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Editorial: On censorship

We were amazed, delighted, and frightened at the response to our call for papers on the topic of censorship. Amazed at the sheer volume of essays, letters, brief notes, bibliographies, and interviews on this tense and timely topic; delighted that the submissions included comments by editors, librarians, teachers, and parents, as well as by an astonishing number of writers who have been on the receiving end of censorship and repression in Canada. Frightened by the revelation of the extent of censorship, the intensity of feelings pro and con, and by our own rather hesitant reaction to some of the work submitted. In editing this material we had to type up some words that *CCL* has not printed before and to okay some comments that seemed at first reading extreme; we had to control the urge to soften and tone down, and in a few cases we did ask writers to reconsider their angry language. As Perry Nodelman says, we are all censors.

As Professor Nodelman suggests, however, if we take a stand against censoring material, insisting that all materials including violent and horrifying materials be available to all readers, then we must also accept the responsibility of clarifying to children why we are horrified or offended by some materials, and what are our own standards of language and action. Refusal to censor should not mean refusal to condemn or failure to suggest alternative modes and mores.

Responses to material in this issue or any other issue should be addressed to:

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De la censure

Devant la teneur des réponses à notre appel d'articles sur la censure, nous avons été à la fois surpris, enchantés et quelque peu effrayés. Surpris devant la somme impressionnante d'articles, de lettres, de notes, de bibliographies et d'entrevues sur un sujet complexe mais "incontournable". Enchantés par ces mêmes réponses qui incluaient plusieurs interventions de la part d'éditeurs, de libraires, d'enseignants et de parents, ainsi qu'un nombre élevé de messages d'écrivains victimes de la censure, voire de la répression qui s'exerce à l'échelle du Canada. Inquiétés, enfin, par l'ampleur de cette répression et par l'intensité des passions contradictoires qu'elle soulève. A cet égard, notre propre réaction au contenu et au ton de la plupart des contributions nous a nous-mêmes étonnés: nous avons dû quelquefois tempérer notre désir d'adoucir certains propos de nos collaborateurs, c'est-à-dire, en termes plus clairs, de les censurer; nous avons également essayé de ne pas céder à une autre tentation, plus pernicieuse, l'autocensure. Bref, avouons-le, nous sommes tous plus ou moins des censeurs.

Toutefois, comme le suggère notre éditeur, Perry Nodelman, si nous nous élevons contre la censure, en soutenant que toutes les publications qui incluent des scènes de violence et des passages scabreux ou douteux doivent être quand même accessibles aux jeunes lecteurs, il n'en reste pas moins que nous devons accepter en contrepartie la responsabilité d'expliquer aux enfants les raisons pour lesquelles nous sommes consternés ou offensés par certains livres, et l'obligation de préciser quelles sont les valeurs qui justifient nos réserves quant à la langue et au contenu de ces ouvrages. En dernière analyse, le rejet de la censure n'implique nullement le refus de condamner ce qui semble répréhensible.

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LETTERS FROM AUTHORS

Book banning: A how-to guide for beginners

Charles Montpetit

Consider sex education. AIDS. Pornography. Safe sex. And government-sponsored campaigns to promote contraceptive devices.

No matter how you look at it, we've reached a crossroad in history. Unless today's parents happened to be at the forefront of the sexual revolution, back in the '60s and '70s, there has never been a greater rift between one's memories of youthful love and the way the next generation looks at sex.

This is particularly obvious in Quebec when we take a look at the incidents which have surrounded the publication of certain books for adolescents (This is not meant to say that the following cases would *only* have occurred in this province. In fact, when it comes to explicit material, Quebec's publishers are among the most *progressive* in North America.):

• in 1990, Governor General Award-winning author Michèle Marineau was almost barred from visiting Princeville's classrooms to talk about her light-hearted teenage romance *L'Été des baleines*. It took a survey analysing the extent of the students' sexual habits to convince everyone that the book wouldn't traumatize anybody;

• another GGA laureate, François Gravel, was equally surprised when his prize-winning novel *Deux heures et demie avant Jasmine*/*2 1/2 hours to Jasmine* was said to be unfit material for high school students. Yet as the title of the book suggests, the entire story is a soliloquy which takes place *before* the main character meets his beloved. We cannot be sure that a romantic episode will occur once the tale has ended, but apparently, allowing for such a possibility was already too much for some people;

© Darcia Labrosse 1984

• artist Darcia Labrosse (GGA 1987) also had to face bitter criticism for the cover illustration of *The amazing adventure of LittleFish*, which features a naked little girl as part of an exposé on birth and evolution—strangely enough, nobody

complained about the inside illustrations, which are much more explicit;

• and I have myself encountered a similar situation with my anthology of true stories about first sexual experiences, *La première fois*. Two boxfuls of these books did get purchased for a lecture tour in secondary schools, but unfortunately, they never got to the teenagers: though the Ministry of Education had already paid for everything, the packages were returned almost immediately—and in one case, the books hadn't even been opened (keep in mind that these places are supposed to teach sex education from Secondary I through V. (The volumes were eventually replaced with a Canada Council-nominated novel of mine, *Temps perdu*. Since its heroine is alternately murdered, eaten and crucified, should we infer that this is less controversial than true coming-of-age stories?)

What is happening here?

Since I've *also* won a Governor General's Award, one might be tempted to establish some sort of connection, and blacklist everyone who has benefited from this dubious distinction. But mitigating circumstances prevent such drastic measures: for all the above authors, sales reports have been quite enthusiastic; in the last instance, the books were going so fast that a second printing had to be ordered twenty days after the launch date (a virtual breakthrough in our children's book industry).

Then again, maybe the documentary nature of *La première fois* has allowed it to avoid any hassles during the production phase. But that can't be the only key to success, for all the works mentioned here have evaded the wrath of their editors (something for which the publishing companies should be commended—after all, instances of large-mindedness deserve as much credit as the opposite needs flak).

Psychologists, sexologists and social workers dealing with related community issues were also called in to evaluate some of the projects, and the books passed these tests with flying colours. These experts went even further: in their opinion, there was a definite *need* for this material in the mainstream market.

Furthermore, the media reactions were overwhelmingly positive. At the risk of sounding immodest, here's a sample of the reviews which were written about *La première fois*:

Magnificent. A chance for young and old to share their thoughts about an important transition. Get hold of these gems! (*Des livres et des jeunes*)
La première fois is the kind of book that school libraries should display on their most prominent shelves. It will be as useful as, if not more useful than condom-vending machines. (*Le Soleil*)
A lot of myths are debunked. First attempts are not always glorious, and this is precisely what teenagers will enjoy recognizing in these stories. (*Le Devoir*)
A Molotov cocktail in the field of children's literature. Well-written and well-balanced... A daring première indeed. (*Le Droit*)

And these weren't exceptions, either. The event was covered by just about

every francophone reviewer (even those who usually don't handle kid lit); over the entire year in which this took place, not a single put-down was uttered. In fact, the anthology ended up being selected by the International Youth Library in Munich for its 1992 *White Raven* honour roll.

So if the authors, the publishers, the experts, the media, the readers and the prize-givers agree that a book is worth reading, what exactly are the weak links that prevent this material from reaching its target audience?

As everybody must know by now, there are two: a small percentage of parents and a large percentage of people who fear these parents (and act accordingly).

As we have seen, the actual welfare of children is not a factor—at least it's not in the opinion of the most knowledgeable specialists in these matters. It's *adult* feelings that are to be spared here, so there won't be any obstacle when their values are passed on to the following generation.

Now, I believe that boycotts and protest campaigns are the greatest tools that consumers can use to make themselves heard and improve their lot. People who are offended by a particular product should not buy it, and they certainly shouldn't be forced to do so. If the sum total of these reactions convinces authors or companies to change their ways, fine. Democracy has spoken.

But that's where I draw the line. If one's personal sensibilities are jarred by a given story, it doesn't follow that this individual has the right to restrict *other people's* access to the same material.

Yet this is what book banning is about. Of course, the arguments are never laid out in those terms; cries of censorship are not reactions one strives to arouse. So in fairness to the self-appointed watchdogs who are just starting to "protect our children," I've compiled an inventory of the excuses that are most often proffered on such occasions. Use them wisely.

1. The kids are too young for this.

I'm always amazed to see how quickly we forget our past sexual fumblings when we become parents. Didn't we all know what a nude body looked like by the time we were eight? Weren't we all curious about sex before we even got to puberty? If we think that the new generation can be damaged by this kind of information, does it imply that today's kids are stupider than we were, or are we trying to keep them from becoming as twisted as *we* have become?

Let's get a few things straight: according to a recent Queen's University Study, 12% of the boys and 8% of the girls in Grade 7 are no longer virgins. These figures grow to 26% in Grade 9 and nearly 50% in Grade 11. That's right: while we are trying to prevent them from *reading* about sex, half of all fifteen-year-olds are already making love behind our backs.

Instead of ignoring these numbers, maybe we should revise the old equation according to which "explicit scenes = adult-only material." In fact, not to do so would be foolish now that sensual imagery has spread all over popular culture—from music videos to commercials to Disney pictures.

If we consider the pressures that teenagers are facing in the sexual arena, the least we can do is *increase* our supply of adequate information; if we don't, the only sources that will be readily available are the distortions provided by media fantasies and schoolyard banter.

2. *We* are not ready for such material.

Ah, that's more like it. Unfortunately, whenever someone concedes that "we" are to blame for censorship, that person is always pointing at *other* people. "The priest in charge of our sex education classes cannot bring himself to say the word condom," a school director explained as he was returning my books. Am I to understand that this statement is all that's needed to make the problem go away?

I'll be the first to admit it: it's not easy to stay in tune with the times. As an author for adolescents, I should know: in spite of an extremely tight research budget, my entire livelihood depends on being "cool enough" to stay relevant in a topsy-turvy world. Aren't educators in the same position? If we were talking about geography instead of sex, what would anyone think of a teacher who chose to ignore the changes in the Eastern Block?

3. We've been criticized for less than this.

So have I, but it didn't stop me from doing what I thought was right. And the same argument goes for all the individuals who have made significant contributions to the human race (instead of trying to remain unnoticed, the avoidance of trouble being their only purpose in life).

Don't get me wrong: I don't advocate raising hell for hell's sake. It's just that there will always be people who get offended, no matter how bland a project turns out to be—when we reduce this *ad absurdum*, breathing our neighbour's air might even be construed as an invasion of privacy.

Therefore, trying to anticipate all types of criticism only makes things worse: if school administrators, teachers and librarians keep trashing their plans every time they imagine that Someone Somewhere *might* take exception to them, what we're going to get is not progress, but a reduction of all learning experiences to the lowest common denominator. In other words, we can kiss civilization goodbye.

Once again, this does not mean that all forms of explicit material should become required reading, regardless of the students' religion, culture or creed. But the exceptions shouldn't dictate the rule, either; if these books are part of a list of suggestions, or if they are made available through the school library, what can possibly be wrong with teenagers consulting them of their own free will?

I like Helen. And I like going into their room when they are still sleeping and playing on their bed

4. We can't encourage premature relationships.

Premature by whose standards? Our ancestors used to marry at the onset of puberty, and they were none the worse for wear; why is it that we, by contrast, panic at the sight of a bare *shoulder* in the Gauthier/Sylvestre *Yuneek* series?

Besides, despite outcries to the contrary, it has never been demonstrated that a glimpse of skin—or straight talk about sex—leads to a life of depravation and promiscuity. In fact, the evidence tends to run in the opposite direction; well-informed kids do not need to make reckless experiments of their own.

By the way, in the case of *La première fois*, four of the sixteen stories extolled the virtues of abstinence, and the average age of the characters was seventeen and a half years (two of them being more than 22 years old). Would anyone prefer the messages that teenagers find on every street corner?

5. Sexual materials do not belong in a writing course.

And why not? Other educational readings are not issue-free: they deal with ecology, feminism, racial harmony and other subjects that are relevant in modern society.

I know it's an old saw, but even in our classrooms, stories dealing with explicit violence are tolerated to a far greater extent than displays of affection between consenting partners. The latter are certainly *very* far from menacing our collective survival, so what is it that makes them more objectionable than a bullet between the eyes?

All right, it's true that romantic novels for young adults are not always sanitized for educational purposes. But then again, neither are the works of Homer, Shelley, Hugo, Steinbeck, Atwood and Richler. Should all masterpieces be banned from the classrooms, then? What will be left of a kid's introduction to literature when made-to-measure readings become the only tolerable art form in our schools?

ORIGINAL VERSION

6. The stories are too crude.

Before we tackle this one, notice that the consequences of such crude "excesses" are never explained. Are certain words empowered with mind-rotting energy? Are non-sexist, anatomically-correct images bad for the eyes? Which is the most hurtful: frank portrayals of reality, *or the sheltering of artificially-created sensibilities*?

It's hard to get a handle on crudity anyway, for the concept varies with every person, time-frame and context in which the issue is raised. A

fully-dressed Madonna (the Warner Brothers kind) might offend some people, while a nude Venus (the Botticelli kind) will remain acceptable to others. And vice-versa.

Strangely enough, no one allows for such variations when we come to children's literature. *Any* degree of explicitness is suddenly too much, even if it occurs in a clinical setting. Kids are supposed to be asexual. End of discussion.

But if our intent is to keep certain concepts from reaching young people's ears, we might as well confess that we've already lost the battle. Like most banning attempts, our efforts to suppress these ideas are bestowing a special status on them, thereby promoting their worth instead of letting sleeping dogs lie.

If we really wanted to keep our offspring from focusing too much attention on their genitals, we should be treating these like any other body part.

7. The contents are not always optimistic.

Of course they aren't. I'll grant you that unilaterally negative coverage of sexual issues is utterly irresponsible—but pretending that everything out there is safe, comfortable and nice doesn't make more sense. We don't censor *Romeo and Juliet* or *Cyrano de Bergerac* because they end in tragedy; why should we treat modern romances any differently?

It's odd that the people who object to an occasional tale about our world's imperfections are often individuals who will tolerate sex education only if the teachers stick to warnings about sexually-transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. Isn't it our collective duty to view emotions as more complex than human plumbing?

When adolescents learn that love can be fallible from time to time, they are more likely to abandon fairy-tale notions, and become more responsible. Now *that's* what true prevention is all about.

8. Too many options could be disorienting.

This is often a euphemism for "we will not tolerate any deviation from the norm," chief among such deviations being depictions of homosexuality. The only texts that are acceptable are those which toe the party line, and the party line is based on what is *already* acceptable in current literary production. You want an example of perversion? Try this incestuous circle of self-fulfilling prophesies!

Sexual identity is nobody's business but one's own. There is no—repeat, no—excuse for ramming a personal standard down people's throats. By the

same token, banning information about the alternatives is just as despicable, for it leaves *no other choices* than the approved, "voluntary" decision. Coercion can be disguised in many ways, and this is definitely one of them. Whenever kids become old enough to procreate, I agree that we should guide them through this new development. But that also means crediting their minds with enough intelligence to deal with this. Teenagers' brains do not short-circuit as soon as they are presented with more than one possibility!

9. All the options are not covered.

Believe it or not, this objection was once offered to me in the same breath as the previous one.

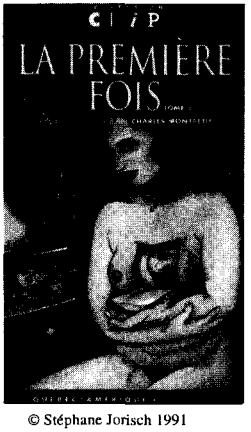
Whether it is written in the first or the third person, a novel is usually constructed so that you can share a particular being's point of view. Unless you're dealing with the ultimate "Choose-your-own-adventure saga," you cannot expect that book to weigh every imaginable opportunity in an objective and egalitarian fashion. No writer alive (or dead) could withstand such a tall order.

As long as authors do not present their scenarios as the *only* solutions to certain conflicts, there is nothing wrong with having a given character follow a given path in given circumstances. If the readers are interested in exploring alternate avenues—I can't believe I have to explain this—they can always look for other documents on the same subject!

10. The text may be o.k., but the illustrations won't do.

In spite of everything we have just said, writers have it easy. For some reason, illustrators will not get away with material that's one-tenth as daring as the texts which are currently being accepted.

Speaking as an occasional illustrator, I cannot see the difference in shock value between yarns that are encoded with alphabetical characters, and those which are told via pencil lines and colour splashes. In both cases, we're talking about ink on a sheet of paper, but there you have it: the word "breast" will very rarely cause a fuss, while a cartoon drawing of the same will send the censors scurrying for their OBSCENITY stamp.



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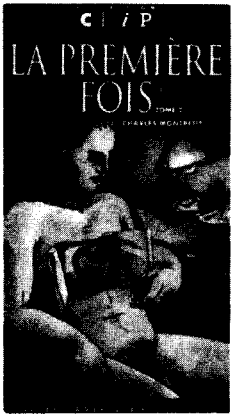
It's not as if the idea was to protect illiterate children from an "improper" visual assault; if the written equivalent is acceptable to grown-ups, then why would it be repugnant to youngsters, especially if the kids have yet to learn about social taboos? When a five-year-old spotted an enlargement of *La première fois*'s cover in a book fair, he didn't even notice that the character was in the buff. All he said was "Mom, look! That man's got an apple in his body!"

The mother was horrified, though. Now, which is the healthier attitude?



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Let's not push this any further. In spite of censorship, in spite of the book bans, in spite of the shifts to the Right in our national priorities, there is still hope for quality books which do not pander to the we-don't-want-any-trouble formula. Incremental changes in attitudes are all pointing the way to sunnier, brighter tomorrows.

Who knows? If they end up sharing the activities of their emancipated children, the book-banners might even read the stuff one day!

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Charles Montpetit *is a cartoonist, a young writers' workshop organizer and the award-winning author of* Lost time *and* Temps mort. *He's presently working on the English-Canadian version of* La première fois, *as well as an international edition with contributions from twenty different countries.*

L' a b c de la censure: petit *vade-mecum* à l'usage des censeurs.

D'après Charles Montpetit

Les années 1990 seront marquées par une réalité sociologique tout à fait particulière: l'écart phénoménal entre la manière dont les jeunes des années 60 et 70 ont conçu l'amour et celle qui se manifeste chez les adolescents depuis, entre autres facteurs de poussée de conservatisme, l'épidémie du Sida. Il semble même ironique que certains parents d'aujourd'hui, c'est-à-dire appartenant à la génération de la Révolution sexuelle, se fassent les porte-parole de la réaction conservatrice et en viennent à promouvoir la censure et à interdire certains livres.

Une petite chasse aux sorcières se fait jour au Québec depuis quelque temps et elle s'est exercée -est-ce un juste retour des choses?- contre des lauréats du Prix du gouverneur général: les romanciers Michèle Marineau et François Gravel, et l'illustratrice Darcia Labrosse ont vu leurs oeuvres contestées.

Quant à moi, mon anthologie intitulée *la Première Fois*, qui rassemble des histoires vraies racontant une première expérience sexuelle, a connu des ennuis dans certaines écoles secondaires. Deux caisses d'exemplaires achetées par le Ministère de l'éducation ont été retournées par des institutions qui, rappelons-le, mettent l'éducation sexuelle à leur programme. Il y a de quoi s'étonner si on tient compte de l'évaluation positive des psychologues, des sexologues et des travailleurs sociaux consultés par l'éditeur, et surtout, si on considère l'accueil plus que favorable des médias. Qui donc a cherché à stopper la diffusion de l'ouvrage?

Comme toujours, dans de tels cas, deux catégories de personnes:
1) une minorité de parents bien-pensants;
2) une majorité de gens qui craignent ces parents et cèdent volontiers à leur chantage.

Soyons francs, ces campagnes de dénigrement et de boycottage sont le meilleur moyen d'accroître la visibilité et l'influence des groupes de pression. Certes, ceux qui sont offusqués par tel ou tel livre ont le droit de ne pas devoir l'acheter et de ne pas se le voir imposer; si leur action parvient à changer la règle du jeu et à modifier les choix des auteurs et des éditeurs, eh bien tant pis, c'est la loi de la démocratie. Toutefois, c'est en vertu de cette même loi qu'il faut cesser de céder à leurs tactiques d'intimidation: un individu qui rejette un livre

pour quelque raison que ce soit n'a nullement le privilège d'empêcher les autres d'avoir accès à ce livre.

Voilà ce à quoi se résume toute querelle de censure. Or, personne n'ose poser clairement la question en de tels termes; on invoque toujours un prétexte entaché de mauvaise foi: c'est pourquoi, pour le bénéfice des bonnes âmes qui cherchent à protéger nos enfants, j'ai compilé les justifications les plus éculées que les censeurs nous servent dans ces circonstances. Je leur recommande de les utiliser avec circonspection.

1. **Les enfants sont trop jeunes pour lire de telles choses.** N'est-il pas étonnant de constater à quel point nous oublions notre propre apprentissage de la sexualité quand nous devenons des parents "responsables"?

Il suffit, pour répliquer à ce premier argument, de faire observer qu'il est prouvé que les adolescents de 12-15 ans ont des relations sexuelles, c'est-à-dire à l'âge où l'on cherche à les dispenser de lire des ouvrages traitant de la sexualité! Il faut oublier l'équation "passage à contenu sexuel = livre destiné exclusivement aux adultes". Il est également nécessaire de fournir aux jeunes une information adéquate dans des ouvrages de leur niveau pour affronter le désarroi de la puberté.

2. ***Nous* ne sommes pas préparés à de telles publications.** Voilà qui est plus commode! Ce *nous* est bien pratique pour celui qui cherche à censurer: on peut toujours blâmer quelqu'un d'autre et cacher son malaise devant la sexualité. Que dire d'un professeur de géographie qui choisirait d'ignorer les changements de l'Europe de l'Est sous prétexte qu'il n'est pas "préparé"?

3. **On nous a critiqués pour bien moins que cela.** Moi aussi, mais j'ai persisté dans mon désir de faire ce qui me semblait juste. Il ne s'agit aucunement ici de susciter la controverse pour le plaisir de provoquer les bien-pensants, mais bien de chercher à rendre accessible aux adolescents ce qui pourrait enrichir leur perception du monde et les aider à régler leurs problèmes émotifs. A la limite, s'il fallait pousser à bout cet argument, on n'achèterait aucun livre nouveau de peur que quelqu'un, quelque part, ne puisse être scandalisé.

4. **Nous ne pouvons pas favoriser les relations sexuelles prématurées.** En fonction de quelle échelle de valeur? Nos ancêtres se mariaient dès la puberté. L'on n'a jamais réussi à prouver que la représentation de l'amour incitait les jeunes à la débauche. D'ailleurs, en ce qui concerne *la Première Fois*, 4 histoires sur 16 proposaient l'abstinence et la moyenne d'âge des personnages était de 17 ans et demi...

5. **Les histoires à contenu sexuel n'ont pas leur place dans les heures de lecture dirigée.** Pourquoi pas? Et les histoires prônant les vertus de l'écologie et de l'harmonie entre les races ne vont pas toujours de soi. N'est-il pas également vrai que plusieurs romans aisément accessibles à l'école préconisent la violence? Enfin, faut-il bannir les chefs-d'oeuvre de la littérature mondiale sous prétexte qu'ils présentent des liaisons amoureuses?

6. **Les histoires sont trop crues.** Il faudrait croire que certains mots ont le

pouvoir de corrompre l'esprit ou de... mordre. Qu'est-ce qui fait le plus de tort? Une approche franche de certaines réalités ou l'aseptisation de celles-ci? Il est impossible de protéger les enfants de certaines réalités, dont la sexualité.

7. **Le contenu n'offre pas de perspective vraiment positive.** Bien sûr que non! S'il est vrai que la représentation exclusivement pessimiste de l'amour et de la sexualité relève d'une attitude irresponsable, il n'est reste pas moins vrai que bien des oeuvres comme *Cyrano de Bergerac* finissent mal, voire d'une façon tragique. Il est curieux de constater que ceux qui refusent les histoires douces-amères sont aussi ceux qui limitent l'éducation sexuelle à des exhortations à la prudence où à la prévention des "m.t.s.". Les adolescents, en apprenant que l'amour peut quelquefois être douloureux, cessent de croire que la vie est un conte de fée et deviennent adultes.

8. **Présenter des modes de vie trop variés et contradictoires peut dérouter les jeunes.** Voilà une façon polie d'affirmer que l'on ne saurait tolérer, chez les personnages, des comportements qui ne respectent pas les normes les plus strictes, comme l'homosexualité. Certes, il faut éviter d'imposer à l'adolescent une orientation mais on doit aussi lui faire confiance et le rendre capable de faire son propre choix.

9. **Tous les modes de vie ne sont pas présentés.** Par un curieux paradoxe, cette objection peut recouper la précédente lorsque la norme sociale n'est pas respectée. Il faut rappeler ici qu'un roman doit tout de même mettre en scène un personnage qui aura, selon le contexte, à établir et à assumer certains choix. A chaque oeuvre son problème moral et sa solution.

10. **Le texte est acceptable, mais les illustrations, elles, ne le sont pas.** Fait étonnant, les écrivains sont privilégiés par rapport aux dessinateurs! Car c'est le plus souvent la couverture qui suscite l'ire des parents et ce sont très souvent ces derniers qui sont scandalisés alors que leurs enfants ne remarquent même pas la nudité partielle ou complète des personnages sur la couverture incriminée!

Ne poussont pas plus loin cette exploration des alibis derrière lesquels s'abritent les censeurs. Malgré la résurgence de la censure, il y a encore sur le marché un nombre important de livres de qualité qui ne transigent pas avec les bien-pensants.

Qui sait? Peut-être qu'un jour les censeurs liront, avec les enfants désormais émancipés, les livres qu'ils condamnent!

Texte traduit et adapté par **Daniel Chouinard**

N.B.: Les personnes désireuses d'obtenir la version française intégrale de l'article de Charles Montpetit peuvent écrire à l'auteur, à l'adresse suivante: 22, rue Mainville, Sainte-Thérèse, Québec, J7E 4V6.

The top shelf: The censorship of Canadian children's and young adult literature in the schools

Hugh Bennett

Résumé: *Hugh Bennett s'ingénie à compléter ce qu'il appelle une "curiosité" bibliographique, c'est-à-dire la description anecdotique des cas de censure les plus médiatisés. Son projet se heurte toutefois à des difficultés majeures: les reportages sélectifs des médias, la rareté des études sérieuses sur le sujet et la délicate question de la différence entre la censure et la "sélection éclairée des livres".*

This bibliography is by no means a comprehensive list. Indeed it reflects only the best publicized incidents: because the formal removing of a book from a school rarely occurs, the very nature of censorship in the schools prevents this bibliography from ever being complete.

Sources for producing this compilation present further challenges. Newspapers, trade publications, newsletters and various library and education literature are the primary mechanisms for reporting censorship attempts, but the media can only describe incidents that come to their attention. Reporting is also selective and there is seldom any follow-up of initial accounts of trouble. A challenge to a book may be covered in a newspaper but the outcome of the dispute may never be reported.

What about sources outside of the media? The Writers' Union of Canada as well as the Book and Periodical Council (BPC) investigate incidents as they learn of them, but these bodies do not maintain comprehensive lists. Only some provincial writers' unions even maintain newspaper clipping files of locally-reported incidents.

What about studies? Formal investigations, such as David Jenkinson's "The censorship iceberg: the results of a survey of challenges in school and public libraries," are rare, and Jenkinson's study deals more with the school library than with the classroom where a significant amount of censorship may take place. A handful of commentators concentrate their excitement upon a few incidents, such as the *Impressions* battle in Manning or *The diviners* controversy in Peterborough.Most books removed from schools do not receive any publicity and often disappear without a trial or chance for appeal. As Penny Dickens, the Executive Director of the Writers' Union of Canada, tells me, the quiet removal of books is "much more of a worry":

Today school boards are usually too smart to ban outright any book. Rather what happens is that the book(s) in question just get quietly removed. To wit: when the Separate School System in Ontario reacted to Robert Munsch's *Giant; or waiting for the Thursday boat*, I do not believe any board actually banned it. As one superintendent said to me, 'It is in the system; where in the system I don't know, but it is in the system.' Well, I know very well where—it was either on the very top shelf of the library beyond the eyes of the children, or in a closet.... I can't prove that and the school system knows it.

In Toronto, Ian Wallace's *Chin Chiang* is actually "in a closet" and one wonders what other texts find a home on a top shelf in Essex County where teachers are instructed to "avoid selections which might provoke undue controversy" (Bruce 14).

The question of what constitutes censorship is the most difficult issue for a bibliography of this type. How does one define censorship? The problem becomes apparent in a case such as Robert Munsch's *Giant; or waiting for the Thursday boat* where teachers said they were concerned with the book's violence (Collins, "Giant problem" 110) and the overall quality of the story (Collins, "Munsch book" 24). Is this an instance of censorship or of good book selection? The issue can be further complicated by ulterior motives. In the case of *Impressions*, there are suggestions the controversy surrounding the series is less an issue of censorship and more a battle over the "whole language approach" (MacCallum, "U.S. fundamentalists" C2).

Despite the problems involved in producing this "curiosity," I hope the result of my work is more than a piece of mental chewing gum. Any discussion of censorship is productive since it brings into the open that which best survives in the closet.

Booth, David, editor, *Impressions*. This is a series of books, published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, that contains literature from Canadian and foreign authors. In 1990 the Alberta Board of Education did not withdraw its approval for *Impressions* after a group called Parents for Quality Education complained of the series' "preoccup[ation] with violence, witchcraft and scary stories" (Ross B2). Some parents of children attending Rosary Catholic School in Manning, Alberta, asked the school and school board to replace the series because of the books' "underlying theme of death and morbidity" ("Alberta school" C1). The school board refused the request until June 1991 when the board agreed to replace the series within a year. During the first day of school in September 1991 a group of parents visited the school to state that if the books were not removed immediately they would burn them. The principal removed the books under the instructions of his superior and the board agreed to permanently remove the series and obtain a replacement (Sangster 1).

Buckler, Ernest, *The mountain and the valley*. The pastor of Calvary Temple in St. John, New Brunswick, and a minister/principal from Havelock campaigned publicly in 1978 for the removal of a number of books from the

province's schools. The works included *The mountain and the valley*, W.O. Mitchell's *Who has seen the wind*, *Canadian short stories* edited by Robert Weaver and Mordecai Richler's *Son of a smaller hero*. Buckler's book was condemned for "explicit sexual scenes" and Mitchell's work for using the word "goddamn." Only a few letters to the department of Education were sent and no official complaints were made. The Minister of Education defended the books saying that most of the titles were optional (Nolan 33).

Buffie, Margaret, *Who is Frances Rain*? The school librarian of Queenswood Public School in Orleans, Ontario, contacted the Canadian Children's Book Centre to inquire about a possible visit from an author during the 1990 November 3 to 10 Canadian Children's Book Week. Arrangements were made for Buffie to speak with the Grade 4, 5 and 6 classes at the school but the librarian thought some of Buffie's work inappropriate for their planned audience so the school obtained *Who is Frances Rain*? for evaluation. A Grade 6 teacher read a portion of the book to his class but the passage contained words such as "damn," "hell" and "bastard" and he identified the language as inappropriate for children at that level. As a result, the scheduled reading was cancelled and students could only obtain the book, through the principal's office, with written permission from a guardian (Collins, "Reading cancellation" 7). Shortly after the incident at Queenswood, the principal of Victoria Albert School in Winnipeg, Manitoba, afraid of "political" difficulties, cancelled a scheduled visit by the author. The cancellation occurred in spite of the fact that the principal did not read *Who is Frances Rain?* Buffie later commented: "I found out later that the school librarian heard about the Orleans banning and decided there might be 'problems'...you can see how one incident will trigger off others" (Hancock 14).

Callaghan, Morley, *Such is my beloved*. Two ministers sought to have this book removed from Huntsville High School, Ontario, in 1972 (Birdsall and Broten 42).

Copp Clark Pitman, publisher, *Adventure series*. Under pressure from the Pentecostal Education Council in December 1988 the Newfoundland department of education forced Copp Clark Pitman to change a Grade 6 French textbook. So as not to "encourage the viewing of rock videos" a photograph of a rock group was deleted and song lyrics changed from "'Je ne peux pas m'êmpecher de danser' (I can't help myself from dancing) to 'Je ne peux pas m'êmpecher de chanter (I can't help myself from singing)'" (Jobb 6).

Doyle, Brian, *Hey, dad!*. The principal of St. Joseph Island Central School in Richard's Landing, Ontario, returned a number of copies of the book to Doyle's publisher in 1984. The accompanying letter explained that the books "promoted negative views and did not contain the values of 'positive citizenship' that the school was committed to teaching" (BPC III. 3).

Findley, Timothy, *The wars*. In 1991, a high school student from Northern Collegiate in Lambton County, Ontario, requested that the book be removed from her high school's English program. She said a passage that described the

rape of a Canadian soldier by his fellow officers during the First World War "pressur[ed] students to accept homosexuality." The head of Northern's English department defended the section as "symbolic of the psychological assault on the main character" and questioned the idea that the author or the readers of *The wars* "condone everything presented in the book" ("Student calls" C5).

French, David, *Leaving home*. The Board of Education in Simcoe County, Ontario, banned this book in 1981 and in 1988 it was not on the list of books approved for use in the county's schools (BPC III. 3).

Geddes, Gary, editor, *15 Canadian poets*. A person in Estevan, Saskatchewan, challenged three books, including *15 Canadian poets*, in a high school in 1988-89. After the complaint was heard through the standard process, the anthology was not removed from the school library (BPC III. 3).

Heine, William, *The last Canadian*. The Grey County Board of Education, Ontario, banned *The last Canadian* and two other books in 1980. One trustee said the books were "secularist" and had "no reference to God." Another trustee who objected originally to the books' "profanity and vulgar language" later changed her mind after reading the works, saying "I think they're good books." Still another trustee said she voted against the books on the basis of what others said, but she "couldn't get over what we've done" (Fluxgold 5). *The last Canadian* was returned to the board's list of approved materials by 1988 (BPC III. 3).

Jesperson Press, *Themes for all times*. In 1989, the publisher of this Grade 12 English anthology being developed for Newfoundland high schools, was forced to modify or delete works including those by Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Antonine Maillet and Eric Nichol before it could be approved by the provincial department of education. Though the department of education's curriculum committee had worked with the editorial team of Judy Gibson, Roy Bonisteel, Ron Clark and Betty King and gave approval to the text, the department's director of curriculum instruction would not give final approval until words such as "hell," "damn" and "for Christ's sake" were deleted. Of the twelve items deemed to contain "offensive" words, the publisher negotiated with the department of education to reinstate six of them, edit four with the approval of the authors or copyright holders and delete two others (Jobb 6). On July 13, 1989, a censorship forum, organized by the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador, was held on the issue. A Grade 12 student argued "the objective of education at the senior high school level is to provide the student with the widest possible background" and "the alteration of the text in question amounted to a denial of the student's fundamental freedom to read." Kevin Major, also in attendance, said "the writer...does not promote or condone the language his characters utter; he uses language, rather, as a tool to depict, for our understanding and edification, the reality of human experience" (Dennis and Field 8).

Laurence, Margaret, *The diviners*. In 1976, the principal of Lakefield District Secondary School, Ontario, removed the novel from Grade 13 reading lists. The

head of Lakefield's English department said "there are 'some people' at the board who find the sex scenes objectionable" but "to teach Canadian literature without putting *The diviners* on [the book list] is hypocrisy" (Sallot 3). The Peterborough County Board of Education's textbook review committee later reinstated the novel despite a 4,300 name petition against the book (BPC III. 4). Later in 1976 the director of Education for Dufferin County, Ontario, temporarily removed *The diviners* from a list of books already approved for use in the high schools by a school board committee. He said the members of that committee did not "have sufficient knowledge to make a decision about the novel... [and] he withdrew the book temporarily to give trustees time to read it." The chair of the education committee which had approved the book "'hop[ed] the book was not removed just because of what happened in Peterborough'" ("Book is ordered" 9).

In March 1977 the Peterborough County Board of Education defeated a motion to remove *The diviners* from the approved text book list (Birdsall and Broten 49). In 1978 *The diviners*, a book "so shocking I can't quote from it," was challenged in the King's County Amalgamated School Board, Nova Scotia (Nolan 33). The work was neither being taught in King's county in 1988 nor was it on the list of books approved for use by the Nova Scotia Department of Education (BPC III. 4).

In 1978 the Catholic Women's League sought to have *The diviners* and two other novels removed from the English classes of Huron County, Ontario, high schools because the books contained "sexual references and objectionable language" ("School board urged" A11). In conjunction with school board officials and Renaissance Canada, an organization which leads a national campaign to remove objectionable material from the schools, the Catholic Women's League was successful in pressuring the Huron County Board of Education to ban *The diviners* (Connel 7) and restrict its use to optional Grade 13 English classes ("Trustees ban" 9). The school trustee who proposed the motion to ban Laurence's novel said "it struck me as a real filthy book" ("Huron County" 1) and the head of Huron's Renaissance group responded to those who felt the novel was a realistic portrayal of life: "there are people who use that language, I am sorry to say, but we should not be using it in our schools, not in English" (Connel 7). The Society for Freedom of Choice opposed the banning and asked school board officials to read the books they ban but the group was unsuccessful in having *The diviners* reinstated (BPC III. 5).

In 1982 a motion to stop using the book in high schools was defeated by the Etobicoke Board of Education, Ontario (BPC III. 5). A school board committee of the Peterborough County Board of Education rejected a call from a municipal councillor in 1985 to ban the "dirty, disgusting and degrading" novel *The diviners* as well as *A jest of God* and *The stone angel* ("Writer decides" E9).

Laurence, Margaret, *A jest of God.* An Etobicoke, Ontario, school board trustee attempted unsuccessfully to have the book banned from high school

English courses in 1978. He described the central theme of the work as dealing with two teachers "who had sexual intercourse time and time again, out of wedlock" and said *A jest of God* diminishes teachers in the student's eyes. Margaret Laurence accused the trustee of not reading and distorting the book: "I wish... [book banners] would not take excerpts and read only those out of context" and "I wish they would not be so oddly preoccupied with sex, which is only one aspect of life and only one aspect among many others within my novels, or the novels of any other serious writer" (Brennan A4).

Legér-Haskell, Diane, *Maxine's tree*. In February 1992, the International Woodworkers of America local complained to the Sunshine Coast, British Columbia school district that Maxine's tree was anti-logging and asked that the book be removed from school libraries until a similarly "emotional" pro-logging work was added to the collections (Bohn B7). The union acted on a complaint from one of their members who said his daughter came home from school one day and "told [him] what [he] did for a living [was] wrong...if [library books] are brought [into the classroom], they shouldn't be used as a means for teachers to discuss their personal points of view". The teacher-librarian who used the book said she "was teaching a unit on rain forests, not logging" so she did not feel it necessary to present a pro-logging view. The author of Maxine's tree was surprised at the commotion: "it's not an anti-logging book... it's really about how one person can make a difference." The board of trustees voted in March 1992 not to remove the work (Collins, "Controversy" 134).

MacLennan, Hugh, *Barometer rising*. The Manitoba School Trustees convention voted unanimously in 1960 to ask the department of education to remove the book from the classrooms, reading lists and libraries of the province's schools. *Barometer rising* had "no place in society, let alone in [the] schools" according to one of the delegates (Birdsall and Broten 19).

Major, Kevin, *Hold fast*. Kevin Major arrived at a school in Parry Sound, Ontario, during the National Book Festival in May 1982 only to find his scheduled reading of *Hold fast* had been cancelled by the principal (French 25). In 1988-89 an individual challenged *Hold fast* and two other books in a high school library in Estevan, Saskatchewan. The book survived the procedure for challenging material and still remains in the library (BPC III. 5).

Mitchell, W.O., *Who has seen the wind*. A group of 125 parents petitioned the Elgin County Board of Education, Ontario, in 1978 to gain permission to examine and review all literature and sex education material used in the classrooms, contained within the libraries, or listed as compulsory reading. The school board Chair indicated that the board would examine the parents' list of offensive material, which included *Who has seen the wind*, but the parents had only the right to examine and not to screen materials ("Parents advocate" 33).

Munro, Alice, *Lives of girls and women*. In 1976, the principal of Kenner College high school in Peterborough, Ontario, removed the work from the Grade 13 reading list. He "'questioned its suitability' because of the explicit language

and descriptions of sex scenes" (Sallot 3). A couple petitioned a high school in Toronto in 1982 to delete the work from the curriculum as they "objected to the 'language and philosophy of the book'". In 1984 the Etobicoke Board of Education, Ontario, defeated a motion from a trustee, who described the book as "porn, pure and simple," to remove the work from the high school English supplementary reading list (BPC III. 5).

Munsch, Robert, *Thomas's snowsuit*. An elementary school teacher in Lloydminster, Alberta, brought the book to the attention of the school principal in 1988-89 saying that it "undermined the authority of school principals in general." The book was subsequently removed from the library, though the librarian was not notified of the decision (BPC III. 5).

Munsch, Robert, *Giant; or waiting for the Thursday boat*. In March of 1990, a teacher from the Middlesex County Board of Education, Ontario, assessed *Giant* as being inappropriate for Grades 1 through 3 and her school board restricted the book's use in the primary grades unless written permission was obtained from a child's guardian. The teacher said she was concerned with violent references, such as "pound[ing] God into apple sauce" (Collins, "Giant problem" 110), but the public school board may have also felt uneasy in using a book with Judaeo-Christian themes. Renfrew County's board of education in Ontario was also reviewing the suitability of *Giant* for the classroom. The Niagara County separate school board banned the book in March since "the violence depicted toward God [was] something we [didn't] want to put across to the children" (McDougall 19). The controversy surrounding the book was further complicated by the fact that critics said *Giant* was "not one of [Munsch's] better books" (Collins, "Munsch book" 24) and the issue was more one of book selection than censorship. According to Robert Munsch the situation arose inevitably out of the diverse composition of our society in which items are acceptable to some people but not to others. Munsch chose not to defend his work: "like little children, there comes a time when a book has to make it on its own" (24).

Newlove, John, editor, *Canadian poetry: the modern era*. In 1987, a parents' group in Victoria County, Ontario, objected to the use of this anthology in the high school in addition to Margaret Laurence's *The diviners*, *A jest of God* and *The stone angel*, Cam Hubert's *Dreamspeaker* and Al Purdy's *Selected poems*. The school board decided that the book would remain part of the curriculum after the group's lawyer appeared before the board to request that the parents receive more information about books used in the schools (BPC III. 5-6).

Rekai, K., *The adventures of Mickey, Taggy, Puppo and Cica and how they discovered the Netherlands*. The Ontario Ministry of Education rejected this book in 1984 on the basis that it "contained 'examples of harmful female stereotyping'" (BPC III. 6).

Richler, Mordecai, *The apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. In 1976, the York County Board of Education, Ontario, rejected the recommendation of its

Standing Committee on Programs to remove the novel and one other book from the high school English curriculum. One trustee, who supported the recommendation, said "what comes in through the eyes and ears comes out through the mouth," while another felt it was the responsibility of the school board to ensure that the students were taught only the "highest values." A trustee against the banning noted that the books had been in use since 1970 without any problem ("No ban" 5). The Etobicoke Board of Education, Ontario, defeated a similar motion in 1982 (BPC III. 6). In 1990 a group of parents asked the Essex County Board of Education, Ontario, to remove *The apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* from high school reading lists because of "vulgarity, sexual expressions and sexual innuendoes" ("Writers alarmed" C1). As a "result of meetings with the schools' English department heads in response to objections raised by the parents' group" the school board issued a memo to high school teachers saying book "selections which might provoke undue controversy should be avoided" (Bruce 14).

Richler, Mordecai, *Son of a smaller hero*. A bakery worker and a Baptist minister campaigned in April 1978 to have a number of books, including *Son of a smaller hero*, Margaret Laurence's *The diviners* and Ernest Buckler's *The mountain and the valley*, removed from the reading lists of high schools in the Annapolis Valley/Kings County School Board, Nova Scotia. At issue was the passage: "his caresses could have been blows. Each time she thought that he was exhausted he managed to summon up energy again from the darkest places. Finally, however, he grimaced as though in great pain and rolled away into a corner of the bed" (Surette 8). In August 1978 the school board began revising its policy for selecting books (Birdsall and Broten 54).

Valgardson, W.D., *Gentle sinners*. In 1989, a parent complained to his son's high school English teacher of the "filthy, pornographic" (Jenkinson 6) nature of the book so the teacher offered the student an alternative novel. A flyer quoting passages of the work and encouraging parents to register complaints was later circulated by a parents' group. The school board voted in January of 1990 to accept the recommendation of an independent committee they established and leave *Gentle sinners* part of the curriculum. By April 1990 the board issued its final decision and upheld the teaching of the novel. The parents' group continued its campaign until the board voted in December 1990 that the book be reconsidered. The teacher withdrew teaching the book as a direct result of "submit[ing] the book, and indirectly himself, to review" (7). In an interview with Canadian library journal Valgardson lamented: "I think that the unfortunate thing, in our society, is that official organizations, such as governments at various levels—local, provincial, federal, whatever—respond to very small groups of people and are immediately prepared to destroy anything, no matter what it is, as long as it will satisfy a small and vocal group" ("Being a target" 18).

Wallace, Ian, *Chin Chiang and the dragon's dance*. This picture book fell victim to a whispering campaign in Toronto public schools in 1991. A number

of officials in the system said the book contained "factual inaccuracies" about Chinese culture. Although *Chin Chiang* did not appear on any formal lists of material approved by the school board, the book was never ordered explicitly off the shelf by the board. One public school librarian noted: "they may not say to take it off the shelf...but you know if there is ever a complaint, we're on our own...I might use [*Chin Chiang*] myself, and then explain it's a nice story but culturally inaccurate and could never happen. It won't be on the circulation shelf. It'll be in my cupboard with the others" (MacCallum, "Following the twisted" E1).

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Children's book challenges: The new wave

Ron Brown

Résumé: *A la lumière des études de Jenkinson (1984) et de Shrader (1992), R. Brown montre que les écoles et les bibliothèques publiques ne sont pas les seules institutions qui ne disposent pas de moyens de défense contre les groupes de pression: les directives des instances gouvernementales restent arbitraires et inefficaces contre ces mêmes groupes. Il analyse toutefois l'impact positif sur la lutte contre la censure de certaines associations comme le Conseil du livre et des périodiques du Canada.*

It no longer shocks us to hear of efforts to ban books like the much panned *American psycho* by Brett Easton Ellis, or even the now classic *Lady Chatterly's lover*. We're used to that. It is, however, more startling to witness efforts to whisk the works of Dr. Seuss (*The cat in the hat*) or A.A. Milne (*Winnie the Pooh*) off the shelves. Yet in a trend that is gaining momentum, more and more children's books are being challenged, and for reasons that are far different than we have seen in the past.

It was almost old hat, for example, when the principal of Queenswood Public School in Orleans, Ontario cancelled a visit to his school by author Margaret Buffie. After all, her book, *Who is Frances Rain?*, contained words like "hell" and "bastard," words which in the opinion of a teacher and the principal, would certainly shock the ten-to-thirteen year olds Buffie was scheduled to meet. As those of us who are parents know, kids just don't use that kind of language!

Nor did we recoil in disbelief when a school principal in Lloydminster, Saskatchewan, removed Bob Munsch's book *Thomas' snowsuit* because it is disrespectful to school principals (in it the main character, little Thomas, thwarts the combined efforts of his teacher and his principal to make him put on his snowsuit). While on the topic of Bob Munsch books, when was the last time anyone saw *I have to go* or *Good families don't* (the book about farts) in their local library?*

But parental paranoia over dirty bits and bodily functions is nothing new. What is new are the current bases for book banning. One stems from the new religious right and its fear over what it sees as creeping "New wave" occultism in children's books. This was at the crux of a bizarre drama played out in the remote town of Manning, Alberta, in September 1991.

Like many other schools in Canada and the United States, Rosary Catholic

School in Manning had decided to use the highly-regarded children's reading series, *Impressions*. Edited by Toronto education teacher David Booth, it contains more than 100 poems, short stories and books, among them works by A.A. Milne, and Dr. Seuss. But some parents became uneasy over its contents. They saw in them references to witches, devils and even cannibalism and attributed such contents to "New wave" occultist religions—a conspiracy by devil worshippers in other words. In early September 1991, 30 parents, members of a group calling themselves Parents for Quality Education, burst into the school and demanded, upon threat of burning them, that the *Impressions* series be dropped. The town, with its small population, was bitterly divided. Unwilling to further split the community, the school board agreed to remove the series. No arrests were ever made.

What was it that so upset otherwise sober and hard-working parents? They claimed that an illustration in one work contained a subliminal image of the devil which could be seen if the drawing were help upside down before a mirror, while a line in anther work, "In Napanee I'll eat your knee" from a nonsense poem by Dennis Lee was, they felt, promoting cannibalism.

The series has been under heavy attack since its introduction to schools in the U.S. Leading the charge have been right-wing religious groups with names like "Parents for Quality Education" and the American Family Law Association. These groups, based in California and Mississippi, have recently expanded into Alberta and Manitoba.

In early 1992 the AFLA took the series to court in the U.S. arguing that if the First Amendment could ban Christian prayers from schools then it must also prohibit the religions of "witchcraft" and "neo-paganism" that the challengers contend dominate *Impressions.* In April of 1992 a U.S. judge disagreed that the series violated the First Amendment and allowed it to remain in the schools.

There are, it seems, two sides to every issue. In Tennessee, a self-proclaimed "witch" recently requested that "Hansel and Gretel" be banned because it portrayed witches in a *negative* light.

The other relatively recent basis for challenging children's books is called "political correctness." Loosely defined, this controversial new term means the act of censoring, or even self-censoring out of the *fear* of offending some group. And there seem to be a growing number of groups who are considered "offendable."

In Toronto, the Race Relations Committee of the Toronto Board of Education recommended that William Golding's *Lord of the flies* be dropped from the school's curriculum over the use by one of the characters of the word "nigger." The board refused the recommendation. However, *Huckleberry Finn* and *To kill a mockingbird*, were both restricted in New Brunswick. There a group calling itself PRUDE (Pride of Race Unity and Dignity through Education) argued that the books presented a negative image of blacks. Meanwhile, a native in Kamloops, British Columbia, objected to the portrayal of natives in the chil-

dren's book *Indian in the cupboard* by Lynn Reid Banks.

Politically-correct challenges extend well beyond race. In England, the London County Council banned Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit* from London schools. The reason: the book portrayed only "middle class rabbits." Meanwhile in Empire, California, near America's foremost wine-producing region, 400 copies of "Little Red Riding Hood" were locked away from school children because, in the view of one school official, such a young child ought not to be carrying wine to her grandmother. Loggers in Sechel argued that the pro-environmentalist *Maxine's tree* by Diane Leger should get the chop.

While the school board in Manning was one which caved in under the pressure (we "wimped out" was how one official described it on the "Fifth estate" episode that covered the event), both *Maxine's tree* and *Indian in the cupboard* were retained.

The processes for banning or restricting children's literature are almost as perplexing as the reasons themselves. In a 1991 *Globe and mail* article, Elizabeth MacCallum provided detailed insight into how one book became "offensive" to a group and how it ended up banned. The book is the acclaimed *Chin Chiang and the dragon's dance* by Ian Wallace. It all began with casual comments in a local community centre in east end Toronto to the effect that some costumes in the book's illustrations were not how the Chinese would wear them, a remark repeated later at a meeting of a library book selection committee. Suddenly, school librarians were removing the work for fear of "offending" the Chinese, and hailing the offensive as a fight against racial discrimination.

This "fear of offending," often dubbed "chill," can emanate from any number of sources. Consultants to the Toronto Board of Education regularly advise public school librarians which books are to be considered "sexist, racist or violent." Among the titles recently recommended for "weeding or reviewing" are "Little old automobile," a 1948 tale of a car that bumps into things (it was deemed to be too violent) and *I'm glad I'm a boy, I'm glad I'm a girl*, criticized for its "sexist" stereotyping.

And how are libraries and schools holding up to these censorship challenges? Not as well as they could, at least according to a pair of recent censorship studies.

A survey by David Jenkinson of the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Education in 1984 concluded that "More than half of all challenges in school libraries resulted in the items being removed."

Books like *How families live together* by Malcolm Provus, *Comment je suis né, The me nobody knows; Children's voices from the ghetto*, by Stephen Joseph, virtually all of Judy Blume's books, and, of course, "Little Red Riding Hood," were all considered troublesome by parents, teachers and other readers and were taken off the shelves.

Jenkinson's study, which covered only Manitoba, made a number of disturbing observations. The greatest number of challenges, for example, came from teachers themselves. Those who are mandated to teach children the role of

literature were instead imposing their own biases. In the survey, a school principal admitted "I have destroyed books I felt did not reflect the community's or my own personal taste or values." The chill effect is also unsettling. Jenkinson quotes one public school librarian as saying: "I try to ensure that books which would cause controversy are never placed in the library."

School libraries appeared to be strangely blasé about the seriousness of the threat to artistic freedom posed by children's book challenges. Some refused to consider books outright if they were by a certain author, Judy Blume's books being the most frequently banned. Few schools even kept records while one respondent sneered, "Some books we have garbaged. I can't even recall titles and authors." Words like that by educators should give everyone serious cause for concern.

In a separate study conducted in 1988, and published in 1992, Alvin M. Schrader asked public libraries across Canada to assess how they coped with book challenges.

One of Schrader's most serious concerns was the reaction by libraries to children's book challenges. He found that libraries lacked any defensible national policy on reacting to children's book challenges. (School boards, on the other hand, have been shown to have policies to deal with books on their curricula that are challenged.) Nor did they exhibit any philosophical foundation for restricting access of patrons aged thirteen and over. Why, he wonders, do some libraries shelve sex education books that are written especially for children with the adult books?

To answer such questions one is tempted to turn to the provincial guardians of educational freedom, the various ministries of Education. Yet even there the prospects of preserving free expressions are gloomy. In Newfoundland in 1989, for example, two government bureaucrats stripped a high school anthology of 12 pieces (out of 171) by such authors as Margaret Atwood and Ernest Hemingway. In the minds of the two government censors words like "Hell" and "damn" and "For Christ's sake" were likely to offend some religious groups.

In Ontario, government censorship is less arbitrary. In fact, the criteria for censorship are spelled right out in a document known as *Circular 14*. According to these guidelines, material is deemed "sexist" if it does not show a balance of women and men and if it portrays women in such "sexist" situations as wearing an apron in the kitchen. In some cases, publishers have denied school anthology editors permission to use their material if it was going to be subject to censorship à la *Circular 14*. The publishers refused, as they put it, to participate in the rewriting of history.

One of the most insidious forms of censorship is silent censorship. Books that have been challenged simply disappear from reading or from curricula or school library shelves with no announcement. In Alberta, *Who has seen the wind* by W.O. Mitchell, *The diviners* and *Catcher in the rye*, all challenged, simply no longer appear on some school reading lists. It will be interesting to see where the

Impressions series disappears.

One organization that is trying to turn back challenges and dissipate chill is the Canadian Book and Periodical Council. When the difficulties that Ontario's *Circular 14* were causing publishers appeared on the agenda of the Council's Freedom of Expression Committee, the BPC acted. The chairman of the FoE committee submitted a letter to the Ontario Ministry of Education outlining changes that would allow educators to avoid legitimate sexism without rewriting history or biasing distinctive points of view. The ministry has yet to act on any changes to the guidelines.

The BPC's FoE committee also prepared a strategy to bring to the attention of the media the parent raid on the Manning school. As a result, the confrontation received wide media coverage, including a documentary by CBC's award-winning current affairs program, *Fifth estate*.

The BPC also hosts the annual "Freedom to Read" week. Kits prepared months in advance contain articles on challenges to Canadians' freedom to read and express and suggest activities for schools and libraries.

The Writers' Union of Canada, through its Rights and Freedoms Committee, frequently supports writers, both members and non-members, whose works face challenges at school boards. Letters of support to authors, letters of concern to school boards or libraries, and press releases all form part of the TWUC's response strategy. Most recently TWUC has entered into the frays surrounding *Maxine's tree*, and *Indian in the cupboard*, in both cases helping to thwart the challenges.

Despite such victories in battle, the war is far from finished. Indeed, book challengers appear better equipped than ever. Groups on the religious right are more widely organized, better financed, and, thanks to the economic downturn, seem to be able to broaden their base of support. "Political correctness" now has a firm footing, particularly on university campuses, and, despite widespread hostility to its impact, has had a "chilling" effect, intimidating newspapers into issuing "politically correct" guidelines.

A humourous and highly-publicized example of the extent to which "politically correct" actions can go was the banning by the City of Toronto (from city-owned venues) of the pop rock group "Bare naked ladies" over its name that some city officials thought "objectified" women.

If literature is to perform its true function, to challenge our views of the world we inhabit, if history and science books are to truly inform, and if children are to remain free to explore unfettered the world of fantasy that opens their minds and stimulates them to creativity, then the fight against children's book challenges must be fought harder than ever. School boards and libraries should adopt policies to deal with parent and teacher challenges. Teachers and librarians, writers and publishers, must all be more vigilant in bringing children's book challenges to the attention of the media and to expose the extent and tenacity of groups with pro-censorship agendas. And schools of education must try harder

to enlighten student teachers on the real role of literature. Otherwise *The cat in the hat*, or *The house at Pooh corner* may disappear with hardly a second thought.

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*Editor's note: *Good families don't* had sold over 100,000 copies by November 1992, which indicates its acceptance by the general public.

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Good impressions—and bad

Peter Carver

Résumé: *L'auteur fait le point sur le retrait en 1992 de la série Impressions dans une école élémentaire de Manning, en Alberta. Il fait ressortir le fait que l'intimidation est la tactique préférée des groupes de pression, qu'elle trouve ses appuis et son encadrement dans les milieux fondamentalistes américains et que son efficacité est telle, qu'elle démoralise les adversaires et réduit quasi à néant la liberté de lire.*

On May 8, 1992, Manning Elementary school in Manning, Alberta, decided to remove the *Impressions* reading series from its Grade 1 to 3 curriculum. On the surface this was an unexceptional decision, reached by an orderly process involving a committee of parents, teachers, trustees and board officials. As one board official said, it was close to the "ideal" method of resolving a discussion about curriculum materials to be used in the schools. One irony was that concern over *Impressions* began with complaints about material contained in books for grades four to six; these books were not being used at the Manning Elementary School.

So there is a sub-text to this apparently orderly process. At the beginning of the 1991-2 school year Rosary School was marked by vigilante-ism, the by-passing of due process, the resignation of an experienced teacher, and the intimidation of a community by a small minority. More ominously on another level, this appeared to be just one reflection of the concerted attempt by fundamentalist religious organizations to control the public school system in Canada and the United States.

A previous chapter in the Manning story occurred one early September day in 1991 at another school in the small town of Manning, almost 600 kilometres northwest of Edmonton. This time it was Rosary Catholic School, where a small but determined mob of 30 parents showed up to object to the *Impressions* series. Their demand was that the principal immediately eliminate the books, which were being used in Grades 1 to 3. By the time the day was over, the parents had entered the school, threatened the principal and staff, tied up the phones, and even warned they would burn the books on the spot unless they were immediately removed. It was the culmination of months of conflict over the use of the much-praised Canadian reading series.

Within a couple of days, the Catholic school board held a tele-conference and

instructed the school superintendent to remove the books—reversing a previous decision the board had reached, in consultation with parents, teachers, and the Alberta Department of Education which has endorsed the series for use in all Alberta elementary schools. Another reading series would be substituted—at a cost of $7,000. At this point, the Grade 1 teacher at Rosary school resigned, distraught at having parents of children she taught turn on her. The school's principal, shaken by the tactics used by the mob and the board's decision, wondered whether he should sell his house and move out of the community where he had been principal for 17 years. [For more information about these events, see the article by Elizabeth MacCallum entitled "U.S. fundamentalists blamed for dispute."]

An organization known as Parents for Quality Education has its provincial headquarters in Calgary, and its objective is to coach parents in methods of challenging the use of certain curriculum materials in Alberta schools. Observers feel that the real aim of the organization is to take control of the schools.

That an educational reading series should cause such extraordinary behaviour is difficult to believe. The emphasis in this and other educational reading series has been to move away from the controlled vocabulary, phonics-based basal readers which used to blanket the elementary school system in North America. Dr. Booth talks about the importance of *story* as a way of drawing children into reading. For teachers who have worked with children and with literature in the classroom for years, the whole language approach makes sense. Like any pedagogical philosophy, whole language and the materials which have been created to apply its theories need to be adapted to the practical needs of each classroom and community. The intelligent classroom teacher probably uses a combination of phonics and whole language in teaching reading.

In Manning, Alberta, teachers at the public and Catholic schools had been using the *Impressions* series since the fall of 1989. When controversy began, it wasn't the pedagogy of the series which caused trouble. Rather it was accusations that the series contained satanic symbols, messages of death, the occult, witchcraft, and devil-worship. Among the more bizarre objections to emerge from these campaigns is that the "u" in the word "colour" is actually a satanic sign (spelling in the books is Canadian rather than American).

The list of objections is identical with those identified by national organizations in the U.S.—such as Citizens for Excellence in Education, the Traditional Values Coalition, the American Family Law Association, and the Christian Educators Association International. These are large, well-funded bodies which have been fighting running battles with the *Impressions* series for years.

The events in Manning demonstrate that the kind of confrontational tactics long in use in the U.S. have now moved across the border. The campaign against the *Impressions* series has surfaced in a number of communities across Canada. But the misinformation which fuels such attacks originates in brochures produced in the United States.

Because of research carried out during the fall of 1991, the story of Manning, Alberta, became known across Canada. An account of the events was carried in the newsletter of The Writers Union of Canada. Most significantly, CBC TV's *Fifth Estate* aired an item on the controversy surrounding *Impressions*, with particular reference to the Alberta context, in late 1991.

The sad truth is that, when 30 parents pre-empted the authority of the school and the school board on that morning in September 1991, no one was there to defend the freedom to read. No one was there to assert the rights of children in that school to have access to reading materials chosen for them by professional educators. Rather, ignorance and misinformation and intellectual hooliganism ruled the day. It was the most destructive stage in a series of events which included schoolyard confrontations between children from opposing camps and parental abuse of teachers in Rosary Catholic School. When asked why he didn't call the police to dispel the crowd that gathered at this school that day, the school superintendent said he felt it would be better for his school and community not to escalate events any further. Indeed, much damage had already been done.

A community has been fractured, the freedom to read has been abrogated in Manning, the life of Manning's schools and teachers has been severely damaged. A small band of agitators has demonstrated that it can make an elected school board yield to its wishes through tactics which go beyond any semblance of legal action.

And, across Canada, schools and teachers and parents should be warned—Manning may be a precursor of what can occur in many communities here, a microcosm of what has already happened on a much larger scale in many American states. One battle has been lost, and the war is not over.

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Out of the blue: Coping with the book-banners

Joanne Stanbridge

Résumé: *A la lumière du cas de Margaret Buffie, qui a connu divers ennuis lors de sa tournée de 1990 dans les écoles, l'auteur analyse le comportement des censeurs. Joanne Stanbridge observe qu'à la base de leurs réactions, il y a le désir légitime de guider et de protéger les enfants, mais elle offre en contrepartie six recommandations aux bibliothécaires et aux éducateurs qui veulent développer une stratégie de défense contre les groupes de pression.*

When Margaret Buffie arrived at our Montreal library for her scheduled reading in November of 1990, she was still dealing with the unexpected news that Queenswood School in Orleans, Ontario, had suppressed her book *Who is Frances Rain?* and cancelled her visit. School officials objected to some of the vocabulary used in the text, citing words and phrases such as "bastard," "damn," and "to hell with the city."[1] Even though she was exhausted from the demands of the tour and from the strain of the sudden media blitz, Buffie gave an upbeat and entertaining presentation. Later, she expressed her frustration over the incident; she felt helpless in the face of the attack.

The incident at Queenswood School highlights attitudes and problems which typically arise when censorship becomes an issue. Using the *Frances Rain* situation as an example, this paper will identify some symptoms of censorship, briefly consider the dangers it poses for all parties concerned, and outline methods which can be used to prevent or minimize the damage caused by the request to remove an item from the shelves.

In a *Globe and mail* article on censorship, Elizabeth MacCallum observed that "librarians are not chosen for their morals, but because they have studied what makes a good book, and the standards of good literature" ("Censorship"). The librarian who overrules the literary value of a book with a moral judgment bypasses three of the basic tools used to establish the importance of a literary work: reviews, best-book lists and awards, and popular demand. Upon publication, *Who is Frances Rain?* was widely and favourably reviewed both in Canada and in the United States. It won the Young Adult Canadian Book Award in 1987, was runner-up for the CLA Book of the Year for Children Award in 1988, and was nominated for the Ruth Schwartz Award. It is an ALA Notable Book, and has been recommended in *Read up on it* (National Library of Canada), *Our choice* (Canadian Children's Book Centre), and in *Canadian materials* "Notable

Canadian fiction books." In Great Britain, it has been recommended by the *Sunday times*, *The Jewish chronicle*, and *The times educational supplement* (Kids Can; Buffie, open letter). At the time of the Queenswood incident, the book had sold 20,000 copies and was in its fourth reprint (Zaleski). So the decision to ban the book at Queenswood School rejected professional considerations in favour of moral ones.

The behaviour of school officials in this situation was absolutely typical. A librarian caught in a censorship controversy should expect to see any or all of these behaviours, which are typical of the censor:

(1) The censor denies that the action he or she is taking constitutes censorship, even if this means simply replacing the word "censorship" with another, less loaded, term like "removal."

(2) The censor dissembles. Having participated in extensive discussions about the moral value of a work, the censor will make a sudden leap in logic to draw attention away from the central issue.

In the *Wilson library bulletin* Linda Waddle lists many examples of this type of dissembling: one school removed a book from reading assignments because of objections to swear words in the text, another school removed a book from its library and recommended that it "be made available only in the secondary schools," yet another removed its entire video library from the shelves because of objections to a handful of titles—and in each situation school officials denied that they were practising censorship (Waddle 68-70). Waddle goes on to say that censors "are realizing that 'censorship' is a dirty word these days...Librarians will say, rather primly, 'It's not censorship, it's selection'," and censors are doing the same thing, saying "It's not censorship, it's removal" (Waddle 70).

(3) One of the censor's most effective behaviours is silence. When asked to discuss or to explain the action taken, the censor finds it most expedient to say nothing. In cases like the one at Queenswood School, this ensures a speedy end to the controversy, as those who oppose the ban have no authority to get the book reinstated.

(4) The censor's strong feelings about a work can overflow into his/her treatment of other work by the same author, and may involve attacks on the author's integrity or morals. Visits are cancelled, lest the author corrupt the audience, and those who defend the book are accused of being insensitive, or lacking in moral character. The censor finds it difficult to understand that those who support his/her cause can argue against the suppression of a title; that the two issues are separate. It is occasionally difficult, when feelings run high, even for the librarian to remember this point.

(5) It is also typical of the censor to object to "offensive" portions of a work out of context, never having read the entire book. At Queenswood School, neither the teacher who instigated the ban nor the principal who carried it out had read *Who is Frances Rain?* (Collins 64; Buffie, letter to author). Case studies of book banning include examples of the "out of context" phenomenon taken to

outrageous extremes: in several cases, censors have painstakingly compiled and circulated—even published—lists of the offending portions of a work. One of the standard procedures in the librarians' reconsideration process is to require all parties in the discussion to have read the entire work. A standard question on the Request for Reconsideration form is "Have you read the entire book? If not, what parts have you read?" and "In your opinion, what is the theme of the book?"

Since one of the hallmarks of good writing is its complexity, we can't use our interpretation of a text in deciding whether to promote or to suppress it. When a school principal argues that the phrase "to hell with the city" is inappropriate and we are sure it is in keeping with Lizzie's character and with the overall tone of the book, it is tempting to move the discussion onto this plane. But the "interpretation" argument leads us back into the censor's quagmire of assumptions and implications. If we argue about interpretations, it means we have already accepted the premise that a novel which "says" *this* deserves to be treated in a different way from one which "says" *that*. We must fight our censorship battles on some other ground. We must accept the principle of intellectual freedom above and beyond our interpretation of the text. We must strive to select and promote good writing on the most objective grounds possible, even if there are objections to certain interpretations of it. This holds true even if, and this is the most difficult part, *we* have objections to certain interpretations of it.

At Queenswood School, as in many other incidents, the censor admits that he/she is acting out of fear of political pressure. This adds another layer of assumptions and implications to already existing layers. When the censor admits that he is afraid of what parents would say about the language in a particular book (Vincent; Kennedy; Bruce) he assumes that (a) everyone will read the book in the same way—i.e., everyone's interpretation will be the same as his, (b) everyone's objections, based on this interpretation, will be as strong as his are, and (c) everyone agrees that the appropriate course of action, given (a) and (b), is to ban the book. His certainty on these matters allows him to defer responsibility for the banning without actually consulting the parents. According to Dave Jenkinson, it is typical of school librarians and administrators to mistake their *in loco parentis* role to include control over what students are permitted to read (Jenkinson 6).

It may be useful to consider the admirable qualities which characterize the censor's position, and to recognize the same tendencies in ourselves. Ken Kister quotes Will Manley on the irony inherent in the situation: "...one of the main tenets of intellectual freedom is that both sides of an issue should be represented. However, intellectual freedom is the most one-sided issue in the profession" (Manley 41).

In *Bookbanning in America*, William Noble quotes a mother in Mayfield, Kentucky, who instigated a much-publicized ban on Faulkner's *As I lay dying*. LaDone Hills showed courage and good intentions in speaking out against what she considered to be a terrible wrong: "The fact that my son had been excused

from reading this book did not extend to others...because of my concern for other students and to make other parents aware of the contents of the material in this book...I began to pursue a way to get such materials removed from our educational program" (Hills 22-23).

The censor is committed to the well-being of children, and operates out of an impulse to guide and protect them. Knowing that censorship is deplored, but convinced that the title under discussion is dangerous, the censor summons the courage to speak out, even when this means facing a public outcry. It is sobering to find that librarians, who are quick to condemn censorship, often possess many of the censor's admirable qualities and even, on occasion, seek to apply them—by declining to purchase or to promote a title, by reclassifying it into a "more appropriate" part of the collection (e.g., closed stacks), or by labelling or expurgating it. If librarians are alert to the fact that the censor's impulses may be admirable but that these *methods* are unacceptable, our position will be more informed and consistent. When we recognize the courage and good intentions behind an act we find so damaging and misguided, we are more likely to address the issue satisfactorily. In dealing with a censorship issue, the censor and the librarian operate out of the same admirable beliefs—the well-being of the child and the courage of their convictions. It is the *application* of these beliefs which comes into question during a censorship dispute.

Another distinguishing feature of the censor's approach is the set of unshakable assumptions which underlie the request to remove a title. Assumptions about the nature of a work of fiction include the following: that the primary effect of literature is didactic; that in recommending a work of fiction, a librarian or educator is understood to have placed a moral stamp of approval on the ideas expressed in it and even on the possible ways in which those ideas might be interpreted; that the strength of our agreement or disagreement with the censor's point of view will have something to do with the way in which we treat the book; that the existence of certain words, images, and stereotypes in a text should automatically condemn the entire work because young people will believe in and mimic everything they read. These are the assumptions from which the censor operates.

In almost every way, the administration of Queenswood School exhibited typical censorship behaviours. In addition, several other factors served to accelerate the process. First, there was the lack of a defender for the book. When school librarians and administration trade their role as defenders of intellectual freedom for a new role as protectors of morality, there is no one left to stand up for the book. In the Queenswood situation, the school librarian, who might have played the "defender" role, would not or could not speak out against the situation. While the Canadian Library Association, the Writers' Union of Canada, and the National Library of Canada expressed concern over the issue, no one stepped in at a local, immediate level to defend the book.

Second, a poor selection process was in place at the school. Using standard

selection techniques (reviews, best-book lists, awards, popular demand), the school librarian could have presented an excellent defence for the book. Instead, these standard techniques were rejected in favour of a moral judgment on *Frances Rain*. If, for some reason, standard selection criteria were insufficient for this school—i.e., if a particular religious or moral slant were required in the collection—this should have been written into the selection policy and applied to every title being considered for the school. One of the librarian's chief responsibilities is to struggle against subjectivity in building collections. The selection policy is one tool for ensuring impartiality. It makes clear that the library will select materials which present a variety of different viewpoints. It includes a commitment to the Canadian Library Association's "Freedom to read" statement. It states that works will be added to the collection based on their literary and historical importance, and that no work will be excluded on the basis of words, ideas, or illustrations which may be found to be unacceptable.

Third, no procedure for reconsideration of the title was in place. The ALA *Intellectual freedom manual* sets out guidelines to be used in reconsidering a title (a 1992 update is available from ALA). Once again, the process is designed to be as objective as possible, while allowing real selection errors to be corrected. Ken Kister relates an incident in which a woman objected to a certain book in a school library collection. The reconsideration committee found the book to be an obscure work, intended for adult readers, from a publisher of undistinguished reputation. It had received poor reviews and was absent from standard lists of recommended reading. In short, it represented a mistake in selection, and was removed from the shelves (Kister 45-46).

The consequences of the Queenswood School incident were also, unfortunately, typical. In his attempt to protect students from the "bad language" in the novel, the principal quoted the offending words out of context to newspaper reporters and on television. Attempts at censorship often backfire in this way, drawing attention to the "objectionable" parts of the text without reference to strengths which made the book a success. In the end, the "offensive" words are made more public than ever and the unexpected publicity fuels sales of the book. Furthermore, the Press is by its very nature one of the greatest defenders of freedom of expression, and it is unlikely that the school could emerge from its sudden media exposure with anything but bad publicity.

Effects on the writer are often overlooked. The controversy propels sales, while the author laments, "Yes, I want good sales, but not *this* way!" Self-censorship is bound to have an effect, if only in the author's struggle not to succumb to it.

One of the most insidious effects of book-banning is the way in which it opens the book up to further attacks. A few months after the Queenswood incident, *Who is Frances Rain?* was banned again—this time at Victoria Albert School in Winnipeg. It is difficult to believe that the controversy over the first incident did not spark the second. Once again, an author visit was cancelled by

an administration which claimed it was not censoring—the book would remain on the shelves, but it would not be used in the classroom as originally planned. Once again, because the attack came from within an organization which traditionally supports intellectual freedom, the book was without a defender, and the author had no recourse.

The following recommendations, some of which are suggested in the ALA's *Intellectual freedom manual*, form the basis of any librarian's successful defense against a censorship attempt:

(1) have a written selection policy including a "portions thereof" statement (i.e., stipulating that no work will be excluded from the collection because of certain words, phrases, ideas or illustrations which may be considered by some to be offensive);

(2) have a well-documented reconsideration process for titles which come into question;

(3) in dealing with a censorship situation, avoid the censor's technique of keeping silent. Insist on discussion, debate and dialogue;

(4) avoid using an interpretation of the text as a basis for a censorship debate—the principle of intellectual freedom must operate above and beyond our interpretation of a text;

(5) respect the individual's right *not* to read, while opposing censorship. The student who has moral objections to a text should be free to choose a substitute title without fear of ridicule, but his or her decision should not lead to an infringement of the group's right to read a given text;

(6) accept responsibility for defending intellectual freedom. Librarians and educators are uniquely qualified for this role. If we become confused about this, no other group is likely to bridge the gap. In situations where we strongly agree with the censor's point of view, or where the majority of the population seems to, or where we are particularly sure about a title's inappropriateness, we must be especially careful. Whenever our role as defenders of intellectual freedom comes into conflict with our role as protectors of children or promoters of self-evident good, we had better think hard before taking action. The current push for "political correctness" is one area where we may be tempted to step over the limits of our profession, confusing others (and, possibly, ourselves) about our commitment to freedom of expression.

In the end, as the Queenswood book-banning shows, nobody wins a censorship controversy. In libraries unprepared for a censorship incident, the storm of emotions and accusations can cause a great deal of damage. The censor, the students, the library and the writer suffer. However, this damage can be avoided if we re-examine our commitment to intellectual freedom—to see it as more than a "motherhood" statement and to understand that it is at the very root of our profession. Then, having established sound selection policies and reconsideration guidelines, we can feel confident that the best books are finding their way into our collections, uncensored.

NOTES

1 Alison Bruce, "War of words," *Quill and quire*, Dec. 1990; Paul Zaleski, "School cancels readings," *The star* [Orleans, Ontario], 14 Nov. 1990; "School cancels reading over book's language," *Kamploops daily news*, 7 Nov. 1990; "Author's reading cancelled," *The evening patriot* [Charlottetown, P.E.I.], 7 Nov. 1990; Janice Kennedy and Angela Mangiacasale, "Cancelled: School turns away writer because of book's language," *Ottawa citizen*, 7 Nov. 1990; Isabel Vincent, "Book banned by Ontario school," *Globe and mail*, 7 Nov. 1990.

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Reflections on a personal case of censorship

Margaret Buffie

Résumé: *Margaret Buffie nous fait part des expériences malheureuses que son roman Who is Frances Rain? lui ont valu à Ottawa et à Winnipeg lors de ses visites dans les réseaux scolaires. Elle décortique tous les arguments de mauvaise foi que les autorités lui ont opposés: selon elle, ceux qui censurent les livres refusent d'admettre qu'ils se livrent à la censure.*

For writers, librarians and educators, the banning or censoring of a recommended book, even *once*, should ring alarm bells. Loud ones. True, the censoring of literature specifically aimed at young readers is most difficult to deal with. For teachers and librarians, the selection of age-appropriate books can be an ordeal. However, in Canada, many people forget that we have a number of highly-regarded committees who carefully choose and recommend books specifically aimed at certain ages, not only for reading levels but, just as importantly, for their literary qualities as well.

The Canadian Library Association has lists of recommended books, as does the Canadian Children's Book Centre (Our Choice Catalogue), the National Library of Canada, and many individual libraries across Canada. There are magazines such as *Canadian children's literature*, *Canadian materials*, *Quill and quire*'s "Books for Young People," *Emergency librarian*, and many others that offer insightful analyses of books for young readers. Available from the United States are the esteemed American Library Association "Best Books List," The New York Library "Best Books List," and journals such as *School library*, *Hornbook* and others. I have heard from some librarians that it is impossible to read every book one orders for a school or library. Still, they can't complain that there is nothing on which to base their selections.

Teachers, librarians and school principals presumably use these lists as guidelines for the selection of books from all over the world, as well as for choosing the finest examples of Canadian literature. One bright note: it has been my experience—talking to a great many teachers and librarians—that a large number *do* buy books on these recommended lists and *do* vigorously defend

them against challenges by individual parents or groups who may wish to have one removed from their library or classroom shelves. And a surprising number of these teachers and librarians have read the books they order. Hooray for these involved and committed people!

Sadly, however, there are still those who feel compelled—for various reasons—to remove age-appropriate and highly-recommended books for young people from school library shelves.

Despite the unanimous recommendation from all of the above groups, and despite winning a major Canadian award and being shortlisted for two others, one of my novels, *Who is Frances Rain?*, was banned from an Ottawa school during my tour to the Montreal and Ottawa areas for Children's Book Week in the fall of 1990.

Ironically, a few months after my experience in Ottawa, just when I thought the nightmare was over, a long article appeared in the journal *Canadian materials* which described the Ottawa incident and talked sympathetically about the dilemma of selecting age-appropriate materials. A number of people were interviewed for this article. The principal of the Ottawa school, Jim Brown, was once again given space to list the "smokescreen" excuses he'd used to justify cancelling my visit. The only person who was *not* interviewed for this article was "the censored one"—the person most affected by the censoring of her novel—me! I had no opportunity at this crucial time to defend my novel, to defend *myself* against the personal slurs, or to respond to the reasons offered for cancelling the visit.

Shortly before I was to fly east for Book Week, I was told that the Principal of Queenswood Public School in Orleans, Ottawa, had cancelled my pre-arranged and confirmed visit. His librarian and a grade six teacher were concerned about certain words in *Who is Frances Rain?* When Principal Brown saw these words, he immediately cancelled my visit. He then removed the book from the classroom and locked it in his office. He told reporters later that he would allow students to see it only with parental supervision, stating that this should not be viewed as censorship in any way.

I was flabbergasted. Warned that I might be besieged by the press upon my arrival in Montreal, I laughed this off. Surely the media had better stories to write about than one isolated incident of censorship.

However, after my first presentation in Montreal, I was called to the phone—the first of many calls. A reporter from a large Toronto newspaper asked for my reaction to the banning of my book. Then she asked if I was aware that Principal Brown was maintaining that the language in the book was only *one* reason for the cancellation of my visit. The main reason was that I was simply too difficult and demanding to work with.

I babbled something sophisticated and worldly along the lines of, "Get outta here! No way!", but the reporter insisted that she had talked to him personally. Principal Brown's attack on my professional behaviour was bewildering. After

all, I had never spoken or written to this man—and still haven't to this day. Preparations for Book Week are always handled through regional co-ordinators.

What on earth, I wondered as I organized my overheads and books for the next presentation, could he mean when he called me difficult and demanding? It took a few months, but I finally found out—in the *Canadian materials* article by Janet Collins. According to Brown, "the author insisted on limiting the audience to sixty students. Nobody else who has come to our school has made that sort of demand."

Let me explain. The Children's Book Centre asks authors what we consider the "ideal" class size, as a flexible guideline for schools. During that particular 1990 Book Week, I talked to groups ranging from 20 to 130 students and teachers. During my various trips across Canada in the past five years, I have given presentations to auditoriums filled with 200 or more students as well as talking to as few as 15 youngsters from a single classroom. Although, like many authors, I prefer smaller groups, I have never turned down students or teachers eager to sit in on a presentation. I would not have dreamed of turning down any student or classroom teacher at Queenswood School. If I had been approached (which I was not) with a request for more than the *preferred* number of 60 students, there would not have been a problem. Principal Brown, however, said in the *CM* article that "many teachers believed their students would be left out and that led to arguments among the staff." Mmm. Doesn't sound as if everyone was in agreement with my being banned, does it? I felt that this "problem" with class size was an excuse used in order to slip-slide around the real issue—the issue of a school principal banning a highly-recommended book and then having to explain his actions.

On hearing this first excuse, I had a sinking feeling that I was in for a pretty bumpy ride. Most censors get away with their behaviour—usually because they practice "silent" censorship, but the media—print, radio and television—wanted to know all the details. Rather than possibly taking an unpopular stand in the public eye, the censor points the finger at the author. It's all her fault!

The *CM* article states, "Once the [Queenswood] teacher ruled out the possibility of grade six students attending the reading, [because of 'inappropriate' language], the question turned to the book's suitability for grades four and five." Principal Brown is quoted as saying, "We had to rule it out as being too complex for them."

I had been told from the beginning that I would be talking to grade six students at Queenswood School. In an interview with *The Globe and mail* on November 7, the Principal stated that certain passages were "not suitable for Grade 6 students." Then he told the Ottawa *Citizen* on the same day that the grade level was four and five. In the local community newspaper, *The star* (Orleans), November 14, he definitely goes with the "too difficult" excuse, citing the grade levels as four and five, with no mention of grade six classes at all. A small enough point but vital: I had been asked to talk to grade six students.

"Logistics" was another "murky" reason offered for my visit cancellation. In the *Globe and mail* article, Brown is quoted as saying, "I cancelled Buffie's appearance at the school, which was scheduled for mid-November, because of logistical reasons. We couldn't fit her into our schedule." Odd, considering that I had been invited to the school and my acceptance had been confirmed. The school librarian had even arranged to take me to an authors' lunch!

In preparing for this article, wading through Principal Brown's excuses, and once again suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous excuses, I perceive that a great deal of this mess in Ottawa came about through Queenswood School's lack of preparation. Not one of these people had read the book in its entirety before responding with knee-jerk reactions to it. If they had read it, they might have decided against censoring it. And if they were enlightened educators the problem of language could have been addressed in class—a point I will discuss in a moment.

When a school librarian, eager for an author visit—*any* author visit—takes on a writer whose work she is unfamiliar with, there is always plenty of time to familiarize herself with the author's work. Most authors automatically assume, quite rightly I think, that the classroom teacher and the students will be acquainted with at least one of their books when they arrive on the scene. Book Week is exhausting, but it is a job we take on with great energy and pleasure. When I arrive at a school or library, *I am prepared.* It is always disappointing when a writer discovers that a school such as Queenswood is unprepared.

Principal Brown admitted to more than one reporter that he had not read the book before banning it. I believe he felt he didn't have to. Certain words—words which were strung together for the media, making it look as if *Who is Frances Rain?* was one long profanity—had been helpfully highlighted for him by his librarian. Why would he need to read the whole book?

If someone hasn't read a book, can he make a thoughtful decision about its appropriateness for a classroom? Is he in any position to discuss it with anyone? Should he be allowed a platform, such as *Canadian materials*, to discuss what he *doesn't know*? Why was he allowed to prattle on about a demanding and difficult author he had never met, logistical problems and grade level problems, without once having to discuss the actual book? Why wasn't he asked why he banned a book that had been so highly recommended for ages ten and up?

And why wasn't I asked to participate in the debate in the *CM* article? It was titled *Buffie reading cancelled.* Where was Buffie's side of the issue? When I asked for an explanation, it was admitted that only *one* phone call had been made to try to locate me. This article came out over two months after the event. Why didn't someone try to call me in Montreal, or after I returned home in November? Is this a fair look at an issue, when the one most damaged by it is left out of the debate? Being offered a chance to respond in a letter to the *CM* editor two months after the article came out was simply not good enough. The damage had been done.

Sadly, we find that there are other principals and educators out there who ban or restrict books without having read them. In March 1991, a Winnipeg principal encouraged the restriction of *Who is Frances Rain?*. A long-awaited visit was discouraged after the librarian read that *Canadian materials* article and took her concerns to the principal. I wonder if she would have been as worried if I'd had a chance to present my views in that article!

Unfortunately, principals such as this Winnipeg educator are so worried about protecting their position that they find it easier to censor, ban, or restrict a book than to face possible political fallout from a few irate parents (often it is only one parent) or nervous school board members. It saddens me when I see how they can give up or put away, often temporarily, their convictions about intellectual freedom to keep their little boats from bouncing around on an unexpected wave or two. I suppose I can see how this happens, but I will not condone it.

It appears to me—and I have heard this from teachers themselves—there are a growing number of principals and teachers who are taking this easy way out—sometimes anticipating a problem *before* it happens, sometimes moving quickly to stop a conflict in their school by banning an author as soon as one parent complains. Those principals and teachers fail the writer and their own students. These are the educators who we assume have handled censorship problems for years and have a sound selection policy. These are the educators who we assume will crack down on unreasonable censorship.

But they don't. It is *those* educators who anger me the most. It is *those* educators who use their authority in an atmosphere fraught—they claim—with political problems, parental pressures, and questioning school boards to remove a highly-recommended book from the shelves; who decide that a book will not be read to the students; who back down to keep peace; who use words such as "sensitivity" in place of censorship. It seems easier to ban a book and to phone an organizer of an event or the author herself and tell her that she is no longer welcome; that her book has been removed from the shelves; that it will not be read aloud to or read by the students before an author visit, as intended. It seems easier to do all of these things than to expend energy and time fighting school boards, trustees, parents and the growing number of organized censor hounds. Do these principals really think that an author will shrug her shoulders and say, "Oh, well. On to the next school"?

I think they do. As in the case of the Winnipeg principal, they speak so reasonably, you see...so apologetically about all of the "political" pressures they are under. And they ask the writer to understand. Then, if the author speaks out, they use other issues to cloud the real one. If a principal clouds the issues with innuendoes and rumours before sliding back into the shadows, then with luck—he hopes—the author will not respond too loudly and peace will once again reign.

Censorship is often based on fear. I think many of those who press for

censorship, whether a parent or a principal or a teacher, do so because of fear. These people believe that the very moral fabric of our society is in grave danger.

The world is a worrisome place. There appears to be more and more violence—especially against women and children. There is growing drug and alcohol abuse and an apparent social acceptance of sexual promiscuity, teen-age pregnancies and all of those things that frighten educators and parents. Some feel that disrespect for authority is also being encouraged. (The banning of Robert Munsch's *Thomas's snowsuit* is just one example of this particular fear overcoming common sense.) How can adults guide their children when so much is out of their control? As a parent I have felt these pressures. For some people, however, I think the fear grows and grows until they feel compelled to find something, anything that they can blame—but it has to be something that they can control. One of the things that frightened adults feel they can control, or desperately try to control, is literature that is aimed at young people.

Those who censor highly-recommended quality literature see words—books—as something with the potential to endanger, to frighten and to corrupt the young. I am absolutely certain of one thing: censors of this type believe that what they are doing is right. They have a sense of absolute purpose. They think they are protecting their children's future emotional and spiritual well-being.

Writers of children's literature and many educators do not believe that banning books is the way to go about protecting our young. To deny a student access to a recommended book because of so-called profane language—by counting the number of swear words in it and putting a limit on the acceptable number—one, two, six?—puts a severe limitation on that student's right to read a wide variety of literature by some of the finest writers in the field today. As Dr. David Jenkinson once said to me, "These people seem to presume that innocence and ignorance are synonymous terms."

In a healthy educational atmosphere, we should be able to discuss *why* a writer might use such language. Ask the students. I have. They *know* why it is used. It reflects the world they live in. Writing a certain word does not condone the use of that word. Writers *must* use the language that exists in the world they are writing about. To deny access to a book on these grounds presumes that the rest of the book, the other thousands and thousands of words and sentences and images and conversations and thoughts and feelings are worth absolutely nothing. And as a writer, I refuse to accept that.

So where does this leave the writer who has been censored? If censors and book-banners are allowed to remove my books from the schools and libraries, if they are allowed to define what *all* children read—not just their own children—according to their own narrow vision of what is "moral" or "proper" literature, where will this leave me? What happens to a writer, I wonder, who gives in and accepts the fact that she must now be told what she can and cannot write? Surely the freedom of true creativity will be lost—for she will have to debate within herself what she thinks the censors will want rather than spending

time on the literary value of her work.

And where does this leave the possibilities of delving into areas that are controversial or unexplored? I cannot write about a family conflict without using the language that is real to that particular family. It is not possible to write a book that is censor-proof. Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit* was banned in the early 1980's. The *Merriam-Webster dictionary* and *My friend Flicka* have both been the victims of censorship attacks in recent years.

It is not easy to sort out the problems of censorship. Fighting censorship calls for courage and commitment. As a writer, I know I would much rather be writing a novel than writing this article. I hate the personal attacks I have had to endure from people I have never met—from people who have not even taken the time to read my books in their entirety.

I see the true educator's job as transmitting knowledge, ideas, the love of reading and writing—not limiting or restricting those things. Many teachers offer their students a wide range of books to read. And they also offer them the opportunity to openly discuss what they have just read. It can't always be easy. But these are the educators who are truly contributing to the development of confident, tolerant, literate, and astute young adults.

I really do believe that this is probably just the beginning of censorship in our schools. The more that educators use trade books in their whole language curriculum, for example, the more flack they are going to face. More people will be demanding that the schools go back to the bloodless and safe educational texts that can be rigorously scanned for controversial material. But rather than all of us running around, screaming the sky is falling, or avoiding books that might be a problem, teachers and librarians—and principals—will have to arm themselves with carefully-prepared selection policies and guidelines for handling challenges which begin with the all-important question: "Have you read the entire book which concerns you?"

Censorship problems won't stop me from writing. I love writing. I love creating another world. I love outlining plots and describing characters, and developing conflict, and choosing the right name for each character. I love watching those characters get up off their two-dimensional planes and move and walk and talk and react with each other. I love my computer. And my pencils and the smell of paper and ink and cardboard boxes filled with each new draft of a manuscript.

For now, I won't throw away my thesaurus, or my dictionaries, or my *Elements of style*, or my *Elements of grammar*, or my *Fundamentals of clear writing*. With all of the support around me, I will continue to write the book that searches me out and demands to be written. And *I* will decide what words to use—and how and when to use them.

Margaret Buffie *is the author of three novels for young adults. Her latest book* My mother's ghost *was nominated for the 1992 Governor General's Award.*

Jan Truss: An interview

Marie Davis

CCL editor Marie Davis interviewed Jan Truss, author of prize-winning novels such as *Bird at the window*, *Jasmin*, and *Summer goes riding*. The full interview will appear in an upcoming issue; for this special issue on censorship we have excerpted a relevant section.

DAVIS: Since this issue of *CCL* focuses on censorship, perhaps we could begin with your views on that topic. A lot of your work, because its subject is young adults, will be considered by teachers for classroom instruction.

TRUSS: I have learned that you can easily offend parents, teachers, and librarians. One librarian said she couldn't possibly put *Summer goes riding* on the grade 6 bookshelf because I had written about horse turds. In *Cornelius Dragon* a young man in the play is at *breaking* point—he's at the end of his line—and he cries out "Shit!" I talked to a university class who were doing this play and I was asked by one very serious young man if I approved of bad language for adolescents. I said, "I have to know if it's appropriate. I don't think I advocate bad language." "Well," he said, "you use a bad word; I could *not* have my students say this." I said, "Well, what word is it?" And he said "s.h.i.t." And I said, "Oh, I thought that was rather mild for him; he's at the end of his line. I thought really he would say something stronger." "Well," he said, "I could not have that word said in a classroom of mine. . . would you let me change it?" So I said, "Why don't you have him say, 'Oh, poop!'" "Oh," he said, "would that be all right with you?" He'd missed the point. There was no concern about rightness or the dignity of the young man's expression. A number of students afterward agreed with him—these were third and fourth year students.

These views cannot go together with art and literature. Think of what was done to Margaret Laurence.

DAVIS: You mean what happened to Margaret Laurence's work in some Canadian high schools?

TRUSS: Yes, I think it killed her. That was the nail in her coffin. I still think Laurence's *The diviners* is a diamond. It's superb: warm, sympathetic, real, true

but not obvious, and I think it will last.

We have to fight for art. We have to stay open to the possibility of re-defining. Art really surprises us. If we're not open we may miss something. I might have missed *Catcher in the rye* because of my initial prejudice against the bad language and the jerky sentences. The suitableness of that expression was absolutely devastating to someone expecting something written with dignity. I remember starting *Catcher in the rye* so many times, each time thinking, "Who wants to read this junk?" And then one day I went home from school with a cold, and it was there by my bed so I read it. I read it with patience and I read it to the end. And I knew that I had to rethink. I now define dignity as rightness, unity of subject matter, tone, intention, and character. And I now think *Catcher in the rye* is one of the most dignified and significant statements about a young man trying to live with hope and decency. I might have denied that novel to thousands of students who came after. What a loss it would have been! For thousands of people that loss was real: it was banned. I felt that I had to teach it; and I did.

At the same time that Salman Rushdie was fighting for his rights, the teacher up the road from us in the local school was in terrible trouble for teaching the Greek myths. She was as powerless in the community as Salman Rushdie is against his detractors. When society says you can't teach about other gods, even the Greek myths, it's ignorance, but it's powerful.

DAVIS: Does the writer have a social function, say, to challenge and question orthodoxy?

TRUSS: Absolutely, as a teacher does. And here and there there is a teacher who has fire in her, who has understanding, who is literary. I went into a junior high school in Saskatoon where a class had obviously taken up *Red.* I had this tremendously sympathetic audience—all these young men *leaning* into me. I thought "What wonderful students," and then I met their teacher, a rich scholarly woman who was a flame. Here and there it happens.

DAVIS: How did working as a teacher with children and adolescents influence your writing?

TRUSS: I think I was a good teacher and never treated young people with disrespect by presupposing what they'd be interested in. In high school, at the end of every day we put up our feet and read to each other. I can remember the year we discovered *The L-shaped room,* when the high school girls read through their recesses, and I remember the guy who'd never read anything and then discovered *Three against the wilderness* and introduced it to us. And I remember all the years when *Catcher in the rye* awoke wonder and passion and sympathy in high-school boys. The vision I have of teaching is not the accumulation of facts, it's designing the world for the next 20 years ahead.

Marie Davis *teaches Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature at The University of Western Ontario.*

W.D. Valgardson's *Gentle Sinners*: A book more sinned against than sinning

Dave Jenkinson

Résumé: *L'auteur examine les tactiques auxquelles le groupe "Moms in Touch" a recouru pour forcer une commission scolaire du Manitoba à retirer du programme d'un de ses enseignants le roman de W. D. Valgardson,* Gentle sinners; *il montre comment, de l'automne 1989 à l'hiver de 1991, le recours systématique à l'intimidation et à la subversion des règles des processus démocratiques a amené l'enseignant en question à capituler et à renoncer au livre qu'il défendait.*

The Setting

Fort Garry School Division #5, one of eleven school divisions within the metropolitan Winnipeg area, is located in the southern portion of Winnipeg and has some 7,000 students attending eight elementary (K-6), three junior high (7-9), two high schools (10-12) plus two French immersion schools. Fort Richmond Collegiate's student body numbers some 850 students with a staff complement of approximately 45.

In 1980, Fort Garry School Division approved a policy, identified as KLB, for dealing with "Public complaints re curriculum instructional material." This Board document recognized "the right of an individual parent to request reconsideration of the use of any book or learning material and such requests shall be processed according to the approved regulations." The Board took the position, however, that "censorship of books and other learning materials shall be challenged in order to maintain the school's responsibilities to provide information and enlightenment." One of the policy's three "criteria for access to learning material" stated that "no parent or group of parents, outside the Corporate Board, has the right to determine the learning materials for students other than their own children."

Chuck Hamelynck, the English teacher who had elected to teach W.D. Valgardson's *Gentle sinners*, was but two years away from retirement when the controversy first arose. A teacher for some 30 years, Hamelynck had, for the previous five years, taught *Gentle sinners* to a single class of English 200 students. The "200" designation means that most students would be in Grade 11 and pursuing a course pattern which could lead to university education. While Manitoba's provincial education department produces a list of "approved

textbooks," teachers are permitted to utilize learning resources which, like *Gentle sinners*, are not on that listing. Hamelynck was the sole teacher in Manitoba teaching this particular book.

Gentle sinners, first published in 1980 and winner of the Books in Canada First Novel Award, was written by William "Bill" Valgardson, an English professor at the University of Victoria. Speaking of the novel's contents, the Canadian Library Association said, "It's about a 17-year old boy who, in desperation, runs away from the home of his strict fundamentalist parents to his uncle's farm in northern Manitoba. On one level, it is a coming-of-age novel, and on another it is an indictment of supposedly respectable and religious folk who are guilty of all manner of sinning" ("Being..." 17).

The Gathering Storm

The community's first knowledge about any parental objections to Valgardson's *Gentle sinners* occurred when four mothers of students attending Fort Richmond Collegiate distributed a two-page letter, dated October 6, 1989, to "... a list of parents we feel would share our concern" (1). Sent "on behalf of Moms in Touch [i.e. mothers] group of students attending Fort Richmond Collegiate," the letter was to alert recipients to *Gentle sinners*' contents. "Depending on your son/daughter's teacher it may be required reading for them this year. On the other hand, if your child is in Grade 10 it is necessary to begin action and make an attempt to have it removed from the curriculum for the next year" (1).

"Moms in Touch," now called "Mothers Who Care," is an international Christian organization whose members are to provide moral support to local schools via prayer. Although the "Moms in Touch" letter stated that "our intentions are not to win a battle against the teachers but instead, [sic] have a positive influence on the material being taught at our High School" (1-2), readers were informed that "it is our goal to have several [people] send in a formal complaint to the School Division" (1). The letter also "encourage[d] each of you to examine the book for yourself" (1).

Accompanying the letter was a page of ten "excerpts taken from the book." These passages, ranging in length from two to eleven lines, were drawn from nine of *Gentle sinners*' 213 pages. The letter's authors quoted Dr. G.C. Richison, a parent, who, "after reading the book ... had this comment to make:

Gentle sinners is about a teen in identity crisis rebelling against his narrow and rigid Christian

parents. Valgardson has chosen to play on the sexual tensions of teens by graphic pornography. Chapters two and eighteen contain the most explicit sexual scenes. These chapters clearly deal with more than the sexual struggles of teens but seduce the reader into sexual values which are anti-Christian. (1)

At the November 2, 1989 meeting of the Board of Trustees of Fort Garry School Division, Dr. Peter Blahey, Deputy Superintendent, informed Board members that a complaint had been received regarding a material but that "the complaint is not wholly consistent with the Board Policy" (Minutes 7). Item #9 on the school division's "Citizen's request for reconsideration of a work" form calls for a response to the question, "What would you prefer the school do about this work?" To the two choices, "Do not assign or recommend it to my child" and "Request it be re-evaluated," the complainant had added a third, "Remove from the curriculum entirely." Blahey pointed out that the complainant's request violated the policy because a complainant "is not permitted to attempt to restrict the use of that material for other children" (Minutes 7).

By the end of November, the Board had received five further written requests with four requesting that *Gentle sinners* be re-evaluated and the fifth asking that the book not be assigned or recommended to the complainant's child. On December 1, 1981, Blahey wrote Terry Angus, Principal of Fort Richmond Collegiate, telling him that: "In keeping with the requirements of the Board Policy and Regulations KLB Public Complaints re Curriculum Instructional Materials, I have informed the Board at the November 30th meeting that these complaints have been received" (1).

Blahey explained to Angus that he would be establishing a review committee consisting of three parents of students from the division's other high school, two members of the English department from that same high school, and a University of Manitoba professor. The review panel was to report by January 8, 1990. Through Angus, the school was asked to provide "a statement indicating the criteria for the selection of this work in the English program, including a statement as to its purpose as it relates to the objectives of the curriculum" (1) as well as "a statement from you outlining the school's policy regarding the choices that students have for alternative materials if they do not want to use this material" (1). Blahey also commented that "if there is consistency among the panelists [sic] in their recommendations, I would take their recommendations to the Board. If the panel is divided, I will call for a meeting of the panel to try to resolve their differences before a recommendation is taken to the School Board" (2).

The Review Process—Round One

In mid-December 1989, the six review panel members each received copies of (a) *Gentle sinners* (b) the School Board's Policy and Regulations related to

public complaints regarding curriculum instructional materials (c) the complaint form of each of the five parents with their identities removed and (d) the school's statements regarding the criteria used to select *Gentle sinners* plus its policy for providing students with learning materials choices.

With regard to (d), Angus explained in a December 18, 1989, letter to Blahey, "Our practice at Fort Richmond Collegiate when students or parents have reservations about the appropriateness of contents of materials to be studied is to offer alternate titles to be studied in the same context" (1). In the case of *Gentle sinners*, "when a parent contacted me, an alternative Canadian novel with a similar theme (*Grain*) was distributed to the whole class. Students were told they could choose either title and questions, etc., were designed to be applicable to either novel" (1). To avoid embarrassment to individual students, teacher Hamelynck distributed both novels to everyone. "In this case, four students chose the alternative title and both novels were studied in the same classroom. The final test applied to either novel" (1).

Hamelynck provided a ten-page rationale for teaching *Gentle sinners*. Subtitled "Why Valgardson's *Gentle sinners* has been taught successfully at Fort Richmond Collegiate for the past five years," the document described the book as "a highly teachable novel with themes that eminently 'fit' within the continuum of themes explored in *Lost horizon*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Grapes of wrath* and *Of human bondage*" (1). Hamelynck also said the novel "has many advantages for Gr. 11 students in Manitoba in that it is written by a Manitoba author, is set in Manitoba's Interlake region, and features a high school student who has completed Grade 11 and who has many of the problems that his present peers can and do encounter" (1). Hamelynck added that "another aspect that recommends it for inclusion in the curriculum is the inherent morality of the novel's story wherein the author shows his ability to deal sensitively with many of the moral questions many of today's youngsters are faced with" (1). The remainder of Hamelynck's rationale expanded upon these points.

In closing, Hamelynck acknowledged that "*Gentle sinners* is a realistic novel. It contains some graphic descriptions of sexuality, hypocricy [sic], dishonesty and plain 'evil'. So does real society and life itself. But within the context of the entire novel, these descriptions are merely one essential item to make the reader more aware of the main issues of the story" (9). Hamelynck concluded:

> To lose sight of all this for the sake of the realism it shares with many other good novels is to do injustice to the story, to the author, and to all the teachers who can make the reading and study of *Gentle sinners* a memorable and worthwhile experience for Gr. 11 students who are fifteen and sixteen years old and whose moral teachings at home should be strong enough to cope with the reality of the end of the 20th century. (9-10)

The "Citizen's request for reconsideration of a work" form used by Fort

Garry School Division requires complainants, in addition to providing some biographical information and an indication of whether they represent themselves, an organization or other group, to respond to a series of questions.

Responding to "(1) To what in the work do you object? Please be specific; cite pages," Complainant A simply listed nine pages; Complainant B said "Pornography" and provided some page groupings; Complainant C replied "pornographic," "sadistic," and "violent thoughts" and offered page references for each concern; Complainant D was concerned about "sexual description, violence, negative thought patterns" plus pages; Complainant E's objections, with supporting pages, were "Fosters ideas of runaways," "Suggestion made to pay for sex," "Lied about age to get employment." In all cases, cited pages were those identified in the "Moms in Touch" excerpts page.

Asked in "(2) In your opinion, what of value is there in this work?" Complainant A said, "I honestly don't know." Complainant B, one of two who had read the entire book, acknowledged, "Flashes of good literature; touches teen problems." Complainant C found on pages 121-22 "One positive attitude of working hard to complete work." Complainant D noted that "subjects and situations expressed in vivid descriptive easy reading style" while Complainant E found "very little—exposes teen problems."

As to "(3) What do you feel might be the result of reading this work?" Complainant A stated, "Kids that may be prone to pornography could justify it by saying it's taught in school." Complainant B felt that "school authorities validate pornography as acceptable value." "No respect for women, elderly, sick views of sexual lifestyle," replied Complainant C while Complainant D thought the results might be "preoccupation with thought patterns with potential destructive behaviour." Finally, Complainant E claimed that "students see this as an acceptable lifestyle when taught by schools."

None of the complainants, in responding to "(4) For what age group would you find this work acceptable?" found *Gentle sinners* to be acceptable to any age group contained within the public school system, though two complainants, C and D, did say it would be acceptable to adults while B stated, "None to those who hold Biblical presuppositions."

As noted earlier, only two complainants, B and C, had read the entire work. The remaining three responded to "(5) Did you read the entire work? What pages of [sic] section?" by saying that, in essence, they had read only those pages referred to in the "Moms in Touch" letter.

In response to "(6) Are you aware of the judgment of this work by critics?" none of the five complainants had sought to discover other interpretations of *Gentle sinners*. Complainant B responded "Irrelevant!"and D commented, "It doesn't really matter what their judgement is."

When asked, "(7) Are you aware of the teacher's purpose in using this work?" the complainants' responses appeared to evidence that only complainants B and E may have spoken to Hamelynck. B simply replied "Yes" and did not elaborate

while E added, "Feels it teaches them sexuality." Though the remaining three seemingly had no personal knowledge of the teacher's purposes, two did proffer what they believed to be Hamelynck's intentions. Complainant A said, "I believe it is to bring into the open the world around and discussion," and C thought the teacher's purpose was "to discover teen sexuality."

To the question, "(8) What do you believe is the theme or purpose of this work?" Complainant A said, "I believe it undermines morals & is anti-Christian, the purpose being more undermining than meets the eye. Negative!" Complainant B claimed, "Among other purposes, to encourage the breaking of conventions & pursuit of other ideas. It is instrumental in presupposition." Complainant C responded, "Run away from home, throw away values to find yourself." Complainant D thought the work's theme or purpose was "a release of negative thoughts and attitudes by the author" while E responded, "To encourage: Runaway from past values; negative viewpoints in life."

In responding to "(9) What would you prefer the school to do about this work? Do not assign or recommend it to my child. Request it be re-evaluated," four complainants requested that the book be re-evaluated while one asked that it not be assigned or recommended "to my child."

The final question allowed complainants to suggest other titles for study. "(10) In its place, what work of equal value would you recommend that would convey as valuable a picture and perspective of a society or set of values?" Complainant A replied, "I am sure there are some on your 'board' who could recommend a better quality book who are more familiar with literature than myself" Complainant B answered "—; there are 100's of books as is no doubt obvious to you." C offered, "Books to encourage, biographies, positive role models" "Who is in the wind [sic] W.O. Mitchell, Prairie literary unit settlers of the marsh S. Grove [sic], Wild geese M. Osten [sic]" were suggested by D who added, "The above works were given by another Gr. XI teacher whose opinion I trust. She commented that it was impossible to present material that did not contain some 'bad' language, etc., but did not feel uncomfortable teaching the above books because of controversial moral & ethical standards." E suggested, "Books teaching character building/heros [sic] Biographies. Numerous bks. available—used with discretion."

Two complainants added comments to the bottom of their form. C said, "This [*Gentle sinners*] would be an 'R' rated movie so why do 16 year olds have to read it." "Making phone calls & talking like book describes would be against the law. —Obscene phonecall [sic]." "Poor role model 'he admired his uncle's drinking, lack of church going & swearing.' pg. 156" "This gives teens the idea that sex before marriage is OK. Then you ask 'why so many teen pregnancies' pg. 190" Finally, E noted that "Mr. Angus Principal F.R.C. has said that it [*Gentle sinners*] was not the best material and he would not teach it himself and "One Grade XI student made the remark, 'I can't believe that this is what is being taught in Grade 11.'" As well, a complainant appended photocopies of two *Winnipeg free press*

articles: "Sex, drugs risk for half of runaways" and "Inmate dreams of slitting throats, court told." The latter also had the handwritten note, "Refer to Page 140 [of *Gentle sinners*]—'He wished he had brought a razor so that he could flit from one to the other cutting their throats.'"

By January 7, 1990, the six review panel members had replied and had unanimously recommended that *Gentle sinners* be retained as a teaching material. This information was presented to the Board at its January 25, 1990, meeting. Because "the judgement of the panel was unanimous and students should be given the option of selecting an alternate novel" (Minutes 2), Trustee Murray felt that no motion of the Board was required other than "That the report of the panel be received as information" (2). In the discussion concerning this motion, one trustee sought clarification about the appeal process available to the complainants. Deputy Superintendent Blahey "responded stating that the policy provides that appeals may be made through the Superintendent's Department to the Board" (2). The Chair also noted "that, should the Board pass a motion at this point, it could be viewed as prejudging any appeal that might be launched by the complainants."

In a January 29, 1990, letter to the panel members outlining the outcome of their work, Blahey reported that "The Board, at its meeting on January 25th, accepted the following recommendation from me on your behalf: 'That the Board support Fort Richmond Collegiate's use of Valgardson's *Gentle sinners* in the English 200 program as outlined in the school's Statement of Purpose, provided students are given the option of selecting an alternative novel to meet the curriculum objectives.'" Blahey also communicated with the five complainants. In addition to providing them with "anonymous" copies of the review panelists' statements, Blahey told the complainants of their right to appeal the decision to the School Board.

The Appeal Process—Round Two

On March 20, 1990, Fort Garry School Division received an appeal of its January decision, and, on the evening of March 22, James MacKenzie appeared before the Board to present a brief on behalf of a delegation. Board Minutes record that MacKenzie raised nine major points in his presentation: (1) It is not clear that the proper procedures were followed in the citizen's request. (2) The language and the situations portrayed in various parts of the book would not be acceptable in other contexts. (3) The text contains questionable role models. (4) The students reading this text are likely to draw conclusions from it that are quite different from those that adults would draw. (5) The text demeans women and portrays them as sex objects. (6) Virtually all of the relationships portrayed in the book are depressing and negative. (7) The Christian religion is presented in a stereotyped, negative light in the book. (8) The book is not used by most other English teachers in the school. (9) The book introduces young people to

questionable attitudes and behaviour (2-4). MacKenzie "stated that they [the delegation] would like to know whether the Board, by simple majority, will make a decision or would a petition signed by a majority of the parents require a withdrawal of the book" (Minutes 4). MacKenzie "stated that he accepts the impartiality of the review panel but thought that it would be helpful if individuals from outside the Division would review the book" (6). The Board told MacKenzie that the delegation would be informed as to when the issue would be discussed at an open Board Meeting.

A Board discussion followed in which two motions were made. The first simply referred the matter "to the next Regular Meeting of the Board on April 12, 1990" (9). The second motion, unsuccessful, called for *Gentle sinners* to "be referred to a committee for review which committee will be comprised of two teachers and three parents all from outside of the Fort Garry School Division" (9). In the discussion about this second motion, Superintendent Henry Izatt pointed out, "If the Board deviates from its policy by convening an additional review panel, the Board will have to decide how many panels will be utilized before it makes its decision regarding the appeal" (9).

Approximately a week before the scheduled April Board meeting, the "setting" suddenly changed. On April 3, 1990, *The south lance*, a flyer-type community newspaper distributed to all homes in the area, ran a half-page article, "Parents claim sexual content in novel is not appropriate for high school students." Though the piece simply reported on the happenings of the March Board meeting without editorializing, the article did broaden, to some extent, community awareness. However, this "quiet," very localized concern became a city and province-wide issue when, on April 6, both of Winnipeg's two daily newspapers had front-page headlines related to *Gentle sinners*. "Trustees urged to ban book" reported the *Winnipeg free press* while *The Winnipeg sun* said "Book ban demanded: Teen sex in acclaimed novel disturbs Fort Garry parents." The latter paper's tabloid-sized third page was given over to two articles dealing with the book: "Parents want book out: But division firm on *Gentle sinners*" and "Author fires back at critics," an interview with Valgardson. On April 8, the *Sun* again made censorship its front page headline, "Schools ban books on monthly basis," and devoted page four to an overview of Manitoba school censorship while the *Winnipeg free press* ran an editorial cartoon showing a pilgrim-type figure wearing horse blinders and carrying a sandwich board bearing the caption, "Good Christian moral values only $3.00." The next day, April 9, the paper ran a brief, overview article, "School division weighing book ban says such requests rare."

The April 12 Board meeting "drew 40 spectators and nine reporters and cameramen, which forced the meeting to be moved from the Board's offices to an elementary school library" (Nikedes 2). Ray Wyant, Board Chair, formally addressed the meeting, saying, in part:

At the outset, I want to say that the publicity surrounding this case has been regrettable. Though there are some who might wish to paint this delegation with the brush of fanaticism, such is not the case and I appreciated, as I think the whole Board did, the passionate yet calm manner in which this presentation was conducted. I listened intently to the presentation, I read all of the material presented and the book, and after doing so, I cannot vote to reconsider the work for use in Fort Richmond Collegiate. (1)

By a 7-2 vote, the Board voted to "reject the request of the delegation to remove the book *Gentle sinners* from the Fort Richmond Collegiate Grade 11 English program upholding the decision of the Committee to review a request for reconsideration of the work" (Minutes 8). A second motion calling for "a letter to be sent to parents of students who will be asked to read the book *Gentle sinners* informing them that it contains scenes and language which some have found offensive and, in keeping with Board Policy KLB, alternative reading materials may be chosen" (Minutes 12) was defeated by a 5-4 vote.

On Sunday, April 15, 1990, both city newspapers reported the Board meeting's outcome. The *Winnipeg free press* quoted MacKenzie as saying that "he will not continue seeking a ban on Valgardson's novel" and that "he won't be looking for more books to ban" (Nikedes 2). *The Winnipeg sun* related that "Board chairman Ray Wyant said Thursday's vote will be the last word on the book in the division. 'There's no further process that the Board has or plans to do'" (St. Germain 5).

The Appeal Process—Round Three

On May 4, 1990, Ron Anderson, a parent of a child in Fort Garry School Division and someone who had attended the April 12 Board meeting, sent a letter to the editor of the *Winnipeg free press* and *The south Winnipeg lance* in which he "compliment[ed] the group of parents working to have this book removed from the schools. I fully support these courageous people and applaud the professional presentation of their most valid point of view" (1). As to the Board's actions, Anderson commented "...one may well conclude that these elected representatives voted as they did for reasons other than common sense, courage and moral wisdom" (3). In his concluding paragraph, Anderson expressed the hope "that the parent group opposed to *Gentle sinners* will keep up their good work, and proceed undaunted by their initial setback" (5).

Anderson's name next appears in the "Minutes of the meeting regarding *Gentle sinners* held on Tuesday, July 3, 1990, at 3:30 p.m. at the Fort Garry School Board Office." At this two-hour meeting, Anderson and five other parents met with Superintendent Izatt and Deputy Superintendent Blahey. The minutes record that Anderson "recognized that the group has had its say before the Board and that the Board has made its decision. However, the group feels it must continue its efforts to have *Gentle sinners* removed from the curriculum" (1).

Anderson put forward six reasons why the matter should be revisited. First, he indicated that a "petition containing over 450 signatures was collected. According to Anderson, the petition was collected through a networking system and not through a door to door campaign" (Minutes 1). This petition asked for "(a) the removal of the book, *Gentle sinners*, by September, 1990, and (b) a request that a review process regarding the selection of materials be instituted" (2). Further, "the group [had] met with the Minister of Education who expressed a concern about the book and recommended that the principal of the school be approached again" (1). According to Anderson, the principal "was not prepared to meet with the group, indicating that it is now in the hands of the Board" (1). Anderson also charged that the initial review process was "mishandled" because "he feels one of the members of the Review Committee was a close associate of the author" (1). Fourthly, Anderson pointed out that *Gentle sinners* "is not on the approved list of the Department of Education" (1). He also called for the book's removal because "he feels that the material like the content of *Gentle sinners* has a link with the behaviour of children in the community" (2). Finally, "he made a reference to the recent Manitoba Teachers' Society report on teacher abuse by students. He questioned how teachers could agree to teach *Gentle sinners* and then 'cry for help' when teachers are abused by students. He cites this as contradictory behaviour" (2). In conclusion, Anderson appealed to the Superintendent and the staff to consider removal of the book prior to the coming term. He cited this as an "honourable and positive step to take" (2).

Another of the group, Dr. Chudley, a paediatrician and Associate Professor of Paediatrics at the University of Manitoba, also spoke to his concerns about *Gentle sinners*. While the minutes record that Chudley had only examined the page of excerpts and had not read the entire book, on the basis of this limited reading, he concluded "that the literary value of the book is not high" (3). As well, he said "that it is his judgement that the excerpts arouse sexual desire" (3).

Asked what is stopping Principal "Angus from pulling the material from use at this stage," (3) Superintendent Izatt unknowingly but prophetically responded, "It is at this stage a matter of the teacher's choice" (3). Later, the group again asked "Izatt to ask Terry Angus to get Mr. Hamelynck to stop using *Gentle sinners*" (4). Told that "the Board has ruled on this issue indicating that it is okay for the school to continue using this material for Grade XI students" (4), Anderson said that "he feels that the Board did not say that the book could not be removed" (4) and asked, "Why does not someone in authority—the teacher, principal or others, remove the book" (4). Izatt again "responded that, at this stage, only the teacher can remove the book" (4). Izatt also said that if "he receives the petition, he will present it to the Board as information. If the group wishes to have a discussion with the Board, the petition should be presented by a delegation at its next meeting on September 12" (6).

On September 7, 1990, MacKenzie wrote the school division's Secretary-Treasurer informing him that the group, now calling itself "Parents for Quality

Education," wanted to present "a petition and brief concerning the novel *Gentle sinners* and related matters to the Board..." (1). Enclosed with the letter were (1) a petition containing 446 signatures, (2) "a copy of the brief of the presentations by Mr. James MacKenzie, Dr. A.E. Chudley and Mr. John R. Penner, (3) "a letter and supporting documents distributed to select parents of students entering Grade 11 at F.R.C.," (4) "a letter from the Director of Women Exploited, Ingrid Krueger, expressing concerns about the novel," and (5) "a letter from Dr. R. Wand, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist expressing concerns about the novel."

In the group's brief, MacKenzie explained that "our purpose in making this presentation is not to challenge that vote [of April 12, 1990, to retain *Gentle sinners*] *per se* but to share new information and clear up any misconceptions ... such that a more informed decision can be made with respect to removing the book *Gentle sinners* and indeed books of like kind." In the group's closing remarks, they asked "that you reconsider your vote and remove the book *Gentle sinners* and replace it with more suitable material" (2).

In his presentation to the Board, Dr. Chudley focused on the suicide incidents within *Gentle sinners*. He pointed out that "suicide accounts for the second most important cause of death next to accidental deaths between the ages of 15 and 19 years.... Social scientists and mental health researchers have confirmed a statistically significant relationship between media coverage and suicide and temporally associated increases in suicide rates among teens" (2). Later Chudley observed:

> The fact that Eric and Larry [two of the book's characters] are 17 years old, an age close to Grade 11 readers with similar struggles and questions about life's meaning, may enhance the student's likelihood of relating to the characters and events in the novel and thus increase the chance of mimickry [sic]. This issue should be of grave concern to both parents and educators. Although we cannot and do not implicate all tragic events in children's lives to novels or stories (in or out of the classroom), parents and educators must be diligent and cautious before recommending controversial educational materials in our public schools. Though no harm is intended, unintended consequences may result. (3)

One Board member, "Mrs. Foster pointed out that other literature such as *Romeo and Juliette* [sic] or *Hamlet* contain suicide. This literature is on the Department's approved list. Dr. Chudley responded stating that the books cited were written by Shakespeare centuries ago and students do not have the same appreciation for their impact as they would if it were a more current work" (Minutes 8).

Addendum #3, a one-page letter dated August 24, 1990, was not signed but simply bore the complimentary close, "Concerned parents' group for quality education." Accompanying the letter was a page headed, "Objectionable excerpts from *Gentle sinners* by W.D. Valgardson." These excerpts closely paralleled those previously distributed by "Moms in Touch" but with four short excerpts added and one deleted. The letter explained that "we have enclosed, for

your perusal, excerpts from the book *Gentle sinners*, which we found to be offensive. The excerpts, [sic] are out of the *text*, but are not out of *context*, as they convey the same meaning as written in the story itself." The letter also told its readers that the group would be presenting its position and the petition" to the Board and that its goal was "to remove it [*Gentle sinners*] from the curriculum and have it replaced with more appropriate English Literature." The letter encouraged parents, "If you find this book to be offensive, now is the time to contact the School at 269-2130, to check in which class your child has been enrolled [sic] and make necessary changes."

Addendum #4 was a one-page letter dated July 13 from Ingrid Krueger to Doreen Penner. Krueger, who identified herself as the Founding Director of Women Exploited, said:

> I was shocked and insulted when I read portions of the book *Gentle sinners* by W.D. Valgardson. This book is clearly an unacceptable piece of 'soft pornography' which merely promotes and even celebrates the dehumanization of women .... A book such as this can simply be added to the underlying causes of the rape and violence that plague women in our communities today. The author has merely shown that women in our society are still most vulnerable to physical violation, not only at the hands of men, but through their pens as well.

Finally, addendum #5, a single-page letter dated September 7, from Dr. Ward, an Assistant Professor in the University of Manitoba's Department of Psychiatry, was addressed to Dr. Chudley, and began, "I am writing in response to your request for my opinion regarding the advisability of including the book *Gentle sinners* by W.D. Valgardson in the high school curriculum. I reviewed the book with regard to the mental health themes which exist within the storyline of this novel, many of which deal with contemporary issues of adolescent alienation." Wand goes on to set forth his understanding of the novel which he sees "approach[ing] many issues in human interaction in a nihilistic manner..." and concluded:

> I have a concern that the depiction of these themes in the manner in which they are presented in the novel may magnify certain vulnerable students' feelings of apathy, despair and depression existing in their own lives to enhance dynamics of learned helplessness existing in adolescents who may become involved in various forms of self-destructive behaviours. Since students come to class unselected as to emotional stability, often without the knowledge of their educators of their personal vulnerabilities, there exists the possibility of increasing problems in some students with literature containing such nihilistic themes. I would not endorse the study of this particular book in the high school population without personal knowledge of the students and the specific issues each is dealing with in their own life.

At the conclusion of the delegation's presentations, the Board, by motion, agreed "That this matter be referred to the next Committee Meeting of the Whole" (Minutes 9).

That next meeting occurred on September 27 at which time Trustee G.

Cummings proposed four motions which were all lost for want of seconders. The first was "that, on behalf of the delegation, the Board remove the book *Gentle sinners* from the classroom" (Minutes 20). The next called for the Board "to implement a code of conduct similar to that found in other social organizations" (20) while the third stated "That, on behalf of the delegation, the Board review the process by which material which may depict harmful aberrations of human behaviour may be identified when approving material for classroom use" (20). Finally, Cummings moved "that the Board direct the Education and Public Relations Committee to study and recommend strategies for parent-teacher curriculum committees along the lines of the Special Needs Advisory Committee" (21).

The motion which the Board finally did pass at that meeting was:

> That the submission from the delegation be received as information and that the Board write to the delegation thanking them for the clarifications which they made during their presentation and outline to them the procedural changes which have taken place at Fort Richmond Collegiate with respect to options that are available to students in the English Literature classes. (Minutes 19)

The Appeal Process—Round Four

While the Board's motion of September 27 indicated that the Board apparently considered the matter closed, MacKenzie, in his capacity as Chair of Parents for Quality Education, wrote to the Board on December 10, 1990. In his two-page letter, MacKenzie briefly reviewed the group's efforts, saying "but, alas, to no avail; [sic] as the Board applauds our efforts but denies our rights." Saying that "this issue is gaining considerable momentum and interest/concern at all levels..." (1), MacKenzie outlined some recent or anticipated Parents for Quality Education actions: "legal opinion has been sought;" "the Women's action groups contacted will be pursuing this matter;" "we will shortly be meeting with Senior's groups;" "consideration is being given to a community blitz describing the failure of the School Board;" "the news media is most interested in our story of frustration at the hands of our elected School Board" (1). MacKenzie then added, "We do not submit this letter as an appeal or threat, but simply for your deliberation, and to go on record regarding why we must take the upcoming actions we have been forced into taking" (1). The letter closed, "As always, we are open to discuss this matter with the Board, but do make you aware that momentum is building in circles even outside the community, and these much larger and more influential resources will be brought to bear on this issue" (2).

At the Board's next meeting on December 13, 1990, a motion calling for the Board to "write to James MacKenzie inviting him to appear before the Board for an informal discussion on this matter" (Minutes 15) was passed. That discussion occurred at the January 30, 1991, regular meeting of the Board. However, prior to the January meeting, Parents for Quality Education took the step of becoming

incorporated. The documents of incorporation included their goals statement:

> The improvement of public education by means including, but without limiting, the generality of the foregoing:
>
> (a) The promotion of traditional Western society religious, social, community and family values in general, and in particular in the public education system, especially in relation to curriculum content and instructional orientation in the classroom.
> (b) The encouragement of teaching excellence in relation to the values aforesaid.
> (c) Encouraging parents, community, and the general public to become involved in substantive educational issues.
> (d) The promotion of positive relationships with teaching staff, School Boards and the Manitoba Department of Education in the public educational system. (3)

At the January 30 meeting, MacKenzie "said that they [Parents for Quality Education] will persevere and not dissipate simply because their request has been denied ... He said that they have no plans to request that any other books be removed from use at the schools" (Minutes 3). Mrs. Chudley, a former teacher in the division, also appeared as part of the delegation. She said that the group is not intending to censor this book or any other, rather the Board should be reasonable in making the decision in connection with *Gentle sinners*. She said that there is a proper area in which censorship is applied, such as in cases where dangerous or libelous material is removed from use in the schools. She said that that type of censorship would be proper for the Board to apply in the case of *Gentle sinners*. As a teacher, she had decided what was appropriate for use in her classroom. Rather than calling it censorship she would prefer to characterize it as discerning wisdom. All teachers exercise a certain amount of censorship in making decisions as to what material is used in their classrooms, as not all material is acceptable for classroom use (Minutes 4).

MacKenzie criticized Board Policy KLB, saying that it "requires an overhaul" (Minutes 3), and suggested that "he would like to see the book reviewed once again, in accordance with the Minister's new Guidelines" (Minutes 6).

The guidelines document to which MacKenzie referred was *Selection of learning resources: Policies and procedures for Manitoba schools*, produced by Manitoba Education and Training. Ironically, the impetus for producing such a document was the observation by its corporate authors, the School Library Media Program Curriculum Committee, that much of the censorship in the province's schools resulted from the absence of board-approved policies and procedures for responding to challenges to classroom and school library materials. The provincial department of education document, in part, provided "Guidelines for selection policy development" which were meant to be used as models by school jurisdictions which lacked policies and which, theretofore, had been using *ad hoc* procedures in reaction to complaints about learning materials. "By providing these guidelines, it is hoped that school divisions/districts and schools which do not currently have policies for the selection of

learning resources will find the basic principles of such a policy within this document" (4).

"Mr. MacKenzie stated that their group is looking at any avenue available to them in order to have the book removed from the school" (Minutes 7). Following some discussion, the Board passed the motion: "That the book *Gentle sinners* be reconsidered in accordance with the Minister's Guidelines entitled 'Selection of Learning Resources: Policies and Procedures for Manitoba Schools', dated January 16, 1991" (11).

The Board never had to implement its motion for, on February 8, teacher Hamelynck sent Superintendent Izatt a four-page letter in which, after summarizing the major happenings over the "past sixteen trying months" (4), Hamelynck announced, "I have decided that I will not teach *Gentle sinners* to my current English 200 class, but will continue to encourage my students in my care to read widely, discriminately, and judiciously" (3). Unaware of Hamelynck's letter, *The lance*'s February 12 issue reported on the January 30 meeting under the headline "Valgardson novel debate continues."

On February 14, the Board received Hamelynck's letter "as information" and voted to rescind the reconsideration of *Gentle sinners* (Minutes 14). Almost two weeks later, on its February 26 front page, *The lance* announced, "*Gentle sinners* pulled from curriculum," while the March 3 issue of *The Winnipeg sun* indicated, "Dispute gets book bounced." In the *Sun* coverage, Chair Wyant was quoted as saying, "The Board never said, 'You can't use it. He [Hamelynck] made the decision he felt was in the best interests of the students and I applaud him for that.' But that doesn't mean the book won't be available to students—it's still on the shelf in the school's library" (Pollett 6). It was not until March 10 that the *Free press weekly*, a Sunday supplement to the *Winnipeg free press*, noted, "Teachers troubled after book pulled from curriculum."

Commentary

How could so many "rights" end up making a "wrong?" Unlike most Manitoba school jurisdictions, Fort Garry School Division had, almost a decade before, established a policy and set of procedures for responding to complaints about curriculum materials. Upon receiving a complaint, the teacher immediately made an alternate learning material available to everyone in the class and utilized a set of assignments and a final exam which were equally applicable to either book. In most instances, the teacher's simple action of providing a substitute learning material would have sufficed and the complaint would have been dropped.

The Review Panel, constituted in accordance with Board procedures, provided a report which was unequivocal in terms of the panel's support of *Gentle sinners* as a Grade 11 learning material. The Board's initial decision on January 25, coupled with its April 12, 1990, rejection of the group's appeal, meant that,

with the proviso that students had the option of selecting an alternate novel, the Board supported the continued use of *Gentle sinners*. Such repeated decisions were consistent with Board policy on two points. Firstly, the Board had said publicly, via its policy statement KLB, that its stance must be anti-censorship: "censorship of books and other learning materials shall be challenged in order to maintain the school's responsibility to provide information and enlightenment." Further, because "no parent or group of parents, outside the Corporate Board, has the right to determine the learning materials for students other than their own children," the provision of an alternate novel had addressed this concern.

Why then did Parents for Quality Education "win?" While no definitive answer can be provided, a number of factors certainly played a part. First, while the Board had an approved set of policies and procedures for responding to complaints about curriculum materials, Board minutes suggest that many Board members were unfamiliar with the specifics of that document. Chair Wyant was quoted as saying that "this is the first request he has seen in his 3 1/2 years on the Board" (Nikides 6 April 1990 4). Without constant prompting from the superintendent's department, some Board members appeared ready to abandon the policy and substitute *ad hoc* procedures.

Perhaps because the Board's initial actions seemed to suggest support for *Gentle sinners*, a strong anti-censorship lobby never materialized within the community. A few pro-*Gentle sinners* parents sent letters to the Board as did the Writers' Union of Canada. Along with a sprinkling of citizens, the Manitoba Library Association wrote in support of the book to the "Letters to the Editor" pages of the local papers. Apart from the *Winnipeg free press*'s April 8, 1990, editorial page cartoon and *The Winnipeg sun*'s April 16, 1990 editorial, "School officials defend principle," the public press simply confined itself to reporting the continuing event. As is evident from the letters of President C. Thain of the Fort Garry Teachers' Association, local teachers certainly kept a watching brief on the happenings. However, it was not until after the Board's January 30, 1991, decision to re-evaluate *Gentle sinners* that the division's teachers indicated the depth of their concern. In a letter to new Board Chair Foster, Thain wrote:

> I wish the Board of Trustees to be aware that the Manitoba Teachers' Society is concerned about attacks on learning material by small pressure groups. It is also concerned about the apparent failure of Trustees to defend the rights of their schools and their teachers to academic freedom. It has reached a point where the Society is ready to go to court to defend the right of teachers to academic freedom including the right to teach without harassment by small pressure groups who demand the right to make decisions for everyone else.
>
> When, and I am deeply concerned that it is when and not if, such action is begun by the Teachers' Society, Trustees in Fort Garry and elsewhere are going to have to decide on which side of the courtroom they intend to stand and with what degree of commitment they intend to stand there. (1-2)

Another factor which led to the final outcome was that, from the outset, Parents for Quality Education appeared to dictate the agenda. When the "Moms in Touch" letter labelled *Gentle sinners* as "graphic pornography," the fundamental Common Law tenet of "innocent until proven guilty" was seemingly abandoned and the Division was put into the defensive posture of proving that the book was not whatever this group alleged it to be. Throughout the Board Minutes, there are numerous instances of the group's making accusations about the behaviour of the teacher, the details of some procedure, or the alleged effects of *Gentle sinners* upon adolescents. Instead of the group's having to prove the truth of its continuing string of allegations, the Division expended the time and energy of proving each charge false.

Gentle sinners (and indirectly teacher Chuck Hamelynck) was denied fundamental justice by being placed in a position of double jeopardy. The book had been "tried" and found "innocent," a decision upheld on appeal, yet that very same appeal Board was prepared to "retry" the book [and the teacher] under a new set of "laws." Actually, had the Board taken the time to compare its own policy with that suggested within *Selection of learning resources*, it would have discovered, as the Fort Garry Teachers' Association pointed out, that "the Minister's guidelines not only mirrored those under which the novel was first evaluated, they also reiterated the basic provision that no one has the right to dictate material for anyone other than their own children" (Thain to Foster 1).

If *Gentle sinners* had been re-evaluated under the Minister's new guidelines in March, 1991, I suspect that the original review panel's decision would have been reaffirmed. And then what would have happened? That was really the question Superintendent Izatt had raised a full year before when he cautioned: "If the Board deviates from its policy by convening an additional review panel, the Board will have to decide how many panels will be utilized before it makes its decision regarding the appeal" (Minutes 22 March 1990 9). Izatt was really saying that, at some point, Board members had to accept responsibility for making a "final" decision and for saying to Parents for Quality Education, "Your appeals are exhausted. The *Gentle sinners* matter is closed."

Because no one in Fort Garry School Division appeared prepared to make a strong, unequivocal statement of closure, in its absence, Parents for Quality Education was ready to continue its actions. Though the Board's April 12, 1990, vote rejected the group's appeal, the fact that two of the nine trustees voted against the motion may have suggested to the complainants that there was some degree of support for the group's position within the Board. Later "sympathetic" behaviours by this pair of trustees might have also served to reinforce the group's continued actions. Regardless, as Mackenzie pointed out on January 30, 1991, Parents for Quality Education "will persevere and not dissipate because their request ha[d] been denied" (Minutes 3). At that same meeting, Mackenzie stated "that their group [was] looking at any avenue available to them in order to have the book removed from the school" (Minutes 7). Certainly the group's behav-

iours evidenced the truth of MacKenzie's statement for, when the review policy's procedures did not lead to the group's ends, they asked the division's superintendents to subvert the democratic process by using the authority of their office to order *Gentle sinners*' removal. When that approach also did not work, Parents for Quality Education's "non-threatening" letter of December 10, 1991, apparently intimidated enough trustees sufficiently that the Board gave them another hearing and then grasped at the delaying tactic of yet another panel.

And the learning for the censors? Maintain constant but shifting pressures on the elected and appointed decision makers until, worn down and exhausted, they will withdraw their support from the school level personnel. The classroom teacher, abandoned and isolated, will then accede to the censors' demands. Frightening, isn't it!

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Too young to know? The censorship of children's materials in Canadian public libraries

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Résumé: *D'après une enquête menée auprès de mille bibliothécaires du Canada anglais, l'auteur analyse les constantes qui se dégagent des tentatives de censure des ouvrages destinés à la jeunesse. Il observe que le cas le plus fréquent, où l'on cherche à faire retirer de la circulation tel ou tel livre, représente 70% des plaintes. Or, seulement dix livres ont été retirés, ce qui prouve que le libraires défendent la liberté de lecture.*

In 1988, I conducted a survey of Canada's public libraries to measure community pressure for censorship of collections, and to document how public library staff respond to this pressure. To date, only one study in Canada has specifically focused on children and young adult users of public libraries (also included were school libraries); this research, by David Jenkinson, was restricted to Manitoba institutions ("The censorship iceberg").

The study reported here was motivated by a desire to understand more clearly the attitudes towards intellectual freedom that prevail in the public libraries of English Canada. While many Canadian residents believe that they and their children can get anything they might want to read, view, or hear through their public library, the Book and Periodical Council, formerly the Book and Periodical Development Council, has a quite different view of Canada as a nation of quiet censors and quiet censorship ("BPDC Sponsors Freedom to Read"). But to what extent does this accusation apply to the nation's public libraries and public librarians, and how are children and young adults affected? The impetus for this study was the realization that Canadian public librarians lacked national information on the scope and nature of community pressures to censor materials that are housed in the nation's public libraries. Also lacking was information on the ways in which public library staff across the country have responded to these pressures.

The questionnaire used in this study asked for comprehensive information on all incidents, whether verbal or written, that had occurred between 1985 and 1987. Censorship incidents involving materials for children and young adults were of particular interest to the study, as were institutional policies that involved the restriction of access to materials written for them.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the nature and extent of community pressures across Canada to deny or limit access to public library materials for

children and young adults during the period 1985 to 1987. In describing this phenomenon, I hope to draw attention to the larger philosophical and social policy issues relating to children's rights and liberties in the Canadian body politic. Are we ever too young to know? How old is old enough? Should children and young adults have a moral right of unrestricted access to information and literature? A constitutional right?

Methodology

A pre-tested questionnaire was mailed in early 1988 to all 1000 autonomous public libraries across Canada. Overall, 560 institutions responded, for a response rate of 56 percent. These 560 responding institutions served municipal populations of more than 19 million Canadian residents, approximately three out of four people in 1987. Because many more small than large public libraries responded to the study, the findings reported here tend to characterize smaller institutions across the country, with a median municipal population of 6,000 residents per library. They also tend to reflect the characteristics of English-language public libraries in Ontario (nine in ten questionnaire responses were in English and four in ten came from Ontario).

Findings

Responding institutions reported that approximately 600 people objected to 687 items in all age groups between 1985 and 1987. These challenges involved some 500 different titles. For a report of the study findings for both adult and children's materials, see the author's article in *Canadian library journal.*

One in five public libraries experienced challenges every year. While half of the challenges were verbal, this almost certainly understates their proportion because both documentation and staff memories of them tend to be less reliable, understandably, than for those challenges registered in writing. A total of 385 or 56 percent of all challenges were directed at materials for children and young adults.

Challenges to materials for children and young adults

In Quebec, one of the study respondents described how a parent had been scandalized to find his daughter reading a public library book on menstruation that was aimed at ten to fourteen-year-olds. The daughter was ten. The father was a doctor. In Newfoundland, another respondent reported that a patron wanted all of Kevin Major's books removed from the children's section of the public library. In Alberta, it was reported that a parent wanted *Trish for president* removed from the young adult section of the public library, on the grounds that it was "definitely unsuitable" for a young adult; however, the real reason behind

the objection, the study respondent noted parenthetically, was the liberated attitude of the girl in running for school president. In Ontario, a parent wanted *Kevin* withdrawn from the public library collection, on the grounds that her son had been counselled "for this gay problem" that she claimed he was confused and unhappy about, and she strongly resented the content of this book, which in her view glorified it. Also in Ontario, a parent requested the removal of *Where did I come from?* by Peter Mayle, which she felt was too explicit and "damaging to her nine-year-old son who was going into the priesthood." In Nova Scotia, a parent wanted the public library to remove its copy of *Nightmares: Poems to trouble your sleep* because one poem, about a ghoul outside the school, "added to the things kids have to watch out for and be frightened of." In Alberta, a parent wanted a book removed from the public library collection so that children would not have access to the obscene words in it. The book in question? *Webster's new collegiate dictionary.*

These are but a few of the hundreds of incidents that came to light in this study. Of the 385 challenges to materials for children and young adults, detailed information was supplied for 316 of them. These 316 challenges involved 125 public libraries across Canada, two-thirds of which served urban populations (median residents was 63,000).

All challenges to materials for children and young adults were initiated by adults, but it is curious that very few of these adults claimed to be acting on behalf of a child—fewer than one in five. Almost all the rest said that they were representing themselves. It is also curious that the majority of complainants wanted the offending materials removed from the library altogether, not just from the shelves for younger patrons.

By age level, 13 percent of all challenges were directed at preschool materials, 43 percent at materials for children aged approximately six to 12, and 44 percent at materials for those between 13 and 18. Fiction was much more commonly targeted than non-fiction, 249 challenges (84 percent) compared to 49 challenges (16 percent). Virtually all challenges involved books of one kind or another: picture books accounted for 27 percent of the total, comic books for two percent, magazines for one percent, and other books for 68 percent. Only one percent of the challenges were to materials in non-book formats such as video and audio recordings. Challenged titles were published over a wide range of years, but half had imprints in the 1980s and 40 percent in the 1970s.

Complainants objected to 257 different titles; four challenges were to "all titles" by particular authors or on particular subjects. The pattern of challenged titles is shown in Table 1.

Table

1. Challenged Titles, by Incidence, 1985-1987

Title	Challenges per Title	Titles Number	Percent
Lizzy's lion	11	1	
Forever	8	1	
Wifey	6	1	2
Slugs	6	1	
Where did I come from?	4	1	
Outside over there	4	1	
5 titles	3	5	2
21 titles	2	21	8
225 titles	1	225	88
Total		257	100%

Most frequently challenged was *Lizzy's lion*—written by Dennis Lee, and illustrated by Marie-Louise Gay—with 11 complaints over the three years covered by the study. *Lizzy's lion* won the Canada Council's Children's Literature Prize for Illustration in 1984. In second place, with eight complaints, was *Forever* by Judy Blume. Tied for third were two titles that each received six complaints, *Wifey* by Judy Blume and *Slugs* by David Greenberg. As the table shows, however, most titles were challenged only once, while a few were challenged several times.

The pattern of challenged authors was similar to that of challenged titles: a few authors had several works challenged, while most authors had only a few challenged. Ten works by Judy Blume were challenged, seven works by Norma Klein, and five works each by Raymond Briggs, Roald Dahl, and Maurice Sendak. While the large number of offending titles identified in the present study suggests that it may not be possible to predict potentially vulnerable titles in the future, the study shows that there are several authors whose works have been challenged persistently in the recent past. It seems reasonable to predict that much of their present and new work will continue to be challenged—as long as they are alive to write and able to resist the chill of sustained censure by a small minority of Canadians.

Complainants gave 430 reasons for challenging these 257 titles. Their reasons reveal a fascinating, and at times bewildering, spectrum of community values, social attitudes, and ideological mindsets. The most common grounds for objections were violence, cruelty, and "scary" titles (24 percent of challenges). Second were titles deemed unsuitable for a particular age group (17 percent), almost always in combination with additional groups such as sex or

violence. Third were objections to sexual explicitness, nudity, and pornography (16 percent). Fourth were objections to titles deemed to promote negative moral values (14 percent).

Specific grounds for objections, ranked by frequency of mention, were as follows:

- unsuitable for age group (74 times)
- violence, cruelty (69 times)
- sexually explicit, nudity (66 times)
- promotes negative moral values (59 times)
- scary, frightening to child (35 times)
- coarse language, profanity (30 times)
- promotes the occult, witchcraft (22 times)
- sexist, demeaning to women (12 times)
- racist (10 times)
- in bad taste (9 times)
- offensive to religion (9 times)
- promotes homosexuality (9 times)
- badly written (8 times)
- pornographic (7 times)
- other (11 times)

These patterns are somewhat similar to those found in several American studies of public libraries in individual states or regions. Noticeably absent from the American studies, however, were challenges on the basis of violence, cruelty, and scary titles. It is interesting that violence did not figure prominently in recent American studies of school library censorship either. In a nationwide study recently completed by Dianne Hopkins of challenges to materials in secondary school libraries, responses showed that violence was at the bottom of the list of concerns, while sexuality, profanity, obscenity, and morality ranked highest (4,24).

Although the statistical pattern in grounds for challenges looks relatively straightforward, it nonetheless masks a great deal of ideological complexity in the thinking of complainants. It masks their attitudes towards other citizens, especially towards children and young adults. Above all, it masks their beliefs about the power of ideas to persuade and tempt, and it masks their fears about the power of reading and the power of words.

Ideology, attitudes, beliefs, and fears are revealed in part through the words of the complainants themselves as they communicated to public library staff their grounds for challenging materials. Complainant objections to representations of violence and what they considered to be excessive or inappropriate violence were expressed in the following verbatim comments (bracketed information about titles and reading categories was supplied by the survey respondents):

• "Morbid and contains several senseless murders...Teaches children to solve their problems by using violence and murder." [*Big Claus and Little Claus* by Hans Christian Andersen, children's fiction]
• "Violence gratuitous and distasteful. Children torture, rape and finally murder babysitter and successfully blame it on a transient farm worker." [*Let's go play at Adams'* by Mendal W. Johnson]
• "Encourages children to feel violence will solve problems, encourages revenge—terrible qualities to teach." [*I'll fix Anthony* by Judith Viorst, picture book for ages three to ten]
• "Promotes disunity between brothers. There is no love or forgiveness but only hatred and revenge." [*I'll fix Anthony*]
• "Violence condoned. Not a good role model for young children." [*Beast of Monsieur Racine* by Tomi Ungerer, fiction for ages five and up]
• "Makes nuclear war sound like fun." [*The butter battle book* by Dr. Seuss, fiction for ages three to eight]
• "Fighting, hating and selfishness." [*Mine's the best* by Bonsall Crosby, easy fiction]
• "Emotional content, rape scene, death and cremation may be too intense for junior YA (ages eleven to thirteen). Might be more suitable to senior YA (fourteen to sixteen)." [*Crabbe* by William Bell]
• "Babysitter wanted to eat kids. Story is violent, inappropriate for three-year-old being left with babysitter." [*Mr. and Mrs. Pig's evening out* by Mary Rayner, picture book fiction]
• "Child was visibly upset by the pictures of eating a live cat and bird and the final basement picture. Upset by wording and torture scene on pages 23 and 24 especially." [*The Werewolf family* by Jack Gantos and Nicole Rubel, picture book for ages four to ten]
• Too violent for patron's child—fox snapped off the heads of his victims. [*The story of Henny Penny* illustrated by Tom and Blonnie Holmes, easy fiction]
• Patron objected to the second verse of London Bridge, specifically "chopped off their heads." [*Sally go round the sun* by Edith Fowke, preschool fiction]
• "This book is gross! It's violent to eat humans—cannibal, and violent to fall apart and split open." [*The greedy old fat man* illustrated by Paul Galdone, preschool picture book]
• "Frightening for a child because the vain queen eats the heart of Snow White (she thinks it's her heart, actually a wild boar's heart)." [*Snow White and the seven dwarfs* retold by Wanda Gag, junior fiction]
• "Child was upset by Tittymouse and Tattymouse because Titty was scalded to death." [*Tales to tell* by Harold Jones, preschool picture book]
• "Body being beaten, hanging." [*The Punch and Judy book* by Ron Mann, juvenile/easy fiction]
• Patron was offended by the illustrations in which some faces are grotesque, the

giant is scary, and Tom comes out of a cow in a cowpat. [*Adventures of Tom* by Freire Wright, picture book]
• Patron found offensive the part where the tiny woman goes to the graveyard and removes a bone from the top of a grave and then uses it to make soup. [*The teeny tiny woman* by Barbara Seuling, fiction for ages three to eight]
• "Story is gory, very unhappy ending, disturbing to young child." [*Big monster* by Shane Zarowny, easy fiction]
• Dialogue had frightened child when parent read the book to him. Crocodile eats child. Wanted us to warn parents that book would scare children. [*The enormous crocodile* by Roald Dahl, easy fiction]
• "Moral dubious, violent, not educational, scary." [*Five Chinese brothers* by Claire Bishop, children's picture book]

Complainant objections to materials with themes involving sex and sexual taboos were expressed as follows:

• "The flap on book did not at all even hint to the abundance of sexual information my child was suddenly confronted with—pg. 15, 20, 45—I do want my children to be aware of all this, but not at age eight and certainly not by accident." [*Naomi in the middle* by Norma Klein, fiction for grade four]
• It would upset her children, who don't know about these things. The patron does realize this occurs in some homes. [*Don't hurt me, Mama* by Muriel Stanek, fiction for ages seven to eight]
• Felt book was too mature for patron's eight year old daughter. [*Are you there God, it's me Margaret* by Judy Blume, fiction for ages ten and up]
• "Suggestions are very explicit. Work is too revealing for young teens and seems to condone sexual freedom." [*Beginner's love* by Norma Klein, teen fiction]
• "Severely lacking morals; advocates abortion, sleeping around." [*It's not what you expect* by Norma Klein, young adult fiction]
• "Inappropriate classification—YA novel about gay teenage boys. Language and subject too crude for early teens who gravitate to YA-designated books." [*Boys on the rock* by John Fox]
• "Discovering the mother and father had sex and the feelings of girls for girls etc." [*Flick* by Wendy Kesselman, fiction for age thirteen]
• "Implied lesbianism and vulgar terms." [*Bouquets for Brimbal* by J.P. Reading, fiction for ages fourteen plus]
• "Book dealt with lesbianism." [*Annie on my mind* by Nancy Garden, fiction for ages eleven to fifteen]
• Wrong cataloguing; concern over "changing" Hercules to (female) Heraclea. [*Heraclea* by Bernard Euslin, juvenile fiction]
• "I find the profanity objectionable as well as the explicit description of sexual intercourse on p. 109. It seems to me that both of these make the book unsuitable for young teens at whom it seems to be aimed." [*Dark but full of diamonds* by

Katie Letcher Lyle, young adult fiction]
• "Specific description of masturbation made children want to try it." [*Deenie* by Judy Bloom, juvenile fiction]
• "Female nudity would corrupt children." [*Tell me grandma, tell me grandpa*, author not given, preschool]
• "Their only relationship is sleeping together—there is no normal relationship." [*Family secrets* by Norma Klein, young adult fiction]
• "Incredibly sexually graphic pictures. They were truly pornographic. The breast, the vagina as a source of violence. This is a sexual nightmare come true." [*The tin pot foreign general and the old iron woman* by Raymond Briggs, fiction for ages twelve and over]
• "Small children might not get the message about the effects of war and could incorporate these ideas into their play." [*The tin pot foreign general and the old iron woman*]
• "Sexual comments—condoms mentioned—not necessary in collection, not even a good story." [*Where has Deedie Wooster been all these years*? by Anita Jacobs, young adult fiction]
• "Book described boy's sexual experiences with girl friend." [*Juggling* by Robert Lehrman, young adult fiction]
• Patron had read a critique which claimed book was an allegory of rape. [*The witches* by Roald Dahl, fiction for ages eight to twelve]
• Graphic representation of birth of puppy offended mother. [*The last puppy* by Frank Asch, preschool picture book]
• "Gives children the wrong impression about sex." [*What's Best for you* by J. Angell, young adult fiction]
• "Nudity, unpleasant story *no* child could enjoy." [*In the night kitchen* by Maurice Sendak, preschool fiction]
• "Sexual references re prurient interests of male adolescents." [*Starring Sally J. Freedman as herself* by Judy Blume, fiction for ages ten to thirteen]
• "Book too graphic about genital parts in a *negative* way—making fun of genitals, etc." [*Les aventures magiques de Corentin au pays de PipiCaca*, author not given, juvenile fiction]

A fascinating cluster of challenges centred on portrayals of less-than-perfect adults and dysfunctional families. Specific themes found offensive by complainants were disrespect of children for parents, unacceptable behaviours such as incest, abuse, violence, and suicide, and inappropriate role modelling. These complaints were usually expressed as promotion of negative (read "unacceptable") moral values.

• "Material depicted youths exhibiting disrespect for parents." [*Angel dust blues* by Todd Strasser, young adult fiction]
• "Taught children disrespect to relatives and other adults when parents were

trying to teach manners." [*Dinner at Aunt Rose's* by Janet Munsil, fiction for preschool to eight years old]

• "Too violent. Showed parents in a bad light." [*Jim who ran away from his wife and was eaten by a lie* by Ailaine Zelloe, picture book for ages three to eight]

• "I felt the main message to kids to be that violence, abuse, disobedience, disrespect, etc. are not offensive—injurious to kids' minds." [*Hector Protector* by Maurice Sendak, preschool fiction]

• "Swearing, smoking marijuana, teen attitudes towards adults." [*Wheels for walking* by Sandra Richmond, young adult fiction]

• "Too scary for children, too violent, seems to condone child abuse." [*Daddy is a monster...sometimes* by John Steptoe, picture book for ages three to seven]

• "Child abuse." [*Tom Thumb* by Charles Perrault, picture book for ages six to twelve]

• "Book discussed family cruelty (wife abuse), violence." [*Cracker Jackson* by Betsy Byers, young adult fiction]

• "Book deals with incest, child abuse." [*Abby, my love* by Hadley Irwin, young adult fiction]

• "Book not suitable for children's library (or indeed any library) because of graphic description of sex, violence, child abuse." [*Barbe-bleue* by Jacques Martin, a comic book for ages eight to twelve]

• "Content and violent pictures show incestuous behavior." [*Le Petit chaperon rouge* by Bruno de la Salle, fiction for ages six to eight]

• "The relationship between the brother and sister is simply not a healthy relationship mostly when they are sleeping together, last page and also putting the baby on the mantelpiece. Really." [*My crazy sister* by M.B. Goffstein, preschool fiction]

• Patron felt book was for 10-12 year olds, indirectly about suicide. Not suitable for children at all. [*Le Petit chien* by Jean Prignaud, picture book for ages four to seven]

• "Total despair in the conclusion—child commits suicide." [*The brothers Lionheart* by Astrid Lindgren, fiction for ages eight to twelve]

• At one point in the story, it states the hero's parents "were so worried they were ready to kill themselves." Patron was horrified that such a statement should be in a kid's book. [*Gorky rises* by William Steig, picture book for preschool to grade three]

• When son is lost, mother is so distraught she says she will kill herself. Talk about people committing suicide NOT appropriate for small children." [*Gorky rises*]

• Patron felt boy's response was overly violent—not true to life. Disliked the ending where the mother fantasizes she would be able to watch soap operas while her son fed the baby. [*When the new baby comes, I'm moving out* by Martha Alexander, preschool picture book]

• Patron said the book had unfeeling treatment of the subject of death, and

disturbed her child who chose it because of its blue cover, in response to our summer reading game. It should be moved to non-fiction. [*Cookies for Luke* by Sheila J. Bleeks, juvenile fiction]

• "Lesson indicates that greed, craftiness and laziness pay off." [*Tom Fox and the apple pie* by Clyde Watson, picture book for ages five to seven]

• "Gross habit: putting in picture and writing a grandpa blowing his nose without a handkerchief. Disregard just that one particular page." [*My old grandad* by Wolf Harranth, picture book]

• Patron found illustrations and poetry offensive and of poor quality, offbeat, eg p. 15 "urine" picture of grandmother. [*High wire spider* by George Swede]

• Patron felt the male/female relationship in the book was an extremely negative influence on students: "Burn book (seriously!)." [*One on one* by Jerry Seigel, fiction for grades nine and up]

• Patron thought book condoned forced marriages, i.e., teen pregnancies. [*Pennington's heir* by K.M. Peyton, young adult fiction]

• Patron felt the book was showing a bad boy who, although he did misbehave, was never punished. Children reading it would think it was cute to be naughty. [*Bad Thad* by Judy Malloy, preschool picture book]

• "Stereotyped. Reinforces acceptance of problems rather than encouraging action." [*New friend* by Charette Zolokow, preschool fiction]

• Patron felt book encouraged children to trust strangers. [*Will you cross me*, author not given, fiction for grade one]

• "The child in the story is wearing a t-shirt with her name on it, which is not recommended practice because of danger from child molesters." [*The other Emily* by Gibbs Davis, picture book for preschool/primary]

• "Not proper for a child to read about having to look after a sibling because they are handicapped; children do not understand about people being different." [*Ben* by Victoria Shennon, juvenile fiction]

• "Didn't think it right that an adult could take over from children and didn't like tone of book." [*The rotten old car* by Geraldine Kaye, fiction for preschool to seven years old]

• "Book shows Santa drinking alcoholic beverages." [*Father Christmas* by Raymond Briggs, picture book for ages five to ten]

• "Did not like children forgetting about dead bird for which they had had a funeral." [*The dead bird* by Margaret Wise Brown, fiction for preschool to grade two]

• "I was very disappointed to hear the endless stream of insults...I'm trying to teach good vocabulary." [*Two stupid dummies* by Mark Thurman, fiction for ages three to seven]

• "Picture of dog defecating on floor." [*Some swell pup* by Maurice Sendak, picture book for ages four to eight]

Several complainants objected to the use of profanity in literature, often urging

removal or restriction of material on the basis of a single word. Examples are the following:

• use of the word 'fuck' [*Freddy's book* by John Neufeld, fiction for ages eight to twelve]
• reference to a penis as a 'hot dog' [*Blue trees, red sky* by Norma Klein, picture book for ages three to seven]
• use of 'slit' instead of 'vagina' [*Thomas is different* by Gunilla Wolde, picture book for ages four to eight]
• use of the word 'slut' [*Cinderella* illustrated by Bernadette, juvenile fiction]
• reference to a cat called 'Fluffybum' [*Badjelly the witch* by Spike Milligan, junior fiction]
• use of the expression 'Oh my God' [*Les aventures de Benji* by Disney, cassette-book for ages six to eight]

Other complaints were about more extensive offence:

• "Inappropriate language (fucking, whore's guts) and explicit graphics (couples copulating, naked females). The theme (that God is a depraved old man) is equally offensive." [*The vagabond in limbo: The ultimate alchemist* by Ribera Godard, fiction for young adults and adults]
• "Encouraged swearing." ["Soap-Box Derby" by the National Film Board, juvenile video]
• "Might make coarse language seem acceptable—damn, bull, up yours, go to Hell." [*Alan and Naomi* by Myron Levoy, children's fiction]
• Patron complained about language—bastard, pissed, Hot Damn, and some we could not find. [*Starring Sally J. Freedman as herself* by Judy Blume]
• "Coarse language—'Mrs. Minish is such a bitch' (p. 30). 'Damn that Blubber! (p. 50). 'Damn!' Mom said (p. 69). Categorize the book so that children under age eleven are less likely to read it." [*Blubber* by Judy Blume, fiction for grades four to six]

Several complainants opposed portrayals of the occult, witchcraft, and religion in literature for children and young adults.

• Parent objected to devil being blamed for child's unacceptable behavior—felt this went against learning to accept responsibility for own actions. [*The Devil did it* by Susan Jeschke, fiction for preschool to grade three]
• "The devil becomes a girl's friend. Becoming a friend of the devil is not good entertainment especially for kids." [*The Devil did it*]
• "Witchcraft is represented as being a real and vital threat to the lives of children...The resolution of the story leaves the witches and underworld figures in the same powerful and threatening position." [*Hag head* by Susan Musgrave

and Carol Evans, fiction for ages six to eleven]
• "Introducing the occult in a matter-of-fact, supposedly innocent way." [*Bumps in the night* by Harry Allard, picture book for ages three to eight]
• "Devils juxtaposed with church, religion." [*Out of the oven* by Jan Mark, picture book]
• "Ridicules religion by creating an extra-terrestrial being." [*Les Huits jours du diable dans "Super Tintin"* by D. Convard, comic book for ages nine to thirteen]
• Patron said that God was depicted as vengeful, not loving. [*Moses—the escape from Egypt* by Geoffrey Butcher, board book for preschool-grade one]

Although challenges to non-fiction for children and young adults were less common than challenges to fiction, some of the grounds indicated by complainants were as follows:

• "Objection to the title—this is not a book for the young and teenagers are young. Sin is never something to be proud of. I would think this book might result in a very sick society in the future." [*Young, gay and proud* edited by Sasha Alyson, young adult non-fiction]
• "Some vulnerable teenager entering puberty might actually believe that homosexuality is okay and give it a try and reap some serious consequences in later years." [*A way of love, a way of life* by Frances Hanckel and John Cunningham, young adult non-fiction]
• "Mention of masturbation, periods, wet dreams could make children experiment early (prepuberty)." [*What's happening to me: A guide to puberty* by Peter Mayle, young adult non-fiction]
• Patron objected strongly to one sentence on masturbation being pleasurable, ie, okay. [*What's happening to me: A guide to puberty*]
• "Material was very explicit and actually encouraging of teenage girls to experiment with pre-marital sex." [*Girls and sex* by Wardell B. Pomeroy, young adult non-fiction]
• "I object to the tone of the chapter on sex. You as librarian are in a perfect position to set a high moral standard for the community." [*The teenage survival book* by Sol Gordon, teen non-fiction]
• "Will initiate curiosity, resulting in sexual experimentation by the children." [*Did the sun shine before you were born?* by Sol Gordon, non-fiction for ages three to seven]
• "My son brought this book to my attention and was upset and embarrassed." [*The body book* by Claire Rayner, junior non-fiction]
• As a Catholic parent, patron was concerned that child would have access to such material, especially about birth control. [*Learning about sex: A guide for children and their families* by Jennifer Aho]
• Patron specifically objected to a sentence that used the word "penis"—parent of grade three girl felt that she didn't want her daughter to know what a penis was

at this early age. [*The joy of birth* by Camilla Jessel, described as non-fiction for preschool to grade three]
• Mention of "chastity belt." [*Alexander the Great* by Constance C. Greene, non-fiction for ages ten to twelve]

Not only was there wide variation in the grounds that complainants offered to justify requests to remove or restrict materials, there were also differences in point of view on the same title. For example, although violence was a recurring theme in complaints about *Lizzy's lion* there were many different interpretations given to this theme among the eleven complainants who sought its suppression:

• "Very violent—may frighten children aged three to six"
• "Unnecessary exposure to violence that a young child does not need to be subjected to"
• "Lion eating up robber—frightening—inappropriate material for young children"
• "Whole book objectionable—caused children to have nightmares"
• "Too violent—a depressing book"
• "Violence was too graphic"
• "Violence—body parts dumped in trash"
• "Violent and scary"
• "Break and enter ideas; insensitive and uncaring about people in general."

Similarly, although sexual explicitness was a recurring theme in objections to *Forever*, several interpretations were also given to this theme by complainants:

• "My daughter's romantic illusions have been shattered. Not suitable for an eleven-year old"
• Patron objected to this book being considered a children's book when it had sex scenes
• Patron thought subject matter was teaching children to have sex
• Patron did not want his teenaged daughter reading a sexually explicit book
• "Too much sex, no remorse on girl's part"
• "Too sexually explicit"
• "Too explicitly sexual."

The grounds for objections to *Wifey* were also expressed in a variety of ways:

• Unsuitable for children—adult material written by popular children's author
• Patron felt that it was inappropriate for YA—cover listed book as adult, too explicit sexually
• Not for children
• Patron was extremely upset as to sexual nature of book and *very* angry as to

placement
- "Unsuitable for young people"
- "Entire content."

The reasons for objections to *Slugs* were as follows:

- Too violent for children
- "The book is a bad influence on child-animal relationships and is generally in bad taste"
- "Gross content, extreme violence indicated, would promote violence and cruelty in children, etc."

Objections to *Where did I come from*? were as follows:

- Patron felt book was too explicit and damaging to her nine-year-old son who was going into the Priesthood
- "Unsuitable for children without parental supervision...writing in poor taste...pictures presented in a poor manner... encourages children to experiment"
- Patron said chapter "Making Love" was too much of a how-to and inappropriate for age of readers to which it was directed
- Patron felt book should be housed in office because children shouldn't be able to get at it themselves; subject matter should be dealt with by parent.

Objections to *Outside over there* were as follows:

- "Desensitizes children to accept ugly; shows children expected to take on an adult's responsibility; the magic has an occult flavour; the illustrations make the gnomes look like adults"
- "Terrifying pictures"
- "Unnatural, scary story, not educational"
- "Simply weird, not suitable for children...doesn't make sense."

The multiplicity of grounds that have been advanced to justify challenges to library materials is best explained by reference to reading theory, or more precisely, reader response theory. The reader (or viewer or listener) inevitably participates in creating the meaning of a text. Indeed, sometimes the reader's interpretation of its meaning is so divergent that it appears the reader has created his or her own text quite independent of whatever the author intended. As Aidan Chambers explains it, response to a text is based in a coming together of the reader's personal history, the reader's reading history, and the text itself (*Introducing books for children*). A reader's personal history includes the formation of cultural, moral, and esthetic values. These values play a part in determining a reader's response to a text, and are among the criteria that a reader

uses, consciously or unconsciously, to decide whether a text is good or bad. If a text is judged on its literary merit, esthetic values should be the dominant criteria. But literature has always been understood to be a force for socializing individuals, and the moral and cultural values that a reader brings to and finds in a text will influence the reader's judgment of the text. These complex interactions are nowhere better illustrated than in the frequently divergent reasons that people give for disapproving of the same title.

Regardless of the varying reasons for challenges, what action did the complainants want carried out between 1985 and 1987? Seventy percent wanted the offending material removed from the public library collection—some even wanted it burned or destroyed as well! And a fringe element also wanted the library staff punished in draconian ways. Other more benign actions requested by complainants were internal relocations, usually from children's to adult or young adult sections but also from young adult to adult, restrictions on borrowing or in-house use, and placement of a warning label on materials.

In spite of the overwhelming demand for withdrawal of items from collections, however, the offending material was retained on library shelves in nine out of ten cases. In only 34 out of 309 challenges was it withdrawn. Five challenges were unresolved at the time of the study. Almost all challenges were resolved within three months of initiation, and in fact many were resolved on the same day that they were lodged. Only two percent of all challenges ever reached the local news media.

Institutional policies

An important aspect of patron access to public library collections is the existence of written policies for selecting materials and handling objections. Also important for children and young adults is whether the institution has age-related restrictions on borrowing and in-house use of materials.

Among respondent public libraries that reported challenges to materials for children and young adults between 1985 and 1987, the vast majority had appropriate access policies—a written selection policy, a written objections policy, a form for handling objections, and a donations policy. The vast majority also endorsed the Canadian Library Association's Statement on Intellectual Freedom (CLA Statement), which states that: "All persons in Canada have the fundamental right, as embodied in the nation's Bill of Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to have access to all expressions of knowledge, creativity and intellectual activity, and to express their thoughts publicly."

However, at the same time that most respondents endorsed the CLA Statement, three in ten also restricted borrowing or in-house use of materials according to age, with restrictions varying from ages twelve to eighteen years old. Some institutions reported that they restrict access to specific titles or authors such as Judy Blume titles, *Wifey, Forever, Boys and sex*, and *Girls and*

sex. A sizeable minority of respondents also restricted children's access to certain categories of materials, variously described as "questionable" adult material, books with "doubtful morality," adult fiction, adult type of material, sexually explicit material, adult comics, erotic comics, sexual enjoyment guides, books on sexuality, sex education books, books on childbirth, "pornographic" materials, "some controversial reference material (sex)," violent material, certain art and science books, or, in one case, "anything that is not housed in the children's room."

Summary

Do children and young adults enjoy unfettered access to Canadian public library collections? This study shows that the answer is, for the most part, yes. While public library staff who participated in the study reveal considerable sensitivity in their reactions to challenges and in their relations with those members of the community who believe that they have a right to personal advocacy in the public library selection process, at the same time, they also reveal a strong commitment to the principle of freedom of access to information and literature for children and young adults. What public librarians across the country need now is enhanced relationships with teachers, school librarians, and literature specialists across the country, in the common goal of helping young people to learn what it is to be human.

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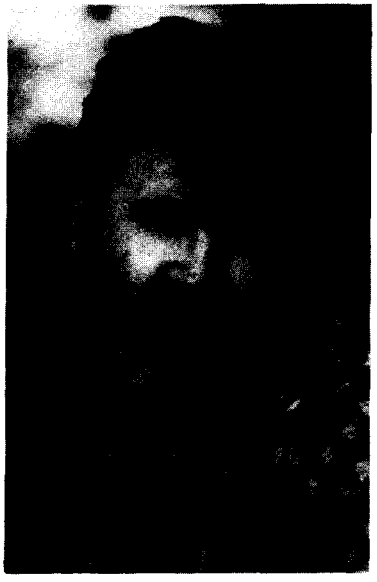
The sad J(y)oke of cultural appropriation



Tim Wynne-Jones

Résumé: *Après l'analyse du droit de l'écrivain à l'appropriation d'autres cultures, T. Wynne-Jones avoue avoir largement "emprunté" à l'univers culturel des Inuits afin de produire un oeuvre consacrée au mode de vie des Autochtones. Selon lui, les opposants à ce droit à l'appropriation du monde amérindien s'en prennent à des boucs émissaires: les vrais coupables, ceux qui détruisent les valeurs autochtones, ne sont pas les écrivains mais le cinéma et les séries télévisées.*

Did you hear the one about the Welshman who started a chicken farm? The government helped him out with 500 pullets. When he asked for another 500 they sent someone out to check. No chickens. When asked what had happened, the Welshman replied: "Either they're too deep or they're too close together but none of them came up!

I remember making Polack jokes. Then came Gdansk and Lech Walesa and Solidarity and it was suddenly all too apparent—on the news every night—that these people were not buffoons. Where had that absurd caricature ever come from in the first place? Oh, I had known from childhood about Chopin and Marie Curie (nee Skoldowska); not to mention Josef Teodor Konrad Walecz Korzeniowski (better known in this part of the world as Joseph Conrad—his name by appropriation). But for me, the events of 1981 firmly and convincingly put pay to the Polack joke. Even though my intentions had never been anything but benign—"Hey, it's just a joke!"—I found I just couldn't put any oomph into my delivery if the butt of the joke was a representation of a people or nation as being of less than average intelligence. So what to do about indulging in this admittedly base form of humour—Stop? No thanks. And thus I chanced upon the dumb Welshman. I didn't actually find any dumb Welshman jokes, I just reworked Polack or Newfy or Frog jokes. I guess you could say I appropriated them. I'm half Welsh: I can poke fun at my own.

The Welsh have never been characterized as being particularly stupid or particularly funny, for that matter. Indeed, they've never been known for much of anything. But then, I figure, any race that could produce the nightclub singer Tom Jones deserves anything it gets! My wife, who feels no strong cultural roots with any one ethnic group but who shares a distaste for racist humour, tells cruel jokes about Ontarions. These go over surprisingly well.

Jokes which imply that someone is playing with less than a full deck are universal. It's no big deal to switch the name of the jokee. But such humour is not the same as that which hangs on presumed racial characteristics. A joke in which the punchline turned on a Welshman's stinginess, for instance, might meet with blank stares; whereas, if I substitute a Scot, all is well. Well, actually, not—except that in my case, I'm also Scotch (50% by volume), I can get away with it. These are also my people. In what other tribe can I claim membership? Canadians, writers, socialists, the United Church—nothing very funny there. Oh, to be Jewish! Now, while I might share a Jewish joke with a trusted friend who will understand that there is no anti-semitism intended in my telling of the story, I will shy away from such jokes, even mild ones, with people I do not know very well. I live with a certain uncomfortable fear of running into prejudice where one might not have expected to find it. Best not to give it a lead in.

It's about knowing your intended audience. It's about the storyteller's intent.

There is a difference between extrinsic and intrinsic humour. It is all right for Howie Mandel to be scathingly funny about Jews; it's his birthright. It's not mine. Humour can be intrinsically useful too. In an article entitled "Excuse me! The case for offensive humour" which appeared in the magazine, *The New Republic* (May 11, 1992) David Segal talks about the disarming nature of risqué humour. "It's safe to bet, " says Segal, "That the films of Mel Brooks and Woody Allen did more to stymie anti-semitism in the past twenty years than all the wide-eyed vigilance and arm-waving of the Anti-Defamation League." The anti-appropriationists in this country might give this some thought. Or have they already: accusing Emily Carr of ripping off native imagery in her paintings is pretty funny, I guess. Maybe it's the delivery...Or maybe the whole thing is just too charged with solemnity to take lightly. I once tried circulating Herman Hesse jokes, when Hesse was big with my crowd. They were pretty morose; they were supposed to be; they didn't go over so well. So I stick to Welsh jokes, such as they are. I can live with this.

What about blonde jokes, then? Could this be an example of a joke type that is so obviously without any grounds in reality that it can be told with equanimity? (Do they even have blonde jokes in Sweden?) Lawyer jokes are okay too, I guess, because *nobody* likes lawyers. Mind you, if they ever took umbrage in a big way, they'd be a dangerous lobby group.

Which brings up the question of power. It seems that it's okay to make fun of people in power. I sat in an audience in Ottawa lapping up Rick Mercer's *Show me the button and I'll push it*, a killingly funny one-man-play which includes a

frontal assault on central Canada—Ottawa, especially. We Ottawans loved it: we could afford to love it, because: (1) it certainly wasn't *me* Rick was lampooning and (2) he's from Newfoundland, so it's kind of tit for tat and anyway (3) we're in power so we probably deserve it. Similarly, I can accept a WASP joke levelled at me because, ostensibly, "we" are in a position of dominance and realize that those clammering to share our power need to let off steam. After all, it must be hard being on the outside of all this glamour and prestige. Now I'm not really a WASP, myself, I'm a WCP but—Hey, a joke's a joke. I can accept jokes about men from feminists too, because, again, us men have so much power, especially us white men. Besides I'm getting used to it. A study done in 1988 revealed that out of 1,000 TV commercials in which one of the characters was made to look bad or silly, in *every* case, the butt of the humour was a white male. It comes with the territory. Interestingly, in my particular territory, publishing, women hold a great deal of power: my publisher is a woman; nearly every editor I have ever worked with has been a woman; and Anna Porter is, arguably, the key figure in all of Canadian publishing. But still, I get the joke about being from Ontario, white and male. And I can live with it. I don't think that's what's bothering me. But I am bothered. Part of what bothers me is that it's not expected that I should have anything to be bothered about. With all this power of mine, I mean.

About power: teaching a writing course some years ago in Kingston, I found myself having a beer with the poet Di Brandt and a self-assured young black writing student with a gold earring. It turned out that he had sent several stories to Women's Press under an assumed (female) name and had been published. Di, an ardent feminist, was appalled. The young man defended himself: he had grown up poor and black in Brazil; he knew all about being in a minority group—more than one—and felt he had every right in the world to take his advantages where he found them. The argument went on and on; I only listened; I wasn't sure how I felt about any of it. I tend to respect rules. For instance, if a competition is open to children twelve and under, then a sixteen-year-old has a decided advantage. But in this case there was no advantage to being a male, was there? And besides, I think in this case, there might not have been a specific rule saying "no men need apply" but only the assumption that none would. Something, however, did bother me about the quarrel: the question of quality never came up. Were his stories good? More importantly, did they *speak* to women? Did the writer connect with his audience?

I think these issues: intent, audience, power and quality are all inter-related in the context of cultural appropriation. I think also that maybe one should not let a perfectly good beer go flat over any of this.

An article in the *Globe and mail* lit the fuse which led to the latest imbroglio in the cultural appropriation skirmish. It was claimed that the Canada Council seemed to be making its granting policy coincidental with a position rejecting appropriation. This was refuted by both the director and the head of the Council's

Arts Awards Services but the wild rumpus the incident created has not entirely laid down and died. Robert Enright, in the spring issue of *Border crossings*, identified the furor as "a warning shot fired across the bow of the old frigate, H.M.S. Kulchur."

The politics of cultural kleptomania is not, it seems—at least, I have not heard anything so far—aimed at actually producing legislation meant to gag artists. The Canada Council fuss centred on whether an arts granting bureaucracy should even be considering debate on such an issue let alone formal guidelines. But what I am most concerned about personally, at this point, is that the Anti-Appropriationists are but one voice in the larger Politically Correct movement, if it can be called that, and the voice of this mother of all moralities is reminiscent of a voice I cannot quite shake: the insolent, abusive, hectoring voice of one Senator Joe McCarthy. Now there's someone who did not have a sense of humour! It's a far-off kind of voice, to be sure, and certainly I have not heard it's like in this new turmoil—Hey, we're Canadians. But if I try to imagine how a country could ever fall prey to such a posturing scoundrel, I have to wonder if it started innocently enough, like the politically correct business, and got bigger because, gosh, a good, moral person doesn't like to complain. It isn't me they're talking about; we're in power, we probably deserve it.

There is a certain troubling irony about comparing the shrill voices of the politically correct to McCarthyism, as James Nadler points out in the summer issue of *Actrascope* (the official publication of the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists). His essay entitled "The Left moves Right" suggests that in issues of political correctness the Left are not above their own brand of pressure tactics. Righteous indignation and finger-waggling are one thing. Are there to be new-age witch hunts? Whatever one's political stripe, it is reasonable to say these are not liberal times!

Nadler's essay expressed a personal point of view and was not meant to be the opinion of ACTRA. The Writer's Union of Canada, to my great annoyance, as a member, does have an official point of view, a motion voted upon at this summer's AGM. It apparently represents a watered-down version of a motion put forward by the Racial Minority Writer's Committee of TWUC. I have not seen the original motion but in the new one such phrases as "cultural appropriation" have been diluted to "cultural misappropriation" so that other member-writers who might frown about losing their "freedom of expression" in order to be "responsible" and "accountable" need not worry a whole heck of a lot. This tokenism irks me but it is more sad than reprehensible.

If I have a credo I would say that, in a profound way, I deplore writing which is immoral, unethical, pornographic, or malicious. But I have little truck with those who feel they can define *for me* in any kind of ultimate way what constitutes a breach of these decidedly abstract notions. Part of my job as a writer is to be responsible for my actions and to take the consequences if I am not. There are legal guidelines on what constitutes plagiarism. Are these laws to be

strengthened to include the telling of tales from a culture not one's own?

It is a rare day indeed on which I dare consider laughing about the issue of cultural appropriation. The players in this game are not a particularly funny bunch. It's a volatile subject and difficult to comment upon with impunity. I feel that my rage towards this form of censorship—for it is certainly that—requires my urgent attention; it also requires tempering. That's why all this unbounded hilarity; well, what a Welshman thinks of as hilarious.

I am plagued with doubts: why this rage on my part? I have not been attacked personally. Not yet. I once was criticized for having whipped off a novel, but I've never yet been accused of having ripped off a novel. And yet it is there: this guilt by association, paranoia. I want to say "Alright, have it your way! In my next novel all the characters will be white males in their forties with lower back pains who live in the woods of eastern Ontario." But actually, that idea has a certain Ira Levine cachet to it and I'd hate it if anyone else stole the idea. Would I hate it less if the person who stole the ideas was, let's say, an Ojibway woman?

And as for being a writer for children—what gives any of us the right to appropriate the voice of this largest of all tribes! It depends, I think, on whether you feel that you are merely writing for children as an audience or, writing *for* children in the sense of representing them. I fear there are people, nice people no less, who feel they write for children in this latter sense. These folks probably use age-appropriate language and talk about what subject matter the average "eight-year-old" can digest. I've never had the misfortune to meet an average child, thank God. There's good reason to think such writers should be dealt with harshly: maybe made to live on Welsh cooking for a week. But no, they'd only come out even more bland than they already are and they'd keep writing so called appropriate material anyway. *No real literature should be appropriate, but rather it should be challenging and the two things seldom go together.*

All of which brings me to another issue for consideration along with intent, audience, power and quality—who one is writing for. This, to me, is perhaps the most important consideration. A writer, I feel, represents in his opinions a constituency of one. Is this just another white, male ploy for getting off the guilt-hook? Well, listen to playwright, Tompson Highway, for example, on the subject of cultural appropriation. "Fuck the controversy!" Highway has been quoted as saying (thus seriously jeopardizing the chances of a children's version of *Dry lips oughta move to Kapuskasing*). "I am totally and utterly against indoctrination of any kind," he continues "As a writer, the whole process of writing is so hard ... I wouldn't dream of telling anyone else what they should write about." Could this be a native voice speaking? Yes and No. Tomson Highway is a native but he is speaking for *himself* not for *his people*. Indeed, there are those among his people who are not at all pleased at the fact that he is presently writing a screenplay based on one of W.P. Kinsella's stories. Kinsella (white) has long been at the centre of this controversy over voice appropriation because of his portrayal of life on an imaginary reservation in Alberta. I suppose

the principle at work here is that Kinsella is trespassing on that reservation. And Tomson?

When I write, I speak for me, not white people or the middle class or men or even the Welsh (who wouldn't understand anyway unless I peppered every word with extra "L"s and spit on them.)

Donn Kushner has said: "I know of no writer who wants to speak *for* another culture but plenty of us want to speak *about* other cultures of fellow human beings." (I quote this from the Writers Confidential section of the September issue of *The Writer's Union Newsletter* with the author's permission.)

So here's the confession. Once upon a time, I wrote the book and libretto for an opera commissioned by the Canadian Children's Opera Chorus. It's called *A midwinter night's dream* and all the characters are Inuit (except for a seal who likes to play cards, cribbage particularly, though, understandably, she finds herself playing a lot of solitaire.) I did indeed appropriate Inuit myth and contemporary Inuit social and cultural concerns in the creation of the narrative, not to mention setting the tale in a fictional arctic community. I scattered a few wonderful sounding Inuktitut words and phrases throughout the opera and one wonderful poem. I've never been north of sixty in my life. To make matters even more blameworthy, the composer, Harry Somers, borrowed from Inuit musical traditions in writing the score. At one point he has a small chorus attempt to imitate the sound of throat-singing. The result is quite extraordinary.

We both, obviously and blatantly, indulged in cultural appropriation. I can see where this could lead to a problem. A lot of people, upon seeing the opera said to me afterwards: "You've said it all! Now I know everything I'll ever need to know about the Inuit people and so I won't have to bother looking at those prints anymore or even caring about them. Thank goodness." Well no, actually nobody said anything of the kind. And in truth, my book and libretto are in many ways probably about as authentically Inuit as Gilbert & Sullivan's *Mikado* is Japanese. I cannot speak for Mssrs. G. & S., but I know that my intentions were entirely honourable. My theme was the preservation of one's culture: I picked a culture with a better track record than my own. I am deeply fascinated and impressed by the North and the people who live there. Or does that sound too patronizing?

My shaman starts the opera singing:

> Shi kin 'e luk!
> Winter darkness.
> Aiyee, how the wind bites,
> How the northern lights
> Murmur like a baby
> In the belly of the night.

How thrilled I was to find a word for "winter darkness." And oh how

beautiful is the description of the northern lights murmuring in the belly of mother night. Whatever anonymous storyteller first described the northern lights this way, his or her words are only to be found in document form now. If I have plundered a culture to write my opera, I had to dig pretty deep in a research library's shelves to find this gem. Or maybe it is a description a lot of Inuit use; I don't know. How about this comment by another northerner: "Once I was in the South. Oh, I did not like it. So many people in the train station, moving like maggots on rotten meat." Pretty good stuff.

But I have transgressed further than that in *A midwinter night's dream.* I have used one whole published poem written by an Inuit, Mary Panegoosho, which I found in a book entitled *Paper stays put* (Hurtig Publishers). "Morning mood," according to Robin Gedalof, the editor of *Paper stays put,* is considered "one of the best known contemporary Inuit poems and no collection of Eskimo writing would be complete without it." I'd go further and suggest it should be in every school poetry anthology.

Here is the first verse from Panegoosho's poem:

> I wake with morning yawning in my mouth,
> With laughter see steaming the tea kettle spout.
> I wake with hunger in my belly
> And I lay still, so beautiful it is, it leaves me dazed,
> the timelessness of the light.

My character, Eva Padluik sings this to her friend, Jimmy Moonwok, who is bored—he has just returned from a trip to Edmonton—to remind him that there are things even more wonderful in the world than Star Wars or The West Edmonton Mall.

Like myself, Harry Somers was enchanted by this poem and his setting for it is exquisite. I only wish Mary Panegoosho could hear it.

After exhaustively trying to find her to get permission to use the poem, I included it anyway with an appropriate credit in the program. In each of the three productions of the opera, to date, I have tried to make certain the credit appeared.

This then would seem a perfect case in point of the native anti-appropriationists' cause. Would I have taken this liberty with the poem of a white writer? Is part of the point the anti-appropriationists are making that their work is not protected as effectively as white artists and therefore is open to such misuse? Is it misuse? Is not the context, the intent, worthwhile? Is it enough for me to say that I thought long and hard about the moral implications of this business and decided it was worth bringing Mary's poem to a larger audience. (Which is really a joke considering the limited audience this opera—or any contemporary opera-will ever reach!) Is this just a typically white European attitude to art, for it is certainly true that this kind of stealing has a long and illustrious tradition in our literature. Is it worth saying in my defense that this poem represents only a moment of the

piece—although a beautiful moment—and that, for the most part, the opera deals with universal themes: the return of the prodigal son; the old ways versus the new ways; and the ritual of coming of age. Matters which deeply concern me? Is it worth claiming that I have resolutely painted the people in this story as warmly human and heroic? Or is that too patronizing?

Paul Simon was widely criticized by the cultural appropriation people for his Graceland album which, incidently, introduced the world at large to King Sonny Ade, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Tao Ea Matsekha and a whole lot more African musicians and musical genres North America gobbled up, hungry for new sounds. Those groups didn't do too badly from it. Strangely, nobody kicked up much fuss when Stevie Wonder came back from Jamaica a few years earlier and enthralled us all with, what for most of us, was something we hadn't heard before called reggae. Maybe the times were different. Or maybe it was because Stevie was a "brother."

The truth is, I approach this whole subject with trepidation. Am I confusing my own personal paranoia for something larger? Or am I upset because nobody has actually ever cared enough about *A midwinter night's dream* to censure me and I feel left out? Paranoia, by definition, is a kind of dippy form of a superiority complex after all. Can this simply be passed off as another white, middle-class, male delusion of grandeur? And am I trying now to pass this off as funny because maybe what I have done is wrong?

My bad temper about this subject provokes me to mockery which is—dare I say it—inappropriate. For my own anger is the flipside of that red hot coin which is the currency of some native cultural activists, certain feminists, and apologists for a variety of minority groups to whom I feel, otherwise, a very genuine solidarity and towards whose concerns I am most unused to being at odds.

I am certainly cranky about all of this. If, however, my voice comes off sounding scornful of those who feel their culture is being yanked out from under them, then I have failed terribly, for that certainly is not my intent. I may be cranky; I feel threatened. But to strike a derisive stance would be to ignore or, worse, disparage, the much greater threat felt by those writers who, already marginalized, insist that their rights are endangered by this cultural poaching.

Here is the nightmare. Native culture in this country is on its death bed. The muscular plays of Tomson Highway, the powerful imagery of Bill Reid, the gorgeous music of Kashtan, the fine poetry of Mary Panegoosho, the stories of Maria Campbell gathered up from *mom tune ay chi kun*, "the sacred well-spring of stories," the mind, are just the last gasp of a dying culture. In the nightmare, the natives who cry out "stop stealing from us" are really crying "Murderer!" And, nightmarishly, in their rage they've drawn their knives on the wrong suspects. Perhaps I have stolen something. But I still cannot concede that I or W.P. Kinsella or Joan Clarke or Emily Carr have done the natives of this country a disservice. With varying degrees of talent and sensitivity we may even have

opened a few bleary white eyes. Daniel David Moses, a native poet and playwright has likened Kinsella's stories to "a bad ventriloquist's act;" be that as it may, Silas Ermineskin and his fellow characters are not portrayed as dummies.

I want to rail at these people: "You want a real villain? Round up: Beverley Hills 90210, Family Matters, Jeopardy." These TV programs say absolutely nothing to or about native culture, to be sure, (or my own culture, for that matter) but beamed, through the wonders of satellite technology, into an increasing number of northern communities, they say in no uncertain terms: *this* is What It's All About. These shows are not stealing native culture—from their point of view, who'd want it!—but in their glossy, seductive way they render its myths and legends boring and meaningless. They banish the Old Stories to Nowheresville. And not just native myth and legend—*all* myth and legend. The new sweat lodge is a bar in Boston. The new altar is The Wheel of Fortune. The new peace-pipe is the videocam handed around so we can all have a good laugh at ourselves. TV says to all of us who cling to the notion of tribal lore and nationhood and the story of our people: "get a life—take the Pepsi challenge."

Funny bit of synchronicity: a friend just phoned and when I told him I was writing about cultural appropriation he thought I meant American appropriation of Canadian culture.

On a recent trip to the Northwest Territories with Peter Gzowski I couldn't help noticing this cultural death, asphyxiation from the airwaves, even while extraordinarily creative and hardworking people, native and white, worked to resuscitate the corpse. Native broadcasting has been about as successful as most local cable access stations in the south. The complaint of the viewer: "It may be us, but it ain't Hollywood."

Every child in Fort Providence, where we were staying, took Slavey Language classes every morning. This should be good news but I couldn't help noticing it was really only a reflection of the fact that the language is no longer being uniformly handed down from one generation to the next. Why bother. I mean, how good is Hulk Hogan's Slavey?

Here's a chilling fact: it is estimated that of the 53 native languages extant in Canada today only three will survive into the next century. And with the language die the stories. And it won't be because I included Mary Panegoosho's poem in my opera or, some other white guy—let's say James Houston, for example—had the gall to imagine being inside the head of Tikta'liktak marooned on an ice flow resigning himself to death and then resolving to live despite everything.

Can I relate to this kind of remorse? Dare I, for instance, equate my own dread and frustration at the conquest of Television and the end of literate culture? Television, a medium which I can barely tolerate, picks over the bones of literature looking for suitable "properties." And the Hell of it is that we writers kind of *long* to be plundered and have one of our quaint print-medium artifacts

made new—brought to living colour—by these conquerors who speak so glibly in a strange tongue but are so eloquent with cash. When I holler "Where are the true stories in this trash pile of broadcasting!" am I really saying: "Here, you wanna buy some really good stories?" And is that what the natives and feminists and minorities are hollering too? "Me, me—have I got a story for you."

And they do. Beyond the politics there are great stories to be told. I'm not against the hollering if that's what it's all about. Besides, every new batch of artists bangs on the doors of the establishment and throws rocks through the windows. I just wish the name-calling and abuse was hurled at the right establishment. Get your bad guys right!

It's hard to get published; hard for anyone, these days. In the children's book world, there are more than ten times as many books published as there were when I arrived on the scene almost twenty years ago; however, the number of children's writers has grown a hundred fold. But I would go so far as to say that at this point in time a native writer has a *better* chance of being published than a white writer in as much as he or she has a better chance of being read intently even if it is partially for conscience-soothing ulterior motives. As an acquisitions editor for Red Deer College Press, I am always looking for a wonderful new story and a wonderful new voice. I'm sick to death of masochistic Christmas trees and enviro-friendly leprechauns; Princess Crystallina charmed her last prince ages ago, as far as I'm concerned; and Bobby Dinosaur's loose tooth fails to matter to me anymore. Who better to tell us new stories than new voices. I want to say, "We're listening."

I think it is also reasonable to say that most publishers in this country would think twice about publishing a book about an ethnic minority unless it was written by someone of that group. It would have to be awfully good. *The chill has set in.* If Jan Hudson's *Sweetgrass*, for instance, came across my desk today, I ask myself, would the quality of the prose, the obvious *honesty* of the writing, win me over; or would I be swayed by the political issue of her "otherness?" I truly believe, perhaps naïvely, and for better or for worse, that this is the prevailing spirit of the times in the arts in Canada. Perhaps the hew and cry is paying off? Perhaps, what is bitter for those who feel marginalized by the predominantly white culture in Canada is that it's too little too late. Or perhaps it's too much like charity?

I cannot address this problem dispassionately or entirely rationally. I am not a political animal. And while it is in the political arena that cultural appropriation has been identified and vilified, it is, I think, at root, an issue of Story: whose story is this anyway?

It comes to me now that in some small ways I have suffered abuse as a cultural poacher. I was in Halifax on the publicity trail for my novel *Odd's end* which takes place on the south shore of Nova Scotia. My first stop of the day was at a radio station where my interviewer could not have been more happy to see me, he fairly gushed with enthusiasm. He had loved my book and was down-right

proud of it. The taps got turned off pretty quickly, however, when he learned I was not a native Nova Scotian—that I had, at that time, *never once visited Nova Scotia*. He turned cold and could scarcely conceal his newly-minted wrath. What bothered me was that this man, from the outset, had not shown the slightest trace of scepticism that I might be a fraud or that I had written with anything less than "authority" on my subject—that is a writer's job, as the name implies. Had he been suspicious, found the book lacking verisimilitude, then his disapprobation would have seemed, if no less painful, at least deserved.

Then there was the time a host of mine in Victoria almost threw me out of her car when she learned that I was not a fan of the jazz saxophone player, John Coltraine. One of my characters in a novel had been quite a fan of Coltraine and she had just naturally assumed that I was too. Considering that there was a psychotic killer in the same book, I wonder what else she naturally assumed?

In each case it was assumed I had acted impudently. Are these examples petty? I suppose so. I guess it's just that writers have always claimed to be what they are not. And audiences of every stripe, I guess, have their sacred turf.

What is the writer's purview? The best short story I've written, *Whatever happened to Baby Roo*? is told, in the first person, from the point of view of Dulcie Sutcliffe, an aging female librarian. I *know* Dulcie Sutcliffe better than I know my own self. Will there come a time when I would have to show a proof-of-menopause card to pawn such a story off on an unsuspecting public? How stupid do we take our readers to be?

Is a man just his sex? His skin colour? His faith? Natalie Babbitt has said, somewhere, that "...we do not come into the world but we come out of the world." I think she means we are what we encounter and how we interpret it. When we can see this, she says, "then we can flow, grow, evolve in the growth and evolution of the universe of which we are a functioning organism." The notion of writing (only) about what you know seems to have achieved wide prominence in the last three or four decades. It's lucky Shakespeare never heard about it.

No writer worth his/her salt makes decisions of voice lightly. And there is always this paradox in fiction: a character's voice is never the author's/is always the author's. The closer to home, geographically or ethnically, one writes one's fiction the more chance there is of writing "authentically," perhaps. Then how to explain *The remains of the day* by the British novelist, Kazuo Ishiguro. It won the 1989 Booker Award and is an extraordinarily cunning and assured vision of the British aristocracy during the second world war. Ishiguro—is that a midlothian name, perhaps? And how to explain Michael Ondaatje's Toronto of the forties or Bram Stoker's Transylvania, not to mention Lewis Carroll's Wonderland: these are all extraordinary evocations of place and time, each in its own way, and all are based on other than first-hand experience.

Writers imagine. Some only do it for money, maybe. But most of us go to great pains to say something that might have some real value. We fail a lot of the

time. I'm not pretending this is noble; nobody made us do this. But most of us take very seriously the responsibility that comes with assuming "authority" on a given subject.

Well, I started off trying to make this funny. Where'd it all go wrong? Maybe it's just that, as Reinhold Niebuhr has said: "Laughter is a kind of no man's land between faith and despair." Maybe my faith in the rightness of my own actions, my own point of view, is not at all secure. Maybe I despair at the frustration felt by those whose discouragement has made them reckless in their aspersions. Maybe my own frustrations are just too deep. Or maybe, like the dumb Welshman's, they're just planted too close together.

Tim Wynne-Jones *lives in the woods of Eastern Ontario with writer Amanda Lewis and their three children. He has three books coming out in 1993, including a collection of short stories for older children.*

Mais où sont passés les pères? Un cas de censure sociale dans la littérature pour la jeunesse des années 80

Claire le Brun

Summary: *Claire le Brun analyses how the father-figure evolved in various Quebec novels written between 1980 and 1990 by male and female authors. Almost all fathers, whether divorced, raising their children alone or still living with their wives, are, at worst, either inept or negative characters or, at best, "absentees" or nice wimps refusing to grow up. However, mothers do keep their traditional qualities while acquiring the positive aspects that used to be the privilege of male family heroes. Since there is no record of instructions to that effect given by editors or educators, it seems we are confronted with a case of cultural self-censorship.*

La famille occupe une place de première importance dans les récits québécois pour enfants et adolescents des années 80. Elle est un des objets discursifs[1] les plus visibles des collections qui ont vu le jour vers 1985, aux éditions la Courte Échelle et Québec-Amérique, et dont l'image de marque a été d'emblée celle de la nouveauté. Sans renoncer aux récits d'aventure traditionnels en littérature de jeunesse—intrigue policière, science-fiction—les nouvelles collections privilégient le récit spéculaire.[2] La récurrence des narrations à la première personne, sur le mode du journal intime, est immédiatement perceptible. L'ensemble des récits donne donc à voir l'opinion que le jeune est censé porter sur les adultes, notamment sur ses parents. Dans le portrait de la famille québécoise actuelle qui se précise, récit après récit, force est de constater que le père est le grand perdant de la nouvelle distribution des rôles. Rêveur, soumis, veule, borné, puéril, fugueur, absent, ou encore inexistant: voilà quelques-uns de ses attributs les plus fréquents. Le dénigrement du père étant devenu un lieu commun, dans un genre qui affirme de plus en plus sa vocation didactique, il nous a paru intéressant de nous demander si l'effacement du père "positif" ne correspondait pas à une nouvelle forme de censure. Il est frappant de remarquer que le père ne trouve pas sa place dans le nouvel ordre moral instauré par ces récits qui ont brisé les anciennes censures du sexe et de la violence. Où sont passés les pères dans ces romans des années 80 et 90, qui se veulent tout à la fois des manuels d'éducation sentimentale, sexuelle, sociale et politique? A quoi correspond ce que l'on pourrait appeler un déplacement des objets censurés? La censure dont il sera question ici est l'autocensure[3] que s'imposent les auteures et les auteurs des dix dernières années. Étant donné la nature de l'objet censuré,

le père, il y aura lieu de se demander si cette autocensure diffère selon que la plume est tenue par un homme ou une femme!

Le corpus d'étude est constitué de quatre collections: "Roman Jeunesse" et "Roman Plus" aux éditions La Courte Échelle; et deux subdivisions de l'ensemble "Littérature Jeunesse" de Québec/Amérique: "A partir de huit ans" et "A partir de quatorze ans".[4] Chaque maison d'édition délimite deux tranches d'âge, correspondant en gros à l'enfance et à l'adolescence (pré-puberté et puberté). Tous les titres parus jusqu'à la fin de 1991 ont été dépouillés. Il est vite apparu que les récits pertinents à la problématique étaient en grande majorité des romans "de la vie quotidienne" offrant les caractéristiques suivantes: autodiégèse; forte teneur introspective; cadre donné comme réaliste: le Québec actuel; thème: l'évolution physique et psychique de l'enfant et de l'adolescent au sein de la famille, de l'école et du groupe des pairs. Certains récits d'aventure comportent, en toile de fond, des figures parentales qui ont été prises en compte dans l'analyse. Mais, dans la majorité d'entre eux, les parents sont, selon la convention, des silhouettes rassurantes qui continuent d'évoluer au niveau de l'ordinaire pendant que les enfants vivent la parenthèse de l'extraordinaire.[5] Au total, une cinquantaine de récits ont été retenus.[6] Un certain nombre d'entre eux s'articulent en séries, ou tout au moins en diptyques. Les séries centrées sur un héros ou une héroïne sont caractéristiques de la collection "Roman Jeunesse" de La Courte Échelle: Ani Croche, Rosalie, Maxime et les autres. Il aurait été possible de dresser un portrait du père pour chacune des collections du corpus, ou encore de caractériser les "pères" de telle auteure ou de tel auteur—il arrive en effet que les auteurs du corpus publient chez les deux éditeurs. Une approche fonctionnelle, dégageant trois positions du père dans la distribution des rôles romanesques, s'est révélée la plus pertinente: le père absent; le père monoparental; le père avec la mère.[7] Cette présentation n'empêche pas de dégager à l'occasion les particularités d'un auteur ou d'une collection.

I. Le père absent

Il faut distinguer les récits où la figure du père est complètement gommée, dont le meilleur exemple est la série "Rosalie", où l'héroïne est entourée de sept tantes, et ceux où le père a déserté le foyer familial. Nous nous attarderons à la seconde catégorie où peuvent être observées quelques variantes de père absent.

Précisons d'abord que la convention actuelle en littérature de jeunesse veut que le schéma du père absent soit présenté comme la norme. L'héroïne des *Cahiers d'Élisabeth* (S. Desrosiers) se plaint: "Pour les parents, (...) je suis *l'exception* (c'est nous qui soulignons): les miens vivent ensemble et s'aiment encore." (16).[8] Même son de cloche dans *Cassiopée ou l'été polonais* (M. Marineau): "(...) j'en avais conclu qu'ils étaient séparés ou divorcés, comme tout le monde" (118). Et encore, dans *Des graffiti à suivre* (F. Ruel): "Je n'échappe

pas à la *règle* (c'est nous qui soulignons encore) des ados de valises: mes parents se sont séparés quand j'avais quatre ans" (14). Le corpus comporte donc une classe de pères fugueurs, parmi lesquels on peut distinguer plusieurs types.

Le **père fugueur** est au mieux un père maladroit. Dans *la Tête de Line Hotte* (J. Dubé), il accumule les bévues sous le regard critique des enfants et ne sait pas comment leur présenter sa "nouvelle blonde". Le père du diptyque *Cassiopée ou l'été polonais—l'Été des baleines* est rigide, plein de reproches, pingre. Une seule chose semble le déranger vraiment: l'argent qu'il débourse pour sa fille. Mais cela n'est rien en regard du père de *la Course à l'amour* (B. Gauthier): ce dernier a doublement trahi, et la mère et le fils, en partant avec la gardienne préférée de l'enfant. Aux yeux du narrateur adolescent, il cumule les défauts. C'est un père qui refuse de vieillir, et de vivre avec sa classe d'âge. Ce faisant, il empêche son fils de grandir. Sa seule réussite dans la vie est, semble-t-il, d'avoir su garder une apparence de jeunesse. A l'occasion, il tentera d'aider son fils dans les difficultés de l'adolescence; mais le contact est rompu. Quand il évoque ses propres souvenirs d'adolescence, le fils persifle: "Je me souviens, en personne!". C'est un Zorro ridicule. La scène se termine sur ces propos grinçants: "Bonsoir, papa. Bonne nuit, Benoît, dans les tendres bras galactiques de ma gardienne préférée" (134). Dans la suite du récit, *Une chanson pour Gabriella*, le manque de père se fait sentir de nouveau. Le héros a brusquement envie de téléphoner à son père, mais il se ravise aussitôt: "Non vraiment, mon égoïste de père, à part son petit confort, rien ne l'intéresse" (112). Le tout est suivi d'un affreux cauchemar où le narrateur se fait torturer sous le regard indifférent de son père. Dans ce second récit, l'insensibilité du père est soulignée par le parallèle, implicite, entre ce dernier et le père de Gabriella, Chilien victime du régime politique. Notons d'ailleurs que le père chilien, absent lui aussi, mais pour de tout autres raisons que les pères québécois, est le seul père-héros du corpus. De nos pères fugueurs, c'est celui de Bertrand Gauthier, auteur de ces deux récits, qui est vu sous le jour le plus sombre par sa progéniture. Il va jusqu'à en faire un **père indigne**, type que nous rencontrerons aussi dans la catégorie du père monoparental.

Le père absent peut aussi être le **père trop occupé**, le *businessman* "workaholic". *Amour, réglisse et chocolat* est un conte moderne où un père, toujours en voyage, communique avec sa fille par le truchement de la télévision.[9] L'adolescente, qui souffre d'"abandonnite aiguë" (34), se drogue au chocolat. Le père P.-D.G. veut régler le mariage de sa fille comme ses autres affaires; il commande un portrait informatique du mari idéal. A l'instar de quelques autres pères du corpus,[10] il joint l'absence à l'autoritarisme, conservant une partie des attributs traditionnels du père. La citation suivante résume l'opinion de l'adolescente: "Tu n'es jamais là, mais tu veux toujours tout décider" (73).

Un père peut être absent à la fois physiquement, par le divorce, et moralement, par un manque de personnalité. La narratrice de *Quatre jours de liberté* (S. Desrosiers) explique la séparation de ses parents par le manque d'initiative du

père, qui n'avait jamais rien à proposer. Elle évoque un père muet (98), qui suscite l'indifférence, et que la mère traitait souvent de "niaiseux" (97) durant la vie commune. Cette figure falotte est en opposition avec celle de la mère "qui est tout sauf une rêveuse" (95). Ce personnage représente le meilleur exemple dans le corpus de **père inconsistant**, trait qui apparaît à des degrés divers dans plusieurs récits.[11] "Il ne dit tellement rien, note la fille dans son journal, que je n'ai pas de raison de le haïr. Pas de raison non plus de l'aimer particulièrement. C'est mon père, c'est tout" (98).

Terminons notre typologie des pères absents par le **père infantile**. Ce dernier type peut être représenté par le père d'Ani Croche, héroïne éponyme d'une série à succès de La Courte Échelle, où la narration a la forme d'un journal intime adressé à... une poupée. Père "séparé" depuis la petite enfance de l'héroïne, il ne sait pas vivre seul; cet état le rend "maussade, nerveux, impatient et agaçant", selon sa fille (*Ani Croche*, 17). Aux yeux de la narratrice de dix ans, c'est un grand enfant, avec des lubies et des caprices. Sous sa plume apparaît un qualificatif qui définit bien une catégorie de pères en expansion dans les années 80: attendrissant.[12] Dans le corpus, le père paraît souvent le moins responsable des protagonistes. Aussi, quand sa volonté de rester jeune à tout prix ne le rend pas odieux comme le père de *la Course à l'amour*, éveille-t-il des sentiments protecteurs tels que l'attendrissement.

Le père absent est donc dans la majorité des cas un père dont l'existence se déroule ailleurs. Il n'est pas précisé, sur le plan discursif, si cette existence parallèle est la cause ou la conséquence de son incapacité à assumer le rôle paternel. Toutefois le regard méprisant ou condescendant des enfants en dit long sur le statut d'adulte-enfant du père.

II. Le père monoparental

C'est dans cette catégorie du père, parent unique, que se retrouvent les modèles les plus positifs du corpus. Dans certains des récits concernés, la quête du père peut devenir une thématique centrale.

Toute axée sur la recherche du père, la série des "Wondeur" de Jocelyne Sanschagrin[13] représente une tendance originale dans le corpus. Oscillant entre le réalisme et la science-fiction, ces récits d'aventures reposent sur une double quête, dans les sphères individuelle et collective: recherche du père et mission écologique. Le jour de ses douze ans, l'héroïne part à la recherche de son père qui l'a confiée toute petite à une vieille femme. Après quelques fausses pistes, l'héroïne retrouve enfin un père problématique. Celui qu'on appelle le karatéka a tué involontairement l'un de ses amis dans un combat de karaté. Frappé d'amnésie après le choc, il a mené une vie errante. L'homme fragilisé trouvera une raison de vivre en se lançant aux côtés de sa fille dans l'engagement écologique. Il y aurait beaucoup à dire dans ce récit, au-delà de la présente étude,

sur une autre censure, celle de la femme adulte (et sexuellement active). Le récit ne comporte aucune allusion à la mère de Wondeur—l'auteure n'est pas tenue à la vraisemblance parce que le cadre est non réaliste.[14] Il présente par contre des personnages féminins forts: l'héroïne à peine sortie de l'enfance et deux vieilles femmes: la mère adoptive de Wondeur et une protagoniste, justement appelée "la vieille femme", qui initie l'enfant à l'action écologique. Tout se passe comme si le père ne pouvait être grand et noble qu'en l'absence de la mère. Le père de Jocelyne Sanschagrin est un **héros tragique**, victime d'un destin funeste, et qui doit son salut à l'amour filial.

Deux romans de Jean-Marie Poupart, *le Nombril du monde* et sa suite *Libre comme l'air* décrivent les relations conflictuelles d'un père et d'un fils. La mère est morte à la naissance de ce dernier. Le père est comptable, profession stigmatisée dans le corpus,[15] et peu compréhensif. Il s'absente souvent, à la fois pour travailler et pour éviter les affrontements. Stress, tabac et bureau ont raison de la santé du père qui fait une crise cardiaque. Cet accident marque le début d'une graduelle transformation du père et de ses rapports avec son fils. Il va de soi que le point de vue narratif est celui de l'adolescent! L'auteur a choisi pour les deux récits la forme du récit épistolaire.

Bien que fort différents par le cadre et l'intrigue, les récits de Jocelyne Sanschagrin et de Jean-Marie Poupart[16] fonctionnent sur la même dynamique de la **rencontre** du père parent unique et de l'enfant de l'un ou l'autre sexe.

Dans plusieurs récits fonctionnant sur une distribution parent unique/enfant unique, le **père** est **ennobli par son statut monoparental**. Dans *Tête de Linotte* apparaît comme personnage secondaire un père réparateur de machines à laver, qui veille soigneusement sur son fils, l'emmenant avec lui au travail, que l'on voit pleurer quand l'enfant a un accident. Père de garçon également, celui de *Mystère et boule de gomme* est colérique et autoritaire, mal à l'aise en l'absence de la mère, "absente pour études" (14), mais somme toute valorisé dans le récit. Cependant le père monoparental peut aussi être un modèle négatif: l'un des pères de *Vincent-les-Violettes* est un matamore, vecteur de tous les stéréotypes machistes. Plusieurs romans de Chrystine Brouillet (série *le Caméléon, le Corbeau, la Montagne noire*) offrent une image idyllique de la relation père-fille. La narration abonde en allusions aux traits communs des deux personnages,[17] aux opinions et aux goûts du père—"j'ai râpé des carottes, le légume préféré de mon père",[18] à son *look* élégant, de façon générale à sa contribution positive à l'existence de la fillette sur les plans moral et matériel. Nul doute que le père est le "grand homme" de l'héroïne, qui s'étonne un peu des soudaines et nombreuses passions des autres filles de son âge. On peut donc voir que deux auteur*es* du corpus, Micheline Sanschagrin et Chrystine Brouillet, proposent un modèle positif de relations père-fille, excluant la mère. Cependant les modalités des deux séries de récits diffèrent considérablement. Sanschagrin fait de la quête du père l'Aventure, alors que chez Brouillet, c'est la présence sécurisante du père qui permet à l'enfant de se lancer dans le vaste monde de l'enquête policière.

Aux antipodes de cette distribution des rôles, le père unique d'*Un mal étrange* est un "**père indigne**" dont les agissements vont bien plus loin que ceux du "père fugueur" de Bertrand Gauthier. La vie du héros, surnommé "Zygote", débute sous de bien sombres auspices. Le père étant chercheur en génétique, il a été créé par fécondation *in vitro*. L'enfant est né avec des iris mal formés, qui donnent à son visage un aspect répugnant. Sa mère s'est suicidée. Depuis, le père ne cesse de pratiquer de nouvelles interventions sur son fils pour tenter de le guérir. Comme il lui faut des fonds exorbitants, il s'est commis dans des affaires de trafic de foetus (102). Les rebondissements de l'intrigue révèlent des accusations de fausse identité, de vol et de meurtre. Étroitement dépendant de son "géniteur", Zygote en est proprement la victime.[19] L'un des avocats de la défense dit au scientifique: "J'ai de plus en plus l'impression que vous vous amusez." (120). En outre, le père, qui peut se payer une jeunesse artificielle, a l'insolence d'être aussi beau que le fils est souffreteux.[20] Le récit de Paul de Grosbois brise un tabou de la littérature de jeunesse en faisant d'un père le bourreau de son propre fils. Par ailleurs, il poursuit la tradition des histoires de "savants fous" de la science-fiction façon XIX^{e} siècle, en en enfreignant les règles également parce que dans ces récits le savant n'est jamais lié aux héros principaux par un lien de paternité; il est, tout au plus, un oncle ou un tuteur. Mais, élément important, le dénouement du roman est ouvert. Le père criminel est condamné à une peine avec sursis et l'épilogue montre l'adolescent "en pleine reconstruction", notamment de sa "relation avec son père" (152). Ce drame d'horreur a le même point d'aboutissement que ceux des romans réalistes de Jean-Marie Poupart examinés plus haut. Pour en conclure avec ce récit particulièrement riche du corpus, il n'est pas indifférent de noter que le modèle de père-savant fou n'est pas présenté comme un membre de la société québécoise: c'est un Américain, recherché par les Autorités de son pays, qui vient poursuivre ses expériences au Québec en se faisant passer pour un professeur de cégep: John Lindman alias Louis Bélanger!

Le **père monoparental** est dans le corpus un **personnage en relief**. Il devient en effet dans la majorité des cas le héros secondaire du récit. Ce dernier a pour enjeu la métamorphose des rapports conflictuels ou inexistants entre l'enfant de l'un ou l'autre sexe et le père. Remarquons toutefois que, dans les distributions rencontrées dans le corpus, les rapports conflictuels de départ n'existent que dans la relation fils-père.

III. Le père avec la mère

Dans cette dernière catégorie, une régularité apparaît d'emblée: le père pâlit de la comparaison avec la mère. Les mères du corpus sont presque exemptes de défauts. Leur "péché mignon"—c'est un trait récurrent des récits—est d'avoir une activité professionnelle accaparante. Toutefois leur travail peut les rendre

pressées, pas assez présentes, mais jamais indifférentes, comme peut l'être le père.[21] Le métier ou la profession de la mère apparaît comme la garantie de ses compétences, la juste récompense de ses qualités d'organisation, d'endurance, d'inventivité, *etc.* (que nous soulignons). Quelques autres travers sont signalés de manière sporadique. L'Ani Croche de Bertrand Gauthier, par exemple, se plaint que les ébats sexuels de la mère et de son "chum" la réveillent.[22] Chez Raymond Plante, apparaît comme personnage secondaire une mère ridicule, qui est l'esclave de son enfant.[23]

Par ailleurs, contrastant avec la tendance générale, il existe quelques récits où les parents sont présentés en bloc indifférencié, en marge des expériences vécues par les adolescents. *Terminus Cauchemar* de Denis Côté et *Un terrible secret* de Ginette Anfousse[24] constituent des exemples représentatifs.

Distinguons quelques modèles de parents en couple.

Une première sous-catégorie regroupe les couples de parents qui ne sont pas des "super-héros", mais où la mère a quelque chose de plus que le père. Le couple de *Mack le Rouge* est constitué d'un camionneur et d'une serveuse. Le père est bedonnant, pas très éveillé; il se laisse abuser par les étrangers (68). Il ne possède pas l'art de la parole et ne sait exprimer ses sentiments, mais "en dedans, Rock, c'est un gros nounours", comme le révèle le narrateur.[25] Rock, le père, rejoint donc la catégorie des pères attendrissants rencontrés plus haut. C'est à la mère qu'il revient de prendre les décisions importantes; cette dernière n'hésite pas à accuser le père de "dire des niaiseries" (36).[26] On retrouve la même distribution chez Raymond Plante, dans deux séries de récits destinés à des classes d'âge différentes. Dans la série *le Roi de rien*,[27] père et mère exercent avec succès leurs professions respectives. Le père est le roi des vendeurs d'ordinateurs et la mère est la reine du hot-dog; le rôle du Roi de rien étant tenu par le jeune héros. Bien que tous les personnages soient peints avec humour, il n'y a pas de faille dans la royauté de la mère. Le père, par contre, fait rire les enfants par ses déboires en cuisine et en bricolage. Il est nerveux, colérique; il est la cible des moqueries du perroquet de la maison. Encore un père attendrissant! Dans la série *le Dernier des raisins*,[28] le père notaire et la mère épouse de notable forment un couple assez terne, dans lequel le père est nettement en retrait. Les deux parents ont une personnalité et un style de vie peu attrayants, mais c'est le père qui est ridicule: objet de farces de la part des jeunes du voisinage, candidat malheureux à la mairie du village. Dans cette série, le père est secondé par deux substituts: le grand-père croque-mort et le curé du village, dont les penchants rabelaisiens contrastent avec la position sociale.

La tendance au **dénigrement du père** apparaît générale dans cette sous-catégorie. Dans *Edgar le Bizarre*, le héros éponyme de Gilles Gauthier se plaint que ses parents ne le comprennent pas. Comme chez Plante, le portrait du père est le plus chargé: "Raymond se met souvent à jouer au savant comme ça quand il ne sait pas quoi dire. Il se met à radoter, et tout de travers, la plupart du temps" (22). Le père d'Edgar ne s'intéresse qu'à son terre-à-terre métier de comptable

et à son unique loisir, la pêche. Il ne conçoit pas que son fils puisse aimer la lecture. Le hobby de la mère, la peinture, est mieux traité. Affichant la même désinvolture, l'héroïne de *l'Automne à quinze ans* (J. Fréchette) déclare: "J'ai lu dans un article que les hommes sont au max de leur intelligence quelque part entre vingt et trente ans. Eh bien, pour mon père, je suis convaincue qu'il a atteint le sommet précisément ce soir-là. Depuis, le quotient lui descend lentement mais sûrement" (90). On retrouve ainsi dans la catégorie du père "avec la mère", l'attitude condescendante qui caractérisait les enfants de "pères absents".

Nombreux sont les couples où la mère occupe le devant de la scène par son activité professionnelle ou l'éclat de sa personnalité. Dans *l'Automne à quinze ans*, par exemple, la mère donne des cours à l'université, le père en suit. Nous nous arrêterons à quelques cas exemplaires. Premier cas: Sonia Sarfati. L'une de ses héroïnes, Agathe, a une mère écrivaine.[29] Celle-ci a su faire accepter son travail à sa fille, dès la petite enfance. L'enfant sait qu'elle ne doit pas déranger sa mère quand l'inspiration passe, qu'elle se représente sous la forme d'un papillon.[30] Le père, en arrière-plan, est publiciste. Autre héroïne de Sarfati, dans *la Ville engloutie*, Soazig a une mère journaliste. La réussite professionnelle de cette dernière ne fait pas de doute,[31] alors que celle du père est encore incertaine. Les activités du père comédien prêtent à rire: il fait surtout des publicités et des doublages et l'un de ses derniers emplois a été de prêter sa voix à un vampire! Le rôle secondaire qu'il vient de décrocher dans un film est représentatif de l'importance de sa profession dans le couple.[32] La narration oppose nettement l'activité incessante de la mère et la fatigue du père;[33] la mère, par exemple, n'est pas sujette au décalage horaire tandis que le père se dit épuisé. Si l'on peut détecter une critique implicite du manque de disponibilité de la mère, les grands traits de sa personnalité ne sont pas mis en question. Le père par contre n'est pas pris au sérieux. Bien plus, il n'est pas exempt de tout soupçon aux yeux de sa fille: une méprise fait croire un instant à Soazig que son père est impliqué dans une affaire de tripot (87). Il est difficile de ne pas voir une polarisation mère forte/ père faible dans ce dernier roman.

Mentionnons deux autres récits qui soulignent le décalage entre l'activité professionnelle du père et celle de la mère. Dans *le Coeur en bataille*, de Marie-Francine Hébert, la mère est pédiatre et le père professeur de cégep. Le père, qui avait davantage de loisirs, a été plus présent durant la petite enfance de sa fille. A l'adolescence, l'héroïne se sent trahie par ses parents: par la mère, toujours à l'hôpital au chevet de ses jeunes patients; par le père, qui a une liaison. A l'égard de sa mère, l'héroïne est tiraillée entre l'admiration et le ressentiment. Quant au père, elle l'a fait descendre de son piédestal, reprenant à son compte le jugement de la grand-mère: "Mon père est un éternel adolescent".[34] *Vincent-les-Violettes* de Céline Cyr met en scène une mère historienne, pressée et distraite, et un père libraire d'occasion, dont l'activité est moins absorbante. La répartition des mérites est ici plus ambivalente: dégagé des ambitions professionnelles, le père semble jouir d'une meilleure vie sociale; la mère se présente elle-même comme

victime de son travail et des échéances trop rapprochées.

La série des *Maxime* de Denis Côté[35] participe également de cette tendance de la mère forte et du père doux ou faible. Les parents sont présentés dans le premier récit, *les Prisonniers du zoo*. Prune, la mère, est mécanicienne; cela ennuie un peu le héros car elle revient sale du travail et son métier fait rire les copains (12). Hugo, le père, est écrivain, mais il a des "crises d'inspiration"; il n'a jamais écrit de roman (8-9). L'enfant porte sur le père un regard attendri: "Pauvre papa. Des fois, il me fait de la peine parce qu'il se prend pour un grand écrivain" (9). Il l'admire "un peu" de ne pas se décourager; mais l'admiration va surtout à la mère: "Prune était formidable, comme toujours" (25). Touchant, le père est un peu ridicule. Dans *les Yeux d'émeraude*, on découvre qu'il est allergique aux chats. Pris de crises d'asthme, il s'emporte contre son fils, puis s'excuse très vite. Le narrateur commente: "En jouant les durs, il avait abîmé sa fragile main d'écrivain" (38). Suit un indice sur la faible stature du père, l'image de son pyjama "aux manches trop longues" (42). Denis Côté travaille allègrement à l'inversion des schémas traditionnels et, pourrait-on dire, à la mise en place de nouveaux stéréotypes. Il évite cependant les écueils de la caricature et du roman à thèse par un dosage exact d'humour, de tendresse et d'action. Le père et le fils ont un rapport de respect et de compréhension réciproques qui rehausse l'image paternelle. Si Prune est sans conteste une femme forte, Hugo n'est pas globalement faible. L'auteur prend soin de préciser que Prune croit au talent d'Hugo.[36] Ajoutons en terminant que, dans la série "Maxime", Côté allie l'intrigue réaliste—sur le plan de la famille et des amis—et l'imaginaire de la science-fiction. Dans *les Yeux d'émeraude*, l'auteur postule un univers parallèle où la famille repose sur un parent unique: le mamanpapa (49).

Enfin quelques romans tendent à équilibrer les mérites respectifs des parents. *Les Cahiers d'Élisabeth* de Sylvie Desrosiers attribue aux performances du père et de la mère des scores à peu près égaux, bien que la mère soit un peu plus compréhensive, en pratique (41). La narratrice explique l'ouverture d'esprit de ses parents par le fait qu'ils ont tous deux été des militants socialistes (148)![37] *Des millions pour une chanson* d'André Vanasse présente un couple de professeurs de français montréalais où le père s'emporte facilement (23) alors que la mère use de fermeté (26); où l'une écoute attentivement et l'autre distraitement (56). Ces héros s'intègreraient parfaitement aux catégories ci-dessus si un petit coup de patte de l'auteur, dans le dénouement, ne faisait apparaître le père comme le plus malin de tous (180). La tendance de Chrystine Brouillet, qui à cet égard apparaît une auteure atypique des années 80, est de donner d'emblée des parents "straight", "écolos", qui assurent encadrement et compréhension.[38] Il est vrai que Brouillet se spécialise dans les intrigues policières, qui, traditionnellement, ont peu à voir avec les questions familiales.

Conclusion

Peut-on discerner, dans le traitement du modèle paternel, deux formes d'autocensure, l'une spécifique aux auteures, l'autre spécifique aux auteurs? Y aurait-il un discours masculin et un discours féminin sur le père?

Les pères fugueurs se retrouvent chez les auteurs des deux sexes, les Bertrand Gauthier, Michèle Marineau, Jasmine Dubé. La même remarque s'applique au motif de l'immaturité des pères, qu'on peut lire chez Bertrand Gauthier (*Ani Croche* et *la Course à l'amour*), mais également chez Marie-Francine Hébert (*le Coeur en bataille*), José Fréchette (*l'Automne à quinze ans*) et, à moindre degré, Sonia Sarfati (*la Ville engloutie*). Le père sans personnalité serait plutôt imaginé par des femmes (Sylvie Desrosiers, *Quatre jours de liberté*). Enfin, d'une part comme de l'autre, les travers du père sont l'objet de moqueries plus ou moins bienveillantes: le Bertrand Gauthier d'*Ani Croche*, Denis Côté, Raymond Plante, Jacques Pasquet, Gilles Gauthier et Sonia Sarfati, Jasmine Dubé. Somme toute, il semblerait que les portraits les plus acérés des pères actuels viennent des auteurs masculins. Rappelons que les portraits de pères indignes, nuisant à leur progéniture, sont signés Bertrand Gauthier et Paul de Grosbois. A l'inverse, le seul exemple de panégyrique est celui de Chrystine Brouillet. On pourrait donc figurer un axe "père plus / père moins" sur lequel Brouillet et De Grosbois ou B. Gauthier[39] occuperaient des positions opposées. Mais les possibilités de systématisation s'arrêtent là. Aussi notre conclusion sera-t-elle ambiguë: la censure du père comme héros positif vient surtout des auteurs masculins, mais de ces derniers proviennent également les récits où le personnage du père prend le plus de relief: ceux d'un Jean-Marie Poupart ou d'un Paul de Grosbois!

L'observation des schémas romanesques de la littérature québécoise pour la jeunesse de la dernière décennie révèle un mouvement de réévaluation du rôle du père au sein de la famille. Nous voyons un phénomène d'autocensure dans la quasi-impossibilité actuelle à présenter un modèle paternel positif. La statue du père fort et autoritaire a été déboulonnée. Celle de la mère performante a été érigée en la place. Dans le procès fait au père, figurent les charges d'absentéisme, d'infantilisme, de rigidité mentale, et dans les cas les plus graves, de non-assistance à enfant en danger et d'acte criminel sur ce dernier. Quand la mère est coupable, c'est surtout de trop travailler. Un modèle parental fort est mis de l'avant, celui de la mère, dont la compétence n'est jamais mise en doute. Tout se passe comme si le personnage romanesque de la mère cumulait les anciens attributs du père—travail, pouvoir et responsabilité découlant de celui-ci—et les siens traditionnels, notamment le dévouement, la tendresse et l'empathie. Le père est ainsi confiné à un comportement puéril ou contraint à la fuite.

Dans le même temps, il semble que le père n'ait jamais eu autant d'importance en littérature de jeunesse. Il est symptomatique que plusieurs des récits étudiés soient centrés sur la quête du père ou la transformation des rapports entre ce dernier et ses enfants. Paradoxalement, le phénomène d'autocensure actuel a

pour conséquence que le personnage du père, dépouillé de ses attributs traditionnels, peut devenir un véritable personnage romanesque, un héros problématique. Quant à la mère, peut-être est-elle encore dans la littérature de jeunesse actuelle un personnage à thèse!

Les discours sur les pères: tableau récapitulatif

I. Pères absents			
• inexistant	G. Anfousse, *Rosalie*	F	E
• séparé/divorcé			
neutre	F. Ruel, *Graffiti*	G	A
maladroit	J. Dubé, *Line Hotte*	F	E
peu compréhensif	M. Marineau, *Cassiopée*	F	A
insensible	B. Gauthier, *Course*	G	A
inconsistant	S. Desrosiers, *Quatre jours*	F	A
immature et attendrissant	B. Gauthier, *Ani Croche*	F	E
• "workaholic"	M. Décary, *Amour*	G	A
II. Pères monoparentaux			
• fugitif (homicide)	J. Sanschagrin, *Wondeur*	F	E
• peu compréhensif	J.-M. Poupart, *Nombril*	G	A
• dévoué	J. Dubé, *Line Hotte*	G	E
• colérique	J. Pasquet, *Mystère*	G	E
• "macho"	C. Cyr, *Vincent*	G	E
• "super-papa"	C. Brouillet, *Caméléon*	F	E
• criminel	P. de Grosbois, *Mal*	G	A
III. Pères avec mères			
• gauche et attendrissant	D. Schinkel, *Mack*	F	E
• maladroit et attendrissant	R. Plante, *Roi*	G	E
• terne	R. Plante, *Raisin*	G	A
• borné	G. Gauthier, *Edgar*	G	E
• piètre réussite professionnelle	J. Fréchette, *Automne*	F	A
	S. Sarfati, *Ville*	F	E
	C. Cyr, *Vincent*	F	E
• immature	M.-F. Hébert, *Coeur*	F	A
• homme au foyer et attendrissant	D. Côté, *Maxime*	G	E
. quasi irréprochable (comme la mère)	A. Vanasse, *Millions*	G	A
	S. Desrosiers, *Cahiers*	F	A
. indifférent (comme la mère)	D. Côté, *Terminus*	F	A
	G. Anfousse, *Terrible*	F	A

Légende

F = sexe de l'enfant: fille
G = sexe de l'enfant: garçon
E = récits pour enfants
A = récits pour adolescents (à partir de 14 ans)
Les titres de romans sont indiqués par un mot-clé (voir bibliographie.)

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Sonia Sarfati, *Sauvetages*, 1989.
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NOTES

1 Cet article s'insère dans une analyse discursive de la littérature québécoise pour la jeunesse. Nous donnons à discours le sens de: "ensemble de règles anonymes, historiques, toujours déterminées dans le temps et dans l'espace qui ont défini à une époque donnée, et pour une aire sociale, économique, géographique ou linguistique donnée les conditions d'exercice de la fonction énonciative" (Michel Foucault). Nous observons la littérature québécoise pour la jeunesse comme discours *sur* la jeunesse dans une problématique de *changement social* et *destiné à* la jeunesse. Nous appelons *objet du discours* les grands thèmes à travers lesquels se formule ce discours: la famille, la sexualité, les rôles sexuels, l'identité individuelle et collective, l'étranger, etc.

2 Qui se veut le miroir de la réalité québécoise actuelle, notamment celui de la jeunesse urbaine (Montréal, Québec) des années 80.

3 Dans notre perspective d'analyse discursive, la censure est vue comme un ensemble de règles sous-jacentes, une norme implicite à laquelle se soumettent les auteurs. A notre connaissance, aucune directive pédagogique, aucune loi sur les publications destinées à la jeunesse, ne régit les représentations de la figure paternelle! Nous abordons donc le problème uniquement en termes d'autocensure.

4 Nous laissons de côté "Contes pour tous" qui présente la version roman de films pour la jeunesse et la toute nouvelle collection "Clip", pour les plus de quatorze ans.

5 Par exemple, la série "Notdog" de Sylvie Desrosiers ("Roman Jeunesse", La Courte Échelle): intrigues policières dans la veine du célèbre Club des Cinq d'Enid Blyton.

6 Voir liste des ouvrages cités en annexe.

7 Nous ne traiterons pas des récits où les deux parents sont présentés comme absents et manquant à leurs enfants. Ce motif peut être un élément constitutif du roman ou apparaître en filigrane. Exemple du premier cas: *Je n'ai besoin de personne* de Reynald Cantin, où les enfants sont confiés à un oncle immoral et vivent des drames allant jusqu'au suicide; l'auteur pose le diagnostic d'un société malade. Exemple du second cas: conversation d'apparence anodine dans un récit d'aventures farfelues de Denis Desjardins, *Des bleus et des bosses*: "Je craignais de réveiller ton père (...).—Mon père est absent, il est en safari (...).—C'est comme moi (...) mes parents sont toujours en train de jouer les globe-trotters. Bah! Qu'ils s'amusent! Nos aventures valent bien les leurs" (105).

8 Les chiffres entre parenthèses dans le texte renvoient aux numéros de pages.

9 Il faut préciser que la mère est totalement absente du récit.

10 Celui du diptyque *Cassiopée et l'été polonais* et *l'Été des baleines*.

11 Cf. aussi *l'Automne à quinze ans* (J. Fréchette): "Faute de mieux, j'ai décidé de penser à mon père. D'abord, j'ai fait la liste de ses cravates. Ensuite, j'ai fait celle de ses souliers. Une fois ça couvert, je ne voyais pas très bien ce qu'on pouvait penser de plus à son sujet" (89-90).

12 "Il est tellement attendrissant quand il se passionne pour quelque chose" (18).

13 *Atterrissage forcé, la Fille aux cheveux rouges, le Karatéka, Mission audacieuse*.

14 Cf. également l'absence de la mère dans le cadre non réaliste d'*Amour, réglisse et chocolat* (M. Decary).

15 Voir aussi *Edgar le Bizarre* (G. Gauthier).

16 Notons que la quête du père est un motif récurrent de l'oeuvre pour la jeunesse de Jean-Marie Poupart; dans *Des photos qui parlent*, l'aventure est fondée sur la rencontre du héros, sans père, et d'un substitut paternel, un détective privé qui fait partie du mouvement des Grands Frères.

17 "Je me promène toujours avec mes jumelles au cou, comme papa." (*La Montagne noire*, 12).

18 *La Montagne noire*, 15.

19 "Pris dans un cercle vicieux, Zygote avait le sentiment d'avancer sur une voie à sens unique: plus il était malade, plus il avait besoin de son père; plus celui-ci le traitait, plus il était malade" (115).

20 "Autant le père avait l'air bien portant, autant le fils semblait dépérir" (112).

21 Cf. B. Gauthier, M. Marineau, S. Desrosiers.

22 *Ani Croche*, 36.

23 *Caméra, cinéma, tralala*.

24 Prologue d'*Un terrible secret*: "J'ai seize ans. Je m'appelle Marilou, Marilou Brochu. Et j'ai un père... disons ordinaire. Et une mère... tout aussi ordinaire" (11). *Terminus Cauchemar*, 15: "Il y a deux jours, j'ai fait une fugue. J'avais décidé de quitter me parents avant de devenir folle."

25 Le récit a cette particularité que le narrateur et héros éponyme est un camion: Mack le Rouge.

26 Cf. *supra* la remarque sur la mère de *Quatre jours de liberté* (S. Desrosiers).

27 *Le Roi de rien* est suivi de *Caméra, cinéma, tralala*, éditions La Courte Échelle.

28 *Le Dernier des raisins, Des hot-dogs sous le soleil, Y-at-il un raisin dans cet avion?*, chez Québec/Amérique.

29 *Sauvetages, le Pari d'Agathe.*

30 *Le Pari d'Agathe*, 10-11.

31 *La Ville engloutie*, 10, 14, entre autres.

32 "Sébastien est vraiment content de tourner un film. Il aime bien le doublage, mais un comédien préfère généralement se trouver devant une caméra... que devant un micro" (60).

33 *Ibid*, 10, 65, 76-77.

34 "Il peut toujours parler, lui, il se cherche encore. Mon père est un éternel adolescent, comme le répète souvent Grand-mamie" (76).

35 *Les Prisonniers du zoo, le Voyage dans le temps, la Nuit du vampire, les Yeux d'émeraude.*

36 *Les Prisonniers du zoo*, 9-10.

37 Dans ce récit apparaît, en opposition, comme personnage secondaire, un père très autoritaire, que la mère et la fille craignent: "Il est tellement catégorique, il a une telle autorité que c'est presque pire. Il n'accepte pas que les autres soient différents de ce qu'il veut qu'ils soient" (107). Des indices laissent penser que ce père est d'origine européenne. La famille entretient des relations avec l'Autriche.

38 *Le Complot.*

39 Les "bons" pères existent cependant chez B. Gauthier: dans l'épilogue de l'histoire d'horreur *Panique au cimetière* apparaît un père qui donne à sa fille un "tendre baiser sur le front" et "éteint délicatement la veilleuse" (88).

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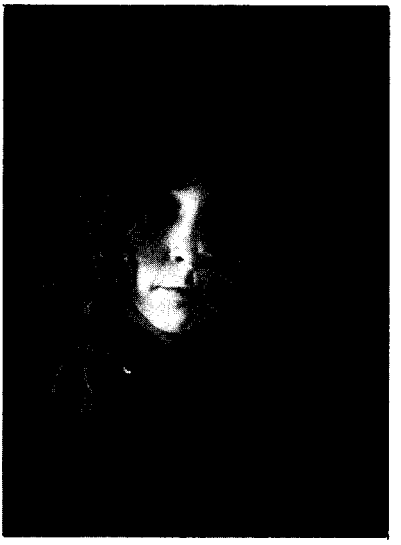
Susan Musgrave: An interview



Marie Davis

Susan Musgrave, currently writer-in-residence at The University of Western Ontario, is one of Canada's most distinguished writers. Long associated with witchcraft, Musgrave comments in a November 1992 interview on the censorship she has experienced in her personal life, as well as the philosophical and moral issues it raises for her as artist and mother of Charlotte (10) and Sophie (4).

DAVIS: Alvin Schrader quotes one person who submitted a complaint to a library about your children's story, *Hag Head*, which reads: "Witchcraft is represented as being a real and vital threat to the lives of children.... The resolution of the story leaves the witches and underworld figures in the same powerful and threatening position" ("Too Young to Know? 81). Do you often get that kind of complaint about your work?

MUSGRAVE: This is an odd complaint because I can't tell whether it's a *witch* complaining or somebody complaining about witchcraft. It's like that bumper sticker I used to see in Berkeley in the 60s—"if you outlaw guns, only outlaws will have them." I never knew whether that was a left-wing or right-wing bumper sticker. This quote is like that: does this person think it is or it isn't a "real and vital threat"? I don't particularly think it is myself; but I know there probably are people who do think that witchcraft is threatening; some Christians do. My ex-husband is a born-again Christian who thinks I'm a witch and is very worried about the way I bring up my children.

Actually, the kind of overt censorship I have experienced—and this was a very odd case—involved a complaint made through Human Resources [in B.C.]. Somebody called the Help Line and said that there was no sign of a child living in my house and that there was evidence of witchcraft everywhere. I don't have the kind of house where I have kids' things everywhere. Charlotte had her own wonderful, bright room which was off the kitchen, full of her art. And the evidence of witchcraft was *The Witches of Eastwick* by John Updike. When the social workers came in, they looked around and just started laughing. I was

supposed to have red and black images everywhere; well, I had a few paintings—North West Coast art is red and black. I couldn't believe the person had called, but they had.

I went to the Head of Human Resources over it and put in a complaint. I think it's good that people are investigated when there is a report but I said I didn't want a record of this. Besides, if I wanted to raise my child as a witch, then there was no reason that I couldn't—RIGHT? They just laughed. The Head of Human Resources said, "I thought you would think this was funny. I have always thought of you as the sanest of the sane" or something like that.

DAVIS: But the complainant caught you where you were vulnerable, where many parents are vulnerable.

MUSGRAVE: Yes. And it was someone who had been in my *home* and with my *daughter*. It's such a long story. I had a lodger, who turned out to be kind of a crazy woman, and she met a woman at a singles' group and brought her home to my house while I was out at my grandmother's funeral. I believe it was my lodger, or the woman from the singles' group who objected to the "images of witchcraft everywhere" and called the Help Line.

DAVIS: Do you think she really believed you were a witch?

MUSGRAVE: No. I think it was that she had never had any kids, and she was really jealous that I had a child. It was very complicated. In fact, I had to leave my own house to get away from her in the end. It was just awful.

DAVIS: You moved?

MUSGRAVE: I moved out of a house that I had lived in for *twelve* years. I left. I just couldn't bear the hassle anymore. Most things don't happen to me this way, but this was a real disaster. Especially since, as a parent, you question every day whether you are doing the right thing, and then when someone in authority questions you, you feel vulnerable. It all had to do with what this woman felt wasn't the right environment for the child, so she tried to, in a way, censor me.

DAVIS: Do you yourself censor—say, what your children watch and read? Do you believe in *any* form of censorship?

MUSGRAVE: Well, Mulroney is now saying he's going to censor violence on television. What do you start with—cartoons? They're some of the most violent images you see for kids. I mean all the figures—cats, the roadrunner—get squashed and then come back again. I think that there is a kind of naivete about cartoons. So, for my kids I don't censor them. But there are a lot of programs with guns in them and violent killings where women are being hurt that I don't want Charlotte to watch.

DAVIS: Children's shows?

MUSGRAVE: No, these are adult shows she is flipping through and I think Whoa! It's a bit much. I don't see that as censorship. I think you draw your own personal lines in places but you don't necessarily inflict that upon anyone else.

Once you start drawing lines, you'll have somebody who finds sexual intercourse obscene and the next person who finds kissing obscene. There are

people who don't believe we should kiss in public. And so, what point do you say we'll allow this? So, I think that you have to allow violent T.V. shows and hate literature, too. Who's to say what hate literature is? It's like giving Customs officials at the border the right to decide what's pornographic. It's ludicrous. So who is judging? Who is it up there who says they're so superior and knows more about what we can take than we do? I don't know anybody.

Now there are people who are very suggestible, who believe everything they read. I tend to believe everything I read. But then I read something else that tells me the opposite and I believe the opposite. But I figure that's just the way you learn and eventually you come to your own conclusions—by seeing all those points of view. You just cannot start drawing lines and say "this can't be published," or "this can't be read" because it does not give us choices then to make up our own minds about how we view the world, or how we would like the world to be.

I never have watched a snuff movie and wouldn't advocate the making of them, but if I am going to believe that there should be no censorship I have to accept that those will exist in the world. But my own personal line is that I choose not to watch them. Other forms of pornography I don't have any trouble with, but I do when someone's hurt or killed, especially killed. Personally, I like bondage. The idea of it. I am really on Camille Paglia's side about this: there's a kind of violence in sexuality. I have never had the kind of bed that I could be tied up to so it looks as if it isn't for me.

Also, I've always liked anything to do with sex, myself. I don't have any feeling that it's obscene or pornographic. I don't have a problem with it. You know, Charlotte at a very young age asked me "What's oral sex?" Well, I had trouble explaining because it does sound pretty yucky to a kid when you are saying this is what oral sex is. She said "Uhh! Don't you get germs?" I said "Well, I don't know." But at least I have tried to always tell her the truth, you know.

Now, Charlotte's a great fan of Madonna. She's got everything to do with Madonna everywhere. But I think Madonna's videos are great. I really like them because they upset people, and I think that art is about upsetting people; shaking up the status quo. And I think what is happening is that people want to go more and more back to not being upset. Where do you start drawing those lines and who is it that is making those decisions? That's what I want to know. Is Brian Mulroney more capable than me of telling me and my family what we should watch on T.V.? I hope not. I mean, given the other decisions he has made I don't fairly trust that he could make a decision for me about censorship.

Back to what you said: Do I make those decisions at home? Well, yes. You hope to instruct and guide and there are things that Charlotte watches that are too old for her.

DAVIS: So, you would not really want to impose your ideas on other people but you would with your children.

MUSGRAVE: Well, you have to. I mean you can't raise children and say "Anything goes, kids!" You don't let a two-year old cross the street alone. Is that censorship or is it just common sense? I really loathe T.V. so I am apt to say things like "What is this program? It looks stupid. TURN IT OFF!" My father said the same thing all the time. Anything with canned laughter I immediately think that it is not something I want Charlotte watching, or things that portray women in stupid, ditsy roles, I don't like either. But what I try to do now is sit down and *make* myself watch these things and say "Okay, is there some redeeming quality in them?" Usually, I can't bear to watch them, but Stephen, my husband, will and say, "This is actually a good message." But I don't think that I have ever censored a book or a story. There is nothing I have ever had to.
DAVIS: Do you worry, though, about your kids not reading imaginative stories that use really wonderful language? Do you worry about them being overexposed to more sensational literature, like some problem novels?
MUSGRAVE: Well, so far Charlotte goes through phases. She went through a phase of reading *Archie* comics. I knew this was going to pass and sure enough it has. Now it's *Teen Beat* but she also reads books. *Listen to Me, Grace Kelly* was the last book she read—she really liked that—and she'll read any kind of horse book you can find. I sort of encourage it. I used to read to her a lot when she was little and I read to Sophie now a lot. I do find a problem with books that aren't well-written or where the grammar is wrong. So I find myself correcting the grammar. I mean if someone says "laying" when it should by "lying" I change that, or if they leave out the "and," and say "Go get your mum," I always put "go and." I'm kind of pedantic about the last. But Stephen speaks a kind of street jargon. He says "I don't know nothing." And Sophie has already picked that up, and is always saying "I don't feel good," like a little gangster. I say "You don't feel well?" I try to correct it by just saying how I would say it. "You don't feel well today?" I don't think it sinks in. I see them going to school and people saying "God, what sort of parents did she have? She can't even speak English." "I don't know nothing."

What worries me most in kid's books—it's even in *Charlotte's Web*—is the mistakes in grammar. I remember thinking E.B. White uses "is" instead of "are" and it's not in the dialogue, which would be forgivable, but it's in the text. Also, "laying" instead of "lying." I thought: "How can an editor let that go?" But you never hear of people trying to censor a book because of bad grammar—just "bad language."
DAVIS: Well, in your case it's the distribution of power, not language, that's objected to—the witches are not reduced to powerlessness at the end of the story.
MUSGRAVE: Yes, but I don't think they are in the same powerful condition. Hag Head is banished to the marsh, the wand is lost. Usually in mythic tales, even in *The little mermaid*, once the wand or sceptre is lost, power is lost; so when the wand is gone, Hag Head is reduced.
DAVIS: But I guess it's because you intermix the two worlds—the real and the

supernatural—that it does not seem really like one world wins out over another.
MUSGRAVE: No, but I don't think it does. I think that would be too neat a way to end a story. I have always thought that good and evil co-existed and that the power of darkness and power of light co-existed. Hag Head is simply banished but then there is always the possiblity that she will come back. I think that kids understand that. I think that I understand that as an adult. Banishing it would be what we would like to be able to do, like banishing violence off T.V.; but in reality it is always there lurking as a possibility.

I don't know why people are so afraid of violence. Violence is out there. To pretend it doesn't happen by not showing it in visual images or in books seems silly to me—you can pretend all you like but it's still going to be there. So, why not directly confront it?

And people seem to accept more in visual images than they do in a book. If they see the word "fuck" in a book, they go berserk; but it's in movies and on T.V., it's everywhere, and people accept that.
DAVIS: Why is that?
MUSGRAVE: I don't know. I can never figure it out. The printed word seems to still have more power. I can have a violent scene in a book I write and people will feel sick about it and say so, but there are horror movies like *Cape Fear* out there that are *way* more diabolical than anything that I could think of writing. Not to mention the things that happen in real life, like Jonestown. Where can you get more surreal, and violent and awful than things that really happen in the world?

So, just to say that we're going to take violence off television and that will stop women from being raped and killed seems so naive and simple-minded as to be shocking. I just can't believe that anyone thinks there are cures like that.
DAVIS: Do you think violence, then, is an inevitable part of human life?
MUSGRAVE: I think it is. I think that people are violent. You watch kids beating on each other before they watch T.V. And animals. They don't watch T.V. and they're pretty violent!

I think there are violent streaks in us; and I suppose we try to civilize ourselves. Certainly, for me the violence goes into my work so that I'm not a violent person. I suspect I would be if I didn't write poetry. I'd probably be a murderer. I know that I sublimate a lot of tendencies. As many writers have. And I've talked about that. Many convicted murderers compose poetry the night before they are to be executed; there's definitely a connection between the criminal mind and the artistic mind, the world of violence and the world of creativity. And I think writers and artists and musicians have a way out; other people play golf, or sew, or knit—they do something—people have to sublimate those confusions that lead to frustration and anger and violence in us.

But by banning anything, all you do is actually send it underground. I mean my friend Linda Rogers has this great song, "The booger Song," that's caused all sorts of controversy on their record *Brown bag blue* and it caused them to be *banned* from reading at a private school in Victoria! It's just a fabulous song.

Kids love it. They hear it once and they sing it forever. And they'll do it behind your back *even more* if you ban it.

DAVIS: How does it go?

Musgrave [singing]: It goes "I got a little booger,
A tickle up my snout,
I don't know how I'll do it,
But I've got to get it out."

Then they play the kazoo. "I could put it in a booger bank
Or stick it on my chair
But I'd really rather stick it
In my sister's frizzy hair."

And it goes on. Every verse has something different, like putting it in the teacher's desk. I don't know why it's so funny myself. I guess it's because they know it's taboo.

DAVIS: To get back to the witchcraft issue: do you consider yourself a witch?

MUSGRAVE: Well, I wouldn't call myself a witch. Other people call me a witch.

DAVIS: But a lot of critics always refer to...

MUSGRAVE: Well, that's because my first book was called *Songs of the Sea Witch* which was not me at all. It was a muse figure. I was reading a lot of Robert Graves and thinking about the white goddess and that's my sea witch: a white goddess figure to whom I wrote these poems when I was sixteen, thinking this was very romantic. And then I got stuck with this typecast image. After a while I stopped denying it. I thought, "what's the point?" I deny it and I get a headline "Witch gives way to woman." That was what was in *The Globe and mail.* I couldn't believe it.

About this complaint: "Witchcraft is represented as being a real and vital threat." My witch friends would say that it isn't. Robin Skelton is a witch and he would say "Of course, witchcraft isn't a threat. We'd never hurt children." Now satanism does. I have nothing to do with satanism at all, and I don't know any satanists. Most people don't know the difference between Wicca and Satanism.

DAVIS: What is the difference?

MUSGRAVE: Satanists practice black magic, they desecrate graveyards, they put curses on people. Witches are the original pagans who worship nature and do healing spells, usually using herbs. The witches are into white magic. I have done a bit of white magic myself and I know it takes a tremendous amount of energy; Robin said I was not grounding myself properly, that's why I was burned out for days after I did any kind of spell, and he said there's a little ritual to ground your energies. But, I stopped doing it.

I have a hard time with my youngest daughter because she thinks witches are bad, and scary and I'll say "Well, a lot of people think I am a witch, Sophie." I love spending time in the wilds. I would in the old days probably have been

burned as a witch simply because I had power. I think witches were women with power, personal power. When I am out in the woods I feel the *most* kind of power, just right there. I can blend in. I can sit and read and something will come up to me or fly right by me or stop on the ground. I can be that still.

So, witches are not threatening to children, but there are a lot of misconceptions out there about them.

DAVIS: Do you ever censor yourself—worry about political correctness or appropriation of voice?

MUSGRAVE: No, I certainly don't. In my new novel, I've got Colombians, I've got West Indians, I've got black women, and my protagonist has one hand; I don't have one hand, I have two. I have this strange mixture of people united by their visits to a prison; I've sort of got a mini-United Nations inside a prison. Now, it is up to me as a writer to *know* the world I am writing about. I'd look like a fool if, for instance, I got the accent or the dialogue of the black women wrong; people would say that I don't know what I'm talking about.

DAVIS: What gives you the "right," though, to speak from another race's perspective?

MUSGRAVE: They're *characters.* I am not saying that I *am* them. My main character is a white, Anglo-Saxon protestant like I am, only with one hand. But what gives anyone the right? Do I have to write like a forty-one year old white woman from Vancouver Island? Can I set my novel in Toronto, if I've never lived there?

DAVIS: So, are you arguing for the rights of the imagination?

MUSGRAVE: Yes, we must allow that right. But writers should always try to know what they're talking about. If they don't, it will show in the writing. If I decide to set my novel in Jamaica and write about a Jamaican family, it's going to show right away if I don't know what I'm talking about. And I wouldn't write about Jamaica because I have no clue as to how people live there, or how they speak, except from what I've heard in reggae, but that's not going to get me very far. If I went and spent a year in Jamaica I might very well feel that I could do it.

I have lived with Indian people in villages, and I know their dialect, so I feel I know a certain amount that qualifies me to write about them. But they're all peripheral characters in my novel. I wouldn't make *myself* an Indian character. I write my own rules and the world I know best is the WASP world. My main character has the kind of mother that's like mine: neurotic and obsessed (doesn't go to a prison because she once went to a dungeon that was stuffy).

So, that's the world I am comfortable with and that's where I write. I think in the world of art there should be "no-go" areas. As artists, we should be able to write about anything we want—witches included.

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We are all censors

Perry Nodelman

Résumé: *L'auteur se livre à l'examen critique des comportements à la base de la censure, parmi lesquels il distingue ce qu'il appelle l'agnosis ou le refus de savoir. Il conteste la répartition des livres en fonction de l'âge des enfants et refuse de concevoir le livre comme une source d'enseignement en soi. Selon Nodelman, la vraie source de la transmission du savoir se trouve chez les éducateurs, dans les exemples qu'ils donnent et les valeurs qu'ils défendent. Dans cette optique, l'enfant devrait pouvoir lire tous les livres qu'il veut, à condition que cette liberté soit encadrée par un adulte résolument impliqué dans le processus d'apprentissage.*

Like myself—like, I imagine, most readers of this journal—the people I talk to about the censorship of children's books are against it. Like me, they chortle in amused horror when union officials in B.C. try to ban a picture book about trees because it will turn children against loggers—or when a school board in Western Canada actually does ban a Robert Munsch story about a teacher and principal failing to get a determined child into a snowsuit, on the grounds that it will undermine young readers' respect for those in authority, i.e., teachers, and principals, and school boards.[1]

We laugh at these clearly misguided acts of suppression because we have a strong faith, not just in the importance of the democratic principle of freedom of thought and expression, but also in the basic good sense of most children. We believe that they are too smart (or maybe just too rigid) to be subverted as easily as most censors and would-be censors imagine they will be.

And yet: in my conversations with others about these matters, there's always a point when even those most scornful of censorship become censorious—themselves versions of the very thing they so vociferously attack. When it comes to children's books, I've concluded, we are all censors.

We anti-censors are most likely to become censorious about books that diverge from our own theoretically anti-censorious values—books that attack individual choice, or reinforce gender stereotypes. The more angry someone is about attempts to ban anti-logging books, the more likely that person is to demand the suppression of other books for being anti-environment.

That's not surprising, perhaps; but it *is* dangerous. To suggest that we have the right to close down discussion of any topic or ban any book is merely to

establish that censorship is, in some circumstances, appropriate; and if it's appropriate in some, then who's to distinguish between those and others?

As is probably clear by now, my own position on these matters is brutally simple—simplistic, some will say. There is *nothing* that anybody should not be allowed to say or to write—nothing, no matter how offensive, how narrow-minded, how boneheaded, or how dangerous I might personally find it. Not anything sexist or racist. Not neo-Nazis misrepresentations of history. Not pornography. Nothing.

But this is not to say that bigots and fools and perverts have the right to let their bigotry and stupidity and perversion go unquestioned. Just the opposite: they *must* be questioned. If we succeed in preventing them from saying it, then we lose our opportunity to question it—and history teaches that evil or folly repressed merely deepens and becomes more dangerous, like gangrene under a bandage. It becomes forbidden and tempting. It grows, and it grows worse. No, I say—better to let it be said, so that we in turn have the freedom to point out how ridiculous or how dangerous it is, in the faith that, if we argue against it logically and well, people in general will be reasonable enough to reach our own wise conclusions about it. To believe they won't be would be unconscionably arrogant.

So: nothing censored, nothing suppressed—and that includes, perhaps above all, the censorious utterances of would-be censors. For if we're truly against censorship, then we have no choice but to allow censors freedom of speech also. If we're truly tolerant, we must tolerate their intolerance—at least to the extent of not condemning the expression of it, so that we can then *condemn* its erroneousness.

All of which, you might well be saying, is fine and true and good: of course we have to let people say whatever they want. But the right of people to say it doesn't mean that other people must hear it—and especially not if the other people happen to be children. So sure, let writers express their racism or anti-environmentalism—as long as I preserve my right not to listen to them, and above all, my right to keep their sick perversions out of the hands of the children in my charge.

In *Storm in the mountains*, his disturbing book about the attempt in West Virginia to ban the language arts text series he had edited, James Moffett suggests that censorship emerges from what he calls *agnosis*—"not-wanting-to-know." Now agnosis is an acceptable personal choice—particularly when it's made by adults who do in fact already know and just aren't interested. I assume that's the basis upon which most of us choose what we read—seek out more science fiction like the science fiction we've already enjoyed, perhaps, and reject pornography. When it comes to children, however, the situation is not so simple.

When it comes to children, many of us practice agnosis-at-one-remove. We reject books on the basis that they might teach children something we ourselves do already know, but that we do not want them to know at all.

We usually don't want them to know it on the basis that it will harm or pervert them—that knowledge of evil will make them evil. That ignores one salient fact: our *own* knowledge of evil has not made *us* evil. Just the opposite, most of the time: when we come upon a sexist stereotype, it's not male chauvinist pigs that most of us turn into—it's angry feminists. Our usual response to the discovery of evil matter in a book we're reading is an outbreak of outraged rectitude.

But that's because we already know how to identify the stereotypes as stereotypes; it might be argued (indeed it is) that weaker or less mature minds than our own won't have that skill. They will accept the stereotypes unconsciously, and that's why we need to protect them from reading books that contain them.

But we live in a world filled, not just with books we don't approve of, but also with TV advertising, drug pushers, phone solicitors, politicians, evangelists, and the children of parents with values different from our own. Keeping children from access to ideas and values we don't like is next to impossible. It would be more logical to protect them, not by trying to suppress the potentially dangerous materials, but by helping them to learn the important skill of being less trusting. My own daughter took over the responsibility of identifying the sexism in the picture books she read as soon as the world made her conscious of her gender and her parents made her conscious of the oppression she faced because of it; since then, she has watched even the Miss USA pageant without any apparent desire to transform herself into a fluff-brained egomaniac.

And let's suppose we hadn't taught Alice to notice gender stereotypes: for all the ardent convictions of adults about what books children shouldn't read, I've never met anybody, not one single person, who admits to having personally learned to be evil or violent from the evil or violence they encountered in the books they read as children. Again, just the opposite: a student in my children's literature course this year showed me a book she still treasures because she'd loved it as a child. But nowadays she told me, she keeps it on the top shelf of a dark closet, behind the linens, for nowadays she finds it obnoxiously racist, and she doesn't want her own children to see it and be contaminated by it. That book is indeed racist: it is called *10 little negroes*, and it tells of Choc'late Sam and his wife Ebony, who are "as proud as any coons" of their ever-increasing family of "nigger boys." But as my student's urgent need to suppress this book suggests, it had not made *her* racist. As a child, she had not herself been the victim of the crime she imagined the book would commit on others.

I have to wonder if these crimes ever are committed—if books by themselves do actually play a significant part in the formation of our less appetizing values. Yes, books can certainly confirm what we already suspect about our world, or perhaps make us question it—maybe even offer us new choices to consider. But surely we make those choices on the basis of what we know and are already. If books or TV shows do persuade children of what their parents or other caregivers would prefer they didn't learn, it can only be for one of two reasons: either

children are inherently and unchangeably evil despite their care-givers' attempts to turn them to good (a conclusion I refuse to accept); or else care-givers' parents didn't provide their children with a context in which they would be likely to reject the evil.

I suspect, then, that books are always less significant in our education than the values our care-givers provide us with—either the ones they claim to believe in and work at inculcating, or the ones they actually live by, and teach us by merely allowing us to observe them. I also suspect it's the latter that actually does teach so many children the love of violence and lack of concern for others that so many of us blame TV and comic books for. Mainstream TV shows and books must be popular to be profitable, and can only remain popular by mirroring mainstream societal values—that is, by confirming the reality the majority of people imagine themselves to inhabit. If we ourselves claim not to share that version of reality but don't work conscientiously to make the children in our care conscious of our objections to the often objectionable values inherent in it, then we can hardly be surprised when the children then accept those values from TV and books.

For the sake of my argument, I'm going to pretend that what I've just argued is, in this one remarkable case, wrong—that the words we read *do* work on us, and that no matter what your position on these matters was before you began reading this essay, I have by now convinced you that I am dead right about everything. My insidious prose has done its clever work, and triumphed over all your previously dearly-held convictions. You have been persuaded: censorship is absolutely and always wrong.

And yet, I suspect, you're still a censor. As I said earlier, when it comes to children's books we are all censors—but the question over which we become most often and most thoroughly censorious has nothing to do with the values, or the violence, or the gender-stereotyping I've been discussing so far. It has to do with age.

Whether we are parents, teachers, librarians, or children's literature specialists, most of us want to determine just one thing about any specific children's book we happen to look at: what *age* is it for? And while we claim to be interested in finding the *right* age, we almost always couch our inquiry in terms of defining the *wrong* one. "Is this book too simple for a four-year-old?" we ask. Or, "Too advanced for an eight-year-old?"

Just about any adult discussion of children's books will confirm the prevalence of this sort of approach to them. I found the following comments in a quick browse through a recent issue of *CM: A Reviewing Journal of Canadian Material for Young People*—a journal intended to guide professionals in their purchases for school and public libraries:

Recommended for younger children up to approximately age eight [but not, clearly, anyone older]. Should appeal to girls in the upper elementary grades [and not, clearly, to those in grade two or

twelve—and it seems that any boy confused enough to like it needs gender therapy].
The complexity of the vocabulary, the emotional content, and the psychological elements make it unsuitable for readers below intermediate level.
Packed with words, up to 200 words per page, much too many for a young picture book fan or audience to cope with.
Young readers may have a difficult time with the sudden changes in time .... The narrative will also be a challenge for young readers, as many expressions are unfamiliar.

Even positive recommendations are couched in the form of censorious comments about which ages of children ought not to read a book:

There is a lot of text, it's a sometimes dark and scary tale, and the illustrations are intricate as tapestries, but if read aloud or recommended to a confident reader, it will surely be enjoyed.

These reviewers take it for granted that a major part of their task is to determine what audiences should *not* be encouraged to have access to these books.

In other words: they are censors.

And yet, I'm sure, they'd be offended by my calling them that. I'd bet that most if not all of them are advocates of free speech, ardent foes of censorship. And I bet that they themselves would identify the practice I've labelled as censorship as something quite different. They'd probably call it "book selection"—and see it as a necessary consequence of our humane concern, as responsible adults, for the welfare of the children in our care.

But just as "erotic literature" is another name for the pornography we approve of, book selection is another name for the censorship we approve of. And it's equally suspicious.

For one thing, these characterizations of the skills of children of specific ages are dangerously akin to the kind of thoughtless stereotyping that underlies sexism and racism. Individual real children rarely match these generalizations about the skills or interests of "children" of specific ages: what one four-year-old finds difficult another may dismiss as too simple, depending on character, basic intelligence, and previous experience of both books and life. In making these generalized prohibitions, then, we deprive a lot of children of stimulating and pleasurable experiences they are quite capable of handling.

But let's assume for a moment that a significant number of children aren't in fact capable—that a certain book does indeed contain a number of words that many children might not in fact be familiar with. Surely we'd be further ahead if we saw that not as a reason for proscribing the book, but as an occasion for teaching children, not just that particular word, but the pleasure of learning new words in general. The selection of books on the basis of what ages of children aren't ready for them yet is peculiarly anti-educational—a way of preventing children from learning the very things we assume they don't yet know.

But I know I'm not likely to convince you of that as easily as I pretended to have convinced you earlier. The assumptions about the nature of childhood that

underlie this obsession with the differing abilities of children of different ages are so strongly ingrained in our cultural attitudes toward children that they have the status of unquestionable truth; and so does the accompanying conviction that we adults have an obligation to protect children from what we perceive as being inappropriate for them. If we are all in some way censors of children's books, it is because our assumptions about childhood, and therefore about children's literature, are inherently censorious.

Even the existence of a body of texts designated as literature for children represents a form of censorship. Prior to the last few hundred years or so, such a literature did not exist, and for a good reason: children weren't considered different enough from adults to need a special literature of their own. The need for such a literature emerged only when children did begin to seem to have significantly different needs—needs almost always defined in terms of their relative vulnerability and the consequent obligation of adults to protect them from complete and dangerous knowledge of the world. Not surprisingly, the first children's books, which appeared in Europe at the end of the sixteenth century, were expurgated editions of classics: censored books.

As children's literature began, so it has continued. C.S. Lewis once said he was attracted to writing children's books because "this form permits, or compels, one to leave out things I wanted to leave out" (236). By definition, children's literature is a literature that leaves things out—i.e., censors them.

The assumptions about the nature of childhood that underlie that censoriousness continue to have great power. Most of us still think of children as being innocent—that is, either ignorant of the restraints of adult maturity and therefore savagely primitive and weakly prone to evil, or else, unsullied by the laxity of adult corruption and therefore delightfully pure and in need of being sheltered. Both attitudes suggest the need to isolate children, either from the corrupting immodesty of adult sexuality or from the corrupting limitations of adult rationality.

In other words, childhood as we understand it *demands* censorious behaviour from adults: children can continue to be children only so long as adults censor their perceptions of the adult world. And we seem to have a deep need to ensure that childhood does continue, as long as possible. The response of many adults to my positive recommendations of children's books containing matter they consider unsuitable is, "Well, sure, they might be able to understand it—but why do they have to read about awful stuff like that when they're so young? They'll find out about it soon enough."

In the centuries since we first conceived of the idea that children are different from adults in terms of inherent limitations in their ability to understand, we've developed a highly sophisticated system of just exactly when and how. We believe that there are "stages" in the development of childhood thinking, and of children's moral and social skills. Not only are children different from adults in the way they think about things, but young children are different from older ones:

the species "human" consists of a series of chronologically distinguished sub-species inherently alien to each other.

That's why we worry so much about those age categories: until children make these abrupt and apparently magical transformations from one sub-species to the next, one stage to the next, they simply aren't able to absorb more than the limited amount that their current stage allows, any more than caterpillars can fly. Exposing them to more would short-circuit their minds, we think—blow significant cognitive fuses. Maybe their heads would explode.

Our censoring acts of book-selection are actually meant to prevent such explosions. Many of the people I talk to about these matters are convinced that providing children with books not suitable—i.e., not simple enough—for their current stage will somehow extinguish any desire they might have to ever think another thought or read another book.

Nor does it help when I get these adults to admit that they themselves have sometimes read books with unfamiliar words in them, and that it did not do any serious damage to them—that they themselves endured "onomatopoeia" or "ecdysiast" and survived, unexploded. And survived moreover, to read again. Before I can persuade them to trust their own real experience over their theoretical convictions about the significance of ages and stages, I have to call those stages into question.

As it happens, that's an easy thing to do. The idea that childhood consists of a series of stages related to specific ages is a version of the cognitive theories of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget—and as most often expressed, an incorrect version. Piaget himself never suggested either that the relationships between developmental stages and the chronological ages of children are as rigid as many of his followers believe, or that information should be kept from children at certain stages because they cannot deal with unfamiliar ideas or experiences. Just the opposite, in fact: Piaget makes it clear that children *need* new ideas and experiences to assimilate in order to move to a new stage—and that they'll make the move only once they have the information, and not simply because they've reached some magic chronological turning point.

On the other hand, Piaget did assert it was impossible for children to learn concepts that he defined as being above their current stage of development—an idea that more recent research in cognitive development has called seriously into question. Slightly different versions of the experiments on which Piaget based his theories have shown that children can accomplish theoretically impossible kinds of thinking at surprisingly early stages.

Contemporary research also challenges the assumption that development is a series of periodic changes from one distinct state to another. Recent studies suggest that learning occurs gradually in a continuous series of small steps, as long as there are new experiences for children (and adults) to learn from. While the distinct stages Piaget outlined do seem to exist, studies suggest they may be culturally imposed, the result of matters such as typical school entrance ages and

our adult expectations of the sorts of experiences children can process; as Barry J. Zimmerman says, "what appears to be maturationally 'normal' in cognition and performance reflects, upon closer examination, a culturally imposed system of 'prods and brakes'" (14).

According to the cognitive psychologist Charles Brainerd, in fact, "Empirical and conceptual objections to [Piaget's] theory have become so numerous that it can no longer be regarded as a positive force in mainstream cognitive-developmental research" (vii). Brainerd adds, however, that "its influence remains profound in cognate fields such as education and sociology"—and so, of course, in the discussion of children's books. There's no reason—except, perhaps, our own rigid investment in a clearly outmoded theory—why we should not follow the lead of cognitive psychologists, and stop using untenable conceptions of childhood stages as a basis for saying no to children's books.

Particularly when the "stages" we imagine do manage so successfully to become self-fulfilling prophecies. Children deprived of information by adults who assume they can't absorb it will be just as egocentric and illogical as stage theory suggests they will be. Denied knowledge, children do remain ignorant.

But of course, ignorance is just another, less positive word for "innocence"—and that leads us back to the other assumptions about childhood I outlined earlier, to our rejecting books that we believe will corrupt or even bring an end to childhood innocence. In order to make my point about the danger of our censorious assumptions about book selection, I need to argue that children either are not or should not be innocent.

That childhood *isn't* particularly a time of innocence is easy to argue—depressingly so. If we refer, not to our ideals and our myths about childhood, but to our actual knowledge of the lives of real children, we must quickly realize that surprisingly few children are ever innocent at all. Those whose livelihood depends on adults buying their sexual services are certainly not innocent—nor are those who are subject to sexual and physical abuse by their relatives. Those who starve on the streets of third-world countries and too often even in the back lanes of first-world ones are not innocent—have no time to be innocent if they have any hope of surviving. Those who do live under roofs but in a poverty that cannot afford to insulate them from the whole range of their parents and older siblings' experiences are not innocent either; nor are the apparently insulated children of wealthier alcoholics or manic-depressives or absent corporate executives.

Nor are the (I hope) numerous children lucky enough to be free from this catalogue of woes particularly innocent either—not if they watch TV, or have contact with other children who do; not if they ever interact with any other fallible human beings at all, including those human beings who are working so hard to keep them innocent.

But, you might well argue, these are exactly the kinds of ugly, brutal, hope-destroying experiences that children should *not* be experiencing. Such experiences

twist and damage people; surely shielding children from them is a way to keep them healthy and sane. Surely agnosis-at-one remove is good for children.

So: *should* children be innocent? Yes, obviously, and ideally—innocent of the actual experience of hunger, of emotional chaos, of exploitation by sex-crazed and violence-prone adults. I have no intention of arguing that hunger and exploitation and violence are good for children; they are not good for human beings.

On the other hand, however, I do argue that *knowledge* of them is good for human beings—including children. If you know about something, you can think about it even if you've never actually experienced it. And thinking about evil is, surely our best defence against it.

Unless, of course, we believe that evil is inherently more attractive than good. I don't. I believe that evil and violence and such are inherently distasteful and dismissable, that it doesn't take much thought to reveal the limits of even pleasurable forms of self-indulgences—as long as one has developed the means of doing the thinking.

I also believe that children given knowledge of such things and provided with strategies for thinking about them will arrive, not necessarily at the same conclusions about them as myself, but certainly at conclusions which are subtle and thoughtful and take as many facts as possible into account. The theories of moral development, like Lawrence Kohlberg's, which suggest that children cannot actually do such thinking, not only depend on Piagetian assumptions which are no longer tenable, but have come under serious and deserved attack for being both male-chauvinist and Eurocentric: they privilege attitudes just like those of their European male creators as the highest point of moral evolution. It's time we gave these theories a rest, and tried to help children of all ages to be as subtle in their moral thinking as we like to believe we are ourselves.

At the very least, giving children knowledge of the world will allow us to discuss it with them—communicate our own attitudes about it to them; whereas if we choose to keep them ignorant of that which we despise on the theory that we are protecting them from it, we will deprive ourselves of the opportunity for such discussions. Meanwhile, it's highly unlikely that children won't be discussing these interesting matters with each other; and call me an elitist, but I have more faith in the validity and serviceability of my own values than in the ones cooked up by a bunch of four-year-olds, or fourteen-year-olds, who have been kept ignorant of mature thought in order to protect their innocence. Anyone who is, like myself, old enough to remember what the playground once taught us about matters such as sex and what women *really* want, in the absence of any public or parental discussion of such topics, will understand why I've reached this conclusion: ignorance is not particularly blissful, and rarely harmless.

I'm convinced, in fact, that more evil is done by people ignorant of what thoughtful moral beings might consider to be evil than by those with knowledge of that: that it is ignorance and not knowledge that destroys paradise.

True innocence is not ignorant. To remain innocent, that is, to try not to do evil, requires knowledge of what evil is. Knowledge then protects innocence: it is only those armed with knowledge of evil, and with the habit of considering the ethical and practical implications of the behaviour of themselves and others, who have the means to be good. And, I am convinced, that especially includes children.

So I arrive at the essence of my own book selection philosophy: don't worry about what children might not understand but should, or about what they might understand but shouldn't. Hope they'll understand. Encourage them to learn. Let them read whatever interests them, at whatever level of difficulty they themselves decide they can handle, in order to find whatever they feel they need to know. Allow them access to knowledge of the world as it is, to books that describe it as it is and as completely as they themselves wish to know it—and encourage them to wish to know it as completely, as deeply, as subtly as possible. And if we think they won't understand something, then let's help them learn how to understand it: teach them the habits of mind and the strategies of reading that will provide them with rich, meaningful, and productive reading experiences.

I have not always possessed this good sense. I learned it from my children. When they were young, Josh, Asa, and Alice selected the books they wanted to look at or have read to them from a shelf containing all the children's picture books we had in the house. It was an eclectic selection: it contained not only what I thought to be good books but also ones I'd bought for use in my children's literature classes as bad examples—examples of bad literature, and sometimes, even, of what I saw myself as bad or silly or superficial values. Much to my chagrin, the children often selected, and enjoyed, my bad examples—and I can't deny I felt that primal parental urge to limit their choices, despite my loud public opposition to censorship.

But then, I realized, the children never seemed to be terribly interested in or influenced by the bad values—and they also often selected my good examples as well as my bad ones. Access to the temptations of evil did not seem to turn them away from appreciation of what their parents were otherwise teaching them was good. So I swallowed my chagrin, stiffened my resolve to live up to my principles, and let them choose what they wanted.

Nothing much changed after they learned to read and gained even greater control of their selection of books. No longer restricted to children's books or even to the other books we happened to have in the house, they read whatever they wanted, albeit occasionally only after I had yet one more struggle with my conscience about letting them do so.

And the result? Free access to knowledge has not made any of my children monsters—not, at any rate, what *I* would consider monstrous. Now in their teens, they seem to their proud father to be thoughtful, sensitive, humane, responsible, and happy: moral beings despite—or, I believe, because of—their vast early access to knowledge of evil, lust, pain, anatomy, vulgarity and violence.

Given this access, of course, my children never were the "childlike" creatures we adults claim to admire. Early on, their knowledge gave them a sense of their own power: their right to be heard and taken seriously, and their freedom to evaluate the behaviour of others, including adults, with a considering and sometimes critical eye. I can't deny that these qualities have occasionally distressed and even enraged some of their teachers, a surprising number of whom have told me that children should respect all their elders always, no matter what bullying or stupidity or small-mindedness those elders choose to indulge in. Indeed, it's these unsettling conversations with surprisingly insensitive and self-protective individuals professionally concerned with the care of youth that have most confirmed my faith that my children's knowledge of evil and ability to think analytically about it have been a protection to them.

This is not to say that I would never reject any book or TV show or play in any circumstance. My pleas for allowing children more freedom in their choices comes with one very important proviso: that it take place within the context of active adult interest and involvement in children's lives in general and their reading in particular—and an active adult effort to teach them whatever skills of critical response and analysis we possess ourselves. Without such a context, children might well be influenced by evil or shallow or silly books and TV shows. Indeed, they are; and consequently, we adults have the right—indeed the obligation—to inform children of what we consider to be evil or immoral or vulgar or just plain silly, even while we allow them access to it.

Thus, my own children had to hear their parents bitch about the stupidity of some of the books they loved even while we allowed them to enjoy the stupidity. When they were young I often refused to read them books I didn't myself enjoy—for instance, books that had somehow palled for me after the first hundred or so readings, or anything about Care Bears; they could look at these books by themselves all they wanted, but not without hearing my opinions first. And they had to hear both their parents wax sarcastic about the silliness of some of the TV shows we made a point of watching with them—and learn either to defend their taste or share the sarcasm. They soon learned both, I'm happy to say: while their tastes and opinions are now often different from their parents, they share our pleasure and interest in the discussion of these matters.

In other words: we worked hard at teaching them that their pleasure in certain experiences took place in a medium of other possible opinions about it. Not only did they have to acknowledge the possibility of those other opinions, they also had to learn ways of thinking about and defending or even changing their own tastes and interests. Their innocence was armoured, not just by having knowledge, but by learning responsible ways of thinking about it.

Some will say that this level of adult involvement is not possible for everybody—that not everybody is a specialist in children's literature, that many care-givers have other responsibilities and just don't have the time to read the books the children in their charge read, or watch the TV those children watch—

let alone also discussing those experiences with their children. But one doesn't need a specialist's knowledge to convey one's own response to a book with children—just the willingness to respond honestly, and to be honest to children about that response. And as for those without the time for such conversations: I'm not all that willing to absolve care-givers of the responsibility of at least feeling guilty about their lack of involvement. Children *do* need care, and responsible care takes time and effort—even the effort of reading and talking about a few books about talking squirrels and fairy princesses, if it means that the children we are responsible for don't end up absorbing values we claim to find abhorrent and, eventually, end up becoming the kind of people we claim to despise. And I think that that's just what it does mean.

Furthermore, I'm convinced that few care-givers remain uninvolved in children's intellectual and imaginative life through callousness or lack of interest. Once divested of a faith in the value or inevitability of childhood ignorance, the adults I've discussed these matters with happily accept the responsibility of providing children with wider knowledge of the world and guiding them towards means of developing a wise understanding of it.

They do so because allowing themselves the experience teaches them one very important thing: most children, given the freedom and responsibility of making their own choices, choose wisely. In his description in *Charlotte's web* of the rope swing in Zuckerman's barn, E.B. White says that parents always worry that children will accidentally let go of the swing and injure themselves. But, says White, "children almost always hang onto things tighter than their parents think they will" (69). And I think they do, both to ropes and to their care-giver's values—but only if we don't give them a false sense of safety by trying to do their hanging on for them.

NOTES

1 An early reader of this essay has suggested that the examples of censorious attitudes I've provided here are so absurd that unsuspecting readers in later times or other places might imagine I made them up as a joke. I didn't, and they're no joke. According to information provided by the Book and Periodical Council for Freedom to Read Week 1992, schools in Lloydminster, on the border between Alberta and Saskatchewan, removed copies of Robert Munsch's *Thomas's snowsuit* from their school libraries during 1988-89, for fear that the book would undermine the authority of school principals in general; as of early 1992, the book seemed to still be unavailable in two Lloydminster schools. In February, 1992, meanwhile, many Canadian newspapers reported that members of the IWA-Canada local on the Sunshine Coast just north of Vancouver had demanded that Diane Leger-Haskell's picture book *Maxine's tree* (Orca 1990) be removed from school libraries, calling the book "emotional and an insult to loggers." It seems that one of the union members had called for action after his six-year-old daughter read the book in school and then came home and told her father, "What you do for a living is bad, Daddy" (*Globe and mail* February, 1992).

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Perry Nodelman, *a professor of English at the University of Winnipeg, is author of* The pleasures of children's literature (*Longman*) *and a fantasy novel for children* The same place but different, *forthcoming from Groundwood.*

Letters from Canadian writers

From Bob Munsch

There are various types of censorship

1. *Government censorship* where writers or publishers are imprisoned or killed for their actions. This can happen in a country where there are laws that let the government do this, or else in countries where there is de-facto government repression in spite of laws. This situation is very rare in Canada and is reserved for people who publish "hate" literature and for authors whose material is seized by customs.

It it important to realize that some types of literature are under goverment censorship in Canada and that this has the support of the general population. Child pornography is the best example. Nonetheless, it is possible to write mostly what we want in Canada. Canada does not rate high in PEN's list of countries that are repressive and we are lucky it doesn't.

2. *Government censorship based on funding*. In many countries, government funding or kickbacks or influence can virtually strangle public media. In Canada, the government funding of arts tries to be fair and to stay at "arm's length" and it generally succeeds. I have not been very much involved with government funding since my books started selling well, since I think that authors who need the help should get it and not me. (It is important to realize that all the funding and support for Canadian literature is a form of government funding pressure that we mostly agree with.)

3. *Local schools and libraries*. This is where a lot of the conflicting values of a poly-ethnic, multi-religious society are expressed when the laws prevent censorship at higher levels; and there are two reasons for this:

(a) Parents see schools, and to a lesser extent, local libraries as *In loco*

parentis and expect them to mirror their own values.

(b) Local schools and libraries are very vulnerable to politics at the most local level and generally want to avoid trouble.

My experience with "censorship" has been at this level. It is important to point out that this is a low level of censorship. Nobody is arresting me or refusing goverment loans to my publisher or shooting me on my front doorstep, and anybody who wants to buy my books can do so. The pressures felt on my books are part of the ongoing civic scrimmage of how low-level public institutions try to serve their populations in a multi-belief society. This, in itself, is not a bad thing. It is part of living in a democratic society.

I think that it does make sense for local teachers andlibrarians to try to reflect local values in so far as their professional ethics let them, and the same goes for authors when they operate in a local setting. For example, I once dropped in on a public school near Kitchener that has a totally Mennonite population. The Principal asked me not to tell the *Paper bag princess* because it didn't mesh very well with traditional Mennonite sex roles. I didn't tell it because I considered that I was, in a sense, a guest of the local community, using their kids to try out my stories on. Of course, there is a difference between censoring myself in a specific situation and deciding to write a book for the general population.

Some issues of censorship are so sanctioned by local ethics that the censorship is automatic. My local school does not have *Playboy* on the shelves and that is that: No *Playboy*! The school librarians know what the parents want and they agree with the parents.

Censorship gets complicated when the community is fragmented on an issue. I think the rule here should be as follows: Material that a significant percentage of the population *wants* should be available, even if the majority doesn't want it.

It has been my experience that a *vocal minority*, maybe three parents out of a school, can get a book taken off the shelves. I once had a very upset librarian call me because three of my books were in trouble in her school district; *Thomas' snowsuit* for being anti-authoritarian, *I have to go* for using the word "pee," and *A promise is a promise* for advocating satanism. The librarian was frantic! "There's an organized movement," she said. I had visions of picket lines around schools. It turned out that she meant that two families in two different schools had made the same complaint about all three books.

But let's deal with numbers that are not trivial. Suppose 10% of a population really wants a book off the shelves and 90% sort of like it, or even really like it. What then? I think the 10% should lose. In real life they often win; .001% can win, as long as they stage a sit-in on the floor of the principal's office.

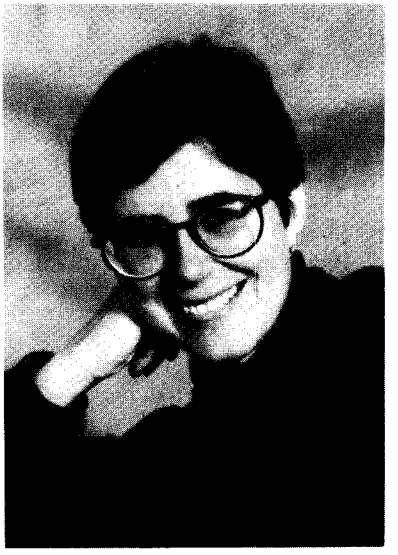
It is unfortunately true that a librarian is much more likely to avoid trouble by quietly restricting access to a book. Only rarely does a restricted book become the subject of an "organized movement of liberation." It is up to a librarian's professional ethics not to restrict books that a significant part of the population

wants, and to defend books against small pressure groups that want to restrict book access for the general population.

In situations where some of my very popular books were restricted or banned from school libraries, it was the response of the majority of parents that led to them being reinstated. Librarians should remember that public opinion can function to keep books in circulation as well as take them out.

Bob Munsch *is a storyteller who makes up stories in front of audiences. He has published 24 books for children.*

From Kathy Stinson



These notes are excerpted from my part in a panel discussion on "Censorship begins at home" for Freedom to Read Week 1992.

My first personal involvement in the censorship issue came with the publication of *The bare naked book* in 1986.

When I began to discover that some schools were carrying all my books except this one, alarm bells went off for me—Why, this is censorship! I thought.

Gradually though, as I heard librarians talk about their reasons for including it, or not, in their collections, I began to see not having *The bare naked book* in a school library more as a matter of book selection than one of censorship; it *would* be censorship if a school decided to have the book in the library but removed it because a parent came in and complained.

But I do have a niggling concern about arriving at this conclusion. Does my acceptance of schools not having *The bare naked book* in their collections give principals or teacher-librarians permission, whenever it's convenient, to hide behind the "book selection" argument, when in fact, for some of them, not choosing to have this (or any other) book might have more to do with fear of controversy than with any professional concerns? If this is what is happening, is it not a form of censorship after all—censorship by anticipation?

It's not that I can't sympathize with the educator's dread of confrontation, or of having to spend time and energy on a book challenge that they'd rather spend on doing their job, but I think some school personnel must examine the reasons behind their choices, and be prepared to stand behind them. Those who do this

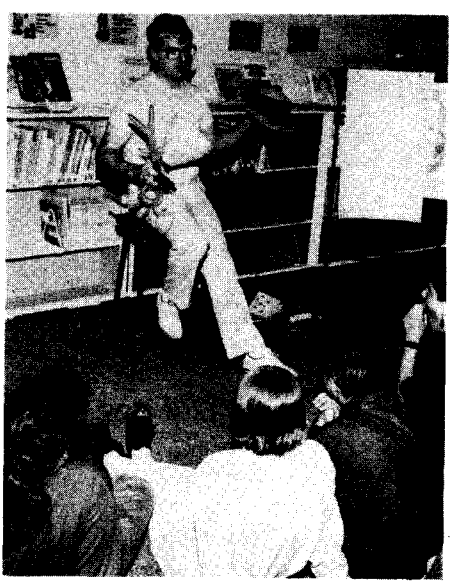
deserve our highest praise.

Those who do not, who avoid books that might cause them hassles, allowing onto their shelves only "safe" books unlikely to raise controversy, must be prepared for the eventuality that there will be few books on those shelves for children to choose from. (*Red is best* will not be there because someone might find the disobedient protagonist objectionable, for example. Someone else might object to the negative mother, or the faceless father, in *Big or little?* Right?)

Since the teacher-librarian's job is above all to open up the world of books to children, those who deny kids access to a book they know in their hearts has value for them, because "somebody" *might* object to it, are quite simply, failing to do their job.

Kathy Stinson, *author of twelve books, is best known for her picture books, among them* Red is best (*Annick 1982*), Mom and dad don't live together any more (*Annick 1984*), *and* Who is sleeping in Aunty's bed? (*Oxford 1991*). *Her first young adult novel,* Fish House secrets, *was published by Thistledown Press in 1992. Oxford University Press will publish* The ball book, *an entertaining and informative work of non-fiction, in 1993.*

From John Batt



When my daughter Eleanora was born, stories began to appear in my head. I wrote them down, and then I began to tell them at libraries and festivals. They were a hit with the kids and the adults: "A mixture of fun and emotions with a liberal sprinkling of good morals" was the way one person described my performance.

Unfortunately, I encountered censorship. One story which incorporated three common childhood beliefs caused me to be banned from Essex County Public Schools. This tale has a sick child taking a ride on a Unicorn's back through space and time to be healed. First stop...Santa...second stop...a manger. Her faith in each is appropriately rewarded.

Santa Claus is an international institution; Christmas is a national holiday;

the babe in the manger represents spiritual movements. Spiritual and mythical materials are dominant themes in all societies. My own cultural background happens to be Christian based, so I drew on it. One parent who was not there when I told the story complained that it had religious overtones.

The Ontario Ministry has made it clear that indoctrination is the issue, not the total ban of all "religious" references. Yet many schools now avoid religion in stories. It seems that no-one is comfortable with the Ministry ruling so it is easier to censor "religious" material. Yet this does not appear to be the case for Native stories which contain what in essence is their religion. In fact, these stories are encouraged.

My stories are positive and promote good morals. My stories show downswings which touch experiences we all share: grief, loss, fear, disappointment and anger. Then the characters rise through experience and they bring listeners back to equilibrium and laughter. My bathroom humour tales also teach lessons as they romp through life's funnier side.

"Big Bully Billy Blundell," for instance, has the audience joining the actions as the bully goes to school. The kids complain and then see a way to resist. Billy cannot take it. He becomes totally dejected and has the audience's empathy for a champion fallen. Finally, he rises anew to become the school hero.

Censorship hurt me. I was not offered my day in court. I feel I have been found guilty without a trial.

John Batt *is Canada's only licensed "Monster Hunter." He also writes and tells his own stories to children of all ages. Variation in styles has earned him the reputation of a one-man variety show.*

From Welwyn Wilton Katz

Obviously I know from first hand what it is to encounter people determined to censor. Sometimes people won't let themselves call it censorship, but when an entire school board, such as the Catholic School Boards of London and Middlesex County, refuses to allow *Whalesinger* to be purchased for its schools because Marty and Nick used a condom (I was told this was the main reason; the actual sexual episode didn't seem to bother them nearly as much), it seems to me that the word "censorship" applies very well. There are other examples. *False face* was not censored, but certain native groups would have liked it to be, because they said I had appropriated a native voice. I hadn't, of course. I had merely invented an individual, a boy with his own unique background that was both white and native, and I spoke with that *individual*'s voice. *Witchery Hill* has given me considerable difficulties over the years, because of the witchcraft. If the would-be censors read the book they would realize that I'm not exactly good

press for the subject.

But they don't read it, of course. They only read it in bits, to find a passage to read aloud to their friends and be horrified over. People will find what they want to find in any book. *The Owl and the Pussycat* has been censored for cohabitation. Yes. Truly. Remember, they got married AFTER they sailed away in the beautiful pea-green boat? *The once and future king* had magic (another apparent no-no to some religious folks.) *The wind in the willows* had the animals appealing to a non-Christian god, and being blessed by him. Look in any great piece of literature, and you will find something that will offend somebody. It is usually only the pablum that doesn't have any potential for censorship. Is that what we want in our society, a library full of pablum that has nothing to say about the real problems of real readers who turn to literature for comfort or example or just plain enlivenment?

I find the whole issue of censorship quite unbearable. It saps me of the energy I need to write, and drains the strength and courage I need to tackle difficult issues. I try to think about the problem as little as possible so as not to let it have any influence on my writing.

Welwyn Wilton Katz, *for seven years a secondary school math teacher in her native London, Ontario, is the author of seven adolescent novels and adult short fiction. She has won awards for* Falseface (*Ebel Award; International Fiction Contest; runner-up, Governor-General's Award for Children*); The third magic (*Governor-General's Award for Children; runner up, Ruth Schwartz Award*); Whalesinger (*nominee, Governor-General's Award). Her latest novel,* Come like shadows, *is set in Stratford, Ontario, during a production of* Macbeth.

From Claire Mackay

I have no easy answers to the problem of censorship. All I can do is to raise some questions, based on three experiences.

Experience 1: An otherwise sensible parent recently said to me, with a straight, even solemn, face, that censorship should begin at home. He went on to describe (or prescribe) a set of rules that sounded to me like a kind of intellectual and

aesthetic straitjacketing right out of Orwell. After I regained my composure, I silently thanked my own parents, who made a home in which any kind of censorship was anathema. My mother and father allowed—encouraged!—me to read anything I pleased. I happily devoured *The girl of the Limberlost*, *Confessions of an opium-eater*, every issue of *Captain Marvel*, *Superman*, and *Wonder Woman*, the *Basic writings of Sigmund Freud*, three or four hundred *Star weekly* novels (does anyone remember them?) which I used as a kind of speed-reading course, *Das Kapital*, *The Decameron*, and a book written by a clergyman entitled *Woman: Her sex and love life* (subtitled *Light on dark subjects*), in which I was abjured, lest I risk my immortal soul, not to wear black underwear and to be careful riding a bicycle. This last was the only book that confused me. None of them led me astray, although I have always been wary of bicycles. And I grew up okay. I am a nice person. I have never been in jail. I have been married to the same fellow for forty years. My children talk to me at regular intervals. Dogs like me. My mother approves of me most of the time, except when I forget to stand up straight.

Questions: Assuming we believe in the freedom to read, should not this mean freedom to read anything? Is such a freedom partial, or divisible? And shouldn't that freedom be extended to all, including those tens of thousands of children who go to bed hungry because there is no food in the house (if they have a house) and unread to because there are no books in the house?

Experience 2: My first book was an innocuous (or so I thought, oh foolish I!) little adventure story entitled *Mini-bike hero*. It concerned a boy who, after a number of spine-tingling interludes, is called upon to save a two-year-old from a raging flood. In my original, the two-year-old was a Métis child. In the course of describing where this child lived, I drew upon my own certain knowledge as a medical social worker whose clientele was largely native, and whose sympathies were definitely so. I used the words "settlement," "shack," and "abandoned wreck of a car." I thought I was being precise. But a reviewer in this journal thought I was only racist, and wrote: "How can the scales fall from our children's eyes if they haven't fallen from the eyes of our authors and editors? Hopefully [sic!], in another printing of the story, this section will be removed" (*CCL* 7:36-38).

It was. In fact, all mention of natives was removed. The settlement became a Sunday school camp, and the Métis baby a blatant Caucasian. The publisher and I just didn't want to mess with the thought police, and I confess I felt a little like Galileo. I had succumbed to an early form of what we now call "political correctness," and in so doing, I had betrayed my writer's duty to set down what is true.

Question: Is political correctness just a new, insidious and very dangerous kind of censorship?

Experience 3: One night a few years ago I was babysitting my grandson Ryder, then three years old. I had brought him a new book—*The three billy goats gruff*, with vivid illustrations by Paul Galdone. Ryder sat at the kitchen table, serious, intent, turning the pages—until he reached the full-colour double-spread of the troll. He stopped. His eyes grew wide. He shut the book with great care, then turned to me and said, "Nana, please take this book to your house and bring it back when I'm a bigger boy." Ryder wasn't ready, at three, for the book. And he knew it. I trusted him to know when that time would come, as I believe all children should be trusted. (And the time did come: I gave him the book when he was five, and a real cool dude. He looked at the terrifying troll, grinned, and said, "Hey, Nana, this excellent!") To quote Katherine Paterson: "Books cannot shock us or change us or move us without our permission."

Questions: Shouldn't we trust our children? Should those who would remove books from library shelves, those who would burn books, those who don't trust children be entrusted with the care and education of children?

These are big questions. Perhaps they aren't even the right questions to ask. But I'm hoping they might help all of us, just a little, in the search for some answers.

Claire Mackay, *whose most recent book is* The Toronto story *(Annick 1990), began writing for young people when her third son nagged her into it. She has so far produced six novels and two nonfiction works, none of which, to her regret, has been banned.*

CALL FOR PAPERS/APPEL D'ARTICLES

LA LITTÉRATURE D'ENFANCE ET DE JEUNESSE ET L'INSTITUTION LITTÉRAIRE QUÉBÉCOISE

Si, au début des années 70, la littérature québécoise d'enfance et de jeunesse était en péril, il semble maintenant acquis, comme l'affirmait Dominique Demers dans *Le Devoir* en juillet dernier, qu'elle représente le seul domaine vraiment "rentable" de l'édition au Québec. Elle a un public nombreux et fidèle, des auteurs reconnus et adulés; elle est diffusée par des maisons d'édition à l'efficacité redoutable; elle assure son rayonnement grâce à des revues d'information spécifiques et elle a maintenant ses spécialistes à l'Université, laquelle, naguère, la dédaignait superbement. Il serait sans doute pertinent de commencer à définir sa spécificité et à examiner son inscription dans l'institution littéraire québécoise. Le comité de rédaction de *CCL* est à la recherche de propositions d'articles qui privilégient l'étude de cette spécificité (thématiques récurrentes, représentations sociales, modèles idéologiques, genres dominants, etc.) et de sa situation dans l'institution littéraire (diffusion dans les réseaux scolaires et les bibliothèques publiques, infrastructure de l'édition, prise en charge par l'Université, carrière ou double carrière des auteurs—oeuvres pour la jeunesse vs oeuvres pour le public en général—, *etc*). *CCL* s'intéresse également aux échanges qu'elle entretient avec d'autres cultures, notamment avec la Francophonie et le Canada anglais (traduction et coédition; carrière "bilingue" de certains auteurs, *etc.*).

Veuillez envoyer toute proposition d'article avant le 15 juin à Daniel Chouinard, Études françaises, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, NlG 2W1 Télephone: (519) 824-4120. Poste 8562 ou 3884

THE LITERATURE OF QUEBEC

CCL invites proposals for articles on the children's and young adult literature of Quebec. We are interested in analyses of this literature's dominant genres, its recurrent themes, and its ideological claims. We are especially interested in this literature's link with literary institutions (libraries, universities, schools, publishing houses, etc.), particularly how these institutions regard the literature, how they buy, distribute, and study it. Finally, we are interested in exchanges between cultures, notably between French and English Canada, "exchanges" that come about through, for instance, translations, or through the use of Quebec literature in French immersion classes. Please send proposals by June 15, 1993 to Daniel Chouinard (see address above).

APPEL D'ARTICLES

IMAGES DE LA VILLE

Images des villes canadiennes, des quartiers favorisés, des terrains vagues et des bidonvilles; villes du mal et de la violence; espaces urbains rêvés, cités utopiennes ou stations spaciales, *etc.* La revue *CCL* est à la recherche de propositions d'articles pour un numéro spécial sur l'imaginaire urbain dans la littérature canadienne pour la jeunesse. Nous entendons consacrer ce numéro non seulement aux représentations, anciennes ou modernes, des grandes villes du Canada mais aussi aux images de l'espace urbain, peu importe où il se situe: en orbite autour de la terre, sur des planètes voisines, au centre du globe, dans un désert inaccessible ou dans l'Arctique. Ces visions de villes fictives relèvent-elles toutes de l'imagerie du royaume du Mal? Quelle sont leur définition et leur dimension sociologiques dans l'oeuvre littéraire? Comment peuvent-elles, dans le cadre restreint de leurs limites topographiques, créer le sens et susciter la représentation?

Veuillez envoyer toute propostition d'article avant le 15 juin à

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CALL FOR PAPERS

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Images of Canadian cities, utopian cities, urban wastelands, cities of evil and violence, cities with a mission, space communities in orbit—*CCL* welcomes submissions for a special issue on all figures of urban communities in Canadian children's books. We intend to focus not only on past and recent depictions of major Canadian cities, but also on displaced figures of the City wherever they might be situated: in orbit around the Earth, on neighbouring planets, in the centre of the Earth, on some remote desert territory, in the remote Arctic. Are all these urban figures Empires of Evil? What could be their sociological definition within the literary text? What is their narrative function? How do they in the tightness of their boundaries contribute to meaning and representation?

Send brief abstracts, proposals, or enquires by June 15, to:

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