

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ASSOCIATION

Quarterly

SUMMER 1980

Bixler Accepts Criticism Award

The Children's Literature Association Criticism Award is a special honor because it comes from persons who like myself are studying, teaching, and writing about children's literature. It is also an honor to follow two Award winners who have been contributors to the field much longer than I have, Aiden Chambers and Leonard Clark. To thank the Children's Literature Association for this award, I would like to mention some of the ways I have benefited from its services. In doing so, I am sure that I speak for many other members, especially those who like myself have begun professional careers in children's literature during the past five or ten years.

Perhaps most obviously, I am grateful for the Association's affiliated journal, Children's Literature, which published my article. At a time when academic survival is not easy, Children's Literature and the expanded Quarterly have provided needed outlets for publication, and I have often found that the varied materials in these journals could inform my teaching as well as stimulate my research. The Association is to be commended also for its recently established Fellowship Awards to further encourage scholarship in the field.

In comparing the content of my article on Frances Hodgson Burnett with that of the two previous award winning articles, I notice something

(continued on p. 2)



Illustration by Anne Burgess for Dusk to Dawn: Poems of Night, selected by Helen Hill, Agnes Perkins, and Althea Helbig, to be published by Crowell Junior Books, Spring 1981.

Grand Canon Suite

by Perry Nodelman

Developing a list of important children's books is an undemocratic but praiseworthy endeavour. Despite our North American horror of offending even the most awful of writers and those who enjoy their awful writing, some books are more important than others. But the word "canon" is infortunate. Its meanings suggest regulation and repression; it applies to church laws, or to axiomatic and universally binding standards; or it is a catalogue of saints. The members of ChLA are often wise and sometimes even saintly, but we are certainly not the First Church of Children's Literature Triumphant. We are not trying to lay down the law about children's literature. We do not mean our "canon" to be universally binding.

(continued on p. 3)

CANON (cont.)

We are not going to decide which books are, as my dictionary says, "genuine and inspired"; and we certainly do not want to consign all the other books to eternal damnation, or eternal remaindering, whichever comes first.

But having talked about developing a "canon" for years, we are stuck with the word; so our first job is to re-define it. Some important steps toward re-definition were taken at the session on "Developing a Canon" at the last ChLA conference. The members of the panel for that session--Mary Ake, Jane Bingham, Alethea Helbig, Marcia Shafer, and Jon Stott--did admirable work in preparing possible lists of works to be included in a canon. Their lists led to a lively discussion; the session as a whole showed what problems there are in canon-building, and even suggested some solutions.

Our search for a canon emerges from our sense of responsibility, as people knowledgeable about children's literature, to pass our knowledge onto others. We all have ideas about what makes a children's book important--and more significantly, about which children's books are the important ones. Our model in developing a canon is a presumed canon of literature in general--a list of the literary works everybody should know. Some people would say such a canon does not exist; even if it does, its astonishing flexibility suggests some of the problems we face.

The canon of important literary works was not put together by a committee. It grew and changed over time; it is still growing and changing. According to the editors of The Norton Anthology of English Literature, there are thirty-one "major" English authors. They include Carlyle, whom I have my doubts about; they do not include Fielding and Dickens, who surely ought to be included. Furthermore, they include Blake and Donne, who would certainly not have been named a hundred years ago; and they do not include James Thomson and Robert Southey, who cer-

tainly would have been named a hundred years ago. Literary canons are slippery things that vary with literary taste; a canon of children's literature is bound to be elusive.

Furthermore, every list of books implies a principle by which choices have been made. A list of books experts admire will be different from a list of books they consider important, and many of us have suffered through numbing sessions with "important" books like Richardson's Pamela or anything by Hemingway. Is our canon of children's literature going to list important books? Or good ones? Or both? If good, who decides what "good" is? If important, important for what reasons?

An even more significant question is, who is the list for? Consider Hamlet. No-one would doubt it is part of the canon of great literature. Everyone should know what Hamlet is about, but educated people should actually have read it; well-educated people should also have read Lear and Othello and Macbeth; people with a good education should know ten or fifteen other "important" Shakespeare plays; people with a specific interest in drama should know everything Shakespeare wrote; and graduate students should know, not just all of Shakespeare, but all of Ben Jonson and of Beaumont and Fletcher and even of Shakerly Marmion. What matters varies with whom it matters to. Is our canon of children's literature going to include only the works everyone should know? Only the works someone specifically interested in children's literature should know? Only the books every child should read? Or all of the worthwhile children's books ever written?

One of the definitions of "canon" my dictionary suggests is, "any comprehensive list of books within a field." Of the lists provided by members of the conference panel, Jane Bingham's were the most comprehensive. She provided the names of seventy-two "Creators of Realistic Fiction Worthy of Study" and of fifty-four "Creators of Fantasy or Science Fiction Worthy of Study." But if comprehensiveness is what we are after, even those sizeable numbers are not comprehensive

enough, and Bingham's lists are most revealing because of what they leave out. For instance, her forty-three "Illustrators Worthy of Study" did not include Heinrich Hoffman, Edward Lear, Randolph Caldecott, Kay Nielsen, Arthur Rackham, Jean de Brunhoff, Nancy Eckholm Burkert, Peter Spier, Richard Scarry, Evaline Ness, Gerald McDermott, Susan Jeffers, Tomie de Paola, Raymond Briggs, Pat Hutchins, or Leo and Diane Dillon. All of these are certainly "worthy of study"; but the real question is, when do we stop adding names? Indeed, why should we stop at all?

The answer is, we stop because we have too many names. In fact, I suspect we are not actually looking for a "comprehensive list of books written in a field." Bingham's fascinating list of writers of realistic fiction puts Mildred Taylor between Noel Streatfield and Albert Payson Terhune, and includes both Frances Hodgson Burnett and Paul Zindel; it tells us something important because it tells us so little. What we really want is a more discriminating list--one that is shorter, one that lists specific books rather than an author's work in total, and one that explains why each work deserves to be included.

Jon Stott's list of "Some Great and/or Historically Important Pre-1920 Books and Authors for Children" meets most of these criteria. Stott explains why the books he suggests are significant; for instance, he says of the poetry of William Blake and the Taylor sisters, "writers of diametrically opposed types of poetry for children; their work provides examples of the dated and the universal qualities of children's poetry." But occasionally, Stott fails to list specific titles. His collection of "Giants" names Macdonald, Andersen, Pyle, Kipling, Nesbit, Potter, and Alcott, but not which of their books deserve canonizing. Do we wish to include Nesbit's Wet Magic or Potter's Squirrel Nutkin in the canon? If so, why? And are we to actually know specific books by the "historically significant" Ewing, Molesworth, Alger, Hale, and Yonge? Or do we only have to know their

names as part of literary history?

While Stott's list is valuable, his job of choosing books published before 1920 was a relatively easy one. There were fewer children's books in the first place, and we have the distance to know which ones still matter to us. Alethea Helbig faced a harder task in her "Possible Canon" of myths, hero tales, folk tales, and fables. Not only is there more to choose from, but most of it was not intended to be children's literature in the first place. The problem of making selections is compounded by having to decide what is, in fact, children's literature, and what is not.

Helbig wisely solved this problem by listing specific editions of the various materials she chose, all of them editions intended for children. But some of her choices might be controversial. Why, for instance, does she name Lucy Crane's translations of the Grimm tales, and not the beautifully lucid ones by Randall Jarrell and Lore Segal? And what tales, in particular, are the canonical ones? Despite many questions like these, Helbig's list of traditional materials to be included in a canon is worthwhile, and worth repeating; in summary, it includes Greek myths, The Illiad, The Odyssey, legends of Norse gods, stories from The Bible, the legends of Beowulf, King Arthur, and Robin Hood, the folk tales collected by Perrault, the Grimms, Asbjornsen and Moe, and Jacobs, the tales of Uncle Remus, and the fables of Aesop. Selections from all of these certainly deserve a place in the canon.

The most contentious list was the one provided by Mary Ake and Marcia Shafer of "fiction titles for young people through grade eight." That this list created so much interest suggests how close it is to our ideal of a canon. Ake and Shafer bravely listed specific titles--126 of them. Not surprisingly, there was a lot of disagreement with many of their choices; but no-one objected to their procedure of listing specific titles. Obviously that is what we want as a canon--a list of specific books.

Agreement about what books

should be included depends on agreement about the reasons for selecting them. Ake and Shafer say of their list that "beside obvious literary merit, other important criteria for inclusion of a title were a) continued popularity of a title, and b) titles that may be successfully recommended to or shared with a youngster. These criteria gave us license to put Judy Blume cheek by jowl with Babbitt, Clemens and Lewis." And there the trouble starts; a list that puts Blume cheek by jowl with Babbitt without explaining which is cheek and which jowl is too indiscriminate to be useful. Unfortunately (but inevitably), literary merit and popularity with children are not always shared by the same book, as the names Blume and Babbitt suggest; we all know which one is popular and which one excellent. So Ake and Shafer actually provided two lists in one--a list of popular books, and a list of admirable books. Unfortunately, they did not say which were which.

Those attending the session felt that literary merit and popularity with children are both significant, but that they do need to be distinguished. A list of popular books would certainly be useful to librarians and teachers, and of great interest to anyone studying children's literature. The fascination of large numbers of children with Gertrude Warner's The Boxcar Children is worth knowing about, and deserves critical attention; and so do the immense popularity of Enid Blyton in Britain and Carolyn Keene in America. On the other hand, we need a list of admirable books, if only so that we can define what is admirable in children's literature. Ideally, I think, our canon would include books for both reasons, but explain why each book had been included. Such a list would indeed include all the books anyone interested in children's literature should know--and that seems to be what we are after.

Ake and Shafer aroused further controversy by naming no more than one book by each writer. Eleanor Cameron, who attended the session, objected strenuously because the only one of her many good books named was

her first one, The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet. Certainly Cameron has done subtler writing more recently; she is not alone in having written more than one book of canonical stature.

Furthermore, many people felt that Ake and Shafer were wrong to list The Black Cauldron, but none of the other Prydain books; The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe but none of the other Narnia books; Alice in Wonderland but not Through the Looking Glass; and Winnie the Pooh, but not The House at Pooh Corner. These series are too cohesive to be represented adequately by one book; they are important as a whole and should all be included in a canon.

In the case of writers known for more than one book, some of Ake and Shafer's choices are admirable. Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret is certainly the most characteristic book of an historically important writer; and while Louise Fitzhugh wrote other interesting books, Harriet the Spy has certainly received the most attention. The agreement of many people with choices like these suggests two important criteria. Books included in the canon should have literary merit, according to a large number of devotees of children's literature; or they should be historically significant. To be "historically significant," they should be innovative; or they should have aroused interest or controversy at the time of their publication; or they should have been or continue to be widely read; or they should reveal something important about the history of children's taste or the ideas of grownups about children and their literature. Ideally, books included in the canon should be both significant and excellent. But in cases like Carolyn Keene or Judy Blume, significance alone would allow entry into the canon; and certainly many excellent books are significant simply because they are excellent.

Given these criteria, Ake and Shafer sometimes made what appears to be the wrong choice. Why, for instance, I Am the Cheese and not The Chocolate War? Why James and the Giant Peach and not Charlie and the Chocolate Factory? Why Brighty of the Grand Canyon and not Misty of Chincoteague or King of the Wind? 5

Why Is That You, Miss Blue? and not Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack? Why The Ghost Belongs to Me and not Are You in the House Alone? Why Zeely and not M.C. Higgins the Great? Why The Railway Children and not The Story of the Treasure Seekers? Why Bartholomew and the Oobleck and not Horton Hatches the Egg?

Some of these choices suggest that personal taste has triumphed over critical judgment; the objections made to them at the conference suggest that a canon should leave little room for subjective considerations. We all know of books we love and think other people should read; but there must be general agreement that a book is worthwhile or significant or both before it can earn a place in the canon. Such agreement would also eliminate bias about kinds of literature; Ake and Shafer's list is noticeably deficient in the area of fantasy, and does not mention Lucy Boston, John Christopher, Pauline Clarke, Susan Cooper, Jean de Brunhoff, Peter Dickinson, Leon Garfield, Alan Garner, Maria Gripe, Russell Hoban, Randall Jarrell, Munro Leaf, Ursula Le Guin, Arnold Lobel, Hugh Lofting, Ann McCaffery, William Mayne, Else Holmelund Minarik, Ellen Raskin, George Selden, or Mary Travers. It also ignores many writers of realistic fiction, including Beverly Cleary, Mary Stolz, Jill Paton Walsh, Susan Hinton, Farley Mowat, Sterling North, and Paul Zindel. Some of these writers surely deserve a place in the canon.

The members of the panel accomplished much in providing lists to be criticized. Above all, they showed what a canon could ideally be--a list of children's books that we can all agree are particularly important (because they are controversial, or innovative, or popular) or particularly admirable, or both, and that anyone interested in children's literature should know--including, I hope, literate children.

What has become clear to me is that, in the long run, we are not really trying to "develop" a canon. In fact, we seem to be acting in the faith that a canon already exists, that we already know which books belong in it, but that we simply

have never got around to making ourselves conscious of our choices. In fact, the members of ChLA who took part in the poll conducted last winter by the Quarterly (see Winter 1980 issue) to determine which books we most admired showed astonishing unanimity in their choices; and most of those who attended the conference session expressed surprise at how much we could agree on.

That being the case, I feel justified in the enormous chutzpah I am about to exhibit. The list that follows is my own combination of the results of the Quarterly survey; the lists compiled by Jon Stott and Alethea Helbig; various other books mentioned by Ake, Shafer, and Bingham; and some other books that seem to have got lost in the shuffle, but that I know many people admire or consider significant, and that I have added myself. The list has many obvious flaws; it probably isn't long enough; it probably should name some of the more significant editions of the various legendary materials; poets are not well represented, nor are books not originally written in English; above all, it offers no explanation for the inclusion of the books it contains.

But my list is not meant to be a canon. It is meant to start arguments. I encourage anyone angered by it in whole or in part to write to the Quarterly and say why. If there are books listed you think do not belong, or books not listed you think should be added, by all means suggest them. A canon depends on consensus. Your assistance is not so much invited as it is required.

★ ★ ★

A TENTATIVE LIST OF BOOKS
EVERYONE INTERESTED IN CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE SHOULD KNOW

(Items of mainly historical significance are marked H: a book is historically significant if it is innovative, controversial, or popular.)

Adams, Watership Down.

Aesop, Fables.

Aiken, The Wolves of Willoughby Chase.

Alcott, Little Women.

Alexander, the Prydain series.

- H Alger, various novels.
Andersen, Fairy Tales.
Armstrong, Souder.
the Arthurian legends (in children's versions).
Asbjornsen and Moe, Norwegian tales.
Babbitt, Tuck Everlasting.
H Ballantyne, The Coral Island.
Barrie, Peter Pan and Wendy.
Baum, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.
Bemelmans, Madeline.
Beowulf (in children's versions).
Bianco, The Velveteen Rabbit.
stories from The Bible.
H Blake, Songs of Innocence.
H Blume, Are you There, God? It's Me, Margaret.
H Blyton, Enid, various series.
Boston, the Green Knowe books.
Briggs, Raymond, Fungus the Bogeyman.
Brink, Caddie Woodlawn.
Brooke, Johnny Crow's Garden.
Brooks, the Freddy books.
H Bunyan, Pilgrim's Progress.
Burkert, illustrations for Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.
Burnett, The Secret Garden.
Burnford, The Incredible Journey.
Burton, The Little House.
H Caldecott, illustrations for "The House that Jack Built," etc.
Cameron, The Court of the Stone Children.
Carroll, the Alice books.
Ciardi, poems for children.
Christopher, the White Mountains trilogy.
Clarke, The Twelve and the Genii.
Cleary, the Ramona books.
Cleaver and Cleaver, Where the Lilies Bloom.
Collier and Collier, My Brother Sam is Dead.
Collodi, Pinnocchio.
Cooper, the Dark is Rising series.
Cormier, The Chocolate War.
Cormier, I Am the Cheese.
H Crane, illustrations for Sing a Song of Sixpence, etc.
Cresswell, the Bagthorpe Saga.
H Dahl, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.
de Brunhoff, The Story of Babar.
de la Mare, poems for children.
de la Mare, The Three Royal Monkeys.
H Defoe, Robinson Crusoe.
Dejong, The Wheel on the School.
Dejong, Journey from Peppermint Street.
de Paola, Strega Nona.
Dillon and Dillon, Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears (illustrations).
H Dixon, the Hardy Boys series.
Dodge, Hans Brinker.
Eager, Half Magic.
Estes, the Moffats books.
H Mrs. Ewing, Jan of the Windmill, etc.
H Farrar, Eric, or Little by Little.
Aileen Fisher, poems.
Fitzhugh, Harriet the Spy.
Forbes, Johnny Tremain.
Fox, The Slave Dancer.
Gag, Millions of Cats.
Garfield, Smith.
Garfield, the London apprentice series
Garfield and Blishen, The God Beneath the Sea.
Garner, The Owl Service.
Garner, The Stone Book series.
George, Julie of the Wolves.
Grahame, The Wind in the Willows.
the Greek myths (in children's versions).
H Greenaway, illustrations for Under the Window.
the Grimm Brothers, fairy tales.
H Hale, The Peterkin Papers.
Harris, Uncle Remus.
Henry, Misty of Chincoteague.
Henry, King of the Wind.
H Hinton, The Outsiders.
Hoban, the Frances books.
Hoban, The Mouse and His Child.
H Hoffman, Struwwelpeter.
Homer, stories from The Iliad and The Odyssey (in children's versions).
H Hughes, Tom Brown's Schooldays.
Hunt, Across Five Aprils.
Hunt, The Lottery Rose.
Hunt, Up a Road Slowly.
Hunter, The Stronghold.
Hunter, A Sound of Chariots.
Hutchins, Rosie's Walk.
Jacobs, English fairy tales.
Jansson, the Moomin books.
Jarrell, The Animal Family.
H Jefferies, Bevis.
Jeffers, illustrations for Three Jovial Huntsmen.
Juster, The Phantom Tollbooth.
Keats, The Snowy Day.
Keene, the Nancy Drew series.
Keeping, Intercity.
Kipling, Just-So Stories.
Kipling, the Jungle Books.
Kipling, Puck of Pook's Hill.
Kipling, Stalky and Co.
Konigsberg, From the Mixed-up

- Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler.
- Lawson, Ben and Me.
 Lawson, Rabbit Hill.
 Leaf, Ferdinand.
 Lear, nonsense poems.
 Le Guin, the Earthsea series.
 L'Engle, A Wrinkle in Time.
 Lewis, the Narnia series.
 Lionni, Fish is Fish.
 Lobel, the Frog and Toad books.
 Lofting, Dr. Doolittle.
 MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind.
 MacDonald, the Princess books.
 Mathis, The Hundred Penny Box.
 Mayne, Earthfasts.
 McCloskey, Make Way for Ducklings.
 McCloskey, Homer Price.
 David McCord, poems.
 McDermott, Arrow to the Sun.
 Eve Merriam, poems.
 Milne, Winnie the Pooh.
 Milne, The House at Pooh Corner.
 Milne, When We Were Very Young.
 Milne, Now We Are Six.
 H Mrs. Molesworth, The Carved Lions,
 etc.
 Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables.
 Nesbit, the Bastables books.
 Nesbit, Five Children and It.
 Ness, Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine.
 H The New England Primer.
 Newbery, A Little Pretty Pocketbook,
 etc.
 North, Rascal.
 Norton, the Borrowers books.
 O'Brien, Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH
 O'Dell, Island of the Blue Dolphins.
 O'Dell, The King's Fifth.
 H Orbis Pictus.
 Paterson, Bridge to Terabithia.
 Paterson, The Great Gilly Hopkins.
 Pearce, Tom's Midnight Garden.
 Fene du Bois, Twenty-One Balloons.
 Perrault, Fairy Tales.
 H Porter, Pollyanna.
 Potter, The Tale of Peter Rabbit.
 Potter, The Tale of Samuel Whiskers.
 Potter, The Tale of Two Bad Mice.
 Potter, The Tailor of Gloucester.
 Pyle, Robin Hood.
 Ransome, the Swallows and Amazons
 series.
 H Rackham, various illustrations.
 Raskin, The Westing Game.
 Rawlings, The Yearling.
 H Richards, Tirra Lirra.
 8 Salten, Bambi.
 Sawyer, Roller Skates.
 H Scarry, The Best Word Book Ever.
 Selden, The Cricket in Times Square.
 Sendak, Where the Wild Things Are.
 Sendak, In the Night Kitchen.
 Sendak, The Nutshell Library.
 Sendak, Higglety Pigglety Pop
 Sendak, illustrations for The Juniper Tree.
 Sendak and Minarik, the Little Bear
 series.
 Dr. Seuss, And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street.
 Dr. Seuss, Horton Hatches the Egg.
 Dr. Seuss, If I Ran the Circus.
 Dr. Seuss, If I Ran the Zoo.
 Dr. Seuss, On Beyond Zebra.
 H Dr. Seuss, The Cat in the Hat.
 H Sewall, Black Beauty.
 Shepherd, illustrations for Winnie the Pooh and Wind in the Willows.
 Silverstein, Where the Sidewalk Ends.
 Speare, The Witch of Blackbird Pond.
 Spier, Noah's Ark.
 Spyri, Heidi.
 Steig, Sylvester and the Magic Pebble.
 Steig, Abel's Island.
 Stevenson, A Child's Garden of Verses.
 Stevenson, Treasure Island.
 Sutcliff, Eagle of the Ninth.
 Sutcliff, The Lantern Bearer.
 H Swift, Gulliver's Travels.
 Taylor, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry.
 H Ann and Jane Taylor, Original Poems for Infant Minds and Rhymes for the Nursery.
 Thurber, Many Moons.
 Tolkien, The Hobbit.
 Travers, Mary Poppins.
 Twain, Tom Sawyer.
 Twain, Huckleberry Finn.
 Twain, The Prince and the Pauper.
 Verne, Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.
 Viorst, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No-Good, Very Bad Day.
 Walsh, Goldengrove.
 Walsh, Unleaving.
 H Isaac Watts, Divine and Moral Songs for Children.
 White, Charlotte's Web.
 White, Stuart Little.
 Wildsmith, various illustrated books.
 Wilder, the Little House books.
 Williams, illustrations for Charlotte's Web and the Little House books.
 H Charlotte Yonge, The Daisy Chain, etc.
 H Zindel, My Darling, My Hamburger.