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Brat Books on the March

by Dr. Seuss

Some twenty three years ago I made a move that most of my writer friends acclaimed as the height of stupidity.

I walked out on a fairly successful career as a writer who wrote for great big Grown-up-Adults and began to write for the Kiddie-Kar and Bubble-Gum set.

This, in the Thirties in the writing profession, was not a sign of going forward. This was a step down. A loss of face. At that time, the attitude of most of this country's top writers was: Writing for Children was Literary Slumming. With a few notable exceptions, they wanted no part of scribbling for little girls who played with dollies and for little boys who had never yet shaved.

And, to a certain degree, these authors were right. In those days, an appalling percentage of books for children were concocted out of inept, condescending, nature-faking ~~and~~ treacle. They insulted the intelligence not only of the child, but also of the people who wrote them. They were batted out, hippity-hoppity, by amateurs and semi-pros with little or no experience in the very tough-to-learn craft of writing. And, so, ^{most} ~~good~~ good writers who had learned their craft stayed upstairs with the adults and pretended there were no children.

The funny part...and the happy part...of this brief historical essay is this:

Those same top professional writers who, a few years back, wouldn't be caught dead with their name on a Brat Book, are today writing enthusiastically in the juvenile field. More and more of them every year.

If you are cynical, you might possibly say they are writing for the money. For, since the war which produced so many G.I. Babies, the junior book business has blossomed into the greatest booming market the publishing industry has ever seen.

But I ~~just~~ don't think that just money is the reason.

I think something much bigger has happened.

I think that writers have finally realized that Children's Reading and Children's Thinking are the rock bottom base upon which the future of this country will rise. Or not rise.

In these days of tension and confusion, writers are beginning to realize that Books for Children have a greater potential for good, or ~~much~~ evil, than any other form of literature on earth.

~~They realize that the new generation must grow up to be more intelligent than ours. They realize that if a boy doesn't learn about good reading before he can shave, the chances are he will grow up to find himself shaving an empty head.~~

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The writer is beginning to see the challenge of this field... and its awful responsibilities.

He can help children to think clearly. Or he can stuff their heads with mush.

He can inspire children with a fire for learning. Or he can discourage them from reading and contribute to their illiteracy and, often, to their delinquency.

He can help them to love. Or he can help them to hate.

He can steer children upwards, downwards or sideways...and build in them basic attitudes ~~moment~~ toward living that will influence their patterns of thought and action throughout every year of their lives.

It is the awareness of this tremendous responsibility that is now bringing so many fine top writers into the once-despised Juvenile Field. To be sure, the field is still full of the Dispensers of Mush, still hippity-hopping around their maypoles and still ladling out their luke warm treacle.

But the children are absorbing treacle in ever lessening doses. For the proportion of fine books vs. junk^{is} growing steadily. And the children are eagerly welcoming the good writers who talk, not down to them as kiddies, but talk to them clearly and honestly as equals.

(Dr. Seuss, beyond being a writer and illustrator for children, is and editor and president of the Beginner Book Division of Random House.)