

Sexism in Children's Books

Posted on September 16, 2018

View this essay online:

<https://academic-master.com/sexism-in-childrens-books/>

Incredibly successful children's books (like "Harry Potter") turn into successful films a few years after the publication. But among them there is one strange exception: Clive Staples Lewis's "Lion, Sorceress and Wardrobe" reached the screens 55 years later. Although, perhaps, this exception is not so strange. At first reading, this and six other "Chronicles of Narnia" that followed it look simple and entertaining and do not cause any criticism, but these stories have found both loyal fans and real enemies. Children either love these books very much or hate them.

There are several reasons for this polarity of views. The fact that Narnia was planned as a Christian allegory provided books with incredible popularity in religious circles, especially in fundamentalist America. It also, according to the reports, made the filmmakers of the new film think hard: how do they submit the "Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe" as a Christian fairy-tale and at the same time not leave on the sidelines of spectators professing another religion or not believing in God? And these doubts cannot be called unfounded. Recently, the extremely talented and equally popular British writer Philip Pullman, author of the trilogy *Dark Beginnings*, who declared himself simultaneously both an agnostic and atheist, condemned books about Narnia for religious propaganda.

Religious Allegory and Cultural Criticism

Some Christian critics also expressed doubts about the relevance of the allegorical depiction of Christ in the form of a huge, mighty lion, Aslan. Typically, youth literature depicts heroes and heroines as relatively small and weak; it can be mice, rabbits, dogs, cats, hobbits, and, of course, children. (When teenagers or adults become positive heroes, they somehow show some shortcomings, although most often temporary ones). These heroes win thanks to moral and not physical strength because they have the standard qualities of a folklore hero – mind, courage, kindness, and luck. Lewis also gives preference to the so-called "muscular Christianity," which preached a strong and even militant faith and portrayed Christ as athletic and emphatically courageous. This current could have influenced Lewis's choice to portray the allegorical figure of Christ as a beautiful but intimidating lion the size of a small elephant rather than the more traditional innocent, meek, and gentle Lamb of God.

Racial Representation in Narnia

Lewis was also accused of racism for portraying the Tariscans in the book "The Horse and His Boy." Tarhistan is a desolate country in the south of Narnia, suspiciously similar to the Middle East: the

inhabitants of this country are black, and they wear turbans and scimitars. They eat a lot of oil, rice, onions and garlic. They cruelly treat animals and worship a four-armed god with a vulture head named Tash, who requires human sacrifice. Like Tash, the rulers of Tarkhistan are greedy and cruel dictators and corrupt officials. Slavery in Tarkhistan is ubiquitous; women are illiterate and are deprived of the right to choose whom to marry. No matter how successful the screen adaptation of the book “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe” is, it’s hard to imagine that “The Horse and His Boy” can become a sequel in our days and not cause a serious political resonance.

Sexism and Gender Roles in Narnia

Other critics see the “Chronicles of Narnia” as sexist. Pullman, for example, called the series “a monumental humiliation of girls and women.” In Narnia, girls always play secondary roles. With them, there are fewer adventures, and none of the girls got into the title of the book, such as Shasta (“The Horse and His Boy”) or Caspian (“Prince Caspian”). In Narnia, there is no kind and strong supernatural female figure; the bearer of a virtuous magical power is a man, while the representative of the forces of evil was the White Witch. In this, Lewis disagrees with one of his favorite predecessors in children’s literature, George McDonald, in whose books the bearer of the forces of good is usually a female person: the fairy godmother Princess Irene, the Lady of the North Wind who flies to save the small Diamond, and the Wise Woman, in whose honor the book was named.

Lewis’s Historical and Cultural Context

All this criticism, in general fair, is partly due to the fact that Lewis was a man of his time and place with a corresponding set of beliefs and prejudices. His traditional Anglican Christianity, his dislike and suspicious attitude toward the southern countries, his preference for the whole northern (as a boy, he fell in love with Wagner’s northern myths and operas), and the fact that his characters are usually fair-skinned boys with fair-haired hair were typical of his conservative writer generation. His sexism is explained by the fact that as an ordinary British Tory who was born in 1898 and spent most of his life in an almost entirely male society in Oxford, he paid less attention to the girls, believing that they were weaker, cowardly and less interesting than the boys. This is especially true for the first three books about Narnia, written before Lewis met the writer Joy Davidman in 54, a brave and outspoken fan and a converted Christian, whom he later married. Maybe it is because of this that in the later books about Narnia there are heroines who ride horses and participate in battles on a par with boys, experiencing exciting adventures.

But in general, Lewis does not hide his dislike for what in his time was considered typically feminine – and, judging by what happened in the final of the series, in “The Last Battle”, to the majority of women in general. Many readers were in terrible anger because he condemned the former wise and tender queen Susan and stated that she was “no longer a friend of Narnia.” She is expelled from paradise forever for what she says at the age of twenty-one about her early experience of visiting

Narnia as a childhood fantasy. In addition, she “was too interested in becoming an adult” and “now was not interested in anything other than nylon stockings, lipsticks and invitations.” Besides the fact that all of the above is not such a big sin, it’s hard to believe that Susan could have changed so much in a few years and forget how good she was in Narnia. Even more unfair is the fact that King Edmund, Susan’s younger brother, who betrayed everyone for the sake of the Sorceress, was able to repent and remain King Edmund, while Susan, whose offenses were not so serious, did not get such a chance.

Perhaps these problems arose from the fact that Lewis did not think through his world from beginning to end; he did not take his creativity for children as seriously as his work for adults (such as “Allegory of Love” or “Just Christianity”). Many readers, including myself, experienced difficulties due to confusing and anachronistic borrowing in books about Narnia. In the book “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe”, for example, there are not only giants, gnomes, ogres and witches from folklore tales, but a whole zoo of talking animals, including two badgers that seemed to come straight from the world of Beatrix Potter. In Narnia also lives a huge population of fauns, satyrs, dryads, naiads, Minotaurs, unicorns and centaurs from Greek mythology, plus a very modern Santa Claus with a reindeer team.

JRR Tolkien, a close friend of Lewis, spent decades developing the world, which he described in *The Lord of the Rings*, creating geography, flora, history and several languages. According to him, fantasy should include “a small act of the universe” – creating a complex and consistent universe. He did not like the “Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe”, believing that the book was written in a hurry and lightly glued from unsuitable pieces.

Many readers disagree with Tolkien’s view, including children who overlooked or forgave Lewis for his shortcomings due to occasional moments of triumph of the author’s imagination, some of which also combine incompatible ones. Take for example the scene at the beginning of “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” when Lucy climbs into a wardrobe with fur coats and gets into a snow-covered forest lit by a London lantern that shows any criticism that sometimes even anachronisms can create a magical impression, even on a short time.

Recent years have brought to the fore the problem of sexual education and upbringing of children and youth. In all historical formations, it forms part of culture. In most civilized nations, the main burden in the field of sex education, as well as education in general, lies on three main institutions: the family, schools and churches, or the ideological superstructure of a society that supersedes the religious one. It is easy to assume that the absence of influence of one of the listed institutions entails a lack of impact, an inability to achieve the desired result. This especially affects children who are deprived of all or part of the educational influence of the family.

In these conditions, the creation of a system of sexual education, taking into account the deficit of educational factors and at least partially replacing them with a targeted impact, becomes especially important. Its main objectives are:

- Formation of masculinity (masculinity) and femininity (femininity) in the behavior of children.
- Preservation of reproductive health of the younger generation (ability to reproduce offspring).
- Forming children's attitudes towards family life.
- Reducing the level of crime in the society.

For the implementation of the proposed sex education program in orphanages and boarding schools, it is necessary:

- Organization of sexual education in residential institutions.
- Development of the program of work of educators.
- Development of a curriculum on the basics of sexology.

The solution of each of these tasks will undoubtedly benefit, but the optimal result of the upbringing of a reproductively healthy generation can be achieved only with their integrated implementation.

Organization of sexual education in residential institutions

The task of educating a reproductively healthy generation raises a whole range of organizational issues before the administration of residential institutions, health and education authorities. It is necessary to create conditions conducive to the formation and consolidation of children's general hygienic skills, reflection skills, and to provide a material basis for educational and educational work, including the prevention of possible difficulties associated with the intimate problems of children. In this regard, it is necessary:

1. Global surveys of girls who are brought up in orphanages and boarding schools for the purpose of early detection of their developmental pathology (conducted by the regional health authorities with the participation of medical staff of the residential institution from the moment the child is admitted and at least once a year).
2. Obligatory counseling of all pupils and treatment in regional health institutions of girls with identified pathology.
3. Training of consultants from among the caregivers who are most trusted by children or pupils 16 years of age or older who demonstrate, by testing the ability to work in the "person-person" system, for counseling teenagers in difficult cases related to intimate issues.
4. Organization of hygiene rooms for girls in all boarding establishments in accordance with the latest WHO requirements for the maintenance of adolescent reproductive health.
5. Regular joint work of the heads of boarding schools, psychologists, and medical workers with the staff of the institution for the prevention of lewd acts against pupils by pedophilic (sexual desire for children), pederastic (secular craving for boys), and homosexual orientation.

Program Of Work Of Educators

Explanatory letter

The main tasks of sexual, or sexual, education stem from the very notion of sexuality. Sexuality is a psychophysiological manifestation associated with gender. Sexuality has three phases: platonic (at the level of views, ideas, spiritual communication), erotic (expressed in external manifestations of sexual differentiation: clothing, demeanor, plasticity, voice, smell, bodily contacts, with the exception of coitus) and coital (from the Latin "coitus"). Proceeding from this, it is possible to define the following tasks of sex education:

- 1) adequate sexual identification;
- 2) expanding knowledge about yourself and the person as a whole;
- 3) the formation of standards of masculinity and femininity;
- 4) development of the emotional sphere of children;
- 5) decline in sexual aggression;
- 6) inculcation and consolidation of hygiene skills;
- 7) prevention of early pregnancy;
- 8) prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS;
- 9) formation of skills of mutual relations in the family.

The development of sexual self-preservation skills along with – general sexual enlightenment – is a feature of working with children deprived of parental care. Before the educators of orphanages and boarding schools, at this stage of the development of Russian society, an extremely difficult task is facing: on the one hand, filling the vacuum of family upbringing, and on the other hand, correcting the negative consequences of the massive impact of the media that make the child and adolescent consumers of pornographic products (the word "pornography" "Comes from the Greek" porn "- debauchery, denotes a vulgar-naturalistic depiction of sexual life in any form).

The task of educators is complicated by the fact that not all regions of Russia (even in its central part) teach the basics of sexology. Consequently, children are deprived of the impact of another institution – the school. In addition, Russia is a polytheistic country. Most of the population has religious roots of either Muslim or Orthodox character. Quite widely represented in Russia and such religious denominations as Buddhism, various forms of Orthodox Protestantism (Adventism, Baptism, etc.), Judaism. Therefore, in work it is necessary to take into account the peculiarities of the region in which

the educational institution is located and the composition of the children of each group.

The program offers work with children and adolescents in three main areas: general hygienic, historical and cultural, socially significant. This program is not a rigid design; it can be transformed by the educator depending on the regional conditions, ethnic, religious, sex composition of the group, the presence in it of children who have periodic, lengthy contacts with the family, the nature of the institution, the experience and characteristics of the caregiver. It is very useful to diversify this program with the methods available in the arsenal of the educator, educational institution, and those methods that are mentioned in the attached list of literature.

Moms and dads are often afraid of talking about sensitive issues. Few people understand that children of any age have the right to know the truth about how they came into being, and it is better if their parents tell them the truth.

7 Books That Will Help Parents In A Difficult Conversation



1. “How I came into the world,” Katerina Janusz, Mervi Lindman

Age: 4-6 years.

Katerina Janusz is a Swedish writer and journalist who has been specializing in sexual education and family relations for over twenty years. She brings up five children, whose questions, in due time, often put her at a dead end. It was for them, in the first place, that the book “How I came into the world” was intended.

Judging by the text, the sons and daughters of the writer worried about problems not only

physiological but also philosophical: the story about conception and pregnancy is preceded by a lengthy discussion about what a person could be before he came to this world – a brave knight or parachutist.

Katerina Janusz also raises an important issue of parental responsibility: although the father does not have a baby, he has no less new responsibilities than his mother. She does not bypass the writer of the themes of foster children and artificial insemination. The illustrations of Finnish artist Mervi Lindman sometimes seem caricatured and naive, but certainly, they will not embarrass anyone with too much frankness.

2. “Where do the children come from?” Doris Rübel

Age: 4-7 years.

The German writer Doris Ryubel managed to maintain a balance between delicacy and frankness. The book “Where do the children come from?” It is intended primarily for parents who are waiting for the addition to the family and want to explain to the older child how it turned out that soon he will have a brother or sister.

The book plays out situations that provoke the emergence of “awkward” questions: the boy accidentally finds his parents for having sex or looks at the photo album and can not believe that he once sat in his mother’s stomach.

A solid part of the material is devoted to pregnancy and the first months of life of the baby: what the ultrasound apparatus shows, what the child does in the womb, and what is done with it immediately after birth. At the same time, a small reader receives a few etiquette lessons – for example, he learns that you should not enter the parent’s bedroom without knocking, especially if the door is closed. Illustrations are provided with dozens of moving parts: by opening a special window, you can see in which part of the abdominal cavity the fetus is in the first weeks of pregnancy or find out what the difference is between the inner structure of a man and a woman.

3. “Where did I come from?”, Peter Mail

Age: 7-10 years.

“Where Did I Come From?” – the first book by British writer Peter Mayle, which was published in 1973 and has since survived several reprints. In England, “Where Did I Come From?” is considered a classic of children’s literature.

From this book, several generations of Englishmen learned about what a man and a woman are doing under the patchwork quilt. It became one of the best manifestations of English conservatism: the

author remained within the bounds of decency but, at the same time, refrained from moralizing.

Illustrator Arthur Robins depicted typical parents without embellishment: the daddy – bald head and beer belly, my mother – problems with excess weight. Peter Mayle was not able to avoid criticism: the fighters for equality accused him of the fact that the book was too “male”, and the role of women in sexual relations was clearly understated.

Russian readers, by the way, probably will be surprised by the fact that if they were told about a stork and cabbage in their childhood, many British kids consider that they were found in a hospital or received in a bar with a mug of beer. And some even say that they appeared in the house thanks to a cat that drags everything from the street.

4. “The Book of Love”, Pernilla Stalfelt

Age: from 4 years.

Sweden is one of the few countries where sex education is organized not only in schools but also in a number of preschool institutions. According to statistics, Swedish children already by the age of 5-6 have a fairly complete understanding of sexual relations and openly discuss sensitive issues with parents and teachers. Therefore, in the book of Pernilla Stalfelt, the emphasis is not on physiology, but on feelings.

“The Book About Love” teaches the child that love is different: similar to an exciting adventure or rather boring, eternal or transient, happy or unrequited. It is also expressed in different ways: someone writes a note with a touching confession, and someone does a tattoo. And although sometimes this feeling makes you suffer, it is she who tells Mom and Dad that it’s time to get married and have a baby.

Pernilla Stalfelt talks with children in their language and operates with concepts that they will perceive much easier than biological terms. Most Russian parents perceived the “Book of Love” critically: the difference in mentality was affected. However, it is very easy to overcome it: it’s enough to take Pernilla Stalfelt’s drawings with humor.

5. “Where do the children come from?” Sexual Encyclopedia for Children 8-11 Years “, Virginie Dumont, Serge Montagna

Age: 8-11 years.

By the age of 8-11, children, as a rule, in general terms know how they came into being and what preceded it, and they turn to adults only for explanations. The reaction of the parents will largely depend on how the sexual life of the adolescent will develop in the future. The desire to get rid of

common phrases is fraught with disastrous consequences.

Especially shy parents can slip their children with a book by Virginia Dumont and Serge Montagna, "Where Do the Children Come From?"

The authors talk about sexually transmitted diseases and methods of prevention. A separate chapter is devoted to the dangers that come from adults: the book teaches the child how to recognize the exhibitionist or pedophile in time and avoid violence.

6. "Mommy Laid an Egg: or, Where Do Babies Come From?", Babette Cole

Age: 3-5 years.

"Mom Carried an Egg, or Where the Children Come From," is the most famous book by the writer Babette Cole, on whose account more than seventy published works. The sexual encyclopedia for children sold a million copies and caused a flurry of ecstasy and an avalanche of indignation.

The particularly stormy discussion unfolded around the pages devoted to sexual poses. Thanks to them, Babette Cole's book was called "Kama Sutra for Children". I found, however, and those who liked the way the writer brought to the child information that sex is, in general, quite a fun experience.

In the book "Mother Took an Egg", the role of enlighteners is taken not by parents, but by children, who are tired of being fed with stories about a stork. They are sure: Mom and Dad have rather vague ideas about childbirth, and therefore we must open the truth to them. Talking about naturalism in relation to illustrations by Babette Cole is difficult. Conditional adults, for example, explain the differences between a man and a woman, drawn on the principle of "stick-stick-cucumber," and the book family resembles the characters of domestic cartoons about the Pilots brothers more than real people.

7. "The main miracle of the world", George Yudin

Age: 6-10 years.

Released in 1991, the book "The Main Miracle of the World" by writer and artist George Yudin is still considered the best of everything that was written on the topic of sex education in Russian. "The main miracle of the world" - this is not an encyclopedia, but a real novel with a fascinating plot, built in the form of a dialogue between father and son. Man is the main character of this novel and the part-time miracle of the world.

In most similar books, the birth of a child becomes a kind of final, to which the parents went for nine months. Georgiy Yudin, on the contrary, positions his birth as the beginning of the path. It is not accidental that a good half of the book is devoted to a story about what processes control the life activity of a person, how his body is arranged, and how he breathes, digests food, thinks, and feels. Some of the illustrations are reproductions of famous canvases. For example, in the chapter where we are talking about how parents met and fell in love, Gustav Klimt's picture "Kiss" is placed.