

Dangers to a Child's Mind

are Dangers to a Child's Morals

by Sr Mary Augustine O.P.

Parents, grandparents, teachers - all you who are dedicating yourselves to the raising of children - not just their bodies but their minds and souls - where do you stand on the subject of READING?

- Are you numbered among those traditionalist and conservative types who still believe the old saying: “what you read you become”?
- Do you belong in the ranks of those who think it’s better for a child to read ANYTHING than not to read at all.

To summarise some of what seems to be the worst aspects of children’s literature:

- The subject matter tends to be MUNDANE - nothing to lift the child’s mind to greater things; nothing to stimulate the imagination.
- The subject is often DEPRESSING and well beyond the child’s conception. Several recent books we have perused centre on subjects like life in a Nazi Prison Camp or a Communist invasion (and these were picture books for young children).
- The relationships presented are often “put-downs” of adults - parents, teachers, clergy, police - and especially more venerable adults like grandparents.
- Family relationships are shown as abnormal and conflicted.
- Gender theory is creeping in; “The Gender Fairy” is becoming a favourite in schools with its suggestions of same-sex - or worse - relationships.
- Dubious or irreverent language is on the increase.
- There is very little plot; just a lot of confused concepts that focus on adult-style emotion and perceptions and that children could not possibly unravel.
- Shallow humour is much favoured: apparently the more gross and disgusting, the more “child friendly” it is deemed to be.
- And worst of all children’s literature runs in ‘fads’ which too often feed into the latest ‘nasties’ in society at large - the occult, violence, sexual deviancy, moral relativism (blurring or eliminating the distinctions between good and evil) etc.

WHAT TO DO?

- Read for yourself BEFOREHAND the book your child wants to read, or that you intend to read to your child. LOOK OUT FOR THE NEGATIVE ELEMENTS LISTED ABOVE.

- Google a sane (preferably Catholic or Christian) review. But don't believe them all!
- Don't let your child pester you for literature (or merchandise) that is based on the latest fad

before you have checked out the possibility of politically correct agendas hidden in it.

AND DON'T FALL FOR THE LIE THAT IT IS WISE TO PLANT YOUR CHILD IN FRONT OF A SCREEN. SCREENS HAVE MOST OF THE SAME HAZARDS AS BOOKS, AND YOUR CHILD MAY INCUR THE ADDED PROBLEM OF GROWING UP ILLITERATE.

AND FAIRY STORIES?

Tolkien, Chesterton and other reputable authors swear by the vital role played by fairy stories in the cultures of the world and therefore in the lives of all people. Obviously not all fairy stories are perfectly safe and healthy for children - particularly some of the modern fantasies which have their own sinister content and dark themes.

But most of the traditional fairy tales/fantasies are wholesome stimulants for our imagination and even contain rich spiritual knowledge.

Even little children know the difference between the 'real' world and the world of fantasy. They can easily identify the moral and religious parallels found in most traditional fairy tales of our culture.

For example, magic has been used to give visible form to invisible spiritual powers - you have 'good magic' which may represent grace, divine power, prayer etc. in the 'real' world of our spiritual life. And you have 'bad magic' which represents the power used by those who do evil in the 'real' world and in particular the evil spiritual powers referred to by St Paul - "The powers and the world rulers of this present darkness...".

'Good magic' and 'bad magic' in genuine fairy stories correspond to true religion and false religion in our world. Children learn about good and evil through the 'parables' of fairy stories more safely and effectively than by being presented with life's harsh, concrete 'realities'.

Fairy stories are stimulants to the child's creative imagination. They enable the child to soar above and beyond the nitty-gritty of daily life. They provide material for creative play, writing, art-work and so on. If our children grow up deprived of the enrichment which our traditional fairy stories can give, they may turn out to be lacking in creativity and aesthetic sense, and in the ability to engage in real play. They may even have a few gaps in their sense of good and evil.

If you choose to expose your children to fairy tales, you may be wise to avoid some of the Walt Disney and other movie versions of the stories. They are often entertaining, but some have a distorted moral treatment of the characters, story or theme. And the dominance of the visual stimulus will probably stifle the child's own personal imaginings. It will also deprive them of the beauty of written language and cause them to miss out on some of the treasures of reading as distinct from viewing.