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DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA PERSONNEL

and

THE CONCEPT OF THE FUTURE AS IT IS PRESENTED IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS TODAY
(The 1974 Phineas L. Windsor Lectures in Librarianship)

by

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These papers represent two of the four 1974 Phineas L. Windsor Lectures in Librarianship, presented at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in May 1974. The other two lectures were given by Harold Lancour, and were entitled "The Role of Americans in Library Education Abroad" and "Trends in Librarianship in Developing Countries." The 1974 Windsor Lectures were given in honor of Alice Lohrer, Professor of Library Science, who retired from the faculty of the Graduate School of Library Science in August 1974.

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DEDICATION

Alice Lohrer's career has been amazingly varied and rich. From the time when she entered the library profession as a school librarian at Oak Park, River Forest, and Hinsdale, Illinois, until her present assignment as a visiting professor in the Tehran International College, Iran, her activities have been wide ranging.

When Miss Lohrer retired in 1974 from the faculty of the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science, she had served a total of
thirty-three years as an instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor. At intervals, she had filled summer appointments on the faculties of Purdue University, West Virginia University, Southern California University, University of Wisconsin, and University of Denver.

In the school library field, Miss Lohrer's largest undertaking was a survey under the sponsorship of the U.S. Office of Education, in 1961-62, of instructional materials centers. In the course of that investigation, she visited every state in the union. Her writings, chiefly on school library matters, are extensive, and she has also been in frequent demand as a consultant on school library matters.

Miss Lohrer's foreign appointments constitute an extraordinary story in themselves. She is a true internationalist, a believer in one world. Immediately after World War II, she undertook a survey of European libraries for the American Library Association. There followed a year as a Fulbright Lecturer at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand, 1955-56; a Rockefeller Foundation grant to teach at Keio University, Tokyo, Japan, 1959; a year at the University of Tehran on another Fulbright lectureship, 1966-67; and her return to Iran in the fall of 1974. Other pilgrimages abroad have taken her on grand tours of Africa and South America. Innumerable foreign students have been privileged to work with her as friend, mentor, and counselor, for she has always been deeply concerned with their interests and problems.

As a tribute to Alice Lohrer's outstanding career and invaluable contributions to her profession, it was highly appropriate that the Windsor lectures for 1974 at the University of Illinois be dedicated to her.

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DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA PERSONNEL

Although the once-modest shelf of books and other media which are about the people who work in school media programs seems to grow exponentially, I believe that not enough has been said lately about those people as people. We have been concerned with academic requirements, job-related experience, behavioral competencies, and similar attributes which people can acquire and which can make those people do better jobs than they might have done without them. It may seem naive to return, at least for this short survey, to think of the personal characteristics which the personnel who do such important work in school media programs should have. I have no intention of implying that any of those other requirements or competencies are unimportant, but in recent years we have not turned our attention sharply or specifically enough to the personal qualities that are important.

That is not to say that personal characteristics are not mentioned occasionally. There is a throwaway line in every speech or article about a successful media program that says something like: "Of course, none of this could have happened without our wonderful librarian!" Annual reports and even school yearbooks touch fleetingly on the fact that leadership, teamwork, or imagination were responsible for much of what was achieved. And more than once, when I have visited a school library media center, I have come away wondering: "How much of this success could have been won without that person?" Or, sad to say, I may have thought, after a less satisfactory visit: "There is a place with all the possibilities, but nothing will happen while that librarian is there."

I have also faced the problem of trying to predict in advance the success of young people wishing to enter the school media field. Although my recent experience has been as a library school faculty member, it does not differ much from my experience of years ago in interviewing applicants for possible jobs in school libraries. Probably the greatest difference is the lack of panic we feel now. There appear to be more applicants with the "paper qualifications" than many library education programs can accommodate, and what has been called the "warm body syndrome"--in which any warm body would do to fill a job--is long since past. But the responsibility of selection increases. It might be appalling to compute the human and financial resources that are wasted when poor interviewing or unwise counseling leads people to enter, or attempt to enter, a field in which they cannot function well. And the employment of a person who does not succeed is not only a personal trauma for him, but may affect the numerous people with whom he is expected to work.

It is not just that we really have no very sure way of assessing personal characteristics, no quality personality quotient to match against a quality point average for academic grades. Even if one were available, we would probably find disagreement about what its components should be and, more puzzling yet, we might well discover that in terms of almost every characteristic judged to be desirable, we are really seeking balance, not just the most of a quality. For example, while friendliness may be an important characteristic, it may need to be steadied with self-assurance to keep its possessor from being gregarious when there is solitary work to be
done. There are other characteristics which may balance and, indeed, strengthen each other.

It is easier to see some of the importance of personal characteristics if we identify them in the negative, and even then one must judge in terms of his own perceptions of what school library media personnel are and what they do. Although I have thought most about the professional personnel in school media programs, I think the personal characteristics for other personnel would often be the same. I have no intention of entangling myself with concerns about whether all libraries are media centers, whether all librarians are media specialists, or what the precise meaning of any of those terms is. I am assuming some agreement on what occurs in school libraries. This was lacking, I think, in a school administrator who wrote a letter recommending a young teacher for entrance to a graduate library education program. I read the letter when the teacher came to me in great distress at having failed to make the grade in library school. While her failure was in terms of academic grades, they in turn had been low because of her virtual inertness and taciturnity as a student. The warning was there, couched in the letter of recommendation: "She is probably better suited to work in a library than in the life-stirring atmosphere of the classroom." Astute judgment of that letter would have saved much personal anguish on the part of the young teacher, either in pointing out to her the kinds of demands that might be placed on her in librarianship, or in rejecting her firmly in the first place. I mention this incident, based on fact, only to underscore that the kinds of places where I assume media personnel will be working are life-stirring atmospheres, and that the people will do some of that stirring themselves.

One of the personal characteristics I rate high for school media personnel is curiosity; I have my share of that. I found myself wondering whether, after I had begun to sort out my own thoughts, it might be a good idea to see what had already been thought or written on this topic, and also whether any of the views of librarians in general might vary significantly from those of school library personnel, in terms of personal characteristics. I believe they do not, and I can now say that, after having reviewed what many people have said and written about librarians as people. Lawrence Clark Powell, for example, who is the perennial example of librarian as powerful personality, has said: "Human values and human judgments are inseparable from good librarianship." ¹ I am not sure that even he has solved the problem of what those human values should be, but in a delightful essay on simplicity, which he suggests as the basis for sound administration, he refers to the Shaker song, "Simple Gifts," which Aaron Copland had in mind when he composed "Appalachian Spring." As Powell says, "Of all the diversity of gifts bestowed by the Lord on his children, the one to seek and the one to cherish is

'The gift to be simple,
The gift to be free,
The gift to come down
Where we ought to be.'"¹
Yet simplicity is also a good example of a characteristic that may be downgraded by those who think it conflicts with knowledge or competence to deal with complexities. Indeed, simplicity can be one's link to sanity when forced to untangle a difficult problem. It implies integrity, honesty, and a number of the old-fashioned virtues which probably did not need to be mentioned when school librarianship was itself a fairly simple field. When the most egregious offense one could commit was to borrow a nickel from the fines for emergency carefare (leaving a signed note, of course), simplicity could be taken for granted. We should put a higher premium on it today, when ethics are far from universally accepted, and when enlarged responsibilities have also increased opportunities for sharp practices.

To juxtapose what might seem at first a characteristic that is counter to simplicity, I would next cite Frances Clarke Sayers's emphasis on belligerence. Writing almost three decades ago and limiting her concern to children's librarians and much of her belligerence to wiping out indifference to books, she still speaks to us with the sweep and vigor that have always characterized her:

The quality of belligerency was never more greatly needed in the profession that it is at this moment. We have been called many things in our time--gentle and genteel; modest and mousy; learned and lame; dedicated and dowdy; unprepossessing and underpaid. I hope for the day when we shall be called the belligerent profession; a profession that is informed, illuminated, radiated by a fierce and beautiful love of books--a love so overwhelming that it engulfs community after community and makes the culture of our time distinctive, individual, creative, and truly of the spirit.2

I read those words a long time ago, and I have quoted them frequently. To my embarrassment, nearly every time someone approaches me later to say that he was glad to be urged to belligerent, because he always did warn the kids not to drop candy wrappers on the chairs or to be more quiet as they went about their work. I think Sayers would be as embarrassed as I to have her words used to justify nagging or crankiness or just general cantankerousness. Her belligerence has more shine, less whine. She sees it as radiant, fierce, overwhelming--the kind of quality that forces us to action toward a goal rather than just urging us on through another day.

I think it is painfully clear that, while there are individuals who have exuded this kind of belligerence, we have failed, as a professional group, to project it as she hoped. In fact, sometimes we must wonder whether we have projected any strong characteristic at all. "The librarian as a person apparently has made relatively little imprint in the minds of professional educators during the twenty years from 1941 to 1960,"3 Robert Edwards wrote in 1961, basing his statement on a survey of 122 texts on educational administration which appeared in that 20-year period. He examined those texts to discover their references to high school librarians, and found that only three discussed the librarian alone, thirty discussed the
library only, while fifty discussed both library and librarian, and thirty-nine discussed neither. (The mere idea of reading more than ten dozen educational administration texts overwhelms and engulfs one, but scarcely anyone has dared suggest that librarians are lacking in persistence or stick-to-it-iveness! Those are qualities we can claim as ours, although they may be two-edged swords, since they can compensate for creativeness or sheer brilliance, of which we are, as a group, seldom accused.) Edwards was writing a master's thesis, so he went on to list and number the qualities mentioned most often by these authors of texts. The top ten included enthusiasm, poise, understanding, approachability, intellectuality, kindness, patience, sincerity, tact, and impartiality. Of the nineteen listed, the two at the end of the list were: power to interest and inspire, and power to encourage.

It may well be that those authors of texts were reflecting an attitude which Sanford attributed to administrators when he reviewed a survey some years earlier. Twenty-five school administrators had listed twenty-five desirable traits in teachers, leading off with adaptability, appreciation, attractiveness, attractive personal appearance, breadth of interest, considerateness, cooperation, and definiteness. Scholarship was number twenty-four out of twenty-five, open-mindedness was twenty, and progressiveness was twenty-one. Sanford comments mildly in a statement where librarians may be understood to be like the teachers: "We must remember that administrators appreciate most the teachers who are likely to give them the least trouble, who best fit into their systems."^4

We may smile at that assessment, but I must say, with some regret, that as I explored what people cited as important personal characteristics they considered essential for school media personnel, I found myself wondering whether they always acknowledged and accepted the aggressive characteristics they identified, and also whether our selection and education of young people for work in this area of the profession always leads to recognition and further development of those very characteristics we say we prize.

Research into the qualities of other kinds of librarians is more recent, and, although disputed by some, is rather damaging. Perry Morrison used the Self-Descriptive Inventory developed at the University of California at Berkeley in his survey of academic librarians, and reported: "As a group, academic librarians can be described as cultured and intelligent, but, like the library science students studied by Douglass, lacking in the traits 'which are most closely associated with forceful leadership'....Those who have the scarce dynamic qualities of initiative and self-assurance tend to rise in the ranks of the profession."^5

Douglass's research, to which he refers, dealt with students in twenty-four accredited library schools in the 1950s, and led to Douglass's conclusion that "The model librarian appears to be characterized by the following traits: Orderliness...Conscientiousness...Sense of responsibility...Conservatism and conformity...."^6 When measuring ascendance, motivation, and drive, Douglass finds "The librarian is not a dominant person....In short, he appears to be weak in the dynamic qualities associated
with social ascendance and leadership," just as he is high in introspection and self-sufficiency. We must take what comfort we can from the fact that the qualities of anxiousness and neuroticism are not unduly present in him. It would be nice to know what a less than undue presence of anxiousness and neuroticism might be.

One may disagree with what seem to be very low-key views of the personality of librarians, and even point out that our image might be improved if we did not spend so much time reflecting on it, but even that reaction, which I share, does not make it entirely disappear. Another argument to the effect that times are changing suggests that new entrants to librarianship are more dynamic than their predecessors, but that dynamism is relative, and I do not believe that we are attracting the more dynamic of the young, nor even making the most of the dynamic personalities we have attracted.

Another reaction may be that school librarianship does not suffer from the same image. Sadly, I believe it does, and that one of the penalties of its being considered a part of the teaching profession as well as of the library profession is that other segments of both may look upon school librarians as some kind of variation in the species in which stranger quirks may emerge. But our own views of ourselves have tended to be more optimistic. Writing at almost the same time as Sanford and basing her statements on what she had heard from schoolmen in administrative posts while traveling extensively, Lucile Fargo commented in 1939 on what the schoolman wanted in a librarian: "Furthermore, he wished the librarian to exhibit traits of approachability, enthusiasm, resourcefulness, organizing ability, initiative, power of intellectual stimulation, intellectual alertness, cooperativeness, adaptability, sympathetic understanding of boys and girls, wide knowledge of and enthusiasm for literature for boys and girls."

With the spate of materials which have been published about innumerable aspects of the school media center, it may seem strange to be quoting a woman of an earlier generation. But I wish to acknowledge my personal debt to Lucile Fargo—a woman I never knew but one whose ideas have informed me from my earliest interest in school librarianship, and a writer who has managed to touch on many aspects of this field with such wisdom that her ideas still have validity. Recently, for instance, I rediscovered that her statement on the problem of swiping books is more concise and probably more timely than that of any other authority I could find. Forty years ago, she was encouraging amnesty for swipers, although not in those terms, and saying that taking a book and putting it into one's locker until the end of the semester is not really stealing, nor a major crime. That comes as a stunning truth to some librarians today who believe they invented systems in which no fines are charged. Fargo embodies the breadth of vision that comes up repeatedly as a desirable personal characteristic for school media specialists.

Authors who have come from the ranks of school librarians have not been as explicit as Fargo about what they hope for or even what they look for in terms of personal characteristics. Jack Delaney, whose books have been much criticized by librarians, perhaps because they present the interesting combination of a hard-nosed view of life and of schools along with a
persistent enthusiasm, has touched on what he considers important for various kinds of school librarians. Not surprisingly, he reports that the people who run large high school libraries "are almost unfailingly persons of considerable cultural and intellectual attainment." What I appreciated even more, however, was Delaney's comment on librarians who work in junior high schools. There, he thought, the essential need was for toughness. Anyone who has dealt with that school age or who has even observed them and felt the overwhelming movement, restlessness, and exuberance, would agree.

I have considered these comments from others as benchmarks or touchstones for my own views of the desirable characteristics of school library personnel. They have proliferated and become convoluted so that I found it helpful, in sorting out my own ideas, to ask other people what they considered the essential characteristics I should mention in this statement. I give them to you in alphabetical order, some of them repeated several times, and some few requiring translation: ahead of time, attractive, breadth of vision, enthusiasm, flexibility, friendly, hard-working, Irish, liking, mental alertness, outgoing, pizzaz, self-directed, sense of humor, vivaciousness. It is a messy list, made up of adjectives, nouns and phrases, but I gave it in the form I received it because I learned, in trying to rephrase some of them, what the perils of that were. The friend who said "liking," for example, used it variously, saying that the school librarian should have likings and be a liking person—liking books, liking people, liking his job, etc. Because it implies the characteristic I consider most desirable, I had not the heart to revise it. I suppose it is axiomatic that in any such group of respondents there will be one who seeks to please both himself and the inquirer with his answer—thus the characteristic of Irishness comes up. Yet if it implies being yourself, with all the background and tradition, all the promise and burden of the generations that have endured to make you you, it can be translated into an important characteristic.

One of the librarians who said a sense of humor is essential—and there were several who felt impelled to justify the inclusion of that—said, "it's the only thing that will get you through the day when the accreditation team is coming and the shelves all fall down." True. I was delighted by its frequent appearance on the list, and I felt some justification for the long-ago day when a college professor, in a lengthy digression from our specified topic, stated firmly that the most important heritage one can give to one's children was a good reputation. I was the only person either awake enough, outraged enough, or just interested enough to respond, and I did so only with a facial expression easily readable by the professor. She asked whether I had something better to offer, and I said, "Well, yes. If you give your children a sense of humor, they can laugh off a bad reputation." In the years since, my esteem for a good reputation has increased, but my value of a sense of humor has not been diminished.

In coming to my own statement of essential characteristics, I found one source coming to mind repeatedly. It was John Gardner who, in Self-Renewal, gave four traits likely to be shared by creative people. It was his definition of openness which made me class it as number one in desir-
ability, because this kind of openness intensifies rather than conflicts with conviction. While it includes openness to all that is around us, it allows one to select the experiences to which one will react most strongly. Further, it requires openness to one's self, one's own emotions, anxieties, and fantasies, as Gardner puts it. And it allows not only for openness in reaction to one's self and to others, but for openness of expression, which I would sharpen into the great need for articulateness among school librarians.

Independence, in Gardner's terms, "is at the heart of [the individual's] capacity to take risks and to expose himself to the probability of criticism from his fellows." It fits the suggestion of the Peter Maurin poster which says: "A leader is a fellow who refuses to be crazy in the way everybody else is crazy...and tries to be crazy in his own crazy way." It is evidence of freedom, rather than singularity for its own sake, and on that basis it is essential. Gardner, like almost everyone else, includes flexibility, but he concludes with the capacity to find order in experience. He refers to the need for one's "profound confidence in his capacity to bring some new kind of order out of this chaos." If the first images that come to mind are those of the librarians sorting through inventory snags or facing the return of a great variety of equipment, some of it in unrecognizable pieces, this need for finding order in experience is readily acceptable as a desirable characteristic. But I would add to that the need for inner peace, a sense of purpose and assurance that allows one to realize that the elements of order are present even in apparent chaos, and that one possesses the competence to discover them in, or perhaps to liberate them from, that chaos.

I would add two characteristics to Gardner's. First, I would add honesty as evidence of an integrity or wholeness which is important in one's expressions of it, as well as in one's quiet acceptance of it. With jargon rampant, with media carrying everything we say and do far beyond earlier limits, it is hard to speak honestly. Increased vocabularies have blurred communications more often than they have improved it, but I think even that honesty in speech is important and, linked with the self-acceptance implicit in many of these characteristics, it is essential. Finally, I would add joy, not in any naive hope that we will always be happy people, but in the sense in which C.S. Lewis speaks of joy as having always some element of surprise and of tragedy hidden within it. The joy a media specialist possesses may look like zest, but it can be communicated to others in one hundred ways.

I was tempted, in preparing this, to conclude with a blank characteristic, where each person would add his own first choice, but I believe the same effect is achieved if we are reminded that no list of characteristics is meaningful until each is tried, thoughtfully and critically, to merge into the "you-ness" that is for each of us the essential. It is not quite the same as being individual. What each of us must be is as much ourselves as we can.
REFERENCES


7. Ibid., p. 123.

8. Ibid., p. 124.


11. Ibid., p. 12.


13. Ibid., pp. 35-40.


THE CONCEPT OF THE FUTURE AS IT IS PRESENTED IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS TODAY

Considering the interest which the title of this lecture has generated, not only among my friends and acquaintances, but among those who have inquired about its content because it relates to interests and ideas of their own, this topic apparently needs no defense. But, because context is important in much of what we may say or think about the future as it is presented in children's books, it pleases me to review some of the events that led me to choose it.

Always, as one calendar year yields to another, there is a yearning and a special joy. It may extend from the simple pleasure of being able to start all over with a neat, clean appointment book to the exultant feeling
that the best is yet to come— and preferably soon—to sheer relief that another year is behind us. All of these feelings were with me in late 1973 as I was contemplating this spring weekend and its responsibilities. Later, they came to mind again as I watched a segment of a news feature on television in which a number of randomly selected people in different U.S. cities were asked what they expected or wanted from the new year. Those who appeared to have the least hoped for the most, but with less personal concern. That is, the older people hoped for continued world peace and some upturn in the economy and the younger ones, students and returned veterans among them, said they wanted happiness or love or enough to eat for everyone in the world. It was the solid, middle-class, middle-aged ones who looked forward to specifics—finishing their car payments, getting a better job, moving, recovering from an illness. Their hopes lacked the sweep of the others' and their attainment would generally be easier to measure. Without attaching too much importance to a feature which, after all, might have been edited to stress the subtle differences I sensed in the points of view, and which was certainly not intended to present any scientific approach to the future, I noted it with interest for several reasons: it was a reminder that the future can arouse comment when we have long since stopped talking about the present; it might suggest that children, like young people, would see the future as a time of universal peace and prosperity, while at the same time raising the question about why that feeling might be prevalent among them; and it reflected some of the attitudes I have come to identify with the media we use to communicate our ideas about the future to children, notably the idea that, without referring directly to our present fears, we build a world in which those fears become irrelevant or in which they simply vanish.

Although it proved to be of so much less moment than had been anticipated, the comet Kahoutek, which was expected to dazzle us from late 1973 into early 1974, was at the time welcomed as a portent of good things to come in the new year. For me, it recalled a time in childhood when a comet was attracting much attention. As my family discussed it with friends one evening, my father was among those who reminisced at the same time about Halley's comet and its 1910 appearance, which he remembered. He looked over at me and said quietly, "And Peggy will be an old lady when that comet comes again." In that moment, as I looked around the group of adults and my older brother and sister, I realized that he was saying they would all be dead and that only I, the youngest, had a chance of being alive in that far future time. Like the hero of Don't Take Teddy, it did not occur to me that people might die out of order—that is, it seemed only right that the oldest would die first, then the next, and on down the line. That idea seems to be prevalent among children, and it is one of many ways that they attempt to put some order into the future which must be unknown. But, perhaps more important, that remark of my father's gave me the sense of the enduring (even if sporadic, as in the case of comets) order of nature, and of man's short span in relation to its great timelessness. It was inevitable, then, that the promise of Kahoutek would remind me of all the reactions to the future which I have observed or experienced since then. And it is a sad mark of our times, as noted in Mike Royko's newspaper column, that Kahoutek proved to be such a disappointment. It did not light up the evening sky, nor even the early morning sky, as had been so cheerfully predicted. Once again, our expectations had come to something less than we had hoped for.
The future is tied forever to both hope and disappointment, it seems, and it therefore seems to be the period of time in which children can engage in speculation as effectively as adults. But even though it is as new or as unknown to adults as it is to children, it is the adults who tell the children what it is likely to be. With all the media we have to inform and to stimulate, the book, with its room for personal imagination to illumine what it may present, offers in this, as in other areas, a unique interpretation. While there are cliches about the future in many children's books, they are not as insistent, I think, as the clattering click of computers or the featureless walls which immediately tell us we are into the future in such varied presentations as the film Future Shock, or the television commercial that begins with a hollow voice saying, "I live in the underground city," and goes on to predict the awful time when our atmosphere will be so unfit that all human beings must go underground. Use of a fisheye lens is a mark of nearly all filmed presentations of the future, as though we will know it by the fact that parts of our view are fuzzily out of focus, but there are other marks in the visual media: the seamless walls, the lack of color, and a uniform drabness of dress. It is strange in a way because I, for one, if moved underground for whatever dreadful reason, would be sure to take with me the brightest, most colorful of my possessions, and I have a feeling that my reaction is general enough that humanity might count on there being some brightness in its underground world of the future—if that is, indeed, where the world of the future may be.

But I should make it clear that my scope in this discussion of the future is broader than simply that of books about future worlds. There are many more ways that books inform or misinform children in terms of what the future may hold. I have also cheated a bit in referring to this as being about current books, because I had no intention of limiting it to the newest titles. One of the phenomena of children's books is that as long as they are read, they are new to new generations, and, accordingly, they continue to present attitudes that help to shape the thinking or feeling of children who may not have been born when the books first appeared.

There is a tendency for extremes to be presented in books that are set in the future, just as there is for other media to stress those extremes; our view of the whole range of technological possibilities in the future runs out of kilter on specifics. For example, as a freshman in high school I wrote an assigned essay describing a trip I was taking twenty years later. In the essay, I was riding alone down a road on a visit to a relative, but I was able to relax in the car and enjoy the scenery because the car was moving at its own safe speed and under its own control, programmed to take me where I had specified. More than twenty years have passed, and I am still driving with my eyes, perforce, on the road. Men have walked on the moon, which I had not anticipated, but I am still driving standard transmission (like some creature from the distant past) and steering. And it seems to me that the false notes which occasionally strike us in science fiction or other views of the future are caused by the fact that not all aspects of change occur at the same pace. In Robert Heinlein's Podkayne of Mars, for example, the prevalent practice for almost everyone in the age bracket from the late teens to the early thirties is for women to bear their children at the age that makes the best sense biologically, and then put them into storage and take them out to raise when the parents are ready.
for that stage. In fact, the plot of Podkayne revolves around the need for
a change of plans when Podkayne's younger sibling is taken out of storage
by mistake, and Podkayne's mother must then change her career plans to
assume her unsought responsibilities. What is funny about the whole thing
is that the author has projected a world where many changes have occurred,
but he has scarcely allowed for the changes sought by the women's liberation
movement, nor has he dared suggest that in a time when children are put into
storage at birth, it might also be that identification of a child with his
own set of parents could be ignored, and that a child taken out of storage
at the wrong time might be placed with the wrong set of parents, with no
one being the wiser. But I think this kind of thing happens all the time,
not only in books; that is, we project strange and wonderful ideas and then
impose upon them some of our current mind-sets. Alvin Toffler, whose
Future Shock capsulized for most of us the problems to be faced in a time
to come, talked in a recent television interview about the fact that young
people, when surveyed for their views of the future, repeatedly anticipated
great sweeping changes in the world around them, but still gave very myopic
views of their own lives and how their personal actions and goals might
be affected by those changes. It is tempting to wonder what effect the
reading of science fiction might have had on those ideas. Has the emphasis
been so much on technological change and so little on social change, to
speak in broad terms, that the individual lacks a measure for himself?

Having said that I am not exclusively concerned with future worlds,
I would like to mention first some of the kinds of futures we do find
presented in children's books. There are, as in real life, the many
dealing with the immediate future: "Just wait till I get my bike!" or
"You'll be sorry when Daddy gets home!" or "When you go back to school,
you'll find out!" They are almost always more threatening than promising,
but we are so familiar with them we can take them rather casually. More
interesting are the gently wistful presentations of the future. While we
might think of dozens, one I consider most appealing to children is
Charlotte Zolotow's Do You Know What I'll Do? Geared to the preschooler
in its picture book format, the story is simply a litany of questions by
an older sister who asks her younger brother whether he knows what she
will do when it snows, or when she goes to a party, or any of a variety of
other events. The answers are reasonable and reassuring: she will build
a snowman, or she will bring home cake. But the last, touching on the
farthest future she can imagine, yet providing him love and reassurance in
the present is: "Do you know what I'll do when I grow up, and am married?
I'll bring you my baby to hug. Like this."

Elizabeth Enright, whose ability to express what children's literature
could and should be always seemed to exceed her ability to write it, has said
that even realistic children's literature usually ends at a high point. We
do not see the hopeful young protagonists face the challenges of college,
nor the problems of marriages, mortgages, and other aspects of adult life. We
remember, instead, what Robert Burch has called the "fierce dignity" of
the heroine of Vera and Bill Cleaver's Where the Lilies Bloom, whose
ability to triumph over her surroundings assures us that she will be able
to achieve all that she has a mind to--as she might say herself. Nor is
this limited to children's literature. She is really not unlike the younger
in *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* which, as play and film, has been directed to adults who come away believing that she will be one of the plants that survives its environment.

But in this matter of a future that extends over a personal lifetime, it may be that at least some of today's children are not only tougher than adults are, but tougher than adults give them credit for being. In a collection of poems by young people from U.S. cities, Glen Thompson, a thirteen-year-old, has described the "Drums of Freedom" thus:

Some of us will die
but the drums will beat.
We may even lose but,
but the drums will beat.
They will beat loud and strong,
and
and
and
on.
For we shall get what we want
and the drums will beat.\(^3\)

Whether we consider that poem from *The Voice of the Children* an expression of youth's constant cry for recognition and respect or the voice of black militancy, we have to see in it an acceptance of the personal losses that may go with group progress. It is a tough voice, and it may remind us that in at least two fairly recent books about young blacks, they have opted for a life where they will have their own piece of turf and, through it, an identity of themselves. *The Planet of Junior Brown* is one, mild enough in spite of the controversy it has aroused among reviewers and others. One objection has been that no group of boys could live as these boys do—surviving in abandoned spaces of the city in a kind of underground of their own. While I admit it would require spunk and imagination, I cannot discount the possibility. After all, I doubt whether Fagin of *Oliver Twist* had a well-marked entrance and neat mailbox for his apartment in another city's and another day's underworld for boys.

In *His Own Where*, June Jordan, in what has been called "the beautiful Black language of struggle and love,"\(^4\) tells of Buddy, a black teen-ager who, with his girl, finds a cemetery where they can live free, away from the harassment of concerned elders and meddlers.

Here, you be bigger than the buildings, bigger than the little city. You be really different from the rest [in the cemetery], the resting other ones.

Cemetery let them lie there belly close, their shoulders now undressed down to the color of the heat they feel, in lying close, their legs a strong disturbing of the dust. His own where, own place for loving made for making love, the cemetery where nobody guard the dead.\(^5\)
More mature than a book for children, Jordan's book is one more example of how the pressures of the present may force young people to look toward another place, if not another time. The future would be hopeless for Buddy and Angela; their own place in this time is more promising. It may be that we are seeing a trend away from fantasy based on the future to a tougher fantasy based on the present, where one's own life-space is changed to make a better, although tiny, individual world.

Yet juvenile fiction filters the future through in many aspects. In the newly awakened interest in forecasting the future, several recent books have dealt with predictions and extra-sensory perception. But of more interest to me is the way children's books have, for a long time, forecast the future to their readers. At the risk of offending all the lovers of the March family and all who have wept over Beth's death (among whom I count myself), I would like to suggest that throughout Little Women, Beth is always treated more gently than any of the others. She is really rather like Joe Btfsplk, the "Li'l Abner" character who goes through life with that ominous cloud over his head. If one read only the first chapter of Little Women and closed the book to guess which of the girls was fated to die an early, sad death, it would have to be Beth. Even her name rhymes with death. Yet real life is not like that. All too often, it is the child who was punished in school for general misbehavior who does not survive the next day's tonsilectomy, and it is the boy who took his father's car without permission who dies in its crash. Life would be neat if we could know that our last encounter with a friend or relative was peaceful and loving, but that is too seldom true, and life is not neat. Nor is the future. "Only the good die young," is surely a myth perpetuated by children's books. The truth is that when the young die, the rest of us have a longer time to reconstruct their lives and our treatment of them, as Louisa May Alcott may well have been doing with Beth.

Fiction allows us to foreshorten the future also, but I think authors mislead their readers when they do so. Mary Stolz, who seldom makes a false move in her well-plotted, well-written books for children and young people, does that in By the Highway Home. It is a story with a contemporary setting, in which a whole family is struggling with the acceptance of the death of the oldest son, killed in the Vietnam War, although he had just come to a realization of the wrongness of the war and was about to be taken out of the combat zone. Catty, the younger sister who loved him most, kept all her remembrances of him in her Keeping Box. When their home caught fire, her older sister, Virginia, saved Catty's box. Stolz tells us:

Catty lived to be a very old woman. She outlived her parents, her sister, her little brother, her husband Duncan, and some of her own children. And when she was very old, turning over memories like cards as old people do, one of those she came across most often was not that bearing the wild poetic picture of Beau [her brother], or of her husband, whom she'd loved, or of the son they had had who looked like Beau and was named for him. The card that seemed to come up most often now in her great age was one that bore the likeness of her sister, Virginia, red hair tangled, face flickering rosily in the light of the dying fire, smiling her gorgeous new smile as she said, "I saved the most important one."
"I loved you that night," the old woman would whisper to the sister of long ago. "I wish I had told you that once I really loved you."  

With those two paragraphs, we are transported from the realistic story of the present to a future far beyond the book, and far beyond the present day. In fact, with mention of Duncan as Catty's husband, this boy who does not appear until later in the book is revealed as the one she eventually marries. It seems like a funny way to blow a plot, and a pointless insertion of speculation. But in children's books we do other things with the future that are funny too.  

With historical characters in some of the less well-done biographies, authors strain to hint at their futures. In one, Patsy Dandridge, later to be Martha Washington and the nation's first first lady, hears the story of Virginia Dare and the lost colony at Roanoke from her father, and she wonders aloud whether it is too late to be the first anything, as Virginia Dare had been the first child born of European parents in America. The reader wants to say, "Don't you worry, Patsy! You'll be first when you grow up!" It is one of many marks of the growing competence and maturity of juvenile biographies that such instances are more difficult to find today—even by someone like me, looking recently with a deliberately jaundiced eye.  

Not faring so well in the way of improvement are the career books written for young readers. Almost without exception, their suggestions about future careers, which their readers would not be entering for five or perhaps ten years, are based more on today than on projections about the future, even when such projections are available. Added to that is the problem of datedness of material and the kind of inaccuracy which occurs when young readers accept older or poorly researched books uncritically. For example, in a 1969 publication, Aviation Careers: Jobs in the Air and on the Ground, the reader learns that "serious consideration should be given to this industry by everyone wishing a career that is challenging and rewarding, in an industry which is exciting, expanding, and as secure as any." That last phrase, "as secure as any," echoes ominously to the ear that has heard the plaints of the unemployed from the aviation industry. Yet not far from that title on a branch library's shelves is Automation, written for young readers and advising: "Vast numbers of engineers and junior engineers will be needed. Indeed, the shortage of people with engineering training is apparent even today, as can be noted in the 'Help Wanted' columns of any large newspaper." Its 1963 publication date gives it validity of a kind, but it does suggest the problem of projecting the future helpfully to young people.  

Children's authors have been known to project back into historical fiction the attitudes of their own times, and usually that has been deplored. But, interestingly enough, the current concern about sexist attitudes in children's books has led to some strange recommendations about fiction that was presented as true to its time. Caddie Woodlawn, heroine in Carol Brink's book of the same name, has been chastised for giving in too easily to the admonishments of her family to act more like a lady. As a library school student of mine commented scornfully, "It was an interesting book, with some
good adventures, but suddenly, there at the end, there was Caddie, spinning at the spinning-wheel!" The same student objected strenuously to Joan of Arc, who seemed to be made palatable as a heroine only by having her appear in men's clothing in the illustrations. But if you put an apron on Joan and pants on Caddie, you have, I think, altered the truth of their stories, even though one is biographical and the other chiefly fictional, and we have put our values and attitudes into another time. There is some risk and some guesswork in our doing that into the future, but to do it into the past seems to be unforgivable.

Sometimes, it may work. In the midst of World War II, when Johnny Tremain was published, readers must have been thinking of their own time as they read the words of a young man speaking after the first shots had been fired and the first lives lost in the American Revolution. He said, "And some of us would die--so other men can stand up on their feet like men. A great many are going to die for that. They have in the past. They will a hundred years from now--two hundred. God grant there will always be men good enough."

It may seem unfair to speak so much of the stories based on our past when talking about the future in children's books. But it was from many of these that we, as young people, got our own sense of time. Sylvia Engdahl, who has not only written fiction for young people about the future, but has also shared her rationale and feelings about them, may have caused me to stress this link, this similarity. Her view is that stories about the future do not function as forecasts in the specific, literal sense. Rather, they serve to shape attitudes toward the future, and toward some of the possibilities the future may hold, as well as toward the universe that waits to be explored....Many of today's children feel a closer kinship with the future than with the past; the popularity of historical fiction is declining, while that of science fiction is on the rise. Only through speculation about the future as related to the past can these readers gain a sense of continuity that their elders acquired through the study of history: the steadying realization that there is no jumping-off place, that past, present, and future are all part of one unbroken thread of time.

I am not sure I agree with all of that, but the idea is a most interesting one. Is it possible that a link with the future will provide for children the security which they used to get from their close links with the past, in a time when families were less mobile and the pace of life at least seemed slower? And is it further possible that what seems to be the growing tendency to describe a civilization on this earth or within our universe which succeeds the civilization we know is intended to give some kind of assurance that our world will peter out with a whimper, rather than explode with a bang? There are instances, of course, of violent ends to our world in fiction, but John Christopher, who has written a trilogy about the handful of men who defy the Tripods who have taken over this world, suggests that our era was what one of the characters describes as the Black Age. He says, "There were too many people and not enough food, so that people starved and fought each other, and there were all kinds of sicknesses." He writes
with wit, but he requires his reader to know a good bit about life today if he is to get the most from the story. When the young hero sees a sign in his village that says: DANGER 6,600 VOLTS, he thinks, 'We had no idea what Volts had been, but the notion of danger, however far away and long ago, was exciting.' The reader needs some information about the present to appreciate the ways it is presented in this book about the future. When the boy leaves his home island and goes to what the reader must recognize as France, he sees for the first time the "shmand-fair", which he describes as "a track made of two parallel straight lines, gleaming in the sunshine, which ran from the town and disappeared in the far distance." Readers unfamiliar with the chemin de fer will not recognize the humor in this view of the boy in the future, who has heard of how people ride the "shmand-fair" by sitting in boxes and being pulled by horses.

There is a great variety of futures from which we evidently are free to choose in children's books. John Christopher's is one where all the technology on which we pride ourselves is lost, but where "the good guys," the uncapped men who band together in the white mountains, have only two attributes which they believe will lead them to destroy the Tripods: freedom and hope. There are closer futures, also. In the recently published House of Stairs, for example, all of the technology that makes the horror possible is known to us. Five teen-agers are placed in a structure that is filled only with stairs. There is a toilet, and there is a machine which will give them food, but only when they strike upon the actions that set it in motion. They program themselves to please the machine, but two of them, not the likeliest pair to rebel, decide to withdraw even if they must starve. Finally, they know it must be only a matter of time until the others kill them, but just as they are ready to give up, the elevator comes and takes them away. All of them have simply been part of an observed experiment to see how they will react. Actually, the story could take place today, but it epitomizes some of the worst of what we fear in the future, so it is likely to be considered a book about the future. And, as is true in many of the books which have a message to give us about the future (as opposed to sheer adventure), the greatest threat is conformity. As far back as Madeleine L'Engle's A Wrinkle in Time, published in 1962, conformity was seen as the threat. And for Meg, who is determined to rescue her younger brother from what is known as IT, there is agony as she realizes she has so little with which to fight IT. But what she possesses that IT does not know is love, and with love she rescues Charles Wallace. I believe that there are worse things than conformity to be feared in both the present and the future, and love and its strength seem like puny weapons in a story with the complexities of tesseracting (traveling in the fifth dimension) and other projected challenges, but the idea is meant to be simple, and so it succeeds.

In a less widely acclaimed story five years later, The Young Unicorns, L'Engle once again had integrity of character and family unity succeed against evil. Set in an unspecified future, the story pits children against what appears to be an aged churchman at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. But the children's puzzlement at the plotting the churchman is doing leads them into opposition, and he turns out to be an actor impersonating the dead bishop and attempting to take over the whole city. Once again, bravery and personal commitment succeed. As the dean of the church
concludes: "We have to do what we can do in whatever way we can, and that's all, even if it isn't enough, even if the city's growing too quickly for us. If that sounds defeatist, it's not. It's the way things get done." It is a sentiment that might have come from ancient Athens as well as from New York in the unknown future. It is evidence of the hope that runs like a thread through nearly all the presentations of the future that we have to offer to children.

That hope appears in many guises; e.g., in Clarke's Islands in the Sky, the young hero noted, after having talked some time with Commander Doyle who sat at his desk in the space station, that the man had no legs. But since all movement in the station was more like swimming than walking, since weight had vanished but momentum remained, it was a great place for the Commander. As the narrator puts it: "He had lived here for the last ten years and would never return to earth, where he would be helpless again. He wouldn't even go to any of the other space stations where they had gravity, and no one was ever tactless or foolish enough to suggest such a trip to him." In the worlds created in fiction, there may be new kinds of cripples, but also new hope for those once considered crippled.

There is hope even in some of the more somber stories, like Enchantress from the Stars. There is, in it, the cadre of those who must save even Youngling civilizations (if they may be called civilizations) from their own foolishness. It is as though all our unrealized hopes for world cooperation and world peace have been translated and expanded to include worlds we do not know. In that, there is surely hope and reassurance.

With only our own view of the past and the present to build on, with confusion about our expectations for ourselves, it does seem that adults have attempted, sometimes confusingly and perhaps inappropriately, to transmit to children hope for the future. As Jean Karl has described it, "And so from the first, children have had two kinds of wisdom, two kinds of experience, thrust at them that came not out of the routine of their lives, but out of the heritage of the past and the adult view of the present." That heritage and that view have also shaped the future as presented in children's books, and, hopefully, children's wisdom has increased as they have become acquainted with the concept of the future through children's literature.

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5. Ibid., p. 87.


12. Ibid., p. 9.

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ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

CHILDREN'S BOOKS MENTIONED IN THIS PAPER


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