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## Censoring the World Riddle

### Abstract

Detailed examination of the efforts of Christian fundamentalists to censor fantasy films and books. Asserts that “one must give up the right to control as the price of entry” into Faërie. Fundamentalist ideologies do not allow for that “suspension of judgment” necessary to confront the World Riddle, or Faërie.

### Additional Keywords

Censorship; Christian fundamentalism; Fantasy—Moral and religious aspects; Fantasy films; Fantasy literature

# CENSORING THE WORLD RIDDLE

TIM CALLAHAN



What could the opening bars of Richard Strauss' symphonic poem, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, and the theme of Peter Weir's film, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, have in common with children's fantasy literature? More than one might expect, since all three open us to a world without closure, a world that cannot be neatly contained in a box, a world that is ultimately beyond the power of our finite minds to comprehend. Let us first consider what the music and the film have in common. The opening bars of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, known to everyone as the theme music for the movie *2001*, constitute the theme in the tone poem called the "World Riddle." Strauss used it as a leitmotif to represent the unknown why of our existence, using Nietzsche's philosophical work as a jumping off point from which to represent musically humanity's attempts to solve the mystery of the universe. The tone poem begins with a Gregorian hymn, representing religion, and ends with a manic, accelerating theme representing the triumphant superman. As this final theme builds to its climax, the bars of the World Riddle sound again. For all the heady exultation expressed in the final movement, it is defeated when it fails to solve the mystery of the universe.

Just as the World Riddle is the pivotal theme of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, an unsolved mystery that overthrows smug, Victorian self-assurance is the theme of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. At a St. Valentine's Day picnic in 1900, three girls from an Australian finishing school disappear, along with one of their teachers. Attempts to find them are fruitless, until a young man who saw the girls heading for Hanging Rock and was attracted to them finds one of them unconscious on the Rock several days after the disappearance. This only deepens the mystery, however, since, when she regains consciousness, the young woman has no idea what happened to her and her two friends, what has become of them or how she survived relatively unscathed in the wilderness for over a week. The other two girls and the teacher are never found, and the mystery surrounding their disappearance eventually destroys the school.

Throughout the movie, the theme of Victorian smugness countered and ultimately overwhelmed by the unsolvable mystery is reiterated and underscored. The girls' boarding school is a ludicrous imposition of British culture (overdone with provincial self-consciousness), on what has to be the weirdest, wildest continent on earth. When the three girls go off to climb higher on Hanging Rock under the influence of some force outside the bounds of the normal world, one of their classmates exclaims in a shocked voice, "Where in the world are they going — without their shoes?" After the disappearance, the theme is played out in miniature by two grounds-keepers in a

greenhouse. The younger man can't let the mystery go. He speculates that the girls were the victims of a mass murderer or that they were kidnapped, and so forth. Finally, the older man has had enough of it. He says succinctly, "There's some questions got answers and some haven't." The young man says no, there must be a logical explanation. At this point the old man says, "Did you know, lad, there are some plants that can move?" The young man is skeptical until his companion brushes the leaves of a sensitive plant and they wither away from his touch. The young man is amazed. The props have just been knocked out from under his world.

But, once again, what does this have to do with children's fantasy? Well, going down that hobbit hole or through that wardrobe takes children out of the well defined — and limited — world of their everyday lives. Hopefully, it will also give them permission to accept the mystery of the universe without attempting to either explain it away or dominate it. In order to enjoy and participate in Middle-earth, Narnia, Oz or any other realm of Faerie, one must give up the right to control as the price of entry. Bilbo practically gets booted into adventure, and, while Lucy goes willingly enough into the wardrobe, her entry is guileless. Edmund's improper entry into Narnia, an act that is full of guile, is what causes all the problems. To be guileless is to be innocent. To be innocent is to go unarmored, weaponless, willingly giving up dominion, into a wilder world we not only don't control but of which we don't demand complete comprehension. If giving up control is the admission price to Faerie, then joy is what it buys. Consider how the kingdoms of Oz are classed by color. Blue for the Munchkins, Yellow for the Winkies, Green for the City of Oz, etc. Now let's consider the color of Kansas:

When Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side. Not a tree nor a house broke the broad sweep of flat country that reached to the edge of the sky in all directions. The sun had baked the plowed land into a gray mass, with little cracks running through it. Even the grass was not green, for the sun had burned the tops of the long blades until they were the same gray color to be seen everywhere. Once the house had been painted, but the sun had blistered the paint and the rains washed it away, and now the house was as dull and gray as everything else. (Baum 1899 pp. 1, 2)

The cyclone takes Dorothy to a land alive with color. To abandon control, to be swept away by the force of a cyclone, to give oneself up to such a wild joy, could be taken as a metaphor for sex. And, while I have no desire to reduce high, or even medium, fantasy to Freudian complexes, the analogy holds to the degree that fantasy, par-

ticularly children's fantasy, is as likely to be the target of moralists as are sex and dancing. All three involve abandoning one's sense of control in the service of joy. This doesn't necessarily mean giving up discipline — few people are more disciplined than professional dancers — but it does mean losing inhibition. It means turning off the internal censor. For most children, this is a relatively easy task. There is a class of adults, however, who are so distrustful of their own feelings of being out of control that they bind themselves to authoritarian ideologies and extend their own internal hyper-vigilance, their own internal censor, outward to safeguard their children (and ultimately everyone else's), from what they see as occult and demonic influences. Convinced in their hearts that they and, by extension, the rest of the human race, will run amok if not kept under strict control, they crave closure, dominion, hierarchy, security and a world neatly explained and without loose ends. This, of course, puts them on a collision course with fantasy, and when that fantasy is aimed at their children, they see in it a demonic threat. What they actually fear is the World Riddle.

Enter any so-called "Christian" book store — they should more properly be called fundamentalist book stores — and you will most probably find a number of books and video cassettes on the evils of animated TV shows, Halloween and fantasy role playing games, such as "Dungeons and Dragons." Among the most popular books are *Turmoil in the Toy Box* and *Halloween and Satanism*, both by Phil Phillips, a minister who has launched a crusade against TV cartoon shows, Halloween and even fairy tales. Phillips' attack on Halloween is a particularly egregious assault not only on fantasy, but on honesty as well. In the second chapter of his book, he claims that Halloween not only derives from the Celtic festival of Samhain, but that this festival involved the seasonal death of a sun god named Muck-Olla. Now, perhaps one might think the proper spelling of this name would be either M-a-c-h and have a somewhat guttural sounding "ch" or M-a-c, the Gaelic prefix for "son of." I'm afraid that any such speculation is nothing more than wishful thinking on the part of Celtic purists. Phillips insists that the name be spelled M-u-c-k dash O-l-l-a. As one can imagine, I searched books on Celtic mythology in vain for any such deity. I decided to give Phillips the benefit of the doubt to the degree that, if his book provided a reference on this god, I would faithfully look it up. Usually, this is not an option. Books of this caliber rarely include such frills as an index or a bibliography. I was quite surprised to find that *Halloween and Satanism* did have a bibliography. Ah, but here's the rub: The reference to Muck-Olla was in chapter 2. The bibliography began with chapter 3.<sup>1</sup> Attacks on celebrating Halloween are widespread among fundamentalists. Even though most of them will agree that trick-or-treaters aren't really worshipping pagan gods, participation in anything bearing such a pagan taint is considered dangerous. In an oft used phrase, it is said to "open a door" to the occult.

What else might open such a door? Well, in the minds of many parents, any book dealing with Halloween, witches and related material poses such a threat. For example, one parent in a suburb of Minneapolis objected to *The Witch Who Wasn't* by Jane Yolen being in the school library because it contained magic and witchcraft. This challenge was successfully defeated, but when a parent in Nelsonville, Ohio objected to Susan Cooper's Newbery Award winning *The Dark Is Rising* being used in a seventh-grade reading class, all parties lost. Despite the school's offer of an alternative reading assignment, the parent, complaining that the book taught Satanism and cultism, went to the principal, who bypassed established channels and ordered the book removed immediately. The result was that, since the school lacked funds to purchase replacement materials, the reading list had to be abbreviated. The school was left with 32 copies of *The Dark Is Rising*, which it now cannot use. Several of the students elected to read the book on their own, so even the censor lost. One might not think of *The Wizard of Oz* as promoting witchcraft, yet in 1983, Vicky Frost of Church Hill, Tennessee led a group of fundamentalist parents who objected to Baum's classic being on the school system's reading list because it portrayed good witches. Oz was just one of many the group, aided by an attorney from Concerned Women for America, wanted removed from the school system's libraries. Ultimately, these parents filed a lawsuit, which was initially successful, but was finally defeated in the Sixth District Court of Appeals in 1987.

Phillips' other book, *Turmoil in the Toy Box*, asserts that children's Saturday morning and after-school animated TV shows, along with the toys they spawn, are part of a plot to subliminally influence children with New Age and neo-pagan messages. Having worked for several years in the animation industry, having seen American jobs exported not only to Taiwan, but to Communist China as well, having seen whole TV series set up as nothing more than a means to merchandise new lines of toys, I could have assured Phillips and others of his ilk that He-Man, She-Ra and the Smurfs were not conceived by nefarious pagans and New Agers. Rather, I can assure any and all that the only god the producers of such shows worship is Mammon.

I was able to speak to Phillips briefly when I called into a radio talk show. Since the program was on Halloween, the host wouldn't let me digress into the subject of animation. Thus, I was unable to pin Phillips' ears back the way I wanted to. I did, however manage to bring up the idea that his views on Halloween could apply to fairy tales as well. His response was:

"Well, I don't read fairy tales to my children. . . I want to make sure that the books I read to my children are beneficial. So we do not read fairy tales." (Live From L.A., KKLA October 29, 1992)

This attitude matches that of the parents' group in Church Hill, whose objection to *Rumpelstiltskin* was that it

was not accompanied by a disclaimer explaining the evils of magic. Phillips is admittedly on the low end of the scale when it comes to sophisticated analysis of the subject matter he would censor. Yet, he is widely read, and the hysteria of his attack is found elsewhere among fundamentalists. In a video titled *The Fantasy Explosion*, Dungeons and Dragons is linked with heavy metal rock as part of a life-destroying Satanic plot. Of course, the dwarfs, elves, wizards and orcs that populate D&D are derived from *The Lord of the Rings*, which is probably one reason that, though the Narnia books and the space trilogy of C.S. Lewis are prominently displayed in Christian book stores, one will search them long and hard for Tolkien's works. D&D is seen as addictive. In the video, the widow of a dungeon master who committed suicide after having become obsessed with D&D, blames the game for his death. Hearing her testimony, I was reminded of an item I had seen in a book of strange newspaper stories about a teenage boy who committed suicide when his local TV station canceled *Battlestar Galactica*. In my more acerbic moments, I'm inclined to see his desperate act as an example of natural selection in action. In reality, however, both his suicide and that of the dungeon master were likely the result of having lives so utterly devoid of meaning and joy that something as flimsy as a poorly acted *Star Wars* ripoff was the only tenuous lifeline keeping him from the abyss. In one of those fascinating Mythcon hall conversations, I heard fantasy author Barbara Hambly point out how many people become fantasy and science fiction fans in their teens, most of them feeling bruised by and alienated from their peer culture. Far from being the driving force behind suicide, it is quite probable that fantasy and science fiction are the only refuge for many of the walking wounded of the teen years.

Far more sophisticated than the likes of Phil Phillips is Ted Baehr's two volume *Christian Family Guide to Movies & Video*. Many of the critiques of films in the guide are quite sound, particularly in terms of the gratuitous sex and violence so often used as a cover for poor plotting and non-existent character development. Yet, an examination of the reviews of fantasy films in the guide reveals the common thread of distrust of fantasy that runs through fundamentalism. A taste of it surfaces when a reviewer says of *Dumbo* that it "is highly recommended, but your children should be warned of the dangers of trusting in magic." (Baehr vol. 1 p. 92)

Surprisingly, *The Wizard of Oz* is recommended without such a warning. Walt Disney's *Cinderella*, on the other hand is recommended only with caution. The reviewer says of it:

Unfortunately, *Cinderella* suggests that magic and wishful thinking can overcome evil. In truth, only Jesus can and has defeated the Evil One. *Cinderella* is recommended with the caveat that children need to be informed that Jesus is the Answer to evil, not Prince Charming nor a fairy godmother. (Baehr vol. 2, p. 141)

The criticism becomes a bit harsher as the magic becomes more central to the plot. Of Disney's *The Sword in*

*the Stone*, which is characterized as having "some antibiblical references to magic," the reviewer says "... you need to inform them [your children] about the evil of magic and taking that sort of thing seriously." (Baehr vol. 1, p. 208)

The worst words of condemnation for a Disney film were reserved for *The Black Cauldron*. The reviewer takes Disney to task over the fact that, "many movies from this studio have been preoccupied with sorcery. Spiritism, mysticism, and occultism are the basic elements of this second-rate movie. Don't allow your children to see it" (Baehr vol. 1, p. 66). Faulting Disney for seeming preoccupied with sorcery is a bit hypocritical, since visiting Disneyland is considered wholesome entertainment. Did the theme park suddenly cease to be the "Magic Kingdom"? Note that the main thrust of the criticism isn't that Disney tried to cram all five of Lloyd Alexander's Taran books into one script. Rather, the magical content, which would be amplified in the books, is the focus of the attack.

Sometimes it is not so much the content of the movie but its affiliation or the affiliation of the producer that calls forth criticism. For example, *The Princess Bride* isn't faulted so much for the one exclamation of profanity and two dirty words that the reviewer duly noted, nor even for the fact that the hero had a career as a pirate (also duly noted by the reviewer). The strongest point against the movie was that it was produced by Norman Lear of People for the American Way. On the other hand, in spite of its R rating, *The Omen*, probably the one of the most gratuitously violent films I've ever seen, and one whose violence was particularly offensive since it hypocritically used the Bible as a justification for its gore, was described as follows:

... the film is guided by a measure of Christian theology. It is entertaining and recommended with the caution that it is violent and theologically askew in parts of the story line. It is not a great movie, but it makes several solid biblical points about salvation. (Baehr vol. 1, p. 166)

Whom is the reviewer kidding other than himself? The only point *The Omen* makes is that violence sells nearly as well as sex. However, let us return to children's fantasy, the dregs thereof, according to the guide. And what are these dregs? They are *Willow*, *Labyrinth* and *Legend*. The guide's second volume rates movies according to their alignment with Christian values as acceptable, caution, extreme caution, bad and evil. *Bambi*, for example, is "acceptable," while *Cinderella* rated a "caution" due to magic. *Bilbo's Blues*, because of its boot camp profanity and a visit to a house of prostitution, was tagged with an "extreme caution." Condoning extramarital affairs earned *The Accidental Tourist* a "bad" rating, while *Angel Heart* and *Blue Velvet* were, for obvious reasons, rated "evil." Knowing all that, where would one suppose a film like *Willow* might land on this scale? Perhaps, due to all the magic in it, this story, despite its heroism and the fact that it was obviously influenced by Tolkien, would end up with a "caution" or even an "extreme caution." Well, if that's what you thought, guess again. *Willow* is rated as "evil." The re-

viewer, Ted Baehr himself, says of the film, "It is occultism, which God abhors" (Baehr vol. 2, p. 381). Although this rating system isn't in place in the first volume, which contains the reviews of *Legend* and *Labyrinth*, they would also probably end up with "evil" ratings. For example, the reviewer says of *Legend*:

*Legend* depicts a mythic realm that denies the reality of God. It has no profanity and no nudity, but don't let the PG rating fool you. It is a totally anti-Christian movie. (Baehr vol. 1 p. 135)

The main attack on *Labyrinth* is not so much in the review of the film but in chapter 2 of the first volume, titled "Asking the Right Questions." The right question under which *Labyrinth* is discussed is, "Does the premise agree with, or conflict with, Biblical truth?" The author says:

For example, the premise of *Labyrinth* is "a strong will defeats evil," which does not square with the Christian world view that only Jesus has defeated evil. . . . If the premise of the movie does not square with a biblical truth, you need to question the message the movie is leaving in the memory of the audience. In the case of *Labyrinth*, do we want people to practice magic thinking, pretending that evil can be dismissed by a strong will? This type of thinking has allowed evil a free rein in our society and eroded the moral base of our culture. (Baehr vol. 1, p. 18)

Considering these three movies, one wonders what it is in them that elicits such vituperation. *Willow* suffers from being derivative and not giving proper attribution to its source material. For what is its hero if not a hobbit? As to the other two films, *Legend*, other than laying on the atmosphere with a cement trowel, to the point that it is arguably one of the best perfume commercials one is likely to see, doesn't seem that grievously objectionable, much less godless or anti-Christian. *Labyrinth* could definitely use some greater character development, since its theme is not so much that of a strong will conquering an outer evil. Rather, the evil involved is the petty vanity of the heroine's personality. The labyrinth represents Sarah's interior world. Therefore, a strong will, or some degree of maturity, is precisely what is needed to overcome evil in this context. The film would have been better if some of the time devoted to musical numbers had been used to show Sarah's transition from pettiness to magnanimity. In other words, David Bowie's entrance as the Goblin King was spectacular, but his dancing around in tight pants did little to further the plot. Still, what is it that the reviewers find so specifically anti-Christian about these films?

Oddly enough, I found the likely answer to this question in two films from widely (and wildly) disparate sources. The first of these is *Pumping Iron II: The Women*. The second is a propaganda film from mainland China. In *Pumping Iron II*, born-again body-builder, Rachel MacLish, repeatedly says that the most important things in her life are a proper relationship with the Lord, or "God, Jesus and the Bible." This last claim is made after she has coquettishly flirted with the judges at a contest while posing

before them in next to nothing. Methinks the bronzed, oiled, bikini-clad iron-pumper doth protest too much. The Chinese film was aired on PBS as part of a series on propaganda films. It was about young women in their late teens riding rafts made of harvested logs down the Yangtze river. Its title, a masterpiece of socialist realism, was, as closely as I can remember, something like *Girls Going Down the Yangtze River on Rafts*. All and all, it would have been a mildly pleasant film about young women getting the opportunity to do something active and exciting, were it not for the constant intrusions of the narrator, whose voice droned such lines as, "As the girls shoot the rapids, they are inspired by the words of Chairman Mao," or "As the girls build their fire, they consider the subtleties of the words of Chairman Mao," or "Before going to sleep, the girls discuss the wisdom of Chairman Mao." By the time this short film was over, I wanted to stuff a certain little red book down the narrator's throat.

Both of these examples illustrate a common flaw in authoritarian ideologies. If one isn't constantly stating the party line, he or she is suspect. The mentality is, "If you're not with us, you're against us." Merely by not overtly saying "God, Jesus and the Bible," the fantasy films *Willow*, *Legend* and *Labyrinth*, already suspect because of their fantasy content, were automatically assumed to be part of the Enemy. The concept that the films could be neutral with respect to Christianity wasn't explored and in fact, probably isn't even an option in the minds of the fundamentalist reviewers. This is an important point, since, along with not dominating and not demanding full and immediate comprehension of the World Riddle, not immediately or irrevocably judging the realm of Faerie one has entered, and being open to the concept of neutrality are essentials to enjoying fantasy literature. Just as willing suspension of disbelief demands a certain level of tolerance and is essential to getting beyond the first sentence of a work of fantasy, so willing suspension of judgment is essential to have any comprehension of the World Riddle. Yet suspension of judgment is not an option in ideologies so intolerant of any uncertainty. Of course, absolute certainty, the mind-set that says that there is no World Riddle, leaves no room for imagination. Thus, evil and imagination are synonymous in the authoritarian mind. And, while this paper focuses on Christian fundamentalism, since it is the chief censor in this nation, other authoritarian ideologies are so strikingly similar as to even use the same wording when they censor. Thus, it is no coincidence that Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories were banned for many years in the Soviet Union because of their "occultism."

Movies are only peripherally part of children's literature. Yet *Cinderella*, *The Black Cauldron* and *The Sword in the Stone* all originated as books. The content of *Legend* derives from folk tales, and I've already mentioned the debt *Willow* owes to Tolkien. Another film deriving from children's fantasy literature is *The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T*, based on a story by the late Dr. Seuss. The review of this video, was

my first introduction to Ted Baehr's *Movieguide* magazine. This review has elaborated the system of approval or condemnation of films on moral grounds, going from +4 exemplary, through +3 moral, +2 good, +1 wholesome, -1 caution, -2 extreme caution, -3 bad, to -4 evil. The story of *The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T* is a boy's nightmare that his prissy piano teacher, Dr. Terwilliker, played by Hans Conreid, is hatching a villainous plot to force five hundred little boys to play his piano concerto on a giant piano using his "happy five-fingers method." For reasons that are unfathomable to me, the reviewer gave the movie and, by logical extrapolation, the book a -3 or "bad" rating. This rating, one cut above "evil," is reserved for movies that depict excessive sex, violence and/or immorality. Since *Dr. T* contained neither sex nor violence, we have to ask what the immorality of the work consisted of. The reviewer, Nicky Ockeloen, only asserts that the film, "portrays a hostile imaginary universe, in which innocent children are oppressed by unjust authority figures" (Ockeloen 1993, p. 15). Using that criticism as a measure, the reviewer could probably rate as "bad" any film adapted from the works of Charles Dickens. What doesn't seem to register with the *Movieguide* reviewers is that a fantasy dystopia may be a vehicle for humor. Some stories aren't really intended as moral lessons, after all, but are only meant to provoke a laugh.

Considering that Dr. Seuss isn't above reproach, who else is likely to face an attack from the Religious Right? In his book, *Ravaged by the New Age*, Texe Marrs attacks Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, as being "New Age," which in Marrs' way of thinking means Satanic. Marrs includes in his attack on L'Engle a letter condemning her work written by a member of Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum. This attack is particularly odd, not only because *A Wrinkle in Time* was originally published in 1962, long before New Age mysticism existed, but also because L'Engle is quite forthright about her own Christianity. What was her sin? Apparently, along with writing imaginative books, she not only failed to mention Jesus in every other sentence, but even said that when she writes, she is a writer who happens to be a Christian. At least L'Engle can take comfort that she's in good company. Marrs makes the following comment on another fantasy writer:

A prime example of how a fantasy novelist is able to weave truth and untruth and fact and fable, thus distorting God's word is found in the C. S. Lewis book, *The Last Battle of the Chronicles of Narnia series*. (Marrs 1989, p. 185)

The example Marrs refers to is the incident where Aslan tells the young Calormene warrior that when he thought he was praying to Tash, he was actually worshipping the true God of Narnia, Aslan himself. Such a doctrine is anathema to fundamentalists, who believe that everyone who is not a Christian is destined for Hell. Despite this heresy, fundamentalist book stores still sell *The Last Battle* — along with books by Texe Marrs.

I was able to speak to Texe Marrs on a talk show in June of this year. Since he was holding forth on the subject of the demonic threat of the New World Order and all of the prominent people who, along with the Masons and the Illuminati, were part of the conspiracy, I asked him, in light of what he had written, if C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien were prominent among the architects of this nefarious web. He said that he did not think so, but that *The Lord of the Rings* was an occultic novel. Though he conceded that Lewis was a Christian, Marrs said of him:

He [Lewis] believed that when we die, we may end up not as servants of God in a heaven, but that we might even end up as planets, within planets (sic). The man had some of the most strange and weird ideas imaginable. (Live From L.A., KKLA June 1, 1993)

This assessment from a man who believes that the world is in the grip of Satanic forces working through such vehicles as the New Age movement and the Trilateral Commission. Admittedly, Marrs operates at an even lower level than Phil Phillips. Yet his attack on the film *Willow* is similar to Ted Baehr's. The attack on *Willow* is echoed again by Berit Kjos in her book *Your Child and the New Age*. This isn't surprising, since this author, whose main witch-hunt against the New Age is leveled at the environmental movement, cites Baehr as a resource. The Eagle Forum, which joins Marrs in attacking L'Engle, enjoys considerable political clout and is active in school censorship drives. According to People For The American Way, *A Wrinkle in Time* was one of the most frequently challenged books of the 1991-92 school year. In one unsuccessful challenge, in Waterloo, Iowa, a parent, who admitted to not having read the book, used material from Citizens for Excellence in Education to substantiate a claim that the book had "cultic implications." In another challenge, in Snellville, Georgia, the objecting parent wanted it removed from a fifth-grade reading list because of its "New Age" content. In making the complaint, the parent cited *The New Age Masquerade* by Eric Buehrer, executive vice president of Citizens for Excellence in Education, and *Children at Risk* by Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family and Gary Baur of the Family Research Council. I found no mention of either Madeleine L'Engle or *A Wrinkle in Time* in these books. However, the parent may well have gotten the idea that Dobson *et al* of Focus on the Family disapproved of L'Engle's works because of reading elsewhere that they were "New Age." Dobson does go on at some length about the triple threat of Secular Humanism, New Age concepts and Satanism. Thus, once a work is branded with any of these three buzz-words, it has made the enemies list. Also, whether it involves opposing the teaching of evolution, attacking sex education, or perceived threats from New Age teachers, Religious Right organizations, such as The Eagle Forum, Concerned Women for America, Citizens for Excellence in Education and Focus on the Family, generally reflect each other's views. It's no wonder these people think alike. I'm sure they would all be happy on Camazotz.

What is the real threat of these would be censors? Are they merely trying to keep Christians from being corrupted? No, their aim, as evidenced by their tactic of putting pressure on movie producers, libraries and school boards, is to censor what the rest of us read or watch as well, as in the case of the banning of *The Dark Is Rising*. After all, the channels through which books, movies and TV shows flow are all public. The only way to keep their children's minds pure, short of withdrawing from society as the Amish did, is to make sure everyone else is also protected from the ravages of uncensored imagination. Ultimately, if they can project their own hyper-vigilance into the minds of children, the young will act as their own censors. The next step is to have the same effect on would-be fantasy authors. If every time a writer sets out to portray a fantasy world, he or she has to worry about whether it squares with the Christian world view, what fantasy literature makes it through the strainer will be such pallid stuff as to be of no threat (nor inspiration) to anyone. Of course the main reason it won't is that it will lead no child to the World Riddle. Be aware that despite recent set-backs, the censors are as dedicated as they ever were and are concentrating on the local level. Challenges noted by People For the American Way were up sharply in the 1991-1992 school year, with Florida, Texas, California, Oregon and Minnesota experiencing the greatest number.

So what is to be done? I can offer at least four tactics to anyone who must confront censors like the ones above. First, demand that they state their objections in detail, saying what, specifically, they object to in any given book. As I noted above, one of those challenging *A Wrinkle in Time* had never read the book. Have them read the sections they object to aloud and follow that up by putting those sections back into the context of the story. If they can be forced to admit that they object to Madeleine L'Engle's work as being New Age, press them to define what they mean by that term, why they consider it objectionable and what concepts in the book fit that category.

Second, demand what other things they want banned. Ask them specifically what they think of using John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* in high school reading lists. That work was the most challenged book of the 1982 to 1992 decade. Also ask them about *Macbeth*. That it even mentions witches upsets some would-be censors. People For the American Way reports both of these classics have often come under fire. Yet they are part of our cultural canon, and forcing the censors to admit that they would attack classics, and why, is likely to make them look like fools.

Third, find out who they are backed by or affiliated with. If they make a pretense at being a local grass-roots, ad hoc group, but are in reality associated with the likes of Beverly LaHaye's Concerned Women for America or Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, they can be exposed as the cat's-paw for a national organization meddling in a local affair, and their grass-roots posturing can be turned

against them. Finally, there is no reason to always be on the defensive. Counterattack with an ad hoc local group of your own. The censors are used to venting outrage. When they are on the receiving end of indignation, they are usually thrown for a loss.

In closing, I'd like to examine one last stroke of the reviewer's pen that will bring us back to where we started. Ted Baehr's critique of 2001 finds nothing objectionable until we get to the summation:

If we take this film as fantasy, pure and simple, then it is very enjoyable entertainment. If we look at its theology, or history, then we are left with many unanswered questions. Look for the entertainment and leave the theology alone. (Baehr vol. 1, p. 224)

There it is in so many words, the threat of the unanswered question. Once again, human presumptions falter before the World Riddle.



#### Note

1. I am indebted to Laura Ruskin for solving the mystery of Muck - Olla. She deduced that Phillips was probably referring to the Irish hero, Finn McCool (phonetic spelling). How Phillips garbled Celtic mythology, to the point that he converted the hero into a sun god, is anybody's guess.

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- Picnic at Hanging Rock* directed by Peter Weir, screenplay by Cliff Green based on the novel by Joan Lindsay, Picnic Productions Ltd. 1975
- Pumping Iron II: The Women* produced and directed by George Butler, Bar Belle Productions 1985