

## Childhood Readers of the Classics:

### A Narrative and Biographical Account

by Jane M. Gangi

It is sometimes assumed classic literature is not relevant for children, and may do more harm than good. Too much too soon, it is thought, could have the effect of making children associate the classics with deadliness and boredom. This assumption is promoted in some of the textbooks written for teachers and librarians, making it possible that newly-credentialed teachers and librarians leave their professional programs rejecting the classics as inappropriate for children. Not to make available the classics could be as damaging to some children.

In *Edging the Boundaries of Children's Literature* Winters and Schmidt (2001) try to define "children's literature," which is a daunting task:

The commonality in children's literature is a concern on the part of the author and illustrator to deal with the experience of the child in a way that the child can access, understand, and enjoy. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* may in many ways be about childhood, among other things, but neither is written with a child audience in view. More than one reader has had the experience of having a book "ruined" by a too early reading. (p. 6)

Similarly, Lukens (1999) recounts the story of an eight-year old whose parent proudly stated her child was reading *Moby Dick*. Lukens comments that the parent and the teacher who allowed this "were failing to make a distinction between the capacity to decode, sound out, or recognize words and the capacity to understand and take into oneself the significant ideas.... *Moby Dick*, a classic, was never for children" (p. xix). Lukens is right, as are Winters and Schmidt, of course, if a student is merely decoding words, if the text is inaccessible to the child. However, to outright discount such books for all children is mistaken.

In this article, I share my own love, as a child, of *Jane Eyre*. Then, by consulting biographies and autobiographies, I consider classics that were most meaningful to others, mostly writers, during their childhoods, and why these books exerted a powerful influence—often before their readers had reached sixth grade.

#### A Childhood Discovery of *Jane Eyre*

Blocks of unpretentious rowhouses surrounded the Leith Walk Elementary School in Baltimore, Maryland in a working-to-middle class neighborhood during the 1950s when I attended school there. The Leith Walk school library—a dusty, modest room—contained a small selection of varying genres: fiction, biography, nonfiction, and some picture storybooks, like *The Five Hundred Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*; the publication explosion in children's literature was yet to come. In 1959, when I was nine years old and in the fourth grade, I found in Leith Walk's little library Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, a book I read and reread over the next several years.

Thirty-three years later, after my father died in 1992, I began to understand the magnetic attraction *Jane Eyre* held for me as a school-age child. If the developmental stages in today's cognitive psychology had been in place at that time, it is doubtful *Jane Eyre* would have been thought of as developmentally appropriate for a nine year old girl and, therefore, not available. For me, the book opened doors no other book could.

No doubt I chose the book because her name was Jane, as is mine. Already an avid reader, I sometimes lied to my mother, who was a teacher, telling her I was sick so I could stay home and read, for the dozenth time, such books as *Heidi*, all of the Laura Ingalls Wilder series, all of Andrew Lang's fairy tale books, and a plethora of biographies: Molly Pitcher, Clara Barton, Florence Nightingale—women who did dif cult and heroic things, but who also enjoyed and loved life. I must have been quite the child actress; my mother seems to have believed my so-called illnesses, invented to avoid school and gain time for experiencing the fantastic worlds of literature.

The activity of reading—and reading *Jane Eyre* in particular—helped me to move beyond a perplexing, sometimes abusive, and often lonely childhood. My family left our home in North Carolina to move to Baltimore when I was six. At the time, I was sure I was the only girl in the world to undergo the acute suffering

of being separated from my grandparents, whom I dearly loved and who were like parents to me.

Our tiny Baltimore rowhouse was a much smaller arrangement than either of my country-bred parents had grown up in. There had been “bad” business between my father and his brother, and my father began in Baltimore a new career as an engineer in the space industry. Although my parents both had good jobs, there was throughout my childhood little money and much tension, sadness, and anger. My mother clearly despised my uncle, but it wasn’t until I was in high school she told me why: He had embezzled money from my father. How much, I asked? After a cryptic pause, she answered, “Several thousand.” Not only had my father “lost his shirt” at the hands of his own brother, she told me, he had also assumed other debts incurred by my alcoholic uncle in their family business. Too proud to claim bankruptcy, my father made sure other investors and creditors in the business did not lose their shirts, too. I accepted my mother’s explanation but, for many years, I thought my father could get over having lost several thousand dollars to his brother. He should just put his troubles aside and get on with his life. To me, “several thousand,” in my mother’s words, meant two or three thousand dollars.

When my father died, I had to learn more about his experience with his brother. I climbed the steps to my mother’s attic where my father’s boxed-up and wire-bound records lay. Using wire cutters, I opened them, something I would not have dared while my father was still alive. In those yellowed, old records from the 1950s I learned what my mother called several thousand was, in fact, about \$50,000. My father’s brother and a bookkeeper had embezzled \$30,000 from my father, and my father had assumed an additional \$20,000 in business-related debts my uncle owed to others. Thirty-eight years of my parents’ mystifying behavior began to come clear.

I also found letters between my father and an attorney, spanning from 1953 until 1956, indicating there was enough evidence to take my uncle to court. After three years of correspondence with the attorney, my father decided not to do it. My mother said he wanted to protect the family name and to spare his widowed mother and two sisters the public humiliation and small-town gossip of a court case. My father and my mother carried this devastating emotional and economic

burden throughout my growing-up years, while trying to project to others that we were, if not well-off, at least middle class. In the attic I found the bank note, dated 1984, showing my father finally paid off his debts, thirty years after his troubles began. He had gone through the high school and college graduations of his daughters, two weddings, and the birth of three grandchildren as financially strapped as a young person starting out, despite having worked for several decades as a professional engineer. I now understood why there’d been few gifts at graduations and other celebrations. Many years after the event, after my father had died, and because one of my sisters pointed out that my parents had never done so, my mother gave me a high school graduation gift (a pair of earrings).

My parents did not discuss with my sisters and me their terrible betrayal by my uncle, but instead, kept a festering silence. They were, in the words of one of my maternal aunts who vaguely knew the situation, “more ill to you.” Their responses to our childish irresponsibilities and misdemeanors were far out of proportion to the offenses. Their bewildering nonverbal behavior was as devastating as their words of anger: scowls, knitted brows, frowns of disapproval. I did not understand their fury. Reading was an escape for me and authors offered helping and sympathetic hands towards an awareness of other potentialities in life.

Laura Ingalls Wilder’s books showed me family life could be different, full of love and comfort, even in the face of life-threatening difficulties. *Jane Eyre* gave me even more. Although the circumstances were different from my own, I found in Brontë, though long deceased, an adult friend who understood what it was to suffer unjustly and invisibly. Her tale and her characterization of Jane created a bridge between me and a larger world than the one I knew.

At the beginning of the novel Jane, left an orphan, lives with an impatient and cruel aunt, the mother of spoiled and selfish cousins who act vindictively towards Jane. In this household, however, she meets Bessie, a servant, who though stern with Jane, becomes her friend. Listening to Bessie’s stories and songs are a comfort to her. She says of Bessie: “Even for me life had its gleams of sunshine” (p. 42). I had that, too, because of my kind and generous relatives who lived in North Carolina. Although they were far away, they brought (and continue

to bring) much cheer into my life.

Jane is prone to rebellion, as was I, and so is sent to Lowood School for orphans, where she experiences brutality at the hands of the hypocritical minister in charge, fashioned on the actual minister, Carus Wilson, of The Clergy Daughter's School where Brontë and her sisters were sent. At Lowood Jane makes her first friend, Helen. Because she loves Jane, Helen counsels her to put the past behind her concerning her experiences in her aunt's home: "Would you not be happier if you tried to forget her severity, together with the passionate emotions it excited? Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity or registering wrongs" (pp. 60-61). Here Jane struggles with conflicting feelings, both her rage at unjust treatment as well as her desire to live a life without blight. With profound insight Helen tells her: "You think too much of the love of human beings. . . . If all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends" (p. 72). Helen helps Jane develop a sense of self that has the possibility of becoming its own source of comfort and companionship, no matter the circumstances.

Helen was probably modeled after Brontë's older sister Maria, who along with another Brontë sister, died of neglect at a young age at The Clergy Daughter's School. To Charlotte Brontë, Maria exemplified all that is of value in the Christian life, but there is in Brontë's writing a sense of something beyond the Christian pilgrimage, as is revealed in Helen's coaxing—of a conscience that matters in the scheme of things. Berry (1990) writes, "The task of healing is to respect oneself as a creature, no more and no less" (p. 9). By the end of the novel, *Jane Eyre* has achieved this respect. Mrs. Reed, Jane's aunt, calls on her deathbed for Jane to visit Gateshead. Returning after many years to this stronghold of bitter memories, Jane reflects, "I still felt as a wanderer on the face of the earth; but I experienced firmer trust in myself and my own powers, and less withering dread of oppression" (p. 230). The very circumstances in which she first knew that sense of dread made evident her growing ability to distance herself from it.

At Lowood School Jane meets Miss Temple, her first real teacher and mentor, intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally. Jane sees in her a woman of compassion

who, though sensible of injustice, lives a balanced life. Eventually Jane says of her teacher: "I had imbibed from her something of her nature and much of her habits: more harmonious thoughts: what seemed better regulated feelings" (p. 87). Sporadically, I, too, encountered teachers about whom I could say the same. One of them, Mrs. Wills, was my fourth grade teacher the year I first encountered *Jane Eyre*. When Mrs. Wills caught me reading under my desk instead of paying attention to her lecture on the spawning habits of salmon, she did not scold me but instead held me up as an example to my classmates. Later, she gently and privately remonstrated me to pay more attention during science class. Mrs. Wills broke her hip that year; my mother made her chocolate cupcakes. My handsome father and I delivered them to her home in Baltimore (yes, there were happy times, too). I missed Mrs. Wills terribly. The substitute teacher handled my wayward reading habits differently; when she caught me reading under my desk, she screamed at me in front of the class, which left me mortified and humiliated.

As a southern girl I was socialized by my mother to perform numerous and dreary household tasks, many of which seemed then and seem now useless and unnecessary, such as turning my father's socks inside out each week before they went in the wash and then reversing the procedure once the socks were dry. In my child's view, this kind of drudgery took away my time for reading, for escape. I sometimes overheard my father say in annoyance to my mother, "You oughtn't let her read so much." I was too vulnerable to argue with him, too much in withering dread of oppression, but surely this passage from *Jane Eyre* was meaningful to me:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a constraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrowed-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary

for their sex (pp. 112-113).

Charlotte Brontë knew how I felt, even if my own parents did not. This passage, no doubt, came out of her own strongly felt emotions as a child. The Brontë biographer Juliet Barker shares this excerpt from a letter Charlotte wrote:

Throughout my early youth the difference which existed between me and most of the people who surrounded me, was an embarrassing enigma to me which I did not know how to resolve; I felt myself inferior to everyone and it distressed me. I thought it was my duty to follow the example set by the majority of my acquaintances...yet I felt myself incapable of feeling and behaving as the majority felt and behaved...all my efforts were useless; I could not restrain the ebb and flow of blood in my arteries and that ebb and flow always showed itself in my face and in my hard and unattractive features. I wept in secret. (pp. 417)

When Jane meets for the second time Mr. Rochester (having first met him on the moor without realizing his identity as her employer), he says to Jane after hearing of her stay at Lowood School, "Eight years! you must be tenacious of life" (p. 125). The knowledge of her tenacity I think must have contributed to some of my own. Rochester's mercurial behavior and moods discomfited her. Perhaps I recognized Jane's description of him: "I thought there were excellent materials in him; though for the present they hung together somewhat spoiled and tangled" (p. 150). So my father seemed to me. He had qualities I loved and admired (after all, he took me to deliver cupcakes to my favorite teacher); his disapproval, sadness, and tempers I could not grasp.

Like the documentation of my father's troubles stored in the attic, so, too, was kept Rochester's nemesis from the past, his mentally ill wife Bertha, living in the mysterious upper regions at Thornfield. In a typical passage, Jane describes Rochester: "He ground his teeth and was silent: he arrested his step and struck his boot against the hard ground. Some hated thought seemed to have him in its grip, and to hold him so tightly that he could not advance" (p. 145). I well remember at age four while we were still living in North Carolina, a year after the embezzlement, observing my father similarly paralyzed. He had taken me to a place where molasses was made and let me play by a stream. I looked up at

him, standing on a wooden bridge with no railings, and saw things, troublesome things, in his face I had never seen before. Surrounded by tall pines and the cumulous clouds in the North Carolina cornflower blue sky, he seemed to be searching the heavens as if trying to find an answer. I did not know how to ask him what he was thinking, and knew he would not answer. Jane reflects, "All I had gathered from it amounted to this,—that there was a mystery at Thornfield; and that from participation in that mystery, I was purposely excluded" (p. 167). Screams and groans in the night, an inexplicable fire in Mr. Rochester's bedroom, the knifing of an unwelcome guest—these incidents were more dramatic than what went on in my household but resonated with my experience nevertheless.

Rochester says to Jane: "To live, for me, Jane, is to stand on a crater-crust which may crack and spue fire any day" (p. 218). The volcanic metaphor she did not yet comprehend, nor did I understand my father's volcanic explosions. After their attempted wedding, spoiled by Bertha's brother Mason, Rochester tells Jane of his future in-laws' knowledge of Bertha's insanity. Nonetheless they did nothing to warn him, "for they were silent on family secrets" (p. 294). It seemed to me, too, not only were my parents silent but my grandmother, aunts, and uncles were as well. Yet the strange innuendoes and odd looks on my paternal grandmother's, aunts', and uncles' faces during family gatherings made me wonder about our family secret.

The ultimate betrayal came from Rochester's own family. He explains to Jane: "My father and my brother Rowland knew all this [Bertha's insanity and her family's predilection towards madness]; but they thought only of the thirty thousand pounds, and joined in the plot against me" (p. 308). So, it seemed to me, was my father forsaken. Although their silence was not motivated by greed, upholding appearances and keeping the family name out of the gossip mill was more important than acknowledgement of suffering and expressions of compassion.

I have mentioned Jane's sense of an interior life and self as friend, yet in light of the romanticism of her time, Brontë also depicts nature as friend. Upon leaving Thornfield after the miscarried wedding, Jane resides for a time with St. John Rivers and his sisters. A pastor, Rivers falls in love with Jane; she refuses him in part

because he does not share in her expansive notions of the possibilities of life and self, nor does he share her friendship with nature:

I think . . . that Nature was not to him that treasury of delight it was to his sisters. . . never did he seem to roam the moors for the sake of their soothing silence—never seek out or dwell upon the thousand peaceful delights they could yield. (pp. 353-354)

This passage reflects Brontë's own passion for the moors around her home in Haworth, England. Though strikingly different environments, the setting and daily cycles of my grandmothers' rural homes near the western hills of North Carolina both enchanted and comforted me: The soft contours of the countryside, the coo of the mourning dove, the ethereal blue of the morning glory, the flickering golden yellow of the fireflies in the evening (we called them "lightning bugs") and the strong, gentle winds of the midafternoon when the cicadas reassured me summer would never end and I could always be my grandmothers' child. The Yorkshire moors with their wide and hilly fields of bracken and heather, sheep ever-grazing in unlikely nooks, and wind that swoops together earth and sky, were a constant source of delight for Brontë and her siblings; I shared her love of place.

The poverty-stricken Riverses had their family troubles too. Jane was present when news came of an uncle's death. None of the Rivers appeared perturbed. Then Diana explains:

Jane you will wonder at us and our mysteries . . . and think us hard-hearted beings not to be more moved at the death of so near a relation as an uncle; but we have never seen him or known him. . . My father and he quarreled long ago. It was by his advice that my father risked most of his property in the speculation that ruined him. Mutual recrimination passed between them: they parted in anger, and were never reconciled. (pp. 359-360)

Nor were my father and his brother ever reconciled.

Because of her difficulties, Jane was able to recognize gifts of far more value than money. While living with the Rivers, the first real "family" she had ever known, she reflects: "Glorious discovery to a lonely wretch! This was wealth indeed!—wealth to the heart!—a mine of pure, genial affections. This was a blessing, bright, vivid, and exhilarating;—not like the ponderous gift of gold . . ." (p. 387). I found in Jane Eyre a

passionate woman of intellect, integrity, and feeling.

Though she had been deceased for over a hundred years, I felt in Jane Eyre's creator, Charlotte Brontë, an adult far closer to me than my parents; her humanity extended across the centuries to me. The discoveries held in this novel, four hundred and fifty-six densely written pages, illuminated and continue to illuminate my life.

### **Classics and Other Childhood Readers**

Having explored the importance of Jane Eyre to me, I wondered what classic books were meaningful to other childhood readers. However, first a consideration of "classics."

For several decades, controversy has raged over the questions: What is a classic? For whom? Consensus is not forthcoming and, most likely, never will be, nor should be, in our pluralistic society. Here I speak of classics as those books that have enduring appeal for many generations of all kinds of people, usually because they resonate with the deepest questions, thoughts, and feelings humans have. For a long time, the authors of classics seemed to have been mostly of European descent. However, that has changed, and continues to change: The writings of James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and others, have been with us for almost a century. And, as more and more historically underrepresented and marginalized authors find their voices—and their publishers—more books by authors of color will become classic. Part of the reason there seem to be fewer "classics" by authors of color has to do with the obstacle of breaking into a publishing field, the gatekeepers for which have been and continue to be mostly white and, therefore, do not always appreciate the aesthetics emanating from cultures not their own. Childhood readers of various ethnicities have found solace and wisdom in "classics" while trying to make sense of their experiences of grief, loneliness, isolation, abuse, and rejection. Most of the childhood readers I consulted grew up during a time when children's literature was not the full-blown market it is today, and the reading they did would be considered rarified by today's standards.

By the time Charlotte Brontë was five, she had lost her mother; in the next few years, she lost two of her sisters. As a child, Brontë read Sir Walter Scott, after which she thought other novels "worthless" (Gordon,

1994, p. 30). Another Brontë biographer, Gérin (1969), describes the reading Patrick Brontë made available to his precocious children:

Besides Homer and Virgil in the original there were Milton's works, Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, Thomson's *Seasons*, Goldsmith's *History of Rome*, Hume's *History of England*, Scott's *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte...* and the works of Byron, Southey, and Cowper. (p. 24)

Gérin observes, thanks to Brontë's father's intellectual passion combined with the isolation of the Yorkshire moors, Brontë "was given a liberty to evolve such as few children... ever enjoyed" (p. 30). Her extensive childhood reading and writing combined with the early loss of her mother and sisters shaped her adult writing, in which the motherless child strongly figures.

Numerous writers have described books significant to them in childhood. For the Antiguan author Jamaica Kincaid, one book was *Jane Eyre* because of "her rebelliousness, her sense of self... of never giving if in if you think you are right. I identified with that completely" (National Public Radio, 2004). For Maya Angelou, it was Shakespeare, whom she found in a poverty-stricken town in Arkansas:

During these years in Stamps, I met and fell in love with William Shakespeare. He was my first white love. Although I enjoyed and respected Kipling, Poe, Butler, Thackeray and Henley, I saved my young and loyal passion for Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson and W.E.B. Du Bois' "Litany at Atlanta." But it was Shakespeare who said, "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes." It was a state with which I felt myself most familiar. (p. 11)

For the daughter of sharecroppers, Debra Dickerson (2000), it was, among others, Maya Angelou:

I was almost out of elementary school before I discovered the huge central library downtown [St. Louis] and saw my first book by a black person: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou. I read it five times. It had never occurred to me that blacks could write books. With this discovery, my desire for serious modern literature burst into flame.

I lost myself in the Harlem Renaissance. (p. 65)

Dickerson adds, however, "I always came back to the canon, those Dead White Men who got me through my

childhood: Dickens, Maugham, Melville, Steinbeck, Balzac" (p. 65). At an early age, through a neighborhood library, Dickerson discovered those dead white men who became her own "treasure room" (p. 33). Once, after her father had severely beaten her, she sought asylum in her room:

I stretched out on the floor for as long as I dared. Bleak as my immediate future was, I enjoyed knowing that, for once, no one would bang on the door and invade my privacy. I did what I always did when I managed to be in a room alone back then; I recited passages from the books I loved. Dickens was my current favorite. I recited the beheading scene from *A Tale of Two Cities*, just to make sure that the good twin's bravery would still bring tears to my eyes even as I faced my own angry mob. It did. (p. 46)

After another beating, "I ached for C.S. Lewis, or Dickens. Even a Brontë" (p. 49). Dickerson also read the Bible in depth, sometimes memorizing long passages. Of all the qualities the classics offer children, perhaps *comfort* should be at the top of the list—comfort because, in eloquent and aesthetic renderings, a vulnerable and as yet inarticulate child can recognize another's experience of injustice and petty tyranny.

Growing up in an anti-intellectual and, therefore, difficult (for a future professor) environment, bell hooks (sic) (1996), who is today a public intellectual and professor of English, found books that made her feel "less alone in the world" (p. 77): James Baldwin, Frank Yerby, Ann Petry, and biographies of George Washington Carver, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Booker T. Washington. She read Laura Ingalls Wilder and all she could get of Alcott (p. 76). Her family regarded her as a problem child and "blame[d] it all on books" (p. 77). Though there were always books in her home, she was told that books were for when she was "older" (p. 76), and family "warned her that books could drive people crazy" (p. 120).

Also someone who endured a loneliness and isolation during childhood, Esther Hautzig (1968) recounts her childhood experience of being deported when she was ten years old to Siberia from Poland, along with thousands of other Polish Jews during World War II. Her sufferings were made more bearable by the surprising discovery of a warm and well-stocked library

in the far reaches of the bleak, barren, Siberian cold: Dumas, Shakespeare, Mark Twain. “It was between the library and two extraordinary teachers,” she writes of her reading habits between ten and twelve years of age, “that I developed a lifelong passion for the greatest Russian novelists and poets. It was there that I learned to line up patiently for my turn to sit at a table and read, to wait—sometimes for months—for a book. It was there that I learned that reading was not only a great delight, but a *privilege*” (p. 180).

Anthropologist and author Zora Neale Hurston (1990) describes the “great anguish” brought on by early reading: “My soul was with the gods and my body in the village. People just would not act like gods.” She wanted most to be like Hercules; however, “[r]aking back yards and carrying out chamber pots, were not the tasks of Hercules” (p. 41). Despite the hardships, she found pure pleasure in the “lyin” sessions of the menfolk where the African-American folk tales were kept alive (p. 48). When she was in the fifth grade, Hurston made such an impression on a group of visiting white ladies when she read aloud the myth of *Persephone and Demeter* they later sent her gifts and books which included the Grimms’ fairy tales and collections of mythologies: Greek, Roman, and, most beloved, Norse myths, and *Gulliver’s Travels*, which she read and loved.

Clearly, making the classics available to today’s children is a worthwhile effort on the part of teachers, librarians, and parents. In the nineteenth century Sir Walter Scott said, “There is no harm, but, on the contrary, there is benefit in presenting a child with ideas beyond his easy and immediate comprehension. The difficulties thus offered, if not too great or too frequent, stimulate curiosity and encourage exertion” (qtd. in Rigby, 1990, p. 20). Doing so potentially provides a way for children to manage their problems, diminish their isolation, begin to understand the complexity of human personality, nourish that which will eventually become their careers and, often, for young girls, female mentors who defy constricting expectations.

In her study of sharing the classics with a small group of women in Tehran, Azar Nafisi observes the “main complications of the plot” are caused by the female protagonists’ “refusal to comply” (p. 195). Making decisions about compliance confront Iranian women on a daily basis—Nafisi’s departure from

the university where she was a college professor was because of her refusal to wear the veil—which is perhaps one of the reasons why the classics have an appeal to Middle Eastern women, who Nafisi calls heroic, in the twenty-first century. Because of their artistic greatness, these books can and are revisited with the passage of time; with each rereading, more riches are discovered. Libraries and classroom libraries—not only the adult and young adult sections—should provide classic books, making it possible for children to find them, as easily as Maya Angelou found them in Stamps, Arkansas during the Depression, as Esther Hautzig found them in Siberia during World War II, and as I found them at the Leith Walk School in Baltimore, Maryland in 1959.

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