

# Walt Disney Accused

by Horn Book

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In the spring of this year Max Rafferty, California's Superintendent of Public Instruction, wrote an article praising Walt Disney as "the greatest educator of this century." Frances Clarke Sayers challenged Dr. Rafferty's stand in a letter to the Los Angeles *Times*, which we reprint with Mrs. Sayers' permission.

It is a pity, in this fairest of springs, to break into the idyllic world of Dr. Max Rafferty and Walt Disney with a blast of anger, but it must be done.

I, too, am an educator, and because I am, it will take more than "a spoonful of sugar to make the medicine go down" — the medicine of Dr. Rafferty's absurd appraisal of Walt Disney as a pedagogue.

Mr. Disney has his own special genius. It has little to do with education, or with the cultivation of sensitivity, taste, or perception in the minds of children.

He has, to be sure, distributed some splendid films on science and nature, but he has also been a shameless nature faker in his fictionalized animal stories.

I call him to account for his debasement of the traditional literature of childhood, in films and in the books he publishes:

He shows scant respect for the integrity of the original creations of authors, manipulating and vulgarizing everything for his own ends.

His treatment of folklore is without regard for its anthropological, spiritual, or psychological truths. Every story is sacrificed to the "gimmick" (Dr. Rafferty's word) of animation.

The acerbity of *Mary Poppins*, unpredictable, full of wonder and mystery, becomes, with Mr. Disney's treatment, one great marshmallow-covered cream puff. He made a young tough of Peter Pan, and transformed *Pinocchio* into a slapstick sadistic revel.

Not content with the films, he fixes these mutilated versions in books which are cut to a fraction of their original forms, illustrates them with garish pictures, in which every prince looks like a badly drawn portrait of Cary Grant, every princess a sex

symbol

The mystical Fairy with the Blue Hair of the *Pinocchio* turns out to be Marilyn Monroe, blonde hair and all.

As for the cliché-ridden texts, they are laughable. "Meanwhile, back at the castle . . ."

Dr. Rafferty finds all this "lone sanctuaries of decency and health." I find genuine feeling ignored, the imagination of children bludgeoned with mediocrity, and much of it overcast by vulgarity. Look at that wretched sprite with the wand and the over-sized buttocks which announces every Disney program on TV. She is a vulgar little thing, who has been too long at the sugar bowls.

FRANCES CLARKE SAYERS  
Senior Lecturer, School of Library Service  
and Department of English, UCLA