

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

    Matt Konzem     for the     Master of Arts      
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Title: "Don't Forget the Doctor: The Life and Writing of Dr. Seuss."

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This study examines the life and writing of Dr. Seuss. Dr. Seuss is the world-famous pseudonym for the shy Theodore Seuss Geisel. Although he was not an exemplary student, Geisel began writing for his Springfield, Ohio, high school newspaper. He continued to write humorous columns and draw political cartoons for the Dartmouth paper, *Jack-O-Lantern*. At his fiancé's urging, he later dropped out of school at Oxford University in order to pursue a job as a newspaper columnist/cartoonist. Finally, he landed a job for Flit Bug Spray which became a deciding factor regarding his future occupation. Through his contract, Geisel was not allowed to write or draw for any media publications; he could only write children's books.

Through his children's books, Geisel teaches children to read. The manner in which he teaches is what makes Dr. Seuss books so special. Geisel's Dr. Seuss books

introduce a revolutionary style of fun, suspense, and excitement. Children love Geisel's books because of their bouncy, anapestic tetrameter and strict adherence to rhyme. Moreover, the wild, wacky illustrations in his books dazzle readers while amplifying his writings' themes at the same time. Consequently, children have so much fun reading and rereading his books, they forget Geisel is teaching them anything.

While Geisel intends to teach children, his books exhibit other themes, as well. Each of his books has a cutting, satirical edge. Geisel satirizes politics, the family, and society. Some of his books mock the silliness of unwarranted discrimination, and others ridicule inept governments and corrupt political leaders. One book questions the nuclear arms race, while another fights for environmental rights. Even though his books have such cynical undertones, Geisel masterfully conceals his satire from children with hypnotic rhythms, clever rhymes, crazy illustrations, silly word-play, and suspenseful plots. However, his political voice is evident to adults.

Geisel's literary works are the most popular children's books of all-time. Geisel won numerous awards and honors for his film and literary works. Three of his books, The Cat in the Hat, How the Grinch Stole Christmas, and Green Eggs and Ham, are among the best-selling books of any type of literature of all-time. Tens of millions of children worldwide have grown up knowing, loving, and learning with Dr. Seuss.

DON'T FORGET THE DOCTOR:  
THE LIFE AND WRITING OF DR. SEUSS

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Division of English

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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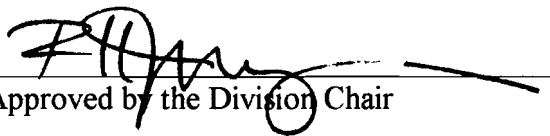
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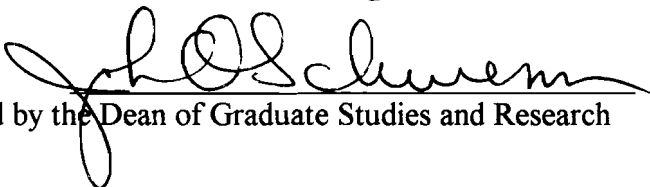
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by

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Approved by the Division Chair

  
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Finally, to my parents and brother, I thank you for your love, support, and confidence in my abilities. All that I achieve in life I owe to you. Thank you for everything.

## PREFACE

“I like nonsense, it wakes up the brain cells. Fantasy is the necessary ingredient in living; it’s a way of looking at things through the wrong end of a telescope. Which is what I do that enables you to laugh at life’s realities.” --Dr. Seuss

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION OF AUTHOR

Theodore Seuss Geisel was born to a middle-class family in Springfield, Ohio, on March 2, 1904. “Ted’s” family was a traditional German-American family in a small but growing, mostly German-American town. His father was a beer maker, causing Geisel to be known as the “German Beer Maker’s kid.” Consequently, in a time of anti-Germanic passion, he received while growing up the nickname of “The Kaiser” (Morgan 15).

However, Geisel outgrew these tough situations with a humility, endurance, and sense of humor that allowed him to exaggerate ordinary, everyday events into large, often humorous productions to his family. With other people, though, Geisel remained very conscious of what he terms his overly large nose and his marked German-American heritage. Hence, Geisel liked to keep a sense of anonymity throughout his entire life (Morgan 22).

With the onset of prohibition, Geisel’s father was forced into other occupations. Besides becoming a founder and park curator for Springfield, Geisel’s father also tinkered with inventions in his garage. Because of the World War, most everyone began treating Geisel as an outsider. Consequently, Geisel and his father became very close. Through his visits to the park and to his father’s “workshop,” Geisel developed a love for both animals and invention. As a child, he was very curious and observant and always carried a pencil to write or doodle (Morgan 12).



Geisel entered high school being known as a talented, but undisciplined student, a label that would continue to describe his performance and attitude toward schooling throughout his entire school career. Although his father wanted him to go out for sports, Geisel did not have a gift for athletics. He chose to focus on areas he had more of a penchant for such as writing and drawing. Geisel found drawing came especially easy to him, and he developed a growing love for it. When asked in interviews, Geisel remembered hating art class because he was forced to follow the existing conventions and the existing rules (Morgan 21). Geisel's unorthodox ways, the teacher insisted, were too out of the ordinary, too against the accepted structure. This stern criticism did not daunt him, though. His talents in different but related areas were realized as he became a cartoonist for *The Recorder*, the high school paper. During this period, Geisel experimented with several different pseudonyms, but eventually rested on T. S. LeSieg--the backward spelling of his name. In high school, Geisel also organized and participated in the mandolin club. He wrote and staged a minstrel play and performed comic roles in different stage productions. At the time of his graduation, he was voted the class artist and the class wit.

Upon graduating from high school, Geisel entered college at Dartmouth. He was disappointed that no fraternities offered to take him in, even though he had made no efforts to sell himself to them during the first couple weeks of the semester. Although not athletic, Geisel had gained a surprising popularity in high school through his cartooning, plays, and witty antics. Consequently, he decided to become an English major in college. Still unmoved by his studies and not taken into any fraternities, Geisel needed something

to occupy his time. He entered some of his work into the Dartmouth paper and was offered a job as a cartoonist and humor columnist. His work at this paper, the *Jack-O-Lantern*, would later prove to be the beginning of his long, lucrative writing and illustrating career (Morgan 27). He met many beginning and established cartoonists and people in the wide field of journalism through this job he loved. As his involvement and love for “*Jack-O*” grew, his dedication for his studies started to slip proportionately. While writing for “*Jack-O*,” Geisel offended different prominent figures and groups on campus and got in a bit of trouble. He was forced to write under a pseudonym in order to keep his job. He chose to use his middle name, Seuss, to keep his writing identity hidden. He simply signed his works, “Seuss.” When he graduated Dartmouth, even though he had many friends and followers through his writing and cartooning, Geisel was voted least likely to succeed (Morgan 27).

Geisel entered Lincoln College, Oxford University by accident. He told his father he had received a Campbell Fellowship when, in fact, he had not, although he had applied for one (Robinson 4). Immediately, his father wrote an article to brag about his son in the Springfield paper. Upon learning that Geisel had not earned the fellowship, Geisel’s father, to save face, resigned to sending him to Oxford anyway (Robinson 4). Geisel enrolled with the honorable intentions of getting his doctorate in English and becoming an English professor. However, he quickly became bored with the material. He found the reading uninteresting and the lectures monotonous. Again, he was a talented student with no dedication.

Because he had no interest in his classes, he quickly struck up a quiet, but deep friendship with a young woman who sat beside him in classes (Morgan 45). At they began to get to know each other better and began to trust each other, Geisel started showing her the doodles that he had been making during classes instead of taking notes. At first his doodles surrounded the margins of his class notes, but as the semester trudged on, they began covering entire pages. Helen, his new best friend and confidante, was impressed with the weird assortment of strange-looking animals and fantasy-like places in his notebook. In fact, she was so taken by his creatures and so concerned for him that she encouraged him to drop out of school and pursue his interests in some kind of art related field.

Geisel dropped out, and at the coaxing of his love, Helen Marion Palmer, traveled Europe with her to broaden his idea-base for his drawings. On this trip, they reportedly professed to each other love at first sight--since the first time they spoke (Morgan 53). Moreover, while the two had been inseparable at Oxford, they developed a natural need to be with each other, and they became engaged while touring. The two planned to move back to the States, back to Manhattan, New York, where she could begin teaching and he could begin a possible career in illustration (Morgan 58).

In New York, at Helen's urging Geisel began going from publisher to publisher, from magazine to magazine attempting to sell some of his cartoons. He hoped a portfolio of single- drawing cartoons would earn him some money. He bombarded editors with humorous pieces with strange drawings of animals and creatures. No one would take a chance on this off-beat artist, though. He was tired, hungry and frustrated, but Helen

pushed him on. Finally he sold his first cartoon to the *Post* in 1927 (Morgan 59). This led to other spots, other cartoons in other magazines. Next, Geisel was asked to illustrate a collection of children's stories called Boners (Morgan 71). Eventually Geisel won the advertising campaign for Flit Bug Spray. He earned twelve thousand dollars per year, which was a sizable amount during the Great Depression. He won several advertising awards for his work at Flit and singlehandedly made Flit Bug Spray a household name (Morgan 59). This large salary allowed him to continue to work on other cartoons as well as giving him the time and money to travel extensively. Suddenly, Ted Geisel had become one of the most successful Dartmouth graduates in his class. In time, Geisel would become known as one of, if not *the* most famous Dartmouth graduate of all time--ironic considering he was voted least likely to succeed.

## CHAPTER 2            GEISEL BEGINS WRITING FOR CHILDREN

On his and Helen's travels, Geisel discovered something that would change his and the lives of millions forever. On a steamer across the Atlantic, Geisel became enthralled by the rhythm from the ship's engines. The anapestic rhythm was hypnotizing to Geisel. He could not get it out of his head. He began making up rhymes to the beat from the boat. Upon returning to New York, he began work on a rhyme that would verbalize a story the rhythm was trying to tell (Morgan 81). He knew he wanted to write but was not able to because he was under a strict contract from Flit Bug Spray which prohibited him to write any books. However, through a loophole, Geisel found he could legally write children's books (Brunzel 160). He wrote all he could remember about his boyhood home, Springfield. He filled his pages with bright pictures of strange animals. He wrote intricate rhymes coinciding with the pictures; all of the rhymes marched to that anapestic beat Geisel heard on the steamer. With Helen's pushing and help, Geisel produced his first book, a children's book called And to Think that I saw it on Mulberry Street. He thought would sell.

However, Geisel found it wouldn't sell. He could talk no publishers into taking a chance on his unorthodox children's book. They claimed children did not want to hear rhymes and would not relate to the pictures or bouncy rhythm and meter (Brunzel 110). Moreover, the publishers argued that Geisel's book did not have an overlying message or moral. Parents did not want nor think their children would read a book just for fun; the

book had to teach a moral. Therefore, Geisel's book was deemed too different, too risky. He was turned down by twenty-seven different publishers until, by chance, he ran into an old Dartmouth classmate who had recently been hired as the juvenile editor of a small book-publishing house (Morgan 81). Mike McClintock of Vanguard Press read Geisel's book and loved it immediately. Soon Geisel's book was published under the pseudonym Dr. Seuss. He had been using his middle name for his cartoons--a carry-over from his Dartmouth days--but added the "Dr." to commemorate his never attaining his Ph.D. at Oxford.

Geisel's first book was an instant success. Across the country, children and parents alike loved the story. Geisel received immediate money which he liked and instant fame which he didn't like. He liked to keep himself hidden, rarely going out in public and isolating himself in front of his drawing board. For the most part, Geisel simply wrote and drew. Helen took care of him--including daily rituals such as the shopping, paying the bills, and answering the door--and the business side of publishing books (Morgan 199).

Upon Geisel's success, he endured the first of his interviews; he hated public appearances of any kind. Geisel was interviewed by a Dartmouth student. "Let's see," Geisel had said. "You want an interview, a sort of life story, as it were." The student nodded. "Truth or fiction?" (Morgan 76).

Geisel did not consider himself a great writer. He simply drew and wrote rhymes. When Geisel's works first became famous, another Dartmouth colleague, Alexander Laing, wrote the following about him:

You're wrong as the deuce

And you shouldn't rejoice

If you're calling him Seuss.

He pronounces it Soice. (Bedno 2)

During World War II, the United States army asked Geisel to produce documentary films portraying the horrors of the Germans to American soldiers and the American public. He received honors for his films. After the war, he continued to dabble in films. He was lured by the enchantment of Hollywood. However, Geisel enjoyed neither the making of his made-for-television movie over his latest book nor the result (Dohm 324). He decided to focus entirely on writing and illustrating children's books. Geisel wrote forty-eight Dr. Seuss books and edited many others including *The Bernstein Bears* series (Bedno 5). The following are some of his most famous books:

And to Think That I Saw it on Mulberry Street 1937

The Butter Battle Book 1984

Cat in the Hat 1957

Fox in Socks 1965

Green Eggs and Ham 1960

Horton Hears a Who 1954

How the Grinch Stole Christmas 1957

The Lorax 1971

Oh, the Places You'll Go! 1990

Yertle the Turtle & Other Stories 1958

Geisel's writing methods were somewhat unorthodox. He wrote in a small drawing room with a window and a drawing board in it. He did not like to be bothered when he was in this think-tank. He kept a stuffed dog named, Threophrastus, from his childhood by his drawing board to remind him of all that he loved and dreamed of when he was a child (Morgan 9). Other than that, he rarely asked anyone into his drawing room. He mulled painstakingly over every line, color, word, and syllable that went into one of his books. He pondered for days over a single word or a single shade of ink. He wanted perfection and expected nothing less than that from himself. This quest for perfection also served as an adamant stubbornness during conflicts over word and color choice with his editors. However, Geisel almost always won these battles (Brunzel 113).

Geisel wrote several books as challenges from friends who were editors, publishers, and educators. He was given a word list of 225 words and bet he could not write a children's book emphasizing and using only words from that list (Robinson 7). After much reflection, Geisel decided he would have to leave out all adjectives, adverbs, and other descriptive words to keep his book's vocabulary at a minimum. Geisel looked down the list, found the first two words that rhymed, and started making a story. The words he chose to build around were "cat" and "hat" (Morgan 154). The story he created became one of his most famous, well-loved books, The Cat in the Hat.

After seeing and not believing the success of Geisel's book, his publisher further challenged Geisel to write another book. This time Geisel was limited to a carefully chosen list of only 100 words. Again, Geisel created a masterpiece. He created Green Eggs and Ham using only a staggering fifty of those new vocabulary words for his children



readers (Morgan 170). This book became and still is the third best-selling book in the English language (Robinson 7). Geisel wrote other Dr. Seuss books as a response to challenges from other friends and peers.

Throughout his entire writing career, Geisel believed traveling would give him fresh ideas for his writing. Therefore, Ted and Helen traveled around the globe to see new and amazing places, peoples, and animals. Geisel often drew ideas from these travels. For example, while visiting the Serengeti while on safari around Mount Kenya, Geisel drew the idea for his silk-tufted Truffula trees in The Lorax (Morgan 210). He and Helen visited museums, historical sites, churches, ruins, small villages, and large cities. On one of these trips, though, Helen complained of not feeling well. She was sick upon getting back to the United States and would never fully recover. Geisel remained at her side during her lengthy sickness and finally her death.

Helen's death almost devastated Geisel. He found himself alone and helpless in a world of finances, bills, and business from which Helen had shielded him. In the ensuing weeks, Geisel found refuge in Audrey Stone Dimond, who had assisted Helen in editing his works. Moreover, Audrey and her husband, Grey, had been Ted's and Helen's best friends for years. Audrey felt for Geisel, and she and Ted decided to marry. She told Grey, "Ted needs me" (Morgan 200), and she divorced. Audrey and Ted married immediately. Geisel explained his seemingly erratic behavior this way: "My best friend is being divorced and I'm going to Reno to comfort his wife" (Morgan 201).

Before settling into their La Jolla estate, Geisel and Audrey Stone Geisel took a seven week trip around the world. For the remainder of his life, Ted and Audrey were

inseparable. She was as much an inspiration for his works as a proofreader and editor. At her insistence, Geisel became more involved in Random House, the establishment of Beginner Books, and the Theodore Geisel Foundation which awards millions of dollars every year to beginning children's writers (Morgan 215). Geisel's stock and shares in publishing house organizations and investments skyrocketed with Audrey's business sense. But Geisel didn't care for such things; he never had. He only loved drawing and writing (Brunzel 113).

As their book sales and publishing houses started and continued to grow, Audrey wished Geisel to use his popularity in order to further promote their investments. Geisel did not want to. He stayed away from the media to the extent that he read neither his own reviews nor those reviews of other children's literature. But Audrey was persistent. And, toward the end of his life, Geisel did make a handful of appearances, book signings, and speeches for small to medium-sized public events. On one such occasion, Geisel delivered an impromptu commencement speech to a graduating class at Dartmouth (Bedno 3). It was impromptu because Geisel found out he was the speaker only moments before he was supposed to deliver his speech. He thought he had been asked to Dartmouth's graduation only to receive his third honorary degree. However, upon finding out that Dartmouth had invited him to deliver the commencement address, he quickly scribbled the following seventy-five second speech which received a standing ovation. The speech is typical of Geisel's life, the poetry he writes as Dr. Seuss, and the messages his Dr. Seuss books offer:

*“My Uncle Terwilliger on the Art of Eating Popovers”*

My uncle ordered popovers

from the restaurant’s bill of fare.

And when they were served,

he regarded them

with a penetrating stare. . .

Then he spoke great Words of Wisdom

as he sat there on that chair:

“To eat these things,”

said my uncle,

“You must exercise great care.

You may swallow down what’s solid. . .

BUT. . .

You must spit out the air!”

And. . .

As you partake of the world’s bill of fare,

That’s darned good advice to follow.

Do a lot of spitting out the hot air

and be careful what you swallow. (Bedno 1)

### CHAPTER 3 DR. SEUSS BOOKS: THE CRITICAL RECEPTION

For many years, the *Dick and Jane* books were the accepted base for children's readers. This series of books was based on concepts deemed the most valuable and efficient methods of teaching kids to learn and to read. The *Dick and Jane* series offered children a simple set of easy words to learn. They presented these new vocabulary words in a slow, methodical manner, allowing young readers to learn one word thoroughly before presenting them with another. Consequently, educators believed children needed to understand the new word introduced to them in the story before confusing them with any additional vocabulary words (Brunzel 107). Furthermore, every *Dick and Jane* reader offered a concrete, easy to find moral. As Dick and Jane learned, their readers were supposed to learn as well. For example, when Dick learned the importance and inherent good of sharing with Jane, every reader would supposedly learn to and want to share with his or her sibling, neighbor, and classmate. Educators in the 1930's felt too many, complicated pictures caused unnecessary distraction from the vocabulary words and the lessons the readers meant to teach. Using this logic, *Dick and Jane* books were kept at a minimum regarding plots, words, and even pictures. A few bland pictures were sprinkled stingily through the most popular children's readers. These somewhat formal, businesslike books were generally accepted nationwide as the best type of literature for the instruction of youth. Consequently, when And to Think That I Saw it on Mulberry Street came out, critics eagerly badgered the unorthodox children's book (Cott 9).

Geisel knew his book would be met with much negative criticism when twenty-seven editors rejected it. However, he predicted Mulberry Street would still be a hit. The cause for his feelings came about from his study of the popular children's books and school readers at the time. He read several and studied how they were put together, what their contents were, and what their messages were. And he was bored. Geisel found the *Dick and Jane* readers and the rest of children's books dull, monotonous, and generally lacking life (Brunzel 107). Geisel contended his new children's book using fun word play and weird pictures would revolutionize children's readers. He argued children wanted to have fun while they read and learned.

When critics first read his unorthodox children's book, the negative criticisms flowed undauntedly. Some claimed Geisel's book was too different--that kids and parents alike would not know how to react to it. Others stated Geisel's weird drawings would distract readers from his words, which some critics believed inappropriate for children as well. Several critics found the verse and meter too hard for children to read because they were still too young to handle the jumpy rhythms (Cott 8). Moreover, early critics argued children would not take seriously Dr. Seuss' rhyming stories nor his fanciful illustrations. They believed children's books had to be written in prose because children wouldn't understand or appreciate rhyme (Cott 11). Still other critics were concerned with the plot of Geisel's new story (Cohen 12). They believed exemplary moral, ethical characters with respective behaviors represented the only way to teach young readers (Cohen 12). In Mulberry Street, Geisel penned a boy, Marco, who was not the perfect little boy with the perfectly happy family. Marco did not happily obey his father's word to the letter.

Marco's attitude was too independent, almost rebellious to a degree. All of the *Dick and Jane* readers before presented perfect children in perfect families away from any sort of conflict or potentially ornery situations (Brunzel 108). Furthermore, several critics felt children would not be able to relate to Marco's exaggerations (Cott 11). They felt the world Geisel had created through Marco was too fanciful--that children would know the content of the book was exaggerated and that these children would neither learn nor take any moral from Mulberry Street. These critics vowed Geisel's book was not necessarily aimed at transforming children into good citizens.

Geisel did not believe the negative criticisms he heard, though. He thought young readers would like his pictures. And, most importantly, Geisel believed children wanted to have fun while they read. He believed his unorthodox book gave them what they had really wanted: fun words, rhymes, pictures, and overall craziness (Kanfer 71). Also, Geisel thought children were tired of reading about perfect kids in perfect families. He believed children would relate to children who were a little ornery, a little rebellious, more than they would to Dick and Jane. Because children would associate more with Marco, Geisel felt children would believe Mulberry Street's exaggerated fantasy element. Additionally, Geisel questioned why children's books were required to teach a moral in the first place (Brunzel 107). He argued his book taught the value of words and dreams--enough of a moral or message for any child. Besides, he thought children could sense a moral coming a mile away and would turn themselves off because of it (Brunzel 108). So, Geisel's book offered no specific moral, but left itself open to one. Geisel argued, his

readers were becoming better people just through learning to read. He knew children would like it; he knew children would benefit from it.

Mulberry Street sold well. Consumers gobbled up Geisel's story full of weird illustrations, exaggeration, and fantasy. Upon the sudden success of this first Dr. Seuss book, critics were quick to praise Geisel's ingenuity. One of the first, and more than likely the shortest, came from Clifton Fadiman's book column in *The New Yorker* on November 6, 1937, and, since it stirred such a profound impact, Geisel could recite it even in the final year of his life: "They say it's for children, but better get a copy for yourself and marvel at the good Dr. Seuss' impossible pictures and the moral tale of the little boy who exaggerated not wisely but too well" (Morgan 84). Later, other reviewers promoted Mulberry Street as a prima dona in children's literature. Geisel's book received marvelous reviews, filling him with unbridled optimism. The children's literature world, though, considered Geisel a rowdy, undisciplined revolutionary (Morgan 84). Dr. Seuss was the first writer of children's stories to match the pictures with the words in order to enhance children's enjoyment of the story (Ort 136). Additionally, the link between the illustrations and the words allowed and challenged children who could not yet read to follow along and figure out what was happening in the story as well as learning some word meanings (Robinson 5). Most critics agreed Geisel's drawings benefitted rather than distracted child readers. Most critics also realized children enjoyed Geisel's use of rhythm and rhyme (Kanfer 71). Children loved the sounds and the sing-songy rhythms of the words and choppy sentences.

Even though And to Think That I Saw it on Mulberry Street reviewed favorably and sold 31,600 copies, the book did not make Geisel an instant success (Morgan 85). America was still recovering from the Great Depression. Besides, there was not much of a market for children's books. However, Geisel's Dr. Seuss books would change that. By the late 1950's, the pen-name Dr. Seuss had become a household word. Geisel sold collectively a few millions copies of his children's books (Morgan 154). Reviews praised his use of language, meter, rhyme, story, and illustration. Geisel had become the leader in children's literature both in the entertainment side and the educational side of popularity.

Dr. Seuss books as a whole were met with negative criticism even after the success of Geisel's first dozen books. Some critics found it necessary to focus on what they deemed negative similarities in his first books (Kanfer 71). They nitpicked, for some reason, even though the majority of educators, parents, and critics found Geisel's books entertaining and beneficial for children. Certain critics centered on the alliances his readers made while reading. Often, in Geisel's Dr. Seuss books, readers ally themselves with antagonists, or characters with traditional antagonistic qualities (Brunzel 110). Many of Geisel's main characters are a bit rebellious, or at least, do not conform to society. For example, Bartholomew Cubbins rebels against his king and entire kingdom because he thinks they are wrong (Bartholomew & the Oobleck); Marco, the boy fishing, does not listen when the farmer McElligot tells him there are no fish in his pond (McElligot's Pool); and in another instance, the main character believes that he can do a better job than the zookeeper (If I Ran the Zoo) and the Master of the Ceremonies at the circus (If I Ran the Circus).



A few other critics believed Geisel's first dozen books omitted the family (Dempsey 1). They believed young readers would miss family in Geisel's books, as his books to that point exhibited a young main character on his or her own. Other members of the family were just not mentioned. Neither was any sort of reason offered for their absence; the main characters were simply having adventures on their own. Some critics thought readers would misinterpret the Dr. Seuss books as trying to take away parents' authority and necessity (Brunzel 165). Furthermore, these critics argued young readers would probably themselves try to become too independent at too young an age. They accused Geisel of trying to create rebellious children who would, in turn, try to undermine the establishment of parenthood.

Other critics chimed in, claiming Geisel's Dr. Seuss books parodied other establishments such as society and government (Cott 35). These critics believed his books such as Bartholomew & the Oobleck made fun of the established government, or at least tried to make government look bad in the eyes of his readers. These critics thought Geisel encouraged his young readers to question authority and society in general. In their view, If I Ran the Zoo and If I Ran the Circus clearly stated the zoo and circus officials cannot manage their respective professions to the standards even children demand (Cott 35). Furthermore, these books seemed to argue that a child such as the reader her/himself could run the zoo and the circus. A handful of critics claimed these books put down these professions. In these ways, a few critics maintained some of the underlying principles in Geisel's books were detrimental to children in the societal values they exhibit (Brunzel 113).

Upon hearing this negative criticism, Geisel was upset. He never intended to make children rebellious and undermine parenting. He did not think his books were detrimental in any way, but he did, however, want his readers, regardless how young, to question. And, Geisel did mildly satirize parenting, society, and the government. His satires were light-hearted and harmless at their worst. Geisel never had to refute these negative criticisms of his books, though. Other critics jumped to his defense, as if protecting this writer whom they knew did not like to openly defend his works, let alone meet any media. The *New York Times* claimed Geisel's books were "highly original and entertaining" and "Dr. Seuss' picture books partake of the better qualities of those peculiarly American institutions, the funny papers, and the tall tale. . . [they are] masterly interpretations of the mind of a child in the act of creating those stories with which children often amuse themselves and bolster their self-respect" (Morgan 84). Jonathan Cott argued in his review, *The Good Dr. Seuss*: "Simply and unselfconsciously, Dr. Seuss has retained a fresh perceiving system, naturally communicating an understanding of children's energies, needs, and desires" (11). Geisel knew children have the desire to figure things out on their own and that they are not exemplary. Geisel knew children like to have fun. Consequently, by creating ornery, realistic kids, Geisel's young readers could relate and understand without the distractions of outside social conventions.

Geisel's later books such as Daisy-Head Mayzie, Oh, the Places You'll Go! and You're Only Old Once! display a subtle difference in the books' primary target audience. Geisel clearly wrote these books for adults as much as he did for young children. These last Dr. Seuss books develop themes relevant to the adult generation: tolerating different

types of peoples and their ideas; holding on to dreams, goals, and ambitions; and remembering the important things in life, rather than focusing on bad health due to aging. Each book has a message applicable to the same audience he addressed in Mulberry Street and in his Bartholomew books. He figured his initial audience was generally in its late forties by then anyhow. He also figured they could, in turn, read these books along with his earlier books to their children and maybe their children's children. Perhaps the subtitle of You're Only Old Once!, *A Book for Obsolete Children*, sums up one of Geisel's underlying principles in his last books.

## CHAPTER 4

## THE ART OF GEISEL'S WRITING

Each of Geisel's books has a flow which captivates the reader to keep turning the pages. Lorrene Love Ort writes in her article in *Elementary English*, "Read aloud a Seuss book *once* to a young audience and there is a well-eared and big-eyed quiet, but read the book through *twice* and the audience will have disappeared! The second-time-'round everybody gets into the act and recites the yarn in snatches or by the yard!" (142). Readers can do this because of the smooth flow of ideas from one thought, from one page, to the next.

One of the major factors contributing to Geisel's fluency is his use of paragraphing. He knows how to keep the action and characters in motion through his breaking up of text into small paragraphs. Consequently, readers get into a sort of rhythm themselves, reading the words, looking at the pictures, and turning the pages as Geisel's wording and paragraphing dictate. Geisel's ability stems from a kinesthetic intelligence under which his words and illustrations move the body of the piece as well as the bodies of their characters (Robinson 6). For instance, Geisel uses ellipses to coax his readers into turning the page in The Cat in the Hat, ending one page with "But that is not all! Oh, no./ That is not all . . ." (18).

Geisel also pulls his readers through the book with his illustrations. In Green Eggs and Ham he leaves one fold of pages with Sam I Am on a train plummeting off a railroad ramp toward a fishing boat chugging across a body of water (44-5). By showing Sam I

Am and the train in mid-air, the reader wants to turn the page in order to see their outcome in the next scene. Possibly Geisel's ability to use both words and illustrations, together or separately, to enhance the overall flow of his books can be attributed to his work in Hollywood studios during the war where he did win the highest American award for film-making (Robinson 6).

In order to keep his readers turning pages, Geisel also employs a type of paragraphing or word placement unique to his Dr. Seuss books. He writes one word paragraphs in certain instances, or he may place a few words on a whole page to provoke a need to turn the page in his readers. For example, at the moment of the food-skeptic's pure exhaustion in Green Eggs and Ham, Geisel writes: "Sam!/ If you will let me be,/ I will try them./ You will see (54). No words appear on the ensuing page or on the next full fold-out pages. He uses only an illustration to show the actual trying of the green eggs and ham. Geisel does not reveal the food-skeptic's reaction in text until the right page of the next fold (59). This forces readers to think about and guess the reaction before they turn the page and realize the *dog's* epiphany. This word placement, or lack of wording, pushes the flow of the story. In a similar fashion, Geisel departs from his generally text-lengthy pages to a page-fold with respectively fewer words on it to mark an important moment in How the Grinch Stole Christmas! Geisel pens only the following to lure the reader into the flow of the tale of Who-ville: "Then he got an idea!/ An awful idea!/ THE GRINCH/ GOT A WONDERFUL, AWFUL IDEA!"

Geisel's use of dialogue also adds to the fluency of his Dr. Seuss books. The majority of his books are structured around the back-and-forth dialogues of a protagonist

and an antagonist. Green Eggs and Ham, for example, centers on the verbal argument between Sam I am and the dog-like, food-skeptical protagonist. All of the events are carried by what they say to each other. Geisel's wild and wacky illustrations help, of course. But in the actual text, there is nothing to relate any action except their dialogue. In The Lorax, once the curious and adventuresome little boy pays him, the Once-ler verbally tells the rest of the entire book as a story about the Truffula trees and the Thneed factory. The Butter Battle Book, on the other hand, consists of more of a conventional mixture of dialogue and narration. In this book, too, the dialogue vacillates back and forth between two main characters. This type of conversation-writing keeps the story moving, the pages turning, and the reader reading.

According to Morgan, Geisel attributed his rhythmic abilities with words to his mother. "She read bedtime stories to them, and often they fell asleep as she chanted softly, in the way she had learned as she sold pies, 'Apple, mince, lemon . . . peach, apricot, pineapple . . . blueberry, coconut, custard and SQUASH!'" (6-7). Geisel began to think about things with his mother's instincts for rhythm. In fact, it was rhythm that changed his life forever. When Ted and Helen were on a steamship, he heard the rhythm of the beat of the engines as they pushed them across the Atlantic. Their beat was a rhythm that "reverberated in Geisel's head: Da-da-DA-da-da-DUM-DUM, da-DA-da-da-DUM" (Morgan 80). This chugging beat from the boat's engines kept pounding through his head the remainder of the trip, and even after he set foot back in New York, he kept reciting the words "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" to the rhythm. Gradually those words changed to: "And that is a story that on one can beat, and to think that I saw it on

Mulberry Street” (Morgan 81), words that became part of his first book. And that rhythm, anapestic tetrameter, would be one that he would use over and over in his other books. In fact, some of his titles alone mark his use of the meter: And To Think That I Saw it on Mulberry Street, How the Grinch Stole Christmas, The Cat in the Hat, Yertle the Turtle, and Green Eggs and Ham. This anapestic tetrameter, noted children’s literature professor Francelia Butler, is “rollicking and easily remembered . . . so rhythmic it can be skipped to” (Morgan 144).

The rhythms in Dr. Seuss books are not necessarily smooth, flowing rhythms. Rather, they are bouncy and hopping, more fit to “be skipped to.” In The Cat in the Hat, for instance, when the boy-speaker and his sister Sally deal with Thing 1 and Thing 2 Geisel writes: ““They should not be here/ When your mother is not!/ Put them out! Put them out!”/ Said the fish in the pot”(37). Geisel’s stop-n-go rhythms are also evident in Yertle the Turtle: “And that plain little Mack did a plain little thing./ *He burped!* And his burp shook the throne of the king!” These bouncy rhythms, including their pauses, stops, and even choppy sentences to quicken action, keep readers awake and on edge. When readers read bouncy rhythms with strategic, plot-induced interruptions, they are compelled to stay alert and interested, as opposed to being lulled to sleep by a smooth, lullaby rhythm (Kanfer 71). Geisel’s skipping rhythms add to the overall excitement of reading Dr. Seuss books.

When Mulberry Street was published, key figures in children’s literature and educators generally thought prose was the only way to teach children. In other words, neither reading experts nor book publishers thought children would take rhyming literature

seriously (Brunzel 107). Rhyming works merely entertained children. Even if they contained and taught a message, experts contended, they surely could not teach vocabulary, grammar, and relations between words. They likened rhyming works to fairy tales which, although enjoyed by children, did little to educate them beyond teaching universal themes such as good versus bad (Abdulla 2).

Geisel set out to prove children's literature could be educational on a more scholarly level while entertaining at the same time. Furthermore, he believed the use of rhyme was a sure way to lighten the mood of the reader and a sure way for the readers--especially the young ones--to have fun while reading and learning and learning to read. "In verse you can repeat," [Geisel] said. "It becomes part of the pattern. To teach, you have to repeat and repeat and repeat" (Morgan 155). Also, his desire to rhyme played a huge role in his word choice for his books.

For example, when Geisel was given word lists from which to compose entire books such as The Cat in the Hat he could only choose rhyming words on the list. Therefore, the availability of rhyming words on the word lists dictated for the most part the content of the story he was to compose. When composing this book, Geisel wanted to incorporate the list words "ship," "fish," and "ball." But he was not sure how to use them with his creation of the cat in the hat. He couldn't just list them to explain what they were. Likewise, he couldn't give up his intent to rhyme the entire story. He had to come up with a way to incorporate those words (among others) with his cat in the hat and somehow make all the sentences rhyme. Eventually, he came up with the following dialogue spoken by the cat in the hat: "I can hold up the fish!// And a little toy ship!// And



look!/ I can hop up and down on the ball!” (18). In this manner, Geisel invented entire stories and scenarios, shaped by his goal to rhyme. The headaches and hardships Geisel endured in order to rhyme his books attest to the importance he placed on rhyme in children’s literature.

While bored in Oxford classes, Geisel began combining words when he combined animal parts in his weird doodles (Morgan 44). He tried to name the winged-lions and antlered-dogs he drew. He accomplished this through word-compounds. However, his real word-invention began with concocting names for characters in his cartoons and poems. In one of his earliest poems, he coined the “Newport Van Blecks” in order to rhyme with the word “sex.” He loved word play as well. The title of one of his earlier cartoon works published in *Judge* magazine sums up his love for word play: “The Tough Coughs as he Ploughs the Dough,” or as he liked to pronounce it: “The Tuff Cuffs as he Pluffs the Duff” (Morgan 69). As time progressed, so did Geisel’s invention of onomatopoeic words and other nonsense words. While at Oxford, he took an Old English class and the grammar rules he learned from that class could possibly be the basis for his linguistic inventions. He created many terms such as “snarggled,” “cruffulous,” “smogulous,” and “Swomee-Swans” (Lorax). He invented “Gluppity-Glupp” and “Schloppity-Schlopp” (Lorax). Geisel also coined “Oobleck” (Bartholomew) and “Lolla-Lee-Lou” (Yertle) and “Hakken-Kraks” (Oh! The Places), among others. In fact, Geisel even invented his own alphabet in *Dr. Seuss’s ABC* book! What makes all of his word-inventions unique, though, are the ways in which he defines, incorporates, and explains them. Sometimes Geisel uses textual hints to *explain* what a term means; other times he

uses his colorful illustrations to enlighten the reader. However, even without these hints, readers can usually decipher his *new* words' meanings through their spellings and their sounds. For example, "Gluppity-Glupp" and "Schloppity-Schlopp" sound like some kind of muck and "Hakken-Kraks" sound like mean creatures. Geisel is as much a master at combining words, sounds, and meanings as he is at combining pictures and text.

The position of ideas in Geisel's Dr. Seuss books is another factor that adds to their zest, to their appeal. Geisel firmly believes in the old adage that "practice makes permanence." Because his books are intended to teach his readers, they rely heavily on repetition. Geisel uses repetition of words in The Cat in the Hat when he lists all that the cat can balance: the cat starts out with a fish, then adds a ball, and then adds a book (14-17). When Geisel adds something to the cat's repertoire, however, he re-accounts everything the cat added before. Retelling the fish and the ball every time reaffirms that readers learn them. Geisel also repeats stanzas that he feels have an important message or relevance to his story. In Horton Hatches the Egg, for instance, the following stanza is repeated six times: "I meant what I said/ And I said what I meant. . . / An elephant's faithful/ One hundred per cent!" With this repetition, Geisel hopes to instill in the reader both the Horton's loyalty as well as the importance of loyalty as a characteristic in general. Geisel uses repetition in these Dr. Seuss books to underscore truths for his readers.

Dr. Seuss books' fresh, wild juxtaposition of unusual ideas adds to the excitement of reading them. Only in Geisel's Horton Hatches the Egg will readers ever get a story and see an elephant sitting on an egg. Moreover, Horton sits on the egg up a small tree, bent over by his weight, plucked out of the ground, and placed in a pot on a trailer pulled

by a pickup. However, everything could logically, but unrealistically, happen: an elephant could egg-sit, he could sit in a tree, a tree could be placed in a giant flower-pot, and the whole thing could be hauled on a trailer. But the absurdity, the unlikely yoking together of these ideas stimulates and entertains readers. This scenario creates a fresh image Geisel enhances with his wild illustrations. In another book, Geisel creates a fox who wears socks who meets up with a civilization of beetles with paddles in a bottle (Fox in Socks). In another, he has a dog eating green eggs and ham on a boat with a goat in the dark in the rain (Green Eggs and Ham). These impossible situations, mixed with perfect reason and logic, come to life in the minds and imaginations of Dr. Seuss' readers.

Stemming from his juxtaposition of different things and ideas, Geisel created other wacky things from scratch. Geisel began inventing things in his first books and continued to make-up not-so-believable things in such a realistic, logical way that readers believe they are real--or that they could happen. Geisel's realism-based fantasy entertains and teaches readers from the creation of new, exaggerated animals in Mulberry Street to the oobleck in Bartholomew and the Oobleck. The oobleck *could* happen. A king or leader could have his scientists send something new from the sky because the king was bored with the same old seasons. The stuff that rains down could be something new, something that sticks to everything. Certainly what happens to the Kingdom of Didd caused by the raining of the sticky oobleck would actually happen if a similar event took place here. This is logical fantasy (Kanfer 71). In The Butter Battle Book, Geisel creates gigantic Blue-Gooers for the Yooks and the Zooks that sprinkle blue goo on each other. Geisel also creates the Grinch. At other times, Geisel's creations are simply minor things to add

flavor such as the sweater-like Thneeds in The Lorax, the mean Hakken-Krak monsters in Oh! The Places You'll Go!, and Thing 1 and Thing 2 in The Cat in the Hat. Because of fun and wacky creations such as these, characters like talking turtles (Yertle the Turtle) and South-going Sneetches (The Sneetches and Other Stories) seem ordinary; they become the norm. What matters is these believable, unbelievable grand schemes, fantasy lands, strange animals, and craggity machines in the Dr. Seuss books pull readers into world where they are so interested, where they are having so much fun they forget they are reading and learning.

Another literary trick Geisel uses to keep his readers turning pages Lorrene Love Ort deems “secure suspense.” “Secure suspense” occurs when he “baits his young audience with the lip-pursing drama of danger; he also adds a saucy feather of fun to his illustrations to serve as a sure and satisfying leaven of levity” (136-7). “Secure suspense” is achieved when the reader feels safe in the qualities of the main character, yet is given an uncertain set of circumstances in which that character is *tested*. In other words, it is not a scary suspense; rather, it is a light-hearted *Oh, no*-type of mini-drama. One such example Ort offers is of Thidwick the Big-Hearted Moose who survives all sorts of dangerous adventures unscratched. He is “aided and abetted by both nature and Dr. Seuss in his one-in-a-lifetime escape from a fate worse than that of a Bingle Bug” (137). And, even when Thidwick faces five exuberant hunters the reader *knows* Thidwick will survive, yet the big-hearted moose’s fate remains questionable at many times: “He gasped! He felt faint! And the whole/ world grew fuzzy! Thidwick was finished, completely. . . / . . . or WAS he. . .?” (Thidwick the Big-Hearted Moose). Geisel employs this “secure suspense” in nearly

all of his works in order to suspend his readers in drama without worrying them.

Geisel uses the *secure suspense* device in several of his books. In The Cat in the Hat just as Thing 1 and Thing 2 are destroying the children's house, their fish sees their mother coming home. They know they will be in big trouble if she comes home and finds the house in such a mess. ““So, DO something! Fast!” said the fish./ “Do you hear!/ I saw her. Your mother!/ Your mother is near!”” Readers know that everything will work out. They know that somehow the cat in the hat will save the day. They just don't know how. In Horton Hatches the Egg suspense builds throughout the book as to when and how the egg that Horton sits on will hatch. Again, readers feel secure that the egg will hatch; they read about all the hardships Horton endures to hatch it. These hardships constitute the suspense. In the Bartholomew books, young readers feel secure knowing Bartholomew and the Kingdom of Didd will survive happily. However, Geisel builds drama when another hat keeps appearing every time he removes one and when the oobleck keeps falling from the sky.

Through his mastery of literary devices, Geisel creates a series of children's books that read fluidly from thought to thought, from cover to cover. Geisel implements the literary conventions of repetition, word placement, dialogue, invention, and juxtaposition of unusual ideas in his writing. Even though his books contain these literary devices, they appear as simple stories. Geisel's superior ability to melt them into a single, flowing plot disguises these devices.

## CHAPTER 5

## THEMES IN DR. SEUSS BOOKS

Dr. Seuss books are more than just cute books with wild pictures, fun word-play, and imaginative literary conventions. Geisel engineers endearing themes in each of his highly creative books. He is concerned with teaching or showing his readers how to get along better in their personal, family, and social lives (Abdulla 2). He also remains passionately interested in politics (“Political” 1). Moreover, almost every Dr. Seuss book also has a satirical edge, hidden by Geisel’s creativity and imagination. His works are satirical because they hold up vices, follies, stupidities, and abuses to ridicule (“Satire” 1193).

In 1955, in the wake of a popular book by Rudolf Flesch, *Why Johnny Can’t Read*, Geisel became determined to write fun books which would foster *growth* in his readers. On reading John Hersey’s response to *Why Johnny Can’t Read* in Life Magazine about how the school primer was an “antiseptic little sugar-book showing how Tom and Betty have fun at home and school” (Morgan 153), Geisel was convinced that children needed different kind of readers. He agreed with Hersey who asked: “why should [children] not have pictures that widen rather than narrow the associative richness the children give to the words they illustrate--drawings like those of the wonderfully imaginative geniuses among children’s illustrators, Tenneil, Howard Pyle, ‘Dr. Seuss,’ Walt Disney?” (Morgan 154). Consequently, Geisel was challenged to write a children’s reader using a word list in order to teach children vocabulary words as well as a message.

From this word list and Geisel's imagination, The Cat in The Hat resulted. Some school librarians throughout The United States and western Europe called Geisel's book "too jokey" (Morgan 175). However, parents all over bought the book--and the rest of his Dr. Seuss books--in mass because "Dr. Seuss made reading fun" (Morgan 175). Geisel's books were also used for teaching adults to read. They were often used in prisons because an illiterate old convict would reject getting a children's reader, yet he would take to a Dr. Seuss book. His books were used in private homes, schools, and other institutions to teach the young and old alike to read. "Teaching a child to read is a family matter. Books should be stacked around. Pretty soon most kids will get curious and want to read them" (Morgan 278).

Geisel's books help children grow as readers and as people because of the qualities he teaches them through his Dr. Seuss books. When they read such children's books as The Cat in the Hat, Green Eggs and Ham, Fox in Socks, and One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish, readers realize they are learning. They know that the rhyme, the rhythm, the repetition, and the sequence of ideas and the pictures help them learn how to read. Moreover, because Geisel creates such fun books with enchanting worlds and magical plots and fantasy characters, readers readily realize they are learning. They know they are learning new words and new ideas and are having fun doing it. While reading other popular Dr. Seuss books, readers know they are learning about or learning how to do something specific: I Can Draw it Myself, Dr. Seuss's ABC, The Foot Book, Mr. Brown Can Moo! Can You?, The Shape of Me and Other Stuff, Oh, the Things You Can Think, I

Can Read With My Eyes Shut!, and Oh Say Can You Say? However, like other Dr. Seuss books, these *Beginner Dr. Seuss Books* entrance younger readers with the same conventions and creative genius.

Dr. Seuss books are not limited to teaching vocabulary, though. They teach children essential qualities such as being open-minded. The little boy fishing in McElligot's pool doesn't put limits on possibilities like farmer McElligot does. Even though he merely dangles a hook in a small puddle, the hopeful boy reminds the farmer anything can happen. He reminds readers to keep their minds open and their hopes up, for the boy claims his small pool may be fed by an under-water stream which connects to a faraway ocean. Furthermore, strange fish of all different sizes could be swimming from the ocean, up that under-water stream just to nibble his hook. Although unlikely, it is logically possible, and farmer McElligot cannot deny that the boy could possibly catch a fish, even though the farmer remains closed-minded and skeptical. Through Geisel's illustrations, though, readers see the unusual fish swimming at the boy; readers realize that the boy is right to keep an open-mind--that almost anything is possible. Similarly, when the dog-like antagonist finally tries and likes the green eggs and ham in the book of that title, readers learn to be open-minded and try new things. In this case, readers learn that good things such as meeting a new friend or loving a new food can come from being open-minded.

Dr. Seuss books teach an array of skills necessary for living in society. For example, I Had Trouble Getting to Solla Sollew can help readers face adversity because the main character claims: "I learned there are troubles/ Of more than one kind./ Some



come from ahead/ And some come from behind./ But I've bought a big bat./ I'm all ready,  
you see./ Now my troubles are going/ To have troubles with me!" In Yertle the Turtle  
and Other Stories, Mack the lowly turtle offers advice on equality and justice: "I know, up  
on top/ you are seeing great sights,/ But down at the bottom/ we, too, should have rights."  
Likewise, in Horton Hears a Who! Horton offers readers this memorable line: "A person's  
a person, no matter how small."

Dr. Seuss books also teach young readers about diversity while promoting family  
togetherness. For example, the speaker of One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish states:  
"We see them come./ We see them go./ Some are fast./ And some are slow./ Some are  
high./ And some are low./ Not one of them/ is like another./ Don't ask us why./ Go ask  
your mother." Another speaker in Happy Birthday to You! teaches readers to be true to  
themselves: "Come on! Open your mouth and sound off at the sky!/ Shout loud at the top  
of your voice, "I AM I!"/ ME! I am I!/ And I may not know why/ But I know that I like it.  
/ *Three cheers!* I AM I!" Finally, I Can Read with My Eyes Shut! provides advice on the  
importance of reading: "The more that you read,/ the more things you will know./ The  
more that you learn, the more places you'll go."

Another way Dr. Seuss books teach readers maturity is by showing them how to  
share. Sam I Am shares his green eggs and ham. All of the Whos of Who-ville share  
Christmas dinner with the Grinch even after he tries to steal Christmas from them. In each  
case, the sharing benefits all and leads to greater friendships. More importantly, readers  
see sharing leads to *happily ever after*. Geisel teaches readers loyalty in Horton Hatches

the Egg, he shows them kindness in Thidwick the Big-Hearted Moose, and he teaches them self-esteem even though they may be *different* in Daisy-Head Mayzie.

Dr. Seuss books also teach other social conventions such as being conscious of others' feelings. Horton Hears a Who!, for example, depicts the same elephant hero from previous books meeting up with a member of a society much different from his. With intentions of trying to help this Who, Horton learns that different societies have different norms. Also, words and actions can and often do mean different things to him than they do to others. The August 1954 *Des Moines Register* called the book highly original in its social implications and considered it "a rhymed lesson in protection of minorities and their rights." Apparently, the American general public agreed, because Horton Hears a Who! was nominated for the Jane Addams Children's Book Award, which rewards books intended to overcome "racial prejudice and suspicion of minorities" (Morgan 151).

Geisel also takes readers on a social adventure in The Cat in the Hat during which two children face the mishaps of an insensitive cat. While readers see the cat in the hat merely wants to have fun, they also recognize the possible trouble the cat could get the two kids in with their mother. Even though most readers side with the cat, they understand he is not necessarily sensitive to the two kids' feelings because they feel pestered by the cat, and they are worried he'll get them in trouble. Again, children learn even though their actions may be based on good intentions, they have to be aware what those actions might mean to others.

Geisel's Dr. Seuss books are wide enough in scope to incorporate learning, to teach social skills, and to satirize other things at the same time. Geisel had followed and

been concerned about politics and political issues since early childhood. During the Prohibition years his father was forced to shut down his beer making facility. Consequently, at an early age Geisel understood the importance and implications of political issues. He followed politics throughout high school to the extent that he drew political cartoons and wrote columns on political issues in the school paper. The first World War began when Geisel was in high school and did not come to an end until he was on his way to Dartmouth. Because of his German heritage, Geisel's interest in the war was intense. Therefore, he continued to follow politics closely throughout his college career (Morgan 34). Even after attending Dartmouth and spending time overseas at Oxford University, Geisel remained extremely interested in and involved in political issues for the rest of his life. As noted earlier, Geisel worked on creating war documentaries during the Second World War. After the war, he regularly wrote letters to congressmen asking them to explain their positions more clearly or badgering them concerning their platforms and their broken promises. He often wrote presidents and met seven Presidents of the United States (Morgan 256). Also, he wrote poems to friends, and he wrote other poems for publication in different political magazines concerning his opinions of state and national proposals and events (Bedno 1).

Geisel's political interest is evident in many of his Dr. Seuss books. Bartholomew and the Oobleck satirizes governments, specifically Naziism and communism. This book was written in 1949, post World War II. Many hardships and carry-overs from the war were still present in Europe where Geisel liked to travel. So carry-over from that war also existed in the United States. This book starts off with a leader, in this case a king, who

wants to glorify himself. Instead of gaining fame by ruling the world such as Hitler, Geisel's king wishes to gain fame in a more trivial manner. This king claims he is tired of the same old seasons, and he wishes to create another season where something new will fall from the sky. By creating something new, the King of Didd wants to go down in history for his famous accomplishment. Recognition of the Axis powers' aspirations concerning the same issue was prevalent at this time. Geisel uses the King of Didd to satirize Hitler and Mussolini who let their personal aspirations become obsession (MacDonald 12). He satirizes their blind obsession with power and wanting to *change* history by mirroring them with cartoon likenesses. His satire trivializes corrupt leaders by likening the world-important objects of their desires to a sticky, green oobleck.

Moreover, other factors included in Geisel's book coincide with the events leading up to World War II. For example, the King of Didd becomes detached from his kingdom and disillusioned with his followers' wishes. He mistakenly believes the inhabitants of his kingdom long for what he wishes. Moreover, the king does not make himself available to any commoners, only associating himself with a tight-knit set of "yes-men." The King's wish is granted, and a green, sticky goo falls from the sky and begins to gel up everything. After Bartholomew realizes the folly of the Kings' wish, he can not get a message to the king, nor can he talk to him. Bartholomew has to go through so much "red-tape" and so many channels of incompetent men, unqualified to make any decisions, that he nearly misses saving the day. But he does get to the King just in time, and the King does realize he is wrong and stops the oobleck just as it's ready to engulf his entire kingdom. Perhaps Geisel wishes to satirize the dangers of a leader not being in touch with his followers.

Perhaps he's trying to insinuate the possible dangers of people not keeping up with their leaders. And, he is trying to accomplish these objectives in a way even children can understand.

Yertle the Turtle also ridicules politics and systems of government. This book was published in 1958, a time in which the Soviet Union and the United States were engaged in a cold war. Greed made up a part of this silent struggle between the world's two strongest powers: greed to be better, greed to have more, greed for total control. Hence, a major theme in Yertle the Turtle is greed. Yertle the turtle is King of a nice, little pond on the Island of Sala-ma-Sond. Everything in his kingdom is happy until he decides all he rules is too small. He decides he wants to rule all that he sees.

Once all of his followers, the turtles of the nice little pond, agree Yertle does, in fact, rule all he sees, he wants to see more. He forces all of his followers to obey his command, building a turtle-tower of themselves which he can climb upon and see more. Perched atop the tower, he orders more and more turtles to add to the tower, making it taller. Yertle orders this without regard for the well-being of any of his turtles in the tower. They work extremely hard for him and his purely selfish obsession to rule more which lowly Mack, the turtle getting smushed at the bottom of the tower, calls to his attention. Mack begs Yertle to come down and let them be, but Yertle is not concerned about his turtles. He only wishes for more *power*. Geisel's book mirrors the Soviet Union's attitudes and actions during the Cold War ("Political" 2). Considering the many letters Geisel wrote regarding his problems with the governing of the Russians and the political cartoons he drew for magazines taking cracks at communists (Morgan 221), one

can safely speculate this book could have anti-Russian undertones. Ironically, after Geisel's death, the Soviet Union, like Yertle and the turtles of Sala-ma-Sond, collapsed due to its leader's lack of concern for and lack of respect for those he governed.

In 1984 at the height of the nuclear arms race, Geisel wrote The Butter Battle Book satirizing the dangers of nuclear war. Groups of protestors picketed the gates in front of the White House everyday. Books were written documenting the imminent destruction that such a war would cause. Other books were written depicting the possible events leading up to man's destruction of the Earth via nuclear war. Still others were written openly protesting America's part in nuclear weaponry and further arms research. Popular movies such as *War Games* and *The Day After* illustrated how a nuclear war could possibly begin and how a nuclear bomb would destroy a nation.

In The Butter Battle Book, Ted Geisel brings the opposing nations of the Yooks and the Zooks to life. They are in the middle of a cold war due to their different notions on how bread should be buttered: butter-side up versus butter-side down. Told from Grandpa Yooks' perspective, the ensuing arms race between these two *warring* nations escalates from merely having to police the wall separating them from the Zooks to each nation threatening the other with their Eight-Nozzled, Elephant-toted Boom-Blitz. The story ends with a Yook and a Zook standing face to face on the wall. Each holds in his hand a Big-Boy Boomeroo, which upon dropping, will blow the other side into "pork and wee beans" and "small smithereens!" Geisel ends this political satire as follows:

"Grandpa!" I shouted. "Be careful! Oh, gee!/ Who's going to drop it?/ Will you . . . ? Or will he . . . ?"/ "Be patient," said Grandpa. "We'll see./ We will see . . . ."

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Clearly, The Butter Battle Book parallels the nuclear arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States (MacDonald 154). Some critics disapprove of Geisel's likening the limits of communism versus the freedom of democracy to buttering bread (Garvey 423). He depicts the conflicting styles of eating buttered bread to enhance the triviality of the difference between the two otherwise similar parties. In the book, the way the Yooks and the Zooks eat their buttered bread marks the only difference between them. They have the same goals, the same science, the same fears, and the same misunderstanding of their enemy. These similarities mirror the qualities of the Russian and American people. Also, each people's quest to build a weapon to best their enemy mirrors the nuclear arms race in that each subsequent weapon invented is more destructive than the last. Moreover, both arms races advance to the same point--each nation holds the potential to destroy totally the other with a single movement of the hand. The race suddenly hits a stand-still, though, because each knows the only step left in this *war* is to use his weapon. And, the arms race between the Yooks and the Zooks parallels the arms race between the Americans and the Russians because the solution or resolution is up in the air.

In The Sneetches and Other Stories Geisel satirically attacks a number of kinds of discrimination. This book details the story of two types of Sneetches: "Now the Star-Belly Sneetches/ Had bellies with stars/ The Plain-Belly Sneetches/ Had none upon thars." The difference between the two otherwise exactly similar factions causes feelings of superiority and resentment in the Star-Belly Sneetches and the Plain-Belly Sneetches respectfully (Anderson 164). The Star-Belly Sneetches claim superiority over the Plain-



Belly Sneetches. Along comes the cat in the hat who “plays on the snobbishness of the factions and gets all [the Sneetches’] money by adding and subtracting stars in turn until the impoverished Sneetches realize snobbishness is silly” (Dohm 324). More importantly, readers should realize prejudice based on appearance is silly. The cat in the hat acts as the hero, illustrating the wrongs of discrimination to the Sneetches and to readers (Dohm 324).

Geisel was also troubled by other social ills. He was angry about the pollution and destruction of the environment and wanted to teach both children and adults the consequences of wronging nature (Cott 28). In an interview with children’s literary critic and writer, Jonathan Cott, Geisel said he was watching a herd of elephants cross a swimming hole in Kenya when the idea of a book he’d been trying to think of struck him: “All of the sudden my notes assembled mentally. I grabbed a laundry list that was lying around and wrote the whole book in an hour and a half. In The Lorax I was out to attack what I think are evil things and let the chips fall where they might” (Cott 28).

The Lorax tells the story of the Once-ler and his Thneed factory in a fantasy land full of bear-like Bar-ba-loots, Humming-Fish, Swomee-Swans, and beautiful Truffula trees. It details the resulting devastation of industrialization on nature when the Once-ler discovers a Thneed, something which everyone needs, can be made out of a Truffula tree (MacDonald 147). He begins chopping down trees and making Thneeds. Then, all of the Once-ler’s kin move in and build a giant factory. Subsequently, all of the creatures and critters are forced to leave. The factory pollutes the air and poisons the water. Suddenly, a little creature, the Lorax who speaks for the trees, warns them that they are destroying

the environment. But the Once-ler doesn't listen. Finally, the last of the Truffula trees is chopped down. Everyone leaves. The factory shuts down. The Lorax leaves, and the Once-ler finally recognizes the treeless, lifeless, smog-covered mess he made of the environment. He writes the word "UNLESS" on a pile of rocks and becomes a hermit in the ruins of his factory. Geisel leaves the *answer* up to his readers--young and old--but he makes his message clear in the Once-ler's explanation of UNLESS: "Unless someone like you/ cares a whole awful lot/ nothing is going to get better./ It's not."

And, when Geisel's environmental book came out, the "chips did fall." The Lorax became the center of a heated controversy because of its supposed criticism of the logging industry and its brainwashing of children to conserve the environment and its natural resources. The book has been banned in many school libraries throughout The United States. Because the town is a single-industry lumber town, outraged parents and loggers in Laytonville, California, forced teachers to remove the book from shelves because it "mock[s] the timber industry"; they believe their kids are being brainwashed (McNeil 67). Furthermore, environmentalists cite The Lorax as evidence the timber industry is partially to blame for the problem of a depleted ozone layer, some endangered animals, and the disappearing rainforest (McNeil 68). The controversy drew so much attention that finally Geisel himself was forced to comment on the issue: "I'm not saying logging people are bad. I live in a wooden house and sit in a wooden chair and write on paper" (McNeil 68). Geisel was not taking an unfair shot at the logging industry; he merely wanted to stir up some pro-Earth sentiment. Besides, if those opposed to the book would take the time to read it carefully, especially its ending, they would see that the Lorax protests cutting down

*all* of the Truffula trees. The end of the book requests once a Truffula tree is cut down, “Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care./ Give it clean water. And feed it fresh air. . . . Then the Lorax/ and all of his friends/ may come back.”

Geisel’s books also deal with topics of dreams, goals, and future aspirations. He begins Oh! The Places You’ll Go! with “Congratulations!/ Today is your day/ . . . You’re on your own. And you know what you know./ And YOU are the guy who’ll decide where to go.” This book contains strategies for decision-making and living life in the usual wacky, Seussian manner. The reader follows a boy weighing his options of what course to take during a turning-point in his life. The twists and turns, corners and side-roads, and ups and downs the boy wades through are relevant to almost any situation when a major decision must be made. For example, the book can help prepare a child’s attitude for beginning school, or it can help an adult make a location, career, or relationship choice. The book urges readers to follow their dreams. However, it also tells them that following dreams is not easy. Even with hard work, it warns them, “I’m sorry to say so/ but, sadly, it’s true/ that Bang-ups/ and Hang-ups/ *can* happen to you.” But that doesn’t mean they necessarily will. Geisel speaks to everyone in this book when he confidently writes no matter who and where you are, “you’re off to Great Places!”

Toward the end of his life, after being in hospitals for months for a series of illnesses, Geisel came up with an idea for what would become his last book. The book, You’re Only Old Once! A Book for Obsolete Children, laments the infirmities of old age and the indignities of the health-care system. It was written when he was “fed up with a social life consisting entirely of doctors” (Morgan 261). Again, a Dr. Seuss book was

surrounded by controversy. Children's literature critics thought the book's subject matter was too realistic, too depressing, even though the plot moves from the Golden years Clinic to the mythical land of Fotta-fa-Zee (Morgan 262). Other critics met the book with cautious and polite reviews, apparently scared to criticize Geisel's sensitive book too harshly. However, parents and grandparents across America were buying the book and reading it to children at bedtime. Adults were buying You're Only Old Once! in mass quantities for gifts for friends and for themselves; the first printing of two hundred thousand copies sold out in a couple of weeks (Morgan 265).

Even though Geisel's works have satirical themes, their entertainment value cannot be overlooked. Geisel fills every Dr. Seuss book with pure fun. Wacky illustrations and far-out ideas provide readers with amazing images of fantasy and crazy situations. For example, every time Bartholomew Cubbins takes off his hat, another bigger, more ornate hat appears under it (on his head), and the king gets angry because Bartholomew's hat is fancier than his. In another, Horton, the loyal elephant, sits on a Mayzie-Bird egg through rain and snow and is hauled to the circus as the main attraction. Other books show the dangerous adventures of Thidwick the Big-Hearted Moose and the wily adventures of children's favorite rascal, the Cat in the Hat. In yet another book, the Grinch tries to steal Christmas from Who-ville with the help of his small dog with a big horn strapped to his head. Fox in Socks, one of the most amazing books of tongue-twisters and word play, depicts the sequences of Lucky Luke licking the lake with a duck and the Tweedle-Beetles battling with paddles in a bottle. Sam I Am hassles and chases his friend through all sorts of interesting scenarios including being on a boat with a goat and being in a box with a fox

in order to coax him into trying green eggs and ham. The story of a stubborn North-going Sneetch facing off with a stubborn South-going Sneetch even when cities are built up around them is intriguing. The fantasy world of the Once-ler, his Thneed factories, and his invention of the Super-Axe-Hacker enthralls readers time after time. The Butter Battle Book craftily displays the escalation of weaponry between the Yooks and the Zooks. Geisel places King Yertle on top of a tower of turtles so Yertle can rule all he can see. Daisy-Head Mayzie details the sad events of a young girl in school who has a real-live daisy growing out of her head. Other wacky books like There's a Wocket in My Pocket and Hunches in Bunches engross readers with other strange, but maybe-slightly possible situations.

Examples such as these evince the creative genius Geisel put into the plot, word choice, juxtaposition of ideas, rhyme, purpose, and invention of every Dr. Seuss book. Moreover, each book is fabulously creative and features wildly imaginative illustrations which complement the story--or maybe the story complements the illustrations (Anderson 164). Either way, these Dr. Seuss books foster in readers the wish to follow along, the desire to read, the will to learn. Furthermore, Dr. Seuss books teach morals, offer messages concerning social conventions, and provide advice on becoming a better person, while often being satirical and always being highly entertaining.

## CHAPTER 6 THE LEGACY OF DR. SEUSS BOOKS

Ted Geisel's Dr. Seuss books have become the corner stone of children's literature and a major constituent of adult literature, as well. Dr. Seuss books have reached an astounding number of readers across the globe. However, the numbers of book sales and prices do not do justice to the sheer volume of those who actually grew up reading Dr. Seuss. In most cases, households buy only one copy of a particular Dr. Seuss book while that same household may have a number of readers. Therefore, the actual number of readers cannot be determined from sales. Additionally, millions more check Dr. Seuss books out of public and school libraries without ever purchasing them. The number of those who have grown up reading Dr. Seuss books cannot be determined.

Yet, the numbers of actual sales give a good idea of the influence Geisel's books have had upon three generations so far. While his first children's books sold very well for children's books, sales were not exceptional. None of his book sales were astounding until The Cat in the Hat first reached stores. The first one-hundred copy order of the book disappeared in a single day as did the next day's order of two-hundred-fifty (Morgan 156). Geisel had a strange contract between two publishers; one publisher could only sell his books to schools, while the other could only sell his books on the open market. Random House's sales, combined with Houghton Mifflin's school edition sales, totaled 12,000 copies per month the first couple of months--then rose from there (Morgan 156). The Cat in the Hat broke all sales records for children's books and jumped into high

positions in the sales of all books. Because of this book, a boom in children's literature erupted. From an overall sales standpoint, children's literature suddenly shot from its meager standing to an overwhelmingly stunning position of power. Publishers found out that besides being exceptionally popular, children's books have a much longer sales life than adult books.

The Cat in the Hat spurred sales of other Dr. Seuss books. The first printing of How the Grinch Stole Christmas sold in excess of 50,000 copies (Morgan 170). By this time the *New York Times* had compiled a list of the best-selling children's books of all time. Five of the top sixteen books were Dr. Seuss books (Morgan 170). Never before had one man, Ted Geisel, dominated a book-selling market. To put the list in perspective, though, Geisel had barely begun to write best-selling books. Next Geisel wrote his best-selling book, Green Eggs and Ham. Upon its release, this book would eventually sell tens of millions of copies worldwide, becoming the most popular of all Dr. Seuss books (Morgan 170). In fact, Green Eggs and Ham remains the third best-selling book of all time is written in English.

Even though some of his books started with low sales, they almost always ended up selling tens of thousands of copies. Geisel's The Lorax didn't sell well at first. Looking back, critics now believe conservation issues were too revolutionary for the times. However, about a decade later, when the environmental movement became widespread, sales of The Lorax took off (Morgan 211). It quickly became a best-seller. Unlike The Lorax, The Butter Battle Book quickly topped juvenile best-seller lists. It swept through the nation, making an appearance on adult best-seller lists. Years later Oh!

The Places You'll Go!, on the other hand, never hinted it would become a huge seller.

Early critics thought the book might be Geisel's last because of its summative platitudes of how to live life. Collectively, critics didn't think the book would have exceptional sales because it lacked the unique Seussian excitement to which readers had grown accustomed. But the book had exceptional sales. The book leaped to the top of the *New York Times* adult best-sellers list and remained there for two years, amassing total sales of 1.5 million copies during those two years (Morgan 283). This one book alone brought Geisel royalties of more than three million dollars in its first two years of publication. Geisel annually made approximately \$750,000 from Random House and another \$750,000 or more in royalties from Grolier Book Club sales (Morgan 257).

Several of Geisel's Dr. Seuss books became worldwide best-sellers. The Cat in the Hat, Green Eggs and Ham and Horton Hears a Who!, for example, were published in twenty different languages, including Braille (Morgan 224). They were huge sellers in nearly every nation in the world including western Europe, New Zealand, the Scandinavian countries, and Japan. In fact, The Butter Battle Book was televised in the Soviet Union on New Year's Day of 1990. "Right after that the U.S.S.R. began falling apart," Geisel liked to brag (Morgan 255). He was always proud of his political undertakings.

Theodore Geisel won numerous honors and awards for his film and literary works. He won an Academy Award for his work on the war film, Hitler Lives, for best short subject documentary in 1945. He won another Academy Award for Design of Death in 1947. Geisel won the Caldecotte Award in 1947, 1948, and 1950 for his books



McElligot's Pool, Bartholomew and the Oobleck, and If I Ran the Zoo, respectively. Moreover, he won an Oscar in 1951 for best animated Cartoon in "Gerald McBoing-Boing." Geisel won a couple of Pulitzer Prizes and several Emmy Awards for his creations of The Cat in the Hat, Green Eggs and Ham and How the Grinch Stole Christmas. In addition to these awards, Geisel received an honorary doctorate degree from his alma mater, Dartmouth. A couple of years later, in 1955, he received from Dartmouth what the university called a delayed doctorate to make his doctoral status official. Through the years, Geisel was awarded six more honorary doctorate degrees from different universities, mainly along the east coast. Geisel joked about his failure to obtain what he called a *real* doctorate from Oxford by adding his new doctoral signature onto his pseudonym dubbing himself "Dr. Dr. Seuss" (Brunzel 113).

Much of the popularity of Geisel's books is due to the different possible interpretations of his books. Most Dr. Seuss books, especially the last ones, can be read and understood on different cognitive levels. For example, The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins can be read as a cute, rhyming story about a boy who keeps *growing* another hat on his head each time he removes one. On another level, the King's jealousy over Bartholomew's hats can be read as a stab at the upper class' elitist views as other people gain more money, property, and stature in society. Similarly, Yertle the Turtle can be read as a funny tale about a greedy king turtle and his mishap with his tower of turtles. It can also be enjoyed as a political satire, ridiculing dictatorships and other forms of totalitarian governments. The Butter Battle Book can be read as an unending tale of some fantasy country, or it can be read as a satire on the escalation of the nuclear arms race and

the danger and uncertainty of a possible nuclear war. The Lorax, too, can be read on different levels according to the age and maturity of the reader. The Sneetches and Other Stories, Oh! The Places You'll Go!, and You're Only Old Once! are definitely intended to be read differently by readers of different ages and experiences. Consequently, Geisel's books are relevant for children of all ages. In fact, the Book-of-the-Month Club announced You're Only Old Once! as a book "For ages 95 and down" (Morgan 263). Arguably, most Dr. Seuss books are for ages 95 and down because almost anyone of any age can take something new from Geisel's books upon each reading.

In support of this argument, references to Geisel's Dr. Seuss books have appeared frequently in mainstream adult life. For example, Oh! The Places You'll Go! makes its annual graduation-month return to the best-seller list of *The New York Times* (Morgan 291). The Reverend Jesse Jackson gave a reading of Green Eggs and Ham on television on Saturday Night Live (Morgan 291). Dr. Seuss has been mentioned in *The Wall Street Journal* (Morgan 291) and on *The New York Times Book Review* (255) as a noteworthy child *and* adult writer. Geisel's contributions to the language were cited in two reference books published in 1992; *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* uses fourteen lines from Fox in Socks when discussing "compounds in context," and the sixteenth editions of *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, edited by Justin Kaplan, includes references from Horton Hatches the Egg and The Cat in the Hat (Morgan 292). Also, NASA designed an innovative unmanned craft for exploring deep space, named the Data Relay

Solar Electric Utility Spacecraft. NASA gave it the acronym of DRSEUS, and, of course, called it Dr. Seuss (Morgan 293). Finally, a giant cat in the hat has appeared in several Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parades.

Theodore Seuss Geisel truly wrote for children of *all* ages. His eye-boggling cartoons, his adventurous story lines, his satire, and his wise and witty prescriptions for living elevate his books to be included among the best-selling books of all-time. Geisel spoke through his books. He used them to counter mainstream education, showing how children could have fun while learning to read. He used his books to teach readers morals so they might live happily with themselves and in society. Also, he used his books as subtle but strong platforms from which to satirize corrupt politics and unnecessary social conventions. Geisel magically condensed these ingredients into intoxicating children's books that have thrilled, dazzled, taught and delighted millions and millions; and, these Dr. Seuss books are sure to teach and delight many more millions in the years to come. As the cat in the hat proclaims:

“It has often been said  
there's so much to be read  
you never can cram  
all those words in your head.

So the writer who breeds  
more words than he needs

is making a chore  
for the reader who reads.

That's why my belief is  
the briefer the brief is,  
the greater the sigh  
of the reader's relief is.

And that's why your (Dr. Seuss) books  
have such power and strength.  
You publish with shorth!  
(Shorth is better than length.)”

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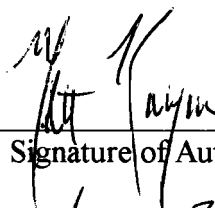
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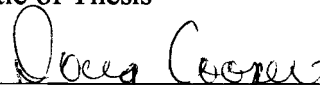
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