

talk," and the cat's thinking, "If only you could stop." [-kw]

Mark responds:

I can see it as a New Yorker cartoon. [-mrl]

Product Placements (letter of comment by Daniel Cox):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on product placement in ENEMY MINE](#) in the 03/12/21 issue of the MT VOID, Daniel Cox writes:

Product placements are often unbelievable in movies, and can break the immersion when done clumsily. But the idea that one of the two big cola products would last 100 years does not seem far-fetched to me. Even more so if the counting starts in 1985, close to the height of the "cola wars". At that time, Coca-Cola was 99 years old. The name "Pepsi Cola" was 87 years old, and the drink was 92. [-dtc]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

"Read Across America" day happened this year, but without the usual references to Dr. Seuss, whose birthday is originally celebrated. In fact, not only is Dr. Seuss being minimized, but his publisher announced that six of his books will no longer be published: "And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street", "McElligot's Pool", "On Beyond Zebra", "If I Ran the Zoo", "Scrambled Eggs Super!", and "The Cat's Quizzer". (The oldest of these, "And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street", was published in 1937, so will not enter the public domain until 2033.)

Oddly, it is the latter that has all the right-wing commentators' panties in a twist. Apparently free-market capitalism is only for the right-wing; companies that show any left-wing tendencies must be compelled (presumably by the government) to publish books they do not want to, even though they own the copyright (so much for private property and personal freedom). This also seems to apply to trademarked properties: the right wing is insisting that Hasbro should continue to manufacture "Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head" rather than just "Potato Head". (The fuss over the Muppets is different-- Disney is not holding episodes back, but rather running content warnings before episodes that "have not aged well.")

And what are the objectionable parts of the Dr. Seuss books? In "And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street" (1937) there is a reference to "a Chinese man who eats with sticks" and a cartoon drawing with a caricature of a Chinese man with a rice bowl, chopsticks, a conical hat, and slanted eyes. (When first published, it was a "Chinaman" with bright yellow skin and a long braid (both removed in 1978), so changes have already occurred.) However, there are also the lines, "Say--anyone could think of that, / Jack or Fred or Joe or Nat-- / Say, even Jane could think of that", which Dr. Seuss refused to change at that time.

"McElligot's Pool" (1947) talks about "some Eskimo fish"; "Eskimo" is a term that has fallen into disfavor (similarly to "colored" and "Oriental" in referring to people).

"If I Ran the Zoo" (1950) has a plethora of objectionable images: Africans with grass skirts and tall top knots, Chinese men with conical hats and Japanese(!) shoes, Russians with big mustaches and fur hats, Persian princes with curved toe slippers, and so on. All of the non-white characters are shown as porters or other subservient characters.

"Scrambled Eggs Super!" (1953) is unavailable to me. (Suddenly all the discontinued books are going for ludicrous prices on-line, and all the library copies are checked out--probably in many cases to be conveniently "lost," so it's harder to find some of them. eBay has banned them entirely, though it was a bit of a Whack-a-Mole game when I looked--new listings appeared as fast as the old ones were removed.)

I always had an affection for "On Beyond Zebra!" (1955), not for the words or the pictures, but for the concept that there were more letters to the alphabet. (Frankly, Seuss's letters look totally unrelated to our alphabet. And our alphabet already has seven "lost" letters: eth ("th" as in "thing"), thorn ("th" as in "then"), wynn ("w"), yogh (guttural "ch"), ash (ae ligature), insular g (various pronunciations), and ethel (oe ligature).

I love alphabets. I think the Georgian alphabet and the Cambodian alphabet are beautiful, and the Korean alphabet is very geometric, and the small differences between related alphabets (such as the Nordic languages) are fascinating. So it's not surprising that I would find "On Beyond Zebra!" right up my alley.

The objection seems to be to the illustration (and perhaps the name) of the "Nazzim of Bazzim".

"The Cat's Quizzer" (1976) has a couple of references to the Japanese. One is a question, "How old do you have to be to be Japanese?" with a cartoon of a man with a bowl-shaped hat standing by a torii gate. But the real objection may be that the man's skin is colored bright yellow, which is also the color of the sky. (No other character has skin that matches the sky, so that's not a choice one sees anywhere else in the book.) There's also a (trick) question about whether the Japanese eat with pogo sticks or joss sticks. On the whole, the book is really dumb, with serious questions mixed in with trick questions, and designed to cash in on Dr. Seuss's general popularity instead of being at all interesting. Then again, I'm not the target audience. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

When I want to read a novel, I write one.
--Benjamin Disraeli

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