



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“In the case of Goodnight Moon, Harper Collins has come to think that it is okay to tamper with the archival record and the heritage of a national icon in an effort to sanitize our culture for the betterment of young people. As if, by removing the cigarette, they have somehow made the world a better and safer place.”

-From www.goodnightreality.com

In a recent “New York Times” article titled “‘Goodnight Moon,’ Smokeless Version” (November 17, 2005), Edward Wyatt tells us that HarperCollins has digitally removed the cigarette from Clement Hurd’s fingers (pun appreciated but not intended). For at least the last twenty years, the wonderful “Good Night Moon” has been graced with a picture of a cigarette-smoking Hurd on the cover. But now no more cigarette, and he has been left looking “slightly absurd” as his son Thacher has said, with only air between the two fingers.

In reaction to this, a temporary website sprang up (www.goodnightreality.com), where you can view the before and after photographs and vote for your choice.

However, the stir over this has apparently caused the publishers to rethink this strategy because, according to the listserv watch on “Publisher’s Weekly: Children’s

Bookshelf” (publishersweekly.com), the updated jacket will only include a head shot, thereby making the cigarette a “non-issue.” However, this is such a great example of trying to improve reality, I couldn’t resist finding out more about it. To my surprise, I discovered this isn’t the first time this book has been fiddled with – dehaenced, I would say, although my dictionary says there is no such word.

According to Leonard S. Marcus, in his biography Margaret Wise Brown: *Awakened by the Moon*, at one of the meetings about the book “...the udder of the Cow Jumping Over the Moon was reduced to an anatomical blur so as to not to disarrange the fragile sensibilities of some librarians – the ‘Important Ladies,’ as she called them.” Of course, I immediately took a look at my copy of “Goodnight Moon,” and sure enough that cow is udder-free. However, if you would like to see the

original look of that illustration, I noticed that if you peer closely at illustration #25, the “Great Green Room,” in Marcus’ book, the cow seems to be intact.

This effort to please the librarians is also interesting to me. Because public libraries purchased so many children’s books at that time, librarians had the power to promote or ignore a new book. When *Goodnight Moon* was published in 1947, New York Public Library didn’t place it on their annual list of recommended children’s books; this mistake was rectified, but not until 1973. I share the concerns of others when it comes to altering an historic photograph. And yet, I can understand the impulse. When my children were young, I was constantly editing the books I read to them – simply leaving out passages I thought inappropriate or confusing. For instance, I remember a book in which a parent spanked her

child – and I just skipped that part. Looking back, I wonder if it wouldn’t have been better to take that chance to talk about corporal punishment – what it means to hit someone, how it makes that person feel, what kind of message it sends when a big person hits a small person. At the time, it seemed easier not to say anything at all, but now I’m not so sure.

The art of Clement Hurd has given generation after generation of children pleasure and inspiration. Maybe a discussion about smoking – and the fact that later in life he quit – would have provided future generations of children with one small tool in what will be a lifelong effort to make sense of the world.