

Recent Losses in Children's and Young Adult Literature

Jill P. May

This spring, professionals in children's literature were saddened by the death of two important scholars. Lawrence Sipe, professor at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, died unexpectedly on March 11. He was sixty-two years old and was still actively involved in his own scholarship as well as with several graduate students in children's literature. Dr. Sipe began his teaching career in a one-room school in Newfoundland. Prior to joining the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania, he received graduate degrees in elementary education, the psychology of reading, and educational theory and practice. During his fifteen years at the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Sipe was honored with awards for his research and teaching. His 2008 book, *Storytime: Young Children's Literary Understanding in the Classroom*, won the Edward B. Fry Book Award for Outstanding Contributions to Literacy Research and Practice from the National Reading Conference. At the time of his death, Dr. Sipe was the North American editor-in-chief for the international quarterly journal *Children's Literature in Education*.

Dr. John Daniel "J. D." Stahl, professor of English at Virginia Tech, died after battling chronic lymphocytic leukemia for ten years. Dr. Stahl had grown up in Luxemburg and Germany prior to moving to the United States when he was fifteen years old. He held a degree in German/English from Goshen College in Indiana and later received his PhD in English from the University of Connecticut, where there is a strong program in children's literature. Once he joined the faculty at Virginia Tech, he founded a faculty study group in children's literature and helped develop graduate programs in children's literature both at Virginia Tech and at Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia. He served as President of the Children's Literature Association at the turn of the century, and in 2006, he and his co-editors Elizabeth Lennox Keyser and Tina L. Hanlon published a major anthology, *Crosscurrents of Children's Literature: An Anthology of Texts and Criticism*. This year Dr. Stahl was the recipient of the Children's Literature Association's Anne Devereau Jordan Award for his scholarship and research in the field.

British fantasy also faced the deaths of noteworthy authors Diane Wynne Jones, Dick King-Smith, and Brian Jacques. Diane Wynne Jones died in March at age seventy-six. Her work has sometimes been compared to the fantasies of J. K. Rowling, but her writing was more varied and did not center on a single set of characters. She received the lifetime achievement award from the World Fantasy Convention in 2007. Dick King-Smith, a farmer/teacher who turned to children's fantasy later in life, died at age eighty-eight. *The Sheep-Pig*, his fantasy set on a farm much like his own, was first published in 1983. It won the Guardian Fiction Award for children's fiction when it was published, and later it

was adapted in the film *Babe*. Brian Jacques, the best known author of the three, died at age seventy-one. His "Redwall" series has been published in over twenty-five languages, and he has sold over 20 million copies of his books globally. Although he never attended college, he received an honorary fellowship from Liverpool John Moores University. In 2007, DC Comics adapted *Redwall* into a graphic novel.

Finally, the United States lost two leaders in youth literature. Margaret K. McElderry began her career as a children's librarian at New York Public Library after attending the Carnegie Library School in Pittsburgh. Often called the "grande dame" in publishing for children, she died in February at age ninety-eight. Ms. McElderry trained many young editors and worked as an editor for several award-winning authors and artists, including the 1952 Newbery and Caldecott winners. Simon & Schuster currently house the Margaret K. McElderry Books imprint in children's literature. This August, William Sleator, renowned science fiction author for young adults, died at age sixty-six in Thailand. Sleator's most critically acclaimed science fiction book, *House of Stairs*, is still pertinent in its presentation of futuristic living in a controlled psychological environment. During his lifetime, he published over thirty books, including the soon to be released novel *The Phantom Limb*.

Works Cited

- Barack, Lauren. "Science-Fiction Master, William Sleator: 1945-2011." *New York: Extra Helping*, 2011. Print.
- "Dick King-Smith." *The Telegraph*, 6 Jan. 2011. Web. 27 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/books-obituaries/8241911/Dick-King-Smith.html>>.
- "Margaret K. McElderry (1912-2011)." *Locus Online News*, 15 Feb. 2011. Web. 27 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.locusmag.com/News/2011/02/margaret-k-mcelderry-1912-2011/>>.
- Priest, Christopher. "Diana Wynne Jones obituary: Renowned children's fantasy and science-fiction author with a dedicated following." *The Guardian*, 27 Mar. 2011. Web. 27 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/mar/27/diana-wynne-jones-obituary>>.
- Staino, Rocco. "'Redwall' Author Brian Jacques Dies at 71." *Extra Helping*, 2011. Print.
- Sutphin, Michael D. "In memoriam: J.D. Stahl, professor of English." *Virginia Tech News*, 19 July 2010. Web. 27 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2010/07/071910-clahs-memoriamstahl.html>>.
- University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. "Lawrence Sipe, In Memoriam." Web. 27 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.gse.upenn.edu/content/lawrence-sipe-memoriam>>.