

element of difference. It is set in the familiar world of baby-sitting and despite a momentary increase in interest when Natalie gets lost in the park, it presents nothing about baby-sitting that differs in any way from what every teenage baby-sitter experiences regularly. Moreover, the protagonist's major personal problem (having to wear braces) seems hardly of sufficient importance to base a book on. At least not today. Perhaps when McNicoll was a girl and had to wear braces it was an horrendous experience, but for modern young people corrective dentistry has become so common that Melissa's emotional over-reaction seems unrealistic. The novel has some glib, fast-paced dialogue, but the story is plot-driven rather than character-driven. Also, it presents nothing original or provocative, and, as a result, will probably be forgotten by most readers even before the last page is finished.

Joan Weir is the author of eleven novels for young-adult readers including *Sixteen Is Spelled O-U-C-H*, and five non-fiction books. She teaches creative writing at the University College of the Cariboo in Kamloops.

EVERYBODY NEEDS A FRIEND

See You Later, Alligator. Norma M. Charles. Illus. Yvonne Cathcart. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1991. 32 pp., \$4.95. ISBN 0-590-73670-1; **Paper Nights.** Pierre Filion and Gilles Tibo. Illus. Gilles Tibo. Annick Press, 1992. 32 pp., \$15.95. ISBN 1-55037-225-4; **The Story of Little Quack.** Betty Gibson. Illus. Kady MacDonald Denton. Kids Can Press, 1990. 32 pp., \$11.95. ISBN 0-921103-97-2.

See You Later, Alligator is about an alligator and a crocodile who might have made up the familiar farewell rhymes that generations of children have enjoyed. They are best friends until one shows off a new pair of shoes, which the other bests with beautiful shoes and striped socks. The game continues in an upward direction, and the rhyming farewells cease. The story would be stronger if one of the characters noticed that the game of one-upmanship is spoiling their friendship, but it is the sun that teaches them the lesson. The text is rhythmical and fun to read. The exotic jungle background enhances the friendship theme because it is crowded with exuberant creatures playing together. The colours are as bright as parrot feathers, and the only white spaces are the whites of the eyes.

In *Paper Nights*, a small boy named Pikolo spends his evenings cutting out fanciful creatures from coloured paper to keep himself company. When he cuts out a little man from his most beautiful paper, the cut-out promptly leads Pikolo into the closet and down a long, dark tunnel to a fantastic land made entirely of paper. This story lacks originality. The tunnel, the hurrying character, the concern about being late, and the dream are all elements which remind one of *Alice in Wonderland*. The story also needs more action and stronger verbs. One wants to know more about what Pikolo did and less about what Pikolo thought

and felt. The comprehensive illustrations in *Paper Nights* are filled with light and their glowing colours are reminiscent of the aurora borealis. The expressions on Pikolo's doll-like face are clear (but it is not clear why Pikolo must wear trousers which are three sizes too big).

The Story of Little Quack is about a small, lonely boy named Jackie (a name which, to a listener, is ambiguous about gender) who lives on a farm. Jackie's mother gives him a duck, which follows him everywhere. This is a love story with a happy ending. When the duck disappears, Jackie is sad and the reader worries about whether or not the duck has the capacity to be loyal. However, there are ten good reasons for Little Quack's disappearance, and Jackie calls them quacklings. This story is a joyful affirmation of the bond that can exist between a child and a pet. The illustrations have a carefree quality, and the bold and varied colours are similar to those children might find in their paint sets. The illustrations truly evoke rural life by showing the different farm animals standing, lying, feeding and moving in characteristic ways. *The Story of Little Quack* is beautifully written and there is not a single vague or extraneous word in it.

Muriel Baribeau is a writer who is presently working on a romantic suspense novel.

PHOTOGRAPHIC NATURAL HISTORY BOOKS: PRESCHOOLERS AND BEYOND

See How They Grow: Pig. Bill Ling, photographer. Scholastic Canada, 1993. 21 pp., \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-74589-1; **See How They Grow: Calf.** Gordon Clayton, photographer. Scholastic Canada, 1993. 21 pp., \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-74588-3; **Natural History Series: Elephants.** Eric S. Grace. Key Porter Books, 1993. 62 pp., \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55013-448-5.

The two books in the "See How They Grow" series continue the current publishing trend toward photographic picture books for preschoolers. Each book is visually appealing, with brilliant close-up photographs of animals superimposed on a stark, white background. The pages are decorated with borders of charming line drawings of animals and the layout of each page's design shows the publisher's careful attention to creating a high quality graphic product.

However, the text in each item does not reveal a similar attention; it is monotonous and flat. While the photographer is given full credit on the title page, mention of the author and editor, in each case Mary Ling, is hidden on the verso. There are no rhymes or language play to delight young listeners:

I am a calf. I was just born. I am trying to stand up but I am very weak.

Without a captivating text to provide some sort of glue, the child is left only