narrator and to accept her weaknesses in some wider context, without necessarily aligning ourselves with the unsympathetic adult world. Given such a perspective, we might find it easier to like Anna. *What's the Matter, Girl?* is certainly more than just another teenage problem book, but its author has not overcome the limitations of the genre – the self-absorbed narrator, the limited and often trivializing adolescent perception, and the tendency to overindulge in the garish and morbid.

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Problem-Solving Models for Children

CAROL ANNE WIEN

The Paper Bag Princess, Robert Munsch. Illus. by Michael Martchenko. Annick Press Ltd., 1980. Unpaged 24 pp. Paper. ISBN 0-920236-16-2.

Peas Again for Lunch, Caroline Beech. Illus. by Gina Caleja. Annick Press Ltd., 1980. Unpaged 25 pp. Paper. ISBN 0-920236-17-0.

Henry Finds a Home, Wendy St. Pierre. Illus. by Barbara Eidlitz. Annick Press Ltd., 1980. Unpaged 26 pp. Paper. ISBN 0-919984-05-3.

These three new picture books intended for children between three and eight years of age provide additional variety to Annick Press' contributions to children's literature.

Robert Munsch strikes again with yet another tautly constructed story, more snappy language, and playful ideas. He takes the traditional St. George and the Dragon fairy-tale and inverts the roles to develop a super-competent, clever princess. With Munsch's usual economy of prose, the story begins

> "When Elizabeth was a beautiful princess she lived in a castle and had expensive princess clothes. She was going to marry a prince named Ronald."

In the illustration, Elizabeth beams optimistically at a disdainful Ronald about to head for the nearest squash court.

> "Unfortunately, a dragon smashed her castle, burned all her clothes with his fiery breath and carried off Prince Ronald."

Elizabeth, clad in a paper bag, sets off to retrieve Ronald. Needless to say, she challenges the dragon the requisite three times, as in all true fairy tales, and he obligingly demonstrates his abilities. In one instance, he burns so many forests with his breath he "didn't even have enough fire left to cook a meat ball." Eventually, he falls asleep in exhaustion, and Elizabeth claims Ronald. The ensuing dénouement is the really unique portion of the story – but also is its problem. Ronald reacts to his rescuer with distaste:

> ". . . you smell like ashes, your hair is all tangled, and you are wearing a dirty old paper bag . . ."

Elizabeth, correctly deducing Ronald's true worth, counters:

> " 'Your clothes are really pretty and your hair is all neat. You look like a prince, but you are a bum.' They didn't get married after all."

Consider the impact this ending has on children in the target age group. Girls enjoy the story, delight in Elizabeth's ability to demonstrate courage and problem-solving skills, but express disappointment that Ronald turns out so badly. Feminists can well argue that it is not too early for girls to learn that the prince often does not match the princess's expectations. The conclusions that the princess's goal of marriage to the prince is inappropriate can be understood in the context of the diverse roles for both males and females which our society increasingly supports. However, the impact of the story on small boys is quite different and problematic. My five-year-old could not bear to hear Ronald called a "bum" and instructed the reader, "Don't read that part; don't turn the page!" In checking children's books for sexism, we instruct student teachers to watch for impact of the story on the child's self-esteem. Calling Ronald a "bum" with no further resolution in the story has a negative impact on boys; thus, it is sexist. Munsch has neatly inverted the roles and explicitly derided males. Rather than deciding whether this is a necessary and useful resolution, or an unfortunate and somewhat ruthless one, I prefer to recognize it as a trouble spot. Left as is, the

conclusion limits the audience for whom appropriateness of the story can be guaranteed. Alternatively, Ronald and Elizabeth's relationship can be discussed and resolved when reading to both sexes.

Martchenko's illustrations are delightfully funny, and match Munsch's playfulness. His dragon is very expressive, alternately sleazy with his western necktie and half-closed eye when he opens the door, and rakish in pose as he shows off for Elizabeth. In spite of his confused morals, he is depicted as so energetic and enthusiastic in his efforts to impress Elizabeth that he is much more prince-like than Ronald. The illustrations combining pen and ink and water colour are very effective.

When Munsch's stories are read, there are always actions which children can perform. Doors are slammed, noses almost caught, and fire breathed. (One perceptive reader did notice that the door in the illustration faces out, rendering a slam by the dragon inside most difficult! See Figure 1.) However, through gestures and motor patterns which children can repeat, Munsch involves children in the action of the story.

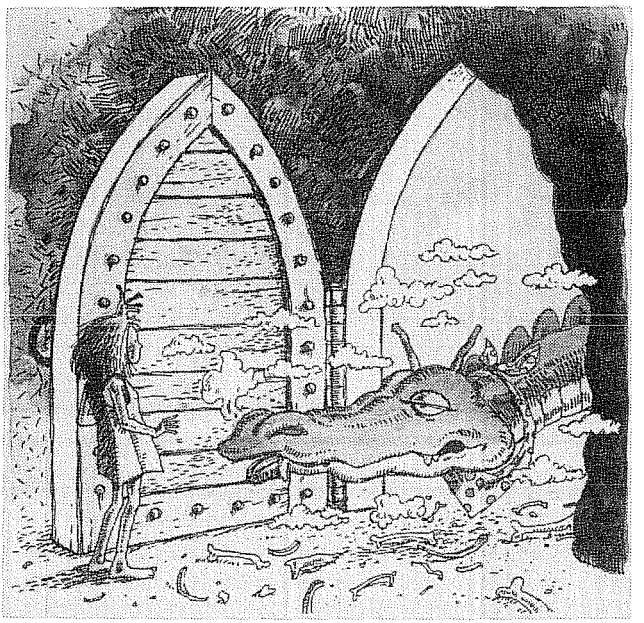

Figure 1.

Caroline Beech's *Peas Again for Lunch* is constructed around the device of a small boy's fantasy of the consequences of throwing a spoonful of peas at his brother. Beech spins out a series of events beginning with food spilling on the floor and ending with a room full of policemen, firemen, dogs, cats, and a gardener. (Is the only female in this child's life his mother?) Shure and Spivak point out that two of the most important problem-solving skills which children can develop are the ability to generate diverse solutions and the ability to anticipate consequences.[1] Since this story is an exercise in anticipating consequences, it models this skill for children. It provides an intellectual exercise which allows children to try to predict what could occur next. Unfortunately, to predict reasonably, there must be some connection between events which allows a deduction to be made. However, as this story becomes more involved, the connection between consequence and cause becomes arbitrary and stereotyped and is not even fanciful. As well, the story is poorly written and frequently in need of editorial attention:

> "These peas would land on Sam's plate and he would end up putting his supper on the floor for the cat and the dogs who would bark and wag their tails while the mailman looked for something he could do to help. Some of them would be getting their hoses out . . ."

The mundane prose and sloppy grammar render the story difficult to read aloud. Eventually, it becomes long and boring, and its selection for publication is questionable. The ratio of illustrations to text is not consistent throughout the book. The illustrations are competently drawn in a realistic domestic style.

Perhaps it is unfair to review Wendy St. Pierre's *Henry Finds a Home* using the same criteria applied to the previous titles, since Wendy was thirteen when it was written. The story conveys both the freshness and the limitations of a child's viewpoint. The simple story, a line or two of text to a page, describes Henry the turtle's attempts to find a home. He first searches in inadequate places such as a bee-hive or cave. The consequences of such choices are not explored; he simply discovers that the places are already occupied. It is King Turtle, authority figure, who points out his "house" is on his back.

Many of us prefer situations, even in books, where children are allowed to solve problems for themselves.[2] This practice in decision-making and in generating solutions is considered useful not only for intellectual development but for children's moral development. Children always governed by others have difficulty deciding what to do on their own. Obedience to others results in dependence on others.

It is not surprising and certainly not inappropriate for a thirteen-year-old to propose a solution provided by a father figure. However, a story is a model showing children how they might behave. Henry's rescue by the King's knights shows him as powerless. It can be argued that for the two-to three-year-old child for whom this is intended, this reassurance that someone will come to the rescue is useful and necessary. It can also be argued that in order to have a wider and stronger audience appeal the story needs more complexity and more evidence of thinking on Henry's part.

The theme that each animal has its own habitat could be more effectively treated without anthropomorphizing animals. To suggest that turtles enjoy playing basketball and find little time to clean house is both inaccurate and extraneous to the story. Nevertheless, this is a minor point which applies to many children's books, and this story has coherence, unity, and an engaging central character. Children under four will enjoy it, though mildly. The illustrations are superbly done. Barbara Eidlitz knows how to combine colour, pattern, and white space into unified compositions which appear deceptively simple. (See Figure 2.)

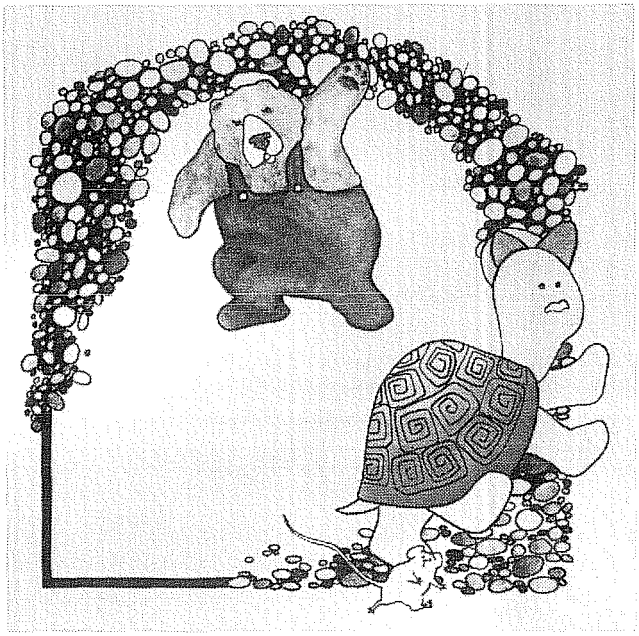

Figure 2.

and to the satisfaction the reader gains in seeing justice prevail.

Early adult mysteries were usually of the British drawing room type. A murder might take place in the city, village, or country estate, but whatever the location, one could be sure that certain traditions would be upheld. The reader could rest secure in the knowledge that fresh flowers would be cut, tea would be served as usual, and the social order, though shaken, would continue to stand.

Such refinement eventually gave way to the mystery whose hard nosed, tough talking detective no doubt shocked a few mystery buffs with his coarse approach to life and the law. Eventually, however, the pendulum returned to centre, with a combination of the mystery of manners and the hard-boiled detective.

Detective stories for children certainly followed in the early footsteps of adult mysteries, if not the later. Nancy Drew, for instance, was nothing if not respectable, and the social structure described in her earlier adventures rivals that of Britain. There might not be a drawing room in sight, but at some point Nancy, correctly attired in frock or sports dress, was sure to preside over some pleasant repast. She was definitely from an upper middle class home but, as befitted her station and temperament, was always polite to those less fortunate - unless they were identified as evil-doers. Nancy was cultured, refined, athletic, popular, and wise beyond her years. She was, and is, truly food for daydreams as she speeds about in her little roadster.

Susan Super Sleuth, Canada's answer to Nancy Drew, is similar to Nancy but far more believable. Just as the early Nancy reflected the world of the 30's, so Susan reflects a more casual contemporary way of life. Like Nancy, she is a mystery mastermind, but except for her unusual detecting ability, she might be the girl next door. Laura Piotrowski's sketchy illustrations depict a long-haired girl dressed in slacks, cut-offs, or casual skirt when the occasion requires it. There is no written description of her, but in the first episode the reader learns she has one more year to go before university. In another episode Susan must spend part of her summer making up courses she failed during the year but there is little doubt she'll make it to university when she chooses. She is not particularly interested in athletics, wipes crumbs from her face with the back of her hand, and is, if not as cultured and well rounded as Nancy, far more believable.

The paperback entitled *Susan Super Sleuth* is comprised of four short stories about Susan, set in various Canadian locations. Author William Ettridge works well in the short story format, packing

Both *Peas Again for Lunch* and *Henry Finds a Home* have the quality of stories invented for children known by the authors. In the private situation, the interweaving of storytelling with the special relationship between adult and child gives the story a certain magic. Neither of these stories however, is sufficiently inventive or remarkable to warrant sharing with the wide audience assumed in publication. Munsch's *The Paper Bag Princess* does display those special qualities of invention, playfulness, adequate challenge and subsequent resolution which lift the story out of the ordinary and make storytelling a celebration.

NOTES

[1]Myrna Shure and Geo. Spivak, *Problem-Solving Techniques in Childrearing*. San Francisco, Josey-Bass Inc., 1978.

[2]See, for example, Constance Kamii and R. deVries, *Physical Knowledge in Preschool Education*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1978; Joanne Hendrick, *The Whole Child*. St. Louis, C.V. Mosby, 1980.

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Bubblegum Gumshoes: Canada's teen detectives

MICKIE McCLEAR

Susan Super Sleuth, by William Ettridge. Illus. by Laura Piotrowski. Potlatch Publications, 1979. 120 pp. $2.95 paperback. ISBN 0-919676-18-9.

The Lost Treasure of Casa Loma, by Eric Wilson. Illus. by Gavin Rowe. Clark Irwin, 1980. 103 pp. Hardcover. ISBN 0-7720-12946.

Since its inception as a popular fiction genre, the mystery story has gained a large and varied following among readers of all ages. Its popularity is due, in part, to the glimpse of human nature it proffers,