

In *Merchants*, however, an overly vivacious use of colour and a cluttered, random distribution of figures and objects negates the subtle understatement that we associate with Oriental art.

*At Grandmother's House* received the certificate of excellence from the Art Director's Club in New York. Its recreation of natural beauty, human activities, and warm emotional relationships emphasises the common experiences that unite children of diverse regions and cultures. *Merchants of the Mysterious East* focuses on cultural differences, appealing to a child's curiosity and, it is hoped, encouraging a tolerance of customs that are different from our own.

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## Mr. Dressup and Friendly Giant in Print

CAROL ANNE WIEN

*The Friendly Giant's Book of Fire Engines*, Bob Homme. Illus. by Kim La Fave and Carol Snelling. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1981. 24 pp. \$6.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-88794-100-1.

*The Friendly Giant's Birthday*, Bob Homme. Illus. by Carol Snelling Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1981. 24 pp. \$6.95 hardcover ISBN 0-88794-099-4.

*Casey Visits the Doctor*, Susan Marcus. Illus. by Deborah Drewbrook. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1981. 28 pp. \$5.50 paper. ISBN 0-88794-101-x.

*The Missing Button Adventure*, Susan Marcus. Illus. by Hajime Sawada. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1981. 28 pp. \$7.50 hardcover. ISBN 0-88794-102-8.

Those venerable institutions, Mr. Dressup and the Friendly Giant, television purveyors of Canadian values and culture for two to five year olds, are moving into the book market, with the help of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. These four little picture books have in common the fact that they bring content from the television medium to the medium of print. Casey, Finnegan and Mr. Dressup, and Rusty and Jerome and the Friendly Giant figure prominently in Canadian children's daily television fare - yes, even for the Inuit! Children will be attracted to these books because they contain characters already familiar. This basic familiarity of content deepens the child's interest rather than fragmenting it, because the child can here seek new meaning within a known context. Psychologists such as Berlyne, McVickers Hunt, and Burton White have shown that such a situation enhances learning. The four books would thus please children who know the television programs from which they are derived; but only *The Missing Button Adventure* can really stand on its own as an interesting story.

The Giant books include a well-constructed book bag, like Rusty's. This is a special touch that will please young children, although it is not clear whether this is a "perk" for the reviewer, or for the general purchaser. *The Book of Fire Engines* provides factual information on several types of firefighting equipment. A slight story frame is provided by Jerome's arrival with a broken toy fire engine in his mouth, just the sort of occurrence consistent with the daily television episodes. There is, however, insufficient detail about the fire-fighting equipment for contemporary urban preschoolers. The content is pretty meagre.

*The Birthday Book* is more successful. Birthdays as subject matter are a surefire success. All the characters work together to construct a homemade party for the Giant, making sandwiches, a paper crown, composing and rehearsing a birthday song. The characters' activity thus serves as a model for the personal power and satisfaction that children can gain from working out their own ideas: making a homemade party right down to the song offers a model of creativity. The message is that the children who read the book can do it too.

Susan Marcus' *Casey Visits the Doctor* fits the genre of "preparation books" for preschoolers, helping them build up realistic

expectations of situations outside the home which might precipitate apprehension: this is preventative medicine applied to emotions. The book's strongest asset is Casey's tremendous popularity and children will attend to the sensible content because of him. I like in particular the careful descriptions of taking blood pressure and of inoculations and Casey's realistic reactions. It helps children when he says of his needle, "It wasn't as bad as I thought . . . I just had one tiny tear." Drewbrook's illustrations have a few lingering problems: faces are not handled completely successfully. However, the title page sports a delightful street scene including a fat middle-aged jogger bouncing bravely past a bakery shop.

The sole bit of "literature" in the foursome is *The Missing Button Adventure*. Casey uses the occasion of his Teddy Bear's missing button to spin out an adventure tale for Mr. Dressup. He travels through rapids, deep seas, snowy slopes and more, meeting in each an animal who inhabits that environment. Although reminiscent of the journeys of fairy tales in other ways, this story presents animals who do not point the way, and in the end Casey finds the button himself in a particularly adept transition from fantasy back to reality. This is a well-crafted story, including repetition and playful details. Casey thinks, for example, that the button might be useful to the beaver as a tail-tapper. A special quality is Susan Marcus' gift for the quirky logic of a child's conversation.

Sawada's illustrations are superb. Clear colour washes provide clarity without flatness and careful drawing provides detail and sensitive expression without busyness. Casey is boy-like but retains the flattened, stylized quality of a puppet face without losing expressiveness. There is fidelity to the values of the television show: even Finnegan wears a life jacket in the rubber raft. Care and affection of adults for children is portrayed in Mr. Dressup's posture and expression towards Casey. (See Figure 1.)



Figure 1.

A Canadian quality is conveyed by the importance of extremes of weather and of vast space in Casey's fantasy. Many critics – for example, John Matthews in *Tradition in Exile* – have remarked that coping with a severe environment is part of the Canadian identity. The interactions between character and environment here reflect this strenuous coping, and provide an element of excitement. Casey demonstrates the gift of imagination and the possibility that each child can become her own storyteller. Susan Marcus is to be congratulated for an excellent story.

Both Dressup books present Casey as a boy rather than as the puppet of the television show. Thank goodness! Casey lives for the children in the same way that Chekhov's characters live for adults, by representing internal life, or externalizing the emotions. It is the internal landscape which surely has the most significant reality for any of us.

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## Canadian Children's Records, Continued

GARY H. PATERSON

“Sensitivity, humour, craftsmanship, and honesty”: in an earlier article,<sup>1</sup> I attempted to list some requirements for success in children's records. The list still makes good sense, although admittedly, it is extremely difficult to do everything well all at once! Just the right amount of emotion or sentiment, exactly the appropriate *rapport* with an unseen audience, touches of humanity and comedy, smoothness, and an all-encompassing professionalism that makes the whole performance seem simplicity itself: whew! Is it possible to produce a flawless gem that meets all these standards, to attain magnificent Mozart without going through the stages of merely bad Boccherini? I think so – and here's some proof.

Jim Duchesneau and Rosalie Moscoe have been performing in the Toronto area before delighted audiences for several years. Although they admit their individual styles to be different, they do make a most