

Fig. 1

Pauline Pocknell est assistante de recherche auprès d'un musicologue à l'Université McMaster, Hamilton, où elle enseigne aussi, quelques cours de langue.

OF PICTURES AND POETICS

Tales from the beechy woods (Fluff's birthday), Molly Burke. Illus. Gerda Neubacher. Hayes Publishers, 1983. 32 pp., \$9.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88625-044-7; *The a to z of absolute zaniness*, Carol Mills. Illus. Susanne Ferrier. Harbour Publishers, 1982. 30 pp., \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920080-90-1; *The bump*, Fred Penner. Illus. Barbara Hicks. Hyperion Press, 1984. 30pp., \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920534-28-7; *Once: a lullaby*, bp Nichol. Illus. Ed. Roach. Firefly Books, 1983. 22pp., \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-88753-105-9; *To the end of the block*, bp Nichol. Illus. Shirley Day. Blackmoss Press, 1984. 18 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-88753-119-0.

A picture book should delight the eye, fill the ear with sounds and rhythms, touch the heart and fire the imagination. All too often, though, a picture book with rhyme gives less than our money's worth. However, when the story, the illustrations and the poetry of a picture book are consistent, interrelated, and well-crafted, the combination gives pleasure many times over. The five poetic

picture books in this review have all the earmarks of a good read, but in varying degrees.

Tales from the beechy woods is the story of Fluff the orphan rabbit's first birthday. Her friends, Horace Hedgehog, Sandy Squirrel, and others in the forest, all have forgotten it and now want to make amends with a hasty surprise party. The story has as much conflict and depth as the name of Fluff.

Gerda Neubacher's illustrations capture the idyllic mood of a safe forest and the frolic of cute and cuddly animals. Although Fluff and her friends retain their shapes as bunnies, hedgehog, pigeon, raccoon and such, their personalities are human. Fluff's little home has table and chairs, wall hangings, bedroom slippers, and potted flowers.

In four-line stanzas with the lilt and rhythm of the traditional nursery rhyme, Molly Burke's text should complement the illustrations, and indeed expand the plot. The rhyme often is forced and the diction slightly unnatural, especially in the dialogues.

"This is Fluff the Orphan's birthday
And, alas, we all forgot,
But if you'll listen closely
I'll acquaint you with my plot."

Burke appeals to her young readers' sympathy for the orphan and need for some caring friends. Unfortunately, the sentiment touches on the maudlin, as she tugs at the heartstrings of the reader.

The a to z of absolute zaniness is an Australian ABC picture book. Both text and illustration bear witness to the outrageous title. There are twenty-six anec-



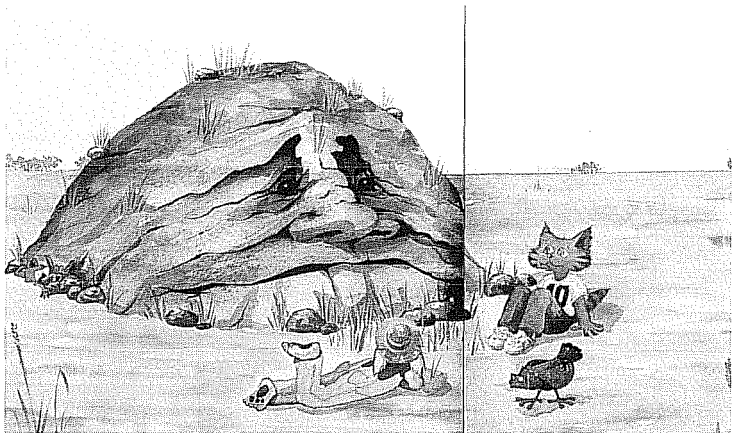
dotal but hilarious stories in the tradition of Edward Lear's nonsense poems. The persons, animals, or things are zany caricatures that illustrate the letters of the alphabet and words. For instance, Tilly Turtle lives in a teapot with ten tadpoles, which grow so fast and big that they push the poor turtle out of her home. The text is an updated version of the tongue twister.

Goobly Goblin grows green grapes in his garden,
He also grows gladioli in his gumboots,
gooseberries in his garage
and
giant gherkins over his gate.
Goobly is a gardening goblin.
He is not a garden gnome.

There are some Australian terms interspersed in the book, but they should not prove bothersome.

Unlike the ABC primers and chapbooks that ooze with conventional morality and instruction, *The a to z of absolute zaniness* prefers fun. It is a participatory book that avoids being pedantic in teaching children each letter and each sound of the alphabet.

Fred Penner, the popular Canadian children's songster, has written *The bump*. This tale of a lonely mound in the middle of the prairie evokes sympathy for the oddball who has hopes of being a hill, a mountain, or a volcano. In the end, the Bump discovers his true need in the form of a family that decides to build their home beside the bump. Penner accompanies his text with the music and lyrics from his recording in the back page. Barbara Hicks' illustrations spread beyond the double page to suggest the expansiveness of the open prairie, the loneliness of the Bump, and the height of the Bump's desires. Hicks juxtaposes the sadsack face of the Bump with his soaring imagination and longing.



This bump wasn't happy being a bump.
He longed for excitement
and adventure.

Penner uses traditional elements of the ballad in *The bump* as well as making innovative changes to the stanzaic pattern. The irregularities of the lines in the rhythm and in the rhymes complement the mood of the unhappy mound. Unlike the sad ending of some ballads, though, Penner's *Bump* has a satisfying ending. The Bump comes to terms with himself, and learns that happiness is not just attaining the impossible dream.

bp Nicol, a well known Canadian poet, has two recent entries in children's picture books. With illustrator Ed. Roach, he has written *Once: a lullaby*; and with illustrator Shirley Day, *To the end of the block*. Both paperbacks are well suited to very young children.

In *Once: a lullaby*, Ed Roach's soft pastels and the deliberately fuzzy sketches capture the singularly sleepy expression in all the faces of the animals. The half-drooping eyelids and the contented smiles suggest a kinship with the little boy and little girl in the last pages. Roach does not intrude with details which may excite the imagination of a child about to fall asleep.

Nicol patterns his text with two couplets for each animal. Only the name of the animal and the onomatopoeic sound that the creature makes change.

Once I was a little goat.
baby goat, little goat.

Once I was a little goat.
MAA, I fell asleep.

Once: a lullaby captures the innocence and simplicity of the relationship between the small animals' and the children's world without being trite.

In *To the end of the block*, Nicol depends on the illustrations to tell the story. He avoids a wide variation in the words and in the rhyme scheme so that the pictures can say more.

Shirley Day unfolds the father-daughter relationship in a simple afternoon stroll about the neighbourhood. Sarah and her father see other children at play, the florist, the ice-cream man, and other folk in the community. The illustrations are paramount, for they show the reactions of Sarah and of her father. In short, plot and characterization depend on each frame in the sequence of pictures. There is a certain charm in Nichol and Day's attempt to imply relationships, to explore simple needs of a child and, all the while, to retain some adult humour and wit.

For price and value, the two Nichol picture books are the best buys.

Garry Engkent has taught children's literature at the University of Alberta. He writes short stories on the ethnic Chinese in Canada.