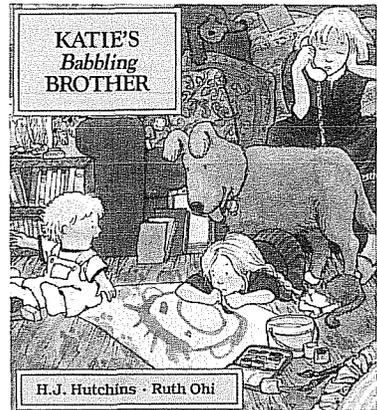


MINI-REVIEWS

Katie's babbling brother. H.J. Hutchins. Illus. Ruth Ohl. Annick Press, 1991. Unpag., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-153-3.

Move over, Robert Munsch! Hazel Hutchins has achieved just the right tone with this funny tale of family angst. Katie is driven nearly to distraction by her baby brother's incessant babbling. She feels so completely frustrated that she decides to take decisive action. Her advisor, the corner store lady (whose area of expertise extends far beyond shopkeeping), offers Katie a secret ingredient to help diminish the problem. In fact, the ingredient diminishes Katie's brother to the point where she has to keep him in a baby food jar. Katie wisely decides to consult her



mother who, surprisingly (to Katie, at least), exhibits a fair amount of frustration with the babbling issue herself. The problem is resolved when Katie's mother helps her to understand that her brother is merely passing through a phase.

Hazel Hutchins is the author of several picture books, notably *Ben's snow song* and *Nicholas at the library*. Ruth Ohl's brightly-coloured watercolour illustrations have the cheerful insouciance associated with Michael Martchenko's drawings. They round out the text admirably. The story is funny and told with a real understanding of one of the many problems that beset children. This is a good book for all children with younger siblings.

The attic of all sorts. Diane Carmel Léger. Illus. Pamela Cambiazo. Orca, 1991. Unpag., \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-920501-47-8.

Set in Victoria, B.C., the story portrays a young boy who lives for a brief period in the House of All Sorts, which belonged to the famous painter, Emily Carr. Using the attic as a play area, Paul becomes enveloped in a rich fantasy-life featuring the artist's exotic pets as described by Mr. Tweedie the landlord. When Paul tells the landlord about his adventure, he is encouraged to draw a picture. Paul obliges and continues to give Mr. Tweedie drawings of his subsequent attic visits until something mysterious happens. The reader is left to deduce that the surprise comes through the spirit of Emily Carr.

One wonders whether the young children who are attracted to the book by virtue of its picture book format will be able to grasp the significance of the conclusion, and indeed it could be misinterpreted: Mr. Tweedie may seem to be the benefactor since it is he who has encouraged Paul in his artistic endeavours.

Paul's animal encounters are charmingly depicted – the variety of Emily Carr's animal entourage is faithfully represented here from her mischievous monkey to the bobtail sheepdogs she raised to eke out her meagre income. It's a nice conceit to imagine that Emily's artistic spirit so permeated her home that a child of the future would be inspired artistically. The oil illustrations appear amateurish with awkward figures and unresolved perspective problems. One painting of Emily pushing her monkey in a buggy stands out – perhaps the illustrator was herself inspired by Emily Carr.

Although an attempt to make very young children aware of a truly great Canadian painter is laudable, these readers would be better served by being introduced later to Carr's own beautifully crafted vignettes of her childhood and career.

Fran Ashdown is head of the children's department of the Capilano Library in North Vancouver.

Simon in summer. Gilles Tibo. Tundra, 1991. 24 pp., \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-261-1.

Simon in summer depicts the self-centred view of an inquisitive, confident child. The story begins: "My name is Simon and I love summer." Simon subsequently searches for ways to make the long warm days of summer stay forever. When his attempts to sing with the frogs and capture the sun fail, and the summer season comes to a close, Simon decides to greet autumn with joy.

The world that Gilles Tibo creates for Simon is a safe and idyllic one. The child is depicted in rural settings where there are no roads or telephone poles. He is surrounded by hills, dales, ponds and sky. But Simon is never lost in the landscape, rather he is always in full view, influencing the world around him. The boy in the drawings is consistent in size and colour throughout the story.

Gilles Tibo uses airbrush techniques to create pleasant summer images. In his pictures he juxtaposes sharp detail with soft inviting expanses, conveying the effect of brilliant summer light on open countryside.

Simon in summer is the last publication in Gilles Tibo's four book series about a little boy's seasonal explorations. All of the books – *Simon and the wind*, *Simon and the snowflakes*, *Simon welcomes spring* and *Simon in summer* – are also available in French editions.

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