be safe. However, the boy wants to go fishing with his uncles. He is compelled to go to the boat and falls asleep there. The next morning, he awakes to the sounds of his uncles' fishing out at sea. As I mother, I was relieved when the uncles say that the boy's mother knows where he is. When they return home and the mother finds out that her son fell overboard, she is very angry and upset. She insists that he will not go out on the boat again because "He is my baby and you're lucky you didn't drown him." This impasse is resolved by having the mother join in as part of the fishing crew with her brothers and son. I liked the fact that the boy is allowed to grow up with the mother included as part of the fun.

The uncles are presented as strong, brave, hard-working fishermen. They are believable and likable characters with big smiles and distinctive looks. The illustrator captures the tender affection between the family members with soft textures and shapes, almost impressionist in style. However, this style did cause a problem with the way the faces are painted. On many pages, the faces have the eyes obscured or shown as slits, which I found disconcerting.

On the last page, the story is quickly wrapped up in two short paragraphs about a shortage of fish which results in the fish factory closing and changes in the lives of the uncles. This leaves an important question unanswered: "Where did all the fish go?" It also moves the focus away from the boy growing up. The story would have been stronger to end on the previous page at the end-of-summer party. The boy's uncles and his mother toast him on how he'd become a real fisherman. He also gets a taste of coffee for the first time and he says "It was bitter and it was raw and it was sweet. It was the taste of that summer and I never lost it." These words are far more powerful and poignant than the afterthoughts on the final page.

Children ages six to eight, particularly boys, will understand and relate to the intense feelings of the boy who wants to grow up and doesn't want to be treated like a baby any more. This aspect of the story makes it one that can be reread many times.

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More Munsch

Munschworks 2: The Second Munsch Treasury. Robert Munsch. Illus. Michael Martchenko and Hélène Desputeaux. Annick, 1999. 133 pp. $24.95. ***We Share Everything!*** Robert Munsch. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Scholastic, 1999. 32 pp. $6.99. ***Mmm, Cookies!*** Robert Munsch. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Scholastic, 2000. 30 pp. $6.99.

Robert Munsch's books often flash exclamation marks in their titles, and even when they do not, they might just as well do so because Munsch is nothing if not

exclamatory. His stories are short, sharp bursts of energy. Characters, young and old, speak in upper-case letters. And we hear upper-case sounds of chewing, running, crying, whapping clay, and yelling. These are loud books. Like the children they present as characters, these books aggressively seek attention with their noise and shouting and naughty language and repetitions and exaggerated numbers and bright colours and impossible situations. The world according to Munsch is an arena for high-energy activity; he appears to share the child's penchant for mischief and the child's delight in extremes. Anarchy can take hold in Munsch's world, at least until the story comes to its end.

The seven stories I look at here offer a good sampling of Munsch's work. Five of the stories appear in Munschworks 2: *Pigs*, *Mortimer*, *Purple, Green and Yellow*, *Murmel, Murmel, Murmel*, and *Something Good*. These stories date from 1982 to 1992, and along with *We Share Everything!* and *Mmm, Cookies!*, indicate how consistent this work is. All but one of these seven stories have the same illustrator, Michael Martchenko, and this continuing collaboration between author and illustrator gives Munsch's world full consistency. These books are brash and bold, bringing young readers confirmation that the world is manageable and that they can have what they desire. In *Pigs*, Megan successfully returns the pigs to the pen; in *Mortimer*, the young songster successfully manages to create a chaos he can blissfully ignore; in *Purple, Green and Yellow*, Brigid successfully convinces her mother to buy her new colouring markers; in *Murmel, Murmel, Murmel*, Robin successfully gets rid of the baby she finds in her sandbox; in *Something Good*, Tyya successfully manages to have her father buy something good in the supermarket; in *We Share Everything!*, Amanda and Jeremiah successfully learn to share and simultaneously shock their teacher; and in *Mmm, Cookies!*, Christopher successfully bakes a giant cookie for his mother and father. The children's success follows a time of chaos, and in some of these books chaos remains at the end although the child is outside the chaos he or she has created.

In Munsch's world, the child is in control. Child power is, perhaps, one reason for the popularity of Munsch's books. Take *Murmel, Murmel, Murmel*, for example. In this story, five-year-old Robin's sandbox gives birth to a baby who utters the words of the title. The plot involves Robin finding someone who is willing to take care of the baby. After failing to convince four people to take the baby, Robin finally comes across a truck driver who agrees to take the baby and who leaves his truck behind as a trade. The child in this story can have a sibling and also get rid of a sibling. She is strong enough to approach several strangers in her quest to find a caregiver for the baby, and she receives a truck, symbol of power and mobility. Young Robin proves a capable young girl. The story is a fantasy of control, competence, and satisfied desire.

Or take the more recent *We Share Everything!* In this story, Amanda and Jeremiah take control of their schoolroom on their "very first day of school." At first, they do not know how to act. They are selfish and demanding. Their teacher, however, insists that "In kindergarten we share. We share *everything*" (emphasis in original). The two children decide to take the teacher's sweetly-intoned words to an extreme, and they exchange clothes. Soon they have everyone in the class removing her and his clothes in order to share them. Cross-dressing holds the day. The place is bedlam; the teacher faints (in the illustrations). The children here accept

their elder's strictures, but turn these to their own advantage. Once again we have the fantasy of child power. In sharing everything, the children succeed in getting their own way. Paradoxically, sharing becomes a means of satisfying one's own selfish desires.

The children in these books may be powerful, but they are also unlikable. I suspect those who enjoy Munsch's books might replace my word "unlikable" with "believable" or "realistic." These are good bad children, the kind we find cute or likable precisely because they are independent and strong-willed. Invariably, they get their own way. Take Mortimer, for example. His mother takes him to bed and tells him to be quiet; he responds by saying "yes" and then singing loudly as soon as she has gone back downstairs. Mortimer annoys his mother, his father, his seventeen brothers and sisters, and two policemen. At the end of the story, Mortimer is asleep while downstairs the father is fighting with the brothers and sisters and the mother is fighting with the policemen. Mortimer never does do what he is told. He manages to create chaos and then to ignore it blissfully.

Take another example: *Purple, Green and Yellow*. In this story, Brigid asks for new colouring markers three times, for ones that wash off, for ones that smell, and for ones she describes as "super-indelible-never-come-off-till-you're-dead-and-maybe-even-later coloring (sic) markers." Not once does she ask politely; not once does she use the word "please." Her ploy is to repeat that she "needs" the new markers, and her mother always complies. For a while, we are led to believe that Brigid is an obedient child because she resists the urge to colour the walls or the floor. Instead, she colours herself and her sleeping father. The results are grotesquely absurd. At story's end, the father sports the indelible colouring his daughter has spread over his exposed skin, and Brigid presumably will become invisible every time she gets wet.

But I ought to be fair. Not only are the kids unlikable, but so are the adults. Mortimer's mother "threw" him into bed and then she shouts at him: "MORTIMER, BE QUIET." No bedtime story here. The other adults who come to Mortimer's room also shout. Brigid's mother shows no resistance to her daughter's cajoling. In *Something Good*, both child and father use upper-case letters with gusto. Neither shows much in the way of politeness, and at the end the father (who looks in the illustrations remarkably like Robert Munsch) rather stupidly pays $29.95 for his own daughter, as a gesture of affection. I could go through each of the books here, but consistency is a feature of these books. Both young and old exhibit a resistance to courtesy, gentleness, sensitivity, and sometimes even sense.

We are, of course, supposed to take all this as just good fun, hijinks, zaniness. This is the stuff of cartoons, and we ought not take it seriously. Martchenko's illustrations complement this cartoon-like absurdity. They are bright and filled with detail, giving the viewer more to read than she will find in the printed story. Some stories end in such a way that the final words find extension in the final illustration. We see this in *Pigs*, which ends with the words: "And Megan never let out any more animals. At least, not any more pigs." The last thing the reader sees is a picture of Megan looking impishly at the lock on the elephant's cage at the zoo. *Purple, Yellow and Green* (illustrated by Hélène Desputeaux in a manner similar to Martchenko's) ends with the assertion that Brigid's father, despite the fact that he has been coloured, looks great "As long as he doesn't get wet." The picture shows the father in

the rain, his face, head, and hands sporting green, red, orange, yellow, and brown marker colours. And in the most recent of these books, *Mmm, Cookies!*, the printed story does not tell the entire story. Here the printed story tells us that Christopher takes the cookie he bakes at school home to his parents. This is all. The last two illustrations, however, elaborate this ending. For one thing, the cookie is huge, far taller than the two parents. For another thing, the parents do not eat the cookie. The final illustration shows us at least fifteen kids, eleven birds, four animals, and two insects eating the cookie. And on the way to the feast we can see a number of birds, and at least one pterodactyl.

The message of these books is, then, excess. They are over the top, and for this reason it is easy to understand why they are popular with young readers. They give them what they want: action and empowerment. They sanction exuberance. What strikes me as less understandable is why these books are so popular with adults. I can only think that adult readers enjoy complicity with childhood innocence in the perhaps mistaken assumption that innocence is bliss.

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Canadian in Michigan?

Bud Not Buddy. Christopher Paul Curtis. Delacorte, 1999. 243 pp. $24.95. ISBN 0-385-32306-9.

Bud Not Buddy won the American Library Association's prestigious Newbery Award as the best children's novel of 1999. Published by Delacorte Press in New York, the novel is set in the American state of Michigan. Its author, Christopher Paul Curtis, himself grew up in Flint, and retains his American citizenship — if he didn't, he wouldn't qualify for the Newbery. In the light of all that, why might a journal called *Canadian Children's Literature* want to review this novel? The answer is simple. For all his American credentials, Curtis now lives in Windsor, Ontario — just far enough across the river from Detroit to be in Canada.

That *Bud Not Buddy* might be considered a Canadian children's novel raises interesting questions about what might constitute Canadian children's literature. On the face of it, the book's subject — the experiences of an African-American boy coping with the hardships of the Great Depression — seems singularly American. But Canadians, including African-Canadians, suffered in the Depression also — and the children who are their ancestors today are likely to be as distant from, as similar to, and as capable of being interested in Curtis's Bud as contemporary American children are. Still, the claiming of *Bud Not Buddy* as Canadian challenges the possibility that there might be such a thing as a distinct group of texts definable as Canadian and understandable as such.

A closer look at the novel confirms that challenge — but, intriguingly, not