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Books / Livres

Young Canada

Baby Dreams. Eugenie Fernandes. Illus. Eugenie Fernandes. Stoddart Kids, 1999. Unpag. \$16.95 casebound. ISBN 0-7737-3139-3. *Young Canada's Nursery Rhymes*. n.a. Illus. Constance Haslewood. Key Porter, 1999. 79 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55263-116-8.

Grandmother's Projections of Baby's Dreams would be a more appropriate title for Fernandes's book. The illustrations, as one would expect from an artist with over eighty books' experience, are competent, kinetic, and even at times droll, thanks to the presence of a brown rabbit in all the full-page pictures and a few of the smaller pictures on the facing pages. The problem with this book is with the text. The first word, "foreword," a very old pun, clearly announces that the appeal of this book is more for other grandmothers than the age group (I'm guessing two to four years) for which it is ostensibly intended. There are annoying sets of dots above the letters "o" and "n" and cutesy dots inside the small letter "a." When coupled with the pseudo-poetic drivel that forms the content of the book, a reading becomes frustrating. The text is written in lines, which creates the expectation of poetry — an expectation left unfulfilled. There are occasional attempts at rhyme, but they would embarrass a six-year-old. For example:

Suddenly you cry
in the middle of the night.
I wonder why ...
but never mind.

Everything will be all right.
Sit with me a while.
Together
we can laugh at the dark.

Regrettably, the illustrations cannot outweigh the text of this book.

Young Canada's Nursery Rhymes is a treasure of a book, originally issued in 1897 by Frederick Warne & Co., the same house which brought Beatrix Potter's

classics to the world. The single surviving copy, which is in the Osborne Collection of the Toronto Public Library, has been recreated with the aid of electronic technology. The physical book is an *objet d'art* in itself. Printed and bound in Italy, it represents the best of the bookmaker's art. The paper is a fine simulation of aged stock. The illustrations, very much of their original period, are finely wrought and coloured in pleasingly-harmonious golden tones. At the same time, there is a simplicity and realism about them that is enormously appealing.

This book is a collection of nursery rhymes popular in a Canada that was young itself. Here the title puns, but with some subtlety. The illustrations supply the motions that were originally associated with the rhymes, in case any reader is unfamiliar with such traditions as "Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross." The collection seems to be quite complete, and the vocabulary of the originals is preserved, allowing for both continuity of experience (say, from a grandmother to a grandchild) and a simultaneous chance for children to learn other ways of saying things. The rhymes here are all perfect, and no meaning lost.

One notes with delight that this is "the first of a series that will bring loved, vintage children's books back into the family library." There is definitely room for more such books.

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Legends, Lore and Litigation

The Mermaid's Muse: The Legend of the Dragon Boats. David Bouchard. Illus. Zhong-Yang Huang. Raincoast, 2000. Unpag. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55192-248-7. *Who Wants Rocks?* Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak. Illus. Vladyana Langer Kryorka. Annick, 1999. Unpag. \$17.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-589-X, 1-55037-588-1. *The Bone Talker.* Shelley A. Leedahl. Illus. Bill Slavin. Red Deer, 1999. Unpag. \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88995-214-0. *Prairie Summer.* Nancy Hundal. Illus. Brian Deines. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1999. Unpag. ISBN 1-55041-403-8.

David Bouchard achieves a masterful blend of legend and history in this dramatic retelling of the story of China's poet-in-exile Qu Yuan. Mysterious truths are revealed as the poet and his muse are misunderstood by the fearful and literal-minded villagers. In a spectacular climax, the dragon boat's origin impressively explains the richer significance behind the instruction "see through your heart."

A profoundly atmospheric work, thanks to Zhong-Yang Huang, all the majesty and drama of *The Mermaid's Muse* is enhanced by masterful brushwork and moody colour schemes. *The Mermaid's Muse* is the third book in the "Chinese legends" trilogy, following *The Great Race* and *The Dragon New Year*. Small wonder that Huang was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award in Children's Book