

resources to do so.

These are the main concerns of the novel. But there is also a minor theme, developed in a mystery subplot, about mistaken assumptions. When a box of rare stamps is donated to her friend's charity drive, Heather helps find the identity of the donor and, as it turns out, the thief of the valuable goods. In the course of the detective work, Heather draws some mistaken conclusions and ends up having to re-examine her preconceptions about people.

Mistaken assumptions also drive the characters in *Raven's Revenge*, the fifth book in Tate's *Stablemates* series. In this novel, twelve-year-old Jessa and her friend Cheryl go to horse camp, where the camp veterinarian is a witch, or Wiccan practitioner. Knowing nothing about his practice or beliefs, Jessa and her friends work up a semi-hysterical fear of Dr. Rainey, convincing themselves that the bad luck befalling them at camp is a result of a witch's spell. By the end of the novel, the girls are duly enlightened by the vet and his handsome (and here, rather smug) adolescent son, who explains, "My dad always tries to show me beautiful things in nature. He wants me to be respectful of all living things and that includes dumb people who think witches are evil beings who practise black magic" (149).

Ultimately, prejudice is reined in by reason, but the idea of keeping an open mind towards the unconventional is really a minor concern in the novel. The plot is mostly taken up with an escalating series of pranks carried out between the girls in Jessa's cabin and their rivals. This novel is firmly grounded in the school story tradition, with its episodic plot structure, scenes devoted to the planning and execution of practical jokes, and the occasional adult intervention when the pranks seem to be getting too nasty or dangerous. There is little psychological depth or thematic development in *Raven's Revenge*, apart from the concluding emphases on getting along nicely with others even if you don't like them, and not leaping to wild conclusions about unfamiliar religious beliefs. With its details about horse riding and camp life, this novel will probably engage young readers who share those interests. But for this reader, Nikki Tate is at her best in the Tarragon Island books with their skilful handling of narrative perspective and their focus on pleasingly fallible characters.

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Like a What?: Sloppy Similes in a Sleepytime Book

This New Baby. Teddy Jam. Illus. Karen Reczuch. Groundwood, 1998. 24 pp. \$16.95. ISBN 0-88899-327-7.

Like Marie-Louise Gay's *Moonbeam on a Cat's Ear*, *This New Baby* is a "moon" book — a night-time book of blue-soaked illustrations and restful verse. Teddy Jam's text celebrates the arrival of a new baby into a family by comparing the infant's languid sleep and awakening eyes to the nocturnal events in nature: the drifting of a hawk



*Illustration by Karen Reczuch from This
New Baby*

across the sky, the settling of dark in the grass. The large format of the book does justice to Karen Reczuch's distinctive illustrations: her characters are realistic — they have interesting faces and assume postures that a less-talented illustrator would not have executed so deftly — and she is able to capture the play of moonlight and bright morning light in the smallest details so that the overall effect is often breathtaking. Reczuch also moves back and forth between close-ups, which generally convey the intimacy and delight of the family, and middle-distance spreads, which situate the family in an idealized farmhouse setting complete with colonial furniture, a wide white porch, and two golden retrievers. The back-and-forth pacing of the illustrations nicely complements the text's movement between the baby and all of the things in the world to which he is compared in a series of similes.

The similes themselves are uneven, however. The first ones, describing the heavy sleep of a babe in arms, seem either ordinary or imprecise:

This new baby
sleeps in my arms
like a moon
sleeping on a cloud
like apples falling
through the rain
like a fish
swimming through a sky

The moon sleeping on a cloud conveys something of the ethereal and mysterious quality of a sleeping baby, I suppose, but doesn't that also imply that the baby is much heavier than the arms that hold it? A baby's sudden descent into deep sleep, signalled by the dropping of the head, is, I assume, what is implied by the reference to falling apples. But don't falling apples just make a dumb thud, even if it's raining?

It's not clear to me how the movement of a fish in the sky is like a sleeping baby, unless I am supposed to think of how wondrous both are, but then that seems like a fairly ordinary sentiment. So, the first series of similes leave me feeling a bit confused: I come away thinking mostly about how ponderous that baby must be.

The next simile is the most accomplished one in the book:

This new baby
lies in my arms
like summer dark
sleeping on new grass

The sense of union between dark and grass, babe and arms, is lovely, and Reczuch's illustration nicely suggests the weight and stretch of the dark across springy grass.

Unfortunately, the verse does not really surprise us again after this simile. What does surprise, however, are a series of obscure or seemingly inappropriate references:

my new baby's cry
chases old ghosts
back into the shadows

What old ghosts? The double-page illustration shows a sleepy father and son standing in a doorway looking across at the mother and crying baby. Presumably, they have been awakened by the baby's cries. But what about the old ghosts?

We are then given this series of similes:

This new baby
opens his eyes
like two moons
shining on a lake
like two dogs
smelling for a bone
like morning love
like two cats jumping

I hate to say it, but we seem to move from the sublime to the ridiculous here: two moons shining on a lake is a nice, crisp image linking the luminosity of the moons to a baby's eyes, but the two dogs smelling for a bone is a strangely banal reference to, I assume, the eagerness with which a baby may open its eyes. The latter reference borders on the laughable just as the reference to "morning love" seems oddly injudicious. Reczuch cleverly portrays the entire family (mother, father, baby and boy) in bed in the morning while two cats jump around the bed, but, if that's "morning love," then fish really can swim in the sky.

This is my ten-month-old's favourite book, and for this I would credit Reczuch's illustrations, Michael Solomon's book design, and the superb complementary pacing of text and illustration. For me, the text is too much like two dogs smelling for a bone: all eagerness and sloppiness in search of something buried out

of reach.

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Professional Advice on Acting for Theatre and TV

Pierre Lefèvre ON ACTING. Instructional video. Produced and distributed by the National Film Board of Canada. Running time: 38 minutes and 38 seconds. Order number C9192017. Order from NFB, PO Box 6100, Station A, Montreal, Québec, M3C 3H5.

Aimed at an audience of secondary and post-secondary drama and theatre arts students, *Pierre Lefèvre on Acting* concisely and effectively covers many essential elements of the acting process that are beneficial to acting instructors and student actors. Using neutral and character masks as the catalysts, the bilingual Pierre Lefèvre guides acting students at the National Theatre School in Montréal through character development and improvisation exercises. Acting teachers are charged with the challenge of encouraging the young, often inhibited actors to get out of their heads and into their bodies. "The mask shields young actors from timidity and self-consciousness, increases concentration, strengthens inner feelings and leads to greater physical awareness and dramatic expression."

This video immediately engages the viewer with the introduction of 24 character masks, which Lefèvre refers to as creatures. The creature does not materialize into a character until "it is on your face." The Master gently cautions the actors not to make quick decisions about character but explore through movement and action and allow the inner life of the character to organically emerge. Lefèvre deftly helps the student actors build their characters through a series of questions and answers and given circumstances. It is fascinating to watch the mask take on its new life and fuse with the actor's body. Once the acting students learn how to express themselves physically and emotionally with the neutral mask they are introduced to the character mask and to vocalization. Using improvisations the actors explore the principles of comedy and construction of character background. These techniques are manifest in a series of entertaining and remarkable improvised scenes involving three characters.

Pierre Lefèvre is a delight to watch. He successfully combines his talents as a professional director, actor, and teacher. His joy and passion for his art and his students is charming and compelling. He describes himself as "an older brother, telling the kids how to get there, based on my experience. I would never ask anyone to do something that I wouldn't have done myself or tried to do myself." Lefèvre also reminds us that acting for theatre is not the same as acting for television. The stage requires a physicality that is fundamental to the communication with the audience. There is no camera to capture close-ups of small eye movements