

deeper truths of *Charlotte's Web* or the fear that is perhaps inherent in all plots.

A common thread, it seems to me, that runs through these books is their unwillingness to deal with the question of fear: fear of rejection, fear of the unknown, fear of the future, fear of death. *Little Red Riding Hood* cannot contain all the different fears that it generates, hence it is a story that keeps being retold in new forms. The popularity and longevity of *Goodnight Moon* perhaps resides in its deep knowledge that while going to bed and saying goodnight, children must evaluate the meaning of their lives and run the risk of encountering unaccountable fears. But when a story fails to deliver a sense of what it means to be alive in our skin or share our daily lives with animals who are equally mortal, the success of picture books can still reside in the power of their illustrations. The sleeping pets that form the final image of *Julian* have an emotional resonance that can only be deepened with the knowledge that Dayal Kaur Khalsa died in 1989.

Gregor Campbell teaches English at the University of Guelph.

Mr. Capra's Cats

Tom and Francine: A Love Story. Sylvia Fraser. Illus. Eugenie Fernandes. Key Porter, 1998. 30 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55013-944-4.

While it may fall short of an exhaustive scholarly definition, I feel safe in claiming that if a children's book reassures, delights, and instructs its young readers, it has done well. If the adult readers of that same book can appreciate the considerable wit of its creators and can come away charmed by its characters and illustration, then it is fine work indeed. One small and one large thumb up, therefore, for *Tom and Francine: A Love Story*, written by Sylvia Fraser and illustrated by Eugenie Fernandes.

The plot is Capra-esque: hayseed boy cat meets snooty girl cat, is spurned by same, vanquishes vicious pit-bull, and wins girl cat's delicate fuzzy paw and employment by the end. It could easily have been quite irritating, but Fraser combines some delightful doggerel (catterel?) with a fine sense of the limits this structure imposes. Much of the pleasure here for the adult reader comes from seeing how Fraser's ear and Fernandes's eye playfully collude to keep each other out of trouble.

Tom and Francine (thankfully) inhabit a place where cats and dogs do not act in the mundane fashion to which we are accustomed, but according to a considerably more reassuring picture of community and humanity. Along with this reassurance, readers are challenged not to put their faith in outward appearances. Tom chases and helps capture a dog with the aid of a "hundred police dogs" who chase and capture not a cat (their more natural enemy) but pit-bull terrier "Spike Hooligan, scourge of the nation." Neither Tom's species nor his outward appearance is in any way allowed to diminish his accomplishments. Canine, feline, and human alike see Tom for what he is, and he is rewarded. Character is destiny, and good triumphs over evil.

Two things prevent this unobjectionable but fairly commonplace collection of

devices from becoming cloying. First are some lovely turns of phrase (I'm especially partial to the "frog on a bench reading Plutarch"), though the same respect for meter is not always shown. Most winning, though, are characterizations informed (I am certain) by many hours of real-time cat and human observation. Francine is vain and urbane; her human correlate would buy a half-caf, easy-foam, extra-hot, almond latte every morning. Tom is the mug of a truck-stop joe. In the book they are beautifully rendered as an elegant seal-point and an orange barn-cat, respectively. Francine's pleading on Tom's behalf is entirely credible as a human characterization. At the same time, anyone who has been subject to feline entreaties/manipulations/imprecations will appreciate the kitty subtext.

Some years ago, Barry Tranquada was an M.A. candidate in philosophy at McMaster University. He now tries to keep track of other people's money in Vancouver, BC.

New Titles from Annick Press

Kate's Shoes. Erica Dornbusch. Annick, 2001. 32 pp. \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-671-3. *The Grandmother Doll*. Alice L. Bartels. Illus. Dusan Petricic. Annick, 2001. 24 pp. \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-667-5. *Bing Finds Chutney*. Andrea Wayne von Königslöw. Annick, 2001. 24 pp. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-669-1. *Night School*. Loris Lesynski. Annick, 2001. 32 pp. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-585-7.

There are a few brief years between the time a child learns to talk and before the sombre rules of "reality" take increasing precedence. During this magic time, toddlers are encouraged to gallop and cavort in any and all directions, both in their physical and mental spaces. Annick Press seems to support the "fodder for the fantastic" approach to reading with the spring 2001 release of these four books for young children: *Kate's Shoes*, *The Grandmother Doll*, *Bing Finds Chutney*, and *Night School*.

Kate's Shoes is a great example of the world seen through the eyes of a dreamy child. The plot revolves around a lost pair of shoes that becomes the object of a frantic search by a harried mother and her young daughter Kate who, while being practical in her search, cannot help transforming her surroundings from the urbane into the deliciously unreal. For example, in the living room the floral wallpaper and chintz chair upholstery propel Kate into the lush landscape of an imaginary garden. And so the search winds not only through the house but across deserts, jungles, and oceans in a wonderful domestic "I-spy" adventure.

The success of *Kate's Shoes* can be found within the talent of writer/illustrator Erica Dornbusch. Dornbusch, whose work as an art director and an illustrator is to get her message across without a word. Without text, the brightly coloured and intriguingly intricate but clear drawings in *Kate's Shoes* effectively communicate a well-chosen message for children ages two to four — enjoy your daydreams because they are beautiful.

The heroine in *The Grandmother Doll* also has a good imagination, but there is no mistaking this Katy for a head-in-the-clouds kind of dreamer! She reminds me, to some degree, of the little girl who, when "she was good, was very, very good and