

acting self-discipline, may make Maybarduk's portrait of the dancer seem too idealized to those readers familiar with press coverage of his bad temper and controversial personal life. Maybarduk states in the introduction that her memoir "is not a tell-all about his private life." Her account of Nureyev's "professional" life has resulted in a book that emphasizes his accomplishments in dance. With over 70 black-and-white photographs of Nureyev both off and on stage, a brief chart outlining ballet history, and a glossary of ballet terms, the book is directed mainly at young readers, female and male. (Nureyev was the dancer to re-establish male leading roles equal to female ones in ballet.) However, older readers will also enjoy Maybarduk's anecdotes about Nureyev.

Wendy Thompson is working on a Master's Degree in English at Simon Fraser University.

Rich Parables for Children and Adults

The Wolf of Gubbio. Michael Bedard. Illus. Murray Kimber. Stoddart Kids, 2001. 24 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-77373-250-0. *The Floating Orchard.* Troon Harrison. Illus. Miranda Jones. Tundra, 2000. 32 pp. \$19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-439-8.

These two books offer rich parables: one retells an old legend, while the second offers a new and poignant tale of change. Like any good parable, both books straddle the worlds of adulthood and childhood, explaining with sensitivity and simplicity the challenges of human life.

The Wolf of Gubbio, nominated for a 2001 Governor General's Award for its illustrations, reworks a legend about St. Francis arriving in the Italian town of Gubbio and encountering there a wolf who has been terrorizing the town. Although the story has existed in various versions since 1226, all versions pivot on the central moment when vulnerable St. Francis confronts a hungry and misunderstood wolf with nothing but trust. When he convinces the townspeople to feed the wolf, they placate the awful horror that was in their midst. Michael Bedard's narrative does not dismiss the religious elements of the story, introducing St. Francis as the Poverello, the leader of "a ragged band of strangers" who are "barefoot" but likely miracle workers. He also asserts the historical veracity of the story, pointing out in an afterword that a large wolf's skull was found under a church floor in Gubbio in 1873. However, the story affects most at the level of parable. It tells us in powerful images that we should confront violence not with more violence but with trust and creativity. Bedard invents a new narrator for the story, a young boy of Gubbio, and we meet him on the last page of the book feeding the large and hungry wolf. Shaping the legend in this way makes it a plea for peace and understanding from the voice of a child whose trust and innocence mirrors that of the Poverello. The illustrations by Murray Kimber are indeed luminous. One of the paintings focuses on the moment of the meeting between St. Francis and the wolf; packed with tension, it is an ideal subject for artistic representation. (Robert Kakagamik, an artist from the Ojji-Cree reserve in Sandy Lake, Ontario, has also tackled this narrative moment very successfully.) Kimber's paintings shine forth with the Mediterranean

light of an Italian village and glower with the primeval forest palette of fairy tales.

Troon Harrison creates a haunting parable about the inevitability of change in *The Floating Orchard*. The main character is Damson, inheritor of her family's magical plum orchard, a place she plans to never leave. During a terrible flood, the hero Bartlett arrives. This pear farmer convinces her to cut down the tallest, most magical plum tree in order to make a mast for the boat that will carry Damson and her animals to safety. She does so regretfully and the boat carries Damson and Bartlett to a new land where they begin anew, creating an orchard of pear trees and plum trees for their daughter, Anjou Victoria, to inhabit. When Anjou says that she will never leave this home, the narrator concludes with the moral of the story: "She didn't know yet that life is full of surprises." The illustrations by Miranda Jones are well integrated, a magical wash of purples and blues, and each picture is framed, somewhat like the art of Jan Brett.

Topics of loss and change are dealt with gently and imaginatively in *The Floating Orchard*. The heroine Damson never forgets her origins and instead feels nostalgia for them; there is no glossing over the loss of childhood in this text, and, in fact, those feelings of pain are transformative. On the other hand, there is nothing heavy-handed in the treatment of these topics. The ideal audience for this text will be those readers who are at once in and out of childhood, able to imagine themselves at a point in the future when their childhood will be a memory. In *The Floating Orchard* and in *The Wolf of Gubbio*, sensitive young readers will see themselves reflected through the eyes of thoughtful adults and may begin to recognize the complexity and richness of the world they will inherit as adults.

Kathryn Carter teaches English at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Sex and Spirits

Before Wings. Beth Goobie. Orca, 2000. 203 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-163-7.

Before Wings bravely confronts two issues about which adults resist talking to their teenagers: death and sex. Adrien is fifteen years old and sure she's going to die any moment. She may be right, having suffered a brain aneurysm two years previously. Adrien has been treated as a fragile object, even by herself, so it's a good thing that she's sent to work at Aunt Erin's summer camp. Aunt Erin doesn't baby her; as Adrien finds out, she has her own demons or, we should say, spirits. Since her aneurysm, Adrien has seen spirits and has felt a strong pull to the spirit world. Standing between worlds makes it "difficult to focus on the here and now."

Goobie's roots as a poet are evident everywhere. Her lyrical style is at once compelling and leisurely. Goobie moves smoothly to connect the dots between the natural world, Adrien, and the spirit world: "Again, the lightning forked the entire horizon. It was like watching her own brain, the knife lines of electricity that sliced through its heavy mass. Come, the sky was calling her into the gray pulp of its brain, the dazzle of its forked currents." The use of the mayfly as a metaphor for the ephemeral works well.

Goobie brings to life the anger and morbidity of the typical teenager. Adrien's