

Is There An Echo in Here?

I Promise I'll Find You. Heather Patricia Ward. Illus. Sheila McGraw. Firefly, 1994. Unpag. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55209-094-9. *Petula, Who Wouldn't Take a Bath*. Linda Bailey. Illus. Jackie Snider. HarperCollins (Alligator Press), 1996. Unpag. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-00-648088-8. *Would You Love Me?* Andrea Wayne von Königslöw. Illus. author. Annick, 1997. Unpag. \$15.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-431-1, 1-55037-430-3.

Some people claim that there are only five story plots in existence, and that our entire literary history revolves around them. But three recent picture books, which bear more than a passing resemblance to their literary ancestors, invite a closer look at similarities and differences.

In its theme, its format, and even its colour scheme, *I Promise I'll Find You* begs to be compared to the classic *The Runaway Bunny*, by Margaret Wise Brown (illus. Clement Hurd). In both books, a mother promises to search for her missing child, travelling across land, water and sky to find him.

First-time author Heather Patricia Ward may lack the deftness of a Margaret Wise Brown, but there is no doubt about the seriousness of her purpose. From its dedication "To all of the missing children in the world..." to her final note stating that a portion of the author's proceeds will benefit child-locating agencies, this book is intended to move adults to tears while providing entertainment for their children.

In that sense, it harks back to Robert Munsch's *Love You Forever*. But Sheila McGraw's illustrations here are completely different from her work in the Munsch book. Like Hurd, she uses a rich, intense palette and puts an emphasis on mass and form over line. In each spread, a tiny image of the missing child stretches his arms toward his passing mother, who repeatedly fails to spot him. She promises to search "until the day [is] done," and "as every day [goes] by." These small touches provide a chilling undercurrent to the soothing tones and bright pictures.

The almost unbearable tension contrasts sharply with the reassuring mood of *Runaway Bunny*. Hurd celebrates his bunny reunion with a cuddle on mother's lap. In McGraw's reunion scene, mother and child stand side-by-side with their backs to us. But even though the theme is dark, the text moves along with a light touch, and there is much here that will appeal to a child. This book shines with the strength of its vibrant, accomplished pictures.

The jingle-jangle rhyme scheme of *Petula, Who Wouldn't Take a Bath* is reminiscent of the *Jillian Jiggs* books by Phoebe Gilman, but this story of a grime-covered girl whose skin begins to sprout vegetables echoes an even older tale. "The Radish Cure," from Betty MacDonald's middle-grade book *Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle*, was recently adapted for the picture book market under the title *Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle's Won't-Take-A-Bath Cure* (illus. Bruce Whatley). It tells how a mother plants radish seeds on her sleeping daughter, successfully frightening the disobedient girl into the bath when her skin starts to sprout.

Petula, on the other hand, revels in the fact that vegetables have begun to grow spontaneously all over her body. Nothing curbs her aversion to

bathtime, until the neighbours launch into a feeding frenzy and threaten to "pick her." The moral is clearly spelled out: "The next time *your* mom says you need a good scrub, / please remember Petula and ... jump in the tub!"

The rollicking text echoes Petula's ebullient spirit. Unsuspecting readers may trip over interruptions in the rhyme and metre which distinguish Petula's voice from that of her mother and emphasize moments of high drama. But the galloping text and zany illustrations suit the story well and rescue it from didacticism as the energy builds to a satisfying shout and splash. Petula is a likable character whose story is sure to delight young listeners.

In the book *Would You Love Me?* a child asks "Would you love a cow that eats up people's clothes?" and the adult replies, "Yes, I'd hug her tight and then pat her soft nose." Sound familiar? Barbara M. Joosse used a similar premise in *Mama, Do You Love Me?* (illus. Barbara Lavallee).

In *Would You Love Me?* each picture shows a different child or (in several cases) no child at all. Without the narrative framework or consistent characters of the Joosse book, *Would You Love Me?* asks readers to make some sophisticated inferences. The visual clues are sometimes subtle, as in the picture of the crowing rooster, where the child holds her hand over her teddy bear's mouth. Slight inconsistencies from page to page make it hard to find a unifying pattern. The question "Would you love an elephant with a long trunk?" refers to a physical characteristic, not mischief-making behaviour, and the response ("Yes, I'd let him sleep with me on my top bunk") seems to come from the child's point of view, not the parent's. In some spreads we are inside the child's imagination, while in others we see the parent's response.

But in spite of slight inconsistencies, there is plenty of child appeal in this book, with lots to look at and to enjoy. The pictures are light and loose, with a touch of naivete that creates a kind of tenderness which is appropriate for this text. Whether or not the echoes are intentional, these three picture books resonate with others in the field of children's literature. They provide an interesting opportunity to compare and contrast various styles and approaches.

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Text and Illustration for Children Seven Years of Age and Younger

Night Fun. Patricia Quinlan. Illus. Ron Berg. Annick, 1997. 24 pp. \$16.96 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-487-7. *Flying Dimitri.* Blair Dawson. Illus. author. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1997. 32 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-284-X. Originally published in 1978 in a substantially different form. *Mary Margaret's Tree.* Blair Dawson. Illus. author. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1996. 32 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-259.

This book for ages three to six was inspired by a favourite nursery rhyme, "Hey,