Le cadre historique du roman remonte à l'époque où s'esquissait l'avenir du Canada; où commençait la dépossession des Indiens et où le pouvoir grandissant des Anglais s'annonce: or, l'auteur évite de perpétuer les mythes du "bon sauvage" ou du "méchant Anglais". Nous sommes en présence d'un soin sincère de peindre les Iroquois en ce qu'ils avaient de sage ou de féroce et de peindre les Anglais en ce qu'ils avaient d'astucieux ou d'intéressé. Menfou Carcajou est le symbole de l'esprit critique que Suzanne Martel nous invite à adopter.

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PASSING THE REREADING TEST: SOME RECENT PICTURE BOOKS

Mother Nature Takes a Vacation. Lydia Bailey. Illus. Sylvie Daigneault. Toronto: HarperCollins, 1992. Unpag., $15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-00-223754-7. **Waves in the Bathtub**. Eugenie Fernandes. Richmond Hill: North Winds Press (Scholastic Canada), 1993. 32 pp., $14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-74318-X. **Melanie and the Magic Bubble**. Mary Houghton Docksteader. Vancouver: Polestar Press, 1993. Unpag., $16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-919591-66-3. Ages 6-10. **The Catfish Palace**. Hazel J. Hutchins. Illus. Ruth Ohi. Toronto: Annick Press, 1993. Unpag., $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-317-X. Also available in cloth, ISBN 1-55037-316-1. **Ten Men on a Ladder**. Craig MacAulay. Illus. Hélène Desputeaux. Toronto: Annick Press, 1993. Unpag., $4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-340-4. Also available in cloth, ISBN 1-55037-341-2. **TV Sal and the Game Show from Outer Space**. Sheldon Oberman. Illus. Craig Terlson. Red Deer, Alta: Red Deer College Press, 1993. Unpag., $14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88995-093-8. **Don't be Scared, Eleven**. Richard Thompson. Illus. Eugenie Fernandes. Toronto: Annick Press, 1993. Unpag., $14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-286-6. Also available in paper, ISBN 1-55037-287-4. **The Big Storm**. Rhea Tregebov. Illus. Maryann Kovalski. Toronto: Kids Can Press, 1992. Unpag., $11.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-081-4. **Alison's House**. Maxine Trottier. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993. Unpag., $5.95 paper. ISBN 0-19-540968-X.

These nine books all start from a seed in the child's own day-to-day experience such as a lost cat, a favourite toy, a bedtime bath, a bottle of bubble liquid, a television show, or a family outing and they achieve varying degrees of success in developing the familiar into a satisfying book. The sincerity of the animal rights message isn't enough to carry *The Catfish Palace*. Also needed in a satisfactory picture-book, but missing here, is a compelling story that children will want to hear over and over and a rhythmic, economical text that parents will be willing to read aloud, not once but possibly hundreds of times. A good editor and a few more rewrites would have helped stodgy dialogue like: "'Yes, I've seen him [the large catfish],' said her father. 'He makes me sad too, but it's not

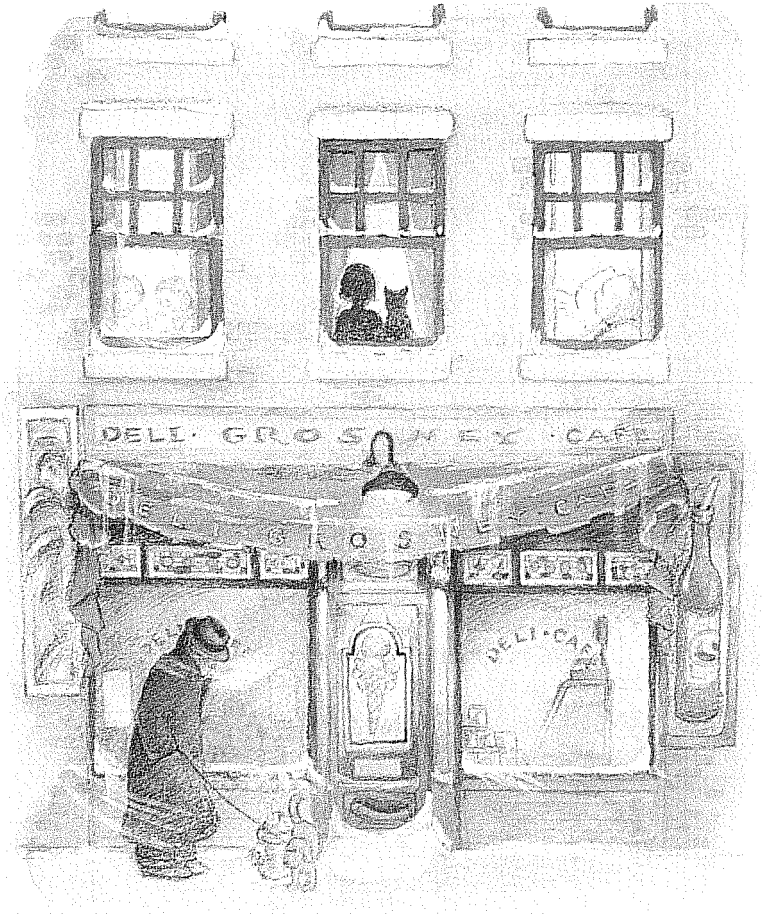

Illustration from *The Big Storm*

as bad as things once were. In the old days some store-keepers had wild animals chained up outside their stores—a bear or a wolf on a very short chain—and they were never taken off the chain. I'm glad people aren't allowed to do that any more. I don't think the catfish is as unhappy as those animals were."

Mother Nature Takes a Vacation is another book with a message, in this case made more palatable by the elegant book design, vivid and detailed illustrations, and heightened language. Lydia Bailey has adapted familiar fairy tale motifs such as the king's proclamation of a reward, failure by all the kingdom's bravest people ("They looked in forests and they looked in caves. But Mother Nature was nowhere to be found."), the offer of help by the unlikely orphan-hero ("'You?' [the king] sneered. 'That's preposterous!'"), her perilous journey and encounter with non-human helpers ("'If you please, Flowers,' she inquired

politely, 'can you tell me where Mother Nature is?'"), and finally her redemption of the kingdom. The contemporary spin on this traditional folk plot is that Mother Nature is fed up because people "throw garbage in my oceans, dirty my soil, and they make my air gray and yucky." She won't come back from her extended Florida vacation until the townspeople mop, wipe, dust, and rub to get the air, water, and soil "all as clean as a whistle."

Also interested in messages, Maxine Trottier has explained that she wrote *Alison's House* "partly with the idea of showing children that some important things, like love, can help them cope" with change, specifically the change involved in moving from a much beloved house. Alison's family has more children than Mother Hubbard—dozens of undifferentiated children crowd into Michael Martchenko's exuberant but by now perhaps too familiar illustrations. When the new baby is born, Alison's parents decide it's time to move to "a great, big house" up the street. All move but Alison, whose refrain throughout is, "I love it here and I'm never going to leave." Eventually Alison discovers that what she loved about the old house was the experience of belonging to a large, lively, loving family. This book offers a message of security and reassurance, because change wasn't really change after all. The soul of the old house has moved to the new house, from which, by the end, Alison is "never going to leave." Although Alison's wise and understanding mother and father look too happy and not nearly tired enough to be parents to seventeen or so children, one dog, and one parakeet, I predict that this book will pass the rereading test and be demanded as a bedtime reading favourite.

TV Sal capitalizes on the fact that children have a subversive streak by taking a possible message and turning it inside out with bounce and humour. In a beginning that parodies discourse on the evils of TV, we learn that Sal had been watching TV all week long at her summer cottage: "Her father said, 'That TV will suck your brain as empty as an old grapefruit.' Her brother said, 'Your eyes will be as square as that TV screen.' Her mother asked, 'Would you like to do something different, dear? Come with us to look at the fog.'" But Sal stays home to watch the *Pretty Piggy Supersweet Special* and ends up making a trade with space aliens: parts to fix their spaceship in exchange for a Universal Channel Changer that "puts you on any TV show in the universe." As Sal surfs from channel to channel, the intertextuality invoked is not to fairy tales but to game show motifs: "'DON'T TOUCH THAT DIAL.' "'YOU'VE GOT A TRADE!' The audience went wild." The insistent and attention-grabbing text finds its appropriate counterpart in Craig Terlson's high-intensity, cartoon-like illustrations.

Illustrations are the strength of *Melanie and the Magic Bubble*. Each spread presents a left page of lacklustre text and a right page of detailed, black and white illustrations which have the intensity of magic realism paintings. Melanie, who seems like a child straight from the fifties, has been sent out to play in a white nylon blouse with lace collar and cuffs, a jumper, white socks, and black, patten-

leather shoes. Wearing this outfit, there's not much she can do but mope, until the mysterious Mrs. Huggins from next door gives her a magic bubble mix. Melanie blows a giant bubble that carries her away and up, until she is floating high and looking down on the whole town. This plot twist provides an opportunity for some striking illustrations (there's an especially dramatic image of a startled sea-gull inspecting Melanie floating in her bubble), but it restricts Melanie to a curiously passive role where all she can do is to float and look. Mary Houghton Docksteader needs to team up with a writer whose story-telling skills match her own powers of illustration.

Eugenie Fernandes's *Waves in the Bathtub* is a more successful example of a book by a single author-illustrator. Fernandes takes the familiar bedtime bath as the setting for Kady's bathtub song that conjures up from the bathtub waves a series of fish, polar bears, dolphins and pelicans, penguins and octopi: "Imagining the ocean/ I can see/ waves in the bathtub/ here with me." For families that want to sing along, the words and music of "The Bathtub Song" are included at the end. This picture-book is intended for a younger audience than the other books under review and has the smallest amount of text—in one spread as few as seven words ("I like polar bears/ in my tub") that serve as a caption to a double-page illustration of a very friendly polar bear mother and cub in Kady's bath. Unlike the predictable relationship between text and illustration in *Melanie and the Magic Bubble,* here there is variety and contrast from one spread to the next. *Waves in the Bathtub* is modest in its ambitions and succeeds nicely. It has the best endpapers too, with a watercolour wash of purple, turquoise and white waves (runner-up in the endpaper department is *TV Sal* with silver stars on a purple background and in last place is the peculiarly mustard-coloured endpapers of *Mother Nature Takes a Vacation*, possibly chosen by a book designer who has never changed a dirty diaper).

Eugenie Fernandes also illustrated *Don't Be Scared, Eleven*, a book in the Jesse adventure series written by Richard Thompson. The seed for this story was a family bicycle camping trip through Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia when the real-life Jesse was three and a half and rode behind her father's bicycle in a trailer. Thompson has said there were times "when it certainly felt like there was a two thousand kilogram elephant riding along with Jesse in her trailer." Eleven is a small, stuffed elephant who goes along for the ride and is a surrogate for that part of all of us that needs a lot of reassurance: "[A]re we almost home?" "Are there bears?" and "Jesse,... we're going over a high bridge. Maybe we will fall in the water!" Jesse takes the parent's role, reassuring Eleven with soothing words and comfort food. The result is a dieter's worst nightmare come true: a few raisins, carrots, apples and "ALL the gumdrops" cause Eleven to swell up to the size of a real elephant. By the final spread, Eleven, now bigger than a house, has found "a whole bag of marshmallows" and has grown right off the page. "A horror story!" remarked one adolescent reader to whom I showed *Don't Be Scared, Eleven,* but the five-year-old set is more likely to respond positively to

the humorous exaggeration of the story and the additional dramatic situations introduced through the illustrations.

Ten Men on a Ladder is another book that elaborates, with some inventive exaggeration, upon a simple and familiar situation, in this case a favourite toy that is lost. After two days and two nights of nameless baby sister's nonstop crying over a fugitive birthday balloon, Marcy sets out on a search that faintly echoes Jack-and-the-Beanstalk's aerial journey. As the basic structural unit which is repeated three times with variations, Marcy climbs a ladder, sees three men working, asks, "Excuse me, but have you seen a balloon?" and hears their answer, "We've seen ... but no balloons." Finally, with nine rail polishers, window washers, and painters right behind her, Marcy climbs the fourth ladder and finds a sooty chimney sweep who is crying and complaining, "I cannot sweep this chimney, because something is plugging it up." The illustrations are boldly executed in bright contrasting colours of green, yellow and magenta that suit the folk-story-in-a-modern-setting feeling of the book.

I've saved my pick of the lot until the end: Rhea Tregebov's *The Big Storm*, illustrated by Maryann Kovalski. This distinguished picture-book tells a story that Tregebov heard from her own mother about the day her cat, Kitty Doyle, waited for her after school during the worst Winnipeg snowstorm of the year. Tregebov in turn told the story to her own son, recreating the Grosney Deli as it was in the '30s with Momma in the kitchen making borscht and gefilte fish and Poppa at the front of the store selling herring and pickles. Maryann Kovalski has rendered this world in loving and accurate detail, showing the counters and round seats of the deli, the big radio in its wooden cabinet in the Grosney livingroom, the trams on the Winnipeg streets, and the clothes of the period. Although seven of the nine books under review feature journeys, *The Big Storm* is the only one that conveys a genuine sense of danger and risk, culminating in the moment when Jeanette finds the cold still body of Kitty Doyle as "a little bump in the snow." The shape of the journey can be seen in the progression of illustrations from the warm brown and red tones of the opening spreads in the Grosney Deli to the dark illustrations showing the frozen, empty, black streets and alleys where Jeanette searches for Kitty Doyle to the final golden image of Kitty Doyle back home in the warmth of the Deli, curled up in a ball, purring. For my money, this book has all the marks of a picture-book that will survive and become a classic. It has a good story with emotional resonance, told in a spare, rhythmic text where every word counts; its illustrations extend the text by providing dimensions of meaning not available in the words alone; and it has the capacity to offer new rewards to both parent and child reader each time it is read and reread.

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