

ing room, Paul Mombourquette's visions lovingly capture the weather-filled look and feel of an east-coast environment. God remains in Helmer's elegant details of word ("raspy, rusty voice") and Mombourquette's thoughtful images (the aluminum door hinge, among many others).

Grandfather reminds me of some chronically unsung character actor, familiar and comfortable. Hannah is slightly less successful as she suffers from the illustrator's toughest challenge — consistency. She may also be based on a real person, but her facial features and head size lapse erratically into adult proportions peculiar on her supposedly eight- to ten-year-old figure. Had the artist chosen a model who aged beyond her role before the book's completion? Technical problems aside, Hannah's uniqueness pleases.

The cat's articulation is remarkable, although its texture tends too often to look gooey and claylike instead of full-bodied, which layered line strokes would produce. Throughout, Mombourquette's beautifully evocative colour and tone, carefully used angles and luminescent light enrich *Fog Cat's* reverberations. Watch and note, the artist and author seem to say together: the dramatis personae in our next hour of crisis may feature a four-footed furry one.

Epilogue: it appears the *Driftwood Cove* creators, the Lightbourns, have quit the forested BC coasts for the Annapolis region and so we may yet see the peculiar eastern magic of *Fog Cat* inspire even greater books of beauty and mystery.

Robin Baird Lewis, an established children's book illustrator (Red is Best, et al), inoculates herself regularly with heavy doses of P.G. Wodehouse and Hunter S. Thompson.

"Thus Grew the Tale of Wonderland ..."

... Thus slowly, one by one,
Its quaint events were hammered out —
And now the tale is done,
And home we steer, a merry crew
Beneath the setting sun."

(Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*)

On Tumbledown Hill. Tim Wynne-Jones. Illus. Dušan Petričić. Northern Lights/Red Deer College P, 1999. 30 pp. \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88995-186-1.

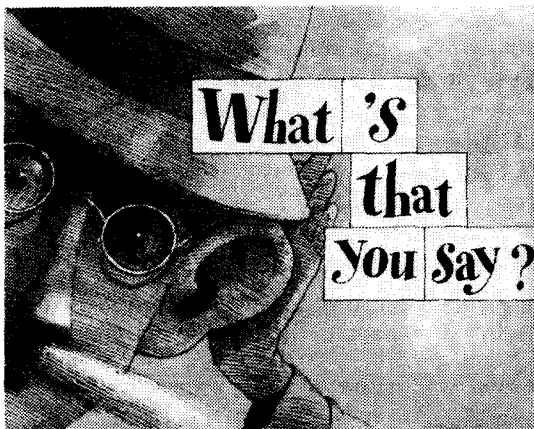
On the cover, colourful, anarchic, paint-splash children tumble across the black tabula rasa of the background. Are these the monsters mentioned on the book jacket? If so, this is going to be a fun book.

You open the book and there they are — 26 monsters — filling the first page with their large black shapes, jumping out at the reader in their oversized type, each one boxed in its own frame -- 26 words! And not a picture in sight: "and what is the use of a book," thought Alice, "without pictures or conversations?" The number of words is decreased by one with each succeeding page, and the balance of illustration to text changes as does the way in which we "read" the book, right down to the last page which contains — you guessed it — no words at all. The narrative is seemingly straightforward: an artist walks up a hill in the early evening accompanied by his pet rabbit and paints a picture of the landscape in spite of constant interference from a group of mischievous children. This *is* a picture book, but it is also a commentary on what books *are* and on what they *mean* to the young child discovering them for the first time, on the relationship between words and illustrations, and on the creative process for author and illustrator.

The book begins by recreating for the skilful reader some of the experiences of learning to read and decode the language of books, both text and illustrations. There is so much to think about — how, for example, does a young child make sense of our language when a long word like "Tumble-down" counts as one word, while the contraction "they'd" counts as two? Try reading the first page out loud. Can you do it without stumbling? It's not easy, one word at a time, in the large print that makes it impossible to use the over-learned eye-movements that allow the experienced reader to "read ahead" so that the physical act of reading flows seamlessly into meaning.

As the book progresses, the relationship between illustration and text changes from its "one picture = 25 (if not 1,000) words" second page, through its sly contradictions between pictures and text, to its final invitation to readers to participate with their own interpretation of the illustrations. The single illustration on the second page does little more than confirm what is in the text. On the third page, text and illustrations complement each other: there is no need to describe the tree-covered hillside — a picture is more economical here. Bun's nervousness is described in both words and pictures on the fifth page and this time words are more economical than pictures — the hiccups are hard to illustrate — but there is a reason for including the illustration here — it's funnier. By the sixth page, pictures and text begin to diverge because the monsters, when they appear in Petricic's illustrations, are not as author Tim Wynne-Jones described on the first page. By the end of the book, the narrator is addressing the reader directly. "Well, do you see any monsters around?" he asks. And we don't, until the final page when he shows us the picture he has painted.

The view the narrator seeks is of trees and fields, and the pet he takes with him is a rabbit, a wild animal that should be at home here in the countryside. He might be the author, out for an evening away from his desk, and away from the stresses of battling with the plot and characters of the narrative and the words he must use to represent them — the "monsters" he must subdue in order to create. If so, he is also the illustrator (the illustrations show him sporting the author's beard and the illustrator's moustache),



plagued by the paint-splash monsters that mischievously upset his paints, obstruct his view, and just won't let him get the peace and quiet he seeks. But for the child reader of this book, these don't look like monsters at all. They are children like themselves, playing and having a good time. So perhaps the monsters do indeed represent Wynne-Jones's and Petričić's work — their books — “monsters” for them in the task of creation, but there for us, their readers, to enjoy. They would be well understood by the “merry gang who attended ‘summer camp’ at Red Deer College” to whom the book is dedicated. And Bun? He is surely the author's and the illustrator's daemon in Philip Pullman's sense of an external representation of the soul (see Pullman's *The Golden Compass*), but also part white rabbit leading the reader into Wonderland, part magician's rabbit popping out of a hat — playful, nervous, and a bit of a coward when faced with 26 monsters.

What else is this book? Well, it's a counting book — 26 words, 25 words, 24 words ... etc. And at the end you can try to count the hidden monsters in the narrator's painting. It's also a funny book — the incongruity of a rabbit on a leash, the slapstick of the mischievous children, along with more subtle humour for the older reader.

It may not be enjoyed by all beginning readers — those big words are scary! And that's a joke too, because the big type caricatures the large print children encounter in beginning readers, but it's a joke that doesn't entirely work — that big print really *isn't* very pleasant to read. Also, having one word fewer in each succeeding sentence gives a rather choppy feel to the story when read aloud, particularly because its being in rhyme leads one to expect some consistency to the rhythm, and, of course, that can't happen given the constraints Tim Wynne-Jones has placed on himself. That's disconcerting at first, but after a few readings the rhymes pop out and act as guides along the way.

Are these monsters just a comment on the relationship between the creator and his tools — the writer with words, the artist with paint? Do they also represent the worries and concerns of daily life? The years of civilized living that must be stripped away before the view can be appreciated for what it is? The lifetime of experience that we can't leave behind us to "just paint what's out there," because the monsters insist on getting in the way of the view? And maybe the final word is that we shouldn't try — that painting at the end looks awfully empty with the monsters painted out. Finally, it is for us, the readers, to interpret them as we wish, and we have the author's and the illustrator's invitation to do just that.

And there you are! You've taken your own voyage through Wonderland, and you didn't even have to tumble down a rabbit hole to get there.

Gay Christofides is an avid reader of Canadian children's literature and the administrator of this journal.

Realism, Magic, and Magical Realism (for Those upon Whom Such Distinctions Are Lost)

Lollypop's Potty. ISBN 2-921198-44-4. *Lollypop's Baby Sister*. ISBN 2-921198-45-2. Joceline Sanschagrin. Trans. Judith Brown. Illus. Hélène Desputeaux. Éditions Chouette, 1993. 20 pp. \$7.95 board. *Once I Was Very Small*. Elizabeth Ferber. Annick, 1993. 24 pp. \$14.95 cloth \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-5037-318-8, 1-55037-321-8. *Aa-Choo!* Wendy Orr. Illus. Ruth Ohi. Annick, 1992. 32 pp. \$14.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-209-2, 1-55037-208-4. *Lullabyhullabaloo*. Mick Inkpen. Stoddart, 1993. 22 pp. \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-2753-1. *Just You and Me*. Eugenie and Kim Fernandes. Annick, 1993. 28 pp. \$14.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-324-2, 1-55037-327-7. *Good Morning*. ISBN 0-000224003-5. *Good Night*. ISBN 0-00-2240003-3. Jan Colbert. Illus. Eugenie Fernandes. HarperCollins, 1994. 14 pp. \$5.95. *The Good Night Story*. Andreas Greve. Illus. Kitty Macaulay. Annick, 1993. \$4.95. ISBN 1-55037-288-2.

Although one suspects most children would endorse the postmodernist insight that the distinctions we make between realism and fantasy are purely arbitrary, it is surprisingly easy to divide a recent group of picture books into these two discrete genres. There are, on the one hand, a number of examples of domestic realism. With protagonists who "stand in" for the reader, and who live through familiar vicissitudes and challenges, these books are primarily designed to teach, to reassure, and to encourage. A second group, on the other hand, entirely subordinates the ups and downs of ordinary life to a sphere in which delightful impossibilities are the order of the day. For the most part, books in this second group are less concerned to promote the