

le décès de son père dans un accident de la route et sur Babouche lorsqu'elle était toute petite.

Après ce chapitre rempli d'émotions, l'auteur termine son roman par un passage où Carl exprime à sa mère sa crainte de perdre Babouche. Sa mère lui affirme qu'il n'est pas question que Babouche parte de la maison "tant que ce sera humainement possible" de s'en occuper. Pour ce qui est des voleurs, un système d'alarme sera posé ce qui a pour effet de faire réagir Babouche qui hurle dès que Carl bouge la nuit. Babouche, cette chienne vieillissante, se sentirait-elle lésée dans ses capacités de "protectrice du foyer"? Veut-elle prouver que malgré son grand âge elle sera toujours aux aguets? Peut-être. . . Bref, après 3 chapitres forts en émotions (chap. 3,4 et 7) la fin déçoit un peu.

Le livre *Ne touchez pas à ma Babouche* fait partie de la collection Premier Roman qui s'adressent à des enfants qui en sont à leur début dans leur carrière de lecteur (8,9 ans). À cet effet, les chapitres se composent de 3 à 5 pages et sont écrits en gros caractères, ce qui facilite la lecture. Certains titres de chapitres sont amusants: Quand ma chienne est là, les chats dansent (chap.1), Pour les mouffettes, elle est parfaite (chap.2). Le texte est agrémenté des jolies illustrations en noir et blanc de Pierre-André Derome. Cependant, le manque de description des personnages et des lieux gêne un peu. Il est légèrement frustrant de devoir attendre au chapitre 6 afin de connaître le nom du narrateur et d'apprendre que Nicole est la mère de ce dernier qu'à l'avant-dernier chapitre.

À titre de conclusion, ce livre de la Courte Échelle pourrait très bien être utilisé dans le coin de lecture d'un centre d'apprentissage portant sur l'amitié ou afin d'entamer une discussion sur les enfants qui se sentent rejetés dans la classe ou en milieu familial. Les jeunes lecteurs sauront sûrement tirer des éléments positifs de cette histoire qui semble, au départ, se vouloir amusante mais qui s'est avérée être particulièrement touchante.

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BOOKS AND BIBLIOTHERAPY

Planting seeds. Patricia Quinlan. Illus. Vladyana Krykorka. Annick Press, 1988. Unpag., \$12.95 \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-007-3, 1-55037-006-5; **Never, no matter what.** Maryleah Otto. Illus. Clover Clarke. The Women's Press, 1988. 24 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-88961-133-5; **Tom doesn't visit us any more.** Maryleah Otto. Illus. Jude Waples. The Women's Press, 1987. Unpag., paper. ISBN 0-88961-117-3; **Katie's alligator goes to day care.** Ann

Decter. Illus. Bo-Kim Louie. The Women's Press, 1987. Unpag., paper. ISBN 0-88961-116-5; **Forget-me-not**. J. Schein. Illus. author. Annick Press, 1988. Unpag., cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-001-4, 1-55037-000-6; **My mom is so unusual**. Iris Loewen. Illus. Alan Pakarnyk. Pemmican Publication, 1986. 24 pp., \$4.00 paper. ISBN 0-919143-37-7; **My mother is weird**. Rachna Gilmore. Illus. Brenda Jones. Ragweed Press, 1988. 24 pp., \$12.95 \$6.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920304-94-X 0-920304-83-4; **Dudley and the Christmas thief**. George Swede. Illus. Allan and Deborah Drew-Brook-Cormack. Three Trees Press, 1986. Unpag., \$12.95 \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88823-121-0, 0-88823-123-7; **The mouse that couldn't squeak**. Tom Harpur. Illus. Dawn Lee. Oxford University Press, 1988. Unpag., \$13.95 cloth. ISBN 0-19-540670-2; **The chocolate moose**. Gwendolyn MacEwan. Illus. Barry Zaid. NC Press, 1981. 24 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-919601-57-X; **Clyde**. Lindee Climo. Illus. author. Tundra Press, 1986. 24 pp., \$11.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-185-2; **Emily**. Susan Gaitskell. Illus. Kellie Jobson. Three Trees Press, 1986. Unpag., \$12.95 \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88823-118-0, 0-88823-120-2.

Bibliotherapy in children's picture books is nothing new. All children's librarians carry around a mental list of "troubleshooting" titles for harassed parents of preschoolers – *There's a nightmare in my closet* for fear of the dark, *The Gunniwolf* for the hazards of strangers, *The elephant and the bad baby* for the value of courtesy. And anecdotal evidence abounds as to the efficacy of such titles – children whose diaper days ended with a well-timed reading of *Sam's potty*. A current batch of picture books in this didactic tradition, however, reveals a dramatically different tone. The modern "problem" picture book differs from its predecessors in two ways. The first is that whereas older titles tended to deal with problems with some distancing techniques – an animal protagonist, a long-ago setting, a folktale structure or a playful use of language, the later books approach the problems head-on, with contemporary settings, realistic first-person narrators and straightforward presentations of the issues. It seems that in this bleak and dangerous world we are losing our confidence in the power of metaphor. The second characteristic of these books is that the solutions they present seem a frail protection against the problems they have revealed. Perhaps as a society we are no longer sure that we can keep children safe.

Planting seeds by Patricia Quinlan, for example, features a child who is worried about nuclear war. It does a good job in explaining the origins of war by relating it to common emotions such as anger and possessiveness. And it gives the child both a vision – the protagonist has a dream of universal brotherhood and a suggestion for action – she plants beans to raise money for the world's hungry, but this admirable attempt to deal with a difficult issue certainly demands an adult mediator. Indeed the publisher suggests that the book is a "vehicle for discussion about conflict resolution."

On a more domestic front are two titles by Maryleah Otto. *Never, no matter what* deals with two children and their mother who escapes a violent household to take refuge in a women's shelter. *Tom doesn't visit us anymore* is about a family friend who sexually abuses the protagonist. The books are simply produced, in black and white, with undistinguished illustrations. The impulse behind them is obviously toward opening a parent-child dialogue.

Another "book-as-tool" production is *Katie's alligator goes to day care*, a preparation for feelings of strangeness and abandonment as a child enters day care. The strength of this book lies in its solidly-designed illustrations by Bokim Louie and its use of a toy as a focus for Katie's feelings.

Forget-me-not by J. Schein is the story of a grandmother with Alzheimer Disease. It is a bleak little book, doubtless an accurate portrayal of the disease but offering little warmth or hope. The fourteen-year-old author is possibly just too close to the experience to have synthesized it into story. One looks forward to more of his work however, particularly in illustration.

On a lighter note are a pair of stories about mothers, *My mom is so unusual* by Iris Loewen and *My mother is weird* by Rachna Gilmore. The theme of the Loewen title is the warm, quirky relationship between a girl and her single mother. The theme comes alive in some scenes such as wild dancing to the radio but other incidents are too generalized and talky. The book would have been improved with more show and less tell. *My mother is weird* deals with parental anger. The metaphor, realized in text and illustration, is that the angry mother turns into a monster. The theme is reminiscent of John Steptoe's *Daddy is a monster. . . sometimes* but this treatment is lighthearted, jokey and refreshingly non-earnest portrayal of domestic chaos. It has the energy of a real story.

Dudley and the Christmas thief by poet George Swede is less a picture book than an illustrated short story. Dudley discovers that Jack, a thief, stole only to acquire Christmas presents for his poor family. The book has a contemporary setting but in its tidy plot and unambiguous celebration of kindness and charity it has the confidence and comfort of the books of a bygone era.

Also in the more traditional mode are three animal fantasies, all of them based on the "it's okay to be different" precept. *The mouse that couldn't squeak* by theologian Tom Harpur is an example of a story that may well have worked in the teller's voice at bedtime but should never have been frozen into print. Rusty the mouse is ostracized because he is mute but becomes a hero when he escapes the owl's claws to bring grain to his community. The text is wordy, over-long, saccharine and lacking the internal logic and energy of a successful fantasy.

The chocolate moose by Gwendolyn MacEwan is also a disappointment. The problem here is that Martin the moose is made out of chocolate and tends to melt in the sun and so on. But the Strawberry Owl persuades him that "Everyone's different, don't you see?/You are you and I am me,/and that's the way it

ought to be!" One pun does not a story make.

Clyde by author-illustrator Lindee Climo tells of a working horse threatened by technology when his farmer buys a tractor. In a series of fantasies Clyde the horse wishes he had the legs of a cheetah for speed, a fish tail to escape and so forth. The fun here lies in the increasingly absurd illustrations of a horse-fish, a horse-frog, etc. The plot is child-like and well-shaped, the solution is logical and believable and the moral is blessedly understated.

The effects are similarly subtle in *Emily*, a picture-book biographical sketch of painter Emily Carr by Susan Gaitskell, illustrated by Kellie Jobson. Gaitskell has made wise choices of details from Carr's own autobiographical writings to introduce children to the whole idea of artistic endeavour. The text is simple and poetic and the pictures match the mood of a quiet celebration of a unique vision.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY AS PLOT MOTIF



Round the bend. Mitzi Dale. Douglas & McIntyre, 1988. 117 pp., \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-069-3; **Promises to come.** Jim Heneghan. Overlea House, 1988. 189 pp., \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-7172-2297-7.

Thirteen-year-old Deirdre sets fire to her bed and is consequently sent to a group home for psychiatric treatment. Two years later, to commemorate the first anniversary of her release, she retells the story in *Round the bend*.

In an unconvincingly colloquial style, Deirdre takes the reader through her childhood, the stealing escapade in kindergarten that led her parents to move to the suburbs, her lack of interest in a new school, her reclusive habits at home. In a series of retrospective anecdotes which interrupt the narrative, Deirdre reveals that she has an anorexic mother, an ever-absent father, and above all a fixation with other people's nervous habits. In order to escape from the world of "sniffing and coughing or . . . scratching and jerking" (13), Deirdre slips into what may well be the epitome of adolescent female fantasies: a continuous