Never Work with Animals and Children
—David Rudd

Chapman, Doug, and Shannon Chapman. *Jasper Explores the Wild West*. Book 3 of Jasper's Great Canadian Adventure. Calgary: Explorers Are We, 2005. 32 pp. $19.95 hc. ISBN 0-9733908-2-4.

Choyce, Lesley. *Skunks for Breakfast: Based on a True Story*. Illus. Brenda Jones. Halifax: Numbus, 2006. 32 pp. $8.95 pb. ISBN 1-55109-586-6.

Harvey, Sarah N. *Puppies on Board*. Illus. Rose Cowles. Victoria: Orca, 2005. 32 pp. $19.95 hc. ISBN 1-55143-390-7.

Jackson, Carolyn. *If I Had a Dog*. Illus. France Brassard. Toronto: Tundra, 2006. 32 pp. $22.99 hc. ISBN 0-88776-725-7.

Kovalski, Maryann. *Omar on Board*. Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2005. 32 pp. $19.95 hc. ISBN 1-55041-918-8.

Kovalski, Maryann. *Omar's Halloween*. Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2006. 32 pp. $19.95 hc. ISBN 1-55041-559-X.

Nunn, Bruce. *Buddy the Bluenose Reindeer*. Illus. Brenda Jones. Halifax: Nimbus, 2005. 42 pp. $12.95 pb. ISBN 1-55109-539-4.

Ruurs, Margriet. *Emma at the Fair*. Illus. Barbara Spurll. Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2005. 24 pp. $19.95 hc. ISBN 1-55005-126-1.

Ruurs, Margriet. *Wake Up, Henry Rooster!* Illus. Sean Cassidy. Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2006. 32 pp. $19.95 hc. ISBN 1-55041-952-8.

Schofield, Louise. *The Zoo Room*. Illus. Malcolm Geste. Vancouver: Simply Read, 2005. 36pp. $19.95 hc. ISBN 1-894965-19-1.

Watts, Leslie Elizabeth. *The Baabaasheep Quartet*. Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2005. 32pp. $19.95. hc. ISBN 1-55041-890-4.

Hearing that I was doing some work on animals, Perry Nodelman asked me to review the above selection of children's picture books—"sight unseen," as they say. It has proved a fascinating and instructive experience, in that I had heard of none of these authors, and the only thing that seemed to unite them was the presence of animal characters of some sort. But they are very different. Of the eleven books, seven anthropomorphize animals to a considerable extent, three try to give them a more realistic context, and one does both—in some way—but neither very successfully.

Let me begin with Carolyn Jackson's *If I Had a Dog*, which is actually "veterinarian-approved," the dust-wrapper informs us. Is this like saying "librarian" or "teacher-approved?" I wondered. The back cover gives the answer: Veterinarian Dr. Russ Tate says it's "[a]n informative must-read on befriending dogs." So, it has one vet's approval, at least.

I don't want in any way to disparage what is a most attractive volume, and one that I'm sure is most informative about how to approach unfamiliar dogs. The main character, a young girl named Maxine, together with her brother, Hugh, desperately wants a dog. And the book shows their encounters with a variety of canines (interspersed with Maxine's refrain, "if I had a dog"), which we are given advice on dealing with: small ones, tied-up ones, guard ones, guide ones, old ones, happy ones, ones eating, ones lively or angry (remain still, arms folded, and avoid eye contact—don't try to be like that other Max, thinking you have the magic trick of staring into their eyes without blinking once!). After this informative walk round the neighbourhood, the two children get back to their house to find that her parents have—yes!—bought them a dog.

Now, I'm no expert, but how responsible is that? For parents to go off and buy a puppy while their children are out, and then to confront them with it, *fait accompli*, on their return? I mean, wouldn't it be better to consult the children, to see what sort of dog they liked and, indeed, what the prospective dog thought of them, too? Don't you take children to a breeder, pet-shop, dog-pound, or whatever, and let them interact with the animals for a while? Basically, shouldn't we involve children in the whole process, making sure that the particular breed is appropriate, perhaps letting them choose it from a litter?

Of course, I speak as someone more familiar with representations of children, rather than animals. But it does seem to me that Maxine hasn't been involved in this decision-making process at all. She is denied agency—which, of course, is the lot of so many children. It would have been good, however, to see a text that was a bit more progressive in this regard. And there is certainly the opportunity, in that, early on in the story, Maxine visits a neighbour whose dog has had puppies. In fact, I presumed that this

was foreshadowing the denouement (building up narrative skills, too); but no.

Perhaps I expected too much of this short text—which is beautifully illustrated by France Brassard—but, given the unnecessary repetition of some parts (lively and angry dogs are, for instance, hard to distinguish, and treated much the same), there could have been room for other issues. And the volume's attractiveness actually emphasizes some of my problems with it, for the book itself, its dogs and people, are all too idealized. I'd have liked to have at least one instance where a dog's behaviour was seen to be a product of human action (as so much of it is)—especially as it *is* owners who present the problem. Around 100,000 dogs are found on UK streets each year—many abandoned because people did not choose their canine carefully. And how come not one of Jackson's dogs experiences the "call of nature?" To give UK figures again, dogs manage daily deposits of "4.5 million litres of urine and 1 million kilograms of faeces" (Serpell 16), with quite a proportion of the latter not being removed (except inadvertently, underfoot!). If Werner Holzwarth and Wolf Erlbruch can write a whole book about animals doing their business, I'm sure this issue could get some attention without the canines (or their readers) blushing too much. Lastly, though UK picture books might be different, I'd have expected to see some ethnic diversity amongst the human population represented here; some non-white people, for instance.

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Let me move on to the one other book that treats dogs in a somewhat realistic manner, though its illustrations are more cartoon-like. This is Sarah N. Harvey's *Puppies on Board*. If the family in Jackson's work is rather too middle-of-the-road, the one in this book is far less so—in fact, the word "hippy" comes to mind, endorsed by the ban-the-bomb and yin-yang signs. Whiteness still rules, but there is some national diversity with, for instance, a Japanese boy, Januchi. The girl protagonist, Mollie, lives with her mother on a houseboat where their dog, Sheba, gives birth to eleven puppies. Without rubbing our noses in it, this text is certainly more open about the fact that a puppy, like Swift's Celia, shits! The illustrations by Rose Cowles are a delight, complementing the text without simply rehearsing what the words declare.

It is a vibrant text, too, sensitive to rhythm and other phonological features: "Water lapped against the hull of the boat, halyards slapped against masts, rubber bumpers squeaked, seagulls squawked and boat engines roared, but the strange snuffly sound was still there." There's also a bonus in the intertextuality. In the first picture we see Mollie lying on a bunk surrounded by books, the covers of *Stuart Little* and *Winnie-the-Pooh* being discernible. When the eleventh pup is born, "too small and weak to compete with his brothers and sisters," Mollie declares, "I think I'll call you Wilbur." The names of the other dogs are presented in a letter (reproduced for us) that Mollie is writing to her dad: "Charlotte is clever. Heidi is curious. Stuart is exuberant. Margalo is beautiful. Max is wild. Pippi is adventurous. Pooh is always hungry. Piglet is timid. Eeyore likes to hide. And Tigger is very bouncy." Though the dogs are not explicitly linked to their names at this stage, the illustrations are indicative, encouraging intelligent guesswork. In other illustrations more book titles are visible: *Pippi Longstocking*, *Heidi*, *Where the Wild Things Are,* and *Charlotte's Web*. And, in a later illustration, where Mollie is seen reading Sendak's classic, Cowles has done an excellent job of reproducing Sendak's cover. Significantly, Mollie reads it while surrounded by a canine sea, Wilbur being the only one paying her any attention. The book is slightly overlong, but it is good to read a text where language is celebrated, where polysyllables, or foreign terms ("Arigato," says Januchi's father at one point), are not feared, and where reader participation is encouraged.

Lesley Choyce's *Skunks for Breakfast* has the subtitle "Based on a True Story," and apparently, so the cover informs us, there is a film of similar events, called *The Skunk Whisperer* (2002). It is a first-person narrative about a family plagued by skunks that have invaded the crawlspace beneath their house. Amusing though it is, it is simply far too long and wordy. By the time we get to the sixteenth skunk, we are well and truly fed up with the beasts. Brenda Jones's illustrations are lively and captivating, but their cartoon-like quality does seem less suited to a tale supposedly based on actual events.

Her style comes more into its own in Bruce Nunn's more fanciful *Buddy the Bluenose Reindeer*. This started out as an oral tale, told on the radio, and it shows:

> Now I know what you're thinking. You're guessing that all of the other reindeer used to laugh and call him names. Am I right?
>
> Nahhh! The other reindeer were fine with Buddy's blue schnozz. (6)

Read aloud, it works well, giving the many puns full rein (oops!). This is also the most parochial of

the books, featuring a number of references to Nova Scotian culture, far more likely to be appreciated by an insider: "Buddy is Rudolph's first cousin, once removed, on his mother's side. A typical Nova Scotian family connection. Though, if you asked me the classic Nova Scotian question, "What's his father's name?" . . . I'm not sure I could answer. I think it's Angus" (5). I have now upset my own order, however, in that I had mentally sorted these books according to their degree of verisimilitude to real animals. Clearly, blue-nosed reindeers helping Santa Claus transport Christmas presents through the sky are not very realistic. So let me go back to *Emma at the Fair* by Margriet Ruurs. Reading the blurb, I learned that this was the fourth book about Emma, a hen. She, too, is represented in cartoon style, but is otherwise seen to engage in chicken-like behaviour. The story concerns Emma's visit to a Country Fair, where the farmer's daughter wants Emma to win such contests as rooster-crowing, turkey-strutting and pigeon-plopping. The latter involves pigeons flying over a floor of bingo numbers, on which people bet. (Yes, there is a decidedly scatological theme emerging here—quite unsolicited, I might add.) Eventually Emma does win a ribbon, but for none of the above: it is for laying an egg, conveying the message that you should always be yourself rather than try to imitate others.

Once again, it is an attractive enough book (have I said that before?), although the writing is a bit strained at times; for example, the simile describing how Emma "sighed and settled down on the straw nest in her cage, like the lid on a cookie jar." But leaving that aside for the moment, let me consider the work's larger, ideological import—which is decidedly conservative; it saddens me, for instance, that we still talk about a "farmer" and a "farmer's wife," rather than recognizing women as farmers too (there are not many farmers' husbands around, of course). And, concentrating on animal issues, I find it disappointing that the whole raison d'être of the Country Fair is itself accepted without question, its activities glossed over. This is perhaps most apparent with the turkey judging, where we are told that "[e]ach proud turkey strutted his stuff, flaunted his feathers, and gobble-de-gobbled as loudly as he could." Following this description, we are told that the "biggest, fattest, loudest turkey" won. I am by no means an expert in turkey judging, but noise is not a consideration. What matters is size, of course. The turkeys don't strut their own stuff either, but are held upside down for several minutes while a judge prods and squeezes the bird, evaluating the meat quality, the proportion of meat-to-bone, and so on. It is certainly not "beautiful plumage" that counts: this is a meat market. Speaking of which, let me now return to that trope about the cookie jar, as, in light of the above, although it is "a bit strained," the strain

is all on Emma's part. For it is after this that Emma lays her egg—which, of course, is valued in terms of food, rather than of motherhood. Emma, in other words, is being rewarded for her part in the food chain, for delivering her own cookies.

Whilst one would certainly not expect (nor want) animal rights issues to be foregrounded in any polemical way, it is a shame how many false images continue to be propagated in picture books. Other authors have certainly been more critical. For example, in Anne Fine's *The Chicken Gave It to Me* (1992)—surely one of the most uninventive titles ever!—the two child protagonists uncover the memoirs of a chicken that has escaped from a battery farm. They compare this savage account with that appearing in a standard illustrated book, *On the Farm*, which they find in the school library: "The pig was rooting contentedly with its snout in a fresh tussock of grass. The cow stood beside her calf, nudging her affectionately out of the ditch beside the hedge. In the soft summer evening sunlight, the hen ran happily round the orchard with her chicks" (Fine 13–14). The girl protagonist explodes: "If it's not *true*. . . . If it's not like this, why do people give us these books? Why do they try and trick us into thinking everything's fine and hunky-dory? This book is as bad as a lie! So why do they *do* it?" (Fine 15). And the boy replies, "Maybe . . . they don't want you to think about it" (Fine 16). Books like Ruurs's will certainly not aid this thinking process. And turkeys, of course, won't get big and fat (and win contests) if allowed to range freely.

Clearly Ruurs likes chickens, for there is another story by her in my selection: *Wake Up, Henry Rooster!* This is about a baby rooster, Henry, which has difficulty getting up in the morning. This becomes a big problem when Henry's father goes away and Henry is expected to be what we might call the farm alarm-cock. But the reason Henry can't get up in the morning is that he likes to party all night (playing cards, popping corn, dancing with the cows, etc). He "just wanted to have fun." Unfortunately, farm routine suffers, until, that is, Henry is advised to stay up even later: to party the night through, then crow before he hits the sack.

It is particularly interesting to compare this text with the one about Emma, for there is a notable difference in the way that the male and female protagonists are represented. Not only is Henry allowed far more latitude in his behaviour (partying, a stereotypical male behaving badly, whereas Emma is passive and accommodating), but the main character is also seen in far more anthropomorphic terms. There are no cages in sight, and although Henry's living quarters are described as a "coop," he's pictured in an adolescent-style bedroom (with posters, skateboard, and trainers), wearing headphones (this, of course, jars somewhat with the old-fashioned

notion that farm life depends on a cockerel greeting the dawn, but we'll let that pass). Henry's sisters abet this gender stereotyping, nagging him to "[c]lean your coop." In fact, Henry appears to be a bit of a chip-off-the-old-block, as his father is clearly also off to party, at the "Roosters' Union Convention." Such licence is reflected not only in Henry's behaviour, but in the whole freedom from conventional life that the book celebrates (unlike *Emma*, this book features no humans, either). Finally, the book is far less moralistic than *Emma*. If Emma learns that being true to one's self is important, what does Henry learn? The accompanying flyer suggests that he discovers "how important it is to find a way to have fun and still crow the sun up each morning." Some lesson! You can party all night and then, as the last words of the book have it, sleep "the day away." What's good for the goose, it seems, is not so good for the gander.

But I must move on. There are two picture books by Maryann Kovalski in this selection, about her bear character, Omar. In *Henry*, above, we made the transition into a fairly anthropomorphic representation of the animal world (Henry's father even has an alarm-clock—unlike the human farmers, we might surmise). As in *The Wind in the Willows*, however, there are residual markers of Henry *et al*.'s animal nature: roosters *do* crow; the animals are housed *on a farm*. When we come to Omar, though, the fact that he is a bear seems incidental. There is little that is bear-like about him: he wears clothes, he shops and engages in human activities (although the bears do all seem to live in capacious tree-trunk houses). Thus, Omar might equally have been a chimp, or a cat, or an elephant. It could be argued that bears are easier to anthropomorphize because they can walk on two legs, like chimps, but then we might recall the bipedal Orlando and Babar.

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Here we have the second and third books about Omar (the first was *Omar on Ice*). *Omar on Board*, the second, shows Omar at the end-of-school summer party. The pupils go off swimming, but Omar finds that he can't float. When the class does the backstroke, Omar finds he is too rough. He finally thinks he will excel at the high dive. But when he stands on the board he is petrified and has to climb down. As his friend Elsie comforts him, her bouquet

of balloons drifts from its mooring. Omar chases it, having to climb onto the diving board to reach it; and yes, you guessed it, Omar goes off the end of the board, still gripping the balloons, and floats gently down into the pond. He surfaces to the applause of his classmates. The message? "Young readers," we are informed, "will applaud when the portly bear finally overcomes his fears and creates his own fun." But does he? I obviously missed this part of the text, for he doesn't seem to confront his fear at all: when he goes off the board he is shown to be fixated on the balloons ("He never let them out of his sight. Not even once"). Omar doesn't *dive* off the board either, but floats gently down, thanks to the balloons. And when Elsie rewards Omar by giving him one of her balloons, he vows never to let it go; and, as the final words tell us, "he didn't." The accompanying picture suggests that he can only jump when armed with this talisman. Come to that, I don't actually see how he "creates his own fun," either. It seems to me that Omar simply responds to a crisis.

But let's not argue over interpretations. What should matter is that child readers are allowed to react in their own way, rather than being told what "the moral of *that* is," Wonderland Duchess style. More significant for me are other messages in this book, which the reader might implicitly take "on board." For once again we have a male who is expected to be active, to come to a helpless female's aid (Elsie can only manage a cry of "Oh no!" when her balloons drift away). Again, I'm aware that I sound negative, and I'd like to say that the illustrations (once more) are a delight, even if the story is a bit contrived.

In *Omar's Halloween* the illustrations are even better, rusty browns and burnt umbers effectively evoking autumn. This time the story centres on Omar's attempt to find a really scary outfit for Halloween. When he cannot, he becomes resigned to dressing up as a standard, white-sheeted ghost. He then gets caught in the rain, however, and separated from his friends. Bedraggled, mud-stained, and twig-adorned, he finally enters the party where, to everyone's horror, he "oozed through the door." Of course, Elsie, true to form, is the one who "shrieked first."

Whereas all the above books have animals in their place (in some form or other), or as substitute humans (as in the Omar books), in Leslie Elizabeth Watts's *The Baabaasheep Quartet*, animals and humans are seen to interact. Actually, this statement needs qualifying, for it isn't animals as such; it is sheep, and four particular ones at that. We learn that they have "retired from the farm" (not the country, note), "to live in the city." Clearly this must have been an unusual farm, given that sheep usually leave hooves first. These sheep, though, wear clothes and clearly appreciate culture (we see them frequenting opera and restaurants). But they still don't feel they belong, so they look for jobs,

which don't work out, either. One of them then finds a playbill. Unfortunately, it has been torn, so they read Barbershop as "Baabaashop," imagining that they might "meet other sheep in the city" and "be sure to fit in." It would be churlish to ask why they imagine that a "Baabaashop Quartet" would involve singing, without the cultural knowledge of an actual barbershop. Howsoever that might be, it is only when they arrive at the actual concert that they come to realize their mistake. Rather than quit, though, they fashion themselves some striped blazers and moustaches and perform. Afterwards, despite their sheepish identity being revealed, they are surprised to win: "No one minded that their moustaches were false, their hats were made of paper, and their stripes were painted with lipstick. The only thing that mattered was how well they sang." They become a success everywhere. Indeed, a telling tour banner declares, "Welcome Sheep!" They learn, in other words (and as the final words of the text tell us), that they "never again" need worry "about fitting in." The notion of being a "black sheep" obviously comes to mind (and one of the four is black)—which is quite neat. Except, I'd want to ask: in what way are these characters in any sense sheep? There really is no attempt to create something "other" that people might have to fit in with. In singing songs, wearing western costume, eating in restaurants, and going to the theatre, they never seem to be sheep in the first place; in fact, their sheepish appearance is as superficial as their barbershop attire.

Interestingly, on the one hand, there has been an attempt to signify more cultural diversity in this book, whereas on the other hand (and ironically), the different ethnicities are dressed exactly alike, in western evening dress. In effect, there is hardly any demonstration of diversity—of a tolerance of difference—at all. Difference has been effaced from the outset, from the moment when the ur-sheep move into their exclusive city apartment with its *objets d'art*. Personally, I felt it would have been far better had the ground rules of barbershop quartets been bent a little more—having, perhaps, not just one black sheep, but some brown Soays, too, or even one or two females?

So far, most of these books have fitted into fairly well-worn cultural grooves—too well-worn in many cases. While *Puppies* (not Oscar) *on Board* rose above this to some extent, it is *The Zoo Room* by Louise Schofield that breaks the mould more powerfully. The frame story concerns another Max, a boy who receives an invitation to the Zoo Room for his birthday. This comes from his wacky Aunt Zelda, a zoo employee who "preferred being with animals"; when she visits, "strange and wonderful things would happen." (With her horsey smile, she looks very like Princess Anne of the Royal family.) The family go to the party on Saturday night, only to

find the zoo gate shut. They manage to gain entry, however, and find the Zoo Room, a restaurant, where a menagerie of animals is already gathered. With Max as the central character, we might anticipate that we are in a place where Wild Things are, and this is partially confirmed: it is certainly a place of the night, a carnivalesque space with an emphasis on the *carne*. The tables are classified according to colour of tablecloth: "The red tables were on the scary side with the killer teeth and murderous claws, evil beaks and gnashing jaws." It is a place where normal table manners don't count, as the father finds out when a cockatoo poops on his head (yes, the theme continues!).

The family is led to a red-and-green checked table, a colour code for omnivores (herbivores sit elsewhere). They are led there by a bear waiter, who bodily lifts Kelly, Max's younger sister, to the table. This picture is particularly unsettling. For a start, Kelly looks scared, seeing herself as not only carried, but as potential carrion (her body points directly towards the carnivores' table). Our view of her is also disturbing (perhaps particularly so for adults), in that her dress has ridden up, displaying her knickers and upper legs (she looks embarrassed, too). This could be seen as having a sexual connotation, but a more embracing word would be "carnal," her legs appearing like haunches on display. But as Carol Adams and others have argued, the links between sex, meat-eating, and patriarchy are historically strong. All this is endorsed in the picture space: Kelly is in a very insecure location, halfway up the picture, and moving against the normal left-right trajectory; whereas, bottom left, in the home position, there is the head of a kookaburra (known for its raucous laugh), with a decidedly phallic beak which thrusts upwards, towards Kelly's exposed behind. In the opposite corner, Kelly's father is visible, suitably wild-eyed.

This book, then, is carnivalesque in quite a dark way: the normal order has been inverted, with humans arriving at a restaurant where the animals seem in control. The origins of the term "carnival" are worth recalling, the word meaning, literally, "to remove meat" (*carne* + *levare*). Carnival is thus a time of partying—of feasting and gorging—just before the restrictions of Lent. It is scarcely surprising, then, that "Max and Kelly . . . forgot their manners," for "eating like animals was not a problem at the Zoo Room." More ominously, there are two zebras visible early on in the book; but later we only see one, and might note what the "big cats" are eating, raw (in fact, the text also alludes to it: "The choices on the red menu included something interesting called 'Beast of the Day'. Max wondered if that was what the big cats were eating. . . . "). It is a zebra they are tearing apart.

There's not time to discuss all the elements of this

rich text, but the shifts in perspective are particularly effective, showing the restaurant from different angles, in both long shot and close-up. This assists the puzzle element of the book, too, as readers are asked on the dust wrapper "how many times Aunt Zelda appears." Sure enough, she can be spotted lurking in most of the pictures, as though masterminding, orchestrating events. Two illustrations are particularly effective: one in the restaurant, where Max has his photo taken while he blows out the candles (and where the question of Zelda's absence is explicitly raised), and in the penultimate illustration, where Max later studies this party photo and spots Zelda riding an elephant—something that was previously out of shot. The notion that our perceptions are always framed, always partial, is subtly raised.

There is more, though, for between these two illustrations we witness a tiger surreptitiously follow the family out of the Zoo Room. It has taken an interest in them for some time. In one wonderful picture the tiger's teeth and slavering jaws, in slightly unfocused close-up, fill the left side of the illustration, as the tiger (and the readers) observes the family moving down the path to the exit. The tiger's claws parting the shrubbery, one on either side of the picture, seem to threaten a pincer movement around the family. Here is a literal metonym for nature red in tooth and claw. We turn the page and see the bleary-eyed children coming down to breakfast, their mother reading a newspaper. The front page is shown on the facing recto: "ZOO UPROAR! TIGER ESCAPES," proclaims the headline. It was the family, of course, that had left the gate open and, if we hadn't spotted it already, we should now notice the tail of a tiger framed by the kitchen doorway. On the following page we see the children getting dressed, with the tiger's tail just visible under Kelly's bed. In the following picture there is a shift in modality, to more hypothetical notions: "Perhaps someone would find the tiger," it is suggested. In the two pictures that support this text we see Aunt Zelda in the crook of a tree, sharing her perch with a large ape. She thus continues to elide the division between animal and human, pointing out that it is a false dichotomy; for we all share the planet, and we are all part of someone's food chain. Unlike *The Baabaashop Quartet*, this book actually confronts species diversity, making us, humans, part of that picture too; hence the title, *The Zoo Room*, which does not refer to a room as such, but is more about making room, about coexisting, whilst avoiding any simplistic notions about lions lying down with lambs.

Finally, we come to *Jasper Explores the Wild West*, of which this is Book 3. This is the most curious text in the selection, and the one I found least attractive. Jasper is a Lost Polar Bear; or, rather, he is a white teddy bear: a soft toy who, with his friend, a stuffed dog named Tundra, is searching for

his Lost Girl (i.e. owner). The series works by having these toys positioned in photographs of the "real" Canada—and I put "real" in scare quotes because I want to emphasize the scariness of this cultural construction of the supposedly "Wild West."

In some ways the juxtaposition might seem touching: a domestic teddy set against a "natural" (there I go again) landscape. But for me it doesn't work; indeed, it annoys me intensely, particularly when the stuffed toys are positioned next to farm animals, and even more so when the jokes begin: "what do you call a pig who's lost his voice? . . . DISGRUNTLED!" Farm animals, of course, are destined to lose far more than their voices (*pace* the baabaashop sheep). The visit to the rodeo—"Horses? Alberta? . . . grab your cowboy hat, IT'S RODEO TIME!!!"—annoyed me further. And, I have to say, though there is no actual excrement in this book, the farting horse joke is probably its most subtle moment.

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Aside from the fact that it once again consolidates a sexist view of the world (the two male soft toys encounter a "beautiful" female toy fox, helplessly lost and needing to be seen safely home), I was most angered by the way the mythical Wild West is celebrated—captured in the figure of the cowboy and fêted in the spectacle of the rodeo, where, leaving aside the cruelty, the gladiatorial spectacle—what Serpell calls "commercialized animal abuse" (224–25)—of the cattle industry is lauded. As others have shown, though, this industry was actually responsible for losing, rather than winning the West, replacing delicate ecosystems with a mono-culture, let alone displacing and marginalizing many native human populations. As Jeremy Rifkin puts it:

> Behind the facade of frontier heroism and cow-boy bravado, of civilizing forces and homespun values, lies a quite different tale: a saga of eco-cide and genocide, of forced enclosures of land and people, and the expropriation of an entire subcontinent for the exclusive benefit of a privileged few. (107)

There is very little to give this book any unity: it really does seem a tourist's postcard guide. For instance, instead of any mention of Alberta's first human inhabitants, Native tribes like the Cree, we are manoeuvred round this for some rather cheap jokes about Alberta's older, and clearly less contentious inhabitants: the dinosaurs of Drumheller.

In conclusion, I have to say that I found this

selection of volumes disappointing—apart from the Harvey and Schofield ones. As has often been said, picture books represent many children's earliest texts, an introduction to our culture and its values. Picture books can thus underwrite our prejudices, or challenge them in some way. The majority of these works celebrate conventional, middle-of-the-road attitudes and prejudices. For something more challenging, I suggest we return to any of Anthony Browne's well-known picture books, perhaps, or genuinely innovative and disturbing works like Chris Raschka's *Arlene Sardine*.

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David Rudd teaches Children's Literature in the Department of Cultural and Creative Studies at the University of Bolton, England. He has published some 100 articles on the subject and two books: one on Roald Dahl, *A Communication Studies Approach to Children's Literature* (1992), and one on Blyton, *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children's Literature* (2000). He is currently working on the issue of animals and toys in children's books for the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*.