

does not in this case allow use of the great resources of magical happenings because he prefers to direct the story toward social comment on present day society. The point of view he presents, however, with its emphasis on preserving the ecology, and the benefits of living in harmony with the natural world is one for which young people feel a great deal of sympathy. Moreover the descriptions of the natural beauty of Tree-Land tends to offset the harsh ugliness of Fair-Look.

The City Beyond the Gates was somewhat marred for me by two things. First, I was puzzled and irritated, unfairly perhaps, by the occasional use of British spelling (“waggon” for “wagon” for example) and of somewhat archaic terms (fence “pales”) in a novel published in Canada, presumably for Canadian school children. More serious however, were the occasional lapses in style. Quite often I found myself tangled up in subordinate clauses, or in imprecise descriptions of physical layouts, trying to visualize what was going on. I even found myself reading short sentences over two or three times, wondering if I understood them. Try for instance “The road kept on over the ditch by a bridge” (p. 111). Apart from these reservations, however, I can recommend *The City Beyond the Gates* as a traditional fantasy, given a contemporary twist. The illustrations by Tibor Kovalik add charm to it, and a touch of magic.

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Wanted: Good Editor for Children's Books

SUSAN BECKMANN

The Big Yellow Frog, David Carefoot. Illus. by Vladyana Krykorka. Three Trees Press, 1978. 24 pp. \$2.95 paper.

The Baby Streetcar, Helen Huyk. Illus. by Kathryn De Vas Miller. Three Trees Press, 1978. 24 pp. \$2.95 paper.

These two picture and story books, while different in many ways, are alike in showing evidence of poor editorial work. It seems worth taking a hard look at the weaknesses in presentation of these books, as an example of a general carelessness in detail which seems to bedevil many books intended for young Canadians. Surely we can be fanciful without being ungrammatical!

The Big Yellow Frog is an engaging story of an enormous yellow frog named Hugo, immensely proud of his size. Hugo is a threat to his fellow creatures, both on the land and in the pond, because the impact of his hopping or diving is devastating. The resentful animals try to scare Hugo with predictions of retribution in the form of a giant heron. But when a great blue “bird” – a plane – appears, to capture the fear-stricken frog, his fellow creatures grieve with him at the likelihood of his being taken away. Hugo utters a magic wish “I would be the smallest, quietest little frog in the neighbourhood. I wouldn’t even mind being green. If only I could stay here.” Hugo’s wish is granted and the story ends with peace and the establishment of proper proportion.

This charming story is, however, marred by the occasional awkwardness in phrasing, such as, “the earthworms shot from the ground like arrows at the birds,” or by failures to indicate the logical relation between two sentences. The description of Hugo’s reaction to the animals’ scare-tactics, for instance, reads, “For a long time he didn’t believe them. One day there was a strange hum in the sky . . .” The addition of “but then” at the beginning of the second sentence would have made the flow of thought more apparent.

More serious are the grammatical errors. Describing the effect of Hugo’s diving into the pond, Carefoot writes:

The water splashed high and wide. With it also went every unfortunate creature, who didn’t fasten itself to something solid, or didn’t swim far enough.

That’s why a number of them always carried little knapsacks on their back.

The comma before the restrictive clause “who didn’t fasten itself” is grammatically incorrect and it obscures the meaning. The use of the relative pronoun “who” with the neuter “itself” is, to say the least, strange, and the “back” of the last sentence should be plural since the fish do not collectively have one back.

The caged Hugo is pictured brooding: “He did not want to leave his home-pond, nor the meadows and woods around it. He would miss it too much.” Surely the pronoun “it” in the second sentence should be the plural “them”, since the previous sentence has asserted that Hugo will miss not only the pond, but the meadows and woods as well.

All these things may seem petty in themselves, but cumulatively they have

a distressing effect, particularly because this book would most likely appeal to children between the ages of five and eight who need good grammatical models before them.

There are other problems with the book: unfortunately the attractive and clear typeface is unevenly spaced in places and the illustrations are troublesome. Vladyana Krykorka is clearly a talented artist, as the attractively designed cover attests, but too often in *The Big Yellow Frog* the illustrations are at odds with the text. The picture of Hugo facing the first page seems grotesque, even sinister, rather than proud. Then on the next two pages, accompanying the text relating the devastating effects of Hugo's hopping, is a sequence of seven pictures of Hugo in the various stages of a hop. The illustration is lively and endearing (see Figure 1), but the point is that the much reduced size and changed character make this seem a different frog. There is nothing in the picture to suggest the danger the hopping is supposed to represent to the other animals. One wonders too why the description of Hugo's terror at the advent of the hunters is illustrated by a brilliantly coloured, stylized sun.

Many of the illustrations contain dramatic cartoon-like animal portraits, but very often the combined effect is one of confused clutter (see Figure 2) or of obscurity. Again one is brought to question whether a sensitive and intelligent editor might not have been able to bring the writer's and illustrator's talents into closer accord.

The Baby Streetcar tells an imaginative tale of the first "infant" to be born in a transit yard. At first, even the old guard John can't believe his own eyes when he discovers the miniature streetcar with defects in its paint job the same as in the mother car, but soon John and his friends agree that if the baby streetcar is really alive it will grow. And grow it does, so that before long it is ready for its first ride. Like all youngsters on their first outing, the little streetcar soon gets tired and so uncle bus has to take it on a piggyback tour of the rest of the city. The baby streetcar is not content to



Figure 1.

carry the tiny park animals the uncle bus has said it can manage; therefore it sets out for the zoo and is badly frightened when a baby elephant asks for a ride. Confined to home for its misbehaviour, the streetcar dreams of being an intercontinental bus; but when it is made an apprentice streetcar, seeing more of the life of the city, it decides happily to be a streetcar on the morning shift.

Regrettably, the baby streetcar is never given a name, so that the sense of its youthful longings and misadventures is somehow incomplete. This incomplete character is reflected in the author's confusion in pronouns. In two consecutive sentences we find first "he" and then "its" used in relation to the young car: "For a while he sat in the nearly empty yard. But soon the baby streetcar started to talk to one of its uncles." A good editor would



Figure 2.

have caught such a confusion and called it to the attention of the writer.

Many of the stylistic and grammatical problems found in *The Big Yellow Frog* are also present in *The Baby Streetcar*. There are awkward sentence structures such as, “‘But we do. We do,’ rang the street-cars and tooted the buses.” (How much better “‘But we do!’ rang the street-cars, and ‘We do,’ tooted the buses” would have been.) There are times when the logical relation between one sentence and the next is omitted: “He became daring and even took a small tiger cub aboard. When a baby elephant came lumbering up, asking for a ride, the baby street-car got scared.” A “But” at the beginning of the second sentence would provide the needed signal.

There are also errors in tense sequence such as “And if the baby street-car wasn’t [instead of “hadn’t been”] riding on the back of uncle bus, it wouldn’t have been able to see anything at all.” There are also ambiguous pronoun references like “One day Carl put a new sign in his front display window. It announced to everyone” The “his” does not refer to Carl as the grammar suggests, nor does the “It” of the second sentence refer to the window as one might expect.

Other anomalies may be attributable to poor proofreading, but sentences like the following just should not slip through: “It just happened kind of sudden,” or “I’ll bet this one will grow lot faster.” The cover spells “streetcar” as an unhyphenated word, while the text itself always hyphenates “street” and “car”. Once “baby” and “street-car” are hyphenated, and the misprint “street-cat” provides further evidence of carelessness.

Although the illustrations in this book accord more closely with the text, in the picture facing page 16, the sign spells “Monkeys” with the “ys” ending, while the text uses the “ies” plural. The illustrations themselves are deadly dull in colour, and De Vas Miller is not an accomplished artist when it comes to the human form. Hands and arms are often poorly proportioned, and facial features are poorly drawn.

In the final analysis neither of these books can be recommended, first because of the poor grammatical models they would provide for children, and secondly because of failures in the illustrations.

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