To read this book successfully, the sounds must be reproduced by the reader. But the reader does not know what the sounds are supposed to represent until two pages after they are heard. In between, there is an incorrect guess at what is producing the sound. This is much too abstract and confusing for two-year-olds. It would be better to play with the child making sounds with real objects and taking turns to guess what makes the sound, for the small child needs accurate, not inaccurate, feedback immediately. If I used this book with young children, I would eliminate the suggested text and follow the child's lead in constructing something that makes sense of the pictures for the child in the process of acquiring language.

Carol Anne Wien *is an Early Childhood teacher trainer and closet writer. She won the Nova Scotia Writers' Federation 1984 prize for booklength children's writing.*

PROBLEMS AND PLEASURES IN PICTURE BOOK FORM

Emily Umily, Kathy Corrigan. Illus. Vlasta van Kampen. Annick Press, 1984. Unpaginated $10.95, $4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920236-96-0, 0-920236-99-5; ***Afraid of the dark,*** Barry Dickson. Illus. Olena Kassian. James Lorimer (Kids in Canada Series), 1980. Unpaginated cloth $6.95. ISBN 0-88862-255-4; ***The big secret,*** Jed MacKay. Illus. Heather Collins. Annick Press, 1984. Unpaginated $12.95, $4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920236-88-X, 0-920236-89-8; ***Matthew and the midnight tow truck,*** Allen Morgan. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Annick Press, 1984. Unpaginated $12.95, $4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920303-00-5, 0-920303-01-3; ***David's father,*** Robert Munsch. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Annick Press, 1983. Unpaginated $12.95, $4.95 cloth paper. ISBN 0-920236-62-6, 0-920236-64-2; ***Millicent and the wind,*** Robert Munsch. Illus. Suzanne Duranceau. Annick Press, 1984. Unpaginated $12.95, $4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920236-98-7, 0920236-93-6; ***Mom and dad don't live together any more,*** Kathy Stinson. Illus. Nancy Lou Reynolds. Annick Press, 1984. Unpaginated $12.95, $4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920236-92-8, 0-920236-87-1.

Problems expressed, and problems resolved — with wit and humour, with fantasy, with pathos: despite great differences in tone and technique, a concern with the anxieties of young children is the common element in this varied collection of recent Canadian picture books. In some the problems are minor, and are handled in a joking fashion; others give a direct, realistic treatment of the troubles of their young protagonists — fears of the dark, of loneliness and re-

jection, of other children's parents, and the distress caused by a family break-up. A tone of kindliness prevails in all these books: the adults depicted are mostly sympathetic and well-intentioned, and each book offers some sort of resolution to the child's problems, whether fantastic — the wind's blowing a playmate up the mountain to Millicent, or realistic — Mario's discovery that the "Big secret" from which he felt excluded was a surprise party for him. Qualities of warmth and humorous sympathy pervade not only the fantasies but also the "problem" stories, making them more gentle and individual than many recent examples of this rather trendy psycho/sociological approach to the picture book. Several of the books in this group make a significant contribution to the development of the genre in Canada, and most of them have something to offer to the right young reader.

The well-merited popularity of Robert Munsch would seem to stem both from his humorously sympathetic appreciation of children's concerns and also from the gift of nonsense — the accumulation of absurd details, patterns of increasingly outrageous sequences, climaxed by an apt reversal, non-sequitur or unexpected twist. *David's father* is in the vein of Munsch's earlier books such as *The paper bag princess* and *Jonathan cleaned up . . .*, with its comical exaggeration and absurd fantasy again well complemented by the expressive vigour of Michael Martchenko's illustrations. Julie's problem in this story is her anxiety about the new neighbours; David, she is relieved to discover, seems "a regular sort of boy" and good to play with, but his father sounds quite terrifying. Indeed, he turns out to be a giant, but this has certain advantage, as Julie discovers when she overcomes her fears and ventures out with him. After showing us the convenience of having a kindly giant around to stop traffic and intimidate bullies, Munsch ends with an intriguing twist: "You think he is scary?" said David. "Wait 'til you meet my grandmother." Martchenko here shows us one improbable, hairy leg in a red high-heeled shoe, and leaves the rest to our imagination. Some of Martchenko's best illustrations in *David's father* are those in which he shows only a part of the giant — his boot, his fist, or his tremendous cutlery — dwarfing the ordinary people in the picture (fig 1). Author and illustrator play on the contrast between alarming appearance and benevolent reality, simultaneously having fun with the tall tale and indirectly reassuring the reader that big, scary-looking adults may be kind-hearted parents as well.

Also illustrated by Martchenko is Allen Morgan's funny and engaging *Matthew and the midnight tow truck.* Matthew's dream of a nighttime adventure helping a burly two truck driver to collect cars enables him to resolve two daytime problems — how to find his lost toy van, and how to persuade his mother to buy some red liquorice. The clever and plausible way in which the dream intertwines with reality and eventually provides satisfaction for the resolute little boy makes a rich and amusing story. The humour is frequently tongue-in-cheek: the manly tow truck driver has a lunch box full of red liquorice, and assures Matthew, "You can never get enough red liquorice you know. It's good

Fig. 1

for you and it gives you big muscles" (fig. 2). The literal-minded moralists probably won't like this much, nor will they like the truck driver's collecting cars off the street, shrinking them to pocket size in the car wash and trading them with his friends! But good absurdist fantasy always irritates someone, and this delightful book has psychological validity as well as an interesting story and rollicking humour.

Millicent and the wind extends the range of Robert Munsch's work into a different type of fantasy — more gentle, evocative and poetic than his previous books. The effect of this new mood in the text is intensified by the illustrations by Suzanne Duranceau which use a delicate line and highly detailed realism to evoke an atmosphere at once very earthy yet full of magical possibilities. For the wind — not an easy subject to draw (Who has seen the wind?) — she uses a broken line and large, swirling, transparent shapes which convey the sense of invisible motion. All the drawings are full of delicate detail of berries, leaves, shaded colours on mountain slope, hand-smocking on a dress, a feathered barrette in a child's curly hair. The spatial relationship of text and pictures is imaginative and varied, as the illustration sometimes extends around the text into a double page suggesting the sweep of the mountain ranges around Millicent's home. The first letter on each page forms part of a small separate picture, like the illuminated capitals in medieval manuscripts. The wild flowers and grasses in these capitals, like the cabin and grain elevator in the pictures, are part of a distinctively Canadian landscape.

Fig. 2

Millicent lives on a mountain top with her mother: "She saw trees and rocks and sunshine and clouds but no other children." The wind is her only companion. When Millicent and her mother make a three-day walk down into a village for supplies, her expectations are sadly dashed as the children there mock and reject her. But eventually the wind answers the lonely girl's appeal and blows up to the top of the mountain a playmate for her. The text manages to be beautiful and funny at the same time, effectively blending the poetic and grand with the homely and colloquial. "I am the very wind of all the world. I blow when I wish and talk when I want to. The day is so quiet and the sunshine so yellow that I feel like talking right now." The rhythms and cadences of the text reflect Munsch's skill as a storyteller, while the understated, matter-of-fact approach to the narrative works as well for this type of fantasy as it did for describing the escapades of his urban children.

The remaining four books are realistic stories which deal with issues or problems — each focussing on a single child character who is having difficulty adjusting to a social situation. *The big secret* and *Afraid of the dark* are not particularly interesting books in themselves, although some adults might find them useful "bibliotherapy" for children with anxieties similar to those of five-year-old Alan who is afraid of the dark, or six-year-old Mario who is adopted. In both books the problems and resolutions seem rather strained. Mario is upset because his friends and family are keeping a secret from him; although the secret turns out to be a surprise party for Mario, the strongest impression left by the book is Mario's distress at his sense of exclusion, and one can't help feeling that the secret party was a bad idea. In *Afraid of the dark* the child's feelings of anxiety are again presented effectively, but the resolution is im-

plausible. One night Alan hears his friend next door crying for help because his house is on fire; pride at saving the friend from the fire cures Alan's fear of the dark, but I suspect that a fearful reader is likely to leave this book not only still afraid of the dark but now afraid of his house burning down as well! Bibliotherapy has its hazards. A story in the realistic mode, with a narrow focus on one particular social or psychological problem, needs to offer a resolution which is also realistic, although it may still be an imaginative and surprising one.

Such a resolution is offered in *Emily Umily,* a sensitive and believable story of a shy little girl whose stammer is mocked by the other children at kindergarten, and who, as a consequence, becomes withdrawn and unhappy. The efforts of Emily to share her interests and enthusiasms with the other children are wryly presented in a cumulative pattern, so that by her third attempt we already know she will fail. "This time the teacher didn't even bother to say that they were very nice kittens. She knew it wouldn't make Emily feel better. She was right." How Emily eventually finds a source of self-confidence and manages to resolve her problem is such a neat, unusual and satisfying conclusion that it makes *Emily Umily* fun in itself, just as a good story, quite apart from its discussion of the problem.

There is no real story in Kathy Stinson's *Mom and dad don't live together any more;* rather, the book is a direct statement by the young narrator of her feelings about the separation of her parents. First person narration is an effective means of expressing the anxieties and longings which are the subject of this book. "I wonder where we'll be on Christmas. I hope Santa knows." "I wonder why Mommy and Daddy can't make each other happy. They say they tried and they can't any more. That's why they're separated." The tone of the book conveys sympathy for the child's distress, but also a calm, reflective acceptance of things as they are. Emphasis is laid on what each parent, separately, offers the child; no false expectations are raised that the family will be reunited. The book avoids casting blame on one parent or the other, and implies that both are caring and responsible.

Nancy Lou Reynolds' attractive illustrations work in harmony with the text, her soft, expressive water colours echoing the intimate discussion of feelings. As the text is dealing with a personal revelation, the pictures appropriately focus on the child narrator, often to the exclusion of any other subject and they emphasize her sensitivity and vulnerability. The book ends with a sense of acceptance: "My mommy and daddy love me too. Just not together." The first sentence is accompanied by a picture of the narrator holding a picture she has drawn, of a big red heart (fig. 3). But the last sentence (fragment) is by itself on an otherwise blank page; there is no softening the finality of the fact of separation. This gentle and honest book does an admirable job of dealing directly with children's anxieties about a now ubiquitous problem.

Attractive, varied in subject and style, rich in humour and sympathy for the concerns of the young, this collection of recent Canadian picture books indicates

Fig. 3

the vitality of the genre in Canada, and the commitment of Annick Press (which published all but one of these) to a generally high standard in writing and illustration. While it is good to see the real-life anxieties of young children addressed directly and helpfully in a realistic picture books, it is even better to see that fantasy, humour and nonsense are still being encouraged to flourish, since these will always be the qualities that draw the young to books.

Gwyneth Evans *teaches English and Children's Literature at Malaspina College on Vancouver Island, and enjoys reading with her young daughter, Emily.*

IN PURSUIT OF QUALITY: RABBITS AND EGGS

Little Snowshoe, Ellen Bryand Obed. Illus. William Ritchie. Co-publication. Breakwater Books, 1984. Unpaginated $5.95 paper. ISBN 0-919519-29-6; ***The woman with the eggs,*** Hans Christian Andersen. Translation of Konen med aeggene. Illus. Jan Mogensen. Breakwater Books, 1984. 29 pp. $9.95 cloth. ISBN 0-919519-66-7.

Little Snowshoe by Ellen Bryan Obed and illustrated by William Ritchie, seems to be a deliberately designed "product," which, for various reasons, comes across as more package than quality content. *Little Snowshoe* has a glossy and attractive self-covering format — an impressive use of Canada Council funds, but somehow neither the story nor the illustrations reach complete success, individually or as a unit.