



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.

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#### IN PURSUIT OF QUALITY: RABBITS AND EGGS

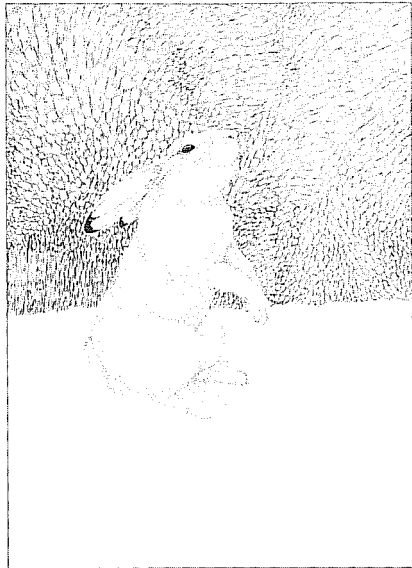
*Little Snowshoe*, Ellen Bryand Obed. Illus. William Ritchie. Co-publication. Breakwater Books, 1984. Unpaginated \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-919519-29-6; *The woman with the eggs*, Hans Christian Andersen. Translation of Konen med aeggene. Illus. Jan Mogensen. Breakwater Books, 1984. 29 pp. \$9.95 cloth. ISBN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

Although Obed's text is repetitive enough to attract little ones who enjoy "reading" a book like *Little Snowshoe* which they can learn quickly, one is left wondering over the useful purpose of the story line and its limiting vocabulary. Surely the point is not to learn quickly, one is left wondering over the useful purpose of the story line and its limiting vocabulary. Surely the point is not to learn such words as "bumping" and "bumpity" et al?

Technical quibbles aside, a more serious thematic question arises: Is Obed's textual message to the child "Go find your Mommy" or stay-put-so-your-mother-can-find-you? Is the author advocating action or inaction? Affirmation or resignation? Confusion remains but one suspects with misgivings that the stay-put policy is being favoured. Perhaps *Little Snowshoe* is merely a sad but accurate reflection of the current street-proofing fears in our society, but it still leaves a muddled message.

Further ambiguity arises between the simplicity of Obed's text and the complex work in Ritchie's illustrations. The labour involved in the hatched ink lines is impressive, and generally there is a clear aim to make the rabbits natural and factually accurate (despite the odd inconsistency in rendering the rabbit eyes). There remains, however, a flatness and stiffness in the illustrator's technique which would have been avoided had a more skilled mix of contour hatching been used.



Snow was snowing on the snow.  
Little Snowshoe was lost –  
He couldn't find his mommy.

Ritchie conveys the silence of a snow-muffled land well and the limited colour screened border is both sensitively and attractively used, but the sophistication attempted in his drawings jars with Obed's elemental text. Two different age groups are being addressed as if no editor told the author and illustrator that their audience had to be consistent. Subsequently, *Little Snowshoe* lacks visual and textual unity. One is left with a feeling of hollowness and not a little disappointment.

Since this issue of *CCL* focuses on illustration, some points are in order here about the nature of the art and craft of illustration. Rather than being just pictures that follow the text, the true art of illustration lies in being able to convey a wide range of events: what happened, what is happening and what is about to happen, with sound technique and sympathetic style. Truly good illustrations add a extra dimension that goes beyond the mere visual enhancement of a book.

Fortunately, in the past ten years, publishers of Canadian children's books have begun to respond to this justified demand for quality.

In Jan Mogensen's illustrations and layout for *The woman with the eggs* by Hans Christian Andersen (also by Breakwater Press in a co-publication), demonstrate the subtle extras a good illustrator can add to a classic tale by giving it a wholeness and harmony that is greater than its parts. Small blocks of slightly italicized text are placed opposite full-page watercolour vignettes that clearly demonstrate Mogensen's command of that slippery medium. This is a European style of watercolour, especially effective on the original artwork's rough stock: gently and confidently confined to an implied box design.

Mogensen allows the woman's head basket to grow with her ambitious dreams and this visual device unfolds throughout the book in the most delightful manner. However, the symbolic image is nicely restrained, especially when a pool's reflection shows the woman only, and not the exaggerated basket and its growing contents. By doing this, the artist deftly alludes to the unreality of an imagination gone wild. Something many of us can identify with!

The visual impact of the disastrous conclusion to Andersen's tale means the artist can add an edge of truth and freshness to the story's otherwise predictable moral. By placing the dejected woman returning with her empty dream basket on the outside back cover, Mogensen has also created a pleasing epilogue and a unifying touch to the book's physical design. This edition of *The woman with the eggs* is not a "great" book, but the illustrator has had the vision and skills to press every possible advantage available to achieve a delightful publication of quality.

**Robin Baird Lewis** lives in Guelph as a freelance artist-illustrator and peripatetic art teacher. She illustrated *Red is best, Big or little?* and *The up-sidedown king of Minnikin*, all by Annick Press, and is now working on projects for the National Film Board, Nelson (Canada) and Oxford University Press (England). Her first solo book *Aunt Armadillo* (Annick) is due out this autumn.