

exercising their ingenuity on three old men he longs for America a land "where the soldiers don't make the old men dance". Simon and Esther die in a typhus epidemic; Jacob emigrates to New York. At his newstand in Times Square, he meets two street musicians, who turn out to be the ghosts of Simon and Esther (for bodies they use mannikins, stolen from Macy's). Jacob's friends are actors still; now they perform in the streets, offering wry and incisive commentary on American mores. Jacob refuses their invitation to join them until he sees mounted police brutally clear the Square of a crowd of the poor and the hungry. Then he dies, his lost hopes for America tempered by his reunion with those he loves.

There is much to commend and enjoy in *Uncle Jacob's ghost story*. Its sense of humour is robust but subtle. Jacob's disillusionment with his chosen land is handled delicately and — mercifully — altogether without stridency. Furthermore, the novel's anatomy of America-as-Bonbon is part of a larger inquiry into our dreams and our limitations. Power is most emphatically not the answer to our problems; Simon and Esther know so much more now than they knew when they were alive and thought the actor's magic could change the world — but now they also know how weak they really are, their powers restrained by inexorable law.

Finally, then, the best thing about *Uncle Jacob's ghost story* is the way in which it honours Jacob's dream without succumbing to a chic cynicism or a cheap assurance that the dream must some day be realized in this world. It deserves praise too for its refusal to confuse worldly prosperity with spiritual maturity. In the eyes of society, those of its characters who truly possess moral integrity look like hopeless failures, like Jacob, who "never had to meet a payroll" and consorted with "street people." In adroit puncturing of our smug assumptions, *Uncle Jacob's ghost story* has much to offer thoughtful readers. **William Blackburn** teaches in the English Department at the University of Calgary. He is the author of numerous articles on Renaissance literature, children's literature, and East-West literary relations.

DREAMS AND DAYDREAMS: THE CONTROL OF FANTASY WORLDS

Busy nights, Gail Chislett. Illus. Barbara Di Lella. Annick Press, 1985. 22 pp. \$12.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920303-20-X, 0-920303-22-6; ***Christopher and the dream dragon***, Allen Morgan. Illus. Brenda Clark. Kids Can Press, 1984. 30 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-919964-60-5; ***There's an alligator under my bed!***, Gail E. Gill. Illus. Veronika Martenova Charles. Three Trees Press, 1984. 24 pp. \$11.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88823-087-7, 0-88823-089-3; ***Brendan, Morgan and the best ever cloud machine***, Gerrem Evans. Illus.

Scot Ritchie. Annick Press, 1985. 30 pp. \$12.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920303-18-8, 0-920303-17-X.

When authors of children's books explore the dreams and imaginings of childhood, their object is to allay the fears of the child reader or to encourage exploration of the world of imagination. Either way, the exercise involves an imaginary world built from the elements of the real world and within the control of either the protagonist or of some friendly guide.

The least satisfying of these four books, *Busy nights*, by Gail Chislett, is a rather thin story from the Annick Press toddler series. Here Bram, the toddler hero, hand in hand with an unexplained and totally nonfunctional old man (who appears each night through a "crack in the wall [that is] really a door") jumps "down down down to the other place."

The dream world there is unpredictable. "It could be scary and dark"; a witch "might appear," and a friendly elephant, a translation of the toy elephant from Bram's crib, "might" make the witch vanish beneath a barrage of cherry cream pie.

Here there is both too much story and too little. The toddler to whom I read it was unnerved by the emergence of the old man from the crack in the wall and not at all satisfied with the destruction of the witch by the elephantine *deus ex machina*. The uncertain nature of the dream world and its unexplored links with reality were more fearsome than reassuring.

A far more satisfying dream story for the same toddler was Allen Morgan's *Christopher and the dream dragon*. In the frame story, Christopher actively sets out in search of a dream, entering into the fantasy world to ask his friend, the Giant, why the moon changes its shape. The result is an imaginative adventure into the cloud world to wake up the dream dragon so it can nibble at the full moon. As a reward for waking it up, the dragon gives each participant a penny from its treasure mound.

From Christopher's elevator closet to the reader's own magic penny glued to the inside back cover, the concrete detail gives this fantasy a reassuring substantiality. The illustrator connects the dream world and reality: the giants' cloudships are like the toy ship in Christopher's bedroom; the Giant himself has the face from Christopher's jack-in-the-box, and the instruments used to wake up the dragon include Christopher's own alarm clock and a party whistle that we see lying on his bedroom floor.

Control of the imaginative world is itself an issue in the adventures of Kevin Marshall Elliott in Gail E. Gill's *There's an alligator under my bed!* Even in broad daylight, Kevin is terrified of the alligator that he believes lurks under his bed. Kevin copes with his own problem when his baby sister crawls under the bed and Kevin is forced to face the alligator in her defence. The result, of course, is that Kevin faces down his own terror and it evaporates. Here the illustrator has subtly set the green of the imaginary alligator and jungle against

a black and white reality with its own touches of green, the colour of the imagination.

In Gerrem Evans' *Brendan, Morgan and the best ever cloud machine*, Brendan decides to make his daydream about being like a cloud come true. Assisted by his more timid younger brother, Morgan, Brendan hammers together a cloud machine with balloons for lift, hot-air squirters for directional control, and a park bench for a seat. To the reader's surprise (and Morgan's), it flies, though it needs some adjustment and must combat the villainous "Dirigible — Cloud Disperser."

Unlike the other stories, which explore interior fantasy worlds, this story takes place outdoors and is interested in the kind of imagination that embraces the external world and enables children to overcome their physical limitations. This is a child's version of invention, gadgetry, and technology.

Whether the imaginative world is governed by a big brother like Brendan, who creates it out of what comes to hand or by a dreamer like Christopher, who explores experience in a mythical way, its elements have to be controlled. For Kevin, the imaginary becomes controllable with his recognition that it has no connection with his reality. In *Busy nights*, without the dreamer's controlling its connection with reality, the imaginative world appears arbitrary and frightening, and one hopes that if Bram appears again, both he and his guide will have a firmer grip on their dream world so that Bram will not have to return to reality for reassurance.

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CACHE-CACHE OU MASCARADE: ET SI LE JEU N'EN VALAIT PAS LA CHANDELLE?

La nuit du grand coucou, Gilles Tibo. Montréal, La courte échelle, 1984. Non paginé 4,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-89021-048-0.

La nuit du grand coucou est l'oeuvre d'un illustrateur chevronné et bien connu du public, Gilles Tibo, qui a assumé, en l'occurrence, la responsabilité du texte et des images.

Disons tout de suite qu'un lecteur attentif ne peut qu'être plongé dans la confusion, la perplexité et le désenchantement par la conception même de cet album dont le contenu ne résiste guère à l'analyse. Qu'on en juge plutôt.

Pendant la nuit, alors que les humains dorment, les animaux de la ferme, du cirque et de la ville revêtent leurs costumes de fête et se rendent, par trois