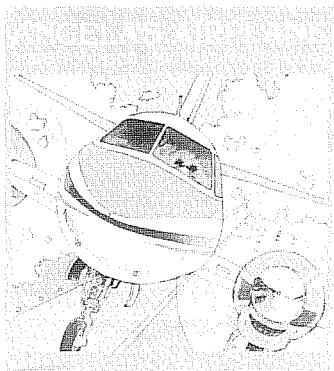


avec son père, séparé ou divorcé, et les enfants de l'école sont d'origines raciales très diverses. La directrice elle-même est noire et c'est d'ailleurs elle qui comprend le mieux Daniel puisque son propre chat l'a aussi suivie et trône sur son bureau.

Peux-tu attraper Joséphine? constitue donc une réussite complète. Stéphane Poulin, à qui le Conseil des Arts du Canada avait décerné en 1987 son Prix de littérature de jeunesse, catégorie illustration, s'est vu remettre, entre autres récompenses pour ce deuxième volet des aventures de Joséphine, le Prix d'excellence de l'Association des consommateurs du Québec. Les enfants comme leurs parents retrouveront certainement avec plaisir Daniel et Joséphine dans un troisième livre dont la parution est déjà annoncée par l'éditeur.

Claude Romney est chargée du cours de littérature canadienne-française et française pour la jeunesse à l'Université de Calgary. Elle a publié plusieurs articles sur la traduction de livres pour enfant et s'intéresse aussi aux lectures que font les enfants des classes d'immersion.

MUNSCH ADO



Angela's airplane. Robert Munsch. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Annick Press, 1988 (revised text). Unpag., \$12.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-027-8, 1-55037-026-X; **Murmel Murmel Murmel.** Robert Munsch. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Annick Press, 1988. Unpag., 99c paper. ISBN 1-55037-012-X; **Moira's birthday.** Robert Munsch. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Annick Press, 1987. Unpag., \$12.95, 4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920303-85-4, 0-920303-83-8; **A promise is a promise.** Robert Munsch and Michael Kusugak. Illus. Vldyana Kry-

korka. Annick Press, 1988. Unpag., \$12.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-009-X, 1-55037-008-1.

Robert Munsch has achieved "name brand" recognition in Canada. Bookstores everywhere have revolving wire racks filled with paperback copies of his books. The undeniable popularity of his public performances and the visibility of his books means that many adults automatically search for "a Munsch" when they

need a book for children from preschool to second grade. For the most part, their choice is justifiable: children do enjoy the exuberance and silliness of Munsch's stories, and they will demand to hear some of them repeatedly, so many times, in fact, that the exhausted adult reader is likely to feel driven to the bookstore to buy another Munsch just to have some story time variety. Munsch does provide comfort for children who want another story "just like this one," but, as with any prolific writer, his books are of uneven quality. Recent reissues and additions to the Munsch bookshelf provide the opportunity for examining the Munsch phenomenon, especially because all four books under consideration here focus on girl heroes.

Angela's airplane (previously issued in 1983) is production-line Munsch. It begins promisingly with irony aimed at adults. When Angela's father takes her to the airport, "a terrible thing happened. Angela's father got lost." This is the only original wit in the book. After this, the tale descends into a series of clichés from old slapstick comedies or Saturday morning cartoons. Wandering alone, five-year-old Angela gets on an airplane, pushes some buttons, makes it fly, and eventually smashes it into pieces. Unhurt, she promises her father that she'll never fly again, but when she grows up she becomes a pilot. Lacking the folkloristic repetition of phrases or episodes that injects life into his other books, this tired tale is so predictable that not even Michael Martchenko's amusing picture of the crash or Munsch's heavy-handed non-sexist ending can redeem it.

Murmel Murmel Murmel, a 1982 book reissued in the tiny Annikin format-perfect for storing in purse or glove box to be handy when needed, and inexpensive enough to be ideal for party favours--is a far more ambitious work. In a sense, it is a child hero story about a quest for someone who will love a baby. The initial conflict here is inspired. Five-year-old Robin finds a baby in a hole in her sandbox, a somewhat appropriate image for the situation of many children who find themselves caring for or tolerating babies who have mysteriously entered their families. Realizing that she is too little to care for it, Robin heroically embarks on a quest for someone who can. Her quest leads to amusing and satirical encounters with adults who refuse to care for the child. For example, a professional woman refuses the baby because she has "seventeen jobs, lots of money and no time." A man refuses it because he can't make money from the baby. In the end, Robin's problem is resolved by a *deus ex machina*: a truck driver comes along and says he needs the child. In return, he gives Robin a truck because he has seventeen already. The trouble with the tale is this ending. The implied theme about not wanting a sibling evaporates and becomes one about adults and their attitudes to babies. Although the reasons for rejecting the baby are clear enough, the motivation of the truck driver who wants it because it says "Murmel" may be obscure or confusing to some children. More seriously, Robin is far too passive, neither displaying wit in resolving the dilemma nor learning to accept babies. The non-sexist implications of

this conclusion, that girls may want to do things other than tend babies and that men may want to look after them, is only slightly less mechanical than the conclusion to *Angela's airplane*. Unlike that book, however, this one contains some entertaining episodes.

The vapidity of *Angela's airplane* and the thematic awkwardness of *Murmel Murmel Murmel* are in marked contrast to the focused silliness of *Moira's birthday*. This story exaggerates the chaos often surrounding children's parties. Moira, in spite of her parents' instructions, invites the entire school to her birthday. Humour develops because Moira remains completely in control while her frazzled parents and other adults fall apart. Munsch has said that "A lot of my oral style is sound effects." *Moira's birthday* preserves these effects through typography, which cues the reader by suggesting where to drag out words and where to increase volume. Because she remains unflappable and has the wit to solve problems that defeat her parents, Moira is a far more effective non-sexist hero than Angela or Robin. Her adventures lack the satiric bite of Robin's, but they are far funnier than Angela's. Verbal and situational repetitions here give pattern to the chaos, and Martchenko's drawings energetically complement the prose. In all, this is a successful translation of an oral tale to picture-book form.

Munsch's latest book, *A promise is a promise*, has roots in genuine folklore, being adapted from a cautionary tale by Michael Kusugak, an Inuit. Unlike Munsch's other books, this one does not have a child hero. Instead, adults, buffoons in most of his books, are wise tricksters who save the day. Conflict begins when Allashua, an Inuit girl, lies to her parents and goes fishing on the dangerous sea ice, where the dreadful Qallupilluit pull her under water. In order to save herself, she promises to bring her brothers and sisters down to the sea. Her mother, the real hero, tricks the Qallupilluit into dancing while Allashua and her siblings rush to the ice to keep their word. Munsch shapes the tale the way he shapes his own, heavily depending on the repetition of European tales as his major structural device. The result is a tale that, in spite of its exotic content, seems accessible and familiar. The book also benefits from a new illustrator. Vladyana Krykorka's colourful illustrations are less cartoon-like than Martchenko's, which appear in most of Munsch's other books. These illustrations, which frequently spread over the text page, give a fitting air of enchantment, a fairy-tale quality, to the book.

Although it is not particularly memorable, *A promise is a promise* is a healthy sign. Too often Munsch has seemed as if he stamped out stories in the same way that bakers use a cookie cutter to stamp out gingerbread men. Furthermore, whenever he has previously abandoned humour, as in *Love you forever* (1986), he has fallen into cloying sentimentality. Here he has made a good contribution to our multicultural heritage without succumbing to either danger.

None of the books under review here is destined to be a classic like *The Paper Bag Princess* (1980). Nevertheless, the comic chaos of *Moira's birthday* and the satiric humour of the initial parts of *Murmel Murmel Murmel* will amuse many children and adults. *Moira's birthday* is especially easy to read dramatically. It is likely to be one of those tales children want read again the moment it ends. It's the kind of comic success that will send adults out to those wire display racks seeking yet more Munsch.

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UN ROMAN TOUFFU

Le retour d'Eliane. Josée Dufour. Montréal, Fides, 1988. Collection Les Enquêtes de Gloria. 122 pp., 3,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-7621-1412-8.

Tout d'abord--et le titre de la série est là pour nous le rappeler--*Le retour d'Eliane* est un roman policier. Ecrit dans la plus pure tradition du genre, ce récit est construit à l'aide des ingrédients classiques constituant les étapes de la recette-enquête: des incidents déclencheurs alarmants qui se multiplient; la présentation de personnages enfermés dans un même espace (ici, un immeuble) et tous potentiellement coupables; des indices qui amènent le lecteur à croire fermement en la culpabilité d'un des personnages; une enquête qui fait tout pour confirmer notre suspicion; le dénouement qui, bien sûr, nous fait voir notre méprise: le coupable n'est pas celui que nous avons soupçonné. L'auteur franchit assez bien les premières étapes; les autres, quoique réussies, sont moins subtilement menées et par ricochet sont moins convaincantes et engageantes pour le lecteur-détective que nous devenons. Au fond, son choix d'indices nous livre trop facilement l'identité du coupable.

C'est un roman touffu, bavard presque: beaucoup d'épisodes d'importance nettement inégale; un très grand nombre de personnages pour 122 pages. Ceux-ci sont tous fortement (un peu trop?) caractérisés. L'auteure fait usage de toutes les techniques disponibles: caractérisation physique des uns, présentation des autres par des objets familiers et des décors, analyse des pensées des uns, clins d'oeil et petites réflexions à saveur didactique (aussi bien sur les homosexuels que sur le système judiciaire). Un peu de tout pour tous. Le texte aurait gagné à être simplifié. Les personnages féminins sont manifestement les plus forts, les plus agressifs, les plus intéressants. Et, de loin, les plus posi-