

A WRITER'S LIFE

Stars come out within. Jean Little. Viking, 1990. 263 pp., \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-670-82965-X.

This second volume of Jean Little's memoirs covers the author's adult life, from the publication of her first novel, *Mine for keeps* to the present. In the first chapter, Little skillfully recaps the ending of *Little by Little*, recreating her time as a teacher of handicapped children, and the exciting moment when she learns that her first novel is to be published.

That moment sets the tone for the volume. The emphasis here is on, as the author states in her prologue, "those incidents and relationships that have added to my education as a blind Canadian woman who writes books for children." Little does not pretend that she is revealing all, but neither does she shy away from the difficult aspects of her blindness or her writing career. She bravely discusses her sight problems, including the anger, fear, and depression that she suffered as a result of losing an eye. She is equally frank about her writing, quoting her editors' criticisms, and acknowledging the value of their advice.

Because it is about an adult, *Stars come out within* may not have the immediate appeal for young readers that *Little by Little*, the childhood memoir, had. However, the author's constant struggle to become self-sufficient despite her blindness will strike a chord with children facing their own struggle for autonomy. Little's search for independence culminates when Zephyr comes into her life. Though he does not make his appearance until halfway through the text, Zephyr, the author's guide dog, will be the star of the book for many readers. Little has created (or re-created) a memorable character here, and has also skillfully integrated a great deal of information about guide dogs and their training. Here are the answers to questions that she must have been asked countless times in recent years.

Indeed, throughout the book, Little is generous in her willingness to discuss the "mechanics" of both her blindness and her writing. About her writing, she states here that she does not believe in bibliotherapy, either as a writer or a reader (she has long protested some reviewers' dismissal of her early books as bibliotherapy). However, she does believe that books can and do make a difference in the lives of readers and throughout her memoirs she discusses writers and works that have had an impact on her life. The books she mentions may be known to some of her young readers, but her enthusiasm and insights will lead many to discover or rediscover writers such as Rosemary Sutcliffe, Emily Dickinson, Katherine Paterson, Richard Adams, and Claire Mackay.

Stars come out within closes with a touching and amusing chapter that illustrates the reception Little's books have had among young readers. She in-

cludes an incident in which *From Anna* did make a difference in a young boy's life, but also quotes from children's letters of the "My class has to write to a live Canadian and I got you" variety. Jean Little knows she does not write for everyone; she writes for readers. She does not write for Reluctant Readers, or work up showy car chases or murders that might hook Non-Readers. She does something much more difficult and much more genuine. She writes pleasurable, satisfying books that she would enjoy reading herself.

David Brown is Director of the Education Materials Centre at the University of Calgary.

TWO FABLES

Franklin fibs. Paulette Bourgeois. Illus. Brenda Clark. Kids Can Press, 1991. Unpag., \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-038-5; **Mr. Sweetums wears pink.** Charlotte Hutchinson. Illus. Brenda Jones. Ragweed Press, 1991. Unpag., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-18-7.

The intent of *Franklin fibs* to teach children a moral lesson is evident, but the didactic purpose of *Mr. Sweetums wears pink* is disguised. This difference is reflected in different levels of anthropomorphism. *Franklin fibs* is the story of a tortoise who boasts to his friends that he can swallow 76 flies "in the blink of an eye." Although this feat is beyond him, his actual accomplishments include handling buttons and pastry-making, and he is depicted with decidedly human expressions and standing on his hind feet, so we know he isn't a tortoise we will meet in the natural world.

The hero of *Mr. Sweetums wears pink*, on the other hand, seems a realistic domestic cat. His story of an animal whose authentic nature is under constant attack by the three little girls who own him seems aimed more at the amusement of its readers than their education. The girls love to treat their decidedly unwilling pet like a doll. His ultimate public humiliation comes when they dress him in a pink tutu for a costume party, but he surprises himself by enjoying the children's admiration. He stops worrying about how other cats see him, and is less bothered by being dressed up. He even secretly takes up dancing on his hind legs, thus moving out of the natural world.

