

bathtime, until the neighbours launch into a feeding frenzy and threaten to "pick her." The moral is clearly spelled out: "The next time *your* mom says you need a good scrub, / please remember Petula and ... jump in the tub!"

The rollicking text echoes Petula's ebullient spirit. Unsuspecting readers may trip over interruptions in the rhyme and metre which distinguish Petula's voice from that of her mother and emphasize moments of high drama. But the galloping text and zany illustrations suit the story well and rescue it from didacticism as the energy builds to a satisfying shout and splash. Petula is a likable character whose story is sure to delight young listeners.

In the book *Would You Love Me?* a child asks "Would you love a cow that eats up people's clothes?" and the adult replies, "Yes, I'd hug her tight and then pat her soft nose." Sound familiar? Barbara M. Joosse used a similar premise in *Mama, Do You Love Me?* (illus. Barbara Lavallee).

In *Would You Love Me?* each picture shows a different child or (in several cases) no child at all. Without the narrative framework or consistent characters of the Joosse book, *Would You Love Me?* asks readers to make some sophisticated inferences. The visual clues are sometimes subtle, as in the picture of the crowing rooster, where the child holds her hand over her teddy bear's mouth. Slight inconsistencies from page to page make it hard to find a unifying pattern. The question "Would you love an elephant with a long trunk?" refers to a physical characteristic, not mischief-making behaviour, and the response ("Yes, I'd let him sleep with me on my top bunk") seems to come from the child's point of view, not the parent's. In some spreads we are inside the child's imagination, while in others we see the parent's response.

But in spite of slight inconsistencies, there is plenty of child appeal in this book, with lots to look at and to enjoy. The pictures are light and loose, with a touch of naivete that creates a kind of tenderness which is appropriate for this text. Whether or not the echoes are intentional, these three picture books resonate with others in the field of children's literature. They provide an interesting opportunity to compare and contrast various styles and approaches.

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Text and Illustration for Children Seven Years of Age and Younger

Night Fun. Patricia Quinlan. Illus. Ron Berg. Annick, 1997. 24 pp. \$16.96 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-487-7. *Flying Dimitri.* Blair Dawson. Illus. author. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1997. 32 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-284-X. Originally published in 1978 in a substantially different form. *Mary Margaret's Tree.* Blair Dawson. Illus. author. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1996. 32 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-259.

This book for ages three to six was inspired by a favourite nursery rhyme, "Hey,



Diddle, Diddle" of the author, Patricia Quinlan, who dedicated *Night Fun* to her son, Kevin. An experienced author, Quinlan's rhymed storyline features Kevin on a dreamlike fantastical voyage in a night-time galaxy in search of fun along with characters Spoon, Dog and Dish. Kevin rides through space with his Mother Goose storybook of rhymes in hand like a traveller's tourbook, exploring planets Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and Pluto while comets and asteroids shoot by. Young storybook listeners will be especially comforted in knowing that Kevin will awake from his dream in the safety and security of his own bed and home.

Berg's detailed and surrealistic colour illustrations in mixed media fill ten 8 1/4" X 10 1/2" pages: images just slightly larger than postage stamps of small parts of the full-page paintings appear on the opposite page together with text. Both illustrations nicely complement each other and offer a delightful bonus when the young child is invited to finger-point-out where the smaller image can be discovered within the larger artwork. This game-like activity that engages the young child in careful observation is a small though important step in promoting visual literacy, valued today in the curriculum goals of many progressive school systems.

Each of Berg's illustrations is full of subject matter depicted in rich representational detail. Bright luminous colours sharply contrast with dark skies, creating a feeling of a mysterious and expansive cosmos. Text and illustrations support each other in a book that is a successful bedtime story for any young child.

Like *Night Fun*, *Flying Dimitri*, by well-known Canadian commercial artist Blair Drawson, is a fantasy story. Dimitri, a lonely boy, lives with his father in a huge house. One evening while brushing his teeth before bedtime, he fantasizes about being able to fly through outerspace to Mars (illustrated in this issue on p. 66). There he confronts Martians, a fire-snorting dragon and an imprisoned queen in a high stone tower. En route over the ocean he enjoys splashing with the great whales. He saves the beautiful queen and the story abruptly ends when he tumbles back to earth where he is tucked into bed by his father.

Drawson's 26 illustrations in this 8 1/2" X 11" book include among them full-page and double-page artwork. Executed in full-colour in what appears to be an opaque medium such as tempera, gouache or acrylic, the artwork surpasses the rather prosaic storyline in its imaginative content, composition and perspective, as well as in its aesthetic merit. About half the illustrations are done in warm muted oranges, yellows, ochres and browns; the other half are done in cool blues and greens. All are subtly shaded in graduated tones, very richly textured, and appropriate to the specific subject matter presented. The artwork is the outstanding feature of this book and will engage young children's detailed and prolonged scrutiny.

Flying Dimitri is suitable for children ages four to seven.

Blair Drawson's most recent children's book, *Mary Margaret's Tree*, is for children ages three to six. Mary Margaret, the little girl featured in the story, goes out one spring morning to plant a tree but she finds herself beginning to shrink as the tree grows huge. She climbs the mighty tree to see the world from this high perch and also busy insects and birds while she settles snugly within a large flower. Her imagined episodes take story readers and viewers through nature's four seasons, including a winter spent hibernating in a dark cave with a collection of wild animals. Mother finally summons Mary Margaret to dinner and a subsequent return to reality.

Drawson has created 23 illustrations in full-colour in an opaque medium. Several full-page and double-page illustrations are included. The front and back inside covers represent the tree, highlighted in the story, as it may be seen through nature's four seasons. Two of the illustrations may be disturbing to young children. One depicts Mary Margaret growing roots from her feet and green shoots out of her head and hands. In another she becomes a tree with her face embedded in a thick gnarled trunk and her outstretched arms as limbs. The artwork, overall, is imaginative especially in its conception of scale. *Mary*



Margaret's Tree presents rich contrasts of flat, smooth areas against richly textured and mottled areas to create pleasing compositions. Illustrations and text are well matched in this charming book.

Dr. Bernard Schwartz is professor emeritus, art/education, University of Alberta. His long-standing interest in the art and literature for children seems to have had a positive impact on his six children. His forthcoming book The Holocaust: Art/Politics/Law/Education, co-edited with Frederick DeCoste, is the result of an international conference held at the University of Alberta.

The Old and the New (and the Old)

Dennis and the Fantastic Forest. Adrian Raeside. Illus. author. Doubleday Canada, 1997. 32 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-385-25531-4. *Eenie Meenie Manitoba: Playful Poems and Rollicking Rhymes.* Robert Heidbreder. Illus. Scot Ritchie. Kids Can, 1996. 32 pp. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-301-5. *Ogre Fun.* Loris Lecynski. Illus. author. Annick, 1997. 32 pp. \$5.95 paper, \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-446X, 1-55037-447-8.

A couple of false assumptions about children's literature exist among the general public, and those who work with children's books sometimes encounter them. One of these is the belief that all children's books are written in verse. Another is the assumption that medieval fantasy elements like trolls, dragons and giants create automatic child-appeal. These days, although re-tellings of traditional folktales are still popular, most original stories steer clear of verse, and few new books are set in the old goblin-and-wizard territory. However, three recent Canadian picture books demonstrate that the oral tradition continues to influence new material, with varying degrees of success.

Dennis and the Fantastic Forest is the third in the Dennis the Dragon series by Adrian Raeside. His career as an editorial cartoonist is evident in the polished, funny, readable cartoon-style illustrations in this book. When the forest burns down, Dennis becomes over-zealous with his re-planting campaign, until trees crowd out his fellow citizens and cause havoc in the town.

Traditional themes, like "too much of a good thing," and "the wicked must be punished" are present here, along with the familiar fire-breathing dragon. But stories rooted in folklore are structurally solid and, unfortunately, this book does not live up to that tradition. When the townspeople complain, Dennis lists his reasons for liking trees, but says nothing about their overabundance. Then he notices that "a few of the trees [are] still looking lean." Dennis transfers these lean trees to the forest and becomes a park ranger. By the end of the story, it is not clear whether the town has been restored, but in a surprising denouement, Dennis sprays his brothers with an extinguisher to punish them for having set the original fire.

The problems with structure and clarity are compounded by the struggle to tell the story in verse. The metre is uneven, the text occasionally slips from past to present tense, and some of the rhymes (e.g. playgrounds/duckponds and