

## AESTHETICALLY BEAUTIFUL BOOKS FROM BREAKWATER

**The woman with the eggs.** Hans Christian Andersen. Illus. Jan Mogensen. 28 pp., \$9.95. **The Elephant's Child.** Rudyard Kipling. Illus. Jan Mogensen. 42 pp., \$11.95;

Breakwater Books is continuing in its tradition of offering exceptional books of high quality for children. Ellen Bryan Obed's *Borrowed Black*, newly illustrated by Jan Mogensen, has been reissued (see review in *CCL*, 57/58); two other titles are worth noting for their excellence of production and definite child appeal.

One of Hans Christian Andersen's most loved classics, *The woman with the eggs* is imbued with colour and light by the charm and whimsy of illustrator Jan Mogensen. Visually enhancing and poetically sound, it's a delight to read aloud to the lap audience, and is also so reassuring and predictable it makes a good "I-can-read-it-all-by-myself" selection.

The book tells the story of a woman on her way to market to sell her eggs, which she carries cheerfully atop her head in a basket. The road being lonely and the distance great, she has time to speculate. The promised yield from her bounty gets progressively more fantastic and grandiose until a euphoric toss of her head sends her eggs (and her dreams) crashing in the wayside below. "And really there wasn't much harm in that," for we enchantingly learn the lesson that we shouldn't dream beyond realistic expectations.

The story is well-paced and easy to follow, thanks to the rhythm of economy in the picture and text balancing. The full-page colour illustrations opposite each bit of musical, lilting text leave the child feeling wonderfully satisfied, as a good children's book should.

The aesthetically beautiful and hilarious adaptation of *The Elephant's Child*, a Rudyard Kipling favourite, also illustrated by Jan Mogensen, tells the story of how the young elephant, full of "satiabile curiosity" (for which he was consistently being spanked by the various inhabitants of the jungle) came to develop the practical trunk as we know it today.

*The Elephant's Child* sets glibly out to ask his most daring question: "What does the crocodile have for dinner?" Why Elephant's Child of course! Specifically, it snaps at his mere smear nose. A series of misadventures culminates in the Elephant's Child coming to the realization that his nose has expanded to a startling five feet. And it's definitely not going to shrink!

However, the Elephant's Child soon makes the intriguing and helpful discovery that his elongated nose has all sorts of "vantages," not the least of which is well-earned revenge on his "dear families" whom he blithely proceeds to spank. And, as is usually the way in toweringly tall tales, his "dear families" themselves ultimately become consumed by "satiabile curiosity" and lumber off to acquire new noses from the Crocodile. And the rest is history.

Full of sophisticated humour and crazy, catchy word combinations, this book is now refreshed by Mogensen's limpid hues and splendid pastels. An impressive production.

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#### PLAYFUL PICTURES MAKE SOME BOOKS EASY TO LIVE WITH

**The troll of Sora** Leslie Elizabeth Watts. Illus. author. Oxford University Press, 1989. 32 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-19-5407172-2; **The terrible Finn MacCoul**. Tom Harpur. Illus. Linda Hendry. Oxford University Press, 1990. 32 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-19-540716-4; **The swan children**. David Day. Illus. Richard Evans. Doubleday, 1989. Unpag., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-385-25233-1; **Little Fan and the fountain fairy**. Margaret Miles-Cadman. Illus. author. Breakwater, 1989. Unpag., \$11.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920911-72-2; **Draw and write your own picture book**. Emily Hearn. Illus. Mark Thurman. Pembroke, 1990. 32 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-921217-46-3.

There is no substitute for living with a new collection of picture books for a few weeks to let us know what we really feel about them. The more time my children and I spend exploring the richly imagined illustrations and rereading the simple but very wise tale in Leslie Elizabeth Watts' *The troll of Sora*, the more we all love it. Drawing upon a traditional Italian folk story, Watts tells the plight of Fragolina, a girl whose inability to accept her plain appearance produces nearly disastrous consequences. As her discontent grows, she isolates herself. The solace she finds in eating only leads to greater despair. Through the magical intervention of a troll and the opportunity to live briefly as a dazzlingly beautiful woman, Fragolina discovers the values which bring her fulfillment. The seriousness of the message is nicely balanced by playful, sensuous and warm-toned paintings.

Another playfully illustrated version of a traditional folk tale is Tom Harpur's *The terrible Finn MacCoul*. MacCoul, the biggest giant in all of Ireland, is really a timid soul who panics when the ferocious Fergus walks across the sea from Scotland to do battle with him. Fortunately, Finn is saved by an amusing plan devised by his clever wife. The pleasures of the tale are greatly enhanced by Linda Hendry's energetic watercolours. Her goodnatured, robust characters spill out of their picture frames, making the world of giants a friendly place to visit. The pictures also provide fascinating opportunities to contemplate reality from a giant's perspective. A half dozen fried eggs comfortably fit onto Finn's fork; the cats that scamper over the gargantuan furniture appear no bigger than mice.