

que l'auteur a vu juste. Ce petit album impertinent est sans prétention moralisatrice, mais on ne peut s'empêcher de se sentir une vague inquiétude face à ces formules qui représentent une somme de bêtises dont la seule raison d'être est de faciliter la manipulation de l'enfant par l'évocation de peurs purement imaginaires. Le texte commence bien par la réflexion que "c'est effrayant ce qui peut arriver à un petit garçon comme moi", et quand on y pense, c'est vrai.

Les illustrations de Philippe Béha sont à la fois belles, drôles et inquiétantes. Elles montrent toutes des scènes où les menaces des parents se réalisent, et où l'enfant en subit les conséquences. Les parents nous sont présentés la bouche grande ouverte; ils gesticulent, montrent du doigt et froncent le sourcil. La dernière image nous montre l'enfant accablé à la fois par tous les malheurs évoqués (voulus?) par ses parents. Son seul secours et compagnon, qui partage sa joie et sa douleur, est un curieux et sympathique animal domestique qui est certainement un chat, mais qui se comporte parfois en chien. Simple figurant ici, il mériterait un jour son propre album.

On peut se demander quelle sera la réaction des enfants. Le petit garçon qui raconte ses déboires aura sans doute toute leur sympathie; en outre, le fait de savoir qu'on n'est pas seul à vivre sous la menace, et qu'en l'occurrence les menaces sont toutes imaginaires, ne peut que rassurer. Ce joli petit album va donc confirmer ce que les enfants savent déjà: que les grandes personnes se ressemblent toutes, qu'ils racontent surtout des bêtises, et que c'est malgré eux que l'enfant finit par s'en sortir.

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POETRY FOR CHILDREN

Dragon sandwiches. Gwendolyn MacEwen. Illus. Maureen Paxton. Black Moss Press, 1987. 32 pp., \$5.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88753-157-1; **Julie Gerond and the polka dot pony.** Fred Penner and Sheldon Oberman. Illus. Alan Pakarnyk. Hyperion Press, 1988. Unpag., \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-920534-70-8; **An armadillo is not a pillow.** Lois Simmie. Illus. Anne Simmie. Western Producer Prairie Books, 1986. 72 pp., \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88833-185-1; **Auntie's knitting a baby.** Lois Simmie. Illus. Anne Simmie. Western Producer Prairie Books, 1984. 70 pp., \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88833-123-1.

Gwendolyn MacEwen's text for *Dragon sandwiches* is brief and whimsical. The little girl wants dragon sandwiches on rye for her school lunch, and Dad has to go hunt for some rather diminutive examples of the species. The poetic form is quatrains rhymed abcd, with two lines on each page so that the rhymes are unobtrusive: the reader doesn't pick up the rhyme until the page is turned,

and quite often adroit half-rhymes are used. MacEwen was a Governor-General Award winning poet, and her rhythms are naturally quite skillful. But the real joy of the book lies in the illustrations. The colours are remarkably bright (the human characters have green hair and the dragons glow) but not garish. Paxton creates expressive faces, even on the rather indolent cat, which children will enjoy spotting in many scenes. It slouches and crouches, and at one point is seen atop the refrigerator, pretending to paddle a large bowl with spatula. Household objects like jugs and teapots turn out on close inspection to have human faces, which adds a mysterious dimension to the work without being frightening. The pictures fit the story perfectly: both are imaginative and whimsical but not cute.

Fred Penner's success on television will assure an audience for *Julie Gerond and the polka dot pony*. He has recorded this story. Unfortunately, the narrative by Sheldon Oberman is lackluster and predictable: Julie loves to ride the merry-go-round and favours a polka dot pony. Eventually she learns that the pony is a real pony under the spell of the wicked old woman who runs the merry-go-round. Julie comes at night and saws through the wooden pole holding the pony, and the two ride away to green pastures by the sea. This variation on the enchanted prince motif is narrated in rather wordy and irregular stanzas. There are some clever sound patterns (the merry-go-round makes noises of "hooting and tooting/And burping and chirping/And purring and whirring/And clanging and banging/And round it all goes.") but no real verbal wit. A few too many tears are shed by the pony and the little girl. The illustrations are also uninspired. The colours are grainy pastels, applied without much imagination, and the draughtmanship is weak. Faces are definitely not Pakarnyk's strong point. Julie's expression suggests a vacuous fashion model rather than a little girl, and the closest she comes to expressiveness is when her hair stands on end in the escape scene. The wicked old woman is somewhat masculine. She manages to be repulsive without being scary. Some of the objects in Pakarnyk's world are animate, but these are not the droll faces of *Dragon sandwiches*. The whistles and some of the other accessories of the merry-go-round have scowling expressions, rather sinister ones, details not required by the plot. In the final scene, Julie and the pony have escaped to a vaguely-described idyllic world with a "grey willow tree." The tree, which looks like a cottonwood, has been coloured green in the picture. Story and pictures seem suited to one another. Neither shows much originality or skill. The book has a perfunctory commercial appearance.

Lois Simmie has a genuine talent for light verse. Her rhymes are suitably absurd (picadilly and picallili) and her rhythms are generally strong, though *once in a while they falter*. She writes about subjects familiar to all: school, eccentric relatives, vacations, pets, and such horrors as being tickled mercilessly. One of the best features of her books is the use of running jokes. In her first and best collection, *Auntie's knitting a baby*, eleven poems about the incom-

petent knitting that Auntie is doing for her expected child are scattered through the work, creating droll speculations about the child's appearance:

Auntie's knitting a baby bonnet
That looks like an airport windsock;
If Auntie's baby fits that hat
She's in for a terrible shock.

After various irreverent speculations, the baby is born and turns out to be normal. Alas, Auntie's misshapen knitting doesn't fit very well, and baby's first words are: "Mama's a *terrible knitter*".

There is also a running joke in *An armadillo is not a pillow*, a series of poems entitled "Look" and numbered 1-11. In each an imaginative child tries to induce Mother to look at some outlandish creature or creatures allegedly seen in the woods, a closet, in the bed, and so on. At the end the monsters are driven off by the appalling threat of asparagus sandwiches. The contemporary references in this book seem especially apt: in one a child's father goes off to Toronto "full of steak and wine/Flying on a DC9," and in another the child laments not having an ideal family like the ones shown on television. A rare misstep comes in a poem about the agonies of the mustard-plaster treatment for a chest cold. Few children today will have heard of a mustard-plaster. A poem alluding to the rhyme about the purple cow might have been cut: it hasn't the succinctness of the original. Simmie is best at treating common emotions, some of them realistically negative. She deals accurately and sensibly with resentment of a friend who is too nice or guilt over homework left undone:

I'm watching "Walt Disney" Sunday night
With my homework still on the shelf;
Monday is ruining Sunday again
And it's me who's mad at myself.

The poems are illustrated by Anne Simmie, whose line drawings are relaxed and witty. They could often be mistaken for amateur work until the unusual perspectives are taken into account: her figures do a lot of slouching and stretching and jumping, and the angle of vision is often from above or below. She conveys facial expression well. The style usually borders on cartoonish simplicity, but when a poem requires more detail she can supply it. While picture books in colour are to be valued, Anne Simmie reminds us that a lively and confident pencil can support a text just as well. Her drawings are as unpretentious and spontaneous-looking as Lois Simmie's poems.

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