Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

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Thom Hinckley, Linda Davis, Carol V. Oaks, Katie Blake, Tim Wadham, Gus Clark, Janice Card, Afton Miner, Janet Francis, Kathy Simpkins, and Catherine Bowles

This book review is available in Children's Book and Media Review: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol5/iss3/4
This book, giving us a lavishly illustrated view of a feast in the king's honour, also treats us to some whimsical stage whispers from the author. The king was probably Henry IV, and if so this feast was likely one of the less lively events of a reign otherwise filled with intrigue. In vivid tapestry colours, we see the considerable preparation and then the formal feast.--Thom Hinckley.

Mother Goose never grows old and children delight in the rhymes and jingles. It is the rightful heritage of every child. Sad to say some of our modern children are missing the joy of experiencing these nursery rhymes.

Allen Atkinson has selected over one hundred verses and beautifully illustrated each verse in soft, appropriate colors. Many of the rhymes are illustrated with animal characters—the children of the old woman who lived in a shoe are rabbits. Little Miss Muffet is a bear. The new interpretation gives added interest.

There are several of the old favorite verses included such as *Humpty Dumpty*, *Little Jack Horner* and *Jack Sprat*. Longer versions of some rhymes are given and will be interesting to children. An example is *Little Bo Peep* who tries to attach the missing tails on her sheep when she finds them. Some delightful lesser-known poems are introduced.

Atkinson has a mixture of verses, but most are true Mother Goose; however, a few sections such as *Mary had a Little Lamb*, *Twinkle-Twinkle Little Star* have known authors, and *Itsy Bitsy Spider* and *Peter Piper* are more modern verses written in Mother Goose Style.--Catherine Bowles.

Again Judy Blume has captured a "child's world view" with warmth and accuracy. Originally written as a part of the "Free to be...you and me" program conceived by Marlo Thomas, the eight-year-old Great One describes her six-year-old brother, The Pain. In her view, he is pampered, favored and loved better, which is strange since he is such a pain and gets into things. And yet there is a hint that she really does like her little brother. When The Pain describes his sister the specific behaviors she shows differ from his, like playing the piano so you can recognize the
tune, but in his view she is pampered, favored and loved better than he. And yet, he really likes her, too?! It is short and fun, especially for Judy Blume fans, but it does not get below a superficial verbal level of the feelings between an older sister and her little brother.—Kathy Simpkins.


Nancy Bond writes a compelling character study in each young adult novel she publishes. A Place to Come Back to, sequel to The Best of Enemies, shows her stature in this department to be regularly gaining substance. Outwardly static in plot, the story deals with a short few days only—but eternity in the lives of at least two of the characters who meet an early torrent of adult life too soon and must form their own means of fording it.

Oliver’s grand-uncle, Commodore Shattuck, dies suddenly, leaving Oliver without the refuge home he has come to harbor in for two years. Although he has willed Oliver the house and property, Oliver sees no autonomy in his near future as his remarried mother prepares to take him to London and school. With transparently detached maturity he tells Charlotte that he can't break loose yet—he has to be prepared to do something with his life first, but he cannot control himself beyond the point of desperately needing a place to come back to—and Charlotte, reluctant to accept the passing of the halcyon days of childhood, must confront her own feelings of uncertainty and fear and respond to Oliver's demand for stability.

This is no Judy Blume expose of adolescent sexual exploration (in fact, there is almost no explicit physical contact in it) but it is the thoughtful presentation of not-so-adolescent uncertainty and recognition of the dark that lies beyond. "Where is he?" Charlotte asks about the dead Commodore (her friend too)—but there is no answer. Charlotte and Oliver are full-fleshed, painfully real people functioning in the midst of a group of equally full-fashioned (if not as well known) other people in a situation they did not create and cannot control, and when Bond voices the human cry for succor in the following passage, it strikes a common chord:

"She was standing at the edge of a cliff, she saw it with absolute clarity: the empty unknown space stretching vast in front of her. And there was nothing she could do but step into it, deliberately, as bravely as she could. She reached out for Oliver,
not because he could save her, but because he was already falling and because he should not fall alone. Maybe together it wouldn't be so bad."

This book may be one of the most effective weapons in the cold war to establish a 'real' young adult literature.--Janet Francis.


Maggie Michaels was a gorilla freak and her father, the director of Fairhaven Animal Park, couldn't have been more delighted. To reward her for a prize-winning science project involving gorillas, he uses certain of his many connections to arrange for her to spend the summer in Nigeria with Dr. Charlotte Wingate, one of the world's leading authorities on the western lowland gorilla.

It was a pretty heady experience for Maggie, who realized that she was fortunate to be working with someone such as Dr. Charlotte and she was anxious to prove herself an asset. But it never occurred to Maggie what an effect she could have on Charlotte's work until Naomi, one of the gorillas in the group Charlotte had been so patiently studying, became enamoured with her and seemed determined to establish a relationship.

Charlotte was cautiously enthusiastic about the unexpected opportunity to study the gorilla at close range but warned Maggie and Ian Haring, an Australian graduate student who was working with them that summer, that Maggie's idea to attempt teaching Naomi sign language would be a grave mistake.

Aware that Charlotte would violently oppose the idea, Maggie persuaded her father to use his influence to get Naomi to Fairhaven, where she could continue working with the cooperative gorilla. The success of her undertaking caused serious problems and in trying to repair damages, introduced the whole idea of the moral (and legal) rights of animals.

Though obviously well researched, the plot seemed too unlikely to this reviewer until she read a National Geographic account of Francine Patterson's gorilla, Koko, who was pictured with the pet kitten she had requested through sign language.

A fascinating, well-written study of nature, enough romance is included to provide a good read for just about anybody grade 6 and up.--Afton Miner.


This is a delightful picture book introducing preschool (and the rest of us) to the similarities between us and handicapped children. The author states that originally the book was intended
to help preschool children to accept and become more comfortable with disabled children. But as the work progressed, the book grows from introduction to disabilities, to a book about us, for we each have our own disabilities. The photographs catch the children living everyday lives. The text says we "hear the same sounds, or see the same things" and yet if we look at the picture closely, we see a child wearing a hearing aid and a child who does not see with his eyes, but with his hands. In the end we all learn that "...what makes someone special are the same things that make you special, too!" With discussion with an adult while reading this book, a young child may develop very positive ideas about disabled children in his or her class or neighborhood.

From the view of a special educator, the book is good but not outstanding. Disabilities are shown but are so unobtrusive that a reader may miss them. A discussion may be necessary to point up the difficulties facing the child who has disabilities.--Kathy Simpkins.


Every night the man who could call down owls went into the forest wearing his soft white cape, broad-brimmed hat, and carrying his willow wand. He stopped and looked up into the trees, raised his wand to the sky and owls came--filling branches nearby and perching on the man's shoulder and wand. Curious villagers followed him on his nightly expeditions into the woods. Always at his side walked Con, a young village lad, who loved and respected this peculiar but wonderful friend of the owls. One night a stranger stood and watched the event and decided he wanted the power of this man who could call down owls from the sky. He takes the owl man's life, his cape, hat and wand, but discovers that the power was not his for the taking.

Bunting and Mikolaycek make a good team. Together they create a haunting mood piece. The text and pencil illustrations complement each other. But the book is so short there is little character development. If the reader could know the owl man and the boy better the story would be stronger. Still, the very sketchiness of the tale could spark imaginations and promote discussions about the situation, characters, and theme.--Janice Card.


A painting found in a stable attic brings unity and happiness to a family who bought an old home in the country as an escape from
their city routine. The mystery of the painting brings charm and intrigue for the reader as well as for the characters of the book.

A heart-warming book of family life in this age when the family seems threatened by outside influences, this book captivates the reader by the personal acquaintance he feels for each character. The text is typically written in Clymer's style, which keeps the reader interested and involved. One can't help noting the good association of a father with his daughter. Well illustrated and refreshing!—Gus Clark.


Pinocchio, the famous woodenhead, steps out into the world to learn about life, and to learn obedience, love, and service so he can earn the right to be a real boy. Stephanie Spinner has nicely adapted Collodi's numerous episodes into a fast-flowing series of events to keep the reader (and his or her audience) involved.

Dianne Goode has created charming, refreshing illustrations which tell you as much as the text about each character. Pinocchio's facial expressions on each page show how his experiences affect him. At the beginning of the tale Pinocchio is a smug, ill-mannered puppet. By the end of the book he has learned many lessons and has become a humble, caring, delightful real boy.

With these beautiful color pictures to enhance it, this version of the classic story of Pinocchio will be a good choice for a read-aloud.—Janice Card.


It is frustrating to write of Gillian Cross' Born of the Sun. The promise is one of an epic masterpiece, but marred by a failed climax and a non-ending, it becomes merely average.

The story is of Paula and her Father Karel, who, along with others, venture into the South American desert to search for the lost city of Atahaulapa. There is mystery, suspense and beautiful description of the jungle. They follow directions found on an old 18th century parchment. All the elements of a truly great book are there, but Cross is unable to bring them together in the end. One must credit her, however, with some marvelous touches. The poems that begin a couple of sections of the book are highly original. She has also done excellent research into the ways of the Kallawaya Indians. But, despite all this, Born of the Sun has no emotional resonance and must be counted as a major disappointment.—Tim Wadham.

Sometimes the best review for a book of poetry is some of the poetry. *Cold Stars and Fireflies* is such a book:

Raise the curtain
on days flaring like trumpets
branding the air with brassy shouts!

says Ms. Eshensen about autumn and I remember Lancelot's lament to Guinevere in *Camelot*—"If ever I would leave thee"...for I cannot pick the poems I would do without. Describing the seasons, the poems are divided into four sections, each one closed by a transitional poem that moves the reader into the next season, i.e.:

Remember
how we entered it
last November—the stone
tunnel. We named it
Winter.

For months
we walked with
muffled shoes,
listened
to silence  echoing...

Now there is thin light
arching.
Puddles fragile with ice
splinter
under our feet.

Water runs off those
icicles
barring the tunnel's end,
and in a splash of yellow
the crocus holds her
fingers
to the sun!

If ever you needed a bulletin board text for seasonal change;
apt words to catch and record a frightening storm, or just plain
language shaped and formed to universal images, *Cold Stars* is
the book you needed!—Janet Francis.
Skir the fox is old enough to live on his own. He has learned well the skills he needs to survive. Isa, a young vixen, joins Skir as his mate and together they hunt and play. When four cubs are born to Isa, the two foxes dedicate themselves to the care of their offspring. Danger and death figure into the story, but there is also a fair share of triumph, and a touch of humor.

Although the foxes are anthropomorphized to the extent that they seem to talk and reason like humans, they never behave like humans. The text provides young readers with accurate information about foxes, and at the same time, gives them characters they can care about.

Romain Simon's sensitive, surrealistic illustrations enhance the readers' introduction to the life of the fox.

Originally French, (Skir, le renard) Skir the Fox is part of the Creatures of the Wild Series. If all the books are as splendid as this one, the whole collection should be found in every school library.—Janice Card.

The brightest reds, blues, greens, and yellows that can be imagined show the steps a construction company takes when it builds a modern road. Everything is described from the earliest maps and plans to take the mounting of lights and the final paint stripes. The Tonka-like illustrations are appealing; they show the details of this most common modern day event.—Katie Blake.

Rumer Godden (1907-1973) wrote a number of well-loved children's stories, among which were seven little books about the relations of children and dolls, mostly illustrated by Adrienne Adams and well-worn in children's libraries. Four of these have been republished in Four Dolls: Impunity Jane, (1955); The Fairy Doll, (1956); "Holly" (The Story of Holly and Ivy), (1958); and Candy Floss (1960). They were originally published by Macmillan in London and Viking in New York; all have been allowed to go out of print; perhaps for a time dolls, for many children, had gone rather out of fashion. However, now it seems that the new edition of these stories is well in order, expressive as they are of the feelings, problems and joys of...
many children, boys as well as girls. Pauline Baynes' new illustrations are excellent; however, this new format does not bring the stories into the hands of children ages 6-8 except perhaps as a good family read-aloud. --Carol V. Oaks.


'Familia' in the original Latin meant a household of slaves. It was only later that the pater, mater and liber were added to the group. Goodall understands this very well. While there is a great difference in status between those above and below stairs, the fact remains that no matter how foreign the idea may be to us, all were family. It is not until after 1780 that the word family ever means the two-generational group of only parents and children.

The families that Goodall paints are multigenerational and none are segregated. The servants are well-clothed and well-fed. Indeed the gentry and royalty accepted that responsibility.

Starting with the middle ages and coming down to today, Goodall portrays a series of typical above-stairs scenes and with the flip of a half-page, shows what the rest of the family is doing. (Anyone who doubts that Goodall considers servants family only need examine his Before the War or Lavinia's Cottage.) That is, we flip half-pages until we get to the family-less scene labelled 'Today.' Goodall understands the world we have lost, but he must make his point subtly. (The dust jacket blurb writers miss the point.) That last scene makes it rather clear that it takes the extended or multigenerational family to survive in the world.--Thom Hinckley.


This excellent beginning book about England should be in all elementary school libraries. The photographs have been well-selected. It touches on geography (fine maps), history, economy, culture, people, and what its author calls "special attractions." Those are thumbnail biographies of important people and a reference section on "quick facts," both found in every chapter.--Katie Blake.


Ivan's wife, Katrina, chattered day and night about anything and everything. She could not be trusted to keep a secret. This became a serious problem when Ivan found a chest filled
with gold. If he told Katrina about it, the story would be everywhere in no time. Their greedy landlord would hear about it and claim the gold for himself. But Ivan is clever and finds a humorous and effective way to protect his treasure and destroy the credibility of his wife's tales.

The retelling of this Russian Folk Tale is nicely done. The illustrations for it are rich in color and texture. Details are carefully, lovingly presented in every picture. Hair, fur, cloth and wood textures seem real enough to feel. Amanda Hall's style does not duplicate others. From cover to cover, inside and outside, this book is an elegant and unified work of art.--Janice Card.


It's impossible to see a holiday cookbook and not open it, especially before lunch. This one doesn't disappoint! It's a collection of recipes, which can be prepared mostly without adult help, for sixteen holidays throughout the year, including Purim, Halloween, Mother's Day and Christmas.

Special safety instructions are integrated throughout: "Using oven mitts or potholders, take cake pan out of oven..., and since the saucepan with the teiglach may be very heavy, ask an adult to help you with this step." A short history accompanies each recipe. How does Emerald Isle Pie, Passover Sponge Cake, Noodle Kugel, Father's Mocha-Chocolate Cake, and Strawberry Cheese Tarts, or Very Easy Trifle sound?--Katie Blake


Amana is an Indian of the Northern plains who is both woman and man and yet she is neither. Her life is guided by legends and visions of old but she must keep them secret. Only two women and a sorrowing, mad widow know of her power. Highwater has made her a symbol of the Indian--weakened and troubled by white man's diseases, driven and cheated out of his vast lands and yet somehow managing to fight on to preserve his integrity. **Legend Days** is a powerful story of Amana's struggle to fulfill her destiny, and it is a handbook of symbolic advice for the Indian who would find himself.

Through Amana's husband, Far Away Son, Highwater warns the Indian that "the white men have brought many remarkable things to our land. But for me it's difficult to imagine that such men who have no regard for women or for the beauty of the land could make so many wonderful things. Sometimes I think they are very powerful people, and sometimes I think they are fools."

Through the shamed and maddened Yellow Bird Woman, Highwater says that the Indian must use the power of his own past to keep
the Indian spirit alive. Her words (to Amana) are: "Within you, Amana, the spirit of our people lives and through the legend of your life all of us will be remembered." But Highwater also advises that the Indian use his own intelligence to "gently refuse" things from the white man that are not good for him and shows how Amana outwits the whisky-drinking trader planning to take advantage of her and rides off with "a great whoop" as she throws back her head victoriously.

Through Amana, the power of the Indian warrior is described--"I just wanted to keep galloping. I never wanted to stop. Nothing frightened me. All I could feel was the power pouring out of me and so I was unafraid;" at another time she feels the power of the Indian woman, "her sister's illness had awakened a new person inside of her, a strong person like the warrior, but a person full of gentleness and compassion."

At the end of the story Amana's family have all died and her tribe has abandoned her, but the fox song returns to give her the spiritual comfort of her legend and because of this she, as a symbol of the Indian nation, is victorious over all hardships, shame and pain. She is still in tune with the vision nature has given her.--Lillian Heil.


These two books are novel books obviously designed for the young reader. The novelty is that the wheels are concentric holes in the book. The young child will enjoy poking his fingers through the wheels. In Splish Splash the focus is on a puddle cut out of each page which forms the boundary for the next puddle, thus creating a rippling multi-colored lake effect. The text, in short verse form on each page, describes the picture on that page. However, the pictures are often exaggerated and sometimes difficult to interpret. For instance, the steam shovel has large red wheels with the holes in the center, a yellow body, and a blue scoop high in the air. The description states the steam shovel scrapes the earth, "...breaking up rocks and clods of dirt, shoveling soil for all its worth." These books probably could be classified as "cute," but the novelty of the cutout ponds and wheels would wear off quickly. --Kathy Simpkins.


The first thing that impressed me about this book was its cinematic qualities. This is a book that would probably be a
more comfortable as a movie. The imagery and action is all very derivative of the "Indiana Jones" type action film.

The premise of The Devil's Door-Bell is quite promising. Martin Hopkins, having been emotionally shattered by the tragic death of his parents, is whisked off to Yorkshire by a horrible stepmother. Martin feels that the people of the village are out to get him, and there does seem to be something terribly wrong going on.

In his struggle to uncover the secrets of the village, Martin teams up with a journalist, Richard Cole. It is here that this novel slips out of gear, and becomes more ridiculous than exciting. There is an episode where the bones of dinosaurs come alive and try to destroy Martin. Unfortunately, Horowitz is not able to make things like this sound plausible in the least.

Horowitz plans to write more in this series about children who fight the evil in the world and discover that they have special powers. Let's hope that Horowitz hones his skills in the forthcoming volume.--Tim Wadham.


James Howe's latest story is about saving the animals in a zoo, called Morgan's Zoo because the gentle keeper had cared for the animals for so long. The animals all understand human speech and, aided by an eavesdropping pigeon named William, they know that the zoo is to be closed because of insufficient funds, lack of interest by the town and the strange behavior of Rollo Hackett, the head zookeeper.

Andrew and Allison are eleven-year-old twins who started coming to the zoo when their parents' divorce interrupted plans to send them to camp. They try to help save the zoo by suggesting that the zookeeper take Clarence the chimpanzee home so he can't be sold to another zoo and by getting their TV newscaster mother to do a special program on the plight of the zoo. None of these projects turn out as planned but the animals of the zoo finally put on a show for the TV cameras that catches the villians, the interest of the town, and a wealthy benefactress who is willing to save the zoo.

The story is told through the eyes of the zoo animals--Lucy the retired circus elephant who has a fondness for big words, the old lions who have forgotten how to roar, Daisy the optimistic giraffe, and others, led by Clarence the chimpanzee, who is the master planner. Readers will probably be wishing they had a zoo like this in their town.--Lillian Heil.

This story is an evocative and terse picture of a journey "across the Plains"—not with pioneers, but with a diverse group of strangers in the Gold Rush of 1849. Seeking to outreach the pain of their departure from home in a rigid Amish community, Meribah and her father Will Simon build a wagon and sign up with a group about to depart from St. Joseph, Missouri, headed West.

At the beginning of the journey there is sharing of food, help, and friendship, but as travelling becomes more and more difficult, relationships take on a shifting kaleidoscope of truth and betrayal. Lasky's vivid first chapter spotlights Meribah, whose character is a complex mixture of sensitivity and tough resilience, struggling with the butt of a rifle, to drive two big vultures off the remains of a deer carcass. Then how she came to be there, and how she finds help is told in a series of climactic events, each powerful in its hold on the reader. Young Latter-Day Saints can get from this story a vivid fictional picture, based on journals and other careful research, of what the journey to the West cost their ancestors who made it to the Great Basin in much the same way.--Carol V. Oaks.


Two girls are surreptitiously lurking by a magazine rack in a shopping mall. They are going through the copies of girlie magazines, putting stickers over indecently exposed women. The stickers bear the legend, "These magazines exploit women." They meet a boy who likes reading these magazines, and would be inclined to remove the stickers. Both girls promptly fall in love with him. The rest of the story concerns the jealous maneuverings of the girls for his affections. He gets one of them; the other is so depressed that she attempts suicide. But, of course, all is well in the end, the three are reconciled and are seen rejoicing at an anti-nuclear rally in New York's Central Park, and deciding that they are all going to go and live on a farm together.

Three Friends is a little better than ridiculous. Awkwardly written, and poorly constructed, it gives a bad name to enlightened adolescent fiction. There is a right and a wrong way to handle the pangs of adolescent sexuality in fiction; Levoy obviously is a follower of the latter school. What are we to make of a girl who is glad that the boy was feeling "sexy about her"?! This book makes one hunger for Judy Blume.--Tim Wadham.

A simple but beguiling tale of an ordinary snowman who starts glowing inside with a warm, creeping, crawling feeling after empathetic Liza decides to warm him with a cup of tea. His search for the perfect place for a snowman to live takes him from the lawn in front of Liza's happy house to a large, bustling city with far too many lamp posts (and other things) for a snowman; to the country where he learns that the warm sun is not too friendly toward snowmen in clover fields in the summer; to an ice floe in the river and, past villages and cities and beautiful countryside; finally, to the perfect home for which he was searching.

It's easy to see why Mira Lobe has twice won the Austrian State Prize for Young People's Literature and Winfried Opgenoorth the 1982 Austrian Children's Book Award for Illustrations. The translation is skillfully done. In fact, this book is a winner in every way. Children—and adults—will especially enjoy the homey, lived-in look of Liza's family's dining room and will probably find themselves intently studying the wonderfully detailed depiction of the snowman's visit to the big city.—Afton Miner.

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This book is a special joy, unfortunately overlooked by this year's Caldecott committee. Thomas Locker is a first-time author. He comes to children's books, like Chris VanAllsberg, from the background of art schools. He has had various exhibitions of his work, and it is something of a blessing to the world of picture books that he has chosen to use his talents to create *Where the River Begins*.

The premise of this book is simple: two boys along with their grandfather journey into the mountains to find the source of the great river which flows near their house, and out into the sea. The mythical overtones of the tale are obvious, and the force of nature is omnipresent.

The major virtue of *Where the River Begins* is in the illustrations. Such quality rarely appears in children's picture books. The reproductions are excellent; if one looks closely, the brushstrokes can be seen. In looking at Locker's lush images, one is awed and overwhelmed all at once. Especially memorable is the sun shining through the trees, and a muted, quiet sunset. One gets the feeling that great care was used in the making of the illustrations.
If this had been an adult book, the pages facing the illustrations would have probably have been covered with pencil sketches, and paragraphs about artistic technique. As a children's book we have something that is haunting and memorable. More power to it.--Tim Wadham.


In this mystery adventure story for younger readers, Lois Lowry acquaints them with Marcus and Louise Cunningham who become intrepid searchers for hidden treasure when tricked by their wily Uncle Claude. During a brief Easter visit in the course of his travels, Uncle Claude describes the precious contents of a bound box he carries, and hints that he may leave them something from it hidden in their house,—and then departs before they awake the next morning. The story contains some fun with foreign languages, a terrible flood, and a scene in the local cemetery in which the children helplessly watch their older brother Tom swept down the river; there's also the loss of the LeBoff family's silver, robbed in their absence. All is resolved in a quick tie-up, and Marcus and Louise realize their love for their family—even wily Uncle "Fraud." Characters are delightful, the family story is, as usual, interesting and lively, but the plot leaves something to be desired.--Carol V. Oaks.


Twelve-year-old Virginia "Rusty" Dickinson returns home to England at the end of World War Two after living in the United States for five years. She is an enthusiastic, bubbly American who is met by her reserved English mother. From this point on, the clash and misunderstanding between Rusty and her native English culture begins. This complicated but fascinating story describes in a very personal way the difficulties which many families faced after the war. Rusty is not the only one with adjustments to make. Her mother, a war worker, is expected to return to the life she led before the war, one of genteel, but purposeless occupation. Only after Rusty runs away and her mother decides upon a divorce do the necessary compromises begin to be made which finally allow Rusty, her mother, and her brother to live together as a family. Ms. Magorian's second novel fully lives up to the reputation which she established in **Goodnight, Mr. Tom.** **Back Home** has a good plot,
excellent characterization, and explicates the differences between British and American culture sympathetically, but with an intense realism that is uncompromising in its discussion of the problems that can arise between two nations. An excellent book.--Linda Davis.


Gerald McDermott has retold the myth of Proserpina (or Persephone) and Ceres (or Demeter) with luscious illustrations and detailed text. The earth, blessed by Cere's generosity, is verdant and glowing; frozen by her righteous, bitter wrath, it is a dead waste. McDermott chooses to keep the figures mythological by giving them the patina of Modigliani paintings—a kind of ageless elongation of face and form—but the character of the myth rings true and the triumphant return of Proserpina to the earth, signifying spring, is satisfying indeed—it would be carping to point out that Ceres, without feet for the first half of the book, might have difficulty walking over the earth to bless it.--Janet Francis.


Taken by itself, 101 things is a "cute" book, but probably not worth the money. First, there are not 101 things to do with a baby, but 101 things a 5 or 6 year old does with and around a baby, including teasing the baby until he cries. Second, the illustrations are fun pictures of not only big sister's "helping" with the baby, but mother's and dad's feelings about that help. You can just tell what mother is thinking as she carries a load of wet laundry into the house out of the rain as big sister pushes the coach and protects herself with the clothes basket over her head. Yet they are flat and provide little background, leaving that to the imagination.

Taken by itself, 101 things does not really help a young child learn ways to "do" things with a baby, but it provides a good place for mom, dad, grandma, uncle, etc. to start talking about creative things to do with babies. Some of the ideas may be outgrowths of what are depicted, but most will come from the minds of the readers—old and young alike—as the text and pictures stimulate discussion.—Kathy Simpkins.

Among groups where storytelling is a vital and important social activity, itinerant storytellers used to carry a piece of vine or a string, to which was attached an object matching each tale they told. The listeners pointed to one of the objects and, upon payment, could hear the story. Anne Pellowski has told and collected stories throughout the world and has authored a number of books for children and adults which include several excellent ones on children's literature, storytelling, and children's books in developing countries. In this book she presents stories with some accompanying activities to give those stories an age-old fascination: String stories, with all the appropriate finger-and-string tricks that go with them (and clear instructions about how to do them); Picture-drawing stories with pictures that are part of them; Finger-play stories for use with small children; a discussion of riddling, with some African riddles; and stories to be used with musical instruments such as African thumb pianos. Stories are given in page columns accompanied by drawings of the actions that go with them. An excellent source of storytelling techniques that will delight listeners.--Carol V. Oaks.


Were I to state a preference for a version of King Arthur in my present state, it would be White's The Once and Future King. But when I was in grade six, my preference was narrow, perhaps solidly in favour of Pyle's King Arthur. Nowhere else do art work, typeface, page design, and language come together in a book more memorable, or more scintillating.

This volume, the first of four to be republished, contains a wide variety of worthies and adventure. Open to any page, start reading, and you will soon be swept along in a swift-flowing stream of captivating narrative. Pyle's language immediately puts us squarely in another age, but language never makes the tale inaccessible. Yet it is the art that conveys Arthurian England. Outlines are sparse and detail rich in black-and-white, full-page, calligraphically captioned illustration, which are the high point in Art Nouveau.

As wondrous as this legend is, there is a piece of 20th century reality even more awesome. Scribner's informed me that all they had to do for the art work was to restrip the 1903 film. The story of Excalibur is almost easier to believe. That someone cares enough to exactly duplicate a classic of my childhood is a minor miracle. A national treasure has re-emerged.--Thom Hinckley.

Easy-Read books usually have primer vocabularies. This one sounds like this: "The Central Processing Unit obeys the instructions to get a result from the information. This result goes to the output unit." Not exactly easy. It does present the concepts in a fairly simplified format, but not necessarily easy words. It seems like one of a spate of books on this very "in" subject. It's informative, the illustrations are fine, and it fills that need most libraries have for more and more titles on computers. The really distinguished children's computer book just hasn't come along, yet.--Katie Blake.


Ruckman's experience with tornado country allows her to describe the destruction and physical appearance of a twister in compelling fashion; the tornado becomes more important than the characters—a bit like the disaster type movies in which the fire, or the earthquake, or the tidal wave are so spectacular that the disaster becomes the main character with people in supporting roles.

The tornado's effect is seen through the eyes of twelve-year-old Dan, his 6-month-old baby brother, his best friend Arthur, and Arthur's fourteen-year-old sister Stacey. The three boys are in Dan's house when the twister hits. They are found by Stacey, joined with parts of their families separated to look for friends, and finally are reunited after a night in a police station and a close call with another tornado.

The author builds suspense by foreshadowing the tornado touchdown right from the sixth page, where it is labeled a black letter day in contrast to the red letter day when Dan won a new racing bike. The despair, the devastation, and the courage and helpfulness of people are well described as the author shows how all the friends and family of the two boys live through the stormy night and begin the process of rebuilding their lives when the storm is over. It is well written; but when a storm is the main character, the story can not be as compelling in terms of the people in the story.--Lillian Heil.

Betsy Bergman is a new-age, East coast Jew—a non-orthodox, chicken-soup hearted young woman with social consciousness, and honest cold feet. Her friend Bernie has all the answers but none of them come from inside (she doesn't listen to the questions). Her new black friend, Charlayne, knows the questions and is willing to put herself into the answers—but does she know about cold feet?

Set in the 1960's, the restless, churning years of our society's adolescence, *Northern Fried Chicken* explores the world of a girl whose own adolescence keeps pace. In a 'nice' Rhode Island town, she fearfully collects food for negroes in the South and finds new friendships, losing, in the process, old, comfortable ones. Each step she takes toward self-assertion is painful but rewarding...and the ambience of the demonstrations, mass arrests, even women's dawning awareness is portrayed successfully.

Although Betsy's climactic trip to Washington, D.C. aboard the freedom train ends the book on a didactic note (with two pages of quotes from Martin Luther King's historic speech) the overall development of action and character leave the reader with insight into the personal aspects of time—and, possibly more importantly, into Betsy's own coming-of-age. Although the writing is uneven, many incidents are vividly compelling and young readers two decades away from that vital time should know how it felt.--Janet Francis.


It was with considerable interest that I read this historical fiction from Australia. Vicky (aged 9), who lost her father, the farm and everything else in a bush-fire, moved with her mother first to Nattai, where they lived two years. But then they inherit the shop in Woolloomooloo from Aunt Susan. And no sooner is the shop open for business than Vicky finds a strange red-headed boy living in a tumble-down humpy at the bottom of the garden. The rest of the book is filled with adventure as Vicky and her mother settle in as the shopkeepers and as they solve the problems of the orphan Daniel.

The language is uniquely Australian and so is the story, which heighten the charm of this book. This is part of a series for young readers, the titles of which look tantalizing. The crisp illustration and the stunning typography make this a memorable book.—Thomas Hinckley.

In her first book for children, Susan Varley has given us a comforting, sensitive and beautiful treatment of death.

Badger, who was greatly loved by all, was very, very old and knew that he soon must die. He wasn't afraid of death, but it bothered him to think of the sadness of his friends when he was gone. And they were very, very sad for a long time after Badger "went down the Long Tunnel." But with the coming of spring they began to remember their good experiences with Badger and the many happy times he had shared with them. They began to realize that each of them had a special memory of Badger--something he had taught each of them to do--and that Badger would always be a part of them. Their sadness began to fade and the smiles returned as they shared remembered stories about their special friend.

Highly recommended for children who experience the death of pets or people close to them--and for anyone else who must one day go "down the Long Tunnel."--Afton Miner.


*If I were in charge of the world
I'd cancel oatmeal,
Monday mornings,
Allergy shots, and also
Sara Steinberg.*

Judith Viorst once said she hears a voice of a young boy, and at other times she hears a forty-ish woman. The first one writes her picture books, the second, her poetry for adults. Now, her young boy has aged a couple of years, and he and a girl his age write funny verses. They envy someone with ten best friends, walk eight blocks to avoid bumping into a bully, Stanley the Fierce, and wonder if adults are still scared of the dark. This book is so popular with middle-grade children, it is never on the shelf and is requested as much as the Silverstein poetry books.
Another sample:

My mom says I'm her sugarplum.
My mom says I'm her lamb.
My mom says I'm completely perfect
   Just the way I am.
My mom says I'm a super-special wonderful terrific
   Little guy.
My mom just had another baby.
   Why?

--Katie Blake.


One of the series of books which describes common meals in
different parts of the world, breakfast begins by looking at this
meal in Britain. Discussion of why certain foods are eaten centers
on the need for food and the influences of advertising and
packaging. The effects of geographical regions, however, is
understated. The impression is left that we eat certain foods
because we live in certain places. Breakfast in Australia, New
Zealand, and the United States are compared with Britain and
similarities are suggested to derive from common heritage as well
as types of farming appropriate to each region. Once these
commonalities are shown, the authors take the reader on a world
tour of breakfast in representative countries of Europe, Asia,
Africa, and South America.

Photographs of foods, shopping marts, and food preparation add
to the story of breakfast. For the adventurous reader, recipes for
British-American breakfasts and for several other countries are
given. However, American readers may have some difficulty in
translating "75ml (1/8 pt.) milk" into "1/4 cup." The book
concludes with a chapter describing food and health problems. The
authors describe a well-balanced diet with the suggested number of
calories required for different ages and sex, and foods in which
specific nutrients may be obtained. A short chapter on overeating
(a problem of the Western industrialized world) and starvation (a
problem of the Third World) provides the young reader with an
understanding of the problem so prominent in the news today.

Although this is an interesting, easy-to-read book for young
children, it seems to "talk down" to the reader. The photographs
are clear, colorful, and yet there were times when the captions
not give enough information to fully interpret the picture. One such example was the world map with a caption saying the countries were labeled that were going to be considered in the chapter. The map labeled the continents of the world and was colored in brown and orange. With a little knowledge of geography and reference to the table of contents the reader might guess the brown colored areas were the countries to be considered.

For children interested in foods, other peoples of the world, and learning about their own body functions, this book, despite some limitations, will provide useful basic information. And with help from a willing adult, the recipes will be fun to try as well as a good experience of how others eat.—Kathy Simpkins.


Yorath, son of the Prince and Princess of Mel'Nir is born slightly deformed and thereby condemned to death. Saved and raised by Thaumaturge, Hagnil, Yorath is forced into soldiery when he kills the man who casually murdered his faithful nurse. Yorath becomes a famous soldier and leader of many men, but he also becomes as bloodstained as the man who killed his nurse. His lover, Owlfwife, leaves him because of what he has become. A former friend, Knaar, tries to kill Yorath, and succeeds in marooning him on an island, Liran. Yorath recovers from his wounds and eventually finds his way off the island a changed man who forgets his previous life. Rescued from the sorcerer Rosmer with the help of his grandmother, Yorath disdains his former life and station and settles to a hermit's life. He is rewarded by meeting the Owlfwife and his son.

This book reminds me of the 'Sword and Sorcery' books of adult fiction. It goes to such extremes that it becomes unbelievable in the middle section after the attempted murder by Knaar. The coincidences are a little too much, and Yorath's change of heart lacks conviction. This is not to say that some might not enjoy the book, but there are many other novels that are much better.—Linda Davis.


Brian Wildsmith shows how Daisy the Cow sees the world and then joyfully returns home to her own meadow of grass and buttercups, contented never to travel again. The illustrations are filled with color. Even the cameras come in vivid primary colors and the cameraman sports varicolored chevron stripes down his black pants and yellow, white, and red shoes with a multicolored shirt that looks like dotted swiss or some unusual fabric. Wildsmith has made
The clever use of half-pages that turn to show more of the action on that page, and it appears to be a rather simple story of going to see the world and being glad to return home. But even for young children, there seem to be some ideas in the book that aren't so simple, and some questions that go unanswered. Since Daisy understands human speech well enough to jump into a fireman's net and to parachute off a plane, she becomes more human than animal and as such she really isn't talented enough to warrant the success she achieves. If Wildsmith is poking fun at Hollywood and the hordes who held a banquet in her honor (which now looks like a palace in Europe rather than the U.S.), his humor will go over the heads of young readers. If he is serious, he's making success too easy even for a long-lashed, amiable cow. The intent of the story was probably neither of these two extremes but it just doesn't have good reasons built into it for the action that is described, and becomes a series of delightful illustrations with a very weak story.—Lillian Heil.


Cassia and Foxfire Young are outsiders in their village because their father married outside of the clan. Their parents had met while doing the "Work" of trying to rid their country of Manchu domination. Cassia becomes the family mainstay when her mother dies, and her father returns to the village permanently crippled from a leg wound received in a battle for the cause. The family situation deteriorates rapidly with poor weather, poorer crops, family arguments, bandit raids and neighborhood travels. Finally Foxfire takes things into his own hands, and leaves for the land of the golden mountain, America. The setting of the novel is fascinating, and the characters are well developed, but the ending is disappointing. The last chapter is too obvious in its reconciliation and leaves a sense of being let down. Nevertheless, the novel is exciting in parts and worth reading for the view it gives of life in a very different time and place.—Linda Davis.