

carefully planned. The variety of ethnic backgrounds of the characters, the mild feminism, the delineation of the single-parent family, all indicate careful work, as does the information on diabetes. The problem for me is that the work is too calculated. It lacks sparkle and excitement on one hand and depth on the other — the sugar that would have helped the medicine go down for those ten — to fourteen-year-old readers.

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PETS FOR THE YOUNG, THE MIDDLE-AGED, AND THE WHIMSICAL OLD

Mustard, Betty Waterton. Illus. by Barb Reid. Scholastic-TAB, 1983. 38pp. \$2.40 paper. ISBN 0-590-71175-X. *Chester's barn*, Lindee Climo. Tundra, 1982. 32pp. \$12.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-88776-132-1. *Pigs: a troughful of treasures*. Sarah Bowman & Lucinda Vardey. Wiley, 1981. 144 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-471-79881-9.

Lately it's been reported that the care and companionship of pets have great therapeutic value for the aged. And children, we already knew, have great and requited love for animals. That leaves the rest of us in-betweeners, the great middle-aged, as the only constituency still to be heard from, the only constituency capable of an unsentimental assessment of the state of the animal kingdom.

If we hold to that categorization, for the moment, then these three books, in spirit at least, fall (with much qualification, exception-taking, and unseemly pushing and shoving) one in each camp.

Youngest at heart is *Mustard* (5 3/4" x 8") because both the child in the story as well as the aging Miss Goldfinch have a spontaneous, no-questions-asked, instinctive attraction to dogs — seven puppies — and one kitten. The reader is pulled along by the hook of ongoing narrative, wondering whether *Mustard*, the story's shaggy dog with big feet and strong affinities for knocking over flowers and uprooting carrots, will ever settle down in civilized fashion.

In the process, the author restrains herself admirably from over-explaining. Witness the deft discrimination between the breakfast "dished up in six soup bowls" for each of the other puppies and in "a lasagna pan for *Mustard*, who spilled a lot." Or, there's this dog's-eye view included in a report of *Mustard* on a tear: "She pulled apart a mop and shook it until it was quite dead."

"Great Galaxies," as Miss Goldfinch is wont to say, here is a children's author (from Vancouver, author of *Salmon for Simon*, 1978, and *Petranella*, 1980) who has faith in her reader's intelligence.

Chester's barn (11" x 8 1/2") sports more of a middle-aged feeling, and intelli-

gence, even though Chester, the kind and stalwart farmer, loves all his creatures great and small (didn't we say there'd be contradictions) that populate the old-style self-sufficient non-specialized farm that Chester prefers.

Chester's barn (this one happens to be in P.E.I.) is the great solid-beamed kind built "when a farmer had to grow . . . [everything needed] to feed his animals as well as his family through the winter," and inside it there's truly a vet's plenty: chickens and geese, roosters and gander, sows, piglets, sheep, lambs, a racehorse for all seasons of P.E.I. harness racing, goats and ponies, a Clydesdale for heavy work as well as for festive parades, a bull that sires prizes, and cats that are good mousers.

U.S.-born artist and animal-lover, Lindee Climo, kept her own farm in P.E.I. in the 70's and her richly-coloured richly-contoured paintings of farm creatures and recreations now hang in public galleries and corporate collections. Her book lives up to its promise of being "carefully informative" with prose that is clear and pertinent to balance the strong, well-rounded illustrations. The text is superb on the detail of how the business of farming is actually done — what foods the various animals need, the production schedule of their lives, what their exercise and what their sleep, and how cows are milked.

Particularly good, I think, as barn-mothers bring forth offspring, is the presentation of the facts of life — including a succinct account of routine and fertile egg-laying (paging the rooster), and a comment on the yearly cycle of the dairy cow with its mandatory freshening of the mammary glandular (paging the bull). The brief explanations are useful reminders of a reality that adults and children raised on supermarkets and quick-trip variety stores tend to forget.

Nonetheless, at the book's end, when Chester shuts up the barn and twilight falls, one feels the absence of any narrative hook that could turn a child back to a favourite element of story, highlighted in drama, preserved in verbal amber. In sum, the book, with neither the whimsy of the old nor the zaniness of the young, comes closer to being that thing of the middle-aged world, an excellent reference volume (plus pastoral painting).

For all of that, parents (who ignore prices) may find *Chester's barn* a safer gift than *Mustard*, a book more calculated to stir acquisitive emotions. Even if children do get caught up in Chester's pastoral charm, the plaintive plea, "Daddy, can we buy a farm?" is a lot easier to answer, definitively, than "Daddy, can we buy a dog?"

The *Pigs* book (7 1/4" x 8 1/4") is a different troughful of farm-flesh altogether. It's a frankly adult compendium of pig literature, pig mythology, pig lore and pig pictures — (no, it's not in particularly pig type) — and is rich thereby in the whimsy and bizarre specialité flaunted by affluent oldsters. Corroborating its well-aged spirit is the occurrence of some of your own porcine companions of yesteryear which are irrepressible en-ambered reminders of long-gone days:

"No, no, by the hair of my chinny chin chin."

"Then [says the Wolf] I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in."

or

They sailed away, for a year and a day
To the land where the Bong tree grows
And there in a wood, a Piggy-wig stood
With a ring at the end of his nose. . .
“Dear Pig are you willing
To sell for one shilling
Your ring?” Said the Piggy, “I Will.”

Among newer items with haunting potential is the authors’ solemn declaration on infant toe-counting: “Pig love begins in the nursery cot.” (Remember? “One little piggie went to market . . .”) Obviously, it continues well beyond that, judging by this selection from G.K. Chesterton:

The actual lines of a pig (I mean of a really fat pig) are among the loveliest and most luxuriant in nature. The pig has the same great curves, swift and yet heavy, which we see in rushing water or in rolling cloud.

When you add that observation to selections from the *Iliad*, Virgil, Beatrix Potter and Orwell, you begin to wonder what else you might have missed in the nursery. At any rate, if your landlord and neighbours rebel at your buying a pig to warm your declining years, you could try giving them this book to improve their humour — unless you think they’ve caught such a bad case of middle-age that it’s become permanent.

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L'ENFANT ET LE REVE OU L'IMAGIAIRE

Nuits Magiques, Jean-Marie Poupart. Illustré par Suzanne Duranceau. Montréal, Editions La courte échelle, 1982, 24 p. 4.95\$. ISBN 2-89021-032-4.

Marie-Luce a 6 ans. Comme tous les enfants de son âge elle perd ses dents, mais elle les conserve précieusement. Pourquoi? Parce que son père ressemble tellement au père du Petit Poucet. . . on ne sait jamais! De plus elle a bien du mal à s’endormir. “Sept heures: en pyjama, sept heures et demie: au lit.” C’est à ce moment précis que débute les aventures abracadabrantes de cette petite fille à l’imagination fertile. Sous les couvertures, elle s’invente des histoires. Devenue Lézarlapin, elle rencontre Crocodilion, son voisin de pupitre à l’école. Avec l’aide de la sorcière Couche-Tard, apparaissent Mélanie la truitécureuil, Josianne la tauparaignée et bien d’autres amis bizarrement métamorphosés.