

faces and general appearances of the characters are deliberately familiar or ordinary, pleasant, warm, and often comic. Pictures of a lively community also fill the pages of Stuchner's book. Row's illustrations emphasize motion as well as emotion on the expressive faces and bodies of the characters. Though there are some attractive illustrations of food, the focus is rather on people.

Each tale draws a moral about belief in self and about dreams being made into reality, but the dreams are practical ones, achieved through practical action rather than magic. The lively writing styles of Fagan and Stuchner combined with the closely related illustrations by Ricci and Row contribute to a pair of books that will appeal both to children and their parents.

Sarika Bose earned her Ph.D. on Oscar Wilde and nineteenth-century drama from the University of Birmingham, England. Children's literature has long been one of her great pleasures. She teaches English literature and writing at the University of British Columbia.

An Emptiness Unearthed

The Money Pit Mystery. Eric Walters. HarperCollins, 1999. 250 pp. \$14.00 paper. ISBN 0-00-648151-5.

Eric Walters's *The Money Pit Mystery* raises critical questions: Will young readers inevitably comprehend and embrace the transparently "intended" reading of a text? What are the conceivable consequences of misreading? While these questions are not easily resolvable as they pertain to children's literature in general, they arise with disturbing implications in *The Money Pit Mystery*, which combines the story of a relationship between a young boy and a much-admired grandfather who has Alzheimer's Disease with the story of an old-fashioned quest for buried treasure.

The eleven-year-old narrator, Sam, arrives with his mother and sister on the island where his grandfather has lived for many years, for the first time since a quarrel between the grandfather and Sam's mother resulted in a three-year separation. Grandpa's yard is in shambles, cats roam through the filthy house, and Grandpa is nowhere to be found. For years, Grandpa had entertained his grandchildren with stories of Captain Kidd's treasure, rumoured to be buried on the island. Grandpa possesses an authentic treasure map and, it turns out, has invested his savings in a costly commercial venture to dig up the treasure. Sam, meanwhile, discovers the real secret of the map and the treasure's whereabouts and recruits his sister and a friend to help find it. But the mildly entertaining boy's adventure story (undermined by plot predictability and the stereotyping of its female characters) becomes a morally muddled morass when Grandpa enters the scene, leading the charge to the real site of the treasure.

Although Grandpa's driver's license has been taken away until he agrees to see a doctor, he defies the law by driving the young treasure-seekers at night in his truck to retrieve the gold, deliberately smashing a police cruiser en route, seriously endangering the officer's life. Although Grandpa's antics provoke a few cautionary notes in the children's shock against his behaviour, at the site itself Grandpa recruits Sam to help prevent a police helicopter from landing. Grandpa is captured

virtually at the moment when Sam, clamouring in the pit, feels the gold coins in his hands.

But while the children and Grandpa discover a buried treasure that makes them indescribably rich, the novel excavates a hollow message best summed up by Grandpa himself after he apologizes to the police for his actions and buys them a new cruiser: "'Amazing how finding a treasure makes everything all right,' Grandpa chuckled."

It is not just legalistic matters that are dismissed so airily, but emotional ones too, for money, in the cynical ending of this novel, buys both material and familial happiness. (It almost seems to buy health, too, as the issue of Alzheimer's never comes up again.) Although Walters no doubt intended a tale about human vulnerability and growth using a romantic, action-filled plot, the ends-justify-the-means conclusion turns *The Money Pit Mystery* into little more than a parable of obsession and greed rewarded.

Eric Henderson teaches at Simon Fraser University.

Living with Animals

It's Raining, It's Pouring. Andrea Spalding. Illus. Leslie Elizabeth Watts. Orca, 2001. 32 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55143-186-6. *The Chicken Cat.* Stephanie Simpson McLellan. Illus. Sean Cassidy. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 2000. \$17.95 paper. ISBN 1-55041-531-X. *Julian.* Dayal Kaur Khalsa. Tundra, 2000. 24 pp. \$9.99 paper. ISBN 0-88776-513-0. *My Sister Gracie.* Gillian Johnson. Tundra, 2000. 32 pp. \$18.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-514-9. *Leon the Chameleon.* Melanie Watt. Kids Can, 2001. 32 pp. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-867-X. *Edmund and Washable.* Chris Jackson. HarperCollins, 2000. 28 pp. \$16.00 cloth. ISBN 0-00-224558-2.

Our domestic pets often function as comedians in the stories we love to tell about them. If laughter promotes love, what are the effects of fear? In the most famous of folk tales, *Little Red Riding Hood*, the wolf's skills of deception increase our interest in the animal left wandering in the wild, outside of our domestic control. Fear locks our doors, keeps us awake at night, makes our heart rate increase, and creates something more interesting than mere hatred. In these recent picture books, animal identities serve to teach children about the complexities of our emotions and what happens when we try to understand them. In Andrea Spalding's *It's Raining, It's Pouring*, a rainy day motivates Little Girl to embark on a skyward journey to visit the giant Old Man who is, in a variety of senses, "under the weather." Leslie Watts's illustrations of a house and a bedroom above the clouds are populated by many animals: dog, cat, goldfish, mouse, bat, duck, and bird. The animals don't participate in the action — there are no serious dangers here — but through shifts in scale they assert their presence. The animals in these illustrations give a sense of belonging; the giant himself isn't going to eat any of them. The end of the story is marked by the return of the sun and the onset of a reflective mood of sadness. Parents play an absolutely minimal role.

The Chicken Cat narrates a more intricate tale of animal life. An orphan kitten,