

The Baritone Cat. Mora Skelton. Illus. Janet Wilson. Lester Publishing Ltd., 1994. 32 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-895555-52-3.

Sam is a feisty tortoiseshell cat* with a "big, warm voice" who sings about the joys of freedom and his disdain of close relationships. In fact, Sam prides himself on not coming when he's called. But Sam's circumstances change and he finds himself on the street — "cold, forlorn and unwelcome." As the weather gets colder, and Sam gets hungrier, he is forced to change his approach — with heartwarming results. After initially biting Joanne, the child who befriends him, Sam "commands" himself: "Don't bite. Don't wriggle. Don't stick your claws into her.... Give it a chance to work."

The story is based on the author's own cat, which no doubt adds to its realistic and appealing simplicity. Janet Wilson's gentle illustrations blend well with the text both in terms of placement on the page and their softly glowing colours. In particular, she has captured the moods of this tough little character. The book will be especially appreciated by those of us who know a small furry creature who has changed his or her tune to gain entry to our heart ... and our home. This book is recommended for ages four to nine, but will definitely appeal to cat lovers of all ages.

Jennifer Charles has a journalism degree from Carleton University and is a scientific editor at the Environmental Technology Centre in Ottawa.

* Editor's note: The chances of a tortoiseshell cat being male are between one in 200,000 and one in a million.

Beauty and the Beast Rap. Sonja Dunn. Illus. Susan Darrach. Moonstone Press, 1994. 32 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-920259-50-2.

Beauty and the Beast is here given the rap treatment. It really doesn't work. In language and garish illustration the old fairytale is in this version downsized to mediocrity. At times the rap beat is strong, but in places it challenges the ingenuity of the would-be rapper to figure out where to place the stresses. Rap has its place in history and in the folk arts. It has shown itself to be a vigorous and innovative language factory. But its place is not among the fairy tales, maybe not even among printed works.

Allan Sheldon has taught English and Children's Literature at Medicine Hat College in Alberta for many years.

Going to the Fair. Sheryl McFarlane. Illus. Sheena Lott. Orca Book Publishers, 1996. 32 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-062-2.

The third collaboration between McFarlane, Lott, and Orca Books, this story departs from coastal themes to explore agricultural fairs. The subject holds potentially wide appeal, and is accessed through the experiences of four children as they pursue varied interests during a day at a fair. It is commendable that two of them are Oriental, suggesting cultural diversity. It is also commendable that (in

our competitive society) the main protagonist is thrilled to receive third prize for her pumpkin, rather than being upset because she hasn't taken first place. Unfortunately, the protagonist's friends are introduced in a manner which fails to identify them (who is who?) and as all the characters remain undeveloped throughout the story, the reader feels uninvolved with them.

Lott's watercolours are, as always, masterfully executed. However, their softness (so suitable for coastal themes) fails to do justice to the verve and brilliance of a fair.

Similarly, McFarlane's lyrical prose fails to capture the brash, noisy excitement of her subject matter; frequently lapsing into lists of tractor manufacturers or pumpkin varieties. While adults may find these details add authenticity, children may find them merely boring. The exclusion of even a mention of the midway seems a significant omission; surely in children's memories cotton candy rates as highly as steers and zucchini. This book seems too prosaic in its treatment of a colourful, fascinating subject matter. It may be most appreciated in classrooms where its sophisticated vocabulary will be an asset to any study unit dealing with rural matters.

Troon Harrison is a poet, and the author of several picture books, including Aaron's Awful Allergies (Kids Can Press, 1996), and Lavender Moon (Annick Press, 1997).

Molly's Breakfast, Molly's Clothes, Molly's Toys, Molly's Bath. Mireille Levert. Illus. author. Annick Press 1997. Unpag. \$4.95 each, board. ISBNs 1-55037-422-2, 1-55037-424-9, 1-55037-426-5, 1-55037-428-1.

This lovely series is a translation from the French, where Molly Bear is actually Charlotte Bear. Mireille Levert is the Governor General's award-winning illustrator of the Mrs. Ming series. Each book presents a simple full-page illustration of a single object related to the four themes: breakfast, getting dressed, playing, having a bath. The illustrations are big and clear, easily recognizable. On the final two-page spread, the child is invited to find the various objects which are not always easy to find. For example, Molly's shirt in *Molly's Clothes* is well-hidden underneath her jacket, with only the bow showing at her neck. This means that the books will remain challenging for longer.

The fabulous illustrations are the best part of the book. The colours Levert chooses are unusual, rich, warm, and softer than you often find in children's illustration, but still bright enough to attract toddlers' eyes. These are books that adults will not mind opening the myriad times a toddler demands. The edges of the books are a wavy die-cut which makes the book an interesting object to manipulate. They are small and lightweight compared to many board books. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Because they're light, they're easier for small hands to handle; the weight is a result of thin pages, however, which means the reader is often turning more than one page at once. This is a small complaint, though, as overall, this is an excellent set of books.

Laura Macleod is an editor with UBC Press.