

has achieved an integration of her former and new lives, and she is described as now being perfectly happy. Jeremiah is a multi-talented farmer who. Like Lavender, is good at his job. When he walks with a group of children down a country lane to their school, he is not leaving his goal, he has not moved from dissatisfaction to contentment, but has acquired yet another gift to share with the people he loves.

Although Jeremiah's story is recommended for ages six to nine, and Lavender's for ages four to seven, the latter is more sophisticated than the former, and probably would appeal to older readers/listeners. Eugenie Fernandes's illustrations are full of motion and colour and are an invitation to see the world as full of possibilities and adventure. The pictures accompanying Jeremiah's story are more serene and realistic; the people and landscape are comfortably solid. Lavender is in her middle ears and apparently has no family, and as such is probably not a figure strongly connected with youngsters' experience. Her story is enjoyable and worth sharing with children as a way of enlarging their understanding of what their lives may become. Jeremiah is a compelling figure of love; he approaches his chores with dignity and dedication and he enjoys passing on his acquired lore. As an archetypal grandfather, he will exert a charm on younger readers who will enjoy the idea of the young teaching the old. The message that an individual can always make choices to make life an ongoing adventure makes both these books worth reading; *Lavender Moon* is full of appealing ideas, but *Jeremiah Learns to Read* speaks more directly to the heart.

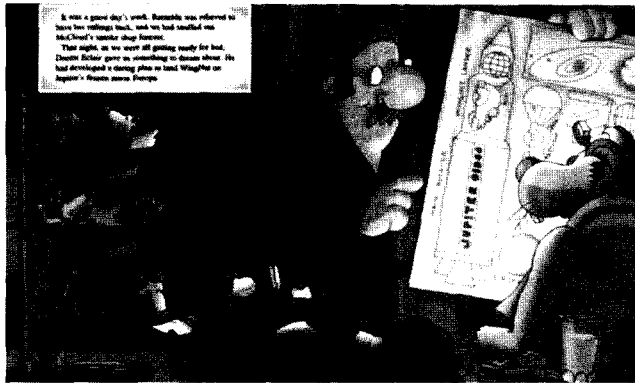
TV Watchers' Picture Books

Melody Mooner Takes Lessons. Frank B. Edwards. Illus. John Bianchi. Bungalo Books. 1996. 24 pp. \$15.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-921285-47-7, 0-921285-46-9. *The Toad Sleeps Over*. John Bianchi. Illus. author. Bungalo Books. 1995. 24 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-9212285-40-X. *The Lab Rats of Doctor Eclair*. John Bianchi. Illus. author. Bungalo Books. 1997. 32 pp. \$18.95 cloth, \$6.95 paper. ISBN 1-921285-49-3, 1-921285-48-5. *The First Big Bungalo Boy Book: Three Stories High*. John Bianchi. Illus. author. Bungalo Books. 1995. 72 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-921285-42-6.

The dominant shaping factor of Bianchi's illustrations of his own texts is the cartoon. Googly eyes, "lightbulb" ideas, darkly dramatic backgrounds, and frenzied action are elements young readers accept as a norm. The pictures tend to move the story along, rather than invite leisurely examination. They are bold and funny and have a happy non-threatening spirit that infuses even the scenes of danger and fear.

Bianchi's texts are adventurous, generally tending to feature male protagonists, and rely on familiarity with TV stock situations. *The First Big Bungalo Boys Book* has three stories about four "tree ranchers" who ride the ranges on trees, rather than horses, and whose enemies include a band of beavers. The stories rely on familiarity with westerns, African safari stories, and hockey games which may reflect Bianchi's childhood viewing habits

more than those of today's pre-schoolers. His jokes made me laugh, but not my grandchildren (ages four and five), not even when I pointed out the absurdities and wordplay. Since they didn't know what bushmen were, they saw nothing funny in there being walking, talking, loincloth-wearing bushes. And they accepted with equal equanimity the Natural Hockey League's team of Penguins and Bruins turning out to be birds and bears.



The Lab Rats of Dr. Eclair takes a mild shot at the exploitation of animals by scientists — one that would go over the heads of young listeners — and pokes fun at old “mad scientist” movies. Its story is the most complex of this group and would probably appeal more to young readers than younger listeners. Its overall effect is like the pilot episode of a TV series where a cast of characters, some of whom have “super” powers, is introduced; but some of those powers are not used in this particular story, which ends with the suggestion of future adventures.

In contrast to the other two books, the story-line of *The Toad Sleeps Over* is simpler and more connected with the ordinary lives of children. The grumpy father and conciliatory mother may strike an adult reader as stereotypical, but they are quite acceptable to children. Its “message” — that you need to give people a chance to prove themselves rather than judging them too quickly — is made most acceptable by its being directed at the father, not the child. The cartoon qualities of the illustrations seem more connected with what children view today. Its domestic setting is also more familiar territory. My two younger grandsons, as well as a nine-year-old and a seven-year-old, chose this one as their favourite.

Written by Frank Edwards and illustrated by Bianchi, *Melody Mooner Takes Lessons* has the least text and the least interesting story — indeed the story is one that parents may find unappealing since Melody rejects skating, skiing, ballet, gymnastics, judo, soccer, painting, swimming, tennis, baseball, and horseback riding after one lesson in each. Her endlessly patient

and apparently affluent family support her through a year of discarding these activities until she finally discovers the tuba. Personally, before the "happy ending," I was ready to punch her piggy little nose.

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Photo Credit: Cyla von Tiedemann

From the Young Peoples Theatre production of Anne, with Jennie Raymond as Anne Shirley and Jamie Robinson as Gilbert Blythe

A New "Anne" on the YPT Stage

Anne. L.M. Montgomery. Adapted by Paul Ledoux from the novel *Anne of Green Gables*. Young Peoples Theatre presentation. Director Patricia Vanstone. Set and Costumers Sue LePage. Lighting Steven Hawkins. Composer Ian Tamblyn.

Perhaps the most telling compliment to YPT's recent (newly adapted!) production of *Anne of Green Gables* is this: it isn't disappointing. The Anne story is beyond familiar to many Canadians — it is something we have internalized to the point of pseudo-ownership. Commissioning and producing a new adaptation of the story can be considered a courageous undertaking. Toronto's Young Peoples Theatre and playwright Paul Ledoux have bravely initiated this project and effectively reworked L.M. Montgomery's famous novel, demonstrating discernment in downsizing a text of somewhat daunt-