

relationship with the animal and plant world must be one of respect and interdependence. It illustrates the values of sharing, helping one another and respect for weaker creatures and teaches the use of songs to heal, to help and to give thanks.

How Turtle Set the Animals Free is a story of how Turtle challenges a physically superior animal, Eagle, in a race and saves the animals from slavery. It teaches that good leadership depends on wisdom and vision rather than strength and power.

Most of the language in these stories is simple and clear, but it is a bit uneven. The first book begins with a complicated concept: "In the world before this world, before there were people and before things were like they are now, everyone was alive and walking around like we do."

Today's children need illustrators to show them the scenes once so familiar to listeners of these tales. The pictures in these three books cleverly show spirit guides and the close bond between animals and humans. The animals are part realistic, part caricature, portrayed with charming detail, revealing emotions, walking, wearing stylized decorative clothes, living in a tipi. There is pleasing continuity in the attractive coloured drawings.

The stories are clearly stated to have originated from the Okanagan Valley. However, they are certainly traditional stories, found in other publications such as Ojibwa stories and legends.

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JEWS IN CZARIST RUSSIA

Sworn Enemies. Carol Matas. HarperCollins, 1993. 132 pp., \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-00-223897-7.

An historical novel for young adults, Carol Matas's newest book, *Sworn Enemies*, is a glimpse into the life of the Jews under Czarist repression in the early nineteenth century. Telling the tale alternatively are Aaron, privileged scholarly son of a wealthy Jew, and Zev, embittered child of a poor family, who makes extra money by kidnapping other Jewish boys for the Czar's army. Zev's hatred for Aaron creates the plot as well as fuelling the characters in a manner that creates coherence and consistency throughout the novel, somewhat coincidental though the plot may seem at times. However, the very differences between the boys sets up a black-and-white counterpoint that weakens the novel.

Aaron is a young but already respected scholar, betrothed to the beautiful Miriam, with whom he is fortunately also in love. He is even exempt from army service because his comparatively wealthy father can pay the bribes necessary to keep him free. Yet after he is kidnapped by Zev and impressed into the Czar's

army, Aaron goes through his own soul-searching, as he learns to eat non-kosher foods and even externally converts to Christianity to survive. However, despite his change of lifestyle, his new experiences and his new doubts, Aaron remains a basically admirable character. He is admittedly bitter against Zev, and certainly desires revenge against him, but he never takes that revenge. His doubts and soul-searching have mainly to do with his faith. While these doubts add interest to the story, they are not likely to really engage the modern reader who may know very little about Jewish beliefs.

Zev is utterly despicable from beginning to end, from his desire and play for Miriam *after* he has kidnapped Aaron, to his repeated refusal to face what he has done, constantly condoning his increasingly repulsive behaviour with an assurance that God would want him to act this way. While unfortunately realistic, Zev is so utterly unlikeable that he, like Aaron, is unlikely to engage the reader.

The themes in the novel are interesting. Matas asks questions about good and evil, including why bad things happen to the innocent or fundamentally good. However, overall this novel does not work because the characters are too black-and-white, too unambiguous. Further, the horrific details of the ugly army-life for Jewish boys in Russia in the 1800s are gruesome and although linked to the theme of racial discrimination, seem a little excessive. Matas has taken potentially powerful material here and written a competent history but not a compelling novel.

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TWO TALES OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Margy. Margaret Smith. Don Mills, ON: Maxwell Macmillan, 1992. 162 pp., \$14.95 \$9.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-02-954096-8, 0-02-954136-0; **No Room in the Well.** Cecil Freeman Beeler. Red Deer, AB: Red Deer College Press, 1993. 174 pp., \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-099-7.

There are similarities and disparities between *No Room in the Well* and *Margy*. Both are set in the Dirty Thirties and both deal with adolescent girls struggling to find their places within their families and to handle the emotional turmoil of growing up.

Both young heroines are strong-willed but sensitive. Margy, who is desperate to please the maiden aunts with whom she has been sent to live, can let her temper get the better of her (screaming and clawing at her stepmother when the latter wears her Momma's shawl—the incident that precipitates her removal to her aunts' home in Ontario), but, under her aunts' tutelage on how to behave as a young lady, Margy learns to withhold her outbursts. Corinne, on the other hand, lacking the environment of genteel poverty of an Ontario town, is less con-