

Cat Lives: He and She

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Cliptail, Gabrielle Roy. Illus. by Francois Oliver. Trans. by Alan Brown. McClelland and Stewart, 1980. 22 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-7710-7843-9.

Kiki of Kingfisher Cove: A Tale of Nova Scotia Cat, Barbara Shaw. Illus. by B. Shaw. Lancelot Press, Ltd., 1977; rpt. 1978. 40 pp. \$1.50 paper. ISBN 0-88999-067-0.

Cats are usually perceived as exceptionally adventurous animals which require at least nine lives to survive their frequent scrapes. Two delightfully written and illustrated books offer examples. Gabrielle Roy's *Courte-Queue*, awarded the Canada Council's prize for the best children's book written in French in 1979, and now available in translation as *Cliptail* by Alan Brown, deals with a young motherly cat whose adventures begin with the discovery of her pregnancy; Barbara Shaw's *Kiki of Kingfisher Cove* concerns a mischievous male cat who decides to stowaway on the family's boat and finds danger at sea. Though both books show some fairly traditional "sex stereotyping" (if that term can be applied to animal stories), this does not detract from the beautiful design and charming style of the stories.

Roy's book is printed in large type on glossy paper with colour and black-and-white illustrations, and is slightly larger in size (24" x 20") than Shaw's (16 1/2" x 21") which is printed on plain paper with black ink drawings made by the author. *Cliptail* and *Kiki* would probably appeal to children between the ages of four and seven, whereas Gabrielle Roy's book is best suited for the younger reader on that scale.

Thematically, as well, the younger child might identify more with the heroine who saves her little kittens and those of her neglectful fellow mother cats, whereas the somewhat older child might want to stray farther from home and hearth - although in the end Kiki does indeed gratefully return to security. That the young of any species must balance the need for protection against the need for independence is the theme that emerges from both books.

Cliptail presents us with a typical image of the mother cat caring for kittens. Because life on a farm does not allow all the young to

be kept, Berthe (the human house-matron) discreetly has Aime (it is never quite clear whether he is her husband) dispose of Cliptail's litter. Pathos is evoked in the story from this point on as the young feline mother inconsolably nurses others' litters; when eventually she has another of her own she is more wary, now knowing the extent of human cruelty. She hides her young far away in the woods and all goes well until winter sets in and forces her to return with them, after considerable ordeal and heroic effort, to the house. Fortunately, this time the humans allow Cliptail to keep her babies and the tale ends happily.

Qualities that one might expect from a mother are demonstrated by Cliptail: warm, loving, resourceful on behalf of her children, protective, and nurturing. When she is shown in such a sympathetic light, the reader is bound to feel moved by her loyalty and personal anguish; perhaps she is a type of feline Rose-Anna! All around her the family is perishing, and it is her mission to ensure that they somehow survive.

Kiki, conversely, is a young male cat who gets bored with his cosy life in the home of the Richardson family which consists of the parents and two children, Mary Anne and David. The mother is a housewife; the father is a fisherman. One day he suggests that the children go lobster trapping with him, and Kiki secretly decides to accompany them. Again, resourcefulness is shown, but this time on behalf of himself rather than for others: Kiki must hide in the boat before any of the family members discover he is gone from home. Curiosity motivates him. David and his father keep very occupied with dragging in lobster traps, Kiki, fascinated, suddenly falls overboard. The rescue is not easily accomplished; however, Kiki is finally fished out and brought home safely, bathed, and warmed up by the stove, at last, in the arms of his mistress, Mary Anne. Kiki vows never again to make ill-considered excursions but rather to watch fishing operations from the safety of a windowsill.

Shaw introduces enough factual details about fishing and lobster-trapping to make this book interesting to young school-children who are eager to learn about the outside world. Kiki expresses those independent urges, within limits.

The hearth figures prominently at the end of both stories as a symbol of security from the dangers of the outside world: for Cliptail, despite the precariousness of the home environment, a greater threat comes from being too far away from it - storms, lack of food, danger of getting lost; for Kiki, home is safety and comfort regardless of its tendency to get boring. The implicit

message is that the young child cannot stray past certain limits without encountering dangers that may be life-threatening. Of course, within each story there is also an ambiguity about home. Berthe and Aime, from the mother cat's viewpoint, are the killers of her young and are not to be entirely trusted; nevertheless, they are the only sources of food and warmth. Similarly, Kiki experiences some discomfort and fear when he is returned home and faces a soapy cleansing in the bath-tub. The human authority figures are felt to be both benevolent and threatening. Any small child is likely to identify unconsciously with that feeling!

While both books are movingly written, one creating pathos and the other suspense, they do reflect sexist roles in cat disguises: the "he" is independent and a solitary adventurer, whereas the "she" is primarily concerned with saving the lives of young helpless charges - her own and others. The young male cat is depicted as resolute and independent while the female cat is already pregnant twice by the end of the story - and, of course, delighted about her mothering role.

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“Dying and Loving Somebody”

WENDY R. KATZ

Hey, Dad!, Brian Doyle. Greenwood Books, 1978. 121 pp. \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-004-9.

You Can Pick Me Up at Peggy's Cove, Brian Doyle. Greenwood Books, 1979. 120 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-001-4.

“Dying and loving somebody,” the thirteen-year-old narrator of Brian Doyle's *Hey, Dad!* (1978) muses. “I always end up thinking of