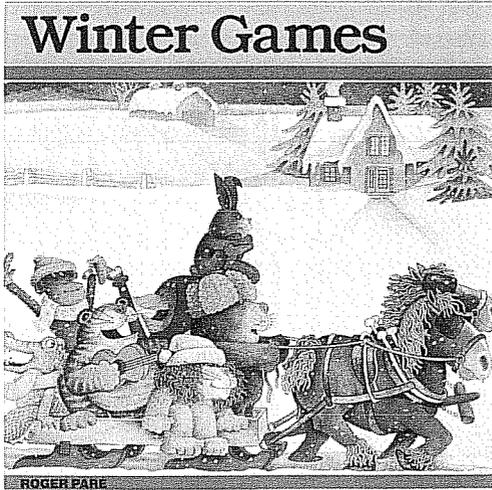


## CATS AND BAWKS AND ELEPHANTS....

**Winter games.** Bertrand Gauthier. Illus. Roger Paré. Annick Press, 1991. Unpag., \$14.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-187-8, 1-55037-184-3; **On a wing and a wish: Salt water bird rhymes.** Al Pittman. Illus. Veselina Tomova. Breakwater Books, 1992. 32 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920911-64-1.



Roger Paré is well-known in French and English Canada for his colourful picture books and has won the Canada Council Children's Literature Prize for Illustration. The strength of his work is in the luminous watercolour paintings of a variety of animals engaged in delightful winter sports. The paintings will remind some readers of Maurice Sendak, though the spirit of the art is perhaps closer to Kriehoff. The animals are not limited to Canadian species, but the set-

ting is clearly Canadian. The elephant on snowshoes is droll and there are some charming monkeys.

The weakness of the book lies in the brief poems that accompany the pictures. They may have been lively in French, but the English is absolutely dull:

Did you see that snowy owl  
In his downy, feathered suit?  
Skiing through the woods,  
With a squirrel, what a hoot!

The owl in the picture is not a snowy owl. The pun on "hoot" is not enough to redeem the uninteresting words and flat rhythm, while the pause indicated by the comma after "woods" is awkward and unnecessary. The words identify the subjects of the pictures, which are rather obvious anyway, but they don't intensify the pleasure of the text. Once, they even run counter to it: we see two cats ice-fishing and are told they are "really wishing/They'd worn their woolen mitts/To go ice-fishing." However, the cats look quite happy.

Al Pittman is a well-known Newfoundland poet and a veteran of children's books. His new book, ably illustrated by Veselina Tomova, has amusing rhymes about 22 birds of Newfoundland. Pittman has given his book a true regional flavour, something lacking in Paré's work. A chart at the end gives the Newfoundland names of the birds and their standard nomenclature. The Bawk, for example, is more universally known as the Greater Shearwater. Pittman often

exploits the more exotic-sounding names in his rhymes. The poems are full of ingenious word play and odd rhymes like “offal” and “jawful.” Perhaps the most enjoyable character is “Ken Kittiwake,” who yearns to be a Superbird but cannot find a phone booth in the sky and therefore never manages to change into his costume. The illustrations and rhymes work skillfully together.

Tomova’s colourful pictures have an individual character and wit, and she has taken great care with the costuming of the birds. They manage to wear human clothes and live in human surroundings while still looking very much like birds. The reader will find progressively more and more in the words and pictures of *On a wing and a wish*. The pictures in Paré’s book are delightful but not especially individual, and the pleasure, though genuine, will soon be exhausted. It certainly will not gain anything from the accompanying text.

**Bert Almon** is an Alberta poet. His seventh collection, *Earth prime*, will be published by Brick Books in 1994.

#### TRIVIALIZING CLASSIC TALES

**Rapunzel’s rap.** Sonja Dunn. Illus. Andrea W. von Königslöw. Moonstone Press. 1992. 32 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-920259-39-1; **Cinderella penguin, or the little glass flipper.** Janet Perlman. Kids Can Press. 1992. Unpag., \$11.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-073-3.

Two recent picture-book retellings of traditional fairy tales demonstrate the current tendency to trivialize profound narratives and to sacrifice literary art for the sake of contemporary vernacular, a quick laugh, or a visual trick. The great spiritual and psychological values of these stories risk being lost in the name of mere cleverness and local colour.

Sonja Dunn’s brief and somewhat patronizing rap version of *Rapunzel* is a case in point. Perhaps in the oral presentation of this version the poor use of language would not be noticeable. As a written piece of literature, however, Dunn’s carelessness is evident. For example, Rapunzel “wasn’t allowed/Downstairs to play,” but later we are told “this tower was high/And had no stair.” After pushing Rapunzel “Down her own hair/Like an elevator” (an image that strains credulity), the witch “stalked” the prince in the “lonely tower.” If he is outside and she is in the tower, waiting for his approach, the verb “stalked” is inappropriate.

The rhythms of this particular rendition lack the facility and fluency of true rap poetry. They are closer to nursery rhyme and to inconsistent iambic pentameter than to rap.

The drawings by Andrea W. von Königslöw are cartoonish in nature and they seem inconsistent with the text. For a child held in captivity by “the queen of mean,” Rapunzel is shown at her keyboard, despite Dunn’s use of the word piano, reading and sewing with a singularly happy expression. Anachronism is a common literary device and may attract a child’s interest. But Dunn’s and Königslöw’s application is more arbitrarily than imaginatively conceived, sacrificing conviction for facile comedy.

More competently written and certainly better illustrated than *Rapunzel’s rap*,