

## Mini-Reviews

**The moon and the oyster.** Donia Blumenfeld Clenman. Illus. Laszlo Gal. Orca, 1992. 32 pp., \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920501-83-4.

*The moon and the oyster*, written by Donia Blumenfeld Clenman and illustrated by the prolific Laszlo Gal, is a complicated fairy tale whose illustrations are bright and big. The protagonist of the inner story is a young oyster, obsessed with the moon's powers of transformation. The frame story, on the other hand, tells the tale of a fisherman's daughter waiting for her father to return home from a long voyage. The world of humans is contrasted with some aspect of the world of nature. The frame story takes place in this world, among real people, whereas the story within this story takes place in the magical world under the sea, among sea creatures. Both worlds, however, are regulated, to some degree, by the beautiful but vain shape-shifter, the moon. Despite unconvincing warnings from the "old oyster," the young oyster's longing to understand the magic of the moon is the cause of his downfall. But, unfortunately, his downfall is not integrated with the happy ending of the frame story (where father and daughter are reunited) except to say that as this boy-oyster perishes, the bright and adorned female moon lights the way for the father whose cargo comprises "great nets of glistening mussels and oysters." Although compelling in its beauty, this tale would be more effective if the frame story and inner story were both developed and then more fully integrated. But then that is the admirable risk Clenman takes in framing powerful stories not obviously connected.

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**The raccoon.** Michel Quintin. Illus. Evelyne Arcouette. Trans. author. Quintin Publishers, 1992. 24 pp., \$12.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 2-920438-60-3, 2-920438-61-1; **The porcupine.** Michel Quintin. Illus. Louise Martel. Trans. author. Quintin Publishers, 1992. 24 pp., \$12.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 2-920438-80-8, 2-920438-81-6; **The mosquito.** Michel Quintin. Illus. Doris Barrette. Trans. author. Quintin Publishers, 1992. 24 pp., \$12.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 2-920438-78-6, 2-920438-7806; **The ladybird.** Colette Dufresne. Illus. Lise Monette. Trans. author. Quintin Publishers, 1992. 24 pp., \$12.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 2-920438-62-X, 2-920438-63-8.

The aim of the "Fauna in colour" series to present factual information on the behaviour, habitat, and characteristics of individual species to young children

has great merit. However, these four additions to the series fail for a variety of reasons, the most evident being that of the translation. Both the rhyme and the rhythm of the texts' verses are clumsy. For instance, words such as use/ruse, ooze/juice, ruined/raccoon, refuses/juices, and wintertime/kind fail in their lyrical purpose. Frequently the text lacks the consistent, smooth-flowing rhythm that is required to enhance the subject matter and ends up creating awkward sentence structures instead. The translators would have been wiser to write in prose since the verses do not become an expression of charming delight but one of unfortunate distraction. Even though these are picture books, the language is such that they would require the direct involvement of the parent.

The illustrations have considerably more merit. With the exception of *The porcupine*, deep, rich and bright colours are used with skilled shading. The insects books' drawings keep the charm of anthropomorphism, while still focusing on natural settings to allow for a better understanding of the facts presented. By comparison, in several of the illustrations in *The porcupine* and *The raccoon*, worthy information becomes confusing for the young reader by the illustrators' misplaced attempt at humour.

The authors do recognize and draw upon a child's natural curiosity to explain why mosquitos bite, the purpose of a porcupine's spines, where ladybirds go in winter, and why we think raccoons wash their food. It is unfortunate that this material was not presented in simple prose with aptly-focused illustrations.

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