

square topsail flapped and filled, and I felt the pulse of the Dragon through the wheel as she quickened on her way.

But soon Dasher took my place. "You can go," he said. "I'll steer this thing. What's the course?"

"Running free," said I.

"Running free," he answered with a nod. "Straight ahead. Steady as she goes." He wore an impish grin. "Lord love me, I like this sailor talk."

And so will all who read this wonderful, exciting novel.

*R.G. Moyles is Professor Emeritus of English Literature at the University of Alberta. His many publications include **From Instruction to Delight: A Critical Anthology of Children's Literature** (Oxford University Press).*

The Power of Vulnerability

Emma's Eggs. Margriet Ruurs. Illus. Barbara Spurll. Stoddart, 1996. 24 pp. \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-2972-0. *Wherever Bears Be.* Sue Ann Alderson. Illus. Arden Johnson. Tradewind, 1999. 32 pp. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 1-896580-18-1. *Omar on Ice.* Maryann Kovalski. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1999. 32 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55041-507-7. *Weighing the Elephant.* Ting-xing Ye. Illus. Suzane Langlois. Annick, 1998. 30 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-527-X. *Dume's Roar.* Tololwa M. Mollel. Illus. Kathy Blankley Roman. Stoddart, 1997. 32 pp. \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-3003-6. *Kitoto the Mighty.* Tololwa M. Mollel. Illus. Kristi Frost. Stoddart, 1998. 32 pp. \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-3019-2.

Young children live in a world in which they often feel small, overlooked, or misunderstood by dictatorial adults towering over them. Not surprisingly, these young persons identify with stories in which vulnerable characters discover hidden strengths and consequently earn respect. The following animal fables and fairy tales serve as richly suggestive metaphors that allow their young audience a creative reinterpretation of their own experiences.

In Margriet Ruurs's *Emma's Eggs*, the above themes are exemplified by a young hen who tries very hard to please the farmer's family, whether by boiling, scrambling, or painting her freshly laid eggs. When the farmers are not pleased at all, the irritated hen keeps her next egg to herself, only to discover soon that a young chicken is hatching. For once, the farmers are happy: "That is what you do with eggs!" While the focus on pleasing others may seem somewhat obsessive, the repeated trials and errors are very comical. Barbara Spurll's colourful illustrations, particularly the expressive physiognomy of the hen and the happy new chick, provide much opportunity for identification.

Similarly, Omar, the delightful chubby little bear in Maryann Kovalski's *Omar on Ice*, is unhappy when the art teacher at bear school mistakes Omar's first portrait of his mother for a rock. Dejected, he sits on the side as the class goes skating. However, they skate poorly, prompting Omar, a natural on ice, to a demonstration. With elegant ease, he skates forwards, backwards, and in circles, his lines creating

wonderful ice pictures. Effectively summarizing the story's moral, a friend compliments Omar: "You just needed a different pencil." Kovalski's soft colours trace Omar's every emotion and endear him immediately to the reader.

The story line in Sue Ann Alderson's *Wherever Bears Be* is at first difficult to comprehend. Are the bears that the two young girls Belinda and Samantha encounter while blueberry picking in the forest *real*? Actually, they are meant to be projections, evoked in the girls' minds by the unfamiliar sounds of the forest. Fortunately, the girls' melodic songs pacify both the imagined bears and the girls (as well as the reader). Arden Johnson's illustrations invite the reader's imagination to play along with the bears and friends.

In the following books, we turn to Asian and African tales and fauna. Ting-xing Ye's *Weighing the Elephant*, lavishly illustrated with water colours and much detail by Suzane Langlois, is situated in a peasant village in ancient China. The local farmers till their fertile fields with the help of work elephants, whose calves are tended to by the children. However, this pastoral harmony is disturbed when the feudal emperor seizes the most popular calf, Huan-Huan. The crying elephant's tears are very saddening to little readers, but fortunately there is a happy end: Heidou, an ingenious little boy and Huan-Huan's keeper, solves a difficult riddle that the mighty emperor has posed as a condition for the elephant's return. Heidou and Huan-Huan are reunited, the little elephant can dance again, leaving the village and the book's readers glad and inspired.

Dume's Roar, by Tololwa Mollel, is adapted from an African fable. Illustrated by Kathy Blankely Roman with beautiful colours, it depicts Dume, a rather self-absorbed lion who expects a group of small animals to tend to his every needs. The flora seem quite unlike Africa (except for the baobab tree) and the story line is not too engaging, perhaps because of the reversal of fortune's direction: the focus is not on a small animal that discovers hidden strengths but on the pompous Dume who loses his assumed strength and impressive roar when hunters enter the forest. Fortunately, the small animals' cunning finally elicits a terrifying roar from the lion and all is well, showing once again that brains may do more than brawn.

Another book by Mollel, *Kitoto the Mighty*, is much more successful, presenting a frightened, sweet little mouse on the run from a deadly hawk. In what could be called a spiritual quest, Kitoto turns to the anthropomorphized elements in its search for the strongest protector, only to be sent from one to the other. Kristi Frost's illustrations are outstanding, notably the human character of the wind, who sports traditional African garb, using the magnificent braids of her long flowing hair to entangle and move the clouds. As it turns out, even the mountain, supposedly the strongest of all elements, has an opponent who is stronger than all others, undermining the mountain's foundation with its many tunnels. This fearsome creature turns out to be a mouse as tiny as Kitoto, reinforcing once again the image of the vulnerable who overcomes considerable obstacles, conquering much stronger opponents and discovering his or her power.

Ulrich Teucher received his Ph.D. in comparative literature in 2000 from the University of British Columbia, where he teaches English as a sessional instructor. He has written on cancer metaphors, the topic of his dissertation, and has published several literary reviews in Canadian Literature. A postdoctoral fellow, he studies life writing by adolescents.