

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.

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#### 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*,

*Cinderella penguin, or the little glass flipper* by Janet Perlman offers, as the title indicates, a visual joke as its basic premise. Despite the publisher's press release, this version is not "authentic right to the end." With no mention of Cinderella's father, her mother's grave, the self-mutilation of the stepsisters, the doves attacking the sisters on the way to the wedding, Perlman's retelling, like many of Disney's renditions of classic stories, is bowdlerized and sanitized.

Perlman, therefore, tells only part of the story of Cinderella, who is depicted as a penguin. As such, it would clearly tickle a child's fancy. A simple trick of substitution, however, does not constitute an interesting achievement. Fortunately, Perlman's illustrations do.

Originally designed as an animated film, *The tender tale of Cinderella penguin*, which won the Parents' Choice Award for Best Children's Video and was nominated for an Academy Award, *Cinderella penguin* would engage a child's interest by virtue of its delightful illustrations alone. In Perlman's retelling of the classic tale, the story is secondary to the artwork. Painted directly on the back of matte acetate, the full-colour illustrations are vivid, uncluttered and amusing. Although lacking depth of feeling or subtleties of shading, remaining more clever than substantial, they nonetheless are accomplished images, convincingly connected to a text which, unfortunately, has been deprived of meaning.

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## STORIES FROM THE OKANAGAN PERSPECTIVE

**Neekna and Chemai.** Jeannette C. Armstrong. Illus. Barbara Marchand. Theytus Books, 1991. Unpag., \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-919441-15-7.



Jeannette Armstrong, an important Native novelist, has written a delightful account of the lives of the Okanagan tribe before the coming of the white man. Her protagonist, Neekna, recounts the activities of her people during the four seasons of the year, beginning with winter. The emphasis is on a way of life which integrates the spiritual with the economic. Food is seen as the gift of the four Food Chiefs, who gave their lives so that the people could live: Chief Bitterroot, Chief Saskatoon Berry, Chief Salmon and Chief Bear. Spiritual values are introduced to the young reader in a natural way. Explained by elders (some-