

Japan 322
February 12, 1997
Prof. Janice Brown
Grade:82%

The Triumph of "Gorsh the Cellist"

Miyazawa Kenji's children's story "Gorsh the Cellist" takes us on a journey of discovery about the human condition and overwhelms us with a tale of triumph. Each step is like a microcosm of the whole - as though each step were a journey in itself. Kenji's stories are set against the whole of the universe - a world replete with people, animals, and all the elements of nature. All hold discourse together. All are in empathy with one another. This free association between the elements and all living things that make up our world is one of the distinguishing features that predominates Kenji's works. The interaction he portrays is never nonsensical but always animated with an authenticity that rings true to its audience. This is most apparent in the scene between Gorsh and the mice where Kenji captures Gorsh's character movement and subsequent enlightenment.

There are four main elements that appeal to readers of Kenji's tales: humour - that he can converse with mice at all lightens the mood of an otherwise somber tale; rhythm that of his music and with it the realization of the healing and soothing properties of music upon the soul; fantasy- as a real event of the mind. Kenji writes of fantastical wonderful things with a nonchalance that makes it almost believable especially through the eyes of a child; and best of all: open-mindedness- to believing in the best of all things in strangers and other creatures.

Every child, and thus, the child in us, loves to be stimulated by the experiences of Gorsh and if one learns the lessons alongside Gorsh as he encounters them, they can consider themselves well taught for "Gorsh the Cellist" is remarkably didactic without being presumptuous- this is Kenji's triumph. The simple lessons of morality are easy to spot and easy to understand. We see, in the scene with the mice, Gorsh invites strangers who knock at his door "Gorsh, who was used to it by now...said 'Come in'" (p.121) unhesitating and with blind trust. This is quickly followed by initial surprise at her request but even "not know[ing] what you're talking about" (p.121) Gorsh listens to the mother mouse's lament and is willing to help, startled that he can "Ah I see...Now I understand. I'll play for you." (p.122). This is a generous offer for one so depressed, and we are further impressed by Gorsh's compassion toward the mother mouse "Of course he's all right...so we don't want you crying now" (p.123) which imparts another important Buddhist principle. By being sympathetic, Gorsh realizes that there is more to music than the satisfaction of the conductor or of his fellow orchestra members. He has discovered the enjoyment of music for music's sake and has uncovered a motivation to play that lies in its healing properties evidenced in the wildlife around him. In healing the tiny mouse, Gorsh in turn heals himself - finding a purpose for his passion that leaves him exhilarated but "quite tiring talking to mice."(p.125).

This story is reminiscent of other children's tales but Kenji's skilful writing sets this above many others. The universal message comes through like a tired cliché given new life by this master of children's literature: "good things come to those who wait" or "try, try again." The charm of "Gorsh the Cellist" lies mainly in that the message can be applied to all areas of life, not just music. Knowing that Kenji himself had left a life of wealth to walk amongst those from whom his father profited only adds to the allure of his tales- that he follows the principles of which he writes.

Kenji lived during a period in Japan's history when the country began to

manifest an attitude that was increasingly self-centred and condescending toward the people of the neighbouring Asian countries, and ultimately resulted in wars of invasion. An important theme in Kenji's stories is the communication that unfolds between certain villagers and the inhabitants of the natural environment surrounding them. His main characters engage in open unprejudiced dialogue with creatures "different" from themselves. This may have indicated Kenji's reaction to the society around him and may have acted as a possible alternative to the closed and exclusionary nature of Japanese society in his day. In our day it poses a fresh question for modern societies on the threshold of a new century.

Works Cited

Miyazawa, Kenji. "Gorsh the Cellist" Wildcat and the Acorns and other stories. tr. John Bester. Japan: Kondansha, 1985.