Ricardo Gancz, "Entry on: The Spring of the Caterpillar [A primavera da largarta] by Madalena Elek, Ruth Rocha", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/675. Entry version as of November 01, 2026.

Madalena Elek , Ruth Rocha

The Spring of the Caterpillar [A primavera da largarta]

Brazil (1999)

TAGS: Aesop Aesop's Fables





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Spring of the Caterpillar [A primavera da largarta]
Country of the First Edition	Brazil
Country/countries of popularity	Brazil
Original Language	Portuguese
First Edition Date	1999
First Edition Details	Ruth Rocha, *A primavera da lagarta.* São Paulo: Formato, 1999, 32 pp.
ISBN	9788516065331
Genre	Fables, Illustrated works
Target Audience	Children (7–9 (according to the author))
Author of the Entry	Ricardo Gancz, Bar-Ilan University, ricardogancz@gmail.com
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Creators



Madalena Elek , b. 1974
(Illustrator)

Madalena Elek is a freelancer who works as an ilustrator and in industrial and textile design. She divides her time between São Paulo, Brazil and Barcelona, Spain.

Source:

Official website (accessed: February 25, 2019)

Bio prepared by Ricardo Gancz, Bar-Ilan University, ricardogancz@gmail.com



Ruth Rocha , b. 1931
(Author)

Ruth Rocha, a graduate in Political Sciences born in Brazil, was the educational supervisor in a school from 1957 to 1972. From 1973 to 1976 she worked as the editor of the infant-juvenile section of books of Brazil's biggest book publisher at the time and in 1977 she published her first book.

So far, she has written over two hundred works a part of which has been translated into more than twenty-five different languages. She has won many prizes and since 2008 has been a member of the prestigious São Paulo Academy of Letters.

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Additional information

Summary

The ant, the praying mantis, the spider, the chameleon, the ladybug, the gecko, the dragonfly and the snail get together in the forest and started to complain about the caterpillar because she ate all the leaves she could find. They continue their whining and call her ugly, agreeing that the solution is to kill her. The snail tries to oppose them but he is too slow to present his ideas.

As the animals make their way to hunt and kill the caterpillar, they meet a beautiful butterfly and ask her where the ugly caterpillar, who eats everything in her way, is. To their surprise, the butterfly tells them she is the caterpillar and invites them to see her own sister who is about to transform.

The animals witness the transformation in awe and the story ends with the butterfly saying that if one wants to know the butterfly, one must have patience with the caterpillar.

Analysis

The story is Rocha's own creation based on the Aesop's fable *The Ant and the Caterpillar*. In the fable, the ant vexes the caterpillar who is ashamed and closes herself in the capsule until nature reveals her as a butterfly. Rocha has a clear goal with the fable, which is to criticize prejudice and to call for inclusion. Although the author does not say so in the book, she does so in her website as she arranges this book with a tag "Get away, prejudice". Furthermore, the message is very clear from the story.

The usage of group mentality and the collective decision made by the animals is very relevant for the target age of the book. In this period, children begin to form groups and often judges others. They tend to pick one or another characteristic they feel as undesirable and from it, to proclaim a judgement in the whole being of the other child, often leading to exclusion and bullying.

Rocha creates a scenario which is familiar to children, namely that one person in the group presents an idea, which is quickly spread. The chameleon is one who is always changing his mind according to whoever is speaking and that is emphasized by the narrator in the story. The snail is unable to present his opposition. These situations often happen in group settings where usually there is some small

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discordance that is usually shut down by the discordant himself because he does not want to break from the group. The group mentality quickly evolves from caterpillar-bashing to a caterpillar hunt, suggesting to the reader how quickly bad thoughts might escalate and thus how dangerous they can be.

Rocha's choice of animals serves to use characteristics of the animals to describe human actions in group setting. The chameleon, who is able to change colour according to the environment he lives in, is portrayed as changing opinions according to whom he speaks. The snail is physically slow and his shell form is twisted. He is portrayed as slow and jumbled when presenting his case. The word "enrolado" means in Portuguese both "in a shell/twisted form" and also "jumbled". The other animals chosen are those not naturally considered as cute, such as the spider, the gecko and the ant. However, these animals who are themselves ugly decide to hunt the caterpillar because she is ugly. This hypocrisy is explicitly highlighted by the narrator.

The book was very well received in Brazil. One of the reasons is that the author is probably the most famous children's book author alive in Brazil and her books always have a place in schools. But even more so because it strikes a goal in presenting a contemporary and relevant issue – prejudice and exclusion – in an easy to read and intelligent way.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Aesop Aesop's Fables

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Animals Emotions Friendship Violence

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