

AND IN THIS CORNER—ROCH

The boxing champion. Roch Carrier. Illus. Sheldon Cohen. Trans. Sheila Fischman. Tundra Books, 1991. 24 pp. 14.95 cloth, paper ISBN 0-88776-249-2, 0-88776-257-3

The Boxing Champion continues the adventures of the young boy introduced to us in Carrier's earlier story *The Hockey Sweater*. This time the village boys' attentions have turned to boxing. Since our hero always loses at the boxing matches held each spring as hockey season ends, he sends away for exercise equipment "guaranteed" to make him a champion. After faithfully following the regime prescribed, he accepts the opening challenge of the next season only to be knocked out by the first punch.

The humour of the story builds with the young Roch's dread of boxing due to his annual defeat and his humiliation in front of the girls. His determination to improve his physical strength through the aid of "patent medicine" brings a smile since the adult reader will recognize the hook for the unsophisticated consumer. The crowning comic touch is Roch's mother's concurrence that a little body building is necessary—necessary enough that she will contribute money to the cause. Our bittersweet certainty of Roch's impending defeat grows as the author describes the stature of the Côté boys and their experience with hard physical farm labour, the exaggerated claims of the Miracle Muscle Centre, and the exclamation of his opponent: "Where did the plucked chicken come from?"

Sheldon Cohen's vibrant illustrations, with their authentic period detail, contribute to the plot development. The inside cover, with its mock advertisements for miracle cures, beauty aids, and the muscle building ad (encircled) foreshadow the boy's action. The details in the pictures—the sea of forlorn No. 9 hockey sweaters, the reluctant Roch on his way to the summer kitchen, the cheering cats as the potential champion spars—all strengthen our empathy with the characters. As a nice touch, the infamous Maple Leaf sweater is shown hanging in Roch's bedroom with a makeshift red number 9 attempting to cover the offending emblem.

The Boxing Champion touches our hearts as we cheer for the underdog who believed "deep in his heart that he was a champion," and yet know he is going to lose. Canada doesn't have Rockys, but we do have Roch—and we're better for it.

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