

A Traditional Sliammon Story

T'aal: The One Who Takes Bad Children. Sue Pielle with Anne Cameron. Illus. Greta Guzek. Harbour Publishing, 1998. 27 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55017-180-1.

As a non-Native reader, I am certain to have cultural blinders that prevent me from appreciating the full richness of this traditional Sliammon story. What I offer here, then, from the perspective of my own British-Canadian heritage, are my impressions of what to me is a wonderful book. In *T'aal: The One Who Takes Bad Children*, Sue Pielle, with Anne Cameron, tells a traditional tale from the Sliammon people on the coast of British Columbia. This tale about the origin of mosquitoes teaches the importance of listening to and learning from one's parents and grandparents. The two main characters in this story are a brother and sister who obey the rule of their village that all children must be inside once darkness falls; otherwise they will fall prey to T'aal, the terrifying creature who lurks in the night to steal away bad children. The two children are sent out one night with special permission to tell their grandmother that their mother is about to give birth. Their father tells them that as long as they hold hands, they will be safe from The One Who Takes Bad Children. When one of them trips, however, their hands break apart, and The One Who Takes Bad Children immediately snatches them up.

The rest of the story tells of the resourcefulness of these children. This story emphasizes, though, that their resourcefulness is not innate, but rather the result of what they have learned from their mother, father, and grandmother: "'Mother says,' the sister reminded her brother, 'that any time anything goes wrong we're to keep our heads calm, and THINK'" (14). The story, then, encourages independent thinking, but in the context of family traditions and wisdom.

Indeed, this story is very much a celebration of family. The events of the narrative are driven by the joyful and celebrated birth of a new baby, and the story ends with the grandmother inviting the two children to "Come see the new person who came to live with us last night" (26). The legacy of mosquitoes, formed by the ashes of the burned body of The One Who Takes Bad Children, is a minor irritation in the presence of human love and the importance of family. Greta Guzek's illustrations provide a striking complement to this engaging story. Guzek makes dramatic use of perspectives and shadows to heighten the elements of fear and suspense.

Gillian Siddall is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Lakehead University. She teaches Canadian literature and literary theory.