

D'une valeur littéraire indéniable ce roman a aussi une grande valeur pédagogique et ferait très bien l'objet de discussions de classe. En effet, si le thème du premier amour paraîtra à certains quelque peu vétuste, d'autres aspects du roman comme la réconciliation entre un père et un fils, l'inquiétude d'une mère et l'harmonie familiale ne peuvent être qu'un apport positif à une époque où les structures familiales et sociales deviennent de plus en plus problématiques et complexes.

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SENSORY EXPERIENCE AND SENSATIONALISM

The sleighs of old Montreal, Carol Italiano. Tundra, 1974. Reprinted in paper 1978. 26 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-88776-103-8; *Bienvenu chez nous/Welcome to our town*, Guy Bailey. Tundra, 1978. Unpaginated \$9.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-111-9.

In his brief introduction, Carlo Italiano mentions that the contents of the book have been inspired by his youth in Montreal during the 1920s and 1930s when he, as a son of Italian immigrants, was an avid "sleigh watcher." His parents had a small grocery store and Carlo, one of nine siblings, indicates that there existed a warm relationship between him and his hardworking immigrant parents: mother took him to Bonsecours Market for shopping and Carlo modified the sled father had made for him so that he could assist in taking the shopping home. This sense of care and respect in human relationship persists throughout the book. One recognizes it when the author mentions how the old driver of the nuns' sleigh could protect himself from the bitter cold, while he depicts the man looking back to make sure that the nuns are all right. It is seen further in Carlo's admiration for the impressive uniform and the official badge of the driver of the Royal Mail sleigh, making him conclude that with such drivers the Royal Mail certainly can take care of its assigned duties. The carefree pleasures of childhood are expressed when Carlo meets the snow removal sleigh, the best to hitch a ride on since the drivers did not seem to mind children hanging on at the back. Positive personal relations with people other than family members are found in the description of the ragman's sleigh. Ragman Harry is a good friend, loved by all; the children sell him scrap iron scrounged here and there. Harry, however, is always honest and tells the children to return those pots and pans which do not seem too old.

The illustrations are painted in vivacious colours. The author depicts the sleighs generally from a side view, offering a clear description of the construc-

tion and the surface decorations. The minimum suggestion of snow on the ground leaves the background open for interpretation. Carlo Italiano is an excellent draughtsman of horses. The different actions of the animals are candidly captured: the dappled Percherons of the brewery sleigh are just putting their full weight against their harness to come to a halt; the bay horse pulling the Royal Mail sleigh trots steadily along, while the old nag of the fruit pedlar is cold under the tattered blanket and lifts his foot slightly; the homely skewbald pony waits patiently for the Montreal Star papers to be loaded on his sleigh, in sharp contrast to the fancy hack pulling the sleigh of the Inspector of the City of Montreal.

The strength of this aware-winning book lies in Carlo Italiano's ability to recreate Old Montreal — he leads us through this bustling city because the simple text combined with the somewhat dated illustrations conveys to the reader a sensate experience of actually being in Montreal. We are sleigh-watching with young Carlo, and with him we see, touch, smell and even seem to hear the sounds of the city. We feel the warm touch of the greasy "patates frites" in our hands and we see the sparks flying inside the knife sharpener's sleigh. The simple shed of the fruit pedlar's sleigh is drawn from a side view, yet the text seems to lead us around it to the back, peeking inside to the coal heater which keeps the fruit from freezing. Old Montreal seems to come alive in this book. The streets echo the bark of the dog on the freight sleigh; we hear the heavy trot of the dappled Percherons and the rumble of the coals rolling through a chute from the coal sleigh into a basement. Amidst all this activity, we imagine we hear the fire hose sleigh and the fire steamer racing in full gallop through the city, its bells ringing, the steam pumps smoking and its horses steaming. Italiano's keen observation of detail makes this a remarkable book.

Guy Bailey, in *Bienvenue chez nous/Welcoming to our town*, recreates his youth in Cap-de-la-Madeleine. Laudably this picture book is printed simultaneously in French and in English. The four pages of text tell in a detached manner the story of how life was. In bold type he lists the topics: at home and school, "Streets and pastimes," "The church was our life," and "The Shrine." Small-type bi-lingual passages of text placed across the top of each illustrated page, flash out the paucity of the main titles. Unfortunately, this typographical organization of the text tends to become confusing and disjointed.

Unlike Carlo Italiano's book, Bailey's text fails to convey a sense of enthusiasm, warmth or plain fun. The book portrays mother stereotyped as the one doing the laundry and gossiping, cooking, and losing money at the bingo game in the church basement. Also, she is always talking on the phone when the boys come home from school. The illustration of mother on the telephone depicts her as a wide-bosomed blond woman with straight hair, looking away from the child who has just meekly entered the kitchen; on the facing page, entitled "Mealtime," a totally different mother (this time with dark brown tight

ly “permed” hair) stands with a grim face in the centre of the kitchen holding a plate of vegetables — presumably to feed everyone around the kitchen table. The author mentions in the text that mother fed them well, yet the illustration of mother implies that she did not enjoy that chore.

The text states that the Saturday night wrestling match was a highlight in the week. “Heroes and villains were easy to identify. We could go and scream our heads off.” The second text, in small type above the illustration, identifies the wrestlers as “Tarzan Babu, Joe the Black Panther, Pit the Terror.” The illustration depicts a make-shift arena and shows two fat figures engaged in a fight. The wrestler at the left has an enormous blond Afro hairstyle, while the one at the right in polka-dot panties has long blond hair. These hairstyles might confuse children, giving them the illusion that two women or a man and a woman are fighting while everybody cheers them on (See figure 1).

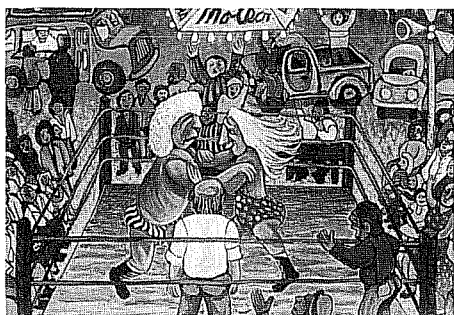


Figure 1

Guy Bailey’s style in the illustrations is deliberately crude. The simplified, cartoon-like shapes are combined with garish colours. One might see these illustrations as a reflection of new expressionist painting, reflecting a strong anti-art attitude. As a children’s book, however, both the text and the illustrations seem to me lacking both in form and in content. The stereotyping of the mother figure and the sexual ambiguity in the wrestling scene is not constructive. The illustrations lack sensitivity and fail to convey a perception of affectionate family life.

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