

Convaincue que nul texte condescendant ou mal lettré n'est propre à offrir à nos jeunes contemporains, je trouve ici que les images de la nature, plutôt en grisaille, sont toujours économes, souvent poétiques et parfois saisissantes. Le mystère et le frisson dépassent le simple roman-policier. Les articulations ainsi que la syntaxe de l'initiation de cette jeune fille au monde des aïeux, des bonnes intentions qui fléchissent et la tentation des rancoeurs sont nouées avec discrétion.

Il s'agit également d'un mini-roman fleuve, car quatre autres récits complètent le cycle, la suite (située au début du vingtième siècle) ayant paru en 1984. La séquence recouvre donc une dizaine de générations, depuis la grandeur des premiers colons jusqu'aux lueurs de notre époque. Sernine engage ses lecteurs par son art narratif, mais aussi par la dignité qu'il accorde à sa prose.

Le papier est bon, la typographie élégante, et — *mirabile dictu* — une seule coquille est même envoûtante.

Marthe LaVallée-Williams est professeur de langue et littérature françaises à Temple University, Philadelphie, Pennsylvanie. Elle se spécialise dans la fiction et le théâtre des dix-septième et vingtième siècles, notamment Camus et l'art narratif.

A MORAL FABLE

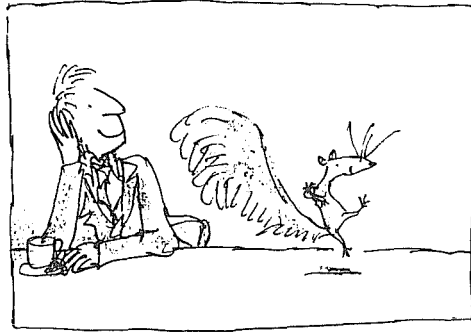
Willie the squowse, Ted Allan. Illus. Quentin Blake. Puffin Books, 1980. 80 pp. \$2.95 paper. ISBN 0-14-03.1160-2.

Though Ted Allan is certainly known in his native Canada — his screenplay *Lies my father told me* was nominated for an Academy Award in 1976, and his novel *Love is a longshot* won the 1984 Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour — he has spent much of his time since 1955 in Britain, where his credits include the stage version of *Oh! what a lovely war*. *Willie the Squowse* first appeared in 1973, in *The Times Saturday Review*, as a winner of *The Times Children's Story Competition*; and was included the following year in *The Times Anthology of Children's Stories*.

The story features an *Allouette*-humming, acrobatic, half squirrel, half mouse named Willie who, mistakenly abandoned after his owner and friend Joe learns that a squowse “just isn't box-office,” lives in the wall dividing the homes of the middle class Pickerings and the slum class Smiths. The Pickerings stuff their stock dividends into a hole in the wall for safekeeping and Willie, becoming “a sort of banker,” uses the #10 notes to plug a hole into the Smith home and so block out the aroma of the cheese Mrs. Smith is using to lure him to his death. Willie's makeup thus combines and moderates the squirrelish tendency

to hoard exemplified by the Pickerings, and the mousish tendency to scavenge and waste exhibited by the Smiths. Willie, of course, takes only what he needs — one #10 note to use as a window shade, and food as needed from the Pickering kitchen — and lives in harmony with his environment: hanging his trapeze from a pipe, and swimming in a pool formed by a leak. His simplicity of character is mirrored in the next generation of Pickerings and Smiths — Richard and Lucille — who marry for love alone, and who genuinely share with Willie qualities only aped by the parents: “a love for people, a sense of belonging to a good world, a patient and wise understanding of human weakness.”

Allan’s humour, whether direct or (more often) understated, is consistently of a moral cast: the Smiths approve of Richard Pickering, who teaches history, because it is “time there was a professor in the family;” and the Pickerings think Lucille is a “dear” when they discover she comes from “one of the wealthiest families in the land.” Some of this will doubtless escape younger readers, but they will enjoy Willie and laugh at Quentin Blake’s expressive line drawings depicting him (Fig. 1). Older children will respond to the satiric humour, and adults will appreciate Allan’s subtlety in having Willie reverse the intent of Shakespeare’s Miranda (*The tempest*, V, i, 11. 188-9) when he laments, on nearly being clobbered by Mr. Smith, “ ‘Barbarians! What kind of world is this that has such people in it?’ ”



Laurence Steven teaches English at Laurentian University and is the author of articles on Canadian and British fiction and poetry.

PERSISTENT PICAROS

Harbour thieves, Bill Freeman. James Lorimer & Co., 1984. 138 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-88862-746-7.

The fifth book about the adventures of Meg and Jamie Bains, *Harbour thieves*,