

Reviews / Comptes rendus

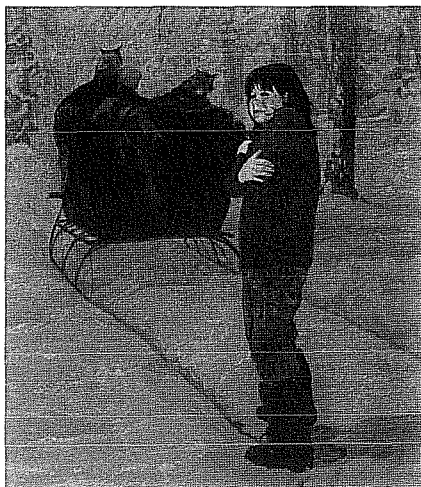
Books / Livres

Margaret Laurence's Classic

The Olden Days Coat. Margaret Laurence. Illus. Muriel Wood. Tundra, 1998. Unpag. \$17.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-455-X.



*Illustration from the 1979 edition of
The Olden Days Coat*



*Illustration from the 1998 edition of
The Olden Days Coat*

Tundra's new edition of *The Olden Days Coat* reminds us once again of Margaret Laurence's timeless genius. While Laurence's text has not changed from the 1979 original (Laurence died in 1987), Muriel Wood's illustrations are new and reveal maturation in her style and technique.

Laurence's tale displays her characteristic fine writing and rich language. Imagery such as snow shining "as though there were a million miniature Christmas lights within it" conjures up the beauty of a Canadian winter, while Sal's "Play! Play what, and who with?" perfectly portrays the impatience of youth. The story

draws us into Sal's journey through time, where she meets her young grandmother, Sarah, and learns the importance of the past and its significance in the present. The narrative's only problem appears in some confusion about the mechanics of time travel: while in the past, Sal becomes convinced that she must toss the olden days coat into the back of Sarah's cutter for her "plan" to work — yet nothing in the text elaborates on this plan. Her sense of urgency is unconvincing, and Laurence never clarifies why Sal cannot simply wait for Sarah to drive away before taking off the coat. This small flaw does not ruin the story; instead, it leaves the reader pondering the mysteries of time travel and waking dreams.

Wood's new illustrations are more colourful, detailed — particularly in terms of facial expressions — and aesthetically appealing than her old ones. Certainly they complement the text better in placement and content by highlighting the action, such as where Sal's admiration of Sarah's Christmas box is accompanied by a facing full-page spread of the two girls and a close-up beneath the text of the box. Conversely, the picture of this scene in the first edition precedes the text and lacks detail. While many of the pictures in both versions share similar composition, the new ones contain more depth, and the use of gouache and pencil complement the story better than the original watercolours. The only weakness appears in Wood's uneven characterization: while Sal and Sarah are convincing, neither edition depicts Gran matching her textual description.

Gran's phrase "the past is in my mind" echoes the book's themes of time and change. While looking through the old photo album, Sal imagines having a granddaughter who finds Sal's jeans and T-shirt as amusing as Gran's striped stockings and high buttoned boots. Later, Sal realizes that while many things in life change, those that are meaningful — love, family, traditions, even language — stay the same. This is the heart of Laurence's message: the important things last and are cherished always.

*Assistant Professor of Children's Literature at Central Michigan University, Anne Hiebert Alton has published articles on children's literature and Victorian literature, and currently is editing **Little Women** for Broadview Press.*

The Taste of Summer

The Fishing Summer. Teddy Jam. Illus. Ange Zhang. Groundwood/Douglas and McIntyre, 1997. 32 pp. \$15.95. ISBN 0-88899-285-8.

The Fishing Summer is a first-person account of an eight-year-old boy's quest for independence. One summer, while visiting his uncles on the Atlantic coast, he sneaks aboard the uncles' fishing boat against his mother's wishes. Even though he ends up falling into the ocean, he has a glorious day learning to fish and wants to return the next day.

Little boys reading this story will relate to the boy's defiance of his mother. She has already lost her father and her uncle to drowning, and she wants her son to