

## WINGED WORDS, AERIAL VISIONS

**The Stone Lion.** Bill Slavin. Illus. Bill Slavin. Northern Lights Books for Children, Red Deer College Press, 1996. Unpag. \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-8895-154-3.

The eponymous lion in this dream-visionary tale set in the Middle Ages is a winged statue leaning out from a cathedral's bell-tower. Like the silversmith's apprentice who climbs upon his back, the lion longs for home, the same green fields the boy's grandmother, now dying in his distant village, had dreamt of as a girl when she, too, homesick in the cathedral town, had shared the lion's aerie. Formed by human artistry, bound to the tower with weak mortar mixed by human hands, the stone lion seeks the place where he would be no lion but a stone again, yet tells the boy a human will take him home.

In keeping with the winged creature's certainty that "nothing is forever and all things are possible under the moon," *The Stone Lion* is a gravely luminous story about a child's awakening to mutability and death and to the truth of dreams that are, like love, strong as death. Beautifully moon-washed watercolours do more than illustrate the tale; they present shifting perspectives on the boy's visionary journey home and towards maturity. For example, the last picture of him, standing at the base of the towering cathedral, and watching his grandmother and the stone lion soaring into the distance, shows the uplifted face of a young man, though in the text he remains a boy, informed the next day of his grandmother's death. The very last picture is of the locket given him by his departing grandmother, showing the winged lion engraved in the fields of their dreams.

To the book's images, verbal and visual, one is drawn again and again by the imaginative power of human artistry they acknowledge and exemplify. Suitable for children "ages five and up," *The Stone Lion* is a book children will want to revisit long past childhood.

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## A SUGARING-OFF PARTY FOR THE ENGLISH

**The Sugaring-Off Party.** Jonathan London., Illus. Gilles Pelletier. Lester Publishing, Toronto, 1995. Unpag., \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-895555-84-1.

The book is illustrated with charming, quasi-naive, paintings which emphasize a traditional folk art style. The illustrator tends to favour the darker tones of the palette, while he draws the tapestry-like compositions from a high point of view. Unfortunately, the small objects painted on seem-

