

## 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.

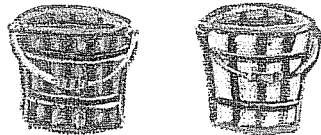
To the book's images, verbal and visual, one is drawn again and again by the imaginative power of human artistry they acknowledge and exemplify. Suitable for children "ages five and up," *The Stone Lion* is a book children will want to revisit long past childhood.

**Linda E. Marshall** is an Associate Professor of English (retired), University of Guelph, with numerous publications on medieval Latin and nineteenth-century English poetry.

## 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-





ingly coarse canvas and placed underneath the text of each page, tend to reveal the artist's limitations: the drawing appears to be careless, the colour becomes murky in most of the vignettes, while the coarse texture of the canvas support interferes with the quasi-naïve definitions of form.

*The Sugaring-Off Party* presents a modest attempt at Canadian bilingualism for young readers: twelve French phrases or words are introduced fairly evenly over twelve pages of English text. A glossary at the back lists a translation of the French. It explains that the term "Maple Sugar Moon" is called by the Abenaki Indians of southern Quebec, Maine and Vermont, "the March moon." This indirect link to the indigenous native population both in Quebec and south of the border implies to the adult that these borders dividing the Abenaki are artificial. The glossary ends with a translation of the first verse of the old French song "Alouette" into English. For those who are not aware of it, the verse is about killing a little lark by plucking off its feathers and finally its head! The inclusion of this well-known song into the book seems peculiar. Why would the author select this song for English-speaking children, a song which in the English translation will ruffle the feathers of any parent or animal rights activist?

**Jetske Sybesma**, MFA, PhD, is a professor of Art History in the Department of Art and Design at the University of Alberta.

## UNFORGETTABLE GHOSTS

**Ghost Train.** Paul Yee. Illus. Harvey Chan. Groundwood Books, 1996. Unpag. \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-257-2.

*Ghost Train*, set around the turn of the century, is about an unusual girl who paints wonderfully. Choon-yi's father, driven by poverty at home, has gone to North America to work on the railway. After two years of separation, Choon-yi