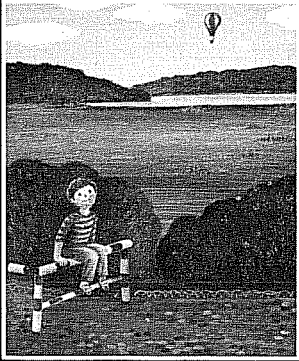


Flowers for Mom



Jirina Marton

Flowers for mom. Jirina Marton. Illus. author. Annick Press, 1991. 24 pp., \$14.95 \$4.95 cloth, paper ISBN 1-55037-155-X, 1-55037-158-4.

In *Flowers for mom*, Jirka, a solitary little boy, talks of playing in the park with friends but is always alone. He follows a bright balloon high in the sky and finds himself far away in a field of glorious flowers. Picking a bouquet for his mother, he gives the lovely blooms away to the people he encounters on his way home. Jirka manages to deflect the taunts of the big bullies in the park, who laugh at him with his blossoms, and carefully saves one rose for his mother.

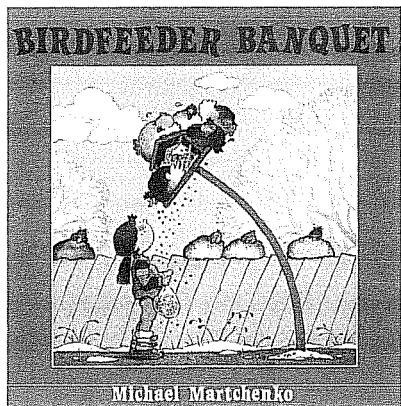
Lovingly hugged and praised for his ability to deal with a difficult situation, he cheerily settles down to a special dinner.

This a well-meant story of a sensitive boy's caring and reaching out to others. However, the awkward text (with its meandering dialogue) and didactic ending work poorly with the dreamlike illustration. While in her earlier picture book, *Midnight visit at Molly's house* (Annick 1988), Marton played with a child's fantasy world that perfectly suited her soft paintings and dreamscapes, here, in *Flowers for mom*, the practicalities of Jirka's day intrude and the dull story is a gloss on the art and not a coherent whole.

Aside from the awkward text, Marton does create a visually lovely experience. Her unusual palette of colours ranges from sombre blues and mauves to garden colours. One particularly stunning scene is framed effectively by iron work. And the book ends on a glowing note with a warm picture of Jirka and his mother suffused by golden light. One small quibble – many picture books today have striking borders and endpapers that enrich the final look. *Flowers for mom* has endpapers in a flat green and some poorly-designed pages with excessive white space. Elegant details would strengthen an evocative book of this type.

Birdfeeder banquet. Michael Martchenko. Illus. author. Annick Press, 1990. 27 pp., \$15.95 \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-55037-147-9, 1-55037-146-0.

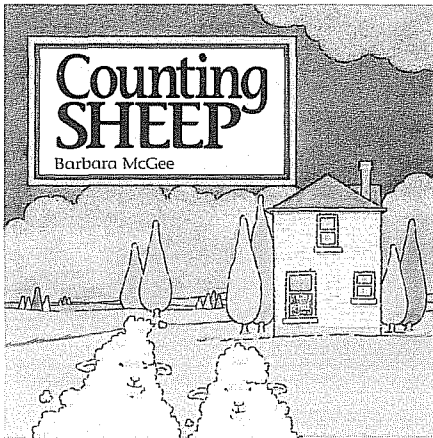
Martchenko has illustrated several successful books for Robert Munsch including *Angela's airplane* (Annick



Michael Martchenko

1988). In *Birdfeeder banquet*, Martchenko has used a similar style as Munsch's, appropriating the same word play with its repetition, exclamation and capitalization. Similarly, each page of text faces a page of illustration. However, Munsch magic is neater, tighter and more amusing. Martchenko does use action words with a sense of motion and verve. This is a noisy text replete with chirping and music but it sometimes stumbles with awkward phrasing and unlikely dialogue. The frenetic theme is enhanced by the fat soup chickens in lively poses, upside down and falling off branches, and generally committing mayhem. They are squashy, lumpy and endearing. The very peculiar dilemma is amusing, and the bumptious, big birds match this silly situation perfectly. The contrast between big and small and between a bright and lively little girl and the porridgy adults is depicted neatly. This book would be a successful read-aloud.

Counting sheep. Barbara McGee. Illus. author. Annick Press, 1991. 24 pp., \$12.95 \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-157-6, 1-55037-160-6.



Counting sheep is a soft and delicious fantasy. The scene is set with Edward in bed counting sheep so he can sleep. But "he wasn't expecting company." And wonderful, fluffy sheep float through his window and cover his quilt. They invite him out to play and when tired, they all return together to bed.

In this well-designed book, white space skillfully provides a border and a sense of inclusion in Edward's world. Window frames are cleverly used to enclose actions and to provide delineation. The sheep slip off on to the endpapers

and it appears that they've come to stay. Here, one finds the pared-down perfection of the excellent picture book. These sheep have a billowy charm and their sense of lightness and playfulness pervades the book. Every word counts in this droll and lightly drawn text and will appeal to the beginning reader while adults will appreciate the subtle humour.

Esta Pomotov, a librarian and research psychometrist, is a selection librarian for the Toronto Board of Education. Workshop presentations include "Best-stressed": Super library materials for the nineties.