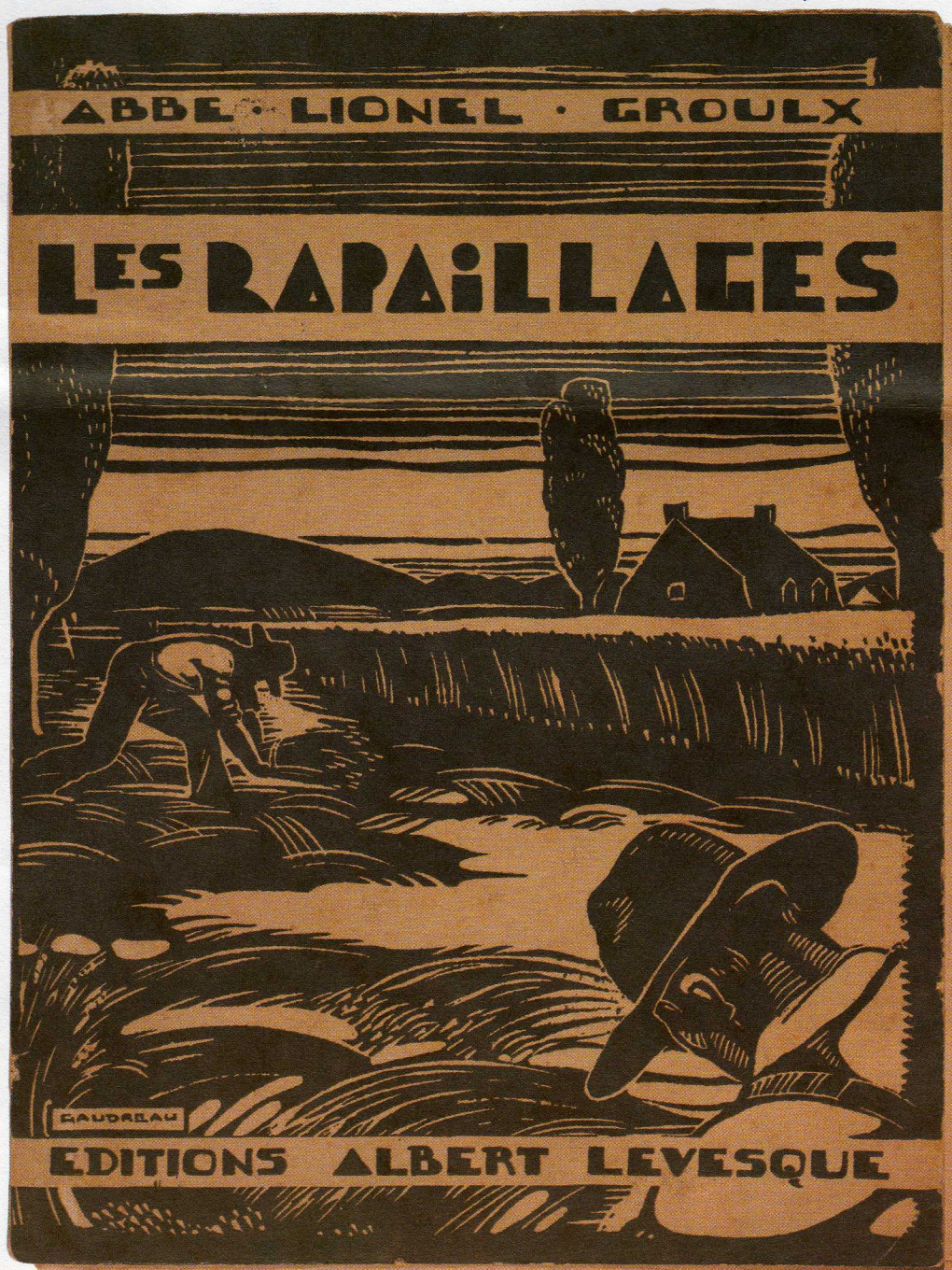


# Journal

The Illustrated Book  
in Quebec and in France (1900-1950)



By the beginning of the twentieth century, book illustration had already come to be regarded by a good many artists as a pursuit that was both creatively and financially rewarding. Art historians have barely touched the surface of this vast body of material, but it is already clear that there is much to be gained from a thorough study of it. For example, by looking at illustrated books brought into Quebec from France during the first half of this century and books illustrated by Quebec artists in the same period, we may gain a broader view of book illustration in general and also deepen our appreciation of Quebec's special contribution to the Canadian tradition in illustrated books. Furthermore, by tracing the habits and tastes of private and public collectors during this era, we may come to a better understanding of the illustrated book as a cultural phenomenon in Quebec.

The place of the modern illustrated book in the history of art appears to be well established now that art museums have acknowledged the so-called "artist's book," that collaborative effort in which the artist intuitively complements the author, while remaining free to express himself in images printed in a technique of his own choice.

Art museums might now begin to broaden their horizon and take a greater interest in the more traditional types of illustrated books. In so doing, they would certainly be fulfilling their mission to preserve and to educate. Illustrated books constitute important sources for a thorough documentation of the work of certain artists, and can also provide some insight into the sensibility of an earlier period.

Although the work of the illustrator can really only be judged by analysing the complete sequence of images that he has created for a given book, one may easily be attracted to a single image alone. In examining the formal arrangement of a page, where the lettering, layout, and illustration together suggest something that presumably reflects the text, the critical eye will instantly recognize a visual universe governed by a fairly strict aesthetic code. For example, the first illustrated edition of *Les Rapailages* (fig. 1) by Lionel Groulx, printed around 1919, has a cover picture that is immediately pleasing and also appropriate to the title. The painter Joseph-Charles Franchère has clearly adapted his anecdotal, naturalistic style, with its frequent impressionist touches, to the writer's purpose. This appears to be the case as well with Theuriet's *La Vie rustique*, illustrated by Léon Lhermitte (fig. 2), an artist undoubtedly known to Franchère. When a subsequent edition of Groulx's book was issued in 1935, its style was altered. The engraver Maurice Gaudreau gave it a modernized appearance (see cover page and fig. 13), as if deliberately to prove that the younger generation could adapt those old snippets of folk memories to the new Art Deco manner.

One might argue that book art is an "impure" art, involving as it does the collaboration of publishers and layout people in addition to illustrators and designers. Indeed the success of the book depends on the success of this collaboration. But impure as this art may be, how fascinating it is, and how revealing of the powers of creation.

Although a number of exhibitions of "artist's books" have been organized by museums and by libraries having a special interest in rare books, mass-distribution illustrated books have still not received the attention they deserve. We know that countless books of this sort have, over the years, been tossed out as scrap; in most cases they were simply too

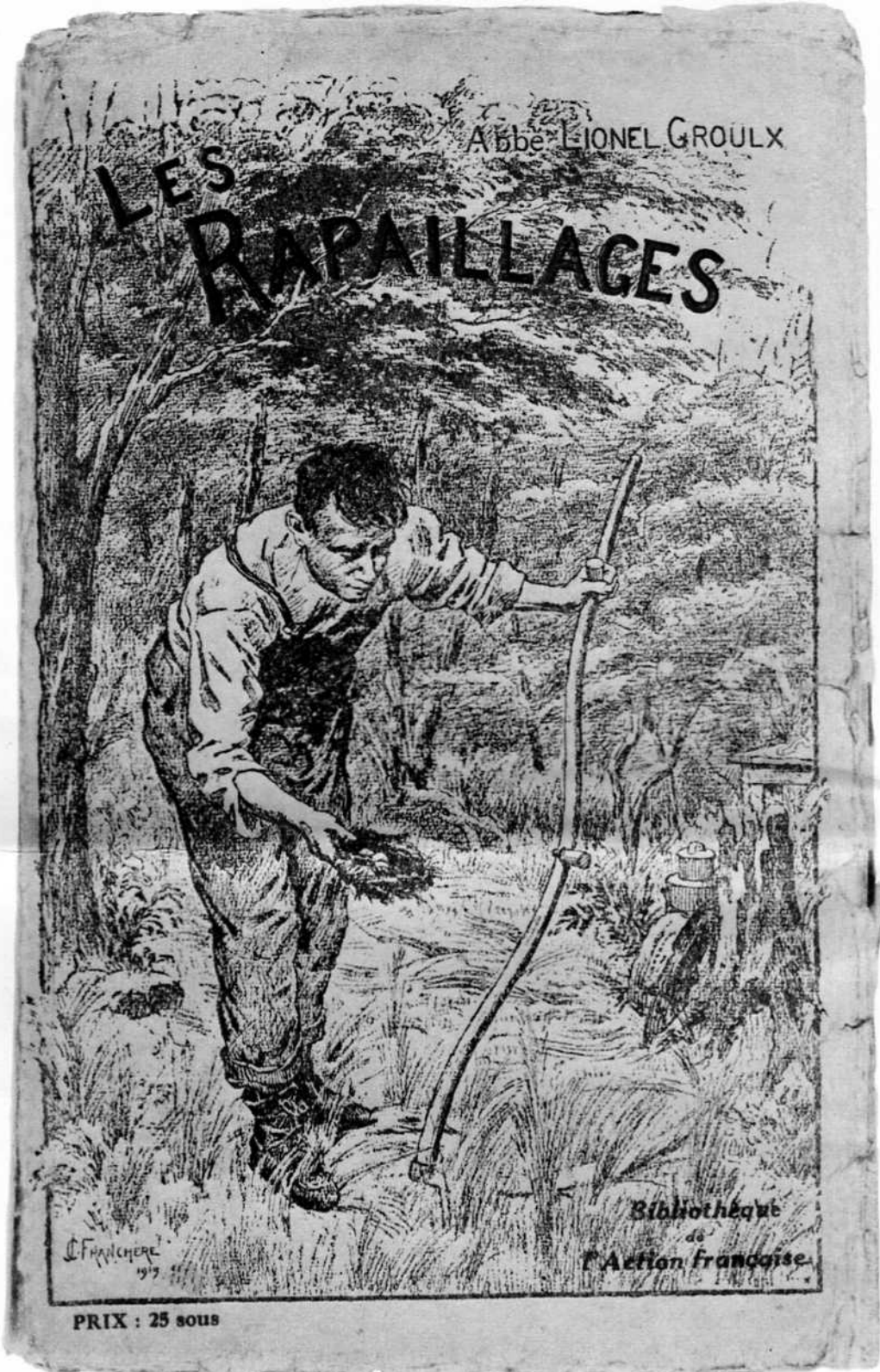


Fig. 1 Joseph-Charles Franchère (1866–1921), cover for *Les Rapailages* by Abbé Lionel Groulx (Montreal: Bibliothèque de l'Action française, 1916 [1919 edition?]). Charcoal drawing, relief printing. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



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J'espérais n'évoquant plus son vif air qu'avec haine. Elle s'en voulait de sa propre faiblesse. Avec apparence à ce parent... En recevant tous les deux ou trois jours une lettre ou se glissant, parait des amoncelés paternels et de tendres remontrances, quelque souvenir des heures saines, le vague espoir d'un rapprochement... Elle ne passait dans cet insupportable point que des années de rancune et de soif. Elle regrettait de ne pas avoir auprès d'elle son oncle, dont elle aimait les parlements où on la raillait cruellement de ses bonnes fortunes. Aux lettres succédaient des cartes postales avec messages de son, pour faire croire aux camarades et aux domestiques qu'elle était venue d'avec; Mais après une nuit blanche, Malin et valet. On leur a dit sans aller remettre Malin, n'oubliez pas de lui apporter une valise de

Fig. 4 Guy Arnoux (known 1920-1951), illustration (p. 97) for *Maxime* by Henri Duvernois (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1927). Woodcut and electrotype. Private collection.

Fig. 2 Léon Lhermitte (1844-1925), frontispiece for *La Vie rustique* by André Theuriet (Paris: La Librairie Artistique H. Launette et Cie, 1888). Woodcut by Clément Bellenger after the drawing. National Library of Canada, Ottawa.

les longues promenades. Au départ, sa mère, en l'embrassant, lui a recommandé de se distraire, de se mêler à la foule, de profiter du voyage pour refaire ses forces.

— Je prierai Dieu trois fois le jour pour qu'il ne t'arrive rien de mal, a-t-elle ajouté.

Le jeune homme ne connaît personne dans la cohue mondaine. A qui parlera-t-il, et qui lui parlera? On le coudoie, on le bouscule, comme s'il était un meuble. Partout autour de lui, on babille, on rit, on s'amuse. Cette gaieté, ce débaillement, l'intimide et le scandalisent. Les jeunes filles à démarche leste, au regard provocant, aux jambes bien fuselées, le croisent sans le regarder, parce qu'il est blême et triste. Des hommes entrent par groupes dans le bar, s'abreuvent, chantent des airs grivois. "Personne ici, se dit-il, ne songe à ses fins dernières". Puis cette question: "Comment peuvent-ils trouver du bonheur dans ces grossières réjouissances?" Le mot "bonheur" le frappe singulièrement. Que signifie ce mot terrible et doux, qui ne représente, semble-t-il, rien de réel, en ce monde, et auquel chacun voue un culte, d'un bout à l'autre de la terre? Le bonheur! Le bonheur!...

La veille, peu après le démarrage du paquebot, Sébastien a vu des femmes en décolleté et des hommes en habit se diriger vers une grande salle d'où une musique endiablée jaillissait à



Fig. 3 Maurice Gaudreau (1907-1980), illustration (p. 37) for *Sébastien Pierre* by Jean-Charles Harvey (Lévis Les Éditions du Quotidien, 1935). Linocut. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

common to be appreciated, and rarely attracted the attention of collectors. Today they are in low demand and mostly ignored by the public, or at best treated no differently than any ordinary book. Public libraries gladly dispose of them at their annual sales. Examples of such unappreciated books are those illustrated by Maurice Gaudreau (fig. 3) in Quebec City and Guy Arnoux (fig. 4) in Paris. It would be a pity if we were to lose all trace of works such as these, for their illustrations reflect in many ways the spirit of an age.

Fortunately, there has always existed a small minority of bibliophiles who cared for these books. Indeed it is interesting to try to identify these people and form some notion of how they went about collecting. More often than not, it is through a chance reading of old letters or through one of those library inventories prepared by meticulous archivists that the image of the individual book collector gradually emerges. Second-hand bookshops also reward patient research with significant discoveries: bookplates and dedications, if not autographs, that reveal stories of purchases and of borrowings (not to mention thefts) from institutional and private libraries.

We know that the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice in Montreal had, since the turn of the century, been especially careful to acquire fine illustrated books on a regular basis. We also know that during the twenties Abbé Olivier Maurault (at one time the director of the Bibliothèque) and several of his painter, sculptor, and writer friends were familiar with the work of illustrators such as Maurice Denis and Jacques Beltrand (fig. 5) and were particularly fond of the work of Paul Baudier and Raphaël Drouart. In the following decades, the graphic arts teacher Simone Hudon in Quebec City conveyed to all her students her admiration for one of the leading figures of Art Deco, the illustrator Edy-Legrand (fig. 6). This discerning minority did not look down on fine works just because they were mass-produced.

Quebec's publishing houses - Déom, Carrier, and then, shortly after 1925, Albert Lévesque - won for themselves a public just as faithful as that of the French publishers Arthème Fayard and J. Ferenczi, who were soon to flood the illustrated-book market with their *Livre de demain* and *Livre moderne illustré* series. In Montreal, around 1945, there was a noticeable resurgence of interest in artist's books illustrated by such figures as Pellan, Mousseau, and Daudelin. And Montreal collectors like Joseph Barcelo and Gérard Beaulieu took an interest in works such as Matta's *Arcane 17* (Brentano's, 1944), Rouault's *Le cirque de l'étoile filante* (Vollard, 1938), Matisse's *Jazz* (Tériade, 1947), and Léger's *Le cirque* (Tériade, 1949).

The juxtaposition of illustrated books from Quebec and from France can be quite revealing. By drawing a comparison in terms of iconography and style, we are able to see the many links that emerge at each stage of Quebec's cultural and artistic development.

Without actually naming influences in every case, one can easily see that the Canadian illustrators represented in this exhibition have adopted visual devices used by European artists before them. Take, for example, Henri Beaulac's little linocut vignette (fig. 7), in the style of an open composition, for Dr Panneton's book *Dans le bois*, and compare it with Raoul Dufy's woodcut (fig. 8) for the August calendar picture in the 1917 *Almanach des Lettres et des Arts*. The image of the fisherman with his pole has about it something quintessential of the early twentieth century. Even though one picture is slightly more



De frère Bernard  
de Quinteval, premier compagnon de saint François.



Le premier compagnon de saint François fut frère Bernard d'Assise, lequel se convertit en cette manière. Étant saint François encore en habit séculier, bien que déjà il eût méprisé le monde, & allant tout dépité & mortifié par la pénitence, à tant que de moult était réputé stupide, & comme fou honni & chassé à coups de pierres & avec fangeux outrages par ses parents & par les étrangers, & lui en toutes injures & moqueries passant patiemment, comme sourd & muet : monsieur Bernard d'Assise, lequel était des plus nobles & riches & sages de la cité, com-

Fig. 5 Maurice Denis (1870-1943) and Jacques Beltrand (1874-?), illustration (p. 3) for *Les petites fleurs de saint François d'Assise* by André Pératé (Paris: Jacques Beltrand, 1913). Woodcut by Jacques Beltrand and his brothers after the gouache. From *Art et Décoration* XI (July-December 1921), p. 131.



Fig. 7 Henri Beaulac (b. 1914), illustration (p. 77) for *Dans les bois* by Sylvain [pen name of Antoine Panneton] (Trois-Rivières: les Éditions Trifluviennes, 1940). Linocut. National Gallery of Canada.

