

Trudeau: La Vie en Rose

George A. Walker

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Trudeau's personality and charisma leap from these pages.

Pierre Trudeau made an indelible mark on Canadian history as its longtime prime minister in the 1970s and 80s, and George A. Walker encapsulates the famous statesman's life in a series of stark woodcuts compiled in the graphic novel *Trudeau: La Vie en Rose*.

The Porcupine's Quill has championed the undeservedly obscure art of the wordless graphic novel, having previously published several similar works by Walker, as well as Steven McCabe, Jarrett Heckbert, and others. *Trudeau*, like the other books, can stand solely on its illustrations without any text at all—including an excerpt from current prime minister Justin Trudeau's eulogy for his father upon the latter's death in 2000, and a preface by Canadian literature professor George Elliott Clarke, both of which precede Walker's series of black-and-white woodcuts.

Such an images-only approach gives broad impressions of Trudeau, and is surprisingly effective, thanks to Walker's careful selection of important and visually striking moments from Trudeau's life. A simple image of the Maple Leaf flag, flying just above Canada's former flag—the Canadian Red Ensign, with its echoes of Great Britain—tells all that's needed about the emergence of Canadian identity, but also provides an emotional impact that a thousand words couldn't convey. When the typically clean-shaven Trudeau suddenly appears with a beard, it immediately imparts a sense of weariness, the toll of fierce political fighting. A woodcut of Paul Rose, a leader of the Quebec nationalist movement, invokes the fleur-de-lis, a longtime symbol of Quebec, and conveys a general sense of anger without spelling out details.

Particularly for non-Canadians, these images provide a penetrating sense of Trudeau and his times, but sometimes sacrifice thorough comprehension. Thus, Walker features not only the previously mentioned text, but also a written addendum, providing context and additional insight into the woodcuts. These brief components flesh out the biography nicely, though as Tom Smart, author and curator of the Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives, writes, "Trudeau grasped the potential of emblematic actions and attitudes," making the star of this biography Trudeau himself.

La Vie en Rose translates roughly as "life through rose-colored glasses," and it's hard to imagine a better subject for a wordless biography than the effervescent and optimistic Pierre Trudeau. Sticking his tongue out, sliding down a banister, pirouetting behind Queen Elizabeth II, or shaking hands with dignitaries and celebrities, Trudeau's personality and charisma leap from these pages. Infused by his energy and Walker's skill, *Trudeau: La Vie en Rose* proves a resounding success.

PETER DABBENE (July 12, 2016)

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