

confusing and muddy streets of Montreal, on the ox-cart going to Lachine, in the canoe on the Mattawa River, and in the bustling Great Hall in the stockaded post of Grand Portage (a map of the journey would have been useful and interesting). Readers will also feel that they have been adventurous in finishing a "chapter book" of over 100 pages, which has taken them over the rapids of rivers, through the fog and bugs, and away from treacherous and evil adults. However, the "bright paddles" that symbolize the journey are perhaps a little too bright to be easily accepted by all readers.

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Around the World in One Campfire

Ghostwise: A Book of Midnight Stories. Ed. Dan Yashinsky. Ragweed, 1997. 223 pp. \$14.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-66-7. *At the Edge: A Book of Risky Stories.* Ed. Dan Yashinsky. Ragweed, 1998. 254 pp. \$ paper. ISBN 0-921556-74-8.

Canadian-based storytellers commit their dramatic tales to text in *Ghostwise: A Book of Midnight Stories*, edited by Dan Yashinsky. As well as originating in the oral tradition, each story seeks to teach a message through the use of a supernatural element or paranormal occurrence. Many of the stories achieve the right degree of mystification to intrigue readers and to provoke an unsettling state of spookiness. However, none is truly frightening despite the introductory warning.

More aptly, many of the stories detail the wistful collision of spirits from other realms with the utterly mundane, the here and now. Tellers use humour in many of the pieces to help make a moral point or to ensure a lesson is learned. Still others, particularly those included in the section "Reaching Across," reel with an unearthly sadness. In "Ma Yarwood's Wedding Ring," Rita Cox tells a story in which a murder and robbery is avenged by the victim's deceased husband. The two spirits collaborate in order to recapture their stolen wedding ring as a demonstration of their enduring love for one another.

In each of the five loosely-themed sections there exists a mix of fable, urban legend, fairy and pourquoi tale. In addition, the telling or writing styles vary so greatly from one piece to another that at times it is difficult to make thematic connections and the overall feel is somewhat disjointed. Ironic as it may be, the book's strength ultimately lies in its diversity. Stories from different cultures and times give the anthology rich appeal. Among the most noteworthy are those told in distinctive voice with regional dialects, direct colloquial speech and a rhythmic pattern of language through repetition and rhyme. Vivid characterization of Stanley Sparkes's narrator in "The Two Tom Cats," for example, entices the reader with its urgent and conspiratorial nature: "One night, when the squids were in, we boys were down on the beach with a fire" (59). This authentic oral style translates well to the page and incites the imagination of listener and reader alike.

At the Edge, Yashinsky's more recent collection, is a similar project but with

more cohesion throughout. Yashinsky's introduction is itself a story wherein he contextualizes the motivation behind the project and the role these written texts play in the history of the oral tradition. Further, he addresses some of the questions that surface when traditionally told stories are converted to print media. He sets the mood and equips the reader for a better appreciation of the written texts and of their less tangible lives, of language and memory, off the page. Why write what is intended to be spoken aloud to a live audience? Why interrupt the generational flow of story by confining one version to the printed page? Yashinsky urges us to "think of this book as a way-station, a temporary shelter for the stories as they move from one voice to the next" (6-7). He encourages readers to put aside the book and retell the stories by candlelight or, better yet, around a cozy campfire.

The contributors' bios and comments reveal further mysteries in both story collections. These end passages are significant for it is here that one learns the original source for each tale. Most of the storytellers cite an oral source, crediting the people and traditions from which the stories come. Others refer to written texts and point out unique aspects of their particular telling of a tale. Each tells the story of how he or she found the tale that is included in the book. Many tell a further story about the oral tradition in their distinct communities or in the communities which nurtured the original tale. Each layer of storytelling works to better frame both collections.

"Storytelling is to awaken the mind," writes contributor Johnny Moses in his bio at the back of *Ghostwise*. "It is a powerful way to teach children because it develops their imagination and different views of the world" (217). From Native Elders to renowned urban performers to rural travellers and mystics, both collections boast a stellar line-up. Their love and respect for the oral tradition equals that of the editor and makes for good reading and even better telling, for children or adults.

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The Trouble with Nature

Kit: The Adventures of a Raccoon. Shirley Woods. Illus. Celia Godkin. Groundwood/Douglas and McIntyre, 1999. 96 pp. \$18.95, \$7.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88899-375-7, 0-88899-376-5.

Shortly before sitting down to write this review I went out to feed the chickens. During the night a raccoon had pried apart a gap in the pen and killed and partly eaten a mother hen and her six newly-hatched chicks. As every keeper of poultry knows, raccoons are phenomenally skilled infiltrators of nearly any structure housing hens or young chicks. They are also one of Nature's serial killers, killing (as do many domestic dogs and cats) as readily for sport as for food.