

Ephraim Weber and George MacMillan. The photographs (over 400), many of them Montgomery's own, are one of its outstanding features, although the layout can be hard on the eyes if one is reading it from cover to cover. The editors have attempted to give *The Album* the appearance of an old-fashioned scrapbook (see pages 113-117 for excellent reproductions of pages of Montgomery's own scrapbooks), but on one page (179) text has been lost by placing a picture directly over the words.

Despite its many idiosyncrasies, this coffee table album with its new information on Montgomery's schooling, friendships, letter-writing, journals, photography, and family life will have something to offer every reader. Of particular significance is the fact that among the many voices the reader of this album is privileged to hear, Montgomery's own voice predominates.

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### Unlikely, Uneven, Yet Readable

*Lucy Maud and Me.* Mary Frances Coady. Beach Holme, 1999. 120 pp. \$8.95. paper. ISBN 0-88878-398-1.

I expected *Lucy Maud and Me* to be a fictional biography that would water down and sweeten Montgomery's journals to fit into twelve-year-old Laura's story. When I discovered that Montgomery herself — Mrs. Macdonald of wartime Toronto of the early spring of 1940 — was going to tell Laura about her life, I was even more sceptical.

By the time I finished the book, I actually wished that Montgomery could have had just such a little girl appear in her very last earthly week to cheer her by "bringing spring back into my life" (119).

Watered down and sweetened, this story is not. It may be too compressed, but not with joy. We see deranged Ewan Macdonald through a crack in the door, and we hear him moaning. At the end, the maid bluntly tells Laura that Mr. Macdonald has "gone crazy" (112). Laura's grandfather tries to explain to Laura some of "poor Maud's" unhappiness, even registering that it could not have been easy for her to have lived with a man who did not value her writing and may have resented being in her shadow.

Coady's picture of Montgomery is sometimes unconvincing. At first Mrs. Macdonald is gruff and rude. But within minutes, the brusque, impatient Maud beams: "well, to use a phrase you might be familiar with — I think you're a 'kindred spirit'" (29). Would discrete Mrs. Macdonald, who hid her husband's bouts of illness from two congregations, really have said so offhandedly to Laura:

'Oh, I'm sure there are all kinds of rumours about my poor husband. He's a minister, you know. He no longer preaches, but his mind still churns dreadfully. He has a mental illness, Laura, and it can't be helped. It's a terrible thing to live with, for him and for me as well.' (35)

Some of Coady's descriptions are troublesome. For example, to describe a weary Montgomery resting from gardening, she says: "She plopped down onto her knees beside the back step" (50).

Yet despite the press of biographical details, the unlikely confessionism, the oddly jarring descriptors, Mary Frances Coady has written an interesting story. For the young reader, *Lucy Maud and Me* offers a quick and readable view of Montgomery's suffering and her triumphs. The scenes in Montgomery's library are worth reading. The wartime frame story about Laura's family is good.

Perhaps the best praise for the book is that I wanted it to have been true. The story made me want to believe that Montgomery desperately but generously shared glimpses of her past with a very young girl whose kindness and youth brought comfort as they reminded her of so many of her own heroines and memories.

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### It's a Mystery

*The Enchanted Horses.* Chrystine Brouillet. Ragweed, 1996. 99 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-63-2. *No Orchids for Andrea.* Chrystine Brouillet. Ragweed, 1996. 87 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-62-4. *Aliens in the Basement.* Suzan Reid. Scholastic Canada, 1997. 83 pp. \$4.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-12392-0. *A Ghost in the Attic.* Suzan Reid. Scholastic Canada, 1998. 105 pp. \$4.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-03867-2.

Young readers adore mystery novels and prefer a dash of magic and fantasy added to the mixture for spice. These uncomplicated and pleasant stories serve as a respite from the realities of today. These youngsters are undemanding and willing to accept desperate plots, unbelievable incidents and assorted inconsistencies. Still, as educators we must look carefully at this vast output and choose the best.

Chrystine Brouillet, a young Quebec author, writes for both children and adults and has won many awards for her body of work. Several young adult books have been successfully translated into English. With this background of quality, one would expect well-plotted, exciting novels. The excitement is there, but the detail is blurred. A strength of her novels is the appealing pair of detectives, Andrea and Arthur. Our apprentice investigators are best friends and equals and treat each other with affection and respect.