

the force of abstract and universal evil into the contemporary context. This universalizing aspect of myth may provide people with a philosophical concept of evil, but the historical thrust of the text would seem to demand political solutions to what is represented not as an abstract form of evil, but rather a complex social and political problem. While Kushner draws relevant connections between the current genocide in Central America and similar actions in Canadian history, by relating these injustices to the universalizing force of myth, he seems to suggest that evil is abstract and inevitable, a message that young readers may find fatalistic and depressing despite the novel's happy ending.

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### A SPIRITUAL QUEST

**Dance of the Snow Dragon.** Eileen Kernaghan. Thistledown Press Ltd., 1995. 325 pp., \$7.95 paper. ISBN 1-895449-41-3.

This book, set in eighteenth-century Bhutan, is based on Tibetan Buddhist accounts of the mystical journey to Shambhala, beyond the furthest snow peaks. Kernaghan uses the narrative of the quest to shape her story. The protagonist, Sangay Tenzing, chosen as a young child to become a monk at the prestigious White Leopard Dzong begins his physical and spiritual journey at eight years of age. After years of daily religious lessons and physical labour endured by all *gaylongs* (novices), Sangay learns that he will never become one of the sacred dancers, something he has always yearned for. Now thirteen, he can see in his mind's eye the complexities of the ritual dances and even compose new ones, but his feet cannot follow his heart or head.

Unsure of his chosen path, Sangay retreats to a hermitage to meditate for 100 days. There he has a vision of a wondrous kingdom headed by a besieged and dying king. And he knows that only when the True Dance of the Gods is performed will Shambhala and everything else he holds dear be saved. Sangay's quest is to travel to this far-off land to witness the dance/battle. On his journey, Sangay meets with a female *lung-gom-pas* (sorcerer-lama) and joins forces with her to complete his quest. On their travels they encounter many physical difficulties as well as spiritual challenges embodied by demons and ghosts. Once at Shambhala, Sangay, using the magic he learned from the sorceress, creates a new dance that releases the spell-bound king and all his minions. Once the barbarians are driven from the land, a final test reveals that Sangay is a *tuklu* — an incarnation of a great Tibetan hero. But his journeys are not ended; now he is to become a life-long seeker of knowledge and wisdom.

This is an extremely detailed, beautifully written novel. Like all good quest stories, the protagonist encounters increasingly difficult challenges on his journey to the ultimate goal. The goal, of course, in young adult novels is the

maturation of the hero. The hero, who starts out alone and alienated, ends up with either the strength of character to rise above that disability or else s/he wins the main prize — a sense of belonging. Kernaghan does not quite achieve this part of the formula. The adventures are so episodic that there is no time for reflection or character development. Sangay clearly grows in spiritual strength but we learn very little of the teenager's hopes, fears, and desires. It is difficult to imagine why an adolescent of the '90s would pick up this book. The hero's problems are so foreign to today's young that they would have little to learn. And while young adults would vehemently deny reading to "learn" anything, it is certain that when they do read they search for a commonality with the protagonist as a way to problem-solve in their own lives. Buddhist rituals, lore, and devices are not explained — making it difficult for someone from the Western world to understand the significance of the imagery. Having said all of that, Kernaghan's use of poetic language to describe (but not explain) the mysticism is superb. A reader with a knowledge of Buddhism and/or Tibet may find this book fascinating but others may find it difficult.

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## AGAINST THE ODDS

**Against the Odds: Tales of Achievement.** L.M. Montgomery. Ed. Rea Wilmshurst. McClelland & Stewart, 1993. 246 pp., \$24.99 cloth. ISBN 0-7710-6172-2.

When a fiction writer today needs to boost her bank account, she might write ad copy for a while, or try her hand at technical writing. When L.M. Montgomery found herself with bills to pay, she wrote short stories and poems. The thriving periodical market of turn-of-the-century North America had a greedy appetite, and in her career Montgomery published more than 500 pieces of short fiction. Seventeen of them are gathered together in *Against the Odds: Tales of Achievement*, editor Rea Wilmshurst's fifth thematic collection of Montgomery's magazine stories.

In her journals, Montgomery disparaged these quickly-spun tales, and in some ways we can understand why: with their formulaic plotting and predictable endings, they are likely to disappoint readers expecting the sophistication of her more satisfying novels. Still, not all writers possess skill enough to master a formula — Montgomery did. These stories, published between 1896 ("In Spite of Myself") and 1934 ("Where There Is a Will There Is a Way"), show the hand of a polished, professional storyteller. We can see what appealed to the magazine editors and readers of Montgomery's day: crisply-drawn characters anchored in specific, earthy landscapes. When the stories become tedious, the blame may lie not with the works themselves, but with the editorial decision to lump 17 similar tales together.