

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.

By publishing these stories thematically — in each, Wilmshurst notes in her introduction, “people conquer the obstacles to their dreams and ambitions” — our attention is unfortunately drawn to the ways in which Montgomery lucratively recycled her ideas and plots. The stories are less successful piled together than they might have been separately.

That said, there are distinct advantages for the *student* of Montgomery’s work to this type of arrangement. It becomes clear, for example, that, had the choice been hers, Montgomery might well have preferred the world to be governed by meritocracy. Worthy, talented people (young women particularly) are held back in each one of these stories by unfair power structures and restrictive social norms — in Montgomery’s fiction, if not in her life, those hierarchies are set up only to be gleefully ripped down.

It is now well documented that a major thrust of Montgomery’s *œuvre* is to give a voice to society’s disempowered and marginalized — the *caveat* being, for this woman so precisely aware of social status and the benefits of good breeding, that people must earn that voice by dint of hard work and virtuous nature. Thus the frustrated old maid of “The Genesis of the Doughnut Club,” one of the strongest and most complex stories in this collection, is allowed her acid-like comments about the older brother who sought to starve her soul and trivialize her existence. (There are powerful sexual overtones to this story, too, with scenes of food preparation that bring to mind the sensual Danish film *Babette’s Feast*.) Thus orphan Gordon proves his repressive old aunt wrong in “Where There Is a Will There Is a Way,” a story rich with echoes of *Jane Eyre*. Thus the old, wealthy, and powerful watch helplessly as the tables are repeatedly turned on them by the young, poor, and pure of heart. Because Montgomery accomplishes this with deft humour and wicked subtlety, these battles make for a lively spectator sport.

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#### OUR GHOSTLY CO-HABITANTS: THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN

**The Warnings.** Margaret Buffie. Illus. Michael Conway. Kids Can Press, 1994. 245 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-251-5; **The Unseen: Scary Stories Selected by Janet Lunn.** Lester Publishing Limited, 1994. 171 pp., \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-895555-42-6.

In *The Warnings*, Margaret Buffie’s fifteen-year-old heroine, Rachel MacCaw, has problems with the spirit world, *and* with the real world. As a “sensitive,” one who possesses the gift of second sight, Rachel must deal with ghosts, ghostly warnings, physically aggressive shadows and disembodied voices. Rachel’s other problems include an absentee mother, and a sudden change of environment when her father sells the family farm and drives into Winnipeg, dumping an