

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

angry Rachel onto batty old Aunt Irene.

Irene MacCaw lives in a mouldering old house with a group of eccentric, equally batty acquaintances, whom Rachel dubs "the Fossils." Once each Fossil has been identified and name-tagged, the reader is swept up into a supernaturally-based family feud between the forces of good and evil. Since this feud affects *all* members of the Gregor/MacCaw clan, in spirit and in living form, it must be resolved.

Rachel is a believable young heroine, one whose towering rage over her sense of parental betrayal almost ignites the pages. Will Lennox, an inquisitive young neighbour, serves as a sounding board, asking the questions the reader needs answers for, and also, as a love interest for Rachel. Encouraged by the Fossils and Will's affection, Rachel gradually frees herself from the destructive anger threatening to isolate her, thereby increasing her vulnerability, leaving her easy prey to the evil Dunstan Gregor's machination.

Despite the spooky nature of the subject, Buffie's book sparkles, stitched together as it is with deft touches of humour, catching the reader with unexpected jolts and dollops of surprise and delight. Buffie has woven a rich historical texture into the background of her novel, stitching in details of everyday reality, including "mouldy dishrags" and "the stink of burned meat and boiled cabbage."

Within this domestic cauldron, the food, cooked and served up by Gladys, one of the Fossils, is simply awful, absolutely inedible. Buffie, however, has whipped up a remarkably palatable novel, set within the confines of this spooky old house in mid-town Winnipeg. Her wildly assorted cast of Dickensian eccentrics band together with the ghostly John MacCaw, "the entire Gregor clan, stretching back in time," which includes Dunstan's sister, Bethia, the three living MacCaws and Will Lennox. Together, they settle, with sure and sound dispatch, the fate of the evil, ghostly Dunstan Gregor. At least, for the present ...

*The Unseen*, Janet Lunn's selection of scary stories, deals with the supernatural in a more serious vein. *The Unseen* includes a variety of genres: poetry, short stories, and fascinating re-tellings of Canadian folklore, mythology and legend. Ghosts, seen and unseen, fill the pages of both books. Yet, even when these ghosts *are* seen, their inability to actually *fill* space, or to continue to fill space for any appreciable length of time, slips them straight back into the "unseen" variety.

*The Unseen* also provides a wider range of examples of ghostly and ghost-ridden situations. Within these stories and poems, ghosts, glimpsed briefly, or not at all, have the facility, the dreamlike quality of fading into silence and empty space, existing, finally, only in mind and memory. Jean Brien's story about the girl in the rose-coloured shawl, Joyce Barkhouse's Annie Copeland and Janet Lunn's Webster are just a few examples that fall within this group.

The little girl in the rose shawl *was* there, but she vanished. Annie Copeland sat and wept by the fire, dived into the icy water off Sable Island, returned, then disappeared again. Webster is *never* actually seen. Just the physical evidence of his presence is revealed, but, as almost all of these stories, poems and narratives point out, the legitimate needs of these ghosts, for example, Webster's, Annie Copeland's, and those of the spirits of the railway in Paul Yee's moving story,

must be respected — and, if possible, restored, especially, if the living wish to co-exist in harmony with this unseen world and its ghostly inhabitants, who from time to time *appear* to become brief co-habitants of *our* world.

The ghost in Tim Wynne-Jones's haunting short story, "The Clearing" goes even further. "Go home!" this ghost tells Ben when Ben tries to befriend him. Whether seen or unseen, these spirits must go back to their own world, once their wishes have been fulfilled, or past injustices or injuries, have been resolved.

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#### MIXED MESSAGES: GOOD STORIES THAT FALL SHORT

**Blue.** James Heneghan. Scholastic Canada, 1991. 140 pp., \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-74044-X. **Four-Eyes and French Fries.** Mary Blakeslee. General Paperbacks, 1991. 130 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-77536-7296-6. **Gallop for Gold.** Sharon Siamon. Illus. Frances Clancey. James Lorimer & Co., 1992. 156 pp., \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-380-4. **Grandpa's Alkali.** Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet. Red Deer College Press, 1993. 96 pp., \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-096-2. **Oliver's Wars.** Budge Wilson. Stoddart, 1992. 101 pp., \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-7737-5508-X. **The Best of Arlie Zack.** H.J. Hutchins. Illus. Ruth Ohi. Annick Press, 1993. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-315-3. **The Firefighter.** Bernice Thurman Hunter. Scholastic, 1991. 161 pp., \$4.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-74051-2. **Riptide!** Marion Crook. Stoddart, 1992. 106 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7362-8. **Where the Sky Begins.** Jill Creighton. Illus. Sue Harrison. Annick Press, 1992. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-270-X.

These novels are at one level successful in providing young readers with some sort of useful message about growing up. They are consistently realistic about the problems of young people, even in those novels that use elements of the fantastic, and for the most part they are successful in their ambition of providing good reading and sound values. Fiction can, however, teach in more than one way, and when one looks at these novels as a group, one discovers a disturbing pattern in the way girls and women are treated.

All these novels are concerned with adolescent growth and change. Budge Wilson's *Oliver's Wars* and Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet's *Grandpa's Alkali* focus on the difficulties young people have relating to the elderly, in both cases cantankerous grandfathers, while Mary Blakeslee's *Four-Eyes and French Fries* and James Heneghan's *Blue* are concerned with the problems of adolescents who, having lost a parent, must come to grips with the remaining parent's new partner. A variation on this theme is H.J. Hutchins's *The Best of Arlie Zack*, which deals with problems of reconciliation with a father who abandoned his family. Bernice Thurman Hunter's *The Firefighter* is also about reconciliation, only in this case about a young boy who is an orphan and who must learn to adjust to living with