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# Book Reviews

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**Ghost Stories and Legends of Prince Edward Island** by Julie Watson. Willowdale, Ontario: Hounslow Press, 1988. 177 pp. (13 illus.), \$12.95, paperback.

*Ghost Stories and Legends of Prince Edward Island* is a very modest effort to capture and present some of those things in the Island's attic that go bump in the night — plus some other stuff. Probably even the most realistic among us love a good fright, and this handsomely produced book beckons us to spend an hour or two among the shadows of things that may or may not have been. Professional photographer John C. Watson (the author's son) provides the windswept tarn and gorgeously Gothic twilight for the cover, and the equally compelling illustrations within, numbering (necessarily, we should think in such cases) *thirteen*.

But there are three false steps before we plunge finally into "The Creation of the World" — a topic for which we might not have expected so many antecedents. The first, an "Introduction," re-states the increasingly popular assertion that Canadian history is *not* dull, and serves notice that we will be dealing not only with things of the mists, but also with the more palpable "citizenry of the province." Personally, we found this mildly disappointing — hedging upon the title's promise and, worse, a dark augury that we might all

fall into more of the sort of antiquarian anecdote and apocrypha that characterizes so much of our Island's "historical" record.

In a second false step, "The Beginning," the author relates the personal circumstances that gave rise to the writing of the present volume, and we are properly warned not to take untruth and exaggeration too seriously. Fair enough, but alas.

The third false step, "An Early History," is an attempt to provide some "background" to the legends and tales contained in the collection. But what is needed is more than yet another general overview of Island history. What is needed is *specific* background introducing *each* of the widely variant entries. Of this there is tantalizingly little — a further quarrel with the book's editor rather than with the author.

With these pitfalls behind us, "The Creation of the World" introduces a handful of charming legends, the story of Mineota, La Belle Marie, Glooscap, Minegoo, and others — part of our Native inheritance and always worth the re-telling. Again, while there are references to immediate sources for many of the tales, our own instincts yearn for more complete bibliographic information (especially with the Micmac culture having a written language). But Julie Watson is laying no claim to having written a history, nor to rigorous

scholarship. She has done what she set out to do: to lure us into exciting realms, whetting our appetite, in the process, for far more serious investigation.

From the legends we move into phantoms and tales of other apparitions that are suspiciously less ethereal. These include not only the burning schooner, the ghost of Binstead, the ghostly miller of Clyde River, and the bell-ringers of the Kirk of St. James, but also, some plain old everyday problems like having one's horse fall through the ice, the pilfering of the Great Seal of Prince Edward Island, ice boat hazards, and seacoast marauders.

Apart from having to digest phrases like, "Thaw, however, was a culprit which never failed to invade the ice..." (p. 147), Yogi Berra-isms like, "Reports became so weird that many were never reported" (p. 164), and ephemeral documentation, such as, "At least one ship, *City of Charlottetown*, a corvette, was torpedoed in the Gulf, according to fishermen in East Point who were told about it by a Mountie" (p. 164) — or maybe *because* of such quirks — *Ghost Stories and Legends of Prince Edward Island* is a fun evening of "trick or treat." Nor does it purport to be anything more.

David Kellum

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**Akin to Anne**, by L. M. Montgomery, edited by Rea Wilmhurst. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988. 256 pp. \$16.95, hardcover.

The writings of L. M. Montgomery are becoming like the widow's curse — destined never to run dry. *Akin to Anne* represents yet another complement to the numerous editions and adaptations

of her work available to her many readers. It is, according to its jacket copy, "the first in a series of re-discovered stories to be collected in book form." Since the collection was chosen from among almost 400 stories previously published in journals or magazines, the series' continuation would seem inevitable.

Published by McClelland and Stew-

art and edited by Rea Wilmhurst, *Akin to Anne* collects 19 stories about people who are "akin to Anne," who lack love or family, orphans in spirit if not in reality. Wilmhurst has organized what must have been an inchoate mass of material by grouping the stories thematically, but the recurring motif of the orphan emphasizes the weaknesses of these stories. While they will interest

the legion of Montgomery devotees, the stories expand her work in only the quantitative sense.

In a journal entry of August 23, 1904, Montgomery regretted having to cater to the tastes of various journals, deploring the need to "lug a moral into most" of the stories in order to sell them. Indeed, the world Montgomery brings into being in this collection is one in which good deeds are never wasted, sacrifice always results in unforeseen benefit, and the highest good is to have "somebody of my own to love." ("Margaret's Patient," p. 232) Coincidence plays a large role in these relentlessly happy, albeit improbable, solutions to the ills of all. However, Montgomery was not above a wry aside on her own propensity to rely on the *deus ex machina*. As one of her characters in "Why Not Ask Miss Price?" remarks, "Things do happen like a storybook sometimes, don't they." (p. 91)

One of Maud Montgomery's strengths as an author lay in her ability to bring

new life to the ordinary and freshness to the predictable. But the juxtaposition and repetition of similar scenes and situations in this collection emphasize the re-warmed nature of the plots, leaving the reader without even an illusion of newness. As we read the first story in the collection, "Charlotte's Quest," (incidentally, one of the more successful), we suspect that Charlotte's search for a mother will not go unrewarded. It does not, and as we continue reading, the inordinately coincidental reunions of lost sisters with brothers, nieces with uncles, and so on begin to wear exceedingly thin.

Read singly, the stories in this collection might invite the suspension of disbelief and involve the reader. We could even overlook such purpled prose as this line from "Jane Lavinia": "Athwart her dreams, rending in twain their frail, rose-tinted fabric, came Aunt Rebecca's voice from the kitchen below, 'Jane Lavinia! Jane Lavinia! Ain't you going for the cows tonight?'" But collecting

such stories serves only to stress the forced character of these jubilant reunions. Through the unknowing kindness of others or their own good deeds, Montgomery's characters find the love they lack, but we tire of the artificiality of how they find it.

In short, although collecting Montgomery's stories and publishing them in book form was a smart idea, rendering them more accessible to her public, it was not a good one. Admittedly, the stories make no pretence to being among Montgomery's best and were written to specifications she disliked, but grouping them thematically accentuates their failings without illuminating their strengths. Although the orphans may be considered akin to Anne in their loveless states, the stories in which they appear are neither kith nor kin to Anne. Ultimately, this collection is for the already-converted Montgomery fan or scholar.

Leslie MacLean

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## Contributors

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**Fred Horne** of Nine Mile Creek worked on the 1988 Scenic Heritage Roads Program. He holds a B.A. in history from the University of Prince Edward Island, and has worked extensively in the fields of Island history, genealogy, and oral history.

**Dr. David Kellum** is one of the reviewers that we can get for nothing. Plus, he lives right around the corner.

**Leslie MacLean** grew up reading L. M. Montgomery's work in Dunblane, Prince Edward Island. She attended the University of PEI and the University of Toronto, where she earned a Master's degree in English in 1984. She presently lives and works in Charlottetown.

**Tanton McNeill** was born and raised in Summerside, where he is a Life Member of the George R. Pearkes, VC Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. He is retired after working for many years with the Unemployment Insurance Commission.

**Randolph Manning** of Charlottetown is a chartered accountant who, in his retirement, completed a Bachelor of Arts degree (history) at the University of Prince Edward Island, where he was also a sessional lecturer in taxation. He is past chairman of the Government House Committee.

Born in Souris and raised in Summerside, **Elmer Phillips** served in the wartime merchant marine and with the Royal Canadian Navy. He retired from his job as a construction engineer in 1982.

**Ian Ross Robertson**, from Mermaid, Lot 48, is the youngest son of the late A. S. Robertson, a flier mentioned in the article in Issue 22 concerning World War I aviators from Prince Edward Island. He is associate professor of history at Scarborough College, University of Toronto. In September 1988, Acadiensis Press published *The Prince Edward Island Land Commission of 1860*, edited by him, with an introductory essay summarizing recent research on the Land Question from 1767 to the legislated abolition of leasehold tenure in 1875.

**Adele Townshend**, a retired school teacher from Rolly Bay West, has written extensively about the history of eastern Prince Edward Island.

**Robert C. Tuck** is an Anglican clergyman, cartoonist, and architectural historian. In previous issues of *The Island Magazine* he has profiled Georgetown, Bedeque, Tignish, Victoria, Guernsey Cove, Souris, and St. Eleanors.

**Jackie Waddell**, who lives in Brookfield, worked on the 1986 Scenic Heritage Roads program. She has a B.Sc. in Wildlife Management from University of Guelph.

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