

Acadian Legends, Folktales, and Songs from Prince Edward Island. By Georges Arsenault, English translation by Sally Ross [Originally published as *Contes, légendes et chansons de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard*]. (Acorn Press: Charlottetown (PEI), 2002. Pp. xiii + 157, foreword, preface, photographs, song annotations, illustrations, notes, bibliography, ISBN 1-894838-02-5, pbk)

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Acadian Legends, Folktales, and Songs from Prince Edward Island.

By Georges Arsenault, English translation by Sally Ross (Originally published as *Contes, légendes et chansons de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard*). (Acorn Press: Charlottetown (PEI), 2002. Pp. xiii + 157, foreword, preface, photographs, song annotations, illustrations, notes, bibliography, ISBN 1-894838-02-5, pbk)

Although working outside the academy, Arsenault is trained as a folklorist. He has been an active folklorist in the French Maritimes since the 1970s, and has had a public presence due to his work as the host of Radio-Canada's morning radio program in Prince Edward Island. Arsenault is a prolific writer and has written numerous books on Acadian history and culture, in addition to producing two folksong CDs. This book focuses on interviews done in the 1970s and 1980s with French speakers born between 1880 and 1936. Arsenault shared some consultants with Edward Ives, so it is no coincidence that Ives wrote the introduction to this book.

Each of the four chapters of the book focuses on a genre: folktale, legend, traditional French ballads, and native American ballads. The chapters are further organized by consultant. Photographs accompany biographical information of each person interviewed by Arsenault. These tidbits are particularly interesting, because they have an oral history feel to them. This information is followed by their contribution to the book: a tale, legend or song. The book includes eight folktales, thirteen legends, and twenty-three songs with lyrics and musical notation. Tales and legends constitute one-third of the text with the other two-thirds devoted to folksongs. Arsenault's treatment of the song texts is truly exemplary; he not only supplies the musical notation, but also provides the songs in French as well as with English translation.

My critique of the book is that there is not much analysis. That said, Arsenault typically points the reader toward the right path without giving too much information for the non-academic. But the lack of analysis is obvious in other instances, such as the chapters' focus on the collections without help of a conclusion to tie it all together. Much of this is due to the fact that the author's voice is suppressed throughout the volume, an approach which is both problematic and enviable. Arsenault's book is a quick, enjoyable read; however, it is compartmentalized in the way that books on folklore topics that are directed towards the mainstream often are. As aforementioned, one to two pages are devoted to the biography of each person who took part

in the project, which is followed by their contribution. Each part, then, reads like an entry rather than a chapter having cohesion. Finally, there are also some areas where the translation is well done, but does not necessarily read as fluidly as it could; however, this is a minor point.

I initially read this text keeping my impending review in mind. Then, on a whim, I assigned it to my Folk Literature class. Students in the Folk Literature class typically have a book from which to draw examples of the topics covered in the course. Arsenault's book was a good choice in that it was "other" yet still familiar to students due to Prince Edward Island's proximity to Newfoundland and Labrador. The students were very positive about the book, finding its approach easy to read, the design attractive, and the price very reasonable (\$18.95 paperback). They were also fascinated to learn about a folk group of which they were previously unaware. In fact, most students in the class were unaware that there is a French population in Prince Edward Island. If I were to assign Arsenault's book again, I would probably also assign Ive's *Drive Dull Care Away*, because I think they would be complementary to one another. As a textbook, Arsenault's book raised discussions in the class, for example, questions about gender and tale-telling, local character legends, the lack of Child numbers for French ballads, and the differences between traditional ballads and local songs. It was also interesting for students to see motifs in the tales that they had become familiar with in English tales, and to see commonalities in songs native to Newfoundland with those from Prince Edward Island (for example, as one would imagine, the sea often figures prominently).

I believe this book would be of interest to anyone who is interested in the Acadians, oral history, island culture, folklore of/in the Maritimes, Canadian and/or French material and examples. The book is also non-threatening for the novice, and as such would make a good gift for those with an interest in folklore, or an illustrative text for novice folklorists.

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