> Feeling herself falling, Meggy clawed desperately at the flaky bark of the branch. Pieces of it broke off in her hands and joined the rain pelting down on the soldier's head. Uneasily he looked up, just as flash of lightning revealed the wild hair, white face, and flailing legs of the dancing apparition, ready to pounce on him from above. He was so spooked, he took off screaming in panic — 'aye-yie-yie!' — as he stumbled down the steep cliff with nothing but his own fear chasing him.

That is very good writing: vivid imagery, varied tone, a range of sentence lengths, and a force that demands to be read aloud. It is typical of the whole book, and makes it an ideal story to read to a restless class.

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Fact and Fiction: A Natural Blend

The Girl on Evangeline Beach. Anne Carter. Stoddart Kids, 2000. 257 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-7737-6139X. ***By the Standing Stone.*** Maxine Trottier. Stoddart Kids, 2000. 224 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-7737-61381.

The challenges facing the writer of historical fiction, apart from that of getting computer-addicted children to read at all, are formidable. Mastering the facts themselves is only secondary to understanding the social, political and personal habits of the period chosen: learning how people lived, what they ate, how they worked and filled their leisure time. And then, as Joan Aiken suggests, having worked so hard to gain that knowledge, the writer of historical fiction must try to forget that she ever had to seek it: if the fact is not neatly blended with the fiction, if a tedious interpolation of fact is laced through the fiction, if the author's knowledge is "displayed," the story is likely to be a tedious failure.

Added to that challenge is the choice a writer must make regarding the approach to take. Shall she, like Shakespeare, adopt a real person as protagonist and attempt to "read" the mind of Henry V as well as follow his exploits through the historical events of his life? Or shall she, as writers such as Rosemary Sutcliff and many others have done, invent a fictional character against the background of an historical event? And, if the latter, shall she create that character as a person of the time, born and bred into it, or shall she, by some sort of curious (and probably questionable) *deus ex machina*, transport a twenty-first century character back to the past to participate in a known historical event.

Anne Carter and Maxine Trottier have understood the complexity of those challenges and have met them with dexterity and self-assurance. Carter, choosing to transport a sixteen-year-old modern boy into Acadia in 1755, convincingly vivi-

fies one of the saddest episodes in Canadian history, the expulsion of the Acadians. Maxine Trottier, writing the second in her Circle of Silver Chronicles, invents her late eighteenth-century characters, Mack, Jamie and Owela, making them run a gauntlet of adventures that involve them in actions (the Boston tea party, for example) leading up to the American Revolution.

Carter chooses what seems to be the more psychologically-demanding approach: sixteen-year-old Michael Denshaw, haunted by his own personal problems (the death of a father and poor family relationships), is also haunted by the ghost of a girl he sees on Evangeline Beach. After being beaten by two thugs, his life hanging in the balance, he is mysteriously conducted to Acadia, where he "comes of age" by courageously participating in the final expulsion drama of the Robichaud family. Though the preamble seems too long, and the "transportation" device somewhat contrived (the beating especially), the main story, set in Acadia, is extremely well-written: it is believable in its blend of fact and sentiment, poignant in its depiction of the beauty of Grand Pré and the inevitable fate of those who love it, and tender in its evocation of Michael's hopeless love for Marie. Carefully avoiding the Star Trek clichés associated with time changes, Carter skilfully ensures that, even though Michael experiences discomfort, even agony, because he knows the eventual fate of those he comes to love, history is in no wise altered by his involvement. Carter is an excellent storyteller, especially attuned to the way dialogue defines character, and recreates history with passion and pride.

Trottier is no less gifted. Though her novel is sometimes more tedious than Carter's, in that she complicates her plot with too many story strands, and allows some encounters to border on the unbelievable, she nevertheless knows her history well, and balances fact and fiction with great skill. Charlotte MacNeil (Mack), the central character, who eventually will become the life-partner of her Oneida guide, Owela, sets the pace for the novel. It is through her eyes and sensibilities that we see the dilemma faced by the colonists, and it is her personal dilemma (to stay in Canada or go back to England) that underscores the drama. Though there seems to be no doubt of her desire, her decision to stay is made irreversible by the experiences she undergoes and the companions she acquires. We, like her friends in London, can be sure that Mack will be "all very colorful and completely Canadian" the next time we meet her.

"Our own late-20th-century culture," wrote Joan Aiken in 1985, "is probably less aware of the past, more separated from it, than any previous epoch." Notwithstanding the fact that a small segment of society is deeply aware of the past, that statement seems as true now as when it was written. Yet, with such fine novels as *The Girl on Evangeline Beach* and *By the Standing Stone* available at such reasonable prices, we can hope that a more favourable evaluation will be made a few decades from now.

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