

these dismal antagonistic forces but only because of an admiration for the spirited capability of Dr. James Barry.

In principle, historical biography is certainly an appropriate genre for children's literature. However, even though the fictional elements in *With a Silent Companion* — dialogues, internal reflections, ideals, passions — will likely have more appeal to a juvenile reader than the purely biographic, a redeeming feature of this book is the author's demonstration of Margaret Bulkley's life as a modern step toward women's liberation. The spirit of rebellion, the courageous drive toward freedom and opportunity that are detailed on every page here could inspire the admiration of any young reader.

Terence Scully, Professor Emeritus of French at Wilfrid Laurier University, has a particular interest in early fiction.

Forbidden to Teach

Dancing for Danger: A Meggy Tale. Margot Griffin. Illus. P. John Burden. 112 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-7737-61365.

When writing a novel with an historical setting, for young readers (at the elementary level), it must always remain a difficult decision just how much factual information to include and how to incorporate it into the story without being overbearing. Margot Griffin has mastered both complexities with great intelligence and skill. The reader is made well aware that Meggy lives in Ireland at the turn of the nineteenth century, that the English have outlawed education for Irish Catholics, and that any learning they engage in must be done so clandestinely under pain of punishment for both teacher and student if discovered. But Griffin blends all this unselfconsciously into the story, never subjugating her story to historical fact, and creates such a dominant personality in her Meggy MacGillycuddy that we are concerned only for her welfare and the resolution to her danger. It is also this concentration on a single character, her love of learning, her courage, and her eventual heroism in saving her teacher from the English soldiers, that makes this a compact, tight story, without any distractions to spoil either its flow or rhythm.

Griffin is indeed an engaging storyteller: her theme should make even the most jaded sensibility more appreciative of the freedoms we now take for granted; her style, especially the dialogue, defines each character, assigning subtle changes in tone and inflection, denoting humour or impatience with deftness. I was somewhat uneasy on the score when I read the publisher's blurb, saying this was a new "Easy-to-Read" book, thinking this might be a kind of "Dick-and-Jane" approach to storytelling. Thank goodness that label does not appear in the book itself, and thank goodness as well, the author has not adopted any pedagogical approach to vocabulary. Her writing is natural, unaffected, and as this passage shows, though well within the range of elementary readers, is not formulaic:

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.

*R.G. Moyles is Professor Emeritus of English Literature at the University of Alberta. His many publications include *From Instruction to Delight: A Critical Anthology of Children's Literature* (OUP).*

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-