can keep us guessing. But Elspet's prologue answers most of the key questions in advance, and in the subsequent story of her young childhood in Scotland and her family's emigration to Canada her own uncertainties are unconvincing.

Elspet's mother is killed by a runaway horse in the streets of Aberdeen when she is four years old. Elspet's sailor father takes her to her uncle and aunt in Glen Buchan, where she immediately becomes absorbed as a daughter into the warm, competent, welcoming family. Her occasional fear that she doesn't really belong is obviously ungrounded. There is ample demonstration of the love that surrounds her. As a result, she seems self-absorbed and even a little whiney whenever she worries about having a belonging place. Is she really loved? Will they go to Canada? Will she never see her beloved Granny again? Will someone catch cholera when they arrive in Montreal? The questions are answered before they even arise. The only real discovery for the reader is Elspet's mother's story, which is gradually revealed and works well.

The charm of the book lies in the details of its historical setting, especially in Scotland. The Canadian half of the story is not as engaging. I kept comparing it (to its disadvantage) with two much stronger novels set in roughly the same time and place: Marianne Brandis's *The Quarter-Pie Window* and Janet Lunn's *Shadow in Hawthorn Bay*. *The Belonging Place* is no more than a pleasant story that leaves the reader with a cosy feeling.

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Dramatized Biography: Fact or Fiction?

Nellie's Quest. Connie Brummel Crook. Stoddart, 1998. 128 pp. $6.99 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7469-1.

Nellie's Quest is the second in a series of dramatized historical biographies (author's term, *CCL* 83:84) on Nellie McClung. Through the accessible medium of a life story, Crook presents this important Canadian activist and author to a new, young generation of readers. To recreate Nellie in 1895-6, the author draws, sometimes loosely, on McClung's autobiographical writings. Crook cites her references — thanks due to her and her publisher — thus making further reading on Nellie, by Nellie, possible.

Crook clarifies Nellie's political concerns well, explaining, for example, the connection between WCTU membership and female suffrage. Women, typically the victims of drunkenness, would vote for its ultimate solution: Prohibition. Crook's descriptions of the seasons, the Manitoba countryside,

and especially schoolroom life, create a believable setting for Nellie's ideas and experiences. The descriptions of social life, however, although believable to an uninstructed reader, can puzzle the historian.

There are anachronisms, resulting sometimes from McClung's writings. For instance, McClung used "shoes," perhaps for her 1930s audience; but the items that she, and Crook, thus label are boots. The wrong term evokes the wrong image, especially in an ignorant audience. The terms chosen have more than descriptive value: women wore different styles of clothing for different social functions, and one would not wear shoes to a lacrosse game. Elsewhere, a woman is described as having hair down to her waist: no woman would have gone outdoors so, unless in great distress; only girls wore their hair down. Again, this seemingly small mistake has great social meaning.

Other inaccuracies, in matters larger than looks, give greater historical misinformation. Crook douses Nellie with cold well water to shock her out of a (faked) hypnotic trance. What rudeness for her and her friends thus to damage a hostess's carpet, what stupidity to soak her clothing and gain at least 22 additional pounds of weight, and what danger to go, wet, into a sleigh on a frosty Manitoba night. McClung's book says nothing about water. Furthermore, there is violence in *Nellie's Quest*, perhaps for an audience used to today's entertainment, that is not found in McClung's writings: Crook's lacrosse game has fights on and off the field; McClung's game is tamer, and she even has a player apologize for accidentally blackening another's eye.

These and other instances raise a more fundamental question, of this and similar books. Can, and should, one "dramatize" biography? In the above examples, historical accuracy is sacrificed for descriptive colour or plot. Also, Crook has altered the actual time progression of certain events in McClung's life. Yet Nellie was who she was in 1895 because of what she experienced in 1892. Indeed, are there any events in a life so unconnected to all others that they are "movable" and thus generic? Who decides?

In this case, however, because Crook relies heavily on McClung's autobiographies, there may be some latitude allowable. Are these autobiographies the truth? Besides relating her life story, McClung wrote for an audience, and wrote to sell; she also wrote as a woman known for certain achievements. How much did she shape her material: how much was life, and how much story? Maybe (auto)biography is to a great extent fiction after all.

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