

## THE ROOT CELLAR ILLUSTRATED

**The Root Cellar.** Janet Lunn. Illus. Scott Cameron. Knopf Canada, 1981, 1994. 231 pp. \$24.95 cloth. ISBN 0-676-97033-8.

Teachers and librarians have noticed that the unfortunate boudoir pink colour of the “Puffin” paperback edition of *The Root Cellar* turns young male readers (as well as some females) away from this otherwise excellent book. They will be delighted that a quality hardback is now available which has not only an attractive dark green cover, but also ten beautiful colour illustrations spaced throughout the book. Scott Cameron is an award-winning illustrator who has been a finalist for the Governor General’s Award for Illustration in Children’s Literature. There are also maps which lay out the action in the novel, making it easy for students to follow the journey of the protagonist, as well as the spatial location of the American Civil War. The novel itself is already regarded as a classic Canadian historical novel, and it is taught widely, as well as read avidly by young people choosing books on their own. It is the well-researched story of the fictional Rose Larkin, an orphaned American girl, who is dumped into the large noisy family of her Canadian cousins; from her twentieth century unhappiness, she journeys back in time to the American Civil War. Janet Lunn, who herself came to Canada from the USA many years ago, has a long-time interest in historical fiction and history, and she is also author (with Christopher Moore) of *The Story of Canada* (Lester, 1992), illustrated in full-colour by Alan Daniel and with numerous historical photographs. Lunn’s many talents have also produced picture books for young people, but she writes that her first love is with historical fiction. This edition will hold up to heavy library use — and it is one children will love.

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## THERE AND BACK AGAIN: THREE TIME-TRAVEL NOVELS

**The Secret of Sentinel Rock.** Judith Silverthorne. Coteau Books, 1996. 162 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55050-103-8. **The Secret under the Whirlpool.** Elaine Breault Hammond. Ragweed Press, 1996. 158 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-61-6. **Thunder Ice.** Alison Acheson. Coteau Books, 1996. 143 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55050-105-4.

Time travel drives these three adventures. *The Secret of Sentinel Rock* tells of twelve-year-old Emily and Emma meeting on a rock in “Saskatchewan.” A 1990s Emily is anxious about her future after her grandmother’s funeral and the impending sale of the farm. An 1880s Emma has arrived from Scotland to face the prairies with curiosity and determination. In *The Secret under the Whirlpool*, a parentless Maggie and legless Marc are caught up in a “whirlpool” on the PEI coast

and sucked back two centuries into an Acadian village. Marc and Maggie are received as lost children; Marc, now ambulatory, and Maggie, now with a family. *Thunder Ice* transports the reader back to Thunder Bay of the 1880s and a divisive family quarrel.

These three books' distinct bio-regional elements draw upon particular historical events integral to the development of the narrative. Silverthorne's story centres on the rock where Emily and Emma meet, and Emily's knowledge of local plants and remedies that she gained from her grandmother. Hammond moves Marc and Maggie from rural PEI to a wild and dangerous Île St. Jean — from summer holiday to a struggle for survival on the eve of the English expulsion of the Acadians. Acheson's story takes place on the shores of Lake Superior and the competitive towns of Fort William and Prince Arthur's Landing, where pride and need separate a family that waits for something explosive to bridge the gulf.

The potentially exciting story in *Sentinel Rock* (Emily searches for a renewed sense of purpose, which leads to these two girls meeting across time) is challenged by the language and characters. Writing inconsistencies might not trouble younger readers, but they threaten to overwhelm the story. There is also not enough time to develop characters, as Emily spends most of the novel travelling to or from the rock. The male characters are furniture, positioned to keep things from looking bare, and the women, who should give the story life, are stereotypes that do not engage the reader.

*Under the Whirlpool*'s "there and back again" narrative gives Marc and Maggie time to interact with the people they meet, the new environment, and each other, as they become young adults. Both have opportunities to contrast their shallow "luxurious" self-centred modern lives with their laborious, dangerous and fulfilling life in the Acadian village. Maggie's character develops an appreciation of the vitality and richness of women who have so few choices in life, while Marc realizes that a communal struggle lightens a private burden. An important nod is given to the generous contribution that the Mi'kmaq made to the survival of the Acadians.

*Thunder Ice*'s strong writing moves fluidly through the experiences of Oliver with his cousin Bert, family and community. This is not a boy's story, but rather an opportunity for males to explore social relationships and responsibility from a perspective of understanding that would not be lost on female readers. Nothing is out of place, in terms of language or characters, and this story would suit being read aloud to younger children, yet still satisfy early teen readers.

These are stories of migration, whether it is moving to a new time or place, or moving toward a new understanding of self, community and environment. The works provide a context whereby newer Canadian readers will be able to contextualize their experience with those who came earlier, and other readers can make parallels between the past of their ancestors and the struggles of all new Canadians.

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