

earlier times than later.

The need to condense the details of a life or period can easily result in generalizations; generalizations too easily can become stereotypes; and an author, especially in a field that is also a "cause", needs to guard against them. That said, *Her Story III* is informative and interesting. Merritt continues to restore our heritage to us, and to ensure that Canadian women's stories are not forgotten. When's the next volume?

Virginia Careless, a social historian in BC, who has worked for many years in museums and historic sites, has published on Canadian domestic life and material culture, as well as on literature in its historical context.

A Hoax in the Service of Mankind

With a Silent Companion. Florida Ann Town. Red Deer, 2000. 176 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-211-6.

Margaret Anne Bulkeley was born in Ireland about 1790. A highly respected physician and surgeon, she went through most of her life under the name James Barry, a name she had assumed while still in her teens. She herself died in 1865. The story that Florida Ann Town has put together narrates the life, the career, the personality and the accomplishments of this woman. The story would not have been remarkable if Margaret Anne Bulkeley had not disguised herself as a man.

The story purports to be a biography. To some extent it is, though the documentary pegs on which it is hung are perhaps scantier than any biographer, including Town, would wish for. What fills in between the dates and the sketches of the historic personages with which Barry came into contact makes an interesting tale at the imaginative hand of the author. The first quarter of the work tends to drag a little with its enumerations of the members of the Barry and Bulkeley families in Cork, Ireland. The harsh tribulations witnessed by the young Margaret foreshadow those suffered by all those she exhausted herself to help as an adult. Her decision to hide the fact she was a woman was motivated by a desire to study medicine at the University of Edinburgh. In many respects, though, what became a lived lie ironically explains both her exceptional success as a physician and surgeon and many of the miseries that plagued her existence. The many complex conflicts within this life are evoked forcefully.

For younger readers — in this case probably in their late teens — a difficulty with this narrative might be its insistence upon the endless, frustrating, often overwhelming struggles of the heroine. Her life, almost year by year, seems to consist of worries, sickness, poverty, bureaucratic obstacles and, above all, loneliness. In this pursuit of an impossible career, she committed herself to choking off every impulse that could be termed feminine. The reader's spirit may rise above all

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: