

The black-and-white illustrations depict mostly toys, kids, and families. Not a single corpse, Nazi, or even a comic-book caricature of the evils 40,000 Canadian men gave their lives to defeat.

Michael Bliss is an author and professor of history at the University of Toronto. His most-recent book, William Osler: A Life in Medicine was shortlisted for a Governor General's Award for nonfiction.

More Canadian Women

Her Story III: Women from Canada's Past. Susan E. Merritt. Vanwell, 1999. 200 pp. \$15.95 paper. ISBN 1-55125-037-3. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55125-046-2.

This set of fourteen mini-biographies introduces more Canadian female forebears, including: Elizabeth Simcoe, diarist; Bobbie Rosenfeld, Olympic medallist; Georgina Fane Pope, military nurse; Elsie Gregory McGill, aeronautical engineer; artist Laura Muntz Lyall; and Thérèse Forget Casgrain, political party leader. Biographies show us what choices others have faced and made in their lives. Biographies of our women ancestors give today's Canadians a context for the choices they face.

The book is well illustrated, although colour would be welcome, and the pictures help tell the stories. There is a timeline, an index, and references, bibliography, and detailed picture credits. The reader therefore can go beyond the book, and do research — just as important in learning about history as being given the “facts.” Like any good anthology, this book encourages you to explore more.

The presentation somewhat conflicts with these strengths, however: one wonders who the intended audience is. The paragraphs are short, often only one sentence, a format that suggests a readership of children. Yet the content is frequently adult; e.g., the discussion of “country marriages”. Merritt deals, although with admirable clarity, with complex concepts such as Impressionism and English Common Law, which would benefit from longer and more developed paragraphs.

Certain assumptions in the book also need questioning. There are frequent references to social classes that are more Old World than Canadian. We, like all societies, have a ranking system, probably more pronounced in the past, but even then the groups were not clearly defined, with uniform attitudes and behaviours. Then too, and more serious, Merritt's discussion of class tends to be value-laden. Further, it also seems to be a given that women's lot was worse in the past than now, and various points are built upon that assumption.

This approach is not unique to Merritt, but it should not stand unexamined. It is a fine line to tread, between chronicling woman's difficulties individually and collectively and the struggle to overcome these through time, and automatically concluding that everything earlier was worse. That interpretation is, woman's history or no, the Doctrine of Progress, which historians long ago identified and discredited as false, as they do still. Many women's lots were, in fact, better at

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