

they will absorb a little piece of Canadian history and the real-life magic of the Selkirk mountains while they read is a wonderful bonus.

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Through Distance, through Time

Beyond the Waterfall. Elaine Breault Hammond. Illus. Mary Montgomery. Ed. Jennifer Glossop. Ragweed, 1997. 197 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-68-3. *Explosion at Dawson Creek.* Elaine Breault Hammond. Illus. Dale McNevin. Ed. Jennifer Glossop. Ragweed, 1998. 197 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-75-6.

Elaine Breault Hammond, a Manitoba-born writer now living and writing in Prince Edward Island, has joined the growing group of writers providing younger readers with time-slip fiction. *Beyond the Waterfall* and *Explosion at Dawson Creek* trace the latest adventures in time travel for her principal character, Maggie Baxter, who, orphaned by age six, is now being parented by her Uncle Jeff and her great Aunt Kate. Maggie's adventures begin in the first book of what seems to be a developing series, *The Secret under the Whirlpool* (1996).

Time-slip fiction provides the writer with an opportunity to flex the fiction-writing muscles in two otherwise distinct genres, historical fiction and fantasy. However, there is always a necessary negotiation, explicit or understood, in satisfying the demands of each genre. Hammond gives minimal deference to fantasy, using only the lonely and disconnected life of Maggie as the impetus to send her on her travels in time and space (to eighteenth-century Acadia in the first book, to end of the nineteenth-century Manitoba in *Beyond the Waterfall*, to wartime Dawson Creek in *Explosion at Dawson Creek*). The means used to send Maggie on her journeys are forces of nature, a whirlpool, a waterfall, an invisible wind-like force. Here is no magic talisman, no shimmering portal, not even a wardrobe or telephone booth to which one might turn (and return) as a means of access and so control. Instead, Maggie, and Marc when he accompanies her, is seemingly at the mercy of a force they can neither anticipate nor manipulate.

When Maggie is in the selected past, she fits almost immediately into the situation in which she finds herself, replacing a figure from that time who has mysteriously gone "missing." There is rarely any concern on the part of either character, or writer, that Maggie might make a mistake, might be found out, might be discovered to be a time-traveller. While this works well in allowing the reader to focus on Maggie's discoveries about the past, it also obviates any possibility for enriching the texture of the fantasy itself. Clearly, Hammond's real concern is to explore Canada's past and to bring that past into clear focus for her readers, old and young alike. She also seems to be intent on making sure that the readers know of Canada's past on a broad geographic and social canvas. Maggie lives in Fredericton,

and her adventures in the past have so far occurred in eighteenth-century Prince Edward Island, late-nineteenth-century Manitoba, and World War II Dawson Creek.

On the whole, Hammond recreates those pasts well. The detail is credible and revealing in her sureness of touch. In *Beyond the Waterfall* what emerges are the details of the trials and rewards of being a Canadian pioneer: the rigours of living in a physically demanding landscape, including wintertime temperatures cold enough to freeze water in the house, prairie blizzards, devastating wildfires, and the need to travel considerable distances to get to a school or a settlement. On the other hand, there are the compensating factors of a close-knit family life, the pleasure of owning fine horses, neighbours helping neighbours with the harvest and in times of sickness. In addition, Hammond explores, in the example of Nicholas Camper, the situation of "home" children sent to the labourer-starved colonies to escape poverty and starvation at home to serve as workers and sometimes to be exploited by unscrupulous employers such as the Ebenezer family.

In *Explosion at Dawson Creek* Hammond is similarly convincing and deft in her evocation of (for older readers) long-forgotten details of daily life in wartime Canada such as the need for ration coupons and tokens for certain commodities, and the practice of many women in painting their legs to give a stockinged look because of the unavailability of nylon during the war. With Maggie we share the experience of being in a sleepy settlement suddenly transformed to become the boom town that serves as Mile '0' on the Alaska Highway. Having both Maggie and Marc allows Hammond to broaden her sociopolitical canvas to catch the imagined experiences of both girls and boys at a significant moment in the development of the country. While Maggie works for room and board only for the acerbic Billie in her Tearoom, and gets relief only in the fast friendship she forms with Lena Kapinski and her family, Marc discovers what life was like as an out of work drifter with no money and no prospects before he lands a job as a truck driver for a company hauling supplies for the highway construction. Hammond can thus provide us with the historical details of wartime Canada, as well as show the continuation of a number of the conditions that marked the lives of ordinary workers in depression-era Canada.

In each book, Maggie discovers in the past the warmth of family, and a sense of freedom that are so conspicuously missing from her life with Uncle Jeff and Great Aunt Kate in her disconnected and repressive present. On the historic details, Hammond is sure and deft. But it is exactly here where Hammond's interest in providing historical texture and creating a sense of belonging for Maggie overrides her interest in time-slip fiction. Maggie's life with the Manitoba Trenholmes, and with Lena and her family in Dawson Creek, is so satisfying emotionally that she soon forgets about home in her own time. As each novel concludes, therefore, her remembering her own family and her sense that she must soon return to them and her own time, seem arbitrary rather than a development in character. The obvious contrast between the disconnected present and the connected past is just as troubling since Maggie is made a victim of historical process as surely as her parents' untimely deaths have made her an orphan.

It may be, however, that Hammond herself is fully aware of what she has done, and that Maggie's disconnected present is finished. At the conclusion of

Explosion at Dawson Creek, seemingly a very personal book, Maggie and her Great Aunt Kate discover that theirs is a shared past and, as a consequence, their present has been transformed. If Maggie is to have further adventures slipping into Canada's past, Hammond will have to come up with another means than Maggie's discontent with her present to serve as the motive force, and if that means more emphasis on the fantasy element, so much the better for both the fiction and the reader.

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Laura Walks Again

Laura Secord's Brave Walk. Connie Brummel Crook. Illus. June Lawrason. Second Story, 2000. Unpag. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 1-896764-34-7.

Advertised as "the only picture book for young readers which tells the legendary tale of Laura Secord's heroism during the War of 1812," *Laura Secord's Brave Walk* tells the familiar story efficiently and dramatically. Each page is a self-contained scene that frames an essential plot complication. Each scene is constructed with believable action and dialogue. The main character elicits empathy.

Here is how the text begins: "'Laura,' James Secord said, 'I must help fight to save our country. General Brock needs more soldiers; I will be one of them.'" The immediacy of this opening is maintained throughout the story. Interest never flags as Laura hides her children when a battle takes place in her back yard, rushes to her wounded husband behind the enemy lines, overhears American soldiers planning a surprise attack, and walks alone nineteen miles through American-held territory to warn the British. My only criticism is that the opening would have been more dramatic had Laura been *shown* to be sad: the locket gesture is too cool.

Specific details add authenticity and texture without ever becoming cumbersome. A quick exchange of dialogue conveys why Lieutenant Fitzgibbon, the British defender of the last portion of the Niagara Peninsula not in the hands of the Americans, was known as "Green Sliver." Laura's sufferings are made easily understandable to a child through such details as her bare feet becoming "scratched," her skirt "hanging in wet and muddy tatters," and her face "sunburned" and "mosquito-bitten."

Mostly I laud the fine, full-colour illustrations, lush with authentic, historical details. The pictures exhibit the same virtues as the text. Lawrason has depicted Laura as relatively young and pretty, as well as highly domesticated and feminine, despite the heroine's awesome courage and physical stamina. Presumably such an image will make Laura appeal even to those who hold conservative views of women's roles.

I do, however, quibble with some minor details in virtually every illustra-