

developed within the last twenty years. What this book lacks in social and political context it more than makes up for in the detail of its descriptions and illustrations. Another strength of this work lies in its inclusion of non-Western forms of mapmaking and navigation. Fortunately for the reader, Smith has supplemented his discussion of Greco-Roman and European technological advances with reference to the contribution of Arab, Chinese and Norse cartographers as well as the mapmaking techniques of Eurasian, Pacific and Arctic aboriginal peoples. No doubt, young readers will find the birch-bark maps of northern Siberian tribes and south-pointing carriage of ancient China as interesting as Mercator's projection and Harrison's chronometer. The glossary of specific terms is most useful to students who wish to further their knowledge of cartography and navigation.

Both works are richly illustrated by A.G. Smith, whose line drawings complement and enhance the lucid text. A clear asset to any school library, either work could be used as a teaching aid because of the considerable detail of analysis and explanation.

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Women in Profile

Scientists. Carlotta Hacker. ISBN 0-7787-0007-0. **Musicians.** Leslie Strudwick. ISBN 0-7787-0031-3. **Writers.** Shaun Hunter. ISBN 0-7787-0007-0. **Political Leaders.** Janice Parker. ISBN 0-7787-0030-5. Crabtree, 1998. 48 pp. \$10.95 paper.

The books noted above are four of a six-part series entitled *Women in Profile* published by Crabtree Press. As the Crabtree catalogue informs us, the *Women in Profile* series is intended for a grade 4 reading level. The books are large in print and format, and include maps, photographs, a bibliography, and an index. All four books are beautifully laid out, with a pleasant flow of text and pictures. Each book begins with a general introduction on the respective theme, followed by six major profiles of notable women plus a number of mini-biographies at the back. The major profile contains biographical sketches and columned sections on key events, background, and quick notes. The text also includes highlighted terms that could prove challenging to a fourth grader, the definitions for which are provided in a glossary at the end of the book.

Young readers undoubtedly will enjoy these colourful and informa-

tive books. They will delight in fun words such as “ichthyology” (the study of fish) and “boogie woogie” music. The stories provide some fabulous surprises, from the secret concert given by Liona Boyd to the jurors of the O.J. Simpson trial, to the discovery made by Mary Leakey of a 25-million-year-old skull of an ape. Less pleasant but equally fascinating are the references to the imprisonment of Pakistan’s Benazir Bhutto, the assassination of India’s Indira Gandhi, and the murder of the American primatologist Dian Fossey. Readers will also learn that sometimes hard work is rewarded to others, as was the case for Chien-shiung Wu and Jocelyn Bell Burnell, both of whom were bypassed for the Nobel Prize in physics despite their great discoveries.

Although the profiles are presented in a cheerful and celebratory vein, the biographies highlight a number of serious subjects, including feminism, the persecution of Jewish citizens, censorship, racism, and sexual assault. Critics who find these themes unsuitable for young readers should consider the words of Judy Blume who is quoted in *Writers*: “I hate the idea that you should always protect children. They live in the same world we do” (12).

Not that these profiles are without their shortcomings. At times the writing style is sentimental, while at other times it reflects problematic suppositions. Thus, we are told in *Political Leaders* about Eva and Juan Perón that “they fell in love immediately” (32) — gag! — whereas the introductory essay in *Writers* informs us that “until quite recently, a woman’s primary work was raising children and looking after her family” (4). No more foolish assertion could be made, unless the writer is referring to some nebulous middle-class ideology in vogue in western suburbia in the 1950s. Interestingly, the occupation of fathers of the profiled women is more often recognized than that of the mothers, especially in the volume on *Scientists*. It is doubly ironic that a series with the noted aim to inspire young readers does so by downplaying the historically diverse roles of women on the one hand, and by turning the story of a dictator’s wife into a fairy tale, on the other.

The fairy tale quality of several of the stories is disappointing. It is doubtful that many young readers will relate to stories of women who were raised by nannies or governesses, women whose families — with some exceptions — never lacked money and influential friends. In short, judging by the four books under review here, the series could use more examples of individuals who succeeded despite their multifaceted marginalization. It is unfortunate, for example, that only one disabled woman was profiled, the writer Jean Little.

Two final comments will suffice to outline some of the problems with this otherwise enjoyable series. First, for reasons that are not all that clear, all women discussed in these books are referred to by their first names. Is this familiarity appropriate in a series that aims to highlight the great accom-

plishments of some great women? What messages are we giving young readers about the status of women and about the seriousness of women's work/identity? Second, and perhaps most importantly, there is a sense of tokenism to this series that is disconcerting. Why women writers, women politicians, women scientists, or women musicians? Why not a series on writers, politicians, scientists, or musicians that includes women and men?

That such questions should be raised by a professor of women's history is almost sacrilegious, but the questions merit some consideration. Certainly one of the reasons for the existence of women's history courses in universities is the lack of reference to women in mainstream history texts. Is this still the case at the elementary level as well? The *Women in Profile* series promotes the notion that there are scientists, and then there are women scientists, women called Jocelyn, Rachel, and Margaret. If the aim of this series is to inspire young girls by showing them role models, should this goal not transpire in a context that does not render the role models exceptional, unusual, far-fetched? The series resembles too closely the old Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew dichotomy. Very few boys read Nancy Drew; will many of them pick up a book on *women* musicians? Yet, boys, too, need to appreciate the potential of both sexes.

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Prime Ministers, Baboo and Canadian History Brought to Life

The Kids Book of Canadian Prime Ministers. Pat Hancock. Illus. John Mantha. Kids Can, 1998. 55 pp. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-473-9. *Baboo: The Story of Sir John A. Macdonald's Daughter.* Ainslie Manson. Illus. Bill Wand. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1998. 32 pp. \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-329-3.

According to its critics, political history has become an intellectual pursuit of the past. It is often claimed that this approach to history has provided too narrow a focus for a proper understanding of past events. It is further alleged that political history — especially Canadian political history — is dull and only remotely related to everyday realities — obviously unsuitable material for stimulating a lively interest in history among the young. *The Kids Book of Canadian Prime Ministers* written by Pat Hancock (illustrated by John Mantha) and *Baboo: the Story of John A. Macdonald's Daughter* by Ainslie Manson (illustrated by Bill Wand) do much to dispel such myths about Canadian history. They bring the history of Canada's prime ministers and