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EXTENDED FAMILY, MISSIONARY STYLE

His Banner over Me. Jean Little. Viking, 1995. 207 pp., $18.99 cloth. ISBN 0-670-85664-9.

Flora and Gretta Gauld
in Taiwanese dress

Jean Little, the grand-daughter and the daughter of Canadian missionaries, is the author of a two-volume memoir as well as of acclaimed works of fiction for children. *His Banner over Me*, a novel based on her mother's childhood, is a finely crafted, moving story which also succeeds, without being didactic, in evoking a significant era in English-Canadian cultural history.

Little introduces the reader to four-year-old Flora Gauld (b. 1902) in Japanese-controlled Taiwan. At age five, she and three of her siblings are taken by their mother to their grandparents' home in Kippen, Ontario. There, for the first time, Flora—she prefers to be called Gorrie—meets her two older brothers and is initiated into a way of life in which little girls like herself, rather than Chinese servants, wash dishes and make beds. After five years, Gorrie's mother

parcels out all but the youngest of her children to various relatives and rejoins her husband in Taiwan. By the time she and Will Gauld return to Canada seven years later, it is 1918. The teenaged Gorrie faces yet another upheaval as she leaves Regina and her aunt and uncle—now much-loved surrogate parents—for Toronto and the bittersweet challenge of reuniting as a family.

Little is at pains to emphasize that *His Banner over Me* is based only loosely on her mother's childhood and youth. Yet, as suggested above, the book is very effective at evoking the atmosphere and values of a time when rural and small-town Canadian Protestants like Gorrie Gauld's parents thought it their duty to "serve the heathen" whatever the personal cost to their own families. And, through Gorrie's questions and ruminations, it raises issues of the sort that intelligent, sensitive "mish kids" invariably had to confront. What did it mean, for instance, to be called *gaijin*, foreigner, in the country in which you were born, and is the Japanese soldier who taunts Gorrie and her sister Gretta in this way rude *because* he is Japanese, or only because he is drunk? (Gorrie concludes that it must be the latter, since her parents have Japanese friends.) And what about "heathenism"? Could it really be that all non-Christian Taiwanese, including their amah's delightful sister, were destined for hellfire just because they maintained beliefs taught them in childhood? Though Gorrie's gentle father answers this question equivocally, he clearly leans in favour of a god of mercy—"His banner over me is love" (73)—rather than damnation. If their beloved parents are truly doing God's work, why is Gretta uncomfortable when they "tell people about God and Jesus" (9), and fiercely determined not to follow in their footsteps? Back in Canada, why is it so hateful to sit on church platforms in Taiwanese dress that the two little girls deface their outfits as a way of ending their ordeal? While doing so, Gorrie guiltily remembers that their amah had loved to see them in the outfits, but "she was sure that Ah Soong would have understood if she had ever sat and watched them being shown off to raise money for 'the heathen'" (75). It is a measure of their mother's own ambivalence about this bit of missionary drama that she understands her daughters' act of sabotage and silently consigns the ruined clothes to the rag bag.

The final chapter of *His Banner over Me* deals with Gorrie's friendship with a tubercular young woman named Ida Raymond, who eventually dies in the seventeen-year-old medical student's arms. This Gorrie is not as satisfying as her younger predecessor: she is a bit too much of a goody two-shoes and a bit too harsh in her judgment of the poor working-class cousin with whom Ida had lived. Perhaps recognizing the need for a different ending, Little has added an epilogue in answer to the child-reader's question, "What happened after that"? (200). It briefly describes Gorrie's courtship by, and marriage to, a fellow medical student with whom she eventually goes to Taiwan. There she joins her sister Gretta, who, despite her earlier disavowal, has also followed in their parents' missionary footsteps.

His Banner over Me will perhaps not appeal to parents who have learned from the media in recent years to regard all aspects of the Canadian foreign missionary movement as unproblematic cultural imperialism and who want only politically correct reading for their children. Like the missionary propagandists of an earlier

age, such parents may want tracts for their times rather than literature. Little's novel *is* literature, a gentle story that acknowledges complexity and pain in intercultural and family relationships but that celebrates connectedness rather than conflict.

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REMEMBERING YOUTH IN THE HOLOCAUST

A Friend Among Enemies: The Incredible Story of Arie van Mansum in the Holocaust. Janet Keith. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1991. 163 pp., cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55041-045-8, 1-55041-067-9. **Tell No One Who You Are: The Hidden Childhood of Régine Miller.** Walter Buchignani. Tundra, 1994. 186 pp., $19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-286-7.

Fritz Freilich, "to me Arie was a hero without a gun; he knew no fear and did not shrink from work..."
A Friend Among Enemies 51

Tell no one who you are, Régine said to herself and pressed her fingers tightly into her palms.
Tell No One Who You Are 112

Remembering our youth is never a simple story. Remembering a war-torn youth during the Holocaust is particularly complex, but especially so when the memories belong to Hitler's victims. Although these two holocaust narratives are based on the complex life stories of people who were youths during the war, they are addressed to readers of all ages. Walter Buchignani's narrative is more controlled and unified than Janet Keith's; it may be the better story in the sense that it reads like a novel. Younger readers will appreciate the intense plot that has been constructed by Buchignani, a journalist who interviewed his subject, Régine Miller, for two and a half years. Keith's narrative is more anecdotal, and incorporates segments of letters from the correspondence of Jewish survivors who knew her subject, Arie van Mansum. Both narratives are, however, compelling and historically accurate accounts of the Holocaust and of everyday life during the German occupations. The meaning of "everyday life" is, in this context, unique, horrid and heroic.

Published three years apart, the books are told from completely different points of view whose narratives intersect in time and, occasionally, in place. *A Friend Among Enemies* is narrated from the point of view of a devout Calvinist resistance fighter in the Netherlands; *Tell No One Who You Are* is, on the other hand, told from the point of view of a Jewish child in Belgium, the beloved daughter of hard-working parents, Sana Moszek Miller and Zlata Miller. Similarly, however, the narratives are reported to Canadian writers by the children who have become the adults who have survived the war and concentration camps, and settled in Canada. Arie van Mansum, born in 1920 in Utrecht, grew up in Maastricht, close to the German border. Régine Miller was born in Brussels in 1932 of Polish immigrant parents. Van Mansum was reunited with his family in Maastricht in April, 1945; Miller's family died in Auschwitz, a fact that was not confirmed until 1982 when German SS files were published and the family's names (and numbers) became