

understandable, and yet her methods of seeking redress are not. She is quirky enough to be really interesting, but not so quirky that she is unbelievable. And solid, kindly Duncan grounds both Moon and the story itself, keeping an atmosphere of fundamental normality that, somehow, makes the fantasy even more believable.

Interwoven throughout the book is the story of Nora, the twelve-year-old who dies by enemy sword after her parents abandon her to her death in their efforts to save themselves from their besieged castle. The life of a twelve year-old lady in the thirteenth century is wonderfully depicted as Nora prepares for an arranged marriage while overhearing her father's plans to take the surrounding fiefdoms by force. Her helplessness, caused by the fact that she has no say in whom she will marry or what is to become of her, is summed up in the scene in which she is abandoned by her parents then killed by an enemy soldier for the sins of her father. Through Nora, thirteenth-century life, especially for noble-born women but also others under the domination of an all-powerful lord, is conveyed. Krossing's depiction of the times is painstakingly accurate, yet most readers will only be consciously aware of the wonder of the magic and the story as Moon learns about Nora through her magical identification with her.

A complex and fascinating story, *The Castle Key* is a superb first novel marred only by a truly dreadful cover. This is one fantasy novel for young teens that is not to be missed.

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### Celtic Fantasy Powerful, Touching

*The Light-Bearer's Daughter*. O.R. Melling. Penguin, 2001. 194 pp. \$17.99 paper. ISBN 0-14-100459-2.

Irish-born Canadian O.R. Melling has written six Celtic fantasies. Some of the earlier fantasies were uneven in style, confusing or even unconvincing in places. However, Melling seems to have hit her stride with *The Chronicles of Faerie*, and the third novel, *The Light-Bearer's Daughter*, is particularly strong.

This latest novel in the four-part series tells the story of eleven-year-old Dana, whose father shatters her happy world when he announces they are moving from their home in Ireland back to Canada, where he is from. Dana is particularly distraught because this means that her mother, who disappeared when Dana was three, will not be able to find them if she comes looking. But Dana herself disappears soon after, called by the Queen of Faerie to aid in a very serious quest to save the realm of Faerie from a human threat. In the course of her quest, Dana discovers and frees her mother, not to return to her and her father as Dana had once hoped, but to take her rightful place again as one of the leaders of Faerie.

Everything about the book is touched with magic: Big Bob and his tree huggers who are trying to save a national park from destruction; Dana's father, Gabriel, with his gentle, wistful air; and Dana herself, child of a faerie and a mortal, who must find and then accept her heritage so she can save her mother's people, while

giving up the mother she has so desperately longed for.

The novel is full of archetypal quest themes, including the very real and terrible sacrifices Dana is asked to make to save those she barely knows. But this is Ireland, where the belief in the world of Faerie lies barely under the surface and which can be released in full in an eleven-year-old girl who is half faerie herself. Thus, the magic of the story works and is utterly believable, as is the alternately frightened and determined Dana. Also real are the many characters she meets along the way in her quest, including the holy hermit Kevin, the mischievous boggles, and the wolf, her kin, who dies to save her. The story is moving because Melling is able to make them all so very real, making the reader care about them so that we laugh with them or weep with Dana over their fate. This is powerful writing.

The only weak point in the novel is Honor, the Queen of the Faeries. When she is truly in her Faerie role, there is no problem. However, Honor is a Canadian girl who has chosen to live in the realm of Faerie, becoming their Queen in the process. She sometimes slips back into her role as mortal-seeming Honor with her North American accent, which is horribly jarring and just feels false. There is no real explanation given for her change of roles, and the transformation is confusing for the reader. Dana is far more believable than the unreliable Honor, and Melling would have done well to leave her converted human/faerie in her new role, with memories of, but not transformations into, her old one.

Overall, however, *The Light-Bearer's Daughter* is a marvellous novel full of Celtic faerie lore and realistic characters that will seduce any reader who has ever caught a glimpse, or even thought they had, of the other realm.

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### Girls Who are Different: Three Historical Girl-Centred Texts

*My Mannequins*. Sydell Waxman. Illus. Patty Gallinger. Napoleon, 2000. 32 pp. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-929141-73-3. Ages 5-9. *Daughter of the Great Zandini*. Cary Fagan. Illus. Cybele Young. Tundra, 2001. 64 pp. \$18.99 cloth. ISBN 0-8876-634-3. Ages 8-11. *Born to be a Cowgirl*. Candace Savage. 64 pp. Greystone, 2001. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55054-838-7. Ages 8-11.

These three historically-based books, two fictional and one factual, are all fine examples of the recent trend of girl-centred publishing. The heroines or subjects are all girls or young women who go against "the grain" of expected gender, age, and period determined roles to do what is considered impossible. All three appeal to the desired age of audience by effective use of the desired format to create engaging girls/young women that the young girl reader can both learn from and identify with.

Sydell Waxman's story is about ten-year-old Dora, who works in her father's dressmaking as a production assistant but who dreams of being a designer. Set in the Toronto garment district in the 1940s, *My Mannequins* evocatively presents the life of a working-class girl. Aptly complemented by Patty Gallinger's colour illus-