

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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Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek teaches at Malaspina University College in Nanimo, BC, where she specializes in children's literature.

### 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-

trations, the reader sees how children worked as part of a family business and learns how garments were made. Gallinger's attention to period detail is superb — from the saddle shoes Dora wears to the style of fashion worn by the mannequins to the marvellous gold, silver, and black Singer sewing machine operated by a foot treadle. Indeed, the representation of the machine that Dora works — that she considers to be almost a pet — is so vivid that it almost comes to life, and so do the mannequins. Waxman's note about anti-Semitism in the development of the garment trade period provides an important historical dimension to the tale, although this is not developed in the story.

*Daughter of the Great Zandini*, Cary Fagan's well-plotted story of Fanny, who lives in Paris in the late nineteenth century, depicts, as does Waxman's story, a girl who surprises her father by going against his wishes to prove herself his equal and partner in a nonconfrontational manner. The storyline draws upon conventional motifs of the girl who must dress as a boy to assert her abilities and gain her parent's respect. Yet Fagan presents this plot in an engaging way, by inventing a self-reflective heroine who emerges as her own person and includes a plot twist to a mystery subplot worthy of a magician! The occasional pen and ink illustrations support key actions in the story as well as enhance the period atmosphere of a vibrant Parisian society. The decision to put the poster announcing the return of the Great Zandini and his family on the cover is an effective strategy to attract the curiosity of the reader.

By contrast, Candace Savage's *Born to be a Cowgirl* is history, not historical fiction. It is a richly illustrated account drawing upon many period photographs and posters to depict how some young women from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century opposed societal expectations by becoming female cowboys in the American and Canadian Wests. The most overtly feminist of the three books, this book demonstrates two recent laudable trends in historical research: uncovering the history of previously unknown or little recognized groups, and facing the colonialist treatment of First Nations peoples directly. Accordingly, while the focus is on white girls and women, two photos, captions, and brief discussion acknowledge how the skill of First Nations women on horseback served as a model for these western girls, and by including a contemporary photo of a young First Nations cowgirl, the book shows how this tradition is being continued today. The biographical account of several cowgirls' lives locates the history in a specific context and holds the reader's attention.

In all, each of these historically-based books provides in its own ways compelling accounts of non-traditional girls. The two fictional narratives successfully create girls who are historically believable while going against the odds. The historical text with its impressive supporting materials (glossary, index, annotated bibliography, websites), could serve as the basis of a research project on women's studies or girl studies. While all three are pricey, they are all fine additions to public and school libraries.

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*Jacqueline Reid-Walsh teaches Women's Studies at McGill University and children's and youth literature at Bishop's University. She has just completed a co-authored book on children's popular culture.*