

periods results in an ambivalent experience for her reader: one is never entirely sure whose story is being told. Orality misleads Lohans as well. More than midway through the story, Lohans introduces onomatopoeia, a device which appears contrived; it sticks out from the rest of the story in both tone and style. Also problematic, the climax of *Sundog Rescue* hinges on a plot element that smacks awkwardly of misplaced melodrama; resolution is reached through the imposition of an archetypal device, straining the depth of the story.

Vladyana Langer Krykorka provides the illustrations in *Sundog Rescue* and manages to smooth out some of Lohans's mechanical flaws. She successfully captures the tension upon which the story is built, choosing to shift her colour choices in order to distinguish between the past and the present. Melissa's imaginative forays are drawn in vividly eerie shades of blue, underscoring the protagonist's sense of isolation, while historical reminiscences are drawn in shades of yellow: they each feature more than one character and reinforce a sense of security, supporting Lohans's guiding ideology about the value of history and family.

*Sundog Rescue* offers validation of young imaginative fancies. Although sometimes frightening, the reader does not doubt the beauty of Melissa's special world. Thus, despite some faults perhaps more glaring to the adult reader than the child, Lohans and Krykorka have presented a story that interweaves the real and the ethereal, and in so doing have created an "otherworld" that casts shadows and sheds light — a story that has much to offer a young mind itself seeking connections.

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### Flights of Fantasy in Time and Place

*Just Imagine*. Deanne Lee Bingham. Illus. Helena Below. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1998. 24 pp. cloth. ISBN: 1-55401-381-3. *I Wished for a Unicorn*. Robert Heidbreder. Illus. Kady MacDonald Denton. Kids Can, 2000. Unpag. 32 pp. \$15.95 cloth. ISBN: 1-55074-543-3. *The Trailer Park Princesses*. Peter Marlowe. Illus. Leanne Franson. Annick, 2000. Unpag. 32 pp. \$16.95, \$7.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-617-9, 1-55037-616-0.

The three story books reviewed here appeal to the imagination of young listeners and readers, ages four to eight years. In each of the tales there is a central motif. Pete Marlowe's experience in archaeology and his many travels glimmer in *The Trailer Park Princesses*. Twin girls from a trailer park imagine they were actually four identical sisters. The two have been separated from their siblings and their royal origins by a cataclysmic earthquake. They travel through time and space, finding themselves in such dislocated historical moments as ancient Egypt and a Wild West town. Clearly anyone in their trailer park, on the school bus, or in their class might

also have such princely roots, particularly their good-natured mother. Peter Marlowe emphasizes this possibility by using the qualifier “royal” numerous times. Leanne Franson’s expressive illustrations in acrylic with pencil crowd each page and accompany the story line. Her suggestion of an Egyptian travel poster (8) tells us the probable source of the girls’ imaginary escapade into ancient Egypt. Her sense of humour and ability to relate to young minds are evident in such illustrations as her depiction of the shaking of the ground and time (5). *The Trailer Park Princesses’* plot is the most complex of the three books under examination here and although much of it is evidently tongue-in-cheek, a literal mind might wonder what became of the sad family, courtiers and castle left behind (10). All of this may be the twins’ way of dealing with a single-parent household. While the oxymoron in the title is ingenious and appealing, this reader was more drawn to the simplicity of story line in *Just Imagine* and *I Wished for a Unicorn*.

In *Just Imagine*, Quin uses a small branch to propel herself and her loyal tabby cat into a series of exciting experiences. Her friends dismiss the magical staff as “just an old stick” (3), but Quin understands its myriad possibilities. Deanne Lee Bingham allows full wing to her protagonist’s imagination as the branch becomes a conductor’s baton or a training stick for a circus tiger who strangely resembles kitty writ large. The branch then becomes a fire hose, a trusted kayak oar, a magic wand or the gear shift for heavy machinery, allowing Quin to load a huge pile of sand. The options open to the adventurous young heroine are egalitarian in nature and know no sexist boundaries. She and kitty trudge through a hot and humid tropical forest, pound a flag pole into the surface of the moon and contribute to the collection of masterpieces held in the museum Quin has built. When Quin’s friends again express curiosity about the branch at the conclusion of this breezy story, she tells them it is whatever you imagine it to be (23). Halina Below’s colourful illustrations are a perfect complement to Bingham’s tale. They enable young listeners and readers to see the reality upon which each imaginary flight is based and how Quin’s creative mind loses itself in magical conjuring.

*I Wished for a Unicorn*, written in verse and in the first person, focuses on the wished-for fantastic animal. With this magical figure — the protagonist’s dog without a horn — the story bounds along, leaving behind a rather nondescript backyard. The unicorn takes the protagonist through a gloomy forest of giant and looming trees to a magnificent fairytale castle.

We spotted a castle  
That rose in the air.  
We rushed to its moat —  
What danger lurked there? (11)

The magic wands they discover at a secret door enable them to storm the castle, stave off a dragon, and shrink an evil wizard. Handsome and gallant medieval knights reveal a map to buried treasure. The adventurous partners soon awaken from their exhausted nap and find themselves once again in the backyard, the unicorn now returned to his canine form. This story is a pleasure to read, with Kady MacDonald Denton’s appealing illustrations expertly rendered in gouache. Young

listeners and readers will certainly enjoy these imaginary flights. Adults too will share in the lively excursions of the childhood mind at work.

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### A Powerful *Beowulf* from Welwyn Wilton Katz

*Beowulf*. Welwyn Wilton Katz. Illus. Laszlo Gal. Groundwood, 1999. 64 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-365-X.

*Beowulf* is Welwyn Wilton Katz's kind of story: it's history, but then it isn't; it's fantasy, but then it isn't. In *Out of the Dark*, *Come Like Shadows*, *Whalesinger*, and *False Face* Katz also uses crossovers of past and present, history and fiction, natural and supernatural to weave a story in which an adolescent protagonist comes of age.

In retrospect, Katz's turn to the *Beowulf* story shouldn't be too much of a surprise. *Whalesinger* introduced Sir Francis Drake's landfall in California; in *Come Like Shadows* we met the historical Macbeth; *Out of the Dark* used Norse sagas to recreate the Viking landfall in Newfoundland. *Beowulf* is next in the temporal sequence.

Clearly, the aspect of the story that most intrigued Katz was the brief account of Wiglaf, *Beowulf*'s fourteen-year-old nephew who, though the youngest member of the king's mead bench, is the only one to aid *Beowulf* in his fatal battle with the dragon. Wiglaf, the last of the Waegmunding clan, is our focus for the entire story. Katz posits a "genetic kink" whereby Waegmunding clan members have special gifts. *Beowulf* has the strength of 30 men, as in the original. Aelfhere, his uncle, is a bard who can read minds. Wiglaf, Aelfhere's grandson, has visions of true events, whether past or future. These last two gifts are Katz's inventions.

Our way in, then, to *Beowulf*'s fight with the nine sea monsters, and with Grendel and his mother, is via Wiglaf's visions of past events and Aelfhere's bardic interpretation of them for the troubled boy. This procedure for getting the story told deftly enables Katz to overcome both the vast distance in historical time and the arcane style of the original West Saxon alliterative epic. Through Wiglaf's teenage interjections, Katz can provide a personal, human dimension while acknowledging the beauty of the highly stylized original. Here is the skald (bard) Aelfhere telling of *Beowulf*'s selection of companions for his journey to fight Grendel:

... Thirteen he sought, the keenest of warriors and stout wave-walkers to cross the whale-way to Hrothgar's realm two days to the south.

'Grandfather,' Wiglaf said. 'The story would go better with fewer wave-walkers and whale-ways.'