

spite of the characters' loaded names, the reader is held in doubt for a while, as is Dusa, about whether the multi-talented, seemingly empathetic sisters are what they claim to be — dedicated researchers into a specific sleep disorder — or shape-shifting gorgons with a wholly exploitive interest in their subject-patients. Once the author has to start showing her hand, however, suspense is increasingly eroded by unintended comedy, which turns black and ludicrous when the scholarly sisters resort to gruesome, primitive methods ... and achieve their Frankensteinian purpose.

Snake Dreamer transmits some whiffs of theme. It suggests, for instance, that maternal wisdom can live on through generations to thwart the stony-hearted. However, the book's brevity and Galloway's concentration on action hinder thematic development. And some spellings-out of unnecessary, cluttering details, such as the precise location of a plane seat, waste words and subvert effective emphasis.

This mixture of heterogeneous ingredients isn't exactly a dud novel. It has its excitements. But lovers of the majestic, the heroic, the tragic, and the terrible in classical stories are likely to find reading it a jangling experience.

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Liberating Tale or Cultural Appropriation?

Clever Lazy. Joan Bodger. Illus. Chum McLeod. Tundra, 1997. 204 pp. \$8.99 paper. ISBN 0-88776-418-5.

Clever Lazy is a cleverly-crafted young adult novel about a girl "in a land that might have been ancient China" who grows up to be the Court Inventor for the Emperor. As a feminist fable about the strength of women in the face of patriarchal oppression, this tale works very well, but as a rewriting of the earlier book, *Clever-Lazy, The Girl Who Invented Herself* (1979), its eurocentric use of Chinese culture is at the very least somewhat anachronistic.

The protagonist, Clever Lazy, first shows her inventive powers when, as a young child, she designs an abacus. Her indulgent parents shelter Clever Lazy from mundane housework so that she can devote more time to developing her special talent. They also kindle in their daughter a great reverence for the Goddess of the Dancing Mountains whose wisdom, passed on through Clever Lazy's mother, helps the girl on several occasions to make difficult choices between good and evil. When Clever Lazy reaches adolescence, her parents die from disease and famine, so she goes to the city to live with her wicked, widowed aunt who runs a shop near the Emperor's palace. Clever

Lazy falls in love with a childhood friend named Tinker and eventually marries him. When a nobleman discovers Clever Lazy's talent for invention, he becomes her patron. She then sets about inventing toys for the Emperor such as an ivory back scratcher in the shape of a tiny hand, a magnifying glass, a kaleidoscope, and a game of chess. Clever Lazy is in the process of inventing a steam-powered piston engine when she is told by her patron to stick to creating toys to please the Emperor. It is at several moments such as this in the novel that young readers may pause to think about how difficult it is for women to achieve their creative dreams in a male-dominated society.

When a lesser Emperor from the South comes to visit Clever Lazy's Emperor, she is ordered to create something particularly enchanting to impress the visitor, so she and her husband prepare and present a dazzling fireworks display. When the visiting Emperor realizes that the Inventor could help him to develop weapons with the magic powder she has used in the fireworks, he attempts to kidnap her. After Clever Lazy manages to fend him off, her own Emperor decides that he too wants her to create weapons for his army. When Clever Lazy refuses, she and Tinker are forced to escape at night with the help of the matches and compass that she has also invented. Their journey back to the land of the Dancing Mountains is made more difficult because Clever Lazy is pregnant. Just as it appears as though Clever Lazy and Tinker will be apprehended by the Emperor's soldiers, they are rescued by the Dragonship of the Goddess and deposited safely in the land of the Dancing Mountains.

Joan Bodger's story contains a number of interesting features. For example, Clever Lazy is an excellent role model for young adolescent girls. She is a courageous and determined inventor who demonstrates an uncompromising passion for her work. She loves her husband, but confronts him when he does not agree with her career plans. And she values the wisdom of the Goddess as it is reflected in the lives of the many women in her life who have helped her to achieve her goals. Finally, Bodger's descriptions of people, palaces, and pyrotechnics are truly enchanting. For these reasons, I think many adolescent girls and boys would enjoy reading *Clever Lazy*.

Nevertheless, I do caution teachers and librarians to consider the fact that several of the pseudo-Chinese characters, such as the two Emperors, the nobleman, the aunt, and the aunt's neighbour, are represented as greedy, deceitful, and violent people. Also, the House of Flowers is mentioned several times in the novel to remind us that Clever Lazy is in danger of being sold into prostitution by her aunt. The stereotypes of the Lotus Blossom Baby, the Dragon Lady and Dr. Fu Manchu need to be resisted by writers and teachers of children's literature. Through the work of Chinese American and Canadian authors such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, and Denise Chong, for instance, young readers are able to encounter rich and varied representations of strong Chinese women to admire and emulate. The question which I need to raise about this book, then, is whether or not it is time to stop exoticizing China as a land of mysterious Orientals even if it requires us

to reject at the same time some of the “magic” that a fable such as Bodger’s can weave for young readers.

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The Return of the Prodigal Cat in Budge Wilson’s *The Long Wait*

The Long Wait. Budge Wilson. Illus. Eugenie Fernandes. Stoddart Kids. 1997. 32 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-3021-4.

The Long Wait, Budge Wilson’s delightful tragicomic cat tale of love lost and regained, tells the true story of Deirdre, an endearing feline antiheroine with a big tummy, a split left ear, a leathery black nose, and a mind of her own. Returning home to Ontario with Mr. Wilson (the author’s husband) from the annual family summer holiday in Nova Scotia, Deirdre throws caution to the wind (expending at least *one* of her nine lives) and escapes from the proverbial bag — in this case, her much-hated cat carrier. Dodging the lethal wheels of the TransCanada highway, she eludes her frantic master and seeks refuge in the New Brunswick wilderness. After frenzied efforts to entice Deirdre back to the car, Mr. Wilson is forced to rejoin his wife and daughters empty-handed. This apparent catastrophe in fact precipitates Deirdre’s miraculous transformation from cossetted house-cat into sleek miniature panther.

An adept storyteller in the best oral tradition, Wilson immediately takes her readers into her confidence. Using strong clear prose with touches of poetry, wordplay, rhetoric, subtle verbal cadences, and a distinctly Canadian context, Wilson spins Deirdre’s disappearance into an intimate story of suspense, pathos, and humour, which begs to be read aloud. Eugenie Fernandes’ wonderful swirling illustrations in vibrant pastel colours are a feast for the eye and the perfect marriage with Wilson’s engaging text. When we first encounter Deirdre and her people, Fernandes’s drawings mirror Wilson’s words exactly. After the pussycat’s escape, there is a subtle shift in this relationship: gradually what we see and hear are wonderfully at odds. As the Wilsons broaden their long-distance search (assisted by many kind denizens of a small Maritime community) and frosty fall weather closes in, the despairing family struggles to remain hopeful; meanwhile, Deirdre is tasting the wild life and loving it. Fernandes undercuts the Wilsons’s woeful imaginings with joyful scenes of a feral Deirdre frolicking with chipmunks,