

Jesse & Louisa: Two Sisters Face Trials Of War And Faith In Christian Novel

Lauren F. Winner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr>

Recommended Citation

Winner, Lauren F. (2001) "Jesse & Louisa: Two Sisters Face Trials Of War And Faith In Christian Novel," *Civil War Book Review*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 .

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol3/iss2/17>

Review

JESSE & LOUISA

Two sisters face trials of war and faith in Christian novel

Winner, Lauren F.

Spring 2001

Snelling, Lauraine *Sisters of the Confederacy: A Secret Refuge*. Bethany House, ISBN 1556618409

When Jesselynn Hardwood chops off her locks and dons britches, she is following a long line of Civil War heroines dressed in drag, from the (real-life) Union spy Emma Edmonds to Rita M' Brown's (fictional) Geneva Chatfield. Unlike Geneva, who pretends to be a boy in order to follow her husband into battle, Jesselynn has an odd-and rather implausible-task. Her father, dying from war wounds in 1863, begs Jesse to save the family's horses, at whatever cost. So Jesselynn leaves her beloved Twin Oaks (no, not Twelve Oaks), band of rag-tag newly freed slaves in tow, to drive that passel of horses to safety in Missouri.

By the end of *Daughter of Twin Oaks*, the first installment of Lauraine Snelling's Secret Refuge series, Jesselynn is safely camped out in a Missouri cave, protecting those precious horses. In the sequel, **Sisters of the Confederacy**, we meet up with Jesselynn again, and we also read about her sister Louisa, waiting out the war at an aunt's house in Virginia. Jesselynn spends another few weeks in Missouri and then hits the Oregon Trail. Louisa, a devoted volunteer at a Confederate hospital, makes a daring trip to Washington, D.C., and smuggles morphine (sewn in the hoops of her skirts, of course) back to Richmond, where she nurses the wounded and mourns the apparent death of her intended.

The Secret Refuge series is part of the sub-genre of Christian historical fiction. Christian fiction has been improving by leaps and bounds in the last few years, but you would not know it from reading *Daughter of Twin Oaks* or **Sisters of the Confederacy**: the plots crawl, the characters are cardboard, the dialogue stilted. Whatever their literary demerits, these novels' explicit concern for questions of faith is actually more historically accurate than their secular

counterparts, often peopled with folks whose secular sensibilities are better suited to the late 20th century than the mid-19th. After all, as Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson recently noted, "religion stood at the center of the American Civil War experience." Trials of faith are every bit as central to Snelling's novels as trials of war. Both Jesse and Louisa are wracked with wartime doubts, both are buoyed by the prayers of others, both have a lively, conversational prayer life.

Perhaps *Daughters of Twin Oaks* and **Sisters of the Confederacy** will inspire more able novelists to pay attention to faith.

Lauren F. Winner (lfw5@columbia.edu) is a doctoral candidate in history at Columbia University and the books producer at Beliefnet.com. She is co-author, with Randall Balmer, of a study of contemporary American Protestantism, which is forthcoming from Columbia University Press.