



Mary Coin

Marisa Silver

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An NPR Best Book of 2013

A BBC Best Book of 2013

In her first novel since *The God of War*, the critically acclaimed author Marisa Silver takes Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother" photograph as inspiration for a breathtaking reinvention—a story of two women, one famous and one forgotten, and of the remarkable legacy of their chance encounter.

In 1936, a young mother resting by the side of a road in Central California is spontaneously photographed by a woman documenting the migrant laborers who have taken to America's farms in search of work. Little personal information is exchanged, and neither woman has any way of knowing that they have produced what will become the most iconic image of the Great Depression.

Three vibrant characters anchor the narrative of *Mary Coin*. Mary, the migrant mother herself, who emerges as a woman with deep reserves of courage and nerve, with private passions and carefully-guarded secrets. Vera Dare, the photographer wrestling with creative ambition who makes the choice to leave her children in order to pursue her work. And Walker Dodge, a present-day professor of cultural history, who discovers a family mystery embedded in the picture. In luminous, exquisitely rendered prose, Silver creates an extraordinary tale from a brief moment in history, and reminds us that although a great photograph can capture the essence of a moment, it only scratches the surface of a life.

Mary Coin Details

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Author : Marisa Silver

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From Reader Review Mary Coin for online ebook

Elizabeth says

Oh, but this was a hugely satisfying read.

Speculative fiction?

I adore thee.

Based on Dorothea Lange's famous photo *Migrant Mother*, Marisa Silver sets out to imagine *the who* of both the migrant in the photo and the photographer. The passage of time is so beautifully paced in this story that I think it is damn near perfect. Both women are exceptional- in their struggles, in their self-determination, and in their survival.

LOVED.

Jill says

It's a bold concept: take one of the most famous photographs in U.S. history – Migrant Mother, the photo that defined the Great Depression – and reimagine the story of the subject, Florence Owens Thompson (called Mary Coin) and the photographer, Dorothea Lange (dubbed Vera Dare).

Whenever an author deals with “faction”, the reader has a decision to make: view it from the prism of history or view it as a fictional creation of the author. I chose the latter. The skeleton facts are all there: the 32-year-old mother with six (or is it seven?) young children whose spirit remains strong even while the family is suffering hunger pains...and the photographer who wrestles with her ambition while making a different decision about her own two children. Add in a completely fictional character, Walker – a professor of cultural history who has his own reasons for pursuing his interest in this story – and you have three intriguing perspectives of the times.

This type of concept could easily have fallen into hagiography, but it doesn't. Marisa Silver does a great job of recreating the era and sketching her characters with enough attributes – both good and bad – to make them come alive.

And then she goes one step further to ask a vital question: when you see a photograph like Migrant Mother, do you look or do you truly see? How far does any photo go to capture the life of the subject rather than just a frozen moment in time? Are we all inadvertent historians? As Walker reflects: “It is the human fallacy to believe that we discover any single thing. It is only that we are slow to learn how to see what is in front of us.”

Marisa Silver has written a fine novel, beautifully weaving imagination with historical fact. Her questions are solid: “Out of the billions o objects that were tossed into the trash bin of time, why did this one survive?” The answer tells us a lot about ourselves.

Celia says

I loved this book. It is my kind of book - historical fiction.

Set primarily in depression era California, Mary Coin tells the saga of three inter-related people:

Mary Coin whose haunting visage was preserved forever in the iconic photograph, Migrant Mother.

Vera Dare, the woman who photographed her.

Walker Dodge, a present-day professor of cultural history, who discovers a family mystery embedded in the picture.

Mary Coin really existed and her picture was really taken. However her real name is Florence Leona Christie. She was married 3 times. She had 10 children.

Vera Dare really existed. She did take the Migrant Mother picture and 5 others. Her real name is Dorothea Lange.

Walker Dodge seems to be a figment of Silver's imagination. His presence does add much to the fictional narrative.

There is an excellent article on Wikipedia entitled Migrant Mother. It relates a little about Florence's life, the taking of the picture, its re-emergence in 1945, and the death of Florence and its aftermath. There were actually six pictures taken; the other five are included in this article.

As I read the Wiki article, I noticed that Silver incorporated many of the true happenings into her book. I encourage you to read the article AND the book. You can't go wrong, especially if you are a lover of historical fiction as am I.

Chrissie says

Are you curious about some of the true facts about Dorothy Lange's 1936 iconic photo "Migrant Mother" of Florence Thompson Owens? More photos were taken. Who were these people? Check out this link: <http://www.jamesaltucher.com/2011/11/...> If you are unacquainted with Lange look here: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorothea...>

A photograph can say so much, but how much is really true?

In this book of fiction, Mary Coin is Florence and Vera Dare is Dorothy Lange.

On completion:

Intellectually, I liked this book. It gets you thinking. There are some great lines and thoughts about truth, what is real and what is fiction, and photography as an art form. I love the ending that clearly defines where

the author stands; you are not left hanging, wondering what the author is trying to say. What you see with your eyes is not always the truth. Truth is complicated and as with everything else people will interpret what they see differently. I liked the way this theme validates the purpose of writing fiction, of creating one version of a possible reality. Whether it is correct from start to finish is not of real importance, in any case you get inside different people's heads and see how they saw the trajectory of events.

The author does not distort the known facts, but she has plenty of lee-way since very little IS known. Owens/Mary had six or seven children. How the story plays out could possibly be true but perhaps not! Just playing with this version, imagining how the characters felt, is worth the ride.

My favorite theme was what you can achieve with photography as an art form.

What if someone took a photo of you and later you saw it used over and over again. It takes on a life of its own. Think about that. How would you feel?

The dialogs and language used by the different characters are very well done. The book starts in the 1920s and continues a decade into the 21st century. I loved the lines of Alice, a rebellious teenager of modern times. Her whole family is totally fictional but this part of the story makes it possible to ponder the themes mentioned above. Alice and Vera and Mary, women from completely different worlds and eras, the author succeeds in making each one feel true to their time. Then there is Alice's father, Walker, a social historian. In the sections set around him the words used are those of an educated person. In contrast, when Mary talks the language is simpler, which I prefer. It is like looking at a painting where all the details are right. The story does flip between the different periods, but it is not hard to follow.

There are some parts of the plot that I found far-fetched. (view spoiler)

The audiobook has three narrators, one for Mary, one for Walker and one for Vera. I enjoyed the male narration by Mark Zeisler best. Alison Fraser narrates Vera's sections, and this too was well done. Eva Kaminsky narrates Mary's sections. In my view her tone felt like that of a modern-day woman. She has a lilt that goes up at the end of each sentence that disturbed me.

I did come to understand the different characters, how past events made them into who they were. But did I feel empathy for them? No, not really, although I did certainly feel in my bones how it might have been to be a migrant worker in California during the Great Depression. I am glad I read the book for this experience alone. I am also glad I read the book because it got me thinking about photography, what can be achieved through it, both good and bad. Finally, how important is it to seek out "the truth"? Isn't it more important to see how different people might view a given event? Maybe it is not really important to analyze which is the one and only correct one!

Gary the Bookworm says

We've all heard someone say that pictures don't lie -- which has always been a distortion of the truth. The earliest photographers learned how to manipulate an image to convey various messages. Pictures can be cropped, colored, or airbrushed to hide or highlight elements of the "truth" and the viewer's perception often depends on factors that go far beyond the factual circumstances of the subject matter. When Dorothea Lange snapped some pictures of a migrant family stranded on the roadside in 1936, she knew she had stumbled onto something significant. She forwarded them to a newspaper in San Francisco the next day and the rest is history.

The most striking image, a stoic, dignified mother, surrounded by her children, with her gaze averted from the camera, has become the iconic picture of America in the Depression. It is also the inspiration for this intermittently riveting, historical novel by Marisa Silver. She weaves their stories -the photographer and her subject - into a powerful tapestry of female empowerment as the Roaring 20's first fizzled...then popped, leaving behind a residue of destitution and despair. Her third character, a contemporary social historian, aptly named Walker Dodge, from a wealthy family of citrus growers, is struggling to connect to his children as he seeks answers about his family's past following his father's death.

Silver's prose is luminous, especially when she's telling Mary's hardscrabble tale of survival. Her Dorothea character, Vera Dare, comes off less vividly, perhaps because her circumstances were less dire so her accomplishments seem comparatively diminished. Walker's modern tale of parenting and divorce isn't nearly as compelling, but he shows endearing qualities as a college professor who is committed to getting his students to observe analytically. The opening chapter, which describes Walker's return to his hometown, is a masterful evocation of the cyclical nature of time and its impact on memory. This thread connects all three characters but, like the overreaches of the 1920's, it is not substantial enough to mitigate the inherent imbalance of their lives or of their stories.

*I can't believe I'm updating this review three hours after I posted it but this article is particularly relevant:
<http://cphmag.com/migrant-mother/>

Stefanie says

Maybe halfway through this book, I scanned a few Goodreads reviews, trying to figure out why it came so highly rated and recommended. But the review that resonated most with my experience reading it ended thusly: "This book is fine for people who enjoy chewing sawdust." OK! Not just me then!

The premise is interesting. It's a fictionalized version of the story behind the famous photograph "Migrant Mother." Silver invents a character behind the unknown-to-us mother, the photographer, and other players, but she tells the story so dryly that I found it hard to care at all about those characters.

Weirdly, other people in the book club I read this for spent an entire hour debating the ethics of publishing a made-up story about actual people, but it didn't even occur to me to be bothered by that aspect of the novel. Who *hasn't* looked at a photo (or at the next table at a coffee shop) and made up a story in their mind about the people they see there? Are we upset merely that Marisa Silver made money doing so? I don't know the original Migrant Mother's story, but Silver's retelling of it didn't strike me as disrespectful. It merely struck me as dry. Boring. Overwrought. Full of forced, failed poignancy. I would quote one of the many passages that made me roll my eyes in annoyance, but I tossed my copy in the center of the circle at book club in defiance, which is what we do to offer our copy of a book we never want to look at again up to anyone who inexplicably loved it enough to offer a spare one to a friend. My apologies to whichever friend of a book club member is subjected to it. But since my copy is gone now, at least I won't be forcing it on any of YOU.

Lou says

Behind a photo is a world unknown, a passage of time not witnessed by the observer.
The famous photo on the cover of this book represents the character that this story has been written of, Mary

Coin takes center stage in this story.

Thanks to this author we have a snippet of life behind that photo. Her journey, her plight, her love, her marriage, her motherhood and her loss are all described well in this story of Mary Coin.

There are two great women at the heart of this story the photographer Vera Dare and Mary coin.

Thanks to writers including John Steinbeck and Woody Guthrie on telling the dust-bowl stories of bygone days and the journeying of people to California, they successfully cemented the plight of the people in peoples minds and hearts. The movie adaptation of Grapes of Wrath had proved to be a great success in the cause too.

Travel back in time with this novel with two great fighting souls, two women that could possibly remain with you in your memories for many a days, their struggle and their determination and hope would be remembered.

“Her face reminded Mary of the shape of a flower vase, the planes of her cheeks rising up at a gentle incline to her prominent cheekbones, bones Mary had inherited, although not her mother’s nut-brown Cherokee skin or her coal-black eyes. Mary wondered how long it would take to inherit her mother’s calloused hands and matching nature.”

“What right did she have to take photographs of strangers? But she knew these faces. Even if she had never seen a single one of these people before, something deep inside of her recognized them. These people had been mad to feel inadequate, abnormal. Their lives were disfigured by circumstances. She had to take their pictures because what she saw, what she saw, marked her as much as a limp or the fact that she was the only gentile in a school filled with Jews or that her father did not love her enough to stay.”

“The story of history is the story of its telling and its retelling. There are truths lost to time and desire.”

Review also @<http://more2read.com/review/mary-coin-by-marisa-silver/>

Suzanne says

Mary Coin, a novel by Marisa Silver, is one of my favorite novels. Silver takes base elements like poverty, homelessness, dust storms and love and transforms them into a valued amalgam.

Mary is part Cherokee, all Okie and tough.. Her claim to fame as a child is a newspaper picture of her grandfather, an accused murderer, who walks into a burning building rather than face the authorities. Mary learns many lessons from her mother, but the greatest is how to build a foundation. Silver takes us in Mary's beat up truck through field after field, watching her fill the bread baskets of America as she and her children share husks of corn and scavenge for fallen birds. Yet Mary holds her children tight as she remembers her mother's grief when Mary's younger sister died.

Not only does Silver create a noble family, the penniless Coins, but she also creates a wealthy dynasty, the

Dodges. Their orange groves finance the building of their homes, but do not sustain their shelters for the dust ups in family life. Walker Dodge is a descendant and a social historian. He searches through pieces of waste, old broken things, discarded pictures, scarred furniture trying to find the past and tell its story and his story. He averts his eyes as his daughter, Alice, starves for his affection after his family breaks apart.

Lastly, Silver shows us a photographer, Vera Dare, who is able to recognize strength, love and harshness as she takes the picture of Mary Coin, and shows it to the world. Her photo is so expressive and impressive that no one can dare look away. Vera, stricken with polio as a child learns to walk with a limp, but develops a keen eye. She poses her subject so that the truth is seen by everyone who looks on her "Mary's" face. Although Vera's subject is clearly maternal, Vera, herself is more ambitious than motherly. Vera subjects her own children to foster care so that she can show the dismantling of American life.

All in all, Silver tells three great stories which are melded into one. Her prose are crafted masterfully which add to the strength of this novel. I truly felt the hunger of the Coins, the Dodges and the Dares. I saw each of these families through different lenses and from many angles. I also followed the characters as they tried to dodge their realities. Marisa Silver is more a magician than an "alchemist" because this book is golden!

Barbara says

As is my custom, I will not give a complete synopsis of this book, but some discussion of the background should suffice. The photo on the front jacket is familiar to many of us. It is a view of a woman of the depression era, a long-suffering, hard-toiling migrant worker. Of interest, the novel is actually inspired by this woman, Florence Thompson, who was "discovered" by photographer, Dorothea Lange.

Silver has related this tale by basing it on the difficult existence of Mary Coin, who married at sixteen and had seven children. Most of them arrived in the midst of her picking season, when she would squat unaccompanied and give birth with little sustenance to comfort her. After her husband died, life became much worse.

"Mary sustained the weight of sorrow that would descend on her freshly each morning when she woke up and had to remind herself all over again that her husband was gone. But what terrified her most was that she knew what had happened to her had not really happened yet. Right now there was only waking and feeding and sending the big children to school and taking the little ones into the field and wiping sweat and filling a bag and standing in lines. A larger grief was still out there waiting to overtake her when she was not looking. She had to be careful." (p.90)

One could not ignore the importance in the portrayal of the photographer, Vera Dare. Her story is interspersed with Mary's. Although she was of a different class than Mary, Vera's life had many difficulties also. She often felt that she had to justify her work.

"She'd gotten just close enough to the woman and her children so that she had not forced a point of view by being too aggressive in angle or by including ironic juxtapositions. The picture had been effective because every single person who looked at it had to decide whose side he was on. But over time it had been so reproduced, so co-opted, so burdened by obligation to represent an entire era, that it had become something both more and less the image she had taken that day." (p 184)

Silver has intriguingly set forth the sadness, the frustration and the absolute soul-wrenching fatigue for the migrant laborers during the Great Depression. She has also managed to interweave the difficulties for other social classes during this period. These factors clearly demonstrate how self-perpetuating some of these

features are in the life of future generations. Yet, despite all this sorrow and the struggles for survival, she has poignantly explored the fundamentals of love, family, privation and aspirations for a better future.

Nancy says

I wish Silver had included an afterward detailing the parts of her story that are based on fact and the parts that came from her imagination. That said, if Walker is her invention and not based on a real person, I would have preferred the novel without him as he has little to do with the story other than the fact he's an historian. Introducing him as a current day tie-in to the famous photograph only made for disjointed story-telling.

Silver writes about the two women during the Great Depression but we know little about them until they are reintroduced in old age shortly before their deaths. I would have liked the book better if she had fleshed out the time in between. I thought Vera was particularly interesting—modeled after Dorothea Lange, a woman ahead of her time. I like her attention to detail—her photographic eye. As she states in chapter 22: “Developing pictures is like giving birth—a newly printed photo that left her hands and went into the world.”

Kristine Brancolini says

I read an article on Marisa Silver in the *LA Times* and ran out to buy this book. Earlier this year I read *Eight Girls Taking Pictures*, based on the lives of lesser-known woman photographers, but Dorothea Lange and her photo *Migrant Mother* have always intrigued me. This beautifully-written book offers a fictional exploration of the lives two women that touch very briefly but with consequences for both women. The third main character, history professor Walker Dodge, is completely fictional and more tangential to the book, but also important to the overall narrative.

Silver does a masterful job of interweaving the stories of the three main character, beginning with Walker in 2010, then moving to 1920 with Mary Coin (Florence Owens Thompson) and Vera Dare (Dorothea Lange). The book focuses on Mary and Vera from 1920 to 1936, when the photo *Migrant Mother* was shot by the side of the road in central California. The encounter lasted less than 10 minutes. Silver handles Mary's story with sensitivity. She had seven children by the time she was 32 and one might ask, "Why not stop having children?," but the book makes it clear why and how this has happened. Vera is also a mother, with a failed marriage and re-marriage to a man who works alongside her documenting the hardships of life on the margins during the Great Depression. Anyone who thinks that financial disaster bears any resemblance to the recent Great Recession should read this book. I also just saw a documentary on hunger in the U.S. called *A Place at the Table* and although it's a travesty that children still go to bed hungry in the U.S. in 2013, Mary's children were literally starving.

I'll let you find out for yourself the connection between Walker Dodge and Mary Coin. This is a wonderful book that sent me to the library for more books by Marisa Silver and a biography of Dorothea Lange.

Randy says

OMG. Just finished this stunning beautiful fiction by Marisa Silver. Publishes in March but I was graced

with an advanced reading copy. Her best yet and the book that will surely catapult her into national recognition. If the National Book Awards gave their award to beautiful fiction, instead of quirky fiction, this would at least capture a nomination. Gorgeous prose. Fantastically insightful observations on the human condition. Believable and moving characters. A beautifully structured story that imagines the intersection of photographer Dorothea Lange and her most famous subject, the face of the Great Depression. Women's lives and hardships are at the core of the story, which also explores the place of photography in capturing history and the intangible ethereal nature of history. What do we truly see in a photograph? What does it mean? And when a person is captured by the camera, is their essence we envision, or, as posed by the author, the ending of a moment. I am especially pleased that Silver took a story which at its heart focuses on a famous person but because so much is fictionalized she has resisted the impulse to use the real name, rather inventing a new persona for Lange, so that we know this is fiction, yet we believe the creation is credible. Truth, family, heartache, women's struggles, the invention of self... these are all at the heart of this exquisitely rendered prose. I do not wish to give anything away, even as the story meanders through time and place and voice, it touches so deeply as to never want it to end. Read it. Treasure it. Pass it along. Brava Marisa Silver.

Theresa says

Actual rating if I was going to judge this book based solely on its entertainment and readability would be 4 stars. But I'm only giving this book 1 star!!!

Bear with me while I try to explain this as I'm stepping away from my normal grading scale for this one because something REALLY got under my skin and I refuse to grade this book higher than the one star I need in order to review. (I'll explain that in a bit.)

This would be my review if judging this book only by its merit of the writing and the fictionalized story.

Like I said I really liked this book on the surface. It was an enjoyable and quick read. I wasn't crazy about the way the author tied things up in the end. It ended too abruptly without much reason. The other issue which I admit honestly is minor but irritating was the author's vocabulary choices. I have a niggling feeling that she simply choose some of her words to sound highbrow and "fancy". I pride myself with having a large vocabulary but a few times I had to look at definitions because even context was not helpful in figuring her meanings. It just rang of pretentiousness to me. Of course, she only employed these words in sections devoted to the college professor because he certainly would be smarter and using these words. Bleh! More irksome was that words in question were not even in dialogue but rather they were in descriptions. So why choose such odd words?

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Now here is my final review and the reason everything good about this book ceases to matter. This is the reason for the 1 star!!

I have a big problem with this book! I'm mad at the author!! I feel she did a great disservice to the lady in the iconic picture, Migrant Mother. I feel she misused and abused the life story of the true person behind the image. I realize the picture is in public domain but I think there was no consideration given to the fact that this was a living, breathing human with ideas and preferences. This book is a work of fiction and the names are changed. I understand that!!! But I just feel it was wrong, more than wrong what the author did. Not only does the author use the picture she also usurps many of the true facts about Florence Owens Thompson's (the woman in the iconic picture) real life and fictionalizes them into the story. That in a nutshell is what got my

hackles up. Wrong wrong wrong! Not cool! (She also does the same but somewhat less harshly with the photographer Dorothea Lange. I guess I'm less outraged for Lange because she lied to Florence Thompson and couldn't be bothered with documenting Thompson's true story. I have a feeling she felt superior to this "broke down tramp" with six children waiting for "her man" ughh!) Anyway, I guess I need to make the point here that all anyone need do is a bit of quick research to find that the lady in the picture, Thompson, truly did not agree to have her image used in the way it was back in the 30's. She disliked the image and never benefited from it. One could argue that the photographer Dorothea Lange did not make money from it either as it was taken as part of a Government Works Project during the depression. However, Lange made a name for herself as a result of the notoriety and subsequently that paid off monetarily. But back to Thompson, even up to 30 years after the photo was taken she tried to have the use of the picture stopped. She never asked to be compensated, she simply did not want the picture to be circulated. Her reason was that she did not give permission and she was told by the photographer that the image would not be published and that it was solely to show the people in the government what was happening with migrant workers. Most importantly Thompson did not like being seen as the poster image for everything that was wrong in the world. She disliked being seen as the epitome of the broken down and trampled on. She was a proud, hard working lady who was doing everything she could to get by and raise her six children after her husband passed away. She never took a hand out and she felt the picture was embarrassing. I can understand full well what her reasons were and the mindset. I grew up listening to first hand stories about the depression from my grandma. She was born and raised in the same area of the country, and in many ways had parallel historical experiences as the real children of Ms Thompson. So I guess I'm trying to say is "I get it". I understand why she disliked that image. I'm angry for her! I'm angry for her grandchildren and anyone else still alive in her family. I'm mad that she is continuing to be used in this way. I'm outraged at this author for stealing her spirit again. Like I said before I realize the names were changed but damn it all!!!! she still swiped just about everything from this poor lady's life and used it as fiction EXCEPT for this book the author invented a "bastard" child who was the result of a romping in the orange groves with the son of a farm owner. Yes, the character was even doing this while she was working. Supposedly no care that she may get caught and therefore not be able to feed her other SIX kids. And if that is not scandalizing enough the author decides to have her just give the baby away. Really?? Who would do that? I'm mad people will read this and think that really happened. Why not? the author took everything else from Thompson's life down to the minute detail of having the main character be from the same hometown in Iowa. What a way to blur the lines !! As I said before I'm angry!! I will never pick anything by this author again and I hope those of you reading my review follow suit.

Chris Witkowski says

In a haunting and heartbreaking novel that spans nearly 90 years, Marisa Silver imagines the back story behind the iconic photo, *Migrant Mother*, taken by Dorothea Lange in 1935. After the death of his beloved, but quite elusive father in 2010, Walker Dodge is left with the task of clearing out the family home, a onerous job for sure, but one that may finally provide some answers to the questions that have always percolated in his mind about his father's background. Why was the old man so secretive about his past? Why did he limit contact with his grandchildren to a few visits a year?

Silver imagines the lives of the woman captured in the photo and the photographer, two women struggling, in very different ways, with the role of being a mother, one woman trying to keep her children alive, the other wrestling with her desire for a career versus being a mother.

One fascinating theme in the novel explores the nature of photography, asking the question - just what does a photo tell us? Does one second in time, captured for all eternity, become the truth? "It is a photograph, an alchemy of fact and invention that produces something recognizable as the truth. But it is not the truth."

This is a gorgeously written novel, written in such detail that I found myself believing that the story Silver imagines must be the real one.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

Sorry folks. Once again I feel like the skunk at the picnic, but I have to be honest.

IMPRESSIONS AFTER 100 PAGES: Marisa Silver has some admirable writing skills. However, this story began to feel like a fictionalized recitation of the life of Florence Owens Thompson, the lady in the 1936 Dorothea Lange photo "Migrant Mother." (The photo has been cropped and colorized for the novel's dustjacket.) Furthermore, the addition of Walker, the modern-day historian, is distracting and superfluous.

"Recitation" was the frustrating factor for me here. It just seemed to me that Silver was trying to barf it all out there as fast as she could, like a history lesson, without developing the characters all that much or firing the imagination. Readers who are less frustrated by that expository style seem to be giving this novel high praise, so give it a whirl and decide for yourself.

NOTE: Having said all of the above, I'm going to persevere a little longer with this book to see if it gets any better.

FINAL DECISION: This book is fine for people who enjoy chewing sawdust. As promised, I persevered with it as long as I could, and finally gave up on page 183. It wouldn't be fair to say the writing is bad. It's not. But the whole presentation is so dry and lifeless that even at two-thirds of the way through the book, I still couldn't care about any of the characters.
