Dreams of Significant Girls - Not Building Romans

Every reader knows that once in a while, you come across a strange word, often from another language. This word may take hold of your imagination because it looks or sounds so weird, or you might be exposed to it over years and years in the most disconnected contexts, until you just have to look it up. Such is the word *Bildungsroman*.

I'd seen it here, I'd seen it there, and finally, in "library school" when I was taking a cataloging class, I saw it again and was forced to look it up. It means a novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main character. Or you could just say coming-of-age story and many more people would get your meaning right away. But, as my high school English teacher said, sometimes it *behooves* us to be able to talk fancy.

Whichever word you use to describe this kind of fiction, I realized I'd read a number of these books. One such is the recently published *Dreams of Significant Girls*, by Cristina Garcia. It takes place over three summers in the early 1970s at an elite Swiss boarding school, and tells the story of three diverse young women's -- you guessed it -- moral and psychological development. Which is to say there's a lot of partying, drinking, first this and that's, and it all shapes the three girls into women. Vivien is the daughter of a Jewish father and Cuban mother, and struggles to accept her parents' separation. Shirin is the only daughter of Iranian royalty and is aloof and spoiled (she has three horses shipped to Switzerland for the summer). The third roommate is Ingrid, from rural Canada, a rebel in every way whose father is slowly being driven crazy by the memories of his time in the Nazi party during the war.

I felt that this book sort of came across as a more mature *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (or Sisterpants as I've heard a number of people call it). Like that bit of slang (you know, a hipster wearing jeans so tight it looks like he's got on "his sister's pants") there's a whole lot going on in this book. Parties, first love, equestrian accidents, pregnancy scares, and parents getting remarried. There are even candy gnome decapitations. Most of it works, though, and it really is a good example of the Bildungsroman, which often relies less on a linear plot and more on how young people are shaped by the whirlwind of their teenage years. It's got all the good stuff found in your average chick lit, with more thoughtfulness than most novels in that genre. Other examples that came to mind for me where Grass' *Tin Drum*, Martin Amis' hilariously rude *The Rachel Papers*, and Zoey Dean's A-List novels. Give this one a try -- recommended for older-age high school students.

Posted by Chris H. on August 30, 2012

Blogs:

- For the Love of Reading
- Information, Answers & Reviews

Reviews Subjects:

- Coming of Age [9]
- Family Relationships [10]
- Female Friendships [11]
- School [12]
- Teens [13]

Reviews Titles:

- Dreams of significant girls [14]

Links
[1] http://mcpl.info/blogs/love-reading/dreams-significant-girls-not-building-romans
[2] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/view.aspx?crn=816676
[3] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/view.aspx?crn=17972
[4] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/view.aspx?crn=54706
[5] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/view.aspx?crn=96205
[6] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/view.aspx?crn=331644
[7] http://mcpl.info/bookblog
[8] http://mcpl.info/category/blogs/information-answers-reviews
[9] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-subjects/coming-age
[10] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-subjects/family-relationships
[11] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-subjects/female-friendships
[12] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-subjects/school
[13] http://mcpl.info/category/reviews-subjects/teens
[14] http://mcpl.info/reviews-titles/1161