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### Alchemy and Meggy Swan

Gabriele I. Kupitz

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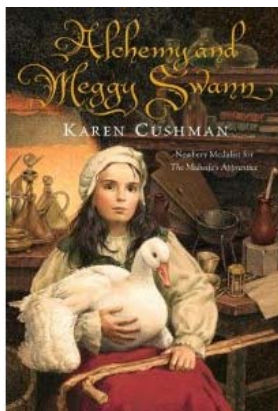
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Cushman, Karen. *Alchemy and Meggy Swann*. Illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline. Clarion, 2010. ISBN 9780547231846. \$16.00. 167 p.

Reviewer: Gabi Kupitz

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: People with disabilities--Juvenile fiction; Fathers and daughters--Juvenile fiction; Great Britain--History--Elizabeth, 1558-1603; Books--Reviews;

It is 1573—now that Granny has passed on, young Margret (Meggy) Swann's hard-hearted mother has uprooted her from the only life she has ever known in Millford village and sent her to live with a father in London she does not know. Meggy's only friend is Louise, a goose. London is full of noise and garbage and rude people who taunt and bully Meggy because of her crippled legs, a curse and surely a mark of the devil. Added to this mix is a distant father who is well-educated, but a poor alchemist who may be in league with murderers. Meggy is distraught, lonely, and always hungry. As Meggy painfully waddles with her walking sticks through the dank streets of the city in search of food and friendship, and to secure supplies for her father, London reveals itself to her. In contrast, Meggy reveals herself to London and some of its citizens. Meggy reaches out and does many good deeds because she was once loved by an adoring grandmother and because she has a sense of what is right. In the process, Meggy finds herself and saves her father and the object of his murderous associates.

A well-crafted historical novel that is engaging and informative. Meggy speaks to all ages of courage, determination, and kindness in the face of unspeakable odds. Cushman's descriptive language brings the smells of London to the reader. "Gobsmacked" may perhaps be a more modern British slang word, but it sounds very appropriate on page 111. Includes a map, an "Author's Note," and bibliographical references.

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