

the concerns of ordinary people. That series set a standard for popular history that Pierre Berton perhaps could, but has not in these volumes, attained.

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LOVE IN WARTIME

Looking at the Moon. Kit Pearson. Viking, 1991. 212 pp., \$17.99 cloth. ISBN 0-670-84097-1.

Kit Pearson's *Looking at the moon*, volume two of her trilogy about the evacuation of 8,000 English children to Canada during World War II, aims not to dramatize the greatest children's adventure of all time, but to explore her heroine's coming-of-age. In the "Afterword" to *The sky is falling*, the trilogy's first volume, Pearson notes: "Many of the children who came to Canada enjoyed the adventure and found warm, welcoming homes. I tried to imagine a child who didn't." That child is Norah Stoakes, and in *The sky is falling*, Norah's sullen anger and resentment (first directed at her parents for sending her abroad and then at Florence Ogilvie, the aloof Toronto woman who takes in Norah and her brother, Gavin) upstage history.

History fares even worse in *Looking at the moon*: Pearson sets her novel at Florence's lakeside summer home, where wealth and privilege keep a "depressing," "boring" war at a safe distance. Now thirteen years old, Norah falls in love. Norah's passage into womanhood is complicated by the fact that she loves Florence's nineteen-year-old nephew, Andrew, a member by birth of a family clan in which Norah enjoys merely temporary membership.

The significance of Norah's painful discovery that Andrew responds to her love only with kindly amusement is spelled out in Norah's talks with two unmarried women: Florence's daughter, Mary, and Florence's sister-in-law, Catherine. Mary tells Norah that single life is not only bearable but also pleasant, given the risks of leaving family to chance happiness in marriage. Catherine tells Norah that it is "much better to be independent, not saddled with someone for the rest of your life."

Although Pearson thus advances the feminist view that men are not essential to women's happiness, her trilogy implicitly conveys a contrary message. For twenty-five years, Florence Ogilvie's mourning for a son killed in the Great War has contaminated her life and the lives of other women: Mary, who spurned a marriage proposal so she could nurse her mother's broken heart, and Norah, whose anger in *The sky is falling* comes from her awareness that she was accepted into Florence's home only because Florence seized upon Gavin as a

surrogate for her dead son.

Pearson's best book so far, *A handful of time*, which also takes place at a lakeside summer home, offers a more tightly-plotted and thematically-coherent story, but in *Looking at the moon*, Pearson's sensitive portrait of Norah—no longer a girl and not yet a woman—is acute and often very moving.

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TRUTH AND RESPONSIBILITY

The girl in the well. Cecil Freeman Beeler. Red Deer College Press, 1991. 125 pp., \$8.95, paper. ISBN 0-88995-075-X; **Loyalist runaway.** Donna Smyth. Formac Publishing, 1991. 136 pp., \$16.95, \$8.95, cloth, paper, ISBN 0-887800-087-4, 0-88780-086-6.

The girl in the well takes place in the winter of 1934, in rural Saskatchewan and Alberta. In this setting, where survival itself is a real struggle, the need for resourcefulness and courage is captured by the struggles of the main character, Corinne Kragh. The winter is so severe that schools have been closed, but for Corinne there is not time for school anyway. The story opens with her hard at work with farm chores; because her father has gone away, she has had to become her mother's "little man." Much of the book occupies itself with the mystery of her father's absence—though she masks her anxieties with fierce shows of independence, Corinne is beset with doubt about her father. Alternating between images of resentful arguments and small flashbacks of emotional family scenes are little scenes where Corinne turns to imaginary discussions with her father to help her solve problems and deal with the responsibilities she has taken on.

Gradually, as the story unfolds through Corinne's internalised narrative, the reader comes to an understanding that Karl, her father, has gone away to the city for the winter to find a job to supplement the family's scanty income. Throughout this period of revelation, however, Corinne continues to fight against acceptance of the fact, choosing indiscriminately most of the men with whom she comes in to contact to "adopt" as her parents. Early in the novel, Corinne says mournfully "I never know the best way to do anything until I go ahead and do it all wrong." This certainly holds true throughout the book as she chooses and rejects family after family as unsuitable for her needs.

Through the comparison of these families with Corinne's own ideas of what constitutes a proper family structure, the reader gains more and more of an idea of Karl's character. The most decisive turning point of the novel comes during a short visit that Corinne and her mother make to the city to see her father. There,