

be much point in telling it.

In contrast, the other two books do trace development. In *The empty chair*, change on the conscious level will be readily understood by a young reader; Kaplan is skillful in indicating the unconscious at work, as well,

## The Empty Chair

Rebecca's happy world falls apart when tragedy strikes her family.



through dream incidents that Rebecca takes to mean that her dead mother is angry with her, but that she comes to understand as her working out the split in her own feelings. The younger girl's development in *Naomi's road* is more directly presented by a present-tense narration that changes in language and perspective as the child matures. In the earliest sections, she talks about the objects she sees at floor level and describes how her doll talks to her. Later she sees the world from a physically higher spot; her doll no longer talks to her, and she understands that it had done so previously only in her imagination. It is only when she is older that

she talks about the length of time in measurable terms. These changes make the narration of the story interesting to an adult reader, and will probably bind the young reader into a closer identification with Naomi. A dream sequence that occurs near the end of the story — Naomi's experience of hearing her parents' voices singing to her from a burning rose and a bowl of mushrooms presumably a ghostly visitation and a symbol of the death of Naomi's mother in Japan — may well baffle an eight-year-old reader. It may be that Kogawa wants that child to turn to an adult for help, and if so, let us hope that she is correct about the kind of response such an appeal will receive.

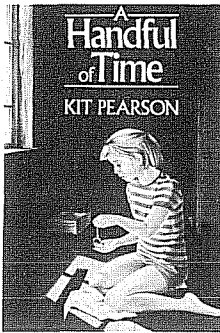
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### A JOURNEY TO CONFIDENCE

**A handful of time**, Kit Pearson. Penguin Books, 1987. 186 pp. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-670-81532-2.

Only "a handful of time" separates this new novel by Kit Pearson from her first, *The daring game* (1985), but the differences in quality are appreciable. Again we meet an adolescent girl from Toronto who feels at odds

with her new surroundings (in this case, the Alberta lake and cottage country rather than an exclusive girls' boarding school), and again this young girl's westward journey becomes a metaphor for her journey to



confidence and emotional maturity. But several new elements enter Pearson's fiction with this newest novel, elements which make *A handful of time* a much more complex and self-aware piece of writing.

First of all, Pearson confronts head-on the relationship of her writing to the well-known "problem fiction" sub-genre, a category of writing recently criticized by Michele Landsberg in her study of children's books. Pearson's Patricia is a young girl with a problem, but she is no candidate for the advice-pandering variety of children's fiction. When her father, whose main interests seem confined to word-processing, cuisinarts and sushi, tries to talk to his daughter

about divorce, he sounds to Patricia "as if he were talking in a book, like the one her mother had just bought for her — *The boys' and girls' book about divorce*" (10). Beware, yuppie parents, Pearson seems to be saying: this book is not a quick, easy substitute for parenting. Albertan cousins, put off by their citified relative, propose a separation pact of their own: "— so we have a solution," Patricia's cousin Kelly decides, "Every afternoon we'll pretend to go out together. Then we'll separate" (34).

The marital separation, in fact, brings into focus an even more crucial separation in the novel: the separation between mother and daughter. Here we find both Pearson's strength and her weakness. The fantastic device of a trip back in time allows Patricia to comprehend why her mother appears so cold, so invulnerable; she has developed those qualities in response to the unfair gender-stereotyped treatment which she had received as an adolescent girl in a household of spoiled boys. Still, some of the negative aura surrounding the career-obsessed mother remains in the novel, in spite of Patricia's — and our — growing empathy. Late in the novel, Patricia is asked what she wants to do with her life. It quickly becomes obvious that she is going to eschew the upwardly-mobile road to fame which her mother, as a CBC television personality, has chosen: " 'Maybe I could run a restaurant. . .Or. . .Maybe I'll be a mother,' she said softly" (156). In a novel which elsewhere manages to call into question the bourgeois assumptions of children's "problem" fiction, we find here what Betty Friedan christened "the feminine mystique" of the 1950s making a return visit. Must the "handful of time" during which women have turned bourgeois assumptions upside-down bring us, along with Patricia, back to the myths of the past?

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