

It is this clear-eyed recognition of the pain, remorse, yet necessity of choices that children face which, along with Pearson's story-telling skills, have made the trilogy so popular among young readers. McNaughton's tale, while concerned as well with children facing the dilemmas of responsible choice, goes perhaps too far in tying together the loose ends in Evelyn McCallum's life and clutters the central theme with Evelyn's encounter with the fairies and an unintegrated side-drama of the housemaid's bad relationship with a menacing, violent soldier (who, of course, has to be an American).

Both books are well researched and are sensitive to the social life of wartime Canada and Newfoundland as well as to period detail. Both authors communicate a convincing picture of the sharpness of class divisions in society, which are still with us but are not expressed forthrightly as they were by Mrs Ogilvie or Evelyn McCallum's grandmother. Perhaps the major historical flaw shared by both books, however, is the inadequate representation of the characters' religious lives and sensibilities. There is a brief memorial service for Gavin Stoakes's parents, but the pervasiveness of religion in Canadian and Newfoundland social life and discourse is strangely absent.

McNaughton has produced a thoughtful and readable first novel that exhibits and supports sound personal values. Pearson's book, however, is the stronger and worthy of its critical and commercial success. It is highly recommended, and although it can be understood and enjoyed on its own, it serves especially as a crown to the other volumes in the trilogy.

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## INTO BATTLE

**No Man's Land.** Kevin Major. Doubleday Canada, 1995. 251 pp. \$22.95 cloth. ISBN 0-385-25503-9.

In a considerable change of pace from his earlier work, Newfoundland author Kevin Major has turned his pen to one of the tragedies of his province's history, the near destruction of the Newfoundland Regiment on the Somme in 1916. In *No Man's Land*, he allows us to watch the men of the battalion over the course of a day as they prepare to go over the top.

In confining his attentions to a single day, Major has set himself a challenge, but, in fact, the pacing is one of the book's strongest suits. At times, he lingers over trivial details to convey the struggle of the doomed soldiers to make every minute last an hour. In other passages, Major nicely captures the impatience of the troops, who just want to get on with the job and get it over with. The story moves in fits and starts, briskly here and slowly there, much in the same way that the infantryman's pre-battle hours must have moved.

The other striking aspect of the book is its apparently conscious determination to gather together most of the iconography of First World War literature. We

have the standard scene of soldiers swimming nude in a stream, in a sort of pre-battle sacrament of purification that is borrowed from Rupert Brooke's 1914 sonnets. Major also gives us the football match between companies of the regiment, an echo of the soldier/sportsman motif which was popularized by Sir Henry Newbolt and which became one of the most potent traditional metaphors of the war. Even the characters are mostly stereotypical: the dull colonel who looks forward to "a damn fine routing of the Hun"; the rakish but ruminative officer who foresees his last day on earth; the pair of rough soldiers who, despite their grumbling, have hearts of gold; and the timid young rifleman who goes to war for glory and finds precious little of that in the trenches.

This derivative quality might well have been fatal to *No Man's Land*, but instead the novella puts it to good advantage. Major's book emerges as a fascinating echo of a forgotten genre of war literature from the 1920s and 1930s: the so-called middlebrow novels which paid tribute to the comradeship of the trenches. In this regard, *No Man's Land* owes less to Timothy Findlay's *The Wars* than it does to R.C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* which, despite its anti-war tone, succeeded in affirming the nobility of the common soldier amidst the squalor of war.

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## THE SKY BEYOND THE COAL DUST

**Trapped by Coal.** Constance Horne. Illus. Linda Heslop. Pacific Educational Press, 1994. 144 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88865-091-4.

"And I never again will go down underground." So proclaims Maritime poet-singer Rita MacNeil's "Working Man." And it is this hope that also is at the heart of Constance Horne's nostalgic portrait of a Vancouver Island mining town at the beginning of the First World War.

*Trapped by Coal* chronicles the difficulties an Extension, B.C., coaling family, the Piggotts, face when the father dies in a mining accident and the fourteen-year-old son, already weakened by the lung diseases that infest this small town, must "go underground" to save the family from being evicted from their company house.

Though not told with the stark realism that defines a Kevin Major novel, perhaps, Horne nonetheless provides a strikingly moving account of a family and a town ravaged by strikes and unsafe mines, and covered by a dust that inevitably will destroy all who breathe it. The tale focuses primarily on Millie Piggott, the oldest daughter, who takes it upon herself to find a way to free her brother and her family from the trap that the town has become. To do so, she must confront an influenza epidemic, drought, and a town so ravaged by a recent strike that it has ostracized her best friend for being the daughter of a scab. Though the conclusion is predictable and perhaps somewhat unrealistic, Horne does provide both a touching and