

convincing account of a family's survival and a finely-etched portrait of a place and time which have not really received the attention they deserve.

My only criticism of the text is that the illustrations by Linda Heslop don't really evoke the claustrophobic world that Horne so effectively describes. There is only one portrait of Art, the son, in the mine, and even here, not even the rats seem all that menacing. Only the cover, a wonderfully evocative portrait of Millie and her mother fearfully looking into a mine shaft, truly suggests the bleakness that permeates this small town. And this cover also artfully provides the optimism that ultimately defines Horne's tale, for beyond the mine and the frightened pair lurking just outside this trap is a bright blue sky, the gateway to a better world.

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IN SEARCH OF THE PAST

White Wave. Mary Razzell. Greenwood, 1994. 196 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-161-4.

In *White Wave*, Mary Razzell depicts with convincing realism a young woman's search for her family's past and her own identity. As World War II ends, Jenny Johns eagerly awaits her father's return from the Navy and her start at a high school away from her critical and unloving mother. *White Wave* has some elements of the teenage problem novel, as Jenny experiences rivalry with her sister, the interference of nosy neighbours, the cruelties of schoolmates, the betrayal of a friend, a complete inability to fit within her mother's mould for her as a "good" girl, and her parents' separation. As she meets people from her father's past, copes with hostility at school, and experiences her first love, Jenny gains the confidence to seek out her father, find out about her past, and reconcile with both parents.

White Wave is a good and convincing narrative, and portrays Jenny's process of self-discovery in a leisurely, realistic manner. We are always intrigued by the secrets in her family's past, and the gradual pacing of the novel allows us to experience the emotional upheavals and difficult revelations of Jenny's believable search. The narrative is structured in three parts, following Jenny at home with her mother, Jenny boarding alone at high school, and Jenny with her father on his fishing boat. In a satisfying and credible way, we accept that Jenny's construction of her adult self is possible only because she comes to understand and deal with the realities of all three of these worlds.

White Wave is set in coastal British Columbia, and one of the great strengths of this novel is its descriptions of coast and sea. Elements of humour and pathos are handled equally well, which is essential in a novel where much of the subject matter is sad and hurtful. The passages in which Jenny receives her first kiss from her boyfriend, David, and later when she learns the details of her birth, are done with sensitivity and never seem overly sentimental or forced. Similarly, Jenny's

mother is depicted not as a one-dimensional ogre, but as a complex and often unknowable individual. The many small ways in which her mother hurts and attacks Jenny's self-image are presented gradually and with believable understatement, allowing the emotional content to be more powerfully felt.

At the end of this novel, Jenny's father names his boat after her, calling it the *White Wave* after the Celtic meaning of "Jennifer." The origins of Jenny's present self are satisfyingly linked together through this name, which was chosen by her birth mother because it echoed the story of Guinevere, and which links to her present relationship with her father as she rescues him when a storm wave washes him overboard. Having arrived at a full understanding of her past, Jenny now confronts the future with hope and strength, and when the final words of the novel declare "Jenny Johns is!", we believe it.

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SPIRITED PROTAGONISTS

Alcock and Brown and the Boy in the Middle. George M. Morgan. Illus. Jennifer Morgan. Tuckamore Books, 1994. 57 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-895387-20-5. **Boys in the Well.** Cecil Freeman Beeler. Red Deer College Press, 1996. 128 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-136-5.

Alcock and Brown and the Boy in the Middle is a brief and simply told tale. In a normal size of type the text would likely occupy some fifteen pages. By setting this in 16-point type, reserving a deep bottom margin and incorporating a large number of line drawings, most of which are full-page, the publisher has managed to create a book with 33 pages of text. The tale has not become correspondingly enriched. The central person is an eight-year-old boy, a victim of polio, who has the chance, in St. John's in 1919, to witness the preparations made by Alcock and Brown for the first transatlantic flight. The boy learns — in part because Brown himself refused to be limited by his leg injury — that willpower and dedication are important in life. The book's format, rather thin story, and predominance of dialogue make it appropriate for reading to, or by, quite young, undemanding persons. In the historical context, the author does, however, manage to seize some of the excitement and wonderment with which the new, experimental technology of flight was viewed by contemporaries.

Boys in the Well is a more substantial narrative with considerable literary value. It continues to trace events in the life of the author's spunky young teenage heroine. In the 1930s her parents' farmhouse becomes the meeting place of several youths from diverse backgrounds. Several themes — blame and responsibility, loneliness, concern about others, and particularly the tentative transition from child to adult — help to structure the plot, but the didactic sense of the story remains secondary. What will draw a reader through its 26 chapters is Beeler's vigorous narrative style and the imaginative perceptions of his young Corinne Kragh who turns to the farm's