Sylvia Gunnery's *We're friends, aren't we*? is a much better book than the blurb on the back cover suggests: "Elizabeth has it all. She is bright and beautiful and secretly going steady with Cass. Why can't her parents see past his motorcycle and his dark good looks and just trust her?" While such a description leads the reader to expect something quite banal, the novel offers a well-written study of relationships, their pressures as well as their pleasures. Elizabeth and Cass and their ostensible love interest fade into the background and the real focus of the work is the friendship between Woody and Elizabeth. This friendship sadly taken for granted in the turmoil of more romantic ties, is doomed from the start, since Gunnery shows the reader in the novel's opening how Woody is destined to die.

The strength of the book is its realistic, funny, lively, dialogue revealing individual differences among the adolescent characters, and capturing the anxious mood of a high school class on the verge of graduation. The characters, however, with the exception of Woody, seem rather dimly drawn. Cass, in particular, is, for Elizabeth's parents, a stereotypical example of the toughguy adolescent, wearing a black leather jacket, and living on the wrong side of town. For Elizabeth, he seems little more than the stereotypical dark romantic hero, misunderstood and misjudged. Elizabeth herself, too insensitive to appreciate Woody's friendly devotion, is variously seen as a wilful girl sneaking out with her forbidden boyfriend behind her parents' backs, and as a serious student winning a scholarship enabling her to go to university and perhaps become a judge. Throughout the story, there is only a very loose connection between Elizabeth's rebellious love for Cass in spite of her parents' disapproval and her rather exploitative use of Woody's friendship.

The novel means to explore the proper bounds and expectations of friendship. It achieves its end more effectively in its record of the characters' dialogue than in its rather contrived plot. Gunnery's ear for natural dialogue and her sense of the diversity of adolescent experience mitigate the flaws in her conception of the story.

Both novels offer the reader a study of the survival tactics needed to get on with life when someone close is threatened by death.

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APPLE-PIE BEDS AND WATER BOMBS

The daring game, Kit Pearson. Viking Kestrel, 1986. 225pp. $12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-670-80751-6.

I was reminded of the words which form the title of my review while reading from Kit Pearson's story about a Canadian boarding school for

girls. The phrase is part of a description not of a group of high-spirited young boarders, but of an army regiment. Robert Ross, in Timothy Findley's 1977 novel, *The wars*, suddenly realizes that training camp in Lethbridge, Alberta, "was much like school: roll call and mess hall. Even the pranks were the same-apple-pie beds and water bombs" (Clarke, Irwin, p.26). In *The daring game*, Pearson's main character, Eliza, makes the same discovery, while standing in the middle of a girl's dormitory: "It's like an army, thought Eliza. Ashdown had never seemed like this before. 'Let's apple-pie Bix's bed!' suggested Helen..." (97). In scores of boarding school novels girls and boys become hardened combatants in the eternal war against authority; headmistresses become barking generals, dormitories veritable bunkers. We are, in short, fascinated by the institutions which regiment our lives.

This long tradition of boarding-school fiction is predominantly British. Eliza first hits upon the idea of going to boarding school as a result of reading some books sent by an English grandmother, "books...with titles like *Fiona of the fifth* or *The turbulent term at St. Theresa's*. They depicted a dramatic world of odd rituals, ordered busyness and loyal friends. Of course, a Canadian boarding school might be different, but there must be some similarities" (10). Here is Pearson's challenge set within the very text she is writing — to create a Canadian version of this well-known subgenre, the boarding-school novel.

Pre-adolescent girls would presumably form the potential audience for *The daring game*. Indeed, the novel opens with the familiar adolescent concern with appearance: "Eliza sat alone in the headmistress's study, trying to stop her knees from trembling. Tugging her dress over them, she wondered again if she should have worn her uniform" (3). What better background, could there be for pre-adolescent appearance-consciousness than an institution where one wears a uniform, where an apparently democratic dress code merely serves to heighten the awareness of other physical and material attributes? Eliza mentally weighs the relative prettiness of her dorm mates; she is as painfully conscious of standards of beauty as she is of the fact that she is the only one of her mates who is not yet encased in a bra.

But the pre-adolescent fear which Pearson has best articulated and which many adults will have forgotten or ignored is the most basic: the fear of becoming an adolescent, a teenager. In fact, Eliza's desire to go to boarding school is born of more than her girlhood reading; we are told that "the prospect of attending the huge junior high school terrified her. Eliza didn't want to become a teenager" (11). For Eliza, teenhood is synonymous with "movie stars, " "backcombing," "dating" (11), "dances" (76), "lipstick," "nylons" and "invitations" (77) and all of the above are decidedly anathema. By having Eliza form a friendship with an older girl, Madeleine (a

puppy love relationship reminiscent of Rose's love for the older Cora in Alice Munro's *Who do you think you are?*), Pearson allows both Eliza and her young readers a link with this frightening world of teenhood — a comforting assurance that (the horrors of dating and dances to the contrary) one may survive after all.

The most crucial link in *The daring game*, though, is one which Eliza forms with a peer and it is this relationship which is less surely drawn. Eliza befriends — much to everyone's surprise — the "problem" student, Helen — a girl whose boisterous and rebellious behaviour only thinly masks the insecurity of an unhappy home life. From this alliance grows the "daring game" of the title — a game which leads to Eliza's act of lying in order to protect Helen, who has gone outside the walls of the school on a dare. The ethical waters become truly muddied, but lest we are tempted to ponder the ethical perplexities of two wrongs occasionally making a right, the author whisks us away from the entire problem at rather short notice.

My sense of ethical unease is accompanied and intensified by a sense of political unease. Eliza's experience at Ashdown is clearly an upper-middle-class one; her father is an opthalmologist who has just been invited to start an eye clinic at the Toronto General Hospital. How, then, is a reader to react to obvious bids for sympathy because of Eliza's relatively spare economic situation? "Eliza was fascinated. She'd never known anyone with servants before. Pam and Carrie must be as rich as some of the day-girls. You could tell by their clothes, and all the places they had been, that their families had more money than Jean's, Helen's and her own" (47). One shudders to think of the living conditions of children of less-than-opthalmological parentage.

Pearson's *The daring game* offers sensitive and valuable insights into the process of growing up. But the fears and challenges of growing up are always, to a degree, determined by social factors such as class. Writers should be aware of this fact and should write with it in their hearts and minds, for not all of the troubled Helens in our society can squeeze into Ashdown Academy and tell their stories.

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IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED

Starring Quincy Rumpel, Betty Waterton. Douglas & McIntyre, 1986. 115 pp. $5.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-048-0.

When *Quincy Rumpel* was published in 1984, Canadian readers were introduced to a new heroine, exuberant, irrepressible and very amusing. Her