

Clarion Review ★★★★★

ROMANCE

Virgin Impressions

Rosemary Wisewould

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Novels depicting the pioneering efforts of young families usually find an appreciative audience. *Virgin Impressions* endeavors to join those ranks by illustrating the difficulties and triumphs of Stacy and Rob, a young couple recently married and just starting their life together in a remote area of Australia in the 1960s. Their struggle to turn their dream of owning a farm into reality is fraught with all manner of obstacles. It challenges their individual fortitude, and their relationship.

The bulk of Rosemary Wisewould's novel ostensibly focuses on both the marriage and the hardships of building a sustainable farm and home in an isolated region. However, the overriding theme revolves around Stacy's debilitating depression and feelings of unworthiness, which began in her childhood with the loss of her parents. Stacy's lack of self-worth propels her into a life of near martyrdom, in which she can barely speak in challenging situations, much less express an opinion. This hampers all of her interactions, including those with her supportive husband and other people who love and care for her.

While the story clearly attempts to portray Stacy's journey from a lonely, insecure young woman to one with confidence, her eventual triumph over self-doubt comes too late and too easily. Along the way, her unrelenting angst proves frustrating. For instance, when Stacy's aunt and uncle, who have cared for her since her parents' deaths, express joy at her announcement that she is expecting a baby, their sincere offer of help is rejected in Stacy's thoughts: "*Why would they want to be burdened with my problems? I'm not their child. I've already been in their way for six years, a millstone around their necks ... No, I will not worry these two good people.*" Regrettably, Stacy's constant self-pity becomes tedious; less patient readers may not be compelled to see her journey through to the end.

Wisewould is unquestionably a competent writer, and typographical and grammatical errors are few. Dialogue is natural and the narrative flows smoothly, although American readers may be momentarily stymied by the occasional Australian slang. The depiction of day-to-day life on the farm becomes a bit repetitive and dreary at times, but readers interested in the topic will find it informative.

A native of the Australian community she has chosen to highlight in *Virgin Impressions*, Wisewould is knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the history of the area. Readers will become familiar with the novel's setting through her thorough and capable descriptions.

Virgin Impressions is a generally solid debut. While most of Wisewould's characters are portrayed with enough depth to engage readers, the characterization of the heroine may prove too monotonous and exasperating for some.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (February 20, 2012)

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