

# South Moon Under Short Guide

## South Moon Under by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



# Contents

<a href="#">South Moon Under Short Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Social Concerns.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Techniques.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Literary Precedents.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Related Titles.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Copyright Information.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>



## Characters

Prior to starting *South Moon Under*, Rawlings lived in the Ocala Scrub for two and a half months, with an elderly woman named Piety Fiddia and her moonshining son, Leonard. The chief characters in the novel, Piety Lantry and her son Lant Jacklin, are very closely modeled on their real-life counterparts. Rawlings had not only helped Piety with her daily chores, but had joined Leonard in illegal deer hunting, in shooting and eating a limpkin ("if you haven't eaten roast limpkin, you just haven't eaten, but you can go to county, state and federal jails for shooting them" she wrote), and in running his moonshine still. Although not all of the other characters are as closely modeled after specific prototypes, they are very much drawn from various people Rawlings knew. One of Rawlings's chief stated goals in her Florida writings was to show her readers what sort of people the crackers really were — not grubby bumpkins or idealized woodsmen — but people confronting a beautiful but demanding environment with remarkable courage and good will.



## Social Concerns

Rawlings had come to know and greatly admire the Florida "crackers" who inhabited the great scrub country of northern Florida — the area roughly identical with the present Ocala National Forest. In *South Moon Under* as much as any of her writing, Rawlings tried to show these people as they really were. She saw them as honest, living close to their environment and surviving often by the thinnest of margins, but with a remarkably resilient and positive outlook on life. Although some of her earlier tales of crackers had brought a protest from the editor of the Ocala newspaper that such people had never existed, it is clear that she had simply paid more attention to his region than he had; her works are now accepted as very accurate pictures of the time and place, and have served as documentary evidence for scholarly studies on cracker dialect and folklore.

Rawlings was struck by the fact that the inhabitants of the scrub were candid, trustworthy people, but nevertheless, as she wrote in a letter to her editor Maxwell Perkins, "almost everything they do is illegal. And everything they do is necessary to sustain life in that place." Certainly one of the implied thematic fulcrums of the novel is the distinction between what is legal (defined by society outside the scrub) and what is right (as determined by those who live in the scrub).

## Techniques

The novel, following chronological order, embraces three generations of a family. Lantry comes to Florida from outside, establishes himself without ever really becoming a part of the land or the people, and dies fairly early in the novel, leaving to his descendants his name and his nameless fear. His daughter Piety and her son Lant are the two major figures in the book, which encompasses Piety's entire life but ends with Lant still a young man.

The story takes place entirely in or very near the Big Scrub; character, plot and theme are all intimately bound up with the setting. The setting is shown in considerable, very accurate detail and is so unusual as to seem attractively exotic.

Rawlings took great pains to have her characters act and speak like the real inhabitants of the Big Scrub; as mentioned above, she lived with the prototypes of her main characters, and she took copious notes on them and their way of life. The dialect (although much of it is "eye-dialect": "ketch" for catch) is quite accurate and was one of the more striking and controversial features when the book was first published.

Certainly then, in *South Moon Under* as in all of Rawlings's important work, the setting — the place and its people — is paramount. Rawlings is thus unquestionably a regional writer — as a rule, the less connection a given piece of her work has with that part of north central Florida she came to know intimately and love, the less successful it is.

## Themes

Although Rawlings's chief motive in writing *South Moon Under* seems to have been to show what the scrub crackers were like, and especially to celebrate the qualities for which she deeply admired them, and a secondary motive may well have been to depict the landscape itself, she was after all writing a novel, not a travelogue. The title *South Moon Under* suggests what is the most carefully and explicitly articulated theme of the book. As one of the characters explains, south-moon-under is one of the four daily cardinal positions of the moon. Deer tend to feed or sleep, readers are told, in harmony with the lunar movements. If animals are controlled by forces they cannot understand or influence or even be aware of, so too it may be with men.

As the character Lantry says, "You got the say so fur, and then you got no say at all." At the climax of the novel (which occurs at south-moon-under) the protagonist, Lantry's grandson Lant (who was born under a full moon), thinks, "Forces beyond his control, beyond his sight and hearing, took him in their vast senseless hands when they were ready. The whole earth must move as the sun and moon and an obscure law directed — even the earth, planet-ridden and tormented." Rawlings's characters do what they do because of where they live, because of ancestral fears, and because of nameless, unknown urgings symbolized by the moon.

## Literary Precedents

In her depiction of Florida as a "frontier eden," Rawlings has been compared by Gordon Bigelow to James Fenimore Cooper, with Lant Jacklin (among other Rawlings characters) resembling Cooper's Natty Bumppo — tough, honorable, little educated, selfreliant, a woodsman. Although her style is a bit uneven in *South Moon Under*, it probably owes something (as does the style of so many twentiethcentury writers) to Hemingway.

In its central deterministic theme, as well as its carefully recorded details of the life of some of the least affluent members of society, *South Moon Under* seems squarely in the tradition of literary Naturalists — Zola and more immediately Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser. Where Rawlings differs is in depicting things less grittily and in always giving her characters the courage, the strength, the skill, the cheerfulness, to confront their world gracefully.

## Related Titles

All of Rawlings's Florida writings, which include all of her important works, are related in one way or another, most obviously in her careful and loving depiction of the land and people of north central Florida. These include *The Yearling* (1938) and *Cross Creek* (1942), the short stories "Gal Young Un," "Jacobs Ladder," and "Cocks Must Crow," and even the cookbook *Cross Creek Cookery* (1947).





# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3. Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994