the characters and situations one might enjoy there. While the content of the novel makes no claim to reality – it is purely entertaining, funny and fast-moving – it has nevertheless a distinctly Canadian stamp to it; you know that you are not in an American or British boarding school. The merit of this novel lies less in the characterization than in the sheer imagination Korman possesses in inventing capers for the two boys to perform. It is sure to appeal to any child who goes to school.

It is to be hoped that the three writers will be sufficiently encouraged with their initial successes to continue supplying their young readership with subsequent work of equally good quality. As teachers and librarians are only too well aware, the demand for good teenage literature is inexhaustible, and it is reassuring to see Canadian authors enter this field hitherto dominated by fine American and British writers.

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The Adolescent Paperback – Canadian Style

VERNA REID

Susie Q, Eric Wilson. Scholastic-TAB, 1978. 162pp. $1.15 paper.

No Way Back, Bill Bleeks. Scholastic-TAB, 1978. 116pp. $1.15 paper.

One of the major success stories in the American publishing business has been the promotion of the adolescent paperback. Firms such as Dell, Avon, Pocket Books and Bantam have been doing "land-office" business producing books for the same early-teen market which has spelled big business for fast food chains, Disco operators, jean stores, and record, film and T.V. producers. If one strolls through the youth section of any paperback wholesaler in either the United States or Canada, one will encounter shelf after shelf of highly coloured jackets with titles designed to catch the reader's eye: *Tuned Out, Leap Before You Look, Are You In The House Alone? Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack.* Booksellers grab them up; librarians have waiting lists of readers.

For those of us who came of age in a more stable and reticent era, these novels are something of a relevation and serve to indicate the extent of social change in the last fifteen to twenty years. These are "problem" paperbacks marked by a mood of social realism. Some of the problems treated are ones that are particularly characteristic of the late Sixties and Seventies – widespread urban violence, increase in broken families and the single parent home, the availability of soft and hard drugs, the widespread use of alcohol, the increase in sexual permissiveness, and the increase in the feelings of alienation and isolation. On the other hand, subjects such as teenage pregnancy, mental illness, death or crime are certainly not new in the Seventies. What is new is their frank treatment in novels for young adults which depict in an intimate fashion the emotional trauma of teenagers caught up in crises. What is new also is the mass marketing of such novels.

Canadian writers and publishers, however, have yet to exploit this market to any great extent. Writers such as Christie Harris, John Craig, Bill Freeman, Ted Ashlee and others, have written novels for this age group but they have followed by and large the traditional adventure or fantasy conventions and have not ventured into the racier genre of the "problem" paperback. Scholastic Books, however, have now brought out two young adult novels written by Canadians and set in Canada which, while somewhat conservative by American standards, can nevertheless be placed in this category. These are *Susie Q* by Eric Wilson and *No Way Back* by Bill Bleeks.

Susie Q by Eric Wilson qualifies as a "problem" paperback for young adults in that it deals in a contemporary manner with the age-old crisis of teenage pregnancy. Susie, the teenage heroine, is both sexually experienced and a "nice" girl, a person of moral worth. She makes love with her boyfriend, and it is she who initiates the sexual activity. At least that is what I decided after Susie announces to her boyfriend Trail, that despite faithful taking of the Pill, she is pregnant. That announcement sent me skipping back several chapters to the hair-brushing scene, the closest Wilson comes to sexual explicitness.

> "That's nice" she said quietly, putting her hand up to Trail's face. "Please don't leave me alone."
> "I won't," he whispered, and leaned to kiss her mouth.

End of chapter. American "problem" paperbacks handle the sexual scene much more graphically than that, and while Wilson's tactful withdrawal may be in deference to the delicate sensibilities of parents, teachers and Canadian publishers, I'm afraid that the teenage reader, used to *Go Ask Alice* or Judy Blum's *Forever* may be somewhat impatient, if not downright confused.

More realistic is Wilson's resolution of Susie and Trail's crisis, in that, in terms of moral judgements, it raises more questions than it answers. What,

for instance, are a young man's rights when he fathers a child out of wedlock? Has a young woman the right to choose an abortion when the putative father feels that abortion is murder? Wilson seems to suggest that Susie has the right of free choice, but the ending is properly poignant.

On the whole, while Wilson's characterizations are somewhat stereotyped (cute little Susie and the basketball star) and his use of proper names (Trail, Duke, and Susie Q) suggests a Hollywood B movie, the handling of the developing emotional attachment between the two main characters demonstrates a sensitive awareness that adolescents are people, and not a breed apart. Their romance is seen against a web of relationships which include family, school buddies and job associates, and when they make different choices at the end, these choices can be seen as the logical results of different life experiences.

Although Susie and Trail are affected in their decisions by their past experiences, by *who* they are, they do not, on the other hand, seem particularly influenced by *where* they are. Outside of a few references to logging, and the singing of "O Canada" at basketball games, Campbell River, B.C. (the setting of the novel) could just as well have been White River, Montana. In *No Way Back*, on the other hand, Bill Bleeks establishes a strong sense of place which is the determining factor in plot development and in the perceptions of the central character, Susan Melnyck, from whose point of view the story is told.

Essentially, this novel explores the limitations imposed by the northern Alberta town of Silver Creek on the life of two adolescent sisters. Susan's younger sister, Miriam, has been missing for ten days when the novel opens, and Susan's outward search for her sister is paralleled in the subsequent chapters by the growing inward withdrawal from all that Silver Creek stands for. When, at the height of winter, Susan discovers Miriam's tragic death, the final tie to the town is cut, and come spring, she promises herself, she'll be gone.

I found *No Way Back* to be an interesting hybrid in that it combines the starkly realistic mood of the American adolescent paperback with a very recognizable portrait of a Canadian small town. The aura of social realism is produced by the grimness of Miriam's suicide, by the father's alcoholism, by an unattractive group of adolescent drop-outs, and by Susan's growing sense of alienation and isolation. These are familiar incidents in the teen paperbacks published by Dell, Avon, Bantam, et al.

The creation of the town setting has more in common, however, with the fiction of Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro. There is the inevitable "good" half-breed Charlie who in this case quotes Matthew Arnold, and the town idiot with the heart of gold. These, despite being Can Lit clichés, are fairly well-handled by Bleeks. Better, however, is his picture of day-to-day living in an isolated town in the dead of winter. I particularly identified with Bleeks' description of what it takes to nurse an old car through the

Canadian winter, and with the description of getting stranded on a remote road in a sea of mud. I also reacted with a shock of recognition to the description of the curling rink as the "true center of Silver Creek society" and of this middle-aged game as seen through adolescent eyes. Susan copes with the people at the rink, and with the discomforts of winter but the coping takes its toll, as does the sight of the dreary landscape "silent, still and rigid . . . like another planet." This is wasteland imagery and it reflects one of the central themes of the novel, the view of Silver Creek as a cultural and social desert. A recent book on Canadian culture makes the point that "in cold latitudes" and "in hard times . . . the consolation of the arts is needed." It is precisely this consolation that is lacking in Silver Creek.

This lack in the final analysis produces Susan's emotional distancing from the town, and her determination to leave. On the whole, I find Bleeks' rendering of the Northern Canadian town to be convincing, and his characterization of Susan a relief after woolly-headed cuteness.

For many adolescent readers, too, it will come as a relief to discover a competent female adolescent who has had to cope with poverty, who shoulders more than her share of family responsibility, who can deal with crises calmly and with common sense, who seems neither obsessed with nor frightened by sex, and who is sick to death of the whole scene. The novel ends on the hopeful note that it is permissible for Susan to put her own welfare first, that it is O.K. for her to choose a better life. It is a message that many adolescents need to hear.

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History as Fiction

DAVID W. ATKINSON

Two for the Unknown Land, Frances Thompson. Borealis Press, 1977. 134 pp. $5.95 paper.

Quest of the Golden Gannet, Dorothy P. Barnhouse. Breakwater Books, 1979. 96 pp. $4.95 paper.

Historical fiction is not easy to write. A writer must be true to historical fact, yet transcend mundane detail to create believable, human characters in situations that entertain and perhaps teach as well. Frances Thompson in