The computer revolts, Bernadette Renaud. Trans. Frances Morgan. Press Porcépic, 1981. Reprinted 1984. 83 pp. $5.95 paper. ISBN 0-88878-230-6.

There is little doubt that after reading Bernadette Renaud's *The computer revolts,* the targetted audience (ages 13-16) will be introduced to basic computer terminology. What makes this book something more than a handbook to computers, however, is an able mingling of plot and character which renders the didacticism relatively unobtrusive and challenges the reader to grapple with ideas far beyond memorizing terms in the computer lexicon such as "software," "decoding" and "fortran." For those readers requiring more than a contextual indication of technical terms, the book, translated by Frances Morgan, contains a glossary of both technical and possibly unfamiliar vocabulary which for the most part is helpful (the definition of "white elephant" as "something no one wants" is a clear exception here).

As Renaud's somewhat complex story begins, computer analyst, Luc Genest, is trying to determine why his company's prize computer, or "System of Advanced Memory for Computer Operations" (acronym Samco) is making mistakes. It is soon evident that Samco, like some benign descendant of Arthur C. Clarke's reasoning, lethal computer, Hal, in *2001: a space odyssey,* is bored with banal, workaday computing, and balks until challenged further. Genest, realizing the potential of an intelligent computer, convinces his employers to allow Samco (whose anthropomorphic behavior qualifies him as one of the two leading "characters" in the book) to help in the selection process to fill a vacancy in the company. Here the plot thickens (and perhaps hardens beyond credibility) when a rejected, depressed applicant confronts the computer. Samco, unable to cope with the unknown element of emotion, suffers a virtual mental collapse, and stops functioning. Genest, working with an understanding supervisor and a conscripted therapist specializing in depressive illnesses, arranges for the rejected applicant to explain his depression to the recalcitrant computer. Samco learns about depression, helps cure the human depressive, is himself cured, and becomes a miracle machine for diagnosing and treating extreme cases of depression.

This cursory summary suggests several weaknesses. The plot, though by no means outlandish to younger readers nurtured on the fantasies of say a Steven Spielberg, seems patently contrived. A thinking, feeling machine is perhaps to most adolescent readers an acceptable starting point; but one which is subjected to an unstable human, becomes unstable itself, then recovers to become the definitive source on depression makes suspension of disbelief a somewhat demanding exercise. In addition, the question arises whether the anatomizing of "reactive depression," is inherently appealing to younger readers.

As for characterization: Samco, for all of his human qualities, is still

something, not someone. The remaining characters are flat, and include such stereotypes as the imaginative but impractical inventor (Luc Genest), a stern but fair supervisor (Eve Dubuc) and an impatient and threatening production head (Denis Matte). Their development is limited and they seldom rise to more than servitors of the plot.

Renaud's novel does address relevant issues — particularly for readers whose educational accoutrement is as likely to include a desk computer as a library book. Could a computer learn to think for itself? Could it experience emotion? And, perhaps the most significant question implied in the book, to what extent has the computer age obscured our appreciation of fundamental human concerns? Such questions are fast becoming part of the experience of many children, and although *The computer revolts* aproaches them in a somewhat flat and contrived way, Bernadette Renaud can be applauded for posing them in a book designed for adolescent readers.

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AMATEUR WRITING IN ADOLESCENT FICTION

I'm locker 145, who are you?, Sylvia Gunnery. Scholastic-TAB, 1984. 139 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-71483-X; *Love-15,* Dennis McCloskey. Three Trees Press, 1984. 112 pp. $12.95, $5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88823-078-08, 0-88823-076-1; *Here she is, Ms. Teeny-Wonderful!,* Martyn Godfrey. Scholastic-TAB, 1984. 176 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-71482-1.

The negative picture many adolescent novels paint of contemporary life, with their emphasis on divorce, crime, drugs, and sex, disturbs not a few critics. Less widespread is concern over the literary merit of much of this fiction. Yet the sheer amateurishness of two of the three books under review here is worrisome. How is it that books like *I'm locker 145, who are you?* and *Love-15* succeed in getting published?

A hackneyed plot does not a bad novel make. In the case of *I'm locker 145,* however, the corniness of the teenage hoodlum-with-a-heart-of-gold is reinforced by the book's style and characterization.

When her father's unfaithfulness causes fifteen-year-old Jodi's mother to move out, a confused, insecure Jodi must adjust to life at her grandmother's, and to a new school. Encouraged by her friend Brenda, she begins an exchange of notes with a mystery boy, who turns out to be Mike Glidden, just returned from reform school. Jodi ultimately helps Mike convince the authorities of the sincerity of his reformation, at the same time talking her mother into giving