

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* approaches 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

her Dad a second chance.

The writing is as trite as the story line. A favourite verb, "blaring" (used at least four times), characterizes Gunnery's style only too well: "Her mother's voice was shrill and angry, blaring through the telephone line" (p. 4). "The only sound was the TV in the livingroom blaring so Nan could hear it" (p. 7). Images read like textbook examples of "colourful writing": "the marshmallow softness of the old bed" (p. 13); "her instant candy-apple blush" (p. 56). Clichés abound:

"I just want you to give me a chance," he replied, his voice soft and slow.

His eyes had that look again. Funny how a criminal could seem like an ordinary nice guy, Jodi thought (p. 52).

To these weaknesses, Dennis McCloskey's *Love-15* adds one of its own: preachiness. The book is a litany of Good Liberal Causes. McCloskey's hero, spoiled, arrogant Scott McIntyre, is a talented tennis player with good prospects of winning the Toronto Junior Tennis Classic in the fall. He is also something of a racist; he calls Sally Sanji a "Paki" the first time he sees her on the courts. But Scott reforms, and when his tennis arm is paralyzed, Sally (now his girlfriend) becomes his strongest ally in developing his left arm for a return to competitive tennis.

Like *Locker 145*, *Love-15* is overwritten. The reader is bombarded with double-barreled adjectives: "the tall lanky coach" (p. 10), "the tall slender pupil" (p. 12), "the brown-skinned girl in the sweat-soaked white tennis dress" (p. 10). And the clichés never stop: "With pity etched on her face . . ." (p. 50), "His heart was aglow . . ." (p. 85).

Dialogue lines are wasted on feeble puns, and the Canadian content quota is met with stilted conversation that reads like something out of an elementary social studies text:

"Grand Pré?" exclaimed Sally. "Isn't that the setting of Longfellow's poem about the Acadian lovers? Oh, what was it called . . . Angel . . . Evangel . . . Evangeline! That's it, *Evangeline!*"

"That's right, Sally," answered Helen, impressed by the girl's knowledge. "How did you know Longfellow wrote a poem set in one of the earliest French settlements in Nova Scotia?" (pp. 60-1)

More authentically Canadian, and altogether more competently written, is Martyn Godfrey's *Here she is, Ms. Teeny-Wonderful!*. Aimed at preteen, rather than teenage, readers, the story turns upon a clever premise: Tomboy Carol Weatherspoon, a young bike-jumping enthusiast, is entered by her mother in the Ms. Teeny-Wonderful beauty-talent contest, sponsored by *Canada Woman* magazine. Plagued by the ultra-feminine (and ultra-malicious) Campbell twins, Carol succeeds in proving that her "masculine" talent is as admirable as more traditional ones, and in demonstrating gumption in the process.

Godfrey has obviously cashed in on a trendy issue: traditional vs. liberated female rôles, but he does this with a light touch:

"If they ask you what you want to be when you grow up, say a doctor or a social worker, a job that helps other people."

"I want to be a cop". (pp. 82-3)

Dialogue is natural, and Carol is a believable tomboy, not a device for convincing preteen girls to burn their Barbies.

Unlike Gunnery and McCloskey, Godfrey generates drama with fresh, precise language:

It was an incredible feeling, being suspended in midair clinging to a metal bike with emptiness passing below. Only, of course, there wasn't emptiness. There were barrels. Six of them with *Canada Woman* painted on them.

One.

The first purple and gold barrel vanished beneath me. (p. 159)

Teeny-Wonderful's full potential for humour is unrealized. It never approaches the uninhibited zaniness of a Gordon Korman novel, or the Korman gift for caricature. Still, Godfrey's lightweight work offers an enjoyable few hours to the young reader. The same cannot be said of the two teenage novels, both seriously marred by poor writing.

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