

siècle. Elle est aussi avocate avec Durocher, Maccagno, Arès, Manning, Lynass, Carr & Simpson, avocats et notaires, à Edmonton.

COMING OF AGE IN CALGARY

Red. Jan Truss. Douglas & McIntyre, 1988. 143 pp. \$12.95, cloth. ISBN 0-88899-077-4.

At the level of dramatic action, *Red*, Jan Truss's second novel in her proposed Summer Quartet, is decidedly uneventful compared to its predecessor, *Summer goes riding*. Tornadoes, graveyard seances, and midnight horse-thieving – all a part of the plot of *Summer goes riding* – are replaced in *Red* by the gentler drama of an early adolescent boy's inevitable psychological turmoil as he confronts the ambiguities of boy-girl interaction, of his role in relation to a rediscovered mother, and of his new-found freedom from parental control.

At the end of a momentous summer in rural Nebraska, Red, the novel's protagonist, boards a bus for Calgary, leaving behind him his father, a rather crotchety taskmaster, and the three good friends with whom he shared dreams and adventures in *Summer goes riding*. Awaiting his arrival in Calgary, Red's birthplace, is his mother, Louise, who has invited him for a two-week visit and whom he has not seen for four years. Only the faded lineaments of the story of his parents' separation – it had something to do with his mother and a rodeo cowboy – remain with Red; what does beat in his head is his father's parting admonition: "And remember, she's likely to come back if you behave yourself. Behave yourself, d'you hear. I want her here, where she belongs." This burden of responsibility only increases Red's anxiety about his mother's reception of him, and when he does get to Calgary, everything is stubbornly unfamiliar: his mother looks more like a film star than the domestic matrons he knows in Nebraska, she doesn't make him eat turnip, and, being a "free spirit" herself, she actually encourages him to "Hang loose" and "Feel free." Even the attractive girl next door, Celeste, who hides behind a curtain of blue-black hair, perpetually smiling and invariably chaperoned by two slavering bulldogs, seems scarcely like Charlotte and Maggie, the girls back home. The vertiginousness that results from trying to digest all of this newness is captured in the novel's prevailing metaphor of the Stampede ride where, Red remembers, as a child "inside a massive spinning drum", he had "walked on walls, held up only by centrifugal force." The story within this story, the book that Red dips into throughout the novel, cleverly highlights

the distance between traditional tales of a boy's coming of age and the contemporary one we are reading: in it the pluck of three boys is tested on a canoe trip in the Canadian wilderness, but the dangers of bears, rapids, and Indians seem touchingly remote from those Red realizes he will confront in the emotional wilderness of his mother's house: "They were in a book, and everything would turn out happy-ever-after. Real life wasn't like that."

While the Calgary of *Red* is not so vividly evoked as the rural setting of *Summer goes riding*, Truss's descriptive powers are put to impressive use when she does turn her eye, if only occasionally, to the natural world. It is that which is unseen, however, that is of central interest – the fears and musings that make up the landscape of Red's mind are followed closely by a narrator who is both clear-eyed and compassionate. Red's response to the discovery that Celeste is a slow learner is explored delicately, and the palpable tensions between him and his mother are not quickly and remarkably resolved. Indeed, when these tensions reach a climax in the novel's most arresting scene, the scene in which Louise and Red finally confront the past, they are handled with startling honesty. Swooping back and forth on a swing in a deserted playground in the rain, Louise, soaked to the skin, her red hair flying, yells out her apologies and explanations to her frightened son: "Do you hear? I don't care about horses and lonely places. And I didn't think I cared about you. A kid. A nuisance. I didn't want you." The characterization of Louise is one of the novel's triumphs. It is partly through her that the novel explores the need for freedom and independence and insists on an appreciation and respect for individual differences.

The novel succeeds as a convincing story of a boy's education in the moral and social complexity of things; it doesn't offer pat answers, but it is affirmative. The characters do not divide themselves easily into those on the side of freedom and those who sanction restriction, and the shape of the story is right; it ends where it began, at the bus station, where, at the end of his two-week visit, Red boards a bus alone, without his mother, bound for his father's isolated horse farm. Truss writes partly, she has said, as "the passionate protector of the inside child": this novel, perhaps more than Truss's other richly varied works, impresses one with this appealingly humane facet of the writer.

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FOR THE TEEN READERS

Bad Boy. Diana Wieler. Douglas & McIntyre, 1989. 191 pp., \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-083-9. **Paddy Martel is missing.** Beverley Spencer. Gage, 1989. 194 pp., \$4.25 paper. ISBN 0-7715-7015-5.