It is not surprising that this idea of the importance of books and imagination plays such an important part of the story, given Pearson's background as a librarian. It is subtly done. And the echo from one generation to the next, between Theo and the ghost, is nicely incorporated — like the passing of a torch. As well, we see that wealth or parental literacy do not necessarily impact on a child's literacy or imagination. This is an important message for children.

As the readers, we are as willing as young Theo is to believe the fantasy of her dream world. Her poverty and fear of being abandoned by her unreliable mother have her dreaming for a miracle and the magic happens. She yearns to be part of a perfect family and her daydream merges with the ghost's fiction. Like Theo, we know that the happy family who adopts her, with no questions asked, cannot be real, but we do not ask too many questions lest the spell be broken. The disappointment is palpable when the dream proves an illusion.

The lesson to be learned is a valuable one. Reality may not be as satisfying as fantasy, but it has its rewards. The yearning for love, success, and security is felt by all. When Theo encounters the real family she met through her dream, she learns this lesson. The story closes on a hopeful note, lifting Theo and her mother out of their initial despair. This is a very satisfying read, a story that does not judge the characters. The fantastic element makes it intriguing and keeps it from being melodramatic.

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A Problem Novel with an Uncharacteristic Problem

Step by Step. Ginny Russell. Beach Holme Publishers, 1996. 108 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88878-364-7.

Ginny Russell assumes a laudable task in this problem novel, the demonstration of how fourteen-year-old Kim Jamieson comes to terms with her mother's accidental death. Having researched this particular problem in Jill Krementz's *How It Feels When a Parent Dies*, Russell would show Kim dealing with grief "step by step" until she is able once again to face life with a sense of positive anticipation or, in the words of her deceased mother, with the recognition that "the real world is full of great things and wonderful people, if you can spot them. And don't forget to roll with the punches."

Like many other recent problem novels, this one examines a central concern, the death of a mother, in the context of a plethora of other problems — drug abuse, alcoholism, smoking, runaway street kids. But one of the great attractions of problem novels for young readers has always been the creation of a compelling character, one just like them who speaks directly to them in an individualized and yet universalized adolescent dialect, whether it be the blasphemous idiom of Salinger's Holden Caulfield, or the flat locutions of Blume's Davey Wexler. It is in this very important dimension that *Step by Step* falters. The voices of Kim Jamieson and her friends Suzy, Buzz and Mike fail to convey who

they are, and, more importantly, why they are who they are. At best these characters remain narrative tools, employed without a careful rationalization or understanding of their psychological dimensions. This is particularly noticeable in Kim's shifting relationships with her old and her new boyfriends, and in the conclusion in her sudden but narratively convenient adoption of the role of matchmaker between her father and her mother's old friend, Sylvia. It is not just the problems of adolescence that are complex; the characters that disclose them are by necessity even more so, as the writing of such authors as Martha Brooks, Julie Johnson, and Budge Wilson so often attests. Admittedly, there are rare moments in this story, such as when Kim remembers spending the night of her sixth birthday in the tree house, that begin to suggest the dynamics of character. But for the most part, the portrayal of Kim's triumph over her grief is as glib and mechanical as is Buzz's over drug dependence and Sam's over running away. It lacks the first ingredient that Kim's writing teacher prescribes for all "good writing": "It's got to be authentic."

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Canadian and Australian Satires of Adult Society

Jacob Two-Two's First Spy Case. Mordecai Richler. Illus. Norman Eyolfson. McClelland & Stewart, 1995. 138 pp. $17.99 cloth. ISBN 0-7710-7471-9. ***The Big Bazoohley.*** Peter Carey. Illus. Abira Ali. Random House, 1995. 133 pp. $19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-394-22463-9.

Both Mordecai Richler and Peter Carey are acclaimed authors of adult fiction. Canadian-born Richler has produced nine novels, including *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, St. Urbain's Horseman,* and *Joshua Then and Now,* several screenplays, and a number of works of non-fiction. Carey, born in Australia, now living in New York, is the author of a number of novels, including the Booker-prize winning *Oscar and Lucinda* and, more recently, *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith.* Richler demonstrated his facility with writing children's literature in 1975 with the publication of the highly successful *Jacob Two-Two and the Hooded Fang. Jacob Two-Two's First Spy Case* is the third of Richler's popular Two-Two series. Carey reveals himself to be equally at ease with this genre in his first children's novel, *The Big Bazoohley.* As writers of children's books, both Richler and Carey achieve a rare combination of humour and social commentary. Both see children as the victims of a social world created and run by adults, and yet both present young boys who find ways to empower themselves within the adult institutions they find nonsensical and often unfair. The integrity and ingenuity of both Jacob and Sam Kellow not only ensure their successful fight against the absurdities of adult society but also foreground for the reader, in a light-hearted way, the ease with which adults can underestimate and even victimize children.

In *Jacob Two-Two's First Spy Case* Jacob is eight (two times two times two) years old and is fighting against corruption in his private school, Privilege House.