must be respected — and, if possible, restored, especially, if the living wish to co-exist in harmony with this unseen world and its ghostly inhabitants, who from time to time *appear* to become brief co-habitants of *our* world.

The ghost in Tim Wynne-Jones's haunting short story, "The Clearing" goes even further. "Go home!" this ghost tells Ben when Ben tries to befriend him. Whether seen or unseen, these spirits must go back to their own world, once their wishes have been fulfilled, or past injustices or injuries, have been resolved.

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MIXED MESSAGES: GOOD STORIES THAT FALL SHORT

Blue. James Heneghan. Scholastic Canada, 1991. 140 pp., $3.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-74044-X. **Four-Eyes and French Fries**. Mary Blakeslee. General Paperbacks, 1991. 130 pp., $5.95 paper. ISBN 0-77536-7296-6. **Gallop for Gold**. Sharon Siamon. Illus. Frances Clancey. James Lorimer & Co., 1992. 156 pp., $8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-380-4. **Grandpa's Alkali**. Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet. Red Deer College Press, 1993. 96 pp., $8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-096-2. **Oliver's Wars**. Budge Wilson. Stoddart, 1992. 101 pp., $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-7737-5508-X. **The Best of Arlie Zack**. H.J. Hutchins. Illus. Ruth Ohi. Annick Press, 1993. $4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-315-3. **The Firefighter**. Bernice Thurman Hunter. Scholastic, 1991. 161 pp., $4.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-74051-2. **Riptide!** Marion Crook. Stoddart, 1992. 106 pp., $5.95 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7362-8. **Where the Sky Begins**. Jill Creighton. Illus. Sue Harrison. Annick Press, 1992. $4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-270-X.

These novels are at one level successful in providing young readers with some sort of useful message about growing up. They are consistently realistic about the problems of young people, even in those novels that use elements of the fantastic, and for the most part they are successful in their ambition of providing good reading and sound values. Fiction can, however, teach in more than one way, and when one looks at these novels as a group, one discovers a disturbing pattern in the way girls and women are treated.

All these novels are concerned with adolescent growth and change. Budge Wilson's *Oliver's Wars* and Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet's *Grandpa's Alkali* focus on the difficulties young people have relating to the elderly, in both cases cantankerous grandfathers, while Mary Blakeslee's *Four-Eyes and French Fries* and James Heneghan's *Blue* are concerned with the problems of adolescents who, having lost a parent, must come to grips with the remaining parent's new partner. A variation on this theme is H.J. Hutchins's *The Best of Arlie Zack*, which deals with problems of reconciliation with a father who abandoned his family. Bernice Thurman Hunter's *The Firefighter* is also about reconciliation, only in this case about a young boy who is an orphan and who must learn to adjust to living with

his two maiden aunts. Sharon Siamon's *Gallop for Gold* deals with issues of environmental responsibility, although it is equally concerned with accepting new challenges and taking on new responsibilities. Problems of juvenile crime comprise the focus of Marion Crook's *Riptide!*, while alcoholism constitutes a backdrop for Jill Creighton's *Where the Sky Begins*, which dwells on taking responsibility for one's family.

Any book aspiring to communicate a message must not be oppressive or preachy, and the message must be fully integrated into the storylines. Especially successful in this regard is Mary Blakeslee's *Four Eyes and French Fries*, whose new teacher Pauline Fordyce, otherwise known as Four Eyes because of her oversized glasses, turns out to be the new romantic interest in Eddie's father's life. The point of the novel is that first impressions are not always the correct ones, and that people play different roles. Eddie must come to see that the "Four Eyes," who in his opinion is unreasonably demanding on her students, is also a woman with feelings; her values, which seem so antagonistic to Eddie's way of life — her concern for healthy foods and obvious dislike of demolition derbies — really just represent a different point of view. Budge Wilson's *Oliver's Wars* stresses the importance of communication and openness and of trusting those to whom one is closest. It recounts how twelve-year-old Oliver Kovak moves east with his mother to be with his grandparents when his father, a nurse, goes overseas to the war in Saudi Arabia. Without friends, taunted because he is poor at sports, and with little in common with his grouchy grandfather, Oliver learns that there is nothing to be gained from hiding his feelings, that he, in fact, has much in common with Gus, the schoolyard bully, and that he can talk with his grandfather if he only takes the time.

Sharon Siamon's novel *Gallop for Gold* is essentially two stories. The first centres on Remington Wickers, who, as the spoiled child of parents who have little interest in spending time with him, is a constant complainer and an irritant to all those around him. The second involves Kiff's discovery of gold in an abandoned mine, and how a beaver dam almost causes a disaster when contaminated sludge left over from the dam nearly leaks into Big Pickle Lake. The two stories effectively converge when Remington puts aside his fears to save both his friends and the lake. Not only does Remington gain new respect for himself and earn the respect of his companions, but Kiff realizes that his discovery is best left a secret if the result is further damage to the environment.

Two of these novels are distinctive because they contain elements of the fantastic. James Heneghan's *Blue* recounts Andy's unusual telepathic experiences with the dog Blue, who is the single survivor when a spaceship crashes on the McAtee farm. Heneghan successfully manages to integrate his story of alien visitors with the more personal story of how Andy must adjust to the blossoming relationship between the strict and unyielding McAtee and his mother. Not quite so successful is Hutchins's *The Best of Arlie Zack*. There is a good deal that goes on in the story — the strange experiences in Mrs. Spinx's house, Arlie Zack's problems with math, broken windows and vandalism, and Arlie's bus trip to find his father. Somehow, though, they do not integrate with one another so that one

feels one is reading a single story.

The most impressive of these novels are those which in a sensitive but realistic way deal with the problems of interpersonal relationships. Mary Blakeslee's *Four Eyes and French Fries* is a story about accepting that a person can play several roles and that one should not jump to conclusions about people. Also stressing that first impressions can be wrong are Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet's *Grandpa's Alkali* and Bernice Thurman Hunter's *The Firefighter* both of which focus on difficulties between generations. In Bannatyne-Cugnet's novel, ten-year-old James Johnston is always getting on the wrong side of his grandfather; like alkali on fertile soil, James is a pest. What he discovers when faced with the possibility of losing his grandfather is that his love for his grandfather is only matched by the deep feelings his grandfather has for him. In *The Firefighter*, Terry is an orphan who goes to live with his maiden aunts, who are caring enough, but whose stuffy house is hardly the place to make a young boy feel welcome. Terry loves fires, and when he is discovered at the wrong place at the wrong time he is accused of arson. This makes his life with his aunts even more intolerable, and he runs away only to discover out in the cold world that his aunts are not as bad as he thought.

One of the most disturbing stories for its realism is Marion Crook's *Riptide!*, which directly confronts the problem of adolescent crime. Rory MacDonald moves from Cooks Harbour to Halifax, where he becomes involved with a gang of shoplifters. Homesick and wanting to find new friends, Rory is trapped into meeting the expectations of the gang. It is only when the gang wants to implicate his unsuspecting cousin Megan, who throughout the novel serves as a conscience for Rory, that he takes a stand about what is right and wrong. The strength of Crook's novel is the realistic way she conveys how easy it is for a young person to be trapped into doing things that he or she knows are wrong. There is an equal element of realism in Jill Creighton's *Where the Sky Begins*. Quiet and retiring Jenkin must look after his younger brother and sister, when his brother Perry is hurt. Jenkin's alcoholic uncle, however, insists on looking after them, and thus the three children leave to find their father who is at a fishing camp in the wilderness. Candid in presenting the effects of alcohol, Creighton's novel effectively reveals how an otherwise caring person is transformed by alcohol into one who is irresponsible and potentially dangerous.

Fiction can communicate both overtly or indirectly. The overt messages of all these novels are certainly positive ones, with which few would disagree. But they send a disturbing message quite out-of-touch with today's world in which one should be trying to escape gender stereotypes. It is startling that in nearly every novel the male characters dominate the story. The only exceptions are Marion Crook's *Riptide!*, in which Megan possesses more common sense than her older cousin Rory, and Sharon Siamon's *Gallop for Gold*, where Josie plays a similar role in relation to Kiff. Even in *Riptide!* and *Gallop for Gold*, one is left with the impression that boys are stronger, capable of more, and far more interesting than their female friends. They are, moreover, inevitably older; one might wonder if anyone writes novels about younger boys and older girls.

While one might argue that sometimes novels must be about boys because the author is writing about a youthful male experience, this is not the case here, as the experiences comprising these novels are by no means gender-specific. And one must ask the question of whether novels for young people should be written for a gender-specific reader in the first place; surely we should rid ourselves of the labels "books for boys" and "books for girls." Male-bonding might be important, as it obviously is in *Grandpa's Alkali*, but the story could have been written about a young girl and her grandfather. The problems of dislocation from the home one knows to a new home is one experienced by both girls and boys, yet there seems a preoccupation with telling a male experience. In *The Firefighter*, one should be reminded that we have female firefighters today. While it is true that novel is set in the 1950s, this only creates additional questions. References to television programs today's young people consider ancient history are out-of-place, especially as the novel is not written with the specific intent of recounting what it was like to live in 1950s Toronto.

More than this, there is a tendency to characterize older women in a certain way. In *The Firefighter*, Terry's older aunts are caricatures of the old spinster, one being kind and good, the other being stingy and bad; one is almost reminded of the three sisters in Cinderella. In *Blue*, Andy's mother, Lucy Scott, seems helpless as McAtee's housekeeper. She seems totally dependent on McAtee, and she clearly recognizes that she is living in "his" house as "his" housekeeper. Andy's mother is forced to find excuses for McAtee's boorish behaviour, and she is concerned that he not be annoyed. That a relationship between McAtee and Andy's mother develops seems to confirm that this is the price that a woman must pay for happiness and security. Having Lucy and McAtee hold hands hardly mitigates the subservient and dependent relationship she seems to have with McAtee. Similarly, in Budge Wilson's *Oliver's Wars*, neither Oliver's mother nor his grandmother can stand up to Oliver's bullying grandfather, and one is hardly convinced by the justification that circumstances are "not that simple." Moreover, there is never any adequate explanation of why the family moves east in the first place. Is Mrs. Kovac so dependent on her husband that she cannot cope alone? Even in *Where the Sky Begins*, it is Jenkin's father who is out fishing while his mother stays at home to care for the children.

The only strong and independent woman is found in Mary Blakeslee's *Four-Eyes and French Fries*, although even here Pauline reverts to being a weepy woman at the end when Eddie is hurt, and she is willing to step aside rather than interfere with Eddie's relationship with his father. The novel begins with Pauline "striding into the room like she was attending a summit meeting" and ends with Eddie finding value in the fact that she is soft and smells good. The picture of Pauline standing in the kitchen in her nightgown cooking bacon contrasts markedly with the picture of Pauline, the independent and self-confident teacher; that it is used to indicate to Eddie that she is a "real" person sends the very wrong signal that a woman's place is in the kitchen. To be fair, Eddie's father takes the role of a single parent, and he is as capable in the kitchen as he is in a demolition derby. But Eddie

and his father eat the wrong things, and are, in fact, proud of it. That Pauline's views on healthy eating never really get a fair hearing suggests that she is willing to give in so that she does not lose Eddie's father. It is as if her concerns and values do not count. At the end, one is left with the distinct impression that Pauline has come round to Eddie's and his father's way of thinking.

As a group, these novels are a mixed accomplishment. Not one of them really deserves the label of outstanding, although certainly James Heneghan's *Blue*, Sharon Siamon's *Gallop for Gold*, Mary Blakeslee's *Four-Eyes and French Fries*, and Marion Crook's *Riptide!* do stand out from the rest. The handling of gender roles is a disturbing one, especially as the majority of these novels are written by women. One general feature: those books that include illustrations could well do without them.

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DETECTING THE FUTURE

Money to Burn. E.M. Goldman. Viking, 1994. 212 pp, $19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-670-85339-9. **Getting Lincoln's Goat**. E.M. Goldman. Delacorte Press, 1995 (An Elliot Armbruster Mystery). 218 pp, $18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-385-32098-1. **The Night Room**. E.M. Goldman. Viking, 1995. 224 pp, $19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-670-85838-2.

The adolescent characters in these three novels are all engaged in trying to untangle the often contradictory messages they receive from parents, teachers, peers, and the media about how to live successful adult lives. What they learn is that apparent short-cuts and easy answers are misleading, and that each must become a real detective who approaches a problem like a jigsaw puzzle, examining the pieces carefully and fitting it together. As the hero of *Getting Lincoln's Goat* discovers: "This takes time. Sometimes it's boring" (*GLG* 215). The most pervasive influence on the young people in *Getting Lincoln's Goat* and *Money to Burn* is TV. Goldman is highly sensitive to its effects, but presents the pleasures as well as the dangers of TV with a light touch. Her mood becomes darker in *The Night Room* where she presents the possible effects of Virtual Reality as an emerging power over people's minds.

TV's positive picture of consumerism convinces the heroes of *Money to Burn*, Matt and Lewis, that the lack of money is the source of all their restless dissatisfaction with life during an idle summer holiday. When they find $400,000 in a suitcase, they assume they have found a completely satisfactory way to fill that emptiness, just as it would in a television entertainment, and they make their early decisions on how to cope with their find by referring to TV as a reliable source of ethics. Real experience teaches them to find pleasure in unpaid work — certainly not a common theme in the sort of TV programming