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

enjoyed by their age group.

Work as a means of adult identification is a major theme of both *Getting Lincoln's Goat* and *The Night Room*, in which students are all engaged in trying to come up with an idea for a possible future career. Elliot dreams of life as a detective, but is keenly aware of how his parents would react to such a choice: "I'd figured out my parents' message a long time ago: Achieve your potential, but don't take any chances" (*GLG* 6). Parents are pushing their children into "safe" jobs, and their children are yearning for more exciting and challenging (and probably less remunerative) careers. Goldman, like Elliot's Life Skills teacher, is encouraging the young to spread their wings and fly.

Television is the most frequently cited source of information in *Money to Burn* and *Getting Lincoln's Goat*. The protagonists work at distinguishing its images from the reality of their lives. In *Getting Lincoln's Goat,* Elliot's secret ambition to be a detective is based on his pleasure in viewing his favourite TV hero. His growing discoveries about the disparities between the image of his hero and the reality of ordinary detective work lead to insights about his own potential. In particular, he learns the difference between TV time and real time by doing real surveillance work, which turns out to be "the most boring thing I'd ever done in my entire life" (*GLG* 19).

Television's insistence on portraying only physically perfect young adults creates real problems for adolescents. In *The Night Room,* Joy becomes obsessed with a desire for the perfect figure and a future as a film actress, and Mac buys into the media-nurtured idea that handsome athletic men who spend a lot of time in bars and engage in casual sex with a succession of beautiful women lead fulfilled and happy lives. In *Getting Lincoln's Goat,* Bruno is a similar macho figure. Like Mac, he is sexually promiscuous, but at a loss when it comes to participating in high school dating, fearing exposure to rejection and loss of control of the situation. These men/boys have skipped past the difficulties of dealing with girls as people like themselves, and thus any opportunity for meaningful relationships.

Goldman's handling of the danger television creates for people, particularly young ones who may confuse its excitement and glamour with real possibilities, is far from being heavy-handed. While her minor characters seem most likely to fall victim, they always get thrust into confronting messy reality, and her protagonists are never really fooled. In *Money to Burn* Matt is reassuringly matter-of-fact about the discordance between TV's picture and real people: "Maybe most of them [girls on a beach] didn't have bodies like he'd seen on TV, but then, neither did the guys. Sometimes Matt wondered where all the people lived that he saw on TV, like maybe there was a Prettytown somewhere and the rest of the people lived in the Uglies" (115). And Goldman is willing to share in the fun her readers experience while watching TV. Many of her humorous scenes could have been lifted from situation comedies; for example in *Money to Burn* a policewoman in her bridal gown takes some criminals prisoner at gunpoint. And in providing entertainment for her readers, Goldman offers them

the sorts of dangers, adventures, and romance that attract people to TV. It's a tricky business to be warning against accepting fiction as reality within a fiction, but she navigates this course skilfully.

Because Virtual Reality offers such convincing experiences to participants, there is a much greater danger that they will take those experiences as real, which ultimately leads to madness — the dark underlying theme of *The Night Room*. Argus is a VR program that ostensibly offers students an opportunity to get a glimpse of their futures. The scenarios projected by Argus are based on probabilities, yet many of the students involved grasp at the idea that it will provide a short-cut to the future — a quick answer to the bewildering questions faced by young people, and an escape from real time with its ennui and hard work. The most alarming case is Graham's: he wants to find out if "his future [is] worth sticking around for" (24-25), and when he sees himself as a drunkard (like his parents), he reacts in horror and despair. Tess refuses to participate because she sees the danger of accepting probability as inevitable. Yet even the sceptical Tess cannot withstand completely VR's power to convince: she sheds a tear when a participant reveals that Ira appears as the husband of another woman.

Belief in the reality of VR is based on the verisimilitude of the experience itself and on the image of science as cool, balanced, and factual — god-like in its transcendence over human emotions. Goldman shows how false this image is through the nonsensical future projected for Barbara, an intellectual and scientifically inclined girl, as a fashion designer. This implausible life is the result of an error by the interviewer responsible for filling in the information to be used by Argus. Barbara is interested in working in genetics, doing research in "designer genes," which is misheard by the interviewer as "designer jeans." A more serious defect is pointed out by Barbara's mother, who suggests that, as a group, the scenarios created by Argus indicate personal bias in the creator of the program.

The greatest danger is the potential use of VR as a means of wish fulfilment. Life in VR is so much easier than real life because the needs of other people need never be taken into account. The seductiveness of such escape and pleasure could be overpowering, leading people to "live their entire lives in dreams" (*NR* 165). Dr. Halstrom, Argus's creator, has her own private programs to fill in her empty life and sees such use as wholesome. She believes that "[i]f life itself did not turn out well, Argus could fill in the empty spaces" (*NR* 180), and that human bliss can be achieved by sinking into individual worlds where "[t]here would be love for everyone. All the love that you could hold to you with both hands. And it would never, ever end" (189). Goldman's delicately conveyed message is that, although the media and the natural adventurousness of young people lead to the belief that happiness lies in high drama and excitement, in the end people can fill in their empty spaces only in the real, shared world — in a family's silly jokes, in the sense of belonging that arises from working in a group for the same goal, and in the clinging fingers of an infant. So over-riding is the need for human love that when the hero of *The Night Room* is projected into his likely future, he never learns what his job is, only that he is a good husband and father, and he is

surprised to discover that such a life is all he really wants.

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## LIKE ROLLING OFF A LOG?

**Speak to the Earth**. William Bell. Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1994. 204 pp., $11.95 paper. ISBN 0-385-25487-3.

William Bell's *Speak to the Earth* is both a fictionalizing of the controversy over clear-cutting the old growth rainforest in Clayoquot Sound, B.C., and the story of fifteen-year-old Bryan Troupe, who is caught up in the issue against his will. His widowed mother Iris, who is an environmental activist; his uncle Jimmy, a logger; his conservationist girlfriend Ellen, whose parents work in forest industry management; his half-native friend Elias, whose brother Zeke is an increasingly reluctant RCMP officer; his elderly Native friend Walter, who can speak to the earth — these are the people complicating Bryan's life. Feeling unsure of his own position, and therefore increasingly isolated from his family and friends, Bryan reacts egocentrically, wishing that he could be left alone and that things wouldn't change. But of course he can't, and they do. Growing increasingly disillusioned with industry, law, and government, Bryan finally takes a stand.

The novel is an uneasy mix of young adult rite-of-passage fiction, and political issue (not to say propaganda) fiction. Both are sub-genres, and adding them together does not necessarily make a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Does the novel exist to tell Bryan's story, or to fictionalize the Clayoquot Sound issue? Theoretically, it can do both, but this is a tall order; if the sub-genres are not to assert themselves formulaically, the author must be interested enough in a range of people that he/she can embody them and enact their disparate views convincingly.

In *Speak to the Earth* no adequate range of characters is developed; this is a *parti pris* novel. Consequently the sub-genres compete with each other for our attention, and neither wins. The depth of Bryan's passage to responsible maturity is not developed with anything like the authenticity of Michael's similar passage in Kevin Major's *Hold Fast* because Bell must spend too much time on the clear-cutting issue. Yet it is treated superficially as well. What hints of character development there are beyond Bryan rest consistently on the side of the environmentalists. Bell makes gestures in the other direction by having Jimmy initially confront Iris and defend the position of unemployed loggers, but Jimmy is uncomfortable all along, and after quitting his MFI work, acknowledges that there are better ways of logging than clear-cutting. Ellen's parents (a manager of MFI and a lawyer) are never introduced except in stony silence as they cart her away to her aunt's. Elias Wilson's brother Zeke, the RCMP officer, finds it harder and harder to do his duty and arrest activists, and finally won't. The judge who becomes the butt of Iris's sarcastic wit when she is in the dock, is a stereotype, and Premier Harrington is a goon.