

cent reader. The books provide the occasional poignant glimpse into the complexities of young people's lives, but the reader is left wanting more depth.

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Silence: Hiding a Father's Abuse

Of Things Not Seen. Don Aker. Gemini Books Stoddart, 1995. 197 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7435-7. *Brad's Universe.* Mary Woodbury. Orca, 1998. 191 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-120-3.

In the young adult novels, *Of Things Not Seen* and *Brad's Universe*, Don Aker and Mary Woodbury write about teenage boys who have abusive fathers. Each of the narratives, which focus almost entirely on the boys' perspectives, revolve around single-child families where the father has either left and then been replaced by a stepfather or, in the case of *Brad's Universe*, where the father has been in and out of jail. In Aker's novel, the abuse is blatant as the protagonist, sixteen-year-old Ben, spends every waking moment trying to avoid both his stepfather's violent beatings and the imminent discovery of the abuse. The sexual abuse in Woodbury's novel is more subversive as it occurred in a past that neither of fourteen-year-old Brad's parents want him to know about.

The problems of hiding the abuse and not revealing the past are key themes in both novels. In *Of Things Not Seen*, Don Aker deals explicitly with how terrifying and invasive physical abuse can be. He uses his characters to reiterate and refute common arguments that are a part of the abuse-victim mentality: when Ben's mother states that the stepfather's abuse is only a result of his love "Ben sneer[s]. 'Look at those marks on your face! That's not love! Not anything like it!'" (144). Though Aker stereotypically situates the abuse within a poor family where money is figured as one of the primary solutions to ending the abuse, he does challenge this class distinction by making one of the wealthiest of Ben's classmates, someone that Ben envies throughout the novel, also the victim of fatherly abuse. Thus, Aker points out that having money does not end abuse. In fact, the only solution that Aker provides to escape the abuse is exposing it — breaking the silence — especially to the police.

The sexual abuse in *Brad's Universe* is figured more as an elusive element that, when revealed, will serve to order Brad's world. Brad himself is not abused by his father. Woodbury's narrative maintains the suspense of

the secret abuse until the end of the novel — only allowing brief flashbacks to a childhood memory of Brad's father, a gifted pianist, and some of his music students in a hot tub which Brad remembers: "The tub was full of big boys, music students, the ones with talent, the ones who got cookies and milk and special help" (171). *Brad's Universe* is not explicitly about the abuse; instead it is about a son who wants his father's love and approval. Woodbury uses the sexual abuse as an ambiguous trope that signals the complexity of the interplay between the paedophilic father and the son: Brad's father excludes his son from his affection, particularly from his sexual affection, because Brad is not musically gifted. As a reader, one is left with the disturbing impression that, had Brad been good in music, he too would have been an object of his father's affection/abuse.

While each of the novels reaches resolution, the abuse itself is not resolved: in the last pages, Aker has the wealthy teen calling Ben for help, and Woodbury leaves open the possibility of future abuse by Brad's father even though he is in counselling. Though Aker's book is written for an older teenage market and Woodbury's is written for younger teens or pre-teens, both books successfully convey elements of abusive situations that may allow others to read and recognize the abuse in their own lives and to possibly get help by breaking the silence.

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To Dream in Canada

Melanie Bluelake's Dream. Betty Dorion. Coteau, 1995. 214 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55050-081-3. *Dreamcatcher.* Meredy Maynard. Polestar, 1995. 138 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 1-896095-01-1.

These two first novels are remarkably similar: each protagonist struggles with the demands of early adolescence on childhood; Native identity is called into question by a hostile, non-Native world; the single-parent family feels the strains of paternal absence; a change of place disrupts the child's world of routine, stability and friendship. In both stories, a central dream clarifies for the child that personal, emotional struggle can be resolved through internal growth. The children in these books learn to be reflective, independent young adults: in their attempt to escape the bondage of parental attachment, they learn to value friendship.

Some readers may be annoyed that Meredy Maynard and Betty Dorion — non-Native writers — choose to write about Native characters and themes