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

or worry that Native identity has become a metaphor for Canadian children in general, such as the two friends in Welwyn Wilton Katz's *False Face* (1987). We should be aware of these issues but also be hopeful that Native issues in this country can no longer be ignored by non-Native writing. When Fran, the thirteen-year-old hero of *Dreamcatcher*, moves from Toronto to the small town of Newcastle after the death of his father, a conflict between the city and town adds to his troubles. He secretly adopts an injured baby racoon, but can't cope with this task until he is befriended by Jo, a girl of the same age whose mother is half French-Canadian, half Mohawk and whose father has returned to his grandparents on the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford. Jo's mother lives close to the land in a forest clearing, and although Jo has been held back in school because of slow reading, she eagerly reads anything she can find on Native identity (which explains why so much of the Indian lore in this book sounds like textbook knowledge)

Fran hates his mother's new boyfriend for reasons he can't exactly explain; his relationship with his mother seems almost nonexistent. Maynard fails to provide the book with enough emotional subtext. Children's literature, by definition, gives the power of representation to children, but parents ought to be given some depth of characterization if they are to be the target of youthful anger and resentment. The friendship of Fran and Jo is entirely innocent — no sexual tension whatsoever — as their bond is based on the common absence of a father. Everything that Jo teaches Fran about Native Culture — respect for nature and supernatural forces, interest in the past — finds its place in the novel's plot. The Native coming-of-age ritual of isolation, starvation and vision becomes the book's climax when Fran becomes lost in the woods, knocks himself out in a fall, and is given a dream that allows him to come to terms with the loss of his father. During this scene, the pet racoon returns to the wild, symbolizing the end of childhood in acts of independence, self-reliance, and freedom.

Melanie Bluelake's Dream is a lovely book that teaches us a lot about how the mother-daughter relationship can sometimes take a wrong turn. Melanie's mother has not finished high school. In an effort to make something of her life, she has taken her daughter from the Elk Crossing Reserve in Saskatchewan to Prince Albert, where she hopes to finish grade 12 and get some job training. Early in the novel, Melanie gives us a list — "Why I Hate My Mom" — and for the duration of the book we learn of the difficult relation between Melanie and her mother. Melanie dearly loves Kōhkom, her grandmother, whose loving attention is the source for Melanie's intense homesickness. Feelings of doubt and limited self-respect have led Melanie's mother to retreat from the authority of parenting. The knowledge of Native culture here is disseminated entirely within the book's emotional subtext: homesickness becomes a profound theme. In what is perhaps the novel's most affecting scene, Melanie's mother can't bring herself to attend a meeting with Melanie's new teacher: "I don't want to go because I can't afford to get your supplies yet. And I don't know what to say if she asks me about it. And then she'll

probably ask me if I found a place to live yet. And I'll have to say no to that too. And I haven't started school." Slowly, Melanie comes to learn of her mother's emotional frailty, but not before she plays a few games with her anger. A visit by two social workers, prompted by accurate reports that there isn't enough food at home to feed Melanie, leads Melanie to exaggerate her mother's poverty as an act of revenge. Melanie thus earns a trip for herself back home to Kōhkom and Elk Crossing. Back in the protective arms of her grandmother, Melanie experiences something new: she misses her mother.

There are many well-crafted scenes in *Melanie Bluelake's Dream*: a sudden recognition that the Saskatchewan River (Cree for "swift flowing water") flows between Prince Albert and Elk Crossing, an attempt to save a trapped Canada Goose, a developing close friendship with another displaced Cree girl, a birthday celebration that falls flat suddenly, and a reconciliation with a classroom bully. The book ends with a consideration of home — the content of Melanie's dream — and a new recognition of complex, often contradictory emotions. Betty Dorion is to be congratulated for her easy recognition that Cree is one of the many languages spoken in this country and for her representation of some feelings that are distinct to Native Canadians.

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Safe in the Belonging Place

The Belonging Place. Jean Little. Viking, 1997. 124 pp. $19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-670-87593-7.

Jean Little's readers know that they can trust her to make things come right in the end. Her protagonists are what Sheila Egoff called safe survivors — children who, whatever their troubles, can ultimately depend on loving and wise adults to help them put the world together. But *The Belonging Place* is too comfortable. In *From Anna, Different Dragons,* and *Mamma's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird,* to name only three of Little's many books, the central characters struggle with real difficulties. We worry for them, suffer with them, and cheer at the satisfactory resolution of their problems. Unfortunately, Elspet, the narrator and protagonist of *The Belonging Place,* doesn't command that sort of engagement.

The story begins at the happy ending. Elspet is sixteen, living on a small farm in the wilderness of Upper Canada. She tells us that she is writing down the events of her life because she has a broken leg and Granny has given her ink and paper to keep her occupied. A novel that begins at the end may still be full of tension: although we know the final situation, how the characters got there and what the concluding circumstances mean to them