wrenching move to a new city and an orthodox Jewish community. The speed of the changes is overwhelming.

In order to be included and feel accepted in the orthodox community Debbie goes along with some of her classmates and joins their exclusive, closed-door sessions with their teacher-principal. They are the privileged ones. As well, her mother accepts comfort in the arms of the same man who is a charismatic leader to his congregation.

The storyline is plausible but somewhat contrived. The marital discord is certainly realistic and helps to explain the tensions between Debbie's parents and the biased view she has of her father. However, her mother's push for the family to embrace orthodoxy seems forced. Yet, it is key to the plot, as mother and daughter pay for their trust in the "religiously pure" as represented by the rabbi and his followers.

It seems unusual to me that young Debbie does not confide in anyone at all about her feelings of unease around the sessions in the rabbi's office and that she does not react more when touched by him in the car. At the beginning of the story she is portrayed as a budding leader, but by this point she is a follower.

This is a complicated coming of age story involving bigotry, betrayal, family love, and — most disturbing — sexual abuse of women. The sleek way the rabbi insinuates himself into both mother and daughter's affections is horrifyingly believable. The abuse is credible. But, I am still left with my concerns about who is the intended audience of this cautionary tale. Without tactful, reassuring, informed adult guidance, this book could have a very reactionary effect on young readers.

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The Tensions of Growing Up: Beached Whales and Cougar Cries

Keri. Jan Andrews. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1996. 96 pp. $6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-240-8. ***Cougar Cove***. Julie Lawson. Orca, 1996. 144 pp. $7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-072-X.

Jan Andrews's first novel, *Keri*, examines an adolescent's resistance to change. Thirteen-year-old Keri lives in a small outport community in Newfoundland. The book begins with a convincing portrait of Keri's anger at her mother; however, Andrews quickly establishes that Keri's anger encompasses more than her mother's nagging. Her father, his fish traps ruined by icebergs, unable as a result to make the payments on his boat, has sold the boat and left home to work on a transatlantic ship. Keri's paternal grandmother, who told Keri stories of the Riley family going back to the eighteenth century, has died. When Keri's mother insists that the changes facing the family and the province must be accepted, that her father's experience is not unusual but a pattern of things to

come, Keri's anger only intensifies. Yet Andrews also suggests that, even without these economic changes, the adolescent Keri would be angry. For Keri's ten-year-old brother, Grae, is in comparison remarkably reasonable and sympathetic to his mother's position. If adolescence is when we resist listening to our mothers, then Keri is the ultimate adolescent.

Clearly Keri does not fully understand why she is angry at her mother, but her need to escape her mother's nagging, critical voice leads her to Rileys' Cove, which according to her grandmother has been family property ever since the first Riley was abandoned there in 1762. The grandmother's story of the abandoned girl and the beached whale that saved her, triggers Keri's fantasy/identification with the girl and the subsequent action of the novel. Holding the whale bone the grandmother has passed on to her, Keri imagines what might have happened to the girl.

When Keri and her brother discover a beached whale, and Keri convinces herself that they can somehow return the whale to the water, this act too is in defiance of her mother. For the mother has mocked her, "If you think those were the glory days, you should have been there to try it" (33). Even as Keri dreams of the abandoned girl's story, she dreams of the fame and wealth that will result. Rescuing the whale will also prove to her dead grandmother that she is as heroic as her ancestors. Andrews deftly captures the adolescent's complex yearning to defy her mother, affirm her link with her grandmother, and restore her father's work, even as she refuses Keri the happy fantasy ending that she longs for. In Keri's dream, the abandoned girl's baby does not survive; despite Keri's heroic efforts on the beach, neither does the whale. Unfortunately this refusal of one happy ending only draws attention to the suddenness of the reconciliation between mother and daughter. Mother and daughter hug on beach; mother confesses, "'I've made your lives a misery. Sure, you've been difficult, but I'm the adult'" (90). The transformation of the mother-daughter relationship does not quite work and the sudden narrative shift from whale's death to human reconciliation only ironically confirms our culture's fondness for placing animals in a supporting role.

In contrast, animals in *Cougar Cove* remain mysteriously other and function as more than simple devices to develop the heroine. Taking place on another island, on another coast, *Cougar Cove* is the story of eleven-year-old Samantha and her first big trip away from home. Since Samantha is pre-adolescent, there is no tension between mother and daughter; mother still knows best when she cautions her not to be carried away by her expectations of the perfect vacation, wise words which Samantha ignores as she spends the plane trip to Vancouver Island imagining how wonderful this vacation with her teenage twin cousins will be. She is, of course, immediately disappointed and confused by their joking and patronizing behaviour. Her first entry in her journal is the unwilling confession "*I made a mistake*" (58). The tension between the cousins and Samantha leads Samantha to explore the island on her own. Determined to prove to "the Horribles" (70) that she is not a Toronto wimp, she runs off to have an adventure. And falls asleep, only to wake up and see a cougar and two kittens. The cousins do not believe her story, and a reader might

sympathize with such suspicion given that Samantha had earlier decided "if nothing adventurous happened, she'd invent something" (70). It is only when all three see another cougar and Samantha scares it off by a very impressive screaming that they start to believe her and change their view of her. Although the book occasionally reads like a textbook in wildlife control, *Cougar Cove* works because Lawson maintains the separateness of animal and human life. Samantha does not make a pet of the cougar. Like the crabs she explores on the beach, she grows a new shell in the course of her vacation as she learns to experience and respect the difference of life on the island, and the difference between her expectations of the vacation and its reality. Like Samantha, readers are left with the memory of a haunting cougar cry, something humans may not understand but may be lucky enough to hear.

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Ethical Freedom in the "Real World"

Why Did the Underwear Cross the Road? Gordon Korman. Scholastic, 1994. 115 pp. $4.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-47502-9. ***Past Tense.*** Ken Roberts. Douglas & McIntyre, 1994. 112 pp. $6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-214-9. ***The Tuesday Cafe.*** Don Trembath. Orca, 1996. 127 pp. $7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-074-6.

It is hard to maintain a sense of perspective, confidence, and humour in an increasingly violent and unstable world. There are children's authors, however, who attempt to redress the balance on a literary level in favour of a more positive attitude of respect, understanding, compassion, and humanity. Gordon Korman's *Why Did the Underwear Cross the Road?*, Ken Roberts' *Past Tense*, and Don Trembath's *The Tuesday Cafe* provide a striking counterbalance for negativity. Each of these humorous and well-written books tries to foster a sane philosophy in which personal freedom is always balanced by a strong sense of social responsibility.

At first glance, the three novels seem to differ in terms of tone, character, and plot. Korman's story is about a group of misfits — Justin, Jessica, and Margaret — whose bungled attempts to win a fourth-grade "Good Deed Contest" get them into trouble with teachers, neighbours, and the local police department. Roberts' *Past Tense* is an equally light-hearted story about a boy named Maxwell Derbin, who is frequently embarrassed by his unconventional uncle's flamboyant disregard for public opinion. The central character of *The Tuesday Cafe*, Harper Winslow, is a delinquent whose feelings of loneliness and insignificance compel him to set fire to a garbage can at school. His punishment involves community service and an injunction to write an essay entitled "How I Plan To Turn My Life Around."

Despite their differences, the books share a concern with introducing young readers to serious and "adult" issues such as crime, punishment, death,