

Journeying to Maturity

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Not Yet Summer, Susan Brown. Scholastic-TAB, 1980. 120 pp. \$1.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-71025-7.

Exit Barney McGee, Claire Mackay. Illus. David Simpson. Scholastic-TAB, 1979. 146 pp. \$1.25 paper. ISBN 0-590-71002-8.

All human beings yearn to be needed, to be appreciated, and to be loved. When deprived of these emotional satisfactions, stress results, both in children and in adults. The two novels under consideration treat the effects of emotional deprivation in young teen children. Susan Brown's *Not Yet Summer* depicts a fourteen-year-old girl and a twelve-year-old boy who find an abandoned baby and try to fulfill their own emotional needs through parenting it; Claire Mackay's *Exit Barney McGee* tells the story of a thirteen-year-old boy whose mother remarries, leaving him feeling displaced and unloved. Each of the books shows the children working through their problems and coming to greater understanding of themselves and those around them.

The first novel, *Not Yet Summer*, opens with Marylee and Petey discovering an abandoned baby near an empty warehouse. Both Marylee and Petey are unhappy children themselves who have suffered emotional neglect, with the result that she has developed a cynical hatred of all people and he has experienced extreme loneliness. They see in the baby a chance to make themselves needed and loved. To Petey's remark, "How can somebody just leave a baby?", Marylee answers, "Who ever wanted me? I'm lame, so they didn't want me. People don't want people who aren't perfect . . . I won't let them pass her around because no one wants her. I won't let them make her like me. I want her. She's mine! I'm keeping her! Will you help me? A baby needs a father as well as a mother . . ." "But I'm only twelve, I can't!" Petey exclaims. "Boy, you'll sure be a no-good father for some poor kid!" exclaims Marylee. Petey responds with bitter resolve: "I'm not a no-good bum like my father! I wouldn't run out like him . . ." And so the story begins, as these two young teenagers talk over their secret plans to be parents to this baby, on the basis of a twenty-four hour arrangement.

Although finding an abandoned baby might seem unlikely, the plot does furnish striking parallels with the situation faced by modern day teenage parents. It presents a practical view of the physical and emotional

responsibilities placed on young parents. The author also presents a host of stereotyped "male-female" responses to the various parenting situations encountered by Marylee and Petey. These passages, together with those passages which give insight into the nature of genuine love, make the book into one that would be an invaluable aid in a "Family Life" course for grades eight to ten. It is easy to see it serving as a springboard for discussions of ethics and morality, in a classroom situation.

The story does have some rough language in it, but, as students will tell you, "That's the way people talk." The book is one that students can relate to, for it deals with emotions that they will recognize.

Susan Brown's first novel, *The Black Tunnel*, was about a claustrophobic boy, and she is currently working on subsequent novels. She is a sensitive writer whose books, filled with dialogue, are easy-reading.

Claire MacKay's *Exit Barney McGee* also deals with a teenager's attempt to find a place where he is wanted, needed and loved. As the novel opens, Barney is faced with two new and unfortunate circumstances. First, his new step-father uproots him by taking him to the suburbs with all their inconveniences, and secondly, his newly arrived half-sister, Sarah, usurps his place. As far as Barney can see, his step-father calls all the shots, and Barney's mother loves her husband more than her son. Barney makes a decision as a result: "He couldn't stay here. They didn't need him. They didn't want him. They didn't understand him. And he knew, he just knew, his real father would."

Thus the stage is set for new experiences and emotional adventure as the boy makes his way to Toronto in search of a father who deserted him and his mother ten years earlier. He envisions his father as an "adventurer" who is "free of all ordinary things, the dull routine stuff, the ruts of time and money. He had fled the road that Conrad [his stepfather] had chosen, the narrow road to nowhere". He imagines his natural father to be lively, reckless and bold - all the things that his step-father is not.

Finally, Barney reaches his intended destination where he encounters Maggie whose smile vanishes when the boy tells her that he has come to see his father - Michael McGee. "Her face was unreadable. Emotions flickered across it like the twitching illuminations of a strobe light, there and gone too fast to decode." She turned away from him as she asked if his father knew he was coming. Barney finds harsh truths to face. He sums it up himself later: "running away just doesn't work. All you get is a whole new set of problems, some of them tougher than the ones you had before. *Maybe being free was something else altogether . . .*"

In this novel, you laugh at the antics of Barney's pet mouse, Saki; you suffer the agonies of a parent who loses a son; and you are deeply touched along with Barney, at the startling condition of alcoholics: "Barney had a sudden painful sense that Mike was the child and he the father". Barney learns that along with life's privileges go responsibilities. He learns that freedom, responsibility, and maturity are all intertwined.

Humanity's state of health - social, moral, economic, and domestic - is ailing, and so the Barney McGee's and the Marylee Jones's of the world are on the increase. What can be done to alleviate their hurting? What steps can be taken to build their self-esteem? Books such as these can provide insight into the reasons for damaging situations, can pinpoint the resulting emotional wounds and suggest ways of developing adequate coping mechanisms.

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Science and Art Can Converge

SHIRLEY LORIMER

Mammals in Profile, Volumes 1 & 2, Randolph L. Peterson. Illus. Martin Glen Loates. Cerebrus Press, 1979. 36 pp. in each. ISBN 0-9200-1600-6 (Vol. 1); 0-9200-1601-4 (Vol. 2).

Animals, Man and Change: Alien and Extinct Wildlife of Ontario, Hugh R. MacCrimmon. McClelland and Stewart: Biomangement Enterprises, P.O. Box 1056, Guelph, Ontario., 1977. 160 pp. cloth. ISBN 0-7710-5420-3.

Arctic Journey: Paintings, Sketches and Reminiscences of a Vanishing World, Peter Buerschaper. Pagurian Press, 1977. 126 pp. cloth. ISBN 0-88932-059-4.