

liked to have found out more about Rachel to help understand her better.

Rebel of Dark Creek is a good read then, which students in the junior grades will enjoy.

Dancer, by Shelley Peterson, is a more complex novel both in plot and characterization and, as a result, will be enjoyed by a slightly older audience who will appreciate Peterson's handling of sensitive issues such as grief, depression, alcoholism and marital discord. The novel's epic saga between good and evil is rivetting as wealthy, villainous Samuel Owens instructs his hired hands to acquire Dancer at any cost. This quickly escalates to sabotaging Mousie's initial ride in front of the queen, sedating and then disguising Dancer and attempting to give Dancer a lethal injection — all to satisfy the whims of his spoiled niece Sara.

My students were intrigued by Mousie and Sandy's friendship, which slowly progresses to a sweet romance. However, they felt that the romance theme was carried a bit too far when the parents, Christine and Rory, fall in love as well.

Students who ride will be satisfied by *Dancer's* detailed descriptions of competition sites, both in the ring and the stable. Many will also love the thrilling fox-hunting scenes in England.

Students felt that Mousie was a well-rounded character and appreciated seeing her insecure, vulnerable side as well as the strength which allows her to overcome various obstacles, including dealing with the death of her father. However, one student did point out that Dancer seems to act as a substitute father figure to Mousie.

Some students enjoyed the fantasy elements of the novel — the riding crop which acts as a talisman, the dream of the beautiful blond horsewoman and finally the appearance of Mousie's father. Others, however, felt that these details were intrusive and took away from an otherwise realistic story. These criticisms aside, *Dancer* is a wonderful story whose classic cover alone will attract many readers. The tasteful sketches at the end of each chapter also add a lovely touch. Peterson's inclusion of horse terminology at the end of the novel is wise for readers new to the genre.

Tamara L Williams's first novel, Glory Ride, was recently published by Lorimer. Tamara is a teacher in Muskoka and a competitive event rider.

Unlocking the Creative: Sarah Withrow's *Bat Summer*

Bat Summer. Sarah Withrow. Groundwood/Douglas and McIntyre, 1998. 160 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-352-8.

Winner of the Groundwood Twentieth Anniversary First Novel for Children Contest, *Bat Summer*, by Sarah Withrow, explores the creative mind of Lucy, a lonely thirteen-year-old girl who thinks she is a bat. Lucy is the thematic centre of the novel, but twelve-year-old Terence is the narrator of this story. Left bored and

lonesome by his best friend's departure to summer camp, "Ter" must come to terms with his own lack of identity and his own burgeoning masculinity. He begins a friendship with the troubled Lucy, a thirteen-year-old girl who behaves outrageously to hide her own sense of despair. The story that emerges is a mixture of the two twelve-year olds' quests — for family and for friendship.

Withrow is a skilled storyteller. While the novel has an ill-defined beginning, it quickly transforms into a moving examination of adolescent turmoil. Withrow intersperses her narrative with sharp social commentary that includes feminist discourse and insights on popular culture — both of which stand out in tone but seem to fit into the overall dynamic of the story. Although obvious, such discourse is not awkward, and Withrow is able to manipulate weighty issues into relevant plot vehicles. I am not certain, however, that this book would most appeal to the audience it is professedly written for. Nine- to twelve-year-olds may not appreciate Withrow's subtlety and may long for more closure than she is able to offer.

Often quite humorous, Withrow does not patronize her characters; their conflicts are sensitively drawn. Terence's insights often border on the very mature, but they are not out of character and are always framed in the kind of insecurity that renders this character infinitely likable and ultimately believable. Lucy is a difficult character; she straddles a very fine line between the potentially insane and the simply creative and emotionally damaged. Withrow spends considerable time developing the nuances of this character, but never brings Lucy entirely out of the shadows of her own story — a device that while in some ways frustrating, fits in nicely with the novel's depiction of adolescent reality. The end of the novel does not offer resolution of Lucy's myriad emotional problems, but this device suits the tone of the story. Withrow offers temporary resolution, but will not pretend that an adolescent's problems simply disappear with finality upon a story's climax.

Ultimately, *Bat Summer* offers an insightful portrayal of adolescent relationships. Sarah Withrow has woven a story that speaks to both the creative and the ordinary reader; the text itself ultimately nestles somewhere in between.

Kate Wood recently completed an MA in English at the University of Guelph. Her thesis is on L.M. Montgomery and turn-of-the-century popular culture.

When a Picture Isn't Worth 1,000 Words

Buddy Concrackle's Amazing Adventures. Chris McMahan. Coteau, 1996. 163 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55050-101-1

With his repeated use of blank photos throughout *Buddy Concrackle's Amazing Adventures*, Chris McMahan is telling his readers that words can be as poignant as any illustration. In order to envision what the blank boxes might have shown had they had a photo in them, readers must use their own imaginative skills to unravel the text's potential. To entice young and potentially hesitant readers into such a posi-