

based, did not go to war as a young teenager. However, he certainly might well have done, and would likely have undergone the same coming of age that McKay and Wilson describe so effectively.

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O brave new world, that has such clones in it

Cloning Miranda. Carol Matas. Scholastic Canada, 1999. 138 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-51458-X.

Carol Matas's *Cloning Miranda* is in some ways a modern Gothic, with a bewildered protagonist, baffling mysteries, hidden rooms, and a mysterious weeping child. Yet it is a thought-provoking text which, in foregrounding the ethical dilemmas clustered around the idea of the creating or replicating human life artificially, features an adolescent first-person narrator who must face a series of potentially devastating revelations. In discovering that many of the apparent truths upon which her life has been built are fabrications, she gains new insights into her self and finds an inner strength of which she was unaware.

Typically, children must eventually find out that their parents are fallible and therefore not the gods they might have appeared to be hitherto. Matas's *Miranda*, however, is shocked to discover that her parents' fallibility lies with them having tried to be God. In one of a number of allusions to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Matas's *Miranda* notes that Prospero, the parent of her namesake, uses "magic to make his daughter happy" (103). As she struggles to make sense of the new and strangely altered world of uncertainties in which she finds herself, *Miranda* is forced to reevaluate her relationship with parents whose anguish over the death of a previous child has resulted in them trying use the "magic" of science to make their daughter happy. It is not unusual, perhaps, for a sense of loss to result in obsessive concern for future offspring; however, the lengths to which *Miranda*'s parents have gone take the novel into territory both new and old. New, because the interplay of ethics and genetics has become particularly topical. Old, because fictions in which people use (or abuse) science to create life in a test tube go back to at least Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). However, while Huxley's tale ends badly for his two protagonists, *Cloning Miranda* does not, partly because *Miranda* surprises herself in discovering a strong sense of self.

This is a strongly moral novel. In challenging her parents' ethical blindness, *Miranda* draws on bonds of friendship, strengthens her belief in the importance of honesty in familial relationships, and gains insight into the importance of environment and experience in shaping the self. However, the story's moral considerations emerge from the story, rather than vice versa. *Miranda* complains at one point about worthy but "depressing books," focusing on "miserable families," which are

boring to read (87). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Matas has not written one of those.

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Overcoming Hardship in Toronto and Afghanistan

Looking for X. Deborah Ellis, Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1999. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-382-X. *The Breadwinner.* Deborah Ellis, Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 2000. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-419-2.

In a fine Canadian tradition, Khyber, the eleven-year old heroine and narrator of *Looking for X*, uses her intelligence and the power of her imagination to overcome what might have been an otherwise degrading and depressing environment. She has exchanged her real name (which she hates) for that of the Khyber Pass in Afghanistan. She imagines this as a wild, romantic place where she can stand and direct lost travellers. She dreams of travelling to such places, all of them quite different from her actual home in Regent's Park, a depressed area of Toronto. There she lives with her mother, Tammy, a former stripper now on welfare, and two younger twin brothers (or half-brothers: we aren't sure if their father was hers) who are autistic. Her days are filled with looking after David and Daniel and attending school (where she does well, despite run-ins with snooty classmates). She works in a restaurant on Saturdays in exchange for her breakfast. On occasion she extorts money from wedding parties who wish to be photographed in the greenhouse in nearby Allan Gardens, by getting in the way until she is bought off.

One very important activity is visiting her friend "X" and bringing her a sandwich. X is a deranged, elderly street woman who travels with her worldly goods in a small suitcase, is terrified of the "secret police" and — from one of the few times that she speaks — was once a folk singer.

The decision (made under the influence of a "green-fanged" social worker) to send the twins to a house in the country where they can get needed professional care precipitates a crisis. Khyber runs to find X. In the Allan gardens they are assaulted by skinheads; afterwards Khyber is falsely accused of breaking a school window. She goes in search of X (whom her mother regards as no more than an "imaginary friend"), as her only possible alibi.

Her search takes her, tired and hungry, on a long trip through downtown Toronto. It is Hallowe'en, and the streets are full of monsters. Khyber is finally rescued by an all-girl band of Elvis impersonators, who bring her back home. The true culprits who broke the window have been found, and her name is cleared. She and her mother decide to move to the country to be near the twins, who are doing very well in their new home. The family will still be in close contact. She says goodbye to her friends, including the mysterious X.