

dépendance ou de soumission à l'égard des générations précédentes et du milieu social. Ce qui frappe, à cet égard, dans les récits québécois, c'est bien l'autonomie des jeunes par rapport aux adultes: peu importe qu'ils vivent chez leurs parents ou non, peu importe même que ces derniers s'opposent ou non à leur désir d'affranchissement, l'adolescent(e) québécois(e) est déjà un être pleinement autonome qui se montre capable d'assumer son choix et de vivre sa différence. Se sentant moins tourmenté et moins coupable malgré les états de crise qu'il peut traverser, il vit déjà comme un adulte. Quant aux malheureux parents qui osent tenir tête à cette poussée d'indépendance, comme la mère inquisitrice de Louise Lévesque, la fausse "maman Plouffe" de Reynald Cantin et le père, professeur de catéchèse et dernier des Mohicans à la Mauriac, de Lucie Papineau, ils ne peuvent que se voir discrédités et se rendre à l'évidence: leur enfant est un être plein et entier, bref, leur égal. La jeune fille handicapée de Michèle Marcoux, qui obtient sans résistance la permission de faire l'amour dans sa chambre même lorsque la famille est présente, serait impensable dans les textes canadiens. Ainsi, malgré les couvertures plus commerciales, plus invitantes et plus franches de l'édition canadienne (la main de la jeune fille qui sonde le pantalon ouvert du petit ami; la main de l'adolescent qui dégage le soutien-gorge de la petite amie), qui nous feront regretter la richesse symbolique et la tendresse un peu mélancolique de l'édition québécoise, malgré la redoutable efficacité de la bande dessinée de Leanne Franson, dont le graphisme approximatif et l'humour doux-amerrappellent, en plus feutré, la *Dirty Plotte* de Julie Doucet, (est-ce un hasard que cette histoire d'initiation à l'identité lesbienne, pleine de drôlerie et se jouant admirablement de la rectitude politique, se passe à Montréal?) et malgré la très haute tenue littéraire de la majorité des récits, on ne saurait oublier l'édition originale.

Car la nouvelle entreprise de Charles Montpetit mérite d'être connue (et reconnue) au Québec: la valeur exceptionnelle de certains textes, l'ampleur et la variété des contributions font de ce recueil, *The First Time*, une excellente introduction à la connaissance d'une littérature étrangère, la littérature canadienne.

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COMING OF AGE IN CANADA AND THE U.S.

Changes in You and Me: A Book about Puberty Mostly for Girls. ISBN 0-921051-95-6. **Changes in You and Me: A Book about Puberty Mostly for Boys.** ISBN 0-021051-03-X. Paulette Bourgeois and Martin Wolfish, M.D. Illus. Louise Phillips and Kam Yu. Public Health consultant Kim Martyn. Somerville House Books, 1994. 64 pp., \$14.95 paper. **It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health.** Robie H. Harris. Illus. Michael Emberley. Candlewick Press, 1994. 89 pp., \$24.95 cloth. ISBN 1-56402-199-8.

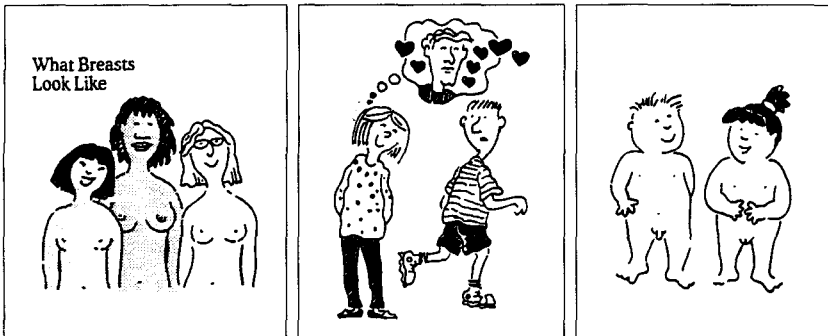
Most of us will recall sneaking books out of the library about sex and human anatomy that were so carefully oblique or scientific that they only served to confuse us further. Talking with peers, and little or no sex education didn't help.

Teens today face a different situation. While sex education continues to be controversial, they are bombarded daily with mixed messages about sex and sexuality. Yet sex is no less confusing in this era of information overload.

Two words come to mind after reading these three books: frank and reassuring. They certainly fill a gap as they provide accessible and clear information at a level that young adolescents and teenagers will understand and appreciate. While much of the basic information is similar, the books differ in their approach and presentation styles.

The first two books are written by Canadian authors Bourgeois and Wolfish who offer separate books for girls and boys. While this may enhance the appeal of the books for gender specific audiences, the books are almost identical, and in the end it is not clear why two books were necessary. This becomes an even bigger question upon reading the American book by Harris which successfully speaks to the whole teen audience. In fact, inclusivity seems to be the key difference as the reader absorbs the text as well as the illustrations in this trio.

The authors all strive to acknowledge the diversities in their intended audience, as well as teens' curiosity about others, but including illustrations featuring a variety of body shapes and sizes, different races, youth with disabilities, as well as gay and lesbian couples; however, the tone of the books differs markedly. The Canadian books are far more cautious and conservative in their content, as well as in their illustrations. Gay and lesbian relationships are acknowledged in one paragraph in these books. The message that comes across is that while same-sex crushes are quite normal for boys and girls, youth who have stronger homosexual inclinations should seek counselling. The American book, in contrast, not only devotes far more space to this issue, but also discusses bisexuality and, most importantly, addresses homophobia. Furthermore, in a very valuable section on families and babies, Harris discusses the varieties of families in North American culture, including the traditional nuclear family, single parent families, gay and lesbian parents, adoptive and foster families. Harris consistently presents a positive yet realistic tone, urging an acceptance of differences at the same time as being clear about risks and responsibilities. Gay



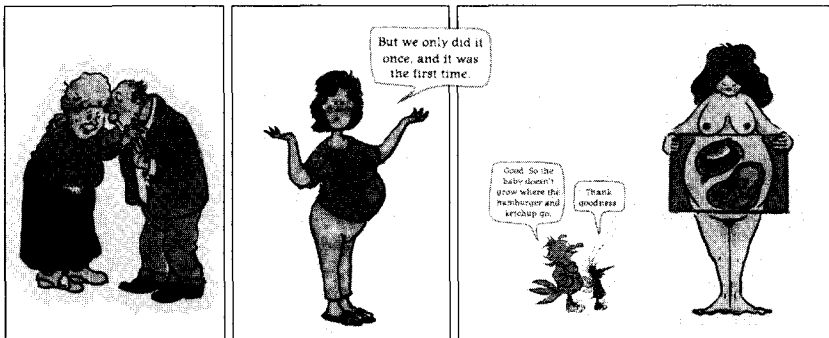
Illustrations from *Changes in You and Me*

and lesbian youth, in particular, need to see themselves in a positive light, and all youth need to think about homophobia.

Changes In You and Me features both line drawings and colour illustrations, with transparent overlays illustrating the developing male and female body during puberty. The transparencies are unique and will catch the eye of teen readers, but on the whole the illustrations are rather sterile and bring to mind biology textbooks. *It's Perfectly Normal*, on the other hand, employs a variety of illustrative techniques which blend with the text extremely well. There are cartoon style series which humorously, but accurately, depict the development and travels of the sperm and egg; and two little characters, a bird and a bee, accompany the text throughout with comments representative of teen views of sex: the bird is very curious and anxious to know more, while the bee is the shy and embarrassed one who has heard quite enough!

Adding to the textbook image of the first two books are short quizzes sprinkled throughout the text. These serve to debunk myths about sex and puberty, but they are not nearly as much fun as the humour in Michael Emberley's illustrations in the Harris book. The latter are ultimately more educational in my estimation because they deliver more information and will appeal even to those who will choose to skim the regular text.

The Harris book is more equitable in its treatment of the sexes. Masturbation, orgasms, and the loving nature of sexual intercourse are discussed openly and evenhandedly, with respect to both males and females. Bourgeois and Wolfish employ a more clinical style, stressing reproductive functions over intimacy. This may have something to do with the authors' backgrounds: Harris was trained as a teacher, while the other two authors are both health care professionals. There are some stereotypes that are disconcerting, and this may be a result of having separate books for boys and girls in the first instance. The boys' book, for example, relies on sports language as descriptors: the tubules in the testicles would run the length of two football fields, and semen is compared to Gatorade. While it could be argued that this language will appeal to boys and enhance their learning, it assumes that all boys are sports enthusiasts. Harris uses more neutral



Illustrations from *It's Perfectly Normal*

language: sperm, for example, stop at the snack bar for nourishment in their cartoon strip journey. Both books confuse sex with gender and neither acknowledge that both girls and boys may exhibit varying degrees of masculine and feminine traits, and that this too is "perfectly normal." Each of the books uses both the scientific as well as slang or day-to-day terms for body parts and sexual activities. The Canadian books provide a further service with a helpful glossary. All of the books are up-to-date in their discussion of sexually-transmitted diseases, AIDS, sexual abuse, sexual assault and harassment, although for some reason sexual harassment is named as such only in the book for boys in the Canadian set.

All in all, while each of these books is a valuable addition to school and home libraries and should be read not only by youth but all concerned adults, the Harris book is superior, in my opinion. Harris makes clear from the outset that "sex is about a lot of things ..." and provides a holistic and thorough discussion of all its complexities throughout. She provides historical and cultural context to show how things have or have not changed over the centuries. She also convincingly portrays sex as a positive and valuable human experience as long as it is mutual, loving and responsible. Emberley's illustrations work very well with the text to further convey both the joys and the angst of puberty and healthy sexuality.

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CRASHING AHEAD FROM MOMENT TO MOMENT: TEEN SHORT STORIES

The Blue Camaro. R.P. MacIntyre. Thistle-down Press Limited, 1994. 158 pages, \$13.50 paper. ISBN 1-895449-23-5. **The Blue Jean Collection.** Thistle-down Press Limited, 1992. 240 pages, paper. ISBN 0-920633-94-3.

These two releases from Thistle-down Press cater to adolescent browsers. *The Blue Camaro* consists of eleven short stories featuring both male and female first-person narrators; *The Blue Jean Collection* anthologizes nineteen "short stories for young adults" selected from nearly 250 entries in a national competition. Because of their single authorship, MacIntyre's stories, one of which is also in the anthology, provide more consistency of tone: all set in the prairies, some are interconnected and others present the same occurrence from two different points of view. *The Blue Jean Collection*, on the other hand, ranges widely over geography, historical setting and narrative voice.

Possibly owing to Saskatoon-born MacIntyre's experience as an actor and a dramatist, his stories succeed in probing the interior life of apparently tough-talking teenagers and reclusive loners. As disaffected critics or sons and daughters trying to make sense of their family and its traditions, these ingenuous narrators allow the reader to share their moments of insight and grace. Usually MacIntyre assembles the promising ingredients at the outset. In "Doing Something," the opening prohibition delivered by the boy's parents before they leave for the day, that he is not to touch the boat ("Don't even think about it!"),