

Nova begins to reconstruct a viable democracy. Blay's search for identity — literally and psychologically — makes her just one of the lost souls in the text who need the people or information which will render them and the community more complete. *The Secret under My Skin* is a text with many parts; their sum is a well-written, absorbing, and thought-provoking whole. It is the winner of the twelfth Mr. Christie Award in the best books for young adults category (ages 12-18).

Alan West recently completed his doctorate at the University of Ottawa. While his dissertation was on selected British utopians and dystopians, one of his preferred subjects is children's literature.

Dark Places in Teenage Lives

The Dream Where the Losers Go. Beth Goobie. Roussan, 1999. 206 pp. \$8.95. ISBN 1-896184-62-6. *Changing Jareth*. Elizabeth Wennick. Polestar, 1999. 278 pp. \$8.95. ISBN 1-896095-97-6.

The Dream Where the Losers Go and *Changing Jareth* each confront difficult and dark places in teenagers' lives, dealing with issues such as sexual assault, incest, and abuse. In *The Dream Where the Losers Go*, Beth Goobie tells the story of deeply troubled Skey, a fifteen-year-old girl recovering from a suicide attempt and coming to terms with the violence that precipitated it. In *Changing Jareth*, Elizabeth Wennick's protagonist, Jareth, begins the story breaking and entering, on the verge of being expelled from school, and ends it a self-reflective, responsible quasi-adult, having survived the murder of his younger brother by his mother.

Both Goobie and Wennick treat their characters with compassion. Each author obviously hopes to capture teenage voices without imposing adult morals, and each seems determined not to whitewash adolescence into television-sitcom simplicity. On the whole, Goobie is more successful at this than Wennick. While both present appealing main characters, Wennick's Jareth is ultimately less convincing than Goobie's Skey. Similarly, Goobie draws her supporting characters with an intensity that renders them truly (and, perhaps for some parents, frighteningly) believable, whereas Wennick paints her characters of the "rebel with a heart of gold" garden variety. Jareth's inner monologue often runs in sharp contrast to his angry, dangerous choices, betraying adult values and certainties. For example, Jareth is a violent thief raised by an abusive alcoholic mother, yet he does not swear, does not drink, and, in the novel's most disconnected moment, behaves selflessly to stop a spoiled grade school kid from selling marijuana. While this is no doubt admirable, it is far from true to Jareth's self-destructive character (or, for that matter, to most teens' realities). One is not clear *why* Jareth changes towards novel's end, only that he does; as such, the novel undoubtedly offers young readers a role model, but one that is ultimately ineffectual and unrealistic.

One would not, however, call Goobie's Skey a typical role model. Goobie is not afraid to make her characters ambiguous. Compassionately written and dis-

turbing, *The Dream Where the Losers Go* captures readers in a difficult tale of teenage sexuality and violence. This novel is not for the faint of heart; Goobie goes where few others would, and, in so doing, offers young readers a brave narrative that speaks to their reality and in their language. If I have a criticism of this novel, it is that Goobie insists on adding a fantastical element to an already deeply layered story. Skey's psychological awakening is made possible through her trips to a kind of dream world and her encounters there with a troubled, nameless boy. The dreams themselves are strongly written, and on their own they would have highlighted the story beautifully, but Goobie cannot resist imposing an unnecessary narrative trick at novel's end that adds little to the story, a plot device readers can see coming miles away.

Further, both Wennick and Goobie are determined to pack their narratives with as much trauma as possible. The overcrowded result ends up reading more like a litany of horrors than a portrait teenagers can recognize their own lives in (although clearly some would find "litany of horrors" an appropriate description of adolescence). The authors' impulse is to create a place where damaged kids can go to find themselves reflected, but, in tossing every conceivable trauma into the mix, I fear that the novels alienate readers more than involve them. Being a teenager, all on its own, is difficult; it "sucks." The material one could derive from puberty, from sexual assaults, abuse, and incest, each on their own, provide more than enough material for any one story. In resisting the urge to cover everything and touch everyone, authors may achieve their goals of reaching kids far more effectively than they are able to in jam-packed novels such as these.

Ultimately both novels do offer complex and interesting depictions of adolescence. Only Goobie's, however, manages to peer beyond adult perceptions of teenage life to offer a narrative that is uncomfortably true — speaking in the voice of a fifteen year-old girl who is able to eloquently capture adolescent culture and its pain, swear words included. Her writing talent has been recognized in 2001: her recent book, *Before Wings*, was shortlisted for the twelfth Mr. Christie Award in the best-books for young adults category.

Kate Wood recently completed her MA in English at the University of Guelph. She is currently completing a joint law and social work degree at the University of Toronto.

Lesson Number One: Attitude

Double or Nothing. Dennis Foon. Annick, 2000. 168 pp. \$7.95. ISBN 1-55037-626-8. Early in this novel about gambling addiction, the central character Kip shares two "rules" sure to lead to success in gaming. The first is about attitude, "If you feel like a loser, you will lose." Kip gets his rush from thinking himself into a bet, believing he cannot lose. This is the edge he craves, and he carries the attitude around like a second skin.

Author Dennis Foon does such a good job of creating this attitude or style