

*Storybook*. This is representative. Never does she babble with the enthusiasm and headlong rush of the novel's Anne. And because so much is condensed into 79 pages, we have strangely unprepared changes, especially Anne's change from a chattering thirteen-year-old to a thoughtful and sober sixteen-year-old about to take on the responsibility of teaching at Avonlea Public School and caring for the aging Marilla. Motivation also changes. Anne colours her hair green because Gilbert has called her "Carrots".

The switch in motivation indicates the direction of the *Storybook* (and the Sullivan film). The focus here is not so much on Anne's personality as it is on Anne's relationship to Gilbert. Clearly, the story, despite its nod to feminism, is about the romance between Gilbert and Anne. By the end, Gilbert can "teasingly" call Anne "carrots" and not receive rebuke from her. And Anne can tell Diana that she will pray "someone wonderful comes to Avonlea and sweeps you off your feet." The two girls go on to speak of Gilbert, and Diana asks Anne whether he is "fair game." The words grate and seem inappropriate to Montgomery's sensibility.

Of course, many abridged versions of the classics have appeared over the years, and perhaps these bring works to readers who might not have read the originals. Yet, I confess dislike for this kind of thing. *Anne of Green Gables* can and does appeal to readers younger than the book's protagonist. Why we need a "simplified" version for younger readers escapes me. As for the book's older readers, they must miss the tensions, the passion, and the complexity of the original novel in this short and recast version. A venture such as the *Storybook* intends to capitalize on the popularity of the *Anne* film. If it serves as a substitute for some readers who might well have read Montgomery's novel, then I lament. If, however, there is any chance that this work may bring readers to Montgomery's novel, then I am pleased. I fear the former is more likely than the latter.

Roderick McGillis *teaches English at the University of Calgary*. He is editor of the Children's Literature Association Quarterly.

## THE DEGRASSI STREET KIDS IN PRINT

The Kids of Degrassi Street: Casey draws the line. Kit Hood and Linda Schuyler with Eve Jennings. Lorimer, 1987. 139 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-88862-866-8; **Karen keeps her word**. Kit Hood and Linda Schuyler with Eve Jennings. Lorimer, 1987. 110 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-009-0; **Martin meets the pirates**. Kit Hood and Linda Schuyler with Eve Jennings. Lorimer, 1987. 111 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-003-1; **Griff gets a hand**. Kit Hood and Linda

Kit Hood and Linda Schuyler with Eve Jennings. Lorimer, 1987. 101 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-88862-869-2; **Noel buys a suit.** Kit Hood and Linda Schuyler with Eve Jennings. Lorimer, 1988. 166 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-068-6; **Catherine finds her balance.** Kit Hood and Linda Schuyler with Eve Jennings. Lorimer, 1988. 111 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-062-7; **Degrassi Junior High: Exit stage left.** William Pasnak. Lorimer, 1987. 187 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-015-5; **Stephanie Kaye.** Ken Roberts. Lorimer, 1988. 160 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-109-7; **Spike.** Loretta Castellarin and Ken Roberts. Lorimer, 1988. 116 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-113-5.

The Degrassi Kids act like real kids in real situations dealing with real problems with which their audience really can identify and this accounts for the popularity and uniqueness, of the award-winning Canadian television series, "The Kids of Degrassi Street" and "Degrassi Junior High". Degrassi's young viewers enjoy seeing kids like themselves handling the problems that plague their own lives – and, better still, resolving them without much adult help. The films are seen in 26 countries. This Fall, "Degrassi High" will be introduced. Television that dramatizes the problems of children without condescension is in demand. In response to the phenomenal success of Degrassi TV, James Lorimer and Company launched the Degrassi books in 1986. The problem novel for kids is by no means a new trend in children's literature. Ultimately, the Degrassi novelizations must be compared not only to the problem novel genre, but also to the television series. They sometimes fall short of both, but that does not mean that the books are not worthwhile reading.

Each book in "The Kids of Degrassi Street" series is a short story collection based closely on three episodes. Familiarity with the series is not assumed, but knowing the characters makes the reading just that much more fun. The books, like the dramas, assure children that their problems are important by considering everything from their perspective. Moralizing is kept to a minimum and often the lesson that needs to be learned comes through direct experience or through the reactions of other kids. Peer pressure is recognized as a major force in children's lives. A fault of "The Kids" series is that a number of the tales suffer from neatly packaged happy endings. The stories are at their best when the tale ends unresolved but with hope: realistically, the problem has not conveniently vanished, but the child is left feeling more in control.

Although the books, written by series creators, Kit Hood and Linda Schuyler with Eve Jennings, are marred by some uneven and trite writing, care has been taken in developing characters and the central issues. Fast-paced, realistic dialogue keeps the stories moving and raises them above awkward descriptive passages. The occasional story reads like a formula television script which makes the narrative line difficult to follow as scenes and story lines intercut. Generally, the best tales focus on the concerns of one child. The title

story in *Griff gets a hand*, based on an Emmy award winning episode, is a poignant look at a young boy's grief and guilt at the sudden death of a friend. In "Martin hears the music" in *Karen keeps her word* the authors skillfully manage to interweave the story of two "different" children: Martin needs a hearing aid and Rachel is fat. The title story of *Casey draws the line* evokes an emotional response as Lisa and Casey, fighting over the same rabbit, ultimately are responsible for its unhappy end. What gives the story its punch is that the rabbit's point of view has not been forgotten.

The "Degrassi Junior High" novels are more loosely based on the TV episodes and are better for it. *Exit stage left* is an original story that successfully interweaves the problems of popular characters, LD, Lucy and Stephanie, as they prepare for the school play. *Spike* and *Stephanie Kaye* deal in depth with the concerns of one child which allows for greater character exploration. Both stories rely heavily on character self-reflection, a common element of problem novels. To achieve an impact and an immediacy similar to the TV episodes on the same subject, the story of Spike's pregnancy is told in the first person. A feature of the "Degrassi Junior High" TV series is the inconclusive endings of episodes which prompt reflection and personal conclusions. The authors wisely have chosen to keep this characteristic in the novels.

Lorimer seems to be targeting the "Junior High" novels to adolescent girls as only female protagonists are featured. Lorimer and the Degrassi team now need to recognize that the problems of male characters, like adopted Wheels and class clown Joey, also warrant attention.

**Bronwyn Weaver** is a doctoral student at the University of Toronto. She is writing her dissertation on Canadian theatre for young audiences.

## CHILDREN AND THE THOUGHT OF DEATH

**Love you forever.** Robert Munsch. Illus. Sheila McGraw. Firefly Books, 1986. 32 pp., \$12.95 \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920668-36-4, 0-920668-37-2; **Gynn.** Mary Jane Muir. North Winds Press, 1985. 28 pp., \$7.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-71546-1; **Deep Thinker and the stars.** Patricia Murdoch. Illus. Kellie Jobson. Three Trees Press, 1987. Unpag., \$14.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88823-127-X, 0-88823-125-3; **Goodbye Rune.** Marit Kaldhol and Wenche Oyen. Breakwater Books, 1987. Unpag., \$11.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920911-09-9 (Co-publication with Det Norske, Sanlaget, Norway); **Goodbye Mom, goodbye.** Philip E. Johnson. Illus. David Peacock. Burlington: Welch Publishing, 1987. Unpag., cloth. ISBN 1-55011-032-2.