

Summer is barely here and your teenage kids are complaining of boredom. They've been hanging out with the gang at the fast food joint. *Burger Wuss* by M. T. Anderson provides a serving of relief with a side of humour. It's new on the menu at the Castlegar and District Public Library. Like a happy meal, it's cleverly packaged, but with a photo of a nearly dead burger on the cover. It doesn't pack any calories, it's fat-free and it won't spoil your teenager's appetite.

The setting is contemporary, small town, New England. The characters are the teenage employees of either O'Dermott's or Burger Queen. O'Dermott's is the multi-national fast food chain with the mascot clown, Kermit O'Dermott and Burger Queen is home of charbroiled sandwiches and an unfortunate condiment troll. The plot is timeless. It's about young people leaving childhood and learning to crawl, walk and finally run into adulthood. It isn't *Hamlet*, but it beats *Drew Carey reruns*.

It has the fundamental elements of teenage anxiety. Anthony, the protagonist, sees himself as a nerd. He can't play softball, and he despairs when he's called to serve on the O'Dermott's team ostensibly for fun, but really to demonstrate the martial superiority of O'Dermott's over Burger Queen. When his girlfriend calls to announce that their relationship is over, his neighbour not only overhears, but participates in the conversation because there's a glitch in the wavelengths of their wireless phones. During the same telephone call, Anthony's parents misunderstand the seriousness of the call. They are so delighted that their son finally has a nice girlfriend that they sing the *Monster Mash* in the background. Part of being a teenager is sensing deepest humiliation. Becoming an adult is realizing that the humiliation was fluff.

There is a lot of campy dialogue in *Burger Wuss* that could make this a cult classic. Anthony and his girlfriend, Diana, spend a late evening with a group of wiry vandals who correct bad grammar on public signs and graffiti. At the conclusion of their exhilarating evening, as they wander through the woods, Anthony confesses that he's glad they did this. For him this was an adventure. Diana admits that she has never before done this kind of thing. Anthony, like *Hamlet*, stumbles over what action to take next.

He says, "I always thought you were someone things happened to... I thought you led a life of risk and adventure."

Diana replies, "Here's what I know: People will think that, if you have a certain kind of hair."

Beyond the schlocky dialogue, there is a sub-theme which examines the impact of the fast-food corporate culture. O'Dermott's head office plans a commercial emphasizing the important role O'Dermott's plays in many aspects of their customers' lives. Their goal is to have customers think of O'Dermott's as a valued friend, a business of and for local people, an agency that really cares. This perspective is contrasted by a fast-food anarchist who attributes the rise in obesity, cruelty to animals, loss of rainforest, exploitation of teenage workers, proliferation of waste all to fast-food. Perhaps too black and white, but it captures the energetic passion of youth and it raises questions not discussed on network television.

M. T. Anderson teaches English at Vermont College. As a teenager, he worked at McDonald's. One of his tasks was to mop a badly soiled washroom. He posted a sign on the washroom door that read "Out of McOrder" for which he was almost fired. He's seen the inside of the golden arches and he's sharing more than his fries.