parents, Megan visits the Miette Hot Springs where she momentarily mistakes a man who has just died at poolside for her father and again feels the strength of her love. Ryan's crisis, less contrived than Megan's, occurs when he befriends "the Drummer," a local boy and petty thief. Ryan helps the Drummer to steal from the Peggy's Cove tourists and they are, predictably, caught by the police. Ryan, sufficiently punished by this experience, is returned to the custody of his aunt. Later, Eddie, Ryan's fisherman friend, loses his thumb to a shark and Wingding, who goes after the shark, is drowned. Because the reader actually cares about these characters (they are not simply dragged onto the set for convenience like the dead man in *Hey, Dad!*), Ryan's crisis is far more moving than his sister's.

Brian Doyle is, fortunately for us, not Canada's answer to Judy Blume. His books do not descend to the sit-com or soap variety of children's literature. However popular and accessible his style, it is also sensitive, intelligent, and witty – love and death are relieved by a great deal of humour. Although his work occasionally verges on pretentiousness and contrivance, and Megan and Ryan will not sit comfortably as first-person narrators alongside Huck Finn, Jim Hawkins, or even Oswald Bastable, Brian Doyle's writing for children must be assessed as accomplished and impressive.

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Getting Loused Up in Newfoundland

MURIEL WHITAKER

Far From Shore, Kevin Major. Clarke, Irwin & Company Ltd., 1980. 189 pp. Hardcover. ISBN 0-7720-1312-8.

The number of Canadian authors writing particularly for teen-age boys is small and those who come readily to mind – Roderick Haig-

Brown, Farley Mowat, and David Walker, for example – have generally confined themselves to adventure stories in which a young hero, blessed with endurance and luck, overcomes the obstacles of a wilderness setting and achieves recognition and reward. While we need not regret our failure to emulate the sex and violence of British hardcore "skinhead" fiction with its racial bias, or the teen-age pregnancies, drug addiction, and gang warfare of American teen-age literature, nevertheless we must recognise the need for well-written books that come to grips with contemporary social problems. Since teen-age boys constitute a substantial percentage of our reluctant readers, and since, when they do read, they are most likely to be attracted by non-fiction, the fiction author must entice them craftily into his novel. Conflicts must be introduced early, dialogue must take precedence over description, and there must be a central character with whom the reader can identify. There must also, I think, be a positive philosophical view that makes a connection between cause and effect and that accepts the possibility of a happy ending. Kevin Major's *Far From Shore* is a welcome contribution to an uncrowded field.

The story begins in the home of a Newfoundland outport family on Christmas Eve. What once was "the season to be jolly" has now become a prime time for family stress. Sixteen-year-old Jennifer resents her brother's boorishness and her father's drinking. Chris, the book's fifteen-year-old hero, prefers the stable household of his friend Tompkins to his own cat-and-dog family. Gord, the father, indulges in maudlin self-pity after the loss of his job, and the harassed Mother is generally fed up:

> I wish sometimes there was no such thing as Christmas. That's an awful thing to be saying, but God knows it was never meant to be like it is now. One big excuse to spend money and get drunk, that's all it amounts to. And the youngsters then, they're not satisfied with anything unless it got a two-hundred-dollar price tag on it. Sometimes I feel like stuffing the Christmas tree and the whole damn lot into the garbage can.

After the father, whom Chris loves and admires, goes off to a job in Alberta, a combination of unfortunate circumstances sets the boy's feet on the primrose path. He stops going to church where he has acted as server to a sympathetic clergyman, the Reverend Wheaton. He breaks up with his girl friend and with his best friend, Tompkins. He fails grade 10, and unable to get a job, takes up with a gang of hoodlums who encourage him to drink and smoke pot, and eventually involve him in responsibility for an act of vandalism. A job at a church camp utilises his virtues of kindness, good humour, and dependability. Nevertheless, this episode ends tragically when the

young camper whom he has befriended almost drowns while they are engaged in unauthorised canoeing. This is the low point in Chris's fortunes:

> Perhaps I'll end up in reform school. In some ways I hope the frig I do. At least that's one place someone will take me in.

The dual shocks of the accident and the court appearance combined with his father's return set Chris back on course. The renewal of his friendship with Tompkins and the acquisition of a girl friend whom he has long admired provide the social acceptance needed to restore his morale while his sister's departure for university removes a source of irritation at home. The story ends with the prospect of better times:

> The old man told me earlier on that he's getting up early so's he can be in Manpower when it opens. I hope by frig he gets a job. I don't want to see things getting loused up around here again.

The strength of *Far From Shore* lies in the author's ability to present each of the major characters sympathetically in spite of their shortcomings. Through the device of interior monologue, actions and attitudes are provided with an emotional frame of reference that makes them comprehensible. For example, Jennifer's anger at Chris is motivated by sibling rivalry:

> That Chris gets away with too much, if you ask me, because for sure Dad won't say anything to him when he finds out.

In his turn, Chris suffers from the fact that his sister is a better student:

> "I hates studying."
> "I can see that by these marks . . . What about Jennifer? She studies and gets good marks. Why in the world can't you be more like that?"
> "Because I'm not like her that's why and I don't want to be . . . ."
> If she wants another Jennifer she's just going to have to find someone else besides me. What she said pisses me off for the whole rest of the day.

The least convincingly portrayed character is Mrs. Slade who is caught between loyalty to her husband and concern for her children. When she takes a part-time job, Chris's feelings of rejection increase:

> Sometimes what we have for dinner Mom cooks herself, more times it's just out of a can. I wouldn't care so much if she'd only find chance to bake some bread now and then. And we never have any pies or anything like we used to before she went to work.

As a working mother myself, I find it hard to believe that Mrs. Slade would nonchalantly jettison her domestic responsibilities. Furthermore, her romantic involvement with her employer seems an unnecessary complication. But this is a small quibble in an otherwise convincingly plotted book.

Major's use of dialogue is particularly admirable both as a means of projecting character and as a device for conveying regional flavour. He catches the rhythms of Newfoundland speech without the peppering of apostrophes that has annoyed me in dialect stories ever since I encountered "Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby" at an early age. Chris's language is also enlivened by the profanity that Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* established as a means of expressing teenage turmoil. The deterioration of the boy's social relationships is marked by a corresponding increase in his use of four-letter words:

> Who the hell gives a shit what marks she got? Not me for sure. So she got brains, she goddam well don't mind bragging about them, though, do she? That Jennifer turns my friggin' guts.

Kevin Major should also be commended for the fine balance which he strikes between social and economic determinism, on the one hand, and personal responsibility, on the other. It is not Chris's fault that, living in a depressed area, he cannot find a summer job. It is his fault that he chooses to waste his time in bad company. Having drifted far from shore, both literally and figuratively, his recognition that "Come right down to it and it was all my own friggin' fault" indicates his new-found maturity. Major's social realism is essentially optimistic. Each of the characters has the opportunity of starting over.

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