



Easy Avenue. Brian Doyle. Douglas & McIntyre, 1988. 118 pp., \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-065-0.

By nicknaming his hero "Hullo", and using type-names such as Easy Avenue, where Hullo keeps Mrs. Collar-Cuff alive by reading *War and peace* in weekly instalments, Mr. Doyle risks turning off the early-teens for whom he presumably writes. He also risks failing to grab them during his opening descriptions of life in Uplands Emergency Shelter, Ottawa, where Hullo lives with his foster-mother, and his girl-friend Fleurette with her mother.

One hopes that Hullo's resuscitation of the heart-attack victim for whom he has been caddying will keep them hanging in there, for from the moment that Hullo heard from his school principal that he was to receive fifty dollars per month from an anonymous benefactor, this reader could not put the book down.

The tale echoes *Great expectations* not only in the surprise of the benefactor's self-disclosure but also in the hero's generous impulses. He funds medical treatment for a schoolfellow and buys a new outfit for Fleurette. Like Pip, he thinks the rich old lady his benefactor, and like Pip experiences worldly temptation, in the form of an invitation from the school cad to join the Hi-Y Club.

Yet Mr. Doyle tells his tale with quite un-Victorian frankness. On a riverside picnic Fleurette bathes in her torn slip, while the hero shrinks from exposing his ragged underwear. Her suspicion that Hullo has betrayed to the Hi-Y crowd her old nickname "Feel" (a corruption of her former street-name) causes her to fling the new clothes down at his door. As Hullo gradually realizes on seeing her many "uncles" emerge after single visits, the nickname refers to her mother's trade of prostitution. Not until Hullo has torn up his application for club membership can he bear to acknowledge his foster-mother as school cleaner, yet he lives too near destitution to become a snob like Pip, nor is Fleurette another Estella.

Frankness apart, young readers should enjoy the naturalness of the boy-and-girl friendship and the hero's laid-back ridicule of fools in office, which recalls *The catcher in the rye*.

In [career] guidance, one question asked if you would apply for a job this way (a) or this way (b). Under (a) . . . was a picture of a guy. . . in front of some big-shot's desk.

. . .sitting up very straight. . .his hands folded in his lap and his pants all pressed just like knives and his shoes shining with little windows of shininess in each. . .his suit jacket buttoned and his hair all slicked back and a big smile on him, but somebody had inked in his teeth and crossed his eyes. . . .Under (b) it showed the same big shot. . .with a really disgusted look on his face like he had just swallowed a piece of rotten fish or something. The younger guy. . .was sitting on the. . .desk. . .breathing in the big shot's face. His hair was all knotted. . .and his face was dirty-looking. . .His pants were filthy and the bottoms were in rags and his shoes. . .scuffed and untied.

Was the answer (a) or (b)? (52).

Hullo loses his cynicism once he has given the cad a bloody nose and discovered the human kindness his foster-mother and girl-friend share with his rich patrons. *Easy Avenue* is populated by real people as well as the snobs who turn up their noses at the smell of old clothes on the bus. One hopes that the youth of Middle Canada will not balk at this and other things perhaps recalled from Mr. Doyle's Dickensian childhood, such as the foster-mother's delusion that her dead husband has survived the Second World War and is sending the monthly cheques.

For his sometimes grim, sometimes amusing, but never unwholesome tale, Mr. Doyle deserves handsome royalty cheques in today's dollars.

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RIRE DES FANTÔMES SOCIAUX

Qui a peur des fantômes? Sylvie Desrosiers. Illus. Daniel Sylvestre. Montréal, La courte échelle, 1988. 92 pp., 6,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-89021-073-1.

Finie, semble-t-il, ou du moins reléguée aux enfants "enfants", la morale à la Comtesse de Ségur, aux "bons sentiments" et à la leçon larmoyante ou attendrie, selon le point de vue. Sylvie Desrosiers, avec sa chasse aux fantômes dans une église en ruines, propose une nouvelle forme de "leçon", la leçon à l'humour désinvolte, à l'ironie amusée. Et finies aussi, bien sûr, la parole aux euphémismes ou les pensées inévitablement charitables. Les personnages n'apparaissent plus avec leur mauvais caractère, évidemment à condamner, ou leur sainteté ne pouvant que servir de modèle; ils peuvent être "alcooliques de métier", comme le Père Labrosse au nom évocateur, "se faire la conversation", pour ne pas dire radoter, et être bien loin, en fait, de constituer les "malins" de l'histoire ou les "monstres" pas encore convertis. Ils peuvent même se révéler passablement philosophes, comme ce Père Labrosse encore qui, possédant une bonne humeur méditative bien qu'assez nauséuse, "content,