from her most satisfying aspect, her dogginess. Any dog is a magic dog to a lonely boy. The fantasy theme undermines the verisimilitude of the plot in favour of the thematic lesson of the text. *The Carved Box* tries to do too much. It is an excellent dog story and a good historical novel. The "problem novel" element weighs down the characters and the magic is superfluous.

Although written in a very different style, the protagonist of Brian Doyle's latest novel, *Mary Ann Alice*, shares Callum's sense of separation from her isolated Ontario community. Like the previous book, this has an historical setting, this time in the 1920s. Mary Ann Alice McCrank "has the soul of a poet." As a result, she is perfectly suited to document the building of the Paugan dam on the Gatineau River. Her voice is bubbly; like the river, it skips, swirls and dives around her family and neighbours, chronicling the dam's impact with an optimism that, nonetheless, acknowledges its uncertainty. The jumpiness and cleverness of the narrative can, admittedly, become exhausting — the book lends itself to being read bit-by-bit as a series of Leacock-esque sketches rather than in one long sitting. The story is unified by recurring motifs connected with the dam, by Mary Ann Alice's voice, and by the personalities of the community. The setting is not outwardly described in any great detail but, instead, is brought to life as a collection of meaningful places. The anecdotal rhythm of the narrative reinforces this sense of personal history in the landscape, making its change more poignant.

Because it is colloquial, with a non-linear plot, *Mary Ann Alice* requires a more self-conscious reader than does *The Carved Box*. Rather than focusing on only one moral, it raises a series of questions about place, property, environment and community. They are questions which apply to the contemporary world as much as they apply to Mary Ann's Martindale. *The Carved Box* would work nicely in a conventional school literature unit. In a more sophisticated class, *Mary Ann Alice* could be read as a literary work and as a catalyst for the discussion of some important social issues.

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Life's Meandering Twists and Turns

Light the Way Home. Nancy Russell. Ragweed, 2000. 230 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-78-0. ***The Twisting Road Tea Room***. Deb Loughead. Ragweed, 2000. 176 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-79-9.

Both these books have fourteen-year-old protagonists who must adjust after a move from Toronto to the Maritimes. Russell's Christine has the harder time, missing her plastic friends and finding her new schoolmates prickly. Loughead's Emma has an easier social transition, though she too suffers emotionally. She also suffers believably.

There is little to dislike about *Light the Way Home*, but nothing lifts it from earnestness into life. We begin with an ABC trio of friends, Allie, Brittany, and Christine: one artsy, one athletic, and one called "Barbie" behind her back. Christine leaves

this plastic world for a PEI populated with *Anne of Green Gables* descendants: her new friend Jennifer is red-haired and freckled, and her romantic interest is cut from the same wholesome cloth — straight-grained and without much texture — as Gilbert Blythe. The lighthouse-keeper and the "Old Salt" unfortunately suggest that PEI is populated with Matthews and Captain Jims, although the narrator is at pains to tell us about modern economic pressures and the tensions of tourism in contemporary PEI. Indeed, it is all heavy-handed: contrasts between the Island and Toronto are not only spelled out but underlined: "The area was filled with stately, old houses, very different from the modern neighbourhood where the family had lived in Toronto. There, their house had been carpeted, with white walls and all the modern conveniences. Their new home was very old, with hardwood floors and creaky stairs" (37). Character is not so much revealed as labelled, like the clothes (Umbro shorts, Doc Martens, Asic runners) the girls wear: "Although she probably didn't realize it herself, Allie was always trying to upstage Brittany, which was hard to do, and to get a rise out of her parents" (8). Christine's emotional tumult is packaged into a dream of shipwreck. Heavy-handed too is the symbolism of the lighthouse, the rescue of which helps Christine survive her transition and find by the end multigenerational friendships, romantic interest, and a renewed closeness with her family:

> Christine smiled to herself and whispered 'Thank you' to the light.... In one way or another, the lighthouse had saved them all. (230)

For all its ghosts and hauntings, Loughead's South Shore of Nova Scotia is more alive and real than Russell's PEI, and the reader cares what happens to Emma Malone. We hear the genuine sullenness of an unhappy teenager's speech, but we can see that she is not entirely wrapped up in her own concerns: though capable of uncharitable observation and hasty judgment, she is perceptive of character and sensitive to atmosphere. Of course, we have the benefit of first-person narration, supplemented by a journal; Emma is quick-witted and clever with a phrase. Some of her similes are a delight, as when her mother squeezes her "leg through the quilt like she was testing me for ripeness" (119), or when seniors, listening to music, "looked like a field of dandelions gone to seed" (138). Loughead trusts her reader, too: when Emma calls her mother's new project the "twisted tearoom," she doesn't feel compelled to explain the feeling behind the words. The mystery of ghosts and tingling rings and thought-reading turns out to have a believable solution that does not eradicate everything uncanny. In short, there is depth and dimension to this novel. Its ending, too, is telling: after the apparently obligatory paragraph that spells out the significance of the title ("and then the three of us clinked our china teacups in the air above the table in a toast to life's meandering twists and turns" [169]), a final entry from Emma's journal reminds us that stories don't have to end so cosily.

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