

message is that the young child cannot stray past certain limits without encountering dangers that may be life-threatening. Of course, within each story there is also an ambiguity about home. Berthe and Aime, from the mother cat's viewpoint, are the killers of her young and are not to be entirely trusted; nevertheless, they are the only sources of food and warmth. Similarly, Kiki experiences some discomfort and fear when he is returned home and faces a soapy cleansing in the bath-tub. The human authority figures are felt to be both benevolent and threatening. Any small child is likely to identify unconsciously with that feeling!

While both books are movingly written, one creating pathos and the other suspense, they do reflect sexist roles in cat disguises: the "he" is independent and a solitary adventurer, whereas the "she" is primarily concerned with saving the lives of young helpless charges - her own and others. The young male cat is depicted as resolute and independent while the female cat is already pregnant twice by the end of the story - and, of course, delighted about her mothering role.

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## “Dying and Loving Somebody”

WENDY R. KATZ

*Hey, Dad!*, Brian Doyle. Greenwood Books, 1978. 121 pp. \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-004-9.

*You Can Pick Me Up at Peggy's Cove*, Brian Doyle. Greenwood Books, 1979. 120 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-001-4.

“Dying and loving somebody,” the thirteen-year-old narrator of Brian Doyle's *Hey, Dad!* (1978) muses. “I always end up thinking of

those two together. Dying and loving” (p. 114). Indeed, dying and loving are of paramount importance in Megan’s narration of her family’s summer holiday drive from Ottawa to the Pacific. Like the grieving child of Hopkins’ “Spring and Fall,” Megan is saddened by a sense of mortality that is yet dimly understood. Slowly she makes the connection between death and love, especially as they affect her relationship with her father. Megan eventually reckons with her own mortality as well as that of her parents and considers, in her green and vulnerable way, the deaths of all those people who have gone before her and all those that will come after. *You Can Pick Me Up at Peggy’s Cove*, Doyle’s book of 1979, is likewise about love and death, although the design here is less obvious and, consequently, more impressive. In this book, also written in the first person, narrator Ryan (Megan’s brother, incidentally) must deal with, among other things, the death of a fisherman friend at Peggy’s Cove, a death that follows directly from the great love of this man for another fisherman and one that helps Ryan to understand his own sense of loss: he has been sent to this Atlantic Coast fishing village to live with his aunt while his father, having run away from home because of a mid-life crisis, decides whether or not to return. Both books depend heavily on their setting to define and develop their narrator’s comprehension of love and death, grief and loss. The children examine the landscape and seascape with an inward- as well as an outward-looking eye. The result, on balance, is strikingly good.

Doyle’s books are, superficially at least, part of the “holiday story” tradition. Their season is summer, when children are customarily free to revel in new and exciting experiences. Doyle’s children, however, unlike the wholesome adventurers of, say, the Arthur Ransome holiday stories, are not segregated from the adult world; they do not wander at will. On the contrary, they are in close and occasionally oppressive proximity to adults and adult concerns. In this sense the books are unique, as are their fully-rounded adult characters. In *Hey, Dad!*, for example, one remembers Megan and her family together, confined to their westbound car to wrestle with claustrophobia, traffic jams, the car radio, and a confusion of maps. In the case of *You Can Pick Me Up at Peggy’s Cove*, one remembers Ryan watching and moving with great care through the relatively childless village community. The tension between adult and child provides the sustaining conflict for these stories.

Doyle’s emphasis is not on the adventures the children have but on their psychological states of being. Megan doesn’t want to go on the trip to the west and she spends a good deal of time – but not all of it – being miserable. Ryan is the more compelling character: he must deal with his father’s crisis, the fisherman Eddie and his mute fishing

partner Wingding, his aunt who runs a tourist shop, and all the tourists who visit Peggy's Cove. In an effort to work out what it means to have a father who has suddenly become "different," Ryan goes about defining for himself the bounds of normality. What with Wingding, who makes smacking sounds instead of speaking, the Widow Weed, who talks to a shark's skull, Mrs. Drummond, who lives in a white and black room, and the assorted tourists who appear and disappear, Ryan finds a generous store of diversity among adults.

Doyle clearly tries to establish a network of relationships for his child characters. They see themselves not only in relation to adults in their families – father, mother, aunt, grandfather, etc. – but in relation to people beyond the family, friends and strangers alike, to nature, and to the universe. In *Hey, Dad!*, history, the land, and our place in it all come together towards the end when Megan, simultaneously tormented and awestruck by the landscape and the sovereignty of time, goes down to the Athabaska River and listen to its voice:

"Decade is ten years. Century is a hundred years. Millenium is a thousand years. Eons is years and years and ages and ages." . . . I was trying to stretch my mind so that I could think about how long an eon was. It was how long the Athabaska roared his deep roar. I stretched my mind. I grunted and held my breath and forced my mind to wrap around that long, long time. I thought of the summer and how long it was, and how long it was that I was in grade four and how long next year would be and then I thought of myself after Dad and Mum were dead and then after I was an old wrinkled lady and how that wouldn't even be a century yet (p. 100).

In the *Peggy's Cove* book such pointedly "significant" passages are harder to come by. However, when Ryan's father finally returns, the boy imagines father and son together, caught within the lens of a camera in his head that moves "back, back and up, until you could see the whole of Peggy's Cove with the foam smashing away at the lighthouse and the pretty colours and the boats out at sea and the tiny tourists running around the little white dots that were gulls. And the tiny still figures in the middle of it all. That was Dad and me" (pp. 120-121). The child and the father move from foreground to background, gradually becoming part of the larger landscape, with the camera focus set at infinity.

With regard to structure, both works are carefully developed. Each child works up to a particular crisis prior to a satisfactory resolution of the problems. For Megan the crisis occurs when she succeeds in running away from her troublesome father and discovers almost immediately how much she loves him. Shortly after rejoining her

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-