

Mado presque sympathique. En fait, on la perçoit sans grande malice, ni violence, mais poussée par les événements à commettre un crime.

Roman sans violence, à part cet épisode où Gloria s'enfoncé un clou dans le pied en jouant, et qui semble être le seul lieu de violence physique du roman.

Ce que l'on peut ajouter, c'est que Josée Dufour dans un court roman n'a pas lésiné sur l'emploi d'un riche vocabulaire et d'un style qui suggère un auteur qui ne demande qu'à s'affirmer. Il y a aussi tous ces personnages secondaires qui ont beaucoup d'envergure. En fait, on peut dire que Josée Dufour a un talent indéniable pour créer des personnages à la Dickens qui ne demanderaient pas mieux que de prendre leur essor. Et c'est avec ce regret de ne les avoir que trop peu connus que l'on quitte *Vol à retardement*.

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WHAT TROUBLES TROUBLED KIDS

Last chance summer, Diana J. Wieler. Western Producer Prairie Books, 1986. 114 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-88833-203-3.

Medieval man blamed violence on human sin. After Rousseau it became fashionable to picture the child as naturally innocent, so that violent habits came from contact with a corrupt environment. It is a mark of the modernity of Diana Wieler's novel that she traces violence to roots both innate and environmental. Marl Silversides, the twelve-year-old protagonist of *Last chance summer*, is a victim of fetal alcohol syndrome. His odd facial features (picturesquely softened by the narrator into "the boy with the almond eyes") and his learning disabilities have marginalized him, made him the perpetual underdog, toughened him so much that he seems inured to a life of crime and punishment.

The story follows Marl's experience at a group home for troubled boys on a small farm near the Alberta Badlands. Wieler does not gloss over life there: fist fights, substance abuse, suicide attempts, and barely concealed resentments all occur. While the characters are not sentimentalized, they are made vulnerable. Wieler steers clear of "Boy's Town" clichés such as "there's no such thing as a bad boy," but she is obliged to travel the same moral territory. The book's ruling psychological assumption is that every tough kid is a hurting kid. The main plot motive thus involves gradually bringing the sources of hurt to light so that the pain can be shared and alleviated. The child-reader, like Marl, needs a horizon of hope. The best healing comes from Marl's peers. The novel's concluding scene has Marl

and another boy share their personal histories, thereby averting the black hole of self-annihilation, and forging a bond which, we are led to assume, will sustain them on the road ahead.

The adults in the story — social workers, policemen, counsellors — are a well-meaning lot, yet their efforts often fall short, and they have their own problems and frailties. One notable exception to this portrait of fallible humanity is Cecile, Marl's social worker. She wafts in and out of the story like a heavenly breeze, arousing in Marl both a longing for maternal affection, and a nascent sexual attraction. Compared with the other characters, Cecile is insubstantial and unconvincing. She is not human, but an idealized vision of providence. Wieler wants the reader to see that even in a situation as desperate as Marl's, one is never utterly lost.

Despite the novel's static situation, the narrative moves briskly, mainly due to psychological tension. Apart from the occasional stale expression ("a shiver ran down his spine"; "his stomach lurched") the prose is refreshingly spare. The substance of the story makes it one for fairly mature readers, though the very act of reading will help foster some of that maturity.

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ROMANCE AND REBELLION IN YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Nobody asked me, Elizabeth Brochmann. James Lorimer, 1984. 182 pp. \$12.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88862-753-X, 0-88862-752-1; **Storm child**, Brenda Bellingham. James Lorimer, 1985. 124 pp. \$12.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88862-794-7, 0-88862-793-9.

Elizabeth Brochmann's *Nobody asked me* and Brenda Bellingham's *Storm child* are novels in James Lorimer's "A time of our lives" series aimed at the ten-to-fourteen-year-old-market. Each deals with a teenage girl who is wrenched abruptly from her familiar environment and forced, in new surroundings, to reevaluate her sense of self.

Nobody asked me is set on the west coast. Rachel lives with her parents in a remote fire station on Vancouver Island. Her grandmother's illness takes the parents away to Europe and Rachel is sent to stay with Aunt Ev, a family friend, in a small coastal town. Rachel's Uncle Sharky, a dance hall bouncer, lives in the same town and Rachel immediately sets about match-making between Ev and Sharky. Her failure in this project and her growing friendship with the young fisherman Bosco form the plot, which is ultimately about Rachel learning to deal with a society larger than the