

arrêt" (91). En fait, les deux substances nocives se ressemblent. C'est Agnès qui remarque, à propos du maire du village: "Avec la quantité de cigarettes qu'il fume, il a déjà une personnalité de drogué" (50).

Par un subtil croisement de stratégies, donc, l'auteur réussit à prévenir les jeunes non seulement contre les apparences trompeuses souvent cultivées par autrui, mais aussi contre les attraits séduisants de la drogue et du tabac. Sylvie Desrosiers rappelle à ses lecteurs la nature ambivalente des signes, pour ensuite appliquer sa leçon à deux éléments délétères du milieu adolescent qui ne sont que trop réels.

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## A QUESTION OF JUDGEMENT

**Nobody said it would be easy.** Marilyn Halvorson. Irwin Publishers, 1987. 194 pp., \$10.95 paper. ISBN 0-7725-1652-9.

Despite the old adage, one can often not help judging, or at least anticipating, a book by its cover. The front cover of Marilyn Halvorson's *Nobody said it would be easy* shows a small plane crashed in a snowy wilderness, with three anxious adolescents scanning the bush for a possible path to start out on. The blurb on the back cover describes the trio's dilemma in detail, promising that "the three must fight together for survival." Picture and blurb mislead the reader, for this is not a survival tale along the lines of *Robinson Crusoe* or *Lost in the barrens*. The crash takes place when the book is almost three quarters over, and the three youths never really do learn to co-operate. One is left behind, while one strikes off on her own. Two happen to find each other just in time to save each other from drowning, after which they simply walk downstream to a research station and are saved.

What Marilyn Halvorson really wants to write about is the protagonist's struggle to deal with the possibility of permanent physical impairment. Fifteen-year-old Lance (who narrates his own story) had injured his hand in a knife-fight (in this novel's predecessor *Let it go*), and the opening chapter here confronts him with the news that the hand may never recover its strength. For a vigorous rancher's son, this is a severe blow. The chief source of dramatic tension in the story is Lance's attempt to hide this weakness from all around him, an attempt which becomes harder and harder to bring off. We

are encouraged to think that Lance will grow as a person despite the humbling of his physical prowess, that he will learn to accept his limitations, to trust in others, to not feel threatened by vulnerability. His strength had given him a crusty exterior; he must learn to wear his heart on his sleeve. Even with such a promising theme, the story's resolution seems quite problematic to me. Lance jumps into a raging, icy river to save his cousin Kat, a non-swimmer. He tries to pull them both out by hanging on to a branch, but his crippled hand appears unable to do the job. He passes out from the strain yet we learn later that, even in unconsciousness, his strength has returned and enabled them to cling to safety (around his neck Lance wears the medal of St. Christopher, who once struggled to carry a child across a river, only to discover he had been carrying Christ). The character who had so much to learn about admitting weakness ends up proudly reclaiming his strength. As if to divert us from the conventionally heroic (and is some ways regressive) ending, Halvorson's closing scene has Lance using his hand to sketch a portrait, leaving us to ponder his approaching choice between life as a ranchhand and a career as an artist.

The technique of first-person narration allows us to see the pain and anxiety that lurk behind the bluff carelessness of Lance's public persona. At times the contrast between the public and private voices seems too great, and the reader has trouble reconciling the brash and impulsive actions with the accompanying thoughts, which even in the early chapters show considerable self-knowledge and wisdom. Consider the following passage from early in the book, in which Lance tries to tell us why he brags to Kat:

I knew I'd better straighten things out, fast. Tell the way it had really been. But, at the same time, I knew I couldn't tell her. It wasn't just stubbornness, either. Sure, my pride had something to do with it. But there was a lot more to it. I was scared to let her get into my life and see me without my armour on. Because the worst scars were the ones that didn't show, and they were still only half-healed and way too sensitive to risk showing to someone who couldn't wait to find a weak spot to pounce on....

The *sententious tone of this* shows the author's voice claiming the character's too much. Halvorson wants to tell us the story of a badly mixed-up kid who must learn some hard lessons and grow as a person. Passages such as this one trivialize the lessons somewhat by making them seem apparent to Lance right from the start. He already seems to know himself; the novel simply witnesses his attempts to alter his public style, to let others see how his knowledge is shaping him.

This difficulty aside, however, Halvorson's writing has many strengths. She has a good ear for the rhythms and idioms of youthful speech. If the thoughts often struck me as incongruous, the dialogue generally rings true, and is full of piquant wit. The plane will take them, Uncle Joe says, into "country so wild it practically growls at you." Despite what such metaphors (like the cover blurb) suggest, though, there will be no wild animal encount-

ers in the wilderness. The antagonist in this novel is Lance's own stubborn will, symbolized by his perpetually stiffened right hand.

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## HUIS CLOS POUR ADOLESCENTS

**Circuit fermé.** Alain Fournier. Montréal, VLB Editeur, 1987. 139 pp., 9,95\$ broché ISBN 2-89005-266-4.

*Circuit fermé*, le premier ouvrage publié dans la collection "Jeune théâtre", est une pièce en quatorze tableaux, suivie d'un cahier pédagogique. L'intention du dramaturge est claire: dissuader les jeunes de se lancer dans la prostitution et la drogue. Mais en dépit de la nature manifestement didactique de l'ouvrage, l'auteur ne témoigne pas moins d'une grande sensibilité littéraire et d'une parfaite maîtrise des techniques dramatiques.

La pièce s'ouvre sur une scène rappelant un vidéo rock: Johanne, une jeune fille de quinze ans, est livrée à une déchirante lutte intérieure, évoquée par une musique rock très rythmée et par un chœur de voix troublantes: celle de sa mère pauvre et abandonnée qui ne cesse de critiquer sa fille, celle de son oncle qui l'abuse sexuellement depuis qu'elle a onze ans, celle de son professeur et celle de son amie Sylvie qui l'encouragent à poursuivre ses études, celle d'un jeune homme anonyme qui essaie de mettre la main sur elle... Ce mélange très dense nous révèle le dilemme de Johanne: rester à la maison où elle n'en peut plus, ou faire une fugue pour s'évader d'une vie qu'elle juge insupportable: "L'avenir pour les jeunes, y est ben noir," chante-t-elle. Elle décide, en désespoir de cause, et pour au moins retrouver un peu d'indépendance, de se faire une "nouvelle vie," mais celle-ci s'avérera désastreuse.

Johanne fait la rencontre de François, un jeune prostitué de 16 ans qui l'accueille, non sans modifier complètement son apparence: la voilà prête à exercer le plus vieux métier du monde. Elle lui avoue que ce n'est pas seulement l'argent qu'elle recherche, mais davantage: une certaine forme d'estime de soi-même: "Y a pus personne qui te traite de niaiseuse et de paresseuse [...] t'as l'impression d'être quelqu'un." Mais elle se rend bientôt compte de sa naïveté quand elle accepte de tourner un vidéo-clip et que le caméraman la viole brutalement.

De retour chez François, elle se plaint amèrement, mais elle s'accroche à son désir d'indépendance. Même l'amour lui répugne, tellement il est contrai-