

Inspired by his own adventure to Ireland's Eye, author Shane Peacock gives much life to the "dead" small island in Trinity Bay, once the east-most settlement of Canada. A controversial resettlement scheme throughout the '50s and '60s encouraged the residents of nearly 200 outposts to move to mainland Newfoundland where the government offered better services. As a result, only 64 outporters lived on Ireland's Eye by the early '60s. A few years later, the place was totally "abandoned." Following Dylan, readers voyage into the fascinating past of Newfoundland.

For young adults as well as for new immigrants, the book is also valuable in learning about the history of hockey, that major part of Canadian culture. The "ghost town" was not the only thing that haunts Dylan; his beloved grandfather, who has just passed away, returns and speaks to him in his dreams. They used to share their love for hockey by watching televised games together during the hockey season. Great hockey stars such as Syl Apps, Bill Barilko, and Teeder Kennedy were common topics of grandfather's stories.

This journey into history is never smooth; at times there are terrifying elements: a gigantic fin whale of "greyhound bus" size swimming beneath Dylan's kayak; smoke coming from an empty town; a haunted house; a horrifying graveyard; ghosts, and villains. With an unpredictable plot and vivid details, Peacock pulls readers into the story. We hear the raging waves, feel the heart beats of Dylan, and see eye-to-eye with the Ireland's eye!

Also fascinating is Dylan's voyage of self-discovery. Perhaps the biggest mystery of all for young-adult readers is how twelve-year-old Dylan gains such skills, strength, and maturity in one short year to single-handedly kayak in the stormy Atlantic.

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### Disconnected? Searching for Meaning in Shelley Hrdlitschka's Novels

*Beans on Toast*. Shelley Hrdlitschka. Orca, 1998. 122 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-116-5. *Disconnected*. Shelley Hrdlitschka. Orca, 1998. 160 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-105-X.

In *Beans on Toast* and *Disconnected*, Shelley Hrdlitschka renders a portrait of adolescence that is intriguingly readable but ultimately hollow. The author manipulates weighty themes into plot vehicles, forfeiting real depth in favour of page-turning drama.

*Beans on Toast*, Hrdlitschka's first novel, tells the story of a lonely thirteen-year-old flute player named Madison, who is spending the summer at band camp. The back of the novel informs us that Madison's sense of alienation stems from her parents' recent divorce. Hrdlitschka does mention the divorce, but she uses it as

shadowy background material, allowing it to function as the implied explanation for Madison's antisocial behaviour without spending any time exploring its significance. Divorce is, of course, a fact of many children's lives and as such does not necessarily need to maintain a central position in the telling of children's stories. But Hrdlitschka seems to be asking us to make connections she herself never makes, for, if not for Madison's implied backstory, who could like her? In the beginning of the novel, Madison is simply whiny; by the end she approaches vindictiveness.

Hrdlitschka relies on her reader's sympathy for Madison's home life, alluded to but never explored, to create a viable heroine, and as such misses out on an investigation of the emotional nuances of the character she creates. Madison's motivations are never clear; her choices border on mean-spirited and the ending of the story (in which Madison's rival is attacked and virtually torn apart by a wild cougar — although she does survive) is more than remotely disturbing. Readers may appreciate the love triangle that shapes much of this story, but will ultimately be left unsatisfied by a politically-correct ending that seems to come from a voice more Hrdlitschka's than Madison's.

Hrdlitschka's second novel, *Disconnected*, is infinitely more readable, but shares some of its predecessor's faults. Hrdlitschka switches her emphasis to developing masculinities in this adventure novel about two boys who live separate lives but who share an intense telepathic connection. It is not a surprise to learn that the two boys, Tanner and Alex, are actually twins separated at birth. Once again, Hrdlitschka introduces an intensely serious issue as a plot vehicle for the cloak-and-dagger action her story ultimately privileges over emotional depth. Alex is abused by his alcoholic adoptive father; he watches him hit his mother, and runs away to the streets of Vancouver at fourteen. The realities of abuse are presented as sketchy subplots, justification for the character's actions and fodder for the real story that is being told here: the reunion of two brothers through supernatural means.

Perhaps most disturbing, however, is that rage is a running theme throughout the novel. From the beginning, Tanner is mystified to discover that he can move objects with his anger. In the epilogue we learn that Alex's father is harassing him and through the rage this produces, Alex finds he shares his twin's angry ability. Alex's continuing anger at his abusive father is simply used to further the psychic connection between the two brothers: his anger, quite literally, produces a "neat" reaction, bonding the two brothers in their ability to feel and direct rage. Hrdlitschka is not interested in explaining or exploring the brothers' seemingly bottomless anger; she is merely interested in exploiting it for its supernatural repercussions. The story that emerges is very much a story, a fairy tale masking itself as serious youth fiction, not because it explores the supernatural but rather because it refuses to focus sustained attention on the horrific realities it manipulates for its own viability. Hrdlitschka is a good storyteller. But her storytelling instincts manipulate real trauma, real pain, and real sadness into melodramatic superficiality and this devalues the adolescents' struggles and simplifies both their victories and their defeats.

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