

de doute que *Zoé entre deux eaux* plaira aux jeunes filles d'une douzaine d'années. Le récit est bien enlevé; les dialogues sont vivants; le mystère et l'humour abondent. En plus de ses qualités d'écrivain, Claire Daignault y démontre une excellente connaissance des adolescentes.

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PUZZLING CHARACTERIZATION

Night fires. Mary Razzell. Douglas & McIntyre, 1990. 176 pp., \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-079-0.



Like her first two novels, Mary Razzell's third novel for young adults, *Night fires*, is the story of a young nursing student in British Columbia. She's got everything going for her: youth, a challenging career, and an ambitious husband. But it isn't long before this rosy picture begins to fade: an arsonist at the hospital puts everyone on edge, and one of Karin's patients tests positive for the HIV virus. Meanwhile, husband Mark spends all his time messing up the apartment and working late, leaving Karin frustrated and angry. Eventually, Karin is forced to make some tough ethical and personal decisions.

Night fires is a puzzling piece of work: while the hospital scenes, especially the nurse/patient relationships, are compelling and believable, Karin's attraction to Mark remains a total mystery. The first chapter is full of examples of his self-centredness, insensitivity, lust for power, and manipulation of other people – he has no redeeming qualities. Mark is the novel's major weakness: he is a one-dimensional cartoon-like character whose dialogue consists of such winning lines as: "...if you really wanted to help, you could iron a few shirts for me" (16), "Up and at 'em, Karin. I'm starving" (87), "I didn't get married to make my own meals, for Pete's sake!" (88).

Karin is not a fully-developed character either. Although she wins the reader's sympathy – she is young and innocent and seems to have a good heart – she never really lets down her guard. Karin consistently puts herself last, solving everyone else's problems but not dealing with her own. Unlike Sheila Brary, the feisty and likeable heroine of Razzell's *Snow apples* and *Salmonberry wine* (Sheila has a cameo role as a nurse on Karin's night shift),

Karin is passive and accepting.

For a contemporary young adult novel, *Night fires* perpetuates far too many stereotypes of male and female roles; what's worse, it doesn't balance them with examples of healthy, equal relationships between men and women. It can only be hoped that young readers are critical enough to recognize this lack of balance. We can also hope that Mary Razzell's next novel will reach the standards set by the first two.

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TREASURES FROM THE PAST

The Queen's silver. Wilma E. Alexander. General Paperbacks, 1990. 128 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7285-0.

This book uses the structure of the junior detective story to tell of an eleven-year-old boy's first steps in resolving the adolescent crisis of identity. Jon Sinclair is a Toronto boy who ignores his Mohawk mother's stories and the heritage program at his school, seeing himself as simply one of the boys, all of whom are "something – Jamaican, Chinese, East Indian, Greek" (7), that "something" being irrelevant to his identity. Jon reluctantly spends a few days on the Tyendinaga Reserve visiting his uncle, not a Mohawk, but a white chaplain, an indication that the past Jon will discover is not solely Indian but that of the centuries-old relationship between the two races.

Jon knows he won't find the people on the reserve living in tipis, but he is amazed that they live in "ordinary" houses. The readers of this story who feel little shocks at how much life on a reserve resembles their own may reflect on how little they know of such life and on why they have assumed it must be different from theirs. Some combinations of traditional Indian culture and modern North American ways are shown as amusing, but never as the source of disrespect – thus Jon enjoys the sight of an elderly friend hitching up her long skirt to fish money out of the pocket of the jeans she wears underneath, but he doesn't laugh at her.

The story is based on actual history of this inter-racial relationship. The title refers to communion silver given by Anne, George III's consort, to members of the Wolf Clan living in Mohawk Valley in 1711 which they buried for safekeeping when American soldiers attacked them, driving them from their homeland, in retaliation for siding with the British. Five years later, a few

