

Here, in fact, lies a fundamental difference between these two books. Perhaps because of its format as a fictional novel, *Earthly Astonishments* does not provide a solid historical context for much of its content. References are made to some people, events, and ideas of the period — most of the story takes place in 1884 Coney Island — but little background information is given to help the young reader through the harsh realities of Little Jo-Jo's marginalized and precarious existence. There is also little attempt to explain the meanings of the strange and wonderful words noted above. Such a component, unless carefully constructed, might have interfered with the flow of the narrative, but the omission makes the instructor's input all that more critical.

In contrast, *Heart and Soul* sparks with invaluable sidebars containing useful and informative details about Florence Nightingale's world, from the etiquette of death and the legal status of married women in Victorian England, to child mortality rates in the seventeenth century and the bitter rivalries between Christian churches in the 1880s. Gena Gorrell's research is commendable, and the candid presentation of her findings makes her book a joy for young and not-so-young readers alike. It is clear that the author admires her heroine, but Gorrell does not refrain from observing Florence Nightingale's bouts of selfishness and arrogance (107-08). A little more could have been said on nineteenth-century assumptions about the pre-eminence of western medical science, and about Nightingale's unquestionable support for British imperialism, for instance, but these minor criticisms pale to the overall achievement of *Heart and Soul*. Gena Gorrell's historical biography and Marthe Jocelyn's fictional novel deal with heroines who were peculiarized by opposite social and economic forces, but whereas Gorrell provides the reader with a substantial meal, Jocelyn merely whets the appetite, which is not necessarily a bad thing.

Darlene Abreu-Ferreira is an Assistant Professor of Women's History at the University of Winnipeg. Her most recent publication, "From Mere Survival to Near Success: Women's Economic Strategies in Early Modern Portugal," appeared in Journal of Women's History.

Mystery Times Six

The Curse of Jonathan Matthew. John F. Green. Stoddart, 1997. 168 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7455-1. *Sky Lake Summer.* Peggy Dymond Leavey. Napoleon, 1999. 176 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-929141-64-4. *The Principal's Kid.* Joan Weir. Polestar, 1999. 173 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 1-896095-98-4.

Mysteries are often thought of as marginal literature because they are often written according to a formula, in endless series, and with flat characters. Here are six mysteries that can be added to school reading lists because they will satisfy the literary expectations of adults and hook readers with their fast-moving plots. Curious, inquiring minds lead the characters of these three initial novels into exciting adventures. Faced with uncertainty, they become bolder and learn more about themselves as they become independent from the adults in their lives. These mysteries

are sure to hook intermediate readers.

In *The Curse of Jonathan Matthew*, an ancient legend about a cursed ghost awaits three young Toronto visitors to the small English village of Warlingham. Ben Hilton, Veronica Shaw, and Eddy Miller accompany Mrs. Shaw, an architect, who has been hired to restore a thirteenth-century church. While exploring the village the three protagonists learn about Jonathan Matthew who was murdered and placed on the church altar but was snatched by robbers before he could be buried. Our three intrepid sleuths realize that the ghost of Jonathan Matthew is cursed to haunt the town and to a "life" of sadness because he was not properly buried.

The ancient legend of the church and its ghost is tied to the life of Richard the Lion Hearted, which gives this story focus and depth. However, the story is not resolved. In spite of the children figuring out that the body needs to be buried in order for him to "rest in peace," there is no burial to complete the story. There is a final exciting scene with a chase and rescue which leaves the ghost with a smile, but he is left to roam. The grade five characters do little to grow and change during the story. Initially, Veronica is the instigator, but once in England she tends to let Ben do the thinking and scheming while she tags along. Eddy is constantly nervous and is a reluctant detective. Readers will continue to turn the pages, but will miss a potentially rich reading experience.

Thirteen-year-old Jane Covington finds a letter written in 1930 in an old library book in which a woman pleads for help. During her *Sky Lake Summer* Jane delves into the past through old library files and interviews with locals to discover the mystery of the woman's unhappiness and bravery. A chance meeting with a woman on the bus and her growing friendship with a local boy who helps her grandmother leads Jane to feel connected to the past and to the Northern Ontario lake where she spends summers with her grandmother.

Leavey, author of *Help Wanted: Wednesdays Only* (1994) and *A Circle in Time* (1997), presents a story that is as much romance as it is mystery. In the beginning, Jane is sceptical about Jess Howard, who is serving a "community sentence." As she comes to understand Jess and eventually to defend his actions, however, she grows confident and more sure of herself. Jane is a strong protagonist. Her grandmother is supportive, but she lets Jane discover the mysteries of the past while she teaches Jane forgiveness. Readers will be lucky to have Leavey's books on their summer reading lists.

The Principal's Kid is Joan Weir's second novel with young sleuths Lion and Bobbi. Readers of her previous mystery *The Witcher* will not be disappointed as they follow Lion, Bobbi, and their lawyer father, this time to the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia. In this book, Bobbi and Lion have two things on their minds: an unsettling message from one of their father's law partners and Dad's overly enthusiastic attention to Mrs. Hamilton, a widow and a middle school principal. Weir deftly weaves a clever plot of mystery from concern for the environment, adult greed, and concern over a father's love. The principal's son, C.J., poses a conflict for the pair of sleuths to figure out. C.J. gets himself in deep water and is surrounded by adults who cannot be trusted. One clue at a time, Bobbi and Lion must try to unravel the unsettling message and save C.J.

Readers will find well-balanced characters, a setting with a strong sense of place, and a plot that is heart pounding. When finished, readers will eagerly await a third adventure with Bobbi and Lion.

Password: MURDER. Norah McClintock. Scholastic, 1999. 204 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-51505-5. *Over the Edge*. Norah McClintock. Scholastic, 2000. 216 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-24845-6. *Double Cross*. Norah McClintock. Scholastic, 2000. 235 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-439-98708-3.

In these three novels, Norah McClintock combines strong character development and tightly written plots with logical surprises. Her protagonists, one male and one female, demonstrate strong common sense, sensitivity in their peer relationships, and believable language.

In *Password: MURDER*, Harley has to find out if the car crash was an accident or planned murder. Harley is driving with his learner's permit when his passenger, his father, is killed. His self-doubt and loss are enough to deal with, but he must also get used to a new stepfather that his mother married while he was still in the psychiatric hospital.

McClintock's plot is vivid and reads like a movie in your head. Harley is a believable character who has many of the same feelings of self-doubt we all share. His best friend Rat (or Horatio) is the only one who believes in him, but this is enough to keep Harley sane and helps him find answers.

In *Over the Edge* and its sequel, *Double Cross*, McClintock introduces readers to Chloe Yan. Chloe is a gutsy, compassionate girl who is trying to figure out how she fits into the small East Hastings high school after growing up in Montreal as well as dealing with a new stepfather who is the chief of police. Being the new kid on the block allows Chloe to keep her distance as she watches her new classmates and asks questions about the death of Peter Flosnick. While working for the school newspaper she learns about another suspicious death and she seeks connections between the two.

McClintock's development of Chloe as a character is well executed. Chloe learns that she must come to terms with her new surroundings in order to find answers. She admits that she "didn't know Peter well enough to guess where he might hide things, and didn't know East Hastings well enough to even begin to guess where all of its possible hiding places might be" (166).

In the sequel, *Double Cross*, Chloe returns to solve another mystery. Her French teacher asks her to tutor a classmate, Jonah Shackleton, who gets behind because his mother died and his father is convicted of the murder. Chloe is not thrilled with the situation but slowly becomes compassionate toward this angry young man. In this first-person narrative she admits that "[w]hen I first decided to look into whether Harold Shackleton could conceivably be innocent, I was hoping that I could help an angry person I barely knew come to terms with a bad situation in his life" (193). Her compassion leads her to stand by her principles and act on her convictions.

In this reader's mind, Norah McClintock scores a hat-trick with these three books. She may well win the Arthur Ellis Award for Crime Fiction for a fourth time. Her previous winners are *Mistaken Identity*, *The Body in the Basement*, and *Sins of the Father*.

Karen Day recently retired from the University College of the Cariboo where she taught children's literature in the School of Education.