Zack. William Bell. Seal, 1998. 211 pp. $7.95 paper. ISBN 0-7704-2860-6. ***Raspberry House Blues***. Linda Holeman. Tundra, 2000. 238 pp. $8.99 paper. ISBN 0-88776-493-2. ***The Boy in the Burning House***. Tim Wynne-Jones. Douglas and McIntyre, 2000. 231 pp. $12.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-410-9.

During the intense passage children make during adolescence from family life to social existence, part of the emotional battleground they must work through is the haunting effects of family secrets that may consciously or unconsciously define their place in time and in the context of existence. The narrative experience of adolescent fiction itself resonates with Nicholas Abraham's and Maria Torok's perspectives on the psychic growth and difficult possibilities arising from the intergenerational nature of family trauma. In *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative* (1992), Esther Rashkin argues that encrypted within every narrative, often most evident in character motivation, is "The relationship among family history, psychic history, silencing, and repression" (158). In fact, Rashkin suggests that in the work of interpreting characters in narrative, part of the experience requires the reader, at some level, "To identify visible elements of selected narratives as symptoms or 'symbols' that point to unspeakable family dramas cryptically inscribed within them" (5). The reader's level of engagement during such narratives depends on which phantoms of family trauma underlie the fabric of the narrative and the protagonist's plight, and is even further distinguished by his or her action or discourse.

The three youth narratives under discussion here are united by family secrets in which identity, memory, and searching are implicated. The primary theme in William Bell's *Zack* is identity and memory within a personal, historical search for the answers to questions that arise during the protagonist's maturation and in his relationships with parents and the community. Bell is a teacher who has several successful novels under his belt. This youth novel incorporates issues of race in Canada intertwined with the hidden stories and the outright bigotry that Zack, the young black protagonist, must face. Living with his white father and black mother in a small Ontario town, Zack pursues his interests in local history and his personal genealogy, two passions that converge in the story's plot. In *Raspberry House*, Linda Holeman calmly thrusts at the reader the story of the rebellious adolescent daughter in conflict with her mother, who is also confronting her own transitions. The tension generated by Poppy's need to "disown" her adoptive mother to make way for the fantasy reunion with her biological mother is varied (but never cancelled) by the introduction of the adoptive dad and his new family, a potential boyfriend, and the possibility of a zany but alluring birth mother. *The Boy in the Burning House* is a tale in which veteran juvenile literature author Tim Wynne-Jones spins the motifs of arson, murder, and bewildering spirals of hidden truth. The narrative bespeaks issues of emergent identity in the adolescent and introduces the family secret which, curiously, is known outside the family and must be reclaimed by Jim and his mother in order for a definitive resolution to occur.

In *Zack*, Bell strategically establishes the background and players in his story in an economical narrative manner. The representation of social struggles, race relations, family and peer conflicts within a small Ontario town is framed in terms of Zack's quest for the story of a former slave and his own family secrets. The ques-

tion of whether Zack will really want to know what the two "C" rings he finds buried in his backyard are actually for is repeated twice in this book. What happens when objects of the past, created for unthinkable acts to other human beings, are unearthed? Bell presents the importance of such excavations for individuals, families, and the collective consciousness. Reminiscent is the work on the unconscious by Abraham and Torok, reinterpreted by Rashkin for its usefulness to literary theorists. Rashkin puts forth how family secrets are "suspended within the adult [and are] . . . transmitted silently to the child in 'undigested' form and lodge within his or her mental topography as an unmarked tomb" (3). Zack is indeed possessed by such a phantom taking shape in the buried family secret of his parents. Gradually Zack is able to digest what motivated his grandfather's and mother's anger toward one another, resulting from her insistence on departing from her southern black heritage by marrying a white Jewish man. Propelling this narrative are the familial and social forces that haunt Zack's existence within a place and time that is filled with other faces he does not know but that impact on him.

Holeman's *Raspberry House Blues* features a compelling introduction, a seeming rarity in youth fiction, which should be mindful of the power of the "hook" to grab the reader's entry and interest. Holeman paints a dramatic enough portal, with sufficient cultural and temporal information and straightforward characterization that never goes overboard. On the surface, *Raspberry House Blues* is a fairly realistic, believable tale featuring a convincing teen who was adopted. The secret of her birth mother's identity and the reasons for her disappearance stand in the way of Poppy's self-acceptance and have a haunting effect on her identity. Her questions of "Who am I?" and "What am I supposed to do in the world?" cannot be easily answered. After a while, most teens come to tolerate more comfortably these difficult issues and learn to endure chaotic moments as part and parcel of the underlying quests of which they partake. In this sense, as Judith Butler reminds us, "Identifications belong to the imaginary, they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitations, they unsettle the I. Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted, and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability" (105). In Holeman's book, the phantom's known and unknown (even unknowable) relationships are confronted in the teen quest for an assured, and reassuring, identity Poppy can call her own. To this end, *Raspberry House Blues* features a fairly strong but not isolated heroine, a wise guru boy-who-is-a-friend, a dad and his new wife (who is not the wicked stepmother but who is supportive and accepting of Poppy's crises), a young adoptive half-brother, and others who are incorporated into the girl's new constitutive family. Thus, the fantasies of finding her impossible "real" family of birth are nicely balanced by the gritty nuances of her actual placement among people who care and for whom she also comes to care.

Similarly, the protagonist of *The Boy in the Burning House* is believable. Wynne-Jones's characterization cryptically echoes Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, resurrecting the names Jim Hawkins and Billy Bones, the missing father, and the mother left in charge of their survival. Jim, the adolescent protagonist, draws us into the mystery of his undigested past through his own despair and desire to survive it. When we meet the boy, he seems lonely, frustrated, and deeply sad. He's like the scarecrow symbolized in the beginning of the story, whom Jim tries to make stand in such a way as to scare away the creatures that cause water to dam up on his deceased father's failing farm. What makes the main character seem so off-

balance is the unsolved mystery of his devoted father's strange disappearance and the destitute condition of his impoverished mother trying to hold on to the family farm. In stark contrast to Jim Hawkins is Rose Marie, a raven-haired youth driven either by medication to help her deal with rage or with her hatred for her stepfather, the town's minister, whom she believes killed Jim Hawkins's father. There is a charismatic connection between the story's two youngsters. While Jim Hawkins tries to resist the fury that Rose Marie incites in him over the unsolved mystery of his father's disappearance, the reader is seduced into wanting to know the truth. By seeking the revelation of the secret, Rose Marie believes she will be able to solve the mystery and punish her wicked stepfather, the supposed perpetrator of the crime. For Jim, too, the stakes of knowing the truth about what happened to his father propel him to fight back against his painfully numb existence and initiate him to a deeply felt and lived presence in the world.

All three tales feature a display of the "endlessly performative self" (Hall 15) and a realization that the self is formed in relation to other people, including parents, teachers, peers, and even absolute strangers or imagined phantoms like an absent mother. For the adolescent reader, the conflicts presented may catalyze the generative force that can lead to an understanding of the suffering and potential healing of individuals. The reader is beckoned by the psychic siren of secret pasts to work through circumstances embedded in family and broader societal issues. Perhaps, at their best, the stories call upon the young reader to expand his or her parameters of how the difficult issues of familial conflict and the complexities of identity may be understood. Upon reflection, it must be admitted that in the most intriguing adolescent fiction, family history and the psychic dramas that follow from it appear on some level, and fit into some interpretation of the stories that writers spin about life and its adventures.

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