

## How One Boy Handles “Emotional Knowledge”

*Stones*. William Bell. Doubleday, 2001. 210 pp. \$16.95 paper. ISBN 0-385-65829-X. Young adult.

As in his novel *Zack*, a Mr. Christie’s Book Award winner, in *Stones* William Bell probes the pioneer past of Ontario. Again, he brings to light sordid details about nineteenth-century racism and the living conditions of black immigrants. This material contributes much of interest to *Stones*. More importantly, though, it provides a counterpoint to the main theme of the novel: its protagonist’s growing consciousness of his unique identity, experienced as his feeling alien to the Orillia high school scene. The key element in Garnet’s coming to terms with his distinctiveness is the balancing of the rationality imparted by the traditional education system with a newfound respect for intuition.

Along with the historical lore, which is not so much factual as emotional, considering that several pitiable ghosts appear, Bell presents Garnet’s relationships with his parents and with his classmate Raphaella. Bell’s writing is always spell-binding. He continually surprises the reader, often with humour; the characters and events certainly come alive. For just one example: in his English class, which is debating the proposition that “love at first sight is a hoax” in connection with studying *Romeo and Juliet*, Garnet is given the task of arguing in favour of this point. For such a firm believer in rationality, this task should be easy, he thinks, and Garnet is “ready to slay [his listeners] with logic.” He delivers a well-reasoned proof that “love at first sight is a hoax.” After he speaks, it is a new student’s turn. Raphaella, who has just moved from another school, is already in the classroom buzz called “weird.” She gracefully and confidently proposes that there are other ways of knowing besides rationality, what she calls “spontaneous insight” and “emotional knowledge.” The boys in the class dismiss Raphaella’s contention as a “girl thing.” Out of the hubbub of arguing that ensues, emerges the final sentence of the chapter; it is Garnet: “Even before she finished talking, I had fallen in love with her.”

*Stones* goes on to explore Garnet’s and Raphaella’s affection in the circumstances of their families, the school, the Orillia community, and the local historical — and supernatural — background. The novel appeals in many ways: it is a love story, a coming-of-age story, and a ghost story. William Bell handles these intricacies masterfully. *Stones* is humorous and poignant, an irresistibly good read.

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## Mining and Maturing in Newfoundland

*Whose Side are You On?* Betty Fitzpatrick Dorion. Ed. Bob Currie. Coteau, 2001. 192 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55050-179-8. Ages 11 and up.

In *Whose Side are You On?*, Betty Fitzpatrick Dorion dramatizes by means of several layers of painful situations an adolescent boy’s striving for independence and his