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WHAT CAN AND WHAT CANNOT BE CHANGED

Julie, Cora Taylor. Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985. 101 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-88833-172-X.

For those entering adolescence, acceptance of oneself and acceptance from others are pertinent concerns. Cora Taylor's first novel, *Julie*, depicts a young girl's struggle to confront and understand abilities that mark her as "different" from others. Ten-year-old Julie Morgan is a "Celtic throwback" whose psychic abilities, inherited from Great-Grandmother Morgan, set her apart from her siblings on the family farm. Visions, smells and voices provide Julie with knowledge of both past and future events, knowledge which can be at once a helpful gift and an isolating burden. Fellow psychic Granny Goderich and Julie's father demonstrate loving acceptance of the girl, but Julie's mother's fear and rejection contribute to the girl's attempts to hide and deny her abilities. A family crisis motivates Julie to reconsider her special powers, recognizing what she must accept and what she can change because of her abilities. Ultimately, the young adult reader is put in the position of choosing whether or not to "accept" the role of psychic powers in determining the novel's conclusion.

Taylor's evocative and beautifully crafted descriptions draw the reader into sharing Julie's premonitions. When sheets on a clothesline become "ships with rows and rows of full, fat sails tossed as though the black summerfallow field were ridged with waves and not furrows", the rhythmic, poetic prose brings the seatossed boats to life. Similarly, Taylor demonstrates a good ear for dialogue between children, capturing typical sibling teasing and rivalry over possessions and territory.

Yet an overall unevenness is evident, and may possibly be attributed to the novel's growth from its original form as a short story. The beginning and conclusion of the novel are clear and dramatic, but the middle is muddled, and this affects reader identification with Julie and her concerns. At five years of age, just as at ten, Julie can outsmart her parents with her

carefully worded replies; in this sense she is static. The third person narration allows for different characters' reactions to Julie's psychic experiences, but this can also create a distance between the reader and Julie. For example, when Julie and her mother, Alice, first visit Granny Goderich, Julie's actions are described, but the scene's emotional impact arises from a concentration on Alice's thoughts and feelings. Because of the resulting imbalance, Alice seems more fully realized; Julie seems slightly wooden. Problems like these are frustrating because one wishes to have had the chance to get to know Julie better — her story is haunting.

Julie is the winner of the Canadian Library Association Book of the Year Award for Children, the Canada Council Children's Literature Prize and the Alberta Writers Guild Best Children's Book Award. This thorough acclaim is questionable, and invites comparison between *Julie* and other award-winners. Yet *Julie* is a promising first novel; Cora Taylor's next work is eagerly awaited.

Heather McKend is the author of *Moving* gives me a stomach ache.

BALLET FOR BEGINNERS

The ballet book, a young dancer's guide, Andrew Ptak. Key Porter Books, 1984. 128 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-919493-45-9.

This book is designed for the fairly serious ballet student about nine to eleven years in age. Detailed verbal descriptions of basic positions and steps are enhanced by large black and white photographs of intent youngsters in practice clothes performing the exercises described. Complicated movement sequences are illustrated in series of three to seven pictures. The book's uncluttered layout and clear typefaces produce a pleasing integration of text and illustration and should help satisfy the young ballet fan's thirst for instruction and amusement. Because the photographs were taken especially for this volume, at the Quinte Dance Centre, the dancers are ordinary Canadian kids with ordinary bodies, rather than the exotic, wiredrawn Bolshoi students who frequently populate children's ballet books.

As it is obvious that Andrew Ptak has taken considerable pains to create a visually attractive, usable text, I find some of his decisions mildly troubling. All the students demonstrating the steps are female, yet the section on "How ballet started" and the chapter on "Famous ballet stars" both