

operations (through sustained psychological, ethical, or aesthetic depth) that would give the book real staying power. While some of the stories in *Graveyard Girl* are strongly delineated (and inclusive, including meditations on same-sex love, racism, youth sexuality, pregnancy, assault, poverty, drug use, Columbine, the Internet), the book as a whole lacks cohesiveness. The Royal Wedding of Diana and Charles is ancient history to modern teens, and while Lewis's enchantment with Princess Diana is clear, its deployment as a symbolic device lacks sufficient subtlety to stay engraved on a reader's heart. While providing some charged moments of insight, the book does not sound like an honest contemporary teen voice, perhaps because the author has so obviously proscribed her own self-expression over teen culture of the present.

The most stressful junctures of a developing child's life include crises, painful situations, or embarrassing, shame-laden, tragic issues. Good books bring these episodes into the open, making them public, therefore giving adolescents permission to talk about them. Especially noteworthy within the triad of books reviewed here is the way in which the first-time Canadian authors have all utilized the journal and the first-person narrative form as a powerful means of presenting young adolescent protagonists as developing, intelligent persons. Stratton's Leslie is memorable for her straightforward, brave, and honest telling of a treacherous tale. While a victim, the protagonist is even more significantly the author of her own recovery and destiny. Similarly, Juby's Alice engages us with an extremely sophisticated, "deconstructed" Alice, a regular Canadian whiz kid of a British Columbia Interior "Wonderland" whose future may better reside in Derridean deconstruction than Napster nostalgia. Lewis makes us think about memory and its haunting, redemptive strains, and how dialogue with the voices of adolescence makes living a life worthwhile. Taken together, the books encourage and help adolescents grow beyond the loss of childhood to a new strength of spirit and achievement.

### Works Cited

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### For Love of Puns and Opera

*The Great Poochini*. Gary Clement. Greenwood, 1999. Unpag. \$16.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-331-5.

Some consider puns a lesser form of humour, but for those of us they tickle, this unusual picture book forms a wonderfully witty collection on the unlikely theme of dogs that sing opera. But who is the implied reader?

Certainly one with sufficient innocence to enjoy a talking and singing dog hero, as well as one having the sophisticated vocabulary and knowledge of opera essential for catching the humour of the puns. Without these skills or without the text, the literal story the pictures tell would be meaningless. The endpaper illustrations could show merely a big house, a dog in clothes, a dog in a clown suit, a dog in a wig, and some dog tails, or they could be read as playbills strewn about, all with funny titles and sketches. What reader would recognize the dogs on the front cover as a press corps?

Early in the tale we see a set of horizontally stacked illustrations depicting a tawny housedog living an apparently ordinary doggy life. The realism implicit in the two upper illustrations serves to heighten the fantasy of the lower, for here we see our hero's immobile profile facing a coffee table that holds a speaker, a machine, and some narrow books. What population group would recognize a record player and a collection of 33 1/3 vinyl albums? And who among us would recognize the intertextual reference to the dog associated with the old RCA recordings? Similarly, the walls of the living room, an old Victorian mansion, are covered with pictures of adults making unusual grimaces, the mouth open, a hand raised. Are they shouting? angry? howling? about to strike someone? At what point does a reader recognize the tableau as amusing caricatures of opera singers?

The age of the dogs in the book is another clue to the age of the implied reader: there is not a puppy amongst them. The hero does not learn by trial and error in a child-like way but demonstrates action-movie problem-solving as he confronts and confounds a burglar. Adult culture is featured exclusively, from the kinds of clothing the dogs wear to the martini glass and the liquor bottle in the ice bucket in the final picture when the hero celebrates his stage success in solitary extravagance at a restaurant. Further, the independence the dog has with its master establishes the two as roommates, as adult peers, rather than any kind of subordinated adult/child relationship, much less that of master/beast.

Who the publishers envision as the implied reader is even more problematic, for the book they deliver has none of the elegance and lavishness of coffee table picture book productions. Instead, the publishers have combined features of both the paper and the cloth-bound book. We expect a dust jacket to wrap a paper-covered board to which the end papers have been glued; here the end papers are not glued to anything, and the jacket wraps a page no more substantial than the rest. The body of the book is sewn together in two chunks of sixteen pages each, but after only a few days of use, my copy was wobbly, the stitching beginning to pull apart. A book with such unstable binding cannot be intended for marketing to children.

Despite all this, I loved the book; but then I sing opera, and I'm an adult.

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