

teaches readers a gentle lesson.

*What's a Daring Detective Like Me Doing in the Doghouse?* begins with a Prime Minister's stolen underwear, an audacious prankster, lots of dogs, and a search to solve "crimes with dignity." This promising setup and snappy dialogue make us settle happily into the book, content that we're in the hands of a master storyteller. In her best mystery yet, Bailey writes a perfect blend of great characters, wonderful wit, and exciting plot. The two sleuths discover that the dog whom they have just dyed green and given a very bad haircut to, belongs to the President of the USA, and all police forces and FBI are searching for the criminal who stole him. Stevie and Jesse must uncover the prankster before they are accused of the crime themselves. Okay, so the mystery isn't that likely to happen, but we enjoy its twists and turns. The first two books reviewed here are so serious. This one has comedic scenes, such as Ms. Schultz's "staff meeting," Stevie's first night with the dog and her cat sleeping in her room, and Stevie's wry asides, that make the reader laugh out loud. This novel transcends the male/female character problems. The story is so good it doesn't matter whether the main characters are boy, girl, or kangaroo. And that's the way it should be.

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### Mindful Excess

**More Minds.** Carol Matas and Perry Nodelman. Scholastic, 1998. 188 pp. \$4.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-39469-X.

In *Of Two Minds* (1994), Carol Matas and Perry Nodelman introduced readers to Princess Lenora, who repeatedly violated orders that she not use her power to make real everything she imagined, and Prince Coren, who resisted constant appeals to use his ability to enter other people's minds. The plot had the pair opposing Hevak, a dictator who was, ironically, an imagined version of Lenora herself. *More Minds*, a sequel originally published in 1996, not only continues the story but also reverses the thematic emphasis that celebrated individuality over conformity. Lenora, who previously represented unfettered individualism, now learns that, because no one imposes order, chaos rules: a destructive giant mysteriously appears, events become unpredictable, and everyone, including Lenora, has lost special powers. Like the previous story, this fantasy has an ironic climax. Going into the past, Lenora discovers that she herself imposed the controlling laws that irk and restrain her in her own time. In an epilogue that obviously prepares for a third adventure, Lenora, who knows that many people are unhappy with her imposition of order, sets off to change the world again.

A fusion of Lewis Carroll and Diana Wynne Jones, *More Minds* is definitely inventive. For example, during Lenora's journey into the past, candy falls from the sky and everything continually changes form. Furthermore, typographical tricks show Lenora's scattered thoughts. The surrealism is, however, too frantically-paced for most of the bizarre events to be amusing or meaningful. The brilliant invention of a book that means whatever the reader wants it to mean is thus wasted. Other inventive touches are more thematically relevant. When Lenora imagines into reality both a double of herself who conforms to her parents' ideal of the obedient daughter and a double of Coren who behaves as the perfect suitor, she underlines the difference between social ideals and individualism. These vacuous stereotypes she creates demonstrate a trivial-minded conformity intended to enhance respect for the individualistic protagonists. Unfortunately, the adventures involving Lenora, Coren, and their mindlessly babbling doubles are satiric without being humorous. They are also too long, pushing aside the quest motif. Another similarly troubling element is Sayley, a girl who resembles Lenora in her refusal to curb her imagination. Sayley may suggest that Lenora is not unique in her rebelliousness, but she is mostly a distraction, and the scene in which she intimidates a vicious motorcycle gang is so strained in its attempt at comedy that it falls embarrassingly flat.

It fails as rollicking comedy, and its plot is unnecessarily convoluted, but *More Minds* contains some intellectual pleasures for those willing to ignore its excesses.

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### A Journey to Awareness

*The Clay Ladies.* Michael Bedard. Illus. Les Tait. Tundra, 1999. Unpag. \$19.99. ISBN 0-88776-385-5.

Michael Bedard calls them the Clay Ladies, but they are better known to history as The Girls. Frances Loring and Florence Wyle were two of the most prominent Canadian sculptors of the twentieth century, known as much for their eccentricities as for their vision and prolific output. In this charming story-within-a-story, a little girl learns some enduring lessons about life and art from these remarkable women and the magical, sculpture-filled world they created in an old church.

The book is about the process of realization and the awakening of understanding. We see the Clay Ladies through the child's eyes, and experience with her the dawning awareness of them. At first, they are simply the objects of rumours passed around the neighbourhood. Then, as her curiosity grows, she spies on them and they become disconnected body parts seen through a web of branches. Gradu-