

strains credibility. The overloaded plot includes four families—three present and one past—who have experienced a collapse due to the loss of a family member. Not only are these families all connected with the ranch, but all are well on their way to healing at the end of the novel. Nevertheless, the suspenseful development of each of these plots is riveting, and the novel as a whole has much appeal for both male and female young adults.

Linda Soutar is a graduate student in the M.A. English Program at the University of Guelph, Ontario.

NEW AUTHOR WORTH WATCHING

The Prism Moon. Martine Bates. Red Deer College Press, 1993. 165pp., \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-095-4.

The second novel by Martine Bates, *The Prism Moon*, is a sequel to her superb first novel, *The Dragon's Tapestry*. Although clearly showing the influence of writers such as Ursula Le Guin, David Eddings and Anne McCaffrey, *Tapestry* is a well-written and compelling first novel, showing many strengths of both composition and content. Characterization, particularly of the heroine Marwen, is excellent, and shows Marwen developing slowly and convincingly from an embittered loner into a heroine ready to risk her life for the lives of others. In *Moon*, Bates continues to develop the still incomplete character as Marwen makes more mistakes and learns and grows through them. Other characters from the first novel also develop, particularly the ugly Maug who chooses to become truly evil and the lovelorn Prince Camlach who becomes a hero in his own right. As explorations of the development and growth of a young person searching for and establishing her own identity, these novels cannot be topped. And as a female role model, Marwen is excellent with all her strength, courage, determination and compassion, but also her very human failings with which readers can identify.

The plot is also exciting in *Moon*. For the most part, the story is handled convincingly, and the action is rivetting. However, there are a few lapses in *Moon* that were not present or at least not so visible in *Tapestry*. Occasionally actions do not seem to follow logically from each other or connections between certain events are obscure, such as when Zephrelle, Marwen's winged steed, dies after laying a premature egg. No explanation for this unlikely death is ever given. Likewise, some of the secondary characters are not consistent. Bashag seems to change from a completely competent and certain worker of magic, to an easily ensorcelled pawn, to a despairing, weak woman who takes to her bed and waits to die. As no explanation for these changes is given, the character loses credibility. Also there are places where the dialogue is weak, so that it becomes either trite or difficult to follow.

Overall, however, the weaknesses of *The Prism Moon* do not negate its

obvious strengths in character, story, theme and setting, which is strongly drawn. Bates is already a good writer and if she keeps building on her multiple strengths, she should become an excellent one, joining the ranks of the few truly fine writers for young adults in Canada.

J.R. (Lynn) Wytenbroek is an English instructor at Malaspina College, Nanaimo, B.C., where she teaches children's literature. Her publications include articles on young adult science fiction and fantasy.

FOREGROUNDING NARRATIVE VOICE

Fish House Secrets. Kathy Stinson. Thistledown Press, 1992. 127 pp., \$16 paper. ISBN 0-920633-91-9.

Deft handling of thorny contemporary issues is one of Kathy Stinson's hallmarks. It comes as little surprise, then, that her first novel for young adults, *Fish House Secrets*, tells of troubled young lives. Fifteen-year-old Chad is one of the book's two first-person narrators: his mother was recently killed in a car accident. The other narrative voice is Jill's: a teenage runaway, she loathes her embezzler father, nurtures a fierce love for her brother (he is soon to be an unplanned parent), is confused by her long-suffering mother. The value of acceptance—of people who are, ultimately, flawed; of accidents that bring both disaster and unexpected joy—is reinforced throughout the novel, but that's as close as it comes to moralizing. The strength of *Fish House Secrets* is that, true to form, Stinson refuses to resolve her characters' problems in any pat or artificial way.

There are other reasons to recommend *Fish House Secrets*. Chad is a remarkably likeable fifteen-year-old, even with his thoroughly authentic teenage myopia. As narrator, Chad creates an impossibly idealized image of his dead mother. A talented painter from whom Chad inherited his own artistic gifts, she functions as his Muse, too. Such saintly characterization is initially cloying—until the realization sinks in that this is an entirely plausible trick of a young man's memory. In fact, that Chad is a more credible character than Jill is a nice rebuke to those who argue that women can write legitimately only about women. It's not that Jill isn't a strong personality, but she never quite commands her share of the reader's sympathy or attention. It is Chad's voice that resonates after the secrets of the Fish House have been told.

This is just one of the problems with the novel's unusual dual narrative structure. The book opens as Chad worries about how to recreate the past: "I don't know where to start. Should I tell you about Jill coming to the Fish House that first time?" (9). But when Jill's voice takes over the narrative a page later, hers is a blow-by-blow account of events as they unfold. The inconsistencies in perspective and timing are jarring, and the rest of the novel does little to clarify the initial confusion. It's an interesting experiment, using two characters to