

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.

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FOREGROUNDING NARRATIVE VOICE

Fish House Secrets. Kathy Stinson. Thistle-down 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.

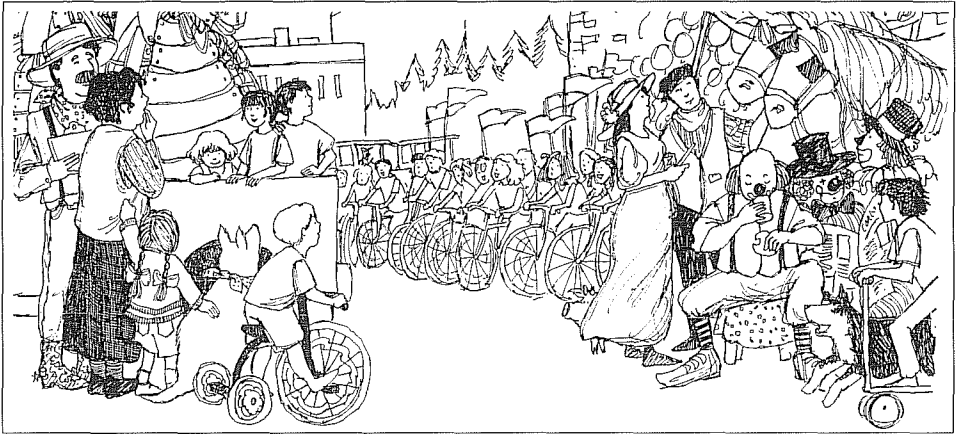
This is just one of the problems with the novel's unusual dual narrative structure. The book opens as Chad worries about how to recreate the past: "I don't know where to start. Should I tell you about Jill coming to the Fish House that first time?" (9). But when Jill's voice takes over the narrative 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

describe the experiences they share. But in a book as readable as this, it is disruptive to brake every few pages to switch narrative voices. The transitions could have been introduced more subtly than by headings of "Chad" and "Jill," and the spaces between paragraphs, explicable only as an attempt to bulk up this slim novel, exacerbate the choppiness. By foregrounding the technique she used to construct her narrative, Stinson prevents her audience from becoming wholly engrossed in Chad and Jill's fictional lives. Readers cannot fully indulge the greatest pleasure of enjoying realistic fiction: forgetting, if only for a while, that it's just a book.

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CAT LOVERS BE CHOOSY

The Case of the Marmalade Cat. James Heneghan. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1991. 86 pp., \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-73824-0. **A Cat of Artimus Pride.** Hazel Hutchins. Illus. Ruth Ohi. Annick Press Ltd., 1991. 96 pp., \$6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-199-1.



Illus. from *A Cat of Artimus Pride*

Both Scholastic's *The Case of the Marmalade Cat*, by James Heneghan, and Annick's *A Cat of Artimus Pride*, by Hazel Hutchins are mystery-adventure novels in the big print format.

In *The Case of the Marmalade Cat* the O'Brien Detective Agency, comprised of Bernice, Sadie and Brick must find Miss Parsnip's missing cat. A quiet woman, who lives alone in a large, frightening house, Miss Parsnip is a mystery; is she a real witch, or not? In *The Cat of Artimus Pride*, Cortez the cat enlists the