

help of Claire, Griff and Amy in finding the buried diary of his beloved first owner, Artimus Pride. The surprise is that Cortez is a 100-year-old talking cat.

Hutchins' intricate plot and quick-changing action demand more from the reader than *The Case of the Marmalade Cat*. Relationships between the characters are positively portrayed: in Griff, the "boy-next-door," Claire finds a creative and sensitive best friend who helps her build a prize-winning float for the Heritage Day parade. Claire and Griff both deal effectively with neighbourhood bullies and pretentious peers. Cortez is the most memorable character. His outspoken wit and charismatic personality charm readers and empower the main characters.

In *The Case of the Marmalade Cat*, however, the less-complex (and consequently, less interesting) story centres on finding a lost cat. Many of the characters' actions don't realistically represent those of children. For instance, the children willingly miss out on Halloween trick-or-treating just to search for a cat.

Relationships here are fraught with tension. Sadie, the wise-talking book-worm, responds to Bernice's authoritative leadership with often harsh sarcasm. These failed attempts at humour alienate readers. Brick is portrayed as a quiet boy who moves with cat-like stealth. His role in the novel is peripheral to that of Bernice and Sadie. One is left to wonder what draws the characters to each other, much less to the reader.

The Case of the Marmalade Cat will leave children with many unanswered questions about the plot and the characters. *A Cat of Artimus Pride*, on the other hand, ends with mysteries solved, reputations restored, and lessons learned. Also, an environmental theme is woven into the story. One is only left to wonder how Hutchins puts so much into such a short novel while avoiding oversimplification and overcrowding.

Kids who love cats as well as rich plots and fun, interesting characters will derive much more reading pleasure from *A Cat of Artimus Pride* than *The Case of the Marmalade Cat*.

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THE WRONG KIND OF ARTISTRY

Chinook Christmas. Rudy Wiebe. Illus. David More. Northern Lights-Red Deer College Press, 1992. 32 pp., \$14.95. ISBN 0-88995-086-5; **A Happy New Year's Day.** Roch Carrier. Illus. Gilles Pelletier. Tundra, 1991. Unpag., \$14.95. ISBN 0-88776-267-0.

At first glance, these two picture books look quite different from each other. But they have a surprising amount in common—and what they have in common represents some unfortunately common assumptions about quality in picture books.

Both books have texts by well-known writers—that is, writers well-known

for something other than the writing of picture book texts. In fact, neither has actually written a picture book text here, in the sense of working with the consciousness that the text will appear in a picture book format. Roch Carrier's text first appeared, without these pictures, as a reminiscence in the *Montreal Gazette*, and the copyright for Rudy Wiebe's text reveals that it preceded David More's pictures by more than a decade. Furthermore, both texts make it crystal clear that they were not intended to be illustrated—and not just because they're each about four or five times as long as your average picture book text.

Carrier's text offers a child's view of New Years Day, 1941. The child has no interest in how the world he takes for granted looks, and the text focuses completely on what he feels and understands. In this context, visual information of the sort that pictures can provide seems beside the point: it can only show us what the child takes for granted and finds uninteresting.

In *Chinook Christmas*, on the other hand, visual information is exactly the point. Wiebe's text is a sort of prairie version of Dylan Thomas's sensuously evocative *Child's Christmas in Wales*, and its main focus is lush imagery that captures how things sound and feel—and look. It's filled with images like this one: "we saw the rectangular windows of our house stunned golden every one with the vanished sun reflecting from the laden, burning bellies of the clouds." With words providing such rich visual information, actual visual images can seem nothing but superfluous.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the visual images actually provided in both these books seem to be exactly that: superfluous—and therefore, inevitably, counterproductive. Gilles Pelletier's charming folk-artish pictures are as evocative of naivety as Carrier's text—but it's a quite different kind of naivety, one which turns everything into bright, cheerful, thoroughly unexpressive surfaces. For all their charm when considered on their own, these pictures are totally at odds with the deeply expressive, somewhat mysterious tone of the text, and annoyingly intrusive in the context of the book.

While David More's energetic pictures convey more feeling, and a feeling more appropriate to the text, they too seem obtrusive—I suspect because they make so much out of the very few moments they depict out of an exceedingly long text in which those moments are really not important at all. The time it takes to look at these richly colourful pictures and realize how very little relevant information they convey about the events they depict seriously disrupts the otherwise carefully controlled rhythms of the text.

Furthermore, both Pelletier's and More's pictures imply some disdain for the narrative function of illustrations. Both convey information directly at odds with the text—buildings and people that look wrong and are found in the wrong locations. More turns "Mrs. Orleski's two stubby arms filled with spruce boughs" into a few twigs held in her hands, and in Pelletier's kitchen, furniture changes size, and pictures on the wall and objects in the cupboard mysteriously appear and disappear as we move from picture to picture. These visual artists are

clearly more interested in conveying a mood than in illustrating a story accurately. They are painters, not illustrators.

Both books, then, offer accomplished texts interesting in themselves, and accomplished pictures evocative by themselves. But since they are texts that need no illustration, and visual art that isn't all that interested in storytelling, the result of their combination is loose and sloppy—and, given the artistry of all four participants, surprisingly artless.

In other words: these are two bad picture books by four good artists. And they are bad exactly because of the participants' artistry.

And yet it is exactly such books that publishers are prone to produce when they strive for quality. What these books make clear, then, is this: the "art" of picture books is not the same as art in general. Good writers are not necessarily good picture book text writers, and good visual artists are not necessarily good picture book illustrators. The picture book is an art form with its own special demands. It requires special knowledge from writers, from illustrators—and perhaps most significantly, from publishers. Publishers above all need to learn to resist the understandable but wrongheaded temptation to fill their catalogues with bad but presumably saleable books by talented artists—artists whose names, while marketably well-known, are well-known for quite other kinds of work.

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SOMETIMES IT'S THE DIFFERENCE THAT COUNTS

Listen to Me, Grace Kelly. Sandy Frances Duncan. Kids Can Press, 1990. 261 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-012-1; **On My Own.** Mitzi Dale. Douglas & McIntyre, 1991. 158 pp., \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-145-2; **More than Money.** Sylvia McNicoll. Nelson Canada, 1990. 127 pp., paper. ISBN 0-17-603058-1.

A glance at some of the successful Young Adult novels of the past decade, such as Kevin Major's *Eating between the Lines*, Marilyn Halverson's *Cowboys Don't Cry* and William Bell's *Crabbe*, seems to suggest that often what sets one book apart from the rest is its degree of difference—some stylistic innovation perhaps and sense of authorial daring-do, some newly broken thematic ground, the introduction of an unfamiliar lifestyle, or simply a refreshingly new way of looking at a familiar situation.

Three recent Young Adult novels—Sandy Frances Duncan's *Listen to Me, Grace Kelly*, Mitzi Dale's *On My Own*, and Sylvia McNicoll's *More than Money*—seem to substantiate this view. Two of them contain that necessary