

strike one at first as a little ponderous—it is executed with such a light touch and with such obvious affection for the scenes and ideas portrayed that children will quickly become comfortable with creative thinking in general. With luck, they may also develop an interest in ideas that will outlast the mystifications of elementary school and carry them into their adult lives.

Very young toddlers will enjoy the Sandseed Collection: the simplicity and sparseness of the illustrations are just right for children who are learning the names of common objects. My young collaborator in this article had his first experience of making a direct connection between a thing and a representation of a thing while poring over the drawings of H el ene Desputeaux. We studied her apple; we bit into apples of our own; and when I asked “Where’s the apple?” he pointed at all three in rapid succession and laughed heartily. The same intensity of interest has not been evident, however, with the “Talk about” series, though the level of concentration required is similar. This leads me to conclude that the charm of drawings consists in their *difference* from the object represented; the charm of photographs, which consists in their *similarity* to tangible objects, appears to be lost on the young child. The element of surprise—vital in learning at this or any age—is lacking in a photograph. I may, on the other hand, be the prisoner of my own preconceptions here, and my son may be conveying in his subtle way that while apples are welcome and good, brothers and sisters are emphatically not. In any case, neither of these considerations is an issue where the “condensed classics” are concerned. Never having seen a symphony orchestra or a Galapagos turtle, he felt free to immerse himself in the self-contained worlds of these little books; I suspect that this is a pleasure that he will remember and repeat.

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#### POEMS TO CHUCKLE OVER

**A Dozen Million Spills and Other Disasters.** sean o huigan. Illus. John Fraser. Black Moss Press, 1993. 24 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-88753-967-X. **Primary Rhymery.** Sonja Dunn. Illus. Mark Thurman. Pembroke Publishers Ltd., 1993. 32 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55138-005-6.

Derivative seems a little ponderous, perhaps, for a couple of thin books of goofy poems for little kids, and maybe it is. There is always room for fun in poetry, and no reviewer wants to be told to lighten up. Still one wonders whether there will ever be an end of chicken pox poems or visits to the dentist poems, or skinned knee poems. Probably not.

Both books fall within the hilarity sub-genre. Nobody produces sillier hilarity than sean o huigan, already widely known for his *Scary Poems for Rotten Kids*. This author is very much at it again in *A Dozen Million Spills and Other*

*Disasters.* A diligent reading turns up some prize lines among the tall, narrow, unpunctuated, casual rhymes. Of a lawnmower caper:

“i can jump  
over that”  
i said  
and i did  
but  
my finger didn’t

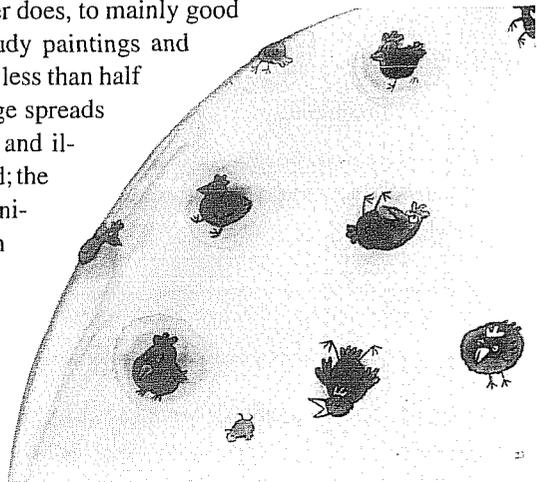
For the child caught short where a bathroom isn’t, o huigan wisely advises

i think  
everybody  
should carry  
a milk jug  
and wear a  
very long  
baggy coat  
just in case

“eyeball bouncers” is a sort of aerobics exercise for the eyes. “i dream,” a very long number about growing feathers, carries hyperbole about as far as it can be carried. The chicken pox poem, “unfeathered friends,” contains this reviewer’s most recent favourite passage:

the chicken pox  
had made  
their nest  
upon my skin  
and in my hair

Ordinarily, poetry seems to call for restraint in illustrations, but in the case of totally unrestrained absurdity an illustrator might as well pull out all the stops. This is what Fraser does, to mainly good effect. His bright, even gaudy paintings and cartoon figures extend from less than half a page in size to double-page spreads overprinted with text. Text and illustrations are nicely blended; the book holds together as a unified whole. The illustration accompanying this review must be imagined thus: red orange chickens centred in orangey yellow skin. These are the “unfeathered friends.” For the authen-



tic experience, buy the book.

Sonja Dunn's book is a more varied performance, which has both an up and a down side. The verse is less even, less consistent in style. Most of the poems are of the fairly hysterical madcap kind, for example, "What's my favourite colour?" which ends

Pink on the ceilings  
Pink on the roof  
Come to my house  
If you want proof.

This is a poem which is unlikely to live long in the Canadian imagination. One that might is about cheese, which begins

Cheddar  
Gouda  
Mozzarella  
    White cheese  
    Blue cheese  
    Even yella

This has the merits of strong rhythm, colour, taste, nonsense and wonderful diction, and it contains only twenty words in eleven lines. The Chinese food poem later in the book just doesn't have the zing of the cheese one.

The book is an odd mix. There are a couple of Hallowe'en poems, but the book itself is not a holiday book or even a seasons book. These two poems just show up and occupy four pages. Possibly the best poem in the book, one which begins

listen listen  
listen to the rain

is a quiet, sound poem, quite lovely and is situated attractively on the right hand sixth of a harmonious double page illustration in quiet pastel. The poem and its illustration are very fine, but quite out of sync with almost everything else in the book, both printed and painted. Dunn, too, has a chicken pox poem, funny and mercifully short:

Chicken pox  
Chicken pox  
Hate them worse than  
Dirty socks.

Both books are at their best read aloud (but, of course, most poetry is). Both books are visually busy, and will give children much pleasure in that way. The zany o huigan/Fraser book has a unity the Dunn/Thurman book lacks, but the latter is far from lacking in attraction.

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