

# Something for Everyone?

JANET BAKER

*All Kinds of Everything*, ed. Louis Dudek. Clarke Irwin, 1973. 150 pp. \$3.50 cloth.

This is disconcerting book to read, and to review. It immediately presents the reader with several questions: outstanding, perhaps, is the question of what audience it is meant for. As the title suggests (and as the flyleaf states) "In *All Kinds of Everything*, there is something for everyone." It seems to me that by the very breadth of its contents the book succeeds in pleasing no one in particular.

*All Kinds of Everything* is divided into ten sections (e.g. "Word Games", "Everyday", "Thoughts", "Poems by Native Peoples") each consisting of about a dozen thematically-related poems. To my mind, the section "Poems by Young People" is the most successful in terms of its freshness and its catchiness and its lack of pretension. As Dudek says in introducing the section, "according to many poets, poetry is fun and games. For this reason young people know more about poetry than almost anybody else (although they may not consciously know it), and can write some of the best poetry in the world." The selections which follow illustrate this notion rather well.

I found other sections of the book less cogent. The section "Light and Shadow", for instance, consists of humorous verse: in his introduction to the section, Dudek notes that "a great deal of light verse has been written, probably because poets have always believed that the purpose of poetry is to amuse as well as to teach something useful. Much of the best poetry, in fact, has been cast in the form of light and humorous verse." The selections which follow hardly bear out this assertion. Instead, the choice of verse illustrates one of the main problems of the book, that of deciding who the readers of the book are meant to be. In attempting to combine amusement with teaching, Dudek often becomes pedantic. For example, in introducing this section he offers as an example of humour a student's definition of "Cereburius" as "the three-headed dog that guarded the river Stynx." Dudek goes on to explain: "(He meant to write, 'Cerebrus: the three-headed dog that guarded the river Styx', the river that runs through Hell in classical mythology.)" Here one feels that he is heavy-handed in his explanation, that any possible humour in the passage was long since beaten to death, and that he is *talking down* to an audience he does not have clearly in mind. The humour section has many similar irritations about it: some of the wit seems simply over the heads of any but college English majors. Coleridge's parody of "The

House that Jack Built" is one such example of esoteric fun. A far better choice, if one's aim were to include Coleridge in a playful mood, both amusing *and* teaching, would have been his "Metrical Feet" written specifically for children. Moreover, the "humour" section of *All Kinds of Everything* leads this reader to have serious reservations about the editor's musical ear. To set down "This is the House that Jack Built" with "(And so on, adding a line at a time, until you get the following:)" mid-way through the verse seems to me to destroy the whole point of the thing which surely rests on the delightful inanity of repetition for its own sake. Dudek's pedantic interjection jars enough to make one wonder why on earth he has included the rhyme in the first place. A similarly obtrusive editing makes the "Hiawatha" fragment unsatisfactory. And for Dudek to have set down only six lines of Kilmer's "Trees" seems absurd: the point of the parody is quite eclipsed by what amounts to a very clumsy job of editing.

Another aspect of the book that is somewhat puzzling is the basis of selection. One wonders how much of the material is included simply because it adds "Canadian content" and how much because it is Dudek's own, a question that arose with his earlier anthology, *Poetry of Our Time*. There seem to me to be some very odd choices in this book. One obvious example would be the inclusion of "Winter", from *Love's Labour's Lost*, without its companion piece and foil, "Spring".

The selections in any anthology are open to controversy and criticism and so the foregoing is obviously a personal view of the book. The most conspicuous flaw in the book, however, and one for which the editor is perhaps not responsible, is its format. A small book (8" x 5½"), *All Kinds of Everything* is ill-adapted to some of the poems it contains. Many poems in the "Song" section, for instance, are very crowded in an effort to get both notes and words on the page. The book's illustrations are a combination of black and white drawings, woodcuts and photographs. The latter often give the book the appearance of a sociology or a home economics textbook, with portions of the text showing to very poor advantage, some of them placed in a cluttered corner and therefore barely discernible. A few of the illustrations are good: the Bewick-like woodcut which accompanies a poem by John Clare is aptly chosen and well spaced on the page. However, the overall effect of the book is kaleidoscopic -- a cramped, randomly chosen set of pictures and poems jammed artlessly into too small a space. In some cases, the illustrations are downright bad. For instance, the inclusion of a comic strip of the Katzenjammer Kids, to accompany Reaney's poem, is a good idea. To have put the comic in colour so as to illustrate the "pink specks" of the poem would have made all the difference to the effect of including it.

My total impression of the book is that in attempting to please everyone Dudek has overreached himself and weakened the book. The agitation experienced by the eye almost everywhere in the book -- perhaps nowhere so much as in the long poem section where the cramped feeling amounts almost claustrophobia -- seems to me to carry over into the contents where, despite Dudek's introduction to each section, the poems often seem quite tangential to the theme around

which he claims they centre. It is very difficult to determine, finally, whether *All Kinds of Everything* would appeal to ten-year-olds, teen-agers or -- and as I suspect -- rather sophisticated adults. Altogether, it is an exasperating book.

*Janet Baker lectures in the English Department at St. Mary's University, Halifax, and has published reviews in the Dalhousie Review.*

## Légendes du Terroir, Légendes de la Mer

ELIZABETH WOODGER

*Le Sorcier D'Anticosti et autres légendes canadiennes*, Robert Choquette. Fides, Montréal, 1975. 123 pp. \$4.95 broché.

*Les Saisons de la mer*, Monique Corriveau. Fides, Montréal, 1975. 154 pp. \$4.95, broché.

La Maison d'éditions Fides vient de publier, à l'intention des jeunes dans la Collection du Goéland, deux livres qui ne manqueront pas d'éveiller l'intérêt des élèves canadiens et de tous ceux qui s'intéressent à la diversité de la culture canadienne. Tandis que *Le Sorcier d'Anticosti et autres légendes canadiennes* donne un aperçu du folklore québécois, *Les Saisons de la mer* présente un tableau intéressant sur la manière de vivre à Terre-Neuve au commencement du vingtième siècle.

Dans le recueil de M. Choquette se trouvent seize légendes du Québec qu'il avait lui-même présentées il y a quelques années, lors d'une série d'émissions dialoguées intitulées *Les Légendes du Saint-Laurent*. Ses premières connaissances du folklore, il les doit à Marius Barbeau et à Louvigny de Montigny, mais ses sources comprennent aussi Phillippe Aubert de Gaspé, Louis Fréchette et Honoré Beaugrand. Bref, il s'agit d'une adaptation de la tradition orale et littéraire à l'intention des jeunes; adaptation pareille à celle de Claude Aubry dans *Le Violon magique et autres légendes du Canada français*. Ces auteurs traitent, d'ailleurs parfois des mêmes sujets - Rose Latulippe, le rocher de Percé, la chasse-galerie. Peu importe, les deux livres captent l'intérêt du jeune lecteur. Robert Choquette élargit notre connaissance en matière de légendes, sorciers, fantômes, loup-garous, et conflits entre les prêtres et le diable. Le ton du narrateur n'est pas trop sérieux. Il nous propose de faire semblant de croire aux légendes pour y prendre plaisir. Le mélange de coutumes, de superstitions, et de foi religieuse crée un ouvrage qui respire la poésie, la gâité et l'humour.