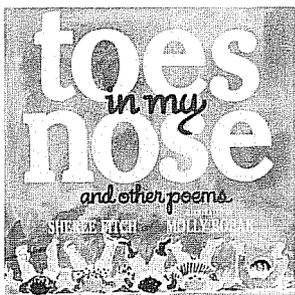


POEMS, AND A PROSE/POETRY MIX

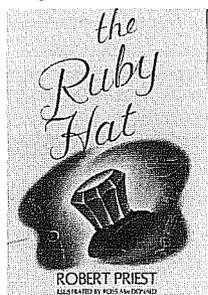


Toes in my nose, Sheree Fitch. Illus. Molly Bobak. Doubleday, 1987. Unpaginated. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-385-251084; **The ruby hat**, Robert Priest. Illus. Ross MacDonald. Aya Press, 1987. 45 pp. \$6.00 paper. ISBN 0-920544-47-9; **Hey world, here I am!** Jean Little. Illus. Barbara Di Lella. Kids Can Press, 1986. 64 pp. \$12.95, \$6.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0921103-14-X, 0-919964-71-0.

Maybe *Alligator pie* hangs like a spectre over the heads of Canadians who dare to write poetry for children. Dennis Lee's language, rhythm and feeling for the child's world are unbeatable. But when new children's poets write rhyming nonsense verse it's hard to resist comparisons.

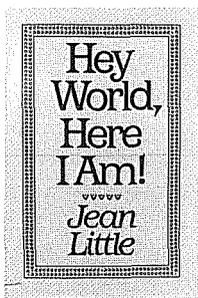
Sheree Fitch is better known as a performer than a poet, and *Toes in my nose* promises to generate some unforgettable author visits. The KA-BOOMs and AHHCHOOs, and a few references to "piddle" and "bum" are prime performance material. At the same time, a few lines ring with the kind of language which makes Dennis Lee so irresistible, especially in Fitch's: "The orangutan", "I banged and twanged my banjo. . . And we diddledanged all day long." These poems would be stronger for more of this kind of word-play. Then, too, some of them build up and then drop to a disappointing end, either by repeating the first stanza or dwindling away like "My kangaroo": "I love my kangaroo, and/She loves me, too./I love my kangaroo/I do. . ./I do. . ./I do. . ."

The book is appealing in design, with brightly coloured pictures in a child-like style, and a bold red cover with delicious yellow end papers. The package promises entertainment, and although the poems don't dance and sing on the page, a dramatic performance — maybe one by Fitch herself — might bring out their potential.



Robert Priest is better known for his adult poetry than for his children's poems. *The ruby hat* is peopled with bizarre creatures: lunatic meatballs, puzzle-piece kids, icicle bicycles, and more. Like Lee's "Nicholas Knock," many of Priest's poems carry moving social messages, but comic illustrations, the air of gleeful craziness and the bouncing metre occasionally detract from the power of his vision, leaving the reader as confused as the poor Heez, which "waits so it can jump itself/then laughs and breaks in tears."

However, there is much to be admired here. "Inside the biggest businessman/a baby waits to nurse," and the souls of caterpillar kids have wings, though "their bodies don't know it yet. . .and [they] wait/for that changing kind/of/sleep." Boys and girls a little older than the *Toes in my nose* crowd will enjoy this book, and find the poems to be rich and original.



Jean Little calls *Hey world, here I am!* a collaboration between herself and Kate Bloomfield, a character who appeared first in Little's *Look through my window* and who starred later in *Kate*. This collection rings with her youthful voice and, like Kate, it is a mixture of prose and poetry. Little's appreciation for those moments which are special to young people is as evident here as it is in her novels — Kate steals a moment alone to hold a newborn baby, quarrels with her mother and suffers through reconciliation, and picnics with her best friend on the first day of spring.

These experiences are filtered through Kate's own language, which is direct, sincere and readable, if not particularly musical. Her diction and her experiences are limited by her age, and many of her insights are small in scale: "Emily likes to write of snow/And dawn and candle-light aglow,/ But I'd rather write about me and Emily and stuff like that."

Some of these poems appeared first in the "Kate" novels. In fact, some of them originated as pages of prose in those novels. Others are new prose passages about Kate and her friend Emily, and these are like tantalizing glimpses into a new "Kate"-novel hidden just beyond the pages of this book. In the most moving of them, Kate visits 90-year-old Mrs. Thurstone, who is dying in the hospital: "I didn't want to move. I felt somehow part of her. I even breathed in time with her breathing. . . ." Mrs. Thurstone observes that "life still has good moments, such as when a young thing like you comes to see me, smelling of fresh air and the whole living world out there." It may not be necessary to deal with the grand themes of life and death in every poem, but more scenes like this could have given the collection more depth and power.

The readability of *Hey world, here I am!* is likely to draw and hold young readers. They will recognize elements of their own world here, and if Kate and Jean have not achieved piercing insight and gorgeous style, they have certainly approached those matters close to a young person's heart with directness and honesty.

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