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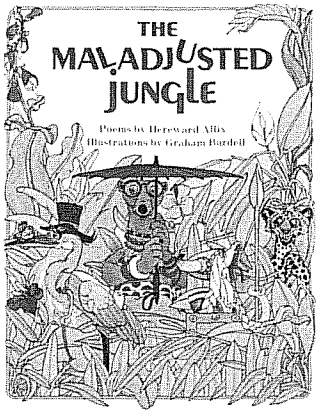
TWO WAYS OF SEEING

The maladjusted jungle. Poems by Hereward Allix. Illus. Graham Bardell. Oxford University Press, 1991. $14.95, cloth. ISBN 0-540781-4; **Voices on the wind: poems for all seasons**. Selected by David Booth. Illus. Michèle Lemieux. Kids Can Press, 1990. 41 pp., $14.95, cloth. ISBN 0-921103-79-4.



Both of these poetry collections have glossy, brightly-coloured, laminated-board covers. But here any similarity ends. Amidst the congestion of leaves and flowery vines on the covers of *The maladjusted jungle* some of the caricatured denizens of the place pop out or peer forth; there's Lily, the leopard cub, unhappy with her spots; Katie, the kingfisher, who prefers worms to fish, along with the "psychologist of note," Dr. Heron, who succeeds in altering her diet; and Suzie, the lisping snake, who achieved acclaim as an opera star (a Wagnerian soprano no less!). The colours are loud and bold, with puce, gamboge and terra cotta orange standing out against the leafy backdrop. Every branch, stem, tendril, limb, eyeball and ornamental prop, however, is highlighted in black line – confirming the suspicion that what follows is a cartoon jungle with exaggerated malaises. *Voices on the wind*, by contrast, is wrapped in a gently shaded sky blue, with the effect of watercolour wash in the bending red, yellow and blue flowers. Nothing garish or overblown obtrudes. As a matter of fact, the viewer must look closely to discern the insect, jauntily perched on a red flower, and doffing a straw boater with one limb while clutching a violin case with another. This miniature muse figure, prompting us to look and listen attentively, is a subtly telling indication of the textual and visual riches that await. If, as Perry Nodelman claims, in *Words about pictures; The narrative art of children's picture books* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1988), "reading is itself an act of vision" and if a picture "can organize space in ways that suggest some of the sequential ordering of time and provide some of its focus" (199), then these poetry books require two different ways of seeing.

Hereward Allix's thirteen ditties may have pleased his own children over a period of thirty years, but their fixed form (unrelenting eight-line iambic tetrameter stanzas of alternate rhyme) and stagey frustrations make them all bizarrely predictable. Although Graham Bardell's lavishly coloured page- and page-and-a-half-illustrations demonstrate a cartoonist's flair, they do little more than show what the words tell. The rhyme scheme, jog-trot at best, is often squeezed to fit. When Peggy the polar bear arrives at her Caribbean island, we're told, she

> Bought a polka-dot bikini
> changed, and headed for the shore,
> Where long, lazy afternoons
> of sun and swimming lay in store.

Like a travel agent's poster, the picture dutifully presents a pudgy, smooth-skinned Peggy spilling out of a beach chair with suntan lotion and a lemon yellow drink within reach. Perhaps the illustrations are so aggressively omnipresent to lend some weight to the decidedly ordinary versifying. Cecil, the terpsichorean centipede, having slipped when showing off with the sword dance, "stumbles clumsily around/on fifty wooden legs!" Bardell's first illustration of the centipede, theatrically rigged out in full ceremonial dress, as metres of Stewart tartan billow over two pages and an endless succession of white booted feet move from right to left, contrasts grimly with the next portrait of hobbling, beslippered Cecil looking in dejection at the trail of toothpicks down one side of his body. Allix's poems all strive to explain or alleviate so-called maladjustment by delivering placebos (as in Lily's advice to her own child: "'don't try to change your spots!'"). Eccentricity is thus palliated and straightened out. Such a curiously tame jungle would not know what to do with the Akond of Swat, the Yongy-Bonghy-Bo, James Morrison, or Nicholas Knock.

Michèle Lemieux's art comments creatively on the poems David Booth has selected for *Voices on the wind*. An eclectic collection displaying a range of seasons, temperaments and stanzaic forms, and including poets as diverse as William Blake and Beatrix Potter, Chief Dan George and Mark Van Doren, John Ciardi and Naomi Lewis, this engaging book successfully ushers the reader into the world of text and illustration. Whether the text appears as a white block in the midst of an earthy network of tuberous, tap and fibrous roots, as for Rhoda Bacmeister's "Under the ground," or whether the illustration sits like a semicircular transom above the door of the poem, as for Marci Ridlon's "That was summer," the reader is encouraged to look closely. The text of Christina Rossetti's "Who has seen the wind?" is perched in the sky. From this aerial view we examine the group clustered close to the lighthouse, follow the course of the sailboat and its passengers, notice the boy and girl playing catch, and, perspective waning, wonder about the solitary goat tethered on a small island. Not only does Lemieux's miniaturist world invite and repay close at-

tention, but her spotlighting of child characters, however tiny they may be, also draws us into each poem's world. A junebug in Else Holmelund Minarik's "Little Seeds" speaking to a little girl who appears to be the same size as the insect, exemplifies the poetic world of small this volume presents. Without exaggeration, intrusiveness, or meretricious cuteness, the illustrator helps the poems to speak.

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SHADES OF THE PRODIGAL PERSON

Caitlin. Catherine Dunphy. James Lorimer, 1990. 159 pp., $4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55028-253-0, 1-55028-255-7; **Wheels.** Susin Nielsen. James Lorimer, 1990. 183 pp., $4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55028-362-6, 1-55028-360-X.

As the notes at the front of these two books indicate, they are based on a Canadian television series, and the authors have used the original television scripts as the foundation for their novels. Since I have never seen the television series, Degrassi Junior High/Degrassi High, I have no way of comparing how successful each medium is at fashioning its material. However, James Lorimer and Company seems to be on to a good thing with the Naf Naf and skateboard set since the two books under review are numbers 16 and 17 in the Degrassi Series with the promise of more to come. In short, the novels seem to be selling at least as well as the T.V. series appears to have, if my sources for the popularity of the latter are correct.

Catherine Dunphy's *Caitlin* tells the tale of a fourteen-year-old girl who is passionately drawn to all of the pressing issues that threaten the quality and length of our lives as well as that of the planet on which we live, but, as it turns out, often leaps before she looks. When we first see her she wants the first page of the school newspaper, which she edits, to carry a story on chemicals in the water supply rather than the frivolous alternatives suggested by other members of the editorial staff and even by the faculty adviser, Mr. Raditch.

Her gradual isolation from uncommitted friends and preoccupied family – her closest friend moves to Markham and her family is otherwise engaged – leaves Caitlin on her own with her social conscience. One day, however, she meets Robert, a video store salesman, who, like her, is committed to pressing social issues. He lends her a copy of the film "If you love this planet" and begins to talk to her about the dangers of nuclear energy.

Inevitably, Caitlin becomes seduced by Robert's maturity, sensitivity, and