

With the rhythm and the strange logic of nursery rhymes, and the same authenticity, Skelton has written a collection that will delight the youngest children, because it speaks to the realities of their experience, and bathes those small realities in magic.

In a similar vein is Sheree Fitch's *I Am Small*, also a collection of lyrics for small children. Now Fitch has some gifts as a poet, but this collection is very uneven. Like Skelton's book, it purports to speak from within the child's mind, but it generally lacks his rare insight and haunting charm. A few of these poems have spark: "When my grandpa visits his voice/ Is like thistles and his laugh/ Is a boom and a cough and a whisper." Too often, however, these verses are blank meandering musings, unenlivened by image or metre or anything resembling Skelton's startling individuality. Kim LaFave's illustrations, moreover, strike me as too soft and whimsical and cute, without the tough humour he has shown elsewhere. They are almost patronizing.

In poetry everything is magnified. If we are lucky, it enlarges the world for us, makes it loom up big and bright and strange again. In children's poetry particularly, working as it does on a smaller, though no less resonant scale, every detail is important. A poem of ten words cannot afford to waste three of them. It is not easy, and here as elsewhere good poets perhaps don't come along too often. Bogart and Skelton are good. Two out of seven ain't bad.

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HAVE IT BOTH WAYS: STORIES ORAL AND LITERATE

Next Teller. Dan Yashinsky, ed. Illus. Sooji Schlanger. Ragweed Press, 1994. 246 pages, \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-46-2.

Next Teller is a collection of 31 stories by Canadian storytellers. A contradiction, surely. It reminds me of the similar experience of people in the early 1800s when they first read the Grimms' publication of *Kinder-und Haus-Marchen*. *Marchen*—earthy, bawdy stories—ignored by the *upstairs* folk (but surely remembered from childhood), were part of the basement kitchen-culture of servants and children. Now read in drawing and dining rooms! In public view! Such elevation must have been disconcerting as well as pleasing—a little like children hearing their latest antics appropriated as good stories for guests. Ironically, the publication of the tales hastened their decline.

So why *print* oral stories? How can text substitute for body and voice with its innuendo, raised eyebrows, pitch and tone? Can you have it both ways—stories which are both oral and literate?

Next Teller doesn't entertain these questions. Instead, it plunges into stories about Curious Children, Tricksters, Lovers and Hauntings. The chapter headings are forwarded with a *Voiceover*—a short editorial note by Dan Yashinsky.

Each tale is prefaced with the teller/author's anecdote about the tale's origin, or about finding and learning the tale. The chatty entries exude a love for the craft.

As do the stories. Ojibway, Chinese, Jamaican, Gaelic, Spanish, Franco-Ontarien, Cree and a variety of other cultures and traditions are represented here. *Va Attacher la Vache* by Justin Lewis made me laugh out loud, made me want to tell—ah ha. Yes, this is the power of a good story—the desire (*the need*) to pass it on. Surpassing the definitions of orality and literacy, sharing is the underlying power of story. These stories will continue to catch the ear, be refashioned and retold, despite their codification.

Those in *Next Teller* range from formulaic, repetitious, incremental folktales, to sophisticated and highly literate stories such as Yashinsky's *The Devil's Noodles*. He details a particular time and place, rather than use the universal imagery of folktale. "The sidewalks were packed, a priest led a choir, a marching band played "I'll do it my way," a Cadillac full of soccer players drove by, everyone shouted *Viva Italia!*" Good luck to aspiring storytellers! Schlanger's cover illustration is lively but the colours are pale, and I'm unsure what the airborne candies contribute. Will the quality of binding and paper withstand the countless thumbings these stories warrant?

Art and its processes has the capacity to build community in ways that most politicians and business-folk can't comprehend. It's good to enter different Canadian communities via these stories, to laugh with the people and situations of these stories told "in small villages, on northern traplines, in downtown coffee houses, in seacoast outports and onstage at storytelling festivals."

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TEENAGE SOUL SEARCHING—A TIRED PLOT

Ellen/Eléna/Luna. Paul Kropp. Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1992. 186 pp., \$15.95 paper. ISBN 0-02-954137-9.

Paul Kropp's *Ellen/Eléna/Luna* targets eleven-to-fifteen-year-old readers and introduces them to the two alternate identities that Ellen Bertrand, the sixteen-year-old protagonist, has invented to supplement her purportedly boring everyday life. That her life is boring, however, is quickly revealed to be a self-induced verdict—not an uncommon phenomenon in teenagers. It is, furthermore, not uncommon for teenagers to temporarily reinvent who they are or, rather, who they think they would like to be. With the help of her best friend Janey, who is editor-in-chief of a city-wide student newspaper, Ellen places an ad in the