

and the obvious underplaying of sex in the plot, there is little to distinguish this book from adult pulp fiction. And that should be a concern. Yes, teens read adult pulp fiction. But I believe that those who write for teens specifically have a responsibility to offer an alternative to what is already out there for the asking. Kids get plenty of guns, knives, crime, and male-dominated power plots. They also know all the moves that Opiel relies on: last minute reprieves; betrayals by brothers and friends; villains who come back to life; and a favourite, the ultimate bad guy who is not really human so okay to hate: "... bundles of thin transparent tubing twined around the creature's arms and legs, chest and neck, pricking into the flesh. A clear liquid oozed through the tubes, circulating and recirculating, and he knew there was not an ounce of blood in this thing's body — only dead water" (127). We've seen it in Schwarzenegger movies. We've read it in Stephen King. It's effective, but it's not new.

And there's the dilemma in this book. The writing is strong, the plotting, although predictable, is effective. But in the end, Opiel takes real issues and trivializes them with commercial packaging. The complexities of brotherly love, searches for personal perfection, the need to be needed — these are all central to the characters and the motives that carry the plot forward. But they become secondary to the surface action of the story.

When Paul, the boy from suburbia who finds himself adrift on the darker side in Watertown, surprises himself and his new friend, Monica, by expertly setting fire to a boat, she asks him "How d'you know stuff like this?" He answers: "TV" (107). If *Dead Water Zone* has a familiar feel, a comfortable fit that invites a reader to ride along without thinking about the underlying issues, we know why.

Bonnie Ryan-Fisher is a former highschool English teacher who now works as an adult educator and freelance writer and editor.

There Was an Old Man: A Collection of Limericks. Edward Lear. Illus. Michèle Lemieux. Kids Can Press, 1994. Unpag., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-213-2.

To many readers Edward Lear is hardly more than a minor erratum in the continental drift of literature, an oddity that rolled out of the way as the mass moved by. He left us "The Owl and the Pussycat," which everyone knows vaguely, and a lot of strange limericks with very odd drawings. The fact is that this lonely man, a fine landscape and botanical artist, left a legacy of language that shows no sign of disappearing. Nonsense scarcely existed in literature before Lear, and it has been a major ingredient in writing for children ever since.

One worries at the prospect of a new interpretation of Lear. Odd as his drawings are, they are oddly correct for what he wrote. Michèle Lemieux, a fine Canadian artist, has taken Lear on in her *There Was an Old Man: A Collection of Limericks*. He has risen with distinction to the occasion. Her style, of course, employs techniques which Lear could not have accessed in mid-Victorian England — colour, for instance, which would have been considered altogether

too costly for his simple cartoons. Lemieux has managed to keep the spirit of Lear's eccentric art, but she has brought it into the modern day — gently. For instance, in "There Was an Old Man of Boulak," the ancient Egyptian temple includes among its hieroglyphics and cartouches a little dog listening attentively to "his Master's Voice" coming from the trumpet of a gramophone. Also one notes a mouseketeer's cap amongst the coats and hats eaten by rats while the "futile old gentleman dozed." There are a few subtle reminders of Victorian colour techniques, too. In some bird pictures, and a depiction of two Victorian ladies tossed from a sinking ship Lemieux slyly incorporates some old colour engravings.

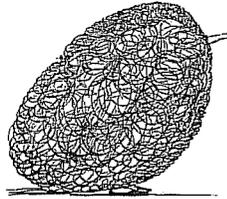
A futile old gentleman reminds us of the wonderful linguistic nonsense Lear introduced. He coined words, and he used odd words in unexpected places. He chased syntax into odd corners:

There was an Old Man of Leghorn,
The smallest as ever was born;
But quickly snapt up he, was once by a puppy,
Who devoured that Old Man of Leghorn.

Lear freed language for the utterance of nonsense. Nonsense is not chaotic, however wild it may appear. The trick, which Lear gave the world, is to make nonsense *seem* reasonable. Michèle Lemieux happily understands this, and she provides as sensitive an updating of Lear as we could hope to see. The blend between the absurd texts of Lear and the equally absurd visuals of Lemieux is about right.

There was an Old Person of Brigg
Who purchased no end of a wig;
So that only his nose, and the end of his toes,
Could be seen when he walked about Brigg

Illustrated by Edward Lear



Illustrated by Michèle Lemieux



Mother Goose: A Canadian Sampler. Forward by Celia Barker Lottridge. Groundwood Books, 1994. 64 pp., \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-213-0.

The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program was established in 1986 to provide support to parents by introducing them to the abundance of literacy and play to be found in Mother Goose rhymes. This worthy project's director is Celia Barker Lottridge, who provides the foreword to this fine book.

The book contains twenty-eight Mother Goose rhymes. Each one is illustrated by a different Canadian artist. Each artist has donated the work to the project. As a sampler, the book obviously lacks something in the unity department. This is not to claim total disunity, for the Mother Goose contents provide a tough bond. Canadian children who get to experience lots of Canadian picture books (how many such fortunate children are there, one wonders?) will recognize many of their favourites here: such strong and distinctive styles!

The nursery rhymes tend to be the most well known: "Jack Be Nimble," "Sing a Song of Sixpence," though some, "Hoddley, Poddley, Puddle and Fogs," "Fishes Swim in Water Clear," are not well known. The artists (and one would so like to name them all) are all published Canadians working in styles unique and in media of many sorts. Each has produced a fresh way of looking at a timeless rhyme. To name a favourite would be like picking a favourite child. It just wouldn't do.

Allan Sheldon *teaches English and Children's Literature at Medicine Hat College in Alberta.*

Kaarina and the Sugar Bag Vest. Irma McDonough Milnes. Illus. Sami Suomalainen. Annick Press, 1994. 80 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-356-0.

This is one in a series of easy-to-read, paperback books. The chapters are short — one or two pages long — the vocabulary age appropriate, and the interest level high. This is a non-threatening chapter book for the young reader, with big, bold print; most chapters are accompanied by a black-and-white pencil sketch. Milnes includes a glossary of unfamiliar words at the end of the book, an excellent way for a child to build vocabulary which eliminates the stress of trying to find unknown words in a dictionary.

Kaarina depicts the life of a Finnish family, living in a small North American town during the Great Depression. It covers some special Finnish traditions — like going to the sauna with the family — but also shows a side of life people during the depression took for granted — hoboos, looking for work and asking for food. *Kaarina* shows how childish innocence and the love and support of family and community helped in those troubled times.

Patricia Feltham *is an elementary school teacher working for the Norfolk Board of Education. She has also been Children's Librarian at the Waterford Public Library.*