Poems please: Sharing poetry with children. David Booth and Bill Moore. Pembroke Publishers, 1988. 271 pp., $18.95 paper. ISBN 0-921217-22-6; **Jumbo gumbo: Songs, poems and stories for children**. Wenda McArthur and Geoffrey Ursell, eds. Illus. Bill Johnson. Coteau Books, 1989. 136 pp., paper, cerlox. ISBN 919926-98-3, 0-91992699-1; **Worm sandwich: Nonsense verses for kids**. Linda Rogers. Illus. Diana Durrand. Sono Nis Press, 1989. Unpag., $9.95 paper. ISBN 1-55039-010-4; **Who greased the shoelaces?**. Lois Simmie. Illus. Anne Simmie. Stoddart, 1989. 72 pp., $14.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 7737-2365-X, 7737-5311-7; **Milford and me**. Patrick Lane. Illus. Bonnie Mclean. Coteau Books, 1989. Unpag., $13.95, $7.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-919926-96-7, 0-919926-97-5; **The park in the dark**. Ann Johnstone. Illus. Ilene Crossan. Family Life Publications, 1989. Unpag., paper. ISBN 0-921761-00-7; **Heads or tails**. J.O. Pennanen. Penumbra Press, 1989. 24 pp., $7.95 paper. ISBN 0-921254-11-3; **Sleeping dragons all around**. Sheree Fitch. Illus. Michele Nidenoff. Doubleday Canada, 1989. Unpag., cloth. ISBN 0-385-25163-3.

In *Poems please: Sharing poetry with children* David Booth and Bill Moore state that children's poetry has "come of age" because it is "complex, child oriented, and philosophically attuned to both developmental stages of the child and of the society in which the child lives" (52). They believe contemporary poets explore a wide spectrum of experience reflecting the divergent aspects of children's lives and that this is accompanied by a wide range of technique. These remarks, although not directed specifically at Canadian children's poetry, can be applied in varying degrees to the collections considered here.

Poems please is a thorough teacher's guide, Booth and Moore having impressive records as teachers and writers of poetry. Their practical experience is especially apparent in the three central chapters "How do poems work?," "When children read and listen to poems," and "When children write poems." To them, poems are not artifacts to be revered or puzzles to be deciphered, but are dynamic forms to play with. In the "Cloze method," for instance, they recommend that the teacher omit rhyme words and key words from a poem, to allow the children to guess what they are. The guide is complemented by extensive annotated bibliographies of current poetry books, organized by type, and a full index. There are unfortunately no footnotes within the text, nor is this omission completely caught in the reference list.

Jumbo gumbo: Songs, poems and stories for children, the second anthology edited by Wenda McArthur and Geoffrey Ursell, is intended for a six to twelve age range. Appropriate to the title image, the stories, poems and songs are an appealing cross-cultural mix from across Canada (the emphasis is on the west),

ranging from nonsense poems to legend, to fairy tale to realism. There is a table of contents but no index.

Certain poets stand out: Sheldon Oberman by virtue of his diversity, Lois Simmie, Richard Stevenson and Edna Alford. Stevenson's "Roundel: Bigfoot is coming" is complex in form and in diction. Yet it reads as a wild tongue-twister dominated by the verve of the metre and the humorously revolting imagery describing the monster:

> Slip-slop-slogging from the burping boggy bayou;
> Eyes like cornered rats, moiling and scrumming,
> Scrabbling over dirty bird nest, dripping like glue. . . .(10)

At the other extreme is the delicate, deceptively simple work of Edna Alford. In "Watching biscuits rise," written in free verse, a family routine becomes a symbol of mutual love:

> reflected in the oven glass
> I can see
> our six small eyes
> watching powder biscuits rise. (27)

Books of poems by individual authors tend to be light-toned with settings less overtly Canadian. The most uneven book, *Twelve kids one cow: Ken Ward's world*, uses childlike forms to present adult observations. The small size suits Ward's short pieces and tiny drawings. Unfortunately, the brevity is not always accompanied by compression of imagery; in some poems, the connections among the images are removed which leaves unrelated lists.

Worm sandwich: Nonsense verses for kids, written by Linda Rogers and illustrated by Diana Durrand, also lacks a table of contents. The book concerns public school children, but the picture-book format and the cover picture of the humorously revolting title poem also appeal to small children. The humour rests partly on grotesque and violent incidents, carried too far in the poems about eating perversions. Most poems focus on typical childhood events, ranging in topics and mood from the rueful "How I got sick" to the delicate "Sunshine poem."

The consistency of voice creates an impression of one speaker, each poem gradually revealing more of the little boy's character. Child readers, boys or girls, would identify with his observations and complaints:

> I just hate recitals.
> Don't put me on your list.
> No matter how hard I practice,
> I never play my best.

This voice, enhanced by strong rhythm and rollicking rhyme, falters only at the very end where in "I wish" Durrand allows her adult concerns to take over. Although laudable, they are out of keeping with the persona.

Who greased the shoelaces? is by the well-known Lois Simmie, with well-placed artwork by Anne Simmie. Of the collections of lyric poems, it has the most polished appearance and format, including a well-organized table of contents. Judith Saltman in *Modern Canadian children's books*, describes Simmie's style as effectively combining light verse with domestic poetry (120). Simmie plays with traditional children's nursery rhymes or proverbial sayings. Always the appeal is to "every child," the joys and irritations of life being related with gusto. In the title poem the girl speaker turns her detailed itemization of sloppiness into a philosophical defence:

> Every so often, I don't know why,
> There's a day when your shoelaces won't stay tied.
> Those are the days, it never fails,
> When your hair won't stay in a ponytail.
> In barrettes, or braids, or elastic ties,
> Won't stay in a thing except your eyes. (34)

Instead of the usual ballad quatrain, Simmie exploits the sound patterns of the girl's colloquial speech. Unfortunately, Simmie continues to include morbid poems of questionable taste: "Jimmy Lorris," "How to tell what you're eating" and the "Murphy" poems.

The remaining four books are all narrative poems set in one picture-book format. The first, *Milford and me*, is by Patrick Lane, an established poet for adults, with drawings by Bonnie McLean. The cover is in attractive pastels and the book is aimed for a three to eight range. Lane uses a modified ballad stanza, shortening the lines to trimeter which lends a lightness and swiftness that accords well with the child persona. The poem begins lyrically:

> My favourite small turtle is Milford.
> He likes grasshoppers, roses, and beans.
> He lives in my garden all summer
> And he always says just what he means.

What starts as a gentle child and animal fantasy turns into a series of discussions of profound subjects: the creation myth, the meaning of names and ultimately the meaning of God. This progressively abstract movement of thought would be uninteresting to a small child, while the early images of a turtle holding up the world and a bumblebee falling and losing the world would be frightening, if understood. Perhaps older mid-school children who are concerned about the nature of existence would benefit. The sequences about Mavis the tiny, hospitable monster and the three-way friendship among the boy, turtle

and cat are appealing. Unfortunately, the disproportion between mode and subject leaves an equivocal impression.

The park in the dark by Ann Johnstone and illustrated by Ilene Crossan is similarly aimed at the three to eight age-group. There are bright-coloured drawings on both the cover and inside the book; the text is superimposed. This poem is a long "song" in ballad form, the three initial stanzas being repeated at the end. The child reader is drawn into a night-time adventure which transforms typical park activities: the sand becomes cotton candy, the climbing bars house monkeys, and the sand castle has a royal family. The final stanzas shift to the first person to reveal that the outing is a dream. Yet this is not jarring for one friend seems reassuringly real: a "big-footed, sniffle-soft pup."

Heads or tails? written and illustrated by J.O. Pennanen is a slight, humorous narrative with an unobtrusive moral. Leon, the lion, discovers that his tail has assumed its own life and will; after various tribulations he tactfully suggests working together. It would appeal to a wide age range. Profusely illustrated in pen and ink, the cover is two-toned. Its rather squat appearance accords well with the anthropomorphic lion squatting meekly beneath a dominant tail. Pennanen is such an accomplished illustrator that the story can be deduced from the pictures alone: sophisticated perspectives range from extreme close-ups to aerial views. The poem, in ballad quatrains, expresses the voice either of Leon or of his tail. The accompanying illustration focuses on the other side's reaction to the text. For example, the cover picture accompanies the tail's first assertions:

> I now have a mind of my very own,
> and starting as of this day,
> there will be No more dragging Me in the mud,
> or sitting on me this way.

In the fourth book, Sheree Fitch's *Sleeping dragons all around*, illustrated by Michele Nidenoff, a young girl decides to sneak downstairs to eat a piece of cake but has to pass eight sleeping dragons. Wakening them by mistake, she first asserts herself but then shares her treat. The book is extremely attractive: opulently produced, large-scale and with full-colour illustrations throughout. The illustrations and text are perfect complements. For example, the glamorous "Priscilla/in pink pantaloons" whose "earrings are blue balloons" is shown reclining on an opulent day-bed, complete with eye-makeup, nail polish, rings and furs. Each dragon is individualized, from punk-rocker to religious scholar to health fanatic. All are fantastic but identifiable as caricatures of family members.

The poem is written in vivid free verse with strong rhythm, repetition and aural effects. Space on the page is also used very effectively. For instance, the final page offsets the slanting text of the return with a miniature view of all the child and dragon feet returning:

Then we all
Tiptoe. . .
Tiptoe. . .
Softly
Back
to
bed.

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ÉRYMÉENS ET TERRIENS

Argus: Mission mille. Daniel Sernine. Montréal, Paulines, 1988. 147 pp., broché. ISBN 2-89039-184-1.

Un excellent roman pour la jeunesse qui mêle ingénieusement l'anticipation et l'actuel, l'aérospatial et la terre. Argus, c'est une ville creusée sur la face cachée de la lune, c'est aussi une organisation spatiale secrète qui a pour but de s'opposer par tous les moyens à la guerre des étoiles telle qu'elle a été conçue par l'ex-président des Etats-Unis, Ronald Reagan. Argus est habité par les Eryméens, hommes et femmes semblables aux "terriens" mais ayant à leur disposition une science plus avancée et, pourrait-on dire, une sagesse supérieure. Les Eryméens accueillent, forment et s'assimilent des terriens bien éduqués et de bonne volonté. Cité, population et desseins qui paraissent utopiques mais qui répondent, d'une part, aux aspirations de la jeunesse contemporaine haïssant les objets de mort mis à sa disposition, et d'autre part à certains courants politiques pacifistes.

Après s'être opposée successivement aux forces meurtrières des Etats-Unis, de l'URSS et de la France, l'équipe de choc d'Argus décide d'une millième mission. Celle-ci consistera à prendre en charge un député fédéral d'Outremont, adjoint parlementaire du ministre des Affaires extérieures. Il s'agit d'Yves Sonier qui a le courage de défendre publiquement la cause palestinienne face à Israël. Victime de l'agression d'un groupe néo-sioniste, il échappera à la mort grâce aux Eryméens.

Bien que les circonstances du sauvetage du député soient un peu invraisemblables, il convient de louer l'auteur sur bien des points. Il donne des définitions très claires des nombreux mots techniques utilisés, il en invente plusieurs qui n'existent pas encore en prévenant chaque fois le lecteur. Il fait ainsi du domaine scientifique une entité avec sa langue particulière, mais accessible. Il met au niveau des jeunes cerveaux plus ou moins cultivés une