



The Hutchinson Treasury of Children's Poetry; Puffin Book of Utterly Brilliant Poetry; Classic Poetry: An Illustrated Collection

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Michael Rosen is one of the ten utterly brilliant poets in the first of these stylish gift books; has compiled the second, and contributed a foreword to the third. These collections all reflect an enthusiasm that has led to a renaissance in poetry written for children in the last 25 years: a renaissance that could be said to begin with the first of Rosen's own collections in 1974.

Of course, it did not all come out of thin air. If the **Puffin Book of Utterly Brilliant Poetry** includes some of the best that has appeared since the seventies - Agard, Ahlberg, Kay, McGough, Patten, Zephaniah, Wright - then it is good to see the really old boys, Causley and Milligan, included in the party. Their poetry is characteristic of much that came after, in its child centredness and its use of popular forms, ballad, limerick, spell, nursery rhyme and music hall: all that has connected recent children's poetry closely to the oral tradition and to performance.

This is a party full of old friends, including the Dancing Bear, the Chocolate Cake, Sky in the Pie, Talking Turkeys and Derek Drew. Each poet is introduced by a short chat with Brian Patten (he is interviewed by his cat, Wiz) that says something about the poet and poetry in general; and each collection of poems has its own illustrator. There is the established firm of Ahlberg and Wegner; and there are some exciting new double acts. Rosen is teamed up with Korky Paul, the only artist who might be able to do justice to the poet himself in full flight in front of an audience. This is a celebration of some wonderful poets. Buy it yourself, and for any 7-10 year old you know, and for school, and for the library.

As you might expect, the emphasis in the Puffin collection is on humour: but all of the poets are capable of reflecting more deeply on the human situation. They are able, as Rosen puts it in his introduction to **Classic Poetry: An Illustrated Collection**, of saying 'important things in a memorable way'. The seriousness of this Walker anthology is never in doubt. It is Rosen's intention to introduce older children, say 10-14 year olds, to the range of outstanding English language poetry, written for adults, since Shakespeare. He provides short biographies of the poets, notes on some of the poems, and descriptions of poetic forms. Many of the poets and poems you would expect are here: Blake's Tyger, Shelley's Ozymandias, and Carroll's Jabberwocky; and there are welcome inclusions from the U.S.A. (Whitman, among others), and Australia (Banjo Paterson and Judith Wright). There are reinstatements of sometime unfashionable poets: Browning, Longfellow, and Tennyson, reflecting Rosen's interest in drama, storytelling and music in poetry. There are choices, too, that reflect Rosen's political and social preoccupations; poets as diverse as Thomas Hood, Siegfried Sassoon and Carl Sandburg give a voice to the common soldiery and working people. There is brilliant illustration by Paul Howard, which varies from a single ldybird, accompanying a poem by John Clare, to a double-page railway carriage stopped at Adlestrop. Howard captures a variety of moods and demonstrates an awareness of artistic sensibilities in particular periods: so that his pictures both mirror and comment on the poems. His research is impressive: his illustrations to the two Langston Hughes poems suggest that he knows more than a little about the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Altogether, this is a striking production.

Alison Sage's **Treasury of Children's Poetry** suffers by comparison with the first two collections, largely because it attempts too much. Poetry from all periods, for all ages from cradle to teens, and a gallery of illustrators from Greenaway to Burningham, with some illustrations recycled from earlier collections, are packed in. There is an array of talent on display; it is good value, as a gift book, even as the most expensive of the three; and there are occasional winning combinations of poem and illustrator; but it lacks coherence, and space for the poems to catch the imagination.

It is easy to find poets and poems that anthologies do not include. But, with some duplication among the three collections, it is interesting that there is only one poem from Ted Hughes, whose body of poems for children was considerable.

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