

**Resurrecting Poetry  
By Coleen Salley  
1979**

**“If there be sorrow  
Let it be  
For things undone  
Undreamed  
Unrealized  
Unattained”**

**-Mari Evans (Hopkins, *On Our Way*)**

All of us have regrets for something in our past, and one of mine is having been a children's librarian **after** having been a high school English teacher. Such a wealth of materials in children's literature that I might have used to captivate and stimulate my jaded, worldly-wise students! My students have gone on, but yours are still with you to experience the delight, the immediacy of good literature and good art, whether it be for children or adults. The really fine should have appeal for both groups.

Of all the genre in children's literature which most readily and obviously adapts to adolescent studies, Junior and Senior levels, is poetry. Actually the number of poets who wrote or write expressly for children is small: C. Rossetti, R.L. Stevenson, E. Field, A.A. Milne, D. Aldis, A. Fisher, K. Kuskin and a few others. The so-called "Collections of poetry for children" are made up mainly of poems written by adults for adults which incidentally speak to children also. The wondrous element of poetry is its universality. The simplicity of language, the use of sensory images, the clarity of word pictures and even the shortness make so much poetry appealing to the same people, young and old. The thrill of recognition-a scene, a thought, a feeling-knows no age barriers.

Philosophies for living one's life are captured in lines of verse.

"Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird  
That cannot fly"  
-Langston Hughes

In "Night" by Sara Teasdale the lines, "Look for a lovely thing and you will find it. It is not far. It will never be far," are inspirational. Eleanor Fargeon consoles us with the thought that sorrow will pass as does the night: "...the night will slip away like sorrow or a tune." ("The Night Will Never Stay"). And would that we all could achieve the independence of Victor Hugo's bird:

"Be like a bird  
Who halting in flight on limb too slight  
Feels it give way beneath him,  
Yet sings,  
Knowing he hath wings"

All these thoughts I first read in collections of poetry for young children!

And so, to my premise for this article. Poetry is a unit of study in the English curriculum. Those of us who have had to "teach" poetry know the negative reactions from students. These adverse reactions are caused by either total unfamiliarity with verse or, worse, by scarring experience with poetry-e.g. memorization of a poem for

punishment, having to write a poem with no background for it or no talent, etc. But “teach” poetry we must. The curriculum dictates that we will.

School librarians can help English teachers to accomplish their given task of teaching poetry with not only success but also lasting results. To know once the JOY of poetry is to love it for life. But librarians (and teachers and students) need to overcome a few prejudices of their own before they can initiate my idea for “resurrecting poetry”. First we must get over our self-consciousness about the word “children”. In my bibliography are a number of collections which have the WORD in the title. I intend to show that in some instances the use of the word is misleading at best and wrong at worst.

Another prejudice is the misconception if there are pictures in a book then it must be intended for children. I am fifty, a grandmother, a college professor and **I** like pictures. Is there an age limit on appreciation of beautiful art in books? Why should little children get all the good stuff? Actually, publishers and reviewers are responsible for assigning grade levels in their book lists and reviews. As a result, upper school librarians never have the opportunity to examine the books. The collections are relegated to the elementary libraries because they have “children” in the title or they have illustrations.

The bibliography which follows is based only upon the collection used for teaching children’s literature at our University and thus represents only a small portion of what is available. Would that I could see and enjoy all collections of poetry supposedly intended for “children only”. How much richer my life would be!

Since the intent of this article is “to expand horizons’ (my favorite theme in children’s literature) for upper school librarians and teachers, I have deliberately excluded some of my favorite collections, but the list still will prove useful to elementary librarians seeking new titles to brighten their poetry collection. I have also excluded those collectors whose works are best suited to upper grades: Untermeyer, Plotz, Lueders, E. Parker, Dunning, Kherdian, Adoff (attention High School librarians: if you are lacking any of these consult BIP immediately and order them all. They are for you.)

My proposal is that librarians buy some of the attractive (yes, beautiful!) collections that we use with children and that they introduce teachers and older students to these riches. Active promotion of the books is essential because of the prejudices cited above. I am convinced that students would enjoy Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” more in the picture book edition with the sensitive illustrations of C. Walter Hodges than scrunched up in a chapter in a Literature text. Why wouldn’t teen-agers appreciate colorful, whimsical, humorous pictures which interpret, extend, and clarify the poems they illustrate? These same, often small, volumes of verse may do more to deepen appreciation and understanding of poetry than any technique currently used. Ultimately the student will be led on to more sophisticated collections.

To give emphasis to my theory I will describe some of the selections I have made. You will be amazed by the caliber of poetry and poets in these collections for the “child”.

The first suggested for students Poetry of the Earth is illustrated by an artist who has made her reputation illustrating easy books and single editions of fairy tales for the young child. But her drawings for the 33 poems she has selected are far beyond the realm of children's books only. The earth tones used reflect the theme of earth and its creatures. A realistic drawing of a herd of buffaloes accompanies Sandburg's haunting "Buffalo Dusk"

"The buffaloes are gone  
And those who saw the buffaloes are gone."....

A flock of crows , black fading to gray on a white background, illustrates Frost's "Dust of Snow"

"The movement of a crow  
Has given my heart  
A change of mood  
And saved some part  
Of a day I have rued"

Randall Jarrell, Yeats, Tennyson, Millay, Isak Dinesen are represented. A double-spread of 30 egrets, stark white in "a pool jet-black and mirror still" captures the beauty of "Egrets" by Judith Wright. And finally shouldn't we all take to heart James Stephen's pleas for forgiveness in "Little Things"?

"Little things that run and quail  
And die in silence and despair.....  
Forgive us our trespasses  
Little creatures everywhere"

The older we are the longer we have had to maim and kill. For me this book is Adrienne Adams' "finest hour".

Richard Adams has written two very witty, short stories in rhyme that have all the appearances of picture books until closer reading of text and examination of art reveal a sophistication in both that goes beyond the world of children. The "Cat" is set in the era of Sir Frances Drake.

"Ahoy! The old Alcestis,  
The Spaniard's bane & death,  
That sails the thirteenth parallel  
Before the trade wind's breath.  
And here's an English cat by heck!  
To serve unmoved thru fire and wreck,  
To climb the yards and swab the deck  
For Queen Elizabeth."

Aldredge's dazzling, full color illustrations capture the pomp and pageantry of Elizabethan England. The romantic days of the empire form the backdrop for The Tiger's Voyage. The text is verrry, very British, and the art of Nicole Bayley is brilliant (I almost included her One Old Oxford Ox, Atheneum, for its clever alliteration and colorful art, but I hesitate to go too fast).

Arnold Adolff is renowned for his anthologies of modern, black poetry. He and Lee Bennette Hopkins have done the most to promote black poets among young people today. In response to a perennial exam question "List some of your favorite Black poets", invariably several students put the two names alongside Hughes, Cullen, Brooks, Clifton, Giovanni, etc. And I never mark them wrong because with those two names in mind the student will be led to something worthwhile. Adoff's Black Out Loud and The Poetry of Black America should be in all High School collections. In recent years he has written some poems apparently for the younger reader but for me they have a much broader appeal. Eats Poems is described on the blurb as being "for anyone who has ever said yes to temptation". Now I ask you: isn't that most of us, irregardless of age? Note the lament in "Love Song".

"Great goblets of pudding...  
Syrup on vanilla ice cream..."  
(also doughnuts, fudge, cake, etc)  
"You are no good for me  
You are no good  
You are so good"

In I Am the Running Girl in poetic text is Rhonda in training, during the race, and afterwards:

"I have no bones  
I have no legs  
I have no stomach that will stay where it began  
But I have won."

The dramatic Tornado! is based on a twister that cut through Xenia, Ohio, April 3, 1974. In unrhymed verse the preparation, the storm and the aftermath are vividly described.

"Always remember that it's good to be afraid  
when there is something  
That can hurt  
When there is  
Some danger  
And you want to have your head  
Come out all round and whole  
As one piece  
Head"

Good advice for anyone to heed! The faces Himler has drawn are real people with expressions reflecting anxiety, fear, relief, sorrowful resignation, hope and anticipation of rebuilding. A powerful "picture book".

Conrad Aiken, Pulitzer Prize winner and recipient of to other literary awards, has written 16 lighthearted poems decorated with strong, vivid drawings by Glaser. Such witticisms as "The Crocodile":

"O crocodile  
That ancient smile  
Old as the Congo  
Or the Nile  
And full of wile  
And full of guile"

And "The Mandrill":

"In the Mandrill  
Unrefined  
Beauty & Beast  
Are well combined"

The Octopus, the crab and the cassowary are poetically described also.

The noted humorist and raconteur R. Armour has done a hilarious job of combing fun and fact that should amuse all ages. For example in *Odd Old Mammals* such beasts as the glyptodont, smilodon, megatherium, macrauchenia, dinohyus are described, amusingly but accurately with the phonetic pronunciation for each.

Co-RIF-o-don  
"Consider first CORYPHODON,  
Among the rather eary.  
He had a mean, unpleasant look  
And seemed a trifle surly".....

"Coryphodon, though, meant no hard,  
And wading in the river,  
Was quite content to nibble plants,  
His nose with joy a-quiver."

Several other stanzas complete the picture of the particular life-style of this creature, filling in as much detail as many of us would ever want to know. Paul Galdone, another well-known illustrator of nursery and fairy tales books has captured the humor of the text in realistic drawings of the beasts with comic touches—a cut of the eye, a turn of the head, a snarl, etc. Surely a high school teacher (science, history, English) with a sense of the whimsical could have fun with these books.

Frank Ash, noted for stories for primary grades and for his intricate (weird?) illustrations, has written two then volumes of verses that evoke a sense of identity. In City Sandwich we recognize loneliness in “The Sugar Lady” who goes with cup from door to door:

“Do you have any sugar?” she asks  
Although she has more than you.  
“Do you have any sugar?” she asks  
Hoping you’ll talk for a minutes or two

I saw myself in “noise” with planes, tires screeching, sirens until:

“I pointed my finger  
And shot it  
BANG! BANG!.....  
And I was quick on the draw  
When the telephone rang  
BANG! BANG!  
BANG! BANG!”

“Fame & Fortune” and “Laundromat” brought smiles. “Field” in Country Pie made me remember all the ditch daisies, yellow and happy, along I-10 only to be mowed down a few days later by a cruel machine.

“I see my neighbor cutting his green lawn  
And I remember when it used to be just a field”

... with wildflowers, “milkweed blowing” and  
“the brown skeletons of Queen Anne’s lace.”

Atwood’s books are extraordinary. Her stunning color photographs support the premise that some photography ranks in the Fine Arts. Double spread, full color pictures illustrate the haiku of the text. One incredible scene is two white-tailed deer captured in mid-leap against the splendor of autumn woods.

“Over the leaf –crisp ground  
The deer in the autumn wood  
Leap...and make no sound”

Against the deep blue of night trees in the foreground frame a full moon.

“Two things the moon steals:  
A light from the trunks of the trees,  
A day from my life”

The text includes excellent discussions of the historical background and moods of haiku and critiques of the masters, Basho, Buson & Issa.

Other attractive collections of oriental poetry on the list are those compiled by Baron, Behn (an outstanding “children’s” poet) Cassedy, Lewis and Mizumura. Candill, best known for her regional stories, has written original haiku in two beautifully illustrated books, Come Along (haiku of mountain & meadow) and Wind... (the deserts of the Southwest). Again the lament for wildflowers:

“Reeper in the field,  
Did you not see the flowers.....”

If you are unfamiliar with poetry written by children, you will be astounded at the creativeness of some youngsters. I defy anyone to capture more graphically the pathos caused by war than the ten year old child in Lewis’s Miracles.

“War”

“Not bad, but miserable.  
Drenched in gray sadness, lonely grief  
Handed out to all”

What a challenge for older students to try to equal some of the poems found in Miracles, Hopkins’ City Talk, Morton’s The Moon is....., poems by Russian children. They might identify with “We, the Young”

“With all sorts of things we are crammed  
Everywhere we are praised and we are damned”

Or from Mendoza’s The World... “Hey, mister, with two cars. Why do I only have one shoe?” Baron’s Here I Am! is subtitled An Anthology of Poems Written by Young People in Some of America’s Minority Groups. These collections are bound to inspire some “closet” poets, too timid heretofore to try. All teachers of English can make sure of the ideas and techniques described in Kenneth Koch’s two books. Both are also anthologies of children’s poems as well as narratives about writing poetry and appreciating poets such as Blake, Shakespeare, Donne, Whitman, Wm. Carlos Williams, John Ashbery, etc. (hardly “kid stuff”). And it is only “children” who would be awed, even humbled, by the poems in I Never Saw Another Butterfly, realizing what those young poets had suffered, realizing that they all faced death, realizing that only a handful survived? I think not.

Another group of very handsome collections are these poetic expressions of the American Indian. These are the philosophical thoughts of adults-about their religion, music, culture, and reverence for nature. But because the poems or poetic statement are

short and simple, because the books are strikingly illustrated, and because Indians are studied on the elementary level, these powerful adult books end up on shelves in elementary libraries. In fact, most are outstanding examples of truly fine and imaginative book design. Betting, Clymer, Hood, Houston, Rasmussen and Wood are worthy additions to any library.

Some examples of misnomers in title are the anthologies of Blishen and Cole. The Oxford Book...is a veritable treasure of anonymous old ballads and narrative poems, some in dialect, most humorous. The index of poets reads like a “Who Was Who” of British literature: Arnold, Blake, Burns, Coleridge, Eliot, Keats, Shakespeare, Shelly, Tennyson, Thackeray, Wordsworth to name a few. And Brian Wildsmith’s bright art heightens the joy of this collection of classics.

Cole’s titles are misleading. The Birds & Beast...is a big, handsome book (320 pages) filled with old and new poets. Dinosaurs has some Shel Silverstein nonsense and X.J. Kennedy’s play on words. Humorous Poetry for Children is definitely a wrong title. Very few children’s poets are included and most of the poems are long and involved. Some of the poets represented are T.S. Eliot, A.E. Housman, Dylan Thomas. His Pick Me Up is excellent. Short does not mean trivial. There are 200 poems by 20<sup>th</sup> century poets-“funny, sad, sweet, sour, witty, wise, descriptive and philosophical.”

John Ciardi is well known to children for his nonsense poems, having published 12 books of poetry for them. But the pithy verse of Fast & Slow is too hilarious for anyone to miss. In fact the subtitle is Poems for Advanced Children & Beginning Parents. “Fast and Slow” should be dedicated to teachers everywhere:

“The old crow is getting slow  
The young crow is not  
Of what the young crow does not know  
The old crow knows a lot”

The ultimate insult is given in “The Family Reunion”:

“I spoke to a gorilla who asked me about you.  
He said he was your cousin. I could see that it was true.”.....

“Your cousin’s waiting for you to get home.  
You’d better run.  
It’s a family reunion and you mustn’t miss the fun.”

And when I read “We All Have Thought A Lot About You” to a group of teachers and librarians, there was a run on the Xerox. Many a principal, supervisor, perhaps a few superintendents even, received anonymous copies of that poem.

In defense of the inclusion of Carroll’s & Lear’s picture book editions of verse: these three books must be seen to be believed. Fabulous is not lightly used here. If

anything one must be adult or approaching maturity to fully appreciate the exquisite detail, the sophistication of the art. Pig-Tale is a satire that bears discussion since I am not too sure what it is saying. I think it is the antecedent of the Peter Principle. I doubt that any child would “get it”. The pictures are graphic illustrations of animals and people in the most elaborate dress.

Ogden Nash completed phrases and supplied missing lines of Lear’s unfinished “...Pip”. Burkert has drawn realistically every species of animal, bird, and fish right down to the fur, feather and scale in full color, double spread illustrations. When she was researching the animals described in Lear’s copious notes, she discovered that in the 100 years since he composed the poem, at least 100 species of animals have become extinct. And who or what was the Scroobious Pip? Was it God?

As for The Owl & The Pussy-Cat, this is an adult picture book. Each page is visual delight with its lush, rich colors and its minute details. Here we have Pussy lolling on her satin pillows, peeking coyly above a lacy fan, drop earrings dangling, looking for all the world like a Sultan’s favorite, purring:

“You elegant fowl!  
How charmingly sweet you sing!”

Eight witty limericks, all brightly illustrated, complete the collection.

Since I seem to have something to say about each title and since I am only in the “C’s”, I shall confine my remarks to those collectors whose names are synonymous with children’s literature and those collections which “look” too elementary. I have included a title that may well be questionable for older students, but I find it so appealing myself- Greenfield’s Honey, I Love... I was captivated first by the art. Such beguiling faces! Then the works spoke to me:

“Honey, let me tell you that I LOVE the laughing sound.  
I love to make the laughing sound.”  
And...”I get way down in the music  
Down inside the music  
I let it wake me  
Take me  
Spin me around and make me  
Uh-get down”

I do not doubt this selection, but others might.

Hopkins is one of the most effective compilers of poetry. His collections are slim, including some 20 odd selections (if that many) of adult and children’s poets in each book. All are illustrated since his talents have been directed mostly to young students. But the poetry is choice and can be read and enjoyed by all. Many a snail in my garden owes its life to Hopkins whose books introduced me to Hughes’ “Snail”

“Little snail  
Dreaming as you go.  
Weather and Rose  
Is all you know.”

On Our Way is one of the best collections of black poetry ever. Young black poets are included along with Hughes stirring “Daybreak in Alabama”. The photographs which illustrate each poem are stunning. I was tempted to list his holiday collections (Halloween, Christmas, etc.) since I first encountered poems by Carson McCullers in those. But her poetry is very child-like and perhaps best left to the young. I personally would want to use these if I were teaching her novels to show another side of her.

One of my most favorite illustrators and authors of children’s books is Mercer Mayer. And I am certain many in elementary school librarian ordered automatically A Poison Tree for her children. What a surprise! Definitely not his usual (the title gives a hint!) Rather, “poems of love and hate, of fear, pain, of sorrow and guilt...” are here. This is “adult stuff”. I think this is his finest art yet and his selections are superb-sensitive poems by master poets captured in haunting pictures.

Prelutsky has amused and delighted youngsters for years. He is another who is so clever and witty that he should be shared with all ages. His Nightmares is hilarious. What teenager could resist his chronicles of the werewolf, the will-o-the-wisp, the vampire? My favorite is “The Ghoul”.

Charlotte Zolotow is renowned internationally for her tender, perceptive stories for the young child. Her gentleness of spirit is revealed in two small volumes of her own poetry, All That Sunshine & River Winding. Short, soft poems, rhymed and unrhymed, impart a reverence for all the small and even ordinary things in nature. Her poems about people and emotions are marked by sensitivity and a sense of humanity. Her stories are for the young, but her poetry is for all.

And finally those collections that on the surface look too much like “picture” books to be seriously considered for older students. Before introducing Fargeon’s poems extolling the beauties of nature, I would play Cat Steven’s “Morning Has Broken” since it is one of her poems. Moore’s concrete poetry and the vivid art complimenting it are among the most imaginative I have seen. My strongest argument for O’Neils’ inclusion are the very lines themselves. Read; listen; react from Fingers... “Greedy fingers, grasping wide, tell tales on us we’d like to hide.” The vivid contrasts in Hailstones... “Think of what starlight and lamplight would lack, diamonds and fireflies, if they couldn’t lean against black.” In What is That Sound: “Jazz is a syncopated beat. In through the eardrums, out through the feet.” And “What is Love?”

“Love is a tone of voice  
Directed to us out of choice”...  
“And in that voice all loved discern

The matchless music of concern.”

As for the Cajun Night..., just trust me. I never go anywhere without it!

Varva’s books deserve a paragraph of their own. Here is a depth of art and text that transcends age limits, and yet the books look like “picture books” and in fact are sold in the children’s department of bookstores which is where I found ours. All three titles celebrate nature, beauty and peace. Fleur Cowles is a renowned artist whose paintings have been exhibited in one-man shows in major cities throughout the world. The owners of her paintings read like International Who’s Who: Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke and King Constantine of Greece. The art is superb, the poetic text sensitive and the book design splendid. These books should be displayed with pride instead of knocking around next to Dr. Seuss and Curious George.

Myra Cohn Livingston is a poet and when poets collect the works of others, you have something special. Listen, Children, Listen is special. It is a small book with enchanting illustrations –very enticing. And while it does have selections from Milne and Aldis, Frost and Cummings are represented too. “November Sunset” by Cummings is memorable: a little boy at a window “thinking that if day has to turn into night, this is a beautiful way.” And Oliver Herford’s “I heard a bird sing in the dark of December.”

Among my favorites are Wallaces’ picture book editions which include poems by Shakespeare, Tolkien, Robert Graves, William Mayne, Silberstein, e.e. Cummings, James Reeves, to name a few. So what if they are all cleverly represented with the most imaginative illustrations? Who wouldn’t delight in Prelutsky’s “Flonster Poem”?

‘the flime devoured the floober  
And the floober dined on flime”

And so on until:

“the floath who fed upon the flone,  
Soon met another floath  
And while they wondered what to do  
The flakker ate them both.”

I love the slippery words of Palmer Brown:

“The spangled pandemonium  
Is missing from the zoo.  
He bent the bards the barest bit  
And slithered glibly through.”

And in Ghost Poems I found my epitaph in the anonymous “On a Tired Housewife.”

“Here lies a poor woman who was always tired  
She lived in a house where help wasn’t hired  
Her last word on earth were “Dear friends, I am going  
To where there’s no cooking or washing or sewing  
For everything there is exact to my wishes  
For where they don’t eat there’s no washing of dishes  
Don’t’ mourn for me no, don’t mourn for me ever  
I am going to do nothing for ever and ever.”

Dear librarians and teachers, I rest my case.