

Playing with Language: Poetry as Children's Literature

Janet Alsup

I think we all remember hearing rhymes of some sort as children, whether they be Mother Goose nursery rhymes like “Hey Diddle Diddle” and “Jack and Jill,” jump rope rhymes like “Down by the River” and “My Name is Alice,” or rhymes that involve games or dances such as “The Hokey Pokey” and “Ring Around the Rosie.” These rhymes formed a sort of backdrop, or soundtrack if you will, for our childhood. As we grew older and read literature in school, some play with poetic language continued. However, unfortunately, as the years progressed, reading became more and more about eliciting facts and information and less about experiencing and expressing playful language. The books reviewed in this issue not only remind us of our childhood joy, but are also wonderful resources for parents, teachers, and librarians who wish to immerse children and young adults in poetry.

The books reviewed here include picture books for younger children (*The Cuckoo's Haiku; Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes; and Rhymes Round the World*) as well as books for adolescents (*T4, A Novel; Frankenstein Takes the Cake; The Swamps of Sleethe; Falling Down the Page; and Tropical Secrets: Holocaust Refugees in Cuba*). These books, which we are calling poetry, accomplish much in addition to being examples of creative, memorable rhymes and rhythms; they are also historical narratives, examples of contemporary art, scientific overviews, and literary surveys. As you will discover when reading the first opinions and second reactions in this issue, the literary scholars, parents, librarians, and teachers who have contributed describe multiple ways these books might be shared successfully with young people—and provide a few caveats about how the books might be misused. In this issue we also hear from the author of the funny and innovative *Frankenstein Takes the Cake*, Adam Rex, and the co-editors of a respected young adult literature journal, *The ALAN Review*. So once again, we present an eclectic and exciting collection of think pieces, reviews, and author reflections which taken together have the potential to inspire all our readers, young and old, to re-experience the joy of poetic play.