



New Verse '90

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Morag Styles looks at new hardback poetry.

We asked **Morag Styles**, well-known anthologist and co-editor of the **BfK Guide, Poetry 0-16**, to take a final look at last year's offerings

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A hardback book of poetry by Roger McGough, Brian Patten or Vernon Scannell is always exciting: new autumn collections by all three is a treat indeed. As chance has thrown these poets together, let's see what they've got in common. All three write for adults as well as children. They've all been on the poetry scene for at least twenty years and are good performers of their own work. All three enjoy popular acclaim. There the similarities end: although humour is strong in these three new books, each has its own particular flavour.

"With loving, too: no point in

asking why.

There is no answer." That is my reply.

Love, Shouts and Whispers (Hutchinson, 0 09 174365 6, £6.95) is Vernon Scannell's second collection for young readers and follows the same formula as his previous, **The Clever Potato** (Hutchinson, 0 09 173442 8, £5.95; Red Fox, 0 09 962280 7, £2.50 pbk): the poems relate loosely to one broad theme, in this case, love. That's not a topic with which to conjure lightly for children of nine to thirteen! But with Scannell's light touch and the delectable art of Tony Ross, there's nothing to worry about. Indeed, the focus of love in this book can be anything from self-conceit to a lullaby for a baby, cupboard love to a monster's need for affection.

Beneath the piteous brute disguise

The need for what might humanise:

The welcome or embrace than can

Change lonely monster into Man.

There's plenty here to amuse and enrich readers of about nine to fourteen, lots of variety and some very moving writing. It's painful to read the last two lines of 'Incendiary' about a child who sets himself on fire: *Which would have been content with one warm kiss/ Had there been anyone to offer this.* Or Scannell's tight rhythms ending 'Love Shouts and Whispers': *And when white winter shakes its icy chains / Love whispers warmth that comforts and sustains.* I believe that the poems we present to children should be equally enjoyable to adults. These are. And Tony Ross's black and

white drawings are magical.

Thawing Frozen Frogs (Viking, 0 670 83036 4, £7.99) is Brian Patten's follow-up to his hilarious Gargling with Jelly (Viking, 0 670 80644 7, £6.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.1904 2, £1.99 pbk). You get fun in abundance - daft puns, groan-making rhymes, kids getting one over adults ... and the drawings that accompany the text (by David Mostyn) are in over-the-top comic style. However, there's more to Patten than the light-hearted: he's always explored the sensitive side of life, as in 'The Secret Prayer': *Dear God/ Don't ever let them die, or if you do/ Make sure I go too*. Or 'Hushabye Lullaby': *I try so hard/ To hear the things /Behind the silence / That sleep brings*. In this book he also gives a strong green message.

How deep the snow,

How white it falls,

How cold and sharp the air,

How perfectly each little flake

Pollutes the atmosphere.

Good stuff.

'His ability to make us smile and be sad at the same time' (Signal) is quoted on the cover blurb of Roger McGough's new collection. This 'shadow round the corner' is one of the features of McGough's work that make him such an interesting poet for the young.

The fifth is set in the future

(And as you can see it's the last)

When the Word was made Computer And books are a thing of the past.

The tone of **Pillow Talk** (Viking, 0 670 81992 1, £7.99), aimed at readers of sevenish-plus, is mainly jocular, though his poems often have a thoughtful underbelly. What's so characteristic of McGough is the wit and the wickedly clever word-gymnastics ('*Alas, poor bottom*', '*chew chew chew/ na sandwiches*').

Steven Guarnaccia's line drawings on every page visually match McGough's inventive language.

Glimpsed through the night

Is the glimmer of the day

Light is but darkness

Worn away.

Recommended.

STOP PRESS: Farrukh Dhondy's first anthology of black and Asian poetry for teenage and adults readers, **Ranters, Ravers and Rhymers** is published by Collins (0 00 191359 X, £7.99) this month. Don't miss it.

The **BfK Guide, Poetry 0-16**, edited by Morag Styles and Pat Triggs, is available from **Books for Keeps**, 6 Brightfield Road, London SE12 8QF, priced £5.50 inc. postage and packing. You can also pay by credit card (Access, Visa, Eurocard or Mastercard) or use the telephone order service on 081-852 4953.

It's worth every penny!

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