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The New Faber Book of Children's Verse

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

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It is fifty years since the first edition of this anthology. Sweeney has made a new selection, aimed at 9-15 year-olds, with the emphasis on quality. He mixes the expected with less familiar work, both classic and modern, and, if anything, favours the classic. De la Mare, for instance, who has not been much in favour with recent anthologists, is well represented. There are only a few poets in translation and, of the wider English speaking world, the Americans make the best showing. Sweeney's personal preferences are exercised here, with Miroslav Holub, Emily Dickinson and Theodore Roethke given prominence. Nor does the collection stray much into the world of performance poetry, although Roger McGough and Benjamin Zephaniah are included. There are, inevitably, some popular writers of children's verse, like Allan Ahlberg, who do not find a place. Fanell's black and white illustrations are clever doodles in the margins of the pages and do not add a great deal to the enjoyment of the poems, serving mainly to confirm Faber's sophisticated house style. As usual, Faber make no concessions to child appeal in the presentation. The great pleasure of the collection, apart from the poems that are not so well known, is in Sweeney's arrangement. He makes subtle connections, sometimes by theme and sometimes by style, that lead intriguingly from poem to poem. Anthologist and poet seem to be in a conversation with the reader that, whether joking or deadly serious, is always respectful. This is an anthology that carries its readers gently out into poetry's deeper waters.

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