

Little book of Australian children's rhymes edited by Kathryn Favelle. Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2004, pp. 47, A\$15.50, paperback, ISBN 0 642 27603 X.



It is a long time since such a wonderful edition of children's rhymes came into my hands. The arrival of the national Library of Australia's *Little book of Australian children's rhymes* took me back on a nostalgic trip to my own childhood in England when, at Christmas and birthdays, some little gem like this would be added to my bedroom bookshelf. This is a most beautifully produced volume of eighteen rhymes and magnificent black and white of colour illustrations. By chance the book happened to fall open at Norman Lindsay's 'Puddin' Song', immediately making me search out my copy of *The magic pudding* and, almost inevitably, that was followed by *Snugglepot and cuddlepie*. Having said that, the reader might think that this is a mere re-run of well-known, well-worn rhymes. It most definitely is not. The rhymes have been chosen carefully to give a spectrum which will please both the child and the adult reader. Take, for example, the rhyme collected by June Factor, 'Way down south', where the penguin down south has got:

so tired of black and white
He wore pink slacks to the dance last night.

Opposite, the full page illustration by E. E. Gostelow gives us a magnificent watercolour of the Little Penguin and the Black Petrel. Then bringing us up to something more modern we have the 'seasonal sizzle' with the Barbie as the centrepiece of a Christmas lunch by Sally Farrell Odgers, accompanied by a black and white photograph of a Bondi Christmas. There are of course the magical wistful mythological bunyips, no collection could be without one of them. Two illustrations of bunyips, both double page spreads, offer two temporal visions of this wonderful creature: that of an anonymous artist working in black and white in 1935 and following C.J. Dennis's entertaining 'The Triantiwontigongolope' and the other in full colour from *The bunyip of Berkley's Creek*, which was illustrated in 1973 by Ron Brooks again accompanying yet another entertaining rhyme 'Onkerplod', by Michael Dugan. This collection moves from the classical children's rhymes, which include the obligatory goblins and fairies, the more Australian frogs, possums, kangaroos and the Southern Cross to the contemporary Laundromat and Barbie Christmas. There are old favourites like 'The man from Menindie' by D.H. Souter with an etching titled 'Here you see the Man asleep as he dreams of counting sheep' from Souter's volume *Bush babs with pictures*, or 'Goblin Stairs' by Annie R. Rentoul to the lesser known 'Alligator' by Spike Milligan. This delightful, dare I say delicious, book, is for

everybody and a great gift for any child, and, why not, for adults too. Parents will delight in reading these rhymes to their children, they will take a trip down memory lane and, one would hope, instil in their children a love for good books. The National Library of Australia has produced a wonderful addition to its collection of *Little Books*. They are to be congratulated on the quality of the rhymes chosen, the apt illustrations, the careful typesetting and little details like the hated curly centipede that frames the odd page numbers in all sorts of gymnastic positions.

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