



Frances Lincoln's new poetry list

Article Author:

[Morag Styles](#) [1]

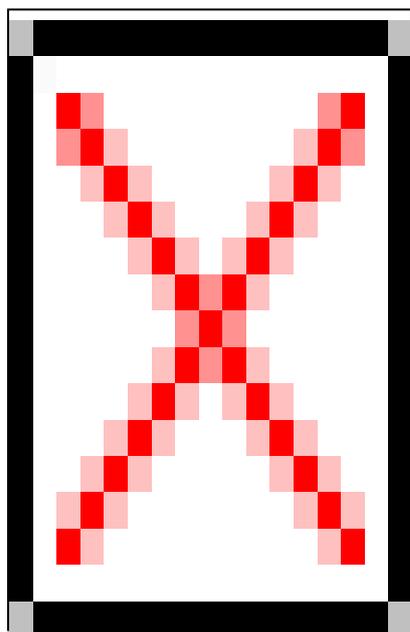
[188](#) [2]

Article Category:

Other Articles

Byline:

Morag Styles talks to **Janetta Otter-Barry** of Frances Lincoln about her new poetry list.



For too long children's poetry publishing has consisted mainly of anthologies rather than single poet collections but this is about to change! **Morag Styles** talked to **Janetta Otter-Barry** of Frances Lincoln about her exciting new poetry list exclusively for **Books for Keeps**.

Although the UK boasts a surfeit of talent in poets writing for the young, in recent years the poetry shelves of children's bookshops and libraries have been largely populated by edited anthologies rather than by single poet collections. Outstanding collections even by famous poets have been allowed to go out of print.

Now Janetta Otter-Barry's new poetry list for Frances Lincoln seeks to buck the trend by publishing reissues of out-of-print collections, new work by well-known poets and work by as yet unknown poets. Rachel Rooney's **The Language of Cat** is an example of the latter, already earning praise from the Poet Laureate who described it as 'a box of delights'. Also published this month is a welcome new edition of Roger McGough's much loved **An Imaginary Menagerie**. Coming in August are new collections from James Carter and Tony Mitton, while October features the latest collaboration between John Agard and Satoshi Kitamura.

MS: *What are your ambitions for your poetry list?*

JO-B: I would like my new list to be recognised as the place to find vibrant poetry from both established poets and new voices. I'd like my books to be bought and borrowed by children themselves at book-fairs, shops and libraries, not just by parents and teachers.

I'd like to be able to develop the poets on my list, so that I am publishing more than one collection by the same poet, and helping new poets to grow creatively.

I want my books to look enticing, with top quality design and illustration to help to draw children into the books. Using Roger McGough's own illustrations for **An Imaginary Menagerie** has given this collection a whole new comic dimension.

I'd like to see a renaissance of children's poetry in general, and for my list to be part of that, so that we see children reading, writing and enjoying great poetry in class, at home, anywhere ? and to be culturally diverse too.

MS: Why do you believe single poet collections should be at the heart of the enterprise?

JO-B: When I looked around I realised that there are very few single-poet collections, and scarcely any at all from new poets. Having enjoyed working with John Agard on **The Young Inferno**, I thought it would be exciting to set up a list giving individual poets the chance to show the full range of their work. I felt that this was a niche I could fill as a publisher, and the more people I talked to, the more I realised the need for it. You only really appreciate a poet through seeing the whole range and diversity of his or her work. Poets need the space and freedom to be adventurous with their poetry and readers need to have the opportunity to get to the heart of a poet's work. It's been incredibly rewarding to see how my first five poets, Roger McGough, Rachel Rooney, Tony Mitton, James Carter and John Agard have balanced the moods, themes and poetic forms of their collections.

Michael Rosen helped me enormously at the beginning, encouraging me and giving me the names of poets he admired, plus the excellent advice that I should publish poets who are prepared to go into schools and perform live.

MS: What are the challenges of publishing a collection by an unknown poet?

JO-B: The main challenge is that it is hard to get enough customers to take the risk of buying a debut collection by someone who no one has heard of ? however good the sample material and the publisher's enthusiasm. This is particularly so when the publisher has yet to build a track record in poetry publishing and before the poet has blazed a trail through British classrooms. It's definitely a struggle, and means that your print run for a debut collection is going to be low ? so the economics of publishing the book are hard to juggle. But I like a challenge, and I know there are poets out there who need to be heard ? and read!

MS: Why do you think poetry is important in children's lives?

JO-B: I feel passionately that poetry is not just important, but plays a vital role in children's lives. We know that reading nursery rhymes and lullabies to babies is crucial for speech and language development. Children seem naturally to respond to poetry, and love to write it too, from a very young age.

Poetry is vital for emotional development. It helps children to understand their own emotions and those of other people. A very short poem can distil and intensify an emotional experience in a way that prose cannot. It can dig beneath the surface and help a child understand the world. It can also take a child out of their world into other worlds. James Carter says he notices that poetry is a safe place for boys of 10 or 11 to try out emotions.

Poetry frees up language. Normal rules don't have to apply. A poem can be very short ? important for a child who might struggle with a chapter of prose. It is very direct, it can communicate sophisticated ideas in a very simple way. It is multi-layered, multicultural, breaks down boundaries.

And the communication of a poet to the audience can just be the best fun, as you will know if you've ever seen a class of children with a poet, from an infant class doing action rhymes to a GCSE class at a Poetry Live session. Poetry is a brilliant, life-changing, life-enhancing form, and every teacher, every parent ? and every government ? should be aware of its magic!

Morag Styles is a Reader in Children's Literature and Education at Cambridge University and a Fellow of Homerton College.

Source URL (retrieved on Sep '19): <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/188/childrens-books/articles/other-articles/frances-lincoln%E2%80%99s-new-poetry-list>

Links:

[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/morag-styles>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/188>