

Sea Creatures Great and Small

MARY FORD

Down By Jim Long's Stage, Al Pittman. Illustrated by Pam Hall. Breakwater Books, 1976. 20 pp. \$5.95 hardcover.

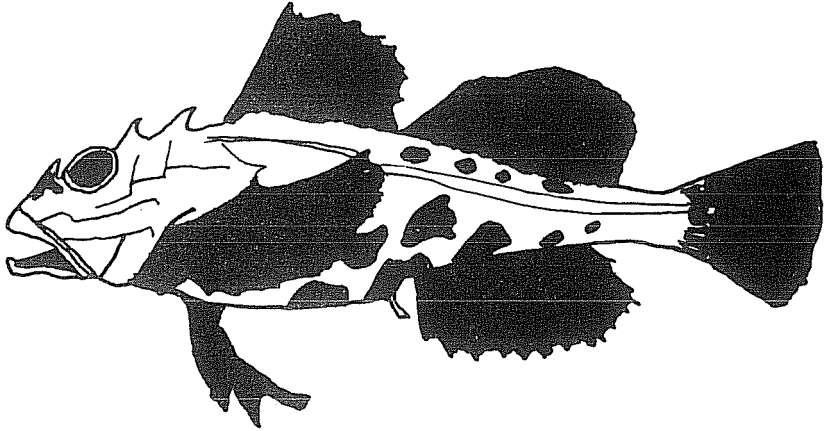
There's a Sound in the Sea, Tamar Griggs. Scrimshaw Press (available from Gage), 1975. 93 pp. \$6.95 paper.

Mammals have had centre stage for a long time. Especially since the eighteenth century, the warm-blooded furry members of the animal kingdom have been imaginatively presented, sometimes dressed and with distinctly human characteristics as in *Wind in the Willows*, sometimes semi-humanized as in Anna Sewell's horse biography, *Black Beauty*, and occasionally realistically portrayed as in *Red Fox* by Charles G. D. Roberts. Seldom, however, have fish or those other inhabitants of the sea, the whale and dolphin, been featured in literature for children.

Now two new, colourful and informative books are doing something to alleviate that imbalance in emphasis. *Down By Jim Long's Stage*, written by Newfoundland poet Al Pittman, with award-winning illustrations by Pam Hall, is a delightful verse-romp through the waters off Canada's east coast. The other, *There's a Sound in the Sea*. . . is a compilation of text and drawings of whales by Vancouver writer-teacher Tamar Griggs.

Down By Jim Long's Stage is described by the author fancifully as "rhymes for children and young fish". The children will be entertained and educated by this book and the "young fish" should be highly flattered that such meticulous care has been taken on their behalf. The book features such characters as Rodney Cod, Sid Squid, Russell Mussell, Ella Eel, Zoro the Swordfish, Clem Clam and many others. Something of the personality and habits of the various fish is conveyed through the verses of author Pittman, while it is possible, in Pam Hall's colourful illustrations, to see the fish and discover something about their environment. There is one human figure in the book, Jim Long, and it is presumably his rickety stage and its watery environs which mark the parameters of the fishes' world. Jim Long is shown eating "fish and brewis" and in Cabot Codfish's dream he gets a stomach ache. Just So! The hero of the book is undoubtedly the cod, but one of the more intriguing personalities is a sculpin:

A sculpin named Sam
thought as he swam
how wonderful ugly
was he
He said with a grin,
"I'm as ugly as sin".
"I'm the ugliest fish
in the sea".



Priced at \$5.95 by Breakwater Books of Newfoundland, it is a delightfully informative book for the young child.

Taking 15,000 entries from schoolchildren in the U.S. and Canada, Tamar Griggs has compiled an exquisite portfolio of whale drawings—some of them fanciful, some humorous, some dramatic, and each of them in its own way a tender homage to the great oceanic mammal, the whale. The first third of the book is devoted to the “happy carefree whale”, shown by the young artists in a tranquil sea, the inevitable sun overhead, joyfully blowing from spouts, and often with a baby whale at its side.

Massive whales also appear, some with wide grins showing enormous teeth; then man with his weapons enters. There is a series of poignant drawings of whales pierced by harpoons, dripping blood and weeping giant tears. The children have learned that whales are an endangered species, and in their innocent way the drawings in this book serve to illustrate this point more dramatically, perhaps, than any government information service could do. One drawing shows an enormous blue whale weeping and alone. The caption on the picture states: “How would you like to have no friends at all?”

The book ends with an Eskimo myth told in the language of an eight-year-old boy. Briefly stated it says that unthinking man in the guise of a raven destroys the “spirit of the whale” by his greed. When he observes the tragic results of his selfishness, he weeps saying, “How beautiful is the

spirit of the whale!" It is a sentiment that echoes through the reading of the book and lingers long after.



Joel Catanzaro, age 11

Mary Ford is a previous contributor to CCL. Her article on the figure of the wolf in childrens' literature appeared in issue number 7.

A Journey into Fantasy

ROBERT H. MACDONALD

Song of the Pearl, Ruth Nichols. MacMillan of Canada, 1976. 158 pp. \$7.95 hardcover.

What becomes of us when we die? Are we judged in the hereafter, are we punished or rewarded, are we given another chance? Surely we have come from somewhere; surely we are moving on? We cannot just cease to be.