

Farley's Follies

A Farley Mowat Reader. Farley Mowat. Illus. Richard Row. Ed. Wendy Thomas. Key Porter kids, 1997. 192 pp. \$26.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55013-899-5.

In his short foreword to this new collection of excerpts from several of his books, Farley Mowat acknowledges his own misgivings about the volume's title; a "reader," he suspects, would have sounded too much like duty, like scholastic "work," to have enticed him as a child: "If it had been me, I'd have called this book *Farley's Follies*" (9). I don't think young readers will be much deterred. For all the implied dustiness of the title, *A Farley Mowat Reader* will give them ample selections from his works to encourage further explorations.

The volume's editor, Wendy Thomas, has ensured that this book will be no random potpourri. She has carefully arranged the selections, grouped under headings, so as to suggest a narrative movement from early life and a discovery of the beauties of the natural world, to a pressing need to write of that world and its inhabitants.

In the last section, "Becoming a Writer," selections from *Born Naked* tell the story of young Farley's early attempts to form a naturalist club (somewhat dampened by parental discovery of rotting animal parts in the family domicile) and to edit a small mimeographed newspaper. Although these episodes are told with the sure comic touch familiar to readers of *The Dog Who Wouldn't Be* or *Owls in the Family*, there's an important message of respect for young adults' activism operating here too. With the proceeds from the paper (the princely sum, in 1934, of \$25.45), the club supplies sick or wounded wintering ducks and geese with enough corn and grain to keep them alive. I began reading this collection knowing I would encounter by-now familiar and important concerns in Mowat's works: the environmental



costs of commercial and technological overproduction and shame at human interruption of that bounty through hunting and killing. But I had forgotten how much respect and importance Mowat also gives children's writing and activism.

Still, as Mowat suggests in his foreword, let's not forget the fun. To quote my seven-year-old expert consultant, "I liked it. It was funny, especially the part ["The Coming of Mutt"] where the boy says 'would you want to buy a duck?'" Arf!

Lorraine York is a professor of English at McMaster University who has written on Timothy Findley, Alice Munro, and Farley Mowat. She lives with her partner and her seven-year-old expert consultant in Dundas, Ontario.

Permission to Celebrate: Embracing Puberty for Girls

Sweet Secrets: Stories of Menstruation. Kathleen O'Grady and Paula Wansbrough. Second Story, 1997. 231 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN: 0-929005-33-3.

Sweet Secrets: Stories of Menstruation is a comprehensive tapestry of facts, short stories, and personal anecdotes that explores what is all too often a source of embarrassment or shame. This unique book celebrates the passage to womanhood while answering many of the questions teenage girls and young women have about their changing bodies.

In the empowering preface, Kathleen O'Grady and Paula Wansbrough briefly outline what each section in the book offers, and encourage their readers to start with a topic of interest. The text begins with a focus on facts, while touching on the cultural and social baggage associated with puberty and the female experience. A variety of personal vignettes and discussions work well at relieving the sometimes too earnest tone in the book's early narrative.

O'Grady and Wansbrough have compiled a great deal of practical information. Employing frank and non-judgmental language, they deconstruct myths and explore a wide range of issues surrounding female sexuality. Many of the scenarios and examples used are excellent, and are certain to spark discussion.

This is not a book for squeamish adults, however. "Thirteen and Normal," a compelling story by Carmen Rodriguez, includes a young girl's first view of sexually explicit material and a description of fellatio. Within the context of the story, it works quite well, but its inclusion may limit young readers' access to the book.