



Editorial ? November 1983

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Editorial

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News and comment from the Editor.

This Spring we interviewed Michael Foreman. He showed us the finished art work for **Christmas Carol** which was waiting to go to Gollancz. On his desk was some work in progress - the illustrations for Terry Jones' **The Saga of Erik the Viking**. The pictures for Dickens were so dazzling that we decided then and there to put one on the cover of our Christmas issue and here it is, wrapped round what we hope you will find an entertaining and useful end-of-year BfK package.

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The idea of Mike Foreman doing illustrations for Dickens and Jones rather appealed to us. (We were feeling a bit silly at the time I suspect.) Fortunately it also appealed to him and he agreed to write about it for us. (See pages 3 and 4).

Then we read **The Saga of Erik the Viking** and knew we had to get Terry Jones in on the act as well. Last year, with **Fairy Tales**, his first venture into writing for children, Terry Jones showed how skilfully he could use, adapt, extend and vary a traditional form of storytelling. This year **Fairy Tales** is in paperback, with Puffin, and from Pavilion Books comes the second Jones/Foreman collaboration. With **Erik the Viking** Terry Jones has pulled off a very difficult trick - taking the essence of the Viking sagas and making it accessible and acceptable to the seven year old listener. The excitement, the power, the violence, the heroism, the high seriousness are all here but in a storytelling style that is exactly right for young ears and never condescends. Erik and his companions Ragnar Forkbeard, Sven the Strong and Thorkhild on their quest for 'the land where the sun goes at night' meet danger, temptation, treachery, in the form of dragons, monsters, enchanters, magic places. These twenty-eight short, tightly-constructed episodes are the result of the very best kind of market research - a gifted writer trying things out on an ideal audience. To find out more about Bill, who 'commissioned' Erik from his dad we sent Tony Bradman to talk to Terry Jones.

To discover what he came back with turn to page 5.

A long-awaited pleasure

Perhaps the most eagerly-awaited book this year has been **The Way to Sattin Shore**, Philippa Pearce's first long novel since **A Dog So Small** in 1962.

Philippa Pearce writes, quite consciously, for children. Her prose is clear and concise, the tone cool, detached, often almost casual, which makes it very accessible to young readers. But beneath this transparent surface lie themes which touch us deeply: she writes of love, of longing, of loss, of need, of the acute intense pain and pleasure of being a child. Through its rhythms her writing stirs depths which few writers for children even attempt to reach. To read or listen to a Philippa Pearce story is to experience a complexity of feelings, to be moved to joy or tears, to be left thoughtful, to be enriched. Adult critics have unpacked the sentences and laid all bare; children may not fully understand their own responses but through thinking and talking they will find meanings in these very special stories by a uniquely talented

and original writer. We are particularly delighted to have Philippa Pearce as the subject for the Authorgraph this issue. We visited her in Cambridgeshire; she was welcoming, humorous, perceptive and modest. Talking about **The Way to Sattin Shore** she managed somehow to be both deeply involved and critically detached.

'I knew what I wanted to write about', she said. 'I had to invent the circumstances to make it possible. I'm conscious of the weaknesses. I'm not very good at plots and there are details in this one that are unexplained, or need too much explaining. I could have waited and ploughed on with another year at it but I don't think it would have made it any better so I decided to commit it to paper and have done with it. I wish I could have made it better.'

I had just read it for the first time and been totally absorbed. I was far too engaged by Kate and her family and her quest for the past and her father to either notice or care if the machinery of the plot was creaking a little. Philippa Pearce allows the reader almost to become Kate Tranter, to experience with her the sensuous pleasure, the perfect happiness of a tobogganing expedition, the mixed emotions of a solo bike ride to Sattin Shore on a day she should have been at school, the minute details of family life. All are realised with a completeness that is characteristic of Philippa Pearce at her very best. And that is something not to be missed.

Good Buys

Sattin Shore is certainly on our list of Good Buys for Christmas (page 8). You'll notice we have chosen book-shaped books, deliberately passing over cubes, boxes, houses, castles containing tricky little cut-outs and minimal stories on pull-out concertina strips. 'Charming' they may be, but £4.00 (average price) doesn't seem like good value for money for something that will be treated like an ornament or a toy.

If you are looking for something outside the booky straight and narrow we enjoyed Macmillans **Do-it-Yourself Pop-Up Books** by Ron van der Meer. (**The Case of the Kidnapped Dog**, 0 333 34220 8, **The Ghost Book**, 0 333 34219 4, both £4.99.) Well designed, (fairly) easy to assemble - no cutting, no gluing, fixers provided - and when you have finished you've got a good hardback book. Or try Maureen Roffey's **Make-Your-Own-Pop-Up Circus Book**, Bodley Head, 0 370 30528 0, £4.95 (Press-out bits, provide your own glue.)

When it's finished the book will have most appeal to younger children. One for older brothers or sisters to make perhaps.

The stage-struck should be delighted by Antony Maitland's **Encore**, (Kestrel, 0 7226 5778 1, £6.95) which unfolds to reveal four different scenes in one ornate proscenium arch. One of my favourites this year and very much in the mainstream of the pop-up tradition. Also in the classic tradition is **Yours Affectionately, Peter Rabbit** (Warne, 0 7232 3178 8, £2.95) a collection of the miniature letters which make up the correspondence Beatrix Potter invented to entertain her young-friends. A delight for all Potter addicts. And for sheer fun try **Otter Nonsense**, Norton Juster and Eric Carle, punning in words and pictures (Faber, 0 571 13179 4, £3.50). A gimmick of a different kind has been making a big impact, literally, in our house. **Juggling for the Complete Klutz**, John Cassidy and B. C. Rimbeaux, (Fontana, 0 00 692226 0, £4.95) comes complete with three cube-shaped soft bags with which to learn the art. Looking for something to occupy the family over Christmas? This is it. (Eds warning: don't practice in the kitchen!) So far we have two fourteen-year-old experts who have graduated to juggling with fruit, invented their own variations and, they say, got a good return by combining juggling with Penny for the Guy. Who knows, this book could be an investment. What price juggling carol singers?

Thumbs Down for Hands Together

Carol singing and all things Christmassy feature large in the first issue of **Hands Together** a new magazine from Scholastic which we received for review. It intends, it says, to provide a regular supply of ideas and materials for use in school assemblies and will appear six times a year. We showed it to a range of people connected with Religious Education in schools. 'To judge from this all the developments of the past twenty-five years might never have happened', said one in amazement, summing up the feelings of the others. 'The very name indicates it's on the wrong track, and it could do harm.' Strange that something so out of touch should come from the same stable as Child

Education and Junior Education which have become so reliably on the ball. For those wanting help with assemblies that is more in line with current thinking we recommend **The Tinder Box Assembly Book**, compiled by Sylvia Barratt (A & C Black, 0 71316 2169, £6.95).

Looking Ahead

Finally, thank you for all the kind and generous letters and messages you have sent this year. We are glad you like **Books for Keeps**, are most grateful for your support and welcome your comments and suggestions. We are very sorry that the last two issues have reached you late. We are making every effort to ensure that you will get your copies on time next year. Meanwhile keep writing and, from all of us at BfK, our very good wishes.

Pat

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