

old people of the Arctic telling this tale “of a ship and a boy and a tall stone figure” and “of how the Inukshuk walked that one, special night.” This Arctic-European connection is also reflected in the setting that inspired East’s paintings — Norway in the winter — and in the book’s dedications “to the memory of Jan Helms, mariner, adventurer, and friend” and “for the Inuit and their homeland.” The wondrous meeting of the young European boy and the old stone Inukshuk is permeated with the mystery and power of the land in which it takes place. For the reader, the stone Inukshuk is a memorable introduction to this land that can take away the sun and trap ships, but can also inspire incredible dreaming, even among stone.

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A Question of Balance

The Forest Family. Joan Bodger. Illus. Mark Lang. Tundra, 2000. 100 pp. \$18.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-485-1.

In *The Forest Family*, Joan Bodger asks what happens to a happy family when the father returns from war as a broken, bitter man. Interspersed with this main narrative are tales drawn from folklore, mythology and the bible, told by the characters as counterpoint to their own story. The marriage of Sir Gawain and the story of Ruth and Naomi are recounted in this way. Bodger uses folklore motifs in her main narrative too. In seeking to cure Bruno, the broken husband, his wife Sylvania visits the mysterious Green Knight in the woods, the family befriends a bear and the children rescue a bad tempered gnome. Mark Lang’s bold illustrations enliven the text.

Bodger is a fine writer, and the tale is well written, but it is possible to have too much of a good thing. The stories within the story add subtle shading to the main narrative. However, the many folklore motifs clustered around the main story obscure more than they illuminate. At the end of the story, we discover that Bruno was the Green Knight, the bear and the gnome, even though he was presented throughout as an ordinary man. He is restored to the family partly through the courage of his wife and children, but not in any straightforward way. The Green Knight asks them each to collect hairs from the chin of a live bear. The mother does this. The two girls bring tufts from the beard of the gnome. The Green Knight says this does not matter, but instead of making the promised potion to restore Bruno, he throws the hairs into the fire and tells them only Bruno can change himself.

At end of the book, the family seems to be recovering without the father. Then, Bruno is suddenly restored when he, as bear, kills the threatening gnome who is another manifestation of himself. The ending reveals an uneasy balance between folktale and realistic story that is never really resolved in this book. The idea that a family can recover from the loss of a member is a theme that can resonate strongly with young readers in current realistic fiction but Bodger’s folktale themes require the restoration of the lost hero. In much of this book, it feels as if the

plot is trying to move in both directions at once, and clarity of purpose is lost in this struggle. *The Forest Family* has many appealing features, but the unresolved struggle between traditional and modern themes will leave young readers confused.

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Orientalism for Children?

Sindbad: From the Tales of the Thousand and One Nights. Retold and Illus. Ludmila Zeman. Toronto: Tundra, 1999. Unpag. \$19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-480-0.

Ludmila Zeman's stylish work as illustrator and teller of tales derived from ancient culture, most notably in her Governor General Award winning *The Last Quest of Gilgamesh* (last in a trilogy), is deservedly acclaimed. In addition to the beauty of her work as illustrator, in which she combines a virtuosic array of technical skills with a historicized sensitivity to cultural alterity, Zeman is a skilled and subtle teller of tales already told. In the case of *Gilgamesh*, based on Mesopotamian stories that are over 5000 years old and recounted on clay tablets, Zeman did not shy away from the sombre thematics that lend this story its particular melancholic lustre: the failed quest for immortality, seemingly self-oriented and narcissistic, spawned by fear of death, morphs into a compelling parable about civic and collective memory. When framed by Zeman's trademarks—bold colours, luminous images, imaginatively wrought chiaroscuro effects, baroque detail, and expressive figures—the results are stunning for all levels of reader. Though younger readers may have a hard time with the length, breadth and subject matter of the tales, the visual components carry their own narrative drive in ways that compel attention.

This strong narrative and visual drive is no less the case for Zeman's most recent book, which extracts one of the *Sindbad* stories from *The Thousand and One Nights* or *Arabian Nights*. Zeman deals nicely with the story-within-a-story dimension that links *The Arabian Nights* narrative excesses with the tangible struggle of the storyteller, Shahrazad, to survive her husband's practice of beheading new brides on a daily basis. The sexual voracity and deathlust of King Shahriyar are tamed by Shahrazad's storytelling abilities, rhetoric and consummate control of the narrative leading to the ethical subjugation and civilizing of Shahriyar, a thematic with obvious relations to Zeman's *Gilgamesh* cycle. The intricacy of Shahrazad's tales is given material and visual resonance when the king, enchanted by the stories and rid of his cruelty, orders "craftsmen to weave the stories into the finest colored silk carpets." The obvious feature of this transformation of the king is that one form of subjection gives way to another. Beheaded brides yield to elaborately patterned carpets that embed Shahrazad's narratives in aesthetically pleasing visual motifs "admired by people around the world" and made by the craftsmen so ordered. (One wonders if the craftsmen required to weave the tiny-knotted, silken patterns of the Oriental tapestries were not children themselves, thus lending an especially ironic context to the story of Shahrazad's survival, made