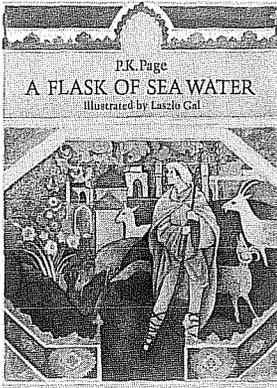


A GOLDEN FAIRY TALE FROM A MAJOR POET

A flask of sea water. P.K. Page. Illus. Laszlo Gal. Oxford University Press, 1989. 32 pp., \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-19-540704-0.



P.K. Page's first children's book, *A flask of sea water*, is a delightful fairy tale complete with beautiful Princess, humble Goatherd, magical Wizard, and Fairy Godmother.

In order to win the hand of the Princess of the Kingdom of Ure, the good-hearted Goatherd (whom the Princess loves and names "Galaad") must be the first to journey to the sea and return with a flask of sea water to present to her father the king. Two others, Stabdyl and Mungu, less worthy than the Goatherd, also want the Princess' hand and vainly struggle to be the first to reach the sea. The three journeys are full of various

"tests" of character. The Goatherd's simple goodness, wisdom, and selflessness of course prevail.

A flask of sea water has proved, from various reports I have received, popular with children of all ages. I offer thanks to people at Havergal College, particularly Mrs. O'Brien, Librarian at the Lower School, who tested the book on her students for this review. She found that the vocabulary was too difficult for her grade three students (although they liked the illustrations); but her grade fives said they would sign it out of the school's library. When asked about the illustration, they reported liking the "genie" the most.

Read allegorically, *A flask of sea water* can be enjoyed on a higher plane by adults. In the "Note from the author" at the end of the book, P.K. Page writes that the sea in this story is "that mythical source of all life, the 'great mother,' which, in most cultures, represents wisdom, wholeness, truth". The "golden" world which Page describes in her story (and which Laszlo Gal beautifully illustrates in rich, burnished tones) is the transcendent realm that is present in all of her work. Page goes on to say that fairy tales "are tales of hope," for they suggest that "another invisible world can manifest itself within our three-dimensional, daily one." This other world or fourth dimension is well-suited to the fairy tale as a form. Given her apparent ease with the form, one can only regret that Page did not start writing fairy tales sooner.

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