



The Left Hand of God

Books Reviewed:

[The Left Hand of God](#) [1]

Issue:

[182](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Geoff Fox](#) [3]

Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

You'd never accuse Paul Hoffman of excessive concern for the sensibilities of his adolescent readers. There's no shortage here of shit, shite or, for that matter, gobshite; [he's] so obliging you'd think he'd lend you his arsehole and shit through his ribs might give the flavour. Language at the other end of the scale also makes few concessions; how about 'obfandous', 'divagations' and 'conniption'? We may be in one of those dystopic worlds where swords and arrows rule, but the dialogue cheerily embraces 'Time gentlemen pleeeese', 'must cost a bob or two?', 'what's the point of having a dog and barking yourself' and 'one I hadn't heard since schooldays' 'go for a long walk off a short pier'. There are other surprising echoes of 40 or 50 years ago 'spivs and Suedeheads and rockers turn up among the baying spectators at a bloody duel to the death. With the exception of a splendidly devious character called IdrisPukke, most of the characters talk very like each other. Sentences sometimes wander off with minds of their own. Being clued up theologically would help a reader's understanding; a character murmurs an unasccribed quotation from Proverbs and at the centre of things is a ferocious version of Roman Catholicism which makes the Jesuits look like liberal wimps. Hoffman is happy to borrow from History too. The battle which brings the first part of this trilogy to a close 'or rather, a transition to Book Two' is all very close to the rain of arrows and the unseated armoured knights floundering on the ground of Olivier's **Henry V** 'it's Agincourt II. (And when you finish the book, there, honest as you like, Hoffman mentions a couple of influential Agincourt sources among his Acknowledgements.)

All of this should not work; but the vigour and chaos of the language and the rest gave an anarchic vitality to a cracking plot. The dark Sanctuary of the Redeemers trains only young males (or does it?). The regime is brutal and physical and mental abuse is rife as the Lord Redeemers plot to impose their ferocious beliefs upon the world through military might. Three teenage boys, each differently skilled in martial arts, escape the Sanctuary. Their first sight of women (echoes of **The Tempest** and Miranda's Brave New World) is, unsurprisingly, disturbing. It would be difficult to defend the novel's chauvinism 'there are only two significant female characters and they are chiefly notable for their physical beauty and passivity. Much like Helen of Troy, Arbell Swan-Neck (you'll have to read it for yourself) may be fought over by mighty armies, but she can only watch as thousands are slaughtered before her eyes. Maybe that will change as the trilogy develops. Whatever his self-indulgences and carefree rejection of political correctness 'and you do feel he's thoroughly enjoying himself' Hoffman is very good indeed at action, excitement, rough and sardonic humour, surprises; and a twist in the closing pages which drives us impatiently towards Book Two.

Source URL (retrieved on Aug '19): <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/182/childrens-books/reviews/the-left-hand-of-god>

Links:

[1] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-left-hand-of-god>

[2] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/182>

[3] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/geoff-fox>