



Peter Dickinson Obituary

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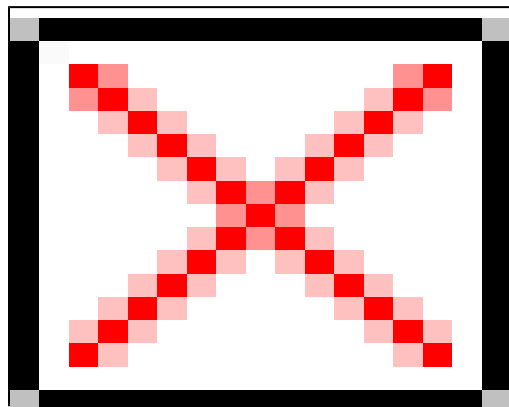
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Peter Dickinson remembered by **Ferelith Hordon**

Peter Malcolm de Brissac Dickinson, FRSL, OBE

16 December 1927 to 16 December 2015

Books for Keeps editor **Ferelith Hordon** remembers the award-winning author.



'Thank you for the book. I will not be reading it since I do not read poetry, but I will keep it on my shelf as a gift from you'. I had just spent a lovely May afternoon in 2013, walking round Winchester with Peter. I had never met him before but had always wanted to and was delighted to be given the opportunity. Despite his age there was no flagging in either our progress or the conversation. I learnt that his artist mother had painted the bosses in Winchester Cathedral and we discovered a mutual love of Kipling; in particular Kipling's sense of history and place. It was as a result of this, I sent a copy of Robert Macfarlane's **Holloway** hoping he might find a similar connection. Hence the typically direct - but much treasured reply. The book is not poetry.

Peter Dickinson was born in Africa - another connection - in what was then Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia, 16th December 1927. The family came back to Britain in 1935 and Peter entered Eton as a King's Scholar (1941) before going on to Cambridge here he studied Classics and English. From Cambridge, he joined the staff of *Punch* in 1952, where he ended up as deputy editor. It was while working for *Punch* that he began to write himself. His first novel, **Skin Deep**, an adult detective novel appeared in 1968 and immediately attracted attention winning the **Crime Writers' Association Gold Dagger** for that year. He continued to write adult novels as well as the many novels aimed at a younger audience for which he became noted.

Weathermonger, the first, was also published in 1968. It was followed by a stream of novels over 40 years including

most recently [In the Palace of the Khans](#) [3] (2012). Nominated for the CILIP Carnegie Medal nine times, he was the first author to be awarded the medal twice, for [Tulku](#) [4] (1979) and [City of Gold](#) (1980). [The Blue Hawk](#) won the Guardian Award for 1977, while [The Seventh Raven](#) (1981) and [Eva](#) [5] (1988) won the Phoenix Award. Such distinction is not by chance. As a writer, Dickinson, is above all a storyteller who manages to combine realism with fantasy in a way that compels belief. He explores ideas, questions, dilemmas without any didacticism, drawing readers into the story, leaving them to make the connections. His novels range over countries and periods - [The Dancing Bear](#) (1972) is set in sixth century Byzantium, [Tulku](#) in Tibet at the time of the Boxer Rebellion; [The Ropemaker](#) [6] and its sequel [Angel Isle](#) are fantasy, while [The Weathermonger](#) and its companion titles in [The Changes](#) sequence, [Heartsease](#) and [The Devil's Children](#) are set in a dystopian England. Other novels explore contemporary issues - [Eva](#) where the brain of a teenage girl is transplanted into a chimpanzee or [AK](#) [7] where the central character is the gun of that name. [The City of Gold](#) illustrated by Michael Foreman, is a collection of short stories retelling the Old Testament in a completely original voice.

Such versatility is unusual in today's world. As is the concise vivid writing with which the stories are related. While he may not have read poetry, Peter Dickinson was a writer of poetry. His prose is direct and uncluttered - but never boring. Time and again the reader will be presented with images that strike the right chord, create the picture - "Margaret's irritation bubbled inside her like milk coming up to the boil" ([Heartsease](#)). Above all he is an author who respects his readers, one who is not afraid to engage the intelligence, whose work always surprises, challenges and entertains.

I will miss him and wish I could have renewed my acquaintance to carry on our conversation. I hope new young readers will be able to discover this voice.

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