

Never Pet a Turtle

By ALICE DALGLIESH

DURING the year 1965, more than 2,800 children's books were published, among them many about animals, wild and pet. There were a number of books about birds sitting on people's heads, or having broken legs or wings and being nursed back to health with the greatest of ease. Vincent Nuccera's *Pigeon on My Head* has an alluring title, but head-sitting by pigeons is not to be encouraged any more than statue-sitting. With so many books available, one can be selective, and several recent medical warnings have been issued about pigeons and small turtles being carriers of *salmonella*. Better just look at turtles, not carry them around and kiss them, as children seem to do. Controlled affection is also healthier for the turtle. Publishers will probably soon be keeping lists of animals that transmit diseases to humans but can be kept if not handled.

Also to be avoided are the hastily written books by those who have learned that children like stories about animals. There are as well the books by sentimentalists, and by scientists who grow livid over anthropomorphism, which pleases small children and is an essential part of many fables and folktales.

My favorite example, however, of going too far in humanizing animals is a book that begins, "Mr. Worm got up one morning and shaved himself carefully. . . ." It's preferable to take a middle-of-the-road course—or we'd have to rule out such informal and amusing books as George Laycock's *Never Pet a Porcupine* and *Never Trust a Cowbird* (Norton).

Fireflies and Monarch butterflies have had much attention and are getting more of it. I am glad to know that scientists are studying the "cold light" of fireflies for a reason, but I also hope the light-givers won't be studied out of existence. Surely by now the scientists know enough about the light of fireflies and the migrations of Monarch butterflies so that these do not have to be caught by thousands of children, or banded, as are the Monarchs.

We have always been ambivalent to an extraordinary extent about creatures. Poems about mice are so numerous that it must be tragic for children to see a mouse caught in a trap or poisoned. Perhaps being sorry for mice has to be an accepted part of life, especially as

artists also love them—they are so pretty in pictures. Think what Beni Montresor did with Mary Stolz's *Asa and Rambo*; we'll welcome them in another book later in the spring.

This is not only the Year of the Horse for the Chinese, but the centennial of Beatrix Potter, whose diary Warne will publish sometime this spring. Her books have become almost a cult, especially in America; I do not believe that even the crustiest opponent of personalized stories about animals would deny his children the fellowship of Peter Rabbit, Benjamin Bunny, and Tom Kitten. Peter wears a little blue coat and takes camomile tea, but in his nature he is very much a rabbit.

THIS seems the place to say that I really do not have the time to "find" books for readers of *SR*, especially if nothing but the title is given. I am most sympathetic about it because the books

Henrietta. *Story and pictures by Boris Drucker. Abelard-Schuman* 32 pp. \$2.75. This is a slight but amusing story of a cartoonlike cat that is always in trouble. The text is recommended for children three and up, and I think it really is suitable for the very young ones. The pictures are in gray, black, and very bright red. But are those fish in the fishbowl swordfish? They look like goldfish. Perhaps they are swordfish as seen through Henrietta's eyes.

Fox and the Fire. *By Miska Miles. Illustrated by John Schoenherr. Atlantic-Little, Brown*, 44 pp. \$3.50. The author of *Mississippi Possum* has given us another book with a dual purpose. The possum book was both a sympathetic treatment of an animal and a picture of a flood in which a family and an animal share food and shelter. Now we have an endearing book about a much-hunted and much-maligned animal, plus the devastation wrought by a forest fire. This fox is true to his nature; when hungry he raids the barnyard. Good pictures. Ages 7-11. (7-10?)

Pascal and the Lioness. *By René Guillot. Illustrated by Barry Wilkinson. Translated and adapted by Christina Holyoak. McGraw-Hill*. 50 pp. \$2.25. René Guillot is a winner of the Hans Christian Andersen award for his well-known books in French with French or African settings. This one was translated in England, but how refreshing it is that Pascal's parents are referred to as *Maman* and *Papa* instead of Mummy (or Mommy) and Daddy. Just such a small touch keeps the child French, as we would like him to be. A pleasant story in the vein

loved in childhood have such an aura in later years. For a long time I have wanted to reread an English book entitled *Dearlove*, about a little girl whose real name was Philomena and whose lower lip "looked as though it had been newly stung by a bee." This is all I know about it, plus its Channel Islands setting, but that is not enough information even for professional book-finders.

I am sorry, too, that I cannot read manuscripts of books for children and recommend a publisher. Stamped, self-addressed envelopes are seldom enclosed. Even if they are, manuscripts do get divorced from them; it's astonishing that writers do not value their manuscripts enough to write their names on them. I've kept one about a personalized peanut for several years, hoping that the author would ask for its return, but she hasn't. And who owns a set of plays for radio written (I hope with permission) from children's books? The first play is *Richard Brown and the Dragon*, from a story by Robert Bright.

The advent of what is known as "The New English" results in requests for lists of "classics" for children of various ages and various school grades. I can't make individual lists, but I shall try to say something about "The New English" in *BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE* next month.

of *Elsa* except that the animals talk to each other. Ages 7-10.

Flash: The Life Story of a Firefly. *By Louise Dyer Harris and Norman Dyer Harris. Illustrated by Henry B. Kane. Little, Brown*. 57 pp. \$2.95. This book is attractive in format, interesting in text; its color pictures provide an opportunity to present the firefly's light. However, an exciting life story does not need exclamation points to carry it along. There are occasional examples of writing down to children—"Raindrops are going plop! plop!" "As Flash goes places he looks like a teeny-weeny freight car."—though not enough to keep the book from "going places." Ages 6 up.

Monarch Butterflies. *By Alice L. Hopf. Illustrated by Peter Burchard. Crowell*. 134 pp. \$3.75. A knowledgeable book, this begins with a costume parade by the children of Pacific Grove, Calif., to mark the arrival of the butterflies that are of such interest because of their beauty and migratory pattern. No one really knows why they have selected this particular grove of trees as a way station, but they fly from Canada apparently as far as Texas and Florida. In Pacific Grove they are protected, although not, so it seems, in other places.

Dr. Urquhart of the University of Toronto has done the most work in banding these butterflies and studying their migrations. Since they lay their eggs on milkweed, it is to be hoped that the bulldozers will spare milkweed plants in some of the places on their routes. Also that young people will be careful in banding the butterflies, if band they must. As suggested in this book, it

should be done in connection with the program of a scientist, not hit-or-miss. No age level given.

Nic of the Woods. By Lynd Ward. Houghton Mifflin. 95 pp. \$3.75. It would appear that this straightforward story about a boy and a dog is told from the author's own experience. Nic, the dog, had much to learn about the woods, especially about skunks and the feel of a mouthful of porcupine quills. When David went on a camping and hunting trip on his own, Nic followed him and showed what he had learned. He even met a very large bear.

The Canadian woods as pictured here seem gloomy, and there has evidently been an effort to brighten the book by using a very vivid blue for some of the text pages, which are overprinted in white, making them difficult to read. Children like a good honest dog story, and they will make every effort to read this one. Ages 6-10.

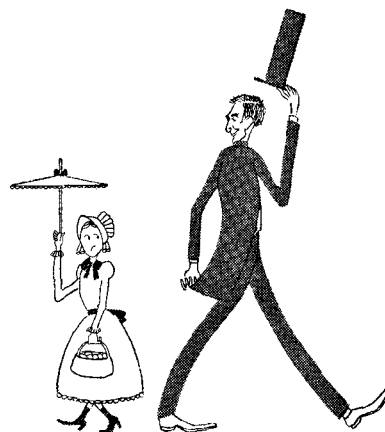
All About Elephants. By Carl Burger. Illustrated with drawings by the author and with photographs. Random House. 134 pp. \$1.95. This seems to me to be the best elephant book of last year, and there were several. The elephants are given names, but are not personified. Any child who opens the book at some of the more dramatic pictures will have to read on. A particularly useful chapter disposes of the myths about elephants: their memory, their graveyards, their fear of mice, and other fabrications that have long misled children and adults. Especially important is the last chapter with its plea for preservation of elephants in Africa. "The majestic African elephant must not be allowed to suffer the fate of so many of its ancestors and disappear from the face of the earth." Ages 10-15.

Miracle Salt. By Mae M. Vander Boom. Illustrated by Erwin Schachner. Prentice-Hall. 64 pp. \$3.50. Salt, "the staff of life," is necessary to human beings and to animals. "Salt and the compounds made from it now contribute in as many as fourteen thousand different ways to our health and the modern comforts of our lives." "At the start of the American Revolution George Washington had a large stock of salt on hand. His orders to his men were that it must be defended at all costs. In spite of this Lord Howe . . . captured the salt. . . . Big rewards were given to those who discovered workable salt deposits."

For a 64-page book this has an unusual amount of information; it will be fascinating to age groups above and below the 8-12 level, at which it is listed. The jacket, though formal, is arresting, and the illustrations are good.

The Abraham Lincoln Joke Book. By Beatrice Schenk de Regniers. Illustrated by William Lahey Cummings. Random House. 92 pp. \$2.95. Here's one from the book: "Lincoln Gives a Book Review: A well-known man read aloud to President Lincoln some chapters from a book he was writing. "Tell me, Mr. Lincoln," said the man, "what do you think of my book?"

"Lincoln didn't think much of it, but he didn't want to hurt the author's feelings, so he said, 'Well for those who like that sort of



—From "The Abraham Lincoln Joke Book."

thing, I think it is just about the sort of thing they would like."

Children seem to love a joke more than anything. A cheerful approach to Lincoln, who also loved a joke, may make children feel closer to him. No age level.

Lincoln's Birthday. By Clyde Robert Bulla. Illustrations by Ernest Crichlow. Crowell. 32 pp. \$2.95. One of the Crowell holiday books, this gives an easy-to-read (but not vocabularized) over-all view of Lincoln. However, its few pages provide little space for Lincoln's family life or his warmth toward his sons, the emphasis being mainly on his boyhood and the reasons why we celebrate his birthday. The illustrations could be better. No age level given.

Spiders, Snakes and Other Outcasts. By Robert Froman. Illustrated by Salem Tamer. Lippincott. 128 pp. \$3.75. If one lowly but beneficial worm is spared being stepped on, this book will have accomplished its purpose. Cockroaches are highly useful in the laboratory, but they seem to have no other value, being prime carriers of disease. I'm delighted to read about those tidy Brazilian spiders that spin their webs at night, catch insects, then neatly fold up their webs in the morning and carry them away. All of these "outcasts" are interesting; bats, for example, though in late years they have been attacking humans, and they do carry rabies. Nevertheless, they have contributed to our knowledge of sonar. However, I take vampire bats more seriously than does the author of this book, because I've had experience with them. Young people will enjoy dipping into this book, and some will read it all the way through. Ages 10-up.



—From "Miracle Salt."

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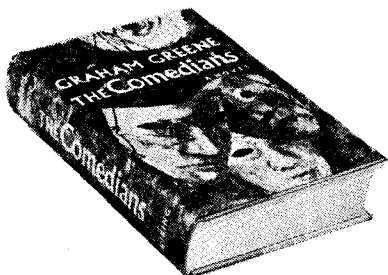
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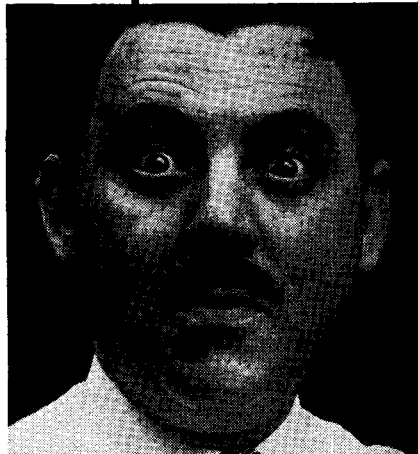


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Evidence Against Abstraction

Silence, by Yuri Bondaryev, translated from the Russian by Elisaveta Fen (Houghton Mifflin. 255 pp. \$4.95), exemplifies in the story of disillusioned veterans the mute acceptance by the Russian people of the horrors perpetrated in the name of Stalin. Daniel Stern is the author of four novels; his next, "After the War," will be published this year.

By DANIEL STERN

A NUMBER of weeks ago an unthinkable scene took place in Moscow. The poet Esenin-Volpin—son of the great poet-suicide of the Revolution, Sergei Esenin—was picked up by the authorities for parading in the streets carrying a placard attacking the police for arresting two writers: Yuri Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky (known abroad as Abram Tertz). Esenin-Volpin was released after questioning and a reprimand. Now—one of the problems you face when you don't shoot people is that they are alive and therefore able to write poems and novels attacking you.

Silence, by Yuri Bondaryev, is one of the books made possible by this somewhat capricious new freedom. In tackling the theme of the two soldiers returning to Moscow after four years of war, the author is immediately faced with the one problem all Soviet writers share: Do I speak in the abstract, optimistic voice of ideology—or do I tell it as it was or, at the very least, as I saw it? Yuri Bondaryev, one of the most famous Russian younger writers, tells it as he saw it and—according to others—the way it was. Konstantin Paustovsky, perhaps the greatest living Russian writer, has called this novel an act of great courage. The title confirms this judgment. The *Silence* is that of all the Russian people—who knew the horrors being perpetrated in the name of Stalin and Socialism, yet did not speak.

To dramatize his theme Bondaryev tells the story of Serghéy and Konstantin, veterans who come home looking for the fulfilled promises of peace. Instead they find hardship, intrigue, and disillusionment. Serghéy is a kind of Tolstoyan hero—stubborn as the Russian earth in winter. Konstantin is a Chekhovian youth—all easygoing charm. Serghéy wants life to mean something; Konstantin wants life to give him happiness.

In the course of their adjustment to



Yuri Bondaryev—"a poetic human note beautifully sounded."

civilian life in the last few years of the Stalin régime Serghéy's father is betrayed to the police, on the fashionable and false charges of Trotskyism, by a money-grubbing, opportunistic neighbor. Serghéy, in an excess of patriotic zeal, exposes a cowardly army officer—only to be defeated by him, expelled from the Communist Party, and forced to resign his student's position at the Mining Institute.

On one level, the actual prose of the book, *Silence* is handsomely written. Bondaryev is in the tradition of Tolstoy and Chekhov, with a naturalistic Slavic lyricism. But, on a deeper level, the habits of ideology are not easy to shake. His good people are, I'm afraid, a little too good. And his bad ones (like the sniveling officer Uvárov) are much too bad. There is, too, a structural neatness that throws one off: one knows from the start, for example, that Konstantin will be drawn to Serghéy's sister, Assia. This, however, is merely a sin of conventionality; in spite of such lapses, there is a great deal here that is moving. The relationship between Serghéy and his father, a weak but well-meaning man, sounds a genuine note of compassion. And if the characters are not profound in the artistic sense, the social texture in which they live is. In Bondaryev's book we hear a poetic human note beautifully sounded where, for so long, there has been only the deafening prose of an optimistic and treacherous ideology. It is a welcome sound.