



## Visions of Sugarplums

by ZENA SUTHERLAND

For me, one of the most exciting first sentences of any book will always be "'Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents,' grumbled Jo, lying on the rug." I was captivated, smitten, lost to the world when I was eleven and found *Little Women* in my stocking. What could be nicer on Christmas morning than a brand-new book?

Each holiday season brings a handful of books about the Nativity. One for the very youngest is Dick Bruna's *Christmas* (Doubleday, \$3.50), the story in the simplest of rhyming words, the illustrations in naïve poster style. Charles Keeping's *The Christmas Story* (Watts, \$3.95) is sophisticated in its somber illustrations but stiffly written. *The Very Special Baby*, by Carol Woodward (Fortress Press, \$1.95), has big pages with strongly designed pictures, and awkward writing that begins, "Walk, walk, walk. Mary and Joseph were going on a long trip. . ." In Mae Vander Boom's *The Shepherd's Boy* (Augsburg, \$2.50) a Jewish child is among the shepherds on the night of Christ's birth, and later dreams that his Roman friend worships with him.

An unusual compilation of Christmas music is *The Shepherd's Pipe* (Plough Publishing House, \$6.50), in which poems by Georg Gick have been set to music by Marlys Swinger and issued, with a record, under the aegis of the Society of Brothers. The songs, designed for a Christmas pageant, are somewhat repetitive but have a haunting quality and are simply arranged for children's voices. Another book to be used for a pageant is Nancy Dingman Watson's *Carol to a Child* (World, \$3.95), static but pleasant.

Based on the first New World carol, written by a Jesuit missionary in the 1640s, Roz Abisch's *'Twas in the Moon of Wintertime* (Prentice-Hall, \$4.95) describes its setting and provides words and music. A book of first carols to play and sing, *On Christmas Day*, compiled by Mervyn Horder (Macmillan, \$3.95), has very simple arrangements of some of the most familiar carols and some less well known. The story of the three kings is told in a book of poetry by Elisabeth Borchers, *There Comes a Time* (Doubleday, \$4.95). Translated by Babette Deutsch and attractively illustrated, each of the twelve poems depicts a month in the kings' year-long journey.

Lillie Patterson's *Christmas in America* (Garrard, \$2.32) is a chronological survey, informally written for young readers, of the contributions from many lands to our Christmas customs. Glenn Crone's *There Really Is a Santa Claus* (John Knox Press, \$2.50) is a well-meant but clumsy attempt to explain the legend: "Many years ago a very good and very wealthy man named Nicholas lived in Asia Minor. We might have called him Claus." In *Christmas Folk*, by Natalia Belting (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, \$4.95), a charming poem describes each day of the festivities celebrated from November 30 to January 5 in Elizabethan England. The material itself is fascinating, and the illustrations by Barbara Cooney are delightfully vivid.

Another prize is Jerome Cooper-smith's *A Chanukah Fable for Christmas* (Putnam, \$3.95), in which a small Jewish boy wistfully dreams of a man in a red suit. He knows there isn't really a Santa Claus, but it is one legend he envies—and into his dream comes a jolly fat man, riding through the sky

in a draydle, wearing what is unquestionably Moshe Dayan's eye-patch. *The Five Brothers Maccabee*, by Libby Klaperman (Sabra Books/Funk & Wagnalls, \$4.50), is an unfortunately dreary account of the revolt led by Mattathias and his sons against the oppressors of the Jews in ancient times.

Among the books for older readers *On That Night*, by Elizabeth Yates (Dutton, \$3.95), is a story both devout and sentimental about the restoration of something precious to each of six people at a Christmas Eve service. Offbeat and amusing, Manghanita Kempadoo's *Letters of Thanks* (Simon & Schuster, \$2.95) progresses from an effusive appreciation of a partridge in a pear tree to an icy and indignant rejection of the wild cumulation on the twelfth day of Christmas. Last of the books that bridge the span of younger and older readers, a selection of color photographs of a Neapolitan crèche in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: *The Nativity* (Doubleday, \$7.95). Olga Raggio, curator, gives the history of the crèche as a Christmas custom, and the text of the King James Version of the Bible is used with the pictures.

There are just a few stories for the very young. *Santa Mouse, Where Are You?*, by Michael Brown (Grosset & Dunlap, \$1.95), is a coy tale of one of Santa's little helpers. Also disappointing is Vip's *The Christmas Cookie Sprinkle Snatcher* (Windmill/Simon & Schuster, \$4.95), about a thief who repents. In *The Great Sleigh Robbery*, by Michael Foreman (Pantheon, \$3.95), a band of robbers in a rocket kidnaps Santa Claus and, prevented by the children of the world from landing anywhere, gives up and becomes docile. A bit slapstick, but bouncy, and the illustrations are riotous with color. A

real charmer is *The Mole Family's Christmas*, by Russell Hoban (Parents' Magazine Press, \$3.50), an animal story that is both bland and funny. The stories in Felice Holman's *The Holiday Rat and The Utmost Mouse* (Norton, \$3.95) are Christmas-oriented, but are concerned primarily with the contributions of the rat and the mouse to human welfare. Tongue-in-cheek, deft, and merry. Trina Schart Hyman's *How Six Found Christmas* (Little, Brown, \$2.95) is delightfully illustrated but a bit precious. A curiosity piece is a re-issue of L. Frank Baum's *A Kidnapped Santa Claus* (Bobbs-Merrill, \$4.95), a turgid morality fantasy.

A fanciful theme combines nicely with its realistic setting in Doris Orzel's *Merry, Rose, and Christmas-Tree June* (Knopf, \$3.95), about a little girl who longs for an old-fashioned doll. Two unusual books with foreign settings are Natalie Savage Carlson's *Befana's Gift* (Harper & Row, \$3.95), set in modern Rome, and *I Saw Three Ships*, by Elizabeth Goudge (Coward-McCann, \$3.95), the story of a small girl in an English village long ago. Beautifully illustrated, *The Extra Gift*, by Mary Sweetser (Macrae Smith, \$3.95), takes place in a Danish village: the family that has adopted him brings comfort to a Portuguese orphan on Christmas Eve. *The Christmas Tree Mystery*, by Wylly Folk St. John (Viking, \$3.95), isn't very mysterious but deals perceptively with adjusting to step-parents. In *The Longest Day of the Year*, by Helen Marquis (Meredith, \$4.95), a thirteen-year-old girl copes with a blizzard on the day before Christmas. Good pace, good style. *The December Dog*, by Jan M. Robinson (Lippincott, \$3.50), is the story of a stray dog that comes for shelter at Christmas. Another animal story is *J. T.*, by Jane Wagner (Van Nostrand-Reinhold, \$4.95), with good photographs of a small, unhappy black child whose pet has died. A Jewish neighbor gives J. T. a new kitten for Christmas.

**Colors.** Written and illustrated by John J. Reiss. Bradbury. 32 pp. \$4.95. The simplest of formats and a sophisticated use of color and design combine to make a big and beautiful first book for the child learning to distinguish colors. The text consists entirely of the names of colors and the names of objects pictured: for red, there are strawberries, raspberries, a fireman's hat, apples, a cut watermelon, lobster, crab, peppers, tomatoes. The shades are vibrant, the layout stunning. Ages 2-5.

**A Lion in the Meadow.** By Margaret Mahy. Illustrated by Jenny Williams. Watts. 32 pp. \$4.95. There was a lion, the little boy said, a big lion in the meadow. His mother said that was nonsense. He was afraid to

go in the meadow because of the big, roaring, yellow, whiskery lion? "Little boy, you are making up stories again," and she gave the boy a small box in which there was, she said, a tiny dragon that would grow huge if released in the meadow and would frighten the lion away. When the boy comes back and reports that his lion is afraid of the ferocious dragon and has run away (it is hiding in the broom cupboard), mother is hard put to it. The humor of the situation should appeal to young pretenders, with whom the author identifies. The writing is rather flat, but it is compensated for by the fancy of the plot and the colorful illustrations that abound in vitality and fun. Ages 5-7.

**Broderick.** By Edward Ormondroyd. Illustrated by John Larrecq. Parnassus. 32 pp. \$3.50. A new hero joins the ranks of great mice in literature! Passionately addicted to books, Broderick (who always judged by the cover, after judicious nibbling) one day came across a book on surfing; having searched for a road to fame, the doughty mouse immediately acquired a tongue depressor and practiced with grim determination. He was picked up one day by an admiring human named Tim, who became his manager, and together they dazzled the crowd at Malibu Beach. Broderick could ride one foot, hang ten, and water-ski; he learned the pullout, the stall, and the cutback. His exploits dazzled the world and the television audience, and when he retired Broderick sent a large, anonymous donation to the library that had started him on his glorious career. Great fun and good style, with illustrations that are strong in composition and delicate in detail. Ages 5-8.

**Wolfie.** By Janet Chenery. Illustrated by Marc Simont. Harper & Row. 64 pp. \$2.50. If your dog doesn't bother to use his dog house, you use it yourself, of course. Harry and his pal George found it an excellent secret hiding place and a good permanent residence for Wolfie, their spider. A staff member at the Nature Center helped the boys discover facts about the wolf spider:



—From "Wolfie."

how he differs from insects, what to feed him, and why he had never spun a web. Mixed with this simply presented information is a bit of amusing by-play with a small sister who wants desperately to help feed Wolfie, and attractive pictures of two alert boys (one black, one white). The book will serve admirably as a beginning science book and as a story for the beginning reader. Ages 6-8.

**Journey to Jericho.** By Scott O'Dell. Illustrated by Leonard Weisgard. Houghton Mifflin. 41 pp. \$3.75. Almost every week someone got hurt in the mine, and every year several men were killed, but David wanted to be a miner when he grew up, just like his father. Mother hated the idea, and when she found out that David had sneaked into the mine on the same day there was an explosion, she put her foot down. No more. Father went off to Jericho, in California, to find work in a lumber camp, and when he sent for his family, he didn't realize that David was going to lug, all the way from West Virginia, a jar of Grandma's watermelon pickles. To David it was the last link with home, but when he saw his father he ran with such abandon that the jar broke. It didn't matter—they were all together again. The combination of a former Newbery winner and a former Caldecott winner has produced a mild story, well told but staid of pace, with very handsome illustrations. Ages 8-10.

**Along Sandy Trails.** By Ann Nolan Clark. Photographs by Alfred A. Cohn. Viking. 31 pp. \$4.95. Color photographs, some of them strikingly dramatic, are seen to full advantage on the oversize pages of a book that captures both the grandeur of the Arizona desert and the contentment of a small girl who walks with her grandmother through the beauty of blooming cacti. Overhead the paloverde tree is a froth of gold, along the trails dart the roadrunner and the quail, the tiny ground squirrel sits watching, bright-eyed. The little Papago girl tells of the giant cactus that holds rain water when the dry time comes, and gives fruit for the hunger moon. In the distance the mountains loom purple, the sun sets, and the two go happily home. "I go into my mother's house and light a store-bought candle to remember all our walks these moons of summer along the sandy trails." The writing has a lyric flow despite its simplicity, the style eloquently echoing the stark beauty of the desert, so briefly softened by flowering in the summer moon. Ages 8-10.

**My Dear Dolphin.** By Cynthia de Narvaez. Photographs by Jerry Greenberg. American Heritage. 64 pp. \$3.95. Dolphins are a big tourist attraction in Florida, but they seldom indulge in a mass love affair with visitors. Cynthia de Narvaez had flown down from New York for spring vacation with her four children (eleven, nine, six, and four), and all of them were so captivated by the dolphins that they persuaded the trainer to let them enter the pool outside of visiting hours and play with these most remarkable mammals. The photographs capture both the

charm of the dolphins and the delight of the children, and the book records a day-by-day history of growing affection and appreciation of the dolphins' intelligence, sense of humor, and amiability. Informative, as many books about trained dolphins are, this has an added appeal because of the participation of children and the immediacy of first-hand observation. Ages 9-11.



**Children of Appalachia.** Written and photographed by Peg Shull. Messner. 95 pp. \$3.95. While there are quite a few stories about Appalachia, there are few informational books. This one has a fictional framework, but it is a description of the children of three families of the Cumberland region rather than a story. The fictionizing is occasionally a vehicle for presenting facts, rather artificially, in the guise of conversation, but it also enables the author to give the flavor of mountain speech and to use local idiom in context. One family resides in town, their cousins are on a farm, and a friend lives "up the holler" in a primitive and self-sufficient, almost frontier fashion. If not always fluent, the writing is competent, and the book gives a very good picture of the region: the feeling of community engendered by generations of intermarriage, the beauty of the mountains that holds the Appalachians, the despoliation that mining has produced, the government programs that have been set up to mitigate the problems caused by lack of education and unemployment. Ages 9-11.

**A Single Trail.** By Karen Rose. Follett. 158 pp. \$3.50. The first few times the family had moved, Ricky had suffered newcomer's agonies at school, but this was the eleventh time, he was in sixth grade, and he had a formula. After two weeks he had friends. So he couldn't understand Earl's hostility. Sure, Earl was black and he was white, so what? For Earl, the fact that anybody was white was enough; he wasted time in school, had no friends, entertained few hopes. The change that opens a door for both boys is an accident in one sense (a hospitalized teacher volunteers to coach both boys in reading), but it is really due both to the persistence and understanding of the teacher and the school principal, and to each boy's need of a friend. Thus thrown together, Ricky and Earl exhibit no instant rapport; realistically, they are just making the first tentative overtures toward mutual trust when the story ends. Perceptive, moderate in scope but infinite in significance, and capably written. Ages 10-11.

**Portrait of Ivan.** By Paula Fox. Bradbury. 160 pp. \$4.50. There was an ease and friendliness in Matt's studio that warmed Ivan, a lonely child whose mother was dead and whose father was too busy to know his son. Ivan sat, Matt painted, and old Miss Manderby read aloud—more because she enjoyed it than because Ivan did. Matt announced he had to go to Florida on a commission and invited both to come along—so this strange and charming trio drive down to Florida, to an old house by the river, where Ivan meets the

girl next door. Twelve and at home in her world, General's freedom to roam and her confidence are a marvel to the boy whose life has been so circumscribed. Their parting is poignant—two friends who may never meet again—but Ivan's life will never be as empty. Written with infinite love and craftsmanship, this is a highly original and deeply moving story. Ages 10-12.

**A Community of Men.** By John Kiddell. Chilton. 200 pp. \$4.95. Having written a play which he modestly admits is the greatest comedy since Hamlet, Hamish seeks a theater. (Hamlet, he explains kindly to his chums David and Bottle, has to be a comedy because Ophelia was nuts and nobody but a clown would carry on the way Hamlet did.) The British-rattle dialogue is typed but amusing, a foil for the serious problems that Hamish and his friends meet in their efforts to mount a play and keep a home for children of divorce from being closed after the man who has run the home (and rented them space for the play) dies suddenly. This is what Ngaio Marsh calls do-goodery, but it never becomes sanctimonious and it has strong characterization, humor, sentiment, and a modicum of Australian flavor. Ages 11-14.

**Sounder.** By William H. Armstrong. Illustrated by James Barkley. Harper & Row. 116 pp. \$3.95. To the small black boy, his father was a tower of strength; all of the family life in their poor sharecropper's cabin revolved around the quiet man who worked so hard. But he stole some meat for his hungry children and was taken away in chains. Sounder, the great dog, tried to save him, and was shot. Weeks later he came back crippled and silent, always looking for his master. The boy looked, too, roaming after the chain gangs. Years after, the father returned, as silent and broken as the dog, and when the man died the dog soon followed. Somber as the book is, it is moving, tender, and inexorable. The human characters have no names; they are a symbol of all the poor, black or white, who face indignity with courage. Ages 12-15.

**Black Folktales.** By Julius Lester. Illustrated by Tom Feelings. Baron. 159 pp. \$4.50. When storytellers were the only custodians of a people's literature, each one adapted traditional tales to his own talents and to his audience. Today, some of the folk tales of the past have become congealed, but those in this collection are, in the best tradition, adapted to our time. The language is a vigorous combination of the traditional and the contemporary, the humor vibrant, the style fluent and roll-

ing. Some of the material is African, some Afro-American; most of it is pure fiction, some of it based on fact. The tales are about the first days of the world, about lovers, heroes, and legendary people, and several of them are bitter or disparaging toward white people, all of whom are portrayed as vicious or stupid. There is an irreverent humor as well as the fun of exaggeration: Death, trying to cope with an uncooperative Stagolee, looking up a reference in *Death Manual*, or the Lord checking *TV Guide* for 1970, just in case he wants to take a vacation then. Ages 12 up.

**Rogues' Gallery: A Variety of Mystery Stories.** Edited by Walter Gibson. Doubleday. 398 pp. \$5.95. Elementary, my dear reader. Just take a dozen seasoned mystery writers, toss in a few lesser lights for piquancy, mix and serve. The operative word in the title is "variety," for the nineteen stories included in *Rogues' Gallery* have been chosen as illustrations of types of detective fiction, and the choices represent almost half a century of development in the genre. A preface discusses the history of the mystery story, and each selection in the anthology is preceded by a note on the author and the tale. Ages 13 up.

**What Shall We Do Tomorrow?** By Mary Hayley Bell. Lippincott. 235 pp. \$5.95. There's always an audience for theater books, captive and glad of it. An actress herself, wife of John Mills and mother of two actress daughters, Mary Hayley Bell is also a playwright, though not a skilled raconteuse. Her style is a bit stilted but her material is fascinating. She grew up in Macao, where her father and his people before him had been in the Colonial Service; was sent to school in England, and decided, when the family became impoverished, to be an actress—something she had dreamed of since she had seen, as a young girl in Tientsin, a band of players that included John Mills. There were years of bit parts and touring before Mary Hayley Bell and John Mills met again and fell in love; there were frequent separations during the war years; there were golden years in which Juliet achieved success and Hayley fame. All in all, a fascinating story. For young adults.

**The Season: A Candid Look at Broadway.** By William Goldman. Harcourt, Brace & World. 432 pp. \$6.95. The season is 1967-1968 and there is nothing, but nothing, about the season and the scene that William Goldman doesn't put under a highpower microscope and probe. Each production of that season serves as a launching pad for a discussion of marvels and iniquities of Broadway today: the power of the ladies who run theater parties, the stars who are the darlings of the critics whether they can act or not, the iron whimsicality of critics, the agonies of the road, the costs of production, the intricacies of booking—everything. Names are named, with no punches pulled, and the writing is vigorous, forceful, funny, and percipient. Should be required reading for anyone interested in the theater. For young adults.

# TREPLEFF

by MacDonald Harris

Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 256 pp., \$5.95

THIS IS A STRANGE NOVEL, propelling a reader forward pell-mell and totally absorbed, but never providing a solid footing. Experiencing it is an exciting but precarious business, like running along a fictional tightrope. Hence, while *Trepleff's* separate merits are many, and it is far better than most novels these days—in fact, it is very fine—the book as a whole never reaches the level of the assured, sometimes brilliant writing in its parts.

For one thing, though its central subject is a man who marches steadily from a position of affluent respectability to a state of semi-idiotic nothingness, its tone sways hither and yon from dead seriousness to slapstick comedy, from high lyricism down to existential coolness, with intermittent squiggles of mood as unexpected as they are indescribable, as if MacDonald Harris was never quite sure what attitude he should have about his own creation. For another, characters don't develop, they leap from this to that, sometimes sans motive or credibility. And always there is the nagging question, what to make of them?

As perhaps might be expected from such a complex balancing act, Trepleff, the hero, ends up in a sort of combined prison-hospital-insane asylum, those final refuges of so many of today's weak but saintly heroes. Yet when he asserts in the last pages that he is not some kind of isolated freak, that there are many destinies like his, the statement echoes the haunting feeling a reader has had all along about the fundamental significance of Trepleff's zany adventures and concerns.

On guilt: "Am I victim or am I myself the criminal I seek?" he asks. On his malady: "I am sick because I forgot how to love." On how we perceive sanity: "It may be that seeing things too clearly is precisely the definition of madness." There are literary derivatives for such thoughts—Kafka, Mann, Dostoevsky, Sartre—as there are for much else in this novel. But they are no less real or moving because of that, no less striking in their recognizable normality, however confusedly they are presented.

By way of clarification, Trepleff is a character in Chekhov's drama *The Seagull*, and since role-playing is still another major theme in this theme-packed novel, the name works as both a title and an identity for the protagonist. When he is still a young man,

preparing for Trepleff's part in a little-theater production, the director describes to him the first and most long-lasting of his many alter egos: "You long for communion with other souls," the director says, "but you are cut off from them by some mysterious curse." Thereafter Trepleff's life (and that of all the other characters, for that matter) is one huge off-stage extension of the Stanislavsky method.

Trepleff's decline is mated with his roles. As Trepleff he marries, less for love than out of pity, a girl already pregnant by another man. As Sinclair Lewis's Arrowsmith he becomes a \$60,000-a-year psychiatrist, the epitome of scientific rationality and square living. As a quasi-Christ he ruins his career by making dutiful love to one of his most pathetic patients. As Trigorin, the heartless novelist in *The Seagull*, he manipulates a rich widow into supporting him, finally driving her to suicide. Basically, however, Trepleff is Trepleff, compassionate and desiring love, doomed by fate and an inner demon to play multiple parts, and as a result to suffer fears, separations, and even crucifixions in each of them.

These are the steps in the action and its principal theme: the inability of men to care, and the pain they cause to themselves and others when they try. Yet any sequence of related episodes and any solid foundation of idea falsifies the nature of this crazy-quilt odyssey. What will stick in the mind are the best of its moments: Trepleff ransacking his own house for loose cash; Trepleff trying unsuccessfully to drown his dog because it insists on fornicating around; shoeless Trepleff being thrown out of a swank Paris hotel; Trepleff in Rome, interrogated by the police about a murder that never happened; Trepleff working out a *modus vivendi* with Nadia, the widow, in one of the queerest love-hate relationships in a long while; or the whole first chapter, an isolated, self-contained gem that has already appeared among *The Best American Short Stories*.

Such episodes as these are handled with a mature style, with wit, energy, intelligence. For such traits a reader should be willing to be a bit out of kilter, to live in a house of fiction where, as Trepleff puts it, the walls are not quite straight.

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## THE JOKE:

A Novel of Czechoslovakia Today

by Milan Kundera, translated from the Czech by David Hamblin and Oliver Stallybrass

Coward-McCann, 288 pp., \$5.95

ANYTHING THAT COMES OUT of Czechoslovakia today is greeted with great interest and compassion. Since writers have borne the brunt of the battle against totalitarianism and occupation, our temptation to consider a contemporary Czech novel as a possible document in that struggle is understandable. *The Joke*, published in Czechoslovakia in 1966, thus attained added significance after the fateful events.

At first, the reader is amazed that a novel like this could have been published in a Communist country at all. He then realizes the extent to which the liberal Czechs have gone in their fight for freedom. This realization finally gives way to bitterness at the perfidy of man to man which the book exposes. The very appearance of *The Joke*, however, attests to the invincibility of the free human spirit.

Not that this novel is a fictionalized political tract. Although the main conflict and the agony of the main character derive from a political situation, life pulsates here with such vigor that the reader is ready to forgive the intrusion of politics into pure fiction.

Ludvik Jahn, a young Communist who desires to contribute to the Party's "building of socialism," is caught in the wheels of party machinery when the watchdogs intercept a postcard on which he had written to his earnest but simple-minded girl friend: "Optimism is the opium of the people! The healthy atmosphere stinks! Long live Trotsky!" Meant as a practical joke, the words boomerang, not only destroying Ludvik's future as a party worker but marking him for life. For a Stalinist society cannot permit itself to be laughed at. The young student is thus sacrificed to the one-track minds of true believers. Fortunately for Ludvik, the ordeal serves him as a purgatory, forcing him to realize deeper and more durable values.

As the plot unfolds the tribulations of this sensitive Czech intellectual multiply. He is expelled from party and university, sent to a hard-labor camp, has an unhappy love affair, and makes an abortive attempt at revenge against the official responsible for his downfall. The dimensions of his initial joke magnify grotesquely until all these bizarre happenings, and the whole history of Czechoslovakia after the last war, become one huge, cruel joke against which the individual is as