

ground, the plot itself tends to seem oversensational — the stuff of juvenile fantasy, rather than the realistic portrayal of a young man coming to grips with experience. There is a near escape from drowning, a confrontation with an escaped murderer, and a narrowly avoided beating-up by a drunken Indian (a rather distasteful racial stereotype, this) — not to mention a stampede, and the discovery that the devoutly religious cowhand on whose advice Delore chiefly relies is a secret alcoholic. All this, in the space of little more than 100 pages, begins to undermine the suspension of disbelief which Paul St. Pierre's command of descriptive detail has created.

While the elegance of St. Pierre's writing ensures that the book remains an absorbing read, this cramming of events into so short a space makes Delore's initiation into adult responsibility begin to seem a nightmare which any normal fifteen-year-old would go a long way to avoid, rather than an experience with which he or she might identify. One or two fewer crises, and a little more variety of pacing, would go a long way to rectifying this. Nevertheless, one is reluctant to be too critical of a work with so splendidly downbeat an ending as this one, with the bedraggled Delore riding into town wearing running shoes and soaked to the skin, to be greeted by the grumbling of a father who seems almost as ornery as the horse that threw him. That very absence of parental recognition is a touch which many of St. Pierre's readers will no doubt find all too realistic.

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## AN IMPORTANT ANIMAL STORY

**Red Fox**, Charles G. D. Roberts. Illus. John Schoenherr. Scholastic-TAB, 1986. 187 pp. \$3.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-71604-2.

Some four or five years ago when I tried to re-order Charles G.D. Robert's *Red Fox* for a class, I discovered that the Puffin edition had gone out of print. Mildly annoyed, I looked elsewhere for an appropriate example of the realistic animal tale, but soon realized how unsuitable the other representatives of the genre were for a young audience. Now, in 1986, *Red Fox* has come back into print, this time as a Scholastic-TAB Publication.

This new edition provides no critical apparatus, or introduction. It simply

makes Roberts's 1905 text available (with John Schoenherr's illustrations) at a very low cost. I welcome the re-publication of *Red Fox*, because of its special significance in both Canadian and children's writing.

The realistic animal story — unlike those stories of humanized animals who pack picnic lunches for a day of boating or who search anxiously in their waistcoats for pocket-watches — originated in Canada and was perhaps the first Canadian writing to win a truly international audience. *Red Fox* itself was not the first of this genre; it was preceded by Roberts's own collections of short stories, *The kindred of the wild* (1902) and *The watchers of the trail* (1904), among others. Published even earlier than Roberts's contributions were those of Ernest Thompson Seton, whose "Life of a prairie chicken" first appeared in 1883 and whose successful and popular *Wild animals I have known* came out in 1898. The pioneering work in these "biographies" of wild animals, as they have been called, prepared the way for innumerable tales in the same tradition by Roderick Haig-Brown, Kenneth and Frank Conibear, and Fred Bodsworth, to name but a few.

Clearly influenced by Darwinism, the genre did not die out as society adjusted to the implications of evolution; instead, it was passed on to a younger audience. *Red Fox's* special importance lies not simply in its being a realistic animal story, but in its being an excellent one for the youthful reader. Let me explain.

First, unlike most of Roberts's and Seton's other tales, the ending of *Red fox* is uplifting in that the animal protagonist escapes to the "rugged turbulence of hills and ravines...." Perhaps such an ending is not so rigorously in keeping with a Darwinian view of the insignificance of the individual, but it certainly makes *Red Fox* less disturbing. Roberts makes perfectly clear that Nature — human and otherwise — can be cruel. The tale begins with the death of Red Fox's father, soon after records the sudden and violent deaths of his litter-mates, and continues with a sequence of close calls for Red Fox. After doing battle with an eagle, a mink, mongrel dogs, and a buck deer in rut, Red Fox is ruthlessly and artificially set upon by fox hunters in pursuit of that uniquely human capacity — "sport." The reader is left with a powerful appreciation for life and a recognition of the necessity of death, but he puts down this book with the sense that the natural processes have won the day over needless and, hence, unnatural killing.

The story itself is a Bildungsroman, a novel of growth and development, albeit in the animal world — an appropriate form for a children's book. Of even greater significance is the character of "the Boy," who, presumably through the close evolutionary bond between man and the lower animals, has an innate admiration for the magnificence of Red Fox. Himself an animal, the Boy rises to the challenge of the hunt, trying to outwit and capture the fox he so totally respects. The Boy's superior animal intelli-

gence allows him to succeed, but his capture of Red Fox does not lead to the fox's unnecessary death. Only when the Boy is deceived into putting his captive in the wrong hands does the sporting capacity of some, who seem disassociated from their animal origins, attempt to destroy Red Fox.

Scholastic-TAB Publications is to be commended for bringing this important work back into print.

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#### STORIES AND GAMES: TWO DELIGHTFUL AIDS

**Tell me another**, Bob Barton. Pembroke Publishers Ltd., 1986. 160 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-921217-02-1. **Games for everyone**, David Booth. Pembroke Publishers Ltd., 1986. 160 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-921217-03-X.

Bob Barton's bright new book *Tell me another* is akin to his storytelling: it quickly gets to the core of things and makes people believe that they're going to have a good time. *Tell me another*, much more than an exciting and excellent guide for storytellers, educators and parents, is sprinkled with amusing anecdotes (Don't tell us any of those "Once Upon A Time Stories," mister!) and literally hundreds of stories, lessons, ideas and bibliographies suitable for all occasions.

Storytelling, reading aloud, chanting, music and games are explored most effectively in six down-to-earth, easy-to-read chapters that make ordinary people say, "Hey, I can do this!" You can hear the author speaking as he suggests how you can find and select a particular story with recurring sequential patterns. He offers valuable tips on call and response stories, chiming in, sound exploration, hooking words together, chanting, drama games, folk songs, activities, round-robin storytelling and many more.

One of the most important aids for the teacher storyteller is the chapter entitled, "Making the Story Your Own," which gives guidelines on ways to learn the plot, to create characters and to add details step by step. "I cannot give you fool-proof guidelines," says Bob Barton, but he allows you to "be" as long as your dramatization of the story is natural and has that necessary warmth and clarity. Twenty-five years' experience in storytelling, from