

1918, Nabokov was on the summit of Ai Petri, where he captured a specimen of *Cupido minimus*." Calling it the "fat of irrelevant fact," Field generally avoids this kind of data. He also avoids digressing into commentary on Nabokov's work, which had been the subject of his earlier study, *Nabokov: His Life in Art*. The note on the back of the Penguin edition of *Nabokov: His Life in Part* classifying it as "literary criticism" is misleading. The few critical comments deal mainly with influences and suggestions of possible sources for characters or incidents that show up in Nabokov's later fiction.

Judged solely as biography, *His Life in Part* is lopsided. Field begins with an over-long—and inconclusive—look at Nabokov's forebearers and then concentrates on his youth and career as an émigré writer in Berlin between the wars. Readers who are unfamiliar with the émigré figures of the 20's and 30's could find this tedious; and readers who are interested in Nabokov primarily as an English writer could be disappointed by the comparatively short account given of his stay in the United States. Only the last chapter deals with Nabokov's twenty years in America, the period during which he made the transition to English writing. Then the biography comes to an early end with the success of Nabokov's most famous book, and we are left with a picture of him following the best seller lists as Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago* (a novel he considered overrated and sentimental) crept up on his own *Lolita*.

It is in portraying incidents such as this (and the strange friendship and enmity between Nabokov and Edmund Wilson) that Field excels. Writers seldom lead exciting lives, but they often have interesting personalities; Field's success is in conveying an impression of Nabokov's personality.

There is, however, a difficulty in presenting an objective portrait of a man when he keeps looking over one's shoulder to see what is being written. Field solves this by printing Nabokov's comments (and the comments of his wife) in boldface type. While at first this is disconcertingly like a red-letter New Testament, once the reader gets accustomed to it, the effect is to give him a feeling for what Field calls Nabokov's game, the "lifelong character part" he performed. "The person he usually imitates at the Montreux Palace is the way

he [Nabokov] puts it." Regardless of how serious this "role" is, it is a delightful one to encounter.

Richard Bryan McDaniel

PATRICIA MORLEY, ED.
Selected Stories of Ernest Thompson Seton

Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1977. Pp. 168.

This volume is the latest addition to the Canadian Short Story Library published by the University of Ottawa Press. It has been preceded by collections of nineteenth and twentieth-century authors, both well known and obscure: Duncan Campbell Scott, Raymond Knister, E. W. Thompson, Desmond Pacey, Isobella Valancy Crawford, Douglas Spettigue, Leo Simpson, and Robert Barr. Ernest Thompson Seton is, of course, a widely popular writer, whose many collections of animal stories are readily available. The chief advantage of this collection, then, is not to focus attention on a previously ignored or out-of-print author but rather to provide a representative sampling of Seton's contribution to what is a distinctively Canadian subgenre.

Patricia Morley's informative introduction stresses that "the formation of a new and unique genre, the realistic animal story," occurred in Canada from the late 1880s to the 1920s and beyond as a result of "the impact of the Canadian wilderness upon sensibilities which were by education largely British or European. . . . The wilderness and the forms of life found there impressed Canadian Writers as something to be feared, respected and loved. . . . Wilderness conditions reinforced the evolutionary concept of the common origin of man and beast." Seton and the other eminent Canadian writer in this field, Charles G. D. Roberts, both saw their work as a development from the evolutionists "who preached that the animals are not simply our spiritual brethren but actually our bloodkin." Seton's stories illustrate the doctrine of survival of the fittest, nature red in tooth and claw. His animal

characters almost all die; as Seton observes in the story "Silver-spot," "there are no hospitals for sick crows." Morley, however, should be applauded for squelching the Polk-Atwood myth that Seton's stories therefore support their theory that Canadians are victims or losers. As she points out, "Seton's consuming interest in his stories lies in *the individual hero*," in animals "of unusual gifts and achievements," in "the real personality of the animal and its view of life rather than the ways of the species," in creatures "who excite our admiration in the highest degree." A hero, whether dead or alive, is neither victim nor loser.

The stories, selected because she regards them as among Seton's best with a Canadian setting, amply prove her point. The first five are from Seton's first collection, *Wild Animals I Have Known*. Silver-spot the crow, Raggylug the Cottontail rabbit, Bingo the dog, the Springfield fox and Redruff the partridge all engage our admiration for their exceptional courage, cleverness, and beauty. With the deaths of these heroic leaders, often through the agency of man, the entire society they have led passes away. Without being sentimental Seton bemoans man's needless destruction. "The Winnipeg Wolf" (from *Animal Heroes*) and "Krag, the Kootenay Ram" (from *Lives of the Hunted*) also stress that the hunted are more admirable than the hunters; in "The Wild Geese of Wyndygoul" (from *Wild Animal Ways*) the lifelong fidelity of the gander and his mate overcomes the interference of the author who has pinioned them.

Morley is perhaps more admiring of Seton's literary skills than other readers may be. Although one cannot deny that "his animal protagonists are dramatically rendered with a fine sense of detail, delightful humour, and simple yet vivid language," the stories lack the formal unity and vivid descriptions of natural setting found in Roberts's tales. As a naturalist who wanted to present his scientific observations in an attractive form, Seton chose a loose, episodic structure which enabled him to describe the training and development of his animal characters at all stages of their lives. This approach also has the advantage that it permits him to alter the mood radically within one story, from the comic to the horrific in "The Winnipeg Wolf," for example. However, it does not allow that intensity Roberts achieves by integrating all the parts in order to create a single

dramatic effect. Nevertheless, this volume should still engage the attention of adults who remember Seton only as a writer for children.

Winnifred M. Bogaards

ERROL TRZEBINSKI

Silence Will Speak: A Study of the Life of Denys Finch Hatton and his Relationship with Karen Blixen
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977. Pp. 348. \$15.00.

There can be no pretending that this is a well-written book, or even a necessary one; but to admirers of Isak Dinesen it is unquestionably an irresistible one. Errol Trzebinski has chosen an impossible subject—the legendary Denys Finch Hatton, dearest friend (lover?) of Karen Blixen—and left the mystery of this man and their relationship virtually intact. It is not entirely Trzebinski's fault. Finch Hatton seemed determined to leave as little of himself behind as he could, so that what is left simply raises more questions than it answers. The biographer's fear, in the introduction, that he will seem "too good to be true" is well founded. Finch Hatton begins and ends maddeningly "pure." Because there is so little to be known about him, the reader is tempted to entertain doubts where none may have previously existed. What secret impulses made him such a wanderer, such a loner, such a daredevil? Was he possessed by vanity, driven by demons? How inhibited were his desires? Just what *was* his relationship with Karen Blixen? This crucial question remains unanswered.

One is left with the curious impression that Karen Blixen was, after all, never really at home in Africa, that she suffered from intense loneliness that may account for her adoration of Finch Hatton. He, however, was perfectly at home there, and this, perhaps, is what stood between them. She tried to absorb it, whereas he let it absorb him. She projected onto it; he took it for what it was.