

Veronica Tennant's topic is not a new one, for the universal theme of a young dancer's dream of success has been explored by other authors. Three that come to mind are Alberta Armer, author of *The World of Molly O.*, Jill Krementz, whose *A Very Young Dancer*, is really a photographic essay, and Briton Noel Streat, whose popular *Ballet Shoes* was made into an equally popular movie.

Tennant's handling of the theme is effective. She consistently provides a realistic and entertaining account of the glamour and drudgery in the life of a fledgling ballerina. That her book succeeds is evident from the comment of an eleven-year-old of my acquaintance who not only reported that Jennifer's story was interesting, but also went back to read the book four more times!

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Beware of the Wolf!

MARY FORD

Wolves and Wilderness, John B. Theberge. Illustrated by Mary Theberge, J.M. Dent and Sons, 1975. 159 pp. \$4.95 paper.

This book looks attractive and tempting. The cover is a bold green, and in large white type it declares: *Wolves and Wilderness*. Occupying more than half of the front cover is a marvelous color photograph by Dr. D. Pimlott (University of Toronto biologist) of an adult wolf and pup standing at the edge of a pond. The rear cover proclaims: "This is the true book of the wolf, the most controversial of North American wild animals." In a period when it is popular to be a wolf fancier, when five thousand people annually take part in the Algonquin Park "wolf howl-ins," when one risks physical abuse by wearing a wolf-lined hood, a book of such attractive proportions is certain to tempt. But beware.

The publishers have been less than honest in the expectations which are raised by the covers because this is not a book which is primarily concerned with wolves. It is rather more like that literary mystery—"gleanings from the notebook. . ." Unlike R.M. Lockley's *The Private Life of the Rabbit*, which skilfully weaves scientific detail into an exciting narrative story of the rabbit, Theberge's book lacks unity, and it is difficult to determine its audience. It is obviously not an adventure story; nor, in fact, is it a scientific book which would necessarily interest a child. The author's tired prose would probably put a child to sleep; he might never read again.

The first one hundred pages deal with the wilderness "adventures" of the author (then a student biologist) and his guide, Lawrence. The two set out early one spring morning in the swirling snow to paddle in the dark across Cache Lake. Their objective, as outlined by the author in the prologue: "to find out how many wolves there were, whether they achieve a limitation on their population density, and what their impact is on the species they eat." (p. 10) It promises to be exciting; it is not. Unfortunately the author, though undoubtedly a fine scientist, cannot write a cohesive, interesting story. His attempts at dialogue are pathetic. Lawrence, a former logger, speaks in nongrammatical mono-syllables. Most of their exchanges consist of one-line replies or commands issued by the logger. For example: "Can't eat that till the water boils. And don't watch it neither! Here, help me get some dry wood" (p. 21). or, "Okay, she's fast, but I can't see no rocks" (p. 80).

Actually, nothing very interesting happens to the two men. They make at least four trips hoping to sight wolves, but they must settle for a few responsive howls and a track or two. The seven chapters in this section do provide the author with an opportunity to expound at length on numerous aspects of the natural world. He offers, for example, a description of moose,

deer, loon, mice, muskrat, ruffed grouse, and various woodland birds. He describes how to navigate white water and manoeuvre a canoe through marsh. The reader learns about "spring overturn" and how to blaze a trail, and, as well, receives a philosophical discourse on the wonders of nature. Added to all this is authorial reflection on the Ice Age, the politics of the bounty, how a cabin decays, and how to cook trout. Interspersed among this mound of detail, Theberge describes life at the Research Station, and recounts two or three wolf legends, carefully refuting the grisly exaggerations.

The section ends with a scientific tour de force. The last two chapters contain information on why hares zigzag, some advantages of forest fires, the destruction of white pine by rust rot, facts concerning the sun's energy, fat globules, and contaminated water. There is really very little factual information that is new about the wolf; but there is something about the Petawawa River: ". . .by the time it laps at the cement bastions of Quebec City, it has been humiliated with sewage effluent and industrial wastes from each town and city it has passed—its biological oxygen demand raised, dissolved oxygen lowered, temperature raised, pH lowered, bacterial count raised, clarity lowered, conductivity raised, aquatic life depleted. Is it water anymore" (p. 75)? Well, if anyone is left after all that, I hope they care.

The last four chapters contain specific information about actual wolf sightings which the author recorded both in Algonquin Park, and in the eastern Arctic some seven or eight years after his original investigations. The most interesting chapter in the book is Chapter IX, entitled "Wolf Music". Here Theberge describes a fascinating particular interest of his own: the wolf howl. He examines the question of why wolves howl and describes the various subtleties, changes in tone and pitch, and distinctions between various cries. He recorded over four hundred howls, and has determined that "wolves probably do actually identify each other by howls" (p. 129).

The book ends with data concerning wolf-prey relationships, some questions about the wolf's ability to regulate his own population, and concludes with the hope that there will always be a place in the wilderness for the wolf.

Frankly, the book is a disappointment. It contains very little new information. It lacks humor, excitement, and a real sense of personal involvement. Lawrence, the logger, could have been a colorful character, but he emerges flat and a little silly. The author's various encounters with wolves and other wilderness creatures are described in dull prose. There is no drama. Once Theberge comes close. After describing the mysterious howling of a wolf on the cool night air, he continues: "The nerves of every forest creature grew tense: the wolf—the hunter was abroad. I got up and switched on my light. There not a foot away was one of the north woods' most remarkable predators" (p. 63). The wolf? No! the author goes on to describe the pitcher plant.

Most of all, the book lacks unity. There is no one story or central theme holding it together. Rather, it is a disjointed arrangement of scientific jottings and personal reminiscences and observations. It has been illustrated very professionally by the author's wife Mary, but here again, while the sketches are good, they do not always fit the narrative, and contribute even further to the non-unified impression of the whole.

To return finally to the audience; if your interest is in photographs of wolves and the latest factual information concerning them, contact the Canadian Wildlife Service. If, on the other hand, your interest is in an entertaining and dramatic story of wolf investigation, look for Farley Mowat's *Never Cry Wolf*. If you like scientific trivia, or are interested in picking up Dr. Theberge's essay on wolf howls (which has been incorporated into this book) then spend \$4.95 and buy *Wolves and Wilderness*, but do not be deceived into believing it is "the true book of the wolf". It is not.

Mary Ford's article on the figure of the wolf in children's literature appeared in issue 7 of CCL. Her review of Judith St. John's Where the Saints Have Trod in an earlier issue of CCL appeared erroneously under the name Mary Ford Huband.