



Wild Animals I Have Known

Ernest Thompson Seton

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In the late nineteenth century, the animal story, a new genre of nature writing, was both popular and controversial. These weren't cutesy tales of talking deer spinning allegories or anthropomorphized, besuited grizzly bears ready to head to the office; rather, the nascent animal story depicted real animals as thinking and feeling beings navigating their habitats with imaginable moral consciousness. As keen naturalists, the writers' extensive observations of animal behavior buoyed the claim that their works were authentic contributions to natural science, despite being artistic narratives and not standardized field journals or scientific papers. Not so for some nature writers, literary critics, and ever bombastic President Theodore Roosevelt, who castigated the animal story as a false, romanticized view of wildlife. In a precursor to Trumpian vernacular, T. R. decried these so-called realists "nature fakers."

But it's a failure of imagination to condemn the animal story, especially when considering *Wild Animals I Have Known*. First published in 1898, it was the literary movement's extraordinarily successful progenitor. The collection presents eight affecting biographies in a reverential tone. Haunting and graphic are the misfortunes that befall Lobo, a majestic wolf; Vixen, a mother fox; Wully, a Janus-faced sheep dog; and Redruff, a rainbow-ruffed pheasant. Elucidating and epic are the daily episodes of Bingo, a wayward dog; Silverspot, a crafty crow; and the Mustang, an indomitable wild horse.

Bound in faux-leather hardcover, this reproduction features two hundred of the author's original illustrations. This wildlife classic engenders an emotional and sympathetic appreciation of the natural world, and any naturalist, animal lover, environmentalist, or history enthusiast will find sagacity and fidelity within its pages.

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (January / February 2021)

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