

sodic devices of the ancient Babylonian poem. Mitchell understands the poem to be overarchingly concerned with self-discovery and acceptance, with appreciating that humans are mortal, hence less than the gods, but also capable of love, and thus greater than mere gods. —Ray Olson

Knott, Bill. *The Unsubscriber.* Oct. 2004. 144p. Farrar, \$20 (0-374-26415-5). 811.

What doesn't Knott subscribe to? Believing only what you see and hear. Simplistic answers. The cult of the automobile. Praise of war. A nimble metaphysical poet given to surrealism, elegant yin-yang perceptions, and wry romanticism, Knott, whose first collection appeared in 1968, is a proverbial breath of fresh air. Great fun to read and complex enough to demand rereading, he is given to scintillating brevity in poems that neatly upend unexamined assumptions, and he turns out splendid long poems. "Relics with Old Blue Medicine-Type Bottle: To X," for example, is a discerning, thrilling rendering of the strategic courtship between two veterans of the heart. Musings on boyhood memories, our tendency to lose sight of the grander scheme of existence, Damocles' sword, our love of gadgets: all convene in this sly and timely collection, a charming yet searing contemplation of life's dualities and a critique of humankind's penchant for violence and ecologically dire habits of consumption. —Donna Seaman

Plath, Sylvia. *Ariel: The Restored Edition: A Facsimile of Plath's Manuscript, Reinstating Her Original Selection and Arrangement.* Nov. 2004. 240p. index. HarperCollins, \$24.95 (0-06-073259-8). 811.

Plath and her indelible writings have been subjected to a veritable hurricane of commentary. The storm seems to be subsiding, and although it does leave devastation in its wake—the unfair vilification of poet Ted Hughes, Plath's husband, the father of their two children and the holder of the copyright to Plath's writing—it has also kept Plath's work in the public eye, and it has inspired the publication of this treasure: the original manuscript for Plath's masterpiece, *Ariel*. As Frieda Hughes, a poet and an artist, explains in her set-the-record-straight foreword, her mother left behind a manuscript of 40 poems ordered by a table of contents as well as around 30 more poems written in what Frieda calls the "Ariel voice." When Ted Hughes published *Ariel*, he replaced and rearranged poems, editorial decisions that have been harshly criticized. Now, finally, readers can see Plath's actual manuscript in this handsome facsimile, which provides a missing piece in the Plath annals and proves that there's nothing like going to the source. —Donna Seaman

YA/C: Students will learn a great deal about how poets work from this original manuscript. DS.

Shange, Ntozake. *The Sweet Breath of Life: A Poetic Narrative of the African-American Family.* Oct. 2004. 192p. illus. Atria, \$29.95 (0-7434-7897-5). 811.

The Sweet Flypaper of Life (1955), by poet

Langston Hughes and photographer Roy DeCarava, brilliantly revealed the everyday lives of African Americans in Harlem, gave voice to unheard citizens, and inspired generations of African American writers and photographers to dispel stereotypes and tell their own stories. *The Sweet Breath of Life* pays direct tribute to Hughes and DeCarava and continues their narrative. Here, the sometimes raw but mostly potent poetry of Shange sings alongside wonderful photographs, mostly portraits, by members of the Kamoinge Workshop, a photography group of which DeCarava was once president. The images and poems span a lifetime, capturing the rapture of certain moments, the pain and anger of others, and profound but often unseen and unsung glimpses of ordinary life. One would be hard-pressed to say whether poetry or photography dominates this book, for they are inherently intertwined and equally expressive, uniting to create a book that will be treasured by anyone with an interest in poetry, photography, or human nature. —Janet St. John

Geography & Travel

Riffenburgh, Beau. *Shackleton's Forgotten Expedition: The Voyage of the Nimrod.* Nov. 2004. 384p. Bloomsbury, \$25.95 (1-58234-488-4). 919.8

Much has been written about Shackleton's Antarctic expedition, during which his ship, *Endurance*, was trapped in the ice of the Weddell Sea and crushed, and about his open-boat journey to South Georgia, his crossing of that island's mountains, and the rescue of his men. What Riffenburgh believes were Shackleton's "most significant geographical accomplishments, greatest deeds, and most momentous decisions" were attained on the first expedition that he led—the British Antarctic Expedition of 1907–9, aboard *Nimrod*,

a former whaler. The members of this expedition not only achieved remarkable scientific results but also became the first to climb Mount Erebus and first to reach the South Magnetic Pole. It was for these exploits that Shackleton was knighted and received his greatest acclaim during his lifetime. Riffenburgh's book is based on original sources—diaries, journals, letters, and papers of the expedition's members—and is the first study of that expedition since Shackleton's account, *The Heart of the Antarctic*, published in 1909. —George Cohen

YA: Thrilling adventure for teens who prefer real-life accounts to fiction. SZ.

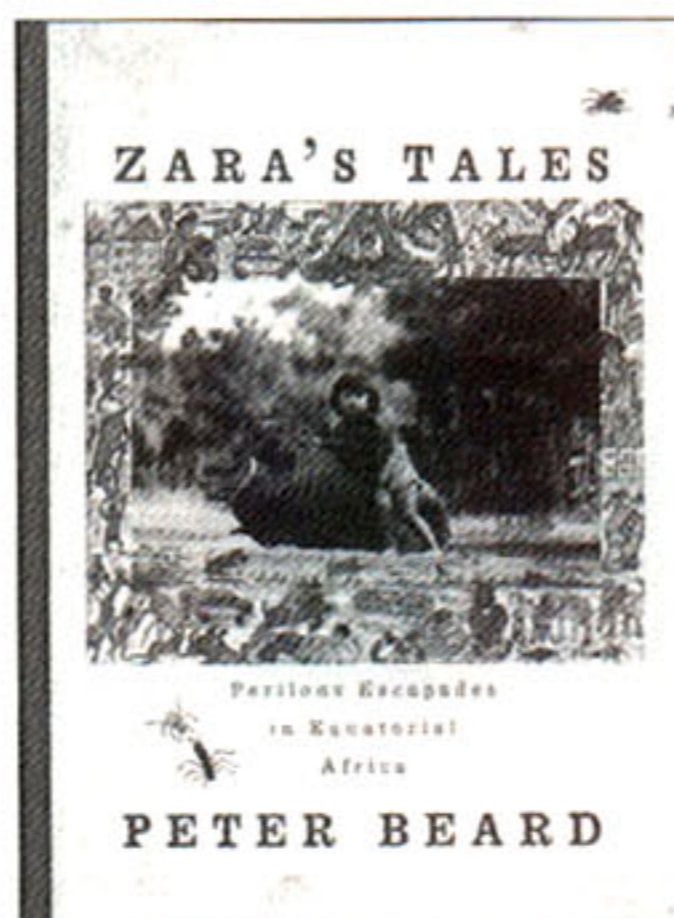
History

Buckley, Veronica. *Christina, Queen of Sweden: The Restless Life of a European Eccentric.* Oct. 2004. 384p. illus. index. HarperCollins/Fourth Estate, \$24.95 (0-06-073617-8). 948.5.

One of the standouts in a long line of self-indulgent European royals, Christina, with her eccentricities, merits Buckley's close attention. From the moment of her birth in 1626, when she was mistakenly identified as a boy, to the time of her death in 1689, she ardently pursued an extraordinarily extravagant life characterized by an emotionally contrary nature. Many have speculated about her seemingly ambiguous sexuality, but, as Buckley discerns, her refusal to even contemplate marriage evidences both an independent temperament and an essentially asexual orientation. Formally ascending the Swedish throne in 1644, she proved to be a lavish and fiscally irresponsible monarch, leading Sweden to the verge of bankruptcy in six short years. Restless and bored, she longed for intellectual and physical warmth, cultural enlightenment, and adventure. Abdicating in 1654, she converted to

★ **Beard, Peter.** *Zara's Tales: Perilous Escapades in Equatorial Africa.* Nov. 2004. 176p. illus. Knopf, \$26.95 (0-679-42659-0). 967.704

An animal-loving New Yorker, Beard lost his heart to Africa as a boy. He acquired 40



acres adjacent to Karen Blixen's Kenyan coffee plantation, and soon devoted himself to photographing wildlife and assisting in conservation efforts. It's been a long time since Beard last produced a book, and this is a gem. Writing with both tough-guy nonchalance and contemplative lyricism, he recounts the true-life adventure tales he often told his daughter, Zara, when she was a young girl enamored of Thaka, an enormous warthog who became a favorite pet. Handsomely illustrated with Beard's photographs, these captivating and hair-raising escapades date back decades to the days when lions strolled through Nairobi, and Beard and his intrepid cohorts risked life and limb to capture mighty rhinos and gigantic Nile crocodiles. He has survived a near drowning, the charge of a lion, and, most traumatically, an elephant attack, brushes with death that have made life all the more precious to him. At once dashing and philosophical, Beard celebrates the

astonishments of nature, and expresses hope that we'll figure out how to live in harmony with what little wildlife still graces the planet. —Donna Seaman

YA: Great fun to read and covertly instructive in African wildlife and conservation issues. DS.