

with a feeling for the whole. What has been, is, and will be "has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order." Further, and perhaps most important, the historical sense is the perception of "the timeless and of the temporal together." Without this sensibility, how could we dare to confront history? Only, I suggest, in a spirit of willful ignorance. The past does not bury its dead. They are a lively presence among us with the right to be fully engaged in our discourse. To patronize their living in the living they did is to profane memory.

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Prairie Dog

by Jane Greer

Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction by Carol Fairbanks, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; \$19.95.

Fairbanks has an interesting hypothesis: that early prairie women loved the plains and their adventurous lives here

as much as pioneer men did. I have never believed in the myth that every pioneer woman was long-suffering, silently hating the prairie and the man who brought her here. I was pleased to think that I'd found here some justification for my belief. Unfortunately, Fairbanks' book reads like the dissertation that spawned it. It might make a good reference text for a women's literature class, but as for *being* literature . . . One of Fairbanks' problems is overkill: Her idea would make a decent article, but in a 300-page hardcover book she smothers the subject.

In her introduction, the author writes, "The present study is committed to this act of revisioning the lives of prairie women in Canada and the United States—looking back, seeing with new eyes, and entering old texts from a feminist critical perspective. I hope to discover new ways women writers have described the experiences of pioneer prairie women and how they have named the 'new' land—the land that was new to the pioneers but old and familiar to native peoples."

Try to overlook the coyness of the second sentence (the introduction was obviously written *after* the rest of the

book). Disregard the question of why we should *care* how prairie women "named" their land and the scarcely revolutionary information that the land was new to pioneers but old to the Indians. Try to ignore Fairbanks' literary sloth: "revisioning," a ridiculous substitute for "reassessing," and the lethargic "looking back, seeing with new eyes." Try to forget all this, because it is just one paragraph, and many of her others are better. Concentrate instead on the real meat of the passage, where Fairbanks is candid about her motivation for all this: She has a "feminist critical perspective." She may or may not love literature and the prairie, but they both get bulldozed aside in her political zeal to build up a dry pile of evidence.

This, then, is the most disappointing thing about *Prairie Women*: that its title is accurate. Far from inviting us to discover some obscure but talented writers, or to think of the prairie more kindly, the author combines fragments of original writing with truckloads of her own somnolent prose to prove her point: that pioneer women were tough and loved it here. Why did this dissertation need to become a book?

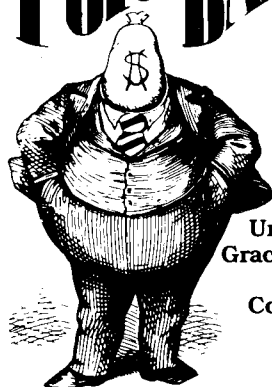
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Letter to Another Editor

by Arnold Beichman

"More and more, the categories we think by are forms of darkness. Yet we keep using them as if fearful of the deeper darkness we'd inhabit if we had to front this life without them."

—Jack Beatty, "The Category Crisis," *Atlantic* (March 1986)

An open letter to Jack Beatty, Editor, *Atlantic Monthly*

Dear Jack:

I hope you will overlook this example of what the French call *l'esprit de l'escalier*. I should have thought of your little essay "The Category Crisis" when you said laughingly, but not amusingly after a few moments' conversation at the Newport party, "Oh, you're a professional anti-Communist." I was surprised at your remark. After all, you were putting me into a category not in a sociological but rather a judgmental spirit. I muttered something about your being a professional anti-anti-Communist; we went off and talked about something else.

When I came home, I went back to your article (I admire some of your things and file them under the category "Beatty," even though it may not be as significant a category as "anti-anti-Communist"), and I began to categorize my thoughts:

1. I began to think back and wonder why you used that particular phrase: professional anti-Communist. You might have said, "Oh, you're an anti-Communist." But you couldn't. If you had, I would have said, "Well, aren't you?" Now that might have been awkward for you to answer. Nobody in his

right democratic mind can today be a pro-Communist (unless he calls himself a Marxist, which in some leftist circles is regarded as a code word for being a Communist) or a neutralist, unless you're a symmetrist, which is difficult—you know, Sakharov, Solidarity, Stalin, Afghanistan, the lot. But to admit you are an anti-Communist would put you into my category, which wouldn't do at all.

2. I don't imagine we've seen each other more than three or four times since we first met back in the mid-1970's. Now, since we have only seen each other a few times in a decade, how would you know I was a professional anti-Communist, not just a plain, nonprofessional anti-Communist?

3. Does the term "professional" refer to expert knowledge about what, say, Bukharin said to Trotsky or Stalin in 1921 about Kronstadt or about Lenin's first words at the Finland station? In other words, is a Sovietologist like Adam Ulam or Richard Pipes a professional anti-Communist, because each draws terrifying conclusions from his reading?

4. Is it possible that the adjective "professional" is in truth a put-down? It could imply that I make a living by exposing, explicating Communist chicanery. But suppose the things I wrote about Communism or the USSR were poorly paid for, and I made a good living on the Chicago options market or going short on IBM at the right time. Would I then be not a professional anti-Communist but an amateur anti-Communist? Or, perhaps, because of my writings I am rewarded with a good deal of prestige among professional anti-Communists (without necessarily being one), which might be glory enough?

5. Just what is the border line between anti-Communism and profes-

sional anti-Communism? Is Reagan a professional anti-Communist, or don't Presidents or statesmen like Kissinger or Shultz count? What is the essential difference between an anti-Communist and a professional anti-Communist? Do you go from one category to the other by some criterion? Is William Buckley a professional anti-Communist or is he an editor-novelist whose themes deal critically with totalitarianism?

6. Does the expletive apply to, say, Soviet émigrés like Dmitri Simes, Solzhenitsyn, and Ladislav Bittman, who make a great deal of money writing about the USSR—much of which is hostile—or does the expletive apply only to Westerners? In other words, a victim of the Bolshevik system who escapes has the right to be a professional anti-Communist but not, say, Norman Podhoretz, whose parents only escaped the Czarist system. (I suppose one could have called the prerevolutionary Lenin a "professional anti-Czarist." He certainly made his calling a profession, according to his *What Is to Be Done?*)

7. Is there a category like a "professional anti-Fascist"? Or a "professional anti-apartheidist"? There are a good many people today who are making a pretty good living on the apartheid issue, and yet they are curiously reticent, when it comes to the suppression of civil freedoms in the Soviet Union. In other words, does the word "professional" only go with anti-Communist? Could you be a professional anti-anti-Communist, for example? If that category could be clearly defined, there would be plenty of candidates.

8. Supposing I got into a debate with Michael Parenti or some other Institute for Policy Studies Sovietophile, or with Howard Zinn, and I called them "professional Marxists," would that have any relevance to our