

A Dream of Indians

The Innocent Eye: The Life of Robert J. Flaherty, by Arthur Calder-Marshall (Harcourt, Brace & World. 304 pp. \$6.95), traces the improbable career of the film director who created "Nanook of the North" and "The Land," a romantic whose vision of the innate goodness of man and nature has led critics to compare him to Melville, Whitman, and Thoreau. Herman G. Weinberg is curator of films at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

By HERMAN G. WEINBERG

"LIKE Melville," Arthur Calder-Marshall notes, "Flaherty had always the sense of the individual embodying some universal principle." And if he was

a Melville sans the apocalyptic visions, he substituted for it something in its own way just as good: an "innocent eye" that saw the world as good, in which there was no villain save natural elements (the harsh Arctic winter of *Nanook*, the storms of *Man of Aran*, the erosion of the earth in *The Land*). "For him there was no Fall in the Garden of Eden," comments Calder-Marshall. "Subjective good and evil were evaded. His moral judgments stopped short at the end of the Creation. There was no Fall and no Redemption. . . . By some magical shortcut . . . the Garden of Eden could be found again—or reconstructed." Even in *The Land*, the only Flaherty film that touches the edge of pain in its telling of the dislocation of American farmers during the Depression, the end result is not a sociological document but a ballad, in the words of Siegfried Kracauer "fragments of a lost epic song that celebrated the immense life of the land."

Who was this singer celebrating the

goodness of the earth and its fulfillment through the goodness of man? What was this poet doing in the purloins of the motion picture world, notorious for its deadfalls? Arthur Calder-Marshall answers these questions and many more in his illuminating biography, aptly named *The Innocent Eye*. For in that appellation lies the secret of Flaherty's art, that pantheism which makes the whole world kin, man and nature in an eternal polarity. It is this that set Flaherty apart not only from the commercial mainstream of film-making but also from his colleagues in the field of the documentary or factual film. Beside their worldliness, he was naïve; beside their realism, he was romantic.

All his life he dreamt of "Indians." Calder-Marshall relates the Tom Sawyer-like childhood of the boy whose father had mining interests in the North Country, of his fascination not only with the North but with the Canadian sub-Arctic as mineralogist, cartographer, and



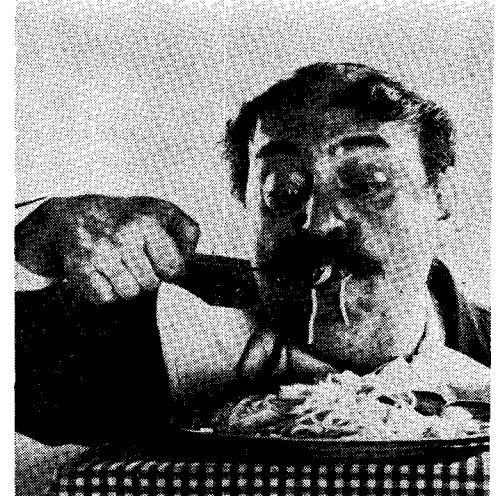
Mobile Face and Brush: I could understand *Zero by Mostel* (Horizon, \$10) if Zero Mostel were an entertainer who inspired the cult frenzy of, say, a Ringo Starr, a personage whose admirers were so obsessed with their idol that anything related to him, no matter how contrived, was a necessity at any price. But to my knowledge Mr. Mostel, a much-respected stage actor, is little known beyond the limited confines of the theater world. His enthusiasts are not to be found among the fan-magazine purchasers. Then why this expensive, coffee-table product that is all potatoes and no meat?

The book devotes about one-third of its length (a length I can only guess at, since the publishers have not seen fit to number the pages) to an interview with Mr. Mostel. Typical questions are: "Do you read your reviews?" "How long have you been painting?" The answers reveal that Mr. Mostel has intelligence and a sense of humor, which is hardly news, but what can one expect in reply to questions a junior-high cub reporter could have come up with?

The interview portion, short as it is, is broken up with black-and-white sketches and washes by Mr. Mostel. The art tidbits suggest a smidge of Lautrec here, a dab of Picasso there, and a seriousness of purpose throughout. The reproductions are not suitable for framing.

The remainder of the book is given over to 152 photographs of Mr. Mostel by Max Waldman. The photographs all prove that Mr. Mostel is a comedian with a mobile face.

—HASKEL FRANKEL.



—Photos from the book.



explorer, finally as documentary filmmaker in *Nanook*, with its directness, simplicity, charm, and above all the poetry of its images. And though he set the classic pattern for this kind of film, "there will be no Flaherty School," Jean Renoir reminds us. "Many people will try to imitate him, but they won't succeed; he had no system. His system was just to love the world, to love humanity, to love animals, and love is something you cannot teach." To which Calder-Marshall adds: "Love cannot be taught. But it can be experienced . . . Flaherty is a country which having once seen one never forgets." John Collier put it another way: "A Flaherty film differs from others. The making of it is an adventure rather than a gamble. It is an exploration into a sort of beauty that cannot be put under contract."

Calder-Marshall tells the rest of the many-faceted Flaherty story: the making of *Moana*, after forty years still the most beautiful film of the Southern Seas ever created; *Man of Aran*, shot off the west coast of Ireland; *Elephant Boy*, after Kipling's "Toomai of the Elephants," made in India; *The Land*, a U.S. government-sponsored project, and finally *Louisiana Story*, filmed in the bayou country. There were way-stations in between: *The Twenty-Four Dollar Island*, a visual poem of Manhattan; *Industrial Britain*, and several abortive ventures including *White Shadows in the South Seas*, *Tabu*, and a film on the American Indians. The production of each of the major films receives full treatment. Each one involved considerable *sturm und drang* before it was completed.

ALONG with the artist, Calder-Marshall portrays Robert Flaherty the man, by now legendary as the most genial and convivial of companions, whether in drinking, telling tall stories (including the hilarious "Bozo the Bear," a delight in its innocent naughtiness), or presiding at the parties he liked to give in the Coffee House Club in New York.

Although the book is spiced with occasional Flaherty anecdotes, the biographer admits he has tried to resist the temptation to include the bulk of them—a difficult, almost an ascetic feat when one recalls how irresistible they are (and everyone who ever knew Flaherty can recall scores of them). But Calder-Marshall had a job to do, and he'd never get it done if he didn't stick to the main line of his story—the improbable career of a motion picture director compared by Oliver St. John Gogarty to Walt Whitman, by Orson Welles to Hawthorne and Thoreau.

We go back to his films again and again to renew and refresh ourselves in his crystalline images, for in them is eternal spring, a fountain of youth, a young boy dreaming of Indians.

People Make the Difference

***Swans on an Autumn River and Other Stories*, by Sylvia Townsend Warner (Viking, 224 pp. \$4.50), focus on character and situation in thirteen quiet tales set in the English countryside and village. Warren Bower is director of the Writing Center at New York University.**

By WARREN BOWER

IN 1926 Sylvia Townsend Warner made a brilliant first appearance before the American reading public with a most engaging fantasy, *Lolly Willowes*, and followed it a year later with *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*, which confirmed her skill as a novelist with a special inclination toward highly flavorsome and tartly odd characters. Since that time five other novels have been published, as well as six books of short stories and four volumes of poetry, not all of which have been released in America. Her audience may not have enlarged much over that gained by her first novel's having been an early book club choice, but it has certainly remained most satisfactorily faithful.

Now, forty years later, after Miss Warner has apparently turned her back upon the novel, there appears another book of short stories which could convince new readers that her narration is deft and sharp in a way that makes her work especially rewarding in a time when subtlety is not a popular virtue. There are thirteen quiet tales in *Swans on an Autumn River*. A few of them, including the title story, are adroitly told incidents slight in significance; however, there are at least three major stories, and one that is a superb example of a potential "shocker," even in these days, but here told with taste, restraint, and verbal felicity. "A Love Match" is an example of the short story at its most artistic: the full dimensions of the revelations in Miss Warner's unconventional situation open in surges of recognition, maintaining the story's impact long after the reading.

The selections in this volume are alike in that they are only potentially dramatic, never overtly so. Their focus is on character and situation, which are set forth by small incidents and subtle characterizations, chosen for what they reveal, but left without highlighting or underlining. Miss Warner never



—Joy Finzi.

Sylvia Townsend Warner—"taste, restraint, and verbal felicity."

raises her voice, indicates any excitement, or directs a reader what to feel; her words and images imply all that a good reader needs. Of an elderly mother, who has again gotten her own way, upon which she is insistent, the author writes, ". . . she looked as composed as a sea anemone digestively sealed on its prey." It is this ability to express much in spare, memorably meaningful phrases that makes Miss Warner's work fresh and evocative.

THE English scene of countryside and village has produced a group of short-story writers who are adept at spinning a tale in which the quality of the experience reported and a vivid sense of character are the chief values. The greatest recent exemplar of such writing was A. E. Coppard, who insisted upon the term "tales" for the stories that made up the total of his writing aside from a small amount of poetry. Another writer whose work has that quality of relaxed telling is T. F. Powys, who disdains "plot" and leads his readers to a full re-experience of the events he recounts in his stories and novels. In this good company Sylvia Townsend Warner is wholly at home. She has, to be sure, her own distinction, her own individual style of story-telling; but she is kin to the best of those who hold listeners or readers intent upon the heart of the tale—its people and what they are like.