

Hutchison's Walden

WESTERN WINDOWS, by Bruce Hutchison. Longmans Canada Ltd., 164 pp., \$4.95.

Bruce Hutchison is promoting Canadianism in his new volume of essays. However, it isn't the Canada that most of us are familiar with in reading or in experience. He overlooks the lights of Mount Royal, the stately mansions of Victoria, or Regina isolated on the prairie. He has forgotten about geographical Canada; the shield, the lakehead, and the St. Lawrence really don't exist.

Canada, to Mr. Hutchison, is his own Canadian edition of Walden Pond somewhere in the woods of Vancouver Island. It seems that Canada's best known newspaperman, who has an international reputation, has metamorphosed into a Canadian Henry Thoreau.

Hutchison implies very strongly that we should all flock to the woods, cut a stand of timber, and each build our own refuge from the evil elements of civilization. We can live without the city, for the city man does not know how to live. City man hasn't had the opportunity to "listen to the bubbling flute note of the Canadian meadow lark hurled across the fields . . ."

Mr. Hutchison should not be condemned for his love of the country life, or the personal satisfaction he derives from the planting of gardens, flowers, trees, or crops. The same should be said for the elation that he feels when he has cut a cord of wood, or rebuilt a stone fireplace. On the contrary, he should be congratulated for his naturalness. However, he should be condemned for the unnatural expression of his position in society.

Hutchison's position is that of a prominent Canadian newspaperman; an accredited and acclaimed non-fiction writer; an accurate political critic; and in short, a man who has been successful through his association with Canadian political and urban life. Why should he shun all of this in his essays? He has denounced political, city, and social organization; and has spurned all the accepted material measures of urban civilization. The whole concept smacks of hypocrisy.

It should not be mistaken that the whole book is about Canadian life in the woods. Mr. Hutchison has extended his talents into comments on other important Canadian issues such as the plight of the critic, government licensing, and the occurrences of men such as Mr. Gropp.

Mr. Gropp is a retired sailor

landlocked in the Victoria forests, who plays a fiddle, paints Indian heads and sunsets on forest fungi, and finally declares that, "Me, I've had my fill of yuman beans". He does however, accept gifts and loans.

Throughout the essays Mr. Hutchison illustrates his lively prose style. When he is in control of his subject he can be very humorous, and somewhat enlightening. He can be very sensitive at times, and this is when he is at his strongest. The first essay is good in this way. In it, a scattered reflection of his experience is handled discreetly with an almost innocent technique. It is a shame that this mode was not kept for the remainder of the book.

It is when he loses control of his subject that Mr. Hutchison becomes very weak. At these times one begins to feel that he is reading the rambling of a senile man. His convictions are too narrow, and he pushes them on the reader with too much enthusiasm.

The majority of the essays would be quite readable and could be considered quaint if Mr. Hutchison had not decided to dabble melodramatic philosophy throughout most of them. He is not in the position to question the humility of man in death, or the freedom of the individual in an urban society. Nor is he in a position to judge and grossly state the value of his frontier existence over the life that has put him in his present state of recognition.

The inconsistency that really cracks Hutchison's foundation of the true backwoods Canadianism is his last essay, in which he states in the final paragraph, "I am dreaming of a two-room flat, somewhere in a nice high concrete tower, where I can smell the perfume of automobile engines and listen to the sweet whir of traffic outside, the soft whisper of steam in the radiator and the click of an electric thermostat."

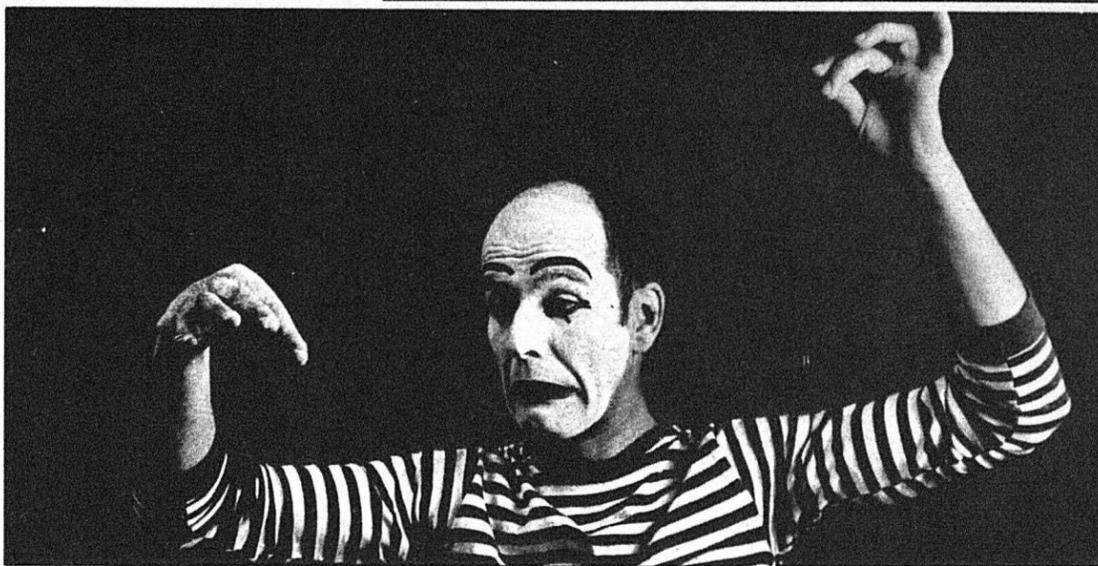
That is a long way from the blisters of a double-bladed axe, the flute note of the meadow lark, the scent of the dandelion, or the crisp crackling of a fireplace.

At his age of sixty-six it seems a little late for Mr. Hutchison to be sitting on the particular fence he has chosen. If he falls one way he'll drown in his Walden Pond, and if he falls the other way, he'll be asphyxiated by urban smog.

To quote Mr. Hutchison again, "good books will not complain if you bruise their cover, smear them with midnight cocoa, whisky and pipe ashes, turn down their pages and scribble comments in their margins, just as long as you read them . . ."

This book groaned the minute I picked it up.

—John Makowichuk



THE INVISIBLE THREAD

. . . mime Claude St.-Denis

Drama comes alive on campus once again—committee making use of new theatre

The past few years have been arid ones in the field of student-produced drama at this university. Now, with a 750-seat theatre at our disposal, things are bound to start happening, and the Theatre Committee is providing the impetus.

The purpose of the Theatre Committee is primarily to see that suitable activities take place in the Students Union Theatre, and that maximum use is made of the available facilities.

Committee Chairman Marg Carmichael stresses the fact that the Theatre is intended for use mainly by "the ordinary student who is not a professional actor".

In order to give students an opportunity to develop their latent histrionic abilities, the Committee is sponsoring several different activities. On Tuesday evenings workshops are held in the theory and practice of acting—experience is neither a hindrance nor a necessity to those wishing to attend. If sufficient interest is expressed, workshops in the technical aspects of theatre may also be held.

The Committee also hopes to hold a series of Theatre Appreciation Matinees, probably short plays or scenes accompanied by discussion. In addition to this the Committee will be cooperating with other student groups who are planning productions in the SUB Theatre.

The main project of the year, however, will be a full-scale production (tentatively scheduled for March) of an as-yet-unchosen play. Aristophanes' *The Frogs* was to have been presented this month,

but difficulties in obtaining scripts necessitated its cancellation.

This play will be completely student-produced, student-directed, and acted by student amateurs. In contrast to the productions at Studio Theatre, which are under the auspices of the Drama Department, it will be an extra-curricular activity for most of those involved with it.

The Committee will also be sponsoring three professional productions featuring out-of-town performers. On November 22 John Stuart Anderson, a solo dramatist, will perform in the Theatre. Mr. Anderson will act out the Biblical story of "Daniel in Babylon" and a sequence based on the voyages of Odysseus.

On February 14 Claude St.-Denis, a French-Canadian mime, will appear; and in March the National Shakespeare Company (a travelling group) will be putting on *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*.

The Committee is co-operating with Newman in its mammoth presentation of *Luther* on December 12 through 16. "It's going to be a

fantastic production", says Miss Carmichael. Newman will also be staging an evening of one-act plays in February.

All in all, the Theatre Committee is shouldering quite a load this year, handling the organizational, co-ordinating, and producing aspects of student theatre on campus. It is hoped, however, that the work done this year will lay the groundwork for more diversified and fruitful work in the future.

Marg Marmichael and the other members of the Committee are hoping to see a Drama Society evolve from the efforts of the Theatre Committee this year; this society would take over the responsibility of producing plays in the Theatre.

In any event, there will certainly be a great deal more going on in drama on campus this year than in years past, and all signs indicate a good future. Anyone wanting to get in on student drama can contact Marg Marmichael by leaving a note in the Theatre mailbox (at the Students Union offices) or by phoning 433-8976.

—Terry Donnelly

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