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Book Reviews

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BANOWSKY AND DECAZES' WESTERN OKLAHOMA

— by Chris Gould

This photographic essay, accompanied by a short historical introduction by William S. Banowsky, is one of several titles issued by the University of Oklahoma Press in recognition of the seventy-fifth anniversary of Oklahoma statehood. It is an impressive tribute to our region.

The technical quality of the more than seventy color photographs is beyond criticism, at least by this reviewer, and their reproduction on fine-quality 8½ x 11-inch paper provides an appropriate showcase for the talents of Daisy Decazes, a young French photographer whose work has been exhibited internationally. Bringing to her subject the fresh perspectives of a newcomer, the photographer has shunned both the glamorous and the stereotypic.

Some of Decazes's most imposing photographs capture the awesomeness of our natural setting: immense slate-colored cloud banks, the vivid contrast of primary colors in earth and sky set against the sparse vegetation of the plains, the jagged protrusion of a "lone tree" or a "burnished hill." Photographs with evocative titles like "Prairie Gothic" and "Panhandle Faces" depict, without sentimentality or condescension, the rugged character of ordinary men and women engaged in timeless routines of work and leisure. We see the unpretentious monuments and revered institutions of Western Oklahoma: the small church, the country store, the rodeo, the parade down Main Street. Finally, there is a series of photographs devoted to the occupations of farming, ranching, and oil excavation.

A four-page introduction by William Banowsky provides a brief historical overview; it commences, almost abruptly, with a forthright claim: "Western Oklahoma demands heroes." Banowsky carries his thesis through a history of conquistadors, acquisitive settlers, and defiant Indians, down to the present generation of deep-gas drillers in the Anadarko Basin — men and women who "instead of standing hip-deep in dust . . . stand hip-deep in debt, gambling on their skill and expertise and instinct to . . . enrich themselves, their state, and their country."

A 1982 publication, WESTERN OKLAHOMA is available at the OU Press in Norman.



TRAVIS ANTHONY IN THE SPOTLIGHT

— by Leroy Thomas

Travis Anthony is an iconoclast. He smartly breaks the impression that by the time a person reaches retirement age he has nothing else to offer. After thirty years in the education field as teacher, coach, counselor, principal, and college professor, Mr. Anthony set himself to writing books. So far, he has published two and has at least two more coming out soon.

For Travis, retirement hasn't been quitting time. So let it be with me.

His first book was CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN, and the second was SUNSHINE AND SHADOWS. Both books tell of Travis' personal experiences of growing up in Oklahoma during the Depression and the years that followed during his teaching career.

The imprints of his three favorite authors — Twain, Tarkington, and Dickens — are upon his writing. There's a great deal of sorrow in his accounts, but it's not all heavy reading. There's also a great deal of laughter.

In a typical ironic manner, Travis has said of his new vocation, "I'll never be able to quit writing now. I think I'm getting the hang of it."

Reading the two books is a joyful as well as poignant experience, but the books should never be separated from the man. Travis is available for personal promotional appearances, and he's a speaker who appeals to all ages. His listener is so engrossed in the man and the speaker that \$21.95 seems a small price to pay for CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN and SUNSHINE AND SHADOWS in order to have the charming 68-year-old around all the time.

Anyone interested in setting up a delightful program may call Travis at 405-476-2211 or write to him at home: P.O. Box 646; Rush Springs, OK 73082.

SONGS OF THE WEST

— by Leroy Thomas

Art Cuelho of Seven Buffaloes Press has made available another literary work — HAWK FLIGHTS: VISIONS OF THE WEST (short stories by Gerald Haslam).

There's even one story in the fourteen-story collection specifically for Western Oklahomans. The title is "Hey, Okie!" It's a compliment to Haslam that the technique of this story and the others is reminiscent of Sherwood Anderson with the conversational style, false starts, repetition for effect, vivid language, and *in medias res* beginning. I consider that an achievement.

HAWK FLIGHT illustrates Haslam's continued expansion of the range of material and style, and his messages are universal. Lawrence Clayton has rightly observed, "Haslam sings a song of the West, but it isn't a traditional ballad. Instead it is the howl of the wind fraying the nerves of the complacent, the slap that awakens the dreamer."

For the person who wants an awakening, HAWK FLIGHTS isn't a sleeper. It's a good buy for \$5.00 — available from Seven Buffaloes Press (Box 249 — Big Timber, MT 59011).