In her thought-provoking study, The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual, Katerina Clark attempts to analyze the Soviet novel "in terms of the distinctive role it plays as the repository of official myths." The study of Soviet literature outside the Soviet Union, notably in the West, has often been based on a discussion of nonliterary, especially political circumstances in which it is forced to exist. While Clark's book seems to follow the same direction, it goes well beyond mere discussion of political matters and accusations. Recognizing the highly political nature of Soviet literature, she delves into seldom-read novels to determine the inner laws that govern them, such as Socialist Realism, the Master Plot, the Positive Hero, the "spontaneity"/"consciousness" dialectic, the "Great Family," etc. In doing so, the author dispenses with the customary method of literary criticism. With generous helpings from history, sociology, psychology, and political events, she endeavours to prove, first, that Soviet literature has deep roots in the nineteenth century, and, second, that while the political sphere has dictated literature, it has also been influenced by it.

The author has achieved her objectives handsomely. She is convincing in the presentation and argument of her theses within the set framework. It is difficult to argue the author's contentions within that framework. One is also grateful that she has undertaken this admittedly drudging task and has done it in a highly scholarly manner. It must be made clear, though, that her success is predicated upon her tightly knit scheme; once the premises are removed, difficulties arise. One of the biggest problems lies in our inability to judge the exact circumstances under which Soviet literature has been and is being created. As long as the author's judgments are based on what has been published and what we are told the writers' intentions were—and, in the last analysis, that is all she could go by—her analyses and conclusions can be accepted. Unfortunately, that does not always represent the whole truth—there have been cases where authors had to revise their work or to repudiate it altogether. Therefore, it is difficult to make certain that the "laws" as presented in this book are natural results of a genuine development or have been manipulated from above. Moreover, the self-imposed limitations in this study preclude the discussion of some of the best Soviet novels (We, Cities and Years, Envy, The Thief, The Artist Unknown, etc.). After all they also do belong to Soviet literature and they do harbor some well-defined myths of their own. Granted, these novels do not fit Clark's scheme but then, the title of the study (The Soviet Novel) is somewhat misleading.

It is unfortunate that the appreciation of this gallant study is limited to those who have read the novels such as Cement and The Blast Furnace. Despite the author's often lucid analyses, it is hard to sustain the attention or to test the validity of her arguments without a familiarity with the novels discussed. As for the author's implied criticism of Western critics for refusing to deal seriously with Socialist Realism novels, one could paraphrase Petronius's remark to Nero concerning his incessant, amateurish fiddling, "Do with me whatever you wish, but please don't bore me to death!" Clark's scholarly zeal—for which she should be admired—should not justify the condemnation of other scholars who are simply trying to defend themselves from being bored to death.

Vasa D. Mihailovich

JOHN R. MILTON
The Novel of the American West

In The Novel of the American West John R. Milton offers a useful introduction to some of the serious fiction written in or about the "interior West," a vertical slice of the United States bounded on the east by the one hundredth meridian (roughly the north-south line followed by the Missouri River flowing through the Dakotas) and on the west by the various mountain ranges. The distinction between serious regional fiction (what Milton calls "the capital W Western novel") and the "popular formula western hacked out for the mass
market" is an important one. Dealing with
the differences between the two in delib­
erate detail, Milton devotes his preliminary
chapter to a discussion of the literary fail­
ings of the popular "western." He lists nine
standard plots (The Rustler Story, The
Range War or Empire Story, the Marshall
or Dedicated Lawman Story, and so on)
and also talks about the unimaginative use
of the four basic elements in this formula
fiction: the hero, violence, love, and the
western landscape.

The second chapter, "The Writer's West,"
which attempts to set the stage for an
examination of the "capital W Western,"
is the most disappointing. It is short, gen­
erally superficial, and frustrating for the
critical reader with its teasing generaliza­
tions ("the American west . . . poses a
problem for the literary imagination partly
because it is the largest and most varied
region within the United States") and its
failure to come to grips with the special
ethos of the region.

In the third chapter Milton looks at the
evolution of the Western novel, tracing its
origins in the travel narrative and journal
of exploration, its development through
the imaginative treatment of themes par­
ticularly suited to the regional setting (iso­
lation and survival, for example), and its
affinities with the literary traditions of
romance, sentimentalism, and adventure.
References to Francis Parkman, James
Fenimore Cooper, and Wallace Stegner
provide a context for Milton's treatment
of several less well-known writers later in
the book.

The core of this study is a close exami­
nation of half a dozen writers who have
made their mark as regional novelists:
Walter Van Tilburg Clark, Harvey Fergusson,
Vardis Fisher, A. B. Guthrie, Jr.,
Frederick Manfred, and Frank Waters. The
names are hardly household words: as Mil­
ton is the first to admit, only two of them
(Fergusson and Fisher) are even men­
tion in the latest edition of the standard
Literary History of the United States. Milton
makes a strong case for reading Vardis
Fisher, with a critical overview of Fisher's
work which offers compelling analyses of
individual novels and intriguing insights
into the artist's attitude towards his craft.
On the other hand, the chapter on Guthrie
and Manfred is a summary overview of a
series of historical novels which seem to
offer little more artistically than many of
the popular westerns, apart from some

structural dependence on an accurate
chronology of nineteenth-century events.
Milton's critical evaluation of Walter Van
Tilburg Clark is perhaps the high point of
his study. Of all the works Milton exam­
ines in detail here, it is Clark's novels alone
that are seen to transcend the western
setting. Novels such as The Ox-Bow Incident
(1940), The City of Trembling Leaves (1945),
and The Track of the Cat (1949) may be
read as a series of fascinating failures, in
which intellect and emotion are seen in
constant tension, balanced and imbal­
ced, in flux and in occasional stasis.
Clark's "perception of reality rests heavily
on dualities and contrasts, an imagery as
well as characterization. . . . he searches
for unity, and while the distinctions or
contrasts of experience are not resolved
openly . . . they are joined by impli­
cation" (p. 197).

The concluding chapter, entitled "Vari­
ations on Western Realism," is a kind of
catch-all in which Milton attempts to link
recent writers whose fiction is set in the
"interior West" with writers as early as
Hamlin Garland, as well known as Wallace
Stegner, and as prolific as those whose
work he analyzes in earlier chapters. The
basic thesis here is that "capital W Western
novels" should be read as part of a contin­
uum, partly because they themselves often
attempt to forge temporal links between
past and present, and at their best are
"prophectic. . . . achieving a "unifying
vision of past, present and future" (p. 324).
The survey is too brief to be satisfactory
as literary history and too crowded with
names to allow convincing critical assess­
ments. Ironically, the chapters in which
Milton attempts to set the work of individ­
ual writers in the spatial context suggested
by his title are the weakest in the study.

The value of The Novel of the American West
lies primarily in the fresh and original
assessments of writers we should know
about, and for this in particular it is worth
having. There is also a useful list of works
 cited with bibliographical information, and
an index.

Stan Atherton