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Book by Stenson, Fred

The Trade Details

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From Reader Review The Trade for online ebook

Arthur Whiting says

The cottage book shelf had something good after all. I picked this up with little hope of something good to read and was most pleasantly surprised.

I didn't know a thing about the history and learned a lot more about Edmonton than I ever knew. When I got the chance I looked up some of the names and places and was surprised to find they were related.

Steven Langdon says

The Trade is a grand, sprawling saga of the north-western fur trade in the first half of the nineteenth century. Historical drama shines through the narrative, but this is a novel not a text, and the focus is on vivid characters, on the harsh brutality that gives the plot grit, and on the complexity of the human relationships that mark the interplay of aboriginal communities and the English and Metis traders. Stenson has more recently written the Great Karoo, a novel about Albertans caught up in the Boer War, and that book dragged often. But The Trade is driven more powerfully by unforgettable characters like One-Pound-One, the temper-flaring founder of what became Edmonton, and his friend Ted Harriott, who could never escape the tragedy that he felt dominated the trade after the death of his young Indian wife. This is a book that will captivate you, tell you much about what really shaped Canada, and stay with you as you consider the aboriginal place in our future society.

Christopher Rex says

As with any 500pp. "epic" I am always a bit hesitant. As a buddy said: "All books should be 200pp. or less". Though, I don't fully agree, I see the logic. Nobody wants to find themselves 100-200pp. into a 500pp. book and wondering why they bothered in the first place - thus starting the "should I plow thru and finish this?" debate. Thankfully, at no point did I want to put down "The Trade" and it was fully worth the 500pp. investment of time/energy.

"The Trade" delivers the goods, no pun intended. I love historical fiction and fictionalized-history. "The Trade" centers around real characters involved in the 19thC fur-trade out of central Canada. Not a whole lot exists in terms of actual historical knowledge of these people and their lives, so the author took to the task of re-creating the more intimate details of their lives within the context of the monopolistic fur-trade which brutalized whites, Indians and "half-breeds" alike (not to mention the beaver and buffalo). The author does a great job of demonstrating the fact that in such an environment there are no "heroes" nor "villains" and that both exist in all of us - that includes the often-glorified Natives. Non-Fiction Textbook History too often descends into such a boring pattern and loses the humanity of characters involved (I refer anyone to "Lies My Teacher Told Me" for a great synopsis of this phenomenon). "The Trade" shows the good and bad that exists in everybody affected by the fur trade and does a solid job of showing the first-hand effects of such a trade.

Highly recommended for fans of history, fictionalized-history and epics.

Neill Goltz says

For a lad like myself who grew up on the US-Canadian border, and canoed the Boundary Waters with his dad, I was thrilled at the map which is the first page of the book, with all the river routes, lakes, and forts running from Lake Superior in the center of the continent to the West Coast.

I wish I had picked "The Trade" up a year ago to read it aloud to my now-late father; he would so have also enjoyed.

The recommendation came from a fellow from the Banff, Canada area with whom I take a hike from time-to-time. He recommended this one to me after he started talking about the new movie, "The Revenant", and I countered with Peter Newman's extraordinary trilogy-history of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), which gives great background to the characters of "The Trade".

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/list...>

The Trade is an excellent treatment of early 19th century Canada just after the Lewis & Clark Expedition. The HBC had already been extracting furs from the forests for over 100 years, but L&C broke its monopoly from the south and created a competition in the Fur Trade between the Americans and Canadians with a huge impact on the Indian tribes who lived on both sides of the border. The result of all this was to create an environmental disaster with the elimination of the bison herds and beaver populations in the mad rush to maximize immediate profits from their hides and pelts.

That is the background to this story of the destruction of human relationships - both between tribes, tribes and traders, and company employees themselves - when a non-regulated business has free rein in its practices.

The history of the HBC is the history of Canada, and author Stenson has done a tremendous job of compressing 40 years (1820-60) of those complexities and relationships into a very satisfying read. This is a truth-telling experience.

Jane says

An excellent read, taking you whole-heartedly into the raw world of the fur trade in the 1800s. Stenson pulls no punches, and plays no favourites - the first nations and the English are depicted equally - both are bloody, savage and unprincipled.

Christopher Scott says

Really good about fur trade. Tended to drag a little.

Erin says

Fred Stenson's 2000 novel *The Trade* was a finalist for the Scotiabank Giller Prize, which I think is pretty neat considering the novel focuses on the fur trade, and as you might well imagine, the fur trade is not usually a sexy or glamorous topic. I say "usually" because Stenson does include some sexy-glam, but not nearly enough to titillate a Giller jury (though maybe I'm projecting here, as the Giller has recognized a fair number of novelists writing historical fiction: Margaret Atwood, Michael Crummey, Guy Vanderhaeghe, Anne Michaels, Wayne Johnston, Jane Urquhart, John Bemrose, Elizabeth Hay, and most recently, Joseph Boyden). So maybe my point is less that historical fiction is unpopular and unrecognized, and more that it is a triumph of the Canadian h.f. novelist. In this case Stenson takes what grade seven history turned into a mind-numbingly-dull exercise in remembering that the NorthWest Company and the Hudson's Bay Company merged in 1822, and turns it into a fascinating and engaging narrative of deceit, violence, betrayal and madness.

My favourite part? When a cat adopts orphaned bunnies only to watch while the bunnies get eaten. A microcosm for the rest of the narrative that sees (somewhat unconvincingly innocent) good-hearted and sincere men turned violent, or become objects of extreme and disproportionate violence. Stenson ultimately lays the blame for the violence of the fur trade at the hands of "colonialism," but does so by personifying the ruthless economy of colonialism in the HBCo governor. This sleight, whereby colonialism is not blamed for the devastation of the land, the buffalo and indigenous people, but rather the governor is, remains a problem for me.

That said, Stenson does well to draw attention to the complexity and pervasiveness of colonial violence by including a missionary and an artist-in-the-field-reporter (I should say that the epistolary narratives of the missionary and artist are distracting and awkward inclusions at the end of a narrative that has otherwise been third-person omniscient) as a way of gesturing to the ways colonialism, Christianity and archival "truth" (in the form of paintings and written histories) sustain one another.

Shirley says

This is the first novel I have read about the fur trade in Canada, and for that reason, among others, I found the book compelling. The novel begins in 1822, following the merger of the rival Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company, and spans four decades. The new Governor, an ambitious, unscrupulous and brutal man, stakes his reputation on the expansion of the fur trade to the west., and orders the Bow River Expedition to find new sources of beaver and to establish trading relationships with western Indian communities. Central to the novel is a young and enthusiastic officer, Ted Harriot, who is deeply in love with his Metis cousin Margaret. Harriot is asked to lead the third expedition to the southwest, and views this as an opportunity to advance his own standing with the Company. Harriot loses his idealistic zeal when he realizes that he has been set up to fail, and perhaps to die, by the Company he had hoped to impress. Harriot is crushed further by the madness and death of his beloved Margaret, a consequence of the Governor's determination to make her his mistress.

This novel deals with several overarching themes including the fierce competition, brutality and abuse of power associated with the fur trade; the attempt to impose European mores, culture and religion in the colonies and the conflicts this involved; discrimination against "half-breeds" and the eventual Metis uprising; and hostilities with Americans over land and resources. These themes are brought to life through vivid and almost cliched characters such as the vindictive Governor, the bitter and determined Metis leader- Jimmy Jock Bird, and the brutal but endearing One Pound One.

Benjamin Thomas says

This is the story of the Canadian fur trade between the years 1822 and 1848. The Hudson Bay Company has merged with it's rival, The North West Company, and since the best fur trapping in eastern Canada has mostly tapped out, they are forced to look to the West, a largely unmapped region of Canada, mostly in present day Saskatchewan. The Company sends out contingents of fur traders to the indigenous tribes of the area. The story itself is told through the eyes of several people including John Rowand, a bitter Company man who was not chosen to lead an expedition, Ted Harriot, a clerk in the company, and Jimmy Jock Bird, who has made his life as a sort of middleman between the traders and the tribes. The characters, particularly Harriot, has to live through some severe hardships, some dealing with the nature of the Company business such as long treks through bitter snow and ice but also in his personal life.

But the real story here is about the evolutionary changes upon the land and among the various interacting societies. The book is told in just a few long chapters, each dealing with a different theme. For example, one chapter, called "The Missionary" deals with the issue of a Methodist missionary coming to teach the native population about his religion. He is successful to some extent but not in the way he hopes. I found the novel to be educational from many perspectives; afterall when I think fur trade and mountain men, I think western America. The writing was well done and very much in the "literary" mold. The characters were OK but to me they were a bit flat. I understand they are true historical characters so perhaps the author wasn't as free to manuever them the way he might have liked. The result, though, was a definite feeling of realness, and not some contrived plot built for pure entertainment.

JBP says

Epic historical fiction set in the English fur trade communities in Canada and upper United States starting in about 1822 that will give you more talk of beaver pelts than you will ever want or need in a novel. This book is too long for one thing. Over 500 pages with a story spread out over four decades, but involving a couple of major characters and their adventures among the cold, the isolation, the Indians, the Americans and of course, the beavers. Trimmed down, it would have been more enjoyable for me, and picked up a little flow and steam to propel itself forward rather than season after season, winter after winter with the characters going through very similar experiences. Still, an interesting snapshot on a time and place I don't know a bunch about, but have always been sort of interested in. And if you like talk of beaver pelts and their value? THE TRADE is for you!

John Hanson says

An easy book to read and enjoy, but I think it suffers from sticking too much to history. I could not identify a protagonist or a goal, no story. This behemoth called "The Trade" kept getting in the way. Still, a much more pleasurable way to learn history than reading a history book, maybe even more authentic.

Ronald Kelland says

I enjoyed this book on a number of levels. It is a great example of some of the best that CanLit has to offer. It is well written and interesting and filled with engaging characters. It is also an excellent example of historical fiction. It is set against a backdrop of actual events and all of the main characters are real people active in western Canada during the fur trade era. These events, people, their lives and their behaviors are well known to historians. The author admits that much of the conversations and day-to-day thoughts and actions of the people is fictionalized, however, the characters behave in ways that seem entirely reasonable given what is known about them. My only complaint about the book is that in covering such a large span of time in so few pages, the narrative seems a bit choppy in places. However, I would highly recommend the book to anyone with an interest in CanLit, Canadian history and historical fiction.

Christine Elsey says

Riveting, fast moving, deep. I highly recommend this book if you want to be totally captured and swept away by a moving tale of the drama and intrigue of Canada's beginnings. The Trade will capture your imagination on life in the woods during early days of the N. American fur trade.

Carol says

Picked up this instead of a more recent book at the library. Glad I did. Worried early in the book about the use of capital h Halfbreeds. Thought the book would reflect the racist attitudes of 1850s. I was wrong about that. Some of The strongest characters in the book are Metis. Good story. Engaging and sympathetic writing

Nikki Anderson says

This was a well written book that spans 4 decades of the fur trade. It challenges our romantic view of traders and voyageurs. There are no heroes or villains, although some are more villainous than others without doubt. The book not only reveals the reality of life during these hard time, it also explores what it is to be human in many ways.
