Writings by Bob Minick. Drawings and Etchings by Leonard Sussman. 
Pp. 163. 
San Francisco: The Scrimshaw Press, 1975. $22.50 cloth. 

Reviewed by William M. Clements 

This book is a cooperative artistic endeavor which creates for the reader/viewer a mythic, nostalgic world—the "hills of home" to which we would all occasionally like to retreat. The point of departure for the creation of this utopia is the Arkansas Ozarks, but the result of the artists' treatment of the culture and landscape in the mountains bears only slight resemblance to anything that ever existed. The rural Ozarks of the book represent what the hills of home should be like, not what they actually are or have been.

Photographer Roger Minick lived in the Ozarks until the age of 12, when his family moved to California. After graduating from Berkeley in 1969, he made several trips back to Northwest Arkansas to take pictures of the land and the people. His landscapes in Hills of Home depict forested mountains, mystically enshrouded in haze or blanketed with snow. His portraits reveal figures, often aged and gnarled, staring out at the camera from a background of log houses and barnyards. Occasional photographs provide nice examples of Ozark architecture, and a few actually show people doing something besides posing for a photograph (my favorite presents a man supervising the operation of a mule-driven sorghum mill).

Writer Bob Minick is Roger's father. He spent about 30 years in the Ozarks and moved to California in 1956 to take a teaching job. His "writings" in Hills of Home include some character sketches of Ozark eccentrics, an allegory of sorts (the protagonist is called "A. Man") about early settlement of the mountains, a suspenseful narrative about a rabid dog, several descriptions of quaint Ozark customs (like playing marbles), and a few anecdotes. The last read as if they might have had an origin in oral tradition. In her introduction to the book, Joyce Minick (Roger's wife, Bob's daughter-in-law) gives some idea about the processes involved in Bob's writing: "For many of the tales in the book, family experiences have been combined with stories collected throughout the Ozarks and then interwoven with ideas of Bob's own creation."

The drawings and etchings by Leonard Sussman, a native San Franciscan, are primitivistic in style and treat folksy Ozark activities and scenes. Most of them illustrate Bob's writings.

It would be easy to fault Hills of Home. Neither photographs, writings, nor drawings tell the reader/viewer anything about Ozark life as it now exists or as it once existed. However, ethnography—or anything remotely resembling it—is not the purpose of the volume. The material in Hills of Home successfully evokes a myth of a golden age and place; the three artistic media work together effectively. The result has no folkloristic value at all, but the book is a nice piece of art (I suppose that in reviewer's jargon it should be labeled a "coffee-table book"). I'll enjoy having it around to look at now and then.