

MERCHANTS OF GRAIN

by Dan Morgan
 Viking, 1979
 387 pp. \$14.95
 L of C 79-11543
 ISBN 0-670-47150-X

The great grain traders volunteer remarkably little information about their operations, even by corporate standards. Cargill and Continental (both U.S.-based), Louis Dreyfus (France), Bunge (Argentina and the United States), and André (Switzerland) are family-owned businesses that publish no financial statements. *Washington Post* correspondent Dan Morgan chronicles the history of big grain operators (in milling, storage, and transport) since 1870, when Leopold Louis-Dreyfus began importing wheat from Tsarist Russia to feed increasingly urbanized Europe. Swiftly matching worldwide supply with volatile demand for grain is the multinationals' task, usually at a profit. Their importance was underscored during the 1972 "great grain robbery," when Russia quietly purchased 20 million tons of U.S. wheat and soybeans. "If the Russians had gone to the USDA [Department of Agriculture]," writes Morgan, "and proposed buying such an enormous amount of American grain, there immediately would have been political problems"—among them, White House pressure for Soviet concessions in other areas. The grain dealers offered what the Russians wanted: secrecy, access to grain, and a buffer between governments.

*Arts & Letters***THE YEAR OF THE FRENCH**

by Thomas Flanagan
 Holt, 1979
 516 pp. \$12.95
 L of C 78-23539
 ISBN 0-03-044591-4

Most historical novels these days are rife with formula plots, stock characters, and facts distorted to accommodate romance or ideology. This long, flowing first novel by a professor of English at the State University of New York is historically accurate, even-handed, and not a bit sentimental. In 1798, 1,000 of Napoleon's troops, dispatched to harass the English, invaded County Mayo on Ireland's northwest coast. There they joined up with the rebellious Society of United Irishmen, a rabble of Catholic and Protestant peasants vexed by English tithes. To the astonishment of all, the