Larry McMurtry's Texas: Evolution of the Myth by Lera Patrick Tyler Lich (review)

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and burlesques—Laughlin later delineates at least eight such accents including Arab and lower-class French—on subjects ranging from medieval lit. to Chinese to the "Worse Libre of Rabbit Britches") ; to the hilarious correspondences, many addressed ("to the embarrassment of the Norfolk Postmistress") to "Nude Erections"; to the economic theories (perhaps not entirely cockeyed afterall) ; to Laughlin's own highly suggestive lectures, mostly to his students at Brown University, on *Homage to Sextus Perpertius, The Cantos*, and Pound's earlier medieval translations—all studded with little gems of insight into Pound's associational, often punning mode of thought and extension.

What emerges is Pound as a very funny man, a joker and trickster of Odyssean verve, a didactic and virtually hyperactive intelligence (he taught himself Chinese from a dictionary and composed for W. C. Williams a complete course in carpentry), a very sweet man (exceptionally loyal to parents and friends), a ravishing correspondent (he allowed as how it only took about 600 people to compose a civilization, and he seems to have kept up correspondences with about that many), and yes, at last, a very sad old man—paranoid, depressed, and, in his own estimation, a failure as a poet and thinker.

A gem of a book.

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Larry McMurtry's Texas: Evolution of the Myth. By Lera Patrick Tyler Lich (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1987. 71 pages, $9.95.)

"I realized that the place where all my stories start is the heart faced suddenly with the loss of its country, its customary and legendary range," stated McMurtry in 1968. In her slim (71-page) volume, Lera Patrick Tyler Lich provides a brief literary biography of Larry McMurtry, tracing his exploration of the Texas myth in fiction. Lich's thesis is that McMurtry writes best when he writes about Texas, particularly his rural Texas heritage. Descendant of cattlemen, McMurtry grew up in a transitional time, when urbanization supplanted traditional frontier ways.

Lich explores the effect of setting in each of McMurtry's novels, from *Horseman, Pass* By (1961) to *Texasville* (1987), finding the middle ones, set in Houston and Hollywood, inferior to the first and last batches, set in small-town Texas. What is Larry McMurtry's Texas? Lich's answer to this could be clearer, for, as she shows, McMurtry writes about Texas past and present, rural and urban, and always with a sense of ambivalence about the value and sustenance his roots give his fiction. Further, Lich is anxious to show that McMurtry transcends regionalism—that the Texas myth is, in fact, the American dream of freedom and independence. In his recent novels *Lonesome Dove* and *Texasville*, Larry McMurtry has apparently come home to small-

town Texas. Whether his fiction is the better for it is a question yet to be answered. Despite Lich's healthy Texas chauvinism, it becomes clear that McMurtry works best not when glorifying Texas mythology, but when exploring a heritage lost—the painful contrast between myth and reality.

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The Letters of Malcolm Lowry and Gerald Noxon, 1940–1952. Edited and with an introduction by Paul Tiessen with the assistance of Nancy Strobel. (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 1988. 163 pages, $27.95 Can., $22.95 U.S.)

The letters collected in this volume do not really shed much light on the rewriting of Malcolm Lowry's magnificent *Under the Volcano* (despite the publisher's blurb), except to establish that during their visits to each other during the early 1940s, Lowry and his old school chum, Gerald Noxon, worked very productively with each other on the revisions. What the letters do show is a three-way literary friendship between Lowry, Margerie Bonner Lowry, a former actress turned novelist, mystery writer, and eventually radio dramatist, and Noxon, a very successful radio writer and less successful poet and novelist. The letters also document a Lowry who was sober and happy, living with Margerie on the beach at Dollarton, B.C., anticipating and recapitulating Noxon's visits.

Lowry's letters are vintage Lowry prose, filled with notes on what to look for in "surrealist Victoria—. . . the delirious rosebushes, the angry totems, and Aristotle peeling among the lobelia . . ." and descriptions of the beach and the Lowrys' state of mind. Lowry also turns out to be a generous and meticulous critic of Noxon's work, while Noxon's kind of encouragement to Lowry can be surmised by his careful, admiring critique of Margerie's novel, *Horse in the Sky.* "Margie and Malc" in concert, the descriptions of their discussions of Noxon's poems and their variant readings and advice, show them as a small and mutually supportive writer's workshop, a correction to the usual idea of Margie as nurse and protector to her talented but unstable husband.

The conversations recorded in these letters were international in scope—*Under the Volcano* is set in Mexico and Noxon's *Teresina Maria* in Italy—rather than "western" or "Canadian," but their very breadth reminds us that the parish is always a part of the world all round.

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