

BOOKS

Review: *Texasville*

Written for the silver screen?

by Lois Wadsworth

Written by Larry McMurtry.
Published by Simon and Schuster, 1987.

Oil-rich Texas in the 1980's is undergoing an identity crisis, and Duane Moore and the entire town of Thalia are, too. Duane is 12 million dollars in debt, and he has no hope of recovering. He's tired all the time. "Getting rich had been tiring, but nothing like as tiring as going broke," he muses. To make it worse, his outspoken but beautiful wife Karla is getting tired of him. She's fed up with his sulking, his girlfriends, and most of all, his inattention to her sexual needs. The messages on her tee-shirts are getting more direct: "LEAD ME NOT INTO TEMP-TATION, I'LL FIND IT FOR MYSELF" and "I'VE GOT THE SADDLE, WHERE'S THE HORSE?" are a couple of her favorites.

Their kids are screwy, too. Duane figures. Nineteen year old Nellie is living at home with her two babies, recovering from her third failed marriage, planning the next doomed one. Son Dickie is selling dope and making love to married women, asking for trou-

ble. The twins have always been out of control. To top it all, Duane's old high school sweetheart Jacy has returned to town, and his wife and kids move in with her.

As far as Duane can tell, the whole town of Thalia is crazy. You may remember this town in the 50's from McMurtry's novel and Hollywood movie, *The Last Picture Show*. Jacy was the high school beauty who went off to find fame in the movies. Thalia remained a dead end town until the 70's oil boom hit, and now that the boom has gone bust, folks are quietly and hilariously flipping out. Love affairs spring up out of the dusty Texas earth like oil used to—improbable couplings that speak of desperation and the wildness of mad love. Ironically, the gravity of history pulls the town toward a commemoration of its centennial where the personal and public zaniness reach some kind of peak in a mass egg fight.

After winning the Pulitzer Prize for *Lonesome Dove*, McMurtry could have expected a large readership for any new novel. And he deserves it. He's been turning out good stuff for many years (including *Terms of Endearment*), and

Texasville is in the tradition of his other contemporary novels. It simply isn't as rich or as involving as his western epic, however.

The characters in *Texasville* are believable in spite of (or is it because of?) their obsession with sex—not money, not love, just sex. It's what they talk about and think about. The whole town is caught up in it. What makes McMurtry's people different is that everybody knows everything about everybody else, and they're all real tolerant. Duane, Karla, Jacy, and all their middle-aged friends and lovers weather the crisis with a kind of implacable good will and a generous acceptance of one another's foibles.

I have one regret about *Texasville* that I have to mention. It's light reading company for a summer evening, but that's about it. It seems to me that the book is a perfect set-up for a film deal. And I worry about what might come of that. I can't imagine how the industry could resist making a sequel to *The Last Picture Show*. For sure they'll cutie it up some more and take out all the funny dirty talk and spoil the whole thing.

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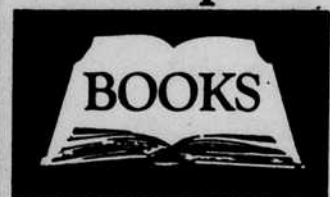
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