

The outside chance of Maximilian Glick

by Morley Torgov
Lester & Orpen Denys
Review by Geoff Martin

Maximilian Glick is a twelve year old Jewish kid living in a northern Ontario city of 50,000 people, named by the author, affectionately as Steelton. Steelton, from Torgov's description, does not sound like a nice place, especially to grow up in. For Max, his world centers around the small Jewish Community of nearly 100 including his parents, grandparents and the local Rabbi.

This is Torgov's second novel. The first was also set in northern Ontario, where, as the superficial blurb states — "the social climate falls into the same category as the seasonal climate — an ongoing act of God best endured with a maximum of resignation and a minimum of talk."

This book is typical of the Canadian genre of "provincial literature", with Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* as the genre's model. As humour, Torgov has definitely hit the right cord with this one. In places the book is very funny, not because of the on-going plot but because of characterization, anecdotes, and odd situations.

The book is very light, but it isn't at all vacuous. It deals with the real problems of being Jewish in a typically gentile society, and in doing so turns social prejudices into humorous situations.

As the family patriarch Maximilian's grandfather, Augustus Glick is very proud of being Jewish, and generally does not seem to have very much use for the *goyim*. Then there is grandmother Bryna and his mother Sarah, who argue over every issue which comes up just for


the sake of it, like a manifestation of their own generation.

One of the two most interesting characters in the book is Derek Blackthorn, a cigarette smoking, often drunken fugitive from the real world, with a past as mysterious as the real colour of his front room carpet. The house was, in Max's mind, "a two-story ashtray." Blackthorn teaches Max piano, and of course Max has become proficient at it.

The other interesting character is the second Rabbi. He replaces Rabbi Kaminski, a nice compassionate secular sort, who is killed by a bus midway through the story. His arrival sends a shock-wave throughout Steelton: He is a Lubavitcher, from an orthodox Jewish sect with customs like their European predecessors — black frock coats, wide-brimmed black hats, and long, untrimmed beards and sideburns.

Rabbi Kalman Teitelman appears stolid and serious at first, but appearances can be deceiving — when one of the members of the Jewish community is honoured by the city of Steelton, Rabbi Teitelman is asked to speak at the banquet. However, he finds it appropriate to make jokes for ten minutes, ridiculing the mayor, the guest of honour, and everyone else, including the delinquent Minister of Culture who happens to be in attendance.

As it turns out, Teitelman aspires to be a standup comedian. Sarah and Bryna argue over whether Max will be a judge or a doctor, and Max quite simply wants to get out of Steelton. Probably forever. *The Outside Chance of Maximilian Glick* is a delightful novel, and a good example of today's collection of Canadian literature.



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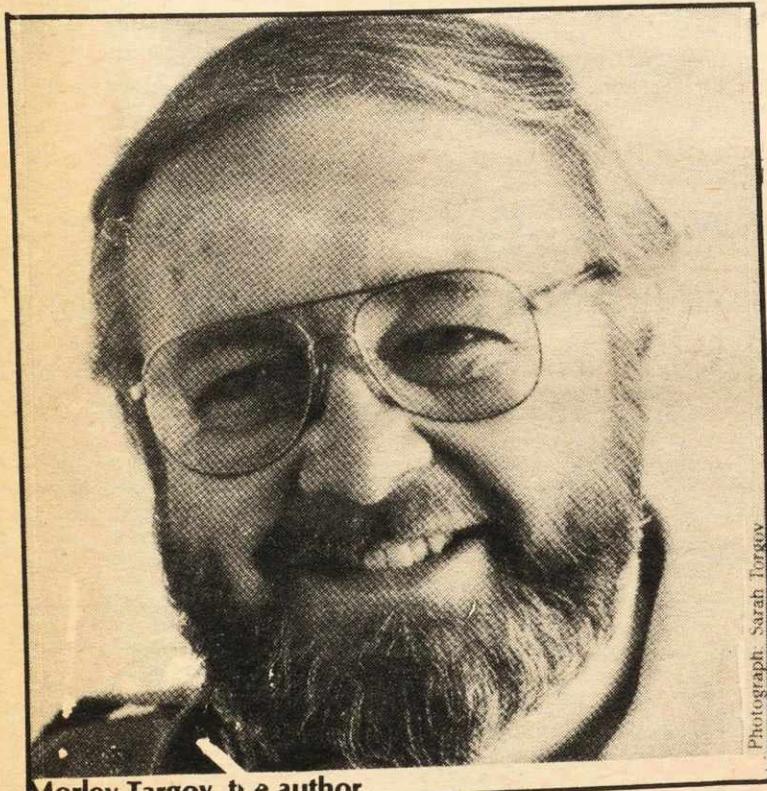
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Morley Torgov, the author.

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