

Williams should not carry on

Back Drops
by Kenneth Williams
J. M. Dent & Sons,
London, 1983
178 pages

Review by Geoff Martin
Did you know Kenneth Williams buys Knight's Castile soap because the initials on each bar are the same as his (Kenneth

Charles) and it "never fails to impress visitors to (his) bathroom?" Do you know who Kenneth Williams is? Do you care? If the answer is no, you'll never want to read his book.

Kenneth Williams, you may remember, is a cult favourite in North America for his performance in the Carry On movie series and his routine appearan-

ces on the British radio show *Just a Minute*.

According to book publishing hype, *Back Drops*—pages from a private diary was published because of overwhelming response to a series of readings from the author's diary on BBC Radio.

The diary must have certainly lost something in the transition from radio to paper.

The book is a banal collection of arrogant self-centered diary entries which may (or may not have) been funny on the BBC but are boring as hell in this, his second book. This book is such a waste of time that one would not even review it except that the publisher feels even bad news is better than no news.

Each entry is a collection of Williams' stories, nostalgic name-dropping, and pedantic ramblings. He alludes to people I have never heard of, do not want to hear of, and if I have heard of them, I don't believe Williams knows them. To say that this publication reflects badly upon the publisher, J. M. Dent, is an understatement—after reading trash of this calibre one might seriously consider forgetting Dent ever existed. But not all is lost—my compliments to the technical staff for a lively lay-out job, and to "Larry" the illustrator for showing up Williams for the schmuck that he is.



Read this book if you read books

The Swell Season
by Josef Skvorecky
Lester & Orpen Dennys
226 pages, 1982

Review by A. D. Wright
Daniel Smiricky is a poet, a saxophonist, and an adolescent boy. He lives in the village of Kostelec in the Reich Protectorate of Czechoslovakia. And he desperately wants to get laid. This quest forms the backbone of Josef Skvorecky's book *The Swell Season*.

Daniel loves the blues and this first brings him into personal contact with the Reich. He is to play the Charleston and has to get this by the local cultural censor:

We were trapped. We couldn't possibly do the Charleston for him. He'd recognize at once that it wasn't an Aryan dance ... At first we were at a loss, but then I suddenly stomped my foot down, slapped my thighs, and began to turn around on the spot with elephant-like steps I only hoped it looked volkisch rather than Judeo-Negroid.

The Reich, however, is the least of Daniel's worries. His main problem is losing his virginity when he has already hit up every girl in town and they all know it. He must resort to more and more outlandish schemes to succeed and is thwarted at every

turn, causing the story to move at a fast clip.

Skvorecky's writing is brilliant. The six tales that comprise this volume read very smoothly and its diverse story elements are skillfully woven together. From the history of one boy's summer, we are given glimpses into small town life, life under German occupation, American and Czech blues, Catholicism, and, of course, adolescence.

Reading this book is a double pleasure because the translation by Paul Wilson is sensitive and flows well. It's easy to forget the book wasn't originally written in English.

This book is a must-read for lovers of good fiction. Rating: Nine out of ten.

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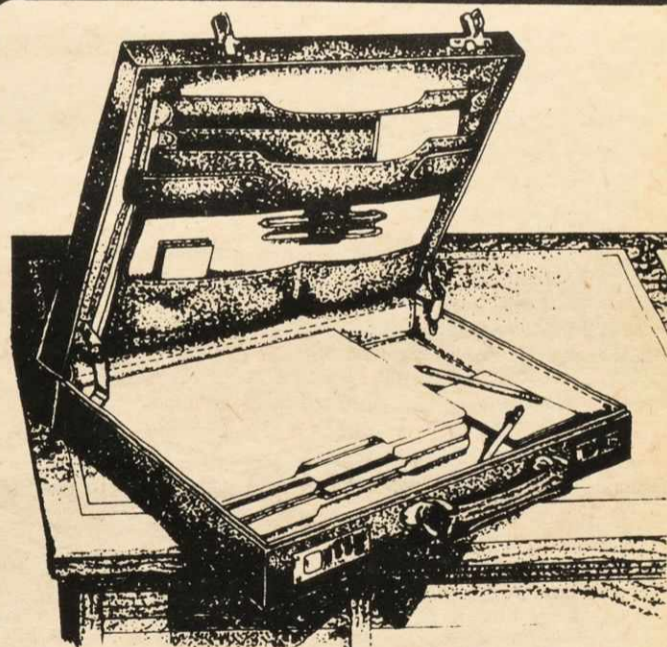


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