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## Review of D'Arcy McNickle

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*The Newberry Library*

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*D'Arcy McNickle*. By James Ruppert. Boise State University Western Writers Series, No. 83. Boise, Idaho: Boise State University, 1988. Selected bibliography. 55 pp. \$2.95.

This contribution to the Boise State University Western Writers Series is slightly more than fifty pages long, but it represents the fullest presentation of D'Arcy McNickle's life and work available in print. While two recent American doctoral dissertations (by Birgit Hans, English, University of Arizona; and Dorothy Parker, History, University of New Mexico) work their way toward publication as books and articles, this will stand as the handiest guide to the man and his work.

Ruppert divides his brief profile into three parts: a biography; a description of McNickle's fiction: primarily *The Surrounded* (1936), *Runner in the Sun* (1954), and *Wind From An Enemy Sky* (1978), all three recently reissued by the University of New Mexico Press; and a discussion of his historical writing: *They Came Here First* (1949), *Indians and Other Americans* (1959), *Indian Tribes of the United States* (1962), and *Indian Man: A Life of Oliver LaFarge* (1971). Two-thirds of the text thus addresses McNickle's writing. The book includes a brief bibliography.

While severely constrained by the Western Writers Series format, Ruppert has done a fine job of marking out the dimensions of McNickle's life and work. He makes clear the author's *métis* ancestry and Canadian roots. (Many Canadians take pride in D'Arcy's achievements—including members of the Canadian wing of his family.) Establishing his lineage and his lack of a specific tribal affiliation also illuminates McNickle's ability to speak across tribal barriers and to work for broad pan-Indian concerns. Ruppert also traces McNickle's chop-suey-like career as a free-lance writer, government bureaucrat, university professor, and social worker. Despite the brevity of the treatment, one gets a glimpse of McNickle's extraordinary range and impact.

Ruppert's discussion of the writer's books is

the most useful part of the book, though his decision to call the prose works "ethnohistorical" is unfortunate because it makes McNickle—who enjoyed writing for a general audience—sound like an obscure academic. Ruppert explores the autobiographical aspects of *The Surrounded* and relates McNickle to other regional fiction writers. In the section on historical writing, Ruppert traces McNickle's steady allegiance to "action anthropology" and to the work of John Collier, but the most interesting discussion is of the autobiographical aspects of *Indian Man*, McNickle's profile of Oliver LaFarge. According to Ruppert, the Indian writer saw the patrician easterner as his mirror image.

A few errors mar Ruppert's text. McNickle appears to have only spent a few months at Oxford, not "most of a year" (p. 7). He was designated to be the editor, not a member of the "editorial board" (p. 15), of the Smithsonian *Handbook's* volume on Indian-white relations (recently published). Some subtitles are listed incorrectly and listings of McNickle's articles are incomplete.

Students and teachers of history, anthropology, and literature will be grateful to James Ruppert for this handy introduction to D'Arcy McNickle's writing and career. Scholars too will welcome this volume as a small but powerful reminder of how much remains to be done before we can understand the dimensions and complexity of modern American Indian culture.

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