

act together, and providing some touching, often outrageously funny, scenes en route.

Michael Malone has given us a sensitive novel, refreshing in its lack of contrivance.

—Ron Kurz

Torch Song

by Anne Roiphe. 226 pp. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$8.95

Torch Song, a confessional novel of a young woman's first love and miser-

WHICH IS TO SAY THAT MARGORIE'S response to her terrible life seems inadequate. She should be furious, but how could she be, possessing a happily-ever-after in a jolly family with a candy-flavored pediatrician? How, that is, except in real life.

—Paul Berman

La Mure is a skilled storyteller with a talent for bringing to life, however superficially, a flamboyant period. Unfortunately, his infatuation toward irony and satire does not sit well on this tale of high romance.

—Virginia Hughes Kaminsky

Roosevelt's Rex

by Richard J. Margolis

Roosevelt's Revolution:

The First Year
by Rexford G. Tugwell. 327 pp. Macmillan, \$14.95

Rexford G. Tugwell, probably the biggest brain and certainly the sharpest tongue in FDR's celebrated "Brain

I wish that he might have indulged himself in a little more psychohistory, so that we might understand better why Hopkins devoted himself to work that absolutely wrecked his health; Hopkins's case seems to be one of the purer examples of workaholicism on record. He dreamed of the Presidency in 1940, when Roosevelt hung fire, but he was less Presidential stuff than the kind of man mobs hang. By giving himself over entirely to Roosevelt's purposes he became assistant President in the division of Ears, Legs, and Dirty Work, and contributed mightily to saving the country and winning the war.

"Both men," writes Adams, referring to Hopkins and Roosevelt, "took and used power for what it would do, not for what it would do for them. In exercising that power, both men left an example of integrity and honor which their successors have too often failed to match." That's a pretty good epitaph: students of the Presidency could do worse than to read Adams's book, to see how two old masters, FDR and Harry the Hop, made the damned thing work. □

Washington air was thick with trial balloons—not a few of them launched from the White House—and with instant solutions ranging, left to right, from a government takeover of basic industries to a 50 percent cut in federal spending. Roosevelt, a born pragmatist, would try first one idea, then another; and each experiment gave rise to a new agency with a new acronym. Tugwell opens with a chronological "List of First-Year Agencies," starting with the RFC (Reconstruction Finance Corporation) and ending with



The Granger Collection

the FSRC (Federal Surplus Relief Corporation). There were twelve in all, and Tugwell had a hand in every one. FDR also had a habit of appointing special high-level committees to coordinate the work of the agencies; in most of these, too, the indefatigable Tugwell played a major role. He was a ubiquitous gadfly, a radical theorist with a sharp bite who worked unendingly to keep the wobbly New Deal from backsliding. As he now recalls, it was mostly a losing battle. Many of the new agencies fell quickly into old, grasping hands—those of the banks and the corporations—with the result that promising reforms, such as the National Recovery Act, soon turned sour. Prices on consumer items began to rise alarmingly, while employment continued to founder.

Worse, Roosevelt clung steadfastly to visions of government retrenchment. Part of his mind remained convinced that an answer to the crisis lay in fiscal prudence, so even as he announced new programs he demanded that all federal departments reduce their expenditures by one-fourth. Tugwell was appalled. He shuttled almost daily between his USDA office and the White House, coaxing Roosevelt to spend more, arguing that "the way to recovery was through the temporary acceptance of unbalanced budgets." In the end, of course, the exigencies of depression overwhelmed FDR's thrifty instincts, and he unwillingly became a champion of deficit spending. But during that (Continued on next page)

(Continued from page 5) first year, Tugwell remembers, the President "seemed to say that all bureaucracies were a nuisance, and that there ought to be fewer of them. . . ." In consequence, "our willingness to be faithful subordinates was severely tested."

Yet faithful he was, sustained always by the idea that the President, who "never had to explain himself to anyone," knew better than his underlings how to overcome conservative opposition and get the job done. Roosevelt, in turn (and in his fashion), remained true to his peppery adviser, even after Tugwell had become a controversial figure. It is hard now to understand how this cool and dapper intellectual, a former Columbia economics professor, could overnight turn into the New Deal's *bête noire*, at least in the eyes of many Congressmen and journalists (including the dean of columnists, Walter Lippmann). "Tugwellism" suddenly became synonymous with "Marxist" and "radical experimentation." He was the New Deal's all-purpose lightning rod, attracting to his person much of the political static that hostile politicians were too wise or wary to aim directly at the President.

By all accounts, including his own, Tugwell bore the punishment with dignity and a measure of wry humor. He was disputatious and doctrinaire by nature; he enjoyed a good fight, especially a battle of wits, and he did not suffer compromise lightly. The customary give-and-take of Washington politics, the incrementalist's tendency to sacrifice large reforms in exchange for small gains, suited neither his way nor his will. He left all that to Roosevelt, the master dealer.

Looking back on that turbulent year, Tugwell now sees his young self through an elder's narrowed eyes. It was "the gloss of my inexperience," he notes in a preface, that got him into trouble.

My convictions about public policy were mature, but I was an innocent in Washington. I saw my real self only as a helper, but I found it impossible to accept many of the politicians' mores and so I set myself in opposition, mostly futile and puzzling to sophisticates. This opposition seems now to an older, and perhaps more cynical, individual to have been undertaken from a position and with an armament that ensured failure.

Yet it seems to me that Tugwell, with his penchant for gloominess, denigrates both his own contribution and that of the entire New Deal. There were mistakes, to be sure, particularly at the start. Yet what comes through in this account is not failure but faith, a faith in the capacity of our democratic institutions to redress old wrongs with new, imaginative programs. It was a time, unlike our own, that welcomed fresh faces and ideas, a time ready to flesh out a thousand long-deferred social dreams. We shall not soon again see its like.

Years later, in a speech to a group of young government officials, Tugwell summed up his philosophy of public service. The note he struck then was considerably less forlorn than the note he has struck in *Roosevelt's Revolution*, and I like to think that it more closely represents his "true" feelings. "Fail as gloriously as some of your predecessors have," Tugwell counseled. "If you do not succeed in bringing about a permanent change, you may at least have stirred some slow consciences so that in time they will give support to action. And you will have the satisfaction, which is not to be discounted, of having annoyed a good many miscreants who had it coming to them." □

for *New York* magazine, hisses in *The New York Times Book Review* (December 26) that "Wolfe is so busy shining his sentences that he can't stop to think." Hess compares Wolfe to Louis-Ferdinand Céline by juxtaposing two similar paragraphs from each. He wonders if Wolfe is a "copycat" or if it's "coincidence." James Wolcott of *The Village Voice* (January 10) asserts, "Wolfe has sacrificed analysis for platitude. . . he is striking a cool pose, fondling his little conceits as if they were rosary beads."

Seated in his compact town-house apartment amid soaring silk flowers, V-8 responses one hand at a time. On *The New York Review's* hostile reception, he quips: "They have the regrettable habit of saying I was right in the last book in order to prove how wrong-headed I've become now. They really should check their slate so they don't give me points in passing." Wolfe used to admire Garry Willis but now laments his

Wolfe's credibility by associating him with Céline's fascism. The fact that Hess ends his review with a line from *The Painted Word* hints at his unconscious motivation. Then, putting this elaborate theory aside, Wolfe remarks, "Of course, I also have to allow for the possibility that he simply doesn't like the book."

Wolfe zings James Wolcott for his "*Village Voice* mentality." "They're like the liberals who live on the side of hills facing the sea, the sky, and the trees. Common people would spoil their view. They love them; they just don't know any."

Wolfe suggests he angers because he has laughed inside the church. The literary and artistic establishments have become the new priests; by exposing their status games he has offended the congregation. He has further sinned by writing about ethnic and racial groups. "It's like the myth in the Thirties when every laborer was an Arnold Schwarzenegger breaking a chain across his neck. There

January 2), some of the memory of early reporting, the sheer animal zest and brilliance. . . has given way to reflection." Wolfe concurs: "I realized from Krim and *Time's* Paul Gray that in the essay form the writer, who is playing God, is having more fun than the reader."

Gary Cunningham observes in the *Chicago Tribune* (December 19) that "Wolfe may be moving into a new phase," implying change from the exuberant days of *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968) to the experiments with new forms in *Mauve Gloves*. "I suppose he could sense something that is unconscious in me," Wolfe replies.

"Where am I going? In my coming book on the astronaut's more involved in structure and intensity of style. I am building actors vertically through dramatic plot rather than horizontal details. I am trying so-