

The ante-room: [early stages in a literary life]



This fascinating biography lies at the intersection of storytelling and Canadian experience in the rapidly modernizing late British Empire. Author and publisher (Horatio) Lovat Dickson (1902-87), known as Rache, recalls his travels throughout the Empire as the son of a mining engineer father alongside his developing love of words. Descended from an Empire-loving colonial family of romantic Scots, who kept the lone shieling of the misty island enshrined in their imaginations, children grew up with tales of long voyages ... bred in the bone. Rache's own fascination with words and storytelling pulls him irresistibly, if not without difficulties, toward the world of letters. A compelling and dramatic story, it was called first rate by the New Yorker and attractive and durable by the New Statesman when first published in 1959. Nearly twenty years later, *The Ante-Room* was recorded by Dickson in daily instalments for the CBC's *Morningside*, and by popular demand was rebroadcast the following year. Dickson is a writer of spare and graceful prose, courageously self-critical and profoundly humanist. From his highly textured recollections of childhood experiences travelling from Australia to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to his survival of a range of adventures and misadventures in Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, and Temiskaming, Rache slowly, and often painfully, comes of age. He eventually moves to Alberta to study literature, moving toward a role in international publishing. This is a Canadian-style Bildungsroman, exploring a no-fixed-address existence as well as feelings of ambivalence towards his inherited identity and narratives of origin.

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