



The Ante-Room: Early Stages in a Literary Life (Wynford Project)

Lovat Dickson (deceased), Neville Thompson, Western University

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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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