

*Arts & Letters***NORMAN ROCKWELL: A Definitive Catalogue**

(2 vols.)

Text and catalogue by
Laurie Norton Moffatt
Introduction by David H. Wood
Univ. Press of New Eng., 1986
1200 pp. \$195 set



An illustration may lack the ambiguity and highly personal emotion of a work of art, but it fulfills a crucial cultural function. The illustrator gives his viewers an instantly recognizable moment in a narrative, drawing their attention to certain character types, relationships, and situations that make up a society's myths about human behavior. These myths often reach beyond the present to an imagined collective past; they tell what it means (or meant) to be a boy, to live in a small town, to celebrate a holiday. By and large, they are happy.

Norman Rockwell, America's best-loved recent illustrator, published his first picture in 1912 when he was 18 and worked unstintingly until just before his death in 1978. Known mainly for the 300 covers he did for the *Saturday Evening Post*, he also illustrated calendars, books (including *Tom Sawyer*), and advertisements. As if that were not enough, he painted more than 200 portraits.

This catalogue of all of Rockwell's known works contains 96 color and more than 3500 black and white plates; they all accompany entries arranged chronologically within each category of his work. Collectively, the illustrations provide a fascinating journey through an idealized 20th-century America, absorbing because its myths remained largely unchanged until the late 1960s. In Rockwell's world, Americans are mainly Anglo-Saxon and Christian, live in small towns or on farms, are mischievous if boys and sweet if girls, have loving if sometimes muddled parents, and are visited by a jolly Santa every year.

VN: The Life and Art of Vladimir Nabokov

by Andrew Field
Crown, 1986
417 pp. \$19.95

Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977) was not simply one of the great prose stylists of 20th-century literature; he was great in two languages. In Russian or English, his stories and novels—*The Defense* (1929), *Glory* (1931–32), *Pale Fire* (1945), *Ada* (1969)—are elaborate linguistic puzzles in which details from his personal and family history are often cunningly concealed. If Nabokov's works are "self-referential through and through," Field cautions, "they only rarely demonstrate a connection with the life we know that Nabokov led."

As in his two earlier studies of Nabokov, Field illuminates many of those obscure links. One