

Nonfiction

POPLORICA: A Popular History of the Fads, Mavericks, Inventions, and Lore That Shaped Modern America
MARTIN J. SMITH AND PATRICK J. KIGER.
Harper Resource, \$22.95 (304p) ISBN 0-06-053531-8

Who'd have thought that Willis Carrier's "Apparatus for Treating Air," an early air conditioner patented in 1906, would set the stage for the Republican domination of Washington that started with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 (by allowing for a population shift to the hotter Southern states)? Or that 260 tons of leftover turkey would help usher in a profound change in the way Americans eat and socialize with their families (by stuffing the first TV dinners)? Smith (a *Los Angeles Times Magazine* editor) and Kiger (a freelancer and regular contributor to *Discovery.com*) share 20 similarly significant milestones in this "Cliff Notes of contemporary culture" chronicling some overlooked but strangely influential moments in American history. A mélange of strange occurrences, the book is brisk and frisky, addressing everything from the extracurricular exploits of sex researcher Alfred Kinsey to the way in which former first lady Betty Ford's public struggle with addiction presaged an era that would finally accept drug and alcohol abuse as a disease and not a moral failing. Though its yuckity-yuck style approaches the cornball at times, the book succeeds in placing into context the chosen developments in a breezy, compulsively readable fashion. Thanks to these two research-happy authors, readers may decide it's okay to restore that velvet Elvis to its honored place above the mantle, where it can enjoy a second life as a treasured piece of ironic Americana. All history should be this much fun. (On sale Mar. 31)

Forecast: *With ads in American Quarterly and Popular Culture and a 50-city national radio campaign, Poplorica could reach fans of quirky trivia, especially after the success of Schott's Original Miscellany.*

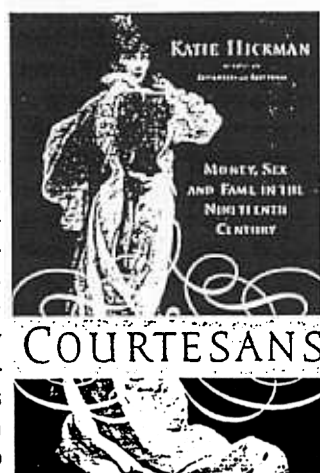
WALDEN POND: A History
W. BARKSDALE MAYNARD. *Oxford Univ.*, \$30 (352p) ISBN 0-19-516841-0

As Maynard dismayingly shows, since the death of Henry David Thoreau, hundreds of thousands of visitors have flocked to Walden Woods each year; they have trampled the flora, polluted the water with debris and urine, blared radios, set up hot dog stands and generally marred the face of this once sacred retreat. Maynard quotes one disheartened visitor who described Walden Pond in the 20th century as "a mass of hu-

manity, a stew of frantic motion, boom boxes and squealing children." In this history of the pond and its surroundings, Maynard relates that in the past 10 years matters have improved markedly. Rock star Don Henley spearheaded the Walden Woods Project, raising millions of dollars for preservation; yet Thoreauvian purists remain skeptical about a Hollywood figure taking charge and pandering for corporate sponsorship. What would Thoreau think about the dramatic changes that have taken place in his name? How did an ordinary pond come to have such extraordinary meanings? Maynard, an architectural historian who has served as a consultant to the Walden Woods Project, tackles all of these questions in a painstakingly researched, reportorial history that begins with Thoreau's first glimpse of the pond in 1821 and carries through to the present day. It's a classic tale of Americans loving their national treasures to death, and though the middle portion of the narrative becomes a bit repetitive with its blow-by-blow account of the growth of crass commercialism, this book will surely appeal to Thoreau buffs and to those concerned with natural and historic preservation. It provides a comprehensive history of the landscape that inspired one of America's most important authors. 85 b&w illus. (Mar.)

**LOVE IN THE DRIEST SEASON:
A Family Memoir**
NEELY TUCKER. *Crown*, \$23.95 (256p)
ISBN 0-609-60976-9

★ As a foreign correspondent, Tucker had worked in conflict zones on two continents and seen death in all its gruesome forms. "The steady stream of violence had worn away my natural sense of compassion to the point where I could cover almost any horror but felt very little about anything at all." Then, in 1997, Neely, a white Mississippian, and his African-American wife, Vita, were posted to Zimbabwe, where the AIDS crisis was feeding an unprecedented wave of sick and abandoned children. "The scale of



A tale of finding love in improbable places by Neely Tucker (this page); a chronicle of five "fallen" Englishwomen by Katie Hickman (p. 55). Jackets by Jennifer O'Connor & Honi Werner.

death, and the depths of misery it entailed, defied the imagination even for someone like me...." Neely and Vita volunteered at an overwhelmed orphanage in the Zimbabwean capital, where diarrhea and pneumonia were killing babies at an alarming rate. Nobody dared whisper the word AIDS, though its specter hung over every crib. Here, Neely and Vita met Chipo, a desperately sick baby girl who had been abandoned under a tree. With temporary permission to take her home, Neely and Vita threw all available resources toward saving her life: round-the-clock feedings, good doctors, medicine and a clean, warm environment. She thrived. Neely and Vita decided to adopt Chipo, only to discover a slew of cultural taboos against adoption by foreigners—a white foreigner in particular. While Chipo grew healthy and fat under their care, the Tuckers negotiated a nightmarish bureaucracy that threatened to tear Chipo away from them; meanwhile, Zimbabwe was entering a period of civil unrest that targeted Americans

and journalists. This is a gorgeous mix of family memoir and reportage that traverses the big issues of politics, racism and war. *Agent, Wendy Weil. (On sale Feb. 17)*

Forecast: *Crown will support Tucker's book with a regional NPR campaign, six-city author tour and print advertising. Tucker's current position (he's a staff writer for the Washington Post) should help him garner further attention.*

GIANT KILLERS: The Team and the Law that Helped Whistle-Blowers Recover America's Stolen Billions
HENRY SCAMMELL. *Atlantic Monthly*, \$25 (320p) ISBN 0-87113-909-X

Freelance author Scammell has written a panegyric to the False Claims Act, a Civil War-vintage statute authorizing private lawsuits (called *qui tam* actions) to recover money swindled from the federal government. As revised and strengthened in 1986, the False Claims Act permits a whistle-blower to sue on the government's behalf; if the