

Frinck

book review

Thomas Haroldson

1967

a review of

Frinck: A Life in the Day of and Summer With Monika by Roger McGough (Ballantine Paperback, 60 cents)

This is one writer's answer to how the modern novella should be written.

"I read the news today, oh boy,

"About a lucky man who made the grade, And though the news was rather sad, Well, I just had to laugh."

—Beatles

Frinck by Roger McGough is one writer's answer to how the modern novella should be written.

It is worth looking into if for no other reason than to see how it is put together.

The story (the second part of the book is a poem), contains only 12,000 words, which is equivalent to about the first 25 pages of a book such as *Catcher in the Rye*. McGough manages somehow to stretch his long short story over 111 pages and to divide it into 50 chapters.

Of course, as a result some chapters are a bit sketchy. For example, the complete text of Chapter 10 is: "Time passed."

This McLuhanistic structuring, in addition to being absurdly funny at times, also makes the book quite readable. In fact, "Frinck," with its short chapters, large print, and simple plot, is custom made for people who ordinarily avoid prose fiction.

This is not to say, however, that the work is completely successful.

Most readers will probably find McGough's British music hall humor a bit difficult to take. It's almost necessary to be a native Englishman to appreciate what he is doing.

On the other hand, the deceptively simple plot has a certain universal appeal: "Frinck" is the story of a Liverpool boy "who rises from teenage obscurity to London stardom on one hit record before he is sent back to Liverpool—used up—at age 20."

At first glance the story seems a bit frivolous, but McGough eventually widens the scope of the work by introducing several variables.

For one thing, "Frinck" calmly accepts the fact that adulthood will corrupt him. He even prepares for the inevitable day by collecting blackmail material which he intends to use when he "grows up."

McGough's suggestion that the present young generation is as corruptible as any other generation, is not a happy thought. But, after all, if the story were all "message" and no message, it wouldn't be much of a book.

fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #41, November 1-15, 1967

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