



Signs of the Literary Times: Essays, Reviews, Profiles 1970-1992 (Suny Series, the Margins of Literature)

William O'Rourke

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This book is O'Rourke's first volume of nonfiction since his 1972 *The Harrisburg 7 and the New Catholic Left*, which Garry Wills hailed as "a clinical x-ray of our society's condition." That book prompted Herbert Mitgang to name O'Rourke "one of the finest writers of his generation." *Signs of the Literary Times* provides new evidence for that assessment. It brings together O'Rourke's unique mixture of literary, political, and cultural criticism published periodically during the last twenty-two years. The collection ranges from autobiographical essays describing his generation's literary evolution, to articles on free speech issues, such as nude dancing and the Bush-era NEA controversies, as well as book reviews that provide a fresh and largely uncharted critical map of the period. O'Rourke is not only interested in genre bending and expansion, but in persevering during this age of academic specialization as, in his phrase, a person of letters.

In the two decades between his first work of nonfiction and this volume, O'Rourke has published three highly acclaimed novels, *The Meekness of Isaac* (1974), *Idle Hands* (1981), and *Criminal Tendencies* (1987). Of the last, *The Virginia Quarterly Review* wrote, "Of all the novelists paraded in recent years by publishers as natural successors to Graham Greene, this one comes the closest. A thoroughly entertaining literary event."

Signs of the Literary Times is not so much a compendium of diverse pieces on various subjects, as it is a cogent and continuing x-ray of our society's condition."

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