

A REVIEW OF:

William Vollmann, *Expelled from Eden: A William T. Vollmann Reader*
New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2004.

William Vollmann, *Poor People*
New York: Ecco, 2007.

Introduction

It's a cliché to begin a review or essay on William Vollmann with a description of how much he has written. So let me begin with a quotation from a 1991 letter he wrote his publishers concerning other matters: "If *The Ice-Shirt* didn't make you money, *Fathers and Crows* isn't likely to make you money, either. Some of the *Dreams* set in the present may do better for you commercially. But *Seven Dreams* is not like a Stephen King book and will never be. I honestly believe that *Fathers and Crows* is my best work so far, and that it will eventually be recognized as such. In the meantime my other books, such as *Rainbow Stories*, are already recognized, and will only sell better as my name becomes better known" (315). These lines appear in the last paragraph of "Letter Against Cuts," one of many heretofore unseen pieces of writing included in *Expelled from Eden: A William T. Vollmann Reader*, edited by Larry McCaffery and Michael Hemmingson (Thunder's Mouth Press, 2004).

The National Book Award-winning *Europe Central* (2005) followed *Rising Up and Rising Down* (2003), a seven-volume, 3,300-page study of violence in McSweeney's limited edition (Ecco published a one-volume abridged version in 2004). Both have attracted attention and many reviews; the NBA has possibly brought newly curious readers to Vollmann. There is, as well, a certain cachet for any publisher to have this award-winning (in US literary circles) writer in their stable. So it seems that Vollmann prophesized correctly. In between those two major works came this *Reader*, and one may legitimately wonder how it solidifies his current reputation and position, where it situates him, and whether it's needed or premature.