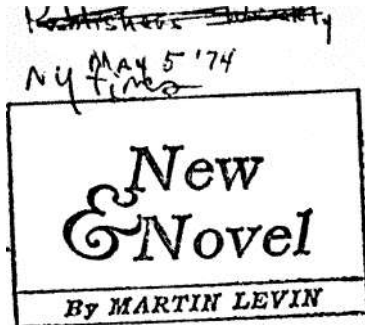


Review of Thin Men of Haddam by CW Smith in New York Times



Thin Men Of Haddam

By C. W. Smith.

327 pp. New York:

Grossman Publishers. \$7.95.

This introspective Western orchestrates a variety of conflicts into a composition with a distinctively original texture. The focus of the novel's complications is Raphael Mendez, the young foreman of a ranch in West Texas. A Chicano, an intellectual, and a lover of the land—Mendez finds himself pulled in many directions. The plight of his kinsmen inclines him to dream of a new order ("an indigenous *kibbutz* for all of his Chicano brothers*"). 'The offer of 30 per cent partnership by the new owner of the Rolling J. aligns him with the old order,

The foreman's conflicts are punctuated by the tall stories of a garrulous old ranch hand, by flashbacks into Pachuco-Anglo high school brawls, and are pervaded by the presence of the harsh semi-desert. All of these fragments are destructively fused by Mendez's cousin Manuelo, a bitter, desperate man. ("no job, sick wife, a houseful of kids, and nothing to eat but Gravy Train.") Manuelo commits a crime that makes him a fugitive and puts his cousin in the ultimate dilemma: "between the sheriff and La Raza."

CW. Smith's technique has the impact of that of Claude Simon, the Provencal farmer-novelist who creates arresting amalgams of past, present, reverie and locale. Can't do much better than that.
(New York Times 5/5/74)