

**SELF-PORTRAIT OF
SOMEONE ELSE**

Vincent Eaton. Viking, \$16.95 ISBN 0-670-82464-X

The anti-hero of Eaton's striking first novel, 28-year-old Californian Tim Buckles Jr., has dropped his graduate studies in psychology to work as a lifeguard at a public pool. While proclaiming this job a sounder way of helping people, he also admits he fears the madness increasingly conquering his mind. When, in separate but questionable incidents, two swimmers drown while he is on duty, Tim's precarious mental balance gives way and he feels himself "slipping slowly inward to the gray recesses of brain . . . [perhaps to] . . . disappear completely within a fold, sucked in, never to return." The narrative, in the form of Tim's diary entries spliced with psychologist, police and employer reports and with interviews with his girlfriend Alisa, forces the reader into the violently alienated inner world of a man whose radically distorted, loveless childhood has left him prey to increasingly vivid and destructive hallucinations. The adoring, pregnant Alisa strains to reach Tim, and her father arranges a prestigious job for him. But the devastating consequences of Tim's traumatic family dynamics, captured powerfully in dialogue and brief vignettes, provide a powerfully destructive counterforce, with devastating consequences. Eaton's harsh, unsparring tale jolts the reader, holding us uncomfortably close to Tim's commingled criminal insanity and humanity. (Aug.)