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Gary McKinney and Robert G. Weiner, editors. *The Storyteller Speaks: Rare and Different Fictions of the Grateful Dead*. Bellingham, WA: Kearney Street Books, 2010. Softcover, 321 pp. ISBN 9780972370684. \$15.95.

HORACE L. FAIRLAMB

Trying to explain the Dead to outsiders, Deadheads sometimes just say, “You had to be there.” Perhaps predictably, the Dead’s iconic countercultural status is as often an obstacle as an avenue to understanding. Where outsiders focus primarily on the long jams and tie-dyed T-shirts, insiders know that the music is an etheric conduit, a ritual occasion, a metaphor for an expanded way of being, an imagination that looks to chthonic roots and enlightened futures. The most direct evidence of the Dead’s deep literacy has always been their resonant and richly crafted lyrics. But now, thanks to an anthology edited by Gary McKinney and Robert G. Weiner, there is a new door to the Grateful Dead imagination, by way of Dead-inspired writings. *The Storyteller Speaks: Rare and Different Fictions of the Grateful Dead* collects twenty-six pieces plus an annotated guide to Dead-related fiction and prose.

The variety and complexity of these pieces will delight the reader but pose challenges to the reviewer. Naturally, there are familiar themes that link the collection: the Tour is perhaps the central metaphor (the long, strange trip) and several lines (“steal your face,” “death don’t have no mercy in this land”) echo across the pages. Still, the variety of style, tone, and genre defy generalization. Even the more dominant themes find such varied embodiments in these pieces, linking some by resemblance but offering striking contrasts with others, marking the variations more striking than the similarities.

The Show

The literal meaning of “having to be there” refers to the special experience of Grateful Dead shows, and several pieces provide accounts of pre-show, show, and post-show experiences. Ted Ringer’s “Eugene ’93” is a straightforward account of a memorable Oregon show. James D.

McCallister's "Nekot and Nipchee Get Tour Hack" complicates the tour experience by recounting an impending illness suffered by two Deadheads as they approach the last show in a tour, pitting tour-commitment against the downward turn of events. Nicholas Meriwether's "Saint Stephen" portrays a transplant to the Bay Area gearing up for a Grateful Dead show in Oakland. Together the West Coast migration/Oakland show suggest a pilgrimage to counterculture Ground Zero, culminating in one of the most remarkable descriptions of the live concert experience to be found anywhere. In a lighter vein, Alex Kolker's "Back-Up" provides a serendipitous solution to the much-dreaded curse of traveling to a show with Mr. Bummer.

The Marginal Life

While the Show is the creative center of the Grateful Dead world, the Deadhead's homework assignment is, as one character says, to find the center wherever you are. Several stories examine life away from the privileged performance space, where Deadhead idealism confronts mundane normalcy and the inevitable dips of Fortune's Wheel. In Stephen Graham Jones' "Til the Morning Comes," a young teen recalls the explosive tensions between a straight dad and a twenty-six-year-old live-in uncle who has never quite gotten off the bus, as both adults struggle to navigate the son's emotional challenges.

In Matt Armstrong's "1996," suburban dad Pete deals with his straight-laced neighbors while learning that one of them might be a bit more clued-in than he first appeared. The narrator of Tom Gonzales' "Ubiquitous" reviews several tragedies that changed his life, for which the Dead provided a kind of musical Greek chorus. Recalling the genre-bending prose style of the Beats, Mary Goodenough's "Notes from the Shanty" mixes poetry with impressionistic recollections over several years. In a chapter from his novel, Gary McKinney's "Biscuit and the Beer Vendor" tells of how an enlightened sheriff engages Dead concert chaos and mitigates a hard-nosed policeman's discomfort with the local free-thinking. And finally, Eddie Cain's "Farewell, My Sunshine" recounts some chaotic moments in the sixties when Garcia, the Pranksters, and New Journalism came together in unpredictable and uncontrollable ways.

The Mentor

Despite the modernity of rock technology and commerce, the Dead community evokes a primordial society, redolent with shamanic aura, sustained by oral transmission, fed by an eclectic synthesis of traditions. Fittingly, across this landscape wander mentor figures to initiate the novice and the wayward. Philip Heldrich's "Fishman Says" relates the experience of two students under the tutelage of a graying hippie with stories and promises of meeting Jerry backstage. Vincent Louis Carella's "The Undead" features a certain Carlos who dispenses some wisdom about the eternal childhood of dogs and the losses of age.

Possible Histories

Where some pieces are autobiographical and historical, some imagine possible pasts and possible futures. Heather Jackson's "Digging Up the Dead" imagines a future grave digger who unearths Crazy Fingers, the prophet of the Dead's second coming. Mitch Myers' "Back to the Fillmore" also travels to the future, only to have his protagonist travel backwards in time to the legendary February 28, 1969, show at the Fillmore West where he is waylaid by Hells Angels, threatening his return to the future. Other authors build more directly on Grateful Dead materials. Melinda Belleville expands the lyrics of "Jack Straw" into a compelling short story, "We Used to Play for Silver," allowing readers to compare their imagination of the tale to hers.

Lyricist Robert Hunter's quasi-lecture, "Metaphor 101," explores how culture shapes history. Reminiscent of Richard Dawkins' memes, the "Gyzmo" is a form of "conveyance which the brain is hard-wired to produce" (108), creating cultural constructions "one generation builds for the next" (109). Hunter wisely leaves the boundaries of the Gyzmo idea vague so that we might imagine it as an idea, an ideology, or perhaps a social structure, such as the Grateful Dead community. Gary Shanks' "And Now It Can Be Told: Lost Stories of the Grateful Dead" offers whimsical histories, building an assortment of narrative puns on Grateful Dead lines.

Self-Deconstruction

Unlike the counterculture critics intoxicated with self-righteousness

and unburdened by humility, the Dead have always had a sober view of human limitations, a view that ranges from the humble to the comic. So it is not surprising that several authors bring into focus the dark and comic sides of the long, strange trip—and no one is exempt from scrutiny, not Deadheads, not well-wishers, not even Jerry. Exploiting the stereotype of dead men walking for purposes of hilarity, Philip Baruth's "American Zombie Beauty" channels George Romero for an attack on a stranded farmhouse by Deadheads who "went Jerry" when a virus (having spread through a series of Dead shows in the mid-1970s) awakens after forty years of dormancy to wreak havoc in the new millennium. "If the early concert schedule of the Grateful Dead was the rootless dream of the 1960s, it played again as the endless nightmare of America forty years later" (33).

In a more serious vein, C. Clayton Chandler's "Show Your Face" plays on the iconic "steal your face" line, restructuring it from its backstabbing origin to a metaphor of self-transformation, gradually building from the protagonist Chester's faceless normalcy to a climactic, incinerating group fire-dance, whose celebrants strip away their flesh, until Chester ascends to celestial heights to find "his true face, caressed by smoke, cut like rubies from the fire." Another tour tale, T. J. Weede's "Steal Your Face," serves up an extraordinarily large dose of counterculture chaos, from an exploding VW bus engine to LSD visions to bad trip encounters, yielding a rollercoaster of ecstatic release and painful loss with the specter of death lurking in the background. Scott MacFarlane's "The Pouring Rain" describes a poignant encounter between the narrator and former Merry Prankster (later Mrs. Jerry Garcia) Mountain Girl, who—when his wife disappears to play the groupie with Jerry—offers him some consolation: "In the faded light, I looked at MG and tried to see why she chose to honor me with her take on my collapsing life. Her words sounded strong, but then I noticed in her distant gaze to nowhere, a hint of sorrow" (199).

Lifting the Karmic Veil

The Grateful Dead worldview can be identified with no particular religion or metaphysic, although it often echoes the theme of deep karmic connections which we may glimpse more or less fully. Ed McClanahan's short interview excerpt, "Grateful Dead I Have Known," recounts an

epiphanic moment when, driving through the Iowa rain, listening to a particularly apocalyptic Fillmore West concert, the road signs of the desolate countryside enigmatically seemed to coincide with Garcia's lyrical contemplation of death. In "Trouble Ahead, Trouble Behind," former Merry Prankster George Walker imagines Garcia driving home at night after a long rehearsal in San Rafael when he begins to hallucinate Neal Cassady, leading to a conversation about ancient civilizations, Edgar Cayce, alternative realities, and visions of a future gig at the feet of a sphinx. Alan Trist, Bob Franzosa, and Rebecca Adams turn to the fable form to build morality tales on the trope of the closing of the karmic circle, Trist's "The Water of Life: A Tale of the Grateful Dead" employing a more traditional fairy tale setting, while Franzosa's "An Embroidered Tale" and Adams' "The College Graduate and the Old Hippy" provide contemporary settings.

Editors McKinney and Weiner have done a great service, not only to the many Deadheads who are already literate in Grateful Dead culture, but for all students and aficionados of American and modern counterculture. In their volume we see the Grateful Dead phenomenon, not only as an inheritance of the perennial philosophy—an admixture of Blakean Romanticism, American transcendentalism, and the Beat revolution of the fifties—but also as the ongoing diaspora of a visionary and often misunderstood cultural impulse.

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