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LAST WORDS

An Anthem for The Bear

ROBERT HUNTER

Augustus Owsley Stanley the Third
being less a name than a designation,
the bearer of the appellation became,
of his own inspiration, The Bear.

Thus he became and thus remained
and every old-timer worth salt has
a tale or two to tell regarding same:
of the time The Bear did this or that
incredibly singular, utterly apposite
action without apology or shame
to his own particular undying fame.

Unreachable, unteachable, aflame
in the light of his own magnificence
reflected in deeds dwarfing the achievements
of the run-of-the-mill creative sort

by a factor of ten or more,
King of Many Things was he
of mortal physiology,
the soul's chemistry,
geography, geology,
not to mention the
applied physics of sound,
regarding which, deaf in one ear,
he pronounced stereo to be
a distraction affording only
one perfect seat in the house
upon which to work its elusive illusion
setting himself to design the world's
most powerful hi-fi system to prove it!

One suspects that, had he but one leg
he'd have seen the advantage in that
and invented accordingly, ingeniously
and, it goes without saying, successfully.

Lovable and loving in the abstract
effusiveness was not his hold card;
his judgments swift, certain and irrevocable
the last word was his personal property.
For the few times he was wrong
there is no accounting.

Was there ever a man who changed so many
while, himself, changing so little?
A Cardinal Sign, were there ever one,
fixed like a bright white star in dark-blue heaven.

Save sentimental eulogies for lesser men
and leave it that he was King of Many Things,
of perfected personal taste and detailed opinion,

first and last a scientist and propounder
of a brand new species of reason.

No bucolic Heaven for such as Bear,
rather a Rock of Ages from where
an eagle in full flight might dare
a sudden detour into endless dawn.
Sail on, dear brother Bear, sail on.

ROBERT HUNTER is a musician, poet, and writer best known as the principal lyricist for the Grateful Dead. His books include *A Box of Rain* (1990), *Night Cadre* (1991), *Sentinel* (1993), and translations of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* and *Duino Elegies* (1993).