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Literary

Boarded Windows
Dylan Hicks
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"You have to know where you're from to know where you're at and where you're going," says Wade Salem, the narrator's erstwhile father figure in Dylan Hicks' novel *Boarded Windows*. But these essentials are precisely what the narrator doesn't know. When Wade reenters the narrator's life after a decade of absence, the tale of the narrator's origins is one of many thrust into question. The longer Wade remains in town, the more the narrator's life becomes simultaneously blurred and illuminated, and the more confused he feels about hovering in Wade's shadow.

Boarded Windows is Hicks' first novel. Also a songwriter and musician, Hicks' love and knowledge of music resonate throughout the book. Though the band and album talk can become dense, one sees that these characters, especially Wade, hold music in the highest regard, elevating it to the plane of philosophy or religion. Wade waxes poetic on this and multiple topics, every anecdote clouded with his characteristic mystique. Of Wade, the narrator says, "He could talk and talk, and it wasn't windbagging, I thought, it was bullshit artistry, at once seductive and irritating, often most convincing when I didn't quite know what he was saying." Of one of Wade's tales, the narrator adds, "I felt strongly that the essence of his story was true, even if some of the details were fabricated."

How important are details, or is essence all that matters? This novel calls into question the notion of truth and asks to whom one's story really belongs. Along with muddying the intangible, Wade also upends the narrator's life in more concrete ways, like getting tangled up with the narrator's girlfriend, Wanda, as well as one of their friends. The book is made up of people with no solid ground to stand on, and so they flap around in midair, bracing themselves for the fall.

When Wade finally departs, the narrator says, "I felt tired and brittle, wished my feelings of good riddance weren't so mixed with longing." This sentiment can be ascribed to every

character, as each blunders through blurred relationships in search of an audience, a comrade, or simply a hand to hold in the dark. Amidst the half-truths and “bullshit artistry” are people who need each other in undignified but vital ways, and this is what makes the book relatable—it is rife with humans desperate for connection, for finding their place in this enigmatic world.

Jessica Henkle