

Here Lies

David Gilbert

Karl Roeseler

Trip Street Press (June 2001)

Unknown \$13.00 (248pp)

978-0-9639192-5-0

The art of prevarication is alive and well. In *Here Lies*, the title of which comes from first-class liar Dorothy Parker, that art is taken to a new level.

In this collection of twenty-one short stories, “every story either features the telling of a lie or the presence of a liar.” Editors Gilbert and Roeseler have chosen stories that present lying in its myriad combinations and permutations.

Some of the lies are overt, like the simpleminded fib spun by the narrator of James Kelman’s “The Block” to avoid being implicated in an apparent suicide. Others are more subtle and poignant, as in David Lynn’s “Advert for Love,” the misadventure of an Indian couple whose attempt at arranging a marriage for themselves backfires when the narrator’s own brother ends up getting the girl.

The collection is captivating throughout, although some of the stories range far afield for their subject matter and confound the reader with red herrings and dense, complex narratives interwoven on one another. Every story has its quirks (for instance, Dallas Wiebe’s “Passage to India” begins with protagonist, Alvin Boneyard, lamenting that he “couldn’t speak dirty to his wife anymore because of his laryngectomy”) and the editors have carefully avoided the repetition that might come from a subject as narrowly defined as theirs. The four years that went into compiling this volume, time enough for the editors to be sure that each story would hold up to multiple readings, was time well spent.

Although not every story comes from a household name—Colum McCann and Gilbert Sorrentino are the two that most readers would recognize—the variety of voices, from ZZ Packer’s African-American lesbian trapped at Yale, to Mac Wellman’s abandoned cigar factory “groaning in the dunes near the settlement at Culpepper” in “Muazzez,” to Lynn Tillman’s title character in “Madame Realism Lies Here,” gives the collection a richness that is often lacking in similar “theme” volumes. The accretion of lie upon lie is both disturbing and entertaining, much like the dual nature of lies themselves.

Here Lies has much to say about the pitfalls and shortcomings of everyday communication; not surprisingly, many of these stories deal with the creative process. After all, what’s more creative—or natural—than lying, and who is better at it than writers?

PATRICK A. SMITH (July / August 2001)

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