



Billy Verite

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“You’re evil,” a bartender tells Skunk Lane Forhension, a Lee Harvey Oswald look-alike and leader of a paramilitary motorcycle gang with the acronym of B.A.D. And evil, in its multiple and insidious forms, permeates this novel and the novel-within-the- novel. The second volume in a La Crosse, Wisconsin trilogy, BILLY VERITE has the trappings of a traditional murder mystery, including crooked cops and a former snitch who is a failed gumshoe, but it is actually a postmodern novel with all its attendant complexities. The book is filled with Faulknerian sentences, jarring time sequences, multiple styles, and literary references to William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes, Daniel Defoe, and Mark Twain, musical references to Niccolo Paganini and Maurice Ravel, and even a cinematic reference to Werner Herzog’s STROSZEK (1977). Despite all this erudition, BILLY VERITE is, at its core, the simple story of a host of people who, in the words of one character, are “world- weary.”

One of the weariest of the lot is the eponymous anti-hero who finds himself in the complicated situation of escaping to an island in the Mississippi River with sultry, sexy Lola, whose own fatigue is significant. Bill and Lola, in Huck and Jim fashion, are outsiders whose survival appears to be dependent upon escaping on a raft—until enemies land on the island.

While Billy and Lola struggle with their dilemma on the island, other characters also struggle with their own dangerous predicaments on land, the land being the seamy underbelly of La Crosse, Wisconsin. One of the characters, the narrator of Billy and Lola’s story, is making his own world-weary journey into the human heart of darkness. As dark and dismal as the setting of BILLY VERITE is, this heart of darkness is even darker—and considerably more disturbing.

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