



I Sailed with Magellan

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

It is fitting that this “novel-in-stories” should appear in 2003—a century-minus-one after the birth of James T. Farrell. Like Farrell but stylistically his master, Stuart Dybek has made south side Chicago his literary home place, only instead of the Irish it is the inheritors of that terrain, the Poles, Italians and Mexicans, who are his subjects.

I Sailed with Magellan is not a picaresque novel in the pure sense. While it is about the adventures of a rogue narrator, it is far more unified than fellow Chicagoan Saul Bellow’s classic of the genre, the scatter-shot *Adventures of Augie March* (1953). Although the personality of Perry Katzek enables the book to cohere, it is about his rogue’s gallery of unretouched photos—of “Sir,” his father’s prime ID; his younger brother Mick, “who turned life at the expense of anything gentle”; a walking-wounded Uncle Lefty, who “found himself ... with nowhere to go and only a pawn ticket to show for ...his life”; and Ralphie Poskosim, a blue baby who somehow survives long enough to become one of Perry’s dreams/memories—he makes no distinction—for life.

Perry’s adventures fall into two categories: those with an utterly fantastic and joyously unreal succession of odd characters—these are the better—and those with girls. Near the end, a madcap recap of his Chicago reunion with Perry, Mick explains syllogistically his unlikeliest of jobs. Being a bouncer calls for acting. All life is essentially about acting roles. Substitute *writing* for *acting* and one comes close to locating the story-telling art of Stuart Dybek.

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/sailed-with-magellan-salem>