



Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen: Reflections at Sixty and Beyond

Larry McMurtry

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In a lucid, brilliant work of nonfiction -- as close to an autobiography as his readers are likely to get -- Larry McMurtry has written a family portrait that also serves as a larger portrait of Texas itself, as it was, and as it has become.

Using as a springboard an essay by the German literary critic Walter Benjamin that he first read in Archer City's Dairy Queen, McMurtry examines the small-town way of life that big oil and big ranching have nearly destroyed. He praises the virtues of everything from a lime Dr Pepper and the lost art of oral storytelling to the perfect piece of pie, and describes the brutal effect of the sheer vastness and emptiness of the Texas landscape on Texans, the decline of the cowboy, the significance of small-town rodeos (and rodeo queens), the reality and the myth of the frontier.

McMurtry writes frankly and with deep feeling about his own experiences as a writer, a parent, a heart patient, and he deftly lays bare the raw material that helped shape his life's work: the creation of a vast, ambitious, fictional panorama of Texas in the past and the present. And throughout, McMurtry leaves his readers with constant reminders of his all-encompassing boundless love of literature and books -- for nobody has captured better the romance of the book trade, in which McMurtry has famously found an equally ambitious second career, gradually transforming his native Archer City into a town of books, like Britain's Hay-on-Wye.

Full of anecdotes, pithy humor, historical insights, and wry nostalgia, this elegiac and strangely touching comic work is at once a literary and autobiographical tour de force about growing up, growing famous, and growing older.

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