

Richard Farina's "Been Down So Long"

Book review

Frank Dedenbach

1966

A few days before recording artist Richard Farina died in a motorcycle accident last May, Random House released his first novel, "Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me." The book, a story of the escapades of one Gnossos Pappadopoulos, shows Farina almost as skilled at prose as he was at folk singing and composing.

Gnossos (or "Paps") is a curly-haired, college-aged hipster who fancies himself both a virgin and immune, because he does not lose his head or his cool, respectively. He returns to Mentor University in Athene from a summer-long search for The Truth that has led him only to peyote drinks in New Mexico and near death in the Adirondacks and elsewhere. But on his college campus the hunt continues, especially for the one who he can really give himself to. Our young swinger will rather predictably find that:

- 1.) there is no truth and
- 2.) love is fleeting.

But in between ignorance and enlightenment is some of the freest and most irreverent humor we have ever read.

Gnossos first rents a room next to some drunken Indian mystics named George and Irma Rajamuttus and then quickly seduces its former tenant. Gnossos and mulatto friend Heffalump attend a pot party given by the underworld character called Mojo where Paps meets knee-soxed coed Kristin McCleod. "I am in love," Gnossos soon announces; he loses his head, is relieved of his constipation. After giving away his philosophical virginity, the young Greek finds himself without his hallowed Immunity as he becomes embroiled in a plot (led by G. Alonso Oeuf, campus revolutionary) to overthrow the college administration. Gnossos' head is full of forebodings about politics, doubts of his girlfriend's fidelity, and bad dreams.

He escapes with some friends to Cuba, discovers he has V.D., tries to commit suicide in the Caribbean, and is saved by a German-Jew turned Venezuelan-Catholic named Juan Carlos Rosenbloom who wears sequined shirts and cowboy ties. What will Gnossos do?

Will he die of despair and clap or find enlightenment from Buddha, a seven foot Negro with an opal in his forehead? Back in Athene, will the revolution succeed, will his girlfriend marry Oeuf? Ha! We won't tell.

Many critics have said that the whole thing is just too absurd; but, after all; that is what Farina is saying too, and with a hearty laugh. We felt that a few of Farina's tricks did not come off; but when they do they add up to a book which is weird, wild, and a gas to read.

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