



Giant Country: Essays on Texas

Don Graham

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In *Giant Country* Don Graham brings together a collection of lively, absorbing essays written over the past two decades.

The collection begins with a twist on book introductions that sets the tone for the essays to come—a self-interview conducted poolside at an eccentric Houston motel favored by regional rock bands. Over piña coladas the author works on his tan and discusses timeless Texas themes: the transition of the state from a rural to an urban world, the sense of a vanishing era, and the way that artists in literature and film represent a state both infectiously grand and too big for its britches.

In “Fildelphia Story,” Graham remembers his Ivy League professorial stint in a city the small-town Texan who rented him a moving van looked up under “F.” In “Doing England” the Lone Star Yankee courts Oxford University and returns with a veddy British education. In “The Ground Sense Necessary” a native son journeys inward to explore the dry ceremonies of frontier Protestantism and to recount movingly his father's funeral in Collin County.

With his wide-ranging knowledge of classic regional works, Graham unerringly traces the style and substance of local literary giants and offers a sometimes irreverent but always entertaining look at the Texas triumvirate of Dobie, Webb and Bedichek. Other essays look at such Texas greats as Katherine Anne Porter, George Sessions Perry, William Humphrey and John Graves.

In a section he calls “Polemics,” Graham includes his best known essays, “Palefaces vs. Redskins,” a sardonic survey of the Texas literary landscape, and “Anything for Larry,” a tour de force that has already become a minor classic. The essay weighs the puny financial achievements of Graham against those of mega-author Larry McMurtry and never fails to bring down the house when Graham gives a public reading.

A recognized authority on celluloid Texas, Graham provides a rich sampling of his knowledge of Texas movies in pieces that blanket the territory from moo-cow cattle-drive epics to soggy Alamo sagas to urban cowboy melodramas.

In the larger-than-life state that is Texas, nobody sizes up the Lone-Star mythos, its interpreters, boosters and detractors better than Don Graham.

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