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## ARISE AND WALK

By Barry Gifford

Hyperion; 192 pp.

Barry Gifford's latest romp through the ooze of the lower Mississippi delta will inspire few half-way responses. Some will deem this New Orleans novel spicy as a Creole smorgasbord and colorful as Mardi Gras. Others will find it a squalid trek on the wild side with the rude, crude and odious to know.

Gifford's plot is as hard to pin down as a live mosquito, as he no sooner gets moving on one tale than he stops short, seems to say to himself, "That one's not sordid enough; I can do better," and begins another.

Rather than plot, this novel is held together by its theme, as stated by former pastor of the Church of the Fresh Start Cleon Tone: "The Good Lord got him some sundry damn messengers, don't he?"

The opening scene finds Tone atop a hotel toilet reading about the mating habits of copperheads, unfazed by the urgent banging of a fellow lodger. Immediately, Gifford whisks us to another hotel where two visiting dental supply salesmen wait for hookers who, after collecting \$400, will force the salesmen at gunpoint to reenact the most pungent scene from *Deliverance*. As atonement, one hooker will tithe \$100.

Other inhabitants of Gifford's Big Sleazy neighborhood include Klarence Kosciusko Krotz, candidate for Louisiana governor of the Real American Party, whose playboy exterior masks his "predilection for older, European pederasts" like 68 year-old Bulgarian Zvatiff Thziz-Tczili. Then there's Croesus "Spit" Spackle and Demetrious "Ice D" Youngblood, who saw their way out of jail with a rusty bedspring and decide, "We can't put some good in the world, might as well take out some bad," and go hunting for hatemongers to kill. Even more eccentric, perhaps, is televangelist Prescencia Espanto who worked as a hotel maid until she realized she had the gift of prophecy, opened The Church of the Ungrateful, and was later indicted by the government for "felonious necromancy."

These characters stumble through a world of homicide, suicide and fratricide where people indulge in sex with virtually anything in the animal kingdom, a world where rats fly through the air with a woman's nipple in their teeth, U.S. senators get caught in hotel rooms with 10 year-old girls and a man who calls himself Roland Roque, the Smartest Mouth in the Deep South, hosts a radio talk show on WJEW called "Prostitutes Talk to Christ." As it's also a world of shotguns blazing and knives slashing, most don't make it to the second half of the book.

One who does, Tombelina Gayoso, takes a job at the Mary Mother of God Rape Crisis Center, established by women "united in the belief that the mother of Jesus Christ, the so-called Virgin Mary, actually had been a rape victim." Led by 16 year-old Marble Lesson, the women believe, "All men were prone to a mental illness that expressed itself in the form of violence toward women." Marble sees to it that all abusive men are eliminated, or at least parts of them.

This novel, obviously, is not for everybody. Some will find it an irreverent comic lark, others may consider it a spicy satire of contemporary America, while many will feel that if it weren't for bad taste Gifford would have no taste at all. I, by turns, drew all three conclusions.