



Father, Child, Water

Gary Dop

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With a playful, off-kilter approach, Dop thoughtfully examines poetic aspects of a varied life, and his perspective is refreshing.

Gary Dop presents his distinctive style of poetry in his first collection, *Father, Child, Water*. Dop is known as a performer and personality as much as a writer and professor. He is the recipient of a Pushcart Prize special mention and the 2013 Great Plains Emerging Writer Prize, and he has also dabbled in acting and stand-up comedy.

While there is a wide variety of topics and tones in *Father, Child, Water*, nearly every poem is marked by the extensive use of enjambment, to the near exclusion of other poetic techniques. Some of the work may even stretch the limit of what is considered poetry, but Dop's treatments are varied and entertaining. His tribute to the Paul Simon song "You Can Call Me Al" thoughtfully reflects on a more innocent age "before 3-ounce liquids in airline bags / and turban fear," as does the protagonist Bill Bitner and his adventures ("Bill Bitner Goes to Wal-Mart" and "Bill Bitner Meets Subway's Jared," among others). The hunting poem, "A Brief Argument," is affecting, as is the introspective title poem, which ends, "My arms strain / against our deaths to hold you up / as I lift you, crying, reaching, to the boat."

Despite these sober moments, the poems in *Father, Child, Water* often lean toward the jokey and humorous, and an off-kilter way of looking at things. Though modern poetry often avoids the first two, the ability to make readers see from a new perspective is perhaps a poet's most important function, and there's no reason that putting things in a less serious light should be seen as inferior or less demanding than examining life with a more melancholy approach.

The litmus test for readers might be found in the very titles of the poems in *Father, Child, Water*: "To My Love Handles," "Destroying a Church Potluck," and "Amish Man in the Andy Warhol Museum" give a sense of the playful and adventurous spirit that Dop brings to his poetry.

For readers intrigued by these themes, *Father, Child, Water* should prove a refreshing and invigorating volume.

PETER DABBENE (Summer 2015)

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