

My Father Moves through Time like a Dirigible

Gregg Cusick

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Cusick is an accomplished storyteller with a striking ability to inhabit the perspectives of men and women, young and old.

The stories in Gregg Cusick's collection, *My Father Moves through Time like a Dirigible*, display the author's keen understanding of emotions from hope to loathing, as well as the murky spaces in between. The protagonists in several of these stories are older men, leavened by experience and at times confounded by their inability to express themselves.

The elderly narrator in the title story is, somewhat improbably, pitching the idea of a play about the doomed dirigible *Shenandoah* to the principal of Sam Houston Middle School. His concept gets tangled up in the telling, so that the principal has a hard time understanding what he means: "I'm eighty-three, but I hardly feel it, isn't that crazy? And I know I sometimes fail to connect my thoughts, but that's only because I hope my listener knows the connectors that are, thus, unnecessary. You follow?"

In another story, "Schrodinger's Cat for Inmates and Baristas," Cal Mabe, age sixty-one, has pared down his acquaintances to a handful of locals, including a barista named Eva, while also maintaining a correspondence with Granger, a death row inmate. This cleverly orchestrated story ends with a twist that leaves a "high-pitched whirring" in Mabe's ears. "He'll think later that it sounded like a huge mill saw, the kind that slices redwoods into quarter rounds."

Other stories revolve around low-level scofflaws just trying to get by in the world. "Balance," one of the most entertaining pieces in the collection, is a love story about Harold and Bonnie, small-time crooks whose love takes the form of five bullets fired by Bonnie into multiple parts of Harold's body. "What he'd thought, laying on the front yard with the neighbors around and then the ambulance and the police. Thinking how she loved him enough to shoot him, *five times*. Damn." Cusick imbues these misguided felons with a hopefulness that belies their grim, real-life circumstances.

The author also uses interlocking points of view as a successful narrative device in several stories. "Gutted," another moving story of low-level thievery (involving custom-made bricks at a construction site), revolves around Joseph Dromski, his daughter Maggie, and her sometime-boyfriend Teddie, whose fate is permanently altered by the outcome of the planned caper. Maggie, embittered by her father's demanding nature, reflects at the end on what he has taken from her mother, herself, and Teddie, and "What he took from the building itself ... And we will all eventually collapse, she thought, our insides looted but the facades left apparently unblemished, betraying no damage."

Gregg Cusick is an accomplished storyteller with a striking ability to inhabit the perspectives of men and women, young and old, and to render their struggles through life with a touching, heartfelt humanity.

LEE POLEVOI (October 17, 2014)

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