

Telémachus

Michael Daley

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In Michael Daley's novel *Telémachus*, a painter seeks to learn about Mac, the father who abandoned him.

This update of the tale of Ulysses's left-behind son includes a flight from accountability, a heroic cycle, and testimonies from a mentor. In it, Bobby hopes to understand his father's transformation from a famous poet and literary critic into a man who left his son behind. Across five sections, he receives a revelatory series of letters from Mac's closest friend, after which other friends chime in like a chorus, their voices distinct as they promise to reveal secrets, often talking in circles, even after Bobby asks, "are we there yet?"

The prose is captivating, with powerful descriptive and reflective passages and striking metaphors, as of "the warehouse of my veins," used to describe Bobby's obsession with his "one art," which is embedded in his body. And the cast of characters describes Mac's "authoritarian views on art and beauty" well, though sometimes these philosophical discussions are forced. Most often, they ably reveal details of how Mac, a "formidable, feared critic," gave in to his flaws, leading to a terrible event.

With its deep insights into the human condition, the book takes on universal questions of inheritance and the duties of fathers and sons. Bobby wonders if he's destined to be like his father. At the same time, he wonders how much attention a father owes to his son, and how much forgiveness a son owes to his father. Piecing together information about his father's secret remorse, Bobby begins to understand how random events can change people forever.

Drawing on classical motifs, the novel *Telémachus* follows a man's search for explanations for his father's abandonment of him.

MICHELE SHARPE (March / April 2022)

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