

CAROL COFFEE REPOSA

On Neckties and Hijabs: *A Review of A Sort of Adam Infant Dropped*

R. Scott Yarbrough. *A Sort of Adam Infant Dropped: True Myths*. Ink Brush Press. 98 pp.

If myth is figurative truth, then the 57 poems comprising this volume justify their title, and then some. Metaphoric resonance, what Robert Frost calls “doubleness,” begins there and continues with growing emotional momentum through the last line of the last poem.

This collection spans a wide arc of theme, form, and genre, moving from an Easter meditation on the Comal River to the wanderings of a sleepwalking daughter, from free verse to the villanelle and dramatic monologue, from elegy to farce. A verbal alchemist, Yarbrough transmutes the most banal of topics (housecleaning, making ketchup, grocery shopping) into emblems of the profound. In “A Necktie and a Hijab,” for example, he recounts adjusting the tie of a young Islamic schoolboy in response to the mother’s mute plea. The speaker produces a perfect Windsor knot to the child’s delight (“He gave me a thumbs up”) and turns to hug the mother. Her religion will not permit this intimacy with a stranger, but she whispers, “I will hug you with my eyes.” What begins as an exercise in the perfunctory grows into a statement of mutual compassion and respect vaulting barriers of age, gender, and culture.

Yarbrough brings to his writing an unsparing honesty, as in “Your Analyst’s Speech He’ll Never Give,” a confessional poem which examines the grim consequences of an affair. The speaker makes no excuses, sees instead “the amputated wife” for whom everything in life is now “cut in half or doubles.” The author also explores the relationship of humor and pathos, often merging them. “Family Reunion” starts as a can-you-top-this dialogue between two relatives but quickly morphs into an encounter with unforgettable horror and ghoulish hilarity. One grandmother as a baby is stuffed into a whisky barrel to save her from marauding “Injuns.” The author pictures the attack as a scene in a campy western, complete with feverish music throbbing in the background. Grandmother becomes a “midget...arthritis already curling her hands,” safely hidden from the Hollywood Indians “slinging tomahawks” and “wearing war paint like crayons.” Meanwhile, back at the metaphoric

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ranch, a less fortunate one-eyed uncle is eaten by wild pigs, the victim of a “preplanned pig attack” devolving into a “Piranha pig feeding frenzy” that leaves only a skeleton, a glass eye, and the real eye “popped from his skull... like sewing thread dangling a ball.” The poem ends with a pointed query: “Are we all fated to spend eternity in one looped moment, a stuck phonograph record turning and turning and turning on our least favorable note?”

The same questions that Yarbrough asks of individuals he puts to society at large. “Oedipus Rex Meets Tiresias at Walmart” juxtaposes the grandeur of Fifth-Century Greek tragedy and the tawdriness of 21st-Century American consumerism. In this new and improved version of the famous myth, the King of Thebes is now an irascible suburbanite who whines because his clubfoot does not qualify him for a handicapped parking sticker. He further resents his diva wife, who treats him “like a boy” and expects him to do silly errands like exchanging her “Do It Yourself: Family Tree” PC disc for a brooch. “This exchange is going to be tragic,” Oedipus prophesies. At the entrance to the big-box store he meets Tiresias, reduced to a servile greeter with a “blind person stick” and “a cookie-dough wrapped around obesity smile.” The Chorus devotes itself to “bitchin’ about how horrible the country’s immigration policy is,” while Antigone and Ismene do little but squabble. Given this trivialization, Oedipus decides that he might as well “blindly” retire to “the white clouds and calm of Colonus.”

A Sort of Adam Infant Dropped takes the reader from drought-seared Dallas to the Emerald City, from an icy road at Christmas to Isla Mujeres, from Eros to Apollo. Whether he is delighting in robust love (“She Said It Might Improve Our Marriage if I Vacuumed”) or pondering a bizarre headline (“Buzzard Starts Fire”), R. Scott Yarbrough harnesses the energy of myth to travel the often rocky terrain of human experience, to map meticulously the losses, miracles, transformations, and absurdities that define an authentic life, charting our way in the process.