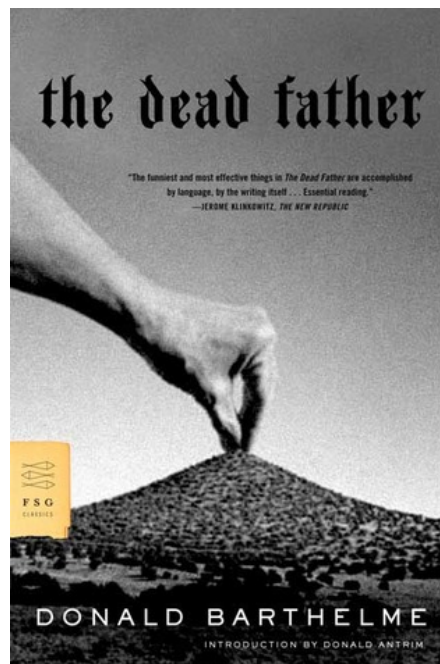




The Dead Father (FSG Classics)

Donald Barthelme , Donald Antrim (Introduction)

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The Dead Father is a gargantuan half-dead, half-alive, part mechanical, wise, vain, powerful being who still has hopes for himself--even while he is being dragged by means of a cable toward a mysterious goal. In this extraordinary novel, marked by the imaginative use of language that influenced a generation of fiction writers, Donald Barthelme offered a glimpse into his fictional universe. As Donald Antrim writes in his introduction, "Reading *The Dead Father*, one has the sense that its author enjoys an almost complete artistic freedom . . . a permission to reshape, misrepresent, or even ignore the world as we find it . . . Laughing along with its author, we escape anxiety and feel alive."

The Dead Father (FSG Classics) Details

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Author : Donald Barthelme , Donald Antrim (Introduction)

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From Reader Review The Dead Father (FSG Classics) for online ebook

David Beavers says

My favorite work of Barthelme's, and one of my favorite books ever. I'd give it 8 out of 5 stars, but Goodreads has no HTML code for this. A book for anyone who has a father, who had a father, who had an absent father, who had a father who loved too much or not enough or the right amount; a father who beat them or taught them to ride a bike or both. A book perhaps not for fathers, but a book for fathers who had fathers themselves (and so, a book for fathers).

This is the story of a son & his lover, and how the son (and daughter as well, though admittedly this is more about fathers and sons than fathers and daughters) -- with a small army of laborers -- is dragging his father across the desert, presumably towards burial. The father -- as fathers tend to be -- is larger than life (figuratively & literally: his measurement is listed at 3200 cubits, and even this absurd & archaic measurement speaks to the character of the Father -- a thing vast and yet past its prime; mythic and absurd). The father (as fathers are wont to do) orates, and the book is filled with his fabulous, illuminating, and hilarious speeches. One of my favorites is the father listing things he has "fathered" in his long reign as father, which include the poker chip, the cash register, the kazoo, the cuckoo clock, and the bubble pipe.

Occasionally, the father -- as fathers sometimes do -- rampages (at one point slaughtering scores of musicians & woodland creatures before his son reigns him in). The title of the book is a proleptic statement - - the father is not yet dead, but all fathers die, and the march of dragging him across the desert is the effort to meet the prolepsis of the title.

That the book is a metaphor of fathers and sons and the process of moving from one to another (this is why it is more concerned with sons than daughters, I think, because sons are the ones who must become fathers) is somewhat implicit. It is a procession to bury the father, or more accurately, to remove him from the son's life. The father rails against his removal as a figure of authority, and yet is arrogant enough to believe he could never truly be removed. The father -- as father's so often are -- is incalculably wise, ridiculously foolish; is learned in the way a father ought to be, and his confidence & arrogance also make him into a fool. His son is, of course, arrogant in the way that the young who plot their ascension are arrogant. It is a beautiful book in that way.

Barthelme isn't usually interested in the emotional nuances of his characters, who are scarcely characters so much as they are figments of some dream being woven (he treats his characters very much the way Italo Calvino does -- more as products of our collective unconscious than as 'characters'). Barthelme also writes with all the tics of the ardent post-modernists from which he sprang in the 60s (look no further than the 'quiz' in the middle of his book *Snow White*, asking the reader how they like the book & if the metaphors are 'working' for them), and their concern is appropriately with deconstruction & not romanticism. Let's not bind Barthelme into that though, and if any literary term raises the hackles it's 'post-modernism'. But despite the eerie detachment and all the absurdity, this book is extraordinarily devastating and deeply affecting. The last line of the book -- a single word, which I will not spoil here -- was a deep & heavy punch to my solar plexus. It still takes the wind out of me to think of.

This novel has in its middle an inexplicable and brief treatise, a kind of mini-book, entitled "A Manual For Sons". This is the heart of the matter -- *The Dead Father* is as much about sons as fathers, and the absurdity that the two are so different when there can be no fathers who were not once sons. The humor and insight here is trenchant and beautiful. Consider this excerpt:

"The penises of fathers are traditionally hidden from the inspection of those who are not 'clubbable' as the expression runs. These penises are magical, but not most of the time . . . Occasionally a child, usually a bold six-year-old daughter, will request permission to see it. This request should be granted, once. But only in the early morning, when you are in bed, and only when an early-morning erection is not present. Yes, let her touch it (lightly, of course), but briefly. Do not permit her to linger or get too interested. Be matter-of-fact, kind, and undramatic. Pretend, for the moment, that it is as mundane as a big toe . . . About sons you must use your own judgement. It is injudicious (as well as unnecessary) to terrify them; you have many other ways of accomplishing that."

For all the book's absurdity and mythic humor, Barthelme is clearly speaking to some very deep fears and humbling human problems. I love this book. The father as a figure of dailiness and the father as a mythic figure are both on display here, and they are both treated with equal measures of cruelty and reverence.

Tom says

To understand my rating, you need to do some basic math.

Most of the book, I thought was a 3-star deal, mainly because I found some of the sections (particularly the long moments when Emma and Julie talked to each other) to be borderline incomprehensible, and while I'm sure Barthelme knew exactly what he was doing, it was one of those situations where I was holding a book in my hands and processing words and then feeling stupid. And maybe I was too dense to understand what was going on, but regardless of reasons or my level of denseness, point is there were about 15-20 pages in here that I didn't understand at all. But that which I understood was funny and smart and interesting and well-done. So, 3 stars.

But, the 30 (ish) page Manual for Sons inset about 3/4 of the way through was so awesome, I give that 7 stars.

So-- $7 + 3 = 10$, $10/2 = 5$. 5 stars. Totally useful and objective review.

Oscar says

Hasta hace poco, nunca hubiese pensado que me iba a convertir en un aficionado a la literatura posmoderna. Hasta hace poco, huía de autores como Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, David Foster Wallace o Donald Barthelme. Requerían de una atención desmedida a la hora de leerlos, y esto no era precisamente lo que buscaba, me interesaban textos más asequibles y de fácil lectura, libros con argumentos e historias, si no lineales o con el clásico planteamiento-nudo-desenlace, sí con una estructura objetiva y clara. Pero llegó un momento en que necesitaba de historias más potentes, de esas que desarman el cerebro y le dan un revolcón a tu manera de pensar y ver la vida. Y son escritores como los anteriores los que han logrado *alumbrarme*.

Con 'El Padre Muerto', Barthelme crea todo un galimatías que le sirve como plataforma para experimentar con el lenguaje (aquí hago un inciso para alabar la labor de la traductora a la hora de hacer frente a esta novela, ya que seguro que no lo ha debido tener fácil). La historia es totalmente surrealista. Haciendo un sucinto resumen, la historia trata sobre el arduo viaje que realizan Thomas y su mujer Julie, junto con una serie de hombres, para acarrear el cuerpo del Padre Muerto, de tamaño gigantesco, en la búsqueda del Vello de Oro y la consecución de la vida eterna, o eso piensa el Padre Muerto. Durante este absurdo viaje se tropezarán con los Wend, que son padres de sí mismos, y darán con el libro *Manual para hijos*, un

libro que trata de explicar cómo enfrentarse a esos seres llamados padres.

La lectura de esta novela no es fácil. Hay momentos en que hay una voz narradora clara, pero que en ciertas partes se pierde, mezclándose los diálogos, algo intencionado por parte de Barthelme, y que te obliga a leer con atención para hacerte una idea de lo que están hablando. También hay algunas historias dentro de historias, y algún discurso del Padre Muerto sin pies ni cabeza, algo intencionado. La novela está escrita en los años 70 del pasado siglo, y Barthelme no se corta a la hora de dar voz a sus personajes con un lenguaje sacado de esta década; su prosa es actual, con frases cortas, a ratos pasando por la escatología, y utilizando todos aquellos elementos característicos de su época.

Dentro de la incongruencia de todo esto, puede parecer que la historia carezca de sentido absolutamente. Pero no es así. Barthelme se aprovecha del simbolismo del Padre Muerto para hablarnos de una sociedad liderada por varones, donde el Padre Muerto representa a todos ellos, al gran varón. Mención aparte para *Manual para hijos*, un libro dentro del libro, una parte muy inteligente e irónica por parte del autor.

‘El Padre Muerto’ es una novela difícil, delirante, desenfadada, brillante, recomendada únicamente para aquellos que deseen probar experiencias literarias nuevas.

Eric says

I've never encountered a prose style that reads so much like poetry. There's a tightness, a smooth imbrication of dialogue and narration. I read it in three or four gulps; the flow carries you on, and one would just as soon stop randomly in this novel as leave a bookmark between the stanzas of a short lyric. And that is what struck me as the stylistic eminence of it all: his idiom and sense of humor, while incredibly elegant and effective, are nothing unfamiliar to readers of Joyce, Beckett and Flann O'Brien...it's the verse-like tautness that feels original, though admittedly I'm not a big reader of actual prose poems, Baudelaire's might have accomplished this already.

I think Barthelme picked a subject (fatherhood, fathers and children) that was a little too big for his method. I'm not saying that surrealistic antics can't cohere into profound symbolic depictions of human conditions--Barthelme achieves that at more than a handful of points--I'm just saying the novel didn't seem up to the enormity of the subject's suggestions. There's a reason why 'King Lear' holds the field here. I wasn't let down, but I probably won't get to the "60 Stories" as rapidly as I had thought.

Rita says

He puesto 3 he pensado he puesto cuatro
Es una propuesta interesante y arriesgada, pero esperaba más
Para mi gusto lector, tiene cosas grandes este libro, muchas, pero pierde parte de su grandeza al intentar condesar demasiado las ideas y sobrepasar el límite de la originalidad
A ratos imprescindible, a ratos prescindible. Aun así, recomiendo leerlo porque me encantan las páginas que rompen las normas y estas lo hacen.
PD: reconozco que talvez me falta algo de formación en filosofía para acabar de comprender el texto.

Marc says

Imagine if you will a plate. A rather large plate. In the middle of the large plate a small morsel of postmodern food. More negative space of plate than actual food. You scoff at the food. With a shrug and a roll of the eyes, you take a bite. A hundred flavors, some you recognize, others you do not, some you miss. You eat away, the food disappearing, wondering as you are eating what food is this, what are its textures. When you are finished, you are full but you are not sure why or how it happened. The plate is empty. The food is gone. You fill full. It is unlike any you have experienced or will experience again.

James Murphy says

I remember reading this twice in the '70s, but I didn't remember much about it. I remember thinking I got it pretty well. Now I'm unsure if my understanding is complete. Because Roland Barthes said the reader is creator of the text I wonder if we're being encouraged here to create because it's so shotgun-patterned that it seems to suggest rather than to mean or define. It's a novel about myth and the hero. The dead father serves as all myth as well as all the cultural weight we've accumulated and lug around with us as we live our lives. Barthelme probably meant it to be Oedipal and Freudian, the sons wanting to kill the father representing tradition and the daughters striving to change the world and give it direction. The novel's distinctive in its page after page of dialogue. The fall of these short statements down the page fashions a look which creates (or the reader creates) both a sterile landscape through which the hero journeys and the line of cable and men pulling him through that landscape. Ultimately Barthelme's text references all the touchstones of western tradition and houses them in the father where they're overthrown. Actually, overthrown implies confrontation. Tradition is weakened by the subversive dialogue of daughters, wives, and sons and in the end, rather than being tumbled, traditional culture, literature, and history willingly lies down and is buried. And is replaced by the postmodernism of Barthelme and others. But reading it I thought mostly of Samuel Beckett.

Franco Santos says

3.5

De lo más absurdo y delirante que he leído en mi vida. Diálogos como soliloquios mutilados, oraciones cortas, vacías, y personajes difusos. Barthelme no deja de sorprenderme, aunque prefiero sus relatos.

Adam Mills says

The Dead Father is the story of your everyday, average funeral procession for a 200 foot tall father figure who's bloodlust and libido have not been quelled by death. Barthelme comically relates the influence that Greco-Roman and Judao-Christian traditions have had on literature and life in the occidental world.. The more the narrative tries to free itself of these cosmologies the harder they pull them back into the fold.

The protagonists and their entourage painstakingly drag the "dead" father to his grave. Though dead this statuesque authority mad patriarch is still commenting and complaining, trying to run his own funeral from

his own bier. It's the riddle of the sphinx writ large as his doddering old age has caused him to resort to childishly begging to vent his frustrations by killing, maiming, and raping. Dragging this giant carcass through strange countries presents logistical problems and elicits questions from the locals.

This absurdist post modern novel is in conversation with other comic works. Neo-Classicism and High Modernism are lampooned partly for their role as torch bearer for the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian values embodied in the dead father. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* seem particularly present, and by this move Barthelme has inserted himself into the canon he desperately wants to burry. Neither the novel's humor nor its poignant message suffer for this fact, however, and *The Dead Father* is both an entertaining and important work.

August Zishu Wang says

Characteristic of most post-modern literature, the *Dead Father* has virtually no plot at all. Consequently, this book was extremely hard to get into and the read was somewhat laboured. However, that being said, the 'Manual for Sons' excerpt was amazingly written and somewhat redeems this novel. The last few lines also hit quite hard.

Joselito Honestly and Brilliantly says

Imagine an alien from a remote, little planet in a galaxy so far, far away. It is a literary genius, and a Nobel Prize for Literature winner in his planet. He hurls into space aboard a spaceship and lands in England where people speak and write English. A few days after hearing and reading English the alien says (in his own language, of course): "I can also write a great novel in English."

This book could be the novel such an alien could have written.

I have never read anything like it before.

It tells a story. In English. But in an out-of-this-world English.

If you're a literature professor, you can assign this book to your students as their reading assignment. Then you ask them to retell the story in this book and I am sure the third world war will start right there in your classroom.

You wouldn't know what I mean unless you read this book yourself. Or, perhaps, until I give you an example.

The scene (as I understood it): two lovers, Thomas and Julie conversing. Thomas starts criticizing Julie. Julie criticizes back, says Thomas is too self-absorbed. Then she betrays her jealousy about another pretty girl

Thomas knew, Emma. Says she had seen him eyeing Emma. Thomas defends himself by saying Emma is goodlooking and, anyway, he and Julie are not married. That nothing lasts forever. Julie, angry, nevertheless takes off her clothes. Thomas is aroused, accepts Julie's invitation to make love, but nonetheless says it doesn't change the way he thinks. Julie says he is a fool, but a lucky one because despite everything, she loves him. Then they make love, missionary style, with Julie's legs up in the air, held by Thomas. With him in the throes of ecstasy, Julie asks Thomas if Emma is as good in bed as her. Thomas gives a non-committal answer. Julie then flicks his balls with her finger and Thomas cries in pain. Julie sneers and tells Thomas not to worry because the pain won't last forever.

Nice. But how did the "alien" tell this story? Here:

"There are some times when you are not too bright, said Thomas.

"Times when I am not too what?

"Bright, said Thomas, there are some times when you are not too bright.

"Well fuck you, she said.

"Well fuck YOU, Thomas said, there are some times when I forget and tell the truth.

"Sloppy, sloppy, she said. Self-pity monstrously unattractive.

"Oh well damn well yes. I'm sorry. But I am taking action, am I not? I could as well have sat at home, worn the cap-and-bells and bought lottery tickets hoping for the twist-of-fate that would change my life.

"Me, she said. Me, me.

"There is that.

"You and I, she said, reaching into her knapsack for a bit of bhang. Have a chew?

"Not now, thanks.

"You and I, she said, the two of us.

"Thomas began counting on his fingers.

"Yes, he said.

"And Emma, she said. I've seen you looking at her.

"I look at everything, Thomas said. Everything that is in front of me. Emma is in front of me. Therefore I look at Emma.

"And she at you, Julie said, I've seen some gazes.

"She's not bad-looking, Thomas said.

"But we, you and I, care for each other, Julie said. It is a fact.

"A temporary fact, said Thomas.

"Temporary!

"Expectoration of bhang juice (emphatic).

"My God, I'm simply telling the truth, said Thomas.

"Viper, she said.

"I know no better soul, he said, and the body is also attractive.

"Measuring, are you? A measuring man.

"Julie cramming more hemp into her mouth.

"You forget the decay of time, Thomas said, I never forget it.

"I don't like it.

"Who likes it?

"I put out of mind that which is injurious to mind. You revel in it.

"The two of us, she said, damn it, can't you get this simple idea into your head? The two of us against the is.

"Temporarily, said Thomas.

"Oh you are a viper.

"A student of decay, is all.

"Julie began to unbutton her shirt.

"Yes, that's a way, said Thomas. Fifteen minutes or in the best case, thirty-five.

"Come crawl behind a bush with me.

"With all my heart, said Thomas, but I cannot abandon what I know. One doesn't find an absolute every day.

"You are an apprentice fool, she said, not even a full fool, nevertheless I will give you a little taste, because I like you. You are a lucky dog.
"Thomas spoke a long paragraph to the effect that this was true.
"Julie pulling at Thomas's sleeve.
"Thomas and Julie underneath the bush. Thomas holding Julie's feet in his hands.
"Wash feet, he said.
"Yes now that you mentioned it, she said.
"I will wash them for you if you wish.
"Not necessary, I know the drill.
"Washcloth, he said. That's the little blue square one.
"Right.
"Rough-textured.
"I've seen it.
"Usually damp.
"I remember.
"I could just put some bags on them I suppose, heavy canvas bags with locks like the Mail Department uses.
"Oh misery me.
"The backs of the knees are on the other hand positively lustrous.
"Not too bad are they?
"Nine lines and a freckle, all immaculate. Nothing to be desired. The height of.
"Could an Emma do as well?
"I don't know, said Thomas. I'll have to think about it.
Julie made a circle of thumb and forefinger and popped him smartly on the ball.
"Anguish of Thomas.
"It will pass, she said, dearly beloved, it is only temporary."

Have you read anything like this before?

T says

I don't yet understand how he was able to make this so emotional at the end, how so silly got so serious so fast without ruining the experience. I don't yet understand, but I will bygod. I will.

??x Nestelieiev says

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Adriana Scarpin says

Espécie de irmão menos bem humorado de Hilda Hilst e onde ambos são filhos de Samuel Beckett, Barthelme nos traz uma história arquetípica cheia de experimentalismo de linguagem, mas que infelizmente não chega à excelência de seus pares.

Rayroy says

Ascending the granite steps of the grand city library, a library sharing space with a museum, fossilized dinosaurs can be seen in the rows of fiction behind the glass walls. Been dead for while. Jill Hill and Thad Dade carry books towards the book return box.

What's that thin sliver book?

It's The Dead Father.

The Dead Father, is he a zombie?

No just dead but alive.

Dead but alive, then he's a zombie.

No, he's giant.

I don't follow.

You don't follow.

No.

It's Post Modern. He's dead in a different sense, it isn't like that awful Pride and Prejudice with Zombies, you liked.

I Read Sci-Fi.

I know.

Fantasy.

Metafiction cantors Thad.

Romance.

Contemporary.

Memoirs.

Memoirs are the worst.

Spare me Mr. Post Metacontemporary.

You wouldn't much like The Dead Father.

I would too.

You would. You would. I can fly then.

Well Mr. Smarty-pants what's it about.

Where to begin

Begin at the start.

It's not like that.

How?

Well there's no plot, the dead father is 7 meters tall or 22 feet, is being dragged by cables by 23 or was 19 people, and he speaks from time to time.

How cruel of them to be dragging him.

He's dead doesn't matter, when he talks he complains, reflects.

Does he have a thundering voice?

No it's just normal and he uses normal size items, eats normal size food, his size is only referred to a small amount.

Thad and Jill now descend the steps and enter the park. Dogs on leashes. Owners carry bags of poop. Fathers and Sons. Playing catch. Playing Frisbee. A Father yells at his son for eating dirt near a slide. Son we do not eat dirt, why son do you still eat dirt still disobey me.

It's just The Dead Father never did it for me, there were moments that floored me, but much of it I wasn't impressed, though it says a lot about fathers and sons. I suppose the dead father is sort of like a God to the people in the book, but he's dead, you know Nietzsche said that God was dead.

Yeah I felt the same way reading the Girl Who books, by book two I didn't care too much.

Can't compare.
They are all books.
Yes.
They are books.
Yes but they are totally different complex or simple.
So I'm simple then?
No but you read simple books.
You're so smug and rightness.
Are you turned on?
Turned on hardly
Your turned on you can't help it.
You aren't my type.
Type?
You're too skinny.
Too skinny, should I be too fat.
I like a man with a rugby player's body; strong legs, firm grip, and a man who doesn't waste time reading unless it's box scores in the sports section
Readings a waste of time?
No, a man who reads a lot, gets lost in books is a turn off for women
I don't believe it
Believe it.
Stop spending all you free time in books
Never!

Mat says

Surreal, hilarious, weird and what Barthelme says about the different types of fathers and sons is very very true!
Barthelme successfully weaves up a style redolent of the best moments in Beckett, Joyce and even Borges (with many many lists). He even wrote one chapter in a spin-off style of *Finnegans Wake*. Very cool. One of the hippest writers who ever lived. Check dis out.

Andrew says

Plotless postmodern novels, if you believe the hype, aren't supposed to be fun, they're supposed to be think pieces that make you reconsider your epistemological premises, through chilly techniques cribbed from scientific and technical writing, through unconventional word choice, through use of archaisms, slang, high culture, low culture, etc. etc. and you're supposed to come out of the whole thing not necessarily happier, not necessarily entertained, but more aware.

Then, why was *The Dead Father* one of the funniest, most poignant things I've read in ages? Why did this book about a giant being dragged along make me snort with laughter? Why did I nearly cry at the end? Donald Barthelme, your stories -- for which you are far more famous -- are mostly notable for their sense of ennui, of blague, and they're good, but they're the sort of things you admire from a distance. Ditto *Snow White*. *The Dead Father*, on the other hand, tugged on my heartstrings like how David Foster Wallace did, even when it was smashing the English language to pieces.

Vit Babenco says

Time passes and humankind keeps hauling a corpse of dead traditions, customs, beliefs, misconceptions and rituals along the trail of history...

"You are killing me. We? Not we. Not in any sense, we. Processes are killing you, not we. Inexorable processes."

Even if some dogmas and tenets are discarded in the process of the constant progress they don't let us go and we keep carrying this burden of the past on our backs.

Brian says

A live wire of PoMo bliss, *The Dead Father* reads very much like the source for so many books in the genre that have come after. I understand Marcus' *The Age of Wire and String* much better and now want to re-read it.

Having just finished the memoir *Double Down* written by Don Barthelme's younger brothers, I was able to clearly divine the influence of the troubled relationship Don had with his father in this work. *The Dead Father* is a monstrous hilarious ribald construct of a thing, and the characters of the novel orbit the titular protagonist with occasional collision producing sparks and carnage.

The author died of cancer before his own father perished. As in all things father/son, the inverse is not an equal equation. I wonder if his father read this work before Don's death? After? Ever?

David Markwell says

Donald Barthelme's *The Dead Father* is a masterpiece of postmodern fiction. A rumination on fathers, life, love, and of course language. Barthelme can make you laugh out loud with his wit and then stop you in your tracks with a turn of phrase. Not to be missed.
