

The Scottish Book of the Dead
A novel by Gavin Broom
Island City Publishing LLC

Review by Timothy Gager

If you're Elisabeth Kübler-Ross you've had a widely accepted theory about the five stages of death and dying. If you are the author, Gavin Broom, your characters get to experience two of them, (maybe three, without giving away the ending) the denial stage and the anger stage. In *The Scottish Book of the Dead*, a father dies and it brings a dysfunctional family together in one location to deal with his death, and to pick up the pieces of their own lives. These characters, the son, the runaway ex-wife, the brother, and the sister-in-law all must address their shortcomings and their past, while attempting to close a chapter with someone else's.



In humanity, we all deal with death in different ways, whether it's diving into side projects (needing to clean out the person's belongings immediately), quitting a job, or traveling across the world to see a son you've not seen in an eternity. Truth is that when someone close dies, each of us die a little ourselves. Broom takes us through this in short, stunning chapters, and in four distinct varied sections. He presents the insanity, real or imagined of the physical and mental world during a pivotal life event. Broom strikes a chord using various writing techniques which show that things aren't what they look like or appear to be. Often, when a family member dies, people can go a bit crazy, but as you read through the layers of *The Scottish Book of the Dead*, the world as we know it, also, doesn't seem based in reality. Author, Broom, allows us to wrestle with the metaphysics of this, but then often, the reality becomes a metaphor, and/or the metaphor becomes the reality. For example, when an earthquake hits, opening up a large crack in the ground, son Adam throws an item of his dead father into the bottomless hole. Later this same item re-appears back at the father's house. We understand that this empty hole, is the wound, and emptiness, we feel when we lose someone. By using this technique, he puts the reader in a familiar emotional place, a place many of us have been who have attended at an actual funeral, where the feelings of displacement, combined with the lack of sleep from the night before gives off a surreal kind of vibe. In fact, many of the characters, in the different sections have gone on without much sleep for large periods of time, thus changing their mental statuses.

The author, born in Scotland, captures Scottish dialect within the novel. Though this may be distracting for some, it creates authenticity within the text. The sound of the pages are just one of the layers of this multi-layered book. The questioning of reality, and of grieving is another. Perhaps there are more stages of death Kübler-Ross has ignored, which author Broom gives us front row seats to—the stages of guilt and obligation. This is

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shown again, and again, the characters continuing on, overcoming these stages, only to arrive at a decent emotional place by the end of the book. The Scottish Book of the Dead, is not light reading, but there is enough humor, magic, and philosophy mixed in to not bury us in a giant hole of sadness.