



Skaldance (Goose Lane Editions Poetry Books)

Gary Geddes

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Gary Geddes's ancestors fished herring off the Orkney Islands, but his own fishing takes a different form. His new poetry collection, *Skaldance*, weaves in and out of the history of the islands like the wind, ocean, and invaders that have shaped the unique Norse-Scottish landscape and culture of the Orkadians.

An outsider with a stake in these remote northern islands, Geddes takes on the role of Skald, the poet of Old Norse tradition, who reports on love, politics, and the past. With wry, quiet humour or bold theatricality, Geddes establishes connections with a people and a land where his forebears lived long ago. Neolithic voices, Viking graffiti, and a fourteenth-century Venetian voyager all have their say in the polyphony of speakers created by Geddes.

So, too, do Armada refugees, Hudson's Bay Company recruits, and Italian POWs in these breathtaking poems that transcend period and time. Like the Scottish film *Breaking the Waves*, the tragic events of these poems are made bearable by moments of black humour. Yet, Geddes's long narrative poems also reverse the process, disarming readers with laughter before delivering the emotional punch.

Whether light-hearted or tragic, ironically detached or passionately engaged, the poems in *Skaldance* are deeply felt, intelligent, witty, and exquisitely crafted.

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