



DRIFTWOOD
PRESS

FRED DALE

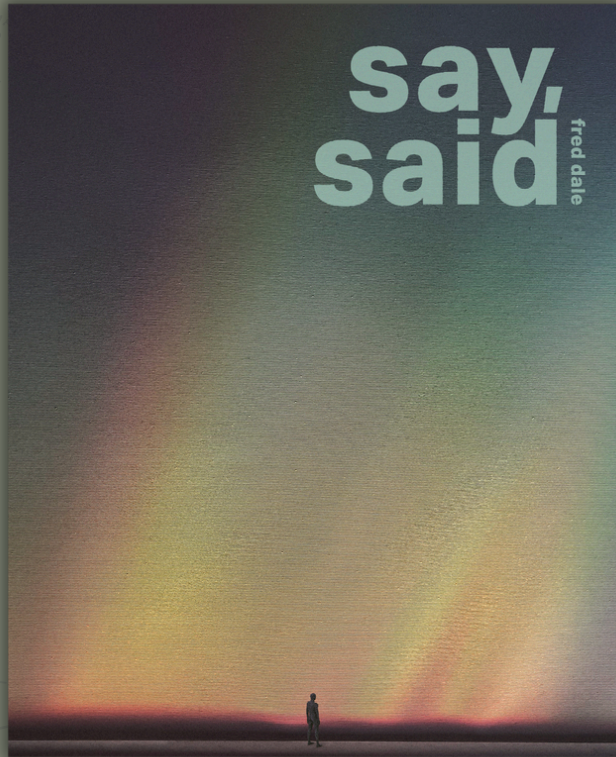
say, said

PRESS KIT





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FRED DALE'S SAY, SAID

interrogates the underpinnings of the American masculine experience with inventive, surprising language and a spiral galaxy of artistic and personal references

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fred Dale is a husband to his wife, Valerie, a father to my good dog, Miss Trixie, and a faculty member in the Department of English at the University of North Florida. He holds an MFA from the University of Tampa, but mostly, he just grade papers. His work has appeared in *Spillway*, *Sugar House Review*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *The Summerset Review*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, and others. He has published two audio chapbooks: *The Dream of Blue Moon Flowers* and *A Boy's Pirating Eye*. Three of his poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.



FOR ORDERS, EMAIL US AT EDITOR@DRIFTWOODPRESS.NET

PAGE ONE

ADVANCED PRAISE

"From the gates, Fred Dale declares that the brain will "not tell you about the pain that's coming," and here in this ecological moment reminiscent of biblical times, where the dead are "picked from us like burrs," and memories of the past form brackish water with the present, *say, said*, holds tender testimony to the remarkable treasures and wounds of the everyday. So fine is Dale's attunement and movement between the natural and human worlds: the insides of trees, "a gentleman in an unwinding tux," a marsh hawk. I would have highlighted this whole book if only that wouldn't make it harder for me to reread or offer as a balm for others to read. This lyric wrests me from despair and reorients me toward the hard-won remarkability of wonder."

**—DIANA KHOI NGUYEN,
AUTHOR OF GHOST OF AND ROOT FRACTURES**

"In *say, said*, Fred Dale's poetry offers a nuanced exploration of memory, identity, and existential uncertainty, using both personal and cosmic registers. With lyrical complexity, Dale's work examines the interplay of gender, familial bonds, and the darker contours of the human psyche. The poems are infused with a compelling blend of the corporeal and the metaphysical, where themes of loss, transformation, and the forces that shape existence are brought to the fore, where speakers are "scraping / the wells of our reserves to survive." Through a fragmented narrative structure, Dale interrogates the tension between self-conception and external forces, while interrogating the hidden histories that form our collective consciousness, often in memorably imagistic ways ("a fragrance encircled by star flowers"). Like the river he writes of in "tonight's the night" ("so much of [it] we never know while we're in it"), Dale's work is immersive, startling, and profound. The result is a collection that challenges the boundaries of form and meaning, urging readers to reflect on the spaces between memory and myth, destruction and creation."

**—LIZ ROBBINS,
AUTHOR OF FREAKED**

"There's a man in full—lives first, writes second—in this book, these poems. His name is Fred Dale, the same as on the cover. Poetry, for him, is language in its finer tunings. His company is worth your keeping."

**—WILLIAM SLAUGHTER,
AUTHOR OF THE POLITICS OF MY HEART AND UNTOLD STORIES**

LETTER TO THE READER

DEAR READER,

The poems in *say, said* are protean, a collection captured in this exact order by the death of my mother in 2023. The title of the first poem, "tonight's the night," was lifted from the title of Neil Young's dark album of the same name, a group of songs written after the drug-related deaths of two of Young's friends. The poem's source is a photograph of four 16-year-old kids dressed up for a Halloween party. The proctologist in the poem, my best friend, Brian, died in a similar fashion to Young's friends. It's a difficult memory to kick off the collection, but the somber nature of that memory is the narrator's alone. Instead, what the reader gets is a mother dressing her son in drag for the party. Freud could have a field day with the idea of a mother without daughters dressing up her oldest son as a woman—and as the photograph displays, a frumpy woman at that! This initial poem also establishes a touchstone for the collection. Women have been foundational in shaping my world view, so it was important for me to imagine the god-like creator in "tonight's the night" as a woman. It's no clever plot structure on my part, but the collection begins with a poem that includes my mother and ends with a poem focused on my wife, Valerie.

The role of the spoken voice is the binding agent in the collection. Everything gets a chance to talk: birds, saints, a shrimp, a monarch butterfly, Dee Dee Ramone, a dive bar (Motorboat Mels), a stripper, an artist, my dad, Moe, and Mamma Rose among them. The idea was to layer the voices in a way that's both absurd and poignant, to keep the reader (you) guessing. I gave my mother the line that gives the collection its title: "she says, say 'said' and I'll remember a single word calls the past back to the living." This comes from "we are told bay leaves," a poem I wrote after my mother passed. The past couple years have taught me that we live with the dead in such a present way, that there's not much of a difference between the past and the present. It didn't matter that my mother once "said" things to me. In my memory, she's still "saying" them. There's no past tense. In conjunction with that idea, when we speak, it's important to know that we're being heard. So, the manifold voices scattered throughout the poems are only half of the equation. The poems in *say, said* also delineate the importance of listening. I want my mother to know, even though our relationship was often fraught, I was listening.

LETTER TO THE READER

Thirteen years ago, I started travelling and hiking with my dad. As a kid, he imbued in me a love of nature and birds and walking amongst it all. He's happiest with a trail in front of him and the promise of ice cream awaiting in the evening. A good number of these poems revolve around our hiking trips. We've banked lifetimes of memories on trails, across streams, and over and along mountain ridges. My dad's enigmatic, worthy of a full collection of poems, worthy of his own podcast. Here's proof: in South Dakota, heading into a movie theatre after a day of hiking the Badlands, the young lady behind the counter asked my dad if he'd like something to drink with his popcorn. Without batting an eyelash, he said, "Yes. I'll have a glass of milk." That he was serious is kind of beside the point. If you recognize a strangeness in these poems, you'll know it's inherited, and you'll get to know something of its source.

**SINCERELY,
FRED**

SHADOW PUPPETS

silhouettes contort on the bedroom wall.

i do this to draw out the cockroach hidden in our closet,
to coax him to the killing field. i once chased a roach
across our kitchen counter so fast it left a leg
in the gummy caulking of the backsplash. like a little kickstand
poking up. and when the harried bug dashed back past the leg,
he gave it a side-glance, noticed the part of himself he lost,
and rebuked it for the pickle it put him in. unbalanced.
his good form gone. i took a photo of the leg for the closeup.
what a specimen, that spiky thigh. might be jealously you're hearing.
might be a lesson on the virtue of no leg left behind.

the roach currently at large is a flier. sports a pair of see thru wings
the shade of root beer. possesses all the time in the world.
i shape a dog on the wall. my go-to shadow puppet.
wait for him to do something, like the roach would hang
with a dog. like companionship is all he's missing.
i twist my thumbs together, wave my joined fingers in a slow-motion
beat of wings, marvel as the shadow floats in place,
await a piercing hawk note, the bothered fish below,
a ruckus of their fleeing. but the roach stays put, catching up
on the plato in my satchel, awaiting night's old habits.
where everything, even shadows, slip into shadow.