

“BAPTIZING THE CAT,” BY ROBERTA GEORGE

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Reviewed by Niles Reddick



Baptizing the Cat by Roberta George is a psychological and realistic novel set in St. Petersburg, Florida in a beach front condo complex and told through the warped perspective of Phillip Craine, a mediocre artist who lives off the monthly stipend from his in-laws' candy company money. A dysfunctional family portrait develops from the cast of characters: Phillip's wife, Susan; two daughters; and their nanny and cook Nursey.

Phillip is mostly gone, either at his studio painting stereotypical seascapes, at Archie's bar knocking back hard liquor, or at the gallery flirting with owner Belle. His marriage is pathetic, and he sees his wife as a washed-up jellyfish, bloated and heaving for air.

His parental role, too, is secondary to his egotistical whims and becomes even more back-seat when he sees neighbor Catherine on the beach. He imagines himself a CIA agent and purchases surveillance equipment to spy on her. His enchantment becomes obsession and they finally meet and have a brief affair. Phillip even plans to kill his wife Susan to be with Catherine, but *Baptizing the Cat* takes an unexpected twist.

Catherine washes up on shore, having been shot and dumped in the sea by missing killers hired by her ex-husband and real estate magnate. Phillip does not come clean about the affair or show much remorse, but instead slinks around like a cat, hiding behind his artistic persona. Fifteen thousand husbands a year attempt to kill their wives, so in this respect *Baptizing the Cat* is a realistic portrait of life from the husband's point of view. It might just keep readers wondering what their spouses are thinking.

Roberta George is founding editor of Snake Nation Press, which was named one of the five Best Small Literary Presses in the nation by *Writer's Digest*. She is the author of a collection *Below the Gnat Line* and the non-fiction book *Ordinary Magic*. She lives in Valdosta, Georgia.

