



The Shine Poems

Calvin Forbes

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Shine is an African American folk character who emerged after World War I in toasts, blues, folk poetry, and children's rhymes. In his new book of poems, Calvin Forbes reinvents Shine, giving him a girlfriend, Glow, and a child, Shade. He renders the figure more melancholy and adds traces of the surreal and slapstick -- accessories "typical of the folk dibbling and dabbling as the tradition is passed along".

While only the last quarter of The Shine Poems concern Shine, all of the poems reflect a similar sensibility. They share the narrative threads of family relationships and personal and social history while they test the full possibilities of colloquial language and speech rhythms in verse. With its songs, blues, and quick, witty epigrams, The Shine Poems is a collection clear, firm, funny, and playful even as it takes that inevitable turn in the road toward the somber. Lyrical yet highly formalized -- "simplicity shackled up with complexity", as Forbes puts it -- these poems resemble the Jess B. Simple short stories of Langston Hughes and take inspiration from the Henry poems of John Berryman, the Jane poems of W. B. Yeats, and the poetry of Sterling Brown.

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