



Multitudes: Poems Selected & New

Afaa Michael Weaver

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The poems of *Multitudes* comprise an African-American opera of towering ambition and scope: there are arias and recitatives, whispers and shouts, growls and coos, formal interludes and symphonic improvisation, all set within a revelatory social and cultural context.

It is difficult to speak of a poet like Weaver, whose gift is large, lush, and expansive. The difficulty is multiplied when considering a Selected Poems, where the magnitude and range of the poet's accomplishments are fully displayed. One could spend a good deal of time merely on the works of lyrical intensity, such as Weaver's series of poems "Lamentations" which explores the painful permutations of a father's illness and a mother's death. One could marvel over the compressed emotion this series somehow manages to contain and, in the end, to release in the reader.

But this would be to ignore the sharply etched portrait poems, such as "Sub Shop Girl," "Bootleg Whiskey," and "Walnut Cinema." It would not fully explain the straightforward narrative power of poems like "The Robe," in which a young boy is cruelly shown his place in the sexual hierarchy of grown women. And it would give no hint of the poet's ability to compose such recent, experimentally daring poems as "Mojo Momba," "Piggly Wiggly," and the breathtakingly associative "A Composition for White Critics . . ." which, among its many effects, brilliantly satirizes "postmodern" literary ethos.

And to speak of any individual poems would not capture the extent of Weaver's operatic accomplishment in *Multitudes*. Weaver is a poet of rare grace, power, and honesty. His work will be read simply because the poetry is superb.

Finally, this is a book that embodies the fraught matter of African-American masculinity, in a way that a thousand essays could not begin to match. *Multitudes* is a clear window into the soul of the African-American male. In this sense it possesses an ambitious, manifest social value that contemporary poetry can rarely claim. Weaver's Selected will be read for the pleasures of its poetry, yes. But it will also be valued for the urgent illumination it provides into one of the central issues of our country and our time.

Afaa Michael Weaver (b. Michael S. Weaver)

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