



Devotions (Phoenix Poets)

Bruce Smith

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In the hands of Bruce Smith, devotions are momentary stops to listen to the motor of history. They are meditations and provocations. They are messages received from the chatter of the street and from transmissions as distant as Memphis and al-Mansur. Bulletins and interruptions come from brutal elsewhere and from the interior where music puts electrodes on the body to take an EKG. These poems visit high schools, laundromats, motels, films, and dreams in order to measure the American hunger and thirst. They are interested in the things we profess to hold most dear as well as what's unspoken and unbidden. While we're driving, while riding a bus, while receiving a call, while passing through an X-ray machine, the personal is intersected—sometimes violently, sometimes tenderly—with the hum and buzz of the culture. The culture, whether New York or Tuscaloosa, Seattle or Philadelphia, past or present, carries the burden of race and “someone's idea of beauty.” The poems fluctuate between the two poles of “lullaby and homicide” before taking a vow to remain on earth, to look right and left, to wait and to witness.

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