



The Girl and the Cat: Singing People With Songs in Them

Paul L. Shriver

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Paul L. Shriver has been writing for a long time, and his poetry collection, *The Girl and the Cat*, chronicles such topics as unrequited and found love, the passage of time, and such political issues as the tobacco industry and the prison system. Divided into sixteen sections and offering dates for each of the poems' conceptions, this collection represents fifty years of the poet's life. The poems in this collection are straightforward: they tell stories and ask questions. In fact, because of the collection's inclusion of drawings, anecdotes, and photos, this collection reads like an old family scrapbook.

The beauty of this collection is not based in poetics; instead, the beauty resides in the honesty with which this poet explores such topics as love and politics. Shriver is not afraid to dip his toe into sentimentality, and though the poems are layered in sugar and spice, there is something refreshing about poems that say what they mean, even if the language and images are familiar.

The strongest poems in this collection occur when the form, metaphors, and subject matter align. In "Since there are 'No Atheists in Foxholes,'" he explains how "every once in Awhile / God has to allow the World / To Become a 'foxhole' / Just for Company, I expect." This poem's form mimics the metaphor of the foxhole: the poem is centered on the page, as are the lines. This poem is not too preachy or gimmicky. Instead, it is restrained and one of the more subtle pieces in the collection.

The passage of time bookends this collection: the first poem, "Here We Go," begins the discussion of the poet's journey, and the book ends with the poem "Time Travels." However personal many of the poems are, Shriver's collection also discusses a collective journey or sense of time. In the poem "Travelers," he writes how, "We're All Travelers / The Trip is All One Way." Shriver's use of capitalization (some of the words in his poems are written in all uppercase letters) amplifies his images and statements: again, it's as if the poet is having a conversation with the reader and wants to stress certain points or ideas.

The book is like reading through a family scrapbook and sometimes the reader may care about the images and people who are discussed, but it can be hard to connect to second or thirdhand experiences or to people the reader does not know.

Shriver is speaking to the reader, and at times, speaking to his younger self. This collection is for people who want poems that tell stories, poems with beautiful instances of music, and poems about people with, as Shriver says, "songs in them."

LISA BOWER (January 11, 2008)

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