



Heaven: Poems

Rowan Ricardo Phillips

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Long-listed for the National Book Award in poetry

"Who the hell's heaven is this?" Rowan Ricardo Phillips offers many answers, and none at all, in *Heaven*, the piercing and revelatory encore to his award-winning debut, *The Ground*. Swerving elegantly from humor to heartbreak, from Colorado to Florida, from Dante's *Paradise* to Homer's *Iliad*, from knowledge to ignorance to awe, Phillips turns his gaze upward and outward, probing and upending notions of the beyond.

"Feeling, real feeling / with all its faulty / Architecture, is / Beyond a god's touch"—but it does not elude Phillips. Meditating on feverish boyhood, on two paintings by Chuck Close, on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, on a dead rooster by the side of the road in Ohio, on an elk grazing outside his window, his language remains eternally intoxicating, full of play, pathos, and surprise.

"The end," he writes, "like / All I've ever told you, is uncertain." Or, elsewhere: "The only way then to know a truth / Is to squint in its direction and poke." Phillips—who received a 2013 Whiting Writers' Award as well as the PEN/Joyce Osterweil Award—may not be certain, but as he squints and pokes in the direction of truth, his power of perception and elegance of expression create a place where beauty and truth come together and drift apart like a planet orbiting its star. The result is a book whose lush and wounding beauty will leave its mark on readers long after they've turned the last page.

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