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Posthumous collection lauded as 'extraordinary artifact of existence'

PITTSBURGH—The late Reginald Shepherd (1963–2008) was always an elemental poet. His work abounds with the imagery and motifs of water and fire. "And while those elements are important in his posthumous collection *Red Clay Weather*, it is air and earth which dominate," said Robert Philen. "Air and earth are present as 'weather,' and 'red clay' recurs as a motif of earth."

Philen—Shepherd's partner, friend, intellectual companion and avid reader—wrote the Foreword for and edited *Red Clay Weather*. Shepherd died in September 2008 after a difficult bout with cancer.

Shepherd was very concerned not only with each poem being as perfect as possible in his mind, but also with the coherence of the collection. "Before his death, he carefully selected the poems for this book, but he didn't have time to arrange their sequence into a coherent work," Philen explained. "I'm confident that I knew him well enough to arrange his poems into an order he'd have been happy with."

"God-With-Us," the final poem in *Red Clay Weather*, was written about two weeks before Shepherd died. According to Philen, Shepherd was not a believer in a conventional way, but most of this poem is a series of questions about God, ending with a statement about the desire to believe.

Shepherd was the author of five previous books of poetry: *Otherhood*; *Wrong*; *Angel, Interrupted*; *Some Are Drowning*; and *Fata Morgana*. His work has been widely anthologized, and has appeared in four editions of *The Best American Poetry* and two Pushcart Prize collections.

"I'm forever grateful to University of Pittsburgh Press and Robert Philen for *Red Clay Weather*," said Amy Newman. "Shepherd's poetry is pearl-like: vulnerable and enduring, an iridescent response to the world's potential threat and damage. His work is exquisite, unabashed, encompassing, real, and all too rare, an extraordinary natural artifact of existence."

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