



Keep the Feast

Poems

STEPHEN CUSHMAN

“Keep the Feast is a joyride through the vicissitudes, ironies, and ecstasies of just about every precinct of human experience, from the quotidian exigencies of everyday life to the lessons of history to the heights of erotic and spiritual devotion.”—Lisa Russ Spaar

“Schooled equally in Thoreau and folklore, the poems in this book are nourishing in their humor, edifying in their precision, and enlivening all around.”—Maurice Manning

“Keep the Feast is a remarkable collection of conversational, exquisitely chiseled poems that negotiate among the secular, the physical, the imaginative, and the spiritual.”—Ernest Suarez

“[The book’s] canny music seduces, its blasphemous wordplay titillates and shocks, and its outrageous faith utterly convinces. Cushman’s rapture creates new and brilliant poetry.”—Jay Rogoff

Stephen Cushman’s *Keep the Feast* sings in the tradition of the psalmists and devotional poets, offering an intimate, ecstatic doxology, both exultant and indicting, spiritual and secular. His poems make prodigious and intrepid forays into the realms of history, sexuality, religious ardor, the imperiled planet, and the reasons for making art. At the heart of this three-part book lies the title poem, which takes as a formal model Psalm 119, the longest psalm in the Bible. In luminous verse, Cushman’s speaker rejoices in the commitments of faith, finding in them a way of living with the paradoxes of twenty-first-century life and of holding belief in an often-unfathomable world.

STEPHEN CUSHMAN is a poet and a scholar of American literature and the Civil War. His recent books include *Hothead: A Poem* and *The Generals’ Civil War: What Their Memoirs Can Teach Us Today*. He is the Robert C. Taylor Professor of English at the University of Virginia.

Love in the Age of Inattention

What I like best about turning a corner
and seeing a snake, seeing me, coil
is having each other’s complete attention.
Nobody saying, What were you saying?
Neither not focused, eyes of both parties
never so locked. Could you hold, please?
That’s not happening. Same goes for meeting
a deer, a hawk, a fox, a bear. Everybody stretched
thin toward the other. You prefer animals
because you fear intimacy, she said from the bed
and glanced at her phone.



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Poetry



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