



Kin

Crystal Williams

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In her first book-length collection of poetry, Crystal Williams utilizes memory and music as she lyrically weaves her way through American culture, pointing to the ways in which alienation, loss, and sensed "otherness" are corollaries of recent phenomena. Williams writes about being adopted by an interracial couple, a jazz pianist/Ford Foundry worker and a school psychologist, and how that has affected her development as an African American woman. She tries to work out the answers to many difficult questions: in what way do African American artists define themselves? What do they owe the culture and what does it owe them? To what extent does our combined national memory inform our individual selves? These poems are steeped in the black literary tradition. They are brimming over with the oral tradition that Williams perfected while spending years on the poetry "slam" circuit. This, combined with her musical upbringing, give the collection not only a sense of urgency, but also a rhythm, a breath all its own. *Kin* tackles not only racial issues, but also the troubling realities of violent acts that can occur, especially in our inner cities. But more importantly, the landscape that Williams creates offers readers an alternative to the racial/political dichotomy in which we all live. Overall, the book resonates with a message of reconciliation that will leave the reader uplifted.

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