



All Saints: New and Selected Poems

Brenda Marie Osbey

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Like the feast day recalled in its title, this collection of twenty narrative poems venerates the dead. Brenda Marie Osbey invokes, impersonates, and converses with her Afro-New Orleans forebears--both blood ancestors and spiritual predecessors--weaving in hypnotic cadence a spell as potent as the religious and magical mysteries of her native culture. In *All Saints* we come to believe the dead do live, in the slave bricks paving the city's faubourgs, in the Hoodoo rites and images of saints, and especially in ourselves, who "walk upon the earth a living man / wearing all the shrouds of mourning like a skin / and memory like a stone inside your organs." Assisted by a glossary of New Orleans ethnic expressions, place names, and characters, we discern in these poems a multitude of voices that speak to us from colonial times forward. Chanting, lamenting, outpouring, healing--Osbey's poems measure her own musical refrain to the past while keeping time with the present: "we cry out together / in time to hear their cries."

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