



The Simple Truth

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Philip Levine has been publishing distinguished poetry since the early 1960's when his first collection, *ON THE EDGE* (1963), appeared. His 1991 collection *WHAT WORK IS* won the National Book Award for poetry. *THE SIMPLE TRUTH* constitutes Levine's fifteenth volume of poetry, and it has won the 1995 Pulitzer Prize for poetry. Born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1928, Levine was reared in a working-class family. Over the years, he has written countless poignant poems concerning how hard life can be for the common laborer.

The thirty-three poems of *THE SIMPLE TRUTH* were all first published in leading American periodicals, including *THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY*, *THE NEW YORKER*, and *POETRY*. The collection is divided into three sections. For the most part, the poems illuminate the past. Through these poems, Levine is able to blend historical fact with mythical constructs.

The first section opens with the poem "On the Meeting of Garcia Lorca and Hart Crane." It would be hoped that when two such literary giants meet that something magical would take place, but the stumbling blocks seem to be too great. A third party had to be present in order to translate what each man said. The young man saddled with the difficult task of translating the conversation turns out to be one of Levine's cousins. It is this cousin, Arthur Lieberman, who becomes a more fascinating character than the world famous writers. The title poem can be found at the end of the second section. The poems speaks of a truth that is as essential as food. This truth can seem cruel, and it can appear to be so "simple" that it is beyond comprehension. The truth will always be there and "made of that dirt we call earth, the metal we call salt,/in a form we have no words for, and you live on it."

THE SIMPLE TRUTH examines memory, history, myth, and the products of all three. There is bottomless despair contained within these poems, but there is also hope because life does go on. It is also understood that great poets like Levine will continue to wrestle with the eternal contradictions of "truth."

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