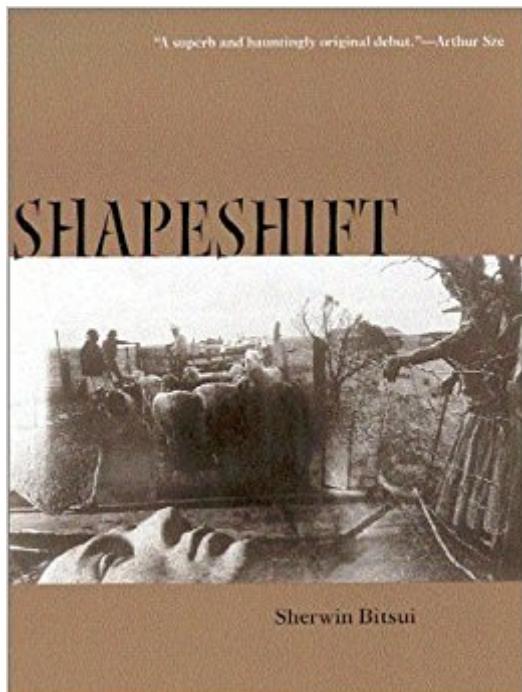


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# Shapeshift (Sun Tracks)



## Synopsis

"Fourteen ninety-something, / something happened / and no one can pick it out of the lineup . . ." In words drawn from urban and Navajo perspectives, Sherwin Bitsui articulates the challenge a Native American person faces in reconciling his or her inherited history of lore and spirit with the coldness of postmodern civilization. *Shapeshift* is a collection of startling new poetry that explores the tensions between the worlds of nature and man. Through brief, imagistic poems interspersed with evocative longer narratives, it offers powerful perceptions of American culture and politics and their lack of spiritual grounding. Linking story, history, and voice, *Shapeshift* is laced with interweaving images—“the gravitational pull of a fishbowl, the scent of burning hair, the trickle of motor oil from a harpooned log”—that speak to the rich diversity of contemporary Diné writing. “Tonight, I draw a raven’s wing inside a circle measured a half second before it expands into a hand. I wrap its worn grip over our feet As we thrash against pine needles inside the earthen pot.” With complexities of tone that shift between disconnectedness and wholeness, irony and sincerity, Bitsui demonstrates a balance of excitement and intellect rarely found in a debut volume. As deft as it is daring, *Shapeshift* teases the mind and stirs the imagination.

## Book Information

Series: Sun Tracks (Book 52)

Paperback: 80 pages

Publisher: University of Arizona Press; First Edition edition (September 1, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0816523428

ISBN-13: 978-0816523429

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.4 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars—See all reviews (5 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,389,505 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #96 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Regional & Cultural > United States > Native American #120749 in Books > Literature & Fiction > United States

## Customer Reviews

In the 1920s, the then new-rage modern dancer, Isadora Duncan said “the entrance comes before the exit and the exit before the entrance.” She meant life is circular and interwoven--a journey with repeated feelings, roots, and themes. Her idea came immediately to mind when I read Sherwin

Bitsui's SHAPESHIFT. This little book of poetry blends Navajo mythology and modern America in a non-linear post-modern fashion. The idea of constant change permeates the book. Horses peel into sunflowers. Leaves curl around a hand and swallow it. Yet as the changes swirls, Bitsui inserts constant references to his Navajo roots and spirituality, giving him, and us a place to hang on and start from, to cope with whatever comes. It is this firm sense of place that holds SHAPESHIFT together. Finding our place in each poem, we can then take our time to savor Bitsui's rich, and sometimes unexpected imagery and universal message--we all must deal with change in our own way. SHAPESHIFT is his way of coping. We can join him on his journey of learning how, because if we know our place in the universe, we can return to it and draw strength from it to go out again and face our ever changing world. The very name SHAPESHIFT reflects this thought. The word implies change, (shifting shapes) and has firm roots in Navajo tradition. However, SHAPESHIFT is not an easy book to read. It can take several passes to get into Bitsui's images and ideas. But once that happens, he offers a unique philosophy to adapt to our own lives.

While Bitsui's work readily draws comparison to the work of Luci Tapahonso and Esther Belin, it belies the character of dissonance at work and that Bitsui, far from being derivative, has sculpted his own aesthetic out of his cultural perspectives. In Bitsui's work, as in the moral and psychological universe of Mediterranean poet RenÃ© Char, Dine (Navajo) wisdom retains its unique and radical difference from the cold world of Puritan postmodernism. For Bitsui, the ceremony of integration is not an easy one. Things do not merge into a blurred likeness, they do not compromise each other, or themselves, by doing so. Each extreme keeps its extreme nature, and this, for me, is what gives Bitsui's work its knife edge. These are not poems of easy transcendence, despite the creative drive to transform pain into something which might bless or save us. His is a sensibility shaped by a landscape in which the forces of mountain, sky, sun, and desert exist together in their most concentrated and relentless forms and Bitsui's aesthetic acknowledges the surrealism of everyday life, leaping from the conscious to the unconscious and back again, and make references to what are, for me, the more powerful spheres of intuitive, spiritual, and sexual knowing that appear informed by his culture. Whatever one's opinion of Bitsui's work, he is certainly a poet to watch, this volume selling out of its first printing within the first eight months of its debut.

I bought this because a. I love poetry, and b. I am interested in Native American culture. This poet evokes a certain atmosphere that I can't describe in words. I would say he manages to capture the mood of being Navajo in contemporary society, but how should I know, I haven't been to Navajo

Nation (yet!)... and still I feel that he is doing exactly that. The language is rich, the poems are mysterious and complex. Don't pass this one up if you like modern poetry. This speaks to the soul.

This product was great! It was a little difficult to read at first but with the help of my professor it came along very well. I loved it!

great

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