



Leviathan

A Poem

MICHAEL SHEWMAKER

WINNER OF THE 2023
L. E. PHILLABAUM POETRY AWARD

PRAISE FOR *LEVIATHAN*

"*Leviathan* is a retelling of Job in which the enduring story is made both painfully familiar and frighteningly strange, and so the poem strikes one as Job might have struck its first readers, which, it seems to me, is more than one can reasonably hope from any book."

—Shane McCrae

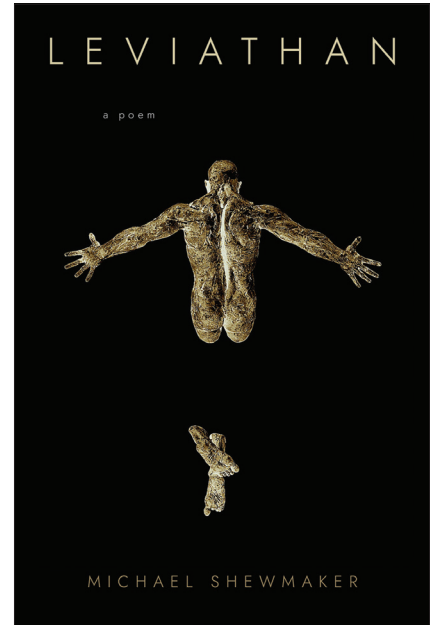
"J. Joiner, a rich and successful oilman in Texas who has lived 'as right as a man can,' has lost his family, his fortune, his health, and is surrounded by unsympathetic friends and the stench of his own failure. Sound familiar? Michael Shewmaker's *Leviathan* is the latest addition to the ancient genre exploring Job's suffering. What is new is that his Job's frame of reference ranges from the fiction of Vladimir Nabokov to the poetry of R. S. Thomas to the classic horror film *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. A scathing critique of the cost of survival, *Leviathan* takes its place among those works of literature that would dare plumb the depths of the divine will."—Mark Jarman

Leviathan, the highly anticipated second collection by Michael Shewmaker, offers an innovative reimagining of the book of Job. Set in the landscape of modern East Texas, the poem unfolds in four cycles of interchanging monologues, each compounding the difficulties of a faith placed in a distant God. With an accomplished music wholly its own, Shewmaker's verse shifts effortlessly between song and story, unearthing beauty from the deep well of loss and doubt.

MICHAEL SHEWMAKER is the author of *Penumbra*, winner of the Hollis Summers Poetry Prize. He is the recipient of fellowships from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the Sewanee Writers' Conference, and Stanford University, where he served as a Wallace Stegner Fellow. Born in Texarkana, Texas, he teaches creative writing at Stanford.

Yesterday, I watched the shadows lengthen
across the wall. And when the sun
was setting in the pines, the needles' shadows
branched over my bed—like blooming thistles,
or swallows scattering in the wind. I felt
relieved and I imagined what
the light must look like in the pasture. How
beyond the trees, beyond the fenceline,
on the pond, the light swells to a brightness
only the bass can know, before
it dwindles and they sink into the coldest
dark water, where they sleep, alone.

—from *Leviathan*



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