



AMERICAN JOURNAL
FIFTY POEMS FOR OUR TIME
SELECTED AND INTRODUCED BY
TRACY K. SMITH
POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES



American Journal: Fifty Poems for Our Time

Tracy K. Smith

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A landmark anthology envisioned by Tracy K. Smith, Poet Laureate of the United States

American Journal presents fifty contemporary poems that explore and celebrate our country and our lives. Poet Laureate of the United States and Pulitzer Prize winner Tracy K. Smith has gathered a remarkable chorus of voices that ring up and down the registers of American poetry. In the elegant arrangement of this anthology, we hear stories from rural communities and urban centers, laments of loss in war and in grief, experiences of immigrants, outcries at injustices, and poems that honor elders, evoke history, and praise our efforts to see and understand one another. Taking its title from a poem by Robert Hayden, the first African American appointed as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, *American Journal* investigates our time with curiosity, wonder, and compassion.

Among the fifty poets included are: Jericho Brown, Natalie Diaz, Matthew Dickman, Mark Doty, Ross Gay, Aracelis Girmay, Joy Harjo, Terrance Hayes, Cathy Park Hong, Marie Howe, Major Jackson, Ilya Kaminsky, Robin Coste Lewis, Ada Límon, Layli Long Soldier, Erika L. Sánchez, Solmaz Sharif, Danez Smith, Susan Stewart, Mary Szybist, Natasha Trethewey, Brian Turner, Charles Wright, and Kevin Young.

American Journal: Fifty Poems for Our Time Details

Date : Published September 4th 2018 by Graywolf Press (first published 2018)

ISBN : 9781555978150

Author : Tracy K. Smith

Format : Paperback 104 pages

Genre : Poetry, Anthologies, Nonfiction, Literature, American

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From Reader Review American Journal: Fifty Poems for Our Time for online ebook

Joshunda Sanders says

This book is deceptively slim, and small. The poems, the poets within, the scope of what they write & offer, their range is wide and broad, beautiful. Our nation's Black woman Poet Laureate (easy to take for granted, but there she is, thank God) has curated a profound testimony to the depth and expanse of the full capabilities of what it means to be a relevant poet now. These poems even manage to somehow enlarge the notion of now in ways that are unexpected and beautiful.

Ryan A. says

A very thoughtfully selected collection by the current Poet Laureate. Not every one of them evoked a strong emotion in me, but all fifty showcased American life, in (what felt like) every shape and form it can take.

Tasha says

Some old favorites and some new favorites. An unsurprisingly stunningly curated collection of poems by the one and only TKS.

Twila Newey says

I love the range of poetry in this small volume. I love its size. You could almost slip it in the back pocket of a pair of jeans. I think it is one I'll return to for the sheer variety, the chorus of voices. I might start reading a poem aloud each night at dinner as our prayer before the meal, as sustenance before the meal. This would be a good book to read through with the kids. Also, I love Tracy K. Smith.

Liz says

This is a wonderful collection. I was happy to reread a few pieces--Kevin Young's "Crowning," which I first encountered in the New Yorker, I think, and Matthew Dickman's "Minimum Wage," from his fantastic collection Wonderland--but especially to be introduced to new (to me) writers like Ilya Kaminsky and Matt Rasmussen. Rasmussen's "Reverse Suicide" is just spectacular, as is Marie Howe's "Walking Home."

Elizabeth Hykes says

Excellent!

This collection includes work by outstanding contemporary poets. The writing is accessible while also innovative.

This is evidence of the value of having a poet laureate.

Danny Caine says

American Journal: Fifty Poems for Our Time, edited by Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith, is a slim book that speaks to the wide breadth of American Experience. This collection of 50 stunning poems from a wide range of voices creates what Smith calls a "loving yet critical portrait of a nation in progress." The poems are divided into five thematic sections and they tend towards narrative and the spoken voice, but that's all the better for Smith's project of America telling the story of itself today. Put this book in your pocket and take it with you everywhere you go.

Brina says

Tracy K Smith is the current Poet Laureate of the United States and one of those few authors who could write a cereal box and I would read it. While not her writing, Smith has selected fifty distinct poems that she says are must reads and represent a cross section of American life. The collection includes works by some of my favorites Joy Harjo and Natalie Tretheway as well as a moving signature piece by Layli Long Soldier. Smith notes that these poems bring her closer to each author, which may not have been possible due to distance of time and place. Through Smith's selections I have discovered new poets who I hope to explore more in the coming years.

4 stars

Ellice says

It's good to know librarians--one of my acquaintance brought an advance reader's copy of this book back from the 2018 ALA conference for me.

It's a nice solid collection of poems. Unsurprisingly, selected as they were by our current US Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith, they are, as the subtitle suggests, well picked for today. The introduction by Smith is amazing and by itself well worth the price of the volume.

Joe says

A quick read, under an hour total, even with some rereading and thinking.

Poems hit each person differently. For me it started slow, and wasn't until at least 1/3 of the way through that I got to one I really enjoyed, but then there were several.

The ones that spoke to me most:

Reverse Suicide

We Lived Happily During the War

38

Object Permanence

Requiem for Fifth Period and the Things That Went on Then

Dear P.

Mercy

We Lived Happily During the War especially hit me hard.

Overall very worth reading.

Nancy says

A box of chocolates in all the best ways: slim, surprising; perhaps not what you'd choose for yourself.

The first poem "Second Estrangement" by Aracelis Girmay is worth the price of admission. "38" stops the show. Turns on the lights and says hey. And then the show has the nerve to go on. There's Kevin Young's "Crowning" which I didn't think could exist as a poem. And the final buffalo, who we must talk to.

James says

U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith edits this collection of contemporary poems that show the diversity, history, and challenges of American life. Like any anthology, some of the selections are stronger than others but this can serve as an introduction to many contemporary poets. I enjoyed some new names as well as a familiar ones.

Reader says

Favorites: "Story of Girls" by Tina Chang (pg59) and "Dear P." by Victoria Chang (pg94).

There's a danger in titling an anthology of poems "...for Our Time." It implies that the poetry within is not timeless.

Jonathan Tennis says

It's The Poet Laureate of the United States so you know the collection is gonna be good. I'd read a number of these before but my favorites from this collection were Reverse Suicide (by Matt Rasmussen),

Downhearted (by Ada Limón), The Long Deployment (by Jehanne Dubrow), We Lived Happily During the War (by Ilya Kaminsky), and For the Last American Buffalo (by Steve Scafidi). With this many poets in one book there is bound to be something to appeal to everyone.

s.penkevich says

The world I return to when the poem is over seems fuller and more comprehensible as a result. - Tracy K. Smith

Celebration is in order for this anthology. *American Journal* is an anthology of 50 poems that comment on the experience of living in the United States, coming out during a very tumultuous time. Our Virgil in this exploration of US living is none other than the incredible Tracy K. Smith, current US Poet Laureate and winner of the Pulitzer Prize for her collection *Life on Mars*. An inspiring and wonderful poet in her own right, she has organized fifty poets to comment on the “American experience” in an open and empathetic way that celebrates the cultural diversity, the struggles, sorrows and joys to build a more honest definition. These are poems rooted in the ‘*promise of community*’. And we are all better for it. Put out in conjunction with the US Library of Congress and Graywolf Press, this reflects an America we can believe in, a nation that exists under the oppression of hatred and bigotry this collection raises its voice to in opposition. Here we read the lives of those in strife, the experience of immigration, the experience of living under police brutality, of trying to connect with your culture in a land that wishes to smite it out, the experience of being human in a land that never belonged to anyone to begin with. The collection of poets is incredible and would make for a perfect introduction to modern US poetry to anyone looking for new, contemporary writers mixed with well-known favorites in a way that embraces culture and reminds us that diversity is one of the greatest strengths there is. This is a collection of a nation free to tell the story of itself without the gloved hand of American hatred holding its mouth shut or beating it down.

Tracy K Smith is a gem. Her work has always been impressive--for me this is particularly presented in *Duende*--and her dedication to poetry and culture is truly admirable. She is currently the US Poet Laureate and using this position well. While serving this post during a controversial and ethnocentric administration, Smith has released this collection of poems that feel like a direct rebuttal to the aggressively racist portrayals of any non-white, non-heterosexual culture. I’m reminded of when Charles Simic, Poet Laureate under the second Bush administration, promptly used the position to release an entire collection of anti-war poetry called *Master of Disguises* during the height of the Iraq war. Poetry is political, always, but then again so is language. And Tracy K Smith uses poetry as a way to help normalize reality and shoo away the fog of hatred that seems to have crept in on little feet and suffocated the US.

The introduction to this collection is alone worth the price of admission. Here she explains the title comes from a Robert Hayden (shoutout to my Detroit hometown poets)--the first African American to serve as Poet Laureate--poem of the same name which chronicles aliens watching planet earth and are particularly drawn to those in the US. In concluding her introduction, she says she these poems ‘*bow in reverence to the mysterious unknown*’ and also:

I am hoping that their courage, intimacy of address, and even the journey they collectively map out--a journey that encompasses consideration of place; reflections on family and individual identity; responses to the urgencies afflicting our collective culture; and gestures of love, hope, and remembrance--might go some way toward making us, whoever and whatever we are, a little less alien to one another.

The collection itself is astounding. So many wonderful poets (most of them my recent favorites) are brought together here: Eve Ewing, Arcelis Girmay, Victoria Chang, Danez Smith, Ada Limón, Nicole Sealey, Terrance Hayes, Layli Long Soldier, Jericho Brown, Laura Kasischke, Natalie, Diaz, Ilya Kaminsky, Natasha Trethewey, among many others. I only wish it could have been a longer collection as fifty feels like a tease. Broken up into five thematic sections, these poems culminate into a beautiful portrait of a troubled place, but one where love is teeming from sea to shining sea.

5/5
