



Teahouse of the Almighty

Patricia Smith

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A National Poetry Series winner, chosen by Edward Sanders.

“What power. Smith’s poetry is all *poetry*. And visceral. Her poems get under the skin of their subjects. Their passion and empathy, their real worldliness, are blockbuster.”—Marvin Bell

“I was weeping for the beauty of poetry when I reached the end of the final poem.”—Edward Sanders, National Poetry Series judge

From Lollapalooza to Carnegie Hall, Patricia Smith has taken the stage as this nation’s premier performance poet. Featured in the film *Slamnation* and on the HBO series *Def Poetry Jam*, Smith is back with her first book in over a decade—a National Poetry Series winner weaving passionate, bluesy narratives into an empowering, finely tuned celebration of poetry’s liberating power.

Teahouse of the Almighty Details

Date : Published September 1st 2006 by Coffee House Press

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Author : Patricia Smith

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From Reader Review Teahouse of the Almighty for online ebook

Laura Yan says

This is how poetry is meant to be! Alive, raw, vivid, sensual, gruesome, heartbreaking, playful...some difficult subjects but always written with such heart. She might have quickly become one of my favorites!

R.G. Evans says

A prodigiously gifted poet--we were very fortunate to have her as featured poet at the Cumberland Regional Poetry Festival this month. Smith literally speaks in tongues, giving voices to murdered children, offstage blues singers, lechers, and silenced women of every stripe, using language so natural it's easy to forget you're reading crafted poems.

Mike says

An incredible collection of deeply felt, lyric and powerful poems. Smith brings art, honesty and a heart that witnesses to her work. I'm in awe of the poetry in this book.

Rachel S says

This book. I took it off my folks' coffee table to, quite honestly, squeeze in my 2015 reading goal. Oh that skinny book I cracked open briefly last visit to my folks--that one with the Ella Fitzgerald poem, and poem for a son in prison--that will end my year quickly and well. Smith's signature and note to my mom in the front of the book--my mom can't remember where, but she must've shared her work with youth--belied the stature in my mind; I thought she must be local. Little did I know I was opening a poetry book of such substance and significance.

It was quick, but it was no filler, squeeze, or spot holder. And thankfully, it took a night, a morning and a night, so I got to end one year and begin another with a monumental dose of gorgeousness.

I cracked it open on the train and couldn't put it down when we arrived in Penn Station, inviting two older teen boys walking behind me to marvel at my ability to walk and read at the same time. Do you know that feeling of simultaneous gratitude and betrayal when a poem with a hopeful title winds up being the most lyrical, tragic thing you've ever read? Walked to Herald Square blessing the bright lights always keeping New York City in day mode, book still cracked open.

A poet dear to me recently critiqued my writing as not being poetry. It was a prose form, one my traditional poet friend was not accustomed to. Still, after reading this book, I think I better understand what poetry is, or is meant to be. Each word or turn of phrase like an object with its own memory, triggered to spew forth its own story.

Before I got to my destination, I read half the book, and on the walk in Brooklyn wrote my own image-punching poem inspired by Smith's taunting, lyrical, vivid imaginary.

Opened up a new day and new year with her last crumbs. She called her girl self a "little crumbsnatcher" in one poem; now, she reigns truly as crumb gifter, gifting morsels.

Patricia says

Patricia Smith is an amazing poet. In this book, she comes at Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans from the inside out, personifying both the city and the storm, and making both terrifyingly and brutally real.

Stefani says

It's been awhile since I've read poetry, but Patricia Smith's work is just so well-written; you can tell she has experience as a spoken word poet. She nails the end of each poem with such grace and wistfulness.

A. says

One of those books of poems where I love the content but am not a big stylistic fan, necessarily. Definitely Smith's poems are ones better heard than read. There a couple poems in here that really knocked me out of the park, though, and I think the celebration of blackness will really appeal to people who it's meant for.

Eva says

I first heard Patricia Smith on Def Poetry Jam. When it came on at 1 in the morning on HBO. She wrote a poem about being a white supremacist. I was amazed. I could see the bald head, the angry look.

This book is no less amazing. In particular, *Related to the Buttercup*, *Blooms in Spring*, *Building Nicole's Mama* and *When the Burning Begins* are prime examples of why she is a huge name in poetry.

If you haven't read or seen her, what are you waiting for?

Henry Cansler says

I loved this book and I loved all the poems in the book. If you have read any of Patricia Smith's work, this book is very similar to the rest of them. I highly recommend the book due to its deep meaning in each poem and the vocabulary you gain with each Patricia Smith book you read.

Michael says

Not pretentious yet literary. A combination of the page and the stage, using conventions and breaking them. The poem about her son coming back from jail destroyed me in the best way. I can only remember not rereading maybe two or three poems. The others I came back too constantly. Which is amazing to consider I rarely read a book twice, as I usually get what I need to get and remember it all. But when I come back it means memory doesn't suffice, I gotta get my fix and retread that path.

She's one of those poets baby.

Julene says

I love Patricia Smith's poetry. Her words are jazz even when I don't understand. These are heart wrenching poems, like each her three other books. Each one I bow to.

The first poem in the book, "Building Nicole's Mama," which I witnessed her perform in a slam last year in Seattle, should bring tears to anyone's eyes. "A teacher tells me this is the first time Nicole/has admitted that her mother is gone,/murdered by slim silver needles and a stranger/her skeleton through for Nicole to see./And now this child with rusty knees/and mismatched shoes sees poetry as her scream/and asks me for the words to build her mother again./Replacing the voice./Stitching on the lost flesh." She helps us all remember why we write, why writing is important, the power of our words.

mwpm says

Emmett was all pelvis, theatrics
in lieu of heft and measure.
I threw Rich out of bed
and made him dance naked
in the hall. His spurt was ludicrous.
A.J.'s cocked to the left,
dots of Hai Karate flowering
his tests. And the bubbled one
with gut smothering the stub.
Florid dramas of the teeny weenie,
the entertainments of strut,
snug synthetic fibers, blustery spiels.
And now this little yellow pill
that grows even history huge.
And easily. Yes, and damn.

- **walloping! magnifying of a guy's anatomy easily**, *subject line for a junk e-mail touting a "penile enhancer"*, pg. 9

* * *

Flustered, without license or sanction, the women
clawed at whispered cotton and lopsided seam,
pushed irritants to their ankles, and stood upright
for whole seconds, just long enough for nipples
to pimple in soft wind. Behind them, a home that
once held his pens, his grimace acknowledging
a tumble phrase, earthquake that grew pliant
in him, and now twenty-eight quick asses framed
in the window. Much too rushed for structure, the
photographer did what he could to stun the slow
chaos - heads were twisted, eyes in blink, pubic
hair indistinct and shadowed. As sirens wailed,
the women hurried into their clothes - blouses
with nervy stink circles, skirts accorded in haste.
Their names were nothing and they were rootless
in their wandering away. There was no sense
to their sacrifice, until the night came and the poet's
slow remembering hands returned for their soul.

- **Sacrifice**, pg. 22

* * *

He says I am gumpopper,
wondrous shoulders,
evil on the days when I bleed.

I say take hold of both my hands.
He speaks cool water on me,
nudges my mood with proverb.

I watch him undress, skin
unto another skin, and I turn
away to keep from craving that.

By the time his hands
touch my shoulders,
I am almost insane

with disappearing,
and the thunder.

- **Little Poetry**, pg. 31

* * *

A lyric unravels,
spins on dizzied axis,
one syllable slinks
and becomes several.

A stark shaft of light
illuminates a never-over evolution.
Each exhalation
excites and concludes

with a slight upturn
of phrase that compromises
the hip, roots fat legs,
lends such southern heave to torso.

Mysteries thrive in the belly
and in the miraculous
of her throating,
send two errant verbs

round 'bout themselves
and into the keys
of her spine again.
It is not for us to know

her trilling suddenly
murderous and cringe
beautiful, inbound.
Her legs gone.

A lack of this elegance
is the end of evolution.
Consider the soundless hole.
Over.

- **Elegantly Ending**, *for Ella Fitzgerald*, pg. 40-41

* * *

My job is to draw the pictures no one can voice,
to soothe and bellow toward the numbed heart,
to breathe in your chronicles, discuss them out
in lines weak enough for you to read and swallow.
My mouth is a jumble of canine teeth, I bite only
at the official whistle. My job is sexy leads for the
bones clattering in your closet, to sing you sated
each night with a forgettable soundtrack of paper
and ink. I am neat, easily folded, a sifter of truth
born to be burned. I count your dead, fathom their

stories, bless them with long, flexible histories
and their final names. There are no soft stanzas
in this city of curb sleep and murdered children.
We need soft words for hard things, this silk
brushing the inevitability of rock. Birth truth in
this way, just once. Craft the news and overcome
all that you ever were - a reason to turn the page.

- **Stop the Presses**, pg. 65

* * *

many more than that many,
this hallelujah, this bruise Jesus
all over purpled ankle, more than
this scrubbed silver and next needle
this whole heart in an African hand
much more than these drum digits
this possible this wait a minute what
does this say this page 47, more than
this mad, this unlatched, this bandage
and gut swirling, what stiff number
was the blanket, scissored felt
and eye buttons, glitter elmer glued
to gone outlines, names too simple
to be so hard pronounced. more
than that, even more than conjured
million, this cock/tail, this twitch
and drool, this vomit, this legislation.

- **Psyche!**, pg. 76-77

Christine says

Excellent.

Thanks Clem for the recommendation.

I loved the language, the rhythm, and the topics.

Favorite poems were:

Stop the Presses

Look at 'em

Women are Taught
Down 4 the Upstroke
When the Burning Begins

Stacie says

This is a slim volume of poetry- 48 poems, 91 pages- but it explodes in your head like a deployed airbag: loud and fast, leaving little little hurts behind that somehow let you know you are still alive. It hits you like a kick in the gut that makes you fight for breath and smile at the same time. I know, intellectually, that there are people who will not like this book or this poet but emotionally I still want to stand on the corner and hand a copy to everyone that walks past.

Andrea says

A very moving collection of poetry. Smith is visual and visceral. It is difficult to imagine reading some of the performance poets I've heard in the past, but when I read Patricia Smith, I can actually hear her voice in every line. I'm a positive person, so reading things that are very dark can be hard for me. Even the works that were disturbing in their subject matter are so beautiful that I found myself moved, and better for having read them.
