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Natasha Trethewey

Former U.S. and Mississippi Poet Laureate

April is National Poetry Month. It is known as the largest literary celebration in the world. Inspired by Black History and Women's History Months, the Academy of American Poets founded National Poetry Month in April 1996 to:

- highlight the extraordinary legacy and ongoing achievement of American poets,
- encourage the reading of poems,
- assist teachers in bringing poetry into their classrooms,
- increase the attention paid to poetry by national and local media,
- encourage increased publication and distribution of poetry books, and
- encourage support for poets and poetry.

Natasha Trethewey is a poet and teacher who served as the United States poet laureate for two terms—2012 and 2013—and as poet laureate for the state of Mississippi from 2012 until 2016. Her poetry focuses on history, society, and culture. She uses poetry to examine the world we live in and to question her role in it.

One major event that began her historical explorations was her mother's murder when Trethewey was just nineteen-years-old. She recalls her mother was "killed, gunned down in a parking lot by her second husband, her then ex-husband, a troubled Vietnam veteran with a history of mental illness". The experience was traumatic for Trethewey who at that time was a freshman at the University of Georgia. It sparked the questioning she would later use to research and compose several volumes of literary

April

National Poetry Month

- 1 - Easter Sunday
- 1 - April Fool's Day
- 7 - World Health Day
- 10 - National Sibling Day
- 17 - Tax Day
- 22 - Earth Day



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works as well as a nonfiction book about the effects of Hurricane Katrina on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

In a commencement address at Knox College, Trethewey shared “one of the things (she loves) most about (her) calling, poetry, is that across time and space, it shows us not that we are different, but how we are alike. It connects us through the intimacy of a single voice speaking across the distances and through empathy to the lives of others, showing us a way to know ourselves in the mirror of someone else’s experience. And, it allows us to say exactly, precisely, what we mean and to mean something else, perhaps even more important, at the same time”. The beauty of poetry is that it speaks to everyone in his or her own “language”. While two different people may read the same work and have different interpretations, both interpretations are meaningful, clear, and correct.

What’s fascinating about Trethewey’s work is how she tells stories that are often untold. While poems are often reserved for special occasions such as births, marriages, and even death, she wants readers to understand that “poetry...speaks to us, all the ordinary days of our lives, if we find the right poems for us”.

Myth

By Natasha Trethewey

I was asleep while you were dying.
It’s as if you slipped through some rift, a hollow
I make between my slumber and my waking,

the Erebus I keep you in, still trying
not to let go. You’ll be dead again tomorrow,
but in dreams you live. So I try taking

you back into morning. Sleep-heavy, turning,
my eyes open, I find you do not follow.
Again and again, this constant forsaking.

Again and again, this constant forsaking:
my eyes open, I find you do not follow.
You back into morning, sleep-heavy, turning.

But in dreams you live. So I try taking,
not to let go. You’ll be dead again tomorrow.
The Erebus I keep you in—still, trying—

I make between my slumber and my waking.
It’s as if you slipped through some rift, a hollow.
I was asleep while you were dying.

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