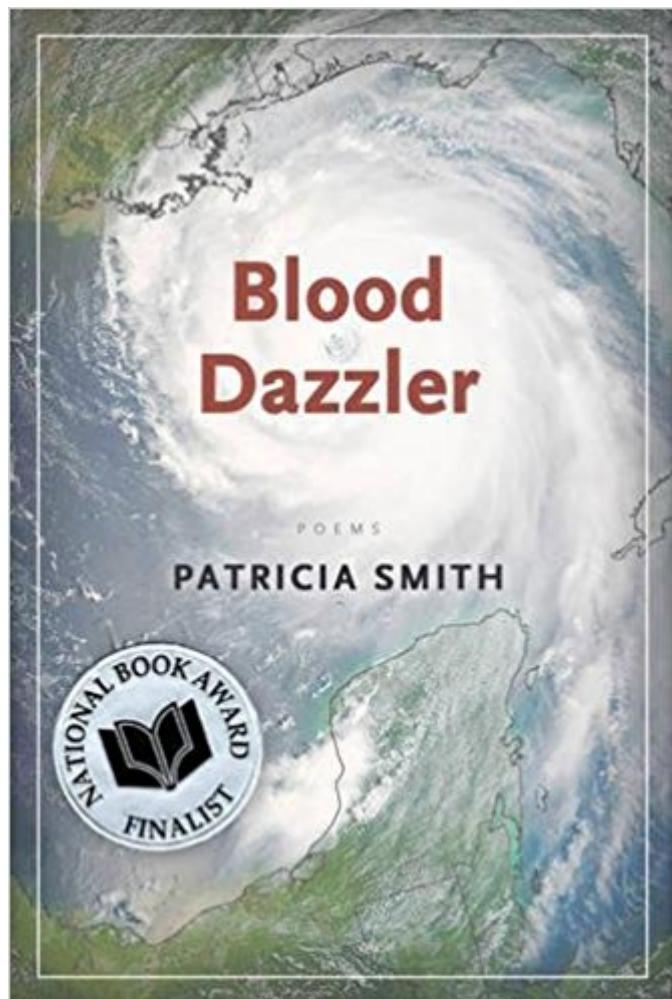


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Blood Dazzler



Synopsis

In minute-by-minute detail, Patricia Smith tracks Hurricane Katrina as it transforms into a full-blown mistress of destruction. From August 23, 2005, the day Tropical Depression Twelve developed, through August 28 when it became a Category Five storm with its “scarlet glare fixed on the trembling crescent,” to the heartbreaking aftermath, these poems evoke the horror that unfolded in New Orleans as America watched it on television. Assuming the voices of flailing politicians, the dying, their survivors, and the voice of the hurricane itself, Smith follows the woefully inadequate relief effort and stands witness to families held captive on rooftops and in the Superdome. She gives voice to the thirty-four nursing home residents who drowned in St. Bernard Parish and recalls the day after their deaths when George W. Bush accompanied country singer Mark Willis on guitar: The cowboy grins through the terrible din, ***And in the Ninth, a choking woman wails Look like this country done left us for dead. An unforgettable reminder that poetry can still be “news that stays news,” Blood Dazzler is a necessary step toward national healing. Patricia Smith is the author of four previous collections of poetry, including Teahouse of the Almighty, winner of the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award and the Paterson Poetry Prize. A record-setting, national poetry slam champion, she was featured in the film Slammnation, on the HBO series Def Poetry Jam, and is a frequent contributor to Harriet, the Poetry Foundation’s blog. Visit her website at www.wordwoman.ws.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Simultaneously accessible and daring, these short, fiery verses describe with sorrow and passion

the Crescent City just before, during and immediately after Katrina. They describe it from startling points of view— one series of poems takes the vantage point of Luther B, a hardy abandoned dog. Another set speaks for the hurricane itself: every woman begins as weather, Katrina warns, sips slow thunder, knows her hips. Other speakers include the spirit of Voodoo, a nursing home patient, a rapist, George W. Bush and a drag queen whose good humor helps her survive: This damned trod spells ruin for her party pumps. Known now as a poet of both the page and stage, Smith (*Teahouse of the Almighty*) was present at the creation of the poetry slam, in 1980s Chicago. Her command of the spoken voice gives her work both speed and pathos. She benefits, too, from her range of forms: rhymed sonnet, sestina, alphabet poem, long- and short-lined, and fragmentary free verse. This book will stand out among literary records of Katrina's devastation. (Sept.)

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In her fifth collection, Smith, a poetry-slam champion and recipient of the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, presents a towering testament to the tragedy of New Orleans before, during, and after Katrina. Her ear for voice and gift for persona poems make for a complex, colloquial, thought-provoking, and nearly minute-to-minute account of the catastrophe that captures the power of nature and the failure of leadership. Smith's observations are painstakingly revealing and unabashedly critical, especially juxtaposed against the beauty of her terse free verse and formal sestina and rhymed sonnets. Following *Teahouse of the Almighty* (2006), this accomplished work reaffirms her position as one of American's strongest and most clarion poetic voices. As Smith writes of Katrina, so to it might be said of this book, "Never has there been / a wind like this. Its throaty / howl has memorized / my name. And it calls, and it / calls, and lamb to ax, I come." --Mark E leveld

Smith is a good poet, and her voice is especially strong and keen where she lends it to what can't speak for itself -- the dead, a dog unintentionally left to die horribly, the storm itself. I was grateful to see her address something few commentators of any kind have -- how many people stayed in New Orleans not only because they couldn't afford to leave, but because they'd heard "storm of the century" so many times before. This was often as difficult an experience as I thought it might be; it took me a long time to feel ready for these poems. They're good poems even if they don't fall quite that close to your heart or your history. A few fizzle out a bit when they lose the thread of narrative in language, but those are far in the minority.

Blood Dazzler is brilliant, original, haunting, and at times so full of complicated ironic humor that you want to laugh, but these astonishing poems "about" Hurricane Katrina, and the mostly black lives who were lost in its fury hurt far too much for any sound--let alone laughter--to emerge out loud as you read these lines. Some of the most startling voices in these poems come from an abused, abandoned remarkably sentient dog, tied to a tree, who has figured out a whole hell of a lot more about what is happening in New Orleans than the folks from FEMA. Beg, buy or borrow it, but absolutely do make time to read Patricia Smith's stunning collection of poems.

Blood Dazzlers by Patricia Smith is the fourth collection of her works--enough to merit her one day having a complete works of . . . and hopefully with a cd of her reading her own works. After all, she is a spoken word artist, a national slam champion, and the pleasure of hearing her read her own words is the only way to truly present a complete collection. Do you already guess that I love Smith's poetry? The truth is, I went into this collection with a boat load of anticipation and very high expectations, a combination that can, and often does, damn a book before it is read; all the more so because I had heard her read one of the pieces from this collection at a poetry reading. Nevertheless, this is an ambitious collection that addresses the events leading up to, through, and after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. Not completely chronological, thematically the pieces are so tightly woven that the horror of the experience is realized on the page in ways that are both surprising and inevitable. Where Smith excels is in her use of personification--whether anthropomorphic or immersion of herself in the personae of another. Smith has grown as a poet, as an artist, and I look forward to her next offering with bated breath and eagerness.

My copy is so raggedy; dog-eared and scribbled throughout. Met the author and had her sign my pitiful copy and was thinking I maybe should be embarrassed. But she was gracious. And heck, I'm a writer too. That description is probably the best review one could give of any book.

This book of poetry is for anyone who wants a deeper understanding of the trauma and loss experienced by those directly impacted by Hurricane Katrina. I know someone who has visited New Orleans after hurricane Katina. He stated even with viewing first hand the physical devastation of the most affected areas, he did not fully appreciate the emotional impact to the residents until reading Patricia Smith's incredible work.

One of the best works of poetry published in the last twenty years, "Blood Dazzler" introduces the reader to an unforgettable cast of characters living through - some surviving, some not - one of the greatest natural disasters to ever hit the United States.

Classic poetry book. Really doesn't get better. Amazing imagery, great stories. Characters. This is a masterwork of one of the greatest poets in America. Although it's a very tough book about Hurricane Katrina with a lot of harsh imagery. But a masterpiece.

I bought this for a class, but was very pleasantly surprised. As someone who visited New Orleans after Katrina, I have only a small idea of what it must have been like for those who actually had to suffer the onslaught of the hurricane. This book of poetry does an awesome job of bringing that tragedy to light.

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