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Second collection reveals “poet of conscience”

PITTSBURGH—The University of Pittsburgh Press has just published *Bringing the Shovel Down*, the second poetry collection by Ross Gay. “These poems speak out of a global consciousness as well as an individual wisdom that is bright with pity, terror, and rage,” said esteemed poet Jean Valentine. “Gay is a poet of conscience, who echoes Tomas Tranströmer’s ‘We do not surrender. But want peace.’”

There are two versions of the title poem in the book—in the first, a dog is killed. “The original poem, in which the dog dies, is a meditation on how we come to be violent,” Gay explained. “And how we come to be violent is very human; it’s out of terror, and it’s actually, precisely, I think, the way that we as a country were convinced to go into a war.”

In the second version, the poet sees the dog as a fellow creature, and chooses not to take the canine’s life. Gay said he is exploring compassion and writing more joyful poems.

Gay is professor of creative writing at Indiana University’s College of Arts and Sciences and author of the collection *Against Which* (CavanKerry Press, 2006). His poems have appeared in *American Poetry Review*; *Atlanta Review*; *Harvard Review*; *Columbia: A Journal of Poetry and Art*; *Margie: The American Journal of Poetry*, and others.

A native of Youngstown, Ohio, Gay grew up outside of Philadelphia. He received his B.A. from Lafayette College, his M.F.A. in poetry from Sarah Lawrence College, and his Ph.D. in American literature from Temple University. He’s also been a basketball coach, painter, and an occasional demolition man.

Gay said that unlike some authors, he doesn’t necessarily write every day. “I probably write lines or words every day. And by words, I mean, like a word, just to remind myself of an idea for a poem that I might have. I’m sort of always with little notes on paper that I’m carrying around, but I don’t have a real firm schedule. I don’t wake up early, I don’t stay up late to do that kind of thing.”

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