AN EVENING WITH

NATASHA TRETWEHEWY

The Subir and Malini Chowdhury Foundation Distinguished Speakers Series

Tuesday, November 1, 2022
Bovard Auditorium
University of Southern California

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Natasha Trethewey is a renowned poet whose honors include a Pulitzer Prize, two terms as U.S. poet laureate, and the Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Prize for Lifetime Achievement in Poetry.

She has written five collections of poetry as well as a memoir and a book of nonfiction.

“I think that I have two existential wounds that make me a writer, and one of them is that great loss. I think that’s my deepest wound, losing my mother, but the other one is the wound of history that has everything to do with being born Black and biracial in a place that would render me illegitimate in the eyes of the law, a place that has tried to remind Black people for centuries of our second-class status . . . ”
—Natasha Trethewey in an interview in The New Yorker, August 12, 2020

NATASHA TRETWEHEWY

Natasha Trethewey was born on the Mississippi Gulf Coast to a Black mother and a white father, at a time when their interracial marriage was illegal. Her mother, Gwendolyn Ann Turnbough, was murdered by an abusive ex when Trethewey was 19. Trethewey has said these facts deeply inform her work as a writer.

Trethewey’s first book, *Domestic Work*, was selected by Rita Dove for the Cave Canem Poetry Prize for best first book by an African American poet. She has gone on to write four more books of poetry as well as a memoir and a book of nonfiction.
Among her numerous honors, Trethewey was poet laureate of the United States from 2012 to 2014, and poet laureate of the state of Mississippi from 2012 to 2016. From 2015 to 2016, she was the poetry editor of the *New York Times Magazine*. She won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for her poetry collection *Native Guard*. She is Board of Trustees Professor of English in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern University.

**BOOKS BY NATASHA TRETHEWEY**

**POETRY**
- *Thrall* (2012)
- *Native Guard* (2006)
- *Domestic Work* (2000)

**MEMOIR**
- *Memorial Drive: A Daughter’s Memoir* (2020)

**NONFICTION**

**AS EDITOR**
- *The Essential Muriel Rukeyser* (2021)
- *Best American Poetry 2017*
- *Best New Poets 2007*

**POET LAUREATES**
The U.S. poet laureate is appointed by the Librarian of Congress. Each poet laureate presents a reading and lecture at the Library of Congress, and many of them also engage in a national community-oriented poetry project. Trethewey's project was “Where Poetry Lives,” a PBS series Trethewey launched in 2013 that explores social issues through the lens of poetry. The position of U.S. poet laureate was endowed by philanthropist Archer M. Huntington in 1936.

**A DECADE OF U.S. POET LAUREATES**
- 2022– Ada Limón
- 2019–2022  Joy Harjo
- 2017–2019  Tracy K. Smith
- 2015–2017  Juan Felipe Herrera
- 2014–2015  Charles Wright
- 2012–2014  Natasha Trethewey
- 2011–2012  Philip Levine

The current Los Angeles Poet Laureate (appointed by the mayor) is Lynne Thompson.
THE SUBIR AND MALINI CHOWDHURY FOUNDATION DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS SERIES

The Subir and Malini Chowdhury Foundation Distinguished Speakers Series is an annual event that brings internationally renowned authors to USC. The series was inaugurated through the Department of English in collaboration with Visions and Voices in 2019 with a reading by Michael Ondaatje. After a pause in 2020, the 2021 speaker was Zadie Smith. Natasha Trethewey is the third distinguished speaker in the series.

The mission of the Subir and Malini Chowdhury Foundation is to advance education and improve the quality of life for everyone.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

○ How do personal experience and national history intersect? How do they inform Trethewey’s writing?
○ Natasha Trethewey has said, “Being able to tell one’s own story...is empowering.” What stories would it be empowering for you to tell?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

○ Where Poetry Lives  
  pbs.org/newshour/tag/where-poetry-lives
○ Cave Canem: A Home for Black Poetry  
  cavecanempoets.org
○ Academy of American Poets  
  poets.org
○ Upcoming Visions and Voices events, including
  11/3 Dahlak Brathwaite: Try/Step/Trip
  11/9 Michele Harper—Radical Truths: The Power of Storytelling to Dismantle Racism in Medicine
  11/9 John Singleton: A Celebration—Rosewood
  11/13 August Wilson’s Radio Golf
  11/30 John Singleton: A Celebration—Shaft
  12/2 The Brothers Paranormal
DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

HUGH MCHARG of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

BOOKS


DATABASES

- Black Women Writers
- Gale Literature Resource Center
- ProQuest One Literature

JOURNALS

- Contemporary Literature
- Poetry

OTHER RESOURCES

- Natasha Trethewey: An Interview
- Poet Laureate Natasha Trethewey Explores the Human Struggles We All Face