FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Tracy K. Smith, Director of Creative Writing Program at Princeton, named U.S. Poet Laureate
Librarian of Congress announces Pulitzer Prize-winning poet for prestigious national post

Photo caption: Tracy K. Smith, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, Professor and Director of the Lewis Center for the Arts’ Program in Creative Writing at Princeton named U.S. Poet Laureate
Photo credit: Frank Wojciechowski

(Princeton, NJ) Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden today announced the appointment of Tracy K. Smith as the Library’s 22nd Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry, for 2017-2018. Smith will take up her duties in the fall, opening the Library’s annual literary season with a reading of her work at the Coolidge Auditorium.

Smith is a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, a professor of creative writing and the Roger S. Berlind ’52 Professor in the Humanities at Princeton University, and Director of the University’s Program in Creative Writing in the Lewis Center for the Arts. She succeeds Juan Felipe Herrera as Poet Laureate.

“It gives me great pleasure to appoint Tracy K. Smith, a poet of searching,” Hayden said. “Her work travels the world and takes on its voices; brings history and memory to life; calls on the power of literature as well as science, religion, and pop culture. With directness and deftness, she
contends with the heavens or plumbs our inner depths—all to better understand what makes us most human."

"I am profoundly honored," notes Smith. “As someone who has been sustained by poems and poets, I understand the powerful and necessary role poetry can play in sustaining a rich inner life and fostering a mindful, empathic and resourceful culture. I am eager to share the good news of poetry with readers and future-readers across this marvelously diverse country."

Smith, a resident of Princeton, joins a long line of distinguished poets who have served in the position, including Juan Felipe Herrera, Charles Wright, Natasha Trethewey, Philip Levine, Kay Ryan, Charles Simic, Donald Hall, Ted Kooser, Louise Glück, Billy Collins, Stanley Kunitz, Robert Pinsky, Robert Hass, Rita Dove, William Meredith, Princeton Class of 1940, and W.S. Merwin, Princeton Class of 1948. Allen Tate, who served as Poet Laureate in 1943-44, helped to found the creative writing program at Princeton. He was hired in 1939 as the first Resident Fellow in Creative Writing to “act as general adviser to undergraduates interested in writing and will be in general charge of the new plan designed to further the work of entering freshman in creative writing.”


For her poetry, Smith has received a Rona Jaffe Writers Award and a Whiting Award. In 2014, the Academy of American Poets awarded her with the Academy Fellowship, given to one poet each year to recognize distinguished poetic achievement. In 2015, she won the 16th annual Robert Creeley Award and in 2016 was awarded Columbia University’s Medal for Excellence.

In the Pulitzer Prize citation for *Life on Mars*, judges lauded its “bold, skillful poems, taking readers into the universe and moving them to an authentic mix of joy and pain." Toi Derricotte,
poet and Academy of American Poets chancellor, said, “The surfaces of a Tracy K. Smith poem are beautiful and serene, but underneath, there is always a sense of an unknown vastness. Her poems take the risk of inviting us to imagine, as the poet does, what it is to travel in another person’s shoes.”

In learning the news of Smith’s appointment, Christopher Eisgruber, president of Princeton University, noted, “Tracy K. Smith is a gifted writer whose work sparkles with insight, imagination, and grace. We are fortunate that she teaches at Princeton, and I am delighted that she will now be our country’s poet laureate.”

Michael Cadden, chair of the Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton, added, “A brilliant artist and a deeply engaged member of the Princeton community, Tracy will now have even more opportunities to engage with communities across the country about how poetry addresses what it is to live fully, deeply, and consciously at this particular moment in time. When she lifts her voice, we would all do well to attend to what she has to say and how she has to say it.”

Born in Falmouth, Massachusetts in 1972, and raised in Fairfield, California, Smith earned a B.A. in English and American literature and Afro-American studies from Harvard University and an M.F.A. in creative writing from Columbia University. From 1997 to 1999, she was a Stegner Fellow in poetry at Stanford University. In addition to Princeton, Smith has taught at Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York, at the University of Pittsburgh and at Columbia University.

**Background of the Laureateship**

The Library of Congress Poetry and Literature Center is the home of the Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry, a position that has existed since 1936, when Archer M. Huntington endowed the Chair of Poetry at the Library. Since then, many of the nation’s most eminent poets have served as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress and, after the passage of Public Law 99-194 (Dec. 20, 1985), as Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry—a position which the law states “is equivalent to that of Poet Laureate of the United States.”
During his or her term, the Poet Laureate seeks to raise the national consciousness to a greater appreciation of the reading and writing of poetry. The Library keeps to a minimum the specific duties required of the Poet Laureate, who opens the literary season in the fall and closes it in the spring. In recent years, Laureates have initiated poetry projects that broaden the audiences for poetry.

For more information on the Poet Laureate and the Poetry and Literature Center, visit loc.gov/poetry/. Consultants in Poetry and Poets Laureate Consultants in Poetry and their terms of service can be found at loc.gov/poetry/laureate-2011-present.html. To learn more about Poet Laureate projects, visit loc.gov/poetry/laureate-projects.html.

The Library of Congress is the world’s largest library, offering access to the creative record of the United States—and extensive materials from around the world—both on-site and online. It is the main research arm of the U.S. Congress and the home of the U.S. Copyright Office. Explore collections, reference services and other programs and plan a visit at loc.gov; access the official site for U.S. federal legislative information at congress.gov; and register creative works of authorship at copyright.gov.

**About Princeton’s Program in Creative Writing**

Princeton’s Program in Creative Writing, now in its 78th year, is unique in its focus exclusively on undergraduate students by practicing, award-winning writers, including Jeffrey Eugenides, Jhumpa Lahiri, Yiyun Li, Paul Muldoon, Joyce Carol Oates, James Richardson, Tracy K. Smith, Kirstin Valdez Quade, Susan Wheeler, Edmund White, and a number of distinguished visiting lecturers. Small workshop courses, averaging eight to ten students, provide intensive feedback and instruction for both beginning and advanced writers. Through the Program, students can earn a certificate in creative writing in addition to their degree in a major. Each year, 20 to 30 seniors work individually with a member of the faculty on a creative writing thesis, such as a novel, screenplay, or a collection of short stories, poems, or translations.

The Program annually presents the Althea Ward Clark W’21 Reading Series which brings renowned writers to campus for public readings, including many past Poet Laureates, and the C.K. Williams Reading Series, hosted by the seniors in the program to showcase their work and
provide them the opportunity to read with and learn from established writers they admire. The series is named in honor of Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning poet C. K. Williams, who served on Princeton’s creative writing faculty for twenty years.

The Program is part of the Lewis Center for the Arts, which also encompasses the Programs in Dance, Music Theater, Theater and Visual Arts and the Princeton Atelier, founded by Princeton Professor, Emeritus, Toni Morrison. In October the Lewis Center will join the Department of Music in opening the major new Lewis Arts complex that will significantly expand the facilities dedicated to the arts at Princeton.

To learn more about the Program in Creative Writing at Princeton, the Lewis Center for the Arts, and the more than 100 performances, exhibitions, readings, screenings, concerts and lectures annually presented at the Lewis Center, most of them free, visit arts.princeton.edu.

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