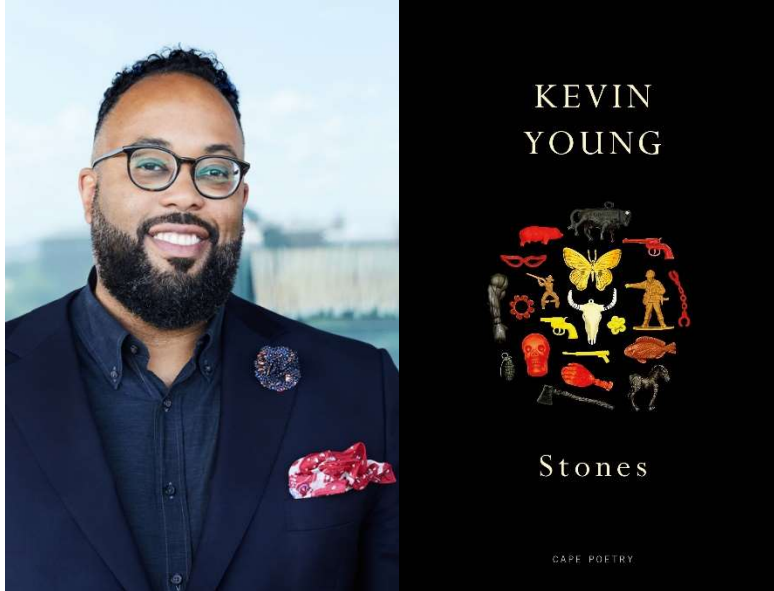


Stones

by Kevin Young



Kevin Young is the Andrew W. Mellon Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. He previously served as the director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Young is the author of fifteen books of poetry and prose. The poetry editor of the *New Yorker*, where he hosts the Poetry Podcast, Young is the editor of nine other volumes, most recently the acclaimed anthology *African American Poetry: 250 Years of Struggle & Song*. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Society of American Historians, and was named a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in 2020.

Reviews

'In *Stones*, Young mines his familial history and calls out moments of sorrow and joy, from musings on his grandmother Mama Annie to poems that consider the generations of people that have lived in the American South. The result is a blistering look at love, loss and everything in between'. - *Time*

'[Young is] excellent in a very particular way. American poetry is at present a jumble of styles, but Young writes in an almost harmonic register. His work can be quirky and brainy, but it's never alienating. . . . He's attentive to sound and wordplay, yet he largely sticks to the approachable free verse model that has dominated American writing for 60 years. His writing is warm, often elegiac and confidently temperate. There's a lot to like.' —David Orr, *New York Times Book Review*

'Young has a way of transforming these things, even grief, into something beautiful. . . . In *Stones*, his newest collection of poetry, Young mines his own roots. The 44 poems within serve as an homage to his loved ones and their home places. . . . We are lucky he allows us

to travel with him into his past and glance over his shoulder.’ - Jeremy Redmon, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

Oblivion

In the field the cows consider
 oblivion, mulling
it over. They and their many

 stomachs know nothing
stays lost forever — that grass, almost
 cruel, resurrects again,

again. They know even
 drought will end
though the family they belong to

 forgets. Cows know the slow
closing eye of the pond
 will once more open

& the sky — rain will find
 their bowed backs,
the burnt earth’s offering.

 Cows keep no cry, only
a slave’s low moan.
 This slight rise

they must climb.

Bouquet

Tell the sky —
 quit stealing
you away.

Above, storm clouds
 only threaten
& will not stay.

The sun finds us
 like fear, or family,
fills the stomach

& asks to borrow
 you awhile. Like sugar forgets
to bring you back.

My skin
 an orange peeling.
There aren't

enough words —
 only these, halting, half
erased in stone —

MY WIFE IS RESTING
 WITH JESUS. But just
how long the widower

sat here, staring at the hole
 no dirt can fill, the wound
in the ground above

his twenty-year-old bride
 whose stone now tilts
& wilts like a bouquet

I cannot say.

Sandy Road

The roads here
 only lately got names.
Before, we lived

on Rural route
 blank, the mailbox
far enough away

across a field
 it was worth a trek
only once a week

to find out what the world had
 to say. Its metal mouth
a garfish few found.

No streets, just this
 rushing stream
after a hard rain. Today

the roads remain
 mostly ditchwater & dirt —
small stones that migrate

but never far. Today
 my auntie complains
the roads were named

for grandnieces born yesterday
 who didn't do nothin' —
instead of after great-

grandfathers & others
 who cut their way
back here by hand

& hatchet, wheelbarrow
 & know-how,
trucking even

daylight in. These
 are our saints —
our *Emiles & Ad-oms*

& *Bananes* who made
 these roads right
as rain. We still live

in their straightaways
 & curves, slowly
buying back

what so & so's foolishness
 fretted away. Once the whole
doggone world was young —

once there were no words
 for things
& people had to wait

among the green

& listen first,
making sure

the things themselves,
the very stones,
would tell you what

they wished to be named.

Discussion Ideas

- Is 'Oblivion' an American poem? What might that term mean to you?
- Is 'Oblivion' a climate crisis poem? What might that term mean to you?
- Who is the 'you' in 'Bouquet'? What is the relationship between the speaker of the poem, the 'you' and the widower? What might they have in common? How are they related to the readers of the poem?
- What do you make of the title of 'Bouquet'? How is a bouquet like a gravestone? Or like the life of a twenty year old bride? Or how is it not like any of these things?
- Do you live on a residential street named after a figure from history? What's the story? Has the street always been called this? Has it changed? Who decides the names of new roads? Who would you name a new road after? Do you agree with the complaining auntie in 'Sandy Road'?

Other books by Kevin Young

Blue Laws: Selected & Uncollected Poems 1995-2015 (Alfred A Knopf, 2016)

Book of Hours (Alfred A Knopf, 2014)

Jelly Roll: a blues (Alfred A Knopf, 2003)

If you liked Kevin Young, try ...

- Shane McRae
- Thomas Sayers Ellis
- Roger Robinson

Kevin Young online

www.kevinyoungpoetry.com