

The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems

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William Stafford (1914-1993) was an earnest, perceptive, and often affecting American poet who filled his life and ours with poetry of challenge and consolation. *The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems* gathers unpublished works from his last year, including the poem he wrote the day he died, as well as an essential and wide-ranging selection of works from throughout his career. An editorial team including his son Kim Stafford, the poet Naomi Shihab Nye, and the poet, translator, and author Robert Bly collaborated on shaping this book of Stafford's pioneering career in modern poetry. The poems in *The Way It Is* encompass Stafford's rugged domesticity, the political edge of his irony, and his brave starings-off into emptiness.

What we remember about a lyric poet is an extremely small fraction of the total work: time, aided by editors, creates a reputation out of about five great poems. In the case of William Stafford, *The Way It Is* has considerably expanded the field of candidates. His widely anthologized "Ceremony," "Thinking for Berky," and "Traveling through the Dark" are here, along with other contenders, including "Adults Only," which begins, "Animals own a fur world; / people own worlds that are variously, pleasingly bare." A writer of silence, loss, memory, and conviction, Stafford wrote a poem almost every morning, rising at four to eat toast and compose. This is a part of his myth that the Stafford industry--other poets, workshop leaders, old friends--agrees is admirable, the hard-working farmhand who beats the cows to the dairy barn. Stafford's poem-a-day habit certainly made things difficult for his literary executors Kim Stafford, Naomi Shihab Nye, and Robert Bly. Nonetheless, *The Way It Is* manages to encompass a pleasingly varied survey of Stafford's 35- book career, from his first collection, *West of Your City*, published in 1960, to the lyric written on the morning of his death on August 28, 1993. Not every poem is as perfect as "The Farm on the Great Plains"; some of them are embarrassingly sentimental, and the editors have curiously omitted a number of Stafford's better and more complicated poems in favor of more recent unpublished ones that he presumably didn't have time to revise. But all Stafford poems are worth reading at least once, and in the absence of a many-volumed *Collected Poems*, *The Way It Is* is a useful compromise, making available poems from his moral, religious, secular, maverick, political, and apolitical modes--all of them wise and at once exquisitely rhetorical and deeply imagistic. --Edward Skoog

So, the world happens twice--
once what we see it as;
second it legends itself
deep, the way it is.

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The poems in *The Way It Is* encompass Stafford's rugged domesticity, the political edge of his irony, and his brave starings off into emptiness. What emerges here is Stafford's faith in language and the soul, those things that form the base for his artistic gyroscope. This

collection reveals the depth and breadth of a poet for whom the art was to make a life richly lived.

Born in Hutchinson, Kansas, in 1914, William Stafford was one of our most prolific and celebrated poets. He was a witness for peace, and for honesty, recognizing in his writing that "justice will take us millions of intricate moves." Author of over fifty books, and recipient of the National Book Award for *Traveling through the Dark*, Stafford was a professor at Lewis & Clark College, and a traveling teacher throughout the world. As a conscientious objector during World War II, he began his unswerving habit of writing before dawn each day, and his habitual generosity to other writers and readers. After serving as consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress in 1970, he was named Oregon's Poet Laureate in 1975. He died at his home in Oregon in 1993.

Other Books

A. R. Ammons: *Selected Poems*, Meditative, comic, emotionally wrenching, steeped in both the natural world and the life of the mind, the poetry of A. R. Ammons is at once cosmic in scope and intimate in its moment-to-moment transformations. With his mastery of description and cadence, his roiling wit and fearless gaze, Ammons was a philosopher of the everyday who found surprise everywhere he looked. "He is often witty, sometimes bawdy," writes editor David Lehman, "on a perpetual quest to find forms capacious enough for an imagination intent on finding a place for everything." A compound, in editor David Lehman's words, of "wisdom, pathos, humor, mortal longing, and intimations of immortality," the work of A. R. Ammons is like nothing else in modern American poetry. Ammons's tireless formal invention and restless curiosity about every aspect of nature and of the mind are embodied in poetry that is effortlessly accessible and generous in its impulses. Whether spreading out in the long forms of *Tape for the Turn of the Year* or *Garbage*, or honing his perceptions down to the extreme brevity of his shorter lyrics, he holds tight to his vision of the way "all day / life itself is bending, / weaving, changing, / adapting, failing, / succeeding." This new selection covering the whole range of Ammons's career offers a superb introduction to the pleasures and surprises of his work. His uncanny ability to balance wide-ranging abstract speculation with meticulous observation of natural phenomena, in poetry that encompasses moods of tragic pathos, low comedy, and seemingly casual profundity marks him as one of the preeminent figures in our recent literature. About the American Poets Project Elegantly designed in compact editions, printed on acid-free paper, and textually authoritative, the American Poets Project makes available the full range of the American poetic accomplishment, selected and introduced by today's most discerning poets and critics.

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