

Work & Days

Poetry by Tess Taylor
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Tess Taylor

**Confirmed press in
*Oprah, The Barnes
and Noble Review,
Travel and Leisure,
and NPR***



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POETRY BY
Tess Taylor

A poet hailed as “stunning” reveals a fierce and sensual intelligence in a meditation about farming, reproducing, and what it means to try to forge a relationship with the earth.

In 2010, Tess Taylor was awarded the Amy Clampitt Fellowship. Her prize: A rent-free year in a cottage in the Berkshires, where she could finish a first book. But Taylor—outside the city for the first time in nearly a decade, and trying to conceive her first child—found herself alone. To break up her days, she began to intern on a small farm, planting leeks, turning compost, and weeding kale. In this calendric cycle of 28 poems, Taylor describes the work of this year, considering what attending to vegetables on a small field might achieve now. Against a backdrop of drone strikes, “methamphetamine and global economic crisis,” these poems embark on a rich exploration of season, self, food, and place. Threading through the farm poets—Hesiod, Virgil, and John Clare—Taylor revisits the project of small scale farming at the troubled beginning of the 21st century. In poems full of bounty, loss and the mysteries of the body, Taylor offers a rich, severe, memorable meditation about what it means to try to connect our bodies, and our time on earth.

Praise for *Work & Days*

“*Work & Days* is our moment’s Georgic, our lyric book about labor and retreat, security and greenness, a book with “a thousand leeks to plant” and also a lament, in “cello tones . . . It is not coming back.” It is vividly seen but also full of open space: Taylor invites us . . . into a seasonal cycle that’s not what it was, that reflects a changing earth, but one that nevertheless looks back to antiquity fully persuaded that its traditions are here for us too.”

—Stephen Burt

“The shape of a day, a year, a life; the press of mortality; the clutch of soil; the specific angles of light in each season: *Work & Days* takes the measure of a contemporary life anchoring itself, provisionally, in a farming year. The beauty here co-exists with rot, ripeness with blight. Taylor’s poems are lean, her imagination and reckoning rich. The turn of the plow offers one of the oldest images of the turnings of verse: Taylor’s poems carve their own furrow in our common soil—a line between wanting and getting, working and hoping, learning and failing, losing and making. This is a severe, attentive book, paradoxically lush in its very stringencies. Despite all, ‘a throaty world sings *ripen*.’”

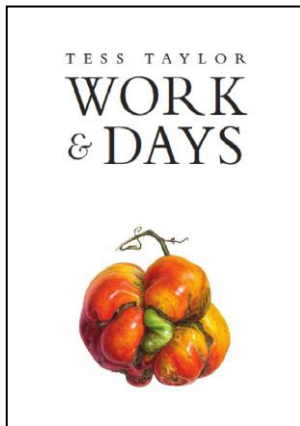
—Maureen McLane

“Taylor is geologically, biologically, and morally alert. With a naturalist’s painterly and wide-open gaze, she includes crises of war and environment alongside the actual, detailed labors of greenhouse and field. This book presents the knowledge of labor in many forms: its ripening in gardens and farms, culture and birth-giving, an inseparable part of our days’ broader makings within the ‘chapped farmhouse’ that houses our hard-won, shared fates amid the existence of all.”

—Jane Hirshfield

Biographical Note

Tess Taylor is the author of *The Forage House*, finalist for the Believer Poetry Award. An avid gardener and cook, she dropped out of Amherst College in her twenties to become a translator and chef’s assistant at L’Ecole Ritz Escoffier in Paris. Her poems and essays have appeared widely in publications including *The New Yorker*, *The Academy of American Poets*, and *The New York Times*. She is currently the on air poetry reviewer for NPR’s “All Things Considered,” and was most recently visiting professor of English and creative writing at Whittier College.



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Praise for Tess Taylor and *The Forage House*

“This first collection reveals a poet with a fully formed voice and involving subject matter, and the genealogy she presents provides a rare view of our history, deepened with mystery.”
—*Library Journal*

“[Taylor] invites us to not only inhabit the past with her, but also to examine the impossibility of ever really knowing it completely. Because of Taylor’s candor, *The Forage House* succeeds as both historical record and a well-written poetry collection, a memorable combination that invites us to inhabit Taylor’s vision of the past.”
—*New Pages*

“[An] expansive, impeccably wrought collection. . . . Taylor’s debut is a morally complex work—an ambitious attempt to unearth and creatively re-construct her family’s history—and one that is ultimately as concerned with the act of reconstruction as with the reconstruction itself.”
—*The Believer*

“Personal history and American history become intertwined in *The Forage House*, the stunning debut collection by Bay Area poet Tess Taylor.”
—*SF Chronicle*

“Visceral, densely detailed, and frequently playful, . . . [*The Forage House* is] a lyric wonder rich with the complications of an Old South genealogy.”
—*Oxford American*

From *Work & Days*

Mud Season

We unstave the winter’s tangle.
Sad tomatoes, sullen sky.

We unplay the summer’s blight.
Rotted on the vine, black fruit

swings free of the strings that bound it.
In the compost, ghost melon; in the fields,

grotesque extruded peppers.
We prod half-thawed mucky things.

In the sky, starlings eddying.
Tomorrow, snow again, old silence.

Today, the creaking icy puller.
Last night I woke

to wild unfrozen prattle.
Rain on the roof—a foreign liquid tongue.