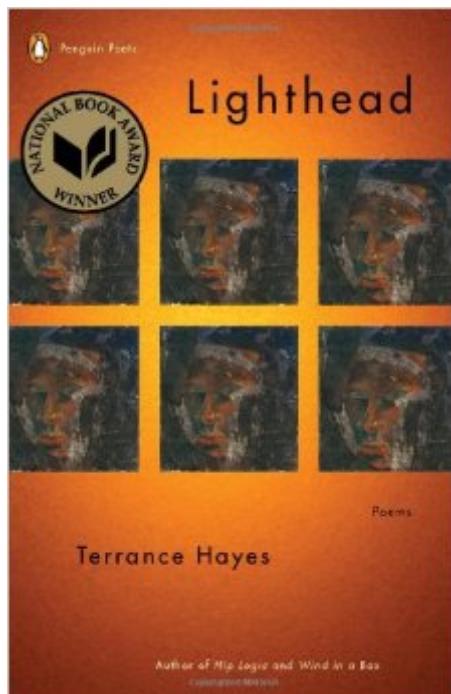


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# Lighthead (Penguin Poets)



## Synopsis

Â Winner of the 2010 National Book Award for PoetryIn his fourth collection, Terrance Hayes investigates how we construct experience. With one foot firmly grounded in the everyday and the other hovering in the air, his poems braid dream and reality into a poetry that is both dark and buoyant. Cultural icons as diverse as Fela Kuti, Harriet Tubman, and Wallace Stevens appear with meditations on desire and history. We see Hayes testing the line between story and song in a series of stunning poems inspired by the Pecha Kucha, a Japanese presentation format. This innovative collection presents the light-headedness of a mind trying to pull against gravity and time. Fueled by an imagination that enlightens, delights, and ignites, Lighthead leaves us illuminated and scorched.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

To read "Lighthead: Poems" by Terrance Hayes is to enter a world that's distinctly uncomfortable, almost jarring, as if the familiar has become dislocated. Perhaps it's like experiencing lightheadedness, except it's experiencing it as a state of normal. And you know this from the beginning of this collection of poems: "Ladies and gentlemen, ghosts and children of the state, / I am here because I could never get the hang of Time. / This hour, for example, would be like all the others / were it not for the rain falling through the roof. / I'd better not be too explicit..."(from "Lighthead's Guide to the Galaxy"). Time in these poems, for example, is itself not so much relative as tenuous, as if it's always slipping away or defined by other tenuous and temporary things. In a related poems group entitled "Three Measures of Time," his brother tells time by food ("The past is

nutritious; the past is there on the table / with the hair you know is Ma's color..."); his father tells time by smell ("The smell / of barbecue in a sentence, the scent / long gone flat as money")' and his mother by "none of the hours jumping at the window. /By the joblessness of God and the body / beneath a floral bedsheet..."Place, too, is something ephemeral, as in "Fish Head for Katrina:"The mouth is where the deadWho are not dead do not dream.A house of damaged translationsTask married to distractionAs in a bucket left in a stormA choir singing in the rain like fishAcquiring air under waterPrayer and sin the bodyPerforms to know it is aliveLit from the inside by reckoningAs in a cityWhich is no longer a city...

In this book, Terrence Hayes does something that I've never quite seen done before; he's smoothly synthesized the sound-and-emotion-oriented style of spoken-word poetry with the artful arrangement and order of more conceptual, academic poetry. For that, I have to give him some five-star love, even though a lot of the poems talk a lot about African-American identity and racism in a way that I have a hard time taking into my own experience. Yet the guy also references David Bowie, Wallace Stevens, "A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Antony and the Johnsons...so it's blazingly clear that he isn't a one-trick rapper/poet. Really though, some dazzling stuff here, particularly his invention of the "pecha kucha" form (based on a style of Japanese slideshow used for business presentations). The tension between the "slides"/stanzas and their individual titles fleshes out the concepts in an even deeper way, even beyond the surface-level puzzles that he puts forward, so that the pieces end up working on multiple levels and kind of driving you insane and force you to read them over and over, getting more and more out of them each time. There's some game-changing stuff in there. As mentioned before, I love how omnivorous he is with his references and also with his themes; love, family, the personal vs. cultural/racial history, music...there's even some funny stuff in there too! For all the brou-ha-ha about the National Book Award committee being so ivory-tower-y, I can't fault them picking this book, at least.

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