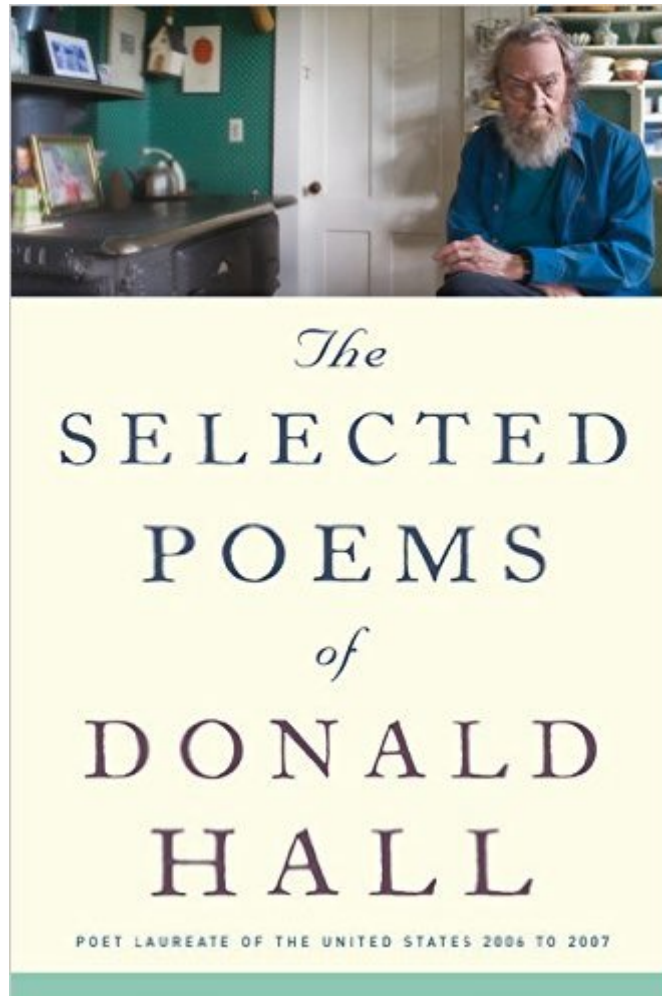


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The Selected Poems Of Donald Hall



Synopsis

Former poet laureate Donald Hall selects the essential work from a moving and brilliant life in poetry. The ability to write poems has abandoned Donald Hall, now in his eighties, one of the most significant and beloved poets of his generation. Instead of creating new poems, he has looked back over his astonishingly rich body of work and hand-picked poems for this final, concise volume that will delight, and endure. The Selected Poems of Donald Hall is the definitive collection, showcasing poems rich with humor and eros and a kind of simplicity that succeeds in engaging the reader in the first few lines (Billy Collins). However wrenching [Hall's poems] may be from line to line, they tell a story that is essentially reassuring: art and love are compatible, genius is companionable, and people stand by one another in the end (New York Times Book Review).

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Customer Reviews

Between 1955 and 2011 Donald Hall published sixteen books of poems. For this, his last book of poems (so he says, at age 87), he has selected from those sixteen books what he regards to be his best poems. THE SELECTED POEMS makes for a fitting valediction, and at the same time a good introduction to a distinctive American poet. Of the acclaimed American poets I am familiar with, Hall's poetry is more accessible than most. There are 79 poems in this selection: I understood the vast majority of them -- perhaps not all details or nuances, but at least the essence of them. Hall's poetry is not abstract, esoteric, or mystical. The broad setting is America; the more specific setting is New England country life. What is most characteristic of Hall's poetry is that it is intensely personal. Most

of the poems are about Donald Hall, his life and his loved ones. Many of the poems are memorials or lamentations -- for his grandparents, his father, his mother, and for Jane Kenyon. Especially for Jane Kenyon, his wife of 23 years who died of leukemia at age 47. At least a fifth of the poems in the book mourn Jane, some bitterly and angrily. Once again in reading Hall I am brought up short by how starkly and pitilessly he bares his soul. (Along the same lines, this collection reveals an obsession with the act denoted by the strong Middle English word more genteelly rendered as "copulation".) Of the 79 poems presented here, I marked eight to return to if and when I conduct a personal poetry-reading retrospective. That relatively low ten percent figure is due in large part to the fact that so many of the poems are so personal, and as such they aren't nearly as meaningful to me as they are to Donald Hall.

Donald Hall, 87, says he can't write poems any more. But he can still write essays and articles, and he can still select his favorite poems and assemble them into a collection that illustrates a lifetime of poetry. The collection is entitled, appropriately enough, "The Selected Poems of Donald Hall." The poems are drawn from some 16 collections of poetry Hall has published since 1955. His poetry is what might be called "New England Plain Speak," not unlike that of another New Englander, Robert Frost. Hall's poetry comes from the land, the weather and the people of New England, specifically New Hampshire and Connecticut, a poetry that is often flint-like and always spare. He's had a distinguished career. He met Robert Frost at the Bread Loaf Writers Conference. According to his biography at The Poetry Foundation, he studied at Harvard, with classmates like Adrienne Rich, Robert Bly, Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery. He received a degree from Oxford. From 1953 to 1961, he was the poetry editor for the Paris Review. He began teaching at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, marrying one of his students, Jane Kenyon. She died from leukemia in 1995, and some of the most moving poems he wrote (several of which are included in this collection) are about Jane, her illness and death, and his grief. In 2006 he was named U.S. Poet Laureate. His poetry is known for something unusual for poets -- it got better as he got older. His grandparents lived on a farm called Eagle Pond in New Hampshire; when his grandmother died, he bought the farm and has lived there ever since. Jane Kenyon died there. He's written a collection of essays about the farm, Eagle Pond, and has published a childhood memoir entitled Christmas at Eagle Pond.

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