

Primer



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In his third poetry collection, *Primer*, Aaron Smith grapples with the ugly realities of the private self, in which desire feels more like a trap than fulfillment. What is the face we prepare in our public lives to distract others from our private grief? Smith's poetry explores that inexplicable tension between what we say and how we actually feel, exposing the complications of intimacy and the limitations of language to bridge those distances between friends, family members, and lovers. What we deny, in the end, may be just what we actually survive. Mortality in Smith's work remains the uncomfortable foundation at the center of our relationship with others, to faith, to art, to love as we grow older, and ultimately, to our own sense of who we are in our bodies in the world. The struggle of this book, finally, is in naming whether just what we say we want is enough to satisfy our primal needs, or are the choices we make to stay alive the same choices we make to help us, in so many small ways, to die.