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00:06

I'm Tracy k Smith, and this is the slow down.

00:22

When I was a student of poetry, I spent a long time fretting about finding my voice. I knew what the poets I loved sounded like, I knew what kinds of words and phrases spoke to me. But I didn't know how I ought to make myself sound. It was years before I came to recognize that my own voice did have a sound, and that it was something intrinsic to me, my thoughts and feelings, I need not have bothered with all that worry, which could have been better directed at a great many other things. One way poets and people develop a voice is through listening. The sound of the world you live in, informs the particular nature of your own emerging voice. And so we are all many different things at once, patterned after the many different models we absorb, consciously and unconsciously. I'm tempted to say that the great American poet, Walt Whitman's body of work might be best described as an act of listening, a gathering up and celebrating of all the many things that inform the poet's sense of self, and place, a nation. Maybe this is why Whitman revised his work again and again throughout his lifetime. Because what he heard, changed. These lines come from the 1900 version of his poem, Song of Myself, I think, I will do now nothing, but listen to a crew, what I hear into myself. And maybe that's what poets are doing, fashioning a larger, Fuller, truer version of their individual selves by attempting to absorb as much of the world as they can. It's not easy. Sometimes it's hard to know if what you're hearing or saying means anything at all. That's why I'm drawn to today's poem, failure by Eugene Gloria. Because it's honest about the vexations of writing, even as it demonstrates the ways that what feels like failure can actually be valuable progress. That's one of the exciting things about writing poetry and living life. We're not always in a position to recognize the big picture, things are adding up to. But over time, the work of being open and receptive to the world enlarges us, it fills us with voices

and ideas and perspectives that can make the hard work of writing and living feel more doable. Failure by Eugene Gloria, I think I will do nothing now. But listen, listen, and rest my head on the noise of familiars to accrue what I hear into myself, and let the pitter patter, the birdie chatter, the Kokoro of the core or the dum dum to accumulate in me how Hopkins does it holds us captive. I cannot tell or how Pessoa makes us forget how to spell. Today, I felt like a failure. A harangue bird whose calls jolt like a doorbell or smother like a pea coat in summer. My malarkey is no more. No mas talkie talkie por meio. For I know failure Well, I live in her house and make her bed, serve her tea and toast and sweep up her mess. You can say she's harsh, but she's also a kind master. whispering the infinite in my ear when I choose to listen. The slowdown is a production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily, go to slowdownshow.org and sign up for our newsletter.