



CHRIS ABANI | SMOKING
THE BIBLE



2023 UNT Rilke Prize

Chris Abani – *Smoking the Bible*

Chris Abani's *Smoking the Bible* (Copper Canyon Press) has won the 2023 UNT Rilke Prize. The \$10,000 prize recognizes a book written by a mid-career poet and published in the preceding year that demonstrates exceptional artistry and vision. Abani will be present for two events: a Q&A on October 4th, 2023, at 6:30 PM in University Union 339 and a reading and book signing on October 5th, 2023, at 8:00 PM in University Union 382.

In his most recent collection, *Smoking the Bible*, Chris Abani memorializes--through the imaginative journey that poems so often take--a brother who has been given the diagnosis of "Terminal." Alongside this commitment to elegize a loved one is a second voyage.

Often in brief portraits, poems diminutive as carved cameos, Abani writes of migrations to new countries and continents, of leaving behind a homeland that is both "wound and suture," a lost landscape whose "persistent aftertaste" follows the speaker everywhere he goes. *Smoking the Bible* is a book intent on understanding nostalgia, a word that burns with pain and grief, but one that also suggests the "flutter of release." Evocative, rich with sensory detail, Abani's poems transport the reader from Nigeria to America's Midwest, ranging between memory, dream, and revelatory vision. At its heart, *Smoking the Bible* worries about acts of translation, how difficult it is to translate languages and cultures. And, beyond that, how we struggle to translate the past into present. "I promise / to walk with you as far as I can," the speaker tells his dying brother, the space between death and the living the most difficult translation of all.





