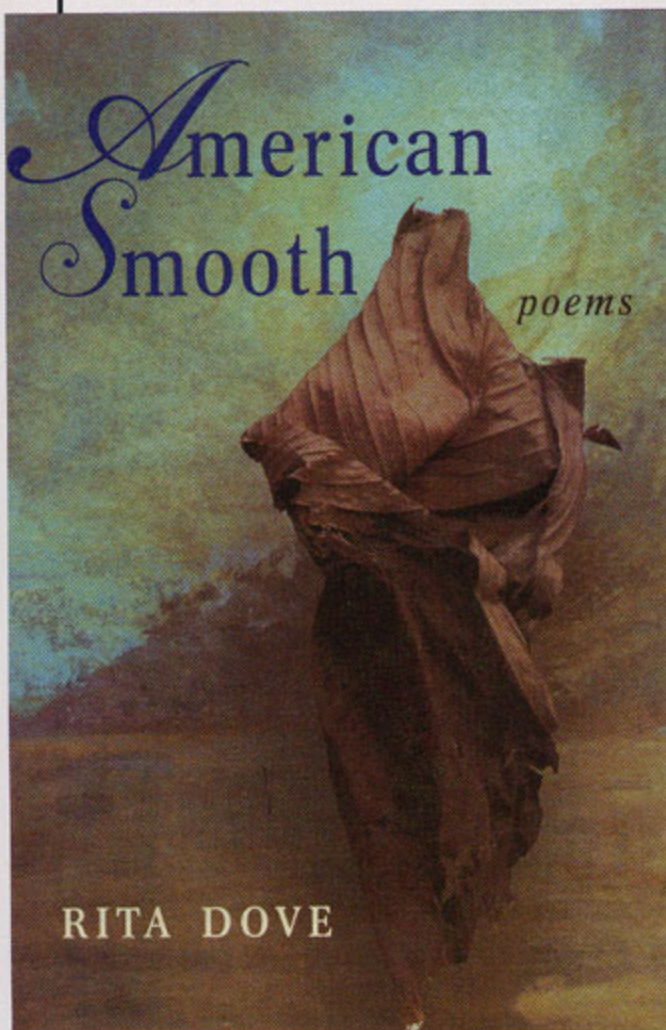


BookSHELF

SOUL DANCE



Dance as a metaphor for life is not a new theme. However, in **AMERICAN SMOOTH** (W.W. Norton, \$22.95), Pulitzer Prize-winning author Rita Dove, the former U.S. poet laureate, takes it to a new level to explore our cultural heritage in her first new collection of poetry in five years. Dove's poems cover the waterfront—from the glorious shimmer of an operatic soprano to Bessie Smith's mournful wail, from paradise lost to

angel-food cake to the Black jazz band in World War I whose music conquered Europe before the Allied advance. Like the ballroom-dancing couple of the title poem, smiling and making the intricate steps seem effortless, Dove explores the shifting surfaces between perception and reality. And for a new generation rediscovering couple dancing, as seen with the current national fascination with Chicago-style Stepping and Detroit-style Ballroom dance, Dove's masterful collection spotlights the grace and beauty of moving in tandem while highlighting the power of individual expression and improvisation.