

# best of the best american poetry david lehman

**Best of the Best American Poetry by David Lehman** is a remarkable anthology that captures the essence and diversity of contemporary American poetry. As the series editor of "The Best American Poetry," David Lehman has been instrumental in shaping the landscape of American verse over the past few decades. This collection stands as a testament to his keen eye for talent and his commitment to showcasing the vibrancy of poetic expression in the United States. In this article, we will delve into the themes, notable poets, and the significance of Lehman's work in the realm of American poetry.

## Understanding the Anthology

The "Best American Poetry" series, founded in 1988, has become a cornerstone for poetry lovers and critics alike. Each volume features a curated selection of poems from various sources, including literary journals, magazines, and online platforms. David Lehman, with his extensive background in poetry and literature, has been the guiding force behind this anthology, ensuring that it reflects the breadth and depth of contemporary voices.

## The Selection Process

One of the most intriguing aspects of "Best of the Best American Poetry" is the selection process. Lehman collaborates with a guest editor each year, allowing for fresh perspectives and insights. The process involves:

1. Submissions: Poets submit their works to various journals and magazines.
2. Curation: The guest editor reviews the submissions and selects standout pieces that resonate with them.
3. Final Selection: Lehman compiles these selections, often adding his own commentary and insights.

This collaborative approach not only enriches the anthology but also broadens the scope, showcasing emerging poets alongside established names.

## Thematic Diversity

One of the hallmarks of Lehman's anthologies is their thematic diversity. The poems included in "Best of the Best American Poetry" address a myriad of subjects, reflecting the complexities of modern life. Some prominent themes include:

## Identity and Self-Exploration

Many contemporary poets grapple with questions of identity, exploring aspects such as race, gender, and sexuality. This theme is particularly salient in the works of poets like:

- Ocean Vuong: His poetry often delves into the experiences of being a Vietnamese-American, navigating the intersections of personal and collective history.
- Terrance Hayes: Hayes's poems examine Black identity in America, using rich imagery and poignant language to articulate the struggles and triumphs of his experience.

## Nature and Environment

The natural world continues to inspire poets who seek to capture its beauty and fragility. In "Best of the Best American Poetry," you'll find works that reflect on:

- Climate Change: Poets address the urgency of environmental issues, using their verses to evoke a sense of responsibility and awareness.
- Personal Connection to Nature: Several poems explore the intimate relationships between individuals and their natural surroundings, celebrating the solace and inspiration that nature provides.

## Love and Relationships

Love, in all its forms, remains a timeless theme in poetry. The anthology features poems that explore:

- Romantic Love: Many poets articulate the complexities of romantic relationships, reflecting on passion, heartbreak, and reconciliation.
- Familial Bonds: The exploration of family dynamics, including parent-child relationships and sibling connections, is prominent in the works of poets such as Ada Limón and Mark Doty.

## Notable Poets and Their Contributions

"Best of the Best American Poetry" showcases a diverse array of poets, each contributing their unique voice and perspective. Here are some notable poets featured in the anthology:

## **Louise Glück**

Louise Glück, the 2020 Nobel Prize winner in Literature, is known for her introspective and often confessional style. Her poems explore themes of loss, family, and the passage of time. Her inclusion in Lehman's anthology underscores her significant impact on contemporary poetry.

## **Natasha Trethewey**

As a former U.S. Poet Laureate, Natasha Trethewey's work often grapples with the history of race in America. Her poems reflect her Southern heritage and the complexities of identity, memory, and belonging. Trethewey's poignant voice resonates deeply with readers, and her presence in the anthology highlights the importance of cultural narratives in poetry.

## **Mary Oliver**

Mary Oliver's nature-inspired poetry has captivated readers for decades. Her ability to convey profound truths about life and existence through simple yet evocative language makes her one of America's most beloved poets. Her work often encourages readers to find beauty and meaning in the natural world, making her a fitting inclusion in Lehman's anthology.

## **The Significance of "Best of the Best American Poetry"**

Lehman's anthology serves multiple purposes, making it an essential read for poetry enthusiasts, students, and anyone seeking to understand contemporary American poetry. Here are some reasons why this collection is significant:

### **Celebrating Diversity**

"Best of the Best American Poetry" celebrates the rich tapestry of voices in American poetry. By highlighting poets from various backgrounds, Lehman emphasizes the importance of diverse perspectives in shaping the literary landscape.

### **Encouraging New Voices**

The anthology often features emerging poets alongside established figures,

providing a platform for new voices to be heard. This inclusivity encourages readers to explore the work of lesser-known poets, broadening their literary horizons.

## **Preserving Literary Heritage**

Lehman's work contributes to the preservation of contemporary poetry as part of America's literary heritage. By curating these collections, he ensures that future generations will have access to a rich repository of poetic expression that reflects the complexities of modern life.

## **Conclusion**

In "Best of the Best American Poetry," David Lehman has curated a collection that not only showcases the talent and diversity of contemporary poets but also invites readers to reflect on the themes that shape our lives. As we navigate an increasingly complex world, poetry remains a vital medium for exploring personal and collective experiences. With its rich array of voices and perspectives, this anthology serves as both a celebration of American poetry and a reminder of its enduring power to inspire, challenge, and connect us all. Whether you are a seasoned poetry lover or new to the genre, Lehman's anthology is a treasure trove of insights and emotions waiting to be discovered.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is 'Best of the Best American Poetry' edited by David Lehman?**

'Best of the Best American Poetry' is a curated anthology that features standout poems from previous volumes of 'The Best American Poetry' series, selected by editor David Lehman to showcase the finest contemporary American poetry.

### **How does David Lehman choose poems for the anthology?**

David Lehman selects poems based on their literary merit, emotional impact, and their representation of diverse voices and styles within contemporary American poetry.

## **What themes are prevalent in 'Best of the Best American Poetry'?**

Themes in the anthology include love, loss, nature, identity, and the complexities of modern life, reflecting a broad spectrum of human experience and emotion.

## **Who are some notable poets featured in this anthology?**

The anthology includes works by renowned poets such as Billy Collins, Mary Oliver, and Rita Dove, alongside emerging voices in contemporary poetry.

## **What makes 'Best of the Best American Poetry' a significant collection?**

The collection is significant because it not only highlights the best poems from previous volumes but also serves as a comprehensive introduction to contemporary American poetry for new readers.

## **How has the reception been for 'Best of the Best American Poetry'?**

The anthology has been well-received by critics and readers alike, praised for its thoughtful selection and its ability to engage both seasoned poetry lovers and newcomers.

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