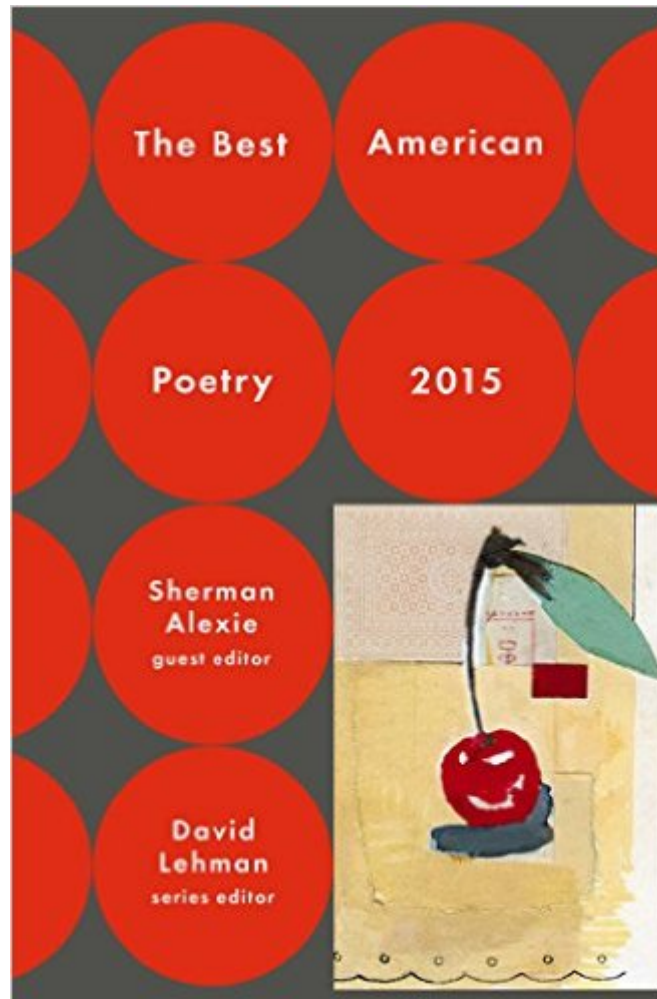


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# The Best American Poetry 2015 (The Best American Poetry Series)



## Synopsis

The premier anthology of contemporary American poetry continues with an exceptional volume edited by award-winning novelist and poet Sherman Alexie, now with a new essay by Alexie on reactions to the 2015 publication. Since its debut in 1988, *The Best American Poetry* has become a mainstay for the direction and spirit of American poetry. Each volume in the series presents the year's most extraordinary new poems and writers. Guest editor Sherman Alexie's picks for *The Best American Poetry 2015* highlight the depth and breadth of the American experience. Culled from electronic and print journals, the poems showcase some of our leading luminaries—Amy Gerstler, Terrance Hayes, Ron Padgett, Jane Hirshfield—and introduce a number of outstanding younger poets taking their place in the limelight. A leading figure since his breakout poetry collection *The Business of Fancydancing* in 1992, Sherman Alexie won the National Book Award for his novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. He describes himself as “a lucky enough to be a full-time writer” and has written short stories, novels, screenplays, and essays—but he is at his core a poet. As always, series editor David Lehman's foreword assessing the state of the art kicks off the book, followed by an introductory essay in which Alexie discusses his selections. *The Best American Poetry 2015* is a guide to who's who and what's happening in American poetry today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Whether it be short stories or poetry, I always pick up a collection assuming I won't like the

whole thing. With short stories, I'm generally pretty happy if I like more than half and thrilled if it's over three-quarters. With poetry anthologies, especially those by multiple authors, it's a bit of a different story. Give me a handful of poems that strike me on the spot, or that linger in the mind long after (sometimes they're the same and sometimes not), or even some lines that wow me, and I'm good. Because one good poem, or three powerful lines can make up for a whole lot of meh. If you can't find underlines or margin notes (or in the case of my Kindle, highlights and bookmarks) in my poetry book, I didn't much care for it. So how does Best American Poetry 2015 fare on this scale? Pretty good, even if to be honest there were a lot of poems that just didn't do it for me. But as poetry is so incredibly subjective, and as a reader isn't investing in a 900-page novel, I'm going to focus less on what I didn't care for and more on what I did (if I refer to great lines but don't offer them up, it's so as not to ruin the effect of their arrival in the poem for the reader).

Jame's Galvin's "On the Sadness of Wedding Dresses" is a plainspoken piece that begins with a striking conception: On starless, windless nights like this I can hear the wedding dresses weeping in their closets Luminescent with hopeless longing, Like hollow angels. and then moves on to some surprisingly evocative imagery as the dresses turn yellow over time, Yellow from praying For the moths to come And carry them into the sky. The sky reappears at the close in a much more starkly concrete image, but one probably unexpected by the readers. Madelyn Garner imagines the inner thoughts of a next-door neighbor who comes outside, In her florid pink nightgown, Exposed breasts like pendulums As she kneels in the gravel Speaking to an empty planter. As the two of us Wait in the kitchen For her children, it is clear Her thoughts float From the back of the skull to the front . . . How resigned she seems To the eviction notices her body is receiving. Along with her neighbor's thought, the speaker thinks as well of the neighbor's family, their conversation about selling the house Because she is a system of bone and blood Because her hands are rusted hinges Because wisps of spiderwebs float behind eyelids The brief stanzas, the sound quality, the use of repetition all build to a thoughtful, powerful impact, especially in the closing lines.

"Goodness in Mississippi," by Lawanda Walters, is another poem that ends with a killer close. The piece opens with a great sense of voice: My friend said I wasn't fat but she was, and we would go on that way, back and forth. She was my first real friend, the kind who changes everything. Her mother was so cool, Didn't shave down there for the country club Pool where we sat beside her. I saw a gleam of her secret, silver hair The conversation tone, the sense of confidence lulls the reader into a kind of peacefulness, one shattered by a brutal ending that has stayed with me. An excerpt from

Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*, meanwhile, which may be as much essay as poem and makes highly effective use of second person should send all readers straight to her collection, if you haven't already read it. Laura Kasischke's *For the Young Woman I Saw Hit by a Car While Riding Her Bike* gives us a piece whose trauma lies not with the bike rider (I tell you upfront: She was fine) but with the witness, who after imagining the young girl laughing over the witness's reaction, thinks: But, ah, sweet thing, take pity. One day you too may be an accumulation of regrets, catastrophes. And then moves the reader into unforeseen territory, allowing us not just understanding, but that sense of pity she so gently asks of the young woman. There are other strong poems in the collection, and even more strong lines, even if the poems they are contained in didn't succeed as a whole for me. And yes, lots of the poems just didn't work at all for me. Some felt more language game than poem, others were technically impressive but left me feeling cold, some I couldn't recall for you a few minutes after reading them. But as mentioned, I expect that in a poetry anthology. The joy is that there is so much here, and the editors have spread such a wide banquet in terms of style, length, and diversity of perspective that it's hard to imagine someone not finding several poems and even more lines that they too would highlight or read to their significant other or a friend, even if they aren't the same ones. I would have preferred to have enjoyed more of the poems as a whole, but I can live happily with what I loved.

Poetry = Anger x Imagination, Sherman Alexie wrote in his preface to this collection he edited. Love and memory also power many of its best poems. Asian Americans wrote some scathing responses when it was found that a white man who submitted work under an assumed Asian name. That aside, there are excellent writing. One standout for me was Lawanda Walters, who writes hauntingly of her childhood in Mississippi. Laura Kasischke wrote *For the Young Woman I Saw Hit by a Car While Riding Her Bike*. David Kirby wrote a lovely poem about children, animals, and adults, *Is Spot in Heaven?* Dora Malech's *Party Games* breaks through a seemingly sweet scene into deeper troubles. The poem that blew me away was *The Main Event*, by Donald Platt, a poem that tells a story in haunting depth.

I ordered this book through [Amazon](#), and it was like new! We had to order it for class, but it had a wide range of contemporary authors. It helped us in class to learn about different techniques because the poems were so diverse. If you want to know what new poets are writing, I suggest that you order this book!

Giftee loved it and read it in one evening.

Everyone should read great poetry. No, seriously! It's not just for snobs and introverts, and not all great poets are long dead. Give it a try, and start with Jenny Keith's poem in this book.

Everyone who likes to write a poem or two should buy poetry books.

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Gave it to a friend who just loved it.

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