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# Night Sky With Exit Wounds



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2016 Whiting Award  
One of Publishers Weekly's "Most Anticipated Books of Spring 2016"  
One of Lit Hub's "10 must-read poetry collections for April"  
Michiko Kakutani in The New York Times writes: "The poems in Mr. Vuong's new collection, *Night Sky With Exit Wounds* possess a tensile precision reminiscent of Emily Dickinson's work, combined with a Gerard Manley Hopkins-like appreciation for the sound and rhythms of words. Mr. Vuong can create startling images (a black piano in a field, a wedding-cake couple preserved under glass, a shepherd stepping out of a Caravaggio painting) and make the silences and elisions in his verse speak as potently as his words. There is a powerful emotional undertow to these poems that springs from Mr. Vuong's sincerity and candor, and from his ability to capture specific moments in time with both photographic clarity and a sense of the evanescence of all earthly things. Reading Vuong is like watching a fish move: he manages the varied currents of English with muscled intuition. His poems are by turns graceful and wonderstruck. His lines are both long and short, his pose narrative and lyric, his diction formal and insouciant. From the outside, Vuong has fashioned a poetry of inclusion. The New Yorker: "The language is painfully, exquisitely exact, the scenes haunting and indelible. Highly recommended. Library Journal, starred review "Night Sky with Exit Wounds establishes Vuong as a fierce new talent to be reckoned with... This book is a masterpiece that captures, with elegance, the raw sorrows and joys of human existence." Buzzfeed's "Most Exciting New Books of 2016" "This original, sprightly wordsmith of tumbling pulsing phrases pushes poetry to a new level... A stunning introduction to a young poet who writes with both assurance and vulnerability. Visceral, tender and lyrical, fleet and agile, these poems unflinchingly face the legacies of violence and cultural displacement but they also assume a position of wonder before the world. 2016 Whiting Award citation "Night Sky with Exit Wounds is the kind of book that soon becomes worn with love. You will want to crease every page to come back to it, to underline every other line because each word resonates with power." LitHub "Vuong's powerful voice explores passion, violence, history, identity all with a tremendous humanity." Slate "In his impressive debut collection, Vuong writes beauty into and culls from individual, familial, and historical traumas. Vuong exists as both observer and observed throughout the book as he explores deeply personal themes such as poverty, depression, queer sexuality, domestic abuse, and the various forms of violence inflicted on his family during the Vietnam War. Poems float and strike in equal measure as the poet strives to transform pain into clarity." Publishers Weekly "What a treasure [Ocean Vuong] is to us. What a perfume he's crushed and rendered of his heart and soul. What a gift this book is." Li-Young Lee *Torso of Air* Suppose you do change your life. & the body is more

thana portion of nightâ "sealedwith bruises. Suppose you woke& found your shadow replacedby a black wolf. The boy, beautiful& gone. So you take the knife to the wallinstead. You carve & carveuntil a coin of light appears& you get to look in, at last,on happiness. The eyestaring back from the other sideâ "waiting.Born in Saigon, Vietnam, Ocean Vuong attended Brooklyn College. He is the author of two chapbooks as well as a full-length collection, Night Sky with Exit Wounds. A 2014 Ruth Lilly Fellow and winner of the 2016 Whiting Award, Ocean Vuong lives in New York City, New York.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ocean Vuong sets a high bar for a debut collection. This dazzling volume displays the breadth of the poet's skill in utilizing form, diction and other poetic devices to express a range of emotions. All the while he remains accessible, never overwrought, and revealing the searing truth of what it's like to live with the echoes of war, displacement, and dangerous loves. Vuong reveals the power of submission. From the opening poem where the speaker says, "I lost it all with eyes wide open" to the closing lines, "Only feel this fully, this entire, the way snow touches bare skin--& is, suddenly, snow no longer," Vuong shows us what it means to be vulnerable, to be wide awake to pain as well as pleasure, beauty as well as ugliness. Identity plays large here. To be an immigrant, refugee, asian american, and homosexual is to live on the edge in multiple dimensions. The largeness of Vuong's poetry is that it eschews sentimentality or nostalgia, it is brutal in its embrace of the facts, and plays with danger despite the threat of being burned. "My mother said I could be anything / I wanted--but I chose to live," he writes. This is a poetry that is deeply affirmative, a voice that rises

above the efforts to silence it.

Rewarding from the start, I will read over and over. Describing his life as a refugee, to a country that might not accept him now was bittersweet. Trying to find my way in his poetry has given me some perspective on that struggle.

These poems are deeply nuanced, subtle, powerful, and wildly innovative. They are exactly what I hope to find when I visit a bookstore looking for a reason to believe in poetry. Vuong, Vietnamese American, is a grandchild of the war who carries the war in his DNA. Here are poems about fathers, lovers, mothers, and an unforgettable country and heritage. Grateful for this book.

Mesmerizing, unforgettable, and a heart open in your hand. Vuong holds back nothing. This is one to reread and keep on the desk. To hold tight to the connection of why we write!"When our lips touched the day closed into a coffin. In the museum of the heart there are two headless people building a burning house. There was always the shotgun above..." Depending on where you stand your name can sound like a full moon shredded in a dead doe's pelt. Your name changed when touched by gravity. Gravity breaking our kneecaps just to show us the sky. Why did we keep saying Yes "even with all those birds. Who would believe us now? My voice cracking like bones inside the radio. Silly me. I thought love was real..." Get this collection! You won't get closer to a heartbeat than this!

What Vuong has achieved here in 'Night Sky with Exit Wounds' is nothing short of transcendental. There is a mastery he has instilled over every word and every syllable, and each poem reads and sounds like a gem wrought from the deepest and darkest corners of emotions you'd never would have known existed. I can not praise this work enough! This is a beyond stellar debut, and I wait with baited breath to see what Vuong will produce next.

Ocean's writing is incredibly powerful, emotionally descriptive and superbly imaged. Taking events and objects that are not generally seen as subjects for poetic writing, he has found a way to carry his message directly to the readers' hearts. *Aubade With Burning City* will continue to haunt me with its use of the popular Christmas carol, "White Christmas," to frame the frightening and tragic emergency evacuation of Saigon at the end of the Vietnam war as experienced by the common man and woman. I hope that *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* is only the first of many collections of

Ocean's writing that will be offered to the reading public.

I read a lot of poetry, teach poetry, hear poetry. Ocean Vuong is like nothing I've ever heard. I feel he is one of the great new voices of the 21st century. Hundreds of years from now, people will still be reading Vuong. His work is so powerful that I read one poem and I have to sit in silence for minutes or days till I can even speak again. I don't know how long has gone by but I know that one poem has made me a new person. I had to read a friend's copy, sold out so fast.

Okay, yes, there's been a lot of buzz about this book. But simply because it's so damned good. The words are made of bone, lace and light. This is a little book in all the finest ways: There's nothing extra. Every word feels essential.

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