

OCEAN VUONG

b. October 14, 1988

POET & AUTHOR

*“Being queer saved my life ... it made me curious;
it made me ask, ‘Is this enough for me?’”*

**He is an award-winning
Vietnamese American
poet and novelist.**

Ocean Vuong is a Vietnamese American novelist, poet, and professor whose work explores themes of LGBTQ identity, trauma, and the immigrant experience.

Vuong was born in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), Vietnam. His family fled the country when he was 2, settling in Hartford, Connecticut. They found work in nail salons and factories. Seven family members shared a one-bedroom apartment. Vuong learned English in elementary school and wrote his first poem in fourth grade. He became the first member of his family to achieve full literacy.

He attended Manchester Community College in Connecticut before enrolling in Pace University. After a brief stint studying international marketing, he transferred to Brooklyn College, where he cultivated his gift for writing. He won the Academy of American Poets College Prize and graduated with a bachelor's degree in English literature. He earned his M.F.A. in poetry from New York University.

During the early 2010s, Vuong released several chapbooks, and various publications featured his work. He published his first full-length poetry collection, “Night Sky With Exit Wounds,” in 2016. Named one of the New York Times 10 best books, it earned the T.S. Eliot Prize, the Whiting Award, the Thom Gunn Award, and the Forward Prize for Best First Collection.

Vuong released his debut novel, “On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous,” in 2019. It spent six weeks on New York Times best-seller list and was nominated for numerous prestigious honors, including the National Book Award for Fiction. It earned him the Mark Twain Award, the American Book Award, and the New England Book Award. He received the MacArthur “Genius” Grant in 2019 and lost his mother to breast cancer that same year. In 2022, he published his second book of poetry, “Time Is a Mother,” inspired by his grief. He told TIME magazine, “I went to school for her, I worked for her—she was the source.”

Vuong is dyslexic. He has struggled with addiction and anxiety—challenges he attributes in part to personal and intergenerational trauma: war, poverty, loss, displacement, and otherness.

Vuong’s many additional honors include multiple fellowships from esteemed institutions such as the Poetry Foundation and The Academy of American Poets. His writing has appeared in a wide range of prominent journals, such as The Atlantic, The New Yorker, The American Poetry Review, and The New Republic.

Vuong taught at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and serves as a professor of Modern Poetry and Poetics at NYU. He lives in Northampton, Massachusetts, with his partner, Peter Bienkowski.

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