

What makes a good poetry collection?

As with all types and genres of writing, some people really love poetry and even prefer it to standard prose; others have a strong dislike for this form of writing. For those who love poetry, it can be the simplicity or the complexity of the language structure that is so appealing, depending on the way in which the poem has been written. Some love the challenge that complex poetry can bring, and the sheer amount of symbolism and hidden meaning that can be captured in a very small number of lines. Alternatively, fun poetry, poetry that rhymes or that tells a silly story can be equally as appealing thanks to its simplicity in meaning and in language. And then of course there is the actual language itself. Whether you love or dislike poetry, you are at least likely to concede that poetry (along with song) is the only real format of writing that can get away with so much alliteration, rhyme and short or meandering sentence construction.

There are many reasons as to why an individual might dislike poetry as a form of writing. It isn't always that accessible, this is true. Certain poets write in such an obscure way that understanding the poem at either face value or at a symbolic level can prove to be greatly challenging. This can be off-putting, even to the most tenacious reader or student. And if it is this type of poetry that an individual is first introduced to, the desire to go back and look at more poetry, even a lighter form of poetry is unlikely to be over-whelming! Personally I like Roger McGough's poetry because it can be fun at times and the structure is all over the place, yet a lot of his work is also moving and 'true to life'. The reader can normally understand and relate to his work, and can see the skill and beauty in conveying so much interest and feeling in such a small amount of text.

Poetry collections are where most people start out their exploratory journey into poetry. Most individuals are given an anthology to study at school or college, or they pick a poetry collection off of a book store or library shelf; either a mixture of poets all writing about a similar theme, or a collection from one particular poet. So, whether trying to attract a lethargic or unwilling reader or trying to keep an avid reader's passion alive, in order to be successful a collection of poetry needs to 'work' as one book. What makes a collection of poems work well? Diversity in style and language sufficient to keep a reader reading through the entire collection, a strong enough thread of storyline or progressive theme to enable the reader to know where he or she is within the collection at any one time, some direct contrasts in style or language to demonstrate change and allow for easy recognition of this change, and regardless of how 'full on' the poetry is, some light reprieves scattered throughout are essential to keep the reader's focus and to provide motivation to continue through the collection.