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LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS APPOINTS TED KOOSER POET LAUREATE

Librarian of Congress James H. Billington has announced the appointment of Ted Kooser to be the 13th Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. He will take up his duties in the fall, opening the Library's annual literary series on Oct. 7 with a reading of his work. Kooser succeeds Louise Glück.

On making the appointment, Billington said, "Ted Kooser is a major poetic voice for rural and small town America and the first Poet Laureate chosen from the Great Plains. His verse reaches beyond his native region to touch on universal themes in accessible ways."

The author of ten collections of poetry, most recently "Delights & Shadows" (2004), Kooser was born in Ames, Iowa, in 1939. He earned his bachelor's degree at Iowa State University in 1962 and his master's degree at the University of Nebraska in 1968.

Kooser's other collections of poetry include "Sure Signs" (1980), which received the Society of Midland Authors Prize for the best book of poetry by a midwestern writer published in that year; "One World at a Time" (1985); "Weather Central" (1994); and "Winter Morning Walks: One Hundred Postcards to Jim Harrison" (2000), winner of the 2001 Nebraska Book Award for Poetry. A book of his essays, "Local Wonders: Seasons in the Bohemian Alps" (2002), won the Nebraska Book Award for Nonfiction in 2003. The book was also chosen as the Best Book Written by a Midwestern Writer for 2002 by Friends of American Writers, and it won the Gold Award for Autobiography in ForeWord Magazines Book of the Year Awards.

Kooser is also the author, with his longtime friend Jim Harrison, of "Braided Creek: A Conversation in Poetry" (2003), for which the two poets received the 2003 Award for Poetry from the Society of Midland Authors.

Among Kooser's other awards and honors are two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, the Pushcart Prize, the Stanley Kunitz Prize, the James Boatwright Prize and a Merit Award from the Nebraska Arts Council. He is a visiting professor in the English department of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

Background of the Laureateship

The Library keeps to a minimum the specific duties required of the Poet Laureate in order to permit incumbents to work on their own projects while at the Library. Each brings a new emphasis to the position. Allen Tate (1943-44), for example, served as editor of the Library's publication of that period, *The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, during his tenure and edited the compilation "Sixty American Poets, 1896-1944." Some consultants have suggested and chaired literary festivals and conferences; others have spoken in a number of schools and universities and received the public in the Poetry Room.

Increasingly in recent years, the incumbents have sought to find new ways to broaden the role of poetry in our national life. Maxine Kumin initiated a popular women's series of poetry workshops at the Library's Poetry and Literature Center. Gwendolyn Brooks met with groups of elementary school children to encourage them to write poetry. Howard Nemerov conducted seminars at the Library for high school English classes. Most incumbents have furthered the development of the Library's Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature. Joseph Brodsky initiated the idea of providing poetry in public places—supermarkets, hotels, airports and hospitals. Rita Dove brought a program of poetry and jazz to the Library's literary series, along with a reading by young Crow Indian poets and a two-day conference titled "Oil on the Waters: The Black Diaspora," featuring panel discussions, readings and music.

Robert Hass sponsored a major conference on nature writing called "Watershed," which continues today as a national poetry competition for elementary and high school students titled "River of Words." Robert Pinsky initiated his Favorite Poem Project, which energized a nation of poetry readers to share their favorite poems in readings across the country and in audio and video recordings. Billy Collins instituted the Web site Poetry180, designed to bring a poem a day into high school classrooms. Most recently Louise Glück has brought the work of younger poets to larger audiences through the Library's reading series.

Consultants in Poetry and Poets Laureate Consultants in Poetry and their terms of service are listed below.

Joseph Auslander	1937-1941
Allen Tate	1943-1944
Robert Penn Warren	1944-1945
Louise Bogan	1945-1946
Karl Shapiro	1946-1947
Robert Lowell	1947-1948
Leonie Adams	1948-1949
Elizabeth Bishop	1949-1950
Conrad Aiken	1950-1952 First to serve two terms
William Carlos Williams	Appointed in 1952 but did not serve
Randall Jarrell	1956-1958
Robert Frost	1958-1959
Richard Eberhart	1959-1961
Louis Untermeyer	1961-1963
Howard Nemerov	1963-1964
Reed Whittemore	1964-1965
Stephen Spender	1965-1966
James Dickey	1966-1968
William Jay Smith	1968-1970
William Stafford	1970-1971
Josephine Jacobsen	1971-1973
Daniel Hoffman	1973-1974
Stanley Kunitz	1974-1976
Robert Hayden	1976-1978
William Meredith	1978-1980
Maxine Kumin	1981-1982
Anthony Hecht	1982-1984
Robert Fitzgerald	1984-1985 Appointed and served in a health-limited capacity, but did not come to the Library of Congress
Reed Whittemore	1984-1985 Interim Consultant in Poetry
Gwendolyn Brooks	1985-1986
Robert Penn Warren	1986-1987 First to be designated Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry
Richard Wilbur	1987-1988
Howard Nemerov	1988-1990
Mark Strand	1990-1991
Joseph Brodsky	1991-1992
Mona Van Duyn	1992-1993
Rita Dove	1993-1995
Robert Hass	1995-1997
Robert Pinsky	1997-2000
Stanley Kunitz	2000-2001
Billy Collins	2001-2003
Louise Glück	2003-2004

The poetry and literature reading series at the Library of Congress is the oldest in the Washington, D.C., area and among the oldest in the United States. This annual series of public poetry and fiction readings, lectures, symposia and occasional dramatic performances began in the 1940s and has been almost exclusively supported since 1951 by a gift from the late Gertrude Clarke Whittall, who wanted to bring the appreciation of good literature to a larger audience.

The Poetry and Literature Center administers the series and is the home of the Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry, a position which has existed since 1936 when the late Archer M. Huntington endowed the Chair of Poetry at the Library of Congress. Since then many of the nation's most eminent poets have served as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress and, after the passage of Public Law 99-194 (Dec. 20, 1985), as Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry.

The Poet Laureate suggests authors to read in the literary series and plans other special literary events during the reading season.

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