

## Poems by David Lehman

DAVID LEHMAN

### Frost at Midnight

White skies, tall pines, blue spruce  
give way to evening darkness total.  
I read Robert Frost's "New Hampshire,"  
twice, getting stuck on a line where "Nothing"  
is a thing or event, like "the nothing that is"  
in Stevens's "The Snow Man." The line:  
"Nothing not built with hands of course is sacred,"  
which is not only a metrical way  
of praising manual labor but also an elevation  
of "nothing," before waving the subject away,  
the real problem having less to do with the sacred  
than with "what to face or run away from."  
That's Frost for you, who elsewhere said Nirvana  
was "the only nothing that is something."  
-- David Lehman

### Negative Capability\*

Imagine the money the Keats estate would have made  
if they could have copyrighted "negative capability"  
and charged permission fees for its use, nearly as pricey  
as Kant's "categorical imperative," which rests on the solidity  
of logic while "negatively capability" stands for  
a destination you arrive at despite signs that say "dead end."  
A letter Keats sent to his brothers Tom and George  
in 1817 is the ultimate authority, for it was there that he coined  
"negative capability" for being in "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts,  
without any irritable reaching for fact." Consider *King Lear*.

The poetry is sublime and we love it despite the ugly atrocities without denying they exist. And therefore “beauty is truth,” or “ripeness is all,” which, according to Yale’s Cleanth Brooks in *The Well-Wrought Urn*, means pretty much the same thing.

-- David Lehman

\* This poem is also forthcoming for the literary magazine *The Common*. Reprinted with permission from the author.

## **Bloomsday**

On this day in 1904, Leo Bloom fried a kidney,  
visited a newspaper office, entered a pub,  
stared at a girl on the strand and visited  
a brothel in his quest to meet his unborn  
or reborn son, Stephen Dedalus, the poet  
as Irish Catholic schoolboy, who had previously  
discovered hell, Aquinas, Shelley, and the villanelle,  
and now lives in a tower facing the Irish Sea.  
When the men meet, they get pissed and then they  
take a piss together in good fellowship.  
Meanwhile Molly, Mrs. Bloom to you, gets  
her kicks and the last affirmative word  
after a gush of them like a river that winds  
around the city, an unceasing flow.

-- David Lehman

## **About the author**

Born in New York City, David Lehman was educated at Columbia and Cambridge universities. He is the author of *The Morning Line*, among other books of poetry, and *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man*, among other books of nonfiction. He edited *The Oxford Book of American Poetry* and is and has been the general editor of *The Best American Poetry* since he founded the annual anthology series in 1988.