

The Best Poems of the English Language: From Chaucer Through Frost

By Harold Bloom

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Harold Bloom

**The great critic presents his personal selection, with commentary, of the
finest poems in the English language.**

This comprehensive anthology attempts to give the common reader possession of six centuries of great British and American poetry. The book features a large introductory essay by Harold Bloom called "The Art of Reading Poetry," which presents his critical reflections of more than half a century devoted to the reading, teaching, and writing about the literary achievement he loves most. In the case of all major poets in the language, this volume offers either the entire range of what is most valuable in their work, or vital selections that illuminate each figure's contribution. There are also headnotes by Harold Bloom to every poet in the volume as well as to the most important individual poems. Much more than any other anthology ever gathered, this book provides readers who desire the pleasures of a sublime art with very nearly everything they need in a single volume. It also is regarded by its editor as his final meditation upon all those who have formed his mind.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Bloom made his critical reputation with a book called *The Anxiety of Influence*, where he argued that poetry proceeds on the misreadings by strong poets of their predecessors. In this massive anthology, Bloom's strongly held, and deeply felt, preferences for the most productive misreadings in the language come to the fore brilliantly. Bloom has developed his tastes over a lifetime and specifically casts this book as their summation—"the anthology I've always wanted to possess." An introduction entitled "The Art of Reading Poetry" tries to help nonexpert readers hear what Bloom hears, explaining that "poetic power... so fuses thinking and remembering that we cannot separate the two processes" and naming poetry "the true mode for expanding our consciousness." While the selections that follow are significant, many are predictable; it is the headnotes that make the book indispensable. The heart of the book, of course, is its choice of poems, most rightly well-known, some (from Jones Very to Conrad Aiken) famous in their time, but now obscure: despite his title, Bloom ends not with Frost but with Hart Crane, whose visionary rhapsodies encapsulate, for him, modern poetry's powers. Popular favorites (Lewis Carroll, Rudyard Kipling) also make the cut, as does the 17th-century "Tom O'Bedlam's Song," which Bloom calls "the most magnificent Anonymous poem in the language." The book is filled with hundreds of taste-making turns and asides; it's hard, no matter where one's affiliations lie, not to love Bloom's offhand demolition of T.S. Eliot's essay on Andrew Marvell. Whether one chooses to adopt Bloom's stances or fortify against them, this is sure to be a formative book for experienced readers and neophytes alike.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—Bloom has assembled selections from 108 British and American poets from Chaucer through Frost. In his cogent and lively introductory essay, "The Art of Reading Poetry"—itself ample reason for reading this volume—the editor says that he selected the poems for "their aesthetic standards" in "reaching the high and ancient art" of poetry that fulfills "man's quest for the transcendental and extraordinary." And what a transcendent journey this is. Both predictable and unexpected titles appear, with particular emphasis on many of the Romanticists, and from these Bloom offers 24 poets' pieces in some detail. Serious students will reap a fruitful harvest from his frequent annotations, presented as commentary before the selected pieces. His freshness of thought shines through in these remarks; even poets like Shakespeare, about whose works so much has been written, resonate anew. Students will appreciate not only the poems, but also the insights into the high art they represent.—*Margaret Nolan, W. T. Woodson High School, Fairfax, VA*
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From [Booklist](#)

Literary lion Bloom's earliest books, reaching back to 1959, examine the work of Shelley, Blake, and Yeats, poets that now figure prominently in his latest prescription for good reading, a massive collection of the best of 108 British and American poets writing in English from Chaucer through Robert Frost. Declaring poetry a "high and ancient art," and discussing its figurative and allusive elements in an instructive essay titled "The Art of Reading Poetry," Bloom analyzes the aesthetics of poetry and what poetry does for us and explains what he believes makes one poem better than another. He also provides illuminating assessments of each poet (Milton, Donne, Wordsworth, Whitman, Dickinson, Eliot, Stevenson) and freely concedes what some will condemn, his inclusion of very few twentieth-century poets and evasion of "extrapoetic considerations of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and assorted ideologies." However one feels about Bloom's focus, every serious reader of poetry really must begin with the works he so ardently loves and champions

(he confesses to reciting Tennyson's "Ulysses" when he is feeling blue), and this comprehensive anthology is an ideal starting place. *Donna Seaman*

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