



# Six Centuries of Great Poetry: A Stunning Collection of Classic British Poems from Chaucer to Yeats

By Robert Penn Warren, Albert Erskine

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Brilliantly selected and arranged by renowned literary masters Robert Penn Warren and Albert Erskine, the poems here reflect the genius of six centuries of poets. It is the finest anthology of lyric poetry ever published.

"Truth" by Geoffrey Chaucer  
"Ophelia's Song" by William Shakespeare  
"The Canonization" by John Donne  
"To Heaven" by Ben Jonson  
"Ode on Solitude" by Alexander Pope  
"The Tyger" by William Blake  
"The Solitary Reaper" by William Wordsworth  
"Ode to a Nightingale" by John Keats  
"God's Grandeur" by Gerard Manley Hopkins  
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and more than ninety additional classic poems.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **From the Inside Flap**

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GEOFFREY CHAUCER/1340?-1400

### *Merciles Beautè*

Your y n two wol slee me sodenly,  
I may the beaut  of hem not sustene,  
So woundeth hit through-out my herte kene.

And but your word wol helen hastily  
My hertes wounde, whyl that hit is grene,  
*Your y n two wol slee me sodenly,*  
*I may the beaut  of hem not sustene.*

Upon my trouthe I sey yow feithfully  
That ye ben of my lyf and deeth the quene;  
For with my deeth the trouthe shal be sene.  
*Your y n two wol slee me sodenly,*  
*I may the beaut  of hem not sustene.*  
*So woundeth hit through-out my herte kene.*

*The Canonization*

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,  
Or chide my palsy, or my gout,  
My five gray hairs, or ruined fortune flout,  
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,  
Take you a course, get you a place,  
Observe his honour, or his grace,  
Or the king's real, or his stampèd face.  
Contemplate, what you will approve,  
So you will let me love.

Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?  
What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?  
Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?  
When did my colds a forward spring remove?  
When did the heats which my veins fill  
Add one more to the plaguey bill?  
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still  
Litigious men, which quarrels move,  
Though she and I do love.

Call us what you will, we are made such by love;  
Call her one, me another fly,  
We are tapers too, and at our own cost die,  
And we in us find the eagle and the dove.  
The phoenix riddle hath more wit  
By us, we two being one, are it.  
So to one neutral thing both sexes fit,  
We die and rise the same, and prove  
Mysterious by this love.

We can die by it, if not live by love,  
And if unfit for tombs and hearse  
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;  
And if no piece of chronicle we prove,  
We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;  
As well a well-wrought urn becomes  
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,  
And by these hymns, all shall approve  
Us *canonized* for love;

And thus invoke us; you whom reverend love  
Made one another's hermitage;  
You to whom love was peace, that now is rage;  
Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove  
Into the glasses of your eyes  
(So made such mirrors, and such spies,  
That they did all to you epitomize),

Countries, towns, courts: beg from above  
A pattern of your love!

JONATHAN SWIFT/1667-1745

*A City Shower*  
*In Imitation of Virgil's Georgics*

Careful observers may foretell the hour  
(By sure prognostics) when to dread a shower.  
While rain depends, the pensive cat gives o'er  
Her frolics, and pursues her tail no more;  
Returning home at night, you'll find the sink  
Strike your offended sense with double stink.  
If you be wise, then, go not far to dine:  
You'll spend in coach-hire more than save in wine.  
A coming shower your shooting corns presage,  
Old aches will throb, your hollow tooth will rage.  
Sauntering in coffee-house is Dulman seen;  
He damns the climate, and complains of spleen.

Meanwhile, the south, rising with dabbled wings,  
A sable cloud athwart the welkin flings,  
That swilled more liquor than it could contain,  
And, like a drunkard, gives it up again.  
Brisk Susan whips her linen from the rope,  
While the first drizzling shower is borne aslope:  
Such is that sprinkling which some careless quean  
Flirts on you from her mop, but not so clean:  
You fly, invoke the gods; then, turning, stop  
To rail; she, singing, still whirls on her mop.  
Not yet the dust had shunned th' unequal strife,  
But aided by the wind, fought still for life;  
And, wafted with its foe by violent gust,  
'Twas doubtful which was rain and which was dust.  
Ah! where must needy poet seek for aid,  
When dust and rain at once his coat invade.  
Sole coat! where dust cemented by the rain  
Erects the nap, and leaves a cloudy stain!

Now in contiguous drops the rain comes down,  
Threatening with deluge this devoted town.  
To shops in crowds the daggled females fly,  
Pretend to cheapen goods but nothing buy.  
The templar spruce, while every spout's abroach,  
Stays till 'tis fair, yet seems to call a coach.

The tucked up seamstress walks with hasty strides,  
While streams run down her oiled umbrella's sides.  
Here various kinds, by various fortunes led  
Commence acquaintance underneath a shed.  
Triumphant Tories and desponding Whigs  
Forget their feuds, and join to save their wigs.  
Boxed in a chair, the beau impatient sits,  
While spouts run clattering o'er the roof by fits,  
And ever and anon with frightful din  
The leather sounds; he trembles from within.  
So when Troy chairmen bore the wooden steed,  
Pregnant with Greeks impatient to be freed  
(Those bully Greeks, who, as the moderns do,  
Instead of paying chairmen, ran them through),  
Laocoön struck the outside with his spear,  
And each imprisoned hero quaked for fear.

Now from all parts the swelling kennels flow,  
And bear their trophies with them as they go:  
Filths of all hues and odour seem to tell  
What street they sailed from by their sight and smell.  
They, as each torrent drives with rapid force,  
From Smithfield or St. 'Pulchre's shape their course,  
And in huge confluence joined at Snowhill ridge,  
Fall from the conduit prone to Holborn bridge.  
Sweepings from butchers' stalls, dung, guts, and blood,  
Drowned puppies, stinking sprats, all drenched in mud,  
Dead cats, and turnip tops, come tumbling down the flood.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH/1770-1850

*Surprised by Joy--Impatient as the Wind*

Surprised by joy--impatient as the wind  
I turned to share the transport--Oh! with whom  
But Thee, deep buried in the silent tomb,  
That spot which no vicissitude can find?  
Love, faithful love, recalled thee to my mind--

But how could I forget thee? Through what power,  
Even for the least division of an hour,  
Have I been so beguiled as to be blind  
To my most grievous loss?--That thought's return  
Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore,  
Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,  
Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more  
That neither present time, nor years unborn

Could to my sight that heavenly face restore.

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS/1865-1939

*Sailing to Byzantium*

That is no country for old men. The young  
In one another's arms, birds in the trees  
--Those dying generations--at their song,  
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,  
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long  
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.  
Caught in that sensual music all neglect  
Monuments of unaging intellect.

An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
For every tatter in its mortal dress,  
Nor is there singing school but studying  
Monuments of its own magnificence;  
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come  
To the holy city of Byzantium.

O sages standing in God's holy fire  
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,  
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,  
And be the singing-masters of my soul.  
Consume my heart away; sick with desire  
And fastened to a dying animal  
It knows not what it is; and gather me  
Into the artifice of eternity.

Once out of nature I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural thing,  
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make  
Of hammered gold and gold enameling  
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;  
Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
To lords and ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

WILFRED OWEN/1893-1918

*Wild with All Regrets*

*To Siegfried Sassoon*

My arms have mutinied against me--brutes!  
My fingers fidget like ten idle brats,  
My back's been stiff for hours, damned hours.  
Death never gives his squad a Stand-at-ease.  
I can't read. There's no use. Take your book.  
A short life and a merry one, my buck!  
We said we'd hate to grow dead-old. But now,  
Not to live old seems awful; not to renew  
My boyhood with my boys, and teach 'em hitting,  
Shooting, and hunting,--all the arts of hurting!  
--Well, that's what I learnt. That, and making money.  
Your fifty years in store seem none too many  
But I've five minutes. God! For just two years  
To help myself to this good air of yours!  
One Spring! Is one too hard to spare? Too long?  
Spring air would find its own way to my lung,  
And grow me legs as quick as lilac shoots.

Yes, there's the orderly. He'll change the sheets  
When I'm lugged out. Oh, couldn't I do that?  
Here in this coffin of a bed, I've thought  
I'd like to kneel and sweep his floors forever,--  
And ask no nights off when the bustle's over,  
For I'd enjoy the dirt. Who's prejudiced  
Against a grimed hand when his own's quite dust,--  
Less live than specks that in the sun-shafts turn?  
Dear dust--in rooms, on roads, on faces' tan!  
I'd love to be a sweep's boy, black as Town;  
Yes, or a muckman. Must I be his load?  
A flea would do. If one chap wasn't bloody,  
Or went stone-cold, I'd find another body.

Which I shan't manage now. Unless it's yours.  
I shall stay in you, friend, for some few hours.  
You'll feel my heavy spirit chill your chest,  
And climb your throat on sobs, until it's chased  
On sighs, and wiped from off your lips by wind.

I think on your rich breathing, brother, I'll be weaned  
To do without what blood remained me from my wound.

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