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Classic Writings on Poetry

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The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty. He is a sovereign, and stands on the centre.?Ralph Waldo Emerson, from "The Poet"

"[The poet] is a seer.... he is individual... he is complete in himself.... the others are as good as he, only he sees it and they do not. He is not one of the chorus. "?Walt Whitman, from the preface to *Leaves of Grass*

Poetry has always given rise to interpretation, judgment, and controversy. Indeed, the history of poetry criticism is as rich and varied a journey as the history of poetry itself. But classic writings such as Emerson's essay "The Poet" and Whitman's preface to *Leaves of Grass* serve as more than a critical "call and response": the works are striking examples of how the finest poets themselves have written on poetics and the works of their peers and predecessors?revealing, in the process, much about the theory and passion behind their own works.

Spanning thousands of years and including thirty-three of the most influential critical essays ever written, *Classic Writings on Poetry* is the first major anthology of criticism devoted exclusively to poetry. Beginning with a survey of the history of poetics and providing an introduction and brief biography for each reading, esteemed poet and critic William Harmon takes readers from Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics* to the Norse mythology of Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál*. John Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* and Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* are included, as is an excerpt from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's verse novel *Aurora Leigh*, arriving, finally, at the modernist sensibility of "Poetic Reality and Critical Unreality," by Laura (Riding) Jackson. For anyone interested in the art and artifice of poetry, *Classic Writings on Poetry* is a journey well worth taking.

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