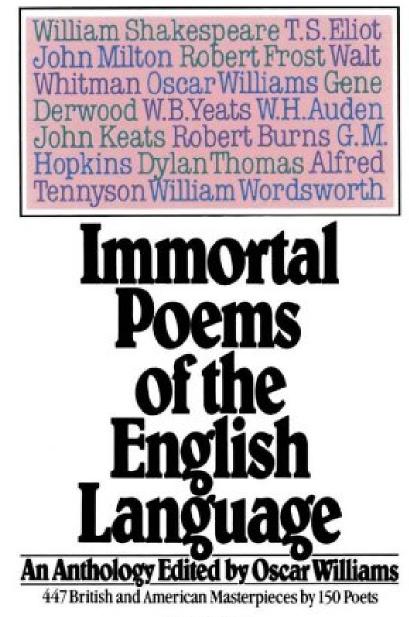


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#### About the Author

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- Sales Rank: #316776 in Books
- Color: Multicolor
- Brand: Pocket Books
- Published on: 1983-08-03
- Released on: 1983-08-03
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
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Most helpful customer reviews

26 of 26 people found the following review helpful.

Words, Glorious Words!

By FrKurt Messick

When a friend of mine wanted to know what volume of poetry I could recommend, adding the caveat that he wasn't going to wade through a thousand pages. I immediately thought of this book, 'Immortal Poems of the English Language', edited by Oscar Williams. This is an absolutely superb anthology.

The poetry is arranged chronologically by poet - it begins with Chaucer and contemporary anonymous compositions, and proceeds through the various literary time periods to the present day. All of the greats are to be found here: Chaucer, Shakespeare, Byron, Yeats, Wordsworth (the list can go on and on) as well as some lesser-known but nonetheless great versifiers such a Peele, Cowley, and Landor.

These are pieces of the English language, from the Middle English of Chaucer (presented without translation or notes) quickly getting to more modern recognisable texts. The poets come from all around the world; English as a literary language was carried forth by the British Empire, and English poetry now belongs, as a product and as an instrument of creativity.

As befits his status as the greatest of English poets, Shakespeare has more pages than any other (29 pages), and some pieces come from the plays rather than his poetry proper. Some poets of giant stature (Chaucer, the first poet in the anthology) seem to get short-shrift here (none of the Canterbury Tales is included; Longfellow and Elizabeth Barrett Browning have less than one page each). However, taken as an accessible, overall compilation, this gives a great insight into the pattern of development of a poetical language.

Being available as a portable paperback, this book has been a frequent travel companion. One of the things I traditionally do on airline flights is to pull out this volume and memorise poems; over the course of time I have memorised hundreds of poems, all from this text.

Perhaps the one thing I would wish for would be a bit more biography about the poets themselves (they appear only as names and dates; one can place them with other poets into time periods). This would, however, significantly increase the size of the volume. Williams has provided a very brief essay on the importance of poetry. Williams himself is represented as a poet in these pages.

While one can quibble at the exclusions and inclusions, it is true that no anthology can ever be complete, and that is true of this one. One unfortunate thing is that it has not been updated to include poets of the past thirty years. It is true that it is difficult to determine what poetry will be honoured and enduring, a nod to some of the more acclaimed poets of this generation would be a welcome addition.

If one is going to have but one book of poetry, it would not be a far stretch of the imagination to believe that it might be this one, and that the owner would be well-served for the acquisition.

15 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

The Best For the Budget/Travel Reader

By Z. D. Houghton

As with all anthologies, there will be a number of reviewers sniffing in an offended manner at the dearth (or glut) of Cummings, Yeats, Aiken, or Pope, but any 600 page anthology, by it's very nature, must be incomplete. I purchased this compilation three years ago for long flights and such and it has yet to disappoint. For the size and price of this work, one would be hard-pressed to do better.

As for content, all the major poets are more or less liberally represented. Cummings gets short shrift, and several of Yeats' most memorable pieces "An Irish Airman Forsees His Death", for one) are excluded. Yet I am certain novice and old hand alike will find this work passes the time admirably.

Having been with me through several housheold moves, military action, and cramped backpacks no selfrespecting piece of literature should have to endure, my copy is now fairly falling apart. Yet when it expires, I will buy another copy. No other anthology, especially in terms of price, convenience, and memories, could ever compare. 23 of 25 people found the following review helpful.

Immortal Poems Anthology By My Dad

By Strephon Kaplan-Williams

I too love this anthology. A passionate love of poetry has been part of my upbringing. Let me say that both my mother, Gene Derwood, and Oscar Williams, my biological father, contributed to the selection of the greatest of the great poetry of the English language. Thus we have the contribution of a husband and wife team. Reviewers have mentioned updating this volume, but what has happened is that modern poetry writing no longer follows a firm tradition. Modern poetry is a shotgun blast. There are no recognizable standards for universal selection. Plath is recognized because you cannot divorce her from her suicide. Ginsberg you cannot divorce from his beard and little clanging bells, a media invention. Bob Dylan you cannot divorce from his being a song writer and media invention. If you are not a media invention and only a poet, what chance do you have? So Immortal Poems represents classic taste before media took over the American mind. The media is immortal these days, not poetry. Selecting from contemporary poets not using traditional standards would be difficult to do. I would still love to do it. For those interested in Oscar Williams there is information now available on the web. Just search it with oscarwilliams and see what their world was like in the twentieth century.

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