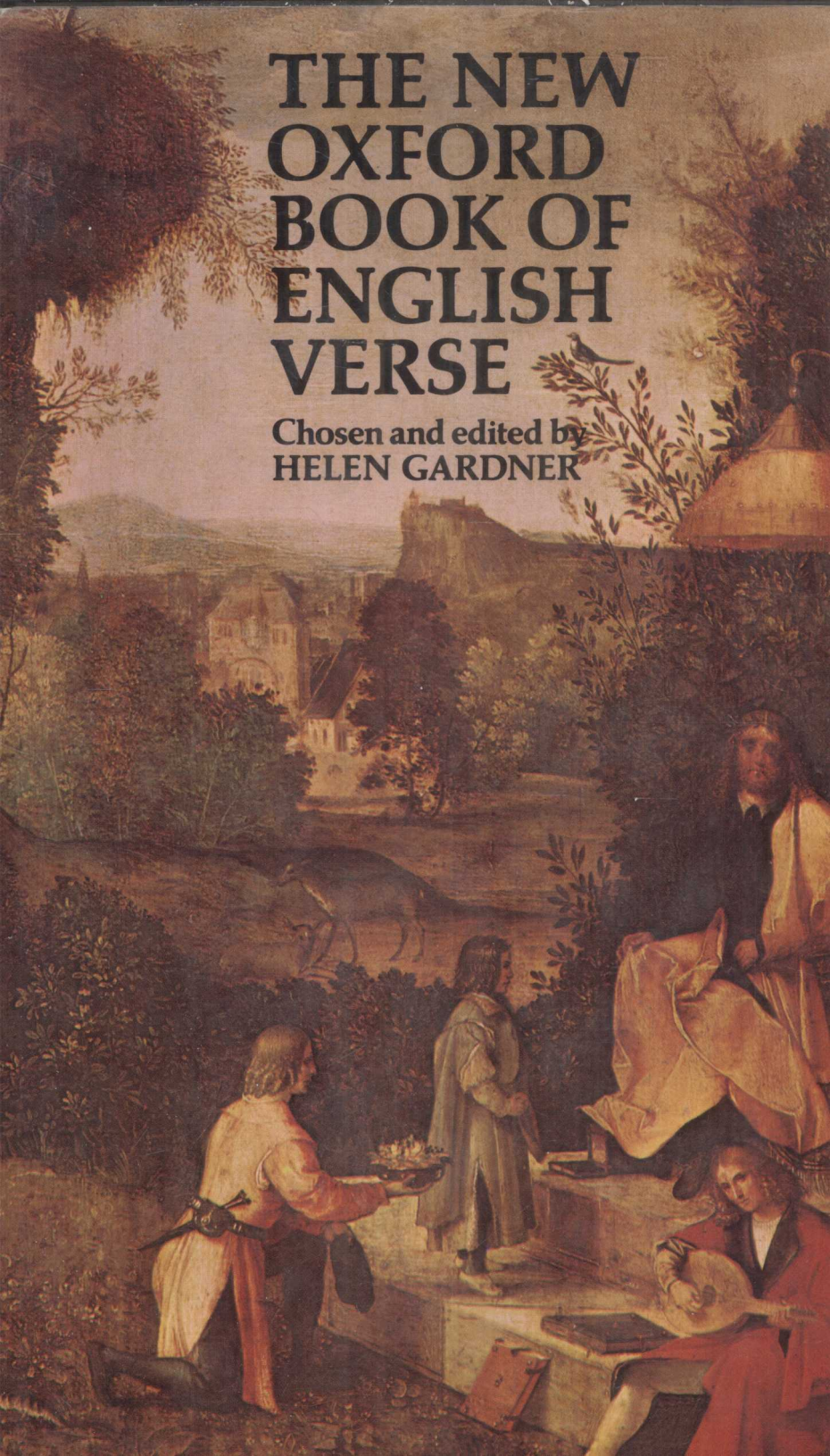


# THE NEW OXFORD BOOK OF ENGLISH VERSE

Chosen and edited by  
**HELEN GARDNER**



The New  
Oxford Book of  
English Verse

1250—1950

Chosen and Edited by  
Helen Gardner

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## PREFACE

*The Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250-1900*, chosen and edited by Arthur Quiller-Couch, appeared in 1900. It rapidly established itself as the classic anthology of English poetry, running through twenty-one impressions in the next forty years and selling nearly half a million copies. The judgement of readers confirmed, to quote the editor's preface, that he had so managed his task 'as to serve those who already love poetry and to implant that love in some young minds not yet initiated'. In 1939 Sir Arthur revised his anthology, 'having come to regret some inclusions and omissions of indolence', and extended it by nearly a hundred pages to bring it down to 1918. The revision hardly affected the first three-quarters of the original book where only some forty items were omitted and some forty added. It was after Keats, in the section that had always given least satisfaction, that Sir Arthur made most changes, dropping some seventy poems, and adding roughly the equivalent number, before extending into the first twenty years of this century. The revision did not change the nature of the anthology. It remained what it had originally been, an anthology of lyrical verse, inspired by the most famous of Victorian anthologies, Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*.

The present edition is not a revision of Q's revision but a new anthology. Like my predecessor, I have tried 'to range over the whole field of English verse' and 'to choose the best'. But any anthology that thus aims at being classic will reflect not only the personal taste of the anthologist but also the critical consensus of the age in which it is compiled. Q was of his age in holding that to choose the best meant to choose numbers 'either lyrical or epigrammatic'. This involved the virtual exclusion of Pope, the representation of poets such as Dryden, Byron, Tennyson, and Browning solely by their lyrics, and the neglect of the tradition of satiric, political, epistolary, and didactic verse in English. Since 1900 the concept of the 'best' has widened beyond the lyrical, and the reputations of poets and of individual poems have changed. Nobody today would give twenty pages to Herrick while giving only seven to Donne and five to Herbert; and it seems safe to say that nobody today would not include such famous poems as 'Ulysses', 'My Last Duchess', and 'Dover Beach' as being finely characteristic of their authors' best work.

In making this new anthology I have in many ways followed my predecessor's example. Although I have widened the range of poetry he

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drew upon, I have followed him in excluding dramatic verse. Here context is all-important. I have also followed him in giving full representation to major poets, and have treated Hopkins, Hardy, Yeats, and Eliot, the four greatest poets of the last hundred years, as he treated Keats and Shelley. I have also not attempted to avoid the familiar, believing with him that 'the best is the best, though a hundred judges have declared it so'. I have also agreed with him in modernizing the spelling throughout (even, as far as is possible, in the medieval poems), with the exception that I have not tampered with the spelling of poems in Scots, and have left Spenser's archaic spelling as an integral part of his deliberate attempt to 'affect the ancients'. I have also, like him, resisted the temptation to gloss, except for the occasional glossing of an obsolete word; and have kept the pages free of references, hiding them away in notes at the back of the volume. On the other hand, I have not followed him in including American poets. Since I have both enlarged the range of verse he drew upon and extended my terminal date to include a particularly rich period of English verse, I reluctantly decided that I must confine myself to poets writing in these islands. It seemed impossible to do justice to American poetry without seriously restricting the selection from English. I have made one exception, and included a handful of poems by Ezra Pound, since, though he kept American nationality, he was at the centre of the modern movement in England. I hesitated whether in a book of English Verse, poems in the Scottish dialect should be included. But I decided that the Scots would be less offended at their inclusion under this title than at the omission of the Border Ballads and Burns, which are part of the cultural heritage of England as well as of Scotland.

The present volume attempts to represent the range of English non-dramatic poetry from 1250 to 1950. It includes no poet who had not established himself by 1950, although I have not felt it necessary to confine myself with absolute strictness to poems published before that date. The end of the Second World War is a genuine terminus, the impetus of the so-called modern movement having spent itself, and the last hundred pages of Q's anthology are a warning of the danger—and the unfairness—of attempting to select from poets in mid-passage. Unlike Q I have excerpted from long poems, supplying titles for the extracts. Those curious for the source of such excerpts will find references in the notes at the close. Q regarded himself as an anthologist, or 'gatherer of flowers', and did not scruple to omit verses, or to lift a couple or so of verses from a poem, give them a title, and print them as a complete poem without signalization. Such a practice runs contrary to modern feeling. Considerations of space make some shortenings inevitable; but it can be assumed that all the items here, which are not

## PREFACE

patently extracts, or noted as such in the Notes and References, are complete poems, unless an omission is signalized by dots, or, if the omission is substantial, by an asterisk. In the latter case, the extent of the omission is indicated in a note.

The poets are arranged chronologically by date of birth, with a few exceptions. For example, I have played a little with the dates at the close of the sixteenth century to place those, like Sidney or Marlowe, who died before 1600 and are strictly Elizabethans, before poets like Greville and Raleigh who survived into the Jacobean period, and I have placed Traherne before Dryden, since he died before Dryden's major works were written. I have followed Q in grouping together poems from the Song Books, though I place them at the end and not at the beginning of the Elizabethan period; and in collecting the Ballads and placing them before the Restoration poets. On the whole, and as far as it can be ascertained, the poems of individual poets are printed in order of composition, or in order of publication.

No anthologist can hope to win approval for all his inclusions and exclusions; but I hope that some who regret the absence of old favourites will discover new loves, and be stimulated to explore further some poets with whom they are not familiar. Q's bias was towards the lyrical and the poem of personal joys and sorrows. This anthology balances against poems of the private life poems that deal with public events, and historic occasions, or express convictions, religious, moral, or political. Together with what may be felt to be a too generous proportion of satire, I have also included familiar verse, and that distinctive English achievement, light verse. As well as attempting to represent the range of English poetry, I have tried to represent a poet's own range, and wherever I could have included poems of tribute to other poets. I can only hope that readers will find half the pleasure that I have found in reading and re-reading for this anthology, in the richest and most continuously lively poetic tradition in the world.

Since I was first invited to revise the Oxford Book, over ten years ago I have had cause to be grateful to many people for suggestions and discussions. My greatest debt is to the late Mr. John Hayward for many delightful hours discussing his own anthology, the *Penguin Book of English Verse*, and his *Oxford Book of Nineteenth-Century English Verse*. Among colleagues I must particularly thank Mr. John Buxton, Miss Katherine Duncan-Jones, and Professor Norman Davis, who encouraged and assisted me in modernizing medieval texts. By great good fortune, just as I was settling down to make final choices, Mrs. Bridget Bertram offered me her services as research assistant. As well as giving invaluable assistance in checking texts, tracing sources, and

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preparing copy for the press, she brought critical judgement and taste to our discussions of the contents. Finally I have to thank Mrs. M. A. Gordon, who, by relieving me of all domestic cares, made possible the completion of my task far sooner than without her I could have accomplished it.

HELEN GARDNER

*Oxford University*

1972

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## ANONYMOUS

I

### *Cuckoo Song*

SUMMER is y-comen in,  
Loudè sing, cuckoo!  
Groweth seed and bloweth meed  
And spring'th the woodè now—  
Sing cuckoo!

Ewè bleateth after lamb,  
Low'th after calfè cow;  
Bullock starteth, buckè farteth.  
Merry sing, cuckoo!

Cuckoo, Cuckoo!  
Well sing'st thou, cuckoo:  
Ne swike thou never now!

Sing cuckoo, now! Sing, cuckoo!  
Sing cuckoo! Sing, cuckoo, now!

2

### *In Praise of Mary*

OF one that is so fair and bright,  
*Velut maris stella,*  
Brighter than the dayès light,  
*Parens et puella,*  
I cry to thee; thou see to me!  
Lady, pray thy son for me,  
*Tam pia,*  
That I motè come to thee,  
*Maria.*

Lady, flower of allè thing,  
*Rosa sine spina,*  
Thou borè Jesu, heavenès king  
*Gratia divina.*

swike] cease

2 see to me] look on me

ANONYMOUS

Of allè thou bear'st the prize,  
Lady, queen of Paradise

*Electa.*

Maidè mildè mother is

*Effecta.*

Of carè conseil thou art best

*Felix fecundata,*

Of allè weary thou art rest,

*Mater honorata.*

Beseech him with mildè mood

That for us allè shed his blood

*In cruce,*

That we moten come to him

*In luce.*

All this worèld were forlore

*Eva peccatrice,*

Till our Loverd was y-bore

*De te genetrice.*

With 'Ave' it went away

Thuster night, and com'th the day

*Salutis.*

The wellè springeth out of thee

*Virtutis.*

Well he wot he is thy son

*Ventre quem portasti;*

He will not wernè thee thy boon,

*Parvum quem lactasti.*

So hendè and so good he is,

He haveth brought us to bliss

*Superni,*

That hath y-dit the foulè pit

*Inferni.*

Of carè . . . best]	In distress you are the best counsellor
Thuster] dark	wernè] deny                      hendè] gracious
	y-dit] shut

ANONYMOUS

3

*The Irish Dancer*

I AM of Ireland  
And of the holy land  
Of Ireland.  
Good sir, pray I thee,  
Of saintè charity  
Come and dance with me  
In Ireland.

4

*The Maid of the Moor*

MAIDEN in the moor lay,  
In the moor lay,  
Seven nightè full,  
Seven nightè full,  
Maiden in the moor lay,  
In the moor lay  
Seven nightè full and a day.

Well was herè meat;  
What was herè meat?  
The primèrole and the—  
The primèrole and the—  
Well was herè meat;  
What was herè meat?  
The primèrole and the violet.

Well was herè dring;  
What was herè dring?  
The coldè water of the—  
The coldè water of the—  
Well was herè dring;  
What was herè dring?  
The coldè water of the wellè-spring.

Well was herè bower  
What was herè bower?  
The redè rose and the—  
The redè rose and the—  
Well was herè bower;  
What was herè bower?  
The redè rose and the lily-flower.

# ANONYMOUS

5

## *The Virgin's Song*

JESU, sweetè sonè dear,  
On poorful bed liest thou here,  
And that me grieveth sore;  
For thy cradle is as a bere,  
Ox and assè be thy fere:  
Weep I may therefóre.

Jesu, sweetè, be not wroth,  
Though I n'avè clout ne cloth  
Thee on for to fold,  
Thee on to foldè ne to wrap,  
For I n'avè clout ne lap;  
But lay thou thy feet to my pap  
And wite thee from the cold.

# WILLIAM LANGLAND

?1330-?1400

6

## *Et Incarnatus Est*

LOVE is the plant of peace and most precious of virtues;  
For heaven hold it ne might, so heavy it seemed,  
Till it had on earth yoten himself.  
Was never leaf upon linden lighter thereafter,  
As when it had of the fold flesh and blood taken;  
Then was it portative and piercing as the point of a needle.  
May no armour it let, neither high walls.  
For-thy is love leader of our Lord's folk of heaven.

bere] byre

fere] companions  
lap] fold

Thee . . . fold] to fold thee in  
wite] keep

6 yoten] poured out

fold] earth  
let] hinder

portative] light to carry

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

?1343-1400

7

*The Complaint of Troilus*

'O PALACE, whilom crown of houses all,  
Enluminèd with sun of allè bliss!  
O ring, fro which the ruby is outfall,  
O cause of woe, that cause hast been of liss!  
Yet since I may no bet, fain would I kiss  
Thy coldè doorès, durst I for this rout;  
And farewell shrine, of which the saint is out! . . .'

From thennèsforth he rideth up and down,  
And everything come him to rémembrance,  
As he rode forby places of the town  
In which he whilom had all his pleasánce.  
'Lo, yonder saw I last my lady dance;  
And in that temple, with her eyen clear,  
Me caughtè first my rightè lady dear.

'And yonder have I heard full lustily  
My dearè heartè laugh; and yonder play  
Saw I her onès eek full blissfully. .  
And yonder onès to me gan she say,  
"Now goodè sweetè, love me well, I pray;"  
And yond so goodly gan she me behold,  
That to the death mine heart is to her hold.

'And at that corner, in the yonder house  
Heard I my allerliefest lady dear  
So womanly, with voice melodious,  
Singen so well, so goodly, and so clear,  
That in my soulè yet me think'th I hear  
The blissful sound; and in that yonder place  
My lady first me took unto her grace.

\*

liss] joy

onès] once

allerliefest] most beloved

## GEOFFREY CHAUCER

'O star, of which I lost have all the light,  
With hearté sore well ought I to bewail,  
That ever dark in torment, night by night,  
Toward my death with wind in steer I sail:  
For which the tenthé night, if that I fail  
The guiding of thy beamès bright an hour,  
My ship and me Charybdis will devour.'

\*

'Was there none other brooch you listè let  
To fiefè with your newè love,' quod he,  
'But thilkè brooch that I, with tearès wet,  
You gave, as for a rémembráncé of me?  
None other cause, alas, ne haddè ye  
But for despité, and eek for that ye meant  
All utterly to shewen your entent.

'Through which I see that clean out of your mind  
Ye have me cast; and I ne can nor may,  
For all this world, within my heartè find  
To unloven you a quarter of a day!  
In cursèd time I born was, wellaway,  
That you, that do me all this woe endure,  
Yet love I best of any creatúre!'

8

### *Love Unfeigned*

O YOUNGÈ freshè folkès, he or she,  
In which that love upgroweth with your age,  
Repaireth home from worldly vanity,  
And of your heart upcasteth the viságe  
To thilkè God that after his imáge  
You made, and thinketh all n'is but a fair  
This world, and passeth soon as flowers fair.

And loveth him, the which that right for love  
Upon a cross, our soulès for to buy,  
First starf, and rose, and sit in heaven above;  
For he n'ill falsen no wight, dare I say,  
That will his heart all wholly on him lay.  
And since he best to love is, and most meek,  
What needeth feignèd lovès for to seek?

To fiefè . . . love] to endow your new love with

8 starf] died