This volume provides lively and authoritative introductions to twenty-nine of the most important British and Irish poets from Geoffrey Chaucer to Philip Larkin. The list includes, among others, Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, Wordsworth, Browning, Yeats, and T. S. Eliot, and represents the tradition of English poetry at its best. Each contributor offers a new assessment of a single poet’s achievement and importance, with readings of the most important poems. The essays, written by leading experts, are personal responses, written in clear, vivid language, free of academic jargon, and aim to inform, arouse interest, and deepen understanding.

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A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.
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The idea of this volume is to provide lively and authoritative introductions to twenty-nine of the most important British and Irish poets writing in English. The list is a mainstream or ‘traditional’ one, running from Chaucer to Larkin, and might be said non-controversially to include some of the best poetry in the world. The selection is restricted to poets of what used to be called the British Isles, though one or two exceptions have been allowed, where there is dual nationality or a distinct and historical British identity, as in the variously special cases of Eliot and Auden. No living writer has been included, as in the case of the parallel Cambridge Companion to English Novelists, in accordance with the practice of this series of Cambridge Companions.

I have incurred many debts. My assistant Cynthia Ingram has contributed more to the shaping of this book than I can easily describe. Colleagues and friends who have given help and advice include Linda Bree, Colin Burrow, Achsah Guibbory, Stephen Karian, James McLaverty, Ed Mendelson, Marjorie Perloff, Maartje Scheltens, James Woolley, and John Worthen.

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