

## THE CAMBRIDGE GUIDE TO READING POETRY

At the heart of this book is a belief that poetry matters and that it enables us to enjoy and understand life. In this accessible guide, Andrew Hodgson equips the reader for the challenging and rewarding experience of unlocking poetry, considering the key questions about language, technique, feeling, and subject matter which illuminate what a poem has to say. In a lucid and sympathetic manner, he considers a diverse range of poets writing in English to demonstrate how their work enlarges our perception of ourselves and of our world. The process of independent research is modelled step-by-step, as the guide shows where to start, how to develop ideas, and how to draw conclusions. Providing guidance on how to plan, organise, and write essays, close readings, and commentaries, from initial annotation to final editing, this book will supply you with the confidence to discover and express a personal response to poetry.

ANDREW HODGSON is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Literature at the University of Birmingham. He is the author of *The Poetry of Clare, Hopkins, Thomas, and Gurney: Lyric Individualism* (2020), has edited and introduced an edition of *The Selected Poems of John Keats* (2019) for the Macmillan Collector's Library, and has written essays on numerous English poets.

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for L. G. G.

... it nourisheth, and instructeth our youth; delights our age; adorns our prosperity; comforts our adversity; entertains us at home; keeps us company abroad, travels with us; watches; divides the times of our earnest, and sports; shares in our country recesses, and recreations [... it is] a dulcet, and gentle philosophy, which leads on, and guides us by the hand to action, with a ravishing delight, and incredible sweetness.

– *Ben Jonson, Timber, or Discoveries (1641)*

Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes: its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms.

– *Percy Bysshe Shelley, A Defence of Poetry (1821)*

‘To be a poet is to have a soul so quick to discern that no shade of quality escapes it, and so quick to feel, that discernment is but a hand playing with finely ordered variety on the chords of emotion – a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge. One may have that condition by fits only.’

‘But you leave out the poems,’ said Dorothea. ‘I think they are wanted to complete the poet.’

– *George Eliot, Middlemarch (1871–2)*

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