



The Strength of Poetry: Oxford Lectures

James Fenton

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Sharp-eyed critiques and appreciations of the essential poets of our time. James Fenton is unique among contemporary writers in having achieved equal distinction as a poet and -- in his reportage and criticism -- as a master of trenchant prose. What is more, he has shown himself a devoted critic of both American and British modern poetry, an explainer of each tradition to the other and to itself. In these lectures, delivered at Oxford (where he succeeded Seamus Heaney as Professor of Poetry from 1994 to 1999), Fenton moves easily from Philip Larkin's laments for the British Empire, to Heaney's uneasy rebellion against it, to Robert Frost's celebrations of American conquest; from W. H. Auden on Shakespeare's homoeroticism to the vexed "feminism" of Elizabeth Bishop; from Wilfred Owen's juvenilia to Marianne Moore's youthful agitation for women's suffrage. In these lectures -- many of which appeared in *The New York Review of Books* -- Fenton makes sense of the last century in poetry, and explores its antecedents and its legacies, with the lucidity, wit, and gusto that have made his criticism famous.

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