



## Break, Blow, Burn: Camille Paglia Reads Forty-three of the World's Best Poems

By Camille Paglia

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America's most provocative intellectual brings her blazing powers of analysis to the most famous poems of the Western tradition—and unearths some previously obscure verses worthy of a place in our canon. Combining close reading with a panoramic breadth of learning, Camille Paglia sharpens our understanding of poems we thought we knew, from Shakespeare to Dickinson to Plath, and makes a case for including in the canon works by Paul Blackburn, Wanda Coleman, Chuck Wachtel, Rochelle Kraut—and even Joni Mitchell. Daring, riveting, and beautifully written, *Break, Blow, Burn* is a modern classic that excites even seasoned poetry lovers—and continues to create generations of new ones.

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### **Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #214317 in Books
- Brand: Vintage
- Published on: 2006-01-24
- Released on: 2006-01-24
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .76" w x 5.16" l, .61 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages



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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The still-vocal critic of *Sexual Personae*, a book that drew on poetry and painting for its de-deconstructions of gender, checks in with an anthology of 43 poems, along with her own close readings of them. Her introduction offers a jumble of justifications for undertaking such a project (though she is "unsure whether the West's chaotic personalism can prevail against the totalizing creeds that menace it," she hopes it will), but the readings themselves reveal Paglia's fascination with poetry, which she likens "to addiction or to the euphoria of being in love." The book's first half presents canonical work that Paglia has found "most successful in the classroom" (Shakespeare, Blake, Dickinson, etc.). The second features mostly canonical modernist and confessional work (Stevens, Williams, Toomer, Roethke and Plath), with a few more recent pieces. Clocking in mostly at two to four pages, Paglia's readings sound a lot like classroom preambles to discussion—offering background, lingering over provocative lines, venturing provisional interpretations. Some of what she says comes off as grandiose (Roethke's " 'Cuttings' is a regrounding of modern English poetry in lost agrarian universals"), some as boilerplate, some as inspired. Though hit-and-miss, Paglia's picks and appraisals provide the requisite spark for jump-starting returns to poetry. (Apr. 1)

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From [Booklist](#)

Brazen intellectual Paglia whipped up controversy as a liberator of critical thinking from priggishness and pretension, championing pop culture and pornography in erudite yet incendiary essays, last collected in *Vamps & Tramps* (1994). Now in a more reflective mode, the diva of shock discourse and a veteran of 30 years of teaching, turns to poetry, an art form she treasures for its "exhilarating spiritual renewal." Paglia's seemingly racy title is found in one of John Donne's Holy Sonnets. It's an appeal to God, not a call to party, and serves as a sure indication that even though she's advocating for serious literature and "unfashionable" humanist values, she's as free of pedantry and as electrifying as ever. Among the many intriguing autobiographical disclosures she offers in her to-the-ramparts introduction is the fact that Harold Bloom was her doctoral advisor, and she is, indeed, on a Bloomian mission as she presents 43 poems worthy of sustained attention that she believes will speak to a diverse audience. Her selections truly are enticing and engaging, ranging from Shakespeare to Wanda Coleman, and including along the way Blake, Emily Dickinson, Theodore Roethke, Jean Toomer, and Joni Mitchell. Some poems are de rigueur, many are unexpected, and all are powerful and rendered piquantly fresh via Paglia's smart, pithy, and relevant interpretations. As Paglia asserts, poetry "develops the imagination and feeds the soul," missions her expert anthology will zestfully support. *Donna Seaman*

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Review

"She flies as high as you can go. . . . Bold and convincing. . . . Exemplary. . . . A rich book."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

"The chapter on Sylvia Plath's 'Daddy' will take the top of your head off!" —James Wolcott

“As entertaining as it is dazzlingly erudite, *Break, Blow, Burn* is capable of re-energizing any reader’s engagement with poetry.”

—Francine du Plessix Gray, *The Week*

“I hope a lot of people read this book. . . . There wasn’t a commentary where I didn’t learn something about the poem in question, no matter how familiar the poem was.” —Philip Marchand, *Toronto Star*

“It will have students storming the walls of tomorrow’s English departments, mad for poetry again.” —*St. Petersburg Times*

“Dazzling. . . . Bursts with her ingenuity. . . . Brilliant insights . . . permeate the book. . . . Readers receive a marvelous education.”

—*Rocky Mountain News*

“Paglia’s vision is always fresh. . . . She makes a fascinating and challenging reading companion. These essays will inspire anyone to turn back to poetry again.” —*The Times* (London)

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#### Michael Berry:

This *Break, Blow, Burn: Camille Paglia Reads Forty-three of the World's Best Poems* book is simply not ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you receive by reading this book is definitely information inside this guide incredible fresh, you will get data which is getting deeper you read a lot of information you will get. This specific *Break, Blow, Burn: Camille Paglia Reads Forty-three of the World's Best Poems* without we recognize teach the one who examining it become critical in contemplating and analyzing. Don't end up being worry *Break, Blow, Burn: Camille Paglia Reads Forty-three of the World's Best Poems* can bring when you are and not make your case space or bookshelves' turn into full

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