



# ILLUMINATIONS

## Great Writers on Writing

# Jorge Luis Borges

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If you take some of the best pages in Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and ask me whether or not I find them better than a sonnet by Shakespeare or Wordsworth or Keats or Yeats, I would say that the question is meaningless. There is no need to like one and discard the other, since you can keep both. But the difference is this: if you attempt a sonnet, you already have something given to you, and the reader can anticipate the form, while if you attempt free verse, everything must come from within you. You have to be far more skillful technically to attempt free verse than to attempt what you may think of as being old-fashioned. Of course, if you happen to be Walt Whitman, you'll have the inner strength, or inner urge, that makes you capable and worthy of free verse, but this doesn't happen to many of us.... So my advice to young poets is to begin with the classical forms of verse and only after that become revolutionary. I remember an observation by Oscar Wilde—a prophetic observation. He said, "Were it not for the sonnet, the set forms of verse, we should all be at the mercy of genius."

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