

# POETRY, BEST QUOTES ON

Phosphorescence. Now, there's a word to lift your hat to....To find that phosphorescence, that light within, that's the genius behind poetry.

--Emily Dickinson

Breathe-in experience,  
breathe-out poetry.

--Muriel Rukeyser

Poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive and widely effective mode of saying things, and hence its importance.

--Matthew Arnold

We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is full of passion. Medicine, law, business, engineering: these are noble pursuits necessary to sustain life, but poetry, beauty, romance, love—These are what we stay alive for.

--Mr. Keating in *Dead Poet's Society*

To fail to delight or touch or instruct one's audience is to somehow fail in the very vocation of a poet.

--Michiko Kakutani

The crown of literature is poetry. It is its end and aim. It is the sublimest activity of the human mind. It is the achievement of beauty and delicacy. The writer of prose can only step aside when the poet passes.

--Somerset Maugham

The success of the poem is determined not by how much the poet felt in writing it: but by how much the reader feels in reading it.

—John Ciardi

Poetry...gives us a keener awareness of life.

--Cecil Day-Lewis

Poetry is a special way of knowing the world and ourselves. Prose talks about experience; poetry re-creates it, both for the poet and the reader.

--Jean Burden

Poetry is a kind of gasp, and there it is, a spark on the page. Fiction, on the other hand, is like a swamp fire.

--Joy Kogawa

Indifference to poetry is one of the most conspicuous characteristics of the human race.

--Robert S. Lynd

### **Immortality**

Nothing dies;  
it changes  
form.  
This poem  
was once  
a human  
thought.

--Betty Lowry

The public has an unusual relation with the poet. It does not even know that he is there.

--Randall Jarrell

A good poem is a contribution to reality. The world is never the same once a good poem has been added to it. A good poem helps to change the shape and significance of the universe, helps to extend everyone's knowledge of himself and the world around him.

--Dylan Thomas

Once in awhile you have a thought, and you rhyme it.

--Howard Nemerov

Poetry is thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.

--Thomas Gray

Poems are moment's monuments.

--Sylvia Plath

Poetry is life distilled.

--Gwendolyn Brooks

However, I learned something. I thought that if the young person, the student, has poetry in him or her, to offer them help is like offering a propeller to a bird.

--Norman MacCaig

Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world.

--Percy Bysshe Shelley

The recipe for poetry involves taking an ounce of experience and subjecting it to a lifetime of distillation; think of the cosmos Emily Dickinson spun out of no more life than would fit in an upstairs bedroom. It is a mistake to think that a person becomes a poet because she undergoes exceptional experiences—because she lives more wildly, intensely, or colorfully than other people. The poet doesn't feel unique emotions any more than the painter sees unique colors; it is what she does with ordinary emotions that turns them into poetry.

—Adam Kirsch

The only thing that can save the world is the reclaiming of the awareness of the world. That's what poetry does.

—Allen Ginsberg

I've read some of your modern free verse and wonder who set it free.

—John Barrymore

It should be *Middlemarch* that changed my life, right? Except it didn't. Nor, really, did any other book read in adulthood. For a book to really change your life, you have to be young, your relationship to the world still pliable. Which puts me in mind of Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*. I can still see its cover in my mind's eye, that free, fenced-in yard containing stylized, elongated animals—a lion that's being hugged by a little girl. The other children are all facing the camera and waving a warm welcome to...me!

—Richard Russo

Plath didn't have thick skin. I understood that immediately. Also that she was angry, though she burned with distant brilliance. Poems directly addressing the person despised? Not just wearing your heart on your sleeve, but setting that sleeve on fire?...The imagery in *Ariel* jumped from the page into my brain, and from there to my inherently less capable, colder fingertips. Her radical poems soared on their own updrafts. I got it right away: Those below should gather what cinders fell to earth.

—Ann Beattie

When we were in the woods beyond Gowbarrow Park we saw a few daffodils close to the water-side. We fancied that the lake had floated the seeds ashore, and that the little colony had so sprung up. But as we went along there were more and yet more; and at last, under the boughs of the trees, we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road. I never saw daffodils so beautiful. They grew among the mossy stones about and about them; some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow of weariness; and the rest tossed and reeled and danced, and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind, that blew upon them over the lake; they looked so gay, ever glancing, ever changing. This wind blew directly over the lake to them. There was here and there a little knot, and a few stragglers a few yards higher up; but they were so few as not to disturb the simplicity, unity, and life of that one busy highway.

—Dorothy Wordsworth

[Journal entry describing the episode that inspired her brother's poem, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.']

Every poem is a little drama, and we may now say that the theme of a poem is what the little drama amounts to. The theme embodies the attitude toward life that grows out of the little drama—the evaluation of human experience but evaluation in relation to the intensities of human experience....The theme of a poem, then, amounts to a comment on human values, an interpretation of life.

--Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

The concern of poetry is not to present pictures; it is to dramatize human experience and human values.

--Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

We like a poem not because it satisfies our curiosity or because it gives us an idea we can 'carry away with us,' but because the poem itself is an experience.

--Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

The more your encounter with poetry deepens, the more your experience of your own life will deepen.

--James Dickey

Poetry enables us to know what it ‘feels like’ to be alive in the world. What does it ‘feel like,’ for instance, to be in love, to hate somebody, to be conscience-stricken, to watch a sunset or stand by a death-bed, to be willing to die for a cause or live in a passionate devotion to some chosen ideal? Only poetry—in the broadest sense of the word—can help us to answer such questions, and help us, thus, to an understanding of ourselves and of our own values.

--Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

My favorite poem is the one that starts ‘Thirty days hath September’ because it actually tells you something.

--Groucho Marx

Poetry is the only art people haven’t yet learnt to consume like soup.

--W. H. Auden

Li Po wrote poems on rice paper and floated them down rivers until they sank out of sight. Contemporary poets publish their poems in little magazines. The results are much the same.

--Louis Phillips

Not the poem which we have read, but that to which we return, with the greatest pleasure, possesses the genuine power, and claims the name of essential poetry.

--Samuel Taylor  
Coleridge

To read a poem in January is as lovely as to go for a walk in June.

--Jean Paul

Among America’s 240 million people there aren’t 1,000 who want a book of poetry badly enough to pay the price of a small pizza for it.

--Beverly Jarrett

Some good, some so-so, and lots plain bad: that’s how a book of poems is made, my friend.

--Martial

War talk by men who have been in a war is interesting, but moon talk by a poet who has not been in the moon is dull.

--Mark Twain

Poetry is that stuff in books which doesn't quite reach to the margins.

--Anonymous Schoolchild

The purpose of poetry...is to explore rather than to explain, not so much to interpret as to intensify.

--Louis Untermeyer

If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know it is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know this is poetry.

--Emily Dickinson

I wish...that Poetry were more popular. I am, however, glad and proud that it is not....If one responds to a poem at all, the response is conscious and voluntary. And poetry cannot, it would seem, be reduced to an idle word. Novels, even good ones, can be read simply to pass the time; music, even the greatest, can be used as background noise; but nobody has yet learned to consume a poem: either one cannot read it at all, or one must listen to it as its author intended it to be listened to.

--W. H. Auden

The lyrics of pop songs are so banal that if you show a spark of intelligence they call you a poet. And if you say you're not a poet then people think you're putting yourself down. But the people who call you a poet are people who never read poetry. Like poetry was something defined by Bob Dylan. They never read, say, Wallace Stevens. That's poetry.

--Paul Simon

Poetry makes a fool of time and a fraud of nationality.

--*Christian Science  
Monitor*

Not reading poetry amounts to a national pastime.

--Phyllis McGinley

Poetry is a way of taking life by the throat.

--Robert Frost

Words are rather the drowsy part of poetry; imagination the life of it.

--Owen Felltham

I would define, in brief, the poetry of words as the rhythmical creation of Beauty. Its sole arbiter is taste. With the intellect or with the conscience, it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with duty or with truth.

--Edgar Allan Poe

Poetry is something that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said.

--E. A. Robinson

One merit of poetry few persons will deny: it says more and in fewer words than prose.

--Voltaire

Poetry is the impish attempt to paint the color of the wind.

--Maxwell Bodenheim

Prose = words in their best order; poetry = the best words in the best order.

--Samuel Taylor  
Coleridge

Poetry is trouble dunked in tears.

--Gwyn Thomas

You will not find poetry anywhere unless you bring some of it with you.

--Joseph Joubert

Publishing a volume of verse is like dropping a rose petal down the Grand Canyon and waiting for the echo.

--Don Marquis

When you read and understand a poem, comprehending its rich and formal meanings, then you master chaos a little.

--Stephen Spender

The business of the poet...is to examine not the individual but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances. He does not number the streaks of the tulip.

--Samuel Johnson

Perhaps no person can be a poet, or can even enjoy poetry without a certain unsoundness of mind.

--Thomas Babington  
Macaulay

The poet is the rock of defense for human nature.

--William Wordsworth

Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge. It is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science.

--William Wordsworth

Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.

--William Wordsworth

Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds.

--Percy Bysshe Shelley

Even when poetry has a meaning, as it usually has, it may be inadvisable to draw it out....Perfect understanding will sometimes almost extinguish pleasure.

--A. E. Housman

A poem...begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a lovesickness. It is never a thought to begin with. It is at its best when it is a tantalizing vagueness. It finds its thought and succeeds, or doesn't find it and comes to nothing. It finds its thought or makes its thought. I suppose it finds it lying around with others not so much to its purpose in a more or less full find. That's why it often comes to nothing in youth before experience has filled the mind with thoughts. It may be a big emotion then and yet finds nothing it can embody in. It finds the thought and the thought finds the words. Let's say it again: A poem particularly must not begin with thought first.

--Robert Frost

A poet looks at the world as a man looks at a woman.

--Wallace Stevens

A poem is a meteor.

--Wallace Stevens

Like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its own melting....Read it a hundred times; it will forever keep its freshness as a petal keeps its fragrance. It can never lose its sense of a meaning that once unfolded by surprise as it went.

--Robert Frost

It is absurd to think that the only way to tell if a poem is lasting is to wait and see if it lasts. The right reader of a good poem can tell the moment it strikes him that he has taken an immortal wound—that he will never get over it.

--Robert Frost

A poem should not mean  
But be.

--Archibald MacLeish

Nobody, I think, ought to read poetry, or look at pictures or statues, who cannot find a great deal More in them than the poet or artist has actually expressed.

--Nathaniel Hawthorne

The great poet, in writing himself, writes his time.

--Thomas Stearns Eliot

You will never be alone with a poet in your pocket.

--John Adams

Poetry is an act of peace. Peace goes into the making of a poet as flour goes into the making of bread.

—Pablo Neruda

All poetry is difficult to read,  
—The sense of it is, anyhow.

--Robert Browning

The best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can.

--Matthew Arnold

As civilization advances, poetry almost necessarily declines.

--Thomas Babington  
Macaulay

Whatever a poet writes with enthusiasm and a divine inspiration is very fine.  
--Democritus

Architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry, may truly be called the efflorescence of civilized life.  
--Herbert Spencer

I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain.  
--John Adams

A grain of poetry suffices to season a century.  
--Jose Marti

Ink runs from the corner of my mouth.  
There is no happiness like mine.  
I have been eating poetry.  
--Mark Strand

Poetry is a deep inner calling in man; from it came liturgy, the psalms, and also the content of religions.  
--Pablo Neruda

Painting is silent poetry, and poetry painting that speaks.  
--Simonides

Poetry—  
all of it—  
is a journey to the unknown.  
--Vladimir Mayakouski

If Poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all.  
--John Keats

The poet begins where the man ends. The man's lot is to live his human life, the poet's to invent what is nonexistent.  
--Jose Ortega Y Gasset

Poetry is adolescence fermented and thus preserved.

--Jose Ortega Y Gasset

It is not enough for poems to be fine; they must charm, and draw the mind of the listener at will.

--Horace

A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth.

--Percy Bysshe Shelley

Poetry cannot be translated; and, therefore, it is the poets that preserve the languages.

--Samuel Johnson

Poetry does not consist in saying everything, but in making one dream everything.

--Sainte-Beuve

Poetry, therefore, we will call Musical Thought. The Poet is he who thinks in that Manner.

--Thomas Carlyle

The essence of poetry is invention; such invention as, by producing something unexpected, surprises and delights.

--Samuel Johnson

The true poem is the poet's mind.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Poetry is the journal of a sea animal living on land, wanting to fly in the air. Poetry is a search for syllables to shoot at the barriers of the unknown and the unknowable. Poetry is a phantom script telling how rainbows are made and why they go away.

--Carl Sandburg

We hold that the most wonderful and splendid proof of genius is a great poem produced in a civilized age.

--Thomas Babington  
Macaulay

Every man is a poet when he is in love.

--Plato

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme.

--William Shakespeare

Poetry is an art, and chief of the fine arts: the easiest to dabble in, the hardest in which to reach true excellence.

--Edmund C. Stedman

The fear of poetry is an indication that we are cut off from our own reality.

--Muriel Rukeyser

The briefest poem may contain a sort of philosophic scheme of the entire creation.

--Josiah Royce

Poetry is innocent, not wise. It does not learn from experience, because each poetic experience is unique.

--Karl Shapiro

If a poem can be improved by its author's explanations, it never should have been published.

--Archibald MacLeish

(A good poem) begins in delight and ends in wisdom.

--Robert Frost

Poets were the first teachers of mankind.

--Horace

Writers should always write to illuminate, not to obfuscate.

--Stephanie Zacharek

Poetry is the mother tongue of mankind.

--Johann Georg  
Hamann

Poetry is a search for the inexplicable.

--Wallace Stevens

Experience has taught me, when I am shaving of a morning, to keep watch over my thoughts, because, if a line of poetry strays into my memory, my skin bristles so that the razor ceases to act....The seat of this sensation is the pit of the stomach.

--A. E. Housman

The two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination.

--Samuel Taylor  
Coleridge

Taught or untaught, we all scribble poetry.

—Horace

A vein of poetry exists in the hearts of all men.

--Thomas Carlyle

All poets are mad.

--Robert Burton

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal.

--Thomas Stearns Eliot

Oh, what company good poets are!

-Jose Marti

While pensive poets painful vigils keep,  
Sleepless themselves to give their readers sleep.

--Alexander Pope

No man was ever yet a great poet, without at the same time being a profound philosopher.

--Samuel Taylor  
Coleridge

All men are poets at heart.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Modern poets mix too much water with their ink.

--Goethe

All that is best in the great poets of all countries is not what is national in them, but what is universal.

--Henry Wadsworth  
Longfellow

Poetry, the oldest sister of all arts, and parent of most.

--William Congreve

Oh love will make a dog howl in rhyme.

--John Fletcher

What I call an achieved poem makes everything happen to me: it turns me inside out, upsets my metabolism, renovates the language I employ customarily, sends me outdoors to stare at a tree, drives me crazy or strikes me dumb with humility.

--Vernon Young

There's nothing in the world less soft than poetry. A good poem is just about as hard as a diamond. It has to be, or it wouldn't last for centuries and continue to thrill men as keenly as it did when first it was written.

--Cecil Day-Lewis

If poets were to be suppressed...nothing of any man would be heard hereafter.

--Giolla Brighde Mhac  
Con Midh

Poetry has always been one of the most indicative indexes of culture at any given moment.

--Jonathan Galassi

The poet...does not take a truth and write a poem about it. What happens is that, in the process of writing (if the poem is successful), some unguessed or dimly perceived truth grows clearer to him.

--Cecil Day-Lewis

The fullest appreciation of poetry or of any art may require as much training and effort as the appreciation of mathematics, and the effort is justified by the additional delight.

--Michael Roberts

Poetry alone can restore a man.

--Guiseppe Ungaretti

The chief use of the 'meaning' of a poem, in the ordinary sense, may be...to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him; much as the imaginary burglar is always provided with a bit of nice meat for the house-dog.

--T. S. Eliot

The ideal reader must be sensitive to words over their whole poetic range, and respond to poetry musically, emotionally, imaginatively, and in other ways besides.

--Katherine W. Wilson

The gods themselves die, but the finest poems survive, stronger than bronze.

--Theophile Gautier

The most beautiful poems are those filled with despair, and I know of immortal lines that are nothing but sobs.

--Alfred de Musset

Poets are sacred vessels.

--Friedrich Holderlin

Ignorant people have nothing to do with poetry.

--Latin Proverb

Like a fine thread, poetry flows from a mind at peace.

--Ovid

Paper poems can stay in the desk—to live, your poetry must be lived through.

--Henrik Ibsen

Poetry is the quivering of nerves in time with the passions.

--Cyprian Kamil Norwid

From time immemorial the poet's treasured crown has been one of thorns.

--Valery Bryusov

Poetry is the cure for unhappy souls.

--Eugeny Baratynsky

Before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal.

--J. M. Synge

There is scarcely one American poet whose work, if unsigned, could be mistaken for that of an Englishman.

--W. H. Auden

I don't feel my poems are mine at all. I didn't create them out of nothing. I owe them to my relations with other people.

--Robert Graves

Most joyful let the Poet be;  
It is through him that all men see.

--William E. Channing

As things are, and as fundamentally they must always be, poetry is not a career, but a mug's game. No honest poet can ever feel quite sure of the permanent value of what he has written: he may have wasted his time and messed up his life for nothing.

--T. S. Eliot

When you write in prose you say what you mean. When you write in rhyme you say what you must.

--Oliver Wendell Holmes

The poet's mind is...a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.

--T. S. Eliot

Maya Angelou's poem 'Human Family'—Her signature plea, 'We are more alike my friends, than unlike,' is truly universal.

—Don Marine

Take care of the sounds, and the sense will take care of itself.

--Lewis Carroll

Poetry is the silence and speech between a wet struggling root of a flower and sunlit blossom of that flower.

--Carl Sandburg

To have great poets there must be great audiences too.

--Walt Whitman

Poetry is the opening and closing of a door, leaving those who look through to guess what is seen during a moment.

--Carl Sandburg

For me, poetry is an evasion of the real job of writing prose.

--Sylvia Plath

In a poem the words should be as pleasing to the ears as the meaning is to the mind.

--Marianne Moore

Poetry...should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost as a remembrance.

--John Keats

The essential mark of poetry is that it betrays in every word instant activity of mind.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Poetry is the language of the Gods.

--Samuel Rogers

Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood.

--T. S. Eliot

Didn't Aristotle say that it is the mark of a poet to see resemblances between apparently incongruous things?

--Marianne Moore

Poetry is a response to the daily necessity of getting the world right.

--Wallace Stevens

To have read the greatest works of any great poet...is a possession added to the best things of life.

--Algernon Charles  
Swinburne

Poetry is the revelation of a feeling that the poet believes to be interior and personal (but) which the reader recognizes as his own.

--Salvatore Quasimodo

When power leads men toward arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of men's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his experience. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses. For art establishes the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstones of our judgment. The artist...faithful to his personal vision of reality, becomes the last champion of the individual mind and sensibility against an intrusive society and an offensive state.

--John F. Kennedy

All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed.

--Percy Bysshe Shelley

Poets, I think, have tended to become technicians of the word. And instead of great generalists...poets by and large tend to speak to other poets because they're living in such a rarefied world of linguistic skill.

--Stanley Kunitz

Poetry is making. It is the old mother of fiction: the creation of people, of life, of events, of meaning. It tells stories.

--Judson Jerome

Poetry...seeks out the order life obscures and articulates the values life may aspire to.

--Judson Jerome

The wisdom of the world is most often encapsulated in poetry: nations require poetry if they are to remember their past and comprehend their future. And in those periods when poetic expression launches out into new forms of expression, new ambitions and new types of statement, it is especially important that our poets obtain a hearing.

--James A. Michener

Poetry is not a matter of dealing with lovely objects, with privileged emotions; it is not an embroidery on life. Poetry is an influence on life, not directly but indirectly. We do not want didactic poetry, but the indirect influence is staggeringly important.

--Cleanth Brooks

Poetry is a natural energy resource of our country. It has no energy crises, possessing a potential that will last as long as the country. Its power is equal to that of any country in the world.

--Richard Eberhart

Poetry is written in America by thousands of young people today as a natural expression of their perceptions of life. It can be written on any subject from the realistic to the idealistic, in any form, in any intensity, in protest, in praise, in contemplation.

--Richard Eberhart

No one kind of poetry is necessarily better than another kind. We should be grateful for poetry as a natural resource of our country and all over the world, a natural energy resource of good will, poetry as a principle of order over disorder and chaos, poetry to enliven the spirit, to advance love and peace.

--Richard Eberhart

What contemporary poetry is about is partially an oral phenomenon which can only be understood and really appreciated if you hear it....the experience of hearing the poetry reading is dynamic to many people who would not have had that experience reading the poems on the page.

--Diane Wakoski

Poetry honors the formed use of language particularly, being concerned with both its sound and its meaning, and a poet spends his life's best effort in shaping these into a patterned experience which will combine an awareness of earlier patternings with the unique resonance of his own voice. He tries to do so in such a way that the experience may be shared with other people. This effort assumes a caring about other human beings, a caring which is a form of love.

--Mona Van Duyn

Every good poem has a life of its own, its peculiar atmosphere, flavour, emotional key ...I believe it is the business of a poem to move the reader: this may not be its primary purpose for the poet, but it is the ground of its survival for the reading public.

--James Reeves

One of the things we should mean when we call a poet 'good' is that his work returns us to the world and not merely to the poet. We do not assimilate good poetry; we become included in its imagination.

--Michael Goldman

Poetry makes a union between the known and the unknown, between the visible and the invisible.

--William Anderson

Your daily speech is imperfect iambic pentameter, or five-foot lines. While some of your friends may assume poetry is too esoteric for them, were you to record their conversations and scan them, you could demonstrate a ragged iambic pattern emerging. And there would be five iambs to the line that would regularly re-create itself. Such is the natural rhythmical pattern of the English language, and, as a result, more English and American poetry is written in this meter than in any other.

--Thomas E. Sanders

I have no doubt that there is a common quality in science and in poetry—the quality of imagination. But I have no doubt either that...the imagination reaches us, reaches into us, in different ways in science and in poetry. In science it organizes our experience into laws on which we can base our actions in the future. But poetry is another mode of knowledge, in which we become one with the poet and enter directly into his and into all human experience.

--Jacob Bronowski

The poet has one great and rewarding advantage over other practicing artists. When he speaks of his own work, he does so in the same medium, language, in which he wrote. When the composer or sculptor or musician speaks of his own art, he must do so in a medium foreign to the musical tone, color and shape and line with which he created his own art.

--Paul Engle and Joseph  
Langland

Variety in poetry, as in any art, is everything. It is the spice without which the cooking is glutinous and unpalatable. To repeat oneself ad infinitum, as even some extremely talented modern poets do, seems to me like locking oneself up with the stale, unpleasant odors in the kitchen.

--William Jay Smith

The poet should be venturing, trying out new things. One doesn't want experimentation for its own sake..., but one does want the poet who is willing time after time to risk everything.

--William Jay Smith

The poet must be constantly exploring, going out on a limb. This does not mean the continual development of wholly new styles, but rather the enlargement and expansion of one's basic style. It means putting out new shoots, growing as a tree grows up and out, feeding more and more on light and air.

--William Jay Smith

I write poetry because I want to know something—to come to know it, even if I have to invent what I know—by living with it on as many levels as I can, by being intimate with it, severe with it, angry with it, baffled by it, in love with it. But what always emerges is the sense of its importance, or at least its importance to me, being quite literally all that I have.

--James Dickey

A ballad is a story sung, and almost every song has the germ, or the vestige, of a story in it.

--George P. Elliott

The language of poetry is highly charged not only with rhythmical, kinesthetic, and sensuous stimuli, but also with every kind of stimulus for arousing the brain to creative thinking of its own. This, I suppose, is why some people find it 'difficult;' but it is also one reason why active minds derive such keen pleasure from good poetry.

--Robert Brittain

Learning to read poetry means learning how to do the creative thinking it stimulated and this...means learning to recognize all the technical devices of the art and to extract from them all the meaning the poet has deliberately packed into his poem through his use of them.

--Robert Brittain

Poetry must be as well written as prose. Its language must be a fine language, departing in no way from speech save by a heightened intensity....There must be no book words, no periphrases, no inversions....There must be no interjections. No words flying off to nothing....Rhythm must have meaning....There must be no clichés, set phrases, stereotyped journalese. The only escape from such is by precision, a result of concentrated attention to what is writing.

--Ezra Pound

A good poem is an expression of something you have felt: it is at the same time quite new, the expression of something you never precisely felt—or did not feel until you read the poem.

--James Reeves

Every good poem has a life of its own, yet partakes of the life of all men. It is unique, as every human being is unique, yet it has significance by virtue of its availability, through our common language....If it were not unique, we should not value it; but if it were not at the same time of wide appeal, how should we recognize it as true?

--James Reeves

The chief difficulty with modern poetry is not so much the poetry itself as what is written about it. Poems are so often riddled by so many interpreters that nothing remains but the interpretation. The expositors tend to examine a poem as though it were a process instead of a product, an exercise rather than an experience.

--Louis Untermeyer

A poem is a living thing: to define it precisely and fully would kill it. We can agree that a poem is some sort of utterance in words: even when it is written down, it has the quality of living speech. We can agree that it is an utterance of some significance or importance. A good poem conveys a feeling of inner compulsion: it is not only something the poet wanted to say, it is something he had to say.

--James Reeves

A poet....wants to give pleasure, to enlarge the experience of others, he wants to earn applause or gratitude for having said something memorable. But his is not enough: not all the desire in the world to please others can make a poet. A poet must also feel an inner compulsion to say something unique and new: a true poet will do this even if there is no one to read his poems.

--James Reeves

The new poet, precisely because he no longer believes in the traditional themes of poetry, is more free, more receptive to whatever rises up from his inner life. But he will feel no need to prove or explain such an experience. His poetry will come about through his need to speak and to share.

--Wallace Fowlie

The poet is one who has a much wider field of stimulation than the ordinary man and one who is able to manage his impulses with less confusion. He is able to order experience because he is able to bring opposed impulses into equilibrium.

--Vernon Hall, Jr.

Poetry sees beauty, science seeks truth; but poetry needs a touch more of truth, just as science has a thirst for a little more beauty.

--Felix Marti Ibanez

The poet possesses a magic loom on which he weaves tremendous possibilities. Though man's repertory of activities is commonplace and limited—to be born, to grow, to work, to love, to struggle, to die—the manner of performing these activities and especially of narrating them is unlimited.

--Felix Marti-Ibanez

The diverse poetic voices we hear today are a natural result of continual experimentation with diction to find a vocabulary suitable to a turbulent age of changing values.

--Morris Sweetkind

Every serious poet engages in a ceaseless quest to discover his poetic identity.

--Morris Sweetkind

The twentieth-century poet has been content with the language of everyday speech, using simple concrete words to charge his poetic line with a high voltage and avoiding...overblown vague rhetoric....The good modern poet practicing artistic restraint and flexibility has made full use of all the resources of language to achieve vividness and appropriateness of poetic communication.

--Morris Sweetkind

Words in poetry invite us, not to 'think about' and judge, but to 'feel into' or 'become'—to realize a complex experience that is given in the words. They demand, not merely a fuller-bodied response, but a completer responsiveness—a kind of responsiveness which is incompatible with the judicial, one-eye-on-the-standard approach.

--F. R. Leavis

If you write a poem to persuade others to believe or not to believe or to act in such and such a way, if you're trying to convert them to a political cause, you're using poetry as a tool, and poetry resents being so employed. What one tries to do always is to convey the intensity and the truth of one's passions and one's thoughts. Some will listen and perhaps it will be of help to them in changing their own lives and their own hearts, but the poem cannot deliberately set itself out to do that.

--Stanley Kunitz

All poetry may be said to start from the emotions experienced by human beings in their relations to themselves, to each other, to divine beings, and to the world about them; it is therefore concerned also with thought and action, which emotion brings about, and out of which emotion arises.

--T. S. Eliot

The only real reward a poet can hope for, most of the time, is in doing the best possible job on each poem, since it may never be read anyway.

--Richard Monaco

The object of experiencing poetry is to make discoveries—whether about the poet, the art, or the world—in the fervent hope of wisdom.

--Richard Monaco

The best poet is the one who can forget his art and his opinions while in the process of writing.

--Richard Monaco

Playing with words is its own reward.

--Richard Monaco

The poet elevates the language. He does everything any other writer does, but he concentrates upon using these things more completely—he wrings everything he can out of every word: denotation, connotation, sound, association, stress, imagery, and so on and on. He handles and forms the language as a potter handles and shapes clay; he molds language into an art object. That is to say, poetry is not to be defined in terms of a particular mode, such as prose or verse, but rather in terms of intensity of concentration on mode, on language of whatever species.

--Lewis Turco

Poetry is still an art. The idea that it is not is comforting to people who are not poets and meaningless to people who are.

--Howard Moss

The poet is one who traps heaven and earth in the cage of form.

--Lui Chi

While almost any experience might create a poem, it does not follow that every successful communication of experience is poetry. Nor does communication become poetry merely by being personal or emotional. Millions of letters and telephone conversations prove the contrary daily. When a poet's experience makes its pressing demand on him, his special psychology casts it into a form which is unlike everyday communication in prose.

--Geoffrey Ashe

Rhyme is neither a trivial ornament nor a purposeless convention. An accomplished writer does not use it perfunctorily but as a resource capable of increasing the emotional impact of his verse. He may use it at times to point the significance of particular words, and he will use it constantly to bind his lines together in a firm and recognizable pattern.

--B. J. Pendlebury

To what extent should a work of art be considered a complete, insular entity whose full excellence can be apprehended without reference to anything outside itself? For some the art work is a closed system. Its 'meaning' is entirely contained within the formal relationship of its constituent elements; it is primarily a design. From this standpoint the finest appreciation is contaminated when it concerns itself with extrinsic factors and relationships, including the psychological vicissitudes of the artist. For others the art work is a reflection of society. It is an epitome of the artist's life and era. This view assumes that the value and meaning of the poem is derived to some extent from its relationship with the larger world, including the author's social and emotional interaction with it, and that the poetic elements are representatives and symbols of extra-poetic realities which must themselves be understood if one is to appraise the art justly.

--John Cody

Whatever its actual content and overt interest, every poem is rooted in imaginative awe. Poetry can do a hundred and one things, delight, sadden, disturb, amuse, instruct—it may express every possible shade of emotion, and describe every conceivable kind of event, but there is only one thing that all poetry must do: it must praise all it can for being and for happening.

--W. H. Auden

A poet is a poet not in what he writes about but in his act of language. Be angry, be joyous, be urbane, or be primitive, but perform it full to the language itself.

--John Ciardi

Great poetry—good poetry—is free of jargon. Poets know as Emerson said, that 'every word was once a poem.' They read aloud to themselves; they hear as well as see. They have an ear for tone and overtone, else they are not poets. They flush the cuckoo adjective out of the nest of nouns and verbs. They seek exactness out of inexactness. They hear their own echoes—all words disastrously repeated—and eliminate them.

--David McCord

Poets...loathe and avoid the cliché— ‘no problem, that’s the way the ball bounces, let’s face it, get with it, that’s what you think, you can say that again, as a matter of fact, no kidding, let me put it this way.’ They choose the muscular metaphor above the weaker simile: something is, not something is like. ‘Up from India glances the silver sail of dawn,’ which is Housman. ‘The smell of liver and bacon sidled into the street with onions on its breath,’ which is Dylan Thomas.

--David McCord

Poets are masters of precision—the precis. Every poet worth his salt gets the essential shiver down the backbone at sight or sound of the inevitable, distilled in the iambic:

I have seen old ships sail like swans asleep  
Beyond the village which men still call Tyre.

He knows why ‘over the hills and far away,’ out of an anonymous nursery rhyme, has been called by G. K. Chesterton one of the most beautiful lines of verse in English. Six famous poets, Tennyson, Scott, and Stevenson among them, have taken it for their own, without quotation marks. What the magic is, which one of us can say? But who will say it is not there?

--David McCord

It is very foolhardy—perhaps impossible—to write poetry about exceptional things. Beware of glorious sunsets.

--Winfield Townley Scott

Keep reading the dictionary. Sometimes an entire poem emerges from discovery of what one word really means.

--Winfield Townley Scott

Quality. In art quality is everything. Yet in general it is likely to emerge from a great deal of quantity. Is that clear? I mean the greatest poets are almost invariably prolific.

--Winfield Townley Scott

The good poet is a manipulator of illusion.

--John Ciardi

Both the writer and the reader of long poems need gall, the outrageous, the intolerable—and they need it again and again. The prospect of ignominious failure must haunt them continually.

--John Berryman

I wanted to write poetry in the beginning because I had fallen in love with words. The first poems I knew were nursery rhymes, and before I could read them for myself I had come to love just the words of them, the words alone.

--Dylan Thomas

Children's poetry does not have to lisp, to singsong, to rope-skip happily down to the last jolly iamb. It does not have to be a specialty item, manufactured by adults for the toy department of literature.

--Melvin Haddocks

Poetry improves us, by showing us images of perfection.

--Cecil Day-Lewis

Poetry is a way of penetrating through appearances to the heart of reality.

--Cecil Day-Lewis

To suggest that poets tell men in crisis what to do, to insist that as poets they acknowledge themselves as legislators of the social order, is to ask them to shirk their specific responsibility, which is quite simply the reality of man's experience, not what his experience ought to be, in any age.

--Allen Tate

Potential in every natural man is the natural poet, since language is the medium of the poet and also the indispensable condition of being a man. Words are not abstractions, mere intellectual or aesthetic counters; they have meanings in life, as well as poetry. The discovery of the natural poet in oneself is often embarrassing, uncomfortable or painful. The more conscious a poet becomes of his awareness of the power and virtue of language, the more difficult does he find it to reconcile the poetic meaning of language with its meaning outside poetry—in the world.

--James Reeves

Poetry...is not rhyme or tricks with words, or wit, laughter, grief, tears, and nonsense....Poetry is rhythm, just as the planet Earth is rhythm....the best writing, poetry or prose—no matter what the message it conveys—depends on a very sure and subtle rhythm.

--David McCord

Contemporary poetry has drawn nearer to the world of its reader—life as it's lived, more than life as it should be. The topics that hit headlines often inspire poems. There will, I expect, always be poetry about love, death, and nature. But at this point in time, poetry has burst out of its old confinements and refuses to be neatly limited. This is vastly important to us all because a poem can often be truer than a headline.

--Richard Peck

To shape, to shear, compress, and delineate; to 'add a hue to the spectrum of another's mind' should make it difficult for anyone to dislike poetry!

--Marianne Moore

Rhyme is wonderful, but children generally aren't able to use it skillfully enough to make good poetry. It gets in their way. The effort to finding rhymes stops the free flow of their feelings and associations, and poetry gives way to sing-song. There are formal devices which are more natural to children, more inspiring, easier to use.

--Kenneth Kohl

The poet has everything to gain by recognizing new patterns in new moments. His existence is in this sense always momentary. Once he lets himself become a slave to the seeming wisdom of experience, he stops discovering real experience.

--Jerzy Peterkiewicz

The urge to write poetry is like having an itch. When the itch becomes annoying enough, you scratch it.

--Robert Penn Warren

Metaphor stands somewhat as a mediating term squarely between a thing and a thought.

--Howard Nemerov

Poetry is the language that is spoken—only better.

--John Frederick Nims

Reading is eye-to-brain, but poetry is eye-to-ear-to-brain. Patterns are not got by eye—if you want patterns and continuity you go to the ear.

--Dr. C. Chandler  
McBrooks

Children's poetry is to adult poetry what the harpsichord is to the piano. It can be whimsical, fantastic, or lyrical; it cannot voice the deeper feelings. Children's poetry is treble tinkle rather than bass chords. But within its range, it can do rather remarkable things.

--Melvin Haddocks

In our society, with newspapers, radio, and movies continuously blaring out a series of emotional platitudes, poets are justifiably scared of saying simple things in simple language; they are afraid of being trite and sentimental.

--Theodore Spencer

Being truly alive, for a poet, implies three things: affectionate understanding between friends; an intense love-life with a particular person; and the occasional luxury of being alone.

--Robert Graves

Some of the most poetic things I remember are classified these days under science when they should not be. For example, the way tadpoles in a Mason jar change into frogs. Watching such a miracle unfold is a different study from cutting up a frog to see how pulling his muscles makes his dead legs kick. Science may lead to reading all about frogs, but somehow knowing everything about frogs does not mean as much as having one for a pet, or hearing hundreds of them peeping in spring and a few old bullfrogs grunting in summer. Watching a caterpillar sew himself into a cocoon and then squeeze out and unfold into a butterfly will always be a beautiful mystery no matter how much scientists learn about biochemistry; and they would be wiser to admit as much instead of slamming their frustrated curiosity shut when their minds confront something logic cannot handle. It is fine for them to go on questioning and measuring and adding to our great treasure of knowledge, but stupid to think the only way of using the mind is in tracing out to nowhere each cobweb of cause and effect.

--Harry Behn

The first thing to understand about poetry is that it comes to you from outside you...but that for it to live, something from within you must come to it and meet it and complete it. Your response with your own mind and body and memory and emotions gives the poem its ability to work its magic.

--James Dickey

All we can really ask, must ask, of a poet is that his poem in part and in whole give pleasure, be durable, and lead us to know better what we dimly intuit as the reality of life.

--Dave Smith

Poetry should illuminate rather than simply mirror experience; it should discriminate those aspects of experience which are lastingly important from those which are trivial or transient; while it may be difficult, it ought not to be pedantic or obscurely private; its language and structure should be more formal than those of prose.

--Christopher Clausen

What makes good poetry for me is a terrible specificity of detail, whether of object or of feeling. The poet names and particularizes and thus holds for a moment in time (and thus for all time, as long as time lasts for humanity) whatever elusive event he/she is drawn to. By terrible, I mean unflinching. Honest and sometimes compassionate.

--Maxine Kumin

A poem compresses much in a small space and adds music, thus heightening its meaning.

--E. B. White

A good subject does not make a good poem; there is no such thing as a bad subject....Nor is a sound philosophy any guarantee of a poem's virtue.

--Louis Untermeyer

The life of a poem depends wholly upon the life the poet puts into it.

--Louis Untermeyer

Poetry takes as a primary value an awareness of one's own aliveness. A man becomes a man by learning the history and miracle and the joy and the difficulty of his own attention and of his moral commitment to it.

--John Ciardi

Poetry is a way of life. It is as much a way of knowing as is science, and the kind of knowledge it vitalizes, stores, and makes available is forever beyond the range of science. It is rather for poetry to instruct science if humanity is to be rescued from its own pushbuttons.

--John Ciardi

Poetry can indirectly have an effect upon the course of events by awakening pity, terror, compassion and the conscience of leaders; and by strengthening the morale of persons working for a common cause.

--Denise Levertov

While the prose writer must nowadays assume his reader to be a busy person whose eye sweeps along the page at a fairly steady rate, seldom pausing long even at key passages, the poet...still assumes his reader to have perfect leisure and patience for dwelling on each word in a poem....Prose, in fact, is expected to reveal its full content at first reading: poetry only at third and fourth.

--Robert Graves and Alan  
Hodge

For only poetry...creates the thing it sees. Only poetry, exploring the spirit of man, is capable of creating in a breathful of words the common good men have become incapable of imagining for themselves.

--Archibald MacLeish

Any American poet under a certain age, a fairly advanced age...has inherited a situation in which no one looks at him and in which, consequently, everyone complains that he is invisible: for that corner into which no one looks is always dark. And people who have inherited the custom of not reading poets justify it by referring to the obscurity of the poems they have never read—since most people decide that poets are obscure very much as legislators decide that books are pornographic: by glancing at a few fragments someone has strung together to disgust them.

--Randall Jarrell

As an exorcist, a poet is actually grappling with his own personal demons, coming to terms with them and attempting to dislodge them. In other words, all poetry is a form of therapy.

--Barbara Holland

What the poet has to convey is not self-expression, but a view of reality common to all, seen from a unique perspective, which is his duty as well as his pleasure to share with others.

--W. H. Auden

Poets, like photographers, must be always on the alert for new images. If they make 'sporadic raids on the inarticulate,' it is to bring back new sights and new insights, in a word, new visions.

--Victor Howes

Poetry that is really good does have rhythm, cadence and sound. But we use very little end stop rhyme. People get bored with end stop rhyme. Too much is lulling.

--Kinereth Gensler

To me poetry is...an expression of life, intense, concentrated, quickened and shaped to pierce deep into our consciousness. Words that convey a poignant mood, or summon up a presence, words that stretch and widen the imagination, words that set a frame around an inescapable thought, surely such words have a pulse beat timed to the high vibration of living. In poetry words crackle and stand up, touch them and there is an electrical current.

--Katherine Garrison  
Chapin

Poetry is finding in the commonplace new truth and grace, and expressing the discovery through imagery and metaphor.

--Wilma Burton

If children were read verse from the very earliest age, without being told solemnly that it is verse, in fact without being told what it is at all, they might feel that poetry is just as 'natural' as prose. We make such a fuss about the sanctity of verse, as if it were a kind of holy writ. Thus a good many children begin to be prejudiced against it.

--Clifton Fadiman

Concrete poems are not written to be read aloud, they're written as objects. In other words, they have to stay on the page. It has to do with the arrangement of sounds and words, of their interpolations or their extrapolations, how they mix across....And basically it is a game. It can be a particularly beautiful game or a fairly dull one depending on who's playing it.

--Paul Blackburn

The poem on the page, or its possibilities in the voice, are the poet's primary rewards.

--Marilyn Hacker

There are many kinds of poets, speaking in many voices, to a public which is becoming accustomed to hearing different vocabularies, different rhythms of song and speech. They've learned them from books. They've learned them from films. They've learned them from the real Top of the Pops, and folk songs, and blues. They've learned them, at last and hardest, from listening to the amazing ranges of speech around them. They can accept the poet's words and matter as a reflection of, and even as a counterpoint to their own.

--Marilyn Hacker

One measure remains and by that measure will worthwhile poetry be written: the success of the poem is determined, not by how much the poet felt in writing it, but by how much the reader feels in reading it.

--John Ciardi

(Poetry) brings out the actual quality of what our senses perceive and what our hearts feel about the perception. It brings out the latent music of our awareness in such a way that we recognize ourselves as never before.

--M. L. Rosenthal

Sometimes (a poem) starts from an idea....Sometimes it starts with an image and sometimes it starts with nothing but a rhythm and then you have to find your poem. You have to go deep into your buried life in order really to bring to the surface that cluster of images that will hold in balance the elements that have excited you and which awake memories.

--Stanley Kunitz

I like to think of a poem as being written in layers. That's what I look for in a poem, a poem that's woven. Just as a tapestry cannot be woven out of a single set of threads because you need another set of threads as a counterweave, so too I think of a poem as consisting of these crossweavings of thought and image and feeling.

--Stanley Kunitz

It seems to me that the truths of poetry are beyond knowledge. The fallacy is in thinking of the poem as a vessel into which experience is poured or as a skin that serves as cover to a skeleton. On the contrary, the language of poetry is ideally a body-language, inseparable from its maker's breath and living tissue. Every language of civilization has a codified vocabulary and grammar, but poetry, which traces its lineage back to song and dance, and which has never forgotten its origins, is the language of languages.

--Stanley Kunitz

Rhymed verse is hard mainly because of the difficulty in making it all come out reasonably natural and idiomatic. And also because you have to spend huge amounts of time wracking your brain for the rhymes. Unfortunately I always had felt it was beneath the dignity of the calling to use a rhyming dictionary. Sometimes I would spend hours and hours looking for a single rhyme, mumbling out all the possible rhyming sounds, alphabetically, in all their permutations, until I hit one that was actually a word.

--Galway Kinnell

There are many words in English for which there are only one or two rhymes, and many with no rhymes at all—‘sixths,’ for instance, which we can hardly pronounce, let alone rhyme. This sometimes limits a poem; it has to confine itself to meanings that one of the available rhyme words can accommodate. It’s here that rhyming poetry is ‘easier’ than free verse. Seeing the possible rhyme words taking shape out there ahead of you, you ‘aim’ for them. So the rhymes lead you forward and actively aid the composition of the poem. In free verse you have no such guide; you have nowhere to go except where the inner drive of the poem takes you.

--Galway Kinnell

I think of poetry as a way of speaking, a special way of speaking. As a poet, I speak in meter, and sometimes in rhyme; I speak in lines.

--J. V. Cunningham

A good poem is the definitive statement in meter of something worth saying.

--J. V. Cunningham

Poets are the verbal antennae of a people. The awareness they distill and convert into the dynamics of language is somehow present in the populace at large. We neglect it at our peril.

--M. L. Rosenthal

The briefest poem may contain a sort of philosophic scheme of the entire creation.

--Josiah Royce

You know, a fellow who has never written a line that anybody remembers is a woe-ful person, isn’t he? Because poems are made up of lines, we remember some lines and not others.

--Mark Van Doren

The tongue of the poet is always the last to be corrupted.

--Italian Proverb

The act of composition is not one of communication between the poet and his public but on intercommunication of different selves within him.

--Robert Graves

Poetry too readily understood is commonly dispensed with altogether, like conversation after marriage.

--Frank Moore Colby

If you take two poems by one man and read them and you can't tell which was written first—that is a minor poet.

--W. H. Auden

Poetry does not consist in saying everything, but in making one dream everything.

--Charles Sainte-Beuve

Poetry watches life with affection.

--Marianne Moore

Diligence in a poet is the same as dishonesty in a bookkeeper. There are rafts of bards who are writing too much, too diligently, and too slyly. Few poets are willing to wait out their pregnancy—they prefer to have a premature baby and allow it to incubate after being safely laid in Caslon Old Style.

--E. B. White

We must get rid of our superstitious valuation of texts and written poetry. Written poetry is worth reading once, and then should be destroyed. Let the dead poets make way for others.

--Antonin Artaud

It is a sad fact about our culture that a poet can earn much more money writing or talking about his art than he can by practicing it.

--W. H. Auden

Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors, and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations, of their age.

--Percy Bysshe Shelley

Poetry should help, not only to refine the language of the time, but to prevent it from changing too rapidly.

--T. S. Eliot

The finest poems of the world have been expedients to get bread.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Poets are like baseball pitchers. Both have their moments. The intervals are the tough things.

--Robert Frost

Respect the children of the poor—from them come most poets.

--Mendele Mocher Sforim

It's silly to suggest the writing of poetry as something ethereal, a sort of soulcrashing emotional experience that wrings you. I have no fancy ideas about poetry. It doesn't come to you on the wings of a dove. It's something you work hard at.

--Louise Bogan

Great poetry is always written by somebody straining to go beyond what he can do.

--Stephen Spender

Poetry is the center of the creative wheel. Everything else is just a spinoff from that: literary criticism, screenplays, novels, even advertising copy. If you take time to write poetry, and you're serious about it, you build up in enormous linguistic skill....the kind of options and word choices that poetry makes you attend to are additionally useful in other kinds of linguistic forms.

--James Dickey

The poet lends a figure to a feeling and to an idea.

--S. R. N. Chamfort

It lost much of its true worth; and the same happens when people try to translate books of verse into another language.

--Miguel de Cervantes

We can read poetry, and recite poetry, but to live poetry—is the symphony of life.

--S. Frances Foote

Nine-tenths of English poetic literature is the result either of vulgar careerism, or of a poet trying to keep his hand in. Most poets are dead by their late twenties.

--Robert Graves

Poets are born, not paid.

--Wilson Mizner

No man can be explained by his personal history, least of all a poet.

--Katherine Anne Porter

True poetry makes things happen.

--Robert Graves

I should define a good poem as one that makes complete sense; and says all it has to say memorably and economically, and has been written for no other than poetic reasons.

--Robert Graves

Poetry is the result of a struggle in the poets mind between something he wants to say and the medium in which he is trying to say it.

--Gerald Brenan

Boswell: Then, Sir, what is poetry?

Johnson: Why, Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not. We all know what light is; but it is not easy to tell what it is.

--Boswell's *Life of*  
*Samuel Johnson*

One possible definition of our modern culture is that it is one in which nine-tenths of our intellectuals can't read any poetry.

--Randall Jarrell

Poetry is the search for syllables to shoot at the barriers of the unknown and the unknowable.

--Carl Sandburg

Mathematics and poetry are the two ways to drink the beauty of truth.

—Amit Ray

Poetry is the art of understanding what it is to be alive.

--Archibald MacLeish

Poetry is language surprised in the act of changing into meaning.

--Stanley Kunitz

Poetry is the renewal of words, setting them free, and that's what a poet is doing: loosening the words.

--Robert Frost

Poetry is to prose as dancing is to walking.

--John Wain

A copy of verses kept in the cabinet, and only shown to a few friends, is like a virgin much sought after and admired; but when printed and published, is like a common whore, whom anybody may purchase for half-a-crown.

--Jonathan Swift

Poets like Shakespeare knew more about psychiatry than any \$25-an-hour man.

--Robert Frost

Poetry comes fine-spun from a mind at peace.

--Ovid

There are no-teachers of Japanese poetry. But they who take the old poems as their teachers, steep their minds in the old style, and learn their words from the masters of former time—who of them will fail to write poetry?

--Fujiwara no Teika

Poets lose half the praise they should have got,  
Could it be known what they discreetly blot.

--Edmund Waller

A man who has not read Homer is like a man who has not seen the ocean. There is a great object of which he has no idea.

—Walter Bagehot

Japanese poetry has as its subject the human heart. It may seem to be of no practical use and just as well left uncomposed, but when one knows poetry well, one understands also without explanation the reasons governing order and disorder in the world.

--Kamo Mabuchi

To a poet nothing can be useless.

--Samuel Johnson

The immortality of poetry is worth the sweat of noblemen.

--Friedrich Gottlieb  
Klopstock

To name an object is to take away three-fourths of the pleasure given by a poem. This pleasure consists in guessing little by little: to suggest it, that is the ideal.

--Stephane Mallarme

Since you usually can expect no earthly reward—money, fame, the things other artists get—if you write poetry, you have to do it for love.

--Roger Bergman

Can you imagine thousands of American men and women crowding into Yankee Stadium to hear Robert Lowell or James Dickey read his poems? Yet we are told that such things have actually happened in Soviet Russia.

--Jay B. Hubbell

We (poets) don't want much; just to be remembered by nearly everyone a few centuries from now.

--Jerome Judson

Rhythm is one of the principal translators between dream and reality. Rhythm might be described as, to the world of sound, what light is to the world of sight. It shapes and gives new meaning. Rhythm was described by Schopenhauer as melody deprived of its pitch.

--Dame Edith Sitwell

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

--T. S. Eliot

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative;' in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion.

—T. S. Eliot

Poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult....The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into its meaning.

--T. S. Eliot

More can be learned about how to write poetry from Dante than from any English poet....The language of each great English poet is his own language; the language of Dante is the perfection of a common language.

--T. S. Eliot

A well chosen anthology is a complete dispensary of medicine for the more common mental disorders, and may be used as much for prevention as cure.

--Robert Graves

All poets who, when reading from their own works, experience a choked feeling, are major. For that matter, all poets who read from their own works are major, whether they choke or not.

--Elwyn Brooks White

Poetry is an act of peace. Peace goes into the making of a poet as flour goes into the making of bread.

--Pablo Neruda

Poets serious about making careers in institutions understand that the criteria of success are primarily quantitative. They must publish as much as possible as quickly as possible. The slow maturation of genuine creativity looks like laziness to a committee. Wallace Stevens was forty-three when his first book appeared. Robert Frost was thirty-nine. Today these sluggards would be unemployable.

—Mark Edmundson

You can tear a poem apart to see what makes it technically tick....You're back with the mystery of having been moved by words. The best craftsmanship always leaves holes and gaps in the works of the poem so that something that is not in the poem can creep, crawl, flash, or thunder in.

The joy and function of poetry is, and was, the celebration of man, which is also the celebration of man.

--Dylan Thomas

Poetry fettered fetters the human race. Nations are destroyed, or flourish, in proportion as their poetry, painting, and music are destroyed or flourish!

--William Blake

In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs—in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time.

--William Wordsworth

Poetry is not the proper antithesis to prose, but to science. Poetry is opposed to science, and prose to metre. The proper and immediate object of science is the acquirement, or communication, of truth; the proper and immediate object of poetry is the communication of immediate pleasure.

--Samuel Taylor  
Coleridge

The two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination.

--Samuel Taylor  
Coleridge

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power...imagination.

--Samuel Taylor  
Coleridge

There is no heroic poem in the world but is at bottom a biography, the life of a man; also, it may be said, there is no life of a man, faithfully recorded, but is a heroic poem of its sort, rhymed or unrhymed.

--Thomas Carlyle

We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us—and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle or amaze with itself, but with its subject.

--John Keats

Poetry should surprise by a fine excess, and not by singularity. It should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost as a remembrance.

--John Keats

For it is not meters, but a metermaking argument that makes a poem—a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Poetry teaches the enormous force of a few words, and, in proportion to the inspiration, checks loquacity.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

There are two classes of poets—the poets by education and practice, these we respect; and poets by nature, these we love.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

The works of the great poets have never yet been read by mankind, for only great poets can read them.

--Henry David Thoreau

For poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact. The strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry.

--Matthew Arnold

A poet is always the product of his—that is, his nation's—language, to which living experiences are what logs are to fire.

—Joseph Brodsky

Whatever your occupation may be and however crowded your hours with affairs, do not fail to secure at least a few minutes every day for refreshment of your inner life with a bit of poetry.

--Charles Eliot Norton

A sonnet is a moment's monument—  
Memorial from the soul's eternity  
To one dead deathless hour.

--George Meredith

The old poets little knew what comfort they could be to man.

--Sarah Orne Jewett

Only the very weak-minded refuse to be influenced by literature and poetry.

--Cassandra Clare

Poetry is simply literature reduced to the essence of its active principle. It is purged of idols of every kind, of realistic illusions, of any conceivable equivocation between the language of 'truth' and the language of 'creation.'

--Paul Valery

Even the most inspired verse, which boasts not without a relative justification to be immortal, becomes in the course of ages a scarcely legible hieroglyphic; the language it was written in dies, a learned education and an imaginative effort are requisite to catch even a vestige of its original force.

--George Santayana

If a poet interprets a poem of his own, he limits its suggestibility.

--William Butler Yeats

You explain nothing, O poet, but thanks to you all things become explicable.

--Paul Claudel

Do you know,

    Considering the market, there are more  
    Poems produced than any other thing?  
    No wonder poets sometimes have to seem  
    So much more businesslike than businessmen.  
    Their wares are so much harder to get rid of.

--Robert Frost

His (the poet's) function is to make his imagination theirs (the people's) and he fulfills himself only as he sees his imagination become the light in the minds of others. His role, in short, is to help people to live their lives.

--Wallace Stevens

My own poetry has only to do with human beings. The moment you leave that, then there is no use to poetry at all. You can do anything, but poetry has to do with people because words have to do with people.

--Yehuda Amichai

Poetry has healing power—not only for sick people. I know that in some mental hospitals poetry is used to heal, like dancing or painting. I mean that we all need curing, we all need healing. I'm curing reality with reality.

--Yehuda Amichai

The poet envies only the poet.

--William Hazlitt

Poetry is the art of substantiating shadows, and of lending existence to nothing.

--Edmund Burke

The eye is the notebook of the poet.

--James Russell Lowell

Poetry is the music of thought, conveyed to us in the music of language.

--Paul Chatfield

Poetry is not made out of the understanding. The question of common sense is always: 'What is it good for?' a question which would abolish the rose, and be triumphantly answered by the cabbage.

--J. R. Lowell

If the grain were separated from the chaff which fills the works of our national poets, what is truly valuable would be to what is useless in the proportion of a molehill to a mountain.

--Edmund Burke

By poetry we mean the art of employing words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the imagination; the art of doing by means of words, what the painter does by means of colors.

--Thomas Babington  
Macaulay

Whatever the poets pretend, it is plain they give immortality to none but themselves: it is Homer and Virgil we reverence and admire, not Achilles or Aeneas.

--Jonathan Swift

Poesy is of so subtle a spirit, that in the pouring out of one language into another it will evaporate.

—Sir John Denham

Poetry is the intellect colored by feelings.

--Professor Wilson

He who, in an enlightened and literary society, aspires to be a great poet, must first become a little child.

--Thomas Babington  
Macaulay

Poetry is painting with the gift of speech.

—Simonides

Poetry is a subconscious conversation, it is as much the work of those who understand it as those who make it.

--Sonia Sanchez

People want to see the other side of the hills. In a wholesome way, they want to know what goes on behind closed doors. It's the human desire to see beyond the obvious. Poetry requires the kind of vision in which you have a hand in the shaping.

--David McCord

Sure,  
poets may  
be  
a dime  
a dozen.

But,  
what better  
way  
to spend  
a dime?

--Kathleen Kern Greene

Poets show that someone has gone before you, that there were the lonely, the lost, the unhappy, and yet they survived with passion, compassion, humor and style.

--Maya Angelou

There exist only three beings worthy of respect: the priest, the soldier, the poet. To know, to kill, to create.

--Charles Baudelair

It may sound a little pompous, but the number of people who read a poem is not as important as how the poem affects those who read it. I'd rather have just one person who reads and feels my work deeply than hundreds of thousands who read it but don't really care about it.

--Derek Walcott

To know how to say what others only know how to think is what makes men poets.

--Elizabeth Charles

The essentials of poetry are rhythm, dance and the human voice.

--Earle Birney

Poetry is a conversation with the world, poetry is a conversation with the words on the page in which you allow those words to speak back to you, and poetry is a conversation with yourself.

—Naomi Shihab Nye

Most people do not believe in anything very much and our greatest poetry is given to us by those that do.

--Cyril Connolly

A good poet is someone who manages, in a lifetime of standing out in thunderstorms, to be struck by lightning five or six times.

--Randall Jarrell

For what is a poem but a hazardous attempt at self-understanding: it is the deepest part of autobiography.

--Robert Penn Warren

When a great poet has lived, certain things have been done once for all, and cannot be achieved again.

--T. S. Eliot

Science is for those who learn; poetry for those who know.

--Joseph Roux

The poet's mind is...a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.

--T. S. Eliot

Poetry is a sequence of dots and dashes, spelling depths, crypts, cross-lights, and moon wisps.

—Carl Sandburg

[Poetry]—An art in which the artist by means of rhythm and great sincerity can convey to others that sentiment which he feels about life.

--John Masefield

Writing free verse is like playing tennis with the net down.

--Robert Frost

When I feel inclined to read poetry I take down my dictionary. The poetry of words is quite as beautiful as that of sentences. The author may arrange the gems effectively but their shape and lustre have been given by the attrition of ages.

--Oliver Wendell Holmes

Reading poetry in translation is like kissing a woman through a veil.

--Chaim Bialik

What does it mean, then to be a poet? It was a long time before I realized that to be a poet means essentially to see, but mark well, to see in such a way that whatever is seen is perceived by the audience just as the poet saw it. But only what has been lived through can be seen in that way and accepted in that way. And the secret of modern literature lies precisely in this matter of experiences that are lived through. All that I have written these last ten years, I have lived through spiritually. But no poet lives through anything isolated. What he lives through all of his countrymen live through with him. If that were not so, what would bridge the gap between the producing and the receiving minds?

--Henrik Ibsen

In this nadir of poetic repute, when the only verse that most people read from one year's end to the next is what appears on greeting cards, it is well for us to stop and consider our poets....Poets are the leaven in the lump of civilization.

--Elizabeth Janeway

'I wish poets could be clearer!' shouted my wife angrily from the next room. Hers is a universal longing. We would all like it if the bards would make themselves plain, or we think we would. The poets, however, are not easily diverted from their high mysterious ways. A poet dares to be just so clear and no clearer; he approaches lucid ground warily, like a mariner who is determined not to scrape his bottom on anything solid. A poet's pleasure is to withhold a little of his meaning, to intensify by multiplication. He unzips the veil from beauty, but does not remove it. A poet utterly clear is a trifle glaring.

--E. B. White

Poetry is life framed and identified.

--R. P. Blackmur

A poem is a way of knowing.

--John Hall Whellock

The poem is an effort to make or discover some pattern in the world....It is conflict with disorder.

--Richard Wilbur

Verses are not, as people imagine, simply feelings. They are experiences.

--Rainer Maria Rilke

Poetry is what in a poem makes you laugh, cry, twist your toes, twinkle, prickle, be silent, know you are alone and not alone in an unknown world.

--Helen Bevington

Poetry is more philosophical and of greater importance than history.

--Aristotle

Lying of an inspired, habitual, inventive kind, given a personality, a form, and a rhythm, is mainly what poetry is.

--James Dickey

The poet marries the language, and out of this marriage the poem is born.

--W. H. Auden

The poet, as everyone knows, must strike his individual note sometime between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. He may hold it a long time or a short time, but it is then that he must strike it or never. School and college have been conducted with the almost express purpose of keeping him busy with something else till the danger of his ever creating anything is past.

--Robert Frost

I could no more define poetry than a terrier can define a rat.

--A. E. Housman

Too many people in the modern world view poetry as a luxury, not a necessity like petrol. But to me it's the oil of life.

--Sir John Betjeman

It is the discipline of poetry that most attracts me. And it is from poetry that I draw both my inspiration, to a large extent, and my understanding of language. I admire what is concise, and I admire each word in its right place, with no other words that are unnecessary.

--Jeanette Winterson

We rely upon the poets, the philosophers, and the playwrights to articulate what most of us can only feel, in joy or sorrow. They illuminate the thoughts for which we only grope; they give us the strength and balm we cannot find in ourselves. Whenever I feel my courage wavering I rush to them. They give me the wisdom of acceptance, the will and resilience to push on.

--Helen Hayes

When you read excellent poetry, you see how precise language can be; you see words being used with great respect.

--William Boyd

This is the kind of poetry that sent critics digging deep beneath the surface for meaning. There's certainly none on the surface.

--Richard Armour

The poet is the priest of the invisible.

--Wallace Stevens

Poetry is not the thing said but a way of saying it.

—A. E. Housman

It's not the poem on the page that makes them laugh or cry. It's how your soul has touched a heart and opened up an eye.

--Charles Ghigna

Souls speak with each other through poetry!

—Avijeet Das

Poetry led me by the hand out of madness.

—Anne Sexton

Poetry is the utterance of deep and heart-felt truth—the true poet is very near the oracle.

--Edwin Hubbel Chapin

With me poetry has not been a purpose, but a passion.

--Edgar Allan Poe

The job of the poet is to render the world—to see it and report it without loss, without perversion. No poet ever talks about feelings. Only sentimental people do.

--Mark Van Doren

Some poetry is extraordinarily involved and obscure, especially modern poetry, but if it is good, we can learn to unravel it. What it says could not possibly be said in prose because a poem has an intrinsic built-in rhythm, which is why it is poetry. It is this rhythm that makes it not only memorable but rememberable. Try remembering whole paragraphs of prose, and you will see the difference. Poetry is also, contrary to what most people think, pithier; more economical, if you like. In three words a poet can give a thought, a vision, a picture that would take sentences of prose.

--Rumer Godden

A person sets out to write a poem for a variety of reasons: to win the heart of his beloved; to express his attitude toward the reality surrounding him, be it a landscape or a state; to capture his state of mind at a given instant; to leave—as he thinks at that moment—a trace on the earth. But regardless of the reasons for which he takes up the pen, and regardless of the effect produced by what emerges from under that pen on his audience—however great or small it may be—the immediate consequences of this enterprise is the sensation of coming into direct contact with language, or more precisely, the sensation of immediately falling into dependence on it, on everything that has already been uttered, written and accomplished in it.

--Joseph Brodsky

If a poet has any obligation toward society, it is to write well. Being in the minority, he has no other choice. Failing this duty, he sinks into oblivion.

--Joseph Brodsky

A poem can be read and reread and reread and will continually yield more and more meanings, but on that first reading, there's just something in a wonderful poem that is mesmerizing and captivating immediately.

--Galway Kinnell

Accepting a summary of a poem, an analysis of someone else's reading or interpretation or experience of it, is analogous to having someone else eat your dinner for you...a work of art, as art, must be a personal experience.

--Louise M. Rosenblatt

A poet is simply an alchemist who transmutes his cynicism regarding human beings into an optimism regarding the moon, the stars, the heavens, and the flowers, to say nothing of spring.

--George Jean Nathan

Poem: what happens when an anxiety meets a technique.

--Lawrence Durrell

Poetry ennobles the heart and the eyes, and unveils the meaning of all things upon which the heart and the eyes dwell. It discovers the secret rays of the universe, and restores to us forgotten paradise.

--Dame Edith Sitwell

Poetry brings pollen of one flower to another flower.

--Robert Frost

The business of the poet and novelist is to show the sorriness underlying the greatest things, and the grandness underlying the sorriest things.

--Thomas Hardy

Poetry is not the assertion of truth, but the making of that truth fully real to us.

--T. S. Eliot

Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt, and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen.

--Leonardo da Vinci

Things in which mediocrity is insupportable—poetry, music, painting, public speaking.

--La Bruyère

A poet's autobiography is his poetry. Anything else is just a footnote.

--Yevgeny Yentushenko

Young poet (to Voltaire, who had berated him for writing and publishing trash): 'I've gotta live, don't I?'

Voltaire: 'I don't see the necessity.'

--Voltaire

Poetry is a rich, full-blooded whistle, cracked ice crunching in pails, the night that numbs the leaf, the duel of two nightingales, the sweet pea that has run wild, Creation's tears in shoulder blades.

--Boris Pasternak

It were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creation of a poet.

--Percy Bysshe Shelley

Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create.

--Gloria Anzaldúa

The notion of expressing sentiments in short lines having similar sounds at their ends seems as remote as mangoes on the moon.

--Philip Larkin

The poem will please if it is lively—if it is stupid it will fail—but I will have none of your damned cutting and slashing.

--Lord Byron

I translate emotions into flowers.

--Sandra Parks

If I had my life to live over again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once a week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied would have thus been kept active through use. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.

—Charles Darwin

I write verses myself, but I have no sympathy with the notion that the world owes a duty to poetry, or any other art. Poetry is not a civilizer, rather the reverse, for great poetry appeals to the most primitive instincts. It is not necessarily a moralizer; it does not necessarily improve one's character; it does not even teach good manners. It is a beautiful work of nature, like an eagle or a high sunrise. You owe it no duty. If you like it, listen to it; if not, let it alone.

--Robinson Jeffers

Why should we need any more light on poems than the light which radiates from the poems themselves?

--T. S. Eliot

Poets all have imagination because they imagine people are going to read their poems.

--Unknown

Inspiration is a trick that poets have invented to give themselves importance.

--Jean Anouilh

Poets die in different ways: most of them do not die into the grave, but into business or criticism.

--Robert Frost

It is the business of reviewers to watch poets, not of poets to watch reviewers.

--William Hazlitt

A poet is a man who puts up a ladder to a star and climbs it while playing a violin.

--Edmond de Goncourt

Nobody knows a poet is alive until he is dead.

--Unknown

The ear is the only true writer and the only true reader of poetry.

--Robert Frost

Poetry is a search for syllables to shoot at the barriers of the unknown and the unknowable.

--Carl Sandburg

In a poem the words should be as pleasing to the ear as the meaning is to the mind.

--Marianne Moore

I like to think of poetry as statements made on the way to the grave.

--Dylan Thomas

What stimulates me to write a poem is that I have got something inside me that I want to get rid of—it is almost a kind of defecation.

--T. S. Eliot

With the so-called modern poets, a dislocated world demands a dislocated poem to describe it.

--Oliver St. John Gogarty

Poetry is better understood in the verse of the artist than in the prose of the critic.

--Matthew Arnold

Poetry is able to say twice as much as prose in half the time.

--Christopher Fry

A publisher of today would as soon see a burglar in his office as a poet.

--Henry de Vere  
Stacpoole

It is as impossible to translate poetry as it is to translate music.

--Voltaire

Prose can be translated, but poetry can only be transmutilated.

--Unknown

Every man will be a poet if he can; otherwise a philosopher or man of science. This proves the superiority of the poet.

--Henry David Thoreau

The poet's aim is either to profit or to please, or to blend in one the delightful and the useful. Whatever the lesson you would convey, be brief, that your hearers may catch quickly what is said and faithfully retain it. Every superfluous word is spilled from the too-full memory.

--Horace

I am overwhelmed by the beautiful disorder of poetry, the eternal virginity of words.

--Theodore Roethke

Information is true if it is accurate. A poem is true if it holds together.

--E. M. Forster

If a poem arises from a dynamic relation with reality, it will be fresh whatever formal difficulties the poet chooses to overcome in the writing of it. If not, it will be like a group of anthropologists demonstrating a rain dance.

--Richard Wilbur

My verse represents a handle I can grasp in order not to yield to the centrifugal forces which are trying to throw me off the world.

--Ogden Nash

Wherever human dignity and liberty are threatened, poets are busy in the night.

--Stanley Kunitz

Anyone who says he likes poetry and doesn't buy poetry books is a dirty sonofabitch.

--*Swallow Press*

Poetry is language at its most distilled and most powerful.

--Rita Dove

Is there a joy except gardening that asks so much, and gives so much? I know of no other except, perhaps, the writing of a poem. They are much alike, even in the amount of waste that has to be accepted for the sake of the rare, chancy joy when all goes well.

--May Saxton

Death is what gets poets up in the morning. If all the poems about death and mortality were removed from the *Norton Anthology of Poetry*, it would be the *Norton Pamphlet of Poetry*.

--Billy Collins

Eighty-three percent of American poetry is not worth reading. I haven't done a study, but 83 percent seems like the right number....The other 17 percent of poetry isn't just worth reading. I couldn't live without it.

--Billy Collins

Poetry gives a kind of pleasure that's unavailable anywhere in the world. That pleasure is a mix of feeling, thought and language. A poem is a conscious effort to create that mix, to use language almost to fuse thought and feeling together. The perfect blend is the pleasure for me—the marriage of thought and feeling.

--Billy Collins

A man should be learned in several sciences, and should have a reasonable, philosophical and in some measure a mathematical head, to be a complete and excellent poet.

--John Dryden

Modernity and beauty simply don't mix. Pragmatism and an industrial-sized busyness denigrate everything that can't squeeze out of a calculator. And the first thing to die under such circumstances is a passion for beauty. For those trying desperately to jump over moving hurdles, pursuing beauty is just foolishness....We just don't have the time for poetry; beauty isn't useful, we say, until we're in our eighties, when many finally reflect and realize that beauty was truly essential to a good life that has now slipped by.

--Douglas Jones

Poetry is like a ripe tomato.  
When you open it,  
it gushes out with juice all over you,  
with no way to get the stain out.  
Poetry can also be like an onion--  
it puts tears in your eyes.

--Alexandra Kelikian

A teacher who can arouse a feeling for one single good poem accomplishes more than he who fills our memory with rows and rows of natural objects, classified with name and form.

--Johann Wolfgang  
von Goethe

Poetry is just the evidence of life. If your life is burning well, poetry is just the ash.

--Leonard Cohen

There's no money in poetry, but then there's no poetry in money, either.

--Robert Graves

Poetry is what gets lost in translation.

--Robert Frost

A poem is never finished, only abandoned.

--Paul Valéry

He who draws noble delights from sentiments of poetry is a true poet, though he has never written a line in all his life.

--George Sand

Always be a poet, even in prose.

--Charles Baudelaire

Poets are soldiers that liberate words from the steadfast possession of definition.  
--Eli Khamarov

Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.  
--Percy Byshe Shelley

Poetry is nearer to vital truth than history.  
--Plato

Out of the quarrel with others we make rhetoric; out of the quarrel with ourselves  
we make poetry.  
—W. B. Yeats

The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the  
other verse... the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of  
thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver im-  
port than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals,  
whereas those of history are singulars.  
--Aristotle

Poetry is a packsack of invisible keepsakes.  
--Carl Sandburg

Poetry should...strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and  
appear almost a remembrance.  
--John Keats

A poet can survive everything but a misprint.  
--Oscar Wilde

To see the Summer Sky  
Is Poetry, though never in a Book it lie—  
True Poems flee.  
--Emily Dickinson

The poet is in the end probably more afraid of the dogmatist who wants to extract  
the message from the poem and throw the poem away than he is of the sentimental-  
ist who says, 'Oh, just let me enjoy the poem.'  
--Robert Penn Warren

Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

--Percy Bysshe Shelley

A prose writer gets tired of writing prose, and wants to be a poet. So he begins every line with a capital letter, and keeps on writing prose.

--Samuel McChord  
Crothers

Poetry is man's rebellion against being what he is.

--James Branch Cabell

A poet is an unhappy being whose heart is torn by secret sufferings, but whose lips are so strangely formed that when the sighs and the cries escape them, they sound like beautiful music... and then people crowd about the poet and say to him: 'Sing for us soon again;' that is as much as to say, 'May new sufferings torment your soul.'

--Soren Kierkegaard

'Therefore' is a word the poet must not know.

--André Gide

The poem is the point at which our strength gave out.

--Richard Rosen

It is the job of poetry to clean up our word-clogged reality by creating silences around things.

--Stephen Mallarme

The true poet is all the time a visionary and whether with friends or not, as much alone as a man on his death bed.

—W. B. Yeats

If the author had said 'Let us put on appropriate galoshes,' there could, of course, have been no poem.

--Unknown

Poetry heals the wounds inflicted by reason.

--Novalis

There is poetry as soon as we realize that we possess nothing.

--John Cage

Only the poet has any right to be sorry for the poor, if he has anything to spare when he has thought of the dull, commonplace rich.

--William Bolitho

Who can tell the dancer from the dance?

--William Butler Yeats

Poetry is the language in which man explores his own amazement.

--Christopher Fry

If Galileo had said in verse that the world moved, the inquisition might have let him alone.

--Thomas Hardy

The poet doesn't invent. He listens.

--Jean Cocteau

Wanted: a needle swift enough to sew this poem into a blanket.

--Charles Simic

The only problem  
with Haiku is that you just  
get started and then

--Roger McGough

You can't write poetry on the computer.

--Quentin Tarantino

Each man carries within him the soul of a poet who died young.

--Sainte-Beuve

Poets are mysterious, but a poet when all is said is not much more mysterious than a banker.

--Allen Tate

The collective wisdom of humanity [is] enshrined in its poetry.

—Robyn Donald

God is the perfect poet.

--Robert Browning

Science is for those who learn; poetry, for those who know.

--Joseph Roux

Poetry is an echo, asking a shadow to dance.

--Carl Sandburg

The worst fate of a poet is to be admired without being understood.

--Jean Cocteau

He lives the poetry that he cannot write. The others write the poetry that they dare not realise.

--Oscar Wilde

Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.

--Robert Frost

You don't have to suffer to be a poet. Adolescence is enough suffering for anyone.

--John Ciardi

Poetry is all that is worth remembering in life.

--William Hazlitt

A poem is true if it hangs together. Information points to something else. A poem points to nothing but itself.

—E. M. Forster

Poetry is the art of substantiating shadows.

--Edmund Burke

Poetry, like the moon, does not advertise anything.

--William Blissett

Happiness is sharing a bowl of cherries and a book of poetry with a shade tree. He doesn't eat much and doesn't read much, but listens well and is a most gracious host.

--Astrid Alauda

If you've got a poem within you today, I can guarantee you a tomorrow.

--Terri Guillemets

Poetry is ordinary language raised to the nth power. Poetry is boned with ideas, nerved and blooded with emotions, all held together by the delicate, tough skin of words.

--Paul Engle

I don't create poetry, I create myself, for me my poems are a way to me.

--Edith Södergran

Poetry is not a civilizer, rather the reverse, for great poetry appeals to the most primitive instincts.

--Robinson Jeffers

He who writes prose builds his temple to Fame in rubble; he who writes verses builds it in granite.

--Edward Bulwer-Lytton

The word 'Verse' is used here as the term most convenient for expressing, and without pedantry, all that is involved in the consideration of rhythm, rhyme, meter, and versification... the subject is exceedingly simple; one tenth of it, possibly may be called ethical; nine tenths, however, appertains to the mathematics.

--Edgar Allan Poe

The poem... is a little myth of man's capacity of making life meaningful. And in the end, the poem is not a thing we see—it is, rather, a light by which we may see—and what we see is life.

--Robert Penn Warren

I saw the gooseflesh on my skin. I did not know what made it. I was not cold. Had a ghost passed over? No, it was the poetry. A spark flew off [Matthew] Arnold and shook me, like a chill. I wanted to cry; I felt very odd. I had fallen into a new way of being happy.

—Sylvia Plath

Poets aren't very useful  
Because they aren't consumeful or very produceful.

--Ogden Nash

What is a Professor of Poetry? How can poetry be professed?

—W. H. Auden

Children and lunatics cut the Gordian knot which the poet spends his life patiently trying to untie.

--Jean Cocteau

Mathematics and Poetry are... the utterance of the same power of imagination, only that in the one case it is addressed to the head, in the other, to the heart.

--Thomas Hill

A true poet does not bother to be poetical. Nor does a nursery gardener scent his roses.

--Jean Cocteau

Everything in creation has its appointed painter or poet and remains in bondage like the princess in the fairy tale 'til its appropriate liberator comes to set it free.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

A poet must leave traces of his passage, not proof.

--Rene Char

Poetry is nobody's business except the poet's, and everybody else can fuck off.

--Philip Larkin

Poetry comes with anger, hunger and dismay; it does not often visit groups of citizens sitting down to be literary together, and would appall them if it did.

--Christopher Morley

Poets are masters of us ordinary men, in knowledge of the mind, because they drink at streams which we have not yet made accessible to science.

--Sigmund Freud

To be a poet is a condition, not a profession.

--Robert Frost

Poetry is the synthesis of hyacinths and biscuits.

--Carl Sandburg

Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth.

--Samuel Johnson

I've written some poetry I don't understand myself.

--Carl Sandburg

The poet is a liar who always speaks the truth.

--Jean Cocteau

The poetry of the earth is never dead.

--John Keats

The poet... may be used as a barometer, but let us not forget that he is also part of the weather.

--Lionel Trilling

A poet's work is to name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world, and stop it going to sleep.

--Salman Rushdie

Poetry is plucking at the heartstrings, and making music with them.

--Dennis Gabor

The greatest thing of all is to be a master of the metaphor. It is the only thing which cannot be taught by others; and it is also a sign of original genius, because a good metaphor implies the intuitive perception of similarity in dissimilar things.

--Aristotle

Poetry is the deification of reality.

--Edith Sitwell

The poet speaks to all men of that other life of theirs that they have smothered and forgotten.

--Edith Sitwell

The first poem...ever written...was probably carved...on a cold damp cave...by a physically unendowed cave man...who wanted to make a good impression...on a physically endowed...cave woman...But maybe not...Maybe it was she...trying to gain the notice...of a hunk...who was in demand...Or perhaps...it was simply someone...who admired the motion...of a sabertooth tiger...and wanting to capture the beauty...picked up a sharpened rock...to draw...We know so very little...about the origin of the written word...let alone the language...that all conjecture deserves some consideration.

--Nikki Giovanni

Inspiration is a farce that poets have invented to give themselves importance.  
--Jean Anouilh

Poets are the sense, philosophers the intelligence of humanity.  
--Samuel Beckett

Poetry is what Milton saw when he went blind.  
--Don Marquis

I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.

--William Faulkner

Real poetry doesn't say anything; it just ticks off the possibilities. Opens all doors. You can walk through any one that suits you.

--Jim Morrison

A lot happens by accident in poetry.

--Howard Nemerov

I am not at all clear what free verse is anymore. That's one of the things you learn not to know.

--Howard Nemerov

I think there was a revolution in poetry, associated chiefly with Eliot and Pound; but maybe it is of the nature of revolutions or of the nature of history that their innovations should later come to look trivial or indistinguishable from technical tricks.

--Howard Nemerov

I think there's one thing which distinguishes our art—we don't consider. We don't think. We write a little verse because it comes to us.

--Howard Nemerov

It may be said that poems are in one way like icebergs: only about a third of their bulk appears above the surface of the page.

--Howard Nemerov

Poetry, however, does characteristically focus on the feelings and attitudes...and not on the action or ideas....Poetry is concerned with the massiveness, the multidimensional quality of experience.

--Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

Poetry, then, is a response to, and an evaluation of, our experience of the objective, bustling world and of our ideas about it. Poetry is concerned with the world as responded to sensorially, emotionally, and intellectually.

--Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

Poetry in ideal perfection brings the whole soul into activity.

--Samuel Taylor  
Coleridge

Poetry, it is clear, is not cut off from life, but is basically concerned with life—that is, with the lived fullness of the world. It extends our own limited experience by means of imagination. By imagination, it sharpens our sense of the physical world on the one hand, and on the other, it deepens our sense of the emotional, intellectual, and moral implications of human situations, and actions. It does not accomplish such things by general description, logical analysis, or abstract reasoning, but by imaginative enactment, by our sense of 'living into' the world portrayed by a poem.

--Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

Whatever ideas are stated by a poem exist not only in the poem but in a context of ideas and 'truths' outside the poem, including, of course, the deepest convictions of the reader.

--Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

Certainly it is not to be thought of as a group of mechanically combined elements—meter, rhyme, figurative language, idea, and so on—put together to make a poem as bricks are put together to make a wall. The total relationship among all the elements in a poem is what is all important; it is not a mechanical relationship but one that is far more intimate and fundamental. If we must compare a poem to the make up of some physical object, it ought to be not to a wall but to something organic like a plant.

--Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

Poetry is incorrigibly particular and concrete—not general and abstract. It presents to us a world that appeals to our senses by giving us a more or less vivid and recognizable impression of some natural scene or natural object—a register, rendered as accurately as the poet could manage, or of the impression received through the senses or through the imagination.

--Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

Poetry puts us back in touch with the freshness of things; and, for people living in an urbanized modern society, poetry becomes a means for, among other things, restoring our originally unprejudiced life of the senses.

--Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

A poet laments to a friend, 'Burglars broke into my house last night.'

Friend: 'Yes? What happened?'

Poet: 'They searched through every room, then left a five-dollar bill on my dresser.'

--*10,000 Jokes, Toasts  
and Stories*

To read a poem is to hear it with our eyes; to hear it is to see it with our ears.

--Octavio Paz

[Paul] Dunbar wrote traditional poetry, but he also wrote in the idioms of the common people in a way that someone with a third-grade education would express things.

—Harry Louis  
Williams II

The poet is a reporter interviewing his own heart

--Christopher Morley

Poetry comes to you from outside you, in books or in words, but that for it to live, something from within you must come to it and meet it and complete it. Your response with your own mind and body and memory and emotions gives the poem its ability to work its magic; if you give to it, it will give to you, and give plenty.

--James Dickey

The sun is new every day, the ancient philosopher Heraclitus said. The sun of poetry is new every day, too, because it is seen in different ways by different people who have lived under it, lived with it, responded to it.

--James Dickey

When you read, don't let the poet write down to you; read up to him. Reach for him from your gut out, and the heart and muscles will come into it, too.

--James Dickey

Poetry, like fresh white wine, is ideal for sampling in the summer; read outdoors, under a tree, with a wide sky above.

--Alexander McCall  
Smith

Poets, in my view, and I think the view of most people, do speak God's language—it's better, it's finer, it's language on a higher plane than ordinary people speak in their daily lives.

—Stephen King

I've never read a political poem that's accomplished anything. Poetry makes things happen, but rarely what the poet wants.

--Howard Nemerov

Poetry is not something that is just done at a desk. It merges out of your experience.

--Billy Collins

The typewriter separated me from a deeper intimacy with poetry, and my hand brought me closer to that intimacy again.

--Pablo Neruda

I believe poems begin as grit, as curiosities that get stuck in the mind.

--Patrick Hicks

I think it is very possible that the novel, like poetry before it, could die. Poetry is already living on a very high, snow-covered peak. But nobody goes to visit. And I think the same thing is beginning to happen to the novel. I say, God bless John Grisham and all the other extremely popular writers. At least they are writing things that entertain. Every writer should entertain.

--Tom Wolfe

Poetry is like making a joke. If you get one word wrong at the end of a joke, you've lost the whole thing.

—W. S. Merwin

Poems in a way are spells against death. They are milestones, to see where you were then from where you are now. To perpetuate your feelings, to establish them. If you have in any way touched the central heart of mankind's feelings, you'll survive.

--Richard Eberhart

In the hands of a great poet, words have ways of affecting us in ways we don't understand.

--Kenneth Branagh

Writing a poem is easy, like swimming into a fish trap. Analyzing a poem is hard, like swimming out of a fish trap.

--William Stafford

Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary.

--Kahlil Gibran

A poet ought not to pick nature's pocket. Let him borrow, and so borrow as to repay by the very act of borrowing. Examine nature accurately, but write from recollection, and trust more to the imagination than the memory.

--Samuel Taylor  
Coleridge

Written poetry is different. Best thing is to see it in performance first, then read it. Performance is more provocative.

--Adrian Mitchell

A great poet is the most precious jewel of a nation.

--Ludwig van Beethoven

Of poets I put Virgil first—he was greatest.

--Mary MacLane

A poet must need be before his own age, to be even with posterity.

--James Russell Lowell

I work very hard on all my poems, but most of the work consists of trying not to sound as if I had worked. I try to make them sound as natural as possible, but with-  
in a quite strict form, which to my ears has a lot to do with musical rhythm and  
sound.

--Anne Stevenson

American poetry is always about defining oneself individually, claiming one's right  
to be different and often to break taboos.

--Diane Wakoski

I write poetry in order to live more fully.

--Judith Rodriguez

I stopped over at the bookstore, and I looked at the poetry section and there was a  
thin volume of poetry called *Fruits and Vegetables*. I immediately pulled it out, and  
it was by Erica Jong before she became famous for *Fear of Flying*. The first poem I  
opened up to was about sautéing an onion, and I thought: 'You can write a poem  
about that? You're kidding.'

--Natalie Goldberg

The poetical language of an age should be the current language heightened.

--Gerard Manley Hopkins

Anticipating that most poetry will be worse than carrying heavy luggage through  
O'Hare Airport, the public, to its loss, reads very little of it.

--Russell Baker

For many years, I thought a poem was a whisper overheard, not an aria heard.

--Rita Dove

A blank wall is an appalling thing to look at. The wall of a museum—a canvas—a piece of film—or a guy sitting in front of a typewriter. Then, you start out to do something—that vague thing called creation. The beginning strikes awe within you.

--Edward Steichen

A poet never takes notes. You never take notes in a love affair.

--Robert Frost

Poetry is delicious; the best prose is that which is most full of poetry.

--Virginia Woolf

Those who have been eminent in philosophy, politics, poetry, and the arts have all had tendencies toward melancholia.

--Aristotle

When the psychologist Kay Redfield Jamison looked at 47 famous writers and artists in Great Britain, she found that more than 38 percent had been treated for a mood disorder; the highest rates occurred among playwrights, and the second-highest among poets. When Joseph Schildkraut, a psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School, studied a group of 15 abstract-expressionist painters in the mid-20th century, he found that half of them had some form of mental illness, mostly depression or bipolar disorder; nearly half of these artists failed to live past age 60.

--Nancy C. Andreasen

Samuel Taylor Coleridge once described how he composed an entire 300-line poem about Kubla Khan while in an opiate-induced, dreamlike state, and began writing it down when he awoke; he said he then lost most of it when he got interrupted and called away on an errand—thus the finished poem he published was but a fragment of what originally came to him in his dreamlike state.

--Nancy C. Andreasen

The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion, all in one.

--John Ruskin

Poets are the only people to whom love is not only a crucial, but an indispensable experience, which entitles them to mistake it for a universal one.

--Hannah Arendt

Without poets, without artists, men would soon weary of nature's monotony.  
—Guillaume Apollinaire

Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. This is the best part of these men's farms, yet to this their warranty-deeds give no title.  
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Poetry transforms and redeems the common, the hurtful, the humiliating.  
—Susan Montez

What actually makes poetry poetry is of course impossible to define. We recognize it when we hear it, when we see it, but we can't define it.  
—Robert Morgan

I gave up on new poetry myself thirty years ago, when most of it began to read like coded messages passing between lonely aliens on a hostile world.  
—Russell Baker

How do we feel about the on-the-page poetry of Dylan Thomas? His big, late-period thumpers are not looking good. 'Fern Hill' is gloop; 'Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night' is inferior Yeats. And his early stuff is impossible, a young man and his bubbling glands, his bubbling thesaurus—*Faded my elbow ghost, the mothers-eyed / As, blowing on the angels, I was lost*—the sort of poetry you press upon a non-poetry-reader if you want to make sure he never goes near a poem again....I am startled, offended, by the plain unreadability of 60 percent of his verse. *Our eunuch dreams, all seedless in the light*...What the hell?  
—James Parker

It is commonly asserted and accepted that *Paradise Lost* is among the two or three greatest English poems; it may justly be taken as the type of supreme poetic achievement in our literature.  
—John Drinkwater

The blood-jet is poetry.  
There is no stopping it.  
—Sylvia Plath

Poe's saying that a long poem is a sequence of short ones is perfectly just.  
—John Drinkwater

A lot of poets too live on the margins of social acceptance, they certainly aren't in it for the money. William Blake—only his first book was legitimately published.

—Jim Jarmusch

The very idea of a bird is a symbol and a suggestion to the poet. A bird seems to be at the top of the scale, so vehement and intense his life. . . . The beautiful vagabonds, endowed with every grace, masters of all climes, and knowing no bounds—how many human aspirations are realized in their free, holiday-lives—and how many suggestions to the poet in their flight and song?

—John Burroughs

Poetry: A superior amusement.

—T. S. Eliot

As a child, I stumbled upon the work of James Whitcomb Riley. I can't remember where or how, whether I was in school or saw a book at the library. Around the age of 13, my mother, knowing my love for Riley, discovered his collection *Love-Lyrics* at an antiques store in Phoenix. I own this book over 30 years later and still consider Riley the founding father of my own ascent into poetry. In Riley's words, I found emotions I was certain I felt too; I discovered topics I'd yet to experience, such a romantic love, death and grief, complexities of the heart too profound for a child of 13 to possibly grasp, but those complexities did not stop my heart from pounding in my chest or the tears from gathering in my eyes. I believe that Riley inspired me to be honest and unafraid, and taught me that a poem about something as simple as the fall of a lover's hair was nothing short of a celebration.

—Lisa Zaran

I love language and can't love poems that don't do something incredible with language, but poetry, for me, is also about how to live a life. Poetry helps me live my life.

—Rachel Zucker

Influence is not imitation. It is more fertile and subtle than that, and less conscious. It comes about when we are driven to possess another poet, to absorb him as if he were a necessary food.

—May Sarton

The only reason for writing poetry is because you have to, because it is what gives you joy....So let me welcome you, dear poet, not into the company of the angels, but into the great company of those who work for joy alone, the poets.

—May Sarton

The gross heathenism of civilization has generally destroyed nature, and poetry, and all that is spiritual.

—John Muir

Maya Angelou was an African-American author and poet whose collected works can be accessed by clicking on the #inspiration hashtag on Instagram.

—*TL;DR Wikipedia*

A haiku is a poem that is seventeen syllables too long.

—*TL;DR Wikipedia*

The worth of a civilization or a culture is not valued in the terms of its material wealth or military power, but by the quality and achievements of its representative individuals—its philosophers, its poets and its artists.

—Herbert Read

A poem is, after all, a fragile thing, and its intrinsic worth or lack thereof, is a frighteningly subjective consideration; but fellowship grants, degrees, appointments, and publications are objective facts. They are quantifiable; they can be listed on a resume.

—Bruce Bawer

Poetry; a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty.

—Matthew Arnold

Poetry is a game of knowledge, a bringing to consciousness, by naming them, of emotions and their hidden relationships.

—W. H. Auden

Baby books bore me....Too stilted. Too bland. Too predictable. Silverstein's poems surprise and amuse. Sly story lines duck down unexpected alleys. Clever phrases squeal and sing. Cuddled in my lap, Alice senses enthusiasm, hears delight. *Sidewalk* entralls Alice because Silverstein entralls me. Baby loves a book not usually shelved with baby books.

—Jack Hamann

To a poet the mere making of a poem can seem to solve the problem of truth, but only a problem of art is solved in poetry.

—Laura Riding

*Sidewalk* resonates because Silverstein wrote for the ear. Purposeful rhythm. Calculated pace. Challenging riffs. Delightful melodies. Words selected as much for their sound as their meaning. Sound becomes meaning.

—Jack Hamann

Before people complain of the obscurity of modern poetry, they should first examine their consciences and ask themselves with how many people and on how many occasions they have genuinely and profoundly shared some experience with another.

—W. H. Auden

The office of poetry is not to make us think accurately, but feel truly.

—Frederick William  
Robertson

You write poetry when you can't see, when you want to write about a molecule of time.

—Sandra Cisneros

In order to create there must be a dynamic force, and what force is more potent than love?

—Igor Stravinsky

Till now poets were privileged to insert a certain proportion of nonsense—very far in excess of one-half of one per cent—into their otherwise sober documents.

—John C. Ransom

Poetry teaches an exceptional love for words, their special properties and ability to signify beyond the literal....such that the experience of reading is not merely one-dimensional, but a full-fledged affair in which multiple of ourselves seem stimulated, our physical body as well as our intellect.

—Major Jackson

A vein of poetry exists in the hearts of all men.

—Thomas Carlyle

The Helicon of too many poets is not a hill crowned with sunshine and visited by the Muses and the Graces, but an old, mouldering house, full of gloom and haunted by ghosts.

—Henry Wadsworth  
Longfellow

Each memorable verse of a true poet has two or three times the written content.  
—Alfred de Musset

The talent of a true writer and poet is in the ear.  
—Bryant H. McGill

In very great poetry the music often comes through even when one doesn't know the language. I loved Dante passionately before I knew a word of Italian.  
—Donna Tartt

Poetry and eloquence are both alike the expression or utterance of feeling; but, if we may be excused the antithesis, we should say that eloquence is heard; poetry is overheard. Eloquence supposes an audience. The peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude, and embodying itself in symbols which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind. Eloquence is feeling pouring itself out to other minds, courting their sympathy, or endeavoring to influence their belief, or move them to passion or to action.

—John Stuart Mill

Of all the writing genres, poetry can feel the most mysterious. It is dense, concise, heartfelt, a wave of words and feeling crashing over the writer and then the reader. Poetry arrives quickly, intensely and, like a comet that has just breached the earth's atmosphere, needs to cool before taking shape.

—Julie Krug

Poetry leads us to the unstructured sources of our beings, to the unknown, and returns us to our rational, structured selves refreshed.

—Archie R. Ammons

Poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese.

—Gilbert Keith  
Chesterton

We have to raise the consciousness; the only way poets can change the world is to raise the consciousness of the general populace.

—Lawrence  
Ferlinghetti

We simply have not kept in touch with poetry.

—Paul Muldoon

I grew up in this town, my poetry was born between the hill and the river, it took its voice from the rain, and like the timber, it steeped itself in the forests.

—Pablo Neruda

If I can put one touch of rosy sunset into the life of any man or woman, I shall feel that I have worked with God.

—Gilbert K. Chesterton

Nations are born in the hearts of poets, they prosper and die in the hands of politicians.

—Muhammad Iqbal

Our sweetest songs are those that tell the saddest thoughts.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley

I write quite a lot of sonnets, and I think of them almost as prayers: short and memorable, something you can recite.

—Carol Ann Duffy

A poet is a bird of unearthly excellence, who escapes from his celestial realm and arrives in this world warbling. If we do not cherish him, he spreads his wings and flies back into his homeland.

—Kahlil Gibran

Rarest of the real poets are born poets. They are the oddballs, not the professors.

—James Broughton

Style is not something applied. It is something that permeates. It is of the nature of that in which it is found, whether the poem, the manner of a god, the bearing of a man. It is not a dress.

—Wallace Stevens

When the poet makes his perfect selection of a word, he is endowing the word with life.

—John Drinkwater

You can't teach the poetry, but you can teach the craft.

—David Hockney

Too much is demanded by the critic, attempted by the poet.

—John C. Ransom

No poems can please for long or live that are written by water drinkers.

—Horace

Poems are no longer clearly defined constructs with precise terminal points for me. Instead, they've become, if I may, a long conversation, an expansive dialogic, that stretches from my contemporaries all the way back to Adam and Eve.

—Abayomi Animashaun

Great poetry or even excellent poetry is written by people who are not afraid to reveal their flaws. ...I think your flaws are your strengths. When I say flaws, I mean your own idiosyncratic way of doing something.

—Alicia Anstead

A poem is like a quilt. The stitching has to be consistent.

—Parneshia Jones

She hasn't written a line of poetry since college, but the lessons she learned from that period—the economy of words, the rhythm of a sentence, the power of choosing a single word—are infused in everything she has written since. The feeling she gets from the sound of a certain word is a powerful compass.

—Aubrey Everett on  
Winnie Holzman

When I first started writing poetry as a high schooler, I adopted what I call 'The Seven Layers of Enigma' model. I wrote a verse that I did not understand, but was sure that others would marvel at simply because it was so inscrutable. I wrote this way because I had found few poems—dished out to me in school by well-meaning teachers—that I understood in the vein that one understands prose. Once I began reading on my own and discovered poems and poets that used clear language that told stories, I was evangelized, and my poems became more narrative, more rooted in stories, often about working-class citizens, and much more accessible to hopefully everyone, including folks who don't typically like poetry. Robert Lowell, in his poem, 'Epilogue,' writes 'Yet why not say what happened?' I ascribe to that.

—Joseph Bathanti

Poetry is truth in its Sunday clothes.

—Joseph Roux

Poetry should be able to reach everybody, and it should be able to appeal to all levels of understanding.

—Peter Davison

The poet must decide not to impose his feelings in order to write without sentimentality.

—John Barton

Great geniuses have the shortest biographies. Their cousins can tell you nothing about them. They lived in their writings, and so their house and street life was trivial and commonplace.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence.

—John Keats

For most of the modernists, the more revolutionary their poetics, the more carefully they concealed themselves behind the manners and professions of the bourgeoisie. T. S. Eliot was a banker when he wrote 'The Waste Land;' William Carlos Williams was a family doctor; Marianne Moore, an editor, was a devout churchgoer who lived with her mother.

—Adam Kirsch

The stanzas that made Julia Ward Howe famous came to her during a night at the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C., in 1861, after she had spent the day visiting Union troops. The poem she scribbled down in the predawn darkness went on to enjoy a viral success as yet unmatched by any other verse in *The Atlantic*, where 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' appeared in February 1962.

—Elaine Showalter

I decided that it was not wisdom that enabled poets to write their poetry, but a kind of instinct or inspiration, such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean.

—Socrates

Poetry is not about emotion, it causes emotion.

—Matthew Buckley  
Smith

The poem is a morbid secretion like the pearl.

—A. E. Housman

Poetry...does characteristically focus on the feelings and attitudes...and not on the action or ideas....Poetry is concerned with the massiveness, the multidimensional quality of experience...Poetry is concerned with the world as responded to sensorially, emotionally, and intellectually.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

This special field of literature [poetry] in contrast to that of practical and that of scientific concerns, involves...feelings and attitudes. At first glance, the field of feeling and attitudes may seem trivial when thought of in contrast to the great bustling practical business of the world or in contrast to the vast body of organized knowledge which science is and which allows man to master, to a certain degree, nature and his own fate. The field of feeling and attitude may seem to be 'merely personal' and 'merely subjective,' and therefore of no general interest. But at second thought, we may realize that all the action and knowledge in the world can be valuable only as these things bring meaning to life—to our particular lives especially.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

In an important sense, all poems are fictional, even poems that profess to be autobiographical, for the voice of the poem is inevitably a creation and not a natural and spontaneous outburst.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

Poetry...is incorrigibly particular and —not general and abstract. It presents to us a world that appeals to our senses by giving us a more or less vivid and recognizable impression of some natural scene or natural object—a register, rendered as accurately as the poet could manage, of the impression received through the senses or through the imagination....Poetry puts us back in touch with the freshness of things; and, for people living in an urbanized modern society, poetry becomes a means for, among other things, restoring our originally unprejudiced life of the senses.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

In a good poem the imagery is under control; that is, it does not introduce or suggest ideas or feelings that are not coherent with the main impulse (idea and/or feeling) of the poem. Further more, even if an image at first seems shocking or irrelevant, the poet ends by justifying its inclusion—according to his purposes and without distractions from his purposes.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

We naturally think of imagery as an evocation in the imagination of some literal sense perception. But we must remember that not only things visually perceived give rise to imagery. Though visual imagery is the most common sort in poetry, there are also images of touch, temperature, smell, and sound.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

What we want from poetry is not the idea as such—the theme as a slogan, a poster, or a piece of sampler work to hang on the wall. As far as poetry is concerned, an idea is worthless unless it is dramatized in the poem, unless it seems to grow out of the poem.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

Comedy, however lighthearted, is possible only because there is some urgency in the world which it treats lightheartedly; and humor and poetry have much in common, including the warmth of feeling and the leap of imagination.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

It is only when the attitude involved in the poem comes as an over-simplified, and unvalidated, generalization, when the response that the poem demands is not warranted by the dramatic situation, when, to sum up, the poem is incoherent—it is only in these cases that we ordinarily reject a poem.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

The 'beauty' of poetry springs from the poet's ability to perceive meaning and significance even in scenes that are in themselves commonplace or ugly, in either city or country.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

A poem is...an image of our life process—and in being that, an enlightening image of ourselves.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

Our business is with their books,—to understand and to enjoy them. And, of poets more especially, it is true—that, if their works be good, they contain within themselves all that is necessary to their being comprehended and relished.

—William Wordsworth

I had thought of the *Lycidas* as a full-grown beauty—as springing up with all its parts absolute—till, in an evil hour, I was shown the original copy of it, together with the other minor poems of the author, in the library of Trinity, kept like some treasure to be proud of. I wish they had thrown them in the Cam, or sent them after the latter Cantos of Spenser, into the Irish Channel. How it staggered me to see the fine things in their ore! interlined, corrected! as if their words were mortal, alterable, displaceable at pleasure! as if they might have been otherwise, and just as good! as if inspiration were made up of parts, and these fluctuating, successive, indifferent! I will never go into the workshop of any great artist again.

—Charles Lamb

We must not confuse information about the life of a poet, or his time, or his materials, with the poem itself....What is important is the poem itself and not the psychological process whereby it was created.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

My word will be more or less taken for it that I played certain poems through without fumbling a sentence....With what pleasure I remember their tractability. They have been the experience I couldn't help returning for more of—I trust I may say without seeming to put on inspired airs.

—Robert Frost

We have to know something of the language a poet is using before we can appreciate his poem—before we can see how the poem came to be. This applies not only to poems in foreign languages but also to poems in our own tongue. The English of one time is not like the English of another. Words are born and die and, to make matters more complicated, the meaning of a word may change from one period to another. Furthermore, the poet himself may twist and wrench the language he uses so that words get new meanings.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

Sometimes, very often in fact, the events in a poem are fictitious, are products of imagination. But the imagination is not entirely free; it is conditioned, too, by the experience of the poet.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

Though Shakespeare never, as far as we know, dreamed up a poem, he apparently did compose with great speed and fluency, and did little revision. Dryden, too, came to have more and more readiness so that, as he says, the thoughts outran the pen. The French poet Bonnard records that when he composed, all the words seemed to crowd in at the same time so that he had the impression of having a thousand voices. But one part of the same poem may be composed in almost a flash and another part may require long and tedious effort. A. E. Housman...was accustomed to compose on his afternoon walk, when he was a little drowsy from lunch and beer and his mind was relaxed and free for the movement of association. Under these circumstances, sometimes stanzas, or even whole poems, would come almost in a flash, sometimes merely the germs of poems which had to be developed later.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

When it is poetically organized, the English language appears to tend toward rising rhythms; that is, the main instinct in English prosody is for iambic or occasionally anapaestic movements rather than for trochaic or dactylic.

—Paul Fussell, Jr.

I don't know a better preparation for life than a love of poetry and a good digestion.

—Zona Gale

Beauty awakens the soul to act.

—Dante Alighieri

I won't deny I have worried quite a number of my poems into existence. But my sneaking preference remains for the ones I carried through like the stroke of a racquet, club, or headsman's ax. It is only under pressure from friends that I can consent to come out into the open and expose myself in a weakness so sacred and in the present trend of criticism so damaging. When I look into myself for the agony I am supposed to lay claim to as an artist it has to be over the poems that went wrong and came to grief without coming to an end; and they made me less miserable than I deserved when I discovered that though lost they were not entirely lost; I could and did quite freely quote lines and phrases of them from memory. I never wrote a poem for practice.

—Robert Frost

It hardly seems worthwhile to point out the shortsightedness of those practitioners who would have us believe that the form of the poem is merely its shape.

—Mark Strand

George Chapman was the first to translate Homer's epics into English....The first portion of the translation was published in 1598, the last in 1616. Until then Englishmen interested in the Homeric tales had to go back to the original Greek, or else to rely on the medieval versions of the tale, as Chaucer and Shakespeare did in their stories of the love of *Troilus and Cressida*. *Chapman's Homer* was by no means an exact translation. In fact, Chapman not only translated Homer into English, but into the Elizabethan idea of English poetry complete with rhymed fourteen-syllable verse and with added moral homilies. Perhaps, for that reason, it proved extremely popular, remaining so even after Alexander Pope, between 1713 and 1726, translated Homer into urbane heroic couplets in equally artificial manner. It wasn't till modern times that more or less literal translations appeared.

—Isaac Asimov

Who says nothing can be accomplished by a poem? *Old Ironsides* was published in the *Boston Advertiser* on September 14, 1830, and was quickly and widely reprinted. It promptly stirred up such a clamor among the American public that the Navy found it could not scrap the *Constitution*....The ship was repaired, refurbished, and put into action again. In 1855 she was converted into use as a training ship. In 1877 she was again repaired and in 1878 made her last trip across the Atlantic. But now, of course, it was the age of steam and of iron-hulled ships (the real 'ironsides') and the *Constitution* was only nostalgia. She was restored again in 1931, and still exists in Boston Harbor, the oldest commissioned ship in the United States Navy.

—Isaac Asimov

The literary term for describing in words what you see in a picture is *ekphrasis*. The practice can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle, through the Renaissance and the works of the Romantic poets, all the way into literature of the 19th century. Typically, the word *ekphrastic* is applied to poetry. Consider Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' Homer's vivid descriptions in the *Illiad*, or W.H. Auden's retelling of Homer's story in his own poem 'The Shield of Achilles.'

—Donna Baier Stein

If you're a certain kind of reader, with a certain kind of brain, you're always on the lookout for the poem that will save your life. Existence heaps itself upon you: your tongue thickens and your thoughts get cluttered. But you keep a muddy eye trained on the world's poetry portals, the places where the poems come flapping through, because you know that a line, a rhyme, a verb can reboot your internal chitchat and zap you out of all your encrustations. You know that this is the poet's job, in the end: to remind you—oh, the cheesiness, but oh, the urgency—how to be alive.

—James Parker

Why write poetry? For the weird unemployment. For the painless headaches, that must be tapped to strike down along your writing arm at the accumulated moment. For the adjustments after, aligning facets in a verb before the trance leaves you.

—Les Murray

Everything one invents is true, you may be perfectly sure of that. Poetry is as precise as geometry.

—Gustave Flaubert

I have spent a good many years since—too many, I think—being ashamed about what I write. I think I was forty before I realized that almost every writer of fiction and poetry who has ever published a line has been accused by someone of wasting his or her God-given talent. If you write (or paint or dance or sculpt or sing, I suppose), someone will try to make you feel lousy about it, that's all. I'm not editorializing, just trying to give you the facts as I see them.

—Stephen King

Works of imagination should be written in very plain language; the more purely imaginative they are the more necessary it is to be plain.

--Samuel Taylor  
Coleridge

Writing poems (or stories, or essays) had as much in common with sweeping the floor as with mythic moments of revelation.

—Stephen King

Poetry is words. It is a certain way of using words, so that they take on a vitality which they have in no other use of them. Every significance which words can carry in speech or prose is intensified in poetry—quality of sound, shades of meaning, symbolic importance—but as well as this sharpening of value, there is a creation of new values, which belong to the poetic use of words alone. They work with a secret potency, they take on a new personality. They may not be distinguished or unusual, at all; indeed, they can be of the barest simplicity. But their choice and ordering seem inevitable; they create a harmony, a security, a conviction

—Elizabeth Drew

Poetry is a function of language, recording, vivifying, correcting word and idiom, like a purification of the blood-streams of nations. As long as people are talking, exchanging new words and evolving a new idiom, poetry is an essential activity of life. If this function is not performed, language, literature, and hence, ultimately, humanity, suffer.

—Stephen Spender

Into this wild ocean of words Shakespeare plunged head over heels, and disported himself in it with a wild dolphin joy. He collected words from everywhere, from rustic speech and dialect (he no doubt spoke the Warwickshire dialect all his life), from Chaucer and the old books, from translators of the classics, from lawyers and grave theologians, from traveled young gallants. He was, moreover, perhaps the greatest word-creator the world has ever known, and has probably added more new words to our vocabulary than all the other English poets put together. He made up his language as he went along—‘crashing’, as he has been described, ‘through the forest of words like a thunderbolt, crushing them out of shape if they don’t fit in, melting moods and tenses, and leaving people to gape at the transformation.’

—Logan Pearsall Smith

Shakespeare does not confine himself, like many poets, only to visual images; he makes use of impressions from the other senses, the senses of smell and hearing; and seems to have been especially fond of images of reverberating sound, trumpets and horns and the baying of hounds from afar. Motor images, as they are called, sensations of effort, strain, movement, of rushing winds or horses, are frequent in his poetry, and also of the sea (‘surge’ is a favorite word with Shakespeare) and of the flow of rivers, as in one of his most splendid images, of the Pontic sea.

—Logan Pearsall Smith

Of twelve poets the last century called great, nine had the means to get a university education, only one was not well-to-do. That one was John Keats.

—John Holmes

For freedom, for brevity, and for vigour, Elizabethan is superior to modern English. Many of the words employed by Shakespeare and his contemporaries were the recent inventions of the age; hence they are used with a freshness and an exactness to which we are strangers. Again, the spoken English so far predominated over the grammatical English that it materially influenced the rhythm of the verse, the construction of the sentence, and sometimes the spelling of the words. Hence sprung an artless and unlaboured harmony which seems the natural heritage of the Elizabethan poets, whereas such harmony as is attained by modern authors frequently betrays a painful excess of art. Lastly, the use of some few still remaining inflections (the subjunctive in particular), the lingering sense of many other inflections that had passed away leaving behind something of the old versatility and audacity in the arrangement of the sentence, the stern subordination of grammar to terseness and clearness, and the consequent directness and naturalness of expression, all conspire to give a liveliness and wakefulness to Shakesperian English which are wanting in the grammatical monotony of the present day. We may perhaps claim some superiority in completeness and perspicuity for modern English, but if we were to appeal on this ground to the shade of Shakespeare in the words of Antonio in the *Tempest*,—

Do you not hear us speak?

we might fairly be crushed with the reply of Sebastian—

I do; and surely  
It is a sleepy language.

—E. A. Abbott

Time concerns him, that he may not waste it. No waking day is ever quite long enough. But eventually he learns whether he must hurry with his life and writing or not. He feels his own sense of time mysteriously regulating his days. He comes to trust that sense, for it will tell him when to wait, when to act, and it tells him that life will be as long as he requires for his work. At last he learns what all great artists know, each in his kind, to hold to a single ruthless purpose, and that purpose poetry.

—John Holmes

Like all artists, Byron and Shelley wrote in order to console themselves for not living, and a man of action appeared to them as an enviable phenomenon.

—André Maurois

I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the Beautiful even if my night's labours should be burnt every morning, and no eye ever shine upon them.

—John Keats

The poet works with those dimensions of invisibility which exist at the opposite extreme from the microscopic dimensions which concern the scientist. He works with the over-obvious, the too-apparent, the phenomena which men cannot see because they are so close the vision blurs, the phenomena which approach the seeing eye so near that they become sometimes the seeing eye itself. It is for this reason that the true perceptions of the poet have such an overwhelming and instantaneous feel of truth. They require no demonstration because they were always true. They were merely never 'seen' before. The poet, with the adjustment of a phrase, with the contrast of an image, with the rhythm of a line, has fixed a focus which all the talk and all the staring of the world has been unable to fix before him.

—Archibald MacLeish

Are you willing to work for many years without the slightest recognition? Are you strong enough to turn your back on all the cliques and schools of the hour, and devote yourself to principles of poetic composition that have not changed since the days of David The Psalmist? Would you rather write poetry than have all the kingdoms of the earth at your feet?

Are you strong enough to bear the dislike of the mob? Are you individual enough to go your own way, no matter what prudent counsel advises an opposite course?

Have you a real desire to explore the last depths of your emotions? Are you aware that those emotions are of no interest to anybody, except in so far as you give them beautiful and dignified expression?

Can you study endlessly the great masters of the past? Can you learn the lesson of their method—not merely of their manner—and borrow from them nothing except their power to express the passion of the individual heart? Can you refrain from copying them? Can you refrain from being 'modern'?

Can you find some way of earning a decently liberal living, quite apart from your writing? Are you aware that poverty is a dark room, into which no sane man will voluntarily go? Do you know that the lovely fable of the poet's attic is a lie invented by rich people, and that lack of books and of diversion and of freedom is stunting to the soul? Are you prepared, I repeat, to earn a decent living quite apart from your poetry?

If you can honestly answer all these questions in the affirmative—then, I would say to you: 'Go on! I wish you well! Maybe your great hopes will come true.'

—Arthur Davison Ficke

The miserable man may think well and express himself with great vehemence, but he cannot make beautiful things, for Aphrodite never rises from any but a tide of joy.

—William Butler Yeats

No matter how the poet may sweat and fast to produce his ode, the chances are that in the poem he will visualize himself as reclining somewhere on a mossy bank beside a running brook. Sir Thomas Wyatt celebrated his bed as ‘the body’s ease’ and ‘quieter of the mind’. Few have been so frank as Wordsworth, who admits lying in vacant as well as pensive mood, but many have professed with Coleridge that they were fain to

dream away the entrusted hours  
On rose-leaf beds, pampering the coward heart  
With feelings all too delicate for use.

Keats, ‘on Skiddaw’s mount lay supine, midway th’ ascent.’ Is it any wonder, then, that the reader, remembering in addition that Coleridge composed ‘Kubla Khan’ while asleep in a chair, considers the writing of poetry a lazy man’s occupation? The public, not unreasonably, perhaps, is prone to take their words literally. The ‘pernicious nonsense’ of the ‘essential laziness’ of poets is, sad to say, a pleasant fiction largely of their own invention.

—Raymond F. Howes

Nine-tenths of the best poetry in the world has been written by poets less than thirty-five years old; a great deal more than half of it has been written by poets under twenty-five. One always associates poetry with youth, for it deals chiefly with ideas that are peculiar to youth, and its terminology is quite as youthful as its contents. When one hears of a poet past thirty-five, he seems somewhat unnatural and a trifle obscene; it is as if one encountered a graying man who still played Chopin waltzes and believed in elective affinities.

—H. L. Mencken

What American literature needs is not more poets (we could dispense with most of those already writing), but mature poets who are willing to devote their whole time to the most difficult of arts.

—Malcolm Cowley

It is felt, pretty widely, that poetry is an effeminate business, and that poets are not ‘men’. When a poet somehow becomes news, the papers are at pains to state that he wears his hair short, enjoys his beer, and attends boxing matches.

—L. A. G. Strong

He hopes to live by writing poems, and yet he has no assurance that his poems will be accepted by magazines. If they happen to be accepted, he has no assurance that they will be regarded as anything else than a free contribution to the cause of letters. Let us assume, however, that he is paid for his work at the rate of fifty cents a line, and that being exceptionally prolific he can produce the equivalent of eight or nine sonnets every month. In this case, granting that all his poems are printed, he will be earning about \$14 a week—approximately as much as the striking mill-hands in North Carolina.

—Malcolm Cowley

I do not suppose that anyone not a poet can realize the agony of creating a poem. Every nerve, even every muscle, seems strained to the breaking point. The poem will not be denied, to refuse to write it would be a great torture. It tears its way out of the brain, splintering and breaking its passage, and leaves that organ in the state of a jellyfish when the task is done. And yet to have no poem to write is the worst state of all.

—Amy Lowell

And here is the natural place to confess that any poet, dramatist, or novelist, who declares that he is indifferent whether or not people give him attention, is either an ass or a liar; anyhow, he is not natural.

—H. M. Tomlinson

I believe I can tell the particular little chances that filled my head first with such chimes of verse, as have never since left ringing there; for I remember, when I began to read, and to take some pleasure in it, there was wont to lie in my mother's parlor (I know not by what accident, for she herself never in her life read any book but of devotion) but there was wont to like Spenser's works. This I happened to fall upon, and was infinitely delighted with the stories of the knights, and giants, and monsters, and brave houses, which I found everywhere there (though my understanding had little to do with all this) and by degrees, with the tinkling of the rhyme and dance of the numbers; so that, I think, I had read him all over before I was twelve years old, and was thus made a poet.

—Abraham Cowley

Verses amount to so little when one begins to write them young. One ought to wait and gather sense and sweetness a whole life long, and a long life is possible, and then, quite at the end, one might perhaps be able to write ten good lines. For verses are not, as people imagine, simple feelings (we have these soon enough); they are experiences. In order to write a single verse, one must see many cities, and men and things; one must know animals and the flight of birds, and the gestures that the little flowers make when they open out in the morning. One must be able to return in

thought to roads in unknown regions, to unexpected encounters, and to partings that had been long foreseen; to days of childhood that are still indistinct, and to parents whom one had to hurt when they sought to give some pleasure which one did not understand (it would have been a pleasure to someone else); to childhood's illnesses that so strangely begin with such a number of profound and grave transformations, to days spent in rooms withdrawn and quiet, and to mornings by the sea, to the sea itself, to oceans, to nights of travel that rushed along loftily and flew with all the stars—and still it is not enough to be able to think of all this. There must be memories of many nights of love, each one unlike the others, of the screams of women in labour, and of some in childbed, light and blanched and sleeping, shutting themselves in. But one must also have been beside the dying, must have sat beside the dead in a room with open windows and with fitful noises. One must be able to forget them when they are many and one must have the immense patience to wait until they come again. For it is the memories themselves that matter. Only when they have turned to blood within us, to glance, to gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves—only then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a poem arises in their midst and goes forth from them.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

Poets, or those who imagine and express this indestructible order, are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance and architecture and painting: they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion.

--Percy Byshe Shelley

The business of the poet is not to find new emotions but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. And emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him.

—T. S. Eliot

There is a great deal, in the writing of poetry, which must be conscious and deliberate. In fact, the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious.

—T. S. Eliot

Planners, builders, laborers, schemers, executives, make a city, a country, a university, habitable, give them their bones and their blood. Poets and novelists make us appreciate the life we live in them, give them their souls.

—Henry S. Canby

What is meant by the word Poet? He is a man speaking to men; a man, it is true, endowed with a more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.

—William Wordsworth

One more royal trait properly belongs to the poet. I mean his cheerfulness, without which no man can be a poet,—for beauty is his aim. He loves virtue, not for its obligations, but for its grace: he delights in the world, in man, in woman, for the lovely light that sparkles from them. Beauty, the spirit of joy and hilarity, he sheds over the universe. And the true bards have been noted for their firm and cheerful temper. Homer lies in sunshine; Chaucer is glad and erect...not less sovereign and cheerful—much more sovereign and cheerful, is the tone of Shakespeare. His name suggests joy and emancipation to the heart of men. If he should appear in any company of human souls, who would not march in his troop?

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Alfred (Tennyson) is always carrying a bit of chaos around with him, and turning it into cosmos.

—Thomas Carlyle

The faint conceptions I have of poems to come bring the blood frequently into my forehead.

—John Keats

Give me Chaucer in preference. He slaps us on the shoulder, and makes us spring up while the dew is on the grass, and while the long shadows play about it in all quarters. We feel strong with the freshness round us, and we return with a keened appetite, having such a companion in our walk.

—W. S. Landor

All beauty comes from beautiful blood and a beautiful brain.

—Walt Whitman

Prior to Wordsworth, humor was an essential part of poetry. I mean, they don't call them Shakespeare comedies for nothing.

—William Collins

It is not that poets are lonely. They are alone in the countries of the mind when they go there to get their poems and bring them back. They would allow no company there, and what they do there may be guessed by the more ingeniously inventive critics. But their speculations will be in error if they prove the poet unhappy in his solitary journey.

—John Holmes

A great poet, who appears in illiterate times, absorbs into his sphere all the light which is anywhere radiating. Every intellectual jewel, every flower of sentiment, it is his fine office to bring to his people; and he comes to value his memory equally with his invention.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The painting was the painter as the poem is the poet, that every choice one made alone—every word chosen or rejected, every brush stroke laid or not laid down—betrayed one's character. Style is character.

—Joan Didion

I know what I have given you. I do not know what you have received.

—Antonio Porchia

Poets are soldiers that liberate words from the steadfast possession of definition.

—Eli Khamarov

I didn't think about whether I was writing poems. I was thinking. And the more I was thinking, the more there was I didn't understand.

—David Antin

Blessed are the weird people—poets, misfits, writers, mystics, painters and troubadours, for they teach us to see the world through different eyes.

—Jacob Nordby

Poetry is the establishment of a metaphorical link between white butterfly wings and the scraps of torn-up love letters.

--Carl Sandburg

If you ask a twenty-one-year-old poet whose poetry he likes, he might say, unblushing, 'Nobody's,' In his youth, he has not yet understood that poets like poetry, and novelists like novels; he himself likes only the role, the thought of himself in a hat.

—Annie Dillard

You don't need to handle poetry with gloves on. A lot of people worry that poetry is a sacred format and that it can only be approached by certain types of people or certain types of minds, and if you're not already a poet that you aren't welcome into the club. And that is both untrue and also unfair. I think that it is way more important for people who don't consider themselves poets or haven't written poetry before to experiment and bring what they know from other forms into that world. I would love to see someone who is traditionally a science writer start writing poetry. Or I would love to see what happens when a historian writes poetry. That's how the art form grows and breathes and expands and makes room for what else is possible.

--Sarah Kay

If you know what you are going to write when you're writing a poem, it's going to be average.

—Derek Walcott

As imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown, the poet's pen turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name.

—William Shakespeare

The poet's, the writer's, duty is ... to help man endure by lifting his heart.

— William Faulkner

I have a dark and dreadful secret. I write poetry....I believe poetry is a primal impulse within all of us. I believe we are all capable of it and furthermore that a small, often ignored corner of us positively yearns to try it.

--Stephen Fry

The power of daring anything their fancy suggest has always been conceded to the painter and the poet.

—Horace

Language may die at the hands of the schoolmen: it is regenerated by the poets.

—Emmanuel  
Mounier

A poet is, before anything else, a person who is passionately in love with language.

--W. H. Auden

In our language rhyme is a barrel. A barrel of dynamite. The line is a fuse. The line smolders to the end and explodes; and the town is blown sky-high in a stanza.

--Vladimir Mayakovksy

Words are not just their meanings; they are sounds. There is poetry in all effective language, even if it is not organized on the page to look like a poem. As sounds, words can have the emotional power of music. I believe that neuroscience will one day explain what poets know, that words arranged with full use of their musical qualities allow us to think and feel simultaneously in a unique way.

—Temma Ehrenfeld

Poets preserve the English language. As long as we make these little cages called poems or prose, there's a place where the language is still getting to play at its full potential, and even managing to expand those perimeters and those boundaries.

—Tony Hoagland

When the poet makes his perfect selection of a word, he is endowing the word with life.

—John Drinkwater

Poetry, even when apparently most fantastic, is always a revolt against artifice, a revolt, in a sense, against actuality.

—James Joyce

In the past I have declined to comment on my own work: because, it seems to me, a poem is what it is; because a poem is itself a definition, and to try to redefine it is to be apt to falsify it; and because the author is the person least able to consider his work objectively.

—James Schuyler

Imagination is a poor matter when it has to part company with understanding.

—Thomas Carlyle

Poetry can help children deal with the other subjects in the curriculum by enabling them to see a subject in a new way.

—Carol Ann Duffy

To a poet, silence is an acceptable response, even a flattering one.

—Sidonie Gabrielle  
Colette

When Marianne Moore wrote a poem titled 'Poetry,' she began with the words, 'I, too, dislike it.'

—Adam Kirsch

The most striking thing about contemporary poetry is that no one seems quite satisfied with it. Non-poets, who generally don't read poetry, are only a little less enthusiastic than poets, who do. Indeed, hardly a year has gone by over the past quarter century without a poet or critic publishing an essay bemoaning the state of American poetry.

—Adam Kirsch

From the time Aristotle anatomized the subject in his *Poetics*, poetry had been what its Greek root, *poiēsis*, indicates it is: a form of making. Poems were things made of words, and a poet was a kind of artisan, who, like other artisans, could produce either shapely and useful items or ungainly and useless ones. In his *Ars Poetica*, one of the earliest and most influential poems about the art of poetry, Horace urged the poet to keep practicing his craft until he perfected it:

Never the verse approve and hold as good,  
'Till many a day, and many a blot has  
wrought  
the polish'd work, and chasten'd ev'ry  
thought,  
By tenfold labour to perfection brought!

Making a poem was never quite as simple as making a table, because it required inspiration and passion, but it did involve studying techniques and following rules. Indeed, the laws of poetry were natural laws, which had been discovered by the Greeks and could be learned from their example.

—Adam Kirsch

Poetry is unprestigious, unremunerative, a form of play rather than grownup work....If you are an adult foolish enough to tell another adult that you are (still) a poet, they will often describe for you their falling away from poetry: I wrote it in high school; I dabbled in college. Almost never do they write it now.

—Ben Lerner

Poetry is a gauge of our mutual connection. If we can't speak the language of poetry, it is a sign that human communication has been blocked in a fundamental way. This feeling of failure is what explains why people tend to hate poetry, rather than simply being indifferent to it. Poetry is the site and source of disappointed hope.

—Adam Kirsch

Logical argument is what destroys poetry because poetry is beyond logic.

--Robert Graves

Including poetry in the integrated curriculum has the potential to broaden students' perspectives, increase their understanding, and support their journey toward making sense of their world. When students have regular, meaningful experiences with poetry they will begin to make connections between poetry and the world they live in, to ask questions about their world, and to look at the world in new ways. Poetry, as it reflects the sounds, joys, sorrows, and anger in our lives, will touch parts of ourselves that bring joy as well as aspects of ourselves we simply don't like. Poetry allows students to make connections to their lives and to their emotions.

—Donald Graves, Janet  
A. Finke & Karen  
Wood

Poetry has the potential to bridge the gap between learning and life. One advantage is its length. Because most poems are fairly short, they are not as intimidating to the average reader as a typical middle school novel. Another advantage is that poetry is powerful. Within the lines of a well-constructed poem is a world of meaning and metaphor that connects print to life. It is precisely this connection that holds appeal for the adolescent learner who is on a perpetual journey of self-exploration.

—Janet A. Finke &  
Karen D. Wood

The Arts are fundamental resources through which the world is viewed, meaning is created, and the mind developed. To neglect the contribution of the Arts in education, either through inadequate time, resources, or poorly trained teachers, is to deny children access to one of the most stunning aspects of their culture and one of the most potent means for developing their minds.

—Elliot W. Eisner

The arts celebrate multiple perspectives. One of their large lessons is that there are many ways to see and interpret the world.

—Elliot W. Eisner

The poor poet has not in these days, nor has he had for two hundred years, a dog's chance. Believe me—and I have spent a great part of the last ten years in watching some 320 Elementary Schools—we prate of democracy, but actually a poor child in England has little more hope than had the son of an Athenian slave to be emancipated into that intellectual freedom of which great writings are born.

—A. Quiller-Couch

It takes most men five years to recover from a college education, and to learn that poetry is as vital to thinking as knowledge.

—Brooks Atkinson

I don't think the creative writing industry has helped American poetry.

—Robert Morgan

The mind that finds its way to wild places is the poet's; but the mind that never finds its way back is the lunatic's.

--G. K. Chesterton

People think of poetry as a school subject... Poetry is very frustrating to students because they don't have a taste for ambiguity, for one thing. That gives them a poetry hangover.

—Billy Collins

Poetry is the most subtle of the literary arts, and students grow more ingenious by the year at avoiding it. If they can nip around Milton, duck under Blake and collapse gratefully into the arms of Jane Austen, a lot of them will.

—Terry Eagleton

A life without books is a thirsty life, and one without poetry is...like a life without pictures.

—Stephen King

Today, the one common feature in American secular culture is its celebration of the self that breaks away from the constrictions of the family and the state, and, in its greatest expressions, from all limits entirely. The great American poem is Whitman's 'Song of Myself.' The great American essay is Emerson's 'Self-Reliance.' The great American novel is Melville's *Moby Dick*, the tale of a man on a quest so lonely that it is incomprehensible to those around him. American culture, high and low, is about self-expression and personal authenticity. Franklin Delano Roosevelt called individualism 'the great watchword of American life.'

--Stephen Marche

When people say that poetry is a luxury, or an option, or for the educated middle classes, or that it shouldn't be read at school because it is irrelevant, or any of the strange and stupid things that are said about poetry and its place in our lives, I suspect that the people doing the saying have had things pretty easy. A tough life needs a tough language—and that is what poetry is. That is what literature offers—a language powerful enough to say how it is.

It isn't a hiding place. It is a finding place.

—Jeanette Winterson

Poetry is the art of creating imaginary gardens with real toads.

—Marianne Moore

Great art projects a sense of inexhaustibility. In literature, particularly in poetry, this may be accomplished through ambiguity: Beneath each and every meaning that I can descry lie others, so that rereading holds out the prospect of new subtleties, inversions, secret codes and ineffabilities.

—William T. Vollmann

For my part, I love to give myself up to the illusion of poetry. A hero of fiction that never existed is just as valuable to me as a hero of history that existed a thousand years ago.

—Washington Irving

Ideally, our literary education should begin, not with prose, but with such things as ‘this little Pig went to market’—with verse rhythm reinforced by physical assault. The infant who gets bounced on somebody’s knee to the rhythm of ‘Ride a cock horse’ does not need a foot-note telling him that Banbury Cross is twenty miles northeast of Oxford....All he needs is to get bounced. If he is, he is beginning to develop response to poetry in the place where it ought to start.

--Northrop Frye

Yes, I read. I have that absurd habit. I like beautiful poems, moving poetry, and all the beyond of that poetry. I am extraordinarily sensitive to those poor, marvelous words left in our dark night by a few men I never knew.

—Louis Aragon

One problem with the marvelous technology that is emerging to empower our minds and science is that it so often neglects music, art, poetry and drama—that is, the spiritual. Our problems are not just scientific and intellectual. We can know what must be done and how to do it...and still not do it.

--Parker Rossman

Art is a jealous mistress, and if a man has a genius for painting, poetry, music, architecture or philosophy, he makes a bad husband and an ill provider.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

An artist lives more passionately, more deeply, with more seeking for life and truth and beauty than any man in the world.

--Charlie Chaplin

I don't think creative people generally do what they do to make money. They may get a process going by which money is made, and they realize it's a good idea to keep that going, but I think that if they passed a law tomorrow that no creative person can ever again make any money on his poems, his paintings, his songs, his sculptures, I don't believe you'd see any fewer poems in the world. I think the number of paintings would still continue to flow because people do that because they're able to. They discover this ability in themselves and derive great pleasure from it.

--Steve Allen

Everything great in the world comes from neurotics. They alone have founded our religions and composed our masterpieces. Never will the world know all it owes to them nor all they have suffered to enrich us. We enjoy lovely music, beautiful paintings, a thousand intellectual delicacies, but we have no idea of their cost, to those who invented them, in sleepless nights, tears, spasmodic laughter, rashes, asthma, epilepsies, and the fear of death, which is worse than all the rest.

--Marcel Proust

I think I love and reverence all arts equally only putting my own just above the others; because in it I recognize the union and culmination of my own. To me it seems as if when God conceived the world, that was Poetry; He formed it, and that was Sculpture; He colored it, and that was Painting; He peopled it with living beings, and that was the grand, divine, eternal Drama.

--Charlotte Cushman

If we are to contribute to a livable society, we must strive to assure that poetry exists to temper technology; that music enlivens and enhances our educational growth; that dance and sculpture challenge our imaginations as much as any new scientific discovery.

--Wynetka Ann Reynolds

The arts are a highway into the soul of the people.

--Arthur Miller

A man should hear a little music, read a little poetry, and see a fine picture every day of his life.

--Johann Wolfgang von  
Goethe

A man of eighty has outlived probably three new schools of painting, two of architecture and poetry and a hundred in dress.

—Lord Byron

The last thing a young artist should do in poetry or any other field is think about what's in style, what's current, what are the trends. Think instead of what you like to read, what do you admire, what you like to listen to in music. What do you like to look at in architecture? Try to make a poem that has some of those qualities.

—Robert Pinsky

Because philosophy arises from awe, a philosopher is bound in his way to be a lover of myths and poetic fables. Poets and philosophers are alike in being big with wonder.

—Thomas Aquinas

Poetry cannot be translated; and, therefore, it is the poets that preserve the languages; for we would not be at the trouble to learn a language if we could have all that is written in it just as well in a translation. But as the beauties of poetry cannot be preserved in any language except that in which it was originally written, we learn the language.

--Samuel Johnson

One can translate an editorial but not a poem. For one can go across the border naked but not without one's skin; for, unlike clothes, one cannot get a new skin.

—Karl Kraus

A poem sings with a bad accent in any language not its own.

—Austin O'Malley

The poet and poetess have always had a rough time of it in the Republic. It has ever been their endemic luck to starve, become a Harvard professor, commit suicide, lose their reading glasses before an audience of sophomores, go upon the people a la Barnum, and serve as homework in state universities, where they could in nowise get a position and where their presence usually scatters the English faculty like a truant officer among the Amish.

—Guy Davenport

The counsellor who never reads a novel or never opens a book of poetry is neglecting an important resource for empathic development.

—Dave Mearns

I will continue to write moral stories in rhymed couplets. But I should be thrice a fool if I did it for aught but my own entertainment.

—W. Somerset Maugham

Poetry is so vital to us until school spoils it.

—Russell Baker

The seasonal urge is strong in poets. Milton wrote chiefly in winter. Keats looked for spring to wake him up (as it did in the miraculous months of April and May, 1819). Burns chose autumn. Longfellow liked the month of September. Shelley flourished in the hot months. Some poets, like Wordsworth, have gone outdoors to work. Others, like Auden, keep to the curtained room. Schiller needed the smell of rotten apples about him to make a poem. Tennyson and Walter de la Mare had to smoke. Auden drinks lots of tea, Spender coffee; Hart Crane drank alcohol. Pope, Byron, and William Morris were creative late at night. And so it goes.

--Helen Bevington

People don't write sonnets about being compatible, or novels about shared life goals and stimulating conversation. The great loves are the crazy ones.

—Blair Waldorf, *Gossip Girl*

Walt Whitman—he who laid end to end words never seen in each other's company before outside of a dictionary.

—David Lodge

Metaphors aren't merely the candy sprinkles on the doughnut of language, not just embellishments to the music of poetry and prose. Metaphors are ways of thinking—and also ways of shaping the thoughts of others.

— Richard Nordquist

Artists—musicians, painters, writers, poets, always seem to have had the most accurate perception of what is really going on around them, not the official version or the popular perception of contemporary life.

—Billy Joel

Names have become traditional for Santa's reindeer. One hangover from the Germanic past is 'Donder and Blitzen,' which means 'thunder and lightning.' All the names are suggestive of liveliness and speed (even Cupid is a winged god) except for Vixen, which is the word for a female fox, or, by extension, that for a shrewish female human being. It seems the one inappropriate name, but Moore needed a rhyme or near-rhyme for Blitzen, we might suppose.

—Isaac Asimov

I am very sure that any man of common understanding may, by culture, care, attention, and labor, make himself whatever he pleases, except a great poet.

—Lord Chesterfield

All creative lives are miserable things. Your creative powers are declining, the things that you do best are harder to do. What greater misery can there be?

--Jack Dunphy

By 75, creativity, originality, and productivity are pretty much gone for the vast, vast majority of us. Einstein famously said, 'A person who has not made his great contribution to science before the age of 30 will never do so.'

—Ezekiel J. Emanuel

Einstein famously said, 'A person who has not made his great contribution to science before the age of 30 will never do so.' He was extreme in his assessment. And wrong. Dean Keith Simonton, at the University of California at Davis, a luminary among researchers on age and creativity, synthesized numerous studies to demonstrate a typical age-creativity curve: creativity rises rapidly as a career commences, peaks about 20 years into the career, at about age 40 or 45, and then enters a slow, age-related decline.

—Ezekiel J. Emanuel

First, I do not sit down at my desk to put into verse something that is already clear in my mind. If it were clear in my mind, I should have no incentive or need to write about it.

—Cecil Day-Lewis

The poet alone knows astronomy, chemistry, vegetation, and animation, for he does not stop at these facts, but employs them as signs. He knows why the plain, or meadow of space, was strown with these flowers we call suns, and moons, and stars; why the deep is adorned with animals, with men, and gods; for, in every word he speaks he rides on them as the horses of thought.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

At night  
when others are sleeping,  
I drown myself  
in poetry.

--Kamand Kojouri

I hate reading poems—school made me hate them. I'd spend hours interpreting one, just to read the memorandum and realize I'd be fucked during exams. I remember making a little asterisk next to every question I struggled with, and at the end of the paper, I'd realize I was looking at the fucking Milky Way.

--Danielle Esplin

Of all the art forms, poetry is the most economical. It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labor, the least material, and the one which can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper. Over the last few years, writing a novel on tight finances, I came to appreciate the enormous differences in the material demands between poetry and prose. As we reclaim our literature, poetry has been the major voice of poor, working class, and Colored women. A room of one's own may be a necessity for writing prose, but so are reams of paper, a typewriter, and plenty of time.

--Audre Lorde

It is naive to suppose that something that has been expressed in one form can be expressed in another without significantly changing its meaning, texture or value. Much prose translates fairly well from one language to another, but we know that poetry does not; we may get a rough idea of the sense of a translated poem but usually everything else is lost, especially that which makes it an object of beauty. The translation makes it into something it was not.

--Neil Postman

I don't write poems  
to melt your heart.  
I write them,  
so our hearts  
can melt together.

--Subhan Zein

I wish you would read a little poetry sometimes. Your ignorance cramps my conversation.

—Anthony Hope

Poetry reveals to us the loveliness of nature, brings back the freshness of youthful feelings, reviews the relish of simple pleasures, keeps unquenched the enthusiasm which warmed the springtime of our being, refines youthful love, strengthens our interest in human nature, by vivid delineations of its tenderest and softest feelings, and through the brightness of its prophetic visions, helps faith to lay hold on the future life.

—William E. Channing

You can't memorize poetry and stay a fake. Sooner or later, you start to understand what these poets are saying, and it makes you feel life has something quite special, with certain layers of meaning to it.

--Donald Miller

Ideal love is a lie put forth by poets.

--Alphonse Daudet

*Beowulf*, of precarious provenance—the single surviving, crumbling manuscript bears the scorch marks of an 18th-century library fire—has traveled across a thousand years to lodge in our imagination like some kind of radioactive space nugget. A story from a pre-Christian era written down by an anonymous Christian, in alliterative Old English verse, it has an otherness, a real frosty interstellar otherness, but also a mysterious resonance. It's holding something for us, this poem, the value of which is inseparable from its long and lonely transmission. And so we keep going back to it, we wonderingly retell it, testing it on our tongues like the syllables of a dream.

—James Parker

Literature destabilizes thought by breaking open language and smuggling in sound, rhythm, and image—an invasion of aesthetics. More easily than analytic writing, poetry can emancipate itself from the standard definitions of words, enabling a breakthrough to new (and perhaps wayward or even nonsensical) meaning, which can then develop after the fact—different at each new reading. Literary language is presumptuous. It dips into the unknown in order to get nearer to a truth different from that of the superficially visible. As the poet Franz Josef Czernin described it, it is as though one step after another into emptiness could become a ladder. Literary writing can take the writers themselves by surprise; it can disturb and disappoint them—for stirring up turmoil is inherent in metaphor. Thus with every flash of understanding that comes from hearing or reading a poem, the fundamental work of thinking is taken up anew.

--Marie Luise Knott

Well-wrought poems and works of imaginative literature can do for us what stone-cold prose can never do. They can help us grasp the full dimension of ways of life other than our own.

--James W. Sire

Readers rightly look to poets to make sense of the world, even if it is a difficult sense.

—Mark Edmundson

Poetry, Shakespeare and opera, are like mumps and should be caught when young. In the unhappy event that there is a postponement to mature years, the results may be devastating.

--Dimitris Mita

The 63 lyrics in that book [*Shropshire Lad*] first published in 1896, have a purity of speech and intensity of feeling that lent the collection the aura of a classic from the moment of its appearance. 'You may read it in half an hour,' said one early reviewer of the book, 'but there are things in it you will scarcely forget in a lifetime.' What Houseman writes about, almost without exception, is sorrow: lost love, nostalgia, mutability, grief, and death. He seems to understand everything about the pain of life, and the beauty of that pain—the way suffering itself can become a source of bittersweet pleasure. He's a poet who can't listen to a blackbird singing without hearing a summons to the grave:

Lie down, lie down, young yeoman;  
What use to rise and rise?  
Rise man a thousand mornings  
Yet down at last he lies,  
And then the man is wise.

—Adam Kirsch

A student has essentially the same task as the poet: to make clear to himself, and thereby to others, the temporal and eternal questions which are astir in the age and in the community to which he belongs.

—Henrik Ibsen

In the 6th century B.C. she [Sappho] composed 10,000 lines of poetry, filling nine volumes. Fewer than 70 complete lines exist. But those have made Lesbos' most famous daughter (as classicist Daniel Mendelsohn has called her) a revered lyric poet of erotic love.

— Duncan Barile

American poetry, like American painting, is always personal with an emphasis on the individuality of the poet.

—Diane Wakoski

Too many people say they don't like poetry when what they really mean is they haven't read poetry—or at least read the right poem, the one that's lurking beneath the surface, waiting to grab them by the throat, to shock and move and wake them.

—Nikki Porter

I really didn't fall in love with the written word until I discovered poetry. Oh, I was a voracious fiction reader as a child, but it was Poe, Tennyson, and the Bard who revealed all the tricks the English language has up its sleeve. I once checked a book of Carl Sandburg poems out of the school library and was so horrified at the thought of returning them that I copied his poems by hand into a hardcover notebook in a horrid shade of vomit-green. It was hideous, but it held the world.

A few years later, it was Gwendolyn Brooks who grabbed me by the poetic jugular with 'piano after war:'

On a snug evening I shall watch her fingers  
Cleverly ringed, declining to clever pink  
Beg glory from the willing keys.

Such phrasing! As I read and reread it, it hummed with life, a living thing.

—Nikki Porter

I would venture to guess that *Anon*, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman.

—Virginia Woolf

Poetry is something to make us wiser and better, by continually revealing those types of beauty and truth, which God has set in all men's souls.

—James Russell Lowell

The novel is born of disillusionment; the poem, of despair.

—Jose Bergamin

A poem is like a radio that can broadcast continuously for thousands of years.

--Allen Ginsberg

Inscrutable poetry. I majored in English. I taught high school English. I have a doctorate degree. And yet, I read poems I can't understand. What does the poet communicate if the reader can't interpret the poem or derive any appreciation or beauty from the experience? So many readers who might appreciate poetry won't go near the genre because of the inscrutability factor. When I write a poem, I want a literate 8th grader to understand it.

—Dan L. Miller

The young people have MTV and rock and roll. Why would they go to read poetry? Poetry belongs to the Stone Age. It awakens in us perceptions that go back to those times.

—Robert Morgan

Back in 1827, a slender volume of poetry was published in Boston. It was anonymous; the author chose to identify himself only as a 'Bostonian.' Strictly speaking, this was true. He had been born there, but the day he found his not-too-enthusiastic publisher, he was revisiting his native city for the first time. He was literally starving, and his clothes were threadbare and tattered; perhaps he thought that a graceful nod to his birthplace might spur the sale of his sheaf of poems.

Today...only six copies of the first edition of that little volume are known to exist. One of them was sold recently at auction for \$10,000. The title: *Tamerlane and Other Poems*; the author: Edgar Allan Poe.

—Bennett Cerf

The reading of a poem should be an experience. Its writing must be all the more so.

--Wallace Stevens

People cannot stand the saddest truth I know about the very nature of reading and writing imaginative literature, which is that poetry does not teach us how to talk to other people: it teaches us how to talk to ourselves.

--Harold Bloom

If a poet has any obligation toward society, it is to write well. Being in the minority, he has no other choice. Failing this duty, he sinks into oblivion. Society, on the other hand, has no obligation toward the poet. A majority by definition, society thinks of itself as having other options than reading verses, no matter how well written. Its failure to do so results in its sinking to that level of locution at which society falls easy prey to a demagogue or a tyrant. This is society's own equivalent of oblivion.

--Joseph Brodsky

The truth, I am convinced, is that there is no longer a poetical audience among the higher class of minds, that moral, political, and physical science have entirely withdrawn from poetry the attention of all whose attention is worth having; and that the poetical reading public being composed of the mere dregs of the intellectual community, the most sufficing passport to their favour must rest on the mixture of a little easily-intelligible portion of mawkish sentiment with an absolute negation of reason and knowledge.

--Thomas Love Peacock  
(1820)

To feel most beautifully alive means to be reading something beautiful, ready always to apprehend in the flow of language the sudden flash of poetry.

—Gaston Bachelard

Poetry is not the most important thing in life... I'd much rather lie in a hot bath reading Agatha Christie and sucking sweets.

--Dylan Thomas

People should be encouraged to regard reading and hearing poetry as an aesthetic experience similar to listening to a song. Everyone, by virtue of being human, is qualified to respond to, enjoy or even criticize it.

—Aaron Poochigian

Reading poetry is like undressing before a bath. You don't undress out of fear that your clothes will become wet. You undress because you want the water to touch you. You want to completely immerse yourself in the feeling of the water and to emerge anew.

--Kamand Kojouri

'Paradise Lost' was printed in an edition of no more than 1,500 copies and transformed the English language. Took a while. Wordsworth had new ideas about nature: Thoreau read Wordsworth, Muir read Thoreau, Teddy Roosevelt read Muir, and we got a lot of national parks. Took a century. What poetry gives us is an archive, the fullest existent archive of what human beings have thought and felt by the kind of artists who loved language in a way that allowed them to labor over how you make a music of words to render experience exactly and fully.

—Robert Hass

When a reader enters the pages of a book of poetry, he or she enters a world where dreams transform the past into knowledge made applicable to the present, and where visions shape the present into extraordinary possibilities for the future.

—Aberjhani

Beautiful things grow rich with the emotion that they have aroused in succeeding generations. That is why old things are more beautiful than modern. The *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is more lovely now than when it was written, because for a hundred years lovers have read it and the sick at heart taken comfort in its lines.

—W. Somerset Maugham

First and foremost, I learned from Whitman that the poem is a temple—or a green field—a place to enter, and in which to feel. Only in a secondary way is it an intellectual thing—an artifact, a moment of seemly and robust wordiness—wonderful as that part of it is. I learned that the poem was made not just to exist, but to speak—to be company.

—Mary Oliver

Skim the table of contents of the major literary journals, including white-shoe poetry enterprises like *Poetry* magazine, and even general-interest weeklies with vast reach such as *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times Magazine*. Scan the recipients of the prestigious and sometimes lucrative fellowships, awards, and lecture-ships granted annually to the most promising young poets in the country. They are immigrants and refugees from China, El Salvador, Haiti, Iran, Jamaica, Korea, and Vietnam. They are black men and an Oglala Sioux woman. They are queer as well as straight and choose their personal pronouns with care. The face of poetry in the United States looks very different today than it did even a decade ago, and far more like the demographics of Millennial America. If anything, the current crop of emerging poets anticipates the face of young America 30 years from now.

—Jesse Lichtenstein  
(2018)

To read a poem  
Is to see light where there is darkness  
Is to hear silence where there is noise  
Is to dance where there is no music  
Is to sing where the only instrument is words  
And the stirring, impassioned pauses.

—A. A. Patawaran

Don't teach my boy poetry, an English mother recently wrote the Provost of Harrow. Don't teach my boy poetry; he is going to stand for Parliament. Well, perhaps she was right but if more politicians knew poetry, and more poets knew politics, I am convinced the world would be a little better place to live.

—John F. Kennedy

I don't see how poetry can ever be easy... Real poetry, the thick, dense, intense, complicated stuff that lives and endures, requires blood sweat; blood and sweat are essential elements in poetry as well as behind it.

--Edward Abbey

A poem records emotions and moods that lie beyond normal language, that can only be patched together and hinted at metaphorically.

--Diane Ackerman

Poetry is finer and more philosophical than history; for poetry expresses the universal, and history only the particular.

--Aristotle

There is the view that poetry should improve your life. I think people confuse it with the Salvation Army.

--John Ashbery

I cannot accept the doctrine that in poetry there is a suspension of belief. A poet must never make a statement simply because it sounds poetically exciting; he must also believe it to be true.

--W. H. Auden

Rhymes, meters, stanza forms, etc., are like servants. If the master is fair enough to win their affection and firm enough to command their respect, the result is an orderly happy household. If he is too tyrannical, they give notice; if he lacks authority, they become slovenly, impertinent, drunk and dishonest.

--W. H. Auden

In the works of the better poets you get the sensation that they're not talking to people any more, or to some seraphical creature. What they're doing is simply talking back to the language itself—as beauty, sensuality, wisdom, irony—those aspects of language of which the poet is a clear mirror. Poetry is not an art or a branch of art, it's something more. If what distinguishes us from other species is speech, then poetry, which is the supreme linguistic operation, is our anthropological, indeed genetic, goal. Anyone who regards poetry as an entertainment, as a read, commits an anthropological crime, in the first place, against himself.

--Joseph Brodsky

One of the ridiculous aspects of being a poet is the huge gulf between how seriously we take ourselves and how generally we are ignored by everybody else.

--Billy Collins

I don't write poetry with the intention of making someone sad but rather to illustrate my own feelings and ideas.

--James Dye

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion.

—T. S. Eliot

The writing of a poem is like a child throwing stones into a mineshaft. You compose first, then you listen for the reverberation.

--James Fenton

Poetry is either something that lives like fire inside you—like music to the musician or Marxism to the Communist—or else it is nothing, an empty, formalized bore around which pedants can endlessly drone their notes and explanations.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

Of all great poems, love is the absolute and essential foundation.

--C. Fitzhugh

Highly important in poetry is Rhythm, but the word means merely 'flow,' so that rhythm belongs to prose as well as to poetry. Good rhythm is merely a pleasing succession of sounds. Meter, the distinguishing formal mark of poetry and all verse, is merely rhythm which is regular in certain fundamental respects, roughly speaking is rhythm in which the recurrence of stressed syllables or of feet with definite time-values is regular. There is no proper connection either in spelling or in meaning between rhythm and rime (which is generally misspelled 'rhyme'). The adjective derived from 'rhythm' is 'rhythmical'; there is no adjective from 'rime' except 'rimed.' The word 'verse' in its general sense includes all writing in meter. Poetry is that verse which has real literary merit.

—Robert Huntington  
Fletcher

Poetry is the language in which man explores his own amazement... says heaven and earth in one word... speaks of himself and his predicament as though for the first time. It has the virtue of being able to say twice as much as prose in half the time, and the drawback, if you do not give it your full attention, of seeming to say half as much in twice the time.

--Christopher Fry

The only thing that can save the world is the reclaiming of the awareness of the world. That's what poetry does.

--Allen Ginsberg

Poetry is not an expression of the party line. It's that time of night, lying in bed, thinking what you really think, making the private world public, that's what the poet does.

--Allen Ginsberg

Teach your children poetry; it opens the mind, lends grace to wisdom and makes the heroic virtues hereditary.

--Sir Walter Scott

Draw a crazy picture,  
Write a nutty poem,  
Sing a mumble-gumble song,  
Whistle through your comb.  
Do a loony-goony dance  
'Cross the kitchen floor,  
Put something silly in the world  
That ain't been there before.

--Shel Silverstein

Poetry is the statement of a relation between a man and the world.

--Wallace Stevens

War talk by men who have been in a war is always interesting; whereas moon talk by a poet who has not been in the moon is likely to be dull.

--Mark Twain

Verses which do not teach men new and moving truths do not deserve to be read.

--Voltaire

All art is sensual and poetry particularly so. It is directly, that is, of the senses, and since the senses do not exist without an object for their employment all art is necessarily objective. It doesn't declaim or explain, it presents.

—William Carlos  
Williams

I have nature and art and poetry, and if that is not enough, what is enough?

—Vincent Willem van  
Gogh

There is not a particle of life which does not bear poetry within it.

—Gustave Flaubert

The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world.

—Edgar Allan Poe

Poetry...wasn't written to be analyzed; it was meant to inspire without reason, to touch without understanding.

—Nicholas Sparks

Always learn poems by heart. They have to become the marrow in your bones. Like fluoride in the water, they'll make your soul impervious to the world's soft decay.

—Janet Fitch

Once in a golden hour  
I cast to earth a seed.  
Up there came a flower,  
The people said, a weed.

—Alfred Lord Tennyson

Whereas story is processed in the mind in a straightforward manner, poetry bypasses rational thought and goes straight to the limbic system and lights it up like a brushfire. It's the crack cocaine of the literary world.

—Jasper Fforde

To elevate the soul, poetry is necessary.

—Edgar Allan Poe

Poetry is a life-cherishing force. For poems are not words, after all, but fires for the cold, ropes let down to the lost, something as necessary as bread in the pockets of the hungry.

—Mary Oliver

Poems are a hotline to our hearts, and we forget this emotional power at our peril.

—Andrew Motion

To write poetry and to commit suicide, apparently so contradictory, had really been the same, attempts at escape.

—John Fowles

The poet, therefore, is truly the thief of fire.

He is responsible for humanity, for animals even; he will have to make sure his visions can be smelled, fondled, listened to; if what he brings back from beyond has form, he gives it form; if it has none, he gives it none. A language must be found...of the soul, for the soul and will include everything: perfumes, sounds colors, thought grappling with thought.

—Arthur Rimbaud

Poetry puts starch in your backbone so you can stand, so you can compose your life.  
—Maya Angelou

The purpose of poetry is to remind us  
how difficult it is to remain just one person,  
for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors,  
and invisible guests come in and out at will.

—Czeslaw Milosz

Real poetry, is to lead a beautiful life. To live poetry is better than to write it.  
—Basho

You should always be trying to write a poem you are unable to write, a poem you  
lack the technique, the language, the courage to achieve. Otherwise you're merely  
imitating yourself, going nowhere, because that's always easiest.  
—John Berryman

[Poetry] is the liquid voice that can wear through stone.

—Adrienne Rich

The poem becomes a map, a note left on a tree, a rock formation at a fork in the  
path, a cry in the distance saying 'this way'.

—Unknown

'Vers libre,' (free verse) or nine-tenths of it, is not a new metre any more than sleep-  
ing in a ditch is a new school of architecture.

—G. K. Chesterton

The audience for poetry is mostly made up of poets.

—Matthew Buckley  
Smith

There are two ways to dislike poetry: One is to dislike it; the other is to read Pope.  
—Oscar Wilde

Poetry, plays, novels, music, they are the cry of the human spirit trying to under-  
stand itself and make sense of our world.

—Laura Malone Elliott

If you want to annoy a poet, explain his poetry.

—Nassim Nicholas Taleb

The whole art of poetry is to say what can't be said.

—Alan Wilson Watts

Poetry makes life what lights and music do the stage.

—Charles Dickens

It is difficult  
to get the news from poems  
yet men die miserably every day  
for lack  
of what is found there.

—William Carlos  
Williams

A poet's mission is to make words do more work than they normally do, to make them work on more than one level.

—Jay-Z

This is perhaps the most noble aim of poetry, to attach ourselves to the world around us, to turn desire into love, to embrace, finally what always evades us, what is beyond, but what is always there—the unspoken, the spirit, the soul.

—Octavio Paz

Some of the greatest poetry is revealing to the reader the beauty in something that was so simple you had taken it for granted.

—Neil deGrasse Tyson

The poet's job is to put into words those feelings we all have that are so deep, so important, and yet so difficult to name, to tell the truth in such a beautiful way, that people cannot live without it.

—Jane Kenyon

Haiku is not a shriek, a howl, a sigh, or a yawn; rather, it is the deep breath of life.

—Santoka Taneda

The courage of the poet is to keep ajar the door that leads into madness.

—Christopher Morley

If it ain't a pleasure, it ain't a poem.

—William Carlos  
Williams

Deprivation is the mother of poetry.

—Leonard Cohen

No one wants to read poetry. You have to make it impossible for them to put the poem down--impossible for them to stop reading it, word after word. You have to keep them from closing the book.

—Muriel Rukeyser

I've got mixed feelings about poetry cause done well poetry is fantastic. But not many people are capable of doing it well. I think you should have some kind of license to perform poetry. A poetic license perhaps.

—Craig Ferguson

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.

—George Eliot

You shall create beauty not to excite the senses  
but to give sustenance to the soul.

—Gabriela Mistral

Poetry is the language of intensity. Because we are going to die, an expression of intensity is justified.

—C. D. Wright

If my poetry aims to achieve anything, it's to deliver people from the limited ways in which they see and feel.

—Jim Morrison

If you only write when inspired, you may be a fairly decent poet, but you'll never be a novelist.

—Neil Gaiman

Great poetry needs no interpreter other than a responsive heart.

—Helen Keller

Anyone who says, 'Here's my address,  
write me a poem,' deserves something in reply.  
So I'll tell a secret instead:  
poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes,  
they are sleeping. They are the shadows  
drifting across our ceilings the moment  
before we wake up. What we have to do  
is live in a way that lets us find them.

—Naomi Shihab Nye

Nothing like poetry when you lie awake at night. It keeps the old brain limber. It  
washes away the mud and sand that keeps on blocking up the bends.  
Like waves to make the pebbles dance on my old floors. And turn them into rubies  
and jacinths; or at any rate, good imitations.

—Joyce Cary

Good poetry makes the universe reveal a secret.

—Hafiz

While the scientist sees everything that happens in one point of space,  
the poet feels everything that happens in one point of time.

—Vladimir Nabokov

I stalk certain words... I catch them in mid-flight, as they buzz past, I trap them,  
clean them, peel them, I set myself in front of the dish, they have a crystalline tex-  
ture to me, vibrant, ivory, vegetable, oily, like fruit, like algae, like agates, like  
olives... I stir them, I shake them, I drink them, I gulp them down, I mash them, I  
garnish them... I leave them in my poem like stalactites, like slivers of polished  
wood, like coals, like pickings from a shipwreck, gifts from the waves... Everything  
exists in the word.

—Pablo Neruda

You know, there are good reasons to learn how to read. Poetry isn't one of them. I  
mean, so what if two roads go two ways in a wood? So what? Who cares if it made  
all that big a difference? What difference? And why should I have to guess what the  
difference is? Isn't that what he's supposed to say?

Why can't poets just say what they want to say and then shut up?

—Gary D. Schmidt

What wretched poverty of language! To compare stars to diamonds!

—Gustave Flaubert

Who you are contributes to your poetry in a number of important ways, but you shouldn't identify with your poems so closely that when they are cut, you're the one that bleeds.

—Dorianne Laux

Real haiku is the soul of poetry. Anything that is not actually present in one's heart is not haiku. The moon glows, flowers bloom, insects cry, water flows. There is no place we cannot find flowers or think of the moon. This is the essence of haiku. Go beyond the restrictions of your era, forget about purpose or meaning, separate yourself from historical limitations—there you will find the essence of true art, religion, and science.

—Santoka Taneda

I believe in being a poet in all moments of life. Being a poet means being human. I know some poets whose daily behavior has nothing to do with their poetry. In other words, they are only poets when they write poetry. Then it is finished and they turn into greedy, indulgent, oppressive, shortsighted, miserable, and envious people. Well, I cannot believe their poems.

—Forough Farrokhzad

The inmost spirit of poetry, in other words, is at bottom, in every recorded case, the voice of pain—and the physical body, so to speak, of poetry, is the treatment by which the poet tries to reconcile that pain with the world.

—Ted Hughes

One must read poetry with one's nerves.

—Wallace Stevens

Poetry is prose in slow motion.

—Nicholson Baker

We aren't suggesting that mental instability or unhappiness makes one a better poet, or a poet at all; and contrary to the romantic notion of the artist suffering for his or her work, we think these writers achieved brilliance in spite of their suffering, not because of it.

—Dorianne Laux

We talk so abstractly about poetry because all of us are usually bad poets.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

Too many poets act like a middle-aged mother trying to get her kids to eat too much cooked meat, and potatoes with drippings (tears). I don't give a damn whether they eat or not. Forced feeding leads to excessive thinness (effete). Nobody should experience anything they don't need to, if they don't need poetry bully for them. I like the movies too. And after all, only Whitman and Crane and Williams, of the American poets, are better than the movies.

—Frank O'Hara

There is no poetry where there are no mistakes.

—Joy Harjo

Poetry may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves.

—T. S. Eliot

When composing a verse let there not be a hair's breath separating your mind from what you write; composition of a poem must be done in an instant, like a woodcutter felling a huge tree or a swordsman leaping at a dangerous enemy.

—Bashō

Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.

—W. H. Auden

Any healthy man can go without food for two days—but not without poetry.

—Baudelaire

The winds, the sea, and the moving tides are what they are. If there is wonder and beauty and majesty in them, science will discover these qualities... If there is poetry in my book about the sea, it is not because I deliberately put it there, but because no one could write truthfully about the sea and leave out the poetry.

—Rachel Carson

I can't think of a case where poems changed the world, but what they do is they change people's understanding of what's going on in the world.

—Seamus Heaney

I wrote poetry from the time I could write. That was the only way I could begin to express who I was but the poems didn't make sense to my teachers. They didn't rhyme. They were about the wind sounds, the planets' motions, never about who I was or how I felt. I didn't think I felt anything. I was this mind more than a body or a heart. My mind photographing the stars, hearing the wind.

—Francesca Lia Block

Some of the popular notions about poetry, that it's kind of an intellectual luxury or a decorative art, are not only misguided but really deceptive and even cruel. I feel like I have an opportunity and maybe also a little bit of a responsibility to say, 'You need this thing and you can have it.'

—Tracy K. Smith

Whatever you get out of poetry—take it. take it. take it.  
Words are better off felt than understood.

—Sanober Khan

Maybe you're one of those people who writes poems, but rarely reads them. Let me put this as delicately as I can: If you don't read, your writing is going to suck.

—Kim Addonizio

It was language I loved, not meaning. I liked poetry better when I wasn't sure what it meant. Eliot has said that the meaning of the poem is provided to keep the mind busy while the poem gets on with its work—like the bone thrown to the dog by the robber so he can get on with his work. . . . Is beauty a reminder of something we once knew, with poetry one of its vehicles? Does it give us a brief vision of that 'rarely glimpsed bright face behind/ the apparency of things'? Here, I suppose, we ought to try the impossible task of defining poetry. No one definition will do. But I must admit to a liking for the words of Thomas Fuller, who said: 'Poetry is a dangerous honey. I advise thee only to taste it with the Tip of thy finger and not to live upon it. If thou do'st, it will disorder thy Head and give thee dangerous Vertigos.'

—P. K. Page

A poem was a box for your soul. That was the point. It was the place where you could save bits of yourself, and shake out your darkest feelings, without worrying that people would think you were strange. While I was writing, I would forget myself and everyone else; poetry made me feel part of something noble and beautiful and bigger than me. [...] I slid them under the carpet as soon as they were done, all the images and rhymes wrestled into place. By the time I had copied them out, I found I had memorized every line. Then they would surprise me by surging through me, like songs I knew by heart.

—Andrea Ashworth

I can't even make up a rhyme about an umbrella, let alone death and life and eternal peace.

—Knut Hamsun

There is also a third kind of madness, which is possession by the Muses, enters into a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyric....But he, who, not being inspired and having no touch of madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks he will get into the temple by the help of art—he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted; the sane man is nowhere at all when he enters into rivalry with the madman.

—Plato

I now wish that I had spent somewhat more of my life with verse. This is not because I fear having missed out on truths that are incapable of statement in prose. There are no such truths; there is nothing about death that Swinburne and Landor knew but Epicurus and Heidegger failed to grasp. Rather, it is because I would have lived more fully if I had been able to rattle off more old chestnuts—just as I would have if I had made more close friends.

—Richard M. Rorty

To have ruined one's self over poetry is an honor.

—Oscar Wilde

Poetry is an intimate act. It's about bringing forth something that's inside you—whether it is a memory, a philosophical idea, a deep love for another person or for the world, or an apprehension of the spiritual. It's about making something, in language, which can be transmitted to others—not as information, or polemic, but as irreducible art.

—Dorianne Laux

The poet knows that he speaks adequately, then, only when he speaks somewhat wildly.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Writing poetry is talking to oneself; yet it is a mode of talking to oneself in which the self disappears; and the product's something that, though it may not be for everybody, is about everybody.

—Richard Wilbur

Most people ignore most poetry because poetry ignores most people.

—Adrian Mitchell

Every good poem asks a question, and every good poet asks every question.

—Dorianne Laux

Poetry isn't like any writing I've ever heard before. I don't understand all of it, just bits of images, sentences that appear half-finished, all fluttering together like brightly colored ribbons in the wind.

—Lauren Oliver

Is not the blood of poets—ink?

—William Soutar

A way of using words to say things which could not possibly be said in any other way, things which in a sense do not exist till they are born ... in poetry.

—Cecil Day-Lewis

Every poet... finds himself born in the midst of prose. He has to struggle from the littleness and obstruction of an actual world into the freedom and infinitude of an ideal.

—Thomas Carlyle

The masters of information have forgotten about poetry, where words may have a meaning quite different from what the lexicon says, where the metaphoric spark is always one jump ahead of the decoding function, where another, unforeseen reading is always possible.

—J. M. Coetzee

Few young poets [are] testing their poems against the ear. They're writing for the page, and the page, let me tell you, is a cold bed.

—Stanley Kunitz

Poetry is the language of the soul;  
Poetic Prose, the language of my heart.  
Each line must flow as in a song,  
and strike a chord that rings forever.  
To me, words are music!

—Lori R. Lopez

Don't you just love poetry that gives you a crinkly feeling up and down your back?  
—L. M. Montgomery

Poetry is the scholar's art.  
—Wallace Stevens

The aim of poetry is to state simple things in an incomprehensible way.  
—Paul A.M. Dirac

I have been used to consider poetry as the food of love.  
—Jane Austen

I wanted to write some words you'd remember.  
Words so alert they'd leap from the paper,  
crawl up your shoulder, lie by your ears,  
and purr themselves to you like baby kittens.  
—C. L. Foster

We may feel bitterly how little our poems can do in the face of seemingly out of control technological power and seemingly limitless corporate greed, yet it has always been true that poetry can break isolation, show us to ourselves when we are outlawed or made invisible, remind us of beauty where no beauty seems possible, remind us of kinship where all is represented as separation.  
—Adrienne Rich

I do not write poetry; I take words and dip them in feelings.  
—Arti Honrao

A poet is simply an artist whose medium is human emotions. A poet chisels away at our own sensibilities, shaping our vision while molding our hearts. A poet wraps words around our own feelings and presents them as fresh gifts to humanity.  
—Richelle E. Goodrich

Poetry is as necessary to comprehension as science. It is as impossible to live without reverence as it is without joy.  
—Henry Beston

Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music, without the idea, is simply music; the idea, without the music, is prose, from its very definitiveness.  
—Edgar Allan Poe

Poetry and art nourish the soul of the world with the flavor-filled substances of beauty, wisdom and truth.

—Aberjhani

Poetry's work is the clarification and magnification of being.

—Jane Hirshfield

The kind of poem I produced in those days was hardly anything more than a sign I made of being alive, of passing or having passed, or hoping to pass, through certain intense human emotions. It was a phenomenon of orientation rather than of art, thus comparable to stripes of paint on a roadside rock or to a pillared heap of stones marking a mountain trail.

But then, in a sense, all poetry is positional: to try to express one's position in regard to the universe embraced by consciousness, is an immemorial urge. Tentacles, not wings, are Apollo's natural members. Vivian Bloodmark, a philosophical friend of mine, in later years, used to say that while the scientist sees everything that happens in one point of space, the poet feels everything that happens in one point of time.

—Vladimir Nabokov

She dotes on poetry, sir. She adores it; I may say that her whole soul and mind are wound up, and entwined with it. She has produced some delightful pieces, herself, sir. You may have met with her 'Ode to an Expiring Frog,' sir.

—Charles Dickens

Poetry: three mismatched shoes at the entrance of a dark alley.

—Charles Simic

Poets are interested primarily in death and commas.

—Carolyn Kizer

One way poetry connects is across time. . . . Some echo of a writer's physical experience comes into us when we read her poem.

—Jane Hirshfield

As the ear is the antechamber to the soul, poetry can adulterate and destroy more surely than lust or gunpowder. The poet's, then, is the highest office of all. His words reach where others fall short. A silly song of Shakespeare's has done more for the poor and the wicked than all the preachers and philanthropists in the world.

—Virginia Woolf

A poet is someone who can use a single image to send a universal message.

—Andrei Tarkovsky

Since when are the first line and last line of any poem  
Where the poem begins and ends?

—Seamus Heaney

How does a poet know when a poem is ended? Because it lies flat, taut; nothing can be added or subtracted.

—Carol Shields

Poetry is nothing if it exists only in books. One has to find it in one's own life.

—Marty Rubin

The crazy thing about poetry is how its simplicity makes it complicated.

—Richelle E. Goodrich

Those moments before a poem comes, when the heightened awareness comes over you, and you realize a poem is buried there somewhere, you prepare yourself. I run around, you know, kind of skipping around the house, marvelous elation. It's as though I could fly.

—Anne Sexton

Some writers are self-centered to the point of failing their audiences. Their writing is so complex, so filled with ambiguity and obscurity, so turgid with hidden and private meanings, that most readers may reject the communication process altogether....The mature writer, on the other hand, masters the forms and techniques of whatever genre he is working in, so that his words will do what he intends them to do....Until the writer's statement is understood, communication cannot begin.

--Thomas E. Sanders

In poetry, especially confessional poetry but in other poetry as well, the poet is not writing characters so much as emotional truth wrapped in metaphor. Bam! Pow! A shot to the gut.

—Jane Yolen

One writes a poem when one is so taken up by an emotional concept that one is unable to remain silent.

—Stephen Dobyns

Living is the opposite of poetry. Poetry is the recollection of living, or, more often than not, the lament of having not lived. Or worse yet, merely the contemplation of living. My advice to you...is this: Live. And keep living. And never stop to look back to write about what you have lived and observed and overcome.

—P. S. Baber

How are poets able to unzip what they see around them, calling forth a truer essence from behind a common fact? Why, reading a verse about a pear, do you see past the fruit in so transcendent a way?

—Elizabeth Berg

Consider the difference between the first and third person in poetry [...] It's like the difference between looking at a person and looking through their eyes.

—Diana Abu-Jaber

The poem has a social effect of some kind whether or not the poet wills it to have. It has a kinetic force, it sets in motion...elements in the reader that would otherwise remain stagnant.

—Denise Levertov

If I'm still wistful about *On the Road*, I look on the rest of the Kerouac oeuvre—the poems, the poems!—in horror. Read *Satori in Paris* lately? But if I had never read Jack Kerouac's horrendous poems, I never would have had the guts to write horrendous poems myself. I never would have signed up for Mrs. Safford's poetry class the spring of junior year, which led me to poetry readings, which introduced me to bad red wine, and after that it's all just one big blurry condemned path to journalism and San Francisco.

—Sarah Vowell

If a serious statement is defined as one that may be made in terms of waking life, poetry will never rise to the level of seriousness. It lies beyond seriousness, on that more primitive and original level where the child, the animal, the savage, and the seer belong, in the region of dream, enchantment, ecstasy, laughter. To understand poetry we must be capable of donning the child's soul like a magic cloak and of forsaking man's wisdom for the child's.

—Johan Huizinga

To delight the ear and the eye is a mere sensual indulgence;—true poetry strikes at the soul.

—Egerton Brydges

Thirsty for being, the poet ceaselessly reaches out to reality, seeking with the indefatigable harpoon of the poem a reality that is always better hidden, more regal. The poem's power is as an instrument of possession but at the same time, ineffably, it expresses the desire for possession, like a net that fishes by itself, a hook that is also the desire of the fish. To be a poet is to desire and, at the same time, to obtain, in the exact shape of the desire.

—Julio Cortázar

Deep feeling doesn't make for good poetry. A way with language would be a bit of help.

—Thom Gunn

How could poetry and literature have arisen from something as plebian as the cuneiform equivalent of grocery-store bar codes? I prefer the version in which Prometheus brought writing to man from the gods. But then I remind myself that... we should not be too fastidious about where great ideas come from. Ultimately, they all come from a wrinkled organ that at its healthiest has the color and consistency of toothpaste, and in the end only withers and dies.

—Alice Weaver Flaherty

All that we call sacred history attests that the birth of a poet is the principal event in chronology.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Many have referred to [Lewis] Carroll's rhymes as nonsense, but in my childhood world — Los Angeles in the '50s — they made perfect sense.

—Wanda Coleman

We fall in love with what we read, and faster perhaps with poetry than anything else by dint of its power...Reading poetry is not only a crucial part of a complete education, but also one of life's great joys.

—*The Wall Street Journal*

Poetry had always seemed something I could turn to in need —an emergency exit, a lifebuoy, as well as a justification.

—John Fowles

poems open doors;  
that don't even exist.

—Basith

Poetry purrs like a kitten on the tip of our tongue. Each word fluidly floating from our lips, like little crystalline snowflakes, before settling onto an emotional wonderland of forgotten feelings. It has the power to pull our deepest emotions to the surface of consciousness and to serenade our soul with the haunting melody of a self, lost... and finally found.

—Jaeda DeWalt

If a poem is concentrated, a closed fist, then a novel is relaxed and expansive, an open hand: it has roads, detours, destinations; a heart line, a head line; morals and money come into it. Where the fist excludes and stuns, the open hand can touch and encompass a great deal in its travels.

—Sylvia Plath

[Fiction and poetry] are medicines, they're doses, and they heal the rupture that reality makes on the imagination.

—Jeanette Winterson

Critics write out of intellectual exercise, not poets. Poets write straight from the heart.

—Erica Jong

You know what I do? I listen to other people, stumbling about with their half thoughts and half sentences and their clumsy feelings that they can't express, and it hurts me. So I go home and burnish it and polish it and weld it to a rhythmic frame, make the dull colors gleam, mute the garish artificiality to pastels, so it doesn't hurt any more: that's my poem. I know what they want to say, and I say it for them.

—Samuel R. Delany

Most people in this country are looking for literature that is useful. They feel that just exploring their feelings is good enough—they should be reading about leveraged buy-outs or how to get thin. We live in a culture that is so absolutely, madly focused on commercialism and on creating money and completely turned away from any other kind of creative value. People don't generally turn to poetry unless they're bereaved or have fallen in love. Or in adolescence, when their feelings are very strong and turbulent. I think most of us are dying for lack of spirit in this culture.

—Erica Jong

Poetry is only the highest eloquence of passion, the most vivid form of expression that can be given to our conception of anything, whether pleasurable or painful, mean or dignified, delightful or distressing. It is the perfect coincidence of the image and the words with the feeling we have, and of which we cannot get rid in any other way, that gives an instant 'satisfaction to the thought.' This is equally the origin of wit and fancy, of comedy and tragedy, of the sublime and pathetic.

—William Hazlitt

Although I've written a few (a very few) poems over the years, I am not a natural poet...and I remain in awe of people who are. The ability to evoke deep emotion, reveal a new facet of the world, or condense an entire story into the limited space and form of a poem (or likewise, of a good song lyric, or the text for a children's picture book) seems like pure magic to me.

—Terri Windling

A world without poetry and art would be too much like one without birds or flowers: bearable but a lot less enjoyable.

—Aberjhani

What else is a poem about?

The rhythm and the images buried in the language. All the ways you can build an emotion with words, but you can't just write 'I feel sad.' I mean, you can, but it's not poetry... I think it has to be experienced instead of studied. You step into it.

—Garret Freymann-Weyr

Poetry is dancing with words.

—Ana Monnar

For a lot of people, poetry tends to be dull. It's not read much. It takes a special kind of training and a lot of practice to read poetry with pleasure. It's like learning to like asparagus.

—Thomas M. Disch

The books [poetry collections] may not sell, but neither are they given away or thrown away. They tend, more than other books, to fall apart in their owners' hands. Not I suppose good news in a culture and economy built on obsolescence. But for a book to be loved this way and turned to this way for consolation and intense renewable excitement seems to me a marvel.

— Louise Glück

Criticism is to poetry as air is to a noise: it allows it to be heard; and even if we can't see it or feel it, it is there, shaping how we hear.

—Annie Finch

The question 'Why poetry?' isn't asking what makes poetry unique among art forms; poetry may indeed share its origins with other forms of privileged utterance. A somewhat more interesting question would be: 'What is the nature of experience, and especially the experience of using language, that calls poetic utterance into existence? What is there about experience that's unutterable?' You can't generalize very usefully about poetry; you can't reduce its nature down to a kernel that underlies all its various incarnations. I guess my internal conversation suggests that if you can't successfully answer the question of 'Why poetry?,' can't reduce it in the way I think you can't, then maybe that's the strongest evidence that poetry's doing its job; it's creating an essential need and then satisfying it.

—Richard Ford

My earliest poems appear almost skeletal to me now—it seems I've learned to add meat, muscle and a nice suit of clothes.

—Wanda Lea Brayton

I love the way poetry turns ordinary words into winged things that rise up and soar!

—Margarita Engle

As one of the oldest forms humans have used to transmit their histories and cultures, poetry needs to be part of the heritage of as many students as possible. Students' enthusiasm should grow if the teacher's earliest approaches begin with the familiar and also engage students in producing poems. Because it is one of the thin cultural threads that binds all living people to the distant, pre-literary past, poetry offers all who read it a high-powered cultural telescope through which they can glimpse the beginnings of their civilization.

—R. Baird Shuman

Did you ever hear Dylan Thomas? What music! If you had put your hands over your ears, not pressing the drum too closely, you could get that sway, that rhythm that breaks through even without the words. It was a charming experience. Somebody advised me to try it while Thomas was reading. I did when listening to Fern Hill. I went right through the poem with him with my ears almost closed to words as such but with the music beating through.

—May Miller

The chief virtues of poetry are found in its conciseness and in its ability to plant verbal seeds that explode into multiple meanings and entice the mind at level after level as one's sophistication grows. Poetry can help students increase their cognitive sophistication, but the genre has to be taught with considerable sensitivity to what students will and will not accept at various stages of their development.

—R. Baird Shuman

The grasshopper poem by e. e. cummings cannot be read aloud. And there is no question that more and more poetry is written to be read with the eye, on the page, as opposed to being read out loud. But even then, you are relying on the fact that somebody will invest his time and his effort in the activity, and he must love the language, even if he is silently reading the poem.

—Bruce Cutler

The first thing to understand about poetry is that it comes to you from outside you, in books or in words, but that for it to live, something from within you must come to it and meet it and complete it. Your response with our own mind and body and memory and emotions gives the poem its ability to work its magic; if you give to it, it will give to you, and give plenty.

When you read, don't let the poet write down to you; read up to him. Reach for him from your gut out, and the heart and muscles will come into it, too.

—James Dickey

Part of the spell of poetry is in the rhythm of language, used by poets who understand how powerful a factor rhythm can be, how compelling and unforgettable. Almost anything put into rhythm and rhyme is more memorable than the same thing said in prose. Why this is, no one knows completely, though the answer is surely rooted far down in the biology by means of which we exist; in the circulation of the blood that goes forth from the heart and comes back, and in the repetition of breathing. Croesus was a rich Greek king, back in the sixth century before Christ, but this tombstone was not his:

No Croesus lies in the grave you see;  
I was a poor laborer, and this suits me.

That is plain-spoken and definitive. You believe it, and the rhyme helps you believe it and keep it.

—James Dickey

Contemporary American poetry is read by poets, by writing students, and by students of literature—and by almost no one else.

—Jonathan Yardley

The more our encounter with poetry deepens, the more our experience of our own life will deepen, and you will begin to see things by means of words, and words by means of things.

You will come to understand the world as it interacts with words, as it can be re-created by words, by rhythms and by images.

You'll understand that this condition is one charged with vital possibilities. You will pick up meaning more quickly—and you will create meaning, too, for yourself and for others.

Connections between things will exist for you in ways that they never did before. They will shine with unexpectedness, wide-openness, and you will go toward them, on our now path. 'Then...' as Dante says, '...Then will your feet be filled with good desire.' You will know this is happening the first time you say, of something you never would have noticed before, 'Well, would you look at that! Who'd 'a thunk it?'

—James Dickey

Despite our enchantment with words provocatively strung together, from graffiti to advertising copy, Americans are ambivalent about poetry.

We early find ourselves chanting insults, bouncing balls, choosing sides, or skipping rope in measured and rhymed verses that become engraved in our minds. In school, generations of us learned by heart texts that echoed through life: Poe's 'Bells,' Scott's 'Lochinvar,' Browning's 'How They Brought the Good News From Ghent to Aix,' Kipling's 'Gunga Din,' anonymous ballads.

Yet few Americans would confess to liking poetry in any form, let alone to actually reading it, even occasionally.

—Morris Freedman

Poetry is a genre of literature that is frequently neglected or overlooked....Studies show that poetry is the most neglected component in the language arts curriculum, and that teachers tend to neglect poetry based on their prior experiences with analyzing poems.

—Gregory Denman, Jon  
Shapiro, and  
Shane Templeton

Poetry cannot redeem the world, but it has undisputed rewards for those willing to receive them. It can, at least for a moment, heighten the experience of being alive. It can sharpen the wits, awaken the imagination, perhaps even leave a grain of wisdom behind. This seems enough to ask of it.

—X. Joseph Kennedy and  
Dorothy Kennedy

Traditionally poetry has been taught as an isolated unit of study. Students are taught poetic forms, analysis of poetry, and how to write poetry in a variety of forms. Unfortunately, this intense, brief encounter with poetry often leaves students believing poetry is isolated from their lives and not something to be enjoyed. Yet, poetry has the potential to open students of all ages to new perspectives and ways of looking at our world....Poetry offers new understandings of the world, provides knowledge about concepts in the world, and helps students identify with a variety of people and situations. Poetry offers insight into ourselves, others, and our world.

—Janet A. Finke and  
Karen D. Wood

Contemporary American poets now seem to put all their energy into one task: the creation of a voice. They strive to sound like no one else. And that often means poets end up pushing what is most singular and idiosyncratic in themselves and in the language to the fore and ignoring what they have in common with others. The current poet may give a certain sort of pleasure by his uniqueness, but no one reading him will say what Emerson hoped to say when he encountered a poet who mattered: ‘This is my music; this is myself.’

—Mark Edmundson

Reading poetry uses all parts of the brain. Is that why we teach poetry? Or do we teach poetry to communicate deep and profound feelings, bind one word to another, explore the architecture of harmonious forms, or create a rhythm with words? Possibly, we teach poetry because we are required to help students develop poetic form and figurative language through individual writing of poetry, acquire a solid foundation in reading and evaluating poetry, and analyze sound elements of poetry that contribute to meaning. Whatever the reason, whatever our battle cry, poetry is one of the most difficult genres to teach well and one of the most difficult for students to understand. Why? For one thing, the language and conventions that a poet uses often break all the rules of predicable reading. Poetry can be considered a more complex style of writing and therefore takes more probing.

—Nanette Avery

Reading and understanding poetry do not go hand-in-hand. Just because our students are physically reading does not mean that they truly comprehend the text. And, just like during content reading or literature instruction, it is essential that we arm our students with the prerequisites required to make their reading experience fulfilling. If students are given the time to become more proficient and inquisitive poetry readers, they will also have learned to engage an extensive complement of their thinking skills.

—Nanette Avery

Poetry, as it reflects the sounds, joys, sorrows, and anger in our lives, will touch parts of ourselves that bring joy as well as aspects of ourselves we simply don't like.

—Donald Graves

Poetry brings together sense and sound giving the reader or listener a different view of life. Poetry, like mathematics, expresses complex ideas in symbolic ways.

—Donald Graves

Social studies content can be enriched by sharing poetry written during the period under study. Students gain insights into the values of ancient American people through listening to their chants and hymns as they study the European conquest of the New World. Students acquire a unique perspective about enculturation when they examine poetry from the Tang Dynasty that has been shared with Chinese children for a thousand years.

—Ann Bullion-Mears and  
J. Yvette  
McWhorter

Poetry's novel use of words and punctuation appeals to students' interest. The rhythmic beat and intense images provide a mnemonic device that can promote student retention of content. Because poetry encourages abstract thought, its use may aid students' transitions from concrete to formal thought operations. Recent brain research has emphasized the role of emotion in learning. Emotional response can promote contextual memory prompts that lead to the recall of information. Reading poetry aloud encourages the engagement of emotional response. It assists students in developing empathy with the expressed emotions of other individuals.

Poetry is quick. It can add interest or provide a focus of discussion in less than five minutes of class time. Poetry is concise. Poets work hard to express complex ideas in a limited amount of space. A well crafted poem reveals in a few lines a concept on which a novelist or writer of nonfiction will spend pages. Poetry enhances and extends classroom instruction. Poems can summon laughter, tell stories, send messages, share feelings, and start students wondering, which helps middle school learners to personalize the abstract. Poetry accentuates both image and meaning....Because of the diversity of formats, subjects, moods, images, and sounds evoked by poetry, a teacher can share a poem every day for a semester or a year and his/her instruction will never seem monotonous or dull.

—Ann Bullion-Mears and  
J. Yvette  
McWhorter

A micropoem is simply a short poem of no more than one hundred words and two verses....The most popular poetry accounts on Instagram and Facebook are the ones that specialize in micropoems, and poetry on Twitter is restricted to the length of a tweet: 280 characters. These poems even have their very own genre, known as Twitterature.

—Rayna Hutchison and  
Samuel Blake

There are distinct duties of a poet laureate. I plan a reading series at the *Library of Congress* and advise the librarian. The rest is how I want to promote poetry.

—Rita Dove, Poet  
Laureate

Only the poet can look beyond the detail and see the whole picture.

—Helen Hayes

The relation between a poet and audience is really insignificant. What matters is the poet is hearing something that he is broadcasting. And whether there is anybody with a receiver isn't the reason he does it. He hopes there is somebody receiving it.

—Peter Davison

I would love to be the poet laureate of Coney Island.

—Thornton Wilder

Poetry reveals language's underlying metrical and intonational regularity, and its tendency to pattern its sounds.

—Don Paterson

The most important tribute any human being can pay to a poem or a piece of prose he or she really loves is to learn it by heart. Not by brain, by heart; the expression is vital.

—George Steiner

Poems connect souls and elevate love.

—Renia Spiegel

Stay away from most modern poems. It's crap. It's not poetry! It's not poetry.

—Ray Bradbury

There are three nevers in poetry:  
Never write something just because it sounds good.  
Never refuse to write something because you are afraid of public reaction.  
And never, never let them see you sweat.

—Nikki Giovanni

For a poet, ‘success’ can rarely be very much more than winning the ungrudging respect of the best of his fellow poets.

—Anthony Hecht

T.S. Eliot said to me ‘There’s only one way a poet can develop his actual writing—apart from self-criticism & continual practice. And that is by reading other poetry aloud—and it doesn’t matter whether he understands it or not (i.e. even if it’s in another language.) What matters above all, is educating the ear.’ What matters, is to connect your own voice with an infinite range of verbal cadences & sequences—and only endless actual experience of your ear can store all that in your nervous system. The rest can be left to your life & your character.

—Ted Hughes

Poems arrive. They hide in feelings and images, in weeds and delivery vans, daring us to notice and give them form with our words. They take us to an invisible world where light and dark, inside and outside meet.

—Susan Goldsmith  
Wooldridge

Metaphors have a way of holding the most truth in the least space.

—Orson Scott Card

A metaphor is like a simile.

—Unknown

I don’t think writers are sacred, but words are. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you might nudge the world a little or make a poem that children will speak for you when you are dead.

—Tom Stoppard

He drove his mind into the abyss where poetry is written.

—George Orwell

The true poem rests between the words.

—Vanna Bonta

Poetry is important...if you don't strive at it, if you don't fill it full of stars and falseness.

—Charles Bukowski

I do not write poetry; I take words and dip them in feelings.

—Arti Honrao

When you're a student of poetry, you're lucky if you don't realize how untalented you are until you get a little better. Otherwise, you would just stop.

—Tony Hoagland

Poetry is the wailing of a broken heart—the etched sorrows of despairing souls. These artful words are an exclamation in rare colors expressed noiselessly on parchment.

Poetry is the unheard cry of a flower, wilting. It is a humble, lucent tear shed with meaning. It is the lovely portrayal of ugliness and the bitter edge of sweet.

Poetry speaks to the spirit by piercing understanding. It interprets all senseless truths—beauty, love, emotion—into sensible scrawl.

Poetry is vague affirmation and bewildering clarification. Like the most poignant of emotions, we understand the essence but cannot adequately do it verbal justice, crippled by inherently weak tongues.

A spiritual soothsayer, poetry is the closest thing to expression of feelings unutterable.

—Richelle E. Goodrich

Medicines and surgery may cure, but only reading and writing poetry can heal.

—J. Arroyo

Poetry springs directly from our primal need and capacity for communication...[Poetry] mobilizes such a concentration of devices, such an intensification of language via rhythm, syntax, image and metaphor. Reading it—the best of it—can create another, very different kind of perpetual present, an awareness that can be as ongoing in the soul as the stop-time of trauma.

—Sven Birkerts

True verse and music grow from suffering.

—Richard Burton as  
Henry in *Who's  
Afraid of Virginia  
Woolf?*

Poetry is nothing more than a facility for expressing that complicated process in which we locate, and attempt to heal, affliction—whether our own or that of others whose feeling we can share. The inmost spirit of poetry, in other words, is at bottom, in every recorded case, the voice of pain—and the physical body, so to speak, of poetry, is the treatment by which the poet tries to reconcile that pain with the world.

—Ted Hughes

I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that is the only way of insuring one's immortality.

— James Joyce

When I sit down to write a poem, I am opening myself up to the magic of possibility, of something beautiful and profound taking shape on the page. I am never sure what will happen.

—Faisal Mohyuddin

Poetry teachers especially at the high school and undergraduate levels, should spend less time on analysis and more on performance. Poetry needs to be liberated from literary criticism. Poems should be memorized, recited, and performed. The sheer joy of the art must be emphasized. The pleasure of performance is what first attracts children to poetry, the sensual excitement of speaking and hearing the words of the poem. Performance was also the teaching technique that kept poetry vital for centuries. Maybe it also holds the key to poetry's future.

—Mark Edmundson

The most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley

A poem that doesn't make sense is just a bad poem.

—Bryce Springfield

Lots of poets we know write nonsense, and even more we don't know. In fact, for some poetry venues, the less a poem displays any argument, narrative, or music, the more likely it is to be accepted.

—Matthew Buckley  
Smith

Against what's offered by the bankers and the ad men, the journalists and the professors, and the politicians (especially them), we need the poets to create our sense of the present and our hopes for the time to come. What Shelley said is so: True poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

—Mark Edmundson

Ambiguity married to musical language is the essence of poetry.

—Curtis Lindsay

American poetry now belongs to a subculture. No longer part of the mainstream of artistic and intellectual life, it has become the specialized occupation of a relatively small and isolated group. Little of the frenetic activity it generates ever reaches outside that closed group. As a class poets are not without cultural status. Like priests in a town of agnostics, they still command a certain residual prestige. But as individual artists they are almost invisible.

—Dana Gioia (1991)

Daily newspapers no longer review poetry. There is, in fact, little coverage of poetry or poets in the general press. From 1984 until this year the *National Book Awards* dropped poetry as a category. Leading critics rarely review it. In fact, virtually no one reviews it except other poets. Almost no popular collections of contemporary poetry are available except those, like the *Norton Anthology*, targeting an academic audience. It seems, in short, as if the large audience that still exists for quality fiction hardly notices poetry. A reader familiar with the novels of Joyce Carol Oates, John Updike, or John Barth may not even recognize the names of Gwendolyn Brooks, Gary Snyder, and W. D. Snodgrass.

—Dana Gioia (1991)

In 1934, Edmund Wilson published an essay called 'Is Verse a Dying Technique?' Fifty-four years later, Joseph Epstein chimed in with 'Who Killed Poetry?' and former NEA chairman Gioia gained fame with a 1991 piece titled 'Can Poetry Matter?' In answering their titular questions, all three to some degree concluded that poetry's concentration in the hands of specialists and the halls of academia was bad for the art form's health.

—*Newsweek* Staff (2009)

Even if great poetry continues to be written, it has retreated from the center of literary life. Though supported by a loyal coterie, poetry has lost the confidence that it speaks to and for the general culture.

—Dana Gioia (1991)

Through the burgeoning university network, it was suddenly possible to think of oneself as a national poet, even if the nation turned out to consist entirely of English Departments.

—Wilfrid Sheed

Let's be clear, some poems—(well these days, most of them have no meaning or significance). People write words, sling them together, have no clue about form, meter, imagery, sound, diction. They forget the basics.

—Nancy S. James

The purpose of poetry is to contribute to man's happiness.

—Wallace Stevens

Poets arguing about modern poetry: jackals snarling over a dried-up well.

—Cyril Connolly

There are at least two reasons why the situation of poetry matters to the entire intellectual community. The first involves the role of language in a free society. Poetry is the art of using words charged with their utmost meaning. A society whose intellectual leaders lose the skill to shape, appreciate, and understand the power of language will become the slaves of those who retain it—be they politicians, preachers, copywriters, or newscasters. The public responsibility of poetry has been pointed out repeatedly by modern writers. Even the archsymbolist Stephane Mallarme praised the poet's central mission to 'purify the words of the tribe.'...The second reason why the situation of poetry matters to all intellectuals is that poetry is not alone among the arts in its marginal position. If the audience for poetry has declined into a subculture of specialists, so too have the audiences for most contemporary art forms, from serious drama to jazz. The unprecedented fragmentation of American high culture during the past half century has left most arts in isolation from one another as well as from the general audience.

—Mark Edmunson

For many, poetry is just something they were forced to read in school. They find it difficult and pretentious, or vague and melodramatic. Poetry still has prestige, but few read or speak it.

—Michael Macrone

Hardly a day goes by when you don't either hear or quote a poetic phrase. It might not even sound like verse—take 'getting and spending,' coined by William Wordsworth, or 'in one ear and out the other,' by Chaucer. You may associate poetry with metaphors and symbols, such as Eliot's *Wasteland* or Poe's croaking raven. But more often cited are the everyday truths well said, elegant yet direct: 'truth is stranger than fiction' (Lord Byron), 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread' (Alexander Pope), or 'thing fall apart' (W. B. Yeats).

It should be no surprise poetry has lent the English language hundreds of quotable phrases. Poets, after all, are experts in saying things well.

—Michael Macrone

This is an embarrassing confession for an adult to make. In their idle hours Winston Churchill and Noel Coward painted. For fun and relaxation Albert Einstein played the violin. Hemingway hunted, Agatha Christie gardened, James Joyce sang arias and Nabokov chased butterflies. But poetry?....An adolescent girl may write poetry, so long as it is securely locked up in her pink leatherette five-year diary. Suburban professionals are permitted to enter jolly pastiche competitions in the *Spectator* and *New Statesman*. At a pinch, a young man may be allowed to write a verse or two of dirty doggerel and leave it on a post-it note stuck to the fridge when he has forgotten to buy a Valentine card. But that's it. Any more forays into the world of Poesy and you release the beast that lurks within every British breast—and the name of the beast is Embarrassment.

—Stephen Fry

Unlike musical notation, paint or clay, language is inside every one of us. For free. We are all proficient at it. We already have the palette, the paints and the instruments. We don't have to go and buy any reserved materials. Poetry is made of the same stuff you are reading now, the same stuff you use to order pizza over the phone, the same stuff you yell at your parents and children, whisper in your lover's ear and shove into an e-mail, text or birthday card. It is common to us all. Is that why we resent being told that there is a technique to its highest expression, poetry? I cannot ski, so I would like to be shown how to. I cannot paint, so I would value some lessons. But I can speak and write, so do not waste my time telling me that I need lessons in poetry, which is, after all, no more than emotional writing, with or without the odd rhyme. Isn't it?

—Stephen Fry

I do not write poetry for publication, I write it for the same reason that, according to Wilde, one should write a diary, to have something sensational to read on the train. And as a way of speaking to myself. But most importantly of all for pleasure.

—Stephen Fry

Poetry never plays a more important role than it does during revolutionary periods; poetry gave the revolution its voice and in return the revolution liberated poetry from isolation; the poet now knows he is being heard by the people, especially young people; for youth, poetry and revolution are one and the same.

—Milan Kundera

The poet who writes ‘free’ verse is like Robinson Crusoe on his desert island: he must do all his cooking, laundry and darning for himself. In a few exceptional cases, this manly independence produces something original and impressive, but more often the result is squalor—dirty sheets on the unmade bed and empty bottles on the unswept floor.

—W. H. Auden

In our age one of the glories of poetry is that it remains an art that demonstrates the virtues and pleasure of TAKING YOUR TIME. You can never read a poem too slowly, but you can certainly read one too fast....Poems are not read like novels. There is much pleasure to be had in taking the same fourteen-line sonnet to bed with you and reading it many times over for a week. Savor, taste, enjoy. Poetry is not made to be sucked up like a child’s milkshake, it is much better sipped like a precious malt whisky. Verse is one of our last stands against the instant and the infantile. Even when it is simple and childlike it is to be savored.

Always try to read verse out loud: if you are in a place where such a practice would embarrass you, read out loud inside yourself (if possible, moving your lips). Among the pleasures of poetry is the sheer physical, sensual, textural, tactile pleasure of feeling the words on your lips, tongue, teeth and vocal cords....

Poetry is an entirely different way of using words and I cannot emphasize enough how much more pleasure is to be derived from a slow, luxurious engagement with its language and rhythms.

—Stephen Fry

I was miserable, of course, for I was seventeen, and so I swung into action and wrote a poem, and it was miserable, for that’s how I thought poetry worked: you digested experience and shat literature.

—William Matthews

He started writing poetry again, but it didn’t come as easily. It was hard now to get past the self-consciousness—the silliness, really—of being such a well-established adult applying himself, seriously, to such a youthful joy.

—B. J. Novak

Before 1855, the year that Whitman published *Leaves of Grass*, he had achieved no distinction whatsoever. He had no formal education—no Oxford, no Cambridge, no Harvard or Yale. His life up to his 35th year had been anything but a success....In the summer of 1854, he was a carpenter, framing two- and three-room houses in Brooklyn.

—Mark Edmundson

‘Song of Myself,’ arguably [Walt] Whitman’s greatest work, can be seen as a vision quest. In the original version, which had no title when it was published in 1855, in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman begins as an everyday workingman. He is ‘one of the roughest,’ the tough, laboring type who is depicted on the book’s frontispiece—shirt open, hat tilted to the side, a calmly insouciant expression on his face.

Through a series of poetic and spiritual encounters he gains in experience and wisdom to become a representative democratic individual, one who can show his countrymen and countrywomen the way to a thriving and joyous life.

—Mark Edmundson

He [the poet] brings out the inner part of things and presents them to men in such a way that they cannot refuse but must accept it. But how the mere choice and rhythm of words should produce so magical an effect no one has yet been able to comprehend, and least of all the poets themselves.

—Belloc Hilaire

For not only is the poet a translator of the inner life of man, with its wonder world of thoughts and feelings—its unspeakable love and sorrow, its hopes and aspirations, temptations and lonely wrestlings, darings and doubts, grim passions and gentle affections, its smiles and tears—which, in their changeful lights or gloomy grandeur, play out the great drama of the human heart, but he also translates into his poetry and reflects for us the very spirit of his time.

—Gerald Massey (1858)

The great use of poetry is its pleasure—not its influence as religious or political propaganda. Certain poems and lines of poetry seem as solid and miraculous to me as church altars or the coronation of queens must seem to people who revere quite different images. I am not worried that poems reach relatively few people. As it is, they go surprisingly far—among strangers, around the world, even. Farther than the words of a classroom teacher or the prescriptions of a doctor; if they are very lucky, farther than a lifetime.

—Sylvia Plath

I'm not talking about epic poems. We all know how long they can take. I'm talking about the smallish, unofficial garden-variety poem. How shall I describe it?—a door opens, a door shuts. In between you have had a glimpse: a garden, a person, a rain-storm, a dragonfly, a heart, a city. I think of those round glass Victorian paperweights which I remember, yet can never find—a far cry from the plastic mass-productions which stud the toy counters in Woolworth's. This sort of paperweight is a clear globe, self-complete, very pure, with a forest or village or family group within it. You turn it upside down, then back. It snows. Everything is changed in a minute. It will never be the same in there—not the fir trees, nor the gables, nor the faces.

So a poem takes place.

And there is really so little room! So little time! The poet becomes an expert packer of suitcases.

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet black bough.

There it is: the beginning and the end in one breath. How would the novelist manage that? In a paragraph? In a page? Mixing it, perhaps, like paint, with a little water, thinning it, spreading it out.

—Sylvia Plath

I admit, I love the classics. Robert Frost. Love the heck out of that two roads sh\*t. Etc. (I really do.) But that is almost exclusively because this classic speaks to me personally; I can see a lot of my own life and dilemmas in Frost's lines. A lot of other people can too. It strikes upon something universal: having to come to terms with competing desires, choose between unknowns, and reconcile our limitations. 'And sorry I could not travel both/And be one traveler.' Wow. Poetry that resonates universally is poetry of the best kind—what makes the classics, classics. It's good, and fortunate, that we study them.

—Rebecca Roach

One of my biggest pet peeves is when people inflate their language about a poet's language. It's really not a contest. When people talk about poetry in a pompous way, especially in an academic setting, like 'this is supposed to be hard' and only for the select few to grasp, it erects barriers between those in the conversation. I'm afraid doing so gamifies poetry in a false and off-putting way, perhaps even robbing one's/others' connection with the poem and enjoyment of its discussion....we overtly contradict the real spirit of poetry (which, I believe, is generosity and understanding), and simultaneously propagate that pernicious stereotype that poetry is stuck-up and elitist.

—Rebecca Roach

There's a lot of shame in American culture surrounding poetry. Shame for not understanding why we teach and learn it. Shame for not getting it. Shame for getting it. Shame for not buying it. Shame for buying it and not liking it. Shame in writing it. Shame in not writing enough. Shame in not getting published. Shame in deciding what's published and what isn't. Just shame all around. A sh\*t show of shame, if you will....this thinking, however it manifests, is so insidious, so poisonous, for everyone. Though it's a universal feeling, no one likes to talk about shame. So it makes perfect sense why many people hate poetry; poetry literally surfaces feelings of shame, when people usually like to keep that buried deep inside. Shame is not pretty, so, the thinking goes, we should keep it hidden away....But when we close off conversations, when we keep our shame under tight internal wraps, we lose our vulnerability—and with it, the very source of the great things in life: empathy, joy, love, happiness, creativity, and innovation.

—Rebecca Roach

Plato, in the most influential attack on poetry in recorded history, concluded that there was no place for poetry in the Republic because poets are rhetoricians who pass off imaginative projections as the truth and risk corrupting the citizens of the just city, especially the impressionable youth....The oft-remarked irony of Plato's dialogues, however, is that they are themselves poetic—formally experimental imaginative dramatizations.

—Ben Lerner

Poetry is two things: Sense and story.

Sense—Just relax and read it through, out loud, like it's a normal conversation. Don't pause at each line break, but instead follow the natural rhythms of the punctuation and clauses, as you would any other piece of writing. Read it through several times more, and listen to the rhythms and sounds of the words. Enjoy the way they feel and the sensory impressions (colors, smells, noises—both pleasant and unpleasant) they evoke.

Story—Then read it once more and listen for the speaker (that's the narrator in poetry). Try to listen to the tone of his voice. Is he angry, thoughtful, homesick, conflicted? Does he reach any resolution or change by the end? Is he merely letting you in on a thought he had or a sight that made him remember his hometown? Try to get a feel for who he is and the story he's telling.

If there's meaning in all that, maybe you'll see it, and maybe you won't. It's okay to just listen. Many poems are written merely to capture the taste of a moment, not to make a statement.

—Rebecca Kerr

The main obstacle to understanding poetry, whether you are talking about Keats or Shelley or Whitman or even Leonard Cohen, is our ingrained tendency to be very literal in communication. We often speak and write in extremely literal terms, because we want to make sure we are understood, and so when communication is incoming we look at it the same way, and try to extract its literal meaning.

This doesn't work with poetry. Great poetry is not literal, almost by definition. As art, it shows us a higher truth that is expressed in a non-literal, non-linear way, a way that is completely original to the artist who has composed it. So the very first thing you have to do is try to tamp down your desire for literal certainty when you encounter poetry. Just read it quietly, then read it aloud, let the words roll around in your mind for awhile, enjoy it as an artistic experience even if you can't extract meaning from it, and don't beat yourself up.

—Stephanie Vardavas

Nonsense isn't the reason so many crummy poems get published, cliquishness is. Indeed. In any given issue of any given poetry journal, you could replace everything after the table of contents with a bound collection of blank pages, and the number of people who even notice would be equal to or less than the number of poets whose books were reviewed in that issue. But why among all the possible kinds of poems one might have found inside—boring, offensive, and even piercingly beautiful—why the perennially of nonsense?

Nonsense, in short, is not incidental to our treatment of poems. It seems to be the reason some receive the praise they do. Few are made up of nothing but nonsense. They're often framed by recognizable images and idioms. But nonsense is their *je ne sais quoi*. It's the baloney in their sandwich. Intentionally or not, nonsense has become a defining virtue of contemporary American poetry

—Matthew Buckley  
Smith

Those words are most pleasant which give us new knowledge. Strange words have no meaning for us; common terms we know already. It is metaphor which gives us most of this pleasure.

—Aristotle

I have my books  
And my poetry to protect me  
I am shielded in my armor  
...  
I am a rock  
I am an island.

—Paul Simon

Three qualities are necessary to write superb lyric poetry. First, the writer must have something of a gift: she must be able to make music, command metaphors, compress sense, write melodiously when the situation demands and gratefully when need be. She must be versed in irony; she must have control of tone. But there is more—a second requirement. She must also have something to say. There must be some region of her experience that has transfixed her and that she feels compelled to put into words and illuminate. She must burn to attack some issue, must want to unbind a knot, tighten it, or maybe send a blade directly through its core.

Given these powers—the power of expression and the power to find a theme—the poet still must add ambition. She must be willing to write for her readers. She must be willing to articulate the possibility that what is true for her is true for all. When these three qualities—lyric gift; a serious theme, passionately addressed; real ambition (which one might also call courage)—come together, the results can be luminous.

—Mark Edmundson

Arguments about the decline of poetry's cultural importance are not new. In American letters they date back to the nineteenth century. But the modern debate might be said to have begun in 1934 when Edmund Wilson published the first version of his controversial essay 'Is Verse a Dying Technique?' Surveying literary history, Wilson noted that verse's role had grown increasingly narrow since the eighteenth century. In particular, Romanticism's emphasis on intensity made poetry seem so 'fleeting and quintessential' that eventually it dwindled into a mainly lyric medium. As verse—which had preciously been a popular medium of narrative, satire, drama, even history and scientific speculation—retreated into lyric, prose usurped much of its cultural territory. Truly ambitious writers eventually had no choice but to write in prose. The future of great literature, Wilson speculated, belonged almost entirely to prose.

—Mark Edmundson

The poems that used to entrance me in the days of Miss Violence now struck me as overdone and sickly. Alas, burthen, thine, cometh, aweary—the archaic language of unrequited love. I was irritated with such words, which rendered the unhappy lovers—I could now see—faintly ridiculous, like poor moping Miss Violence herself. Soft-edged, blurry, soggy, like a bun fallen into the water. Nothing you'd want to touch.

—Margaret Atwood

It's up to the artist to use language that can be understood, not hide it in some private code. Most of these jokers don't even want to use language you and I know or can learn...they would rather sneer at us and be smug, because we 'fail' to see what they are driving at. If indeed they are driving at anything—obscurity is usually the refuge of incompetence.

—Robert A. Heinlein

Today poetry is a modestly upwardly mobile, middle-class profession—not as lucrative as waste management or dermatology but several big steps above the squalor of bohemia. Only a philistine would romanticize the blissfully banished artistic poverty of yesteryear. But a clear-eyed observer must also recognize that by opening the poet's trade to all applicants and by employing writers to do something other than write, institutions have changed the social and economic identity of the poet from artist to educator. In social terms the identification of poet with teacher is now complete. The first question one poet now asks another upon being introduced is 'Where do you teach?' The problem is not that poets teach. The campus is not a bad place for a poet to work. It's just a bad place for all poets to work. Society suffers by losing the imagination and vitality that poets brought to public culture. Poetry suffers when literary standards are forced to conform with institutional ones.

—Mark Edmundson

Louis Untermeyer's *Modern American Poetry*, first published in 1919, was recently revised to keep it up to date and was a perennial best seller. My 1942 edition, for example, had been reprinted five times by 1945. My edition of Oscar Williams's *A Pocket Book of Modern Poetry* and been reprinted nineteen times in fourteen years. Untermeyer and Williams prided themselves on keeping their anthologies broad-based and timely. They tried to represent the best of what was being published. Each edition added new poems and poets and dropped older ones. The public appreciated their efforts. Poetry anthologies were an indispensable part of any serious reader's library. Random House's popular Modern Library series, for example, included not one but two anthologies—Selden Rodman's *A New Anthology of Modern Poetry* and Conrad Aiken's *Twentieth Century American Poetry*. All these collections were read and reread by a diverse public. Favorite poems were memorized. Difficult authors like Eliot and Thomas were actively discussed and debated. Poetry mattered outside the classroom.

—Mark Edmundson

## THE PERPETUAL POET

So often with others I write in my mind.  
My wife when she sees me will poke from behind.  
I wake in the night to scribble what seems  
Some clever ideas conveyed in my dreams.  
At ball games I often draft with my phone  
The gist of, to me, the world's greatest poem.  
I find that my writing flourishes best,  
In places I find myself fully obsessed.  
I thrive in that setting,  
While often forgetting  
I've closed out all life—  
Including my wife.

—Dan L. Miller

Poetry is not just about understanding, it is mostly about feeling. A poem must be felt....But more importantly poems are hard to feel or understand if you don't have relevant life experience to extract from. You need to live, love, hurt, be lost, and ask questions, then you can read poetry, enjoy its sound, feel it, and get lost in its meanings.

—Alina Acosta-Romay

Edgar Allan Poe originally wanted a parrot to repeat the word 'nevermore.' Wisely, Poe decided that a parrot didn't fit the melancholy tone that his poem was going for, and he settled on a raven.

—Erin La Rosa

We try to write the poems that we need to write for ourselves, and it turns out that other people need those poems too.

—Jericho Brown

The Mexicans have a fervent appreciation of poetry and make regular use of it. It occupies a high and ancient seat in the Mexican culture. The Aztecs called it 'a scattering of jades,' jade being what they valued most, far more than the gold for which they were murdered in great numbers by invading Spaniards. They felt that the more profound aspects of certain concepts, whether emotional, philosophical, political, or artistic, could be expressed only in poetry.

—Linda Ronstadt

The experience of reading poetry aloud when you don't fully understand it is a curious and complicated one. It's like suddenly discovering that you can play the organ.

—Philip Pullman

Go into the arts. I'm not kidding. The arts are not a way to make a living. They are a very human way of making life more bearable. Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven's sake. Sing in the shower. Dance to the radio. Tell stories. Write poem to a friend, even a lousy poem. Do it as well as you possibly can. You will get an enormous reward. You will have created something.

—Kurt Vonnegut

Romanticism is the abuse of adjectives.

—Alfred De Musset

I believe in fiction and the power of stories because that way we speak in tongues. We are not silenced. All of us, when in deep trauma, find we hesitate, we stammer; there are long pauses in our speech. The thing is stuck. We get our language back through the language of others. We can turn to the poem. We can open the book. Somebody has been there for us and deep-dived the words.

—Jeanette Winterson

When we come to literature, we find that, though it conforms to the rules of grammar, it is yet a thing of joy; it is freedom itself. The beauty of a poem is bound by strict laws, yet it transcends them. The laws are its wings. They do not keep it weighed down. They carry it to freedom. Its form is in law, but its spirit is in beauty. Law is the first step toward freedom, and beauty is the complete liberation which stands on the pedestal of law. Beauty harmonizes in itself the limit and the beyond—the law and the liberty.

—Rabindranath Tagore

Poems are the music of our childhoods.

—Suzy Davies

The poems that used to entrance me in the days of Miss Violence now struck me as overdone and sickly. Alas, burthen, thine, cometh, aweary—the archaic language of unrequited love. I was irritated with such words, which rendered the unhappy lovers—I could now see—faintly ridiculous, like poor moping Miss Violence herself. Soft-edged, blurry, soggy, like a bun fallen into the water. Nothing you'd want to touch.

—Margaret Atwood

I would like *The Discovery of Poetry* to be a field guide to the natural pleasures of language—a happiness we were born to have.

—Frances Mayes

If you look a word up in the dictionary and twenty minutes later you're still wandering around in the dictionary, you probably have the most basic equipment you need to be a poet.

—Billy Collins

When I asked if she read poetry anymore, she said no. She had lost her taste for it. That was how she said it, lost her taste. I asked how that could happen, and she said she agreed with Plato, or at least Plato as summarized for her: that there was something dishonest about it and that he was right to want to banish the poets. What she meant, she told me, was that the only reality was life, real life, and that these beautiful versions were lies and she no longer had patience for it.

—Daphne Kalotay

Poetry is a sort of truancy, a dream within the dream of life, a wild flower planted among our wheat.

—Michael Joseph  
Oakeshott

A poet if anything must be a poet and far more than just a writer of words. The poet is the storyteller, the shaman, the jester and the rogue. The poet lives in the world of language and imagination, love, death & obsession and yet still sees the universe in the smallest of everyday things that we merely take for granted.

—R. M. Engelhardt

Poetry is the struggle against the simplification, codification, and mummification of language, it serves as a constant redirect—moving us to the experience to which the words point.

—Billy Marshall  
Stoneking

In the beginning was the word, and primitive societies venerated poets second only to their leaders. A poet had the power to name and so to control; he was, literally, the living memory of a group or tribe who would perpetuate their history in song; his inspiration was god given and he was in effect a medium.

—Kevin Crossley-Holland

Poetry translation is like playing a piano sonata on a trombone.

—Nataly Kelly

Words are little houses, each with its cellar and garret. Common-sense lives on the ground floor, always ready to engage in ‘foreign commerce’ on the same level as the others, as the passers-by, who are never dreamers. To go upstairs in the word house, is to withdraw, step by step; while to go down to the cellar is to dream, it is losing oneself in the distant corridors of an obscure etymology, looking for treasures that cannot be found in words. To mount and descend in the words themselves—this is a poet’s life. To mount too high or descend too low, is allowed in the case of poets, who bring earth and sky together.

—Gaston Bachelard

Poetry is above all a concentration of the power of language, which is the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe. It is as if forces we can lay claim to in no other way, become present to us in sensuous form. The knowledge and use of this magic goes back very far: the rune; the chant; the incantation; the spell; the kenning; sacred words; forbidden words; the naming of the child, the plant, the insect, the ocean, the configuration of stars, the snow, the sensation in the body. The ritual telling of the dream. The physical reality of the human voice; of words gouged or incised in stone or wood, woven in silk or wool, painted on vellum, or traced in sand.

—Adrienne Rich

Aimlessly  
It pounds the shore.  
White and aimless signals.  
No one listens to poetry.

—Jack Spicer

Inspired by Rudyard Kipling and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, [Badger] Clark shunned free verse in favor of meter and rhyme, composing primarily in ballad form. The best of his poems bounce you in the saddle, gallop across the page, train your eyes toward the sun and your heart toward the West, offering a vital escape from the hassles of modern life: the overdue bills, the overflowing inbox, the wearisome commute....Clark’s verses beg for recitation, and it’s little wonder his work spread so quickly throughout the Western cattle country of the early-to-mid century. As one old cowpuncher supposedly said after reading Clark’s first collection, ‘You can break me if there’s a dead poem in the book, I read the hull of it. Who in hell is this kid Clark, anyway? I don’t know how he knowed, but he knows.’

—Carson Vaughan

If they'll pay for such stuff, why, here's the job I've been looking for all along—no boss, no regular hours [or] responsibility.

—Badger Clark

Some poets deliberately write to be obscure. And you're not going to like every poet, just like you probably don't like every writer or TV show or album ever produced by Pink Floyd. All of that is cool. It shouldn't hamper your reading the ones you do like....Just because you don't get it now doesn't mean you won't get it later. Assume a growth mindset. Your brain is huge and super-plastic; it's busy absorbing things even if you don't quite know that's happening.

—*The Writer*

(December, 2020)

Write a six line poem, about anything, but rhymed. No fair tennis without a net. Make it as good as you possibly can. But don't tell anybody what you're doing. Don't show it or recite it to anybody, not even your girlfriend or parents or whatever,... OK? Tear it up into teeny-weeny pieces, and discard them into widely separated trash receptacles. You will find that you have already been gloriously rewarded for your poem. You have experienced becoming, learned a lot more about what's inside you, and you have made your soul grow.

—Kurt Vonnegut

Be alert to a poem's mood, its tone and pitch and rhythm and texture, and not just 'what it says.'

—Nick Laird

There must always be two kinds of art: escape-art, for man needs escape as he needs food and deep sleep, and parable-art, that art which shall teach man to unlearn hatred and learn love.

—W. H. Auden

My words itch at your ears till you understand them.

—Walt Whitman

Honk if you wish all difficult poems were profound.

—Ben Lerner

I've had it with these cheap sons of bitches who claim they love poetry but never buy a book.

—Kenneth Rexroth

My own prescription for making poetry popular in the schools would be to ban it—with possession treated as a serious misdemeanor, and dealing as a felony.

—Clive James

Almost all poetry is a failure because it sounds like somebody saying, Look, I have written a poem!

—Charles Bukowski

No word in the English language rhymes with month, orange, silver, and purple.

—Tony Jeary and John  
Davis

I examined the poets, and I look on them as people whose talent overawes both themselves and others, people who present themselves as wise men and are taken as such, when they are nothing of the sort.

—Socrates

Each day should be spent finding beauty in flowers and poetry and talking to animals. That a day spent with dreaming and sunsets and refreshing breezes cannot be bettered.

—Nicholas Sparks

Expressive arts, including poetry, are important for a child's social-emotional development, according to clinical psychologist Dianne Jandrasits. Adults can create a secure attachment with kids by actively reading with them, especially between the ages of 0 and 5, and the sound of poetry can make the process fun. Poetry, Jandrasits says, can help a child learn to take a perspective and to understand someone else's feelings. For a young child, she says, it all starts with someone understanding your feelings.

—Jason Basa Nemec

It is worthwhile adding that the power of the poem to teach not only sensibilities and the subtle movements of the spirit but knowledge, real lasting felt knowledge, is going mostly unnoticed among our scholars. The body of knowledge locked into and releasable from poetry can replace practically any university in the Republic. First things first, then: the primal importance of a poem is what it can add to the individual mind.

Poetry is the voice of a poet at its birth, and the voice of a people in its ultimate fulfillment as a successful and useful work of art.

—Guy Davenport

Of all the different kinds of art, you see, poetry is the one most attuned to man's condition, and therefore the most noble and the most demanding of them all. Just as men struggle to transcend the inherent limits of geography, history, and biology to find the meaning of life, so poets strive to transcend the inherent limits of language, meter, and structure to find beauty and truth. And just as life wouldn't have meaning without death, so poetry wouldn't have its sublime power outside the prison of its form.

—Olga Grushin

If there's one thing you can say for fascism, it had some good poets.

—Sally Rooney

Poets think they're pitchers when they're really catchers.

—Jack Spicer

As a psychiatrist and researcher who has worked to alleviate emotional suffering, I've long been fascinated that language can have as remarkable an effect on humans as direct biological treatment, like antidepressant drugs. Of course, most people think that psychotherapy has unique therapeutic effects, but the surprising truth is that everyone has access to the medicinal power of words without seeing a therapist. There's a treatment that's free and has no side-effects: poetry....Although all literature can provide solace, poetry is uniquely potent in this regard.

—Dr. Norman E.  
Rosenthal

There is empirical evidence that supports the emotional effects of poetry on the brain. Neuroscientist Eugen Wassiliwizky and colleagues at the Max Planck Institute in Frankfurt have found that listening to recited poetry can elicit strong emotional responses, including chills and objectively-measured goosebumps, by activating the brain's reward circuitry.

—Dr. Norman E.  
Rosenthal

A writer is a person who cares what words mean, what they say, how they say it. Writers know words are their way towards truth and freedom, and so they use them with care, with thought, with fear, with delight. By using words well they strengthen their souls. Story-tellers and poets spend their lives learning that skill and art of using words well. And their words make the souls of their readers stronger, brighter, deeper.

—Ursula K. Le Guin

The common prejudice that love is as common as ‘romance’ may be due to the fact that we all learned about it first through poetry. But the poets fool us; they are the only ones to whom love is not only a crucial, but an indispensable experience, which entitles them to mistake it for a universal one.

—Hannah Arendt

Horace writes all these bum-sucking poems about his [patrons] saying how great they are, but the point he always makes to them is ‘You’re going to die and the poem is going to live, and who wrote the poem?’

—Boris Johnson

My teacher told me I’d be no good at poetry due to my dyslexia, but so far I’ve made three jugs and a vase, so f... you, Mr. McPherson.

—Mark Hebden