

WHAT IS POETRY?

Poets' Thoughts on Poetry Through Their Poems

Ten Definitions of Poetry

1. Poetry is a projection across silence of cadences arranged to break the silence with definite intentions of echoes, syllables, wave lengths.
2. Poetry is the journal of a sea animal living on land, wanting to fly in the air.
3. Poetry is a series of explanations of life, fading off into horizons too swift for explanations.
4. Poetry is a search for syllables to shoot at the barriers of the unknown and the unknowable.
5. Poetry is a theorem of a yellow-silk handkerchief knotted with riddles, sealed in a balloon tied to the tail of a kite flying in a white wind against a blue sky in spring.
6. Poetry is the silence and speech between a wet struggling root of a flower and a sunlit blossom of that flower.
7. Poetry is the harnessing of the paradox of earth cradling life and then entombing it.
8. Poetry is a phantom script telling how rainbows are made and why they go away.
9. Poetry is the synthesis of hyacinths and biscuits.
10. Poetry is the opening and closing of a door, leaving those who look through to guess about what is seen during a moment.

Carl Sandburg

Sonnet 65

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
O how shall summer's honey breath hold out,
Against the wrackful siege of batt'ring days,
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
Nor gates of steel so strong but time decays?
O fearful meditation, where alack,
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?

Creative Writing: Poetry
Pomerantz

Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back,
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
Oh none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

William Shakespeare

Constantly Risking Absurdity

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Constantly risking absurdity
and death
whenever he performs
above the heads
of his audience
the poet like an acrobat
climbs on rime
to a high wire of his own making
and balancing on eyebeams
above a sea of faces
paces his way
to the other side of day
performing entrechats
and sleight-of-foot tricks
and other high theatrics
and all without mistaking
any thing
for what it may not be
For he's the super realist
who must perform perceive
taut truth
before the taking of each stance or step
in his supposed advance
toward that still higher perch
where Beauty stands and waits
with gravity
to start her death-defying leap
And he
a little charleychaplin man
who may or may not catch
her fair eternal form
spreading in the empty air
of existence

Poetry

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in

it after all, a place for the genuine.

Hands that can grasp, eyes
that can dilate, hair that can rise

if it must, these things are important not because a

high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are

useful. When they become so derivative as to become unintelligible,

the same thing may be said for all of us, that we
do not admire

what we cannot understand: the bat

holding on upside down or in quest of something

to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf

under a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a
horse that feels a

flea, the

base-

ball fan, the statistician—

nor is it valid

to discriminate against 'business documents and

school-books'; all these phenomena are important. One must
make a dis-

inction

however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the
result is

not poetry,

nor till the poets among us can be

'literalists of

the imagination'—above

insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them,' shall we have

it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,

the raw material of poetry in

all its rawness and

that which is on the other hand

genuine, you are interested in poetry.

Marianne Moore

In My Craft or Sullen Art

In my craft or sullen art
Exercised in the still night
When only the moon rages
And the lovers lie abed
With all their grief in their arms,
I labor by singing light
Not for ambition or bread
Or the strut and trade of charms
On the ivory stages
But for the common wages
Of their most secret heart.

Not for the proud man apart
From the raging moon I write
On these spindrift pages
Nor for the towering dead
With their nightingales and psalms
But for the lovers, their arms
Round the griefs of the ages,
Who pay no praise or wages
Nor heed my craft or art.

Dylan Thomas

ABOUT THE POETS

Carl Sandburg (1878-1967)

Sandburg was born in Illinois and wrote mainly about American urban and rural life. He wrote mostly in unrhymed lines of varying length. See *Harvest Poems* for a collection of his works.

William Shakespeare (1564-1623)

Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. He wrote nineteen plays, mostly in iambic pentameter. The Shakespearean sonnet is named for him--it follows the rhyme scheme ABABCEDCDEFEGG.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1919-

Ferlinghetti is an American poet who became associated with the Beat Movement of the 1950's. He is a strong believer that poetry should be heard and not necessarily printed. See *Pictures of a Gone World* (1955) for his first published book of poems.

Marianne Moore (1887-1972)

Moore was born in St. Louis. She often wrote about animals using them as ironic metaphors for people. She uses long sentences and seems break her lines arbitrarily, but uses a consistent syllabic measure. Her *Collected Poems* (1951) won a Pulitzer Prize.

Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)

Thomas was born in Swansea, Wales and became one of the best-known British poets of the mid-20th century even though he died at age 39. He suffered from depression and alcoholism.