

Poetry as Enchantment

All quotes from Goia:

4 - "Outsiders" (Pound, Graves, Muir, Kathleen Raine, William Everson, Bly, Les Murray, Berry, Paglia) view poetry as a "foundational element of education." [Mine them for quotes]

5 - Poetry is the oldest form of literature. "Verse was humanity's first memory and broadcast technology—a technology originally transmitted only by the human body. In Robert Frost's astute formulation, poetry was 'a way of remembering what it would impoverish us to forget.'" Continuing his summary of Frost: poetry "opposes the natural forces of time, mortality, and oblivion, which humanity must face to discover and preserve its meaning." [#time](#) [For my article: My students don't know this, but in memorizing poetry, they are sandbagging themselves against these natural forces, which could cause them to forget the things that are really important."

6 - Poetry = a universal human art. Every society has developed poetry. It's baked in. You can respond to poetry without understanding the meaning of the words. (cf. Ackerman: we respond to music even when we don't understand) On p. 11, Eliot: "Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood." [Many of the students choose poems without really understanding what they mean.]

7 - "In oral culture, there is no separation between the poet and the poem. [...] Without writing, a 'text' has no existence outside the auditory performance." The question is not "Is it correct?" but "Does it work?" Did the audience respond?

10 - Philosophy distrusts poetry. Poets would be banned in Plato's Republic. Goia adds: "Contemporary thinkers have enjoyed far more success in suppressing poetry by sequestering it in the classroom."

13 - Poetry and dreams, including the rhythm. [#the-flying-boy](#) Yeats: "In dreams begin responsibilities." On p. 16, another quote from Yeats: "The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, / is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment / when we are both asleep and awake."

14 - A quote from David Perkins: "The unpopularity of poetry at present... is in some ways an advantage both to poetry and to society as a whole."

16 - "People have sung or chanted poems to sow and reap, court reluctant lovers, march into battle, lull infants to sleep, and call the faithful to worship. Poetry gave humanity the words to get through life."

16 - Commenting on Sidney ("to delight, instruct, console, and commemorate"), Goia says it does these things through *enchantment*: "The power of poetry is to affect the emotions, touch the memory, and incite the imagination with unusual force." (An interesting side comment on affecting emotions visually vs. aurally) Even though poetry doesn't hide itself (you can always tell when you're reading or hearing a poem), it slips past our defenses.

20 - Poetry and education: "Going to school meant becoming well versed." Poetry was the central subject matter of the curriculum, not just in literature, but in grammar, elocution, rhetoric, history, morality. It was used to practice handwriting, speaking, memory. (cf. Repplier, assuming that children know poems and can recite them to pass the time)

20 - "For thousands of years, poetry was taught badly, and consequently it was immensely popular."

21 - Why isn't poetry as popular? "I suspect that one thing that hurt poetry was being too well taught." Continuing on p. 23: "Classroom instruction gradually narrowed to a few types of textual analysis, increasingly taught to students with limited experiential knowledge of poetry."

23 - "The purpose of literary education is not to produce more professors; its goal is to develop capable and complete human beings."

25 - A quote from Oscar Wilde: "There are two ways of disliking art. One is to dislike it. The other, to like it rationally."

26 - A quote from Disraeli: "When a man fell into his anecdotalism, it was a sign for him to retire from the world."

26ff - In a few generations, poetry has gone from something enjoyed and recited aloud (even performed) to something grudgingly analyzed on the page. Goia goes on to describe the success of the Poetry Out Loud competition.

32 - Recommendations for teaching poetry:

1. Enchantment - memorize and recite. Bring pleasure and exhilaration. [I've had students applaud after I read a story or recite a poem]
2. Recognize that there are elements to poetry that resist analysis

The notes above are from his essay "Poetry as Enchantment." Below are my notes from the rest of the book. At the bottom is a list of poets and poems to look into.

37 - "Part of a creative life is the necessity to create—and constantly revise—your own life."

43 - "It is impressive how much one can learn at university if one ignores the required schoolwork."

50 - Davie on the style of Gerard Manley Hopkins: "a muscle-bound monstrosity"

53 - Czesław Miłosz "saw California as a new society tethered to landscape and climate but not to history. 'I could not find the rhythm of time,' he wrote. 'That was not a place where I could feel the granularity of historical time. Thus what remained was nature. I still perceive America exclusively as nature.'" [#time](#) He's not wrong. Americans and the natural world constantly hold each other at arm's length, neither relaxing their grip.

67 - Workshops "disrupted my focus." Exactly how I feel about conferences, etc.

67 - "Art relies on an author's confidence in his or her imagination."

70 - As a critic, Donald Davie almost always dissented from the consensus, but he "had no need to prove himself right."

78 - Frost lodged more than a few poems "where they will be hard to get rid of." (maybe a quote from Frost himself)

86 - "Everything written is as good as it is dramatic. It need not declare itself in form, but it is drama or nothing." - Quote from the preface to something called *A Way Out* (Frost?)

87 - Thinking of Frost as a short story writer makes him long narrative poems incredible (see "Home Burial," for one).

125 - Quoting John Ashbery: Elizabeth Bishop was "a writer's writer's writer."

126 - Bishop wrote, on average, two or three poems a year. See "Questions of Travel," "The Map," "The Moose," "One Art," and of course "The Fish."

132 - Delicious descriptions: "If Uncle Neddy was a 'devil,' a feeble smokey-black one, Aunt Hat was a red, real one—redheaded, freckled, red-knuckled, strong, all fierce fire and flame." And this of a store in rural Brazil: "A glass case offered brown toffees leaking through their papers and old, old, old sweet huns "

reading through their papers, and old, old, old sweet buns.

134 - Quote from EB White: "Commas in the New Yorker fall with the precision of knives in a circus act, outlining the victim."

140 - Cyril Connolly: "Whom the gods wish to destroy, they first call promising."

146 - On Philip Larkin: "A better man would probably not have written so well."

146 - From "Reference Book" (I think):

Truly, though our element is time,
We are not suited to the long perspectives
Open at each instant of our lives.
They link us to our losses: worse,
They show us what we have as it once was,
Blindly undiminished, just as though
By acting differently we could have kept it so.

154 - Samuel Menashe's unspoken rhymes:

"Nightfall, Morning"

I wake and the sky
Is there, intact
The paper is white
The ink is black
My charmed life
Harms no one—
No wife, no son

"The Bare Tree": "There is never enough / Time to know another" - suggests the word "mother," which Menashe doesn't use.

156 - From "The Shrine Whose Shape I Am"

The shrine whose shape I am
Has a fringe of fire
Flames skirt my skin

157 - "No modern American poet since TS Eliot was so greatly shaped by the images and rhythms of the King James Version, and no contemporary Jewish poet developed such an austere Anglo-Saxon poetry style."

158 - "Bread"

Thy will be done
By crust and crumb
And loaves left over
The sea is swollen
With the bread I throw
Upon the water.

162 - Pound: "But for something to read in normal circumstances? / For a few pages brought down from the forked hill unsullied? / I ask a wreath which will not crush my head." See also Wordsworth, "The Day is Done."

163 - "When Lutherans turn literary, watch out."

165 - "What Keillor suggests in *Good Poems* is that what makes a poem good depends on what one intends to use it for and who intends to use it."

171 - Truman Capote to Weldon Kees: "I can tell from the way you act you don't want to be a success."

184 - "Oddly, the better the translation [of the Aeneid] the less Virgilian the results." All too true.

208 - "Love is the central idea of Auden's diverse and protean career." [#wh-auden](#)

211 - "A great artist should—at least on occasion—be a show-off."

213 - "It was Auden's particular achievement to embody his full intelligence—and what an alert, quick, and capricious mind it was—in irresistible and unforgettable language."

219 - "I discovered Ray Bradbury that same way everyone else did—on the verge of adolescence."

222 - Bradbury's influence went way beyond writers. The spot where Curiosity landed on Mars was named "Bradbury Landing."

224 - "Today if you research the fifty highest-grossing films of all time, you will discover that forty-eight of them are science fiction or fantasy."

224 - Bradbury tried to reconcile his love of high and low literary culture - same!

227 - Bradbury as mythmaker, resembling Dickens and Poe. All three wrote stories that translate easily to other media.

247 - Fred Allen on Southern California, "It's a great place to live—if you're an orange."

257 - LA "doesn't adjudicate taste; it creates it."

Donald Davie
Elizabeth Bishop
Goldsmith, "The Deserted Village"
Lorine Niedecker
Samuel Menashe
Edgar Lee Masters
David Mason
Andrew Hudgins
Mark Jarman
Mary Jo Salter
Sidney Lea
Alfred Corn
Robert McDowell
AE Stallings
Christian Wiman
John Allan Wyeth - Thank you!
Jean Starr Untermeyer
Gladys Oaks
Elizabeth J. Coatsworth
Auden, "Lullaby"
George Saintsbury, "History of English Prosody" (1906)

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