

## Some Reflections on Poetry

If a poet looks through a microscope or a telescope, he always sees the same thing.

The poet puts language in danger.

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

Ah, poems amount to so little when you write them too early in your life. You ought to wait and gather sense and sweetness for a whole lifetime, and a long one if possible, and then, at the very end, you might perhaps be able to write ten good lines, For poems are not, as people think, simply emotions (one has emotions early enough) they are experiences. For the sake of a single poem, you must see many cities, many people and Things, you must understand animals, must feel how birds fly, and know the gesture which small flowers make when they open in the morning. You must be able to think back to streets in unknown neighborhoods, to unexpected encounters, and to partings you had long seen coming; to days of childhood whose mystery is still unexplained, to parents whom you had to hurt when they brought in a joy and you didn't pick it up (it was a joy meant for somebody else); to childhood illnesses that began so strangely with so many profound and difficult transformations, to days in quiet restrained rooms and to mornings by the sea, to the sea itself, to seas, to it is still not enough to be able to think of all that. You must have memories of many nights of love, each one different from all the others, memories of women screaming in labor, and of light, pale, sleeping girls who have just given birth and are closing again. But you must also have been beside the dying, must have sat beside the dead in the room with the open windows and the scattered noises. And it is not yet enough to have memories. You must be able to forget them when they are many, and you must have the immense patience to wait until they return. For the memories themselves are not important. Only when they have changed into our very blood, into glance and gesture, and are nameless, no longer to be distinguished from ourselves only then can it happen that in some very rare hour the first word of a poem arises in their midst and goes forth from them.

Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

[Poetry] is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily. It always endeavors to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process. . . . Verse is a pedestrian taking you over the ground, prose--a train which delivers you at a destination.

T. E. Hulme

A poem is not so much heard as overheard.

John Stuart Mill

The poems composed by every great poet are attempts to put into words one single poem. His greatness depends on the extent to which he has

entrusted himself to this unique poem, for it is this which enables him to maintain the purity of his poetic utterances by keeping them within the ambit of their single origin. This unique poem in a poet remains unuttered. None of the individual poems, nor all of them together, say everything. And yet each poem speaks out of this unique uncomposed poem and each time says what is the same.

Martin Heidegger

📖 The figure a poem makes. It begins in delight and ends in wisdom. The figure is the same as for love. 📖 A poem is a momentary stay against confusion. 📖 Like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its own melting.

Robert Frost

I don't believe in a tame poetry. When poetry hears its own name, it runs, flies, swims off for fear of its own life. You can bet your boots on that. Jean Cocteau said a poet rarely bothers about poetry. Does a gardener perfume his roses?

Frank Stanford

[Poetry] gives knowledge of the chaos and confusion of the world by imposing order upon it which leaves it still the chaos and confusion which it really is.

Archibald MacLeish

Poetry is indispensable—if I only knew what for.

Jean Cocteau

Men do not invent those mysterious relations between separate objects, and between objects and feelings or ideas, which it is the function of poetry to reveal. These relations exist independently, not indeed of Thought, but of any individual thinker. And according to whether the footsteps are echoed in primitive language, or late on, in the made metaphors of poets, we hear them after a different fashion and for different reasons. The language of primitive men reports them as direct perceptual experience. The speaker has observed a unity, and is not therefore himself conscious of relation. But we, in the development of consciousness, have lost the power to see. Our sophistication, like Odin's, has cost us an eye; and now it is the language of poets, in so far as they create true metaphors, which must restore this unity conceptually, after it has been lost from perception. Thus, the "before unapprehended" relationships of which Shelley spoke, are in a sense "forgotten" relationships. For though they were never yet apprehended, they were at one time seen. And imagination can see them again.

Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction*