

Quotes about Poetry

Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself

William Hazlitt

Poetry must have something in it that is barbaric, vast and wild.

Denis Diderot

Poetry, whose material is language, is perhaps the most human and least worldly of the arts, the one in which the end product remains closest to the thought that inspired it.

Hannah Arendt

Poetry
makes nothing happen.
It survives
in the valley of its saying.
Maxine Kumin

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

Dennis Gabor

Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before.

Audre Lorde

Poetry is important. No less than science, it seeks a hold upon reality, and the closeness of its approach is the test of its success.

Babette Deutsch

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, above all, an approach to the truth of feeling A fine poem will seize your imagination intellectually—that is, when you reach it, you will reach it intellectually too—but the way is through emotion, through what we call feeling.

Muriel Rukeyser

Quotes about Poetry/2

Poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese.

G.K. Chesterton

Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

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

Poetry is a search for ways of communication; it must be conducted with openness, flexibility, and a constant readiness to listen.

Fleur Adcock

Poetry is at least an elegance and at most a revelation.

Robert Fitzgerald

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.

Christopher Fry

Poetry isn't a profession, it's a way of life. It's an empty basket; you put your life into it and make something out of that.

Mary Oliver

Poetry is a way of taking life by the throat.

Robert Frost

Poetry is truth in its Sunday clothes.

Joseph Roux

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 a remembrance.

John Keats

Poetry is the only life got, the only work done, the only pure product and free labor of man, performed only when he has put all the world under his feet, and conquered the last of his foes.

Henry David Thoreau

Quotes about Poetry/3

A poem begins with a lump in the throat.

Robert Frost

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

Language is fossil poetry.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Poetry operates by raising our curiosity, engaging the mind by degrees to take an interest in the event, keeping that event suspended, and surprising at last with an unexpected catastrophe.

Sir Joshua Reynolds

I write poetry in order to live more fully.

Judith Rodriguez

For women . . . poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of light within which we can predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives.

Audre Lorde

Writing poetry is the hard manual labor of the imagination.

Ishmael Reed

For poetry, he's past his prime,
He takes an hour to find a rhyme;
His fire is out, his wit decayed,
His fancy sunk, his muse a jade.
I'd have him throw away his pen,
But there's no talking to some men.

Jonathan Swift

Good poetry could not have been otherwise written than it is. The first time you hear it, it sounds rather as if copied out of some invisible tablet in the Eternal mind than as if arbitrarily composed by the poet.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Quotes about Poetry/4

You campaign in poetry. You govern in prose.

Mario Cuomo

All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.

William Wordsworth

For poetry was all written before time was, and whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warblings, and attempt to write them down, but we lose ever and anon a word, a verse, and substitute something of our own, and thus miswrite the poem.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

If there were no poetry on any day in the world, poetry would be invented that day. For there would be an intolerable hunger.

Muriel Rukeyser

When power leads man towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the area of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

A speech is poetry: cadence, rhythm, imagery, sweep! A speech reminds us that words, like children, have the power to make dance the dulllest beanbag of a heart.

Peggy Noonan

. . . it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt.

Audre Lorde

Writing a book of poetry is like dropping a rose petal down the Grand Canyon and waiting for the echo.

Don Marquis

Yet poetry, though the last and finest result, is a natural fruit. As naturally as the oak bears an acorn, and the vine a gourd, man bears a poem, either spoken or done. It is the chief and most memorable success, for history is but a prose narrative of poetic deeds.

Henry David Thoreau

The sources of poetry are in the spirit seeking completeness.

Muriel Rukeyser

Quotes about Poetry/5

Poetry is the synthesis of hyacinths and biscuits.

Carl Sandburg

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

Emily Dickinson

Most people ignore most poetry because most poetry ignores most people.

Adrian Mitchell

Breathe-in experience,
breathe-out poetry.

Muriel Rukeyser

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.

W. Somerset Maugham

At certain times, men regard poetry merely as a bright flame, but to women it was, and always will be, a warm fire.

Franz Grillparzer

Such is the role of poetry. It unveils, in the strict sense of the word. It lays bare, under a light which shakes off torpor, the surprising things which surround us and which our senses record mechanically.

Jean Cocteau

Prose—it might be speculated—is discourse; poetry ellipsis. Prose is spoken aloud; poetry overheard. The one is presumably articulate and social, a shared language, the voice of “communication”; the other is private, allusive, teasing, sly, idiosyncratic as the spider’s delicate web, a kind of witchcraft unfathomable to ordinary minds.

Joyce Carol Oates

It is the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake.

George Gordon Noel Byron

A poet must never make a statement simply because it sounds poetically exciting; he must also believe it to be true.

W.H. Auden

Quotes about Poetry/6

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.
There is no happiness like mine.
I have been eating poetry.

Mark Strand

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

Leonard Cohen

At the touch of love everyone becomes a poet.

Plato

Poetry is the journal of the 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

Reality only reveals itself when it is illuminated by a ray of poetry.

Georges Brague

There is not a particle of life which does not bear poetry within it.

Gustave Flaubert

Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge.

William Wordsworth

Poetry is language at its most distilled and most powerful.

Rita Dove

Do you know how poetry started? I always think that it started when a cave boy came running back to the cave, through the tall grass, shouting as he ran, "Wolf, wolf," and there was no wolf. His baboon-like parents, great sticklers for the truth, gave him a hiding, no doubt, but poetry had been born—the tall story had been born in the tall grass.

Vladimir Nabokov

Ordering a man to write a poem is like commanding a pregnant woman to give birth to a red-headed child.

Carl Sandburg

Quotes about Poetry/7

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

Kahlil Gibran

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

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

Robert Graves

A poem should not mean
But be.

Archibald MacLeish

Science sees signs; Poetry the thing signified.

Augustus and Julius Hare

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

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

Stephen Mallarme

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

Robert Frost

Poetry comes nearer to vital truth than history.

Plato

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

André Gide

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

Frederick William Robertson

Quotes about Poetry/8

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

John Ciardi

Poetry is like fish: if it's fresh, it's good; if it's stale, it's bad; and if you're not certain, try it on the cat.

Osbert Sitwell

Poetry is a packsack of invisible keepsakes.

Carl Sandburg

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

Dylan Thomas

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

Earle Birney

Poetry is thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.

Thomas Gray

Poetry heals the wounds inflicted by reason.

Novalis

For me, poetry is an impish attempt to paint the colour of the wind.

Maxwell Bodenheim

Poetry is all nouns and verbs.

Marianne Moore

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

A poet can survive everything but a misprint.

Oscar Wilde

Quotes about Poetry/9

Poetry is not a profession, it is a destiny.

Mikhail Dudan

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

Richard Rosen

Like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its own melting.

Robert Frost

Poetry is all that is worth remembering in life.

William Hazlitt

A poem is never finished, only abandoned.

Paul Valéry

Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.

Percy Shelley

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

Eli Khamarov

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

Groucho Marx

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

Thomas Hardy

Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

Percy Byshe Shelley

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 filled with passion. And medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for.

from Dead Poet's Society

Quotes about Poetry/10

Poetry is life distilled.

Gwendolyn Brooks

Poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty in words.

Edgar Allan Poe

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

James Branch Cabell

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

John Cage

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

Yevgeny Yevtushenko

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

Roger McGough

To have great poets there must be great audiences too.

Walt Whitman

Poetry: the best words in the best order.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

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

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

Carl Sandburg

You can't write poetry on the computer.

Quentin Tarantino

Quotes about Poetry/11

God is the perfect poet.

Robert Browning

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

Poetry is an echo, asking a shadow to dance.

Carl Sandburg

Poetry is the art of substantiating shadows.

Edmund Burke

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

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Poetry, like the moon, does not advertise anything.

William Blissett

I regard a love for poetry as one of the most needful and helpful elements in the life-outfit of a human being. It was the greatest of blessings to me, in the long days of toil to which I was shut in much earlier than most young girls are, that the poetry I held in my memory breathed its enchanted atmosphere through me and around me, and touched even dull drudgery with its sunshine.

Lucy Larcom

(Lucy Larcom was born in 1824. When her father died, the family moved to Lowell, Massachusetts. There Lucy became a textile mill worker at the age of 11.)