

13.

Poetry Is and Isn't

This is a rather simplistic prompt. The challenge is to use particulars to make your poem more than the result of a stupid exercise.

Poetry is the past that breaks out in our hearts.

Rilke

Poems Are Maps

Poems are maps for getting
lost in your heart
where everyone can find you.

Come and be wildered.
You don't need to ask the way.

Which way does the magnolia bud unfold?
To the East or West? Right or Left?
Please touch the whole world now.

Awaken in every direction at once.
Be the radiance you seek.

Alfred K. Lamott
in *Savor Eternity One Moment at a Time*

Poetry is a bird
that lands gently.
Skittish, he'll leave
if startled.

Pretend you're not looking.
Admire him
out of the corner
of one eye
as he cleans
his plumage.

Hope that one

lost feather
lands on your page —
to become
a multi-colored
keeper.

jch 6/9/2015

It's not so much what poems are, in themselves, but the infinitely larger optimism they offer by their intermittent twinkles: that beneath the little lights on their tiny masts, so far from one another, so lost to each other, there must be a single black sea. We could have no sense of the continuousness of the unknowable without these buoyant specks.

Kay Ryan
Poetry, Sept 2013

A Poem Can Be a Safe Harbor

When the seas grow wild.
and your boat's too small to brave the buffeting
winds or ride the mountainous waves,

the world seems ruled by crazies,
another friend has died,
and the small boat of self is tippy.

Find a safe harbor, sail into
an antidote poem where
winds can't reach and silence settles.

When is a poem like a hug? Can a poem
become a kind mother, bending over, kissing
your eyelids to chase away bad dreams?

jch 7/14/2019

A Glass of Cold Water

Poetry is not a code
to be broken
but a way of seeing
with the eyes shut,
of short-circuiting

the usual
connections until
lioness and
knee become
the same thing.

Though not a cure
it can console,
the way cool sheets
console
the dying flesh,
the way a glass of cold
water can be
a way station
on the unswerving
road to thirst.

Linda Pastan
anthologized in *Coming to Age: Growing Older with Poetry*
edited by: Mary Ann Hoberman and Carolyn Hopley

Is this poem a pebble,
or a raindrop coated with dust?

Harrison or Kooser
in *Braided Creek: A Conversation in Poetry*

Today my poems seem
only the spells I muttered
while waiting for poems.

Hayden Carruth
in *The Collected Poems: Shorter Poems*
1946-1991

You might start by making an arbitrary list of nouns or phrases a
poem might be, and, using that as a diving board, leap into your
poem.

Is this poem...

a footprint, a tombstone, a cairn, a frog, a wetland,
a flag, a ladder, a popsicle, a river, a flight, a garden,
a kite, a black beach stone, a fancy dress, a parade of
words, a trampoline, a snowflake, a "see what happens"
Etc...anything goes.

A poem is a "see what happens"