

A Brief Introduction to Poetry:

"Poetry is like a curvy slide in a playground — an odd object, available to the public — and, as I keep explaining to my local police force, everyone should be able to use it, not just those of a certain age. The only things that all poems have in common is that they are all strange in some way, because all great literature is strange, the way all good slides are slippery." — Lemony Snickett

Poetry gets a bad reputation. Most of us encounter it for the first time in classrooms. We're taught that poems are riddles, that reading poetry means "figuring out" what a poem "means." We're taught there is a "right" answer and a "wrong" answer.

This is all wrong. Poetry isn't a riddle – it's a slide. It's not meant to be difficult; it's meant to be enjoyed. We don't ask "What does a slide mean?" We just go down the slide, and it's exciting. The same with poems: We read them, and they are exciting. We don't have to ask, "What does this poem mean?"

You *can* ask that, of course. For some people, asking what a poem means is part of the fun. For other people, the fun comes from evocative imagery, or it comes from the way the poem sounds, or it comes from the questions the poem raises, or it comes from the surprising ways the poem uses language.

Poetry is different from other language. We don't write poems to tell people something. When you say, "I'm hungry," you're telling someone you're hungry. When you say, "Two plus two equals four," you're telling someone that two plus two equals four. Poems don't tell us things – they give us experiences.

When we experience a poem, we experience the world in a new way. Think about how you experience the world differently when you're going down a slide: You're flying through the air, the wind is rushing past you, you see the people and the trees and the park all blurring together in a smear of imagery. That's what poetry is like: It's like seeing the world from a new point of view; it's like seeing the world all rearranged, and you can really *feel* it. Poetry isn't just about seeing, it's about *feeling*.

Poetry Is for Everyone

"Every single human being is creative. If our creativity is an organ we need to start thinking of it as a vital one. When we commit ourselves to nurturing our artistic capacities we improve our ability to more deeply discern the world around us and make the constructive decisions needed in order to thrive in this world. "It is absolutely necessary, right now, at this very moment, to embrace our creativity. No matter who you are, having a daily creative practice can expand your ability to better form the important questions we need to be asking ourselves about how to best change the destructive direction we are all headed." — CA Conrad

Poetry makes the world bigger. When you write a poem, you change the world. Before you wrote that poem, it didn't exist. Now, it does exist – and the world is a little bit bigger. It is everyone's duty to make the world bigger, to make a world that contains enough room for everyone and everyone's experiences. Poetry is one of the ways we do that.

Burn Lake
Carrie Fountain

For Burn Construction Company

When you were building the i-10 bypass,
one of your dozers, moving earth
at the center of a great pit,
slipped its thick blade beneath
the water table, slicing into the earth's
wet palm, and the silt moistened
beneath the huge thing's tires, and the crew
was sent home for the day.
Next morning, water filled the pit.
Nothing anyone could do to stop it coming.
It was a revelation: kidney-shaped, deep
green, there between the interstate
and the sewage treatment plant.
When nothing else worked, you called it
a lake and opened it to the public.
And we were the public.

A Boat
Richard Brautigan

O beautiful
was the werewolf
in his evil forest.
We took him
to the carnival
and he started
crying
when he saw
the Ferris wheel.
Electric
green and red tears
flowed down
his furry cheeks.
He looked
like a boat
out on the dark
water.

The One About the Robbers
Zachary Schomburg

You tell me a joke about two robbers who hide from the police. One robber hides as a sack of cats and the other robber hides as a sack of potatoes. That is the punch line somehow, the sack of potatoes, but all I can think about is how my dad used to throw me over his shoulder when I was very small and call me his sack of potatoes. *I've got a sack of potatoes* he would yell, spinning around in a circle, the arm not holding me reaching out for a sale. *Does anyone want to buy my sack of potatoes?* No one ever wanted to buy me. We were always the only two people in the room.

Poem ["Lana Turner has collapsed!"]
Frank O'Hara

Lana Turner has collapsed!
I was trotting along and suddenly
it started raining and snowing
and you said it was hailing
but hailing hits you on the head
hard so it was really snowing and
raining and I was in such a hurry
to meet you but the traffic
was acting exactly like the sky
and suddenly I see a headline
lana turner has collapsed!
there is no snow in Hollywood
there is no rain in California
I have been to lots of parties
and acted perfectly disgraceful
but I never actually collapsed
oh Lana Turner we love you get up

Your Voice in the Chemo Room

Max Ritvo

There is a white stone cliff over a dropping slope
sliced along with bare trees.

In the center of the cliff is a round dry fountain
of polished stone. By seizing my whole body up

as I clench my hand I am able to open
the fountain into a drain, revealing below it

the sky, the trees, a brown and uncertain ground.
This is how my heart works, you see?

This is how love works? Have some sympathy
for the great spasms with which I must open

myself to love and close again, and open.
And if I leapt into the fountain, there is just no

telling: I might sever myself clean, or crack
the gold bloom of my head, and I don't know

onto what uncertain ground I might fold like a sack.

The Songs of Maximus: SONG 1
Charles Olson

colored pictures
of all things to eat: dirty
postcards

And words, words, words
all over everything

No eyes or ears left
to do their own doings (all

invaded, appropriated, outraged, all senses

including the mind, that worker on what is

And that other sense
made to give even the most wretched, or any of us, wretched,
that consolation (greased

lulled
even the street-cars

song

from Sharking the Birdcage ["this is"]
CA Conrad

 this is
 exactly
 the kind
 of space
 I want to
 follow you into
 holding your little
mute worm on a twig
make it marble
make it touch like tough winter
in the next life we will have longer love
better places with extended embraces
now we leave the song to return to the front
 leaf closing on closeness of
 mothers in the next world
overseeing premium
waste of the planet
reincarnate
anywhere
but here
 land on a different rim

Silencio

Eugene Gomringer

silencio silencio silencio
silencio silencio silencio
silencio silencio
silencio silencio silencio
silencio silencio silencio

A Moral Doctrine

Matthew Kosinski

A string of pearls
emerges from the Santa Monica Mountains,
enormous and wasteful
but capable of flight,

and

above the Atlantic,
look down at
all those tiny nameless islands
each appearing
as a broken chain of lights.

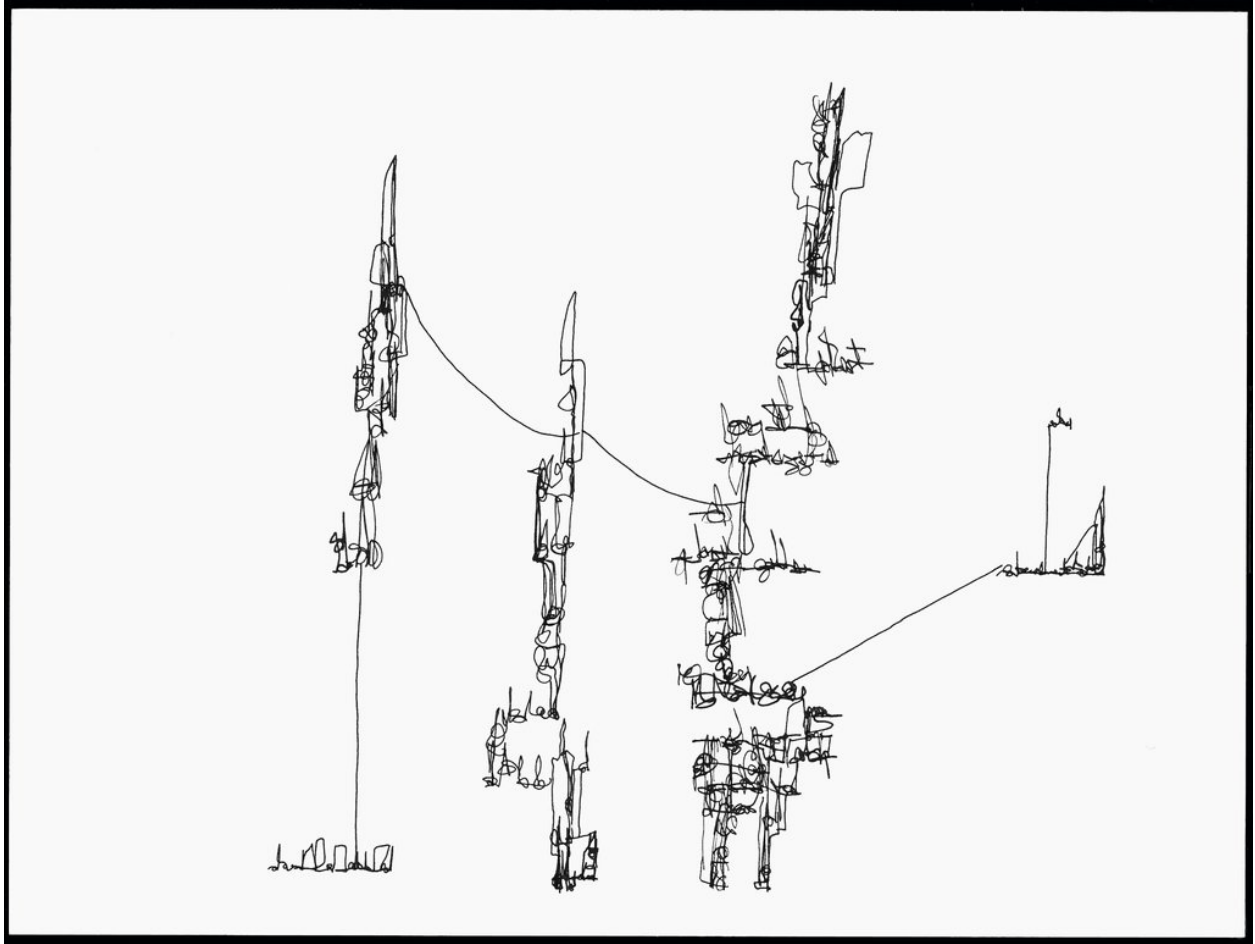
The space between eternal and self, is it not a moral doctrine?

What you've seen
in your life is a private matter, despite the
handsome bodies of men
who would monetize it,

but

if you could reach
whatever lives
inside those aircraft, you would
forge a stronger
set of links and pull us all upward.

Prose Architectures 2016
Renee Gladman



Swan and Shadow
John Hollander

Dusk
Above the
water hang the
loud
flies
here
O so
gray
then
What A pale signal will appear
When Soon before its shadow fades
Where Here in this pool of opened eye
In us No upon us As at the very edges
of where we take shape in the dark air
this object bares its image awakening
ripples of recognition that will
brush darkness up into light
even after this bird this hour both drift by atop the perfect sad instant now
already passing out of sight
toward yet-untroubled reflection
this image bears its object darkening
into memorial shades Scattered bits of
light No of water Or something across
water Breaking up No Being regathered
soon Yet by then a swan will have
gone Yes out of mind into what
vast
pale
hush
of a
place
past
sudden dark as
if a swan
sang