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WHAT IS POETRY? Read “When the Rain Comes”

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WHAT IS POETRY? Read “When the Rain Comes”

- Jorge Luis Borges: “Poetry is something that cannot be defined without oversimplifying it.”
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge: “that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriate the name of imagination.”
- William Wordsworth: “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings ···recollected in tranquility.”
- Matthew Arnold: “a criticism of life.”
- Marianne Moore: “imaginary gardens with real toads in them.”
- Robert Frost: “...the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another.”
- Howard Nemerov: “getting something right in language.”
- Mary Oliver: “Poetry is a life-cherishing force. For poems are not words, after all, but fires for the cold, ropes let down to the lost, something as necessary in the pockets of the hungry.”
- Emily Dickinson: “If I read a book (and) it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me I know *that* is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry. These are the only way I know it. Is there any other way?”
- William Stafford: Poetry is the kind of thing you have to see from the corner of your eye.

You can be too well prepared for poetry. A conscientious interest in it is worse than no interest at all, as I believe Frost used to say. It’s like a very faint star. If you look straight at it you can’t see it, but if you look a little to one side it is there.

If people around you are in favor, that helps poetry to *be*, to exist. It disappears under disfavor. There are things, you know, human things, that depend on commitment; poetry is one of those things. If you analyze it away, it's gone. It would be like boiling a watch to find out what makes it tick.

If you let your thought play, turn things this way and that, be ready for liveliness, alternatives, new views, the possibility of another world – you are in the area of poetry. A poem is a serious joke, a truth that has learned *jujitsu*. Anyone who breathes is in the rhythm business; anyone who is alive is caught up in the imminences, the doubts mixed with the triumphant certainty of poetry.

HOW I CAME TO & KEEPING RETURNING TO POETRY: Read “Girl”

- Started out as visual artist, began writing like a maniac at age 14 in the middle of my parents' divorce, found some wonderful mentors: a youth group advisor at my synagogue and a teacher at my high school
- Went to a fantastic community college to study poetry, but by the time I finished, urged by father to switch to journalism, which is what got me to the Midwest: U of M School of Journalism, got a history degree instead, kept writing poetry.
- Moved to KC to be reporter for labor newspaper, fired when my editor left, went to Missouri Commission on Human Rights to file sex discrimination complaint, got hired there, left eventually to do grassroots organizing on environmental and labor issues, then fell in love with someone in Lawrence, moved here and worked on organizing with social service agencies, but kept writing.
- Decided KU was in Lawrence and so was I, so went for my MA & PhD. Fell in love

with teaching.

- From teaching at KU, Haskell, and eventually Goddard College, decided to start doing community writing workshops, realized people wanted to write about their stories, tell their truths, so for last 21 years, led workshops for people with serious illness, mental illness, teens and kids, elders, women and men in transition, intergenerational groups, low-income women, native people, and many other communities - love hearing people speak the truth of their lives
- Found need for developing TLA at Goddard (explain)
- Wrote all the way through, working on 3-4 books at once, seem to be published in pairs or trios but I usually spend 5-15 years/book
- Poet Laureateship: 2009-2013, just ended and very happy KHC took it on.
- Each time I write a poem: I don't know how.

Poetry as jubilee: talk and read poem