

32 Statements about Writing Poetry

MARVIN BELL

- 1 Every poet is an experimentalist.
- 2 Learning to write is a simple process: read something, then write something;
read something else, then write something else.
And show in your writing what you have read.
- 3 There is no one way to write and no right way to write.
- 4 The good stuff and the bad stuff are all part of the stuff.
No good stuff without bad stuff.
- 5 Learn the rules, break the rules, make up
new rules, break the new rules.
- 6 You do not learn from work like yours
as much as you learn from work unlike yours.
- 7 Originality is a new amalgam of influences.
- 8 Try to write poems at least one person in the room will hate.
- 9 The "I" in the poem is not you but someone who knows a lot about you.
- 10 Autobiography rots.
- 11 A poem listens to itself as it goes.
- 12 It's not what one begins with that matters;
it's the quality of attention paid to it thereafter.

- 13 Language is subjective and relative, but it also overlaps; get on with it.
- 14 Every free verse writer must reinvent free verse.
- 15 Prose is prose because of what it includes;
poetry is poetry because of what it leaves out.
- A short poem need not be small.
- 16 Rhyme and meter, too, can be experimental.
- 17 Poetry has content but is not strictly about its contents.
A poem containing a tree may not be about a tree.
- 18 You need nothing more to write poems than bits of string
and thread and some dust from under the bed.
- 19 At heart, poetic beauty is tautological: it defines its terms and exhausts them.
- 20 The penalty for education is self-consciousness.
But it is too late for ignorance.
- 21 What they say “there are no words for”—that’s what poetry is for.
Poetry uses words to go beyond words.
- 22 One does not learn by having a teacher do the work.
- 23 The dictionary is beautiful; for some poets, it’s enough.
- 24 Writing poetry is its own reward and needs no certification.
Poetry, like water, seeks its own level.
- 25 A finished poem is also the draft of a later poem.
- 26 A poet sees the differences between his or her poems
but a reader sees the similarities.
- 27 Poetry is a manifestation of more important things.
On the one hand, it’s poetry! On the other, it’s just poetry.
- 28 Viewed in perspective, Parnassus is a very short mountain.
- 29 A good workshop continually signals that we are all in this together, teacher too.
- 30 This Depression-era jingle could be about writing poetry:
Use it up / wear it out / make it do / or do without.
- 31 Art is a way of life, not a career.
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