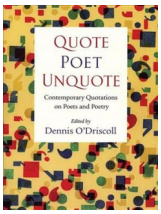
Quote Poet Unquote [1]



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I'm both a poetry and quotation aficionado, so what could be better than a twofer? Dennis O'Driscoll's wonderful gathering of quotations about poetry *Quote Poet Unquote: Contemporary Quotations on Poets and Poetry* [3] is the kind of book you read through to inspire you, make you laugh, or help you figure out what modern poetry is and does. Appropriately, Copper Canyon Press (the publisher) chose for their pressmark the Chinese character for poetry. It's constructed of two parts that mean *word* and *temple*.

O'Driscoll begins his introduction with Boswell's question to Samuel Johnson (the famous dictionary maker), "What is poetry?" Johnson's witty reply was, "Why, Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not."

The book itself is arranged in sections each beginning with a phrase. Examples include: "What is it anyway," "Making a Start," "Inspired Moves," "Call Yourself a Poet," "Best Words," "The Audience," "On the Contrary," and "In Memory." This is just a sampling. O'Driscoll has devised a lot more categories.

Here are a few of my favorite quotes (although there are so many good ones it's hard to winnow them down to a short list.)

"The making of a poem ought to be a sprinkling of words and experiences with gunpowder and throwing a match in." --Michael Milburn

"A poem is a box, a *thing,* to put other things in. For safe keeping." --Marianne Boruch

"Writing poetry is like trying to catch a black cat in a dark room." --Robert Greacen

"So much of the energy of the poem comes from the secrets it folds into what we would call, in a flower, its crown. The height of the beauty of a bloom is its folded state, rather than when it's fully opened." --Stanley Kunitz

"Poetry is deep gossip." --Liam Rector

And finally: "Every poem is an answer to the question what poetry is for." --Jamie McKendrick

If these quotes inspire you to explore poetry more fully, try Edward Hirsch's *How to Read a Poem: and Fall in Love with Poetry.* [4]

Posted by Dory L. on April 23, 2012

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