KING GEORGE I
I hate all Boets and Bainters.

DELMORE SCHWARTZ
All poet’s wives have rotten lives.
Their husbands look at them like knives.

GEOFFREY GRIGSON
Obsession begets poems. But you need to vary your obsessions.
One obsession, one poem.

JAMES SIMMONS
When I had curls I knew more girls.
I do more reading now my hair is receding.

DOROTHY PARKER
Authors and actors and artists and such
Never know nothing, and never know much.
Sculptors and singers and those of their kidney
Tell their affairs from Seattle to Sydney...
People Who Do Things exceed my endurance;
God, for a man who solicits insurance!

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Ballast is an acronym for Books Art Language Logic Ambiguity Science and Teaching, as well as a distant allusion to Blast, the short-lived publication founded during World War I by Wyndham Lewis, the Vorticist artist and writer. Ballast is mainly a pastiche of astonishing passages from books, magazines, diaries and other writings. Put differently, it is a journal devoted to wit, the contents of which are intended to be insightful, amusing or thought provoking.

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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.

16. A short poem need not be small.

17. Rhyme and meter, too, can be experimental.

18. Poetry has content but is not strictly about its contents. A poem containing a tree may not be about a tree.

19. You need nothing more to write poems than bits of string and thread and some dust from under the bed.
20. At heart, poetic beauty is tautological: it defines its terms and exhausts them.

21. The penalty for education is self-consciousness. But it is too late for ignorance.

22. What they say "there are no words for"—that's what poetry is for. Poetry uses words to go beyond words.

23. One does not learn by having a teacher do the work.

24. The dictionary is beautiful; for some poets, it's enough.

25. Writing poetry is its own reward and needs no certification. Poetry, like water, seeks its own level.
HINDU SAYING
Whether a knife falls on a melon, or a melon falls on a knife, it is always the melon that suffers.

JAMES HOWELL
(Familiar Letters)
Some hold translations not unlike to be The wrong side of a Turkey tapestry.

WALT WHITMAN
I sound my barbaric yawn over the roofs of the world.

B A L L A S T  Q U A R

26. A finished poem is also the draft of a later poem.

27. A poet sees the differences between his or her poems but a reader sees the similarities.

28. Poetry is a manifestation of more important things. On the one hand, it's poetry! On the other, it's just poetry.

29. Viewed in perspective, Parnassus is a very short mountain.

30. A good workshop continually signals that we are all in this together, teacher too.

31. This Depression Era jingle could be about writing poetry: Use it up / wear it out / make it do / or do without.

32. Art is a way of life, not a career.

* * *

VACLAV HAVEL [in receiving the Fulbright Prize] On the one hand, there are its [America's] profound commitment to enhancing civil liberty and to maintaining the strength of its democratic institutions, and the fantastic developments in science and technology which have contributed so much to our well-being; on the other, there is the blind worship of perpetual economic growth and consumption, regardless of their destructive impact on the environment, or how subject they are to the dictates of materialism and consumerism, or how they, through the omnipresence of television and advertising, promote uniformity, and banality instead of a respect for human uniqueness.
Your conscience is a nuisance. A conscience is like a child. If you pet it and play with it and let it have everything that it wants, it becomes spoiled and intrudes on all your amusements and most of your griefs. Treat your conscience as you would anything else. When it is rebellious, spank it—be severe with it, argue with it, prevent it from coming to play with you at all hours, and you will secure a good conscience; one that is to say, a properly trained one. A spoiled one simply destroys all the pleasure in life. I think I have reduced mine to order. At least, I haven’t heard from it for some time. Perhaps I have killed it from over-severity.

MARK TWAIN interviewed in Rudyard Kipling, Sea to Sea, 1889.

* IN THE 1950s, American families could travel vicariously by looking at stereo photographs of national monuments, wildlife, and exotic places with a handy plastic viewer called a View-Master, a black streamlined descendant of Wheatstone's hooded stereoscope. Now, a new company called View Productions is using the exact same device to provide historic stereo tours of buildings, interior details, and furniture by some of the 20th-century's most admired architects and designers, among them Antonio Gaudi, Charles and Ray Eames, Frank Gehry, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Bruce Goff. Available are the View-Master stereoscope (including a 1940s Bakelite edition) and sets of the stereo photos on wheel-like cartridges. For prices, ordering options, and other information, see their web site at <www.viewproductions.com>.

CHABRIAS
An army of deer led by a lion is more to be feared than an army of lions led by a deer.

PARIS, THE "city of lights," is divided by the River Seine, the south edge of which, known as the Left Bank, is the legendary home for artists, writers, musicians, and anyone else with free-thinking or Bohemian tendencies. As vividly depicted by this historic reconstruction of the sights and sounds of Paris in the 20s, the area was a haven not only for artists but also for lesbians, for "a new kind of woman" who preferred to live independently of men. As a result, this film is two films intertwined. On the one hand, it is an overview of the artistic and literary climate in Paris in the 20s (for men as well as women), in the period after World War I and before the Great Depression. At the same time, it also provides an account of a group of lesbian artists and couples (most of whom were acquainted) who lived in Paris at the time, among them Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier (who owned bookstores opposite one another), Janet Flanner (who, using the penname "Genet," wrote a weekly column about Parisian life in the New Yorker), Natalie Barney, and the writer Djuna [pronounced "June-ah") Barnes. Throughout the film, we are treated to photographs, historic film footage, and audio recordings, some of which are very rare. Toklas is described by Stein, for example, and Stein (after her death) by Toklas. Beach recalls James Joyce (whose novels she was the first to publish), Ernest Hemingway, and events that took place in her bookstore, called Shakespeare and Company. There are segments of interesting interviews with German-Jewish photographer Gisele Freund, Sammy Steward (who later wrote a book about his friendship with Stein), Barney's housekeeper, and others. Among the highlights is a film clip of a song and dance by Josephine Baker, the American Black nightclub performer, and Flanner's memory of Stein and Toklas in which she describes the latter as malicious, whereas "Gertrude could be destructive, but malice was not her gift." For those with an interest in Paris, or the history of Modernism (in art and literature), or women's studies, this is a delightful, informative source.

ELBERT HUBBARD
Poet. A person born with an instinct for poverty.

HILAIRE BELLOC
If you can describe clearly without a diagram the proper way of making this or that knot, then you are a master of the English language.

JOSHUA HENKIN
In today's [literary] market, writers can't just be writers. They have to be performers and publicists as well. The image of the lonely writer honing his or her art is fast becoming outdated. What's demanded instead is something else: a hook, a smile and a shoeshine.

ANON
Avoid clichés like the plague.
A page from a book by ROBERT BADEN-POWELL, the founder of Boy Scouts, in which he claimed that, under the pretense of butterfly collecting, he had acted as a spy in various Mediterranean countries (c.1890-93). The plan of the fort at the bottom is concealed in the butterfly drawing above.


IN ONE OF his books, British literary critic I.A. Richards said something I've never forgotten: To communicate to the widest audience, you should focus intently, specifically on your own deepest concerns. Only by being true to ourselves can we persuasively address the lives and emotions of others. I thought of that as I perused this astonishing book, which is an ambitious anthology of the family folklore (the tattled tales of padded tails) that comprise the history of one American family, a branch that grew out of the marriage in 1937 of Frank Lester Schwarz and Nona Ruby Sills in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Their first-born child was this book's compiler (now aged 64), an Iowa-based ceramic artist who is widely-known for his unique and often huge clay pots, the rich glazed surfaces of which he embellishes with inscribed pictographic narratives. The stories in this book reach back into history, as far back as the American Revolution and Civil War, while bounding ahead to the present as well. Places Nona Lived. Charlie Steals His Own Car. World War Two Stories. Lane's Ontario O' Ontario. Oh-Oh. An Acorn Song. In page after page (in 330 large format pages), dozens of family characters take turns in preserving forever their candid and incomplete feelings about hilarious, tragic, and strange events (from diaries, letters, and taped interviews), any of which could as easily have been overheard at the gatherings of other American families, with allowance for differing details. What is most extraordinary about this book is that it is not the work of a single person but a rich conglomeration of the plainspoken, memorable memories of a wide range of individuals, distinct and yet closely related.

JOSH BILLINGS

The grate art in writing well, iz tew kno when tew stop.
RALPH WALDO EMERSON
The clergy are as alike as peas.
I cannot tell them apart.

AMBROSE BIERCE
UNDERSTANDING n.
A cerebral secretion that enables one having it to know a house from a horse by the roof of the house. Its nature and laws have been exhaustively expounded by Locke, who rode a house, and Kant, who lived in a horse.

JOHNNY CARSON
I know a man who gave up smoking, drinking, sex, and rich food. He was healthy right up to the time he killed himself.

B A L L A S T Q U A R


IT IS BECAUSE of the Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations (the first international trade fair) that the Modern era in industrial design and architecture is commonly said to have started in 1851. Erected temporarily in Hyde Park in London, this 18-acre structure (the world’s largest building at the time) was made of glass with iron struts, all of which had been prefabricated elsewhere, then shipped to the site and assembled. It was nicknamed the Crystal Palace, partly because it resembled (and in some ways also functioned as) a huge, resplendent greenhouse, with live historic trees inside. In the first five months, nearly six and a half million people streamed in to witness 14,000 displays and demonstrations from throughout the world (nearly half from England) of the latest devices and products to come from the Industrial Revolution, among them the Colt revolver, Thonet bentwood furniture, and stereoscopic photography. Arts and Crafts founder William Morris, who was 17 years old when the event opened, got as far as the door with his parents, then sat on a bench and refused to go in, because, he said, it was “wonderfully ugly.” It is now often said that, while the building’s structure and the process of erecting it were astonishing, the products inside were a mixture at best. This is a collection of essays on various social aspects of the Crystal Palace by scholars from varying backgrounds, who take turns addressing such issues as the fair’s appeal to the working class; the event as satirically followed in Punch; the socio-economic strata of those who attended; the concurrent promotion of technical and mechanical drawing (“an industrial vision”); and reactions to the exhibition on India, regarded then as the British Empire’s “jewel in the crown.” For anyone interested in design, architectural and cultural history, there are portions of all of these essays that are both surprising and informative. Sadly, the book as a whole is distressing because its cover and interior page layout (its form) are greatly at odds with its content (or function). The layout, as Morris might argue, is ugly (not wonderfully) and borders on being outrageously dull. Inadvertently, at the end we are faced with the question(s): Has there been no progress in book design since the Crystal Palace! Have we learned nothing in 150 years! And, if that’s the case, why bother to publish such essays!

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI
My country tears of thee.
One time [during World War II, in Japan, while held as a prisoner of war in a coal mine], at the end of the day, while I was waitin' for the little train to take our shift out, I laid back against the rock wall, put my cap over my eyes, and tried to get some rest. The guy next to me says, "God damn, I wish I was back in Seattle." I paid no attention. Guys were always talking about being back home. He said, "I had a nice restaurant there and I lost it all." I turned around and looked and it's a Japanese. He was one of our overseers. I was flabbergasted.

He said, "Now just don't talk to me. I'll do all the talkin'." He's talkin' out of the side of his mouth. He says, "I was born and raised in Seattle, had a nice restaurant there. I brought my mother back to Japan. She's real old and knew she was gonna die and she wanted to come home. The war broke out and I couldn't get back to the States. They made me come down here and work in the coal mines." I didn't know what the hell to say to this guy. Finally the car come down and I says, "Well, see you in Seattle someday." And I left. I never saw him after that.


DON MARQUIS
business business business
grind grind grind
what a life for a man
that might have been a poet
PETER VIERICK

Today the women come and go
Talking of T.S. Eliot.

D. H. LAWRENCE

(The Best of Myles) But a better case for the banning of all poetry is the simple fact that most of it is bad.

Nobody is going to manufacture a thousand tons of jam in the expectation that five tons may be eatable.

MYLES NA GOPALEEN

(Talking of T.S. Eliot.) A young man is afraid of his demon and puts his hand over the demon's mouth sometimes and speaks for him. And the things the young man says are very rarely poetry.


This program, which was produced in England for a popular audience nearly twenty years ago, was apparently the first attempt by Vienna-born art historian Sir Ernst H. Gombrich at presenting a televised lecture. It seems natural for him to have done so, since 35 years earlier he had phenomenal success when he wrote an enlightening volume about Western art history for the general reader. Titled The Story of Art, that still best-selling textbook now is in its 16th edition and has been translated into 32 languages. Despite such sales numbers, his greatest contribution came in 1960, when he published Art and Illusion, a book of provocative lectures about "the psychology of pictorial representation." In the four decades that followed, as he grew increasingly famous, he never stopped actively writing about art history, art and perceptual psychology, and adjacent subjects, until his death at 92 on November 5, 2001. With his passing, it may be helpful to look back on his achievements, including the several occasions on which he lectured on camera. In viewing this film, for example, one notices three qualities that also occur in his writings: Clarity of idea, a dry humor, and the belief that whatever may happen in art can as easily take place in daily life. His humor is evident in the title of this lecture, which is an understated pun: It is of course a talk about the language of vision ("the language of the eyes"), but one in which variations in the size, shape, and direction of the eyes exemplify the means by which we communicate nonverbally. Similarly, when he refers to eyes as "windows of the soul," he deliberately makes an allusion to the tiny rejections of windows that artists place on painted eyes, as a way of creating a highlight. While his lecture is focused and simple in ways, it is also wonderfully complex in the number and range of examples he cites, including artworks by about twenty artists, from several cultures and a wide range of time periods. Some people, perhaps most, may find it too great of a challenge to follow Gombrich's pronunciation, since he spoke with both an accent and a distinct lisp, or to tolerate his "talking head," which seems too static when compared with today's music videos. To better appreciate this video, it may be of help to conceive of it as not merely a lecture, but more importantly, since his death, an historic artifact as well.

AMBROSE BIERCE

Bark, n. The song of the dog.

This video is one in a series of ten arts-related children’s films, titled Behind the Scenes. Starring in each is a prominent guest artist or performer, while the hosts throughout the series are the popular team of magicians, artists or comedians named Penn and Teller. In this case the star is supposed to have been David Hockney, the British painter who now resides in California, and is known for his various interests in pictorial representation, and perspective in particular. I say “supposed to have been” because, while Hockney has the announced lead role, there is a hidden star whose name is never mentioned, not even in the credits. That person is Adelbert Ames II (1880-1955), the American lawyer, artist, and optical physiologist, who is best known for having invented the Ames Demonstrations in perceptual psychology, which include such astounding phenomena as distorted rooms in which people appear to shrink and grow, demonstrations of spatial overlapping using trumped up playing cards, and a rotating trapezoid window. As this film opens, Penn and Teller are standing in an Ames Room and appear to be of equal height, although one is normally much taller than the other. When they exchange positions, their difference in height becomes greatly exaggerated. Soon after we are introduced to Dawn and Debbie, identical twins who are made to appear to grow shorter or taller without using an Ames Room, merely by photographing them from a low vantage point, by which the viewer is denied any information about the ground plane. Other Ames-indebted scenes include an enlarged playing card which appears to be overlapped by (to lie behind) a smaller and presumably more distant card; and a giant coffee cup which looks at first as if it were a close-up view of a normal-sized cup. It is sad but not surprising that the film gives no credit to Ames, spoken or otherwise. Were he still alive, he may not have objected. Since, according to William H. Ittelson (who worked with him), he was “truly humble” and believed that a person’s greatest tribute is “to remember his work and forget his name.”
I think that I think, therefore I think that I am.

Poetry is the opening and closing of a door, leaving those who look through to guess about what is seen during a moment.

Publishing a volume of poetry today is like dropping a rose petal down the Grand Canyon and waiting for an echo.

Poetry is to prose as dancing is to walking.
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Jean Cocteau  
You don’t make a poem with thoughts; you must make it with words.

Walt Whitman  
To have great poets, there must be great audiences too.

John Fowles  
We all write poems; it is simply that poets are the ones who write in words.

Max Eastman  
A poet in history is divine, but a poet in the next room is a joke.

W. H. Auden  
"Why do you want to write poetry?" If the young man answers: "I have important things I want to say," then he is not a poet. If he answers: "I like hanging around words listening to what they say," then maybe he is going to be a poet.

Cover Derived from a detail from a Farm Security Administration photograph by Arthur Rothstein (1936).