

Nikki Giovanni
(1945-)

Poetry

poetry is motion graceful
as a fawn
gentle as a teardrop
strong like the eye
5 finding peace in a crowded room
we poets tend to think
our words are golden
though emotion speaks too
loudly to be defined
10 by silence

sometimes after midnight or just before
the dawn
we sit typewriter in hand
pulling loneliness around us
15 forgetting our lovers or children
who are sleeping
ignoring the weary wariness
of our own logic
to compose a poem

20 no one understands it
it never says "love me" for poets are
beyond love
it never says "accept me" for poems speak not
acceptance but controversy
25 it only says "i am" and therefore
i concede that you are too
a poem is pure energy
horizontally contained
between the mind
30 of the poet and the ear of the reader
if it does not sing discard the ear
for poetry is song
if it does not delight discard
the heart for poetry is joy
35 if it does not inform then close
off the brain for it is dead
if it cannot heed the insistent message
that life is precious

40 which is all we poets
wrapped in our loneliness
are trying to say

Archibald MacLeish
(1892-1982)

Ars Poetica
(1926)

A poem should be palpable and mute
As a globed fruit,

Dumb
As old medallions to the thumb,

5 Silent as the sleeve-worn stone
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown--

A poem should be wordless
As the flight of birds.

A poem should be motionless in time
10 As the moon climbs,

Leaving, as the moon releases
Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,
Memory by memory the mind--

15 A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs.

A poem should be equal to:
Not true.

For all the history of grief
20 An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

For love
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea--

A poem should not mean
But be.