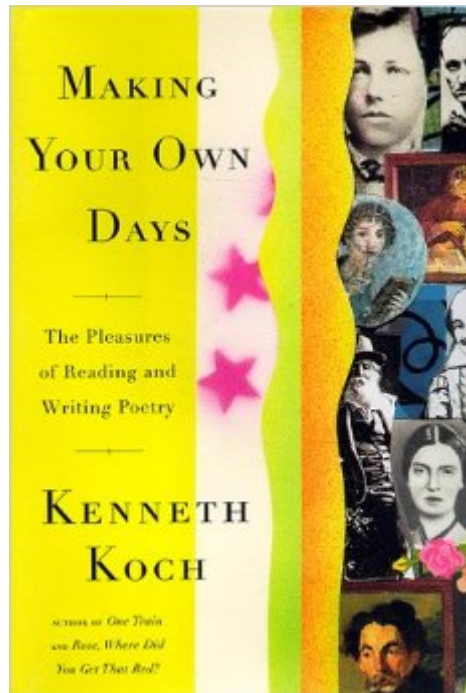


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Making Your Own Days: The Pleasures Of Reading And Writing Poetry



Synopsis

In *Making Your Own Days*, celebrated poet Kenneth Koch writes about poetry as no one has written about it before -- and as if no one had written about it before. Full of fresh and exciting insights and experiences, this book makes the somewhat mysterious subject of poetry clear for those who read it and for those who write it -- and for those who would like to read it and write it better. Koch accomplishes this revelation of poetry by presenting the idea that poetry is a separate language, a language in which music and sound are as important as syntax or meaning. Thus he is able to clarify the many aspects of poetry: the nature of poetic inspiration, what happens when a poet is writing a poem, revision, and what actually goes on while one is reading a poem -- how confusion or only partial understanding eventually leads to truly experiencing a poem. The language of poetry, like other languages, can be learned by reading it and writing it. To assist the reader in learning the language of poetry, Koch provides a rich anthology of poems -- each accompanied by an explanatory note -- specially designed to complement and illuminate his text. There are lyric poems, excerpts from long poems and from poetic plays, poems in English and in translation. Among the poets whose work is included are Homer, Ovid, Sappho, Shakespeare, Byron, Dickinson, Baudelaire, Li Bel, Stevens, Williams, Lorca, Ashbery, and Snyder. In this book, Kenneth Koch's genius for making poetry clear and bringing out its real pleasures is everywhere apparent.

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Customer Reviews

Extroverted teacher, thinker, humanist, and poet Kenneth Koch has once again contributed a book

that is everything its publisher and its reviewers claim. As a teacher - and a famous promoter of poetry, its creation and its creators - he is fun-loving, but also trustworthy. He knows a lot, he is humble and giving, and his goal is that you should know a lot, too. He tells the reader, "Certainly you don't have to be embarrassed by not understanding a poem right away." He succeeds. I took several weeks to read this book. You can't rush through it - it's too rich for that. Half is Koch's tour of poetry. His approach is bracing, stimulating, and calming in turn. It's a course, really, in Koch's approach, which is utterly straightforward, while retaining plenty of respect for language's possibilities for delight, mystery, enchantment, and love. Kenneth Koch admits on page 281 that he does not always understand W.H. Auden. I appreciated that. This book is especially useful for teachers of poetry. The "Anthology of Poems" that comprises the second half of this wonderful book are each followed by wise, interesting, and fresh commentary by Koch. Definitely worth reading.

Am daunted, in the task of writing a review, by the fact that the previous reviewers all got it exactly right! The late Kenneth Koch (1925-2002), whimsical poet, teacher, and enthusiast for the evangel of poetry here gives us a book ideally suited for any poet or reader from high-schooler to nonagenarian. The first 135 pages of the book are something of an instruction manual, or an explanation of why poetry seems so strange at first. He patiently explains the obvious : sound matters as much as sense; words have musical value; there is a "poetry language" -- or perhaps several poetry languages? -- that we discover through reading anything & everything in sight. He comes up with the happy comparison of poetry as language being put through a synthesizer! He speaks of the need to build up a "poetry base" through much exposure to the poems of the past and present; he "opens up" the Wallace Stevens poem "Anecdote of the Jar" and makes enchanting a poem that irritated me on previous readings; he makes apposite remarks on revision and inspiration ... The latter half of the book is a neat -- but not quite comprehensive, as Koch himself admits -- anthology of poetry from across the globe, & encompassing three millennia. From Li Po (Li Bai) to Lorca, from Sappho to Snyder, from Ovid to O'Hara. Senghor and Césaire are alongside Ashbery and Wallace Stevens. Marvell and Shakespeare, Whitman and Hopkins and several in between, before and after. Most of the poems are suffixed by a comment by Koch of less than a page (except for Keats's "Bright Star" which he allows to shine by itself!). Especially good, I thought, his brief note on the sonnet by George Herbert, "Prayer," which I have been trying of late to memorize. Excellent reading for the train, the waiting room, the bed, or whatever region of the house you call your workshop or study!!

this a wonderful book... an absolute must-have for lovers of poetry... especially for those who need permission to not "get it" the first or second time reading through a poem. Koch's passion will rub off on you as well, as your appreciation for the music of poetry deepens... get it now!

This is excellent for beginning readers and writers of poetry. In the essays at the beginning, Koch is successful at convincing the reader that poetry is not as hard as we make it out to be. If we relax and don't allow ourselves to be intimidated, we can enjoy poetry. The rest of the book is devoted to groups of poems, each by one poet, thereby allowing the reader to get to know writers' styles. At the end of each section is a poetry writing exercise asking the reader to write a poem in the style they have just read. These are excellent exercises for broadening anyone's writing; they have certainly broadened my own writing. The only criticism that I have of the book is that the poets included are mostly men. I would think that it could have been more inclusive of women, especially the confessional poets such as Plath whose style new poets may grasp. Overall, this is a great book for teachers, writers, and readers.

Making your Own Days is about the best book you can read about poetry if you are interested in the following things (things that it seems most other books about poetry don't address or think are important). 1. Why people write poetry. 2. What makes poetry writing different from writing that isn't poetry. 3. How and why people become poets. 4. Why poets who write poetry continue to write poetry. 5. Why people who aren't poets aren't poets. 6. How to learn to appreciate poetry. 7. Why people find poetry difficult. 8. How to read poetry. 9. How to appreciate poetry if you have the inclination to do so. 10. How to deepen your appreciation of poetry if you develop an appreciation for it in the first place. Now, here is the one criticism I have of the book: Kenneth Koch uses the word "pleasure" so much that it becomes aggravating. Unfortunately, by emphasizing or I should say overemphasizing the idea that poems provide 'pleasure,' something he never quite defines, it reduces the import of some aspects of poetry that are equally if not more important, for example, its ability to communicate the transpersonal, so that we need not feel alone in our own worlds, emotions, perceptions. A secondary aspect of the ability of poetry to communicate the transpersonal is the shared, communal and social function of poetry that can occur in poetry groups, song, and theatre. Ironically, Koch mentions and provides examples of poetic drama, for example, Lorca, and obviously Shakespeare, but doesn't cover its communal function in terms of myth and ritual. I know you can't cover everything in a primer on poetry appreciation but this was a big omission in my view--particularly since that is how I came to appreciate poetry.

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