

THE HIDDEN CONNECTIONS AMONG THINGS

By Richard Taylor
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I know your time and energy are precious. You've probably got a job to do; there's way too much on your plate, too many demanding people depending on you. And to top it off, you've got to figure out who you are, and where the hell you're going. But you know, if you don't let yourself give in to a little poetry now and again, there just might be a real hole in your life.

Even though I have only published one honest to God poem that charged out of me the day John Lennon was shot, it's not that I don't adore poetry enough to write more poems, but my epiphanies usually arrive as short stories, novels or pieces of creative nonfiction. I write every day. I read voraciously, a half dozen books and magazines at a time. And every night, I fall asleep with the music of words. I guess you could say that in this insane, accelerated age of hi-tech consumerism, no-nonsense knowledge, progress, business and profit at all cost, it might seem a tad suicidal to make a career out of the simple pleasure of words. I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream. But look all around. The music of poetry is everywhere.



Shakespeare discovered that poetry
is the food of love

A long time ago, my godmother who lives alone now in a rambling old farmhouse up above the Ottawa River in Quebec once gave me an ancient tome, *A Dictionary of Thoughts* written in 1891. Recently I have been dipping into it for pleasure and plunder. This scarce, leather-bound book is a gathering of striking thoughts of the world's best thinkers. This collection of thoughts was begun by one Tryon Edwards, D.D. for his own personal use and reference. Eventually Edwards, whose dour heavy-lidded demeanour stares out from the inside cover like some dispossessed Confederate general was encouraged to compile a book of laconic quotations. Edwards, not unlike the solitary nighthawks who relentlessly surf the net these days for random knowledge and inspiration, gathered

together a wide range of wisdom, beauty and common sense, to form a work that would provide solace to others. Early on in the century and on down through the tumbling decades, I imagine Edward's sturdy *Dictionary of Thoughts* was the perfect friend on dark nights of the soul up at my godmother's lonely, lamp lit farmhouse.

Alphabetically arranged by subject, I found Poetry wedged in between Pleasure and Policy. On the opposite page is a hangdog, sleepy-eyed lithograph of poor old bedraggled Edgar Allan Poe who for some odd reason that would surely exacerbate his famous paranoia isn't even listed in the author's reference index. I noticed, however, that Tryon Edwards, D.D. has almost as many of his own quotes in the index as Goethe, Emerson and Shakespeare.

Written well over 100 years ago, the first four quotes on Poetry are still apt: Poetry is the art of substantiating shadows, and of lending existence to nothing - Edmund Burke. Poetry is music in words; and music is poetry in sound - Thomas Fuller. The office of Poetry is not to make us think accurately, but feel truly - F.W. Robertson. You will find Poetry nowhere, unless you bring some with you - J. Joubert. Curiously, two pages later I notice the Burke quote is duplicated exactly - a small editorial screw-up by Tryon Edwards, D.D. After finishing with the fine century-old wisdom about Poetry, I closed the book, resisting a detour into Avarice, Longing, Forgiveness, Guilt, Cheerfulness and Responsibility.

My trusty *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines Poetry as "elevated expression of elevated thought or feeling in metrical or rhythmical form; quality (in any thing) that calls for poetical expression."

I'm convinced that most people recognize poetry when it confronts them, and when they feel the lack of it in their lives.

The provocative film, *American Beauty*, deals with the hidden connections among things. One of the characters, a lonely misunderstood teenager, shoots an unhealthy number of videos with his hand-held camera. His favourite is a short haunting bit of footage of a discarded white plastic bag caught in a sudden dust devil of wind. Like the slow dance of a small white ghost, the white bag lilts up and down in a sublime, hypnotic swirl that is so inexplicably sensual and exquisite to watch, you feel thunderstruck by an overwhelming sense of poetry.

Forget about the stress of your life for a little while. Forget about being intimidated by poetry. Forget Margaret Atwood's assertion that, even though it matters a whole lot, "poetry doesn't make money." Remember too that Wallace Stevens said, "all poetry is experimental." And according to Ezra Pound, "only emotion endures." Get into it the way you might listen to a song the first time. Sometimes it takes a few listens, and sometimes even after listening to it a few times it either works for you or it doesn't. No big deal. Nothing is lost. But often responding to a poem can uncover hidden magic and associations that might titillate or challenge your emotions and intellect. Like anything else, the experience should wildly surpass its component parts. Or as the old proverb says, "The wind in the grass cannot be taken into the house."