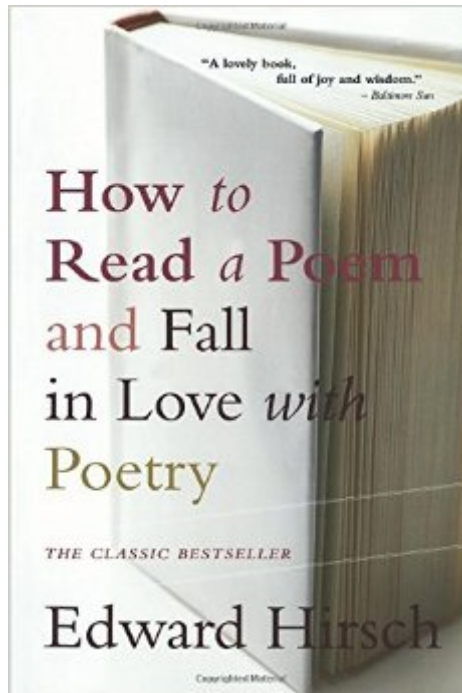


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How To Read A Poem: And Fall In Love With Poetry



Synopsis

How to Read a Poem is an unprecedented exploration of poetry and feeling. In language at once acute and emotional, distinguished poet and critic Edward Hirsch describes why poetry matters and how we can open up our imaginations so that its message can make a difference. In a marvelous reading of verse from around the world, including work by Pablo Neruda, Elizabeth Bishop, Wallace Stevens, and Sylvia Plath, among many others, Hirsch discovers the true meaning of their words and ideas and brings their sublime message home into our hearts. A masterful work by a master poet, this brilliant summation of poetry and human nature will speak to all readers who long to place poetry in their lives.

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Customer Reviews

Edward Hirsch has written a meticulous analysis of the art of poetry, imbued with an authentic love of the form. From page to page he dissects and interprets; his enthusiasm remains high throughout. Not just the poetry, but also the poets themselves are lavished with heroic praise, their craft transcending the mortal. Their words are golden strands of virtue more appropriately whispered into the ears of gods. But, but... For those of us uneducated in the art of poetry there is a much more basic level of understanding that has to be achieved first: Why no punctuation? Why do sentences break in mid-breath? How does one find the meter in a poem? How does one read poetry without the stops and starts from line to line? Perhaps we should have learned this in school, but we didn't,

so we bought this book. This is a good book, really, but it is not what its title suggests. It should rather be entitled "The Love of Poetry", or "Falling in Love With Poetry", or "Furthering Your Love of Poetry", or something else emotive. "How to Read a Poem" sounds mechanical, the basics, just what those uneducated among us get when we do a keyword search on how to read a poem. Select another book in order to learn how to read a poem, then graduate to this one once you comprehend the basics.

I got this book because I'm a complete novice who would like to learn to enjoy poetry. The book certainly put me on the right track, as it was inspiring more than anything else. My one gripe is that my biggest problem with poetry is that I simply don't understand much of it. Any time I pick up a poem, I will, sure as anything, hit a line or two (at least) I can't figure out, and then I lose interest in the poem. There is a skill to reading poetry and I don't have it yet. Hirsch at his best would pull a poem apart and explain his reading. However, many times he would quote a few lines and talk about how wonderful they were, without explaining what they meant to him, and I was clueless. It was frustrating to have a book that purports to explain poetry to novices assume I would understand something I didn't. That said, I understood about 75% of the book, thought it beautifully written, and am now looking for other introductions to move me along the path.

A mentor of mine always used to say "There are two kinds of people in this world!" and he would then expand on whatever dichotomy was on his mind at the moment. He might well have said that there are those who "get" poetry, and those who don't. I have always been firmly in the latter camp, but perhaps am more recently moving toward the former. Though I still have quite a ways to go, this book really helped move me along. This is a very well-written introduction to the joys of reading poetry. Besides presenting the reader with examples of many different types and styles of poetry it's just very enjoyable to read this author's writing. While my reaction to the poems in the book is not even on the same scale as the author's very visceral, emotional responses, I feel like I nevertheless grasped enough of his reaction to know what he was feeling, and what he was getting at in his description. But I'll admit that some of the poems I read over and over again trying to detect some of *his* response in *me*, and I rarely did. I think this has more to do with my naivete, and I sort of envied the author's obvious depth of feeling in response to these poems. Anyway - it's a great read and if you're a lover of poetry or even just curious about it, I recommend this book highly.

I really enjoy reading Hirsch because he has a romantic love affair with poetry and his enthusiasm is

infectious in the extreme. This is an excellent introduction to what poetry is and what it can do. Hirsch focuses on the romantic/spiritual side to poetry, his favourite poets being Whitman and Emerson. He does get a bit carried away with this at times and is best introducing new and obscure poets such as the modern Greek poet Cavafy. It is not the sort of book you read over three days. I found myself reading very slowly, like eating a big rich chocolate dessert.

I was utterly charmed by this book, but unfortunately lost my copy half way through. I bought a second, determined to have it on hand to be a primary guide as I try to learn more about poetry. For those of us with "literal" minds, Hirsch's words offer plenty of reasons to persevere over what may at first seem to be imponderable communications. He emphasizes the excitement of puzzling out messages poets leave for us and the thrill of the feelings they elicit in response. This is a very good book to have if you are growing into poetry or have wondered what all the fuss was about.

Anyone fortunate enough to read an Ed Hirsch column in the American Poetry Review knows that this man's enthusiasm for poetry is unparalleled. In this Book, Hirsch offers his bottomless understanding of poetry's necessity, showcasing his ability dig dig into the souls of great poets to answer the question "what is poetry for?" I found myself smiling and shaking my head in agreement with his comments about poets I've never heard of. When someone can get me so interested in a poet about whom I know nothing with just a few pages in a book, I know I am reading the work of an incredibly deft mind. Yes, this book does have the ability to transform people into poetry fans, but readers must first have some sort of interest or passion for poetry. If you've got that, Ed Hirsch does all the rest for you.

What an elegant, passionate, personal exploration of the joys of good poetry. I was instantly hooked by the author's beautiful prose and his obvious love of the subject. Knowledgeable without being condescending, he explores the importance of the reader's response in making poetry come to life, and he uses appropriate and interesting examples throughout. Despite the dreadfully stale title, this book is rich and rewarding and deserves a slow, savoring read. Recommended for all lovers of good writing, and especially those looking for a deeper experience of poetry. If you only buy one book on the poetic experience, let this be it.

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