

TENTH EDITION

Perrine's
Sound and Sense

An Introduction to Poetry

THOMAS R. ARP
GREG JOHNSON

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An Introduction to Poetry

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learned to dance.
'Tis not enough no harshness gives offense,
The sound must seem an echo to the sense.

ALEXANDER POPE
from *An Essay on Criticism*

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Sound and Sense

An Introduction to Poetry

THOMAS R. ARP

Southern Methodist University

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Preface

This tenth edition of *Perrine's Sound and Sense*, like the previous editions, addresses the student who is beginning a serious investigation of poetry. The authors of this new edition seek to give that student a sufficient grasp of the nature and variety of poetry, some reasonable means for reading it with appreciative understanding, and a few primary ideas of how to evaluate it. The authors have striven for conciseness and compactness, and have presented the elements of poetry in a progression in which each new topic builds on what preceded it. The separate chapters gradually introduce the student to the elements of poetry, putting the emphasis always on *how* and *why*: *How* can the reader use these elements to get at the meaning of the poem, to interpret it correctly, and to respond to it adequately? *Why* does the poet use these elements? What values have they for the poet and reader?

In matters of theory, some issues are undoubtedly simplified, but we hope none seriously, and some more sophisticated theoretical approaches have had to be excluded in the interests of time and space. The purpose has always been to give the beginning student something to understand and use. The first assumptions of *Sound and Sense* are that poetry needs to be read carefully and considered thoughtfully, and that, when so read, poetry gives its readers continuing rewards in experience and understanding.

Each chapter contains two parts: a discussion of the topic indicated by the chapter title, with illustrative poems and a relevant selection of poems with study questions for further illustration of the topic. A heavy line indicates the division between the two parts. The presentation of poetry in the whole book is similarly divided into two parts: Part One consists of the sixteen discussion chapters; Part Three contains a selection of poems for further reading, without study questions.

As in previous editions, three poets (Emily Dickinson, John Donne, and Robert Frost) are represented by a sufficient number of poems in the chapters and in Part Three to support study of them as individual artists.

The tenth edition differs from the ninth chiefly in the following respects: while maintaining the desirable balance between traditional and contemporary works, the number of poems by women and by

members of ethnic minorities (and the number of poets representing these groups) has again been increased; what was previously presented as an appendix on "Writing about Poetry" has been augmented at the request of students and instructors using the ninth edition and has been given a more prominent position as Part Two of the book; in addition, in response to the desire of those using the book in their classrooms, "Suggestions for Writing" have been added to most of the chapter presentations.

Through the ten editions of a book that originated in 1956, *Sound and Sense* has evolved in many ways, responding to shifts in interest, concern, and taste expressed by its users. But certain abiding principles remain as relevant at the turn of this century as they were in its middle decade. Among these are the conviction that the close reading of a text is basic to the understanding and appreciation of poetry; that to understand the means by which a poem achieves its ends is an essential part of experiencing it fully; and that reading poetry is important to the development of the whole person.

I am particularly pleased to have been joined in the preparation of this tenth edition by Greg Johnson, Ph.D. Greg is a widely respected writer of fiction, poetry, and literary criticism, and he brings to this book a new range of experience. He also represents a link to the origins of the book, for he was a student of Laurence Perrine's when he earned his master's degree at Southern Methodist University. For much of what is innovative in the discussions and the selection of poems in this edition, I am deeply grateful to him.

A book of such enduring appeal grows through time and advice, and the debts to the helpful attention of others are now innumerable. In addition to the list of professional acknowledgments that follows this preface, I wish only to single out for my special gratitude the experienced teachers and novices who participated in my workshop on teaching and writing about poetry at the Stanford University Advanced Placement Institute in July, 1999.

—T.R.A.

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Foreword to Students

"I've never been good at poetry." Most teachers have heard this statement repeatedly from students like you as they begin the serious study of poetry. The patient teacher knows what you mean—that there is something apparently mysterious or even intimidating about trying to experience the full range of what a poem can mean or be. And the teacher believes you, because reading poetry is a learned skill and you may not have had the practice or opportunity to learn that skill, just as you might not have mastered the skills necessary to bake a pie or dive off the 10-meter platform or win at poker.

If this is your situation, this book is for you.

On the other hand, you may feel that your experience with poems has developed for you the sensitivity to respond fully and to live vicariously within the world that a poem represents.

If this is your situation, this book is for you too.

Here's why: both the beginner and the more experienced reader of poems can profit from a book that provides a step-by-step method of understanding how a poem does what it does and of judging its accomplishment. All of us—teachers, beginners, experienced students—know how we feel when we first read through a poem. We probably start by thinking "I like this" or "this poem doesn't say much to me" or "what in the world is this supposed to mean?" Under normal circumstances, if you could, you'd either act on your first reaction and read the poem again, or you'd attempt to discover its meaning, or you'd drop it and go on to do something more pleasurable.

But you're in a special situation. You're taking a course (either by your own choice or because you're required to), and one of the rules of the game is that you're supposed to move from your initial reaction to some sort of "serious" response that will satisfy your teacher. If you like the poem and want to reread it, your teacher will pester you with wanting to know *why* you liked it, and might even insist that you offer reasons why other people should like it too. If you are only a little bit curious about it, or think that it is a waste of time, your teacher will lead (or nudge, or bash) you into finding things in the poem that might change your initial opinion. In any case, the terms of your special situation, as a student in a course with a grade on the horizon, make it

necessary for you to have more than an initial reaction. You'll need to develop an understanding of the poem, and you'll need to show in discussion or writing both what you understand and how the poem led you to that understanding.

That's where this book will help. In addition to a systematic guide for discovering how and what a poem means, we've provided you with suggestions for writing at the ends of the chapters and standards for your written work in Part Two of the book.

Why is writing important? It's the most straightforward way of sorting out your feelings and ideas, putting them into shape, nailing down your own experience. All writing about literature has a double motive—it sharpens your grasp of the work, and it helps you to lead other people to share your experience. Writing about literature is writing persuasively, and persuading others to see what you see helps you to see it more clearly.

So at the most basic level, we want this book (and your course) to help you with reading and writing. But you have every right to ask, "Why read and write about poetry?" That's a good question, because in our world there are so many ways of gaining experience and insight into our lives and the lives of others that focusing on one resource based on the spoken and written word may seem narrow and old-fashioned. We're willing to grant that, and we'll go even further: in a sense, literary study is elitist, and turning to poetry as a source of experience will set you apart from the majority of people.

But as you'll see as you proceed through this book, poetry is the most compact and emotionally stimulating of literary experiences, able to deliver the most insight in the smallest amount of space, a richly powerful way into the hearts and minds of many different kinds of people in many different situations. We challenge you to hold it up to the several other sources of insight into human behavior with which you might be familiar—films, television drama, radio and television talk-shows, courses in psychology or sociology, eavesdropping on other people, or quarreling and making up with people who mean something to you. All of those have limitations when you compare them to the compacted experience and wisdom of poetry. Poets are experts in seeing, feeling, understanding, and expressing. In ages before literacy, poets were the only means to truths beyond individual experience, and they can still help us to enlarge our limited lives.

You can understand and benefit from poetry. And you can learn to express your thoughts and feelings about the experience it conveys by writing persuasively about it. In short, you can be "good at poetry." Turn to Chapter One to begin.

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