



# Making Your Own Days: The Pleasures of Reading and Writing Poetry

By Kenneth Koch

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## Making Your Own Days: The Pleasures of Reading and Writing Poetry By Kenneth Koch

From one of the most esteemed American poets of the twenty-first century comes a celebration of poetry and an invitation for anyone to experience its beauty and wonder.

Full of fresh and exciting insights, *Making Your Own Days* illuminates the somewhat mysterious subject of poetry for those who read it and for those who write it—as well as for those who would like to read and write it better. By treating poetry not as a special use of language but as a distinct language—unlike the one used in prose and conversation—Koch clarifies the nature of poetic inspiration, how poems are written and revised, and what happens to the heart and mind while reading a poem.

Koch also provides a rich anthology of more than ninety works from poets past and present. Lyric poems, excerpts from long poems and poetic plays, poems in English, and poems in translation from Homer and Sappho to Lorca, Snyder, and Ashbery; each selection is accompanied by an explanatory note designed to complement and clarify the text and to put pleasure back into the experience of poetry.

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### **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Ordinary mortals and poet scholars alike will find something to love in Koch's down-to-earth approach to making sense of that most head scratching of literary genres. Asserting that "poetry ... is a separate language," he steers clear of the stodgy, hidden-meaning school of deciphering poems (wherein the reader digs through the poem "for some elusive and momentous significance") and takes us instead on a tour through the tonal, rhythmical, and metrical aspects of poetry. Yes, it's about the music: "The sound of words is raised to an importance equal to that of their meaning, and also to the importance of grammar and syntax." But rather than asking us to simply take his word for it, Koch provides lively and insightful examples (including many rarely anthologized poems). For instance, why does "two and two are rather green" have little or no meaning, while "two and two / Are rather blue" smacks of the truth? Why does "I don't know whether or not to commit suicide" plop from the mouth like so much cold oatmeal, while "To be or not to be, that is the question" is so pleasing to the ears? Resonance, says Koch. "Poetry lasts because it gives the ambiguous and ever-changing pleasure of being both a statement and a song."

Moving from poetry's music to its methods (comparisons, personifications, and apostrophe, to name a few), Koch continues to offer up an amusing and edifying array of excerpts and analogies to clarify his point that with poetry, "as with baseball ... one has to understand a little in order to enjoy it...." Insightful, yet never patronizing, *Making Your Own Days* is for anyone who's ever read a poem and wished it were more "like a newspaper article." Though Koch can't tell us why Wallace Stevens wrote "I placed a jar in Tennessee," or why "So much depends / upon / a red wheel / barrow" (William Carlos Williams), he helps us listen to--and savor--that sometimes bewildering conglomeration of words otherwise known as poetry. --*Martha Silano*

#### From Library Journal

Koch, a preeminent American poet and author of two best-selling books on teaching poetry to children, has at last produced a guide for adults. This book is divided into two parts: a series of essays on subjects such as meter, rhyme, and personification and an anthology of favorite poems. Most remarkably, non-English poems often appear with several translations, underscoring the flexibility of poetic language. *Making Your Own Days* will be most useful to writers already familiar with the basics. However, while some of the playfulness that marked *Wishes, Lies and Dreams* (HarperCollins, 1980) and *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?* (Vintage, 1990) creeps in, the overall tone is that of a lecturer, and Koch covers the same ground as Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux's *The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry* (LJ 10/15/97), though in a less engaging manner. David Kirby, Florida State Univ., Tallahassee

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#### Review

Michael Dirda *The Washington Post Book World* Kenneth Koch is one of our finest living poets....*Making Your Own Days* is...exhilarating.

David Lehman *American Poetry Review* A poet of the highest originality....[Koch] has stretched our ideas of what it is possible to do in poetry.

Frank Kermode I would recommend Koch's way of teaching poetry above all others. His book is informative, witty, and surprising. It's also authoritative...it is a precious defense of poetry.

Ned Rorem Koch is that rare phenomenon, the poet who can write prose -- prose that is necessary and lucid. In his book, he offers a new and healthy dimension to the life of virtually everyone.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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