Definition of Poetry

Lynn Z. Bloom

Once
I took a course in aesthetics:
Three hours credit
If I could learn
What a poem was.

A poem was "the record of the best and happiest moments of the best
        and happiest minds";
"The best words in the best order";
"A criticism of life."
But what was "best"?
Would "happiness" necessarily prevail in a criticism?
And if a poem "tells us . . . something that cannot be said," how
        could we discuss the ineffable?

A poem was a poem, we learned, if it made you feel as if the top of
        your head were taken off,
Or if your spine tingled
Or your gut quivered,
Save the classics, and with them, the more cathartic, the better.

A poem was metered, rhythmic, regular—
Except free verse.
A poem rhymed—
But not blank verse.
A poem had consonance, assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia—
Or none of these.
A poem used a "higher concentration of imagery" than prose.
"But how high is high?" asked we bourgeois gentlemen, speakers of
        prose all our lives.

A poem was "poem-shaped,"
Yes, just as a human being was man-shaped,
        unless she was a woman.

Finally, we were told, "a poem should not mean, but be."
Be what?

To answer the question for myself
I wrote a term paper.
"A Definition of Poetry."
The instructor gave it an A.

But I never wrote
A poem.

The Fine Art of Ineptitude*

Sue Winemiller

Each of us knows at least one of them. They are perched before easels duplicating the spring's emerald meadows and the autumn's turbulent skies. Clad in leotards, they pirouette and pas de buerre their souls into the "Nutcracker Suite," while their colleagues entrance the audience with skill in the orchestra pit. Not content with a monopoly of the fine arts, their type is found fashioning Christmas angels from empty toilet paper rolls, making doll houses out of old cereal boxes, and whipping together gourmet dinners from cans of Campbell's Chicken Noodle Soup. I speak of my personal nemesis, the artist—one who, by inborn talent or by inclination, excels at his craft.