

Every morning I awake torn between a desire to save the world and an inclination to savor it. This makes it hard to plan the day. But if we forget to savor the world, what possible reason do we have for saving it? In a way, the savoring must come first.

E.B. White

*From a New York Times interview in 1969 by Israel Shenker*

I will make the case that to explore and affiliate with life is a deep and complicated process in mental development. To an extent still undervalued in philosophy and religion, our existence depends on this propensity, our spirit is woven from it, hope rises on its currents.

Edward O. Wilson

Introduction to *Biophilia*,

1984 Cambridge: Harvard University Press

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.

Henry David Thoreau

*Walden, Or Life in the Woods* (1854)

Chapter Two, Where I Lived and What I Lived For

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,  
One clover, and a bee.  
And revery.  
The revery alone will do,  
If bees are few.

Emily Dickinson (1765)

*The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Ralph W. Franklin ed.,

Cambridge, MA.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1951.

We could feel the peace and power of the Great Mystery in the soft grass under our feet and in the blue sky above us. All this made deep feeling within us, and this is how we got our religion.

Luther Standing Bear, *My Indian Boyhood*  
Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.

It is an environment where nothing comes between me, the sky, the horizons, and my dreams.

Ed Butterfield, *The Shortgrass Prairie* (1988)  
C. Cushman and S.R. Jones, Pruett Publishing Co., Boulder, CO.

On the prairie, what you are left with is the bare truth, the land pared down to the bone, the basic dirt and grass and sky that shape the lives that play out upon it.

Tom Groneberg, *The Secret Life of Cowboys* (2003)

The question is always asked by the curious travelers who have crossed the Plains at Interstate speeds, “How can you live here without the mountains, the ocean, the woods?” But what they are really speaking to is their desire to “get it” right away. The sublime of this place that we call the prairie is one of patience and looking. There is no quick fix...If one is to understand the beauty of this place, the old answers just won’t do.

Keith Jacobshagen, “Personal Journey” in *The Changing Prairie* (1995)  
A. Joern and K.H. Keeler, eds, Oxford University Press

A passion builds inside anyone who spends time on the prairie.

Dave Showalter, *Prairie Thunder: The Nature of Colorado’s Great Plains* (2007)  
Skyline Press, Pueblo, CO

Whatever else prairie is—grass, sky, wind—it is most of all a paradigm of infinity, a clearing full of many things except boundaries, and its power comes from its apparent limitlessness; there is no such thing as a small prairie any more than there is a little ocean, and the consequence of both is this challenge: try to take yourself seriously out here, you bipedal plodder, you complacent cartoon.

William Least Heat-Moon, *PrairieErth* (1991)  
Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, MA

1. When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong.
2. The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible.
3. Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

Three "laws" of prediction by Arthur C. Clarke  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarke's\\_three\\_laws](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarke's_three_laws)

So here I am . . .  
Trying to use words, and every attempt  
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure  
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words  
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which  
One is no longer disposed to say it.

T.S. Eliot  
*Four Quartets, East Coker, Section V*

My heart rouses  
    thinking to bring you news  
        of something  
that concerns you  
    and concerns many men. Look at  
        what passes for the new.  
You will not find it there but in  
    despised poems.  
    It is difficult  
to get the news from poems  
    yet men die miserably every day  
        for lack  
of what is found there.

William Carlos Williams  
*Asphodel, That Greeny Flower*

The greatest barrier to consciousness is the belief that one is already conscious. I've found that the chief difficulty for most people was to realize that they had really heard new things: that is things that they had never heard before. They kept translating what they heard into their habitual language. They had ceased to hope and believe there might be anything new.

P. D. Ouspensky  
Introduction; *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution* (1950)  
Vintage

Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don't just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought. Conversation doesn't just reshuffle the cards; it creates new cards.

Theodore Zeldin,  
*Conversation – How Talk Can Change Our Lives* (1998)  
The Harvill Press, London

I wrote a poem one day, and it changed my life. I had a sudden sense that the language in poetry was “magical,” unlike the language in fiction: that it could create or transform reality rather than describe it.

Gregory Orr  
*Poetry As Survival (The Life of Poetry: Poets on Their Art and Craft)* (2002)  
University of Georgia Press

Poetry is the kind of thing you have to see from the corner of your eye. You can be too well prepared for poetry. . . . It's like a very faint star. If you look straight at it, you can't see it, but if you look a little to one side it is there.

If people around you are in favor, that helps poetry to *be*, to exist. It disappears under disfavor. There are things, you know, human things, that depend on commitment; poetry is one of those things. If you analyze it away, it's gone. It would be like boiling a watch to find out what makes it tick.

If you let your thought play, turn things this way and that, be ready for liveliness, alternatives, new views the possibility of another world – you are in the area of poetry. A poem is a serious joke, a truth that has learned jujitsu. Anyone who breathes is in the rhythm business; anyone who is alive is caught up in the imminences, the doubts mixed with triumphant certainty, of poetry.

William Stafford  
*Writing the Australian Crawl (Poets on Poetry)* (1978)  
University of Michigan Press

The fish trap exists because of the fish;  
Once you've gotten the fish, you can forget the trap.

The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit;  
Once you've gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare.

Words exist because of meaning;  
Once you've gotten the meaning, you can forget the words.

Where can I find a man who has forgotten words  
So I can have a word with him?

Zhuangzi  
(also written as Chuang Tzu) 300 B.C.

Inside me a hundred beings  
Are putting their fingers to their lips and saying,  
“That’s enough for now. Shhhhh.” Silence  
is an ocean. Speech is a river.

When the ocean is searching for you, don't walk  
to the language-river. Listen to the ocean,  
and bring your talky business  
to an end.

Jelaluddin Rumi  
*The Essential Rumi* (1995) by Coleman Barks with John Moyne  
HarperOne

Silence is a privileged entry into the realm of God and into eternal life. For silence is a language that is infinitely deeper, more far reaching, more understanding, more compassionate, and more eternal than any other language.

Meister Eckhart

True silence is the rest of the mind; it is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment.

William Penn

Not merely an absence of noise, Real Silence begins when a reasonable being withdraws from the noise in order to find peace and order in his inner sanctuary.

Peter Minard

Our task is to listen to the news that is always arriving out of silence.  
Rainer Maria Rilke

And both of them, the spirituals and the blues, they was a prayer. One was praying to God and the other was praying to what's human. It's like one was saying, 'Oh, God, let me go,' and the other was saying, 'oh, Mister, let me be.' And they were both the same thing in a way; they were both my people's way of praying to be themselves, praying to be let alone so they could be human.

The spirituals, they had a kind of trance to them, a kind of forgetting. It was like a man closing his eyes so he can see a light inside him. That light, it's far off and you've got to wait to see it. But it's there. It's waiting. The spirituals, they're a way of seeing that light. It's a far-off music; it's a going away, but it's a going away that takes you with it.

Sidney Bechet, jazz musician

It is a great adventure to contemplate the universe, beyond man, to contemplate what it would be like without man, as it was in a great part of its long history and as it is in a great majority of places. When this objective view is finally attained, and the mystery and majesty of matter are fully appreciated, to then turn the objective eye back on man viewed as matter, to see life as part of this universal mystery of greatest depth, is to sense an experience which is very rare, and very exciting. It usually ends in laughter and a delight in the futility of trying to understand what this atom in the universe is, this thing – atoms with curiosity – that looks at itself and wonders why it wonders.

Richard Feynman  
*The Meaning of It All; Thoughts of a Citizen Scientist* (1998)  
Helix Books/Addison-Wesley

It began in mystery and it will end in mystery. However many of life's large, captivating principles and small, captivating details we may explore, unpuzzle, and learn by heart, there will still be vast unknown realms to lure us. If uncertainty is the essence of romance, there will always be enough uncertainty to make life sizzle and renew our sense of wonder. It bothers some people that no matter how passionately they may delve, the universe remains inscrutable. 'For my part,' Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote, 'I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move.' The great affair, the love affair with life, is to live as variously as possible, to groom one's curiosity like a high-spirited thoroughbred, climb aboard, and gallop over the thick, sun-struck hills every day. Where there is no risk, the emotional terrain is flat and unyielding, and, despite all its dimensions, valleys, pinnacles, and detours, life will seem to have none of its magnificent geography, only a length. It began in mystery, and it will end in mystery, but what a savage and beautiful country lies in between.

Diane Ackerman  
*A Natural History of the Senses* (1990) Random House

## Keeping Quiet

Now we will count to twelve  
and we will all keep still  
for once on the face of the earth,  
let's not speak in any language;  
let's stop for a second,  
and not move our arms so much.

It would be an exotic moment  
without rush, without engines;  
we would all be together  
in a sudden strangeness.

Fishermen in the cold sea  
would not harm whales  
and the man gathering salt  
would not look at his hurt hands.

Those who prepare green wars,  
wars with gas, wars with fire,  
victories with no survivors,  
would put on clean clothes  
and walk about with their brothers  
in the shade, doing nothing.

What I want should not be confused  
with total inactivity.

Life is what it is about...

If we were not so single-minded  
about keeping our lives moving,  
and for once could do nothing,  
perhaps a huge silence  
might interrupt this sadness  
of never understanding ourselves  
and of threatening ourselves with death.

Now I'll count up to twelve  
and you keep quiet and I will go.

Pablo Neruda

From *Extravagaria* (translated by Alastair Reid)

Jonathan Cape, London, 1972 (original *Estravagario*, Editorial Losada, Buenos Aires, 1958)