

James Fenton Quotes

*Writing, Doe, Musical, War, Lines, Order, Children, Reading, Poetic, Art, Song,
Poetry, Voice, Age, Faces, Accidents, Names, Transmission, Epic, English
Poetry*

The writing of a poem is like a child throwing stones into a mineshaft. You compose first, then you listen for the reverberation.

~James Fenton

Imitation, if it is not forgery, is a fine thing. It stems from a generous impulse, and a realistic sense of what can and cannot be done.

~James Fenton

The lullaby is the spell whereby the mother attempts to transform herself back from an ogre to a saint.

~James Fenton

Babies are not brought by storks and poets are not produced by workshops.

~James Fenton

Hearing that the same men who brought us 'South Park' were mounting a musical to be called 'The Book of Mormon,' we were tempted to turn away, as from an inevitable massacre.

~James Fenton

One does not become a guru by accident.

~James Fenton

A cabaret song has got to be written - for the middle voice, ideally - because you've got to hear the wit of the words. And a cabaret song gives the singer room to act, more even than an opera singer.

~James Fenton

Windbags can be right. Aphorists can be wrong. It is a tough world.

~James Fenton

In rap, as in most popular lyrics, a very low standard is set for rhyme; but this was not always the case with popular music.

~James Fenton

My feeling is that poetry will wither on the vine if you don't regularly come back to the simplest fundamentals of the poem: rhythm, rhyme, simple subjects - love, death, war.

~James Fenton

English poetry begins whenever we decide to say the modern English language begins, and it extends as far as we decide to say that the English language extends.

~James Fenton

Poetry carries its history within it, and it is oral in origin. Its transmission was oral.

~James Fenton

The Mormon mission to Africa, as to other dark-skinned parts of the world, was for a long time hobbled by the racism of the movement's scripture.

~James Fenton

The composer does not want the self-sufficiency of a richly complex text: he or she wants to feel that the text is something in need of musical setting.

~James Fenton

Nobody really knows whether they are a poet. I knew I was interested from the age of 15.

~James Fenton

At somewhere around 10 syllables, the English poetic line is at its most relaxed and manageable.

~James Fenton

What happened to poetry in the twentieth century was that it began to be written for the page.

~James Fenton

My sonnet asserts that the sonnet still lives. My epic, should such fortune befall me, asserts that the heroic narrative is not lost - that it is born again.

~James Fenton

Considering the wealth of poetic drama that has come down to us from the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, it is surprising that so little of any value has been added since.

~James Fenton

When Mr Ackroyd says that in the 18th century, stranglers bit off the noses of their victims, I feel that he probably knows what he is talking about. I just wish he hadn't told me.

~James Fenton

Oh let us not be condemned for what we are. It is enough to account for what we do.

~James Fenton

I don't see that a single line can constitute a stanza, although it can constitute a whole poem.

~James Fenton

A poem with grandly conceived and executed stanzas, such as one of Keats's odes, should be like an enfilade of rooms in a palace: one proceeds, with eager anticipation, from room to room.

~James Fenton

One problem we face comes from the lack of any agreed sense of how we should be working to train ourselves to write poetry.

~James Fenton

I prefer writing in the mornings, so to that extent I have a routine. I do reading and other things in the afternoon.

~James Fenton

Generally speaking, rhyme is the marker for the end of a line. The first rhyme-word is like a challenge thrown down, which the poem itself has to respond to.

~James Fenton

Great poetry does not have to be technically intricate.

~James Fenton

There is no objection to the proposal: in order to learn to be a poet, I shall try to write a sonnet. But the thing you must try to write, when you do so, is a real sonnet, and not a practice sonnet.

~James Fenton

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