

What It Takes

It takes so much to make a poem even a small and faithful one
 bucolic quatrain stoic epitaph haiku's reticent gesture
it takes entire planets whole solar systems the vast peculiar cosmos
 of a carefully prepared understanding

Let's admit it poetry is not very efficient the genuine article demands
 all the light one mind can absorb to release such astonishing force
it asks every atom of our being to detonate the private Hiroshima of
 insight the half-life of lingering implication
poetry is destructive yes it has split more than one planet in two and
 yet it yields no more than the energy of which it is composed

Poetry demands a lot and the contents of a poem are not economical either
to describe even a glass of water necessitates several oceans
to observe so much as a hillock a knoll a rise requires an enormous range
 Carpathians the Hindu Kush and surely Shelley scaled many peaks
 getting a grip on Mont Blanc
what endless rivers flowed when Stevens gazed across the fateful one that
 runs past Haddam Meadows
how many soldiers died as Homer cut his hero down in dust

Poetry asks everything
it asks all the poems that have ever been all the people and places things
 and thoughts
poetry is to seek everywhere to find in any object no detail too cunning
 for it no elaboration too grandiose
it appears profligate
it shows itself multitudinous
it looks to overlap infinity or so it seems to the man at his keyboard each
 morning struggling to assemble materials
poetry wants whole worlds

But in fact it's not that easy
there exists just one world really and in it just several poets and in them
 only a very few poems