Ars Poetica

By Archibald MacLeish

A poem should be palpable and mute
  As a globed fruit,

Dumb
  As old medallions to the thumb,

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone
  Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—

A poem should be wordless
  As the flight of birds.

  *

A poem should be motionless in time
  As the moon climbs,

Leaving, as the moon releases
  Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,
  Memory by memory the mind—

A poem should be motionless in time
  As the moon climbs.

  *

A poem should be equal to:
  Not true.

For all the history of grief
  An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

For love
  The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—

A poem should not mean
  But be.

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Source: Collected Poems 1917-1952 (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1952)