

Written Off

"They don't teach handwriting anymore. They say we don't need it."

My grandson

John Donne confessed: "I cannot

say I loved, for who can say

he was killed yesterday?"

Anyone

who ever loved agrees.

Equally

ironic was Minucius Felix:

"Is it not foolish to worship

what one ought to weep for,

and to weep for what one ought

to worship?"

That's dated tomorrow.

Robert Frost insisted that

the sound of words should match

their sense, which makes speed-

reading an insult to poetry

and a total waste of attention.

Flaubert dismissed all progress

as vain unless it was moral.

Immoral progress still prevails.

All these are quotes from books

I've read.

Quoting or jotting
notes in margins or underlining
words is how I chat
with authors as I read.

It lifts
communication to communion.

Screen-viewing fails because it
seems more public than a reader's
privacy before a page.

Viewing's gift is recognition.

Understanding comes with words.

That's why I'm close to books
in all their bound variety---
the bookness of books.

And yet
what else are books but scripts
translated into print?

Each written
page produces multiple printed
copies, affirming the root
difference between machinofacturing
and manufacturing---made by hand.

The privacy I taste while reading
handwritten letters is even
more intimate.

The writer's
presence on the page is life

itself transcribed.

Why else

are letters of love, praise,
gratitude or understanding rarely
thrown away?

What the heart

prompts the hand to say
on paper has no equal.

Imagine

discovering a handwritten sonnet
of Shakespeare's signed by Shakespeare.

Imagine it side by side

with thousands of printed copies
of the same sonnet.

Which one

brings you closer to Shakespeare?