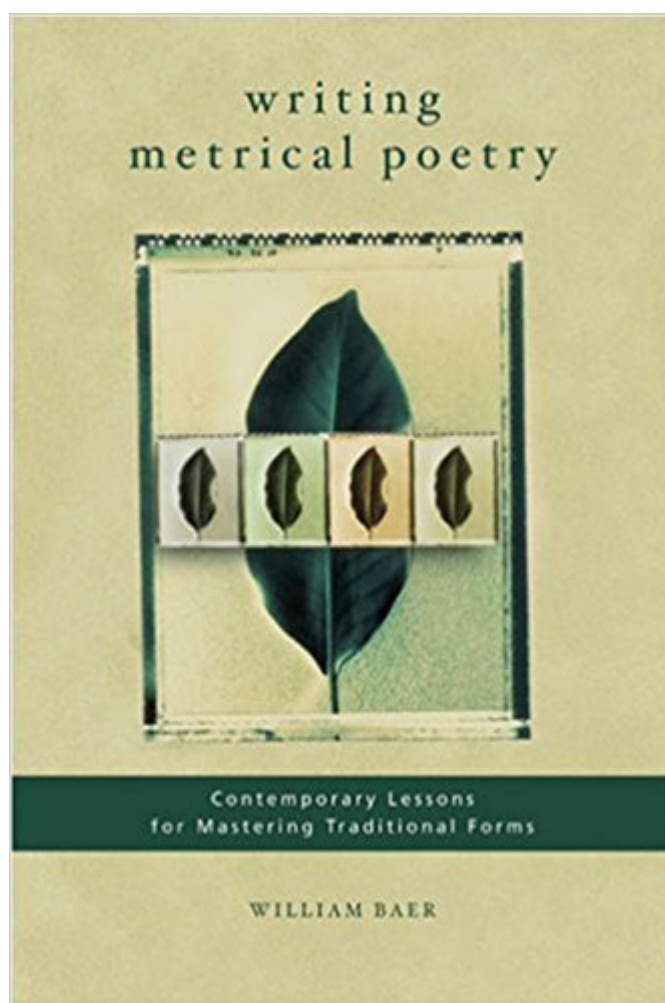


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Writing Metrical Poetry: Contemporary Lessons For Mastering Traditional Forms



Synopsis

Write poetry in the great metrical tradition of Dante, Shakespeare, Dickinson, Frost, and the poets of the current Formalist revival. In this contemporary guide, you'll learn how to write metrical poetry in all the major forms, from blank verse and quatrains to sonnets and villanelles. Each chapter provides step-by-step instruction that's accessible and easy to understand for even the most beginning poet. This book includes unique features difficult to find anywhere else: Essential but non-intimidating instruction on meter and rhyme; Focused assignments detailing how to make your first attempt at a specific form; Illuminating discussions on pop culture, figures of speech, difficult themes, and other important topics; An engaging overview of poetry's history, and why it's important to learn the traditional forms; Complementing the instruction are many classic and contemporary poems, including recent work by Richard Wilbur, Wendy Cope, X.J. Kennedy, Dana Gioia, Rachel Hadas, Wyatt Prunty, Alicia Stallings, and many others. Writing Metrical Poetry is the perfect course in metrical poetry for the person working alone or working in the classroom.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

William Baer is the founding editor and publisher of The Formalist and head of the University of Evansville Press. He is the winner of the T.S. Elliot prize for poetry, a NEA fellowship for fiction and the Jack Nicholson Screenwriting Award. He lives in Evansville, Indiana.

This is a valuable little book that helps poets disentangle the long standing argument between Modernist poetry and the inherited forms of poetry. The author prefers the structured poetry and gives many examples of how the sound of a poem contributes to its haunting effect. There are essays at the end of the book showing the differing stances still alive in poetry today. He explains poetic terms in an easy way and makes many things formerly dark, clear. An excellent book for poets.

Just a caveat before I begin. I had been writing metrical verse for some years before purchasing this book. I was familiar with the author because of his years as editor of *The Formalist*. I happened to come across this book while browsing at . Intrigued by its title and author, I purchased it, hoping to gain some very detailed insight and advice about the mechanics of writing metrical poetry. Instead, what I received was a defense of the practice of formalism in an age dominated by free verse, a rather basic introduction to scansion and metrical substitution, followed by definitions and examples of blank verse, ballad stanzas, the sonnet and the French forms such as the villanelle and the triolet. Baer's manual offers exercises for the poet, but no way to grade them or evaluate them. The exercises offered are very general, such as "write a sonnet, using either the Italian or English format. Use only pentameters and solid rhymes. Avoid the pop culture. Avoid old-fashioned diction. Avoid convoluted syntax that's manipulated to hit the rhymes." What is the reader to do when she/he has already written 60 or 70 sonnets? The book purposely avoids technical language. You won't learn of anacoluthon, asyndeton, synairesis, aposiopesis, sczons, rima bacciata, apocope, syncope, acatalexis, acephalexis or similar terms. In short, it is a strictly introductory level book, probably intended for the poet who has been dabbling in free verse and who wishes to try her/his hand at formalism, but has very little experience with traditional poetic forms. I have found that many other books go into greater depth, even though these other books are intended to help the reader of metrical poetry and not strictly the writer: Paul Fussell's *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, Beum and Shapiro's *The Prosody Handbook: A Guide to Poetic Form*, Steele's *All the Fun's in How You Say a Thing*, Turco's *The Book of Forms*, Pinsky's *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide*, and Hollander's *Rhyme's Reason*. I think the book would be very useful for its intended readership, but I don't expect a budding neoforalist trying to improve his/her craft to get the type of information she/he is looking for. Had I come across this book in an actual bookstore and had the opportunity to peruse it in more depth, rather than online, I wouldn't have purchased it.

The book arrived quickly and in excellent condition. I am reading through the "course in writing poetry" and have found it quite helpful with the practice suggestions.

Metrical Poetry is not the only form of poetry. There are times when a writer is restricted by using metrical poetry. However, a good book on this subject.

Many poets write only free verse because that's all they know! But learning about only 5 little feet (the iamb, trochee, anapest, dactyl, and spondee) will enable you to enter the centuries-old party of poets who waltz or jive their way into traditional forms. In the book *Writing Metrical Poetry*, William Baer clearly demonstrates each step, assigns practice pieces, and calls you into the dance. Besides his clear discussions of such important subjects as rhyme, rhythm, compression, lines, emphasis, and metrical feet, Professor Baer provides you with traditional patterns you can turn to whenever you want to write a sonnet, villanelle, triolet, rondeau, or other timeless, well-loved form. Or, if you want to help other poets and poetry students find contemporary uses for classical forms, this highly recommended book will help teachers too.

I'm not a poet, but have always enjoyed reading it. Perhaps there are more technical and advanced books available, but I would say William Baer strikes the right balance explaining the terms and the forms without overwhelming the interested reader or budding poet. Nor does he stop there. He gives examples aplenty and powerfully simple and straightforward analysis. Best of all, he avoids the touchy-feely approach of more populist poetry manuals that throw the rules out the window and just want you to get in touch with your inner self.

If you wish to learn the rules and methods of mastering metrical poetry, look no further than *Writing Metrical Poetry: Contemporary Lessons for Mastering Traditional Forms*. It's a rarity in the world of the poetic free verse of modern times, and provides all the details needed to work with poetry in the major forms, from quatrains to sonnets and beyond. Step-by-step directions offer easy instructions and plenty of examples and exercises to reinforce focused assignments. Diane C.

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