



The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms

From Strand, Mark (EDT)/ Boland, Eavan (EDT)

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"Concise, learned, revisionary... should enrich the passionate conversation about poetic forms for years to come."? Edward Hirsch, author of *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry*

Two of our foremost poets provide here a lucid, straightforward primer that "looks squarely at some of the headaches and mysteries of poetic form": a book for readers who have always felt that an understanding of form (sonnet, ballad, villanelle, sestina, among others) would enhance their appreciation of poetry. Tracing "the exuberant history of forms," they devote one chapter to each form, offering explanation, close reading, and a rich selection of exemplars that amply demonstrate the power and possibility of that form.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The Making of a Poem is among the best how-to-read-poetry titles. Edited by two of our greatest living poets, one Irish and female, the other American and male, it is both an exploration of poetic forms and an anthology. Eavan Boland and Mark Strand each offer an introduction and then give us a series of chapters devoted to particular verse forms--the sonnet, the ballad, the sestina, the villanelle, blank verse, the stanza--as well as a long section devoted to what they somewhat vaguely call shaping forms. This refers to poetic structures established not by a specific rhyme and/or metrical pattern but by content: the elegy, for example, or the pastoral or ode. The book then concludes with a section on open forms. Each chapter is conveniently subdivided, each topic simply defined: a single page gives "The Ballad at a Glance" (or, for that matter, the pantoum) as a quick overview of the form's structure. A page or two on the history of the form follows, along with a brief comment on "the contemporary context." Then a chronological anthology of poems demonstrates the particular form. In the sonnet's case, for instance, we are treated to 23 brilliantly chosen examples--everything from Shakespeare's "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" to Seamus Heaney's "The Haw Lantern" to Mary Jo Salter's playful "Half a Double Sonnet." The section then concludes with another brief analysis of one example. In this spot, the villanelle features Elizabeth Bishop's classic heartbreaker, "One Art," and blank verse gives us far too brief a take on Robert Frost's tantalizing "Directive." Itself worth the price of admission, the poem begins:

Back out of all this now too much for us,
Back in a time made simply by the loss
of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off
Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,
There is a house that is no more than a house
Upon a farm that is no more than a farm
And in a town that is no more than a town.

One can readily see both the advantages and the limitations of such a format: definitions are kept lean, at times approaching the sound bite, and the short sentences and brief paragraphs often seem designed for a readership more accustomed to journalism than to the complexities of Dante (see, for example, the one-page history of the sestina). All of this looks like an attempt to reach an audience of both college students and general readers. While more information might help (brief comments on why certain poems in the anthology are defined as odes, pastorals, or elegies, for example), the bottom line is that *The Making of a Poem* does an excellent job of taking the inexperienced reader inside the mystery of poetic form. In these terms the volume succeeds, giving us a way into the history of poetry, along with an excellent anthology as a starting point for a deeper exploration of the glories of the genre. --*Doug Thorpe*

From Library Journal

If example is the best teacher, than students new to traditional poetic forms can learn much from this collection of villanelles, sestinas, sonnets, elegies, pastorals, ballads, pantoums, odes, and other familiar structures that have shaped English poetry since Beowulf. Each chapter focuses on a single form, but explanatory material is kept to a minimum: a concise list of formal characteristics, a summary history, a short discussion of the form's contemporary context, and a brief "close up" on an individual poem. Most useful are the selections themselves, which illustrate how particular forms have been employed over time, from canonical classics by Chaucer, Shelley, and Elizabeth Bishop through newer pieces by Hayden Carruth,

Michael Palmer, and Thylia Moss. The concluding section on open forms seems somewhat uncertain and conservative, barely straying from much of what precedes it, but that's to be expected given the tastes of the editors, each of whom provides a lively and personal introductory essay that young poets should find quite instructive. D. Fred Muratori, Cornell Univ. Lib. Ithaca, NY
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Review

"A generous and exquisitely selective anthology of poetry forms that may make you decide to give up E-mail and start writing sestinas and villanelles." (Francine Prose - Elle)

"A marvelous new anthology... intended for readers daunted by terminology and complex poetic forms."
(Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

"This is the book writers and readers, teachers and students, have been dreaming of?canny, generous, and practical, Boland and Strand are ideal guides through the golden labyrinth of poetry at its most ingenious and commanding. A marvelous collection!" (J.D. McClatchy)

"Much more poetry than commentary appears, making the book both a splendid classroom text and, since the selections are top-drawer poems by first-rate poets, a book any poetry lover or would-be poetry lover may learn from and love." (Booklist)

Users Review

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