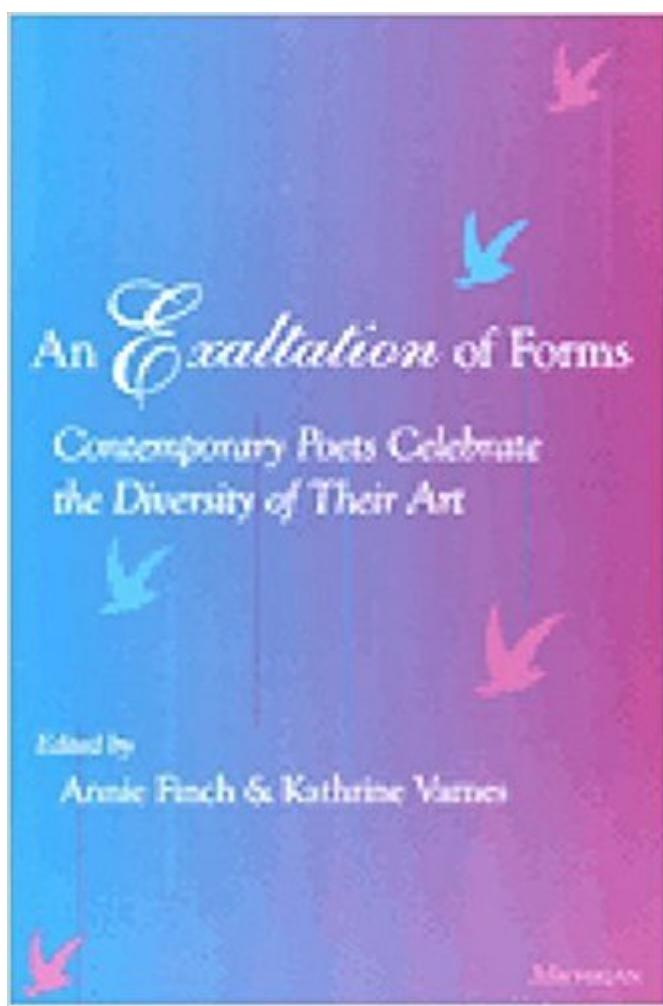


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An Exaltation Of Forms: Contemporary Poets Celebrate The Diversity Of Their Art



Synopsis

At once handbook, reader, and guide to the literary tastes and wisdom of poets, *An Exaltation of Forms* is an indispensable resource certain to find a dedicated audience among poetry lovers. The editors invited over fifty contemporary poets to select a poetic meter, stanza, or form, describe it, recount its history, and provide favorite examples. The essays represent a remarkably diverse range of literary styles and approaches, and show how the forms of contemporary English-language poetry derive from a wealth of different traditions. The forms range from hendecasyllabics to prose poetry, haiku to procedural poetry, sonnets to blues, rap to fractal verse. The range of poets included is equally impressive--from Amiri Baraka to John Frederick Nims, from Maxine Kumin to Marilyn Hacker, from Agha Shahid Ali to Pat Mora, from W. D. Snodgrass to Charles Bernstein. Achieving this level of eclecticism is a remarkable feat, especially given the strong opinions held by members of the various camps (e.g., the New Formalists, LANGUAGE poets, feminist and multicultural poets) that exist within today's poetry community. Poets who might never occupy the same room here occupy the same pages, perhaps for the first time. The net effect is a book that will surprise, inform, and delight a wide range of readers, whether as reference book, pleasure reading, or classroom text. Poet, translator, and critic Annie Finch is director of the Stonecoast low-residency MFA program at the University of Southern Maine. She is author of *The Ghost of Meter: Culture and Prosody in American Free Verse*, *Eve*, and *Calendars*. She is the winner of the eleventh annual Robert Fitzgerald Prosody Award for scholars who have made a lasting contribution to the art and science of versification. Kathrine Varnes teaches English at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She is the author of the book of poems, *The Paragon*. Her poems and essays have appeared in many books and journals.

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Customer Reviews

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When I started to edit An Exaltation of Forms, everyone thought my vision for the book was a revolutionary idea: Ã to invite performance poets, free verse poets, metrical poets, and exploratory poets together into one book to talk about what form meant to them and to provide discussion and examples of their favorite forms. It took eight years to edit the book, and by the time we were done, everyone thought the idea made complete sense. Ã It is still the only book of its kind, and I hear constantly from people who use it in teaching or in their own writing and find it irreplaceable.

this is an indispensable book for my poetry practice...

Excellent text.

I LOVE this book and urge you to read it. In fact, I found it important enough to reference in my MFA poetry thesis: "My attitude towards formal poetics echoes that of friends and colleagues Annie Finch and Kathrine Varnes, as detailed in their recent anthology An Exaltation of Forms: 'by including both exploratory and traditional forms. . . . [we] hope to open a discussion about form that cuts across poetic movements, which have for too long either ignored or distorted each others' insights and expertise' (2). In the spirit of Smith, both Finch and Varnes embrace this multiplicity of being, but they apply the concept to poetic form itself. I too find their willingness to consider organic form seriously a sturdy bridge between New Formalism and the more experimental and 'non-academic' schools of poetry. Such willingness to hear, to learn, and to understand can make poetry (and other cloven territory) stronger at its broken places." Whether you are a hardcore formalist or convinced that "form equals fascism" (a position that I would gently urge you to reconsider), you will find many tools for the poetic toolbox in this book. Keep an open mind, and a both-and rather than either-or mentality, and try the experiments that you find the most suspect. For me, it was Jena Osman's procedural poetry (pp. 366-78), which involved the seemingly inane exercise of circling words in a printed article, then using those words to build a draft of a poem. What I got was one of my

strongest free-verse pieces! For a book to cover a range of expertise and poetics including (but not limited to!) Dana Gioia, Shahid Ali, Marilyn Hacker, Allison Jospéh, Hilda Morley, Alice Fulton, Tim Steele, Tracie Morris, Bob Holman, Amiri Baraka, DJ Renegade, Sam Gwynn, and Charles Bernstein is nothing short of amazing. That Finch and Varnes came out with a book useful for creative writing workshops, individual writers, literary theorists, and general readers is a great gift to all of us who care about the art and craft of poetry.

Finch and Varnes have compiled and edited a groundbreaking and important book on poetry and its forms. Most outstanding is how the book is true to its title; it IS an exaltation of forms. Eclipsing Lewis Turco's *The Book of Forms*, this volume celebrates poetic expression in its polyvalent forms. The editors gathered short, pithy introductions to poetic forms (from dactyl metrics to the ghazal) used by practicing poets from the well-known (Billy Collins, Maxine Kumin) to the emerging (Vince Gotera, Tracie Morris). Accompanying the introductions are poetic examples of the forms. Most impressive is the range and eclecticism of topics: LANGUAGE poetry lies next to new formalist poetry lies next to slam poetry lies next to shaped poetry. In short, this book deftly and enthusiastically answers the question of where poetry stands at the beginning of the 21st century. Highest recommendation.

I LOVE this book and urge you to read it. In fact, I found it important enough to reference in my MFA poetry thesis: "My attitude towards formal poetics echoes that of friends and colleagues Annie Finch and Kathrine Varnes, as detailed in their recent anthology *An Exaltation of Forms*: 'by including both exploratory and traditional forms. . . . [we] hope to open a discussion about form that cuts across poetic movements, which have for too long either ignored or distorted each others' insights and expertise' (2). In the spirit of Smith, both Finch and Varnes embrace this multiplicity of being, but they apply the concept to poetic form itself. I too find their willingness to consider organic form seriously a sturdy bridge between New Formalism and the more experimental and 'non-academic' schools of poetry. Such willingness to hear, to learn, and to understand can make poetry (and other cloven territory) stronger at its broken places." Whether you are a hardcore formalist or convinced that "form equals fascism" (a position that I would gently urge you to reconsider), you will find many tools for the poetic toolbox in this book. Keep an open mind, and a both-and rather than either-or mentality, and try the experiments that you find the most suspect. For me, it was Jena Osman's procedural poetry (pp. 366-78), which involved the seemingly inane exercise of circling words in a printed article, then using those words to build a draft of a poem. A strong and very different kind of

poem resulted from my willingness to try procedural form exercises. For a book to cover a range of expertise and poetics including (but not limited to!) Dana Gioia, Shahid Ali, Marilyn Hacker, Allison Jospeh, Hilda Morley, Alice Fulton, Tim Steele, Tracie Morris, Bob Holman, Amiri Baraka, DJ Renegade, Sam Gwynn, and Charles Bernstein is nothing short of amazing. That Finch and Varnes came out with a book useful for creative writing workshops, individual writers, literary theorists, and general readers is a great gift to all of us who care about the art and craft of poetry.

Wow, this book has made quite an impression. There is nothing I can say to top what has been said already, but what I can do is add my two cents of approval. I actually prefer this book over Turco's Book of Forms. It reads better and explains the forms better. This book covers a wide variety of traditional and experimental forms of poetry. And Finch and Varnes pulled together a diverse group of poets, from R.S. Gwynn and Dana Gioia to Maxine Chernoff and DJ Renegade. From Anthony Hecht to Paul Hoover. There's Tim Steele, Jan Hodge, X.J. Kennedy, Agha Shahid Ali, Maxine Kumin, Charles Bernstein, and Billy Collins. You get all styles of poets and poetry within. For any serious poet, this is a must have book. And it is loaded with great examples of each type it discusses.

My undergrad poetry professor assigned this book for a formal poetry class. That was one of the best things that has ever happened to my work. An Exaltation of Forms forever changed the way I write. Thanks for putting together such an amazing book!

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