

FRONTIER POETRY LAB'S

CRAFT BIBLIOGRAPHY & WORKBOOK

We've collected here a small selection of six of our favorite books on the craft of writing poetry. This list is not exhaustive nor prescriptive, but I do hope it helps clarify a direction on your continued path to self-improvement in your writing.

I've also included templates for you to track and process your own experience of these works, as you would if you were participating in an MFA program.

The list is also, unfortunately, not yet diverse enough—the poetry community is on the vanguard of equity and inclusion, but we still have plenty of catching up to do. Please, if you have suggestions of craft books by authors of color / underrepresented writers, send them to me (josh@frontierpoetry.com) and I will share them with everyone in the lab.

—Josh // Editor, Frontier Poetry

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HOW TO READ CRAFT BOOKS

Always trust your gut.

Poetry is forever changing, the priorities and expectations of your peers always renewing—but it will also always be centered around your own authenticity and emotional truth.

Don't be defensive. Don't be passive.

Do be eager for that electric touch of insight.





FOUNDATIONAL

These three texts will offer a clear view of the foundations of much of contemporary poetry. Ultimately, readers decide what poetry is, and poets can only do their best to articulate back to them the structures of their joy. These texts are among our current best attempts to do so.

DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

Not for the faint of heart, these texts seek to illuminate further the crevices and odd corners of those foundations. Here you'll find the nature of writing in tradition and a vivid explication of the long history of poetic forms. Dive into these with determination.

GENERATIVE FOCUS

If you're looking to be directed more specifically toward the creation of new work, in response to deep thinking on craft, this book performs that service exceptionally well. Look here to be spurred onto exciting subjects and new adventures of writing.





A POETRY HANDBOOK

by Mary Oliver

“Whatever can’t be taught, there is a great deal that can, and must, be learned. This book is about the things that can be learned.” —from the Introduction

I cannot recommend this book enough. So much good advice fills the slim volume—pound for pound, your best purchase at understanding contemporary craft.

Mary Oliver is not only a fabulous poet but also a fabulous prose writer. This work is the most clear, the most erudite, and the most democratic—in the Whitman sense of the idea: for everyone.

Confused by any of the terminology you see poets and writers whipping around in their discussions and essays and interviews? Mary Oliver’s Handbook is your glossary, your dictionary, your periodic table.

But don’t take her approachability to mean her insight and writing is shallow, by any means. Mary Oliver is as sharp as they come and her writing here, like her poetry, will take you deeper, quicker, than almost any other.

This book is a great starting point to introduce you to the depths of the contemporary-prioritized elements of craft.

THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

/ Introduction
/ Getting Ready
/ Reading Poems
/ Imitation
/ Sound
/ More Devices of Sound
/ The Line
/ Some Given Forms
/ Verse That Is Free
/ Diction, Tone, Voice
/ Imagery
/ Workshops and Solitude
/ Conclusion

122 PAGES





MY ANNOTATION of A POETRY HANDBOOK

IN ONE SENTENCE...

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT IMAGERY?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT MUSICALITY?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT WORD CHOICE?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT THE POETIC LINE?



WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT STRUCTURE & FORM?

WHAT DO I DISAGREE WITH?

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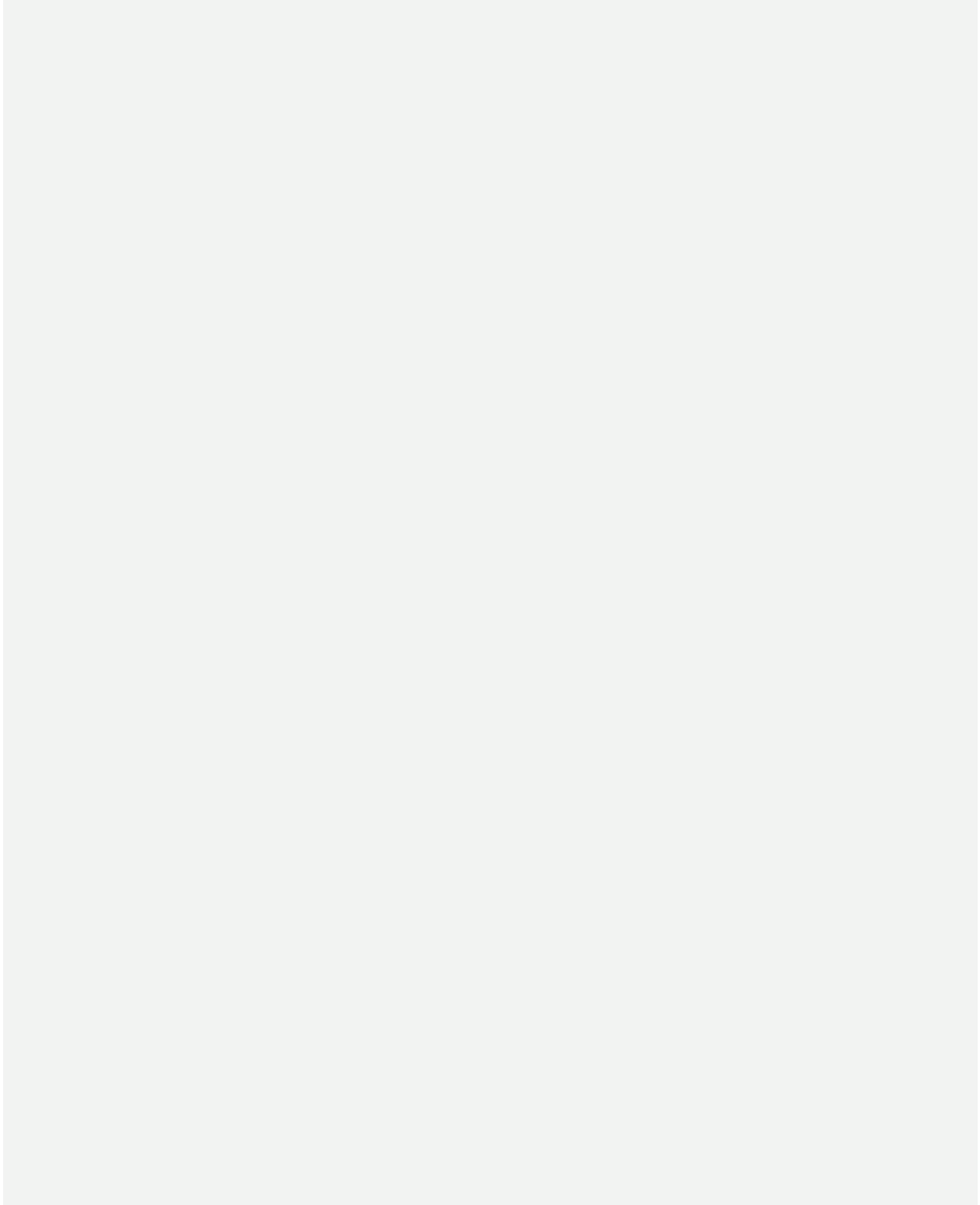
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MY ANNOTATION of A POETRY HANDBOOK

HOW WILL I CHANGE MY WRITING AFTER READING MARY OLIVER?



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THE TRIGGERING TOWN

by Richard Hugo

“I don’t know why we do it. We must be crazy. Welcome, fellow poet.”

Personally, this book was transformative for my own writing and for my understanding of what seemed so magical in other poets’ writing. Though fabulous insights abound throughout, the deep meat of Hugo’s book is in the titular chapter, and it involves the way in which we allow poems to be places of discovery.

All writers are on a journey of connecting to the deep and mysterious places within themselves and Hugo’s illuminative method of creating poems gives much needed structure and guidance on that journey. His focus is on how we must, inevitably, trust ourselves and trust our associative mind to bring us to truth—and bring us to truth in such a way as to be relatable and interesting for others!

His theory of triggering subject —> generated subject may be just what you need to hear to unlock those new poems within. It will also open up your understanding of how contemporary poets infuse their work with that surprising and energetic flow between subjects within their poems.

THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

- / Introduction
- / Writing Off the Subject
- / The Triggering Town
- / Assumptions
- / Stray Thoughts on Roethke & Teaching
- / Nuts and Bolts
- / In Defense of Creative-Writing Classes
- / Statements of Faith
- / Ci Vediamo
- / How Poets Make a Living

109 PAGES





MY ANNOTATION of THE TRIGGERING TOWN

IN A FEW SENTENCES...

WHAT IS THE TRIGGERING SUBJECT AND HOW IS IT USEFUL?



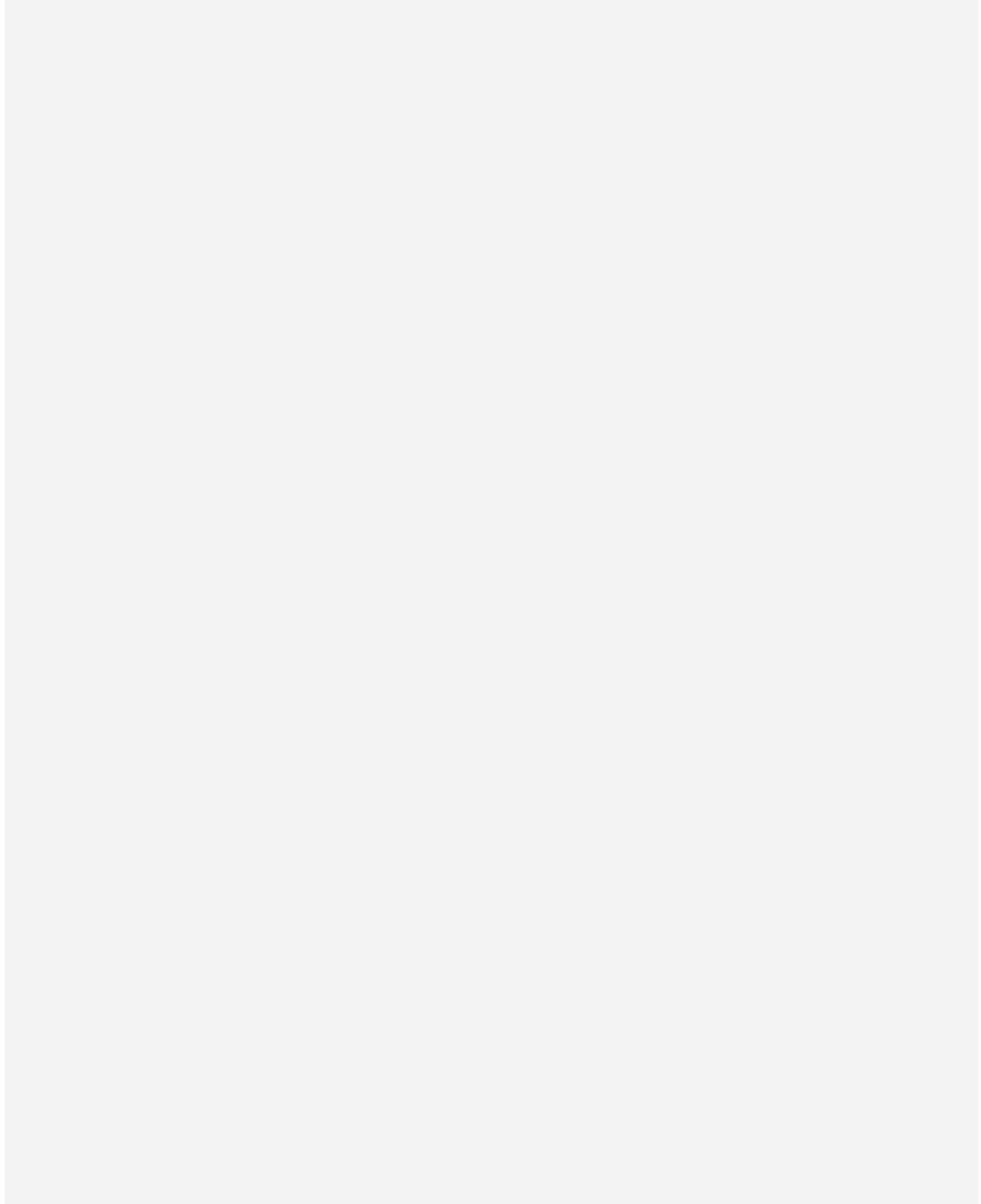
WHAT IS THE GENERATED SUBJECT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?





MY ANNOTATION of THE TRIGGERING TOWN

HOW WILL I CHANGE MY WRITING AFTER READING RICHARD HUGO?



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FAVORITE QUOTES FROM THE TRIGGERING TOWN





THE SOUNDS OF POETRY

by Robert Pinsky

“It is almost as if we sing to one another all day.”

What I love about Pinsky’s book is that it is a deep and careful elaboration of poetic techniques at building musicality—without drifting into pretentiousness or academic jargon.

His method of reading for music is plain-spoken and simple, searching not for rules, but principles or “working ideas” open to change as necessary.

“I hope to focus,” he says in the “Theory” chapter, “on the way an extraordinary system of grunts and mouth-noises evolved by the human primate has been used as the material for art.”

Poetry will forever be about song and music, and I haven’t yet read a more accessible dive into the intricacies of how words on a page can convey rhythm.

I recommend paying special attention to his theories around the ways poetry uses syntax in tension with the line—this in particular is very much a priority of contemporary poets.

THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

/ Introduction
/ Theory
// Accent & Duration
// Syntax & Line
// Technical Terms and Vocal Realities
// Like and Unlike Sounds
// Blank Verse and Free Verse

116 PAGES



MY ANNOTATION of THE SOUNDS OF POETRY

PAGES THAT SHINE

Series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.

WHY

- IMAGERY
LINES
SOUNDWORK
WORD CHOICE
SUBJECT / FEELING
TRADITIONAL FORMS

Five rows with gear icons and dashed lines for notes.

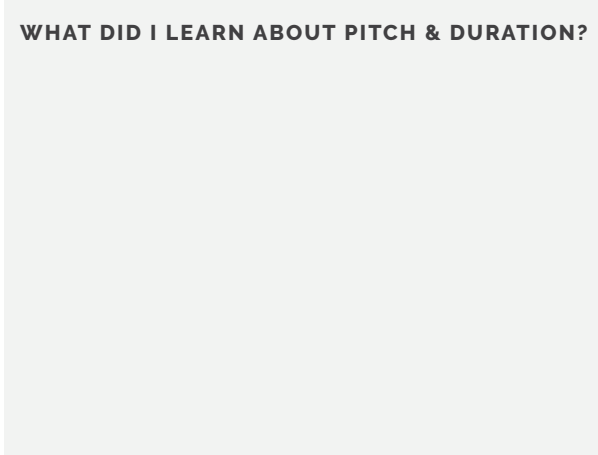
Five rows with square icons and dashed lines for notes.



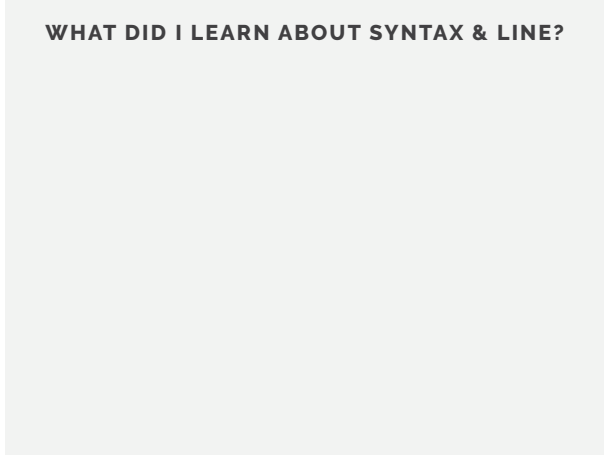
MY ANNOTATION of THE SOUNDS OF POETRY

IN ONE SENTENCE...

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT PITCH & DURATION?



WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT SYNTAX & LINE?



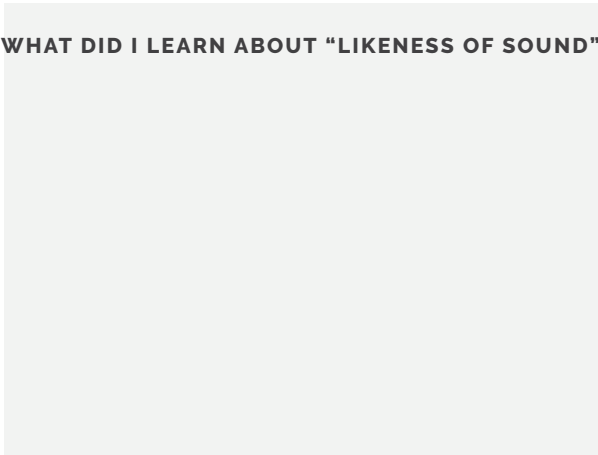
WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT RHYTHM?



WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT METER?



WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT "LIKENESS OF SOUND"?

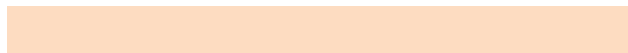


WHAT DO I DISAGREE WITH?

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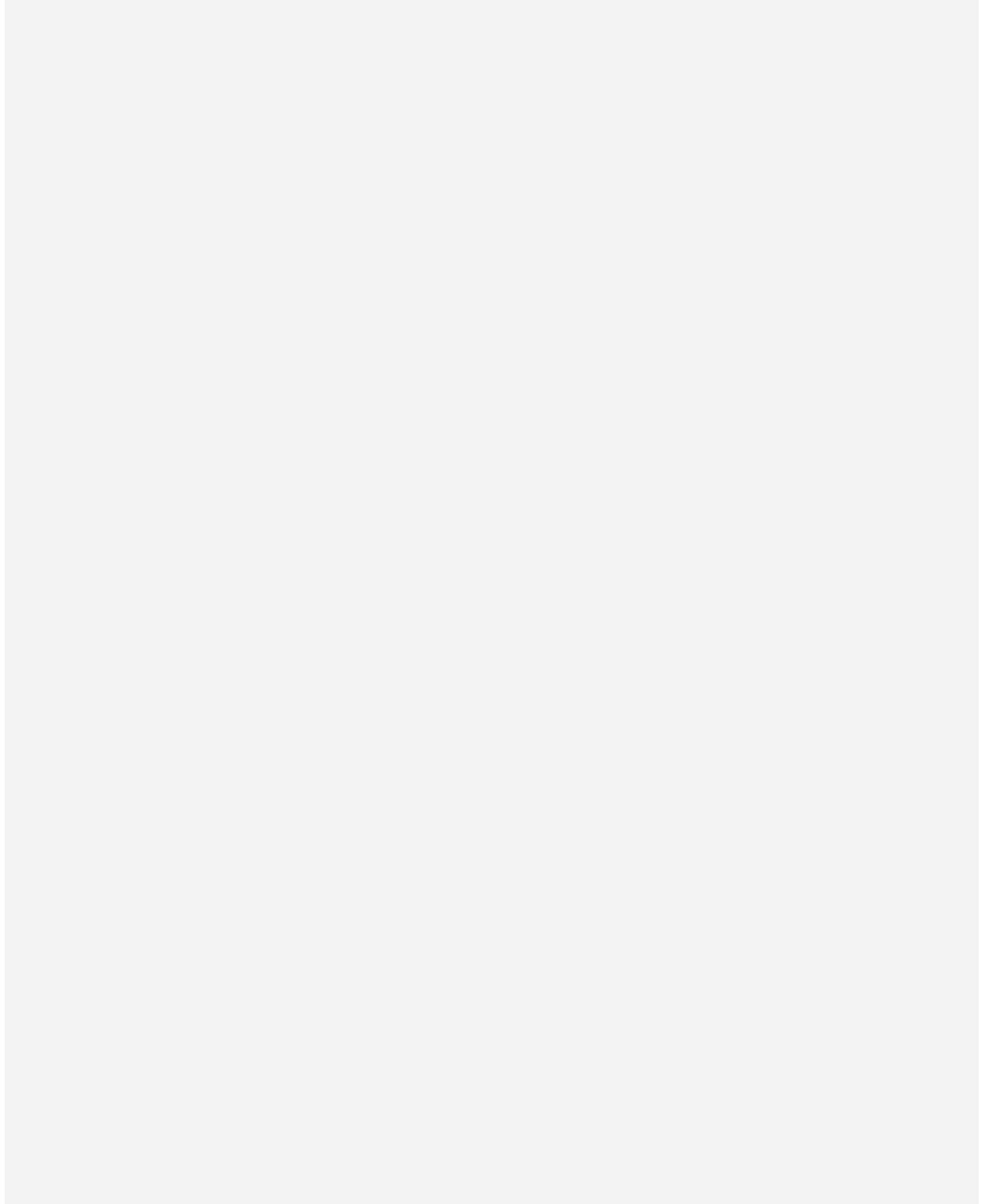
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MY ANNOTATION of THE SOUNDS OF POETRY

HOW WILL I CHANGE MY WRITING AFTER READING ROBERT PINSKY?



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STRONG MEASURES
edited by Philip Dacey & David Jauss

**“At the heart of the debate about
traditional forms is the issue of freedom.”**

Written in celebration of the “renaissance of formal verse in contemporary America,” *Strong Measures* is a necessary text for anyone interested in exploring formal poetry.

The introduction is a well researched and profound defense of the indispensable role of formal poetry in contemporary writing and thinking, as well as an edifying description of the different ways in which today’s poets are approaching the project of bringing traditions forward to their readers. The appendices are also incredibly useful.

Thankfully though, this is a textbook of poetic form that seeks not to explain or describe each and every form, but instead to allow poets to SHOW the forms through poetry. The bulk of the book is its anthology of contemporary formal poetry.

In that way though, the work does not hold your hand. Instead, it asks you to read carefully and closely—to discover, on your own, just what makes Roethke’s “Dinky” a *kyrielle*.

THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

/ Foreward
/ Introduction
/ The Poems
/ Appendix A: Meter & Scansion
/ Appendix B: Definition of Forms
/ Appendix C: Classification of Poems
/ Appendix D: Selected Bibliography of
Books and Articles About Form

465 PAGES





MY ANNOTATION of STRONG MEASURES

THE FORMS I WANT TO TRY MY HAND AT...

FORM: _____ (PAGE _____)
WHAT EXCITES ME ABOUT THIS FORM?

FORM: _____ (PAGE _____)
WHAT EXCITES ME ABOUT THIS FORM?

FORM: _____ (PAGE _____)
WHAT EXCITES ME ABOUT THIS FORM?

FORM: _____ (PAGE _____)
WHAT EXCITES ME ABOUT THIS FORM?

FORM: _____ (PAGE _____)
WHAT EXCITES ME ABOUT THIS FORM?

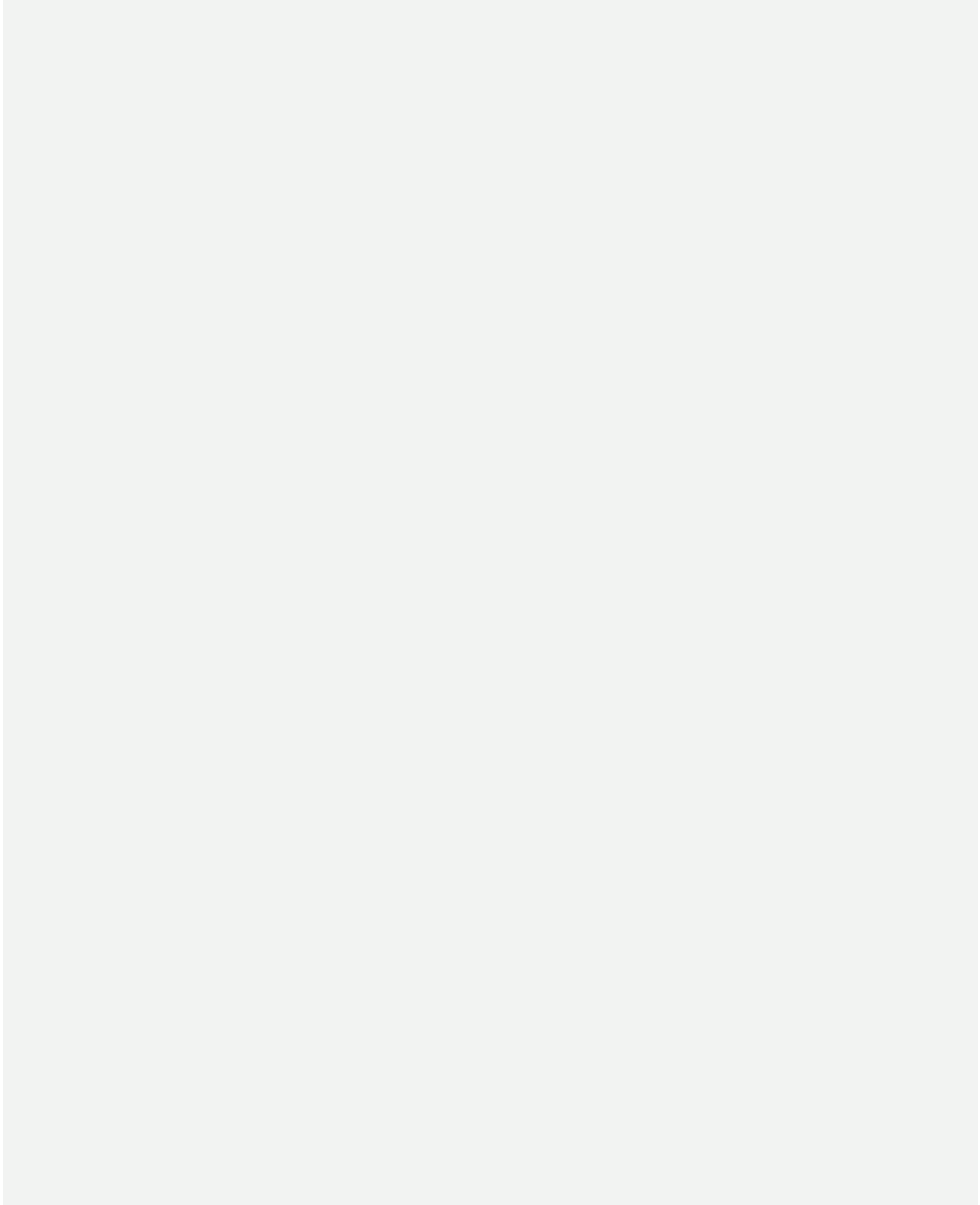
FORM: _____ (PAGE _____)
WHAT EXCITES ME ABOUT THIS FORM?





MY ANNOTATION of STRONG MEASURES

HOW HAS MY UNDERSTANDING OF FORM & POETIC FREEDOM EVOLVED?



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A POET'S GUIDE TO POETRY

by Mary Kinzie

“How is understanding reached? By reading within centuries and within forms and then by reading across centuries and forms. One needs good instruction and a good grasp of the essential processes of poetic thought. This book aims to help in the provision of those essentials.”

So, I told you Pinsky's book is great because it keeps academic jargon at arm's length—I'll tell you now that Kinzie's *A Poet's Guide to Poetry* is great because it waters that academic jargon into a beautiful garden of blooming flowers.

Don't underestimate what this thick tome asks of its reader however—this is a textbook that wants you to take your time in consumption of its ideas. I wouldn't recommend it if I didn't think that time were very well spent.

From the Table of Contents, you can see just how thorough Kinzie wished to be in her text on the craft of poetry. She leaves no stone unturned in her effort to meet all the traditional elements of writing poetry with a modern sensitivity to “moving through uncertainties.”

Give yourself a good month, plenty of empty pages in your notebook for notes, and lots of quiet mornings with strong coffee—and enjoy.

THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

/ Introduction
/ What the Poem Thinks: A Poetics

PART I — The Six Elements of Relation

/ Line & Half-Meaning
/ Syntax & Whole-Meaning
/ Diction & Layers in Meaning
/ Trope & Thought
/ Rhetoric & Speech
/ Rhythm as Combination

PART II — The Elements, Controlled in Time

/ Accentual-Syllabic Meter
/ Stanza & Rhyme
/ Further Rhythms in English
 Counted Forms
/ Further Rhythms in English
 Non-Counted Forms

PART III — Writing in Form

/ Exercises for Beginning and Advanced
 Writers
/ Poetic Terms
/ Annotated Bibliography of Further
 Reading

565 PAGES



MY ANNOTATION of A POET'S GUIDE TO POETRY / PART 1

IN ONE SENTENCE...

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT THE POETIC LINE?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT SYNTAX?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT DICTION?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT TROPE?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT RHETORIC?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT RHYTHM?





MY ANNOTATION of A POET'S GUIDE TO POETRY / PART 2

IN ONE SENTENCE...

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT ACCENT & STRESS?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT METER?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT POETIC TENSION?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT ECHO?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT MANAGING RHYTHM?





MY ANNOTATION of STRONG MEASURES

THE EXERCISES I WANT TO TRY ARE...

EXERCISE: _____ (PAGE _____)
WHAT EXCITES ME ABOUT THIS EXERCISE?

EXERCISE: _____ (PAGE _____)
WHAT EXCITES ME ABOUT THIS EXERCISE?

EXERCISE: _____ (PAGE _____)
WHAT EXCITES ME ABOUT THIS EXERCISE?

EXERCISE: _____ (PAGE _____)
WHAT EXCITES ME ABOUT THIS EXERCISE?

EXERCISE: _____ (PAGE _____)
WHAT EXCITES ME ABOUT THIS EXERCISE?

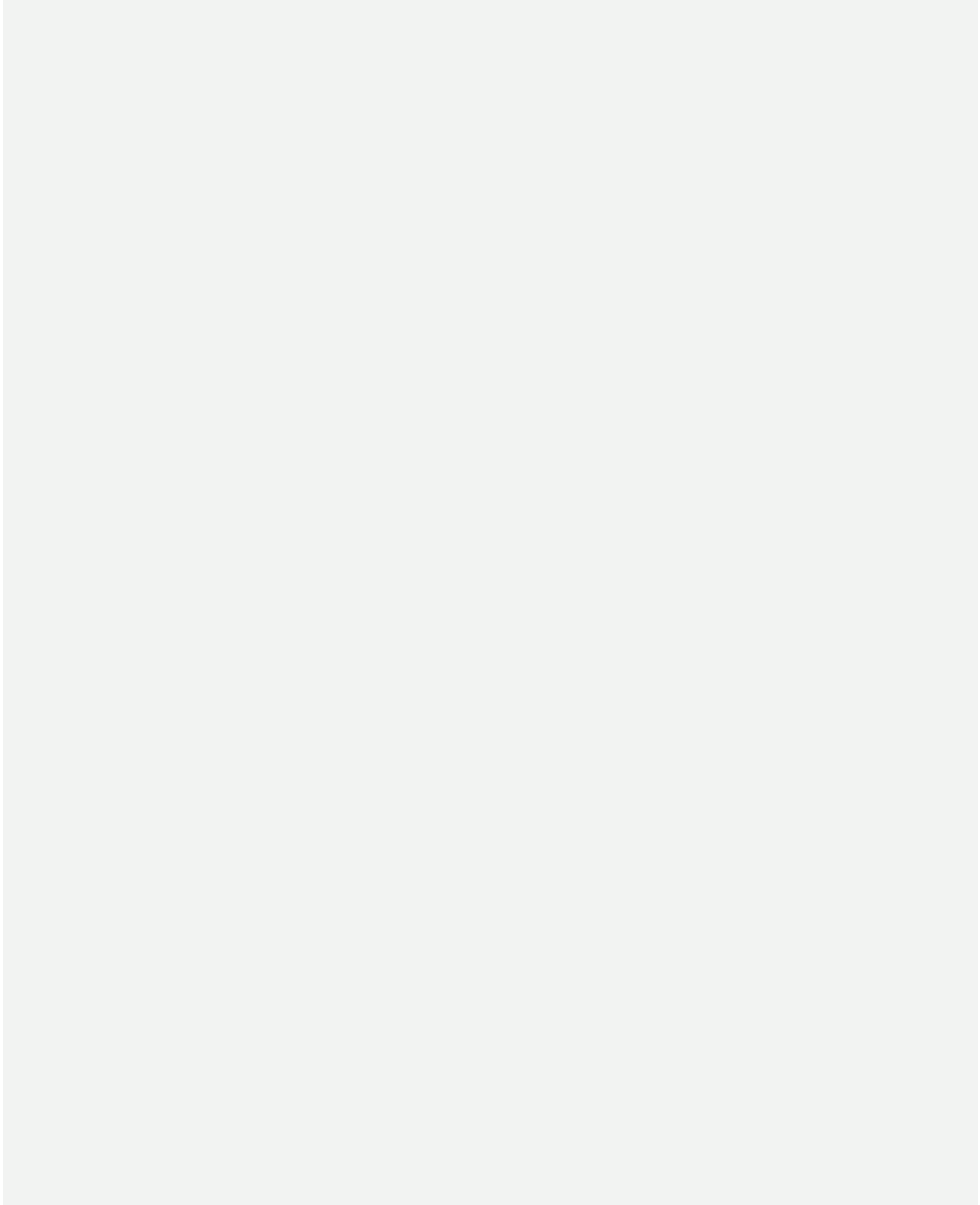
EXERCISE: _____ (PAGE _____)
WHAT EXCITES ME ABOUT THIS EXERCISE?





MY ANNOTATION of A POET'S GUIDE TO POETRY

WHAT HAVE I LEARNED ABOUT MY OWN STYLE FROM THIS BOOK?



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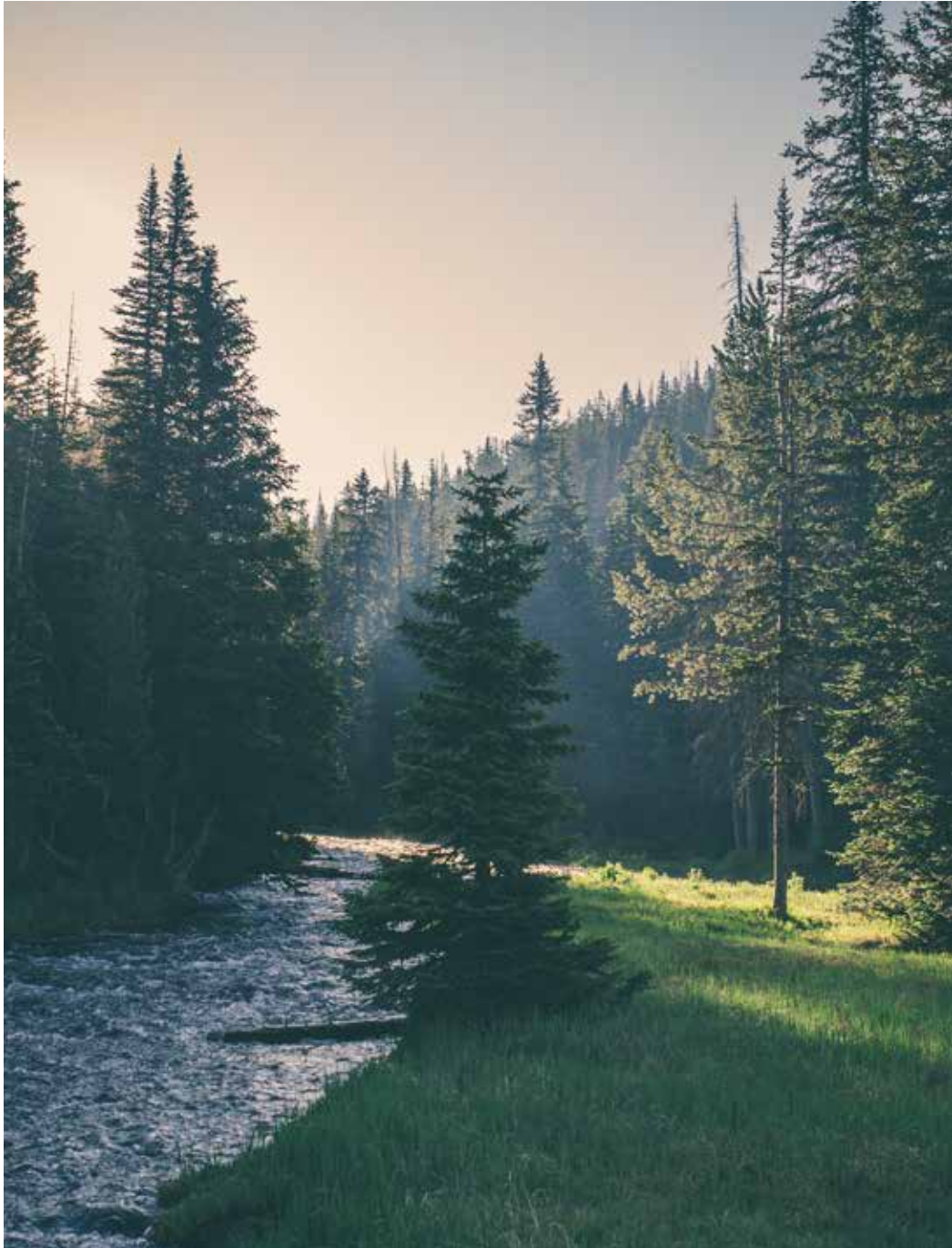
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THE POET'S COMPANION
by Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux

“We need more poets, not fewer, as some critics of creative writing programs would have it. We invite you to do what Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy asked: to add your light to the sum of light. Do it with patience, and love, and respect for the depth and difficulty of the task. This book is offered in that spirit.”

I should probably just have to say that Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux are the authors of this book, and that's recommendation enough.

The great thing about *The Poet's Companion* is that “spirit” in which it is written—from poet to poet. Addonizio and Laux write not to a student, but to a peer, a friend, a fellow adventurer.

With that in mind, they take into consideration some of the greatest concerns writers have, beyond craft—questions like what to write about, how to write, how to overcome self-doubt, how to start a career.

Even their exercises are considerate of writers in their mode and structure (only 20 minutes).

This is a must have resource for new writers especially, for whom all these questions are startling and fresh as they put pen to page.

THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

/ Introduction

PART I — Subjects for Writing

/ Writing & Knowing

/ The Family: Inspiration & Obstacle

/ Death & Grief

/ Writing the Erotic

/ The Shadow

/ Witnessing

/ Poetry of Place

PART II — The Poet's Craft

/ Images

/ Simile and Metaphor

/ The Music of the Line

/ Stop Making Sense: Dreams & Experiments

/ Meter, Rhyme, and Form

/ Repetition, Rhythm, and blues

/ More Repetition: Villanelle, Pantoum,
Sestina

/ A Grammatical Excursion

/ The Energy of Revision

PART III — The Writing Life

/ Self-Doubt

/ Writer's Block

/ Writing in the Electronic Age

/ Getting Published

PART IV — 20 Minute Writing Exercises

Appendices: Books, Markets, & Resources

277 PAGES





MY ANNOTATION of THE POET'S COMPANION

PAGES THAT SHINE

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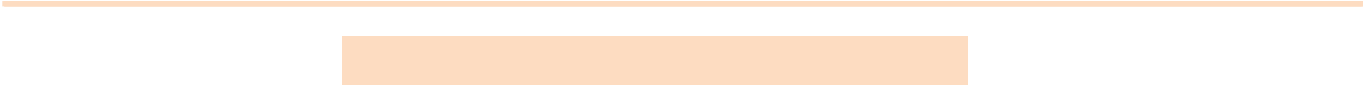
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WHY

- IMAGERY**
 - LINES**
 - SOUNDWORK**
 - WORD CHOICE**
 - SUBJECT / FEELING**
 - FORMAL INNOVATION**
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MY ANNOTATION of THE POET'S COMPANION / PART 1

MATERIAL BRAINSTORM

BRAINSTORM SOME POSSIBLE SUBJECTS DEALING WITH SELF AND FAMILY



BRAINSTORM SOME POSSIBLE SUBJECTS DEALING WITH DEATH AND EROTICISM



BRAINSTORM SOME POSSIBLE SUBJECTS DEALING WITH PLACE AND POLITICS





MY ANNOTATION of THE POET'S COMPANION / PART 2

IN ONE SENTENCE...

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT IMAGES?

WHAT DID I LEARN METAPHOR?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT THE LINE?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT STYLE?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT DREAM WRITING?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT RHYTHM?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT GRAMMAR?

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT REVISION?





MY ANNOTATION of THE POET'S COMPANION / PART 3

AFFIRM THYSELF

HOW WILL I OVERCOME SELF-DOUBT?



HOW WILL I OVERCOME WRITER'S BLOCK?



HOW WILL I GET PUBLISHED?





MY ANNOTATION of THE POET'S COMPANION / PART 4

YOUR FIRST 20 MINUTE EXERCISE

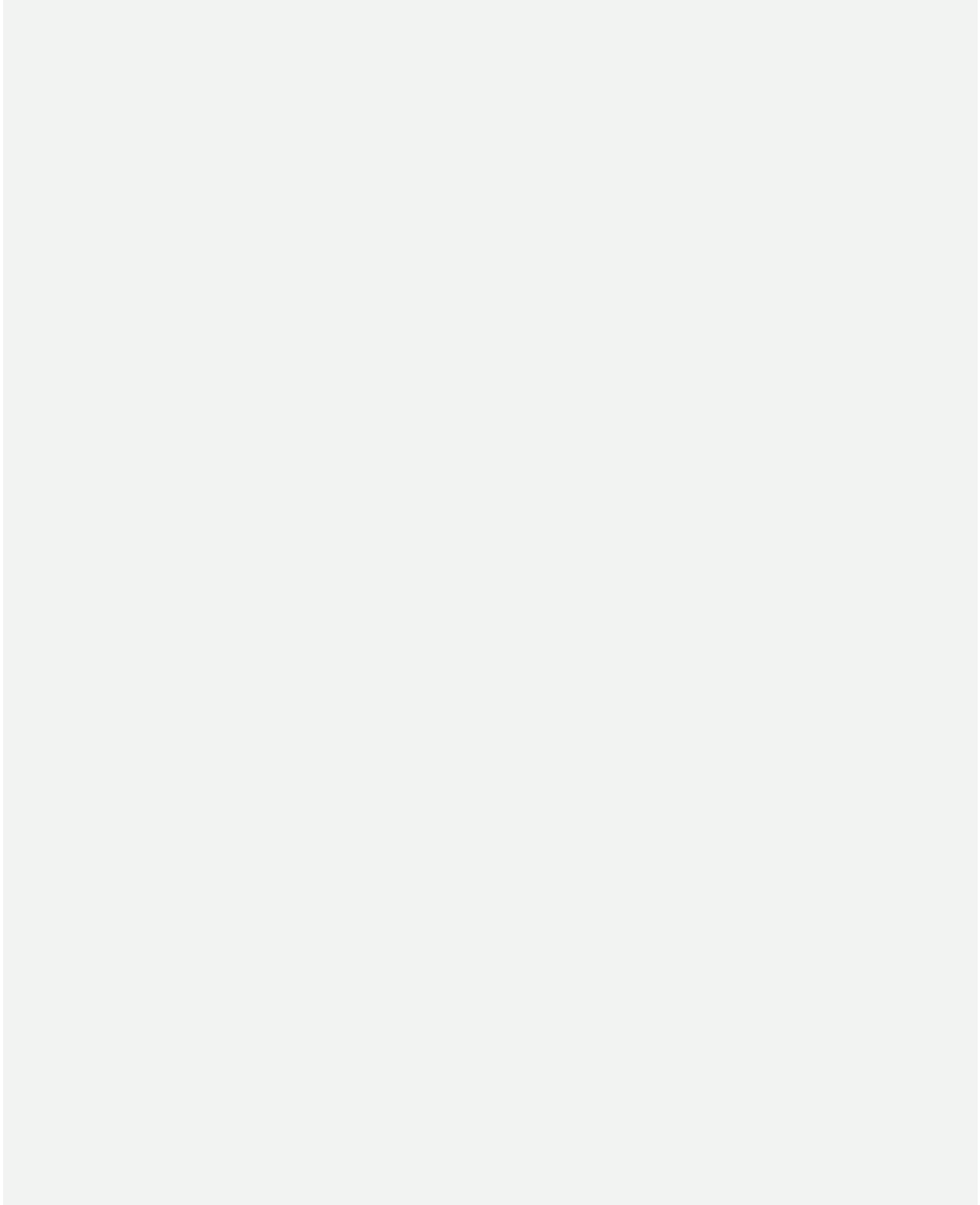
COMPLETE THE "SIMPLE EXERCISE" ON PAGE 228 BELOW





MY ANNOTATION of THE POET'S COMPANION

WHAT ARE THE AUTHENTIC, URGENT CONCERNS THAT DEFINE MY STYLE?



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FAVORITE QUOTES FROM THE POET'S COMPANION