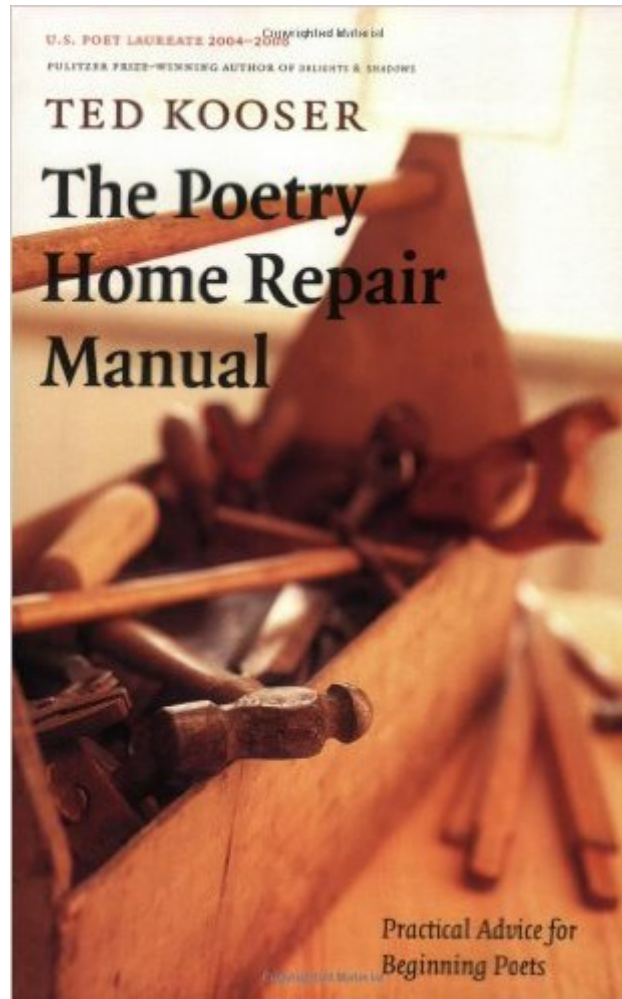


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The Poetry Home Repair Manual: Practical Advice For Beginning Poets



Synopsis

Recently appointed as the new U. S. Poet Laureate, Ted Kooser has been writing and publishing poetry for more than forty years. In the pages of *The Poetry Home Repair Manual*, Kooser brings those decades of experience to bear. Here are tools and insights, the instructions (and warnings against instructions) that poets "aspiring or practicing" can use to hone their craft, perhaps into art. Using examples from his own rich literary oeuvre and from the work of a number of successful contemporary poets, the author schools us in the critical relationship between poet and reader, which is fundamental to what Kooser believes is poetry's ultimate purpose: to reach other people and touch their hearts. Much more than a guidebook to writing and revising poems, this manual has all the comforts and merits of a long and enlightening conversation with a wise and patient old friend "a friend who is willing to share everything he's learned about the art he's spent a lifetime learning to execute so well.

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Customer Reviews

Ted Kooser, our most current Poet Laureate, writes some of the most accessible poetry around today. Reflective of his Midwestern origins, his poetry is lyrical and simple, beautiful and stunning. Just pick up any of one of his many books, and delve into his works to appreciate why he has earned this national honor. Kooser, teacher that he is, has responded in kind, and written for us a wonderful manual on the art of writing poetry, "*The Poetry Home Repair Manual*". The subtitle of this work is "Practical Advice for Beginning Poets", but I daresay this book can be a guide for anyone

interested in the art of poetry. I myself have dabbled in poetry since high school years, and I found this guide insightful. It allowed me to reflect upon my own work, illuminating what I've been doing well and supporting change in other areas. It also ignited a renewed interest in writing poetry, which had fallen off since a recent foray into screenwriting. Kooser writes this non-fiction book like a poet would. There are some absolutely beautiful images that Kooser paints to elaborate his points. He describes the first few lines of a poem as an invitation to a houseguest, which we welcome into the poem for a short stay. These, and others, are indelible images that you can retain as you write. Also, fortunately, Kooser shies away from long, arduous explanations on the mechanics of writing poetry. One of the ways to turn people off quicker to this writing is to demand an understanding of meter and rhyme. Kooser's discussion is quick and painless, much like tearing off a band-aid. He suggests focusing on emotions and memories, yet talks about the mechanics as a way to bring it to your awareness. Kooser has given us a gift in this book. His initial discussion in the book about making poetry understandable is right on. So much of poetry is lost on the masses because the context of the poetry is lost on the reader. You know you should understand the poem, and appreciate it, but in reality, it's way beyond anyone besides scholars.. Kooser's book itself is a well-written, understandable kick-in-the-pants to everyone who loves poetry, both the reading and the writing of it.

This is the best book on writing poetry I have ever read. Kooser takes you by the hand and walks you through the poems, pointing out what makes each unique along the way. The book, itself, is beautifully written. Kooser makes you want to read and write poetry again. Every newspaper in the country should publish his column on poetry! Let's start something..... Can you imagine what just might happen if we all woke up and read a poem in the morning and thought about that all day, talked about it at the office?

Having just won the Pulitzer Prize and being named to a second term as Poet Laureate, Ted Kooser ought to know what he's talking about--and he really does. This book is filled with practical advice and a wealth of ideas and techniques for his fellow poets. He is really strong on simile and metaphor and how to use them correctly. He is also very insightful on how to work with detail. Most books about poetry have lots of exercises and dwell on the topics you might write about--how to get your ideas together. Kooser breaks the pattern of the typical poetry manual: no exercises, but tons of practical advice. You can hear him talking over your shoulder. One of the greatest things Kooser does is remind us that the poem is directed to a reader--gets us thinking about our audience, who

they are and what they want. A poem is communication--a poem is intended to be read by someone. I find one of the most interesting things to be Ted Kooser's reflections on poetry itself which light up every page with their wisdom and wit. We learn, for example that most of our poetry nowadays is anecdotal--a kind of "cracker barrel" set of anecdotes about our own lives--and he doesn't really criticize this so much as point it out and suggest it wasn't always this way, and it doesn't need to be this way. Writing a poem is about choices and you have the option of stepping back from the window of the poem and not having yourself in it quite so much. He suggests going out on "poetry patrol," in the supermarket, the yard sales, the cafes to do people watching. This is exactly what Whitman did. You can tell Walt Whitman went out and watched the carpenter sawing through the plank, smelled the sawdust, watched the sailor making the boat fast to the dock etc. -- that's how you get so much specific and concrete detail. It's obvious from reading Kooser's own poetry that he practices what he preaches. He has an eye, and ears and a nose for the specific and concrete details of the real world--just as Whitman. One of his most interesting observations is about the way metaphor and simile create a bridge to another dimension of seeing--another plane of existence. He doesn't exactly call this spiritual or make any metaphysical claim for this special place that poetry brings us to--but it's very exciting to hear him talk about. Something to strive for in writing. The best poets take us there. Beginners can use this--but it's not just for beginners. Anyone wanting to write poetry or simply read more attentively will find *The Poetry Home Repair Manual* a superb guidebook.

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