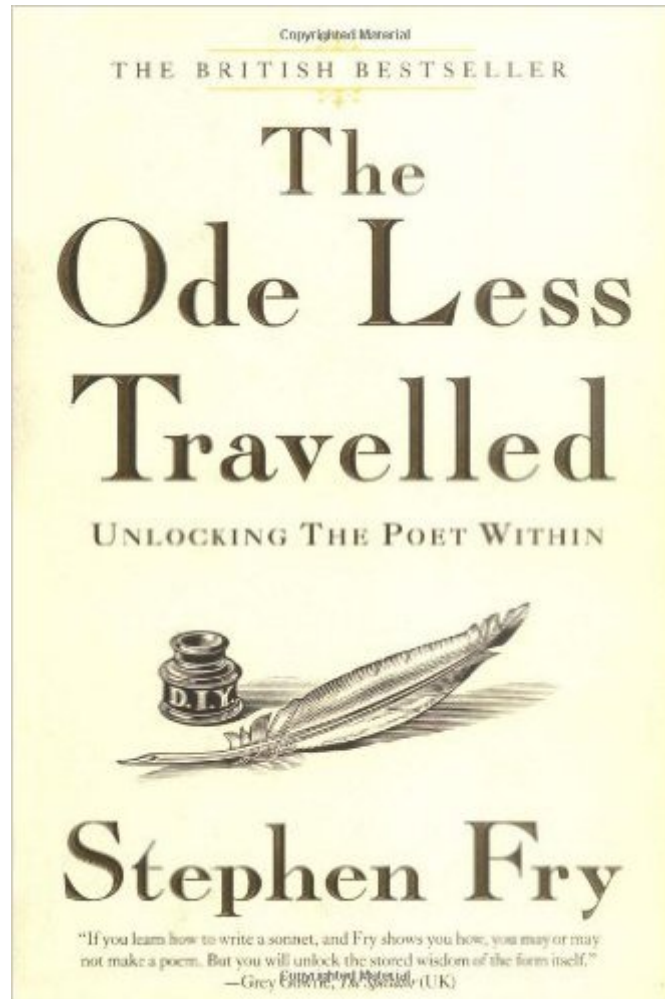


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The Ode Less Travelled: Unlocking The Poet Within



Synopsis

I have a dark and dreadful secret. I write poetry... I believe poetry is a primal impulse within all of us. I believe we are all capable of it and furthermore that a small, often ignored corner of us positively yearns to try it. —Stephen Fry, *The Ode Less Travelled* Stephen Fry believes that if one can speak and read English, one can write poetry. Many of us have never been taught to read or write poetry and think of it as a mysterious and intimidating form. Or, if we have been taught, we remember uncomfortable silence when an English teacher invited the class to "respond" to a poem. In *The Ode Less Travelled*, Fry sets out to correct this problem by giving aspiring poets the tools and confidence they need to write poetry for pleasure. Fry is a wonderfully engaging teacher and writer of poetry himself, and he explains the various elements of poetry in simple terms, without condescension. His enjoyable exercises and witty insights introduce the concepts of Metre, Rhyme, Form, Diction, and Poetics. Aspiring poets will learn to write a sonnet, an ode, a villanelle, a ballad, and a haiku, among others. Along the way, he introduces us to poets we've heard of, but never read. *The Ode Less Travelled* is a lively celebration of poetry that makes even the most reluctant reader want to pick up a pencil and give it a try.

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Customer Reviews

One of my favorite quotes about poetry is from Dame Edith Sitwell. "Poetry is like horticulture," she said. "Each poem should be allowed to grow according to its natural form." In his new book, *The Ode Less Travelled: Unlocking the Poet Within*, Stephen Fry creates a veritable topiary garden of poetry, providing not only an encyclopedic overview of poetic meters and forms in English but a

cogent, bracing and witty demonstration of their value. As its subtitle suggests, "The Ode Less Travelled" is written as a primer to both beginning and experienced poets who need, shall we say, a jump start to their creativity. Each chapter offers a discussion, with examples, of a particular meter, rhyme scheme or form, and suggests exercises at the end for readers to create their own examples. Fry quotes English poets from William Shakespeare to William McGonagall to illustrate his points, as well as a gratifyingly large array of American poets. Sometimes, when an example from the canon is not readily available, Fry will write his own, such as when he illustrates a dactyl (one stressed syllable, two non-stressed) followed by a molossus (three sharply stressed syllables in a row) in an imagined argument between Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader: Why do you bother me? Go to Hell! I am your destiny. Can't you tell? You're not my father. Eat my shorts! Come to the dark side. Feel the force! Fry--a renowned writer, actor, director, wit and polymath--brings all his Cambridge erudition to "The Ode Less Travelled," combined with the passion of a man who cares to the depth of his soul about language and his possibilities.

Whether writing poetry is curse or gift, the cat is out of the bag: the most unexpected people write poetry. It is Stephen Fry's intention to unveil the mystery, which he does with enthusiasm in chapters addressing Metre, Rhyme, Form, and Diction and Poetics Today, a daunting task by any measure; Fry approaches his topic with an attention to the details that often overwhelm would-be poets, for example the unusual jargon and technical vocabulary that accompanies a serious discussion of poetry. Anticipating a reluctance to dive right in, Fry offers three golden rules: take your time ("you can never read a poem too slowly, but you can certainly read one too fast!"); avoid over-thinking what you are reading ("poems are not crossword puzzles"); and invest in a notebook to carry everywhere, the only equipment necessary. Thus prepared, the journey begins, Fry the experienced guide. The chapter on metre is expansive, a thorough dissection of rhythm, pentameter, beats per line, each section followed by a helpful poetry exercise to bring each example home. The question, to rhyme or not to rhyme, includes the inherent problems and advantages to the rhyme-inclined. More advanced is the how and why of form, the stanza and its variations, the ballad, heroic verse, ode, comic verse, haiku and the Mercedes of serious poetry, the sonnet. By far my favorite chapter addresses "The Doctrine of Poetic Diction". What is acceptable language? What are the obvious pitfalls? Most helpful, what are the particular vices a poet should avoid? We are reminded that laziness in a writer, poetry or otherwise, produces a plethora of subsets: sentimentality, vanity, self-indulgence, technical ineptitude and a lack of originality.

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