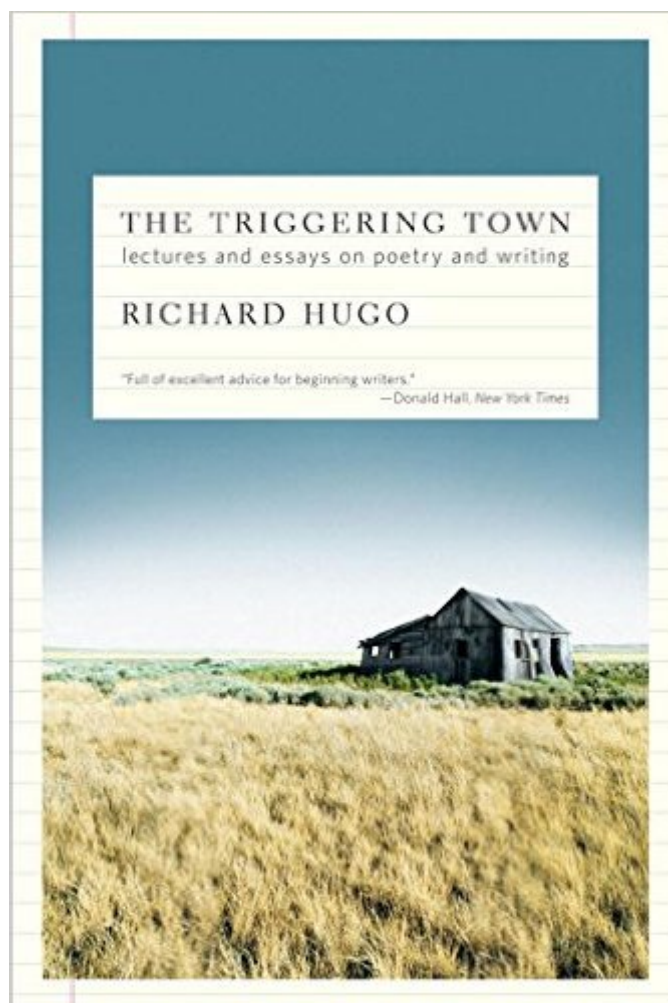


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# The Triggering Town: Lectures And Essays On Poetry And Writing



## Synopsis

â œl donâ™t know why we do it. We must be crazy./Welcome, fellow poet.â •â •Richard Hugo  
Richard Hugo, whom Carolyn Kizer called â œone of the most passionate, energetic and honest  
poets living,â • was that rare phenomenonâ •a distinguished poet who was also an inspiring teacher.  
The Triggering Town is Hugoâ™s classic collection of lectures, essays, and reflections, all  
â œdirected toward helping with that silly, absurd, maddening, futile, enormously rewarding activity:  
writing poems.â • From pieces that include â œWriting off the Subjectâ • and â œHow Poets Make a  
Living,â • anyone, from the beginning poet to the mature writer to the lover of literature, will benefit  
greatly from Hugoâ™s playful and profound insights into the mysteries of literary creation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

All the wisdom you need to write are in two small books: "The Elements of Style" and this one. I  
heard it from the man himself, and though Hugo's summary cannot reproduce the richness of his  
poetry seminars at the University of Montana, it's the closest you can come this side of paradise.  
His poetry exercises work. You can apply them and your writing will improve. Hugo cannot give you  
talent but he can help you understand if you have it or not. Even his stories show how to live as a  
writer. Here's a couple Hugo sayings that are not in this book: "To be a poet, you have to know  
what's important about life. And it's not washing the damned car on Saturday." "There are many,  
many good poets. There are very few good critics."

Hugo is a delight to read in the way C.S. Lewis is: he is endearing, humble, and gentle--a man of style, grace, and quick wit--while remaining tough, straightforward, and confident. Even if you don't pay attention to what Hugo is saying, the way he says it could carry you through the book enjoyably. Hugo's intent in assembling this book of lectures and essays is to teach and instruct hopeful poets, and for him the soul of poetry pedagogy is basically (and simply) to save students time, to show them what they would eventually teach themselves if they continued writing on their own. The danger in "The Triggering Town" is that Hugo is at once demanding and seductive. He doesn't put his suggestions and opinions in uncertain terms, and yet he avoids coming off as a control freak by expressing his thoughts so beautifully and clearly. Reading Hugo, it's difficult not to be wooed into becoming a Hugoite. Make no mistake: There are far, far worse things for a poet than to follow Hugo's advice and methods. Still, if a poet is never able to shrug off some of Hugo's axioms, she will never achieve true greatness. Conventional wisdom has it that only after you have learned to follow the rules can you break them. There is truth in this. But it is possible to be taught the rules so well that one can never break them. It is a daunting task for any poet to muster up the sense of authority to dismiss Hugo's teaching. If a poet is too shy and insecure to throw away his teacher's instruction (as many greats are), perhaps the best path is to avoid the formal instruction Hugo offers and to simply read the fruit of great poets instead.

This collection of essays comprises the single best "anti-How To" book on writing. Hugo cuts to the chase and encourages us to discover what's at stake in our writing, and to allow the poem or story to tell itself in the way it wants to be told. I read this one annually, just to remind myself to trust the story -- I don't have to "manage" it.

The Triggering Town by Richard Hugo is a treasure chest full of tips for creative writers. It is overflowing with the wisdom of Hugo's years as a professor and poet. The book is made up of compiled lectures and essays about poetry and writing. Placed into chapters, these teachings make the book into a type of guide for creative writers. Hugo wrote on his own experiences as a student, professor and writer. He also told how experiences in a person's life could affect that person's writing. For example, Hugo's experiences in the Second World War helped to generate many poem ideas that eventually became poems. Also, he grew up with the perspective that he was outside of society. He called these thoughts or feelings triggers. The triggers will initiate the passion needed to write the poem about the subject. Richard Hugo taught at the University of Montana and has written 12 books total, a few of which are A Run of Jacks, Death of the Kapowsin Tavern, Selected Poems,

and Making Certain It Goes On. However, these books are slightly different from The Triggering Town in that they are books of poems. The Triggering Town isn't the typical "how to" book but instead is somewhat like a guide showing the possibilities. Experienced poets and teachers will find this book delightful, and beginners will find it's help extensive.

And that's saying quite a bit, as I've read more than a few. I also like Ted Kooser's Poetry Home Repair Manual, so if you like that I'm pretty sure you'll like The Triggering Town. I think what I like best (so far - I'm not quite done) from Hugo is his concept of writing "off the subject" - as a poet it just seems to make so much sense to me. I've already ordered several other copies of this book to give as presents to folks in the graduate program here at UT.

Have used this book in poetry workshops with great success. Offers advice that's right on the money and easy to apply, and is as direct as the poet himself. I have missed this book and sure am happy to see it's available again. Recommended for both seasoned and new poets alike. cc

Richard Hugo begins his collection of essays on poetry and writing the same way he begins his poetry classes: "You'll never be a poet until you realize that everything I say today and this quarter is wrong. It may be right for me, but it is wrong for you" (3). It is with this caveat that Hugo proceeds to presents his ideas on writing and poetry. Hugo writes in a voice that is at once omniscient and intensely personal--it is this voice, and the attitude it embodies, which Hugo believes is necessary for a writer. Hugo's essays address both the beginning and the mature creative writer. He is concerned with his own writing process, not his students'. His most powerful example of how poems are written comes in an essay detailing his experiences in Italy during World War II, how he returned to Italy with his wife in the 1960s, and the poems that resulted from those two separate and complementary experiences. His thesis is delivered again and again: This is how I write; figure out how you write. His one exception is in detailing how his own creative writing professor, Theodore Roethke, taught, although there is again the suggestion of "This is how Roethke taught. This is how I teach. It depends on the writer." In fact, Hugo admits to mimicking Roethke in the classroom, noting how Roethke's style of teaching was not Hugo's style, and how he had to move from under that shadow to become his own kind of writer and his own kind of teacher.

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