

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Poets on Craft: Alan Catlin and Tony Gloeggler

Bunkong Tuon · Wednesday, August 26th, 2020

Poets on Craft is a cyberspace for contemporary poets to share their thoughts and ideas on the process of poetry and for students to discover new ways of approaching the writing of poetry. In the face of a pandemic that is both viral and political, it is a resource for strength and creativity, friendship and beauty, love and rejuvenation. It is thus a celebration of the beautiful and eclectic minds of contemporary poets. This series is intended for educational purposes only.

The format is as follows. I emailed poets these questions: “Generally speaking, how do you build a poem? How do you start a poem? How do you move from one line to the next? How do you know when to end a poem?”

With the exception of length requirement, poets are free to respond in whatever manner they find appropriate to their styles and concerns.

Access to *Poets on Craft* is democratic. Generally speaking, anyone can have free access to these posts. With that said, please consider supporting our poets by clicking on the links in their bios and purchasing their work.

For this fifth post in the series, we have Alan Catlin and Tony Gloeggler.



Alan Catlin worked as a professional barman for over thirty years; a fact he finds stranger than fiction. During that time, he also worked as a writer publishing well over seventy chapbooks of prose and poetry. His most recent books of poetry are [Asylum Garden: after Van Gogh](#) (Dos Madres) and [Lessons of Darkness](#) (Luchador Press).

There is no right or wrong way to write a poem. What there is, is a way that works. That is, a way that works for you. My method is fairly simple. I begin with a first line or a phrase. Sometimes I have a title in mind. Usually, I don't. Once I have this workable starting place, I just follow where the thought expressed in the line, or title, takes me. In a way it is free associating, though I like to think of it as: informed expression.

After years of writing on a variety, a large variety, of different subjects in completely separate voices, I have a fall back manner of expression. If I am going to write a poem that expresses impressions formed by watching Noir movies based on books, I have a certain voice that expresses

my impressions. If I am going to write about being in a bar, from the barman's point of view, I have a persona. If I am going to write about art, depending on the artist, I have a leaner, more compressed style; one that lets the light in and leaves lots of space on the page.

The fact is, no matter how clever and unique your writing may be, someone else is likely to have had a similar idea, been there, and done that. The challenge, then, is to imprint your personal vision on the subject and make it feel new again. Read the past masters and know your contemporaries, understand what they are doing, where they are coming from, and where they are going. That's what I do. Find what works for you. Write.



*Tony Gloeggler is a life long resident of NYC who's managed a group home for developmentally disabled men for 40 years. His work started appearing in journals in the late 1980s and his poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. His chapbook *One On One* won the 1998 Pearl Poetry Prize. His first full-length collection, *One Wish Left*, published by Pavement Saw Press went into a 2nd printing in 2007. *Until The Last Light Leaves*, published by NYQ Books, was a finalist for the Milt Kessler Book Award in 2016. And NYQ Books released his new book *What Kind of Man* in June of 2020.*

The initial idea for a poem comes when I encounter some kind of situation (in my own life or something I see, hear or read about) that makes an impression on me and I find myself wanting to explore it more or from different angles/dimensions in order to understand it more fully. These ideas build a kind of momentum in my head until I feel compelled to sit and try to write it down.

I think about the idea for awhile and usually work a lot of it in my head and, if it still seems worth spending time with, I will then try to make it a poem. Often I will have the first line and, being a narrative poet, I'll have different threads I want to touch on and the arc of the story/poem and sometimes I'll have an idea for an ending. I'll never sit down hoping to write a poem or finding an idea while I stare at a blank paper. I'd like to think it gives my poems an urgency and a sense that I had to write the poem, that it matters to me.

Line by line, I am following the outline in my head, trying to move from the start to the closing of the poem. The lines are ruled by the voice and rhythm of the piece. A lot of it is intuition and I have these little tendencies such as wanting the lines to be of a similar length and I try to not end lines with an article while trying to give a music to the lines, some sound play to make the poem easier to read.

(Featured photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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