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Poets on Craft: David Dephy and Wayne Miller

Bunkong Tuon · Friday, November 26th, 2021

For this fifty-third post in the Poets on Craft series, we have David Dephy and Wayne Miller.

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.

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.

This series is intended for educational purposes only.



David Dephy is a Georgian/American award-winning poet. Author of the poetry book *Eastern Star* (Adelaide Books New York / 2020), Dephy is called “A Literature Luminary” by Bowery Poetry, “The Stellar Poet” by Voices of Poetry, “The Incomparable Poet” by Statorec, “A Brilliant Grace” by Headline Poetry & Press, and “An Extremely Unique Poetic Voice” by Cultural Daily. He lives in New York. (Photo by Nugzar Metreveli)

I build a poem by breath and heartbeat. I called this process “the architecture of feelings, sounds and visions,” and it is based on my 1992 MFA work at the Faculty of Architecture at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Georgia.

I can feel the words and I can see the words as both breath and heartbeat of language – of Georgian language, and of English language. I am a Georgian/American poet. I understand that it may sound strange when Georgian language and English language meet each other in your consciousness and find a forever home there, but this is love and expressing it, especially in the language which lives inside your heart, is a crown achievement of poetry for me. Poetry itself is a native language of humanity and a constitution of all mankind. Yes, the spirit of us is poetry.

For me, a poem most often begins simultaneously with the vision and sound in a particular

linguistic stream as well as in its music and silence. In all honesty the image of scene does not exist separate from its expression. Silence is a clue.

Unexpectedness is the way. Moving forward and trusting the flow, that is the main thing. Poem knows what to do with you, you must trust your own heartbeat. All the mysteries of the world are dwelling beyond the fear to continue on the path. Breath after breath, word after word, line after line, trusting the flow, you navigate your ship of narrative across your own self.

You do not know when a poem ends. No one knows. You can only feel a very precious pause and then continue. This pause is magical and not always a logical point of view. There is no end and no beginning. Poetry is beyond traditional understanding of time and space. Poetry is the answer to all the mysteries of our world. It is the reason for the existence of language; it is a breath which brings out every genuine word in that very moment when you stand across from yourself, language, and poetry itself and have no fear. I think that a human being gets strength from the truth and transfers that strength to others and fills them with comfort and allows them to carry on during everyday struggles. This truth is poetry and it has no boundaries. It is timeless and ageless.



Wayne Miller is the author of five poetry collections, most recently *We the Jury* (Milkweed,

2021) and *Post-* (2016), which won the Rilke Prize and the Colorado Book Award. He has co-translated two books by the Albanian writer Moikom Zeqo, most recently *Zodiac* (Zephyr, 2015), which was shortlisted for the PEN Center USA Award in Poetry. He teaches at the University of Colorado Denver and edits *Copper Nickel*. His website is onlythesenses.com. (Photo by Chris Kannen)

My poems generally begin with a bit of disconnected language—a phrase, an image, a metaphor—that I sort of capture or overhear from inside myself. I write down these fragments in a little notebook I carry around with me (or, if I don’t have my notebook, I type them in the “notes” function in my phone).

Periodically I transcribe my notes—without really editing or filtering—into one big Word document, at which point some (but certainly not all!) of the notes feel like they still carry that mysterious charge I felt when I first recorded them. That’s when I begin drafting poems, often two or three at a time, with the partial goal of simply exploring what it is about those triggering fragments that continues to feel electric to me. Sometimes I discover that several of the fragments I’ve jotted down over a particular period are thematically connected in some way, and I begin combining them—which is also an exploration of how they might be charged.

More broadly, for my past couple books I’ve been obsessed with the interconnected relationship between the “public” and the “personal”—how private spaces and moments are couched inside the public sphere, while the public sphere is inevitably experienced through the lenses of our private selves.

I studied history in college, and I’ve consciously tried to write poems that consider (or witness) the public complexities of our historical moment: war, debt, the decline of the American middle class, gun violence, the urban-rural divide, ecological disaster, etc. But I’ve also tried to think about my family’s domestic spaces and experiences inside those larger sociohistorical narratives, and I’ve been particularly interested in exploring moments when the personal and the public touch up against each other. (For example, in my most recent book, *We the Jury*, one of the central poems is about the fact that my grandmother attended the last public execution in American history. In my previous book, *Post-*, the opening poem is about my father’s financial debts and my inheritance of them when he died.)

Most important to me is the idea that poems explore complexities and paradoxes, rather than try to persuade the reader of streamlined rhetorical or political ideas. I believe that poetry—at least the poetry I’m most interested in—is an intimate art, in which the author and the reader explore unresolvable questions together across the medium of the page.

(Featured image by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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