

Cultural Daily

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Poets on Craft: Joshua Levy and Carlyne Van Der Meer

Bunkong Tuon · Wednesday, March 17th, 2021

For this thirty-first post in the *Poets on Craft* series, we have Joshua Levy and Carlyne Van Der Meer.

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.



Joshua Levy is a Jewish Canadian poet and prose writer who splits his time between Montreal and Lisbon, Portugal. Check out his work at www.joshualevy.net

Every poem begins the same damn way: a startling line explodes like a supernova in my mind's eye and blinds me until I grab a metaphoric syringe, fill the syringe with my red-hot thought, and plunge the metaphoric needle deep into my Microsoft Word document's poreless white skin. I then go about attempting to swathe the initial image with my complimentary obsessions. Of course, it feels like the state of the universe is at stake. Of course, I fail. Finally, I fail a little better. I deduce, deviate, delete. I'll get down on my knees and sniff-out what truly is at stake. It does not matter what I want to say; only what I need to say. Once I discover this, I know the poem will live no matter what I do to it (I might accidentally deface the poem during the editing process, but its inner beauty will shine through even my clumsiest stitchwork). I know I am done when the poem stops screaming at me to bring it to life; when it stands on its metaphoric two feet, bows, and skips off my computer screen. Every poem is Pinocchio, which means I am Geppetto.

I will then close my computer, scratch my metaphoric bushy white moustache, and try to sleep.



Photo By: Bassam Sabbagh. www.bassamsabbagh.com

Carolyn Van Der Meer is the author of *Motherlode: A Mosaic of Dutch Wartime Experience* (2014), *Journeywoman* (2017), *Heart of Goodness: The Life of Marguerite Bourgeoys in 30 Poems* / *Du coeur à l'âme : La vie de Marguerite Bougeoys en 30 poèmes* (2020), for which she

translated her original English poems into French. Another collection of poetry, *Sensorial*, is forthcoming in 2021. She lives in Montreal, Quebec.

My poems often start in surprising places. In other words, I might not be looking for a poem at all. A word, an expression, a snippet of conversation, an image might spark something. I never know where it's going, of course—and it might be total crap. But I tell myself that I need to start somewhere, often with just that first line or bit.

The next step for me is to jot. And I really mean that. I carry a journal wherever I go, and I jot random and arbitrary thoughts and ideas in it—ideally as they come to me—and often inspired by that first line. It's not always possible to do that: life sometimes gets in the way. But that's what works best. And I've learned over time that I need to “like” the journal I'm using, along with the writing instrument. These things help me let go and let the ideas flow. This is what helps me get from one line to the next. As for ending the poem, I think that's instinctive in my case. I feel the dénouement of my poetic story rather innately and literally “feel” the end as it comes. I stop where it feels right. That's not to say I don't go back and rework, rework and rework, but this is how a poem first makes its way onto a page.

(Featured image by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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