

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Poets on Craft: Justin Hyde and Michael Flanagan

Bunkong Tuon · Wednesday, December 9th, 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 nineteenth post in the series, we have Justin Hyde and Michael Flanagan.



### Justin Hyde lives in Iowa.

A visitor: coffee-shops, truck-stops, cafes. People-nearby, but distant. Headphones; music is a powerful catalyst – next to a window: cars, people walking by, strands of existence, time, light, wind; alchemy in the panoply of motion... A memory, some dormant vignette from my past, emerges, becomes imbued with the energy of motion, people, and music. The beginning and end of a poem come like that. The job, the work, is the middle, connecting it all; making it coherent to another set of eyes.

The guts of a poem are an un-earned gift, then comes personality, aesthetic, craftsmanship, stubborn laser focus – I’ve always had a predisposition toward the laconic, terse, an economy of words. I like the look and feel of tight vertical lines down the page in the same way I like the look and feel of zaftig dark-haired women. If a vision comes, I’ll spend an hour or so using my analytical side shaping it on the page until the vision and logic meld. Then:

Patience. When I started writing I immediately sent stuff out to be considered for publication. Put

a poem away for at least a month, two is better – – then, 99% of the time, it actually ends two or three lines from where I thought it did – – and I do a-lot of pruning in general. It's very rare anything is ever added. Many times, looking at something a month later, it's not even something I want to send out to be considered for publication.



**Michael Flanagan was born in the Bronx, N.Y. Poems and stories of his have appeared in many small press periodicals across the country. His full length collection, *Days Like These*, is out from Luchador Press, a subsidiary of Spartan Publications.**

For me, there are two ways I normally begin a piece. Often when I'm doing other things, working, driving, hanging out doing nothing, some line or thought will pop into my head and I'll grab a piece of paper and start writing the line down and continue, stream of consciously, until I have a bunch of lines. These I write down real fast, like a grocery list. Later, when I'm at my desk specifically to write, I start with those lines and build on it. More often than not, a lot of the original lines end up eliminated. During this process, I rework things until I see where the poem is going and perhaps what it is I wish to get at. From there I keep revising. The other way that I start is to force myself into the room, sit down and start typing whatever comes to mind. When that begins I basically follow the same path as above.

How do you know when to end a poem—

It's almost a mystery to me when to end a poem. That probably sounds more esoteric than it actually is. What's the old adage? A story is never finished, only abandoned. That's true in the sense I could go on revising forever, though actually doing so would drive me mad (I have an ego, so like completing pieces to get them out into the world). It's pure instinct that tells me the poem is done. When I feel I've gotten what I want down on the page, and the end line hasn't ruined things and hopefully has added to the work in the right way, I'm done. And once I send the poem out for consideration, I never go back to it for revision, even if it keeps coming back rejected, I just fill another envelope with it, not for any other reason really than I simply can't face the damn thing anymore; I've done my best with whatever it is and, selah.

*(Featured image by Alexis Rhone Fancher)*

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