
Cultural Daily

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Poets on Craft: Katelyn Delvaux and David M. Taylor

Bunkong Tuon · Wednesday, January 20th, 2021

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 twenty-third post in the series, we have Katelyn Delvaux and David M. Taylor.



Katelyn Delvaux's currently lives in St. Louis, Missouri where she teaches composition, creative writing, and literature. Her poetry has received multiple nominations for Best of the Net and Pushcart prizes, while her scholarly work has earned her fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Poetry Foundation. Find out more at www.katelyndelvaux.com.

My writing process begins with a commonplace book/journal. I have a notebook where all manner of thoughts, quotes, sketches, observations, vignettes, and even just interesting words and their definitions are kept. I call it my spark book—anything that sparks my interest goes in there. It's sort of an external hard drive for my brain; it houses these thoughts so my mind has the freedom to roam and mull things over, then when it feels like a common thread is being drawn between two or more items from the spark book, I open a document on my computer (actual laptop, not metaphorical brain), copy down the embers/sparks, and get to work.

Quite often, I start my poems in paragraph format; I focus on content and getting the ideas out rather than the words or lines just then. Once it feels like I've said all I can on that subject, I hit 'Save' and walk away. I need time to gain perspective on a piece, so after a day or two I will come back to the paragraph and start the long work of line breaks. I'm a big fan of enjambment, as well as the understanding that a line should be able to stand on its own merit, not just its contribution to

the stanza. This often leads to changes in word choice as you will find far too many articles or filler words when moving from paragraph to stanza.

I think a poem ends when its story is told, when it completes its arc. This isn't just for narrative poetry—when the gesture is made, the image revealed, the writer must stop or fall into that all-too-common problem of treating the reader like a child and summarizing the poem for them. Have faith that your audience will understand what you're saying until you're told otherwise. Then it's back to the editing phase.



David M. Taylor's work has appeared in various magazines such as *Albany Poets*, *Califragile*, *Misfit Magazine*, *Nine Mile Magazine*, *The Cape Rock*, *Rat's Ass Review*, and *Trailer Park Quarterly*. He has been a featured poet on KRCU's "Poetry on the Air" series as well as a judge for several literary contests. His most recent poetry chapbook, *Growing up Black*, was published by Dark Particle Press.

Generally, there are two ways I start a poem—I'll either try to hook the audience or begin building a scene central to the poem. I prefer shocking people or startling them in some way with blunt imagery or language or twisting a preconceived notion. While it's fun for me, it also quickly establishes the tone and mood of the poem. However, when I begin by establishing a scene, I'm usually drawing out a story where the weight of the poem rests in the last couple of lines.

As for how I move from one line to the next, I'm fairly pragmatic about it. I try to have similar line lengths, which is established by the first stanza. To me, this makes the poem aesthetically pleasing on the page. And I use this same approach when moving from one stanza to the next. I don't like lines or stanzas that are too long with chunks of text. That said, I also consider how I read the poem aloud and where I pause or my inflection changes. These are places where I'll break a line or establish a new stanza.

Knowing when to end a poem can be tricky. If I'm lucky, the poem ends naturally without much work. However, sometimes I'll over-write and have to delete or carve out an ending from the lines I have. Other times, I'll have an ending, but the poem doesn't seem finished, so I'll have to go into the poem and flesh out the ideas and images. But no matter what, I have to read the poem and feel satisfied that I don't have anything else to say.

(Featured image by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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