
Cultural Daily

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Poets on Craft: Kelsey Bryan-Zwick and Kevin Ridgeway

Bunkong Tuon · Friday, August 13th, 2021

For the forty-fourth post in the *Poets on Craft* series, we have Kelsey Bryan-Zwick and Kevin Ridgeway

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.



Kelsey Bryan-Zwick (she/they) is a queer, disabled, bilingual, poet and a columnist for Los Angeles Poet Society & Lead Collaborating Fellow at The Poetry Lab. Pushcart Prize and The Best of the Net nominated, her forthcoming microchapbook, *Bone Water* (Blanket Sea Press September 2021) and her first full-length, *Here Go the Knives* (Moon Tide Press February 2022), focus on her decades surviving with scoliosis.

I really appreciate this chance to discuss poetic process, thank you. I believe that like many, my process is formed through body realness and environment. I've often admitted that without

computers I never would have graduated from UCSC because of how physically demanding it is to type on a typewriter, plus I am a terrible speller. I am disabled with scoliosis which makes my fingers clumsy reporters and pain can often overwhelm me from completing any task. There is a quote by science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke that states, “any sufficiently developed technology is indistinguishable from magic.” And that is a truth for me—computers are the magic that allow me to develop, edit, and share my poems with a wider audience (outside my 3 cats and 1 fish that is!).

It is technology that has both saved my life and allowed me to share my poetry, which you might have guessed, is often focused on my experience with disability. As a conundrum of this modern world I struggle to receive the care I need despite living in the wealthiest nation on this planet. It is a subject and a reality I know I will continue to explore throughout my life. It is this struggle that often condenses itself in my mind to a line or two of poetry, lines I furiously write down on any available scrap of paper, lines that become my first draft. When I have the energy, I take these scraps to the computer.

I used to be able to type these lines, but lately even that has become too physically demanding. Now I use a voice transcriber that comes with Microsoft Word to get the words on the page. Then I can add line breaks manually and correct any “voice-os,” and begin to edit a poem. When editing I also use the Read Aloud function in the review section of Word as it allows me to listen for small word errors without having to stare at the screen (which gives me motion sickness if I stare at it too long). When I am in “writer mode,” my body often fades into the background as the poem comes into focus; it is a magical process for me, to have all my synapses preoccupied in this way. This is the real reason I continue to find ways and work-arounds, with the help of magical technology, to keep creating poetry.



Kevin Ridgeway is the author of *Too Young to Know* (Stubborn Mule Press) and nine chapbooks of poetry including *Grandma Goes to Rehab* (Analog Submission Press, UK). His work can recently be found in *Slipstream*, *Chiron Review*, *Nerve Cowboy*, *Plainsongs*, *San Pedro River Review*, *The Cape Rock*, *Trailer Park Quarterly*, *Main Street Rag*, *Cultural Weekly* and *The American Journal of Poetry*, among others. He lives and writes in Long Beach, CA. (Photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

Every poem is different, but mine are born out of passion, inspiration, perspiration... and, of course, insanity. The first lines of my poems have to not only hook the reader in, they have to hook me in. Writing a poem is akin to solving a sophisticated puzzle, full of surprise truths I never knew

could be hidden inside narrative free verse lines. Sparks of electric adrenaline ignite and fuel me until I fall silent and the poems do the talking, my inner critic long dead. The muse guides my hands through the beautiful ugliness which stains my rough drafts. I use these chicken scratch blueprints to help me erect crude stanzas on top of one another until they can stand on their own.

The appearance of my poetry has grown over time—influenced by several contemporary narrative free verse poets like Tony Gloegler. I craft plain-spoken verse and unveil each new line like a slow striptease—to let my careful words breathe and not overwhelm readers with too many details at once—I geek out on line breaks like Tony’s and try to steal them. My poems are little movies. Readers tell me my poems transport them. Poems also transport me on a journey that leads to the great light of a true poem, the final lines conceived while I locked into a creative zone that’s way better than drugs and even sex. I chase the muse through dozens of new poems each week—some of them wind up becoming absolute shit—I prefer wild poems that all escape from me and tease me from printed pages across the globe.

My education as a poet has come primarily from editors with master’s degrees who saw something worthwhile in my work and took the time to help me make it even stronger. The best poems I’ve written were all drafted in an ecstatic frenzy, infected with inspiration from everyone and from everywhere. It’s not just my voice in the poems, it’s other voices stacked around mine until they sing out a collective noise no one ever heard before. So I can concentrate on the noise inside my own head, with relentless ideas for poems every few seconds, some born and some lost in the deserts of my imagination before I can write them down. I build poems that people who don’t even like poetry would want to read. I do my best to remain humble and teachable when it comes to the evolution of my own poetry. Poetry comes with enormous responsibility. Poetry is my Goddess—poetry is one of the miracles that have saved my life.

(Featured image by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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