

Cultural Daily

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Poets on Craft: Kristin Camitta Zimet and Heather Lynne Davis

Bunkong Tuon · Tuesday, July 27th, 2021

For the forty-second post in the *Poets on Craft* series, we have Kristin Camitta Zimet and Heather Lynne Davis.

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.



Kristin Camitta Zimet is the author of *Take in My Arms the Dark*, a full-length poetry collection, and her poems are in a great many journals and anthologies. She co-founded *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review* and a poetry performance troupe. She is also a surreal photographer, a Reiki healer, and a Master Naturalist in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. (Photo by Deborah Carlon)

Poems mostly arise in me at four A.M., as an image or complex of images, multivalent and insistent. The poem wants me to get up now and I don't stop even to dress; I sit down with it for hours, even a whole day. The poem wants to play, to open and root in many directions, so it is best to write on paper (I am never anywhere anytime without paper), which becomes a map, scrawled with alternate wordings, arrows, and numbers, layered, scotch-taped, practically three-dimensional. I glimpse where the poem means to go, but I do not foreclose on it. This is dreamwork, prophecy, vision more than mine. I used to write only from and about myself (as a new widow, I do write about grief); but now I love giving voice to the voiceless, living inside others in the act of transforming.

Then comes the choosing. At this point I am ruthless. I believe in form, but not externally applied—not bonsai, not espalier. What I want, as I close in on the real poem, is to let meaning live in the form as much as in the words. Everything matters. I stroke the poem as a unified sculptural shape, and I x-ray its armature for micro-fractures. I say it aloud, for music, implications of flow and stoppage in phrase length and line length. I look into the depths of each word, its etymology, its overtones. I tend to the speaker's back story and emotional ground, rich or scarce, generous or constricted. I clear the way for the poem's drive, its reach for resolution, but I rarely let a poem become too easy. I value ambiguities.

I am perfectly out of control and perfectly in control—both. In the end the poem lets go of me. Or it needs sleep, for days or years, until I wake again and finally write it true.



Heather Lynne Davis is the author of *The Lost Tribe of Us*, which won the Main Street Rag Poetry Book Award and has published poems in *Fledgling Rag*, *Gargoyle*, *Marsh Hawk Press Review*, *Northern Virginia Review*, and many others. Her short stories and essays have appeared in the *Rehoboth Beach Reads* anthology series, *Us Against Alzheimer's: Stories of Family, Love, and Faith*, and *Furious Gravity: D.C. Women Writers*. She works in public health and lives in Washington, DC with her husband, the poet José Padua, and their son and daughter. (Photo by Maggie Padua)

My poems are built under duress. What else can a working mother say? Many of them get away. The ones that don't are like ghost moths—images that flit by, a feeling that rises up and keeps batting its wings against my chest. Sometimes that feeling is a sense of irony, or of mourning, anger, praise, or surprise. The feeling demands an audience and its own body—finding the right

images, metaphors, similes, and sounds is building the body—and once you have that body, the poem can breathe and move. It can fly.

The language I use tends to rush forward on the page. I often enjamb the lines instead of ending them at a natural pause or I employ a mix of natural and enjambed breaks depending on the effect I want. I have to remind myself to slow the poem down and use stanza breaks and space, if that is warranted. I also revise a lot. I may get 75 percent of the way to final in the first draft, but that last 25 percent is a killer. Recently, I finished a poem I had been working on for years. When I tried a new form and pinned down a key image, it felt complete and got picked up for publication a week later.

I'm always driving toward a core revelation in my poems. Even in the poems that have a slower pace and more white space, every line and stanza is part of that drive to say the thing that needs to be said, to convey some essential understanding. When I get there, the sensation is almost physical, a coming together of idea, breath, and emotion—like when you ask your partner to scratch your back and they finally hit that sweet spot—you know it when you feel it and it's wonderful. Sometimes, though, I go too far and need to cut the last line or lines so that the reader is forced to finish the puzzle—everything the poet does in the poem should make the reader need to see that completed picture.

(Featured photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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