

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Poets on Craft: Nick Soluri and Matthew Graham

Bunkong Tuon · Wednesday, March 3rd, 2021

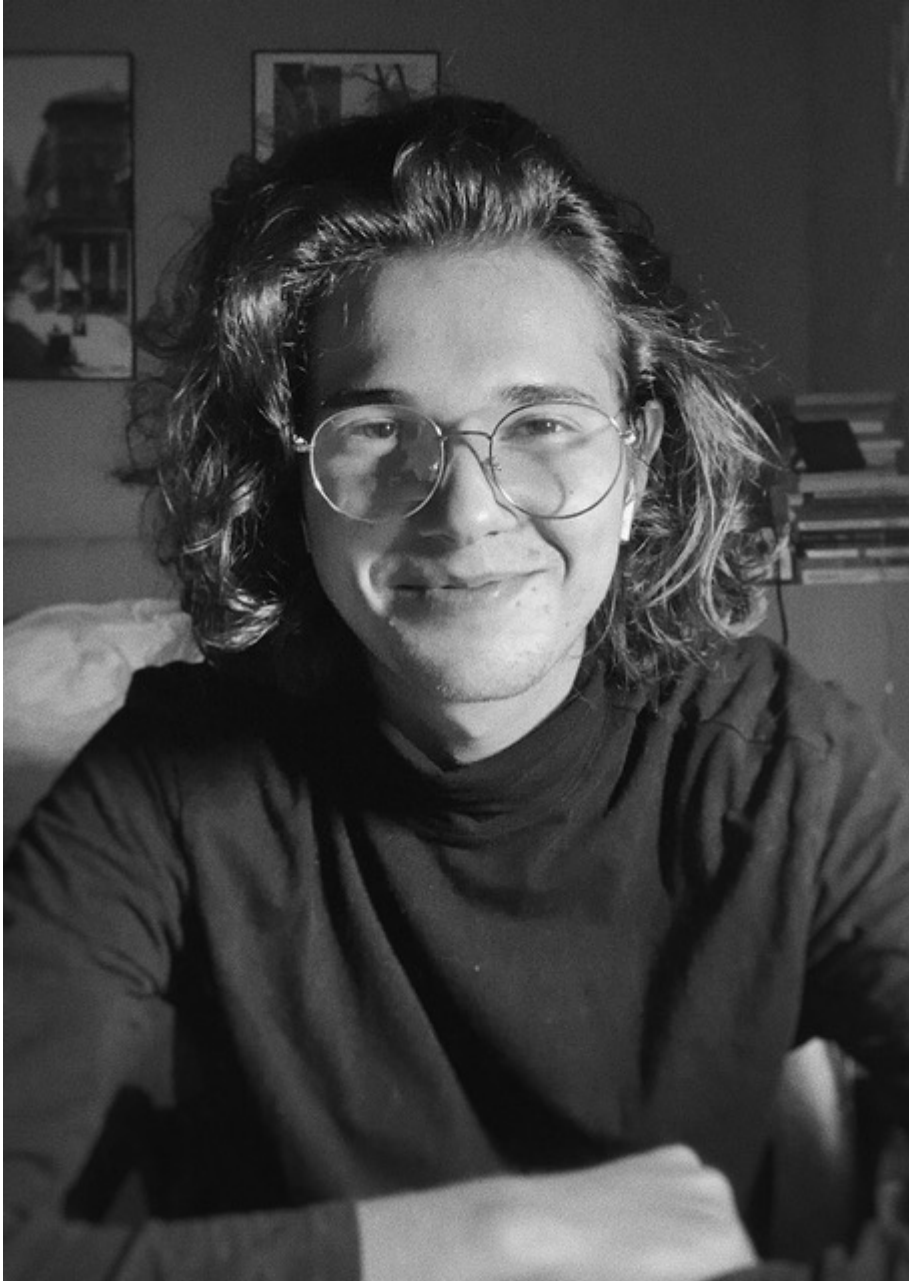
For this twenty-ninth post in the series of *Poets on Craft*, we have Nick Soluri and Matthew Graham.

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.



Nick Soluri is a poet and playwright from New York. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in [Hobart](#), [Misfit Magazine](#), [As It Ought To Be Magazine](#), [Ghost City Review](#), [Albany Poets](#), as well as the anthology *Without a Doubt: Poems Illuminating Faith* (NYQ Books, 2021). An alumnus of Union College, he's currently an MFA candidate at Sarah Lawrence College, and tweets @nerkcelery

In the past couple of months, my fidelity to embrace the stillness of our new lives has been a key factor in my writing process. Stillness, a quiet place, a moment to ourselves, I mean these things in the bodily sense. We're all isolated in ways which amplify our own bodies to ourselves. We've spent much of the last year looking at ourselves in the mirror because we've been forced to—which is equal parts uneasy and beautiful. I approach poetry as a means to confront the realities of my own body, the ways in which my own body has experienced life, and the ways in which things have left my body. If something goes away, how is it replaced? Is it replaced in the same way as before? Does it look the same to you? Does it look the same to me?

When I approach a poem, writing into what I don't know has been a key element. Each of my poems are written down first, but the language itself begins to take another shape once the poem is

given air. Poetry is performance, it takes on another life once spoken, and I'm constantly concerned with the ways in which I can communicate through speech.

Reading, of course, is the foundation of good writing. Constant and critical reading to learn new ways to approach a poem has been the most important thing for me. Reading across genres, listening to readings online, communicating with people—the ways in which we learn from each other through spoken word, through the page, through careful, attentive, listening—these are keys. Each line break, each word choice, every heartbeat, cadence, and sound becomes immensely important when working on a poem. However, as easy as it is to forget, reading and writing are fun. The entire process is immensely joyful, even when it becomes difficult. Don't forget why you're sitting down to write in the first place: because you realized you not only had something important to say, but you found joy within the craft and process.



Matthew Graham is the author of four books of poetry most recently, *The Geography of Home*, from the Galileo Press. He is a professor emeritus at the University of Southern Indiana and is the current Poet Laureate of Indiana.

For me, I have a subject I want to think about, sometimes, or I just have an image or a line in my head that might lead to something. I'm not sure. I'm a very slow writer – I have a lot of other things in my life that seem to be more important than writing. But still, I'm always thinking as a

writer. And I think that's important. I read a lot – everything – as long as it is well written – and that kicks my ass to be a better writer. You can always be a better writer by reading really good writers. When I was young everything was a poem and I lived my life as though there was poetic intensity in everything I did. And maybe there was. Luckily, I did not take this too seriously.

I try to keep my lines about the same size on the page – I've developed an interior, free verse rhythm that I think I'm most comfortable with, although it is hard to explain. I really like lines that turn into each other, that bounce off each other. And that sometimes surprise. But with no cheap tricks.

Gosh, sometimes I get so sick of my own voice on the page – that guy again, with all his complaints and problems. Yuck! So, the delete button is great thing. Or the wastepaper basket. Valery said: "A poem is never finished only abandoned." I looked into this quote and I found that what he really said was – "A work is never truly complete but abandoned."

I dunno. Yes and no. Sometimes you are so sick of something it is done. On the other hand, if a poem needs more work – and you know it – well, then work on it!

(Featured image by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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