Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Poets on Craft: Shome Dasgupta and Alina Stefanescu

Bunkong Tuon · Monday, May 9th, 2022

For this seventy-fourth post in our Poets on Craft series, we have Shome Dasgupta and Alina Stefanescu.

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.

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.

This series is intended for educational purposes only.



Shome Dasgupta is the author of nine books, including The Seagull And The Urn (HarperCollins India) and most recently, Spectacles (Word West Press) and a poetry collection, Iron Oxide (Assure Press). Forthcoming novels include Cirrus Stratus (Spuyten Duyvil) and Tentacles Numbing (Thirty West Publishing House). He lives in Lafayette, LA and can be found at www.shomedome.com and @laughingyeti.

A calling—a hope that is—I hope that is, for a poem to seek me out for a home or a belonging, a place to exist so that it's no longer a ghost drifting back and forth in the tides of unknown oceans. Such is a casual haunting—a gentle murmur, a rustling—that stirs in the mind like brown and cracked leaves rattling around in a wind near the earth, hovering close to maintain its fortitude—to be heard in a skull carved for a spark, a lightning—an infinite flame of a candle.

Oh, indeed it’s me in search of a home, though—a specter myself, wandering from mirror to mirror, reaching out to grasp a clock, a second, an endless search to vaguely recognize a tilted head of a pup, this way and that or that way and this, that is—a touch of skin, a tongue, a quilted world sewn with thread resembling roots and soil and minerals, such is the dirt.

A sound and a sound and a sound—malleable in its creation to construct meaning and sense from a tug or a pull to venture into a hypnotizing journey where the tangible is just beyond the fingertips. So, the intangible—twirling and clasping and swirling until photographic flashes flicker, coming and going, until there’s a word next to a word next to a word, and there, becoming a river fed by streams into an unending deluge, only to be directed, with its approval, into a rhythm, however disguised or evident, where it’s definitions or intentions arrive from sentiment or sediment.

The sadness of sorrow—the joy of jubilation, either a clashing or harmonious clasp—an arrival or a departure or the two, paired hand against hand—hand in hand, a carriage into a light, however dim or luminous. However and however, forever a facade, blanketing or revealing subtle sutures so that, that is, a land can be grazed upon by each and every grain of sonance.

Poetry, a memory. Perhaps, to be forgotten—perhaps to be remembered, remember. I’ll never ask, and if I don’t ask, there’s no conclusion—only, an understanding, that is, an agreement that there exists not a beginning or ending, but rather a ghost of myself or you or us in perpetual plains to find a harvest, that is, a poem to find you or me or us to feel a familiarity amid oceans and shiny tidbits of time.



Alina Stefanescu was born in Romania and lives in Birmingham, Alabama. Her most recent book is Dor, which won the Wandering Aengus Press Prize (September, 2021). Alina’s poems, essays, and fiction can be found in Prairie Schooner, North American Review, World Literature

Today, Pleiades, Poetry, BOMB, Crab Creek Review, and others. More online at www.alinastefanescuwriter.com.

A sound and a sound and a sound—and the knife an angle of light lays over an echo. The poem often begins for me in displacements, or in the absence of space, in the areas which lack community or conversation, and I suspect this is because reality is loud but truth stays homeless—it settles inside no ideology, it belongs to no nation-state, it blurs the borders we create for it.

For me, the inner life isn't seperate from the external world that lights it with wonder, terror, and astonishment. The inside feeds on the outside. We are all bound by the billboards, the bible verses, the monuments, the media, and our responses to the made world. Yet we are hardly touched by the bombs that fall in foreign languages. The poet's wonder at the daffodil's sunny face meets itself in the bombs it evades.

Socialization trains us to feel things, and to imagine those feelings or responses as "normal." But poetry often begins in the willingness to be naked, to lay bear, to bare the self outside the words used to numb it.

I'm fascinated by the distance between official memory–as exemplified in media, museum, and textbooks—and vernacular memory, or cultural memories arising from below and signified in unofficial memorials.

I love staring at the bones of a building, at the scaffolds of a structure, at the ways institutions set boundaries on remembering in order to shape the form of available nostalgia. The critical gaze isn't a refusal of wonder so much as vulnerable engagement of it, and this enters my poetics often as paratext, epigraphs, quotations, foot-notes, trails into the cement.

Like Shome, I find the poem is a vessel that doesn't conclude so much as it opens, it rests in a space of shared seeing, and it allows us to see what we've been trained to overlook, ignore, or erase.

One of the inscriptions on Ceausescu's grave left by a 1994 visitor reads: "Even blamed, your memory will live on in the legend of our country." The inclusive pronoun enacts a strange intimacy. The visitor posits the country against the dead dictator whose "memory will live on" in the vernacular memories of Romanians.

A note for the dead is how the pool of available nostalgia widens, making space for mockumentaries of Ceausescu, the dictator who hated to be laughed at. To laugh at a dictator is to enact his worst fear.

I think laughter and suffering share a splinter sometimes, and it is the splinter in the sole that draws me to the page–and haunts me in the writing of others.

(Featured image by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

This entry was posted on Monday, May 9th, 2022 at 7:23 am and is filed under Education, Poetry,

Criticism

You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.