



Where Poetry Is Born: Copper Canyon Press

Posted by [Dan Fecht](#) / 11 Mar 2017

Poetry is, indeed, a story told in a snap or a glimpse inside ones head with a map.

Oftentimes, poetry can act like the middle sibling; moderately overlooked but still dearly loved. But why is that? What makes us desire to read emotionally charged verses built around feelings? Or what makes us condemn the art of it all to somewhere between the couch seat cushions? This is an answer that isnt easy to isolate, but a lot of sociological indication points to one phrase: Its quite, if not totally, misunderstood by the general public.

There is a deeper meaning to poetry than romance and roses. With that stated, we must realize the aforementioned phrase is a false stereotype that of which needs to be broken or at least set aside until one takes the time to further review what its all about. Picture reading a good novel or a short story during those moments when you find yourself most at ease. If said book is literature that you're enjoying, then one typically feels fulfilled mentally, longing for the next free moments in their day to scan the pages. Theres an emotional and expressive connection being made here, and thats something that we long for as people.

We found some time to catch up with Kelly Forsythe, Head Publicist with Copper Canyon Press, one of the leading publishers of fine poetry in the world. We were curious to get an insiders take on what she sees now and for the future of the written word of intensity:

DC Life Magazine: What is your role in the world of poetry and with Copper Canyon Press?

Kelly Forsythe: I direct the publicity program there as I work to get our authors noticed in print and digital media through reviews and interviews. Im also working on literary advocacy, on behalf of the press to raise the visibility of poetry in general, which is a very lofty undertaking! In the world of poetry outside of the work I do, I am an author, and I have a book coming out from Coffee House Press called "Perennial". Additionally, I teach at the University of Maryland at College Park. So, I am very immersed in life and I obviously have no time to sleep and I try not to nod off in the Washington, DC traffic (laughs).

DC Life Magazine: Can you name a couple of the poets with Copper Canyon Press or otherwise that we need to be reading right now, and why?

KF: Copper Canyon has a long history of publishing authors who break the norm. Id

say that you'd also find our poetry to be politically charged. Most recently, we published a book called *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* by Ocean Vuong. This book of poetry is about the immigrant experience, LGBT youth in America and it is simply a very important new voice. We have a new book coming out soon by Javier Zamora, an undocumented poet, called *Unaccompanied*. It chronicles, in part, his journey coming to America under such circumstances and it is vital to the poetry world. I'd also recommend Solmaz Sharif and Morgan Parker, too. These are all poets that we should be getting acquainted with and I wish media outlets around the nation were asking this question more directly, quite frankly.

DC: Why do you think poetry is important in culture and education?

KF: There's a plethora of reasons for that. One of the things I have found about poetry, and I read about this in a *New Yorker* article recently, is that poetry is like protest as it uses language that is uttered with intention. There's always a sense that the poet is building something big through a particular purpose to create the largest impact that they can. Through this, it's making a cultural contribution. For example, is the poem about a marginalized experience? This draws a picture in the reader's mind and influences our edification of the subject(s). It's a community building experience and an emotional connection that can empower. It adds to the greater cultural landscape of our existence, even.

KF: Great question, I even encounter this with my undergraduate students. They come from High School expecting an Emily Dickinson rhyming scheme or an internal rhyme. I think it is a choice by the author, so I don't think it is any lack of skill on the poet's behalf, particularly. It allows for less constraints on the poet so they can more easily express their words without working into that mold and rhyme structure.

DC: What personal hints or devices can you share for someone trying to make that connection with poetry, as if it were a good novel?

KF: For me, the key is starting with the emotion of the poem and figuring out what the goal of that emotion might be. If you are reading a whole book of poetry, it can be really hard to read it narrative style. They read in a different way. There is an emotional narrative that runs consistently through every book of poetry, including my own, that I have come across. Whether it focuses on sadness and grief or a divorce, etc.

I'm thinking of Sharon Olds and her book, *"Stag's Leap"*. It had this thread of emotion running through it that submitted itself to this divorce she was going through. So, I start with figuring out what the author was intending to convey. And then, from there, you can put your own understanding to it of how it reflects on you. Also, the process of writing poetry versus writing fiction is an intense build and drop. Very penetrating for a shorter period. A novel is a slower build for a larger piece of prose with a sustained intensity.

KF: Definitely. With Copper Canyon, I can speak to what we are doing as an organization. We are working to support the National Endowment for the Arts. We've been doing the best we can to vocally support a campaign called *#ThankyouNEA*, which contains a lot of other organizations within the initiative. We are also part of a

larger coalition called Litnet, which consists of 60 or so non-profit organizations and publishers that were established the first time the National Endowment for the Arts was under attack during the Reagan administration. This is an organization that actively goes to Capitol Hill and works to directly affect and support literary nonprofits through direct political and civic engagements. Poets, right now, are certainly speaking of political ordeals. However, poets have been pushing back against political agendas for all of time and this work that is happening right now is work that has been happening for decades. The difference is that now, poetry and its audience is expanding and becoming more engaged because of this political climate. So, who needs poetry now? Well, what a great time to see the need for it!

DC: If someone would like to check out good poetry for the first time, who is a recommended poet to start with to get them fired up for it?

KF: Pablo Neruda, Maggie Nelson, Lucille Clifton, C.D. Wright are all great to start with. On the personal side of poetry and the creation of it, film and cinematography can also be inspirational for the poetic mind. There is something about a good film that can get ideas going in your mind.

DC: What is your prediction or the future state of poetry?

KF: We should be focusing on who is writing the poem, what is the poem representing and who is publishing them, and even the ways they are being distributed. As a community, there needs to be some thought put into it for the future because the historical cannon of poetry that has been published in the United States is and can be a little homogeneous. The future should incorporate and reflect our actual nation which is not homogeneous at all.

DC: When you're not focused on poetry, how do you unwind?

KF: Love film and movies and talking about them and spending the time to figure out what happened in them. I saw all of the Oscar movies this year and enjoyed talking about them at length. I enjoy cooking. My partner has Indian heritage so to learn more about foods that are Indian influenced has been a great joy for me. I always look forward to going to the Folger Shakespeare library, too.

DC: Have you ever thought of submitting your poetry to Copper Canyon under a pseudonym to see what your co-editors would say?

KF: (laughs) No! not quite.

Please check out <http://coppercanyonpress.com> to discover the beauty of poetry.

Kelly Forsythe's poetry book, "Perennial", is due out in 2018 from Coffee House Press.

Photo of Kelly Forsythe: Janessa Jackson