

**Kennesaw State University**

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**From the Selected Works of Cheryl Stiles**

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## 21: Twenty-one Questions Frequently Asked by Poets

Cheryl Stiles, *Kennesaw State University*



Available at: [https://works.bepress.com/cheryl\\_stiles/S2/](https://works.bepress.com/cheryl_stiles/S2/)

# 21

## **21 Questions Frequently Asked by Poets**

Presentation for Red Clay Writers Conference

Poetry Panel with Jennifer Sadre-Orafai

October 18, 2015

### **What is your advice about cover letters?**

Only include if asked.

KISS...keep it short and simple, certainly no longer than a page.

Show genuine interest in the journal that you are submitting to.

Read previous issues.

Only include brief list of previous publications.

What is unique about you...in terms of the journal?

Southern Women's Review

SLANT

### **What if I don't have any previous publications?**

Persistence will pay off

If you include the other items mentioned above, you have a cover letter

### **What if someone copies my work?**

Probability is small

Contact the journal editor

Or consider it flattery

### **How can I copyright my work in advance?**

Copyright law states that your writing, once produced, is already copyrighted by you.

If you want a back-up plan, mail an envelope of your poems to yourself.

Keep the sealed, postmarked envelope.

**Print vs. online journals. Like comparing apples and oranges but both still fruit.**

### **Print journals**

Tangible printed item

Usually one or two comp copies

Sometimes indexed

Limited by print run

Generally, longer response times

An aesthetically beautiful object

### **Online**

Many no longer considered “substandard publication”

NEA grants

Faster response times

Faster time to publication

Much, much wider audience

### **Can I do simultaneous submissions?**

More and more journals accept them, even encourage them

Notify other journals ASAP if piece is accepted elsewhere.

### **Who owns my poem once it is published?**

Rights usually revert to author/ referred to as one time serial rights

Be wary of any publications that require exclusive or permanent rights

### **If I publish in an online journal will I always be able to get back to my poem?**

The most likely answer is no.

Print is stable. The digital world is fragile.

My suggestions...

Make a print copy (preferably in color)

The poem on the web

Table of contents

Cover page of journal

Masthead

Bio page with your info

You can also save these as HTML

### **Where do I find calls for submissions?**

Poets and Writers

Writers Chronicle

Poet's Market

New Pages website

Duotrope website (limited free)

CRWROPPS listserv/ Allison Joseph

### **Are there free tools out there for writers?**

Amazing tools

Writer's Digest Annual Best Websites for Writers, May/June issue

Manuscript tracking

Screenplay writing software

Free Funds for Writers

### **Can you recommend any books for poets and aspiring poets?**

I'm a librarian. It is what I love to do!

See handout

### **What about contests?**

I remain skeptical. Fauxetry.com

Enter judiciously.

Do you get a copy of the winning book or a copy of the journal?

### **Why are some writers so prolific? What can I do about writers block?**

Jane Yolen, Owl Moon  
Fifty plus children's, YA , and adult lit books  
She was once asked this question.  
She held up a pen  
BIC...she said it again  
Butt in chair

**How do I know if a poem is finished?**

Subscribe to the “no poem is finished, only abandoned” theory  
You can always revise  
Put the poem away for weeks or months then see if it seems finished  
Does it have a coherency to you? Thematic, formal, narrative

**Where do I find inspirations for poems?**

Libraries  
The natural world  
Works of other poets  
Science junkie...Science News, Nova, NY Times science section  
Social issues  
Trying to explain the inexplicable...Texas nurse's aide, True

**What is your favorite rejection letter?**

“Editor does not like laundromat poems”

**What is the average starting salary for a poet?**

Always have a job, you will likely never make a living from it

**What is a chapbook?**

Often a poet's first publication  
Limited edition, 200 or less  
16-24 pages, up to 32  
Usually sold at readings by poet  
Most time honored tradition for poet's first publication  
EE Cummings, Frost

## **What is the history of La Vita Poetica Press?**

Launched in 2006 to produce limited edition, handcrafted chapbooks

Copies in archives and special collections at KSU, Emory, Duke etc.

Work in collaboration with poets on cover design, layout, etc.

Honor a poet's work by creating an aesthetically beautiful work

A treasure to hold in one's hand

Have published seven volumes to date

## **What do you look for in a chapbook manuscript?**

Musicality of language

That there is an arc to the poems

Authenticity or consistency of theme

Everything Turns

Matchbook

Momentum

Surprise and delight, sublimity and terror

Knowledge of poetic traditions

Record of previous publications