

## From A to Z: An Interview with Josh Medsker on His Encyclopedia-Inspired Project, *Medskerpedia*, Part II

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*craft talk* by Meaghan Quinn

*Every day for his Medskerpedia Project, poet Josh Medsker reads an entry from the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics; in turn, he writes a poem that is thematically, formally, or structurally inspired by a given entry. By the summer of 2019, Medskerpedia will consist of a compilation of roughly 1,600 poems!*

*[For the online version only: Click here for Medskerpedia, Part I.*

*Link to:*

<http://www.thetishmanreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Medsker.pdf> ]

*See The Tishman Review: Volume 2, Issue 3, July 2016 for Medskerpedia, Part I.*

March 11, 2017

**Meaghan Quinn: This morning, 2/17/17, you wrote poem #492. How do you feel stamina-wise? Do you feel your focus and drive depleting? Or are you more motivated than ever?**

Josh Medsker: I feel pretty pumped. My focus is as strong as ever, I think. I went through an idea drought about a month ago, but I think I'm coming out of it now. I have sort of come to terms with the ebbs and flows.

**MQ: You seem to be doing more with social media platforms to promote this writing project. For example, you now have an Instagram page, "Medskerpedia." What is your hope in utilizing social media platforms?**

JM: I wanted to bring in Instagram to showcase the more visual work we've been doing. A couple of us are doing erasures and other found poetry, concrete poetry, and work where the form of the poem is crucial. Sometimes I will create a few different versions of the same poem idea . . . so I was hoping to post these alternative versions of my own works on Instagram. Hopefully, the other Mpedians will come along!

Also, I finally figured out a way to get my website into the mix. I've been posting short little paragraphs every day, giving a little insight to my writing process, and announcing what the daily entry is without giving away the actual poem. That has been a lot of fun. I like giving people a taste. I'll post it on Twitter and it automatically links to my Josh Medsker Facebook page.

**MQ: I am fascinated by your writing pace and check in to see the new work you post. And I often see others working alongside you. Does the creative energy of the Facebook group help or hinder you, as there are eyes on you?**

JM: The creative energy of this group totally spurs me on. I was just thinking today about how physically exhausted I am, and how nice it would be to take a break . . . and then I saw a poem from a regular Mpedia contributor and it just made me say, “Damn, that’s incredible. I gotta beat that.” Haha! I’m pretty competitive. Little known fact.

**MQ: This is the second time I have interviewed you on behalf of *The Tishman Review*. What would you say has been your favorite form since the first time I interviewed you? What new “letter” has been the most liberating? The most challenging?**

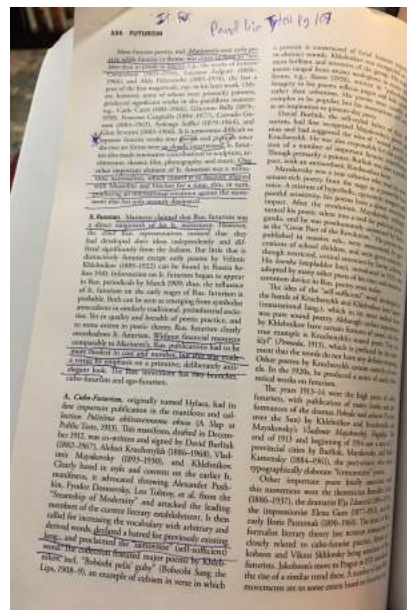
JM: I really liked Fractal Poetry, once I could figure it out. I also liked Fu. These entries hinge on repetition and re-perception of images, and that really struck a chord with me. I have found that my best poems deal with perception and language. And all entries are challenging for me. There’s still so much to learn! So daunting, but so fun.

**MQ: You are now annotating in the margins of the encyclopedia you draw inspiration from. Does this mean you are studying the forms in a more interactive way with the various genres and forms? Can you shed some light on your daily writing process and how it has evolved?**

JM: So my previous process was: I open the encyclopedia, read the entry, and then I go to Wikipedia or another source for further clarification. And then begin

writing. I started marking up the book so that I could have a record of what I was thinking. Helps me solidify connections. For example, I’m currently reading John Tytell’s biography of Ezra Pound (*Ezra Pound: The Solitary Volcano*). I was reading about Pound’s connections to Italian Futurism, and as luck would have it, Futurism was the entry for that day. I marked up passages in the encyclopedia and made weird marks only I understand in the margins. Haha!

So my process is more or less the same, but now there’s an extra layer. Another thing that I like to do now is record myself reading the poems. I have about an hour recorded right now. It helps me figure out which poems are worth fixing, and which are just going to be experiments or springboards to something else. Listening to the lines helps me determine which ones are interesting and valid.



*Pictured here is a shot of Medsker’s encyclopedia complete with annotation.*

**MQ: How, if at all, has the new political climate affected the poems you write for *Medskerpedia*? Do you find the work to be a form of escapism from politics?**

JM: 2017 is not the time to be bashful or equivocating in writing. I don't use the poetry to escape from politics, absolutely not. It's the opposite. In my life and writing, I've tried to stand up for the little guy and tell his or her story in my own way. Now, if the work is successful, that's another story. Hopefully, it is. It's a tough thing to do properly, mix political ideas and poetry. I think my work focuses a lot on societal concerns, but it's subtle, and that's its strength. When I've pulled it off.

**MQ: And lastly, any new tips for writer's block? What do you eat, listen to, watch, think about when your mind or the pen simply refuse to write another poem?**

JM: I try to keep in mind that, in the grand scheme, my life is irrelevant. Not trying to be negative, just putting out a true statement. I'm like a drop of rain in the ocean, as they say, and so is my work. But knowing that takes a lot of the pressure off and helps me be less self-conscious. It lets me experiment and push the boundaries a little further.

Nuts-and-bolts-wise, if I'm struggling with a poem, I'll set it aside for a day, write the next day's poem. I'll usually just dash one off and never look at it again. Haha! Since there are hundreds of poems I still have to write for *Mpedia*, I am

willing to have a few of them be total crap. ♦

*Josh Medsker's journalism, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and criticism has been featured in a variety of publications, including: The Ekphrastic Review, Haiku Journal, The Brooklyn Rail, The Anchorage Press, The Review Review, Penmen Review, Empty Mirror, and Red Savina Review. For a complete list of Medsker's publications, visit his website: [www.joshmedsker.com](http://www.joshmedsker.com). He can be reached at [joshmedsker@gmail.com](mailto:joshmedsker@gmail.com).*