

1.

Mark, can you tell us a bit about yourself? Where were you brought up and educated?

I'm not sure where I'm from exactly, but I came into the world in Epping, New South Wales—country of sandstone and turpentine, belonging to the Wallumatagal people of the Darug nation. Though we never stopped to think in 1962, when I arrived, whose country this really was. My Grandfather, a Methodist (then Uniting Church) minister, and my grandmother, Dad's folk, had retired to Epping, and we saw a lot of them when I was growing up. My mum's mother lived in a flat attached to the house my parents built near Epping Oval, so we grew up with her. I went to school at North Epping Primary and then Barker College, Hornsby.

My childhood country feels as much like North Avoca, quieter then, where we holidayed most summers, as it feels like our suburban home in Epping. I feel almost as if I grew up in the places my grandfather preached and my father and his siblings grew—Oberon, Crookwell, Kempsey—and in my grandmother Rachel's Gundaroo and my mother's childhood Helensburg, as in Epping. I inhabited the places their stories told, rather more fully than I inhabited my own suburb and its parks and backyards and streets and shops and rags of bush. Perhaps belonging—even of the illegitimate variety a colonial boy practices—is intergenerational. Like trauma. Like callings: my mother's to music and teaching and my grandfather's to the Word and the Cloth, if not my father's to accounting. I grew up in the social democratic tradition of Methodism, where abstemiousness and kindness prevailed; I grew up lower middle class, in a family where education was known to set you free and where books mattered and sport mattered and in which no one, incredibly, drank; and I grew up in music—my mother is an organist and conductor; my grandmother played I played the cello and my brothers (I have three brothers) all played instruments, and I sang in church choirs and musicals. I grew up in sport—playing soccer and cricket, following rugby league, following pretty much everything.

From that complex ecology, my childhood, it was not improbable that a poet like Mark Tredinnick should have come. I wrote in a poem once: "My childhood is inadequate to my purposes," but I don't think that's right, and I didn't when I wrote it. My childhood was mild, I meant, and on the surface of it plain and tame and happy. But there were strains of vaulting spiritual aspiration I heard back then—in the worlds and mysteries and rhythms and plots I read in books, in the encouragement I received to think for myself, in the practical religion I heard preached and saw enacted around me, in the holiness with which modesty was invested, in the justice we were led to believe sat even closer to godliness than sobriety, in the Bach and Debussy my mother played and I sang—and they counterpointed much that was orthodox and suburban. There was the kind of pain—some of it, some kind of wounding, mysterious to me, still, but written in my body and heart—no childhood escapes. There was always a deep sadness in me, a gift for melancholy (and worse) I think my grandmother taught me, along with the capacity to endure it; there was a severity of mind and spirit, accompanied by a dedication to play, which I believe my grandfather, the preacher might have leant me. Where I grew up, teaching and preaching and singing (if not dancing) were everyday virtues and the disadvantage you were taught to protest was never your own; where I grew up, all faith included doubt, and nothing worth believing in lacked music; where I grew up, all wealth was suspect. We didn't fight much, as I recall. Until we did. We tended to bottle and ferment our grievances.

I've spent my life leaving a lot of my childhood behind; but it fashioned me, as childhood will, for good and for ill, and I am who I am and I've written what I've written because of who I was then and was able to become—in part in order to outgrow that childhood and its constraints—because I grew up with Bach and Job and Hildegard of Bingen and Wesley and

the Dragons and the turpentines and the Hawkesbury sands and my grandfather's vegetables, but without much knowledge of the people whose country we thought we owned, and without any way, consequently, of belonging where I found myself or even of feeling at home in my skin. That took the next forty years and a lot of reading and writing and love and loss and country.

2.

You were involved with the legal profession. When did you realise that this wasn't the right fit? When did you realise you were a writer?

Though I always wrote and read, I didn't find a way to imagine writing as a life. It will come as a shock to anyone who knows me, but I managed to score 99 percent in Maths in my HSC, not a feat I've managed to repeat often since. I only studied maths because you had to; ancient and modern history, English and Latin were my other subjects, and they still feel like fields so rich and delightful you oughtn't to be allowed to study them at school. Of course, those were the days before we lost our way into managerial misunderstandings of education. Before we replaced learning with curriculum, with outcomes and rubrics—and why did anyone allow that to happen?

Still, one thing a boy from the suburbs didn't learn at school was that he, too, might lead a life that participated fully in the fields he so loved at school. What he might do with his nice scores in the humanities was head off and study law. I did Arts and Law at Sydney University, after a first year on a scholarship at the ANU. At the end of two degrees (honours in history and in law) I went to the College of Law and then I got a job in a law firm because that's what a middle-class boy like me, not yet awake to his life, to life, did with a good law degree. It took me six years to get my degrees; it took me six weeks to work out I didn't belong in the law, at least not in one of the biggest firms in the country. I hated time sheets and billable hours; and I am terrible at transactions and the filing of documents, and that is what most of the practice of the law seemed to entail. I also realised in those first six weeks that I could not act for clients who shafted the people they did business with or employed, and it seemed to me many of the banks and franchisors and media companies we acted for did that. Inside a year I blew the whistle on the fraudulence of my own life as a lawyer.

I found a job as an editor, and later a publisher, in legal publishing (Butterworths), a nice transition from Law to the Arts. After four years, I went to Allen & Unwin, and for four years there I commissioned and published academic and trade books in history, sociology, politics, anthropology, psychology, writing, and business. In these years, largely through the books I published and the conversations I had with the people who wrote them, I got a little wiser and a lot more passionate about ecology and land rights and civil rights and literature. I learned also that writing might be a life. After a year at HarperCollins, when the division I was running (HarperEducational) was sold, I left to make my way as a writer and freelance teacher and editor. That was 1996. I'm still at it.

It seems to me now I never did not know I was a writer. That didn't mean I thought I was entitled to presume the world should read my works, or that I could presume to call myself one and try to make a living from words. My first book came out when I was forty-one. A writer has to learn how to write, and a writer has to learn how to live: both things took a while, in particular the living. One needs a life worth writing *from*, even if one never writes *about* it. By 2003, I was on my second marriage and my second batch of children; I had nearly finished a PhD; I had been teaching writing and working as an

editor and copy writer and corporate trainer for seven years. I had lost my way, lost love, squandered chances, lacked courage and learned it. I was good and ready. I'd been ready years before, but something my childhood taught me was how to wait.

All along though, I could write, and I kept reading to learn how to write better (and because reading makes living more resonant). In our family mythology, I was the writer. And I was the reader, the speaker, the one among all my grandparents' twenty-three grandchildren most likely to "take the cloth." I wrote plays and poems and stories at school, and I won prizes there and later. But writing is a long time and a long way, and I took my time. This is how it went for me. If Keats had waited as long as I did the world would never have heard from him some words I have lived by: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty; that is all ye know on Earth, and all ye need to know." Well maybe not quite all.

3.

Who were your main influences in writing?

Much of inspired me writing and inspires me still, is not writing. The uncanny, broken beauty of the world—landscape in its forms and voices and ways and means and weathers—feels like a gift I'm called to return the best way I know how, and writing is the way I know best. Birds inspire me. Trees. Rocks. Places. Horses. Clouds. Shorelines. They are teachers and they are models and they are metaphors and they are subjects. But not topic is worth long attention if the earth is not in it, and so it always was for all the writers and musicians whose work inspires me. I could write a memoir, and maybe I will, framed around the books I read and loved at different stages of my life. Here's a list off the top of my head (I am away from my study) from all eras of my life. It is ragged and incomplete, and I will probably leave off many things I love. Leo Tolstoy, Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, Mikhail Sholokhov, Jane Hirshfield, John Berger, Jane Kenyon, Mirabai, J R R Tolkien, Beatrix Potter, Cormac McCarthy, Mary Oliver, Emily Dickinson, The Song of Songs, The Book of Job, Walt Whitman, James Galvin, Barry Lopez, Anne Sexton, Rainer Maria Rilke, Kenneth Rexroth, Dorothy L Sayers, Raymond Chandler, James Baldwin, Robert Gray, Czeslaw Milosz, Jack Gilbert, Eduardo Galeano, Seamus Heaney, Ben Okri, John Keats, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Charles Wright, E B White, Michael Ondaatje, Judy Beveridge, Judith Wright, Golo Mann, Eric Hobsbawm, Langston Hughes, Larissa Behrendt, Matsuo Basho, Kent Haruf, Rumi, Dante Alighieri, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, John Donne, Major Jackson, Li Bai, Du Fu, Jidi Maajia, Peter Matthiessen, Zadie Smith. I carry many of those I loved as a child and young man with me, though some when I return to them, fail me (or I them). But the list keeps growing, and, as I say, it may be that the biggest influences on what I feel called to write about and how and in what form are not books and poems, but places and works of visual art and people (lovers, teachers, friends, children).

Rereading that list, I am conscious suddenly how male it is and how euro. So it goes, I guess. I am conscious, as I was not once, that I have read predominantly within the literature of my culture, the dominant one. I wish that weren't so, but it is. My reading is not mostly English, though. I always loved the Americans and the Russians and more recently the Persians and Chinese and Indians. You will find most of the world in my shelves. I am much engaged with ways of perceiving

and belonging that are Indigenous. Friends and teachers, some of them writers, have led me to greater wisdom in those areas—kinship with country: Kirli Saunders, Larisa Behrendt, Tony Birch, Fran Bodkin, Melissa Lucashenko... And it has been said that my work—*The Blue Plateau*—practices a belonging that is close to Indigenous in nature. I came to it, though, sideways: Colonialism did not leach from me entirely that deep human gift and need for apprehension of the sacredness of places. Place, for me, has always been a practice. Land has always been an ethic. I found resonance for what my soul knew to be true—that land is the real estate, the home of what is holy, the locus of anything like belonging, even of Selfhood—in Thoreau and Emerson and Whitman and Dickinson, more latterly in Barry Lopez and Rachel Carson, and I found it in Chinese classic poetry (and in the concept of Xing). I found it in Keats and Hopkins. I found it in St Francis. I found it, too, in what I have learned of Indigenous knowledge, and it is ancient there and idiomatic of Australian places and sensibilities, and I know too little of it and I have read too little Indigenous literature. From the start, mine has been an unconforming way of seeing self and world. It has been a mystic way, and part of mysticism has always been the reverence for the more than merely human world.

And music. Music makes me resolute to write poems or prose as rich in thought and emotion and world as that music seems in its soundscape—especially the kind without words. Bach, Debussy, Tallis, Part, Glass, Beethoven, Grieg, Barber (oh, dear, all of them are men). I love and know, but am not knowledgeable about, jazz. Some popular music (Cohen, Joni Mitchell) and even some C&W, a little trance.

Silence influences me and intelligence and beauty and that anything that takes itself seriously enough but not too seriously. Anything that know how to be both grave and light-hearted at once. Elegance and grace and proportion and the forms in which they are embodied and enacted.

Right now, I am finding Hokusai's *Thirty-Six Views of Mt Fuji* the closest thing I know to "a joy forever". And only partly because I am trying to finish a poem of the same title (after a short visit to Kanagawa and Fuji last year).

4.

How do ideas for poems or prose occur to you?

Sometimes I realise I am writing a poem—or what wants to become one—in the midst of writing a Facebook post or email. Sometimes I get up at five in the morning to write a poem whose form and ideas I have been agonising about between the twenty-three other jobs and obligations for three weeks and sketching phrases of in my journal, and today is the day the magazine or the composer or someone else wanted it, and so today is the day, before the other things that also must be done, that it will be written. And mostly it gets written, and sometimes it is good.

Form helps a poet write under these conditions, which are the conditions under which I and many of us "creatives" work. Form tells you how many feet you want per line, how many lines per stanza, how many stanzas. And of course, at least half the time the poem will want to come out another way, and so you help it. An idea alone will not get a poem written. Poems have bodies and they have architecture and they have speech music, and I have to intuit or stumble upon a little of all those before I can get past the first scrawls. I need an image, and often it comes from nature. Or it comes from a conversation overheard or shared, or an incident, a moment, or a response I found myself saying or thinking and writing

down to a book or a news story or a painting or a play or a song. What gets a poem finished is persistence and deadlines (self-imposed or given); but what helps me know a poem is finished is the little I have learned about prosody, and about form and the line and rhythm. I know I am finished a sonnet when I have written fourteen good lines and there is a volta around the end of line eight; a sijo when each of three lines has fifteen syllables and the other conditions of that tradition are met. Form forces more finish into the language, the phrasing, the music, the soul of the thinking; somehow it brings more world into the mind of the making.

Sometimes I write a poem on commission, and I love that. There is so much work to do in making a poem, I like it when some of it is done for me for once: a theme, a deadline, an image. But mostly I wrote poems because there is something that seems to want to be said, and it wants to be said by this poet—another kind of commission, really. I write poems, though, never knowing how they will end and what it may turn out the poem has to say. Poetry is a dark place you make light by finding your way through and out of it. Prose is different, although not as different for me, I suspect, as for other writers. I write from a lyric place inside me (outside me, too). Until I find a lilt and a key, I make no progress—poem or prose. Still, the difference holds. Prose is more purposive: there is a kind of case I have to make and I go at it till it's made. My prose, though it's a poet's prose (as my poetry is, I suspect, an essayist's poetry), is not fictive; and although I work to write fragments and scenes, mostly I write exposition and argument. That makes it rhetorically different from poetry. Poetry must not explain itself, I think (even though I like my poems fairly clear); prose must explain itself. That difference is profound.

I used to plan my prose more than my poetry, but that's not true anymore. I put phrases down that become sentences and paragraphs, and then it becomes apparent where the paragraphs belong, and I push them around, and they become sections, and then I push the sections around and renumber or name them, and there in the end is a lyric essay that feels, I hope, orderly while remaining organic.

Lately all my prose—a series of mostly longer lyric essays—has been commissions: “The Temple of the Word” for a book, *Hearth*, on themes of community and healing; “Nourishing Terrains,” on place for *The Sydney Review of Books*; “I Am Nobody; Who Are You?” on identity and the artist, for a panel discussion and magazine in China. But a couple of months ago, when the government in its idiot hubris decided to price the humanities out of the reach of Australians, I was moved by rage to write an essay, a lyric rant, “The Inhumanities”. I just found myself writing it, and I wrote all morning, and five hours later I had a 4000-word piece. I posted it on my website and put out word on Insta and Facebook, and before the weekend was out it had been read 6500 times. I guess I had been writing it all my life.

I love detective fiction, and I have plotted three or four. Someday I may summon the courage and steal the time and attempt one. I fear my antipathy toward police and the poverty of my imagination about the operations of revenge and manipulation will count against me. Let's see. A good detective fiction is three parts location, two parts weather, and two parts character. I can handle those. Given time and luck and a good story, I could fake the plot and forensics, maybe.

5.

What are the biggest challenges you encounter when you set out to write, and how do you deal with them?

In an interview, Seamus Heaney once said, “I’m a binge writer.” He meant that he doesn’t write much for weeks and then he may write four or five poems at once in a few days. I write like that, and I think that, even if I had the time to write I keep complaining I don’t have, I’d still write that way. It seems to be in my nature. I am like a river: I am a chain of stagnant ponds, and then I am in spate. I keep thinking I’ll become a serious writer one day and develop regular habits of work. But I’m 58 and I think this is just how I work, or how the poetry works on me.

My worst writing habit looks like this: when I have a poem to write—when I have a deadline, or when I know that if I don’t soon start writing what has struck me, it will desert me—I circle it. I walk round and round the poem, sometimes for a day, finding another book to read first, another site to check, another unimportant task to get done. It’s a kind of stage fright. It’s a kind of perfectionism: I don’t want to start because I might not do the inspiration justice. I am like a dog that circles its bed, circling a sleep it needs to fall into.

Maybe it’s just my process. It is the meditation I do in anxiety that I’d rather do in calm. I deal with it by finally sitting down and beginning. I deal with it by taking a pen I like and writing down the key phrases and images in my journal or diary in a loose kind of mindmap. That process usually relaxes me and I find myself begun. I am in cricket terms a nervous starter. Once I get my eye in, though, it’s hard to get me out. Once I have a line written, my anxiety levels drop, my sense of self expands. I have found my way to the poetry place

Sometimes it helps to pull up some recent work—something already well begun—and edit that for a while. Coming at my work sideways seems to disarm my perfectionism; it fools my fear of failing.

Other times the trick, when I need to write a poem, is to start some client work instead. I have a hard time allowing myself the time off “real” work, the kind they pay you for, the lectures and the editing and the mentoring, the manuscript appraisals—to get creative work made. Part of the trouble is there is always far too much else to do, and making poetry or considered prose takes time and space and the right kind of energy. But what I’m dealing with is, I think, the darker side of my lapsed Protestantism. A privileging of the unexceptional, the functional—a habit of valuing first what puts food on the table and meets your obligations to family and society. What helps me get through that thicket of negativity is to include on my to do list each day a poem that needs beginning or finishing or a manuscript that needs curation. What works is to turn creativity into just another item on the list. (Secretly it remains sacred, but it is democratised and made quotidian in my mind by this means, and so I turn to it.) But what also works is giving priority to duller work too often, so that the poem, still the hardest work on the desk, takes on at once the sheen of a sabbatical. Perversely, I seem to have written my best work when I really ought to have been preparing the slides or editing the corporate copy.

One more bad habit I probably don’t want to learn how to break. Jane Hirshfield said to me recently: “I am the home-baker of all my sentences.” She meant that she simply cannot let herself write a sentence the same way she’s written it before. It is the same with me. Even in a piece like this. For these are all questions I have answered often enough before. I, too, seem to have to make every sentence by hand, from the beginning, and in a way that feels fresh to me. Nearly all my writing wants all of me and all I know of writing. It makes things slower than they’d like to be; it runs me late for family and for poetry. But maybe it keeps the world a little freer of cliché and banality. Of tired language.

6.

Are you working on anything at the moment?

The poems I like best are opportunistic, occasional. And they are probably most of my work: the poems I find myself writing because a holy or unendurable moment insisted on a response. As the recipient of those blessings, the curator of moments, I am never off duty. Poets make books, too, though, and I just sent one off to Pitt Street Poetry. It's a collection, my fourth: *Walking Underwater*. I have another manuscript here on the desk, too: *A Beginner's Guide*. In case this seems impossibly prolific, I need everyone to recall that, before *A Gathered Distance*, which Tegan Gigante published at BirdFish in February this year, my last collection was *Bluewren Cantos* in late 2013. Seven years is a long time between poetry collections.

The truth is, I've been gathering poems all that while, but a marriage ended in 2014, and there have been very hard years to survive, in particular for my children. There was a legal work to do and there was a grief to be endured. I was poetically derailed. At least, I could not find the peace of mind to sit and make books of the poems that kept being written. I am not, it seems, a poet who writes well when life is hard to live. On the other hand, this hard time has been made liveable by poems I read and poems I wrote. And so it is that it ends up being 2020, and there is one book in February and another in November, and a third sometime early in 2021: *A Beginner's Guide* contains many poems I wrote before *Bluewren Cantos*, and just as many written in the years since.

I have been busy with the curation of these three manuscripts since December last year. I have to prepare a collection of one hundred poems for translation into Chinese—a book will come out there next year. I collection of my essays will come out in Chinese, too, sometime over the next two years; I hope to find a publisher for that in English. Meantime, there have been and always will be, I hope, the poems that arrive and want me to write them. There is "Thirty-six Views," which I mentioned before and keep meaning to write. I'm working with my musician brother Russell on a show based on his musical transcription of many of the poems from *A Gathered Distance*; it's not an easy time to plan a show, and we may end up doing that online. There are other collaborations, too, with classical composers. That is work I enjoy very much. I'm planning a book of translations—poetry from many cultures and eras. Since my work has begun to be translated, and since I've begun to translate some Chinese, myself, I've come to appreciate the importance and sophistication of the art of poetic translation. So, watch this space.

There are prose projects, too—apart from the book of essays. I have plans to for a work—it may be an extended kind of haibun—called *The Divide*, in which I travel the Great Divide and reflect not only on the geographies of the inside country and the coast, on watersheds and erosion and geologic time, but on the schisms in our selves and in our history and in contemporary society. The crisis of the times, beyond covid, is ontological. We are split from ourselves—ecologically and spiritually. We are, in dominant culture, orphaned from nature and orphaned also from the lyric nature of reality, including our own. As long as we are cut off from our deeper humanity, from our animal selves, our ecological selves, we are likely to remain alienated from each other, too. To categorise and catalogue people, the privileged and the unprivileged, was the colonial project—the alienation of each from other, the exploitation of the first world by the third, of women by men, of black by white, of children by everyone, of the powerless by the powerful. The outcry for justice that rings the world is the pain that long exploitation of all human spirits—of black lives and women's lives and children's lives, in particular—has caused.

But these are angry times, shrill and divisive. And while we work for justice, we must guard against perpetuating the alienating, stereotyping, demonising project of colonialism. What we cannot reconcile in our selves we're likely to keep breaking apart in the world. I think the work of achieving human as well as natural justice will not be achieved until we recover a lyric and ecological conception of ourselves—each of us and all of us. The tropes at play in the movements for justice are sometimes as divisive, often as toxic, as the racist and misogynistic tropes of Colonialism. Stereotyping the other doesn't help a just cause any more than it made an unjust cause just. Until we know ourselves as humans, how can we find and regard the full humanity in others—deeper than the labels we trade in and deeper yet than the identities we assert, as if they said ourselves?

Inside the rhetoric of outrage that prevails, some animals remain more equal than others. Whereas, in fact, a few arseholes aside, we are all angelic organisms, we are all inhabitants of earth, and all of us have a tendency to get up ourselves, or to flail and forget. I think we need more feeling with—more compassion; we need less animus *against*.

So I want to travel and talk and consider and witness and think about the divisions that rend contemporary selves and societies, and I want to see what it is that places (damaged and intact) and what cultures of belonging have to say about mending our alienation from ourselves and each other and from the natural world.

A big project, yes, and one I have been trying to get to for years, one I have approached in many of my recent essays and poems. I'm doing a talk and reading soon with the poet and QC Brian Walters. We've called it "Poetry as the Conservation of the Wild." Those words riff on Thoreau's "in wildness is the preservation of the world." And they are a way of saying much that I have come to believe and want to explore in this new book, and will, inevitably, in all my work: in poetry, in the lyric way, is the conservation of what is wild and animate and beautiful in all selves and on the earth.

There are other books, too: the long-promised memoir on reading and the reading life: *Reading Slowly at the End of Time* and an adaptation of *The Little Green Grammar Book* and *The Little Red Writing Book* for younger readers.

Covid made me realise teaching poetry can work quite well online. This May I launched my first online poetry masterclass, *What the Light Tells*. I'm prepping the second offering now—it runs from 14 August. Check my website: marktreddinnick.com.au. I love teaching—poetry in particular. And offerings like the masterclass, grammar workshops and creative writing masterclasses, will remain a central part of my writing life in the years ahead.

7.

Not only do you write, but also edit and teach writing. What are the common mistakes new or even seasoned writers make?

I don't like to dwell on negatives. And any failings I see in others' work I only recognise because I fall into those errors myself. But these, very briefly, the five ways many emerging works fall short of themselves:

- Far too little evocation of the world outside the merely human. Too much prose and poetry I read is locked in the privacy of its emotions and abstractions. To work, a poem must seem to witness any human life, not merely yours or your character's. And it has to occur somewhere, and not just in your head. "Put a bird in it" is one of my teaching adages. Spend nearly fifty percent of your ink on the scene.

- A piece of literature wants a place and it wants a voice. My first point speaks of place. There are many ways in which a writer may not find and speak her voice, his voice on paper. They include a want of grammar, a surfeit of theory, too much accidental phrasing, too many commonplace turns of phrase. Some of this is what I think of as the disciplines of grace; some is want of care and respect for language; some is disregard or want of respect for readers in their humanity
- Good writing—all good art—expresses not just the selfhood of the speaker, but somehow all our selves. There is a spiritual intelligence behind fine writing, an understanding that it is oneself as any one of us at all that one wants to write. Many poems cast the speaker as the hero of his own narrative. Many, on the other hand, give a reader no subjectivity at all, and without a sense of self in the writing, the reader, in her self, cannot enter the text or feel a thing.
- I would be rich if I earned a dollar for each adjective I sand from students' and clients' and mentees' work. They clutter writing; they crowd a reader out. They also tell a reader what to feel and narrow an experience of the world the words are trying to invite.
- Hemingway, admittedly a man and probably not a very nice human being, but a pretty fair writer says this, which is true: you get to sound true to yourself by refusing to write anything the way you've heard it said before. The gift of cliché is that it goads you to try harder to find your own way of saying it. Many writers are too wedded to clichés, and many of them are the tropes these days of theory.
- Writing is semantic music. The sentence is not right, as Joan Didion said, until the rhythm is right. Rhythm and musicality, sadly, are not evenly spread about. But work on them, if you can. Half or more of what makes a piece of writing resonant is how it sounds, its ups and downs, its cadences and feet. Much of the writing I read could do with some dance classes. And some musical intelligence.
- Lack of form and want of shape. Hard arts to teach and master, but there they are in all the works that do the distance. Now one form is right for a poem, and no one structure for prose. But forming and shaping are indispensable disciplines for writers. It helps to have a feel for the architecture of utterance. You get it, or develop it, by reading widely and by listening well. And by knowing, from the outset, that any old shape will NOT do.

8.

What advice would you give to a writer aspiring to write poetry?

I'll be brief about this.

1. Read a lot of poetry from all cultures and eras. Keep reading it as you write and think of your own poems as a participation in the long lyric conversation poetry carries on.
2. Get outside a lot, and school yourself in the world beyond the merely human and the merely personal. Deepen your place literacy; hear the many languages in which reality speaks.
3. Work at your speech music and apprehension of rhythm. Do this by reading well and taking some classes. Do it by sounding out every line you write, whether your poem is for the stage or for the page.
4. Poems have bodies like us. Making a poem you are sculpting a voice and a little world. So, learn some forms, and work at inventing your own. Above all: regard form. Don't ignore it. If a poem is written without regard for form, it's probably not a poem.
5. Make poems and keep making them. Make them as if each were not a discourse or a performance or a thesis, but an enactment of love, a gift of thanks for being alive. Theory will not help you write a poem. Get out of your head and into your body and into the world.
6. There is a Spanish word *Sentipensante*. It means thinking-feeling. I know it because one of my mentees, Fernanda Penaloza shared it with me. There is some scholarship on it. Galeano used it. It is a word said to have been coined by Columbian fishers. And it works well to speak of the work that the poet does with words: think with your body; feel with your intellect. Speak what the heart says to the head, the world to the body, the body to the voice to the world. Musicality is good for this work. Too much head or too much heart, and a poem will fall short. Where music is present, though, the heart and body and the lyric nature of things are all likely to be present.
7. So, lead a life that has more in it than poetry and concepts. Love people and things. Read way outside your field. Learn how much was known in other times and how much is known in other cultures and fields. Broaden yourself;

become multiple. Get over yourself by getting into yourself. All this so that when you write, your poem sings the universe of you, in which the universe of all of us is gestured at.