

This interview took place in October 2019 and was published in the NGY Review in January 2021.

An Interview with Tyler Barton

by Cam Villanueva

Tyler Barton is the author of the flash fiction chapbook, *The Quiet Part Loud* (2019), which won the Turnbuckle Chapbook Contest from Split Lip Press. His fiction can be found in *Kenyon Review*, *Subtropics*, *Gulf Coast*, *Paper Darts*, and is forthcoming in *The Iowa Review*. I found his story, “Breakthrough Mailboxes of Southern Pennsylvania” on *Subtropics* earlier this year while researching lit mags. So when asked to do this interview project for *Concordia-St Paul*, I initially wanted to contact well-published authors, but I didn't have much luck. I ended up thinking about some really interesting emerging writers to reach out to, and I could not get Tyler's story out of my head. I had forgotten his name, the publication, the title. I couldn't forget his characters, though. I also remembered he did his MFA at Mankato. Luckily I was able to find his story again through some research, and I contacted him. Tyler was more than eager to answer all of my questions. The following is a revised transcript of our email correspondence.

INTERVIEWER

Mr. Barton, I read your work on *Subtropics*, and I really loved it. Thank you so much for agreeing to this email interview.

TYLER BARTON

First off, thank you so much for emailing me. It means so much that you not only read my story, but remembered it, and reached out. I've been trying to do this as much as possible lately—emailing a writer when their work connects with me. Too often, publishing can feel like a tree falling in the forest with no one there to hear it.

INTERVIEWER

I know what you mean. I've never been published. And I've actually never thought of trying to connect with an established writer before taking this class at Concordia-St Paul.

TYLER BARTON

That actually leads me into the theme of how I'll answer your questions—the advice I have is that I don't know if I'll ever feel established, and I may well always feel like I'm emerging. I know writers who have the kind of "success" that I crave (a book of stories published with a great press, praised by reviewers, doing book tours) who still feel like they haven't "made it" yet. There's always another step. Even when I've received some of the most exciting acceptances ever, the feeling I have just after elation is either imposter syndrome, wondering if they had made a mistake, or anxiousness, in that how I will ever get into an even "better" journal. Or, what if this is the last thing I publish? Writing is full of self-doubt and struggle.

INTERVIEWER

Self-doubt is probably the one thing that binds all writers, besides their love of language. How do you cope with it?

TYLER BARTON

Luckily, what keeps me from drowning in these thoughts and feelings are other people, other artists, other writers, mostly. The community I've found from writing is the single most valuable thing I've achieved. I've found my community through workshops, publishing. I attend, organize, and host live events with other writers. I'm active on Twitter and Facebook, and email, and I have the occasional strange chance encounter at coffee shops.

INTERVIEWER

You sound like you don't like to be locked in a cave at a desk typing away. Instead, it seems like you work really hard at connecting with other people.

TYLER BARTON

I really believe that if a writer today chooses to be isolated, to be reclusive, or to be averse to community, they have made their uphill battle for "success" even steeper.

INTERVIEWER

How long did it take to establish yourself as a writer?

TYLER BARTON

I don't know exactly what this means, but I'll take it to mean: when did I start truly identifying as a writer and making writing my central passion and avocation. This was in 2014, when I graduated from undergrad and began working three jobs and writing while at each of them.

INTERVIEWER

What were the key events after you decided that you were a writer?

TYLER BARTON

Definitely when I started submitting work and facing rejection. It was also in 2014. My first real publication came in 2015, and it changed my life, made me feel like maybe I could do this. Another key event was having my chapbook published this year. This gave me a physical tool to use to reach readers and get readings, workshops, speaking engagements, and so on. The best part of these new opportunities, again, is the people I've met. Another big milestone for me, strangely, was going to Literary Death Match in 2016. I was just an audience member. I saw how live literary events could be fun, weird, exciting, and bring so many people together. It made me want to create live literary events in the same way, and so I did with the help of my partner. We've held two so far and it's called Page Match.

INTERVIEWER

What is your daily writing ritual like?

TYLER BARTON

I wake up at 5:45am, shower, and then sit at my desk and write for an hour. Then I either go to the gym or for a bike ride. I take notes on my phone if anything comes to mind concerning the writing I had done in the previous hour. Then I go to work. I work full time at a museum. In the evenings, if I have energy, I do a little editing and revising of my work, or I might work on submissions and also residency applications for 40 minutes or so. It's important to me to have a daily routine, with practice, though I know it doesn't work for everyone.

INTERVIEWER

What writing exercises do you like to do? Could you share a couple for the new writers?

TYLER BARTON

Writing each morning is important for my process. If I don't have a project in progress, when I sit down I will look into the notes app on my phone and find some image or scrap of language that I had noticed and recorded over the last day. This is the best prompt for an exercise, and it is also pretty boring: write down the things you notice as you go through your daily life. Notice the smallest things. I am currently obsessed with finding power lines that have chunks of tree branch grown over them. The treecutters then cut the tree down or the branch down, but they can't cut the part that has grown over the power line or they will cut the line, so they leave a little chunk up there. For some reason these little tree chunks inspire me.

My other favorite exercise is to just look at visual art and then try "ekphrasis," which is the process of writing about visual art. It's a response to the art, how it influences me. I'm particularly interested in Yayoi Kusama right now. I have rented many of her books. When I need inspiration, I open to a painting, sculpture, or performance of hers, and see if it inspires anything. Ekphrasis is another way to remind myself that I'm an artist, not just a "writer" and it frees up my approach to writing.

INTERVIEWER

What advice do you have for the emerging writer?

TYLER BARTON

Besides everything else I've already mentioned, I think it's important to consider yourself an artist who uses writing as their medium. Study and appreciate art of all kinds. Anything can influence your work. It's freeing to remember this is art and not a set of rules or workshop comments.

Find him at tsbarton.com or [@goftyler](https://www.instagram.com/goftyler).