

All About Chapbooks

With poet & editor C. Kubasta

A little about me: my books & work

I have two chapbooks *A Lovely Box* (which won the WFOP chapbook prize) and *&s* (both from Finishing Line Press), and I read chapbooks and full-length poetry collections for Brain Mill Press. For 17 years I taught writing, literature, and cultural studies at a small Catholic university, where I also founded the Muriel Press focused on publishing literature from Midwestern authors. I'm also the founding and managing editor of *Bramble*, WFOP's literary magazine, publishing Wisconsin poets and essays, and featuring Wisconsin artists on the cover.

A Short History of the Chapbook

- Sold by the “chapman”
- Short books (often made by folding a single sheet of paper, so numbering 8, 12, 16 or 24 pages) bound with a simple saddle stitch
- Contained folk stories or ephemera
- Inexpensive to print, buy, and read

Today, there are chapbooks for poetry, prose, hybrid forms, graphic novels, and almost anything else you can imagine. Some are scrappy and handmade. Some have ISBNs and are distributed through regular channels.

Chapbooks vs. Full-length Collections

- Chapbooks are often shorter, so a more condensed reading experience → imagine a reader devouring a chapbook in one sitting
- The poems in a chapbook are often linked in some way → that link could be thematic, stylistic, formal, etc. Sometimes the poems are a collection of your “best poems” but this is rarer.
- A chapbook-length series of poems can be a good project, or way of thinking about your work. How do the poems talk to each other?

Once you have a series of poems, think about order:

Think about:

- Creating a narrative arc in the reading sequence
- Creating tension
- Ensuring you've got a banger of a poem early on
- There's a progression (of theme, style, etc.) in the order
- Including some well-placed publications (if they ask for that)
- Having poems you love, poems that challenge, poems that will surprise/deviate from the reader's expectations

Where to send your chapbooks?

As with any press (or magazine), do some research. You'll want to see if your kind of work aligns with the kind of work they publish. Look at their lists, what they're looking for, and if it's a good fit.

If they publish experimental, and you write formal, probably not a good fit. If they mostly publish LGBTQ+ authors and that's not you, probably not a good fit. If you read the work of their authors and don't like it, don't send your work there!

Other considerations: ISBN or no? What kinds of distribution? Production value? How much support and/or engagement do you have in the process? If things matter to you, you might want to make certain decisions about submitting.

Resources

[Heavy Feather Review](#)

[Poets & Writers](#) classifieds

Submittable

Other things to think about:

- Submission fees?
- Simultaneous subs?
- Timeline?
- Feelings?

Best Advice I Ever Got

Once you start sending work out, think of yourself as your own administrative assistant. You're not the poet anymore.

When the poems/manuscript comes back rejected, just re-package and send out again. Process and send out. Often, the key to getting to the right press and the right readers is a numbers game. Keep sending out—readers and reading (especially when it comes to poetry, with so many different styles and aesthetics) is subjective.

Questions?