

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Poets on Craft: Amanda J. Bradley and Raymond P. Hammond

Bunkong Tuon · Wednesday, September 2nd, 2020

Poets on Craft is a cyberspace for contemporary poets to share their thoughts and ideas on the process of poetry and for students to discover new ways of approaching the writing of poetry. In the face of a pandemic that is both viral and political, it is a resource for strength and creativity, friendship and beauty, love and rejuvenation. It is thus a celebration of the beautiful and eclectic minds of contemporary poets. This series is intended for educational purposes only.

The format is as follows. I emailed poets these questions: “Generally speaking, how do you build a poem? How do you start a poem? How do you move from one line to the next? How do you know when to end a poem?”

With the exception of length requirement, poets are free to respond in whatever manner they find appropriate to their styles and concerns.

Access to *Poets on Craft* is democratic. Generally speaking, anyone can have free access to these posts. With that said, please consider supporting our poets by clicking on the links in their bios and purchasing their work.

For this sixth post in the series, we have Amanda J. Bradley and Raymond P. Hammond.



Amanda J. Bradley has published three poetry collections with NYQ Books: Queen Kong, Oz at Night, and Hints and Allegations and has published poems widely in literary magazines such as Paterson Literary Review, Chiron Review, Lips, Rattle, The New York Quarterly, and Gargoyle. She lives in Beacon, New York, and her website can be found at www.amandajbradley.com.

Poems grow for me from one of two notions: an idea of what I want to write about or an image. The poem starts to take off when I can meld those two notions together. I rarely know precisely what I want to say or where the poem will take me when I write the first draft. That's one thing I love about writing poetry: learning what's eating at me.

I write the first drafts of my poems with pen and paper, so the first drafts are often quite messy. Synonyms sit atop one another, huge swaths are crossed out, sections wind up numbered to indicate moving to here or there. Enjambments that do a lot of work in several directions at once are fun to play with, and I start from that premise in deciding my line breaks. Where can I break

this line to make the end of this line say the most it can possibly say?

When I transfer the poem to the computer, I begin to edit more precisely. I then try to get distance from the poem. I'll let it sit as a closed document on my computer for months, sometimes years, then return to it to edit again. My whole poetry writing process is incredibly intuitive, and the most mysterious part is knowing where to end a poem. Although it's not much of an answer, it is most accurate to say that for me, it's a feeling. I can feel it approaching like a distant train so I begin to expect it as I hear it chugging closer and then it's suddenly here with a roar of closure.



Raymond P. Hammond is the editor-in-chief of both *The New York Quarterly* and *NYQ Books*. He holds an MA in American Poetry from NYU's Gallatin School and is the author of Poetic Amusement, a book of literary criticism. He lives in Beacon, NY with his wife, the poet Amanda J. Bradley, and their dog Hank.

Inspiration. For me, a poem begins the moment the idea flashes in my brain—like a camera shutter shutting in an image. The whole idea exists in that photograph in my brain. I will make notes or write some raw lines right there on the spot. I may go home or wake fully or sit down on a park bench and flesh out the beginnings of the poem. I make detailed notes on images, sounds, the free association of words, any emotionally evocative details such as how I felt or what I was thinking as the idea buzzes about in my head. I then allow the poem to percolate for days, weeks, years.

Intuition. Once I decide to move forward with a poem, I just start writing out the poem and see where the line breaks tend to naturally fall. Then, since I often write in syllabics, try to flesh out a couple of the major lines in various syllabic counts. I often find that if at least several lines of the poem fall naturally into a syllabic count, then I can force the remainder of the poem into that same meter, often providing for some unique word choices. But I always keep in mind not to force too hard as the poem may need to be a prose poem, or completely free verse – I can only keep trying. I just have to listen to the poem and my gut.

Intuition, again. I am also constantly aware of sound and how the words play against one another; as well as, asking if the diction is focusing like a laser sight on what I am trying to convey—to be frugal and accurate. For this I use several dictionaries and research the etymology of each integral word to the meaning of the poem or a word I may not feel that I know fully. Often, I find an even deeper meaning to what I am writing or, conversely, that I am using the wrong word for what I wish to convey. Once I get the planetary alignment of imagery, sound, and meaning, I usually begin to think the poem is pretty well finished.

(Featured photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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