
Cultural Daily

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Poets on Craft: Laura Grace Weldon and Donna Hilbert

Bunkong Tuon · Wednesday, April 14th, 2021

For this thirty-fourth post in the *Poets on Craft* series, we have Laura Grace Weldon and Donna Hilbert.

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.



Laura Grace Weldon is the author of four books. Her most recent is the forthcoming Halcyon Poetry Prize winning collection, *Portals*. She was named 2019 Ohio Poet of the Year for her previous collection, *Blackbird*. Find her online at lauragracedweldon.com.

I rarely attempt a poem head-on. The most naturally freeing poems sneak out from the edges of other work I'm doing. Often when I'm reluctant to keep my attention on a manuscript I'm editing, I let myself slide sideways into writing poetry. I stretch, yawn, look out the window or stand on the porch, and a poem calls me. (This is why too many of my pieces are set at the window or on the porch.) I don't pay close attention to how a poem is built or how it moves line to line as I'm writing. Instead I try to let it through from that endlessly generative creative source available to all of us whether we're riffing on a recipe or reimagining our lives. I say "try to let it through" because, of course, the critical mind wants to intrude. Writing works best for me if I let what fills me take over. Maybe body memory, or playfulness, or fury, or wonder at a scientific discovery, but often it's just quiet awe at the planet we inhabit and the moment we're in. I'm often not sure where a poem should end and I'm almost never satisfied with titles. Sometimes I ignore common sense and send a poem out right away. Never a good idea. It takes time's perspective to see where a piece should be honed down, When I wait, ideally weeks, before editing a piece I'm better able to see where the lines want to break, what sounds want to be heard, and which images need to linger. Letting a poem become more fully itself is what I hope to learn.



Donna Hilbert's latest book is *Gravity: New & Selected Poems*, Tebot Bach 2018. Other books include *Transforming Matter* and *Traveler in Paradise*, both from PEARL Editions. Her new collection, *Threnody*, is forthcoming from Moon Tide Press in late 2021.

A poem begins with a phrase or an image I can't banish, like an itch or the urge to sneeze. Sometimes a poem awakens me from sleep, or emerges when I am writing a grocery list, or stirring a pot of soup. Poems seldom come from an intention to write about a particular thing.

I write with a fountain pen on good paper, unless I am caught without, then I grab anything handy. I resist the computer until many drafts have been written, because a poem feels more open to possibilities before it's typed. When I'm in the process of the poem, I say it to myself at night as I fall asleep, and what I can't remember, I take out in the morning.

I read the poem aloud until reading is a fluid process, because if the music isn't right, nothing is right. When I think the poem is finished, I let it simmer on my desk for a few weeks until I have ceased changing line breaks, and putting in and taking out commas.

(Featured image by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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