

I'm a poet who doesn't fit into any traditional category, so I've focused on manipulating language to the extent that I am successful at it. I spent time in grad school learning how to write properly in form, sort of the way one gets a musical education, and then learned how to walk away from those forms and rhythms over the course of sentences and lines. I stopped writing in verse and found that my voice fell into the standard rhythms of the English language anyway, and I loved playing with pacing and getting lots of thumps and pauses in there. Robert Pinsky showed me how to think about and absorb the world, and about form in poetry before casting it off, and Derek Walcott taught me patience, and how to manipulate sentences and verbs over a stanza. Both men's voices are in my head. Now I just write from my gut. I experiment a little, and I'm lyrical a lot.

The first time I took in an outside voice was in college, when I took to Adrienne Rich. Vivified by her feminism and her experiences, I studied and adored everything she wrote. I swallowed all of it, obsessed with her depth of feeling. For a long time, I felt the same about Marilyn Hacker, and loved her sonnet sequences, her bravery, and her intelligence. But my longest-surviving love is for Elizabeth Bishop—for her restraint and specificity, for the way her tales are metaphors for how we long for things and the ways in which we open up or constrict our feelings, and for the tricky lyrical wonderfulness of her sounds, which so often convey darker feelings than what one finds more explicitly on the page. And for sonnets, to me a remarkable thing, I bow down to John Donne and Seamus Heaney. Both huge influences. Donne's feelings course so violently, in a stop-and-start way, over a line peppered with caesuras, and Heaney's rough, guttural sounds and the shape of his sentences, sometimes turned so upside down, are entrancing. I've been reading these poets repeatedly all of my life.