

One Thing – Literary Edition with Stuart Brown

EPISODE 1. AMANDA CARBONELL

<https://stuartjbrown.com/podcast/one-thing-literary-edition-1-amanda-carbonell/>

January 7, 2026: My guest for the premier episode of “One Thing – Literary Edition” is Amanda Carbonell, a former Junior Agent at the Belcastro Agency.

SUMMARY

In the podcast episode of “One Thing – Literary Edition,” host Stuart Brown interviews Amanda Carbonell, a former junior agent and author. The central theme of their conversation is the importance of persistence in the literary world.

The “One Thing”: Do Not Give Up

Amanda Carbonell’s primary advice to new authors is to never give up on their work. She highlights several reasons why persistence is vital:

- **Market Fluctuations:** The publishing market is constantly changing; for instance, horror is currently seeing a resurgence after being less popular a few years ago.
- **The “Right Desk” Principle:** Success often depends on finding the “perfectly right person” at the “right moment.”
- **Subjectivity of Rejection:** Rejections are often based on factors outside the author’s control, such as an agent’s personal mood, the weather, or if they already have a similar project in the works.
- **A “Pass” is Not “Never”:** Carbonell emphasizes that a rejection from an agent often means “not right now” rather than a permanent “no.”
- **Personal Experiences with Persistence**

Both Carbonell and Brown shared personal anecdotes to illustrate the necessity of staying in the “trenches”:

Personal Experiences with Persistence

- **The Agent’s Perspective:** Carbonell once contacted an author who had withdrawn their submission out of hopelessness, encouraging them to try again because the work was strong.
- **The Author’s Perspective:** After a hiatus and “gutting” her own book from A to Z, Carbonell returned to querying and eventually received three offers of representation.
- **The Playwright’s Perspective:** Stuart Brown noted that in playwriting, he has received rejections from one festival and high praise from another for the exact same play, proving the subjective nature of the industry.

Strategies for Staying Motivated

- To handle the “sea of rejections” and the “lonely” nature of writing, they suggest the following:
- **Take “Mental Health Breaks”:** It is okay to take a hiatus (a “woo-sah”) to recharge before returning to querying.

- Find a Support System: Joining a writers' group or finding a partner can help authors share their "angst" and keep each other pushing forward.
- Internal Agency Opportunities: If one agent at an agency passes, it may still be worth querying another agent at that same firm (if their policy allows), as tastes vary individually.

ACTION CHECKLIST

Mindset & Preparation

- Commit to persistence: Remind yourself that giving up on a project only opens the door for another author to take your spot.
- View rejection as "Not Right Now": Reframe a "pass" from an agent as a timing issue rather than a permanent "never."
- Be willing to "gut" the work: If a project isn't landing, consider hiring an editor or doing a deep structural revision (from A to Z) before heading back into the trenches.
- Acknowledge subjective factors: Remember that success often depends on landing on the "right desk" at the "right moment," which can be affected by an agent's personal life or even the weather.

Tactical Strategy

- Monitor market trends: Stay aware of shifting genres; a book that was rejected years ago (like horror) might be exactly what the market wants now.
- Research rising agents: Keep an eye on interns, apprentices, and recently promoted junior agents who are actively looking to build their lists.
- Explore the full agency: If one agent passes, check the agency's policy to see if you can query a different agent there whose tastes might align better.
- Keep a submission spreadsheet: Track your queries to stay organized through the "sea of rejections."

Sustainability & Support

- Take a "Woo-Sah" break: Schedule mental health hiatuses when the process feels like a "black hole" to avoid burnout.
- Find your community: Join a writers' group or find a partner to share the emotional highs and lows that only other writers truly understand.
- Celebrate the "glimmers": Focus on small wins, like a request for more pages, to stay motivated through the darker periods of the process.

TRANSCRIPT

Stuart Brown: Welcome to One Thing – Literary Edition, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasoned literary agents. What is one piece of advice you would give to new authors? I'm your host, playwright and author Stuart Brown. Information about all my works can be found at my website, stuartbrown.com. On today's episode, I am very pleased to have Amanda Carbonell, a former junior agent at the Belcastro Agency. Welcome to the program, Amanda.

Amanda Carbonell: Thank you so much for having me.

Stuart Brown: So Amanda, what is your one thing?

Amanda Carbonell: I would say my major one thing that I would say to all authors is to not give up. I know that querying in general is just sometimes a black hole and it can feel very bleak and very much almost like doom scrolling through TikTok and Instagram, and all of a sudden you're swimming in a sea of rejections. But you get that one little glimmer of a request, you know, and sometimes then there's still a lot of darkness around you. But the one thing that I heard a long time ago that I always love to repeat as much as possible is if you give up now, you are closing the door for yourself and opening it up for another author. So that essentially is a motto that I love to spread the word of, because you just never know what agent is not an agent yet and could potentially still be an intern. They could still be in college, they could still be in high school, you know, or they could be an agent apprentice who is soon to be promoted to a junior agent. You know, there are so many different factors, as well as markets that are just constantly changing. You just never know when your idea is going to land with the right person. And just to backtrack, you never know what agents are going to wind up changing the genres that they represent. When one agent may have just represented only picture books, they might be opening up to young adult fantasy or anything across the board. And again, the asks of editors are always constantly changing in today's market. There was a big, big jump for rom-coms for a long time, and there's still an ask for rom-coms, but of course it's simmered a little bit and it's kind of veering off into a bunch of different genres that are starting to have the light: horror, for example. Those who may have queried horror a couple of years ago, perhaps didn't get offers or got a few passes, so on and so forth. Maybe they shelved their book. Now all of a sudden horror is really back and it's big on the market, which I'm very excited about personally. But that would definitely be one of my big things is almost like when you're looking in your side view mirror, objects in mirror maybe closer than they appear. You never know when that message is going to come in. So if you give up now, you're just opening the door for somebody else to take your place. Don't give up your spot.

Stuart Brown: Have you had experience with an author or authors where they did give up and you gave them a pep talk or something that can really illuminate what you just said?

Amanda Carbonell: Yeah, you know, when I first got promoted to junior, I actually have two little tales. So one from the agent perspective because I myself am also an author. From an agent perspective, I had a really, really great storyteller that had queried me. And I was absolutely in love with their opening pages and I just hadn't had a second yet to hit that request button, and they had actually withdrawn their submission. So I wrote them a message and basically said to them, you know, listen, if you ever decide to query this again, I would absolutely love to see it. I think that your opening pages were incredibly strong. I think that you have something here. I would love to read more if you decide to put it back out. Because the withdrawal was essentially them saying it had been out for a while, they had just given up hope on it. So thankfully they decided to reach back out to me through email. I believe it was about a month or so later that they just needed to take a little woo-sah, nice little mental health break, which we all need from time to time. And you know, because writing is not for the faint of heart, it's very much a lonely career that you just feel so alone when it comes to rejection because you can share it to your partners or share it to your friends, but they're not going to fully understand it like somebody within the writing community would understand it. It's filled with a lot of emotional attachments coming to our writing and our books and the stories that we tell. So when we get those rejections, it's really disheartening as I'm sure many people can relate. And for this one author in particular, thankfully they had reached back out to me, sent me their work. It wound up not being a complete match, but I did wind up passing them on to another agent. I'm not quite sure how it had worked out for that agent as well, but you know, the writing was still phenomenal and I still have that open window of, for me, a pass is not a never, it's just a not right now. And I always welcome if anybody has any stories that they want to query me with in the future, by all means, absolutely reach out to me. So that's an agent side. From an author perspective, I've been doing this now since 2020, when the world went to hell in a handbasket. And I've been represented before where I left my original agents. It was not a match. I learned a lot about agenting; it's actually what had originally inspired me to want to be an agent. And then I gave up. I gave up for a little while

because it was tiring and I had gone on submission and, you know, obviously didn't do well, and I needed a mental hiatus. And I wrote a couple of books, didn't feel strong enough. I hired an editor, worked with an editor who is wonderful, and I gutted my book from A to Z, and I went back out there into the trenches because it was just first, you almost become like just addicted to the pain, you know? And you know, you just need to keep trying and continue querying. And that's what I did. I, and within that timeframe, actually, I was moving, I had gotten married and it turns out that I was pregnant in 2023. And so I was again, filling my well with all rejection during all of this until finally, a couple of months after my son was born, I had gotten a message for an offer of rep, and I received three offers for this book. You know, all the offers were wonderful people. Listen, the book is still out on submission. I love my book. It's been out, I think, since 2024 roughly, and which if you think about it, where it feels like a long time, it's not exactly within the world of publishing and editors who have a lot on their plate. So I guess what I'm trying to say from that is rejection is always going to come within this field. Whether or not you're querying, whether or not you're out on submission. The only positive when you're out on submission is you have a partner to guide you through it and to say, I believe in you, I believe in the story. We just have to find the right desk. And that is essentially what being a writer is, is landing on the right desk at the right moment with the perfectly right person. You just never know what can happen if you stop.

Stuart Brown: When I introduced today's podcast, I mentioned that I'm a playwright and would-be author. And I've done more with the playwriting, and I'm writing ten-minute plays, which if people are listening thinking, huh, ten-minute plays? Yeah, it's a big thing, actually, they're festivals all over the world. And I've had a lot of my plays staged all over the country, I've written one-acts and they've been staged. And I do get rejections, but I've had a lot of positive. And what I've found out with the playwriting, which I think is applicable for book submission, is it really depends who you are getting, the time of day, how they're feeling, there's a lot of these unknown factors that you don't know. And I always find it funny when one theater festival says, no, we're going to pass, or someone will review one of my plays and I just scratch my head, like, huh? And the next day I get something, we love this play! So it's like, okay, wait, you're reading the same thing. So I think that really is what you're talking about, is you have to wait and keep at it. I mean, if I just stopped after my first five festival submissions, then that would have been it and I never would have had all the successes I've had with that.

Amanda Carbonell: Absolutely. You know, you never know the desk that you choose to originally try to land on. You don't know if they just have a lot going on in their personal life that they can't give as much attention and devotion to fully focusing in on your story. You don't know if they have something similar in the works, so it's not necessarily your idea or your project, it could just be they have something very similar that they're coming out with. So it's just not the right person. You just need to find another. There are so many different factors. It could be raining. Like there are so many different factors that just go on, you know, regardless of just human emotion, it could also just be what's currently on a person's bill. Sometimes if one agent passes, try another at the agency. Not all agencies do it, but it's worth it because not every single agent's taste is going to be exactly the same. Stuff that fellow agents at Belcastro have passed on, I've requested. You just never know who's going to come into the scene.

Stuart Brown: Amanda, I think your one thing is so important and it's hard. Again, as an author myself, I could show you my spreadsheet and my spreadsheet probably is nothing compared to some other person's spreadsheet, but it's to keep going, and it is hard. And maybe getting together in a writer's group or a partner, someone that you can share your angst or maybe help each other is a way to get around that. But I think the key is to keep pushing. I've been speaking to Amanda Carbonell, a former junior agent at the Belcastro Agency. You've been listening to One Thing – Literary Edition, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasoned literary agents. What is one piece of advice you would give to new authors? I'm your host, playwright and author Stuart Brown. Thank you for joining me. I hope you will join me again next time.

ABOUT THE HOST

Stuart J. Brown is an award-winning Connecticut playwright whose 10-Minute works have been staged across the country. He's also written four full one-act plays. You can see all his work at stuartjbrown.com.

Brown is a theater critic with the Outer Critics Circle and the Connecticut Critics Circle. Additionally, he operates the 24/7 online Broadway radio station, Sounds of Broadway (soundsofbroadway.com), featuring the best from Off-Broadway, Broadway, and London stages. His 'On Broadway' podcast features discussions with figures from the world of music and stage. He's aired more than 730 episodes since 2006. (broadwayradioprograms.com)

Additional podcasts include "One Thing with Stuart Brown" (stuartjbrown.com/podcast) with the latest edition focusing on the publishing and writing world. He asks a simple question of seasoned literary agents...

"What is one piece of advice you would give to new authors?"

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