



THE WRITER'S CENTER MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2024

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Jami Attenberg &
Athena Dixon

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FREE

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POETRY
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THE WRITER'S CENTER MAGAZINE SUMMER 2024

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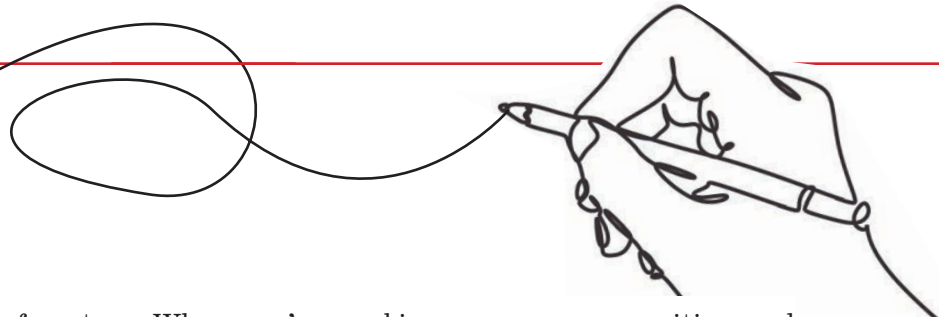
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Formal writing advice has been around for at least a couple thousand years. We have records of Aristotle in the 4th century BCE and Lu Chi in the 3rd century CE grappling with what today we'd call the craft of writing. Since then, thousands of writers have written about the subject, too.

I suspect most of you come to The Writer's Center to learn more about this ancient craft. After all, our instructors and guest authors are experts. But I challenge you now to pay attention to your own expertise.

Jot down every idea you have about the craft of writing.

When you read a novel and something in the prose strikes you, try to work out a theory as to why.

When you read an essay on craft, make note of how you respond to its advice. Prompt yourself with "Yes, but..." or "Contrarily...."

When you're working on your own writing and recognize processes or techniques that you regularly employ, record them.

As a writer, you're constantly engaging with craft, creating your own internal textbook full up with tips and tricks. Why not make it an external text? At the very least, putting your own writing ideas on paper will concretize them. You'll strengthen the foundations of your writing practice.

And maybe someday you'll flesh out one of these ideas into an essay, and another writer will read it and understand something new or something old in a new way, and they'll be inspired to write.

That's the dual life of the writer, isn't it? To inspire oneself to the end of inspiring others.

—Zach Powers, Artistic Director



Jeffrey Berg

As It Is (4), 2023
Cardboard, color pencil
30 x 40 in. unframed

Jeffrey's work will be on display in The Writer's Center's Joram Piatigorsky Gallery May 18 – August 2, 2024

ABOUT THE COVER

My vision as an artist is to engage the viewer in an internal journey, connecting an exploration of individual character with the context of the world in which we live. By investigating person-centered narratives and internal themes — such as how we carry our past with us always as the lens through which we view life — and the need for human connection, dreams, and memory, my drawings ask how who we are connects us with community. In other words, how do we define ourselves as individuals within our social context?

Drawing is everything to me. I work within a narrative; my work tells a story. I like stories that have intimate yet broader community implications, sometimes as revealed to me through life in Washington DC, my former work as a counselor in a community mental health clinic, what I'm reading, current events, and social justice and contemporary humanist themes.

This drawing is part of a five-drawing suite titled *As It Is* and is inspired by Adrienne Rich's beautiful poem, "The Spirit of Place." To view other drawings, visit my website at jeffreyberg.art.



photo by Ecco

SOMETHING TO FEED MY SOUL

An interview with debut novelist Shelby Van Pelt

By Claude Olson

Shelby Van Pelt's debut novel, *Remarkably Bright Creatures*, was published in 2022 and received widespread acclaim, becoming a *New York Times* bestseller and selling over half a million copies worldwide. The novel introduces us to a cast of extraordinary characters, including a widow named Tova and an opinionated octopus named Marcellus, who Tova eventually befriends. Earlier this year, The Writer's Center awarded Shelby the [2023 McLaughlin-Esstman-Stearns First Novel Prize](#). She joined us for a discussion of the novel and her work as a writer.

CO: Tell me a little bit about your development as a writer. Is there anything from your life outside of writing that ties into it?

SVP: I guess I'm a self-taught writer. I don't have an MFA or anything like that. I really didn't start writing fiction until I was in my thirties. My husband and I had moved across the country for his job so I was in between things in my career. I had some time finally and thought maybe I'd dabble a little bit in fiction writing. It had always been the thing that I was good at but I had never considered making it a career. I was just looking for something to feed my soul. We were living in a new city where I didn't know anyone and the previous occupants of our house had subscribed to a continuing education catalog from the local university. They had a creative writing class so basically that was where my novel was born. We actually had a writing exercise, a point

of view exercise that we did on notebook paper. That was what became the first pages of my book. And I remember my instructor telling me that I should keep going with it. It just makes me think that we should always give the compliment. If she hadn't said that to me, I might not have kept going with it. Early in that journey of finding a writing voice, the smallest bits of encouragement can mean a lot. If you like something someone wrote, always say so. You never know how much it's going to mean to them.

What was your initial inspiration for the book? How was the final product different from what you initially expected taking that class?

Initially, it was just a character and I think that's really consistent with how I approach all of my writing projects. I always start with characters and then fill the plot and the rest of the structure around them. It started with this cranky octopus character who was inspired by a YouTube video. When that instructor said that she liked what I wrote and that I should keep writing it, I started coming up with more and more octopus scenes. But at some point, I thought that no one wants to read a whole book of just this cranky octopus and his hot takes. You've got to have some human characters. So that was the harder part from my perspective, figuring out the humans, the mystery, making all of those pieces fit together. I think I wrote about 270,000 words on the way to a 98,000-word novel so there were a lot of wrong turns. There were a lot of cul-de-sacs,

like when you're going down a road only to find out it goes absolutely nowhere. The houses might be beautiful, it's a lovely way to spend time, but it doesn't go anywhere, so I don't want it!

“

Having a community is so important.

”

—Shelby Van Pelt

Did you grow up in a place like Sowell Bay? Was that part of what sparked your inspiration for the setting?

I grew up in Takoma, Washington, which is a much larger city than Sowell Bay, the fictional town in the book. But I'm very much a Pacific Northwest girl through and through. I lived there until I was 18. I haven't ever lived there full-time since but it is *home*. When I thought of writing a novel, I never really considered setting it anywhere else. I've lived in a lot of places as an adult but I don't feel like I *know* any

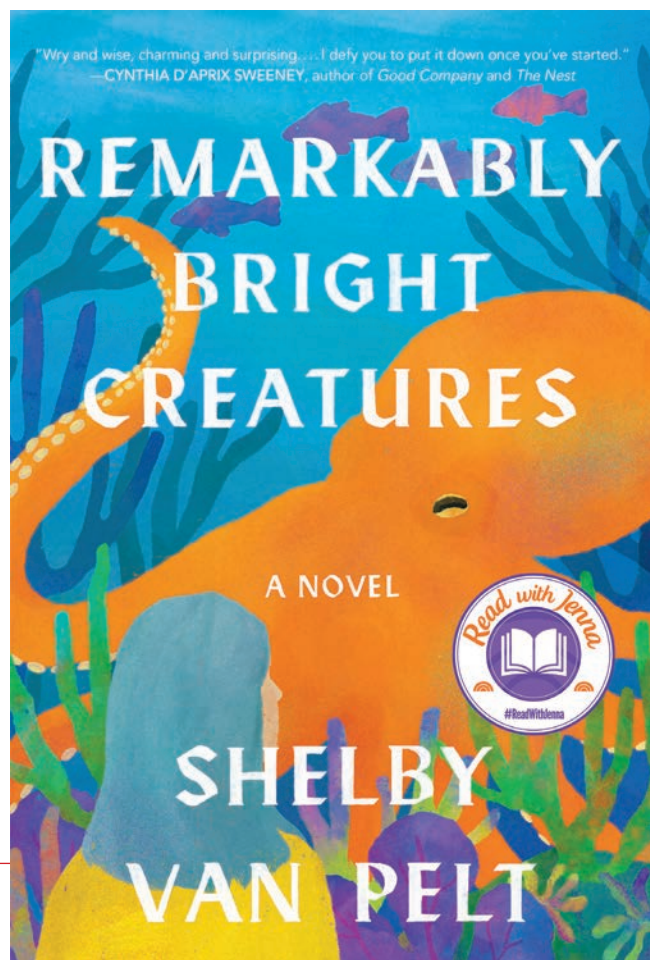
place as well as I know western Washington. I also loved the idea of Marcellus, a Giant Pacific octopus, being a stone's throw from his true home. In that sense, it really is the only place that I could've set the book. Writing this book was a way for me to reconnect with my own roots of where I grew up and feel like I was connected to it again.

As far as I know, you are not a marine biologist, so what sort of research went into doing this?

I think I wrote in some diary when I was eight that marine biology was what I wanted to do. Obviously, I never did that. I have no formal science background at all. I educated myself through the internet. I was really lucky to meet some people that were in marine biology through connections from my online writing groups. That's one of the cool things about these communities. You just get people from so many different backgrounds and areas of expertise. So I did rely on the expertise of others to help me make Marcellus feel as real as possible. I wanted everything that he was doing physically to be possible. Of course, everything that's happening in his head is fiction.

This book has been a huge success, especially for a debut novel. There is even a "Read with Jenna" sticker on the cover. Was this reception what you expected?

It is wild. The book has had a unique trajectory. We had a lot of success with it right out the gate. Being on "Read with Jenna," the *Today Show* book club, obviously was a *huge* boost, especially for a debut novel. No one has ever heard of my name or heard of me but a certain number of people will buy this book if it's recommended by a celebrity book club. It had its moment on the *New York Times* list. I think it came in at number 15 right away and then it dropped off and was off for months. We thought it was winding down and then it just picked up again! And it has stayed up ever since. It went back on the *New York Times* list. It made a lot of year-end lists in 2022 and even in 2023. It was just a really organic, word-of-mouth type of growth. As the author who made this thing, there is no higher praise than to hear that someone recommended your book. They put it in the hands of someone else and said "Just read this, trust me." It's like the biggest warm fuzzy on the planet. I'm very, very lucky. And then to be recognized for an award like this on top of all of that. What did I do to deserve this? I don't know, but it's just fantastic.



Do you have any new projects in mind?

Yeah, I'm working on a couple of new projects. I've actually been in my writing cave the last couple of months trying to get a couple of things off my desk that have been sitting there for a while kind of festering. Writing a second novel is hard, particularly if your first novel has any kind of success. You're in the shadow of something. And it might be a really big, really good shadow but...it's still there. I've had a lot of people say I should do a sequel or a prequel. That's not really what I want to do next. I love octopuses and animals but I don't want to just be the octopus lady.

Do you have advice for people who don't have a literary background, who are just starting from scratch and learning on their own?

Having a community is so important. I would not be able to write this book by myself. There's the stereotype of the writer that goes away to the cabin in the woods and emerges like a butterfly with a novel six months later but that's not how it happens for most people. I feel like that's what you guys at The Writer's Center are trying to get at, too. Not everyone is going to be Hemingway or whatever with their sea shack. You need to have a community. You need to have a space that's not only a writing space but also a social space and a collaborative space.

Every day I communicate with my critique partner over text and at least once a week on Zoom or over the phone. It's a collaborative process in my mind. And it's the same thing with my new projects. I'm always bringing people in and bouncing things off them. If I were to go to write a novel in a sea shack by myself, it would probably be terrible.

ABOUT THE MCLAUGHLIN-ESSTMAN-STEARN'S FIRST NOVEL PRIZE

Each year, The Writer's Center awards \$3,000 to the author of an exceptional first novel published in the previous calendar year. Conceived and funded by former board member Neal P. Gillen, the McLaughlin-Esstman-Stearns First Novel Prize honors three dedicated writers and members of The Writer's Center faculty — the late Ann McLaughlin, Barbara Esstman, and Lynn Stearns — each of whom have nourished and inspired students and fellow writers.



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MELANIE FIGG | For more info:
www.melaniefigg.net

Kathryn Johnson is a bestselling author of over 40 internationally published books, an acclaimed motivational speaker, and sought-after writing coach.

Hire her as your editor, book doctor, or coach—and make your fiction project the best it can be.

kathrynjohnsonllc.com



Highlights from The Writer's Center Virtual Craft Chat Series

POET SARAH GHAZAL ALI ON HER DEBUT COLLECTION, *THEOPHANIES*

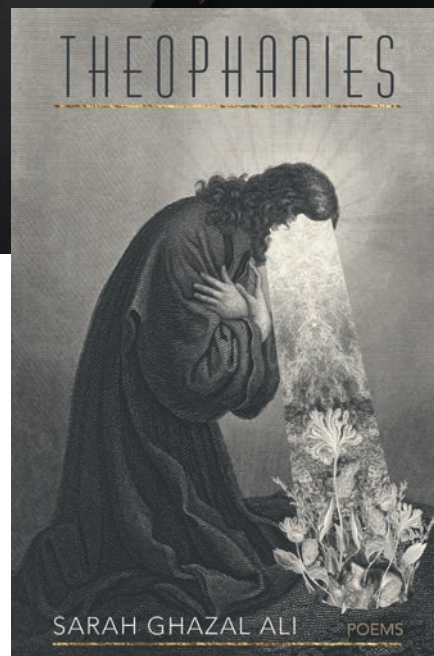


ON LINE BREAKS AND MEANING

I love working with the line, and it's something in the book that I feel really proud of, my craft accomplishment. I love the line as a unit of meaning because it's a really good way to bring play into poetry, especially if what you're writing about tends to be really heavy, which I know is true for many people and is definitely true for me. That really helps me kind of distance myself from the thing that is painful, and it turns into something more excitingly creative instead of just devastating. So I really like playing with the line.

I also think it was really important to me in a number of poems to be able to say as many things as possible. I don't like the idea of reading a poem and then being asked, *Oh, what does it mean?* I want there to be lots of built-in ambivalence and I want to be able to ask a million questions and say a million things and also say contradictory things in the same space on the same page without it feeling chaotic or without it feeling scattered.

And the line as a unit of meaning is such a great way to do that, where the line pulls you horizontally and can say one thing, and then the question is, Where do you want your reader to take a breath? Where do you want your reader's eye to go and stop and track?



It's also this really exciting way to kind of use your finger to turn the reader's cheek a little bit, to direct their attention. It's a really interesting way to think about who will be reading this and engaging with this, and how can you play with speed and with time and with what you're drawing their attention to?

I love how the line isolates a thought because the poem is where I go to do my thinking, and so then how can I make it a more interactive experience when a reader encounters my thoughts unfurling on the page. So I just love the line as a place for ambivalence and to say many things and not be locked into one thing.

**AUTHOR JAMI ATTENBERG
DISCUSSES HER NEWEST BOOK,
1000 WORDS**



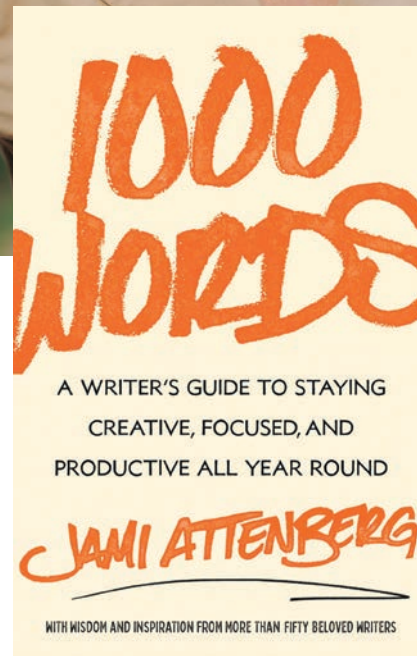
ON GETTING THE WORK DONE

What I would say is it's okay to forgive yourself because not every day is going to be a good [writing] day. But what I would also say is the reason why I get to write this book is because I'm really productive.

So, I'm giving you the benefit of being someone who sits down and really does know how to get work done. I've put out a book every 2 years for the last 18. I have two books coming out this year. I know how to sit down and do the work. I hope I'm not cursing myself, but it's one of the things that I recognize as a skillset, which I hope other writers understand. Maybe they don't even realize that being a fast writer is actually huge and important, but it really is.

Something that I write a little bit about in the book is that I worked in advertising for a long time. And in advertising you have to learn how to write quickly. It's part of being good at your job there. I really think that it's not something to be ignored to be a fast writer and a consistent writer.

I'm not, by the way, saying that everything that I write is good. But I write it. I get it done. That's why 1000 Words of Summer [where a virtual community of writers comes together to write 1000 words a day



for two weeks straight] really works for me because I get this big pile of words, and then I kind of swim through them and say, all right, which of these are good? How is this working? Is this not working? But if I don't write it all down, I'm never going to get there.

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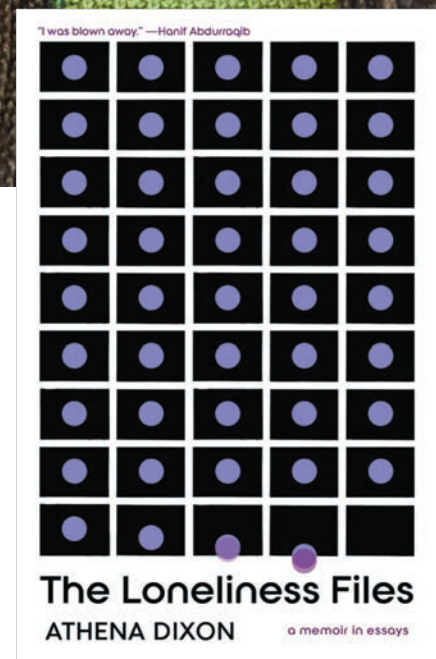
ATHENA DIXON ON HER MEMOIR IN ESSAYS, *THE LONELINESS FILES*



ON PRIVATE AND PUBLIC WRITING

I have a folder called “Good Morning Heartache” on my laptop that’s full of poems and stories and essays that I’ve written about very personal stuff that I needed to get out of my body and my brain. But it’s very rare that anything makes it from that folder into the real world, because it’s either full of rage or destruction. It’s me taking people down, taking myself down. There’s no good reason for that work to be in the world, but I need not to hold it in my body.

So I make that first determination: Is this something that I’m willing to put into the world? Is it something I’m willing to talk about? Is it something that I’m willing to have to explain to people? Am I willing to hurt myself and other people by putting this into the world? Once I make that determination, I do my best to only write towards people and experiences that I can feel good and/or neutral about. And when I say neutral, I mean I’m not going to make you better or worse than you were. I’m just going to tell you what happened and what my reaction to it was. If I can say that I’m neutral towards something, then it’s okay for me to write it, meaning I’ve been able to harness my creative thought process enough where I’m not using my platform and my ability to write these words to harm you.



For me, it's a matter
of tenderness.

—Athena Dixon



For me, it’s a matter of tenderness. If it’s tender, like I can touch [the subject] and I’m like, oh, it’s a little achy, I feel like it’s okay to write. But if I touch that memory or touch that page and I’m like, I’m afraid — I’m afraid that this is going to cause myself or somebody else harm, then I back away from it.



Your True, Full & Authentic Self

A DISCUSSION WITH NOVELIST ANNA LAPERA ABOUT MANI SEMILLA FINDS HER QUETZAL VOICE

By Amy Freeman

In a coming-of-age story that shifts between very real concerns both personal (when is she going to get her period?) and global (why is her mom insisting they visit Guatemala if it's so dangerous there?), Writer's Center alum Anna Lapera brings the reader into the complex struggles facing contemporary teens. Anna was kind enough to answer a few questions about the experience of publishing her debut novel.

AF: So many questions! What does having a quetzal voice mean to you?

AL: I love this question! My protagonist, Mani, is constantly being told by her abuelita to find her quetzal voice. She often refers to legends in Guatemala where, put simply, the quetzal bird is said to have stopped singing during the Spanish invasion but would one day sing again when Guatemala is free. It was my editor, Irene Vázquez, who helped me think about what having a quetzal voice means for Mani beyond just referencing the legend. They asked: how can Mani use her voice not just to speak out against something, but to truly sing? Once they said that, everything clicked. And I apply that to what it means for me, too. It means using your voice in a way that is authentic to you and that can let you be your true, full, and authentic self; a voice that leaves little room for ever being quieted and that lives beyond you.

Despite her struggles — we all have 'em! — Mani does indeed find her quetzal voice. What made you decide she was the vehicle you wanted to use to reach younger readers? What do you want your readers to take from the book?

Mani really stumbles in her journey of finding her voice. It was important for me to show someone who doesn't always get it right. Finding your voice can be messy, and there is no perfect or *right* way to be an activist. I want young readers to remember that ultimately they have to find the voice and way of showing up for a cause that is authentic to *them*. It doesn't always mean being the loudest person. Speaking up for justice is a worthwhile effort, even if they don't get it right all the time.

I also want young readers to feel confident and justified in speaking up against harassment and bullying in schools. We should not accept the "boys will be boys" or "that's just kids being kids" attitude that so many of us have grown up hearing. To accept that as simply part of school life and growing up is a disservice to all. I want readers to close the book knowing that everyone's body should be respected.

Mani's concerns range from personal (menstruation) to global (violence against women). I felt like you really captured the turmoil of being an adolescent trying to figure out what matters to you. How did you find the balance for Mani?

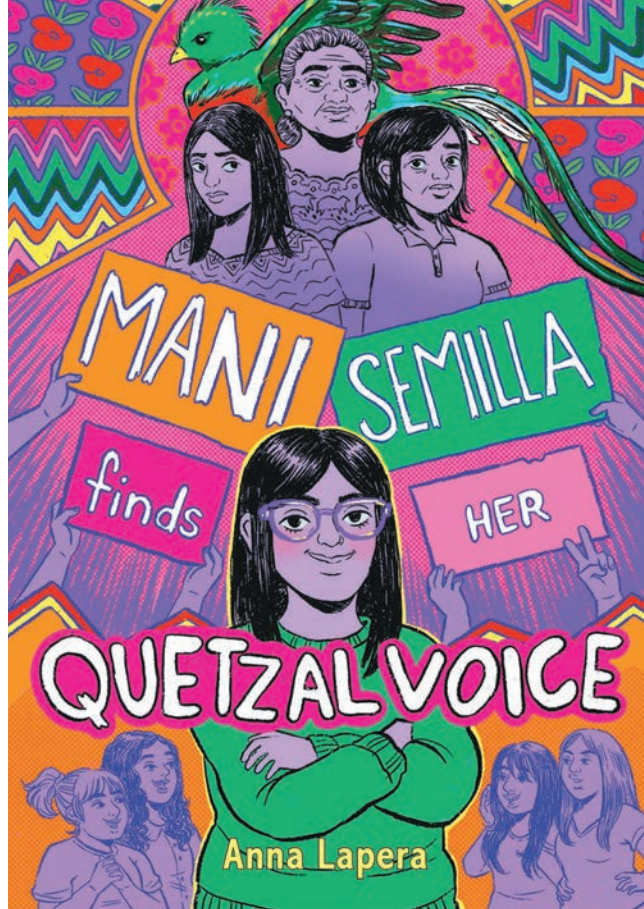
Mani has struggles that are both relatable to many, but also unique to her family, which I think is the case for so many kids. At first, Mani is obsessed with getting her period and “becoming a woman” because she thinks that is the ticket to being treated with respect and being able to make her own decisions. However, for her, these questions are set against a larger multigenerational and multicultural conversation. Mani begins with a very narrow idea of what being a feminist means to her. But then the discovery of the letters between her mom and her disappeared activist aunt propels her not only to find out more about Guatemalan history, but also the expression of feminism within her own family. After a while, she starts to make the connection between the femicides she learns about, and the culture of harassment going on around her. She recognizes that it is not the same, but she asks herself: is it all part of the same long thread? Because of her hybrid identity and connection to history in so many places, I thought that Mani was the perfect person through which to explore these pulls and connections.

I love the way the narrative moves seamlessly between English and Spanish, without the kind of italicizing of non-English words that some editors seem to insist on. Was that something you discussed with your publisher?

In my opinion it is a really exciting time, especially in the kidlit world, where it seems that writers are discouraged from using italics or other ways of “othering” non-English. I can’t remember the last time I read a recent book with non-English words that were italicized. And honestly, it makes me feel really respected as a reader to know that someone trusts me to at least try to figure out the meaning through context. There are so many books out there right now where non-English words are just woven in seamlessly.

There was one moment in a very early draft when my agent, Ellen Goff at HG Literary, unitalicized a word, and that just set the tone for the rest of the book. By the time it got to my editor and publisher, it wasn’t even a discussion.

What I love most about this is that it celebrates the lived linguistic reality of so many people and families in this country. Early readers of the draft commented that they loved how it felt like they were listening to their own families. This made me so happy!



I’m thrilled to acknowledge that this book “grew up” through a year-long class you took at The Writer’s Center, taught by the astounding Dr. Ivelisse Rodriguez. Interestingly, that was a short story workshop. What role did that class take in shaping these pages into a book?

This class was everything to me and this book! The novel began as a short story titled “The Meteor Can Wait.” It was a messy 20-page plotless story about a girl obsessed with getting her period, later gets it, but it’s not what it seems. That’s it! It was so rough.

Ivelisse, being the brilliant writer, editor, and reader that she is, helped me take the story to the next level. She pushed me to think about what I truly wanted this story to be about; to choose the main threads that would drive it forward. Then, she asked me if I realized that I was writing for young adults and if I had considered turning it into a novel. Before I could let both ideas sink in, she sent me an application for a mentorship program with Las Musas, a collective of Latinx women kidlit writers.

Ivelisse opened so many doors for me. I am so grateful to her and The Writer’s Center because otherwise I don’t think this novel would exist.

Does the final book resemble the original short story? How did you figure out which elements to expand?



It means using your voice in a way that is authentic to you.

—Anna Lapera



The final book resembles the short story in that at its heart it's about a girl who wants to have more agency in her world, and she thinks that getting her period is the solution. In the book, this idea expands as she comes to learn about how feminism has played a role in her own family history and how the different members of her family express this.

While there is some truth to the popular idea that writing in a solitary endeavor, I also believe that writing takes a village. Many people helped me turn this into a novel! Both Ivelisse Rodriguez and my incredible fellow writers in that cohort urged me to develop the classroom scenes more and really focus on expanding the story around Mani's world: school.

During my mentorship with Las Musas, I spent six months turning the short story into a first draft of a novel. I was paired with the writer e.E. Charlton-Trujillo as my mentor, where I learned so much about the craft of novel writing! They helped me to expand the story chapter by chapter, develop the supporting characters, and most importantly “find the connective tissue” in every moment. That is a line I constantly think about whenever I sit down to write anything new.

Once I began working with my agent, I expanded and shaped the letters Mani finds from Tía Beatriz, her disappeared journalist aunt (among so many other things!)

Once we signed with my editor, their first round of edits pushed me to further develop three important elements: Las Nerdas (Mani's friend group,) Mami,

and moments around the quetzal references.

So for me, this book was built in sections, at different moments.

What was your path to publication?

This story has been surrounded by incredibly talented people who believed in Mani from the start and her place in the world.

I met my agent at the Maryland Writer's Conference when I signed up for a 10-minute manuscript critique. I hadn't even finished a first draft yet, but we kept in touch for six months until I was ready to send her a full manuscript. I met my editor, Irene, the following year through a mentorship at the Kweli Journal (thanks to Ivelisse!) to get help on an idea for a second novel. This happened to be exactly when my agent started the process of submitting the manuscript to editors. I casually mentioned this to Irene on our first mentorship call, and when they asked me what novel #1 was about, I was so unprepared. I had to search through what seemed like hundreds of word documents on my computer to find my synopsis. It was so embarrassing, but makes for a great story.

What's next for you?

I'm currently working on a historical fiction YA novel set in 1970's Guatemala. I have written one messy draft (my drafts are always very messy), and it is currently being reviewed by my wonderful agent. I hope to have more news soon!



WORKSHOP GUIDELINES

Write with us! The Writer's Center offers more than 300 workshops every year in all genres and for all experience levels.

You'll work with published, professional writers as you explore the craft of writing in genre-specific as well as special topics workshops. Take a look below at the basic levels of instruction, and then find our workshop schedule in the following pages. You can find detailed workshop descriptions and instructor bios at writer.org.

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REFUND POLICY

In the case of a workshop cancellation, participants can receive either a full refund or a credit toward a future workshop(s). Workshop participants can withdraw (at least 48 hours before the first workshop session) for a full credit valid for one year. No refunds are offered for withdrawals. For our full refund policy, visit writer.org/refund-policy.

CODE OF CONDUCT

No jerks! The Writer's Center is committed to providing a welcoming environment for all program participants, instructors, staff members, and volunteers regardless of race, ethnicity, age, religion, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, appearance, or class. To view our complete code of conduct, please visit writer.org/conduct.

**SUMMER 2024
WORKSHOPS ARE
ON SITE
& VIRTUAL**

LIVE VIDEO CONFERENCE workshops will be held via **Zoom**. You can view brief tutorials on using the platform at support.zoom.us.

ASYNCHRONOUS workshops will take place over **Wet Ink**, an online learning forum and discussion board.

Register now at writer.org!

SUMMER 2024 WORKSHOPS

KID LIT

PICTURE BOOK REVISION WORKSHOP with Kathy MacMillan

6/29/24 | Saturday | 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Zoom | Intermediate | \$60

Bring your completed picture book manuscript to work on as we make real-time revision that addresses the big picture, plot and character beats, and line-by-line strengths and weaknesses of your manuscript.

FICTION

INTERMEDIATE NOVEL: THE 8 CS OF NOVEL WRITING with Tammy Greenwood

4/26/24 – 6/14/24 | 8 Weeks | Asynchronous

Wet Ink | Intermediate | \$395

From Concept to Conclusion, we will study the key components of a novel, with generative and evaluative exercises along the way.

CREATING NOVEL CHARACTERS with Tammy Greenwood

4/26/24 – 5/17/24 | 4 Weeks | Asynchronous

Wet Ink | All Levels | \$215

Participants will explore the main character(s) in their novels-in-progress.

CRAFTING FICTION: ELEMENT BY ELEMENT with Elizabeth Poliner

5/8/24 – 6/19/24 | 7 Wednesdays | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom | Beginner/Intermediate | \$350

This seven-week workshop will explore craft elements one at a time and ask participants to practice them through in-class exercises.

FICTION II: REFINE YOUR WRITING VOICE with Nick Gardner

5/9/24 – 6/27/24 | 8 Thursdays | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

The Writer's Center | Intermediate/Advanced | \$395

Each writer will leave the workshop with written feedback from the instructor and the group as well as a more established revision plan for this and future works.

Participants should have a piece of fiction 15 pages or fewer ready to submit by the first workshop.

HOW TO WRITE A KEY SCENE with John DeDakis

5/15/24 | Wednesday | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

In this session, you'll learn tips and strategies for making the scene you see in your head come alive on the page. Writing exercises will give class members a hands-on feel for how to add texture, dynamism, and drama to a story.

YOUR FIRST (OR NEXT) NOVEL with Kathryn Johnson

5/18/24 | Saturday | 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

Participants will initiate a flexible writing plan that will keep their writing flowing. This is a great half-day session for the beginning long-form fiction writer, or for the more experienced author in need of a quick strategy brush-up.

FICTION

CRAFTING SHORT STORIES with Christopher Linforth

5/20/24 – 7/8/24 | 8 Weeks | Asynchronous

Wet Ink | Intermediate | \$395

After a recap on the elements of short fiction, we will take a fresh look at contemporary and classic stories alike. Each week, writers will craft a new piece and offer feedback to fellow participants.

PLOTTING YOUR NOVEL with Tammy Greenwood

5/24/24 – 6/14/24 | 4 Weeks | Asynchronous

Wet Ink | All Levels | \$215

In this workshop, participants will study the architecture of a novel and devise plans for plotting their own.

WRITING COMPELLING HISTORICAL FICTION with Dave Tevelin

6/1/24 – 6/29/24 | 5 Saturdays | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

The Writer's Center | All Levels | \$250

Tap into the DC area's rich history and discover the resources to explore it.

CREATING BACKSTORY & FLASHBACKS with Kathryn Johnson

6/1/24 | Saturday | 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom | Intermediate/Advanced | \$60

Learn how to masterfully weave in details and experiences that enrich your characters and create believable motivation.

HOW TO WRITE A NOVEL with John DeDakis

6/5/24 | Wednesday | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom | Beginner | \$60

We'll discuss how to transform the nub of an idea into a book-length project, populated with interesting characters, a twisty-turny plot, and an interesting setting.

THE EXTREME NOVELIST with Kathryn Johnson

6/5/24 – 7/24/24 | 8 Wednesdays | 7:00 – 9:30 PM

Zoom | Intermediate/Advanced | \$395

This popular course will help you complete a rough draft of a novel in just eight weeks.

Note: this is not a workshopping course.

SHORT STORY I with Buku Sarkar

6/10/24 – 7/29/24 | 8 Mondays | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom | Beginner | \$395

Participants will bring in work to be workshopped by the entire class. This workshop will teach participants how to edit other's work, read like a writer, scrutinize sentences, and how to submit to magazines.

PLOT LIKE A PRO with Kathryn Johnson

6/29/24 | Saturday | 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

Build a strong plot for any story with these fail-proof steps!

HOW TO WRITE DIALOGUE THAT ADVANCES PLOT, SCENE, AND MOTIVE with Joyce Winslow

7/11/24 – 8/1/24 | 4 Thursdays | 7:00 – 8:30 PM

The Writer's Center | All Levels | \$215

In each session of this workshop, you'll hear a brief lecture with examples, and be able to practice a particular technique to understand the why and how it's effective.

INTRO TO THE NOVEL with Tammy Greenwood

7/12/24 – 8/30/24 | 8 Weeks | Asynchronous

Wet Ink | Beginner/Intermediate | \$395

Participants will discuss many elements of fiction (dialogue, scene, etc.) with an emphasis on discovering the writing process that works best for each writer.

POINT OF VIEW AND NARRATIVE VOICE with Tammy Greenwood

7/12/24 – 8/2/24 | 4 Weeks | Asynchronous

Wet Ink | All Levels | \$215

We will look at everything from the first person point of view to the editorial omniscient, as well as some of the less traditional points of view, to help you choose the best voice to tell your story.

FICTION II: REVISE, PERFECT AND SUBMIT! with Marija Stajic

7/20/24 – 8/31/24 | 7 Saturdays | 10:30 AM – 1:00 PM

Zoom | Intermediate/Advanced | \$350

This course aims to help you experience your work objectively, help you polish your work, and give you tools to submit to either literary journals, competitions, or agents.

WHAT A CHARACTER! with Clarisse Baleja Saidi

7/20/24 – 8/24/24 | 6 Saturdays | 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$295

This workshop will be an introduction to the key elements and craft strategies of fiction, with a focus on creating and refining character-based stories (whether short stories or novels).

TROUBLESHOOTING YOUR FICTION with Kathryn Johnson

7/27/24 | Saturday | 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

This fast-paced, half-day class focuses on the ten most common mistakes and concerns, often overlooked by authors before they send their story out into the world.

DIY NOVEL REVISION with Tammy Greenwood

8/2/24 – 8/23/24 | 4 Weeks | Asynchronous

Wet Ink | All Levels | \$215

Do you have a finished draft of a novel but don't know what to do next? This workshop will take you through the revision and editing process step-by-step.

READY, SET, WRITE! A GENERATIVE FICTION WORKSHOP with Lacey N. Dunham

8/2/24 | Saturday | 12:00 – 2:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

A range of prompts, short reading selections, and class discussion — along with in-class writing time — will introduce different craft techniques, styles, and approaches that will pump up your inspiration and get the words flowing. By the end of the session, you'll have the start for 4-5 new story drafts.

STORY PLUS STYLE with Sayan Ray

5/4/24 – 6/8/24 | 6 Saturdays | 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

The Writer's Center | All Levels | \$295

This workshop will tackle all elements of your storytelling from top to bottom. Participants will develop two original pieces of writing to be workshopped once with a focus on story structure, and then a second time with a focus on prose mechanics.

TIPS FOR REVISION FROM THE PROS! with Aaron Hamburger

5/8/24 | Wednesday | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom | Intermediate/Advanced | \$60

In this hands-on, active learning workshop, you will learn some of the various ways writers reshape, rethink, and "re-vision" their pieces.

THE MUDDLE IN THE MIDDLE with Kathryn Johnson

5/8/24 | Wednesday | 7:00 – 9:30 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

This quick-take session focuses on ways to get yourself unstuck when a story's middle gets thorny, or you lose your way.

PROCESS YOUR PROCESS with Mathangi Subramanian

5/11/24 | Saturday | 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

In this supportive space, we'll reflect on our creative insecurities, develop self-care plans, and design realistic writing routines for who we are and where we are in life.

HOW CREATE A COMPELLING VOICE with Laura J. Oliver

5/11/24 | Saturday | 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

Acquire the tools you need for developing a compelling voice of your own through the study of entertaining published examples, a clear explanation, and writing exercises designed to ignite your unique way of expressing yourself.

THE POWER OF STRUCTURE: FIXING YOUR TABLE OF CONTENTS with Nikki Frias

5/15/24 | Wednesday | 7:00 – 8:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

In this workshop you'll learn how to organize your ideas effectively, create a roadmap for your readers, and ensure your manuscript flows seamlessly from start to finish.

WRITERS LISTENING with Christian McEwen

5/18/24 | Saturday | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

This workshop will offer inspirational examples; practice in listening through writing, drawing, and mediation; and community support in your process.

FACING YOUR WRITING FEARS with John DeDakis

5/29/24 | Wednesday | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

In this session we'll look at understanding what frightens us, and how to get beyond those fears.

EVOKING READER EMPATHY with Lynn Auld Schwartz

6/1/24 | Saturday | 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Zoom | Beginner/Intermediate | \$60

Reading examples and short exercises will give participants the opportunity to experiment with creating empathy on the page.

EXPERIMENTING WITH FORM with Mathangi Subramanian

6/8/24 | Saturday | 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

Free your imagination by writing stories, poems, and essays in unexpected ways. Come take a risk and see what you discover about your craft, your inspiration, and yourself.

CREATING CONFLICT & TENSION with Kathryn Johnson

6/15/24 | Saturday | 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

Whether you choose to write literary fiction, mysteries, family sagas, thrillers, historical fiction, sci-fi, fantasy or even creative nonfiction — you can learn techniques for drawing readers into your tales through action, dialogue, and plot twists that make your work stand out.

UNCLOGGING YOUR BRAIN with Lisa Jan Sherman

6/18/24 | Tuesday | 7:00 – 8:30 PM

The Writer's Center | All Levels | \$60

Improv prompts will spark memories, characters, and places, turning them into poems, scenes, dialogues, and stories.

INSPIRATION STATION — A MULTI-GENRE WORKSHOP with Patricia Gray

6/23/24 | Sunday | 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Zoom | Beginner | \$60

Helpful exercises and prompts can free your imagination and lead you to surprises in your writing. You will leave with a finished poem and flash fiction or memoir excerpts.

FLASH: BEYOND THE GENRE BINARY with Jubi Arriola-Headley

6/25/24 | Tuesday | 7:00 – 10:00 PM

The Writer's Center | All Levels | \$60

During our time together, we'll read some pieces resplendent in their brevity, talk about what makes them great flash — or not, and spend some time crafting mad flashes of our own.

HOW TO START A COMPELLING STORY with Laura J. Oliver

7/13/24 | Saturday | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

This workshop will teach writers how to capture readers' and agents' attention from the very first sentence and keep them turning pages.

CREATIVE SPIRIT: INFUSING YOUR WRITING WITH ENERGY AND INSPIRATION with Lindsey Van Wagner

7/13/24 | Saturday | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

The Writer's Center | All Levels | \$60

Unleash your creativity and overcome creative blocks as you learn to stimulate artistic expression and promote personal growth in your writing!

MIXED GENRE

HOW TO WRITE A LOT with Kathryn Johnson

7/13/24 | Saturday | 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

You may think you don't have the time, energy, or inspiration to write because of your hectic lifestyle. Wrong! Learn to build an invincible writing routine.

ELEMENTS OF WRITING: SOUND & VISION with Lorin Drexler

7/20/24 | Saturday | 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

In this workshop we will engage multidisciplinary modes of creativity to guide inspiration for writing. Using sound and vision as the aperture to ignite the inner dialogue, each week will integrate these mediums to engage a sensory interplay and weave a tapestry for the written word.

EXERCISES TO IMPROVE YOUR WRITING with Sayan Ray

7/27/24 – 8/24/24 | 5 Saturdays | 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

The Writer's Center | All Levels | \$250

Exercises offered in this workshop are designed for repeated use in your practice at home — including some tailored to jump-start your inspiration.

CRAFTING YOUR LIFE INTO STORY with David Hicks, PhD

9/7/24 | Saturday | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

The Writer's Center | All Levels | \$60

Learn how to identify several pivotal events of your life and shape one of them into a work of fiction or non-fiction.

NONFICTION

WRITING ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS with GG Renee Hill

5/15/24 – 5/22/24 | 2 Wednesdays | 6:00 – 8:00 PM

Zoom | Beginner/Intermediate | \$115

You will learn creative ways to practice self-discovery through writing and turn personal experience into art, and you will come away with two rough drafts in whatever genre you choose.

PLANT WRITING with Sam Nelson

6/5/24 – 6/12/24 | 2 Wednesdays | 7:00 – 9:30 PM

The Writer's Center | All Levels | \$115

Together, we'll discuss and practice writing traditions such as garden writing, science communication, and personal essays with a focus on our relationships to plants and the land around us.

FINDING SUBJECTS THAT MOVE AND ENTERTAIN with Laura J. Oliver

6/8/24 | Saturday | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

Using published examples, writing exercises, lively discussion, and inspiring instruction, this workshop will distill from memory and imagination the story you are meant to write.

VULNERABILITY IN PERSONAL STORYTELLING with GG Renee Hill

6/23/24 | Sunday | 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Zoom | Beginner/Intermediate | \$60

You will come away from this workshop with perspective on your unique storyteller type and how grasping it can build courage, as well as best practices for taking care of yourself as you do this introspective work.

HOW TO WRITE, PITCH, AND PLACE OP EDS with Joyce Winslow

7/10/24 – 7/31/24 | 4 Wednesdays | 7:00 – 8:30 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$215

In this class you'll learn how to write an opening paragraph that pulls readers in, what factual sources editors trust (or don't), the three questions an OP ED editor needs you to answer, how to take down opposing arguments politely, and end your piece to get results.

MICRO MEMOIRS with Melanie Figg

8/8/24 – 8/29/24 | 4 Thursdays | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$215

We'll read and discuss Micro Memoirs, also called Flash Memoir (50-250 words), to inspire your own writing and enhance your storytelling skills. Each week, with provided prompts, you'll write about a variety of incidents, stories, or memories while building specific craft skills.

JOURNALING TECHNIQUES FOR WRITING MEMORIES with GG Renee Hill

8/21/24 – 8/28/24 | 2 Wednesdays | 6:00 – 8:00 PM

Zoom | Beginner/Intermediate | \$115

Use your journaling practice to mine your memories for themes to write about your life.

POETRY**FOUNDATIONS OF POETRY with Meg Eden Kuyatt**

5/6/24 – 6/10/24 | 6 Weeks | Asynchronous

Wet Ink | Beginner/Intermediate | \$295

Over the course of six weeks, we'll discuss four key elements of poems: image, sound, form, and realization.

EKPHRASTIC POETRY with Melanie Figg

5/30/24 – 6/27/24 | 5 Thursdays | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$250

Each week, with provided prompts, you'll be encouraged to visit a local gallery/museum and write about an artwork that moves you. Participants will read aloud drafts for feedback.

POETRY OF THE EROTIC with Natasha Oladokun

6/3/24 – 7/8/24 | 6 Weeks | Asynchronous

Wet Ink | All Levels | \$295

This workshop offers an opportunity for poets to write their own poems with Eros at the center, as well as read and study poems featuring a wide range of poets of color, and queer and trans poets.

POETRY

WRITE THROUGH IT: A GENERATIVE WORKSHOP ON GRIEF AND LOSS with Courtney LeBlanc

6/15/24 | Saturday | 2:00 – 4:00 PM

The Writer's Center | All Levels | \$60

In this workshop we'll read poems about loss and use them as prompts to write our own poems about the people/things/places/ideas we've lost or are grieving.

5 WOMEN POETS with Ann Quinn

6/20/24 – 8/1/24 | 6 Thursdays | 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Zoom | Intermediate/Advanced | \$295

One outstanding poet will be featured in each class, and as we examine their work we will write 3 or 4 of our own poems, for a total of 15-20 poems during the course. Note: No meeting July 4.

FREEDOM WITH FORMS with Claudia Gary

6/23/24 | Sunday | 11:00 – 1:30 PM

Zoom | Intermediate/Advanced | \$60

After exploring several traditional forms, we will experiment with creating improvised (nonce) forms. Participants may leave with at least one new draft poem and ideas for creating more.

NATURAL METER CRASH COURSE with Claudia Gary

6/29/24 | Saturday | 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom | Intermediate /Advanced | \$60

Guided by an internationally published author of sonnets, villanelles, and other metrical poems, this one-day workshop includes scansion of well-known poems, writing exercises, and, if you like, close examination of a poem you've drafted prior to class.

POETRY WRITING AND REVISION with Emily Holland

7/9/24 – 8/13/24 | 6 Tuesdays | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$295

This course will help participants not only write new work with ease, but also return to those poems with a keen eye towards revision.

MY FAVORITE THINGS: WRITING ABOUT ORDINARY OBJECTS AND PLACES with Abdul Ali

7/10/24 – 7/31/24 | 4 Wednesdays | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$215

In this workshop we will write a new poem each meeting based on odes, praise songs, and, yes, our favorite things to arrive at the pleasures and wisdom of poetry.

MARKETING YOUR POETRY with Courtney LeBlanc

7/15/24 | Monday | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

This workshop will show you easy hacks for promoting your book.

PERSONA POEM CRASH COURSE with Claudia Gary

7/21/24 | Sunday | 11:00 AM – 1:30 PM

Zoom | Intermediate/Advanced | \$60

Guided by a widely published author of persona and other poems, you will read and discuss several time-honored examples, then start new ones of your own.

POETRY VS. TRAUMA with Claudia Gary

7/27/24 – 8/10/24 | 3 Saturdays | 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom | Intermediate/Advanced | \$150

This workshop will present some of the many ways poetry has helped writers both heal trauma and prevent post-traumatic stress syndrome. Guided by an internationally published poet, you will explore the science behind this and learn a range of techniques, immediately putting several of them to use in drafting new work.

POETIC MEMOIR with Al Basile

8/6/24 – 8/13/24 | 2 Tuesdays | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom | Intermediate | \$115

Write your memoir in poems instead of a book! You'll draft one poem after the first session and have a clear sense of how to revise it by the end of the second.

BEST SERVED COLD: WRITING REVENGE POEMS with Courtney LeBlanc

8/17/24 | Saturday | 2:00 – 4:00 PM

The Writer's Center | All Levels | \$60

This generative workshop will review and discuss poems that serve, in some way, a bit of revenge on someone. We'll then write our own revenge poems. Participants can expect to leave with 2-4 new drafts.

PUBLISHING**GET AN AGENT FOR YOUR NOVEL with Marija Stajic**

5/11/24 – 6/15/24 | 6 Saturdays | 10:30 AM – 1:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$295

Make your work the strongest possible before sending to literary agents, journals, or competitions.

BOOK MARKETING ON A BUDGET with Rob Jolles

5/30/24 – 6/6/24 | 2 Thursdays | 9:30 AM – 11:00 AM

Zoom | All Levels | \$115

In this workshop we'll focus on over two dozen book marketing tips, with a close eye on budgets.

FIND THE RIGHT AGENT FOR YOU with Eva Langston

7/13/24 – 7/27/24 | 3 Saturdays | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

The Writer's Center | Intermediate/Advanced | \$150

After studying sample query letters, you'll write your own query to be critiqued by your classmates. We will also workshop everyone's opening pages and discuss topics such as conference pitch sessions, common query mistakes, and agent red-flags.

PROFESSIONAL WRITING

HOW TO WRITE A GRANT PROPOSAL with Cara Seitchek

8/3/24 – 8/17/24 | 4 Saturdays | 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$215

This workshop will cover how to research prospective funders, the elements of a good proposal, and how to approach funders. Note: The workshop will meet August 3, 10, and 17. There will be a fourth meeting on September 14 to review your finished proposal.

BOOK PROMOTION THROUGH PODCASTING with Rob Jolles

8/8/24 – 8/15/24 | 2 Thursdays | 9:30 AM – 11:00 AM

Zoom | All Levels | \$115

In this workshop we'll focus on how to prepare your pitch materials, how to get booked on podcasts, how to be a great guest, and even how to create your own podcast.

WRITE LIKE THE NEWS with Hank Wallace

8/29/24 | Thursday | 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$60

Become concise as news, precise as law.

STAGE & SCREEN

FROM IDEA TO SCRIPT: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO SCREENWRITING with Mel Barrett

5/4/24 – 6/22/24 | 8 Saturdays | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

The Writer's Center | Beginner | \$395

Every week participants will build on the foundations of story, structure, character arcs, the do's and don'ts, industry standards, and the technical side of writing a script until they have a completed a short screenplay that will be workshopped during the last weeks of class.

HOW TO WRITE A STAND-UP COMEDY ACT with Sheila Wenz

5/7/24 – 6/4/24 | 5 Tuesdays | 6:00 – 8:00 PM

Zoom | All Levels | \$250

Learn how to recognize a premise, extract the humor, and hone it in to a stand-up act or funny story.

THE COMPLETE PLAYWRIGHT with Emily DeDakis

7/11/24 – 8/29/24 | 8 Thursdays | 7:00 – 9:30 PM

The Writer's Center | All Levels | \$395

Dig into the full spectrum of playwriting — with workshops on process, form and technique, and group critique sessions that develop your individual approach to writing for performance.

For details and to register
visit [writer.org!](https://www.writer.org)



FREE EVENTS FOR WRITERS: SUMMER 2024

OPEN MIC @ THE WRITER'S CENTER

Second and Fourth Wednesday
of every month, 7pm ET

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT WITH POET SYDNEY LEA

Thursday, April 25, 7pm ET
Zoom

AMANDA SHAW BOOK LAUNCH WITH SEBASTIAN MERRILL AND A TRIBUTE TO SANDRA BEASLEY

Friday, April 26, 7pm ET
In Person

WOMEN WRITERS MIXER

Tuesday, May 7, 5:30 – 7pm ET
In Person

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT WITH NOVELIST LISA KO

Thursday, May 9, 7pm ET
Zoom

LATINE OPEN MIC @ THE WRITER'S CENTER

Saturday, May 11, 7pm ET

RONALD COLLINS IN CONVERSATION WITH CAROLYN FINNEY

Tuesday, May 21, 7pm ET
In Person

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT WITH POET AMANDA SHAW IN CONVERSATION WITH MAJDA GAMA

Thursday, May 30, 7pm ET
Zoom

DANNY LAWLESS & AMANDA NEWELL BOOK LAUNCH

Sunday, June 2, 2pm ET
In Person

SUSAN COLL & PAUL GOLDBERG BOOK LAUNCH

Tuesday, June 4, 7pm ET
In Person

LGBTQ+ WRITERS MIXER

Wednesday, June 5, 6 – 8pm ET
In Person

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT WITH POET S. FEY

Thursday, June 6, 7pm ET
Zoom

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT WITH ESSAYIST HEATHER BARTEL

Thursday, June 13, 7pm ET
Zoom

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT WITH POET LAUREN CAMP

Thursday, June 20, 7pm ET
Zoom

PSYCHOANALYSIS & POETIC PROCESS WITH JUDITH HARRIS

Tuesday, July 9, 7pm ET
In Person

DISABLED WRITERS MIXER

Thursday, July 11, 5:30 – 7:30pm ET
In Person

Find more free events and register at writer.org!

Honestly & Unflinchingly

AN INTERVIEW WITH SARAH MCCAMMON ON HER NONFICTION DEBUT

By Zach Powers

NPR Correspondent Sarah McCammon is a seasoned storyteller, but with *Exvangelicals: Loving, Living, and Leaving the White Evangelical Church*, she's done two new things: written a whole book and turned her journalistic skills toward herself. The result is both investigative and intimate, and readers are given a personal glimpse inside one of the most influential movements of the last half century. I first met Sarah over a decade ago when she worked for Georgia Public Broadcasting, and we caught up via email for this interview.

ZP: Can you share the origins of this project? How did it go from something you experienced, and thought about, and maybe talked about to something that you wrote a whole book about?

SM: I'd first heard the term "exvangelical" while covering the 2016 campaign, while doing a story about evangelical women who were discomfited by the release of the *Access Hollywood* video in which then-candidate Donald Trump bragged about grabbing women "by the pussy." The term caught my ear because it succinctly conveyed the idea that a person had been evangelical but no longer aligned with that term. I'd been through my own long and sometimes painful journey with trying to make sense of many aspects of my evangelical faith, and I began to notice a growing number of people from similar backgrounds were talking about their own "deconstruction" experiences and faith journeys in online spaces and podcasts. I began paying attention to these spaces and eventually, talking to people in

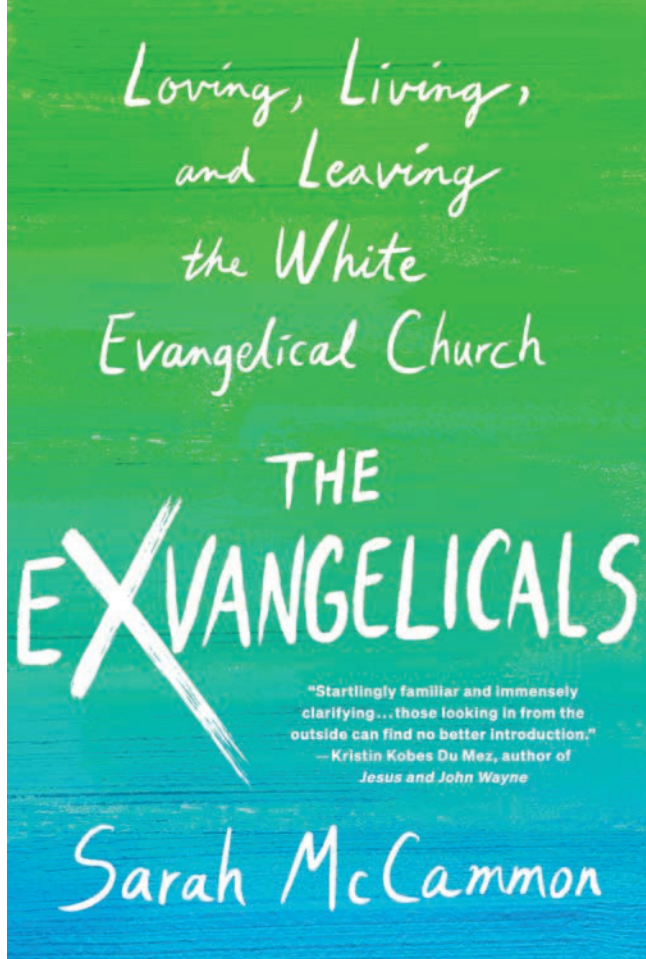
them. I ultimately decided I wanted to write about this in large part because of the Christian nationalist ideas that helped fuel the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol.

One of the concepts that comes up throughout the book is cognitive dissonance, which is something I think about a lot in the world but also in writing. Cognitive dissonance is a force that can push someone away from fundamentalist thinking by challenging it. On the other hand, cognitive dissonance can keep people wedded to a type of thinking by forbidding honest consideration of opposing viewpoints. How do you write about a personal, emotional subject in a way that doesn't make people automatically and psychologically shut down?

As a journalist, I try to describe rather than preach — you could say, show not tell. I believe that simply telling stories honestly and unflinchingly is powerful. People can make up their own minds about those stories; my job is to tell them as I and others have experienced them.

I don't think a lot of people realize the fact that one of the main things broadcast journalists do is write. What differences and challenges did you face in going from writing for broadcast to writing for long-form print?

I started out as a print journalist, so in a way, this was a return to the form that is most familiar to me. I



found the book-writing process to be very satisfying because I could divide the work into chapters that focused on particular themes, and spend time unpacking each theme in more detail than I can for a typical radio piece.

For broadcast, you always have to remember that there's no going back. If someone misses a critical idea, it's gone — unlike in print, where the reader can always backtrack. This means that writing for radio has to be succinct, clear, and with just enough gentle repetition of ideas to help the listener along. I think those lessons are actually useful for book-writing as well. People are busy and have short attention spans, and tight, clear writing is never a bad thing. That said, I feel I can get away with longer sentences in a book than I could writing for the ear. I think the old advice to read your work out loud is good advice. You catch mistakes that way. You crystallize your ideas by saying things out loud and even hearing yourself read your words. I tried to do that as much as possible.

This book is part memoir. What was your experience of turning your reporter's observational skills toward yourself?

As much as possible, I tried to approach the memoir sections the way I would anything else. I fact-checked myself and tried to refine my memories by talking to friends and family, pulling out my old journals, and turning to primary source materials like my old Christian school textbooks. That said, obviously this is my telling of my story. I left some things out because they were too private. But I also shared plenty of personal details and experiences, if I felt they were salient.

I'm interested in how this book came to have its structure and shape. It covers your youth, adolescence, and up to the present, as well as third-person histories, biographies, and individual recollections covering an even broader timeframe. So, not chronological. What was your organizing principle and why did you choose it?

I organized the book around themes of cognitive dissonance that many exvangelicals experience and which force them to re-think their faith. So no, it's not entirely linear. I tried to write each chapter in a way that made sense on its own. But I also used my grandfather's story as a narrative arc which does unfold fairly chronologically.

Finally, what's one piece of advice you'd give to a writer just starting out on a book-length project?

Get organized. Plan out, as much as possible, what you'd like to do with each chapter and think ahead about what you'll need to execute that plan — whether it's research, reporting, or just time to get your thoughts down. And make a schedule. I'm forever grateful to my editor, Hannah Phillips, for helping me put together a writing schedule that I mostly stuck to and without which the book still might not be done!



From Luther Hughes's Guest Edited Folio: *Love Poems by Queer Writers*

Adam D. Weeks Unbegun Duet

After Richard Siken

He's afraid of what he loves
and what it means for him.
He meaning you? Yes.
And how would he describe love?
As his favorite shirt, the one
he's so careful washing,
running his hands along
the stretched neckline,
the distressed hem. *Is that all?*
Not the half of it. He'd say
it's the lake that's only deep
when you jump into it.
That people don't know
you need it like water.
He'd wax poetic,
use the phases of the moon
and the life cycle of a bird
to break it down, make it
visual. *He sounds creative.*
No, he just likes to impress
you. *Does he think he needs to?*
It doesn't matter. *Why not?*
He tells himself it doesn't
matter what people think
but sometimes he takes this
too far. He says he's dying
to make something, to see
his hands flitting like quick
wings, building his own little blue
roof. He's thinking of taking up
knitting, wants to make the softest
wool shirt in the loveliest pinks—

fuchsia, magenta, blush. *Who is
he making it for? Whoever needs
it. Whoever it fits. Some threads
are loose but it's so warm
it seems it wants to hold
you. What else would
he make?* Little silk birds
with wings that really flap.
Each with its own name
and story. The blue jay
that lost three eggs. The robin
always hard-rockin'. The sunset
-red cardinal always singing
it's way home. *Sounds pretty.*
Look, he's about to show
you. *Show me what?*
That everything is.

Submit and subscribe at
[PoetLore.com!](https://www.poetlore.com)

Seth Leeper

St. Helena

the fog parts through the windshield
to reveal yellow lines and guardrails,
our little red car hugs the roadside
on each turn through this concrete
rural maze, cutting its way down
the mountain, reluctant to keep
going, trying to delay the inevitable
insistence of gravity, the pointed tips
of the pines below poised to break a fall,
or spear a hole through us, yesterday,
we were laughing on opposite sides
of a bench in an anonymous vineyard,
dry air hazy and moving, our hands
on the hot table, not touching,
splinters poking at the bottoms
of our thighs from the unsealed wood,
today, we are silent, on opposite sides
of the gears shifting from drive
to neutral, pretending yesterday
never stopped, but the speeding
brown and green landscape blurring
past our windows defy this denial,
and the first sign for the freeway
promises the end of our bodies'
proximity, we can touch elbows
now while you grip the wheel,
we can pull over and hug
in the foreground of exploding
geysers, fade to black, instead,
we leave negative space in our wake,
and an unobscured view of the shooting
springs, later, at the kiosk, we will touch
hands, our fingers trade a last burst of heat



From Volume 118 3/4

**Jhila Hosseini, translated by
Tyler Fisher and Haidar Khezri**

Bliss

I longed to know you by sight and make you known:
with steel-toed shoes and iron cane,
I left no city, village, street, or alleyway
unsearched,
but none could tell your whereabouts or name.
I traced deserted wastes and distant hills
and never saw you.
I turned the ocean, with my burning breath,
to steam and turned up nothing in its depths.
Heartache and weariness heartfelt and heart-full pain:
the sorrow of the poor I probed
and scrutinized the wounded body of the maimed.
All laughed at me:
"Bliss?!"
What you are seeking
was a child they beheaded newly born."

Gina Franco **Reign of Terror**

Looking up at the dome, not seeing the dome.
When did it become transparent?
The search lights swing their arms through the night.
Yoked to one another, to earth, at the neck,
what can they shoulder but the point
of return? Which way? Which way home?
Memory, bejeweled and longing, places a chair in the center of its room
and waits.
I remember the stations. The arrests.
What you want to believe you believe.
Hands in the air, an upside-down march through the night.
The ticking was time in my hands, my own smooth round bleak
bomb to diffuse. I cracked it like an egg. True
to itself, it showed me its golden eye.

Yoona

White Sand

At a refugee camp in Bidong, squatting between frayed tents, a girl wrote new words in the sand. The wind blew away her attempts, but that did not stop her pruned finger, wrinkled from helping her mother wash rags in the river running rust.

Gifting the girl a smile because she had witnessed too much death too soon, her mother told her stories of a frog who transforms into a beautiful woman and a flower who is really a fairy queen.

The girl gathered the other children for a makeshift theater, directed them to sketch smiling faces and drifting petals in the sand. Thousands of miles across the Pacific

and twenty years later, she forsakes a language where there is more than one way to say *I love you*. She sits on a low plastic stool in front of white women, learns new words like *district, mortgage*.

At the front desk, in the standstill hours of evening, she fiddles with the rake of a mini-Japanese Zen garden. Transfixed by the flashing neon sign, she writes in the white sand what she wishes to become—barren of wonder she once believed in—*open*.

Matthew Tuckner

The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

To accurately describe the cancerous body, you resort to Freud: *the nature of horror*

is when the home becomes unhomelike.
The cowardly liver. The lionizing bedsores.

The people you love invested in the particulars of a pain they can't see.

If the cancer could speak, you say it would say: *I am calling from inside the house.*

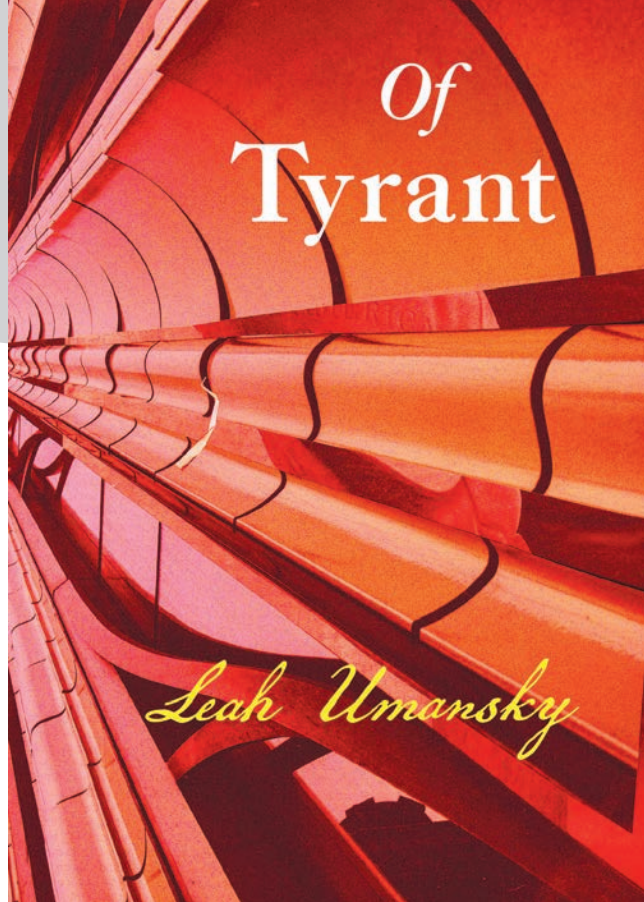
The pain is the pain of creation. The pain is the making of room for yourself inside yourself.

REPETITION & INSISTENCE

**Emily Holland reviews
Poet Lore contributor Leah
Umansky's new collection,
*Of Tyrant***

It is not difficult to imagine the world that Leah Umansky's new book *Of Tyrant* (The Word Works 2024) evokes. These poems have a sense of timelessness to them, a timelessness in which the speaker investigates tyrants of both the past and present, highlighting the ways in which history is bound to repeat itself. Tyrants feature prominently, yes, but the poems here are also grounded specifically in their speaker and her relationship to the world around her. Rather than remaining in fear and hopelessness, the speaker reminds us of hope, courage, and vulnerability despite the forces of society that seek to drag us down. How does one survive all of *this*? Through repetitions and vulnerable assertions, Umansky's latest collection boldly asks, and attempts to answer, what can we do when tyranny is all around us?

In *Of Tyrant*, Umansky pushes the boundaries of the typical page with poems that are printed in landscape style. This physical twisting of the book as you read creates pause and asks us to think about the ways that tyranny twists words, twists reality, and even twists our sense of self. The poem "Hate Dream," one of these "twisted" forms, grounds itself in the shifting reality of a dream, or perhaps a nightmare. As the poem moves through the speaker's fragmented sense of time and the world around her, emotions find their way into the images. Fear and hate are positioned alongside one another. As the speaker says "I deserted my sense of self. I deserted my people and my past," the poem becomes more and more fragmented with every short sentence. And while the statements are short — some only one word — the landscaped page orientation allows for longer lines to stretch across the page. We feel the emotions of the dreamworld blurring into the speaker's real world.



The use of anaphora across many poems works to reiterate the daily or ever-present struggle against the "tyrant." Umansky's tyrant throughout these poems is specific — in one poem, his voice booms "I hereby demand." But the tyrant is also general, a poetic device of Umansky's creation that allows the reader to feel the claustrophobic grip of authoritarianism across poems. We feel this especially in part one of the poem "Rise and Fall of the Tyrant":

The tyrant is at your job
The tyrant follows you home
The tyrant is in your grief
The tyrant is in your longing
The tyrant is in your sick
The tyrant is in your heart
The tyrant is on your train
The tyrant is beneath your earnestly
The tyrant is in your breath
The tyrant is in this poem

In this poem, and in others across the book, we cannot ignore the presence of the tyrant. Every line emphasizes his oppressive being. The enjambments prevent us from the satisfaction of an endline pause, as well. When we read, we tumble through the

lines, hit again and again by the repeated opening. We cannot forget.

This is a book of repetitions and transformations. About repetition, Gertrude Stein writes, “The inevitable seeming repetition in human expression is not repetition, but insistence.” Umansky’s poems are poems that insist. They beg us not to turn away, but to act and react to the violence around us.

“

This is a book of repetitions and transformations.

—Emily Holland

”

Even the “I” of the speaker becomes its own echo of repetitive insistence. In “Self-Reflection,” the

speaker reminds us she is both easy to resist and irresistible when she says “I repel; I reject; I shun; I halt; I discard; I deter; I resist, and I disavow.” Her “I” fulfills the repetitive urge we have seen in other poems. Later in the same poem, the speaker reflects: “All my aligning and redefining. I think about all my reframing, all my scaffolding and my lexiconic leaps.” Moments like this speak not only to the world of the poem but also to the overarching themes of the collection as a whole.

Umansky’s poems propel us through the book with a keen sense of urgency. There is an immediacy to the concerns of the speaker and a breathlessness through which she approaches these everyday acts of oppression. As the speaker moves through subways, busy streets, and active classrooms, we rush forward with her — living. In the end, what we saw as repetitions within poems become a sort of heartbeat for the book, a way to remind us that yes, we carry on. In the poem “Surrender,” the speaker says “I’m trying to imagine a better future,” but she does not shy away from the present. These poems carry that imagination through every line.



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Tips to Get Your Self-Published Book on the Shelf at Your Local Bookstore

By Megan Bormet, Owner, People's Book, Takoma Park, MD

First and foremost, congratulations on your new publication — what a feat! As a brand new independent bookstore owner, I'm always delighted to see how many people are engaging with the written word. Since opening last June, my store, People's Book in Takoma Park, MD, has already made special connections with local authors in our community.

There are so many reasons we love our vibrant local writers' scene. To begin, hometown authors help bring a unique flavor to our store; there's nothing like the smile a customer has when they stumble across their own neighbor's book! We also recognize the power of the community that our local authors have already built around them. Events, like book launches and local author readings, have consistently proven to bring warm bodies into the store...and we love new customers! Finally, working with local authors often provides us a level of flexibility in sales that can help our bottom line. While we can often (and usually preferably) order a book directly from a publisher (like Penguin Random House) or wholesaler (like Ingram), we can also offer direct purchase or consignment arrangements with authors — you can expect bookstores to ask for between a 40-50% discount on a book.

So let's get into brass tacks here. In the spirit of

transparency, there are few myths I regularly address with local authors:

- **MYTH #1: My local bookstore will accept a box of my books because I'm local.** While we have a special part of the store devoted to local authors, we have very minimal storage space. This is typical in bookselling — we want all our books to be displayed, and having them in the back prevents it. We will often carry one copy of a local author's book for the local author shelf, and sometimes place a second copy in its respective section (mystery, history etc.), but don't expect your bookstore to carry more than a few copies. Shelf space is our most valuable asset, and we need to be flexible about how we curate and refresh the space!
- **MYTH #2: If my book is shelved, it will sell.** Independent bookstores work tirelessly to curate their collection and keep the inventory fresh. We regularly return stale inventory to publishers, promote new titles, and refresh displays and staff recommendations. If your book doesn't sell, don't be surprised if you're asked to come pick it up. However, there is much you can do to help your book sell! Add the book's availability at your local bookstore to your website and

social media accounts. Write a “shelf-talker” (a small index card with your elevator pitch) to post under your book. Post flyers around town. Encourage your friends, family, and networks to find your book at your local bookstore. The more you can market yourself and your book, the more likely it will continue to sell.

- **MYTH #3: My local bookstore has a responsibility to carry my book.** While we certainly value our local writers, there are some situations that put us indies in a tricky position. If you self-published a book on Amazon, don't be surprised if your local bookstore does not agree to sell your book. To be blunt, we probably don't want to do business with you if you are sending money to a company devoted to putting us out of business. Amazon is cheap, but they are not your friend. Amazon's monopoly model allows them to essentially *lose money* on every book purchase in order to lure customers in and eventually *make money* on subscriptions and other high margin items. This model makes it extremely difficult for small independent bookstores to thrive or even exist. If you haven't published your book yet, it might be worth a conversation with your local bookstore, who might be interested in helping with this process.

People's Book in Takoma Park, MD offers over 13,000 new books, zines, and gifts. They provide readers of all ages opportunities to explore, learn, and connect. They host monthly book clubs, local & national author events, and weekly children's storytimes. Learn more at peoplesbooktakoma.com or follow them @peoplesbooktakoma.

As you can see, the relationship between authors and their local bookshops is really a two-way street. If and when your local indie store agrees to carry your book, be sure to ask yourself if there are ways you can help them! Are you a regular customer? Have you brought a friend in recently to browse with you? Perhaps you've written a positive online review about the store? Does your website send customers directly to the store or to bookshop.org and/or libro.fm (respectively, the preferred Amazon and Audible alternative)?

I truly wish you the best of luck in selling your book locally — hometown writers are such a vital cog in the bookselling machine. Take care, and remember to shop local!



HOW TO BECOME A BETTER WRITER AND GET INTO HEAVEN FOR FREE OR, HOW I LEARNED TO WRITE GOOD BY READING THE SLUSH PILE

By Michael Tager

The truism is that the more we read, the better writers we become. But *what* are we supposed to read? Better books? Multiple genres? Diverse authors and stories? Well, yes, but there's another option: read submissions for an indie journal or press. Not as a mitzvah, but for your own benefit.

There are all kinds of benefits from submissions, most likely from the slush*. The easiest is learning to identify the mistakes that get a piece immediately disqualified (like submitting prose to a poetry contest). More valuable, however, is learning from people just like us, those trying to get published. We learn from where they miss the mark or, more fun, where they go right!

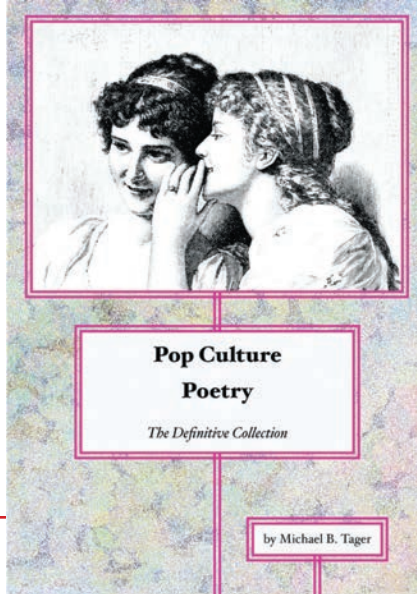
We begin seeing patterns in what gets kicked up to the decision-making big brains, the editors. We see that what makes it through is *fire* and we understand why it burns so good. Maybe it's the language, or character, or narrative. Probably, though, it's that the good stuff tends to be surprising.

Good news! We can also be surprising.

Once we see certain patterns, we can internalize what separates an excellent, transcendent piece from one that's merely very good**. We can take that to our own writing, identify the safe choices, and shake things up in the manuscript.

There are, of course, more positives we can take from our fellows, but first...

We don't need to go over all the ways writers can go astray, because I don't want to be a bummer, and I have a tight word count. Suffice it to say that after reading our tenth, hundredth, or thousandth submission, we see that many writing "rules" we're



told in school and craft books are true. We know it's true, because we see it reflected in our decisions to *not* publish some writing. (We'll leave arguments about canon influencing our decisions for another time.)

Sure, we've been told that we have to write nonfiction so that it's more than an anecdote, but after we reject yet another essay that ends with the feeling "you kind of had to be there," we can avoid that ourselves. And yes, as poets we know to use synonyms and avoid clichés, but after reading the word "bone" a million times, we wonder if we shouldn't go through our poems and maybe use the word tibia or femur. As novelists, once we get lost enough times in pages of exposition, we learn the value of economy and pacing.

Let's not belabor it! Now that we're sold on volunteering our time (It's a mitzvah! You'll build community!), where to find journals and presses? You can ask friends or check out *Poets and Writers Magazine*, *Duotrope*, *Chill Subs*, social media, etc. Do your research! Once you find a publisher that seems great, kindly, respectfully ask them if they need volunteers (follow their submission guidelines whilst doing so!). If they don't, thank them and ask if they might have some suggestions. Keep at it and you'll be reading the slush in no time.

Let us know how it goes!

**The slush pile is the unsolicited pieces submitted to a journal or press. From the days of yore, hundreds of manuscript pages on the floor might look like slushy snow.*

***Editors and readers struggle most with this category of work: "really good, but good enough to publish it over other work that's also really good?"*

Michael B. Tager is stardust masquerading as the author of *Pop Culture Poetry: the Definitive Collection*. He is also the Managing Editor of Mason Jar Press. His favorite color is teacup pig. Find more at michaeltager.com.



WINNER OF THE 2023 BETHESDA POETRY CONTEST

Margaret Flaherty

Burn Barrel

(In memory of Brigadier General William St. John, 1909-1993)

It's against the law now, but in the 50's, we had burn barrels behind our houses for burning trash. Rusty & black, they sat on concrete platforms

set back a safe distance. Now & then, sparks escaped & set something on fire, but mostly they pricked & flecked the mild suburban air before

they disappeared in harmless puffs; nothing above us but weather & the rare plane that roared overhead from Pittsburgh, forty miles east, leaving

faint contrails of white exhaust. We kids could be reckless, but we knew to keep our distance until the trash fire burned down. As the oldest, I was

first to stretch on tiptoe & peer inside to inspect what was left. I learned then fire doesn't leave just ashes. Some things refuse to burn. Before

fire smolders out, it streams, blood-red, between blackened remnants, like the glowing arterial rivers that flooded Tokyo's streets after U.S.

bombers dropped incendiaries, a sight most Americans have only seen in aerial photographs from World War II. My Uncle Bill fought in that

war. I was told he walked through fire in Burma. Post-war, he sold men's clothes in Connecticut & never spoke of Burma, until the year of his

death when he heard bombs again, artillery fire, the crack of pistols & tried to speak, but couldn't stop weeping for friends he'd lost, what he'd

endured to survive; what burned to ashes inside him, what wouldn't.



WINNER OF THE 2024 BETHESDA POETRY CONTEST

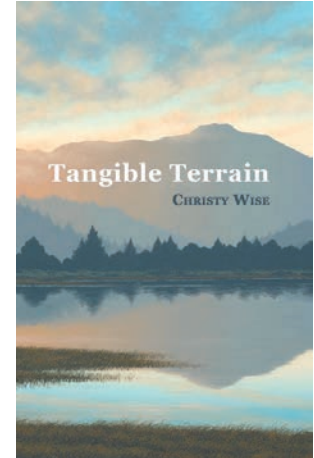
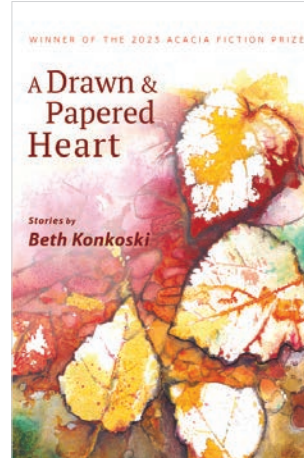
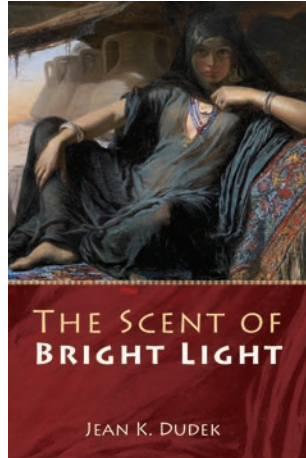
May-Mei Lee

Chinatown

On 7th street,
before the fire,
there was a restaurant,
the one with the roast pork in the window
next to the Walgreens that used to be a CVS that used to be a Peoples Drug that used to be
the knick-knack store that displayed the musical pencil case I coveted,
where the cooks knew my parents,
so tossed in extra pineapple buns.

The Chinese sign tells me it will be *Owl Restaurant*.
Hooters - intentionally lost in translation.

Each year, Bethesda Urban Partnership in collaboration with MoCo360, The Writer's Center, and The Trawick Foundation celebrate the best writing from around the DMV with a poetry, short story, and essay contest. For more information, visit bethesda.org.



NEW BOOKS FROM THE WRITER'S CENTER FAMILY!

Real Life and Other Fictions: A Novel

Susan Coll
susancoll.com

In this comically surreal, warmhearted journey, failed-journalist Cassie encounters people she never knew existed — chief among them, an enigmatic cryptozoologist, who helps her in the quest to discover her past. And along the way, she looks for answers regarding curious sightings of a creature known as the Mothman in the months before her parents died. As the line between real life and fiction blurs, Cassie finds herself grappling with the nature of stories, myths, and who gets to write the endings.

The Scent of Bright Light

Jean Dudek

Biblical matriarch Sarah experiences a strange sensation of light when a mysterious, unknown God speaks to her and Abraham, promising them a large family. But the promise remains unfulfilled for decades. *The Scent of Bright Light* is historical fiction providing an ingenious reading of the biblical text. The ancient tale becomes a new story when it comes from Sarah in her own voice.

A Drawn and Papered Heart

Beth Konkoski
kallistogaiapress.org/a-drawn-papered-heart

Characters practiced in the arts of grief and disappointment live in the stories of Beth Konkoski's collection, *A Drawn and Papered Heart*. From a young boy facing death at the hands of a troubled relative to a woman who must bail her friend out of jail in the middle of the night, these lyrical stories evoke for readers bittersweet reminders of the many ways to journey toward resilience.

Tangible Terrain: Poems

Christy Wise
christywise.com

The natural landscape of *Tangible Terrain* is 1960s northern California when rural lands were consumed by houses, streets, schools and the families living and working in those spaces. The internal landscape is that of a girl who seeks comfort in dry grassy hills, eucalyptus groves, a frog swamp, an open field, and nearby Richardson Bay as a counterbalance to ominous words unspoken inside her childhood home.

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