

2022 Conference & Bookfair in Philadelphia Event Outline

EVENT TITLE: **Bound, Stitched, and Pressed: On Chapbooks and Community**

Event Description: Why publish a chapbook? Is a chapbook just a short book? What makes a community of poems a successful chapbook? Ephemera, folk tale, town gossip, political tract: the little book pressed into the hands of everyday people has historically connected tale and song with community. This panel focuses on why poets write chapbooks today. Panelists will share our own chapbook stories to reveal how your poems can sing in this morsel of a form, reach readers, and gleam in the gamut of subjects and themes.

EVENT CATEGORY: **Poetry Craft and Criticism**

Event Organizer & Moderator

Tyler Mills is the author of the poetry books *Hawk Parable* and *Tongue Lyre*, the chapbook *City Scattered* and collaborative chapbook *Low Budget Movie*, and is finishing a memoir, *The Bomb Cloud*. She teaches for the Writing Institute at Sarah Lawrence College, is Founding Editor of the *Account*, and lives in Brooklyn.

Event Participants

Hadara Bar-Nadav is the author of several poetry collections, most recently *The New Nudity*, *Lullaby* (with Exit Sign), *The Frame Called Ruin*, and *Fountain and Furnace*. She is also co-author of *Writing Poems*, 8th ed. Bar-Nadav is a Professor of English at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Kwame Dawes is author of 18 collections of poetry; two novels; several anthologies; and plays. He has won a Pushcart Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and an Emmy. At the University of Nebraska he is a Chancellor's Professor of English and Glenna Luschei Editor of *Prairie Schooner*.

Philip Metres is the author and translator of a number of books, including *Shrapnel Maps*, *The Sound of Listening*, *Sand Opera*, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, and *To See the Earth*. His work has garnered Guggenheim and Lannan fellowships, two NEAs, three Arab American book awards, and the Hunt Prize.

Brian Teare is the author of six critically acclaimed books of poetry, most recently *The Empty Form Goes All the Way to Heaven* and *Doomstead Days*. An Associate Professor at the University of Virginia, he lives in Charlottesville, where he makes books by hand for his micropress, Albion Books.

Opening Remarks and Housekeeping Announcements:

Welcome to our panel about why poets write and publish chapbooks today and how “small books” might reach readers and connect with (and sing into) a variety of subjects and themes. Chapbooks can and do exist in other genres, but our panel is going to focus on how and why poetry connects with this particular kind of book.

This panel came into being as I thought about my individual journey with my new chapbook, *City Scattered* (Snowbound Award, Tupelo Press 2022), and its tight focus on a period in history (Weimar Berlin). Is there a way in which a “small book” might create the feeling of something larger, even cinematic? Might the chapbook be better equipped to create this sensibility than a full-length collection sometimes? (If this *can* be the case, why?) As I thought about my own experience with this kind of book, both in my single-authored chapbook, *City Scattered* (Tupelo Press), and in the chapbook co-authored with Kendra DeColo, *Low Budget Movie* (Diode Editions), I wondered what it means for us, as poets, to choose to create communities of poems in chapbooks. I’ve heard from word-of-mouth that some poets view chapbooks as a precursor to a book (as poems that will later fold into a larger project), but what does it mean to step away from this narrative and celebrate the “small book” as an end in itself? As I considered these questions, I thought about poets who would offer so much insight and experience on this subject, and I’m so fortunate to share this stage with Kwame Dawes, Hadara Bar-Nadav, Philip Metres, and Brian Teare—poets (and publishers) who tackle grief, love, politics, diaspora, and history in a host of published chapbooks. We will speak about how to write a chapbook, how to publish one, and what is at stake if you connect a poetic sequence with the little book. Africa, the Holocaust, Palestine, the American Midwest, East and West Coast, sexuality, and class will be discussion points.

I would like to conclude my introduction by thank you for being here with us—for being in community with us and our conversation. We look forward to your questions. After introducing my fellow panelists and their terrific and individually insightful work with chapbooks, each panelist will speak for about ten minutes and share a poem from a chapbook with you. At that point, I’ll ask questions from our panelists and invite questions from you in a fifteen-minute Q & A.

Participant Initial Remarks:

Tyler Mills: I’ll speak to the ways that the chapbook form has historically connected with communities of reading publics at the margins and connect this with how the form itself can become a way to connect with reading publics outside of the mainstream. What does it mean to work on a project that might be successful on a smaller scale—in smaller batches of poems? How might the chapbook form work especially well for collaborative texts, whether this is between two poets or between a poet and an outside source? I’ll address these questions in my remarks with my own experience from a craft perspective and share the story of how *City Scattered* came into being.

I’ll talk about my own process as it related to writing the collaborative chapbook, *Low Budget Movie*, with Kendra DeColo and my single-authored chapbook, *City Scattered*, which is in dialogue with a study of wage labor in Weimar Berlin. Both of my chapbooks push back against

societal norms in specific ways, and I'll also speak to why I think that the form of the chapbook has invited this in both books. In these remarks, I'll also speak to the problems of thinking about chapbooks as containers for "projects," and I'll share a definition of "community of poems" that is separate from "project book." I'll also read a poem from *City Scattered*.

Hadara Bar-Nadav: I have published chapbooks and judged/screened chapbook contests, all for different publishers. I plan to share these various experiences and insights. I'm particularly interested in the chapbook as a continuous note held, small enough to read in one sitting and wide enough to build an entire world.

Chapbooks demand a certain intimacy and an intensive, immersive experience. If a chapbook is a work in its own right, why then do they so often end up being, in whole or in part, republished in full-length books? What can this sense of completion and incompleteness being held at the same time offer writers who explore this form? What can the chapbook teach writers and publishers, who may disagree about the form, scope, and future of the manuscript?

Kwame Dawes: I'll speak about my experience writing and publishing numerous books of poems and editing the New-Generation African Poets: A Chapbook Box Set series.

Philip Metres: I'll talk about the process and product of two chapbooks published by Diode Editions: *A Concordance of Leaves* (2013) and *Returning to Jaffa* (2019). Each began as extended lyrical explorations. The first, *A Concordance of Leaves*, grew out of a presentation that I would give on the last day of my course on Palestinian and Israeli literature, in which I'd share a slideshow of photos from my sister's wedding in a village in Palestine. As the years went on, I wanted to memorialize that moment in time and started to find language to do so. Each poem in that sequence—or rather, each bit of that long poem—offered a snapshot into that time of celebration, and how it contained both the joyful and the painful of Palestinian life as I came to understand it. The second, *Returning to Jaffa*, came out of my relationship with Nahida Halaby Gordon, who would come to my course (the same one) to share a bit of her story of exile from Palestine. In both cases, I knew that I wanted to offer to my sister and to Nahida a gift of the book, but I didn't have designs on something as long as a full-length collection—which happened in 2020 with *Shrapnel Maps*. This idea of the gift to me is at the center of the chapbook concept—that it's ultimately not really a commodity but part of a gift economy (like nearly all of poetry). Time permitting, I will talk a bit as well about hybridity (image/text).

Brian Teare: I'll talk about my experience writing and crafting chapbooks and full-length collections and publishing chapbooks through my micropress, Albion Books.

Moderator Questions:

- 1) Why might poetry (as opposed to fiction or nonfiction) be a uniquely fitting genre for the chapbook? What can poems in this vessel do that are distinct from other forms of writing?

- 2) For the publishers on our panel, what are the biggest joys and challenges you've experienced in producing chapbooks of poems? What information do wish poets knew who approached you with a manuscript? What makes a chapbook successful, in your eyes? How do you choose a manuscript for publication? And what mistakes have you seen poets making? (In other words, in instances when you've *almost* published a chapbook, what made you decide against it?)
- 3) Here's a question for all of our panelists: In what ways might a chapbook be in relationship with—but distinct from—a full-length collection, even if both works might share poems between them? Why do poets later in their careers turn to this publishing format?
- 4) From a craft perspective, what kinds of poems have you found to truly sing within the format of a chapbook? "The little book" can be carried with you quite easily because of its size; how, from a craft perspective, might the poems inside of it be carried with their readers (through memory) in the way they employ metaphor, persona, simile, form, or any other craft techniques?
- 5) As our lives become more and more screen-oriented, why turn to a format that celebrates the stitched, the bound, the material qualities of the book-as-artifact?