

AWP 2021: Event Outline for “Five Writers Walk into a Bar: Humor in a Flash”

Introduction

Plug for the humorous potential in flash fiction. Mention its long history and include the anthology *Flash Fiction Funny* etc.

What I see as the editor of *Vestal Review* is not enough funny flash or, to be more precise, not enough humor ready for publication. Successful humor in flash fiction isn't easier than the so-called serious stuff but more difficult to pull off. As the actor Edmund Gwenn uttered on his deathbed, “Dying is easy, comedy is hard.”

So I thought it fitting that AWP devote a panel to humor in flash fiction. Fair game is anything from its checkered past to its funny future, but mainly what works and what doesn't and why—all the while admitting that anything which works, works.

The five writers in this panel all have some great ideas about the subject, or I wouldn't have hired them.

Francine Witte is the author of 10 books of flash fiction and poetry and stories in *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Wigleaf*, *Best Small Fictions*, *Best Microfiction*, W. W. Norton's *New Micro*, and *Flash Fiction Funny*. She is flash fiction editor for *FLASH BOULEVARD* and *SoFloPoJo*. She lives in New York City.

Francine Witte will talk about how humor isn't always LOL but often on a very quiet, “oh, yeah” kind of level, the satisfaction of seeing what the author is doing. Various forms in flash—the hermit crab, the breathless paragraph, and the braided flash—all rely on the reader to assemble the meaning and create humor in this way.

Rone Shavers is author of the experimental Afrofuturist novel *Silverfish*, recently shortlisted for a CLMP Firecracker Award. His writing has appeared in *Big Other*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Bomb*, and elsewhere. Shavers is also a fiction editor at *Obsidian: Literature and Arts in the African Diaspora*.

Rone Shavers will discuss how flash fiction's use of the unexpected, the ironic, and the absurd naturally lend themselves to comedic interpretations.

Beth Ann Fennelly, a 2020 Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow, was poet laureate of Mississippi from 2016-2021. Her collection of flash CNF, *Heating & Cooling: 52 Micro-Memoirs*, was a Goodreaders Favorite and an *Atlanta Journal Constitution* Best Book. <http://www.bethannfennelly.com>

Beth Ann Fennelly will present on comic timing: how a writer can maximize humor in flash through a careful rearranging of syntax designed to heighten surprise, using Lydia Davis and others as examples.

Alle C. Hall's flash fiction was a finalist for The 2021 Lascaux Prize. Other work is in *Litro*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Creative Nonfiction*, Dale Peck's *Evergreen Review*, and elsewhere. She was a former associate editor at *Vestal Review*. Her first novel publishes in 2023. She favors a "sense" of humor.

Alle C. Hall will discuss how to bring a humor to more serious works, giving readers a laugh before you hit them with the next painful realization.

David Galef has published novels, short stories, poetry, children's books, criticism, and translation. His latest book is *Brevity: A Flash Fiction Handbook*. He is a professor of English and the creative writing program director at Montclair State University, as well as the editor at *Vestal Review*. <https://davidgalef.com/>

David Galef will be talking about anecdotes, from their reliance on short, sharp scenes to their tripartite structure with a payoff at the end. Examples will range from Henny Youngman to Alison Bechtel.

After the presentations, we'll have some moderated panel discussion following wherever the panelists speeches lead, including questions:

1. Since you're magazine editors and veteran readers, what's your take on what's out there in flash humor? What would you like to see more of?
2. Does humor reside in the content or presentation?
3. What are some forms of humor that flash *doesn't* accommodate?
4. Got a really funny, really short anecdote?
5. What flash humor writers do you admire, and why?

The last part of the panel will be a 15-minute question-and-answer session.