

Event Title: No F*cks to Give: Women Poets Writing Sex and Raunch

Event Description: Women artists have long used raunch as a tool of empowerment and comedic relief, to claim space and assert identity in healing and transgressive modes. In this joyful and bawdy reading, five women poets will celebrate sex, profanity, and raunch, asserting what Audre Lorde writes: “In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial.”

Event Category: Poetry

Event Organizer & Moderator

Kendra DeColo: Kendra DeColo is the author of three poetry collections, including *I Am Not Trying to Hide My Hungers From the World* (BOA Editions, 2021). She is also co-author of the chapbook *Low Budget Movie* (Diode, 2021), written with Tyler Mills. She has taught at Sarah Lawrence College and performed her work in comedy clubs and music venues across the country including the Newport Folk Festival. She lives in Nashville, Tennessee.

Event Participants

Dorothy Chan: Dorothy Chan is the author of most recently, *BABE* (Diode Editions, Winter 2021), in addition to *Revenge of the Asian Woman* (Diode Editions, 2019), *Attack of the Fifty-Foot Centerfold* (Spork Press, 2018), and the chapbook *Chinatown Sonnets* (New Delta Review, 2017). They were a 2020 and 2014 Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowship finalist, a 2020 finalist for the Lambda Literary Award in Bisexual Poetry for *Revenge of the Asian Woman*, and a 2019 recipient of the Philip Freund Prize in Creative Writing from Cornell University. Chan is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Editor Emeritus of *Hobart*, Book Reviews Co-Editor of *Pleiades*, and Co-Founder and Editor in Chief of *Honey Literary Inc.*, a 501(c)(3) literary arts organization.

Tiana Clark: Tiana Clark is the author of the poetry collection, *I Can't Talk About the Trees Without the Blood* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), winner of the 2017 Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize, and *Equilibrium* (Bull City Press, 2016), selected by Afaa Michael Weaver for the 2016 Frost Place Chapbook Competition. She is the Grace Hazard Conkling Writer-in-Residence at Smith College.

Erika Meitner: Erika Meitner is the author of six books of poems, including *Ideal Cities* (Harper Perennial, 2010)—a 2009 National Poetry Series winner; *Copia* (BOA Editions, 2014); and *Holy Moly Carry Me* (BOA Editions, 2018), winner of the 2018 National Jewish Book Award and a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in poetry. [Her poems have appeared most recently in *The New Yorker*, *Orion*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Believer*, *The Southern Review*, and *Poetry*.] Meitner is currently a professor of English at Virginia Tech. Her newest book, *Useful Junk*, is due out from BOA Editions in April 2022.

Diane Seuss: Diane Seuss's most recent collection is *frank: sonnets* (Graywolf Press 2021). *Still Life with Two Dead Peacocks and a Girl*, (Graywolf Press 2018) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in Poetry. *Four-Legged Girl* (Graywolf Press 2015) was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. She was a 2020 Guggenheim Fellow, and she received the John Updike Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2021. She was raised by a single mother in rural Michigan, which she continues to call home.

Opening Remarks

Welcome to the AWP reading “No F*cks to Give: Women Poets Writing Sex and Raunch.” It is an honor to be moderating and participating in today’s reading. As someone who was raised on the sexual explicitness, and poetic Camp of artists such as John Waters, Lil Kim, Marianne Faithful, and Peaches, I’ve always been drawn to reading and writing poems that speak apologetically and fearlessly about the body and desire. While it’s clear to me that writing sex and raunch is a powerful tool, and a subject no different than any other, I’ve found that it can be treated as inappropriate, leading to exclusion and censorship. Putting this reading together feels urgent and life affirming, celebrating sex and raunch as a way to assert our humanity in all of its messy and unkempt beauty, echoing Audre Lorde’s essay “Uses of the Erotic” in which she writes: “In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial.”

It’s my pleasure to introduce the following poets whose work is as fearless and defiant as it is brilliant and joyful. I will introduce in the order of our reading and at the end we will have a conversation about our work.

Participant Readings

Dorothy Chan:

Triple Sonnet for Celebrities with Three Names

For Josh

If you've got three names and you're famous
does that mean three times the amount of fucking?
I daydream about my ideal lovers and hearing
Cut! when the director tells us to switch positions
on the set of our bedroom, and what's a bigger
turn-on than someone saying your name under
the covers—how about saying your name three
times, and oh, *fuck, fucking, fuckest*—yeah that's
a superlative, like the Beetlejuice effect, only
freakier, like let's get transported into the house
I built in a simulation game where my avatar
seduced then killed the richest man for the sake
of inheriting then remodeling his mansion into
her dream of glass windows in every room—

the pleasure of always watching what's going
on, and I swear, I'm a really nice girl. I really
am. Just say the magic word, and I'm all yours,
and surveys reveal that the word lovers wished
their lovers said more is "please," and I wonder
if please is short for pleasure, as in eat your girl
right, as in I'll order a clitty clitty bang bang at
a midnight viewing, as in please let me put on
a show for you, as in I love any event with a ton
of cameras, as in keep feeding me macarons
while you're feeling me up in the bath, and if
I was a celebrity, I'd tack my middle initial
K back into my name for extra effect, my secret

K, as in Ka-Ying, as in white boys will you
stop calling me by my middle name because
you think speaking Cantonese will bring us
closer, and it's ironic how an actual lover
adds in the K every time she says my full
name, and she says it with such authority it's
a turn-on, like, *Baby, say my full name again*

and I'll record you, why don't you, K?

K is for kink. K is for knot. K is for kissing,
K is for king. Crown me. And don't fool me

by saying Queen, because I know where all
my power lies. And K is for knock me down
and pin me down on the grass, lover, because
you on me is the closest to nature I'm ever getting.

Triple Sonnet for Batman Villains and Whatever This Is

I want to judge a shirtless contest in Vegas
 poolside with my best friend, over Mai Tais
and shrimp tacos, because I'm a little sapphic,
 and let me just say: Cheers to our BDE forever,
girl. We're like 007's Bambi and Thumper,
 only undefeated, and in this fantasy, we'll keep
kicking Sean Connery's *Diamonds Are Forever*
 ass, or how Tommy Lee Jones' Two-Face in
Batman Forever was the luckiest man alive,
 with Sugar and Spice cooking him lemon souffle,
quail eggs, and poached salmon, and all the meats
 and heat—meats and heat, but what woman even
needs a man. Or men. Let's prance around in
 white feathered robes, and cheers to Drew Barrymore

 giving us sexy '90s villain fantasy, and how many
rappers will write songs about you in a lifetime
 is a question for only a legend. And I'm a little
sapphic, thinking about my first crushes on women,
 or how Taneum says that it's stupid when people
call them "girl crushes" when we know they're
 crushes—or maybe even true love, the idea that
we could be dripping in diamonds together, but
 you're just playing. I could play too. Let's go out
for sushi—a love boat filled with sashimi and Snow
 Beauty sake and mango mochi for dessert. I often
think about Harley Quinn and Poison Ivy sharing
 a Christmas tree and one-bedroom apartment in
Gotham, and it's beautiful how in recent timelines,

Harley doesn't go back to Mister J. Not all women
 want men in their lives. I remember Barbara asking
me what all these guys were doing in my poems.
 I don't know, B. I really don't know. Or how
one night, a lover asks about the first woman
 who loved me, L—how back in college we would
nap together naked and keep kissing until the sun set,
 and then I'd walk home wearing her flannel after
she redid my lipstick. Sometimes when I'm down,

I search for that girl, walking home in the dark—
how at that age, I knew I'd take over the world,
how at that age, I knew I'd never settle, because
there are too many fish in the sea. I still am that girl,
swimming, searching—guided by the Ithaca moon.

Triple Sonnet Because She's a Little Pornish

Rita says my bangs make me look Good Girl
in the pornish way, reminding me of the slo mo
when the East Asian model lowers her glasses
in the steam room, opening her mouth—could
I feed her a Luxardo cherry or an orange slice
dipped in chocolate or an oyster shooter—baby,
swallow it whole or take the next train home.
XOXO, GG or Good Girl or Gigi and Gaston in
MGM's last great musical or the Good Girl clutch
sashaying down Moschino's runway, and Honey,
it's 2021, so why are we even labeling anything
when every day should be Sexual Fluidity Day,
also known as taking the blue pill *and* the pink pill
and the purple pill: all the above, let's have a time

because falling in love with you was the easy part—
becoming an attention-whore-brat was the second
part, or an ode to sexiness or how I spent my twenties
with pink drinks in queer bars with rodeo themes—
photos of older gentleman cowboys framed or how
Andrew would fixate on my fixation as we danced
into the night or how an older man who treats you
and eats you well is the biggest myth in the book,
the way the irrelevant ex-lover said our sex life
was a category of porn, to which I say: *What kind
of shit are you watching because it's not the kind
of shit I'd star in, especially if it involves you.* But
every non-love story involves a costume: schoolgirl
for basic boys, leather and feathers for the guilty rich,

chartreuse slip and matching heels for the slow play,
hearts over nipples for the girl of your dreams, or
what about the qipao the boy in Singapore offered
to buy—to buy me—to get it tailored—to get my
body hugging—or as Rita said, “That’s a different
type of roleplay.” I remember the dim sum dinner
he bought me to buy me, the sushi and chirashi
meal, after parading me around malls and malls
and malls—the way he'd flinch when I hugged him,

how he was raised to find a wife, not a lover, and I'll
never be that good Chinese girl. I'm a Chinese woman,
getting my bangs cut the pornish way, or how Ginger
Spice/Geri Halliwell called the nineties "like the sixties,"
and give me that decadence—turn the camera my way.

Tiana Clark:

Transcript available

Kendra DeColo:

I Write Poems About Motherhood

Tonight I can write the most motherly lines,
for example: it's true, my asshole will never be the same

after giving birth, not its shape, but its soul, small wick
of shadow I once called *home* and *dream*. Tonight

I can write how it burned like a votive, the whole
inverted star a series of grievances from which another

self grew, séance and seam, split off
to live parallel lives like vaporish twins. I can write

that I gave birth and died and came back to life
and my asshole will never be the same. It wore

a haunted look those first few weeks. Claimed
it needed to "take fresh airs" in the country, wore

aggressively Victorian clothes and strutted
around naming geodes like a gentlemen

farmer. *Shut up, asshole*, I admonished. Tonight I write
my daughter emerged and split me into two selves. It did not hurt

the way they said it would. I rocked on my knees
singing a song like hurtling my voice off a cliff.

My husband's hand disappeared into mine
and for a moment I left this world, a hem of blood

between us. I broke onto the shore of a fixed
note. I helixed and drank the urine of starved

apparitions to keep me afloat, slapped the shit
out of my reflection, squatted and squeezed

a rocky planet out from the blue horizon
like a ship bifurcating a labial sky. But my asshole,

to whom I must now give credit where credit is due,

taught me how to anchor to the earth, locate the hot center

which I always knew was there but never saw
shining in my sacrum like Orion's belt

when they stitched me shut in a ragged,
casual way, even though I wished

to stay open a little longer,
unhinged and full of silences. Tonight I can write

that I would give birth a million times
over and not tell anyone about it

if I could feel that kind of way again:
one hollowed self opened wide

enough to swallow my own body
then spit it back out onto the earth.

I Would Like to Tell the President to Eat a Dick in a Non-Homophobic Way

I would like for him to really taste the dick

Savor it like a last meal

Note the way it has or hasn't been recently washed

The residue of baby powder and sweat

Sheathed at the base like a foamy negligee

I'd like for him to choke on the dick

If that's what he's into and it's been talked about beforehand

I'd like for him to really get to know

The dick, how it curves to the left and bends towards justice

How it is sweet and bitter under the foreskin

How it is unashamed

Of its history

And knows where it's going

And while we're on the subject

I would like for Paul Ryan and Mitch McConnell to eat a bunch of dicks too

Casual, Lunchables-style dicks, a confetti

Of frosting-covered dicks exploding

In their taste buds like a Saturday morning balloon-drop

I would like to ask the president to eat so many dicks

That he vows to eat more pussy

Which have vitamins and minerals

And the secrets to success

Until he feels clean

Until he feels as close to the face of god as a man can get

Until he loves dick and pussy so much he shakes

Like a man redeemed in a church revival tent

Understanding that first there was the word and the word was

Let them eat dicks

And the word was good

Lord, let him eat a dick

That knows it will one day die

A dick that expects nothing in return

Humble dick

Tired dick

The dick he must eat

The one he has feared his whole life

The dick that might fill the endless void inside

I Don't Like to Have Sex While I'm on My Period

even though my husband is the kind of guy

who isn't afraid

of a woman's fluids

who might even go down

if the flow is light

a real man

you might say

if the logic wasn't steeped

in toxic masculinity the way

the sheets are steeped in blood

after making love on day three

the rasp of stain beneath us

like a bat fluttering its wings

in a puddle of Robitussin

I can't help but think

it's crude

to put down a towel

before we begin

the way a man sticks a gloved

finger up his wife's vagina

to assess if she's done bleeding

clean you might say

if that language wasn't steeped

in violent misogyny

because isn't my blood the cleanest

part about me

fuck a towel

if you want to go deep

you better be willing to draw blood

my husband is a real man

isn't afraid to smell

the shed lining

muffle his face in the spasm of cells

wasn't afraid to watch our daughter

emerge and split me open

crowning

which means my body

concussed around her like a crown

which means

there was so much blood

I had to touch it

to remember where I came from

the hot and pulsing corona

ruckus of DNA

metallic and stinging

Love, forgive me

I do not want to be touched

while my body

orchestrates this unraveling

as much as I love

the bouquet of clots

rioting around the base of your cock

bright as a truck stop souvenir

to own a part of you

where the blood remains

dried

and hissing

a dwelling

of dank perfume

as the body

travels back to its source

and I am answerable to no one

not even my own name

I Hope Hillary Is Having Good Sex

I hope Hillary is having good sex
I say to myself at the farmer's market
While fingering the over-ripened bustier
Of an heirloom tomato
So close to rot it nearly sucks
My pinky into its dappled maw
I hope she's at least getting decent head I say again
Now that she's proven a woman
Can win the popular vote
And still lose to an imbecile
Because sexism
Because Russian interference
Because my grandmother
Who worked for LBJ and then
Nixon and was harassed by male coworkers
Until she had to quit
Even she said of Hillary, "There is something
About that woman I just don't trust"
I hope Hillary is getting it in
By Bill or someone better at listening

Who asks her what she needs
Then gets directly down to business
Without preamble or pussyfooting
Someone who emerges
Only for a sandwich or breath of fresh air
I hope she has multiple sidepieces
Each a different build and scent
And when they ask
To see her closet full of immaculate suits
Organized and shimmering on their racks
Like a god's molted skin
She lets them touch just the hem

Erika Meitner:

Transcript available

Diane Seuss:

Lately I've been feeling about poetry like sex. Now and then I'm in the mood but then the mood doesn't bloom. The thought of it makes me a little sick to my stomach. Lead-up, lead-in, clean up. Mixing of martini, metaphor, or the hard bangery of no metaphor at all. Cumbersome *I* like a big dick you have to handle. The *we* with all that *we are getting ice cream, we are thinking about getting a cat*. How does *we* think about stuff? Is it a brain stem thing? An art I never mastered. I have met people who would bang Ted Hughes on Plath's grave and then write about it. *I, too, bit his cheek*. That sort of crap. Yeah, I, too, have been that person. I want to say *at times*. *Long ago. I'm better now*. Really I'm just tireder. A guy, I'm going to name him Delaney, once said to me when I wanted to be done with him, *now that you've had your little orgasm*, murder in his eyes. I called down all the angels from the skies to get him out the door so I could bolt it and wash him off of me. His big hand reaching for my throat. The prayer I prayed. That was sex and poetry.

My private parts are many, my teeth are private, my tongue, the buoy
of my brain bobbing in its cloistered sea, my eye's vitreous detachment,
the lightning that crackled when the membrane broke inside my eye, I
was at a Kmart roving among female sanitary products, each in its private
firing chamber, and a flock of crows rose in my vision and never since
has found a branch to land on, the flock's voice private, my own voice box's
wet surreptitious lid opens to the jewelry-box ballerina who keeps my tune
whirling, and what is beneath her gauze skirt is private, and the hole in the crotch
of my pants, and my memory of the bloodstain on the crotch of the yoga
teacher's sleek leggings private, my viscera, as if some scalpel could penetrate
me, some X-ray could make my fractures glow, my first love was not a football
player who wiped my tears with his dirty sock, who grew into a fireman
and fell through the roof, my first love was a phallus of cheap perfume,
a small black bottle from the mall, a clandestine phallus called femme fatale.

Either everything is sexual, or nothing is. Take this flock of poppies

smoke-green stems brandishing buds the size of green plums, swathed

in a testicular fur. Even those costumed in the burlesque of red crepe

petals have cocks under their skirts, powdered with indigo-black pollen,

staining everything they touch. Either the whole world is New Orleans

at 3 a.m. and a saxophone like a drill bit or it's all clinical sunlight and sad

elementary school architecture, circa 1962, no broom closets opening into escape

hatches, no cowpokes with globs of sap skewered on hickory sticks. Either

it's all New York in 1977, the Pan Am building lit up like a honey hive and erecting

itself out of the fog, and one of us is a junkie and one of us is naked under a gold

skirt safety pinned at the waist and the material melts in the rain, either Kinky

is playing the Lone Star and Earth is the women's john at the tail end of the bar

and the stall doors have been blow-torched at the hinges and dragged away

by horses, either cunnilingus is an ocean salting every alleyway and lifting

every veil or the French teacher did not masturbate beneath the desk as he taught

the subjunctive, and lightning did not cleave the cherry tree and pleasure

its timbers. Either straitjacket, or shock treatment orgasm igniting the dinner theatre,

the actors cradling and hair-pulling, kissing each other so deep some might call it

brain surgery, the wigs slipping, chintz curtains aflame, codpieces bursting

into flower, or what's left is a book of wet matches, my dear,

and it's all been for nothing, for didn't Jesus say you are either

with me or against me, from out of his blossom of bloodshot dust?

Moderator Questions

- In what ways do we use profanity and raunch as comedic tools and/or as a medium of resistance?
- How do we keep our language of raunchiness fresh? (How do we resist falling into the trap of being "shocking"?)
- What do you see as your raunch lineage?
- What are the challenges of code switching within a poem? How do we incorporate different modes of profanity/raunch, such as sexting?
- How does writing about sex make us vulnerable and how do we deal with this risk both while writing and performing our work? How