

EVENT TITLE: Not Another Male Orgasm: Using the Shapes of *Meander, Spiral, Explode* in CNF

Description: Jane Alison's craft book *Meander, Spiral, Explode* discusses narrative shapes beyond the traditional climactic arc—but her examples are drawn from fiction. In this session, each panelist will show, through both example and speculation, how Alison's shapes (waves, cells, spirals, explosions) can function in creative nonfiction. The session will include a series of generative writing prompts, and end with a discussion of the ways that shape, pattern, and design can provoke and enrich CNF content.

EVENT CATEGORY: Nonfiction Craft & Criticism

Event Organizer & Moderator

Randon Billings Noble: Randon Billings Noble is an essayist. She is the author of the essay collection *Be with Me Always* and the editor of *A Harp in the Stars: An Anthology of Lyric Essays*. She teaches in the MFA in Nonfiction Program at Goucher and the Low-Residency MFA in Creative Writing at West Virginia Wesleyan.

Event Participants

Ellie L. Bozmarova: Ellie L. Bozmarova is a Bulgarian-American writer living in the San Francisco Bay Area. She received the 2021 SFF/Nomadic Press Literary Award for nonfiction and 2020 Women's National Book Association-San Francisco first place award in nonfiction. She is querying her first book, a coming-of-age immigrant memoir about reckoning with her mother's suicide in the shadow of the evangelical church. Her work has appeared in *Business Insider*, *SFGATE*, *The Common*, *phoebe*, *TIMBER Journal* and elsewhere. She has an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Goucher College.

Kristina R. Gaddy: Kristina R. Gaddy, author of *Flowers in the Gutter: The True Story of the Edelweiss Pirates, Teenagers Who Resisted the Nazis*, is a Baltimore-based writer and fiddler. She has received the Parsons Award from the Library of Congress, Logan Nonfiction Fellowship, and Robert W. Deutsch Foundation Rubys artist award. Her next book *Well of Souls: Uncovering the Banjo's Hidden History* (W.W. Norton 2022) is a literary exploration of the little known history of the banjo in the Americas, its role as a spiritual device in the hands of enslaved Africans, and the instrument's legacy in today's culture and society.

Laura Laing: Laura Laing is a queer journalist, essayist and author. A graduate of Goucher's MFA in creative nonfiction, she is president of ASJA. Her essays have appeared in a number of literary journals, and she is working on a memoir, weaving story with explorations of abstract mathematics.

Opening Remarks and Housekeeping Announcements

Welcome to “Not Another Male Orgasm: Using the *Shapes of Meander, Spiral, Explode* in CNF.” A few reminders before we begin:

- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the moderator of the panel, (identify moderator), know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.

- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone's use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

[In my opening remarks, I (Randon Billings Noble) will give a general summary of the book *Meander, Spiral Explode* and explain how it rebels against the more traditional rising action, climax, falling action arc ("A bit masculosexual, no?" Alison quips). Then I'll talk a bit about how this panel started as an essayists' book group that discussed ways in which these shapes could be applied to creative nonfiction.]

Participant Initial Remarks:

Randon Billings Noble: I'll begin by considering the ways in which writing nonfiction in some ways limits the way we approach form; instead of making up content to fit a form, we must carefully consider how we shape the truth to fit the form (or find a form to hold the truth). I'll talk through a few examples of essays that were intentionally written as waves, meanders, cells, and fractals and then speculate about other essays that appear to be. Lastly, I'll give a series of short writing prompts to generate new work in these forms or help revise a work-in-progress so that it can meander, spiral, explode.

Ellie Bozmarova: I'll talk about wavelets—small, rippling tensions and resolutions in a story—and how writers can creatively revise their work to accentuate the rhythms that propel the reader forward. We'll be looking at an essay from Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* by the same name and an excerpt from my book, *In the Valley of the Shadow*.

"...with its abolition of a single wave in favor of a sea of many small ones—as a feminist critique altogether. The narrator

exists, maintains, and renders in words a field of tensions that pulse around her..." (Alison, 114)

Kristina R. Gaddy: To arc or not to arc? I plan to talk briefly about why a narrative arc isn't necessarily bad, but where its limitations lie. Then, I'll explore how in *Well of Souls*, I had to step out from under the arc to create a structure that worked--partially by trial and error. I'll discuss meanders and spirals, and offer some examples of this structure in other works.

Laura Laing: I plan to consider different structures from the queer literary perspective, especially as it relates to coming out as a great influence. Since coming out is an everyday process, the traditional narrative arc doesn't work for many queer stories. Therefore, many queer essayists use other structures to help illustrate the in-and-out nature of our experiences.

Moderator Questions

TBD by the audience.