

Occupational Hazards: Teaching and Writing Risk Across Genres
Moderator: Lesley Wheeler

Description

Writers conjure literary power by putting something real on the line. Yet risk operates differently across nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and translation, raising craft questions as well as the challenge of inspiring students to bring vulnerability to their writing. Panelists with experience in many teaching contexts—including universities, conferences, and community workshops—will share concrete ideas for empowering and equipping students to take personal and aesthetic chances.

Statement of value

Risky writing makes a workshop more valuable and engaging, but it's difficult to foster a community that supports it—a paradox that's central to the pedagogies of these award-winning cross-genre writers. An inclusive ethos is paramount, but diverse classrooms change the dynamics of risk, too. Beatty, Birdsong, Moscaliuc, Solomon, and Wheeler have great insights to share about what works, what fails, and why. For teachers and writers at every level, these are urgent and vital questions.

Event outline

1. Lesley Wheeler introduces each panelist.

Destiny O. Birdsong is a poet, novelist, and essayist whose debut poetry collection, *Negotiations*, was published in 2020 by Tin House and was longlisted for the 2021 PEN/Voelcker Award. Her debut novel, *Nobody's Magic*, was published in February 2022 from Grand Central Publishing and was longlisted for the Center for Fiction's First Novel Prize. During July 2022, she was the Hurston-Wright Foundation's inaugural Writer-in-Residence at Rutgers University-Newark, and she now serves as a 2022-23 Artist-in-Residence at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

Jan Beatty's sixth poetry collection, *The Body Wars*, was published in fall, 2020 by the University of Pittsburgh Press. She is the winner of the Red Hen Nonfiction Award for her memoir, *American Bastard*, published in 2021, and a new chapbook, *Skydog*, recently appeared from Lefty Blondie Press. Other books include *Jackknife: New and Collected Poems*, winner of the 2018 Paterson Prize and named by Sandra Cisneros on LitHub as her favorite book of 2019. She is also a recipient of the [Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize](#), the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry, and the Creative Achievement Award in Literature.

Erika Meitner is the author of six books of poems, including *Ideal Cities*, a 2009 National Poetry series winner published by HarperCollins; *Copia* (BOA Editions, 2014); and *Holy Moly Carry Me* (BOA Editions, 2018), which won the 2018 National Jewish Book Award in Poetry, and was a finalist for the Library of Virginia Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award in poetry. Her newest book, *Useful Junk*, was published by BOA Editions in April of 2022. She directs the MFA program at University of Wisconsin-MD.

Asali Solomon's latest novel is *Afrakete*. Her first novel, *Disgruntled*, was named a best book of the year by the San Francisco Chronicle and The Denver Post. Her debut story collection, *Get Down*, earned her a Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers' Award and the National Book Foundation's "5 Under 35" honor, and was a finalist for the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award. Her work has appeared in *O, The Oprah Magazine*, *Vibe*, *Essence*, *The Paris Review Daily*, *McSweeney's*, and several anthologies, and on NPR. Solomon teaches fiction writing and literature of the African diaspora at Haverford College.

2. Each panelist speaks for 8-10 minutes on the following questions:
 - a. What has your own writing life taught you about risk, including how risk changes across genres?
 - b. How do you cultivate a space in which other writers are able to take chances?
 - c. How do your strategies vary across teaching contexts?
 - d. What pedagogical risks have you taken and what were the consequences?

3. After a 20-minute Q&A, each panelist will briefly offer their most important takeaway.