

T201. (1:45 pm to 3:00 pm)

Rooms 443-444, Summit Building, Seattle Convention Center, Level 4; Thursday, March 9, 2023

WELCOME STATEMENTS:

Welcome to “Winning Words: Best Practices for Submitting to Book Prizes.” Thank you all for being here. I’ll offer up some basic reminders, deliver some remarks, and then introduce the panelists.

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 know—that’s me, Katie Cortese, 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.

Opening Remarks:

Authors of novels and memoirs with commercial appeal—even new and emerging writers—have plenty of options when submitting their long-form projects for potential publication (some of which involve securing agents to take on that onerous task for them—which is not to say that getting an agent or landing a high-profile, or any, book deal with the Big Five is easy). This panel, though, focuses on the ins and outs of submitting to book prizes offering publication through small,

independent, and/or university presses, which is one of the main paths to publication for writers of contemporary literature with less obvious trade potential including poets, writers of short stories, literary memoirists, creative nonfictionists, lyric essayists, and writers of novels that center characters, language, concepts, structure, and/or any other literary element above and beyond plot. Small and university presses often accept unagented submissions from creative writers outside of contests as well, but since book prizes actually solicit book-length collections of short stories, essays, poetry, and other hard-to-place works, they guarantee serious consideration for projects that might not otherwise fit neatly into a given press's publishing priorities. Too, book prizes offered by small and university presses seek out works based on literary merit first and potential profit second, if at all. This does not mean, of course, that all book prizes are alike in legitimacy, honorariums, selection processes, or general reputation, and many of them charge submission fees, all of which can complicate an author's decision about whether and where to submit their work. Too, just as literary journals have individualized submission procedures, different book prizes have their own guidelines for participation—some presses only consider anonymous submissions and some deliberately engage with authorial context; some want acknowledgements and others just the primary text. This panel was assembled for authors of literary works who want to learn some dos and don'ts for submitting to book prizes as well as to begin to understand everything they stand to gain or lose by doing so, and our aim is to demystify the process and to empower authors to give their books the best chances of rising to the top.

The plan today is for me to briefly introduce the people sitting in front of you, and then for each of them to speak for a few minutes about the book prizes they run or read for, the aesthetics of their various presses, and any other information they feel will be useful to our conversation. After everyone's brief talk, I'll throw out a few questions for discussion among the panelists, and then we'll open up the conversation with some questions from the audience.

So, in the order in which they are seated, our panelists are ...

Jonathan Johnson: Jonathan Johnson's most recent book of poetry is *May Is an Island*. His work has appeared in *Best American Poetry* and numerous other anthologies and magazines. He migrates between Scotland, Upper Michigan, and Eastern Washington University where he is a poetry professor in the MFA program.

Whitney Koo: Whitney Koo is a PhD candidate in English-creative writing at Oklahoma State University and the founder and editor in chief of Gasher Press, a nonprofit literary press focused on representing emerging voices.

Kristen Renee Miller: Kristen Renee Miller is the executive director and editor in chief at Sarabande Books. A poet and translator, she is the recipient of a 2023 NEA Fellowship and the translator of two books from the French by poet Marie-Andrée Gill. She lives in Louisville, Kentucky.

Bethany Snead: Bethany Snead is an acquisitions editor at the University of Georgia Press, where she acquires trade creative works, literary studies, and environmental studies, and oversees their series-based literary competitions. She has worked in scholarly publishing since 2008.

Katie Cortese: I'm the author of *Girl Power and Other Short-Short Stories* (ELJ Editions, 2015) and *Make Way for Her and Other Stories* (University Press of Kentucky, 2018). I teach in the creative writing program at Texas Tech University where I also serve as the faculty director for Texas Tech University Press and the series editor for the Iron Horse Prize for a First Book of Collected Prose.

MODERATOR QUESTIONS:

We will plan to leave at least ten-fifteen minutes for questions. The moderator will kick off the Q&A period by asking panelists the following questions, after which she will open up the session.

- 1)** What are the benefits for authors of submitting to book prizes at your publishing houses or others like them, especially for people who might be wary of contests or of paying contest entry fees?
- 2)** Are there any commonalities of successful titles that winners have submitted whether within or across genres?
- 3)** On the flip side, are there any practices you would warn authors not to engage in—ways their submissions can go wrong or that might lead to rejection aside from the quality of the work?
- 4)** Would anyone like to share a wish list or priorities for genres and types of works your press might be seeking through your prizes? Are there any subjects, styles, formats, genres, or anything else that you're specifically not interested in?

QUESTIONS WILL NOW BE TAKEN FROM THE AUDIENCE UNTIL THE TIME ALLOTTED FOR THE PANEL ELAPSES.