AWP Event Outline

**Event Title:** The Fine Art of Craft Talking

**Type of Event:** Multiple Literary Genres, Craft & Criticism

**Event Description**

At some point in our careers, we might be called upon to give a craft talk. The prospect of such a task can inspire both excitement and trepidation. In this lively discussion, panelists will speak to their experiences devising craft talks, and we'll explore nuances of this genre, addressing questions such as: What is a craft talk? How do you write one? Are there certain conventions? Do you subvert those conventions? We'll also discuss how to repurpose a craft talk for publication.

**Event Organizer and Moderator**

**Brenda Miller:** Brenda Miller is the author of six essay collections, including A Braided Heart: Essays on Writing and Form, and co-author of Tell It Slant: Creating, Refining, and Publishing Creative Nonfiction. Her work has received six Pushcart Prizes. She teaches English at Western Washington University.

**Event Panelists**

**Barrie Jean Borich:**
Barrie Jean Borich is the author of the lyric memoir Apocalypse, Darling. Her hybrid essay Body Geographic won a Lambda Literary Award, and her memoir My Lesbian Husband won a Stonewall Book Award. A professor at DePaul in Chicago, Borich edits Slag Glass City, a journal of the urban essay arts.

**Jenny Johnson:**
Jenny Johnson is the author of In Full Velvet. She received a 2016-2017 Hodder Fellowship at Princeton University and a 2015 Whiting Writer's Award in Poetry. She teaches at West Virginia University and in the Rainier Writing Workshop's MFA Program.
**Wendy Call:**
Wendy Call co-edited the craft anthology Telling True Stories and the annual Best Literary Translations. She wrote the award-winning nonfiction book No Word for Welcome and has translated three books of poetry by women writing in Mexican languages. She teaches in the Rainier Writing Workshop MFA.

**Geffrey Davis:**
Geffrey Davis is the author of three collections: One Wild Word Away, Night Angler, and Revising the Storm. A recipient of fellowships from Bread Loaf, Cave Canem, and the NEA, Davis serves as Poetry Editor for Iron Horse and teaches with the Univ. of Arkansas and with the Rainier Writing Workshop.

**Event Structure**

This panel will be structured as a conversation among panelists as well as with the audience. The Moderator will welcome attendees, give reminders for accommodations and accessibility, and provide some context for the panel and how it came about. Each panelist is a contributing author to the forthcoming anthology *The Next Draft: Inspiring Craft Talks from the Rainier Writing Workshop*; we will have information available about this book and its contents, and our panel will show the various ways one can approach devising, refining, presenting, and revising a craft talk. After the opening remarks, the moderator will ask each panelist in turn to describe the craft talk that is included in the anthology. We will then proceed with questions to each panelist about their processes, from conception to publication.

**Opening Remarks and Panelist Introductions**

Welcome to The Fine Art of Craft Talking. I am Brenda Miller, the moderator for this panel, and the editor of the forthcoming anthology *The Next Draft: Inspiring Craft Talks from the Rainier Writing Workshop.*
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, 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.

I’d like to begin by giving you some context about how this panel came about. Each panelist is a current core faculty member of the low-residency program at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington: The Rainier Writing Workshop. In operation since 2004 (it’s our 20th anniversary!), RWW has one residency each summer for ten intensive days of workshops, classes, talks, readings, and conversation.

On a typical residency morning, the Pacific Lutheran University campus wakes up for another packed day of activities. Students and faculty alike can be seen wandering toward Xavier Hall, coffee cups in hand, eyes bleary from the late night before. But they’re also excited, because they are about to experience a “Morning Talk” by one of the faculty.

These morning talks have become legendary among students and faculty alike. Each speaker sets the bar higher and higher, creating what have been described as transcendent experiences. Though attendance at these events is not required for faculty members, we wouldn’t miss them for the world, no matter how quickly we must bolt down our breakfast to get there in time.

These hour-long talks intricately show innovative approaches to craft and literature across genres, and they often become the touchstone for our conversations.
throughout the residency. We emerge from Xavier Hall with new titles to add to our reading lists, excited about how to read literature with a more nuanced perspective, and with ideas about how to bring our own work to a new level.

During each residency, someone always says: we should collect these into an anthology! And last year, finally, we did. This anthology, now called *The Next Draft: Inspiring Craft Talks from Rainier Writing Workshop*, collects a sampling of these morning talks so that they can reach a wider audience. Each of our panelists here today has an essay in this book that started as a nascent idea when Rick Barot, our director, made his call for that year’s morning talks.

To begin, I’ll introduce each panelist and ask them to tell us a bit about the morning talk that is included in the anthology:

**Barrie Jean Borich** is the author of the lyric memoir *Apocalypse, Darling*. Her hybrid essay *Body Geographic* won a Lambda Literary Award, and her memoir *My Lesbian Husband* won a Stonewall Book Award. A professor at DePaul in Chicago, Borich edits *Slag Glass City*, a journal of the urban essay arts.

Barrie’s essay is titled “Radical Surprise: The Subversive Art of the Uncertain.” Barrie, can you read from the beginning of this essay and summarize some of its key points?

**Jenny Johnson** is the author of *In Full Velvet*. She received a 2016-2017 Hodder Fellowship at Princeton University and a 2015 Whiting Writer's Award in Poetry. She teaches at West Virginia University.

Jenny’s essay is called “On Imagistic Endurance.” Jenny, can you read from the beginning of this essay and summarize some of its key points?

**Wendy Call** co-edited the craft anthology *Telling True Stories and the annual Best Literary Translations*. She wrote the award-winning nonfiction book *No Word for Welcome* and has translated three books of poetry by women writing in Mexican languages.
Wendy’s essay is titled “Writing and/as Art: The Long/Wide View.” Wendy, can you read from the beginning of this essay and summarize some of its key points?

**Geffrey Davis** is the author of three collections: *One Wild Word Away*, *Night Angler*, and *Revising the Storm*. A recipient of fellowships from Bread Loaf, Cave Canem, and the NEA, Davis serves as Poetry Editor for Iron Horse and teaches with the University of Arkansas.

Geffrey has two pieces in the anthology, and they serve as prologue and epilogue, bookending the collection. The first is called “Breaking the Silence,” and the second is called “Playing Backward on the Train.” These pieces started not as morning talks, per se, but for other occasions when we are asked to speak: the Graduation lunch, the graduation itself, or on panels where multiple faculty members speak to a certain theme. Geffrey, could you read a little bit from one of these pieces and sum up its main ideas?

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**Moderator Questions:**

Thank you all for giving us this quick overview of your pieces. Now I’d like to begin the conversation with some questions. (These questions will be asked in turn, with each panelist answering before the next question is asked. There will naturally be some improvisational flow to the questions and answers, and we might not get to all of them.)

1. When Rick puts out his call for morning talks, what excites you about the prospect of giving a talk? And/or: what do you fear?

2. What *is* a craft talk? Are there certain conventions you hear/see in craft talks? Is there an ideal structure (for you or for anyone writing a talk)?

3. How do you come up with your ideas/title? And/or how do you focus these ideas for a morning talk format? How do you know if your idea is “original enough?”
4. What is the process like for writing a morning talk? Is it different than writing a creative piece or article?

5. How do you write something that you know will be delivered orally and not just on paper? Do you make a visual accompaniment to your talk? Why or why not?

6. How do you consider your audience and diverse backgrounds/perspectives when you’re drafting your talk?

7. What is the revision process like for a talk? Do you practice it? Do you revise the talk even at the last minute?

8. Did you need to revise much for a written, publishable version of the talk? Do you ever take the ideas that came up in the Q & A into the revision process?

9. Did you publish it elsewhere, and if so, how did you go about the process of submitting it?

10. What questions do you have for each other?

We will conclude with a Q & A from the audience.