A Turn of the Page: Journalism and Creative Writing  
Friday, February 9th, 2024  
1:45 - 3:00 pm  
Room 2215C, Kansas City Convention Center, Street Level

**John Byrne Barry** is a writer, designer, actor, pickleball player, and crossing guard. He is author of three plays and three novels, including *When I Killed My Father: An Assisted-Suicide Family Thriller*, and *Bones in the Wash: Politics is Tough. Family is Tougher.*

**Brenda Stanley** is a writer and journalist who spent more than two decades as a news anchor and investigative reporter with the NBC affiliate in eastern Idaho. Her work has been recognized by the Scripps Howard Foundation and the Hearst Journalism Awards. Brenda is the author of six published novels, including "The Still Small Voice," which recently won first place in the CIBA awards for mystery.

**Mugabi Byenkya** is an award-winning editor, performer, rapper and writer of prose, poetry, comics, essays, drama & songs; they are the creator and host of the forthcoming podcast “One Foot In Closet” via the pseudonym “Name Redacted”, where they interview Queer & Beyond the Binary Africans both on the continent and in the diaspora who live life with "One Foot In The Closet" for safety like themself; Season 1 is forthcoming funded by the House of African Feminisms followed by Season 2 funded by *Open Country Mag’s* Curatorial Fellowship.

**Kahlil Crawford** is a poet and prose artist. He has served as co-editor with *Synchronized Chaos Magazine*, music journalist with *Unrated Magazine* and tech writer with *Hacker Noon*. Kahlil is the (co-)author/curator of ØRGΛN C1TY - a metarhythmic treatise on urban futurism and universal subculture.

**Nika C. Beamon** attended Boston College and is a TV writer/producer in NYC. She is the author of the non-fiction book, *I Didn't Work This Hard Just To Get Married* (Chicago Review Press, 2009) and the critically acclaimed memoir, *Misdiagnosed: The Search For Dr. House*.

Questions the moderator will ask/that the panel will discuss:

- How have your journalistic practices helped with your creative writing and vice versa?  
- Please share your career transition/development experience and insights you’ve learned from it  
- Where are good places to look for paid gigs, either as a freelance journalist or as a creative writer?
How can creative writing programs best serve current/former journalists and help them maximize their strengths and develop areas of weakness?

Main points, summed up in a sentence or two, that each panelist wants to make about how journalistic practices can help with creative writing, and vice versa, or about their career transitions:

**John Byrne Barry:** I will briefly talk about how I turned a 9,000-word cover story for the *East Bay Express* called “The End of Garbage,” about the garbage and recycling movement in the Bay Area into my first novel, *Wasted: Murder in the Recycle Berkeley Yard*. One of the most interesting things that happened was that I included a lot of what I thought was fascinating background about the garbage/recycling world, and then I cut much of it as I edited because it didn’t move the story forward.

Another thing I will talk about is how frequently I include journalists, especially TV reporters in my novels. In my current work-in-progress, set in Sausalito in the late 1970s during the “houseboat wars,” the TV reporter serves as a sort of Greek chorus, summarizing the development for his TV audience as well as the reader.

The protagonist of *Wasted* is a freelance reporter for a local weekly called the *East Bay Beat*, and he is an alter ego of sorts researching and writing about the recycling world like I did. That world is rich with resonant themes of reinvention, transition, and discarding that which no longer serves us.

One technique that serves both journalism and fiction is the telling detail. A brief anecdote or descriptive phrase that stands in for a longer or more comprehensive description. Here’s an example of such a telling detail from my own life: When my son was two or three, he fell off a table and before he hit the floor, he said, “I’m OK,” which is so telling because that is who he has been from the start. Someone who takes care of things. Who is OK even when he’s about to hit the floor. (He did cry, however, after impact.)

**Mugabi Byenky:** I’ll focus on career transitions. I began writing professionally in the world of academia and transitioned out of that due to my disabilities. I then focused on creative writing which was more accessible to me. I did this for a number of years before adding podcasting via a pseudonym to protect my identity and the identities of the interviewees. Being interviewed has helped me become a better interviewer. I’ve been interviewed by over 90 media outlets, so far, and I’ve used these experiences to
frame how I ask questions and to create a safe space for the interviewees to share their stories.

**Brenda Stanley:** I was a television reporter/anchor for NBC in Idaho for almost thirty years. I taught news writing as an adjunct professor at Idaho State University. I’m the author of six published novels.

When I was in high school, my dream was to be a novelist. I wrote my first novel when I was seventeen. I soon learned that being a novelist isn’t a “job” with a stable income. I found a job as a radio reporter for a small station in eastern Utah when I was only eighteen, and that began my love of journalism. I eventually got a degree and went on to produce and eventually report and anchor for television for affiliates of both ABC and NBC. My love of research and investigation is why I focused on crime reporting. My first novel (the one I wrote when I was 17) was published in 2010, and each novel after that has been a mystery with some sort of tie to my days as a reporter. My love of creative writing helped my storytelling in news, and my attention to detail and research has been a huge asset in my fiction.

The transition from journalist to author was much more challenging than I thought it would be. When I was working full-time in the news, I was very scheduled and prioritized my time so I could have the time to work on my novels. When I transitioned to full-time fiction, my strict schedule went out the window, and I found myself doing everything but writing. To get back to being productive in my writing, I had to restructure my time and thinking, and while I still love writing, I look at it as my own business rather than just a hobby.

Writing every day has been what keeps me productive. Although my focus is on my novels, there have been numerous times that I have written shorter fiction pieces, non-fiction magazine articles, newspaper cooking columns, or blog posts just to keep from becoming stagnant. Some of these sell, and that’s always a good thing, but even those that are just exercises benefit my overall writing.

Many of the contacts I made while in the news have been incredibly helpful either for other freelance writing projects or for research. Most of my novels involve an element of crime, and my contacts within law enforcement have been vital to the authenticity of my stories.

**Nika Beamon:** creative writing is just an extension of what I do daily. As a television news writer in NY, I am forced to crank out more than a dozen stories a day on a variety of topics with a time constraint. However, I do not choose the angle or subject matter.
Creative writing allows me to express my own thoughts, ideas and opinions in long form. Sometimes I'm even about to fantasize about news events in a different way. I believe writing daily has enhanced my ability to tell stories because it's given me the discipline to finish stories.