First Time’s the Charm: Debut Novelists on How to Debut

Debuting as a novelist is a fraught process, and the experience and advice vary seemingly year to year in a rapidly changing, and not always kind, literary landscape. The recent and forthcoming debut novelists of this panel will share tips, tricks, and hard-won lessons from the months before and after our own debuts. Topics to be discussed will include positioning a debut novel for publication, working with editors/etc. during the publication process, and publicity and marketing campaigns after the debut. Additionally, a portion of the time allotted to this panel will focus on the lessons we learned while debuting and the questions we wish we had asked. Whether attendees are debuting their own novels in the immediate future or still dreaming the book into being, they will find fresh, urgent, and valuable discussion about the processes here.

Agents, Contracts, Contests

After customary introductions, the panel will begin by having each of the five panelists discuss their unique journey of writing, submitting, and publishing a debut novel. These individual narratives will take approximately five to seven minutes each. Afterwards, the panel will engage in a discussion about how—and sometimes why—that process played out. The intent is to provide future debut novelists with a roadmap of sorts for their own journey to and through publication. This portion of the presentation will likely run twenty to twenty-five minutes. The panel presentation will conclude with a question-and-answer session for however much time remains. Attendees will be encouraged to give voice to those topics that potentially went unaddressed within the previous discussions or to further conversation into the topics that were.
V. Event Participants

**Holly M. Wendt** (co-organizer) is the author of *Heading North* (Braddock Avenue Books, 2023). They are a recipient of the Robert and Charlotte Baron Fellowship for Creative and Performing Artists from the American Antiquarian Society and fellowships from the Jentel Foundation and Hambidge Center. A 2023 Peter Taylor Fellow at the *Kenyon Review* Writers Workshop, Holly has also been a member of workshops at Bread Loaf, Sewanee, and Tin House. Their work has appeared in *Passages North, Shenandoah, Barrelhouse, Memorious*, and elsewhere. Holly is a former *Baseball Prospectus* contributor and contributing editor for *The Classical*. Their nonfiction has appeared in *Bodies Built for Game: The Prairie Schooner Anthology of Contemporary Sports Writing, The Rumpus*, and *Sport Literate*. Holly is Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing at Lebanon Valley College.

A first-generation college student, Holly earned their BA from Lycoming College, their MA from Ohio University, and their Ph.D. from Binghamton University. Holly is the 2023 recipient of the Thomas Rhys Vickroy Distinguished Teaching Award from Lebanon Valley College, and their work within and beyond the classroom has been recognized with a NISOD Excellence Award. They have twice served as co-coordinator for the Equality State Book Festival and presently direct Lebanon Valley College’s visiting writer series, Writing: A Life. They also serve as the vice president of the board for the Annville Free Library.

Beyond the writing life, Holly is a multidisciplinary fiber artist and cycling enthusiast.

**Jeremy Broyles** (co-organizer and moderator) is an Arizona native, originally from the Cottonwood-Jerome-Sedona high desert. He earned his B.A. from Doane College, now University, his M.A. from Northern Arizona University, and his MFA in fiction from Wichita State University. He is a professor with nearly twenty years of experience teaching in higher education, and he currently serves as the creative writing program director at Mesa Community College where he has taught since 2017. His stories have appeared in *The MacGuffin, Santa Clara Review, Rock and a Hard Place Magazine, Black Fork Review, Pembroke Magazine, Red Rock Review, BULL, Suburbia Journal*, and *Reckon Review* amongst many others. His novella, *What
*Becomes of Ours*, was published in 2014 by ELJ Publications. His novel *Flat Water*—the story of siblings, surfing, and sharks and what happens when those things come together both in and out of the water—was released by Mint Hill Books in 2023. He is an aging rider of bicycles, a talentless surfer of waves, and a happily mediocre player of guitars.

**Kate Reed Petty**’s debut novel, *True Story*, was a New York Times Book Review “Editor’s Choice” and was a finalist for a Bram Stoker Award and a Shirley Jackson Award. Kate’s fiction and essays have been published by *ZZYZZYVA, Electric Literature, American Short Fiction, Blackbird, Nat. Brut, The Los Angeles Review of Books Blog*, and *Ambit*. Her work has been supported by a Rubys Grant from the Robert W. Deutsch Foundation, a Tennessee Williams Scholarship to the Sewanee Writers’ Conference, and creative residencies at Bloedel Reserve and The Mount.

In addition to fiction, Kate’s short films have appeared on *Narrative* magazine and at the 2019 Maryland Film Festival. And her middle-grade graphic novel, *The Leak*, illustrated by Andrea Bell, was published by First Second Books in March 2021.

Kate lives in Baltimore.

**Sarah Cypher**’s debut novel, *The Skin and Its Girl* (Ballantine 2023), received starred reviews in *Publishers Weekly* and *Booklist*, was one of Goodreads’s most popular debuts of 2023, and made over two dozen most-anticipated lists. She holds an MFA from the Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College, where she was a Rona Jaffe Graduate Creative Writing Fellow in Fiction. Her writing has appeared in the *Washington Post, Literary Hub, Electric Literature, New Ohio Review, North American Review, Crab Orchard Review, Mizna, Rowayat*, and others, and she has been a resident at the Headlands Center for the Arts and Vermont Studio Center. She grew up in a Lebanese Christian family near Pittsburgh and lives in Austin with her wife.

**Sarah Marian Seltzer**: I am a writer in New York City where I live with my family, surrounded by books, records, CDs—and a lot of snacks.
I am an editor at Lilith Magazine and have been a journalist for many publications (some that still exist and many no longer exist!), reporting on activism and culture, and writing essays, cultural criticism, and the occasional opinion piece.

The Singer Sisters, born out of my fascination with families who put their struggles into art, will be published by Flatiron Books in summer 2024. It was such a pleasure to write, a project that helped me through the frustrations of balancing early motherhood with work, life, and living in a broken world.

I hope you get some of the same escape and solace reading it as I did writing it, and it feels like listening to a beloved song.

Happy reading!