

Beyond the Immigrant Narrative: the Poetics, Politics, & Craft at the Margins

The immigrant narrative has long posed questions about borders, traditions, assimilation, and multiple identities. Writers and artists have worked across genres and media to create these experiential portraits. In this conversation, we'll explore the effects, consequences, and stories that emerge when writers and artists invoke characters from second and third generation immigrant heritages that journey through intersectional communities while creating one for themselves.

By bringing writers from multiple disciplines together, we'll explore and examine the craft behind immigrant narratives. Too often the craft of these works is overlooked because of the politics inherent in the portrayal of character and setting. Too often we limit our discussion of these stories to the weight of what assimilation and tradition mean. By bringing together writers across genre and media (poetry, prose, visual art), we'll explore how craft models the intersections in these stories.

Hello everyone. Thank you so much for attending our panel "Beyond the Immigrant Narrative: the Poetics, Politics, & Craft at the Margins."

Alongside Erika T. Wurth and Kristen Millares Young, in attendance with you, Jason Mgabo Perez and Shin Yu Pai joining us via Zoom, my name is Juan Carlos Reyes, also joining you via Zoom.

This is going to be a roundtable conversation that begins with us and continues with you. We'll offer pieces of ourselves, of our work, of the experiences and vantage points that inform how we consider these many ideas that one title manages to hold together like an overstuffed suitcase.

Immigrant. Narrative. Poetics. Politics. Craft. Margins.

For starters, what we offer today is a solidarity across diaspora, a way to talk about craft outside the white patriarchal norm and in way that centers heritage, experience, and interiority.

We draw on various expressions of the literary self, different approaches to voice and character, and many ways of thinking about our creative ancestry.

The writers and artists we draw inspiration from are as much our contemporaries as they are part of our past.

For us, as I imagine for so many of you, we had to unlearn what we'd been taught about language, writing, and literature, and we had to stretch ourselves to look for and discover the work that spoke to us and the way we saw the world.

And we certainly found all that beautiful literary work outside the canon as it had been taught to us. Literary work that spoke to how writers of color explored and examined language,

relinquished the need to explain without apology, and understood the personal as both a political and a craft choice, a command of oneself on the page that challenged what the literary establishment expected from us or limited us to.

You can imagine that journey as something like a decolonization of poetics, politics, and craft, but you can also imagine the friction one can experience on that path and the creative leaps we must take to overcome those bumps in the road that often come in the form of self-doubt, fear, and the need to apologize.

And so on this panel we're prepared to give ourselves and you permission to be critical, to experiment, and to improvise.

We'll begin with me, and in my belief that the narrator's interior space creates the world made to be shaken and shattered—that a language's friction expands what fiction can do and how it can empower us as writers.

We'll continue with Erika T. Wurth, whose critical work butts up with notions of hierarchy and value, with precedence and lineage, with heritage as both form a writer fits into and informing of what is possible.

We'll continue next with Shin Yu Pai, who brings echo and resonance to voice, not just because its interdisciplinary approach embodies melody, instrumentation, and more, but because her approach looks to uncovers new expressions of intersectionality.

We'll continue with Kristen Millares Young who brings intercultural fluidity to her voice, narrators that don't hide from the friction of social and family collisions and who portray many renditions of themselves as they deconstruct personal, social, and family history.

Finally, we'll conclude with Jason Mgabo Perez, a poet who brings a sense of material to his voice, speakers who unapologetically take up space through improvisation and a language, like handwriting, that embodies a sense of self and story.

We look forward to the conversation with you.