

**AWP 2022**

## **Multitudes: Writing Intersecting Identities in Short Fiction: Outline**

**Event Title:**

Multitudes: Writing Intersecting Identities in Short Fiction

**Event Description:**

Short form fiction has an important part to play in children's literature – particularly when it can highlight the intersecting identities that make up the reality of our world. A diverse panel of authors writing for children across age groups will discuss the impact that short fiction can have on readers and how learning how to write short fiction can deepen and improve craft.

**Event Category:**

Children's and Young Adult Literature

**Event Organizer:**

Alexandra Villasante

**Event Moderator:**

Eric Smith

**Event Participants:**

M. García Peña /Mía García

Katherine Locke

Nova Ren Suma

**Opening Remarks and Housekeeping Announcements:**

Greeting and administrative notes (who may not be able to attend in person) changes to programs and corrections. [following must be included at in-person Remarks]

Welcome to **Multitudes: Writing Intersecting Identities in Short Fiction**. 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, (identify moderator), 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.

**Eric Smith:** To get us started, I'll introduce myself, then I'll pass the mic and if you could each introduce yourselves and give a brief overview of your work, particularly your work in short stories or short fiction for children.

**Participant Initial Remarks:**

[Order in which we are sitting/might change]

**Nova Ren Suma:** I'm Nova Ren Suma, and my pronouns are she/her. I write YA novels and short stories. My most recent novel is a ghost story called *A Room Away from the Wolves*, and I also wrote *The Walls Around Us*, and three other novels. My short stories have appeared in *Slasher Girls & Monster Boys*, *Toil & Trouble*, and *It's a Whole Spiel*. I teach creative writing in the low-residency MFA program for Writing for Children and Young Adults at Vermont College of Arts or VCFA, so if you have questions about the program feel free to ask me! I also teach at Penn here in Philly, where I teach courses focused on Writing for Young Adults and have my students to write YA short stories, the topic of our panel today! Along with YA author Emily X.R. Pan—who was originally on this panel, so if any fans of hers are in the room, I hope you have preordered her gorgeous new novel *An Arrow to the Moon*, which comes out next month!—I was the co-editor of *Foreshadow*, which started as an online publication of YA short stories at foreshadowya.com and became an anthology of stories and writing craft advice, published by Algonquin. I live here in Philadelphia, and this is my first in-person appearance since February 2020!

**Katherine Locke:** I'm Katherine Locke and my pronouns are they/them. I write all over the map. I've written picture books like *Bedtime for Superheroes*, *Being Friends with Dragons* and *What Are Your Words* which is a book about pronouns. I also co-edited and contributed to two anthologies, *It's a Whole Spiel* and *This is Our Rainbow*, and contributed as well to *Unbroken* and *Out Now*. My YA novel *The Girl with the Red Balloon* was a Sydney Taylor Honor and my next book is *This Rebel Heart*, out on April 5th!

**Mia Garcia:**

I'm Mia García also soon to be publishing as M. García Peña. My pronouns are she/her. I was born and raised in Puerto Rico and I'm the author of *Even If the Sky Falls* and *The Resolutions*, both YA contemporaries. I will also be in the upcoming *Latine Horror Anthology - Our Shadows Have Claws* - from Algonquin books and a yet to be unannounced anthology.

**Alexandra Villasante:** I'm Alex Villasante, my pronouns are she/her and my debut young adult novel, *The Grief Keeper* came out in 2019 - in the before times - and my first short stories, as part of anthologies, come out this year, which I'm really excited about - the first is *ALL SIGNS POINT TO YES*, a collection of YA short stories linked to the astrological signs, and the second, coming out in September is *OUR SHADOWS HAVE CLAWS*, a Latinx anthology of horror, supernatural stories and myths. I have another two anthologies I'll be part of which haven't been announced yet, which goes to show you that I'm completely and totally addicted to short stories now!

### **Moderator Questions**

#### **1) How did you first start writing short fiction, and what was the inspiration for starting?**

##### **Nova:**

- Wrote short stories long before attempting to write a novel; grad school at Columbia; interning for and editing literary journals; author who inspired: Aimee Bender

##### **Mia**

- I loved exploring a moment and exploring those moments and intense emotions via a short story were a perfect match. A lot of the times I'd tell myself that I was writing them to turn them into a longer novel but the truth was that they were meant to be short stories from the beginning and that realization was very freeing.

##### **Alex:**

Amazingly, I never thought about writing short stories until after my debut published. One of the editors from my first anthology out in May, *ALL SIGNS POINT TO YES*, Cam Montgomery just DM'd me and asked me to contribute - and I was like, I have no idea how to do this but I should say yes because Cam is amazing and this idea sounds amazing. Then I promptly panicked about it. I saw Katherine at the Highlights Foundation and asked them how they do it (because I loved their short story in *IT'S A WHOLE SPIEL*) and they said, it's about finding THE moment and building around that. That stuck with me.

##### **Katherine**

I'm glad that what I told Alex made sense because I feel like I'm still figuring out short fiction! I wrote some in college for a creative writing course, but I really identified as a novelist and felt

very constrained at that time by short fiction. I didn't start to enjoy it until I *had* to finish something for *Unbroken*, the first anthology I was in, which was edited by Marieke Nijkamp. That story unlocked something in me and really helped me see that moment and how interesting and complex short fiction could be.

## **2) How does writing short fiction differ from writing longer form novels (aside from length, obviously!)**

### **Nova:**

- Story-writing process; compression and concentration; knowing the end and writing for that moment. A quote many of us know that resonates with me: “Short stories are tiny windows into other worlds and other minds and other dreams. They’re journeys you can make to the far side of the universe and still be back in time for dinner.”—Neil Gaiman

### **Mia:**

I find them a lot more freeing. Perhaps this is because of the length, or perhaps because they are stripped down to the essentials, I’m not sure. But it feels like there’s room to dip in and out of genres for example and play around a bit.

### **Katherine:**

I tend to wander a lot in my books. I enjoy books as a reader and a writer where you might have a thousand words of characters just holding hands and having feelings in cities. So for me, it’s an exercise in figuring out what I love about those emotional moments, and then trying to bottle that feeling in as few words as possible. It’s a challenge. I think that’s why I like it. It’s a mental exercise. Like--wordle but for authors.

### **Alex:**

I’ll go back to that ‘moment’ Katherine told me about. They told me to find that moment in my story idea and build around that, and it really is a clarifying way to approach a short story. Long form fiction are about a series of moments that lead to a climax, or a change or a resolution. In short fiction, I feel like it’s a singular, crucible of a moment that burns away everything else but the essential of the story, if that makes sense

Alex: We’re going to shift gears a little to do a quick Writing exercise: Panelists will each read 100 words from a short story that illuminates the ‘moment’ in the short story that is the essence of that piece

**Finding the Moment:** 5 minute writing exercise for attendees to free write their story’s ‘moment’

by asking yourself these questions:

- What is the thing your MC wants now but can't have?
- What is one thing that keeps your MC up at night?
- What will happen to make TOMORROW very different from TODAY?

**Nova:**

- I will read an excerpt from a short story published in *Foreshadow*, both online and then later collected in the print anthology *Foreshadow: Stories to Celebrate the Magic of Reading & Writing YA*, co-edited by me and Emily X.R. Pan. This story was written by one of our featured New Voices, Tanya Adyelott, and was selected and introduced by YA author Jandy Nelson.

Short story in full can be found here:

<https://foreshadowya.com/articles/33-flight>

**Alex:**

I'll read an excerpt from my short story *El Viejo de la Bolso*, part of the *OUR SHADOWS HAVE CLAWS* anthology of Latine Horror and Mythology coming out on September 9th 2022

**Katherine:** I'll read an excerpt from my short story *The Wish and the Wind Dragon* in *This is Our Rainbow!*

**3) How do you know when a short piece you're writing is actually meant to be something more? And vice versa, how do you know a novel idea, is better suited to a short piece?**

**Mia:**

- I base a lot from my feelings. If it feels like I'm going to force a lot of plot expanding this idea, it's not meant to be. If it feels like the piece is tied to more characters, plot, stories that keep tumbling out, it's my queue to explore that.

**Nova:** When I know the end right away, it's a short story. When I see only an opening situation and can get myself as far as a cliffhanger... with a sea of questions beneath it, then I know it's a novel and I'll be lost inside it for years. Possibly I'll have more practical advice to offer, too.

**Alex:** I really love Nova's answer and that rings true for me - when I can see immediately where the 'moment' will lead my main character I feel like it's a complete short story. When a moment leads to more questions and more answers and more possible moments...that's a longer piece of fiction I'm gonna struggle with!

**Katherine:** I think for me, it's when I only know a piece of the story but it feels like it could be something larger--not now, but maybe for a reader, or for me down the line. In the excerpt I just read, I knew that I had a character on a boat and a dragon and somewhere to be, but I only knew that bit of that character's life, that one long day. So it felt very clear to me that at that time, that was a short story.

**4) When writing short fiction, audience is important, and knowing where to pitch your work is pretty important when you're done. When you think about sci-fi or fantasy, you think about sending stuff to Lightspeed or Tor or Asimovs... adult fiction, to endless places. But what about kid-lit short form stuff? Where can our audience members send, or read, that kind of work?**

**a) Sub Question: With the market as narrow as it is, what should readers do with these stories. Start a journal? Look for anthologies?**

**Mia**

- I'll defer to others on this. My short fiction has been largely linked to anthologies. And those that haven't I haven't pitched anywhere.

**Nova:**

- Major lack of venues for publishing short stories in the YA category; if you're not solicited for an anthology—and many writers are never asked—it may feel like there's nowhere to send your short work.
- A few litmags open to short YA fiction to look into: Hunger Mountain , Lunch Ticket , an online venue I just learned about called Voyage YA ...
- Foreshadow had so many submissions in the brief year we were publishing, which shows there are many writers who want a place to publish YA short stories. Emily and I have hoped that Foreshadow would inspire others to create YA publications of their own.

**5) Short kid-lit fiction thrives in anthologies. All of us have been in them, edited them, you name it. How does a writer get involved in contributing to an anthology? Or even creating one?**

**Mia**

- I got involved with Our Shadows Have Claws by expressing interest when it was pitched as an idea on twitter. (I know) And my second (which is still on sub) when I met the coordinating author at the Highlights Foundation. I've also given anthology coordinators names for fellow authors I know would be great in an anthology, but are rarely asked or represented.

**Nova:**

- Contributing to anthologies: Often you need to be solicited, which can be frustrating if you don't know people or have an established career. But more and more, there have been open calls for stories, some for stories by unpublished writers; keep an eye out for announcements on Twitter. I love when anthologists do this and hope this happens more and more.

**Alex:**

I do think anthologies beget anthologies and saying yes to being in a proposal for one - as I have done - is scary - not knowing if it will ever come to fruition, then not knowing if when it does, that I'll be able to pull off what I say I will do - and finally, and this happened recently, proposing to write one kind of story for a proposal, then when it sells having a different direction for the story and seeing if the editors are open to it. It's the uncertainty and freedom that really draws me to both the short form and the anthologies. It feels slightly more dangerous and freeing. And sometimes, like with *OUR SHADOWS HAVE CLAWS*, there are lovely surprises, like each story having its own illustration which is incredible!

**Katherine:** Honestly, have a reputation for being a good person to work with. And have an agent who is a good person to work with! When I put together an anthology, I want to know that I'm pulling in writers who can meet deadlines, who can stick to the theme (if there is one, and for my anthologies so far there has been one), and who will consider the edits thoughtfully. And the other thing is: be open on social media and with the community about wanting to be an anthology. That does *not* mean tweeting at an anthology editor on the day of their announcement "Why wasn't I in this" or "I'd like to be in your next one." It means saying, "Hey! I would love to be in an anthology. I'm really interested in SFF anthologies for YA or MG readers, and as a queer person, I'd be open to writing about my identity in genre too!" I remember those tweets, I promise!

**Q&A From Audience**