

EVENT TITLE: Writing Poetry/Writing History

Event Description:

Temple University has been Philadelphia's only full-time residential graduate Creative Writing program since 1985. This panel celebrates that history by presenting readings from five poetry alumni whose recently published works explore poetry as historiographic practice, covering topics such as surveillance capitalism, the settlement of North America, the Salem witchcraft crisis of 1692, anti-Asian violence since 9/11, and Black voices hidden in the archives.

Poets Emily Abendroth, Sarah Dowling, Pattie McCarthy, Divya Victor, and Yolanda Wisher have all made significant contributions to contemporary poetry and poetics on local, national, and international levels. Their work represents the Temple MFA program's commitment to interdisciplinarity, creative research and political aesthetics.

EVENT CATEGORY: Poetry Reading

Event Organizer:

Jena Osman: Jena Osman is a poet who has taught in the Temple MFA program since 1998.

Event Moderator & Participant:

Yolanda Wisher: Yolanda Wisher is the author of *Monk Eats an Afro* (Hanging Loose Press, 2014). A Cave Canem and Pew Fellow, Wisher was the 3rd Poet Laureate of Philadelphia and works as the Curator of Spoken Word at Philadelphia Contemporary.

Other Participants:

Emily Abendroth: Emily Abendroth's newest book, *Sousveillance Pageant* (Radiator Press, 2021), coasts restlessly between fiction, poetry, and research essay. She is author of the poetry collection */Exclosures/* (Ahsahta Press, 2014) and *The Instead* (Carville Annex Press, 2016), a book-length collaborative conversation with fiction writer Miranda Mellis. She lives and works in Philadelphia.

Sarah Dowling: Sarah Dowling is the author of three books of poetry: *Security Posture* (Invisible Publishing, 2009), *DOWN* (Coach House Books, 2014), and *Entering Sappho* (Coach House Books, 2020), which was recently shortlisted for the Derek Walcott Poetry Prize. A literary critic as well as a poet, Sarah is also the

author of *Translingual Poetics: Writing Personhood under Settler Colonialism* (University of Iowa Press, 2018).

Pattie McCarthy: Pattie McCarthy is the author of seven books of poetry—most recently *Wifthing* (Apogee Press, 2021)—and over a dozen chapbooks. She was awarded a Pew Fellowship in the Arts in 2011. In summer 2013, she was a resident at the Elizabeth Bishop House in Nova Scotia. She teaches at Temple University.

Divya Victor: Divya Victor is the author of *CURB* (Nightboat, 2021) and *KITH* (Fence, 2017), among others. Her work has been translated into French, German, Spanish, and Czech. She is currently Associate Professor of English at Michigan State University.

Opening Remarks and Housekeeping Announcements.

Good afternoon and welcome to “Writing Poetry/Writing History”
[this section will be updated later]

Participant Initial Remarks:

Emily Abendroth: I will be reading an excerpt from my recent book, *Sousveillance Pageant* – a hybrid work that coasts restlessly between the categories of poetry, novel, and nonfiction essay. I will talk about some of the research/archive-based investigations that provided the initial impetus for this book, as well as the decade of anti-prison organizing that I participated in (with many others!) simultaneous to its drafting -- providing a set of experiences and relationships that profoundly shaped the text's contents. I will speak about the influence of the practices of documentary and eco-poetics on my own creative work and what those fields have opened up (and continue to open up) for me as a set of possibilities. I will also speak very briefly about how the shape and approach of *Sousveillance Pageant* changed across time/multiple drafts and why it did so.

Sarah Dowling: I plan to read some short selections from my book, *Entering Sappho*. I will talk about the different kinds of research that I did in order to write this book, which included working with different libraries to access rare, out-of-print, or never-in-print historical documents; reading a range of translations of Sappho's poetry; as well as eco-poetic-ish practices of being in a particular place. I will draw links between these practices and the writing of other people who have connections to the creative writing program at Temple (including my fellow panelists). I will try to offer some suggestions about what I believe are the unique and specific practices that are supported and sustained through this program.

Pattie McCarthy: I will be reading from my book *wifthing* and discussing my research process. I wrote most of *wifthing* using my own institution's library & online resources because I did not have to opportunity to travel for most of its writing. I hope to address both the site-specificity of archival research and writing in place, as well as what can be done when this is not possible (in my case, due to childcare responsibilities and/or travel restrictions due to the pandemic).

Divya Victor: Divya Victor will read from CURB, a book of poetry and prose essay that maps our post-9/11 political landscape by locating the wounds of domestic terrorism at unacknowledged sites of racial and religious conflict across cities and suburbs of the United States.

Yolanda Wisher: I'll be reading from my book-in-progress, *Maple Street Rag* which explores how poems, in their elasticity and ingenuity, can tell a family's stories in ways that defy and amend the erasures and distortions found in census sheets, death certificates, oral histories, and environmental reports. I will talk about the genealogical research I've been conducting alongside the writing of poems and the ways that my research into the lives and archives of ancestral poets like Nellie Bright and Alice Dunbar Nelson has informed my understanding of legacy.

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Moderator Questions

1. What was your experience of the interdisciplinarity, creative research and/or political aesthetics of Temple's Creative Writing program?
2. What challenges emerge for you practicing poetry as historiography? What are the challenges of looking backward? Do you even see it that way – looking backward?
3. Who are the poets who have inspired your practice in this vein or presented new paths/directions for the work you wanted/want to do?