

AWP Panel: Archives of the Body

with Michelle Bowdler, Putsata Reang, Anastacia Renée & Kristen Millares Young

Thursday, March 9, 2023, 9:00 a.m.-10:15 a.m.

Seattle Convention Center, Rooms 433-434, Summit Building

705 Pike Street, Seattle, WA 98101

Archives of the Body

Introduction:

The body yields many archives. We grasp for meaning through documentation. Yet as Saidiya Hartman argued, the deliberate absenting of certain voices creates “the violence of the archive.” When women cede evidence of our collective histories, we sunder connections with our forebears and each other. Real artistic gains have been expunged from cultural memory. Today, as women have done for millennia and as we must continue doing, we will investigate the [archival body] – corporeal, the body politic, and our bodies of work – to refuse silence imposed by the patriarchy.

This panel brings together Black, Jewish, Latinx, Cambodian-American and queer writers to assert a truer reckoning with the layers and spectra of our womanhood. Literature is an ongoing historical project. While honoring the aesthetic contributions of past writers, we hold space for the inclusion of new voices. By juxtaposing our stories of liberation in the face of inherited trauma and refusing the erasures of racism, rape and refugeehood, we can advance an intersectional canon.

I will begin by introducing each of our four panelists, including myself. We will then share a brief excerpt from a past woman writer whose work speaks to our own. After that honoring of our elders, we'll each read briefly and answer a question before the next reader performs.

Our discussion will include a round robin format – we have curiosities about each other’s work and wish to decentralize our conversation – while holding space for audience questions. We welcome your inquiries. Stay curious.

Event Structure: Reading Order and Questions

- 1) Collective welcome/honoring the elders

Anastacia- Renée: **Quote from an Ancestor: Ntozake Sange**

Where there is a woman there is magic. if there is a moon falling from her mouth, she is a woman who knows her magic, who can share or not share her powers. A woman with a moon falling from here mouth, roses between her legs and tiaras of Spanish moss, this woman is a consort of spirits.

Michelle Bowdler: **Quote from an Ancestor: Adrienne Rich, *Sources***

To say: no person, trying to take responsibility for her or his identity, should have to be so alone. There must be those among whom we can sit down and weep, and still be counted as warriors. (I make up this strange, angry packet for you, threaded with love.)

I think you thought there was no such place for you, and perhaps there was none then, and perhaps there is none now; but we will have to make it, we who want an end to suffering, who want to change the laws of history, if we are not to give ourselves away."

Putsata Reang: **Quote from Arundhati Roy, *The Cost of Living***

"To love. To be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never to forget."

Kristen Millares Young: **Quote from H el ene Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1971**

And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it.

- 2) Michelle reads

- 3) **Kristen asks question of Michelle:** Michelle, your first book *IS RAPE A CRIME?* details the police destruction of the evidence of your assault, part of a widespread suppression of rape kits and the justice they might have served within our country. Could you please share more about the results of your investigation into this criminal erasure? (Follow up: How did writing your memoir require you to also produce a manifesto?)

- 4) Kristen reads

- 5) **Anastacia asks question of Kristen:** How do you both incorporate and separate the magic, intuition and history of your own body-lineage, body-trauma and body-healing in your work?

6) Anastacia reads

7) **Put asks question of Anastacia:** What burdens do you bear passed down from the generations and where inside you do they throb?

8) Put reads

9) **Michelle asks question of Put:** - I was taken by the beauty, clarity and lyricism of your words while talking about war, identity, trauma survival, and rejection. Can you talk about the choices you made throughout the book and your craft in conveying concepts of home, displacement and loss?

10) We each ask a question of the group

Anastacia Question to the Group: Throughout history the dismissal, denial and deletion of women's bodies has been perhaps the biggest erasure poem of all times. If this systemic erasure were once a living poem, what "lines" or words would you add or add (back) that you feel have been erased?

Putsata Question to the Group: Can you talk about a time when your body and bones held a memory but your mind did not comply? In other words, an experience that lives at a cellular level in your body but you have no corresponding images to affirm and/or confirm that experience?

Kristen Question(s) to the group: Archives are a body of knowledge. The scholar and theorist Saidiya Hartmann has written about the silencing of marginalized voices as "the violence of the archive." What archival violences have you witnessed in your trajectory as a writer, and how do you see your own work, and that of our collective generation, as a corrective to that erasure? What comes next?

Michelle Question for Group: Audre Lorde writes in her poem *The Black Unicorn*:

"...and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid
So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive."

Can you speak to the power of your words and have you been asked, as I have, if you ever regretted sharing your truth through writing? I have found this question so curious and would welcome hearing from other writers their thoughts and experience with the assumption we will regret authenticity.

11) audience Q&A which Kristen will moderate

The Panelists:

Michelle Bowdler is the author of *Is Rape a Crime, a Memoir, an Investigation and a Manifesto*, longlisted for the 2020 National Book Award in Nonfiction. Bowdler has been a fellow at MacDowell and Ragdale, and is a recipient of the Barbara Deming Memorial Award for nonfiction. Her work has been published in the *New York Times*, *Ms. Magazine*, *Literary Hub*, *Psychology Today* and other literary journals. She is working on a second book entitled *The Kids Are Not Alright* which will be published by Basic Books, an examination of the college mental health crisis and higher education's failure to offer effective solutions.

<https://michelle-bowdler.com/>

Putsata Reang is an author and journalist whose writings have appeared in a variety of national and international publications, including the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *Ms*, *The Seattle Times* and the *San Jose Mercury News*. Putsata was born in Cambodia, and raised in rural Oregon. She has lived and worked in more than a dozen countries, including Cambodia, Afghanistan and Thailand. She is an alum of Hedgebrook, Mineral School and Kimmel Harding Nelson residencies. She is a 2019 Jack Straw fellow. In 2005, she received an Alicia Patterson Journalism Fellowship that took her back to Cambodia to report on landless farmers. Her memoir *Ma and Me* (FSGxMCD) won a 2022 Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award.

www.putsata.com/

Anastacia-Renee (she/they) is a queer, hybrid writer, educator, retro-flector speaker and podcaster. She is the author of *Side Notes from the Archivist*, (HarperCollins (Amistad)), (v.) (Black Ocean), and *Forget It* (Black Radish) Renee was selected by NBC News as part of the list of "Queer Artist of Color Dominate 2021's Must See LGBTQ Art Shows." She was former Seattle Civic Poet (2017-2019), Hugo House Poet-in-Residence (2015-2017) Jack Straw Curator and Arc Artist Fellow (2020). Their work has been published widely.

www.anastacia-renee.com/

Moderator and organizer Kristen Millares Young is a journalist, essayist, and author of the novel *Subduction*, named a staff pick by *The Paris Review* and called "whip-smart" by the *Washington Post*, "a brilliant debut" by the *Seattle Times*, and "utterly unique and important" by *Ms. Magazine*. Winner of Nautilus and IPPY awards, *Subduction* was shortlisted for the VCU Cabell First Novelist Award and named a finalist for two International Latino Book Awards and Foreword Indies Book of the Year in 2020. Her essays, book reviews, and investigations appear in the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian*, *Literary Hub*, and the anthologies *Advanced Creative Nonfiction*, *Latina Outsiders*, and *Alone Together*, winner of a 2021 Washington State Book Award. A former Prose Writer-in-Residence at Hugo House, she is the editor of *Seismic: Seattle, City of Literature*, a finalist for a 2021 Washington State Book Award. Kristen was the researcher for the *New York Times* team that produced "Snow Fall," which won a Pulitzer Prize. She is the 2023 Distinguished Visiting Writer at Seattle University.