AWP 2024 EVENT OUTLINE

EVENT TITLE: Ripped (Gently) from the Headlines: The Ethics of Writing Fiction Based on Fact

EVENT DESCRIPTION: All writers borrow from life: people we’ve known, things we’ve witnessed, and historical events inevitably find their way into the work. But when novelists explicitly set out to retell true stories, they face serious ethical and artistic challenges. What does it mean to "shape" reality? What do we owe the people whose lives are our source material? Is our responsibility to historical accuracy or to the meaning we find there? Five authors discuss the fraught process of turning fact into fiction.

EVENT CATEGORY: Fiction Craft and Criticism

Event Organizer & Moderator
Andrew Altschul: Andrew Altschul is the author of the novels The Gringa, Deus Ex Machina, and Lady Lazarus, and short fiction that has appeared in Best American Nonrequired Reading, Best New American Voices, O. Henry Prize Stories, and elsewhere. He lives in Fort Collins, CO and teaches at Colorado State University.

Event Participants
Charmaine Craig: Charmaine Craig is the author most recently of the novels My Nemesis and Miss Burma, longlisted for the National Book Award and the Women's Prize for Fiction. Her writing has been published in The New York Times Magazine, Narrative Magazine, AFAR, and Dissent. She teaches at UC Riverside.

Eva Homa: Ava Homa is an acclaimed author, activist, and speaker. Her novel Daughters of Smoke and Fire was selected for Roxane Gay's book club and won the 2020 Silver Nautilus Award. Ava holds a master's degree in creative writing and teaches at CSU, Monterey Bay.


Justin Torres: Justin Torres is the author of the novels Blackouts, winner of the 2023 National Book Award, and We the Animals. He has published short fiction in
The New Yorker, Harper's, Tin House, and other publications. He lives in Los Angeles, where he is Associate Professor of English at UCLA.

Opening Remarks
- Welcome
- AWP Housekeeping Announcements
- Introduction of Panelists
- Organizer/Moderator Introduction
  - How this panel came about
  - Why the topic is of importance to contemporary writers
  - Brief discussion of the relevance of panelists’ work to the topic

Moderator Questions (each followed by panelists’ answers)
- Describe the factual history or personage(s) on which your book was based. What was your relationship to the real-life story? Each panelist shares a 2-minute reading from the book.
- What were the ethical and aesthetic challenges you grappled with in writing your book?
- Did you share the work with anyone whose life or history had been fictionalized in it? Did you tell them you were writing it? What was their reaction?
- To what extent did reviews and/or criticism focus on the factual basis rather than the fictional treatment?
- Looking back, would you do anything differently?

Open Discussion: To be determined by panelists’ responses to the above questions

Audience Q & A