What Is an Author—Off the Net? An Update

Event Outline

Event Description:

In 2000 three members of this panel presented "What Is an Author--on the Net?" at AWP. The landscape has changed, and the question is different too. Online publishing is more inclusive and accessible, with greater outreach than a print-dominant approach tied to top-tier creative writing programs, and most writers, especially poets, make use of both. How has this changed the aesthetic standards of the poetry world? How has it changed the way poets approach their writing and careers?

Organizer and Moderator: Lisa Lewis

Lisa Lewis's books of poetry include *The Unbeliever, Silent Treatment, Vivisect, Burned House with Swimming Pool, The Body Double,* and *Taxonomy of the Missing.* She teaches in the creative writing program at Oklahoma State University and serves as editor of the *Cimarron Review.*

Other Panel Members

Jennifer Kwon Dobbs is the author of *Paper Pavilion, Interrogation Room,* and the chapbooks *Notes from a Missing Person* and *Necro Citizens* (German, English). A co-translator of Sami poetry, she is also senior poetry editor at *AGNI* and Professor of English at St. Olaf College.

Ralph Burns has published seven books, most recently, *But Not Yet,* winner of the Blue Lynx Poetry Award; *Ghost Notes,* winner of the Field Poetry Prize; and *Swamp Candles,* winner of the Iowa Poetry Prize. He edited *Crazy Horse* periodically from 1985 to 2000. He lives in Fair Lawn, New Jersey.

Laura Minor won the 2020 John Ciardi Poetry Prize. Her critically acclaimed debut book of poems, *Flowers as Mind Control,* is on BkMk Press/University of Arkansas Press, 2021. She was also a finalist for the 2019 National Poetry Series and the winner of the 2019 ILA’s Rita Dove Poetry Award.

Clemonce Heard’s poetry collection, *Tragic City,* explores his relationship to Oklahoma and the Tulsa Race Massacre. Heard has been awarded time and space from the Tulsa Artist Fellowship, the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, Sala Diaz, MacDowell, and the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation.
Moderator Questions:

What have writers learned about the possibilities of the online world in supporting their work?
Has online publication become a necessity now for any successful writer?
How are other online literary realities working for us?

Participant Remarks:

Jennifer Kwon Dobbs
Reflecting on the pandemic and its aftermath, she’ll discuss how the literary community experimented with digital spaces during COVID-19’s peak and what has become of them in recent years.

Ralph Burns
When Lisa asked me to answer the question what is an author, my first impulse was to ask another question -- who or what is a reader? What happens between them, and what do they imagine they need? Could they be wrong? So I imagine an author is a conversation, what Johnathon Gardner called a great conversation. So I think a poem is a moment in that conversation with all of its attempts to connect and discover, sometimes to move closer and closer to what seems most difficult.

So it’s something which both changes and remains. And it might be impossible to meaningfully mark how and when the conversation changes, but I think that whatever that glue is that weds both conversations is the thing which lasts. It’s going to be in poems you keep returning to – past and present, and it’s not just writers or words written down, but also other people, your uncle who bent down close to your ear and whispered something and walked away, but also maybe mostly, it’s the way uncertainty sounds, the way it searches.

Laura Minor
I will be discussing how the growth of online publishing has evened the playing field for many literary communities, including growing accessibility for disabled writers. Writers of all backgrounds now have access to free poems, stories, and creative writing scholarship—eliminating, to some extent, a long-reigning exclusivity in the creative writing world. One downside of creative writing as it grows awkwardly alongside social media is the corporate "step over the dead" model of trying to crush the competition, an unfortunate side-effect of the monetization of CW programs far and wide, an unfortunate phenomenon that puts relentless self-promotion over quality control in the work and the finished product, a book. The programs are producing more
writers than ever, making the need to publish greater, which has created an overwhelming amount of new online (and print) publications to the point of saturation and dilution. And because the CW internet now comes with podcasts, Zoom readings, and webinars, the programs themselves are changing. The notion of "expert" is changing with options to work with your favorite writers outside of programs, privately, online—a challenge to the formerly coveted CW "Ivy League" programs. The internet has changed the way we read, access writing, teach writing, and publish our books. And, most importantly, it has changed the way we think, speak, and write. The internet and the information age have added the possibility of immediate and meteoric fame for everyone instead of a few carrots for a few select, special-status players. The future is free and inclusive, and in this future, everyone decides.