Event Title: How Book Reviewing Is Changing and Why It Matters

Event Description: Like everything in publishing, book reviews are in flux, with mainstream venues reducing reviews in exchange for interviews, cover reveals, and book round-ups that feel like marketing pieces. This panel of book critics will discuss why they write book reviews, the state of book reviewing today, the need for diversity in book reviewers and in books reviewed, and how criticism can help reshape an often myopic and inequitable industry.

Event Category: Multiple Literary Genres Craft

Event Organizer & Moderator:

Alice Stephens: Alice Stephens is the author of the novel Famous Adopted People; a book reviewer, essayist and short story writer; co-founder of the Adoptee Literary Festival; facilitator at the Adoptee Voices Writing Group; an editor at Bloom; and a member of the Starlings Collective.

Event Participants:

Ericka Taylor: Ericka Taylor lives in Washington, DC where she writes fiction, book reviews, and opinion pieces. She is a regular contributor to NPR books, and her writing has appeared in YES! Media, Willow Springs Magazine, Bloom, and The Millions. She serves on the board of the PEN/Faulkner Foundation.

Martha Anne Toll: Martha Anne Toll's debut novel, THREE MUSES, was shortlisted for the Gotham Book Prize and won the Petrichor Prize for Finely Crafted Fiction. She brings a long career in social justice to her work as a critic and author interviewer at NPR Books, the Washington Post, Pointe Magazine, The Millions, and elsewhere. Toll is a member of the National Book Critics Circle and serves on the Board of the PEN/Faulkner Foundation. Her second novel, DUET FOR ONE, will be out in early 2025.


Event Agenda:

The moderator will introduce the panelists who will then give a brief introduction on how and why they came to book reviewing and read a short excerpt from a book review or essay. The moderator, who will also be a panelist, will open up discussion with questions that will be addressed to the panel as a whole, as well as to individual panelists. Finally, there will be a 10-15 minute audience Q&A.
Moderator Questions:

1.) We all came to book reviewing in different ways, but we’ve continued over the years not only for of a love of review writing, but also because of a sense of mission. What is your mission as a book reviewer? How is that reflected in the books you review?

2) A bad review also has repercussions for the reviewer: editors prefer good reviews, quotes don’t appear on book jackets, the writing community is fairly small, and more. What do you do with a disappointing book that you cannot in good conscience give a good review? Have you ever agreed to review a book that you suspect you will pan even before reading it?

3) What gives the reviewer the right to review a book? Can you review any book you want, or should you stick with those that are closely associated with your lived experience?

4) For Tope, please discuss the difference in writing long-form and short-form criticism.

5) How is the world of book reviewing changing?

6) What is your advice for aspiring book reviewers and for authors who would like to get their books reviewed?

7) Besides reviewing, how do you support books that you believe are worthy of attention?