EVENT TITLE: The Trans Fantastic: Craft, Themes, Reception

Event Description: Literary realism has treated trans stories with skepticism, flattening trans lives to fit hostile narratives or excluding them completely. Trans writers have responded by embracing the fantastic. Join a panel of trans fantasists to discuss the uniquely transformative nature of our craft, themes, and readership in a time of artistic flowering and mounting danger

Event Category: Fiction Craft & Criticism

Event Organizer & Moderator
Maya Deane: Maya Deane is the author of the critically acclaimed trans historical fantasy debut Wrath Goddess Sing (Morrow, 2022) and a Lambda Literary Award finalist. She teaches writing and memes at New Jersey Institute of Technology.

Event Participants
Alina Boyden:

Izzy Wasserstein: Izzy Wasserstein is the author of two poetry collections, a short story collection, and the forthcoming novella These Fragile Graces (Tachyon, 2024). She is an Assistant Professor of English at CSU San Bernardino, and a Lambda Literary Award Finalist.

Megan Milks: Megan Milks is the author of Margaret and the Mystery of the Missing Body and Slug and Other Stories (both Feminist Press, 2021), as well as Tori Amos Bootleg Webring (Instar, 2021). They coedited the anthology We Are the Baby-Sitters Club and teach writing and gender studies at The New School.

Nino Cipri: Nino Cipri is a queer and trans/nonbinary writer and educator. Their work has been nominated for the Shirley Jackson, World Fantasy, Lambda, Nebula, and Hugo Awards, among others. Nino's YA horror debut, Dead Girls Don’t Dream, will be published by Holt Young Readers in 2024.

Housekeeping Announcements
A few reminders before we begin:

- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the moderator of the panel, Maya Deane, know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

**Opening Remarks**
Good afternoon, and welcome to “The Trans Fantastic: Craft, Themes, Reception.” I’m Maya Deane. Thank you for joining us today; the conference is in full swing, and I imagine many of us are feeling the weariness of exertion compounded by the background weariness of living in 2024. What times we live in! But I hope that for the next hour and fifteen minutes you can join me for a topic I find incredibly interesting: the trans fantastic—whether it is in fact a recognizable mode or subgenre of its own or simply my overdetermined description of a set of common approaches and preoccupations that keep showing up in trans-written fantasy and fantastic literature.

As trans writers in 2024, we’re at something of a crossroads, where hopefully we’ll soon encounter Hecate and the devil. On the one hand, an enormous backlash to our increased visibility and thriving has resulted in mounting state censorship and attacks on our lives at every level. On the other hand, this is the golden age of trans literature, and trans fiction has never been more visible, more commercially viable, or more widely read—and this coincides with a broader ascendancy of fantasy and the fantastic.

A well-known thread of literary realism runs from contemporary trans classics like Imogen Binnie’s *Nevada* in 2013 and Casey Plett’s *Little Fish* in 2018 to the very public success of Torrey Peters’ *Detransition, Baby* in 2021 and more recent books like Emily Zhou’s *Girlfriends*, but many of our most prominent works of fiction are fantasy. Of the four trans fiction finalists in the 2023 Lambdas, three—Izzy Wasserstein, Morgan Thomas, and myself—were nominated for broadly fantastic works, though Morgan’s stories often hover in a complex space of magic realism. Trans bestsellers are disproportionately fantastic-inflected works like those of Andrew Joseph White and Aiden Thomas.

*I have argued before that this is no coincidence;* that the realist mode in fiction, which rose to popularity in the late 19th century as the voice of the middle class
through such exponents as William Dean Howells, is basically inimical to trans existence and made us unmentionable, “unrealistic.” Howells argued in *Criticism and Fiction* that fantastic stories occupied an inferior place in the evolution of literature, and that higher, realistic fiction should “portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and the passions in the measure we all know,” with “fidelity to experience and probability of motive.” In practice, of course, some people—some “men and women,” specifically—were “in the measure we all know” than others: middle-class, bourgeois, white, cisgender men and women.

I believe that there’s something distinctively *ours* about fantasy and the fantastic, where we can subvert, alter, reset, or abolish the rules of realism and unfold tales of glorious difference. I believe that transness structures our craft, our themes, and the way our work is received—but let’s see what our panelists think.

I’m thrilled to be joined today by four stars of contemporary trans fantasy and fantastic literature: Alina Boyden, Izzy Wasserstein, Megan Milks, and Nino Cipri. To get us started, could you each please introduce yourselves and talk briefly about what it means to you to write fantasy and the fantastic as a trans author.

**Participant Opening Remarks**

**Alina Boyden:**

**Izzy Wasserstein:**

**Megan Milks:**

**Nino Cipri:**

**Moderator Questions**

I’m leaving these questions pretty open-ended, but feel free to interpret them as broadly as is helpful, or to disagree with the premise.

1) Is there a distinctively transgender pattern or mode of fantasy and fantastic literature and if so, what are its features?

2) What is the relationship between being trans and your fantasy craft, in terms of what stories you tell and how you tell them?

3) What is the relationship between being trans and your writing career, in terms of how you shape your work for the market and how it is received?
4) What do our stories do for readers, trans and cis, that stories either less fantastic or less trans could not do?

Participant Responses to Moderator Questions
Alina Boyden
Izzy Wasserstein
Megan Milks
Nino Cipri

Q&A Session
At the end of the event, there will be time for a 10-minute Q&A session. The wireless microphone will be passed to persons posing questions, or questions will be repeated into one of the wired microphones.