Pathways to Publishing for Indie Authors of Color
Thursday, February 8th, 2024
9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.
Room 3501CD, Kansas City Convention Center, Level 3

Kiran Bhat is an Indian-American polyglot, traveler, and author who lives in Mumbai. Celest Woo teaches English in NY, and has published a poetry chapbook and a full-length poetry book, each with indie presses. Amy M. Le is the award-winning author of The Snow Trilogy and CEO of Quill Hawk Publishing, a hybrid-publishing company dedicated to amplifying diverse voices one story at a time. Mugabi Byenkya is an award-winning editor, performer, rapper and writer of prose, poetry, comics, essays, drama & songs; in addition to being published in over 40 anthologies and publications, they published their award-nominated Ugandan bestselling debut novel-memoir “Dear Philomena,” in 2017 via Discovering Diversity Publishing a Canadian hybrid-publisher, which was self-published in Uganda in the same year, and released their award-nominated debut mixtape “Songs For Wo(Men) 2” via the independent American record label Hello America Stereo Cassette in 2022. Jee Leong Koh is a Singaporean writer and editor, and the publisher of the NYC-based indie literary press Gaudy Boy.

9:00 - Jee introduces himself and the other four panelists briefly (5 min)
9:05 - Celest speaks about her publishing experience with indie presses in the US (5 min)
9:10 - Mugabi speaks about his experience publishing from the Global South (5 min)
9:15 - Jee speaks about Gaudy Boy, a traditional indie press (5 min)
9:20 - Amy speaks about Quill Hawk, a self-publishing consultancy (5 min)
9:25 - Kiran speaks about Girar, web serialization (5 min)
9:30 - Jee starts Q&A with panelists (20 min)
9:50 - Jee opens the floor to the audience (25 min)
10:15 - End of event

Topics the panel will discuss:

- The accessibility of publishing for POC, Queer, Beyond The Binary, disabled and neurodivergent folks
- The accessibility of publishing for folks who are citizens of the Global South
- The importance of independent presses/publishing taking a chance on folks that the big five and their imprints won’t take a chance on
I think it’s also important to address other alternative models from which people can publish writing, particularly as traditional publishing starts to vanish (KB)

Main points, summed up in a sentence or two, that each panelist wants to make about their pathway towards getting published and what advice they have for other aspiring authors:

**Kiran Bhat:** Discussing Girar, a literary web serialisation that works on a subscription model.

**Mugabi Byenkya:** Being published as a Ugandan citizen without representation, which severely limits opportunities for publishing as publishing favours citizens of the US, Canada, and European countries. Being published by independent presses and labels. Lastly, prioritising accessible literature, due to my disabilities and neurodivergence.

**Jee Leong Koh:** Gaudy Boy publishes Asian authors of poetry, fiction, and literary non-fiction from across the world. We publish and distribute in the US and Singapore. We are a small team of volunteers, so we publish only four books a year. We hold an annual Gaudy Boy Poetry Book Prize to select a winning manuscript for publication. For other genres, we accept book proposals from un-agented authors all year round. We started a translation imprint because translator-editors approached us with their manuscripts. We have since published anthologies of translated fiction from Kazakhstan, Myanmar, and the Philippines. We’ve commissioned another anthology, this one by Sri Lankan women writing in Tamil.

**Celest Woo:** I’ve had big strokes of luck, and also the opposite: I’m sure we all have stories of frustration, being ignored, etc. I guess my main things I would share are 1) research the press or venue ahead of time, and 2) keep determined. Things that have been good for me: connecting with other authors (and publishing professionals), seeing what presses publish them; capitalizing on our Covid-induced familiarity with Zoom and electronic communication (I took many zoom writing workshops during pandemic shutdown, many focused on POC, and thus I have a potential lead on an agent for the memoir I’m completing).

A few random snippets: I was published in a great Asian American poetry anthology by a new press, which then folded. Also got a poetry book published by a small indy press founded by my former colleague & former student, which is doing great, but they can’t afford Amazon fees, so their books don’t appear on Amazon. I’m happy that there are way more quality online lit mags & journals now, and some orgs are figuring out how to do poetry readings on zoom and make them warm, affirming spaces.
Amy M. Le: After 30+ rejection letters from literary agents, I decided to self-publish my debut auto-fiction novel, Snow in Vietnam. Why was my manuscript rejected? “I couldn’t relate to the protagonist.” “I am looking for something more diverse.” “Sorry, just didn’t hook me.” I was deflated, but then I received an offer of publication from a small press. And I was elated, however, the terms were not favorable, and I declined the offer. The self-publishing journey can be maddening, frustrating, and self-sabotaging.

My personal experience led me to form my LLC, Quill Hawk Publishing, to help other writers indie-publish their work through a consultative approach. Our writers own all rights and royalties to their work. We help them get from A to Z and beyond which includes everything from obtaining a Library of Congress LCCN to support with PR, branding, marketing, and sales. We even host a writing contest. We believe every story deserves to be told and we support our writers every step of their authorpreneurship journey.

What are some of the pathways to publishing today and how are they different? What are some of the advantages or disadvantages of each? (Traditional, Self, Hybrid, University, Vanity, etc.) And how do these pathways differ from country to country?

What are the economics of publishing? (Cost, timeline, expectations, representation)

And what are the steps to publishing ie the author’s journey, from idea to market? (Writing, Critiquing, Editing, Proofreading, Formatting, Alpha & Beta readers, Reviews, Branding, Promoting, Pitching/Querying, Marketing, etc)

PANEL FORMAT:

Introduction of authors by moderator. Or perhaps we all take a minute to introduce ourselves in our own words (5 mins)

Going through the different types of publishing and defining them - traditional, self publish, hybrid.

Q&A

1) How does independent publishing change depending on the country one lives in or works in? What are some of the hurdles that people of different backgrounds
face when it comes to getting traditionally published, either in these countries, or abroad?

2) What are the economics of publishing (or being a writer as a whole)? I think Amy, you can discuss the steps to getting published here.

3) What work is being done to make publishing more accessible for groups usually excluded from publishing? Mugabi, you can make your points about neurodivergence here.

4) A question to talk about completely alternative publishing models that break away from the traditional ones discussed. This will allow me (Kiran Bhat) to speak about Girar, or Mugabi Byenkya can speak about his work with rap and spoken word.