Scriptural Entanglements: Poets Writing Into, Through, and Against Sacred Texts

Event Outline

Event Organizer & Moderator
Rachel Edelman is a Jewish poet raised in Memphis, TN and the author of the debut collection Dear Memphis (River River Books, 2024). She teaches high school Language Arts in the Seattle Public Schools, where embodying and care root their personal, poetic, and pedagogical practice.

Event Participants
George Abraham is a Palestinian American poet. His debut Birthright (Button Poetry, 2020) won the Arab American Book Award. He is Executive Editor of Mizna, a Kundiman fellow, a board member for the Radius of Arab American Writers, and a Litowitz MFA+MA candidate at Northwestern.
Sarah Ghazal Ali is a Pakistani poet and editor. A Stadler Fellow and winner of the Sewanee Review Poetry Prize, her forthcoming debut collection, Theophanies, was the Editors' Choice for the 2022 Alice James Award. She is the poetry editor for West Branch and lives in the Bay Area, California.
Patrycja Humienik, queer daughter of Polish immigrants, is a writer and editor. She serves as an editor and facilitator with The Seventh Wave, and is an MFA candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her first book, Anchor Baby, is forthcoming with Tin House in 2025.
Rachel Mennies is the author of The Naomi Letters and The Glad Hand of God Points Backwards, winner of the Walt McDonald First-Book Prize in Poetry and finalist for a National Jewish Book Award. She works as an adjunct professor and freelance writer, and serves as a member of AGNI's editorial staff.

Welcome
Welcome to Scriptural Entanglements: Poets Writing Into, Through, and Against Sacred Texts. 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, (Rachel raises hand), 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
(Rachel will read shared statement, then each participant will introduce the next)

I. Shared Statement from Panelists
A. Religious texts are world-making words; their laws have governed families, communities, and nations for millennia. Poetic engagements with scripture illuminate alternate valences
for that language and, thus, for the world we inhabit now. Throughout history and in the present, scripture has been weaponized as a tool for dominance; in our engagement with religious text, we pursue liberation for all people. We assert, through every angle we can, the autonomy and humanity of the Palestinian people alongside all those oppressed by ideologies of domination.

II. Opening Remarks
   A. George Abraham
   1.
   B. Sarah Ghazal Ali
   1.
   C. Rachel Edelman
   1.
   D. Patrycja Humienik
   1.
   E. Rachel Mennies
   1.

III. Questions
   A. What poetic tools propel prismatic interpretations of religious text?
   B. How do we honor lineages of thought while holding poetic agency?
   C. What is the role of translation and transliteration in engagement with scripture?

IV. Audience Questions

Event Application Materials
Description (500 characters, incl. spaces)

Religious scripture is among the oldest and widest-read written material; as such, it carries immense potential for poetic reimagining. In their scriptural entanglements, these five poets explore and explode notions of gender and property, faith and belonging, violence and care. The literary canon is largely white and Christian, and this panel, led by poets across spiritual and religious backgrounds, pushes for a more expansive and inclusive practice of devotional engagement on the page.

Statement of Value (500 characters, incl. spaces)

Religious texts are world-making words; their laws have governed families, communities, and nations for millennia. Poetic engagements with scripture illuminate alternate valences for that language and, thus, for the world we inhabit now. At a time when Christian hegemony motivates state laws that strip away bodily autonomy, poetic exegesis resists dominant dogmas. In this panel, five poets from Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and unaffiliated spiritual identities will speak.