2024 AWP/EVENT OUTLINE

TITLE: Writing Your Way Through a Major World Event

EVENT CATEGORY: Multiple Literary Genres Craft

Event Organizer & Moderator

Sasha Vasilyuk is a journalist and author of the debut novel Your Presence Is Mandatory (Bloomsbury, April 2024), which will also be out in France, Germany, Italy, Finland, and Brazil. Her writing has been published in the New York Times, Time, Harper's Bazaar, Los Angeles Times, Narrative, USA Today and others. She grew up between Ukraine and Russia before moving to California at the age of 13.

Event Participants

Katya Apekina is the author of The Deeper the Water the Uglier the Fish (2018) and Mother Doll (March, 2024). She translated poetry and prose from Russian for Night Wraps the Sky: Writings by and about Mayakovsky (2008), short-listed for the Best Translated Book Award. Born in Moscow, she lives in LA.

Jasmin Iolani Hakes is from Hilo, Hawaii, a place that heavily influences her writing. Her work has appeared in the Sacramento Bee and the LA Times. She is a 2018 Hedgebrook fellow. HULA, her debut novel, is out now with HarperVia.

Cecilia Rabess is a writer and data scientist in San Francisco. She is the author of the novel Everything’s Fine. Her nonfiction writing has been featured in McSweeneys, FiveThirtyEight, Fast Company, and FlowingData, among other places.

Lena Zycinsky is a poet and artist whose work appeared in the New York Times, Poetry Archive, Consequence among other places. Author of numerous books and shows abroad, she holds a BA in English Literature and is currently a low-residence MFA student at NYU in Paris.

Opening Remarks

Today’s panel on Writing Your Way Through a Major World Event tackles the enticing, yet daunting desire of writers to set their work around an important world event, whether historical like the Russian Revolution, World War II, or Hawaii’s colonization or more current like the U.S. 2016 presidential election or the war in Ukraine.

Choosing such a setting presents multiple challenges. One is setting your particular story or poem apart from the other artistic treatments of the event. For example, a WWII novel is practically a cliché these days and writing anything new and unique about that time can feel nearly impossible.
Another challenge is one of scale. We are not historians. We’re storytellers, which means we must find a smaller, human-scale story to tell within the larger historical context. The third major challenge – especially for novelists - is one of balance because we must figure out how to weave fictional elements into a nonfictional framework.

Today, we’ve invited one poet and four novelists who also write essays and short stories to discuss their unique approaches to writing around a major world event.

**Participant Initial Remarks**

The panelists will give a brief description of their work and read a 5-min passage, commenting on their decision to tackle a major event and what inspired the particular story they found within that framework.

**Moderator Questions:**

- What are some opportunities and limitations of writing a fictional narrative or poetry surrounding a real historical event?

- How did you go about researching the historical event for your novel? Can you talk practically about the kind of research you did--what was and wasn't helpful?

- How do you decide what the reader already knows about said event/time in history, and what you need to explain or provide context for?

- How do you account for the idea of hindsight in approaching world events, the idea that looking back means you are bringing a lot of hindsight to the topic, or if the topic is a world event that's still ongoing you are *not* bringing hindsight to the story that future readers may have?

- Have you encountered instances when your understanding of past events changed and made you reconsider your own past statements or work that you’ve published? As people who are defined by our written word, how do we account for our past mistakes?

**Audience Q &A**