ACCESIBILITY OUTLINE

EVENT TITLE:
Make Yourself at Home: Writing the Familiar from a Distance

EVENT DESCRIPTION:
How do writers convincingly render the places that shaped them as their distance from those places increases? If our lived experience of a place is a form of research, what are its limits as time passes? How can we avoid falling back on long-held assumptions about a setting we used to know intimately? Five writers whose fiction is deeply associated with a particular place and who live outside of it will discuss their strategies for rendering settings simultaneously familiar and distant.

EVENT CATEGORY:
Fiction Craft and Criticism

EVENT ORGANIZER & MODERATOR:
Jennine Capó Crucet is the author of How to Leave Hialeah, Make Your Home Among Strangers, and My Time Among the Whites. Her work has received numerous awards, and her novel has been an all-campus/first-year read at over 35 colleges. She works as an associate professor of creative writing and Ethnic Studies at the University of Nebraska.

EVENT PARTICIPANTS:
Manuel Muñoz is the author of a novel, What You See in the Dark, and the short-story collections Zigzagger and The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue, which was shortlisted for the Frank O’Connor International Short Story Award. He has been recognized with a Whiting Writer’s Award, three O. Henry Awards, and an appearance in Best American Short Stories. Mentored by Helena María Viramontes, he is currently directing the creative writing program at the University of Arizona.
Laura van den Berg is the author of two story collections and the novels *Find Me* and *The Third Hotel*, which was a finalist for the New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award. Her third collection of stories, *I Hold a Wolf by the Ears*, will be published in June.

A Chicana/Latinx feminist, **Helena María Viramontes** is the author of a bilingual edition of *The Moths and other Stories* and two novels, *Under the Feet of Jesus* and *Their Dogs Came With Them*. She is currently working on a novel titled *The Cemetery Boys*, and is interim director of the Creative Writing Program at Cornell University.


**OPENING REMARKS:**

Welcome to Make Yourself at Home: Writing the Familiar from a Distance.

A few reminders before we begin:
- Please check to make sure that there are no chairs that have moved into the aisle or into the areas marked for wheelchairs.
- In every session room, there are chairs reserved for those with accessibility needs. Please be aware that attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of this accommodation.
- Presenters will use the microphones at all times for those who may be hard of hearing. During the Q&A portion of this event, a wireless microphone will be passed through the audience.
Please wait to receive the microphone before asking your question.

- If you need a hard copy of the event outline for accessibility reasons, please see the moderator of this event and one will be delivered to you. You may also access this document on the #AWP20 mobile app or on the online version of the schedule on awpwriter.org.

Thank you all for being here. We know you have a lot of excellent panels to choose from, and we really appreciate you spending the next 75 minutes with us.

I hope you’re as intrigued by this topic as I am. This panel came about for somewhat selfish reasons. I’m working on a new novel set in present day Miami, which is where I grew up and where I like to say my imagination lives—much of my fiction has been set there. And I started to realize, to my horror, that I was struggling to depict Miami as I drafted some of the scenes, because Miami has changed a lot since the days when I lived there. I’m finding my way through and slowly gaining back my confidence, but I’m very excited today to be surrounded by these fantastic writers, who have all made brilliant careers writing about places that aren’t the same ones in which they were raised and who have navigated and found solutions to the very same questions I’ve encountered: Tiphanie Yanique, Manuel Muñoz, Laura van den Berg, and Helena María Viramontes. Please join me in welcoming them.

PANELIST INITIAL/OPENING REMARKS (10 minutes per panelist)

TIPHANIE YANIQUE: TBD

MANUEL MUÑOZ:

- I have a hard time not thinking of “home” as “place.” Nearly every piece of fiction I’ve ever written has let these two words act as doubles.
• “Home” and “place” very often mean “landscape” or “region” to me: California’s Central Valley remains, at least in my mind, inaccessible to the imagination of many readers. I think that’s why I am often driven to describe it first, sometimes even before characters.

• Helena was instrumental in getting me to recognize that “place” could narrow down to specificity of neighborhood. “Town” or “store” is not enough: it must be named. Everything must be named. Yet I battle with the fact that I come from—and feel that my characters sometimes run from or even embrace—places (and, yes, homes) which obliterate your name.

• The constant challenge is to make myself think of “place” as smaller than it is—the more intimate and unique it is to the character moving through it, the greater that tension about why they see the world in a particular way.

• A conversation with the Irish writer Nuala Ní Chonchúir alerted me to how dialogue and events can embody place simply by how our conversations enact or reinforce or encode our cultural ideas. She had never visited the western part of the US, but she found a strange affinity of place when she read Faith Healer. It reminded her of the rural Ireland she knew—not the physical landscape, but the psychic one, a place dominated by religious orthodoxy. This was revelatory for me, though it felt obvious as soon as I heard it—that someone could see “home” in a place that they had never been.

LAURA VAN DEN BERG:
Writing from a place of humility and curiosity vs. a place of arrogance; how time passing can change and complicate one’s perspective; thinking about all the questions I never asked when I lived in Florida and how I am learning to ask them now (for me I think this is also connected to a deeper valuing of the kind of knowledge people who have never left, like my sister, holds about
place, for example—again something I’d failed to do for a long time, going back to curiosity, humility, etc.); the role research can play in writing the familiar.

I now suspect I avoided writing Florida for a long time because I felt like it was a place that had harmed me and that I had harmed in kind. To engage that most familiar place creatively meant also to engage with some really painful histories and what I saw as the worst parts of myself. And that was work that I was just really unprepared to do—or not even alert that I needed to do—for a long time. So perhaps the particular demands writing the familiar can place on us as writers and how we might imagine meeting them?

HELENA MARÍA VIRAMONTES:
Discussion of the writer as exile in her own country.

MODERATOR QUESTIONS:

1) What is the position of the writer when writing the familiar? Meaning: where exactly do we think we are writing from? How are we encountering or defining “the familiar?”

2) In Alexander Chee’s essay, “The Autobiography of my Novel,” he talks about researching Maine, where he grew up. How do we approach, if we do at all, research when writing the familiar?

3) What role does memory play in writing the familiar? Are we doomed to write the places we’re from as they are in our memories, stuck in a particular place in time?

Q&A session:
At the end of the event, there will be time for a 5-10 minute audience Q&A session.