



Library podcast

2018 Jack Straw Writing Program

[00:00:05] Welcome to The Seattle Public Library's podcasts of author readings and library events. Library podcasts are brought to you by The Seattle Public Library and Foundation. To learn more about our programs and podcasts, visit our web site at www.spl.org. To learn how you can help the library foundation support The Seattle Public Library go to foundation.spl.org.

[00:00:36] Hi everybody. Thanks so much for being here. I'm Stacia Brandt and I'm the Literature and Humanities program manager here at the Seattle Public Library.

[00:00:48] And as we are getting started today I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered together on the ancestral land of the Coast Salish people. We would like to honor their elders past and present and we thank them for their stewardship of this land. Welcome to today's program with the Jack Straw Writers presented in partnership with Jack Straw Cultural Center. We think our author series sponsor Gary Kunis and the Seattle Times for their generous promotional support of library programs. We're also grateful to the Seattle Public Library Foundation private gifts to the foundation from thousands of donors help the library provide free programs and services that touch the lives of everyone in our community. Now I am delighted to welcome Daymond Rendell the twenty eighteen Writers Program curator Daymond is a poet playwright performer and teaching artist. He's performed in venues across the country and has been repeatedly commissioned by both Seattle and Bellevue art museums as teaching artist. He's faculty member at Freehold theater and tap lab at the Washington state teaching artist training Lab. He's also adjunct faculty at Seattle University and Tacoma School of the arts and writer in residence through Seattle Arts and Lectures writers in the school program and also the chagrin of her Poetry Foundation. As a writer he is a 2013 extra hour writer of honor voices writers workshop fellow and his work has been published by City Arts Poetry NW Specter and crosscut magazines and he recently co adapted the novel Welcome to Bragg's bill into a play for book Repertory Theatre. So please help me welcome Daymond Randall. Good afternoon

[00:02:46] Was a delayed response. Let's try that again. Good afternoon. All right you're there you're alive you're awake.

[00:02:54] Excellent is good to see all of your beautiful faces. For those who are up a little bit higher you are more than welcome to come in closer.

[00:03:03] This is a bit of an intimate reading as a long bio and a lot of time is spent on things that that I've done in the past.

[00:03:12] I think my role or what is as important about the role that I played as as curator was having the pleasure of being introduced or reintroduced to these 12 incredible writers. And this reading is a celebration of them and the work that they have created and their utter brilliance. So let's give a round of applause to the twenty eighteen Jack Straw Writers. Applause

[00:03:44] As an audience. One thing that I'm going to encourage you to do is to allow yourselves the freedom to be reactive to feel what these writers are putting out there into your space to let it impact you to let it move you. So if you feel the need to snap in response I know that's the stereotypical poet thing to do but I highly recommend it. It is a way of giving feedback to the artists and letting them know that you're being moved by what they're saying.

[00:04:17] There's also the name that makes you think. Everybody try it.

[00:04:23] It's a feel good. That just let that vibration hit you. There's the let's try that. Was something you went high pitch with that I like it. There's a yes

[00:04:38] Oh somebody went Yeah. Breaking out of the mold. I like it. Feel free to interact and give that feedback to the artists to let them know how they're moving you.

[00:04:50] All right.

[00:04:52] One thing that I absolutely love about each of the Jack Straub writers is their willingness to lean into the places we want. They peer into the darkness with eyes wide open. It often feels as if they are archaeologists uncovering bits and pieces of the voices and stories we have abandoned or forgotten or lost sight of. And regardless of how we may have treated these wrote these words they hold them up to the light for us all to see.

[00:05:22] Like magicians there's suddenly pulling these words out like a dove that we were positive had gotten smushed in the hat or they pull out the card that we saw as one thing and now it's been presented to us as something completely different. These writers remind us of who we are who we have been and who we might still become if we are willing to believe or more simply see with each of the writers I have an introduction for them.

[00:05:56] First we are going to be welcoming up Brian Brian's narratives feel fresh out of the box brand new and Deja Vu nostalgic at the same time. I was astounded at Brian's ability to build these fantastical fragmented stories of which he only gives us the beginning not as a tease or because he ran out of ideas but because this is the part we needed to hear and yet having heard only a fraction.

[00:06:26] We are still left feeling whole. Please welcome to the stage Brian

[00:06:46] Thank you. I'm gonna jump right in

[00:06:56] Take heed of your body and your body's surroundings find your thoughts at a location outside of your body remember that location emerges from the locus a place.

[00:07:08] Remember that your psyche or your mind emerges from breath. And thus your mind need not stay in a place located within the body but can and should spread to fill up the entire room the entire place the locus is psyche. Our mind is a place to enter it. Let it exit you let the room read and warm become your breath. Step into the self and observe the vaulted arches of bone. Observe the golden dirt between your toes. Observe the olive colored marble columns decorated with a network of blue veins. The room breathes as you breathe the windows blink their eyes and the walls expand from surrealist Meditations by Yom Caligula. That that was 1927 in our home you walk against yourself every possession in morning light dignifies itself with a lineage of object doubt. Thus the symbols such that they are given to us from the missions of the universe enter the mind's eye as a total of all perfect known things. This home is a metamorphosis and Chrysalis wherein we become all possibilities and lost opportunities within each chamber is a new awakening. Enlightenment does not live here but it certainly visits and is polite company. So we best pay attention to the nocturnal lessons of sleeping matinees the liturgy of the soul from the smoke school dictionary of dreams by Bronwen smoke 1870 the wasp dreams and the egg before it breaks before it breaks free. It dreams of the death of Father once free mother nourishes she feeds the creature images of the future they are cultivated from her honey in a paper house predictions written on the walls the devil plays the trumpet the songs can kill but within death we find memories of the Saviour Celtic text is Cordero visions of the WASP 1869 I don't find it pleasant when people smile why should it please us animals baring their teeth.

[00:09:47] I don't know anything about evolution or instinct but I don't think the smile was designed to make people comfortable Sure. Maybe when someone is in a small group a person sitting with his friends for example in that small group the smile might be somewhat positive. Everyone in the little pack huddles together and bares their teeth and howls and laughter grunts and snorts and stretches their face wide. A show of solidarity perhaps

[00:10:15] But the outsider I think walking by this pack of snarling wolves is intimidated by the smiles. I'm intimidated. They have their own secret world to growl at and I am not invited. And maybe they laugh at me. Maybe they smile when they pass me in the hallway or in the parking lot. The smile isn't comforting. It doesn't make me happy and it doesn't make me think that they are happy. I think they want to attack me. I think they grin and guffaw because they want to kill me. I'm afraid of them. I admit it I'm afraid of everyone from smoke school by Jacob Baltar 1998 this world I've created I did so to fill a void within myself but the void is endless and so the world must continually grow like a cancer despair is living within the void living within that fantasy world is still living within the void. It is still despair more palatable initially but it will cut me off from what is real.

[00:11:24] I will talk to no one care for no one care not for the version of myself that exists in the real world but only for the version of myself that exists in this construction.

[00:11:34] There are other ways to fill to fill the void. I can drink or make love but creating this world strikes me as the best option at least with this I can share my void with you. Here is my void. Do you find it beautiful. From fantasy and sorrow.

[00:11:53] By Nessa Lovelace 1959 thank you.

[00:12:11] Oh we are off to a damn fine start. Did you hear something that moved you. Did you hear something that the major think. Excellent. We are going to continue.

[00:12:25] Next up is Kumari Kumari is not only a mastermind of brevity. She is the Shruti of brevity O'Connor forever in writing. There is a commonly used phrase killing off your darlings describes this challenge of cutting out words lines sometimes whole characters that the author loves in the service of that piece of writing.

[00:12:51] I often imagine Kumari standing literally over the pages of her work staring down each word of her poems. And if they so much as flinch they got to go so that what we are left with is the pristine Lee picked clean bones and marrow a foundation we can stand on and not a hair's breadth.

[00:13:14] More please welcome Kumari.

[00:13:27] Can I can I just this should I leave it. I'm going to leave it so I'm going to share three poems with you all from a collection of works that I am bringing out

[00:13:44] That draws a connection between Christian folklore and present day misogyny and patriarchy. And the first one that I'm going to share is called The Garden. And so this one is based off of this story of the Garden of Eden if anyone is unfamiliar with this story in the Bible there was the first man and the first woman Adam and Eve and they were in this like utopian garden. And God told them that they could have everything in that garden except for one tree. And so of course with that being the one thing they couldn't have. That's the one thing they want it and that's the thing they hate. And the story was that the woman ates from the tree and gave it to her husband and once they ate they found out that they were naked and tried to hide themselves from God and God knew that they had eaten from the tree and kicked him out the garden. And after that there were a bunch of consequences that happened to the rest of humanity. So this poem the garden is my interpretation of that story of the Garden of Eden and in that moment when he saw her partake of the

[00:15:02] Angel that was the forbidden fruit of the tree of God Adam realized he was inadequate naked.

[00:15:16] He saw what the woman pulled from his body knew long before that he was dim and dirt made that the angel was her own piece of for ever to consume while he was merely her limitation in paradise. And Adam felt the heave of less than like

[00:15:44] The first heart that ever broke then told Eve to put some fucking clothes on.

[00:15:57] And the second piece I want to share is called severance.

[00:16:04] They want your praise to anoint their feet to lord over you with dominion and power. They want to for a give you of your inferiority to sprinkle benevolence upon you like holy water. They want to build themselves in the all mighty image of God with the leftover carvings of your fervent courts.

[00:16:35] And for that you must realize that you are a rib a rib you are an incomplete body of Blaine and the last few someone to share is called chalice for the people of Flint Michigan with empty cups and running faucets someone fed them a story of Jesus turning water to wine.

[00:17:17] Here they heave from their subsequent thirst lies wafer thin as the body laid pours out as the blood do this in remembrance. Do this and remember it do this and dismember them I mean

[00:17:55] You can start to see why the selecting of these 12 riders was not difficult at all.

[00:18:04] Our next writer on the list is Corbin who is not present but I wanted to share the intro that I wrote for him. Part 2 bar fight part salons part fever dream and part 3 a.m. howl at the moon. Corbin holds up the mirror to show us who we are by showing us who he is.

[00:18:30] Minus the fun house he chooses to engage the aftershocks more so than the Richter scale measurements. The peak of the roller coaster the thrill of the illusion of weightlessness gravity's curse the inevitable impact and the echoes reverberation Corbin sorts through the beautiful wreckage and always shows us what he finds.

[00:18:56] So while Corbin is not here one thing to be aware of is that you can buy the anthologies so that you can take home with you all of the writer's work. Next up we are going to be welcoming to the stage Meredith Meredith plays tricks on her readers minds.

[00:19:15] She takes us to places we have never been with memories that are not ours and somehow leaves us remembering. Then she takes us to places we have been a thousand times aspects of our lives we have lived on repeat and invites us to somehow experience them as if it is for the very first time. It is not that we have forgotten or blindly ignorant. Her words teach us to bloom and remind us that we are new every day. Please welcome Meredith

[00:20:00] Hi. So I want to just take a moment and think this so many people and institutions who have made this eleven months possible especially Daymond Levi the people of Jack Straw people of the Seattle library and this year's fellow Jack Straw Writers.

[00:20:22] It has been a remarkable honor to be among you. I'll be reading an excerpt from my second book length work which was begun as part of this year's jockstrap program my lover says she will teach me to dive we stand on the dock at the end of the day and she shows me the head tucked

the arms one foot first the bend of the knees and each time I falter each time some part of me refuses to believe that the water will catch me but the water will still be there that the water will part at the last minute. She says When I surface you pull back instead of entering all at once I enter afraid so many times that my thighs bruise in huge constellations and sink holes of blue a record of the thing I could not commit to that I believe there is a me sized hollow in the lake somewhere. But what are my chances of finding it that I believe there is a girl sized hollow in time held open by the grandfather clock in the green room by the pendulum still swinging though the clock itself is gone but I believe there is room in me for the rest of me to return I will reach right through time I tell her it's not that hard just guide my hands in the dark a girl does not lose herself all at once a girl loses herself by degrees so incrementally that the process of it cannot be seen it is only in looking back on the broad expanse that you can tell the light has begun to turn inward refractory a girl in her narrow bed a girl making static with the blankets and the sheets a girl and her ceiling of stick on stars in the upper room. The rocking chair moves on the uneven floorboards. Ship on the water's ship on the waters whose body holds whose body who cannot sleep. Who is here to hold her not carefully. The wind is turning the pages.

[00:23:35] Tell us a story.

[00:23:37] The girls say when the lights go out once I begin there was a girl who time could not touch like me one of them says. And an older one corrects her. Like us I've blistered myself where I held the two small acts against the lilac blistered myself the way it did not finish the work though the X bit and bit but never cut through someone coming down the beach strident I unhinge my knife I would I say I would says the blade go back the avenging angel guard your life with your life and if I can in the end gather myself back. If I can create a record of the process as proof the poison will go back a whole ungodly wave. You will feel it as it rushes by to meet and strike its mark. At the height of it the worst thing that has happened to me happens to me every several minutes it runs through me hot and frantic and I am desperate to prove to myself. You are in another body now you're in another year look I command myself the yellow kitchen table your lover's hand her hand on the stem of the glass look at the glass the star that is etched how the light cast that star on the table and I imprint on that star for a minute but I flood again from the center stay says the star the six pointed star as it sinks out of sight I feel the darkness running through me I feel my spirit slipping I struggle against the memory and the memory struggles back eye of the needle eye of the needle says the huge and spinning Moon This is the hardest part. Your whole life is passing through

[00:26:38] Next we are welcoming up Dougie do Jews work makes us dive head first into the looking glass in his investigation he has forceps for grasping and labelling purposes and push pins to hold the captive. Each and every recollection he finds. He's also got a magnifying glass that he could use to savagely burn the pieces of his past that he doesn't want to reckon with. But in this painstaking search this honest thumbing back through memory. While there is regret there is a gentle quarter rising of wounds stoking of the fire of love he has for his kids and even some hints of hope for the future. Please welcome Dougie I'm just going to cruise through as many of these poems as I can in the time that I've got all of them are new ish and one very new the first one's called Ode to the golden hour on the day of finalizing my divorce Oh thank God you're finally here to various into the dark

filtered through the first to remind me of my greenness everything is green and blue and yellow even my daughter's open wound a cut on a scar on a knee I snap at the kids all through dinner irritated at the light at the sun at the slight of my nose and jaw on their faces you saw that right you're right there on their brows pulled in the dimples of their chin I raised my voice against myself and immediately apologized I think that's growth

[00:28:35] Is that new growth old love Maybe that's unfair to ask of light after dropping off the kids I drove straight for the ocean startled to have stopped at the shore stapled and gold I breathed in the salt laced in gold the driftwood got that shine on it and broken shelves flecked and gold even the seabirds dipped in gold. Everyone knows the trick of the golden hour is that it all ends in dark but the part I'll never forget is the second before the sun's final snarl ending with blood in the sky just occurred to me the first three poems are like ode elegy and then the next one's a lyric that was accidental this isn't elegy for a childhood ending with a prophet's open hands we never seem to repair our children enough Pops. We teach them to burn the sandalwood but not the words that beckon our ancestors we teach them the words that beckon our ancestors but not what to do when they arrive or maybe I was toying with the fringe of my prayer mat instead of listening to it but that day that in my mind never arrived quite right I don't even remember the ride home in your gray 1984 VW Rabbit so stubborn was I so determined to beat back the wolf to be an example enough to outrun your voice crooning the on and a house turned mosque so assured and the persistence of virtue any virtue even and especially if it wasn't my own. Everything is a choice even in the deluge of an ordinary day even struck or stuck in prayer even when a leather belt sprouts from your clenched fist and your school age child pleads Poppa please Poppa stretch my hands across these fields of plum and clover rub moments and time between my fingers roughing them with your mercy pops pressed them into hardness I am your type your divine retribution I am your a sanction trial a child's collar in your closed grasp a writhing boy's body hovering inches above the ground.

[00:30:36] Death lies below our feet a fee a sea of arms grasping at the sky. Death knows more than you what it's owed mayors summit is close enough to America to be paid its dues a banker sneezes and an immigrant mother prays to her child to forgive their frothing Father who forgives who in this play. The curtain swings open the play repeats ad nauseum I'm exhausted Pop's faith takes so much and I don't know how to grieve anymore none of us know how to grieve anymore such a public spectacle of collective ineptitude tell me it's okay to fold at the sound of the onion pops

[00:31:14] To drop to stop running when the wolf finally nips at our heels to fall when no one living will catch you there are so many of us huddled down here around the heat of Hades we set the new colossus aflame years ago we're still swapping stories by its light well Lockheed these men of faith with faces like yours pops know a good story is mostly smoke just a hint of blood the longest beard among them the mom.

[00:31:39] I'm pretty sure says to me I will never prove a counterfactual without faith. At least that's what I believe he meant by yet another retelling of the Prophet Ibrahim peace be upon him intending so much to sacrifice his son alone atop a mountain which while dramatic makes for a long fall from

grace how devastating to be devastated at the sight of your living son your hands on bloodied still receiving the grace of God it's done.

[00:32:10] After the long one there's a really short one. Ibrahim if you don't know is just the Arabic Muslim analogue to Abraham. This is called short lyric as Ibrahim sacrificed Sultan. Is this boy's body a lamb or a blade. Shall I a slender bone to pick hurl at my trembling father. I watch his hand come down then nothing so heavy the thud I hear ringing my death which no more chooses here to walk through is a door and the debt of some other story to phrase blow obsessed with Ibrahim at the moment.

[00:32:50] Is the third poem where he appears and will probably be the last one in this it's called when I say Wolf I mean a knife handle falling I mean the door knob turning liquid in hand to God combat I mean what hasn't been met by whole when I say Wolf I mean red red dripping take this finger and make blue here's bone when I say bone I mean ghost I was Ibrahim's boy trust we get in. I mean my pops is alum and lead concentrate on the veering when I say veering I mean hover when I say hover I mean palms like teacups wide enough to pour the Milky Way and some work visas into when I say into I here into it's me not shukran I mean how are you I am yes thank you. When I say Wolf I mean my own I mean it's the year twenty to twenty and I'm still a child in a forest all the trees slender I italics no one ask how I got here when I say here I mean a nation made and unmade by blood or do I mean a body.

[00:34:02] Thank you. Uh. Time for another short one. All right last one. It's called early to the dentist. Here I am at eleven twenty three a puff of amaranth and a crown of hops a room filled to the brim and yet I am consumed by a politics of grace. It isn't even lunch yet. And Dan has explained the legal standard upon which we know drone strikes to be foolproof. Kathy tells the room about her affair. Emily floats or veers and the joke is never revealed martial shall I say to no one in particular.

[00:34:39] Today is a good day for a tomato blossom to field to bless the furious knees of Trump of a tribe of had Dawn stooped over an asparagus stock I will consume in three bites or less who I am that is the arbiter of violence I sit on pleather seats when you say community it ends forming the start of a joyless smile it's the same for me as well or as that imagined threshold. Surely someone is left out in the cold ticking their tongue against a flash of teeth

[00:35:19] I was not paying at all attention to the time of duty and asked two more times do I have time for another. Yes yes there would have been time James Baldwin said if I love you I have to make you conscious of the things you don't see these writers consistently make us see things that we don't see but need to next we are welcoming up Danielle Danielle's work could be likened to a legend or a ghostly spirit ethereal impactful mysterious or like or a gamey layered and forever unfolding. Or like an octopus skilled adept and a bit ancient. But none of that is accurate enough when you listen to Danielle's work you quickly realize there is none other like her. She cites influences like Shel Silverstein Donna Smith and Tupac Shakur. But in her work you'll find only a faint note of them because it's her truth. She holds at her core like a wine that's been perfectly aged but there's nothing faint about her words. They hit like the impact of a fall one that makes you count your blessings. That

makes you appreciate the view on the way down and may even make you rethink your fear of heights. Please welcome Danielle

[00:37:02] Had a little bit of a short commute to get here. Shout out to New York. I want to just think Damon. I want to thank Levi. I want to thank all the Jack Straw Writers in particular. Julianna.

[00:37:15] Kristen once called Word I still love poetry.

[00:37:20] Some of it anyway. The kind I like when we move. Pace that night the second win before actually sleeping. We vibrate dusk. You respond to my hugs with squirms and sick days. I draw to your morning dressings of face paint and smell goods. I know what pretty means. It doesn't last. The words are remembered but the scent is often reminded in passing. Fraud is the best way to describe aging crayons under fingernails or food stains on gray t shirts. I am alone for once in my room. Hearing echoes from past house parties the performance self. Ready with a black shirt on the black ants marching across the screen the world before civilization and country lines and immigrations. Just the dream I think about the boy on the bus and where he will be buried. And if anyone will place flowers on the carved stone in the names of clouds a teal and orange Dragonfly clips onto one green strand sways back and forth and this mother fucker moves like a blade of grass some pops.

[00:38:22] This is my two hundred and forty third plane ride.

[00:38:25] Ballpark figure they always pull me off the line. They always say it's a random search. Chicken liver you always called me when I have plenty n is half assed half assed nightmares scattered with broken pine cones even those the ones that you think are perfect. Turn it over to expose it's broken I turn her over to plow her exposed broken I'm a citizen here but you couldn't tell the difference you miss cooking me Black Eyed Peas this New Year tracing my pale finger over your shape up freshly shaved your nails were never trimmed but I held your hand tight in that scorching hot apartment with all the windows held up with books that no one read my pigtailed still crooked under the rosary by your bed we sprinkle with baby powder our air conditioning where you left to find the other woman or for rock with the other kids you had never told me about or the guts that you held in your hand at the poker table next to a bottle of E and J. The roaches in the ashtray playing with the ones on the wall and a sawed off shotgun under Daddy's bed Pops please forgive me I've taken up most of your vices as legacy I'm sorry I'm not more attractive I'm sorry I'm not more ladylike I'm sorry that I don't shave my legs and night I'm sorry young not a baby mama I'm sorry you got karma come into you cloak and collect this soak in it right.

[00:39:38] Tattered and frayed and tattered spleen side up I dig two fingers inside and tug until the inside slides out to finger the bits in search of the ache and so the outside creeps in and I am inside out seems like street lights glow when happened to be just like Mom is passing in front of me so I hopped in the cab and I pay my fare see no mom that's the nation but I'm just not there in the streets another New York City memoir. Muscle memory rides home on streets scented with garbage and rats with facial expressions. This has been what you've called home and that's still your mother but her eyes hang lower and your wallet is still from high school and Jason still missing a front tooth and lies

there with that guy that we all kept warning her about and we're all that guy we've been warning her about and there's always a she but no one stays the night and that's where you called right since you could remember lips on lips and slimy tongues but now you know you've been doing it wrong so the bed is warm with your own sweat and no one else's and the rats still scamper when you hit the strip of body bags lining the sidewalk under that hospital light yellow glow over the streets and in June you already feel summer slipping and it start and it's already Gray in September so your mattress sheets to the occasion and every 15 minutes or so into the event you Irish exit to smoke a spliff and find your legs pumping forward and a sort of smell circling each block giving each chunk of land its own fragrance of independence like the cheese and the warnings each find their place in your bold fist and you know you just rather be home and I don't feel like she's mine enough God I feel like I could have you wanna end up butterfly on my wrist you make pretty women out of my skin and I don't feel like and I know you wouldn't.

[00:41:29] Pink carpet with her pink prints on my juice glass gaps in her lip stains like the gaps when she spirals and I jump off the side of the earth tandem into her unapologetic blackness a grass for Glitter grin and only like a skateboard trying to push buttons I am not a Gameboy writing Andy across my feet because I'm always your toy as boy or girl grabbing all my clothes like her hands that claw long slits to my casing skinning an aging ghost like she calls me the I Gatsby. I like her lip prints off my cup it's safer than her mouth. Thank you

[00:42:17] This is gone by way too fast.

[00:42:22] Next up is Natasha there is a surrender to Natasha's work a trust that is required to ask the deeper heavier questions because when we do there is no guarantee that we will receive the answers we want or any at all. And this sort of uncertainty this doubt is so palpable and makes us so very uncomfortable we hide it and hide from it. But it is absolutely necessary for growth for sites for us to really be able to see who we are instead of who we think we are. We have to be willing to not know. Natasha is brave enough to show us that journey like the canary in the mines and she sends us word that these doubts are real but so are we. Please welcome Natasha

[00:43:24] Thank you to everyone for being here today and a big thanks to Jack Straw and Daymond for adding me to such an incredibly talented cohort. When I applied part of my wish was to meet different writers in the area and I just had no idea what to expect and three writers who have been flying in from different places have also been part of this group it's been such an honor. Thank you so much. My project is about living in two different worlds at the same time. My father's from India. My mother mother's from Holland. We are first generation American a lot of it touches on that theme but what I'm going to read today came from the application and it has more to do with what women are what is expected of women in seating themselves to men talks about aggression and you'll see even as a naturopathic doctor the struggles we face that our financial this small house the man in the blue and green hat the one with the pom pom begs for change. My car ran out of gas he needs whatever I can give him I need a world where men don't expect me to fuel them this small house of debt I have could feed my family your family

[00:44:56] Forever this price of higher education this price of becoming a doctor for which I will struggle to afford my own I have always loved too much.

[00:45:11] The Giving Tree around the corner. I spy a family all bright and shiny.

[00:45:19] They are fresh pennies. I locate the dust cloth work my edges.

[00:45:26] Somewhere I am something beyond process before the man next door decided you were his north before you enlist shades all day before your landlords insist he'll never talk to anyone before you before the metal rages till three before you ask for help.

[00:45:45] We don't feel comfortable approaching before you insist. I live alone less than ten feet away before he shows you the traveling lines from Marley Ellis to patella before you call your medical friend cellulitis instabilities before you urge him to visit the emergency before you beg him to lower the volume before he gives you his cell.

[00:46:07] Call me whenever you need me to turn it down. I'm sorry.

[00:46:14] I'm sorry before he switches from metal to porn before you notice his back doors open always open even in winter towards you before your landlord's contact his absentees before you break your lease before you lose more money. Home before your friends move you 50 miles away before your doubt devour a butter like it is essential before he drives his car into the golf course like before you read the police blotter. Blank was found at the corner of blank and blank screaming just screaming help

[00:46:55] Before you develop another layer between you and the world's coppers affinity for oxygen is undeniable.

[00:47:07] Eventually chloride wins replacing tarnished with something not unlike spinach.

[00:47:12] Loving the gap between your teeth there is that part about green how it adheres to whatever is closest when an other man knocks.

[00:47:26] Ignore the persistence that kind of banging is not a mirror.

[00:47:33] Do not indulge recitation or apologize for what the moon or Naruto.

[00:47:38] Confused you are here. And here is still

[00:47:44] Disinterested. Full stop.

[00:47:51] Notice the new season always some slim cycling men. Sure as climate change there will be blackberries in late spring. What will you make from all of this. The Earth brings equal parts drop snow Stark yellow Narcissus which will you. Thank you

[00:48:28] One aspect of the Jack Straw Writers Program that we haven't mentioned is the podcasts. So while each of the writers submitted several pieces of writing for the anthology they also did a recorded interview with me performing some of their work and talking about what the process was what the pieces mean and where they're going.

[00:48:52] So two of them have already been placed on the Jack Straw Web site so please go check them out. I believe it's Brian and Julian as have been or is a Kumari is that have been put up tomorrow. So Brian and Kumar hasn't been put up already please go check those out and more will be coming in in the coming weeks.

[00:49:16] I'd like to read the intro for a Santamaria who is not with us when you hear her voice is reminiscent of a feather lightly brushing the skin soft and tender like a lullaby. Remember lullabies bring bitter sometimes even danger with the sweet. There is a musical inspiration and a flow in the arc of ceremony as work. Perhaps the music is meant to soothe the savage beasts of love a family of memory although as you hear her read it may seem more like she is shining a light on the beasts and showing us the glint and glimmer in their claws their teeth. She fearlessly puts her head in their mouths and you can't help teetering on the edge wondering if she will escape and wondering if she wants to. So this is a writer who you will not get to hear today but if you pay attention to the Jack Straw Web site you'll be able to hear her read next up is one Carlos my favorite kind of people are students not in the sense of youth or adolescence but in the sense of wonder people who refuse to sit idly by when grand experiences present themselves who see the grandness in places most of us miss. And then take those gems and in turn that internalize them like the work of the chrysalis Juan Carlos whose work is constantly doing that taking the inspiration he finds in the brilliance of other writers and letting it turn him into something more. Then he invites us along for the ride. You can hear this in the way his characters blossom often within a short period of time and in so doing we can't help but be inspired to do the same. Please welcome Juan Carlos

[00:51:23] Firstly thank you so much to Damon for just for this amazing year I've I've never been so intimidated in my life. Being part of this group and I think that that's a good thing. And I'm really thankful for that experience. So as far as the big project that I had for this fellowship I my hope was to finish a novel. I'm only about two thirds of the way through. And it's the first time I read a segment of it and it's called Beyond the Sun. It's a cancer story it's a road trip story it's a family story.

[00:51:59] And so here goes beyond the sun prologue. This is a love letter for the children. This is a love letter for you. There won't be anything before it and nothing else after if I've written it well enough. It's the only picture of you they're ever going to need. It's the only way they'll ever want to remember you. To me you're everything here. But I can't say all of it won't just be a cheap take that I won't gloss over the things I thought you saw in me and us and in yourself the things you considered but didn't say the first time you tripped over the bottom step up from the basement when you forced a

smile the first time your hands shook carrying a hot dog on a paper plate when you first turned away from my. From holding my hand because the pain to your last kidney had started to multiply when you clenched your fists in the end it's just the best I can do right now and May maybe had I waited I could have done better but the kids have been asking more and more questions and most times I just don't know what to say. This is all that ever comes out of me to tell them and I guess it only makes sense to write it all down to make it whole. They could read it whenever they want see it on repeat as often as they need.

[00:53:32] Maybe it isn't all appropriate but I'm sure they'll appreciate the honesty maybe it's just too simple to think it but love letters feel like they're really just about repeating the soundtrack about playing the same songs over and over again until the words sing out of you like they sing out of the songs about listening to the same thing until it finally settles you that the words aren't going anywhere that they'll always be there when you need to open them I understand of course that maybe none of this makes any sense that maybe I still have a lot to learn about love letters about writing them and what they do but how to frame them and how to share them and so maybe this one becomes a certain kind of schooling. Writing just this one letter becomes the open textbook I can pull out of my desk to show me the way whenever I get lost. Chapter 1 waking up and getting it together. It's a simple dream. Kids kick up the wet sand as they run ahead of her at the beach. They stop at the edge of the water to dip their fingers. They bring their hands to their noses as if the salt can help them season the bitter days behind them even the ones to come and then they turn around to watch their mother approaching their mother being carried on someone else's back. Their mother owns the view. Her dream commands the whole picture and the edges of it bleed from grainy to blurred to black as both kids.

[00:55:19] The tall young girl and the younger growing boy stand there with a patience that age alone could never have taught them the breeze whips their eyes shut. They brush hair off their faces to keep from losing sight of their mother. The man who carries her adjusts her thighs on his shoulders. He presses his fingers into her skin as if feeling for the blood in them and for the woman inside the blood his hands slide into place just under the hem of her shorts his palms don't explore. But they're also not afraid. They're at home in the heat of her that strikes her right at the moment as a memory a burning that's run its course but which asks which is always asking and unbeknownst to anyone else for someone to never give up trying to remember it for someone to help it return the memory of itself so that it can relive every past sting every past battle every past illusion and finish just one less time. The woman slouches over the man's head turns one cheek down and her nose up and we can never say enough about the healing effects of inhaling the sun the breeze undoes her eyes and a view exhausted of fighting the light satisfied finally. OK to sit in the heaviness I can no longer ward off.

[00:56:59] I think it's a natural stopping point. First page of the novel. Thank you so much for this. And yes thank you so much. Applause

[00:57:18] When I read the intro for Daniel was also not here. Daniel's writing reminds me of a card shark right before your eyes he's shuffling the deck of his family history from one hand to the other so deftly so smoothly fans them out so you think you know what this trip down memory lane and memory lane is going to entail.

[00:57:40] You think you know the stakes so you can't help but take your chances and play along. When it comes to family the stakes are always high. But that doesn't stop him from pulling us in for the ride and then catching us off guard with a wild card from up his sleeve. But in fact what he is doing is telling the story of a people who the deck has always been stacked against. No magic trick no sleight of hand. Simply craft and skill and bravery. Again check out the podcasts on the Jack Straw Web sites to be able to catch Daniel and the other writers who we didn't get to hear today their interviews and their writing.

[00:58:25] Next up is Julianna Yolanda's work is the monkey wrench thrown into the machine that grinds everything to a halt which might seem like less of a compliment unless you consider how massive the machine is how it chews us up and spits us out.

[00:58:43] Or you could think of it rather like a flood of protesters across a highway forcing us to stop and reflect on what is wrong around us and within us every revolutionary act is an act of love. Juliana's work loves us into awareness a wake up to the ugliness and pain all around which of course makes us want to run and hide. But she won't let us go. Brian Ellis said bravery will never belong to the beautiful Juliana hits the pause button and asks us to reconsider what we consider beautiful and sacred. She is giving us permission to see those things in ourselves again as if they never left us because in fact they never did. Please welcome Joanna

[00:59:42] Lowe. So this is my first residency and I don't know if anyone ever really gets over the anxiety of letting people read their work finished or unfinished otherwise but uh

[01:00:02] I'm just really glad this was a really great experience for me. So

[01:00:11] Which pays to the god of silence Medusa had her snakes and her things they were a gift. After all I am still trying to rough in this sweet tooth up. It is still too much poolside too much papier mâché against rock

[01:00:29] Too much silence to be shield I practiced blessing the diaphragms pairing them with the essence of wing believing in a voice that seethes and hisses a voice that prays to my city and gets an answer.

[01:00:49] Allergies and other struggles.

[01:00:54] There was the car we let show us the country when we ran out of dirt.

[01:00:58] Directions to shoot ourselves in there are the times we went to bed Wolf ish. Full on spoiled endings to old stories. There was a time I had my aunt's backyard fence to meet you and your mother's car

[01:01:13] And you taught me your city's underbelly with nothing but the heads of street lights. There was a library in the woods I did my job interviewing I would have never found it without you offering up your grief at shuttle. There was the motel in my hometown. We got kicked out of for being too ferocious and. Pounding out an outlet.

[01:01:35] When we found ourselves overwhelmingly alive we took so many risk. Mostly when it came to fish.

[01:01:46] How many times did I forget to brush my teeth before kissing you on the mouth how many conversations took place with you in another room while the aroma cleared from the kitchen how many bubbles of air.

[01:01:59] Do we breathe into this massive body of water we were.

[01:02:07] Did you guys hear me OK. OK great. I guess it doesn't really matter because I'm on my last form but. Fruition.

[01:02:20] This is the day that I have made the day I felt in my womb.

[01:02:26] I bought into fruition watched it seize and resuscitate with a cup of melancholy with intention with a scalpel with my nails digging into it with a murmur of chance about time and how to use it. This is the day I am most proud of thank you

[01:02:59] Writing is an act of faith. It is standing on the roof of the garage with the umbrella in hand or. The towel tied around the neck pretending it's a cape taking the leap off the edge and hoping

[01:03:21] Maybe even believing that flight will happen.

[01:03:28] Take notice of all of the flying that you've witnessed.

[01:03:33] This afternoon and now we're welcoming up our last reader Rachel's work is like a combination of Indiana Jones and MacGyver minus the whip and the fancy gadgets. She digs through her family history one recollection at a time pulling back the veil. There is no such thing as face value. Everything has layers every artifact telling another story. Most of us stick to the quips and playful soundbites when it comes to our family stories. Saving the ones that cut and bruise for therapy or the dark places in our closets. Rachel brings us with her on the expedition and treats us like family. We are welcome to see every item she can reach with memory and shows it to us with dignity fairness and dignity. And like MacGyver turning each memory regardless of judgment or regret or fear into something we can hold honor and take with us please welcome up Rachel

[01:04:53] Hi. All right I'm just gonna get into it.

[01:04:56] This is an essay called from here to austerity it is from a collection of essays about my family called homesick about 15 Thanksgivings ago my sister Sarah and I discovered fun new ways to torment our family.

[01:05:10] For her it was getting arm loads of loo out themed decorations from the only party supply store in Buford South Carolina and adorning the living cum dining room with her treasures.

[01:05:20] If you asked my mother's parents to describe their choice of decor they would quickly answer Scandinavian the word carried a certain alone in their house indicating the brutally right angled approach they applied to their furnishings and perhaps their parenting to heavy wooden minimal stuff. These were the words most readily associated with my mother's parents my Nana and Papa. Yet the tropical theme wasn't entirely out of place. Tucked away on Cabinet shelves and touches were trinkets brought home by my uncles from wherever the military sent them. If you looked you'd find fat gods and turquoise tunics and six inch sarcophagus. From who knows where the grandest jewel in this copper crown however was a tremendous sea shell Mobil suspended from the ceiling hundreds of cow Richelle strung together with fishing line created a spiraling man a war that had the size and mass of a Midwestern middle schooler as I sat before that ziggurat of Polynesian kitsch looking out upon the Craig paper pineapples and a banner demanding Aloha and bamboo letters. I chose to torture my family in a more sinister way. I asked everyone to go around the table and name one thing another person was grateful for and revelled in the collective groan and uncomfortable shifting that followed unsurprisingly my sister jumped at the chance to go first. Sarah possesses a willful sense of festivity that only intensifies when challenged. Sarah looked around the table her arms folded and her index finger raised to rest on the tip of her chin as it usually does when she is thinking a habit with no evidence of its effect.

[01:07:01] I think Sarah began as her gaze fell on Nanna. Her face brightened. She was tapping her chin now as the idea materialized and gained momentum. I think Nana is grateful that I was able to make it here from Tucson for Thanksgiving because I know she misses me and is happy when I can make it out for the holidays Sarah onetime nanny gave her a lopsided smile and slowly nodded her head. It was the sort of reluctant encouragement a piano teacher would give a student practicing their scales when Sarah finished Nanna nodded her head a few more times. Yes she agreed and that I survived cancer. The words came out a bit garbled as half of Nana's head was still paralyzed and covered in gauze from the operation she'd had to remove. Her left eye just a few weeks before if my mother's family had a crest it would probably be a Medicaid card with the words if it isn't fatal it's funny underneath so when Nana received her cancer diagnosis we all took the news of their characteristic calm. My family is not prone to panicking when bad news comes hobbling out of its swamp. We remain very still and deposit any pain or fear into Atari writhing cache of unwanted feelings located just beneath our ribs and behind our guts.

[01:08:13] I think that's why we have such big asses in my family. We're all sitting on a collective pansy of ancestral anxiety a Jurassic Mark of our ability to swallow reality whole and continue on with our days as it thumps against our stomachs and throttles our insides the absurd payment of this cancer that had it exacted an old Jewish woman's weak watery eye took the edge off its malignancy

in fact once Nana realized she wouldn't die. She enjoyed adding another disease to her growing collection. Nana spoke fondly of her medical conditions the way she would about her equally old and deteriorating friends all with strange names and requiring medications I could never quite remember. The psoriasis the diabetes the arthritis that made her knuckles swell like tubers. These were her closest companions and she bestowed upon them a possessive pride the way a grand dame would for a needy lapdog as the sole possessor of our family's most novel oddity. Nan was happy to hold court at the head of the table her cancer playing a gesture that entertained and shocked us with its irreverence. We renamed her nana one eye and became eager witnesses to our new Carnival after dinner. When it was time to dress her bandage all of the grandchildren gathered around Nana when I seated Aug Lee on a metal folding chair in her and decorated bedroom as though we were about to hear a beloved children's fable we hovered with our hands cupped on our bended knees our mouths slackened eyes wide as pop up steady enough hands artfully peeled away the tape then the gauze.

[01:09:40] Until finally we were inches away from a wet gaping socket in our grandmother's skull and we'd cheered at the unveiling. My 10 year old cousin stared into a grisly aperture of mortality and laughed my uncle Larry was the only one who couldn't look. A retired Marine with a booming voice and intimidating frame. He'd rush past the open bedroom door and shout over us that he couldn't hear our gleeful play by play. It was a surprisingly soft side that I'd never seen him before. In spite of the angles points and hedges that dug into my uncle as he grew up the worthlessness his parents beat into him the empathy of the military beat out of him. He was human after all. Years later just a few months after pop off withered to nothing Nana was finally consumed by a less funny more fatal cancer after the funeral. We returned to their house Larry's house now and felt a jarring emptiness that had nothing to do with Nana's passing missing where the wooden cabinet side boards and shelves whose oppressive heft and severity were so I'll match that of my grandparents. As soon as Nana died Larry had set them all on fire.

[01:10:46] Thank you. Did you hear some things that made you think. You here's some things that made you feel

[01:11:07] Excellent.

[01:11:08] One of the best ways that you can show appreciation to a writer is to either buy their merch or tell them how impressed you are by their work.

[01:11:21] They're right over there thank you all for coming out again please check the Jack Straw Web site for the podcasts for each of the writers. We've got two already up lots more coming down the line.

[01:11:35] Thank you again for spending your time with us this afternoon.

[01:11:53] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.