

Panel 13

Intermedial Interventions in Contemporary Fiction

The Female Migrant Subject and Literary Form:

Reading *Ekphrastic* Encounters in Xiaolu Guo's *A Lover's Discourse* and *Radical: A Life of My Own*

Nishtha Pandey
Amity University

The ubiquity of contemporary migration and refugee crises has influenced the form of the novel and the memoir and rendered any distinctions between the two tenuous. This presentation discusses *ekphrastic* encounters in two texts by Xiaolu Guo—the auto-fictional novel *A Lover's Discourse* (2020) and her memoir *Radical: A Life of My Own* (2023)—in order to examine the impact of various features of migration on articulations of female migrant subjectivities across the two genres. It suggests that the intermedial nature of Guo's writing, be it through the inclusion of photographs and ruminations on music and musicians in *Radical* to discussions of artists and art theorists like Marguerite Duras, Le Corbusier, and Walter Benjamin in *A Lover's Discourse*, allows Guo to not only expose but also play with contemporary globalized realities.

While the protagonist of *A Lover's Discourse* is a young woman pursuing a PhD in visual anthropology who migrates to London from China to meet a man and move with him, the middle-aged narrator of *Radical* navigates an extramarital relationship in the United States while her family is in London. The presentation argues that the use of *ekphrasis* in Guo's writing significantly shapes the emergence of the female migrant subject whose experiences with travel, estrangement and crisis is singular and continuously evolving. It suggests the estrangement associated with migration and the ageing body across the two texts impacts the two forms distinctively and establishes the relationship of the contemporary female migrant subject with the intermedial. It argues that the dependence on the intermedial seen in both the narrator of the memoir and the novel's protagonist indicates their struggle to navigate the urgent demands of contemporary crises.

Biography

Nishtha Pandey is Assistant Professor in English at Amity University, Noida, India. Her doctoral thesis examines erasure and loss as global forms in novels by contemporary female authors like Olga Tokarczuk, Jenny Erpenbeck and Geetanjali Shree. Her work has been published in reputable international journals and several edited volumes. She may be contacted at nishthapandey7@gmail.com