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The Poetics of Postmemorial Nostalgia in Paul Muldoon and Agha Shahid Ali

Paul Muldoon and Agha Shahid Ali share the poetics of postmemorial nostalgia. As the concept of postmemory theorized by Marianne Hirsch refers to both inherited trauma and creative reinvention of the past, the two poets maintain a subtle tension between politics and aesthetics in their nostalgic imagination. As postcolonial and transnational subjects, they reimagine in playfully melancholic manners the experiences of the previous generations that bear witness to the British colonial history of Ireland and Kashmir, respectively, and its aftermath of contemporary sectarian violence. Their postmemorial nostalgia can be discussed in terms of three poetic forms. First, they use poetic structures, such as sestina and ghazal, to provide a rich space for imaginative reconstruction of the traumatic past. Second, their rhyming sounds work in a tension between closeness to and distance from the past, which creates their ironic attitudes toward the past. Last, their association techniques lead to the affiliative working – through that pursues mnemonic solidarity among those who have inherited painful memories.

Special Session - "Presidents' session: panel with Presidents of National Associations"