

The New York Browning Society, Inc. Newsletter

Founded in 1907

The National Arts Club
15 Gramercy Park South
New York NY 10003

Date Wednesday, January 15

Time 1:00– 2:00PM

“From Brown Girls to Elizabeth
Barrett Browning” by Tusiata Avia



Tusiata Avia, “I go to My Sister-Artists and We Talk,” 2017

From a young age, I became an expert at trying to fit. Imagine me as one of those full-figured Victorian ladies trying to stuff herself into a whalebone corset. I’ve spent a good deal of my life lacing myself into impossible shapes, pulling myself in so tight that my eyes nearly popped out of my head. So tight, I could only take the shallowest of breaths.

It wasn’t until my mid-30s, when I entered a life in the arts, that I discovered what a gift my life had given me. Many gifts in life start off as painful ones. Not fitting was great training. Not fitting was a gift. It was a spiritual gift.

It allowed me to walk between worlds, to become a boundary walker, a shape shifter. It enabled me to inhabit a number of different worlds and write from inside those worlds in a voice that rang true.

Poet and playwright Tusiata Avia is in New York City for her groundbreaking show *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt*, the first Samoan female ensemble to perform at the Soho. She is an acclaimed poet, performer and children’s book writer. Avia’s poetry collections are *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt*, which she staged as a one-woman show around the world from 2002–2008, *Bloodclot*, and *Fale Aitu—Spirit House*. She has held the Fulbright Pacific Writer’s Fellowship at the University of Hawai’i (2005), was the Ursula Bethell Writer in Residence at Canterbury University in 2010, and the 2013 recipient of the Janet Frame Literary Trust Award. We are delighted that Avia will be our speaker on January 15th.

In her essay “I go to My Sister-Artists and We Talk,” Avia speaks about the importance of having a supportive network of sister-artists, from past to present. She writes that “it is easy to believe that we are not sisters and allies and midwives to each other’s beautiful things, but that we are fighting each other tooth and nail to survive, that the failure of your beautiful thing’s funding or award or good review means

the greater possibility that my beautiful thing might have a chance at life.” Avia asserts that “we have all given birth to someone or something. This is our nature. It is also our nature to help midwife for each other. It is only fear that stops us.” She explains that in finding a spiritual connection with sister-artists, “we confess to each other and realise how much the same we are. We ignite courage in each other. We act as mother-confessors and absolve each other.”

Please join us in listening to Avia converse with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who also conceived of herself as a sister-artist. In her presentation, *From Brown Girls to Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, Avia will focus on Barrett Browning as a warrior poet.



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