

PEN South Africa newsletter / Issue 12.

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**By Finuala Dowling**

Cape Town marked PEN's 34th International Day of the Imprisoned Writer with a gathering of writers and songwriters at Kalk Bay Bookshop on Monday 16 November. With moving and thought-provoking readings and rousing speeches and songs, the event provided an opportunity to reflect on the importance of freedom of expression.

Three local writers – Claire Robertson, Jim Pascual Augustin and Sindiwe Magona – each had eight minutes to express their feelings in any way they chose on the theme of the evening. (Strange how unnerving such freedom can be!)

Before each free writer stepped up to the podium, Finuala Dowling described the arrest, persecution, torture and incarceration of one of their fellow writers from across the world: **Raif Badawi** of Saudi Arabia, **Amanuel Asrat** of Eritrea, **Juan Carlos Argeñal Medina** of Honduras, **Khadija Ismayilova** of Azerbaijan and **Patiwat Saraiyaem and Pornthip Munkong** of Thailand.

Claire Robertson (*The Spiral House*, *The Magistrate of Gower*) read a brief extract from Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, followed by a longer piece from Robert Musil's exquisite allegory, *Flypaper*. Anyone who has ever lived under a repressive regime will recognise the plight of Musil's trapped flies:

"They hold themselves upright, gathering strength and pondering their position. After a few seconds they've come to a tactical decision and they begin to do what they can, to buzz and try to lift themselves. They continue this frantic effort until exhaustion makes them stop. Then they take a breather and try again. But the intervals grow even longer."

Jim Pascual Agustin read seven of his prize-winning poems. These included one, 'Goat, Rope, Rock', which contained a poignant image of a goat tied by its foot to a rope:

"But this is the goat that will not surrender  
gnawing at the rope even as darkness reigns.  
It will not give up while rope  
taunts the limits of teeth. Even when I  
am no longer by the window to witness  
its freedom."

In a powerful speech, Sindiwe Magona – whose new novel *Chasing the Tails of My Father's Cattle* has just been launched – unpacked, brick by brick, the full horror of what it means to imprison a writer.

The evening ended with student Emma Rycroft and Blacksmith band member Nielan Prinsloo singing 'I Shall Be Released', 'Chimes of Freedom' and an original composition by Prinsloo.

Several members of the audience signed up to hear more about PEN.

View photos from the event here

Read Sindiwe Magona's speech below

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### **Sindiwe Magona: "We Need Brave People Who Can Speak Truth to Power"**

Censorship – Imprisonment – Freedom of Expression. That PEN saw the need for this day of remembrance points to a sad fact, indeed. When I look at the three items on our menu, I believe Freedom of Expression is the mother of the other two – that is, the other two wouldn't exist were it not there – the sine



### **Closing Letter from President Emeritus John Ralston Saul**

A last monthly letter to say thank you and to report on the 81st Congress in Quebec City. First, the obvious, we have a new President. Jennifer Clement, a wonderful novelist. She was President of PEN Mexico when we organized our first new style international delegation in 2012, so I have seen her handling difficult, risky situations. I know she is

qua non...[read more](#)

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### **Jacana Media's Bridget Impey on the State of Publishing and the Zapiro Litmus Test**

My partner, business partner and the one who started all the trouble by setting up the publishing list of Jacana Media 12 years ago, Maggie Davey, likes to tell a story when she introduces herself to the commissioning students on the Wits Honours Publishing course. The story is complicated, relates to the ease with which she, based on a racing tip from her mother, became a habitu  of Paddy Powers online racehorse gambling

already hard at work and I look forward to being a follower...[read more](#)

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

Take a look at what's happening in December...[read more](#)

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## CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

Ballymaloe International Poetry Prize...[read more](#)

*New Orleans Review* Shakespeare Special Issue...[read more](#)

Cove Park Literature Residency...[read more](#)

Wilbur Smith Adventure Writing Prize and Author of Tomorrow Award...[read more](#)

*Asymptote's* Close Approximations

network...[read more](#)

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## CONGRATULATIONS

Karen Jennings and Kopano Matlwa Mabaso have been shortlisted for 2015 Morland Writing Scholarships...[read more](#)

## CALL FOR BOOK DONATIONS

The inaugural Khayelitsha Book Fair – also known as the Kulture Book Fair - started last weekend, with PEN SA member Thando Mgqolozana as the guest speaker. The fair is calling for book donations "of all genres, specifically titles from Africa and the diaspora and the work of late authors such as Lauretta Ngcobo, K Sello Duiker and Chris van Wyk."

Books can be dropped off at:  
2 Rhodes Avenue  
Allan Cormack House  
University of Cape Town  
Mowbray

Translation Contest...[read more](#)

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*Asymptote*: general call for previously unpublished writing in translation - poetry, fiction, non-fiction, criticism and drama...[read more](#)

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## NOMINATE YOUR BOOKSTORE OF THE YEAR

The London Book Fair is calling for nominations for The Bookstore of the Year Award for stores whose primary business is outside of the UK. We have some fantastic bookshops here that certainly deserve to be nominated - Love Books in Melville, Joburg was just [recommended in \*The New York Times\*](#) and PEN SA President Margie Orford mentioned The Book Lounge as a Cape Town literary icons in [a recent interview](#). Plus Durban's Adams & Co is celebrating 150 years as booksellers and stationers this year and The Book Lounge is turning eight next week (and [celebrating it with a sale and an evening of readings](#))...[nomination form](#)

Cape Town, 7700...[read more](#)

## Send us your news

Had a book published recently? Attended or participated in a festival? Won an award? Achieved a personal milestone of note? We welcome any news of your activities for future issues of the PEN SA newsletter.

**Please email your contributions to**  
[communications@pensouthafrica.co.za](mailto:communications@pensouthafrica.co.za)



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