

PEN South Africa newsletter / Issue 5 2016

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SOUTH AFRICA

**Write!**  
Africa,  
**Write!**

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*By Mandla Langa, written for PEN America's **PEN World Voices Series**. This is part of the **PEN SA essay series** on South African literature. If you are interested in submitting a piece, contact us on [communications@pensouthafrica.co.za](mailto:communications@pensouthafrica.co.za).*

The South African literary tradition harks back to the 19th Century with the most notable biography written about a black South African written by John A Chalmers on Reverend Tiyo Soga. There followed during the colonial times what was described as the colonial adventure stories by likes of Sir Rider Haggard, whose *King Solomon's Mines* was to give the world a distorted and racist view of the indigenous Africans, a view which, alas, still prevails today. Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, published in 1883, has

been described as the founding text of South African literature. Although silent on the presence of Africans, it is credited with giving an “authentic” voice to South African writing.

There followed, since the establishment of the black press at such as *Imvo Zabantsundu* and *Ilanga lase Natal*, a freeing of black opinion, which decried the colonial dispensation; it must be remembered that it was the British colonial rule which gave the world the color bar, the precursor to apartheid.

There was the Anglo-Boer War, which led to some unremarkable books, in support or against it; so, too, were books and journalistic critiques on Cecil John Rhodes, most notably by Scheiner’s *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*. There were others that satirized the corruption of boere.

The ANC was formed in 1912 as a response to the Act of the Union of 1910; most educated black people, writers included, aligned themselves with the ANC for decades to follow.

There were writers with notable contributions, such as Sarah Gertrude Millin, whose views echo DW Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*; Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka* novelizes the life of the Zulu monarch, Shaka. These were contemporaneous with William Plomer, Roy Campbell and Laurens van der Post.

In the post-World War II years people like Peter Abrahams came to the fore; so did E’skia Mphahlele, whose stories had the feel of reality as they were written by people who had experienced racism firsthand. One of the most important texts however was *Cry the Beloved Country*, by Alan Paton.

The 1950s saw the launch of the ANC’s defiance campaigns and the birth of magazines like *Drum*. Nadine Gordimer, who was to become a quintessentially South African voice and later win the Nobel Prize in 1991, published her short stories around this period. Many anti-apartheid magazines and journals were published. People fled into exile after the banning of the liberation movements in the 1960s. In 1965 Nat Nakasa, who was also part of the *Drum* tradition, died in New York, in exile. The 1970s saw the revival of voices once suppressed by censorship laws. Poetry was the dominant voice, people like Wally Mongane Serote, Breyten Breytenbach, Mafika Gwala, James Matthews and Don

Mattera. Women poets and writers Gladys Thomas and Fatima Dike were the precursors to Antjie Krog, Gabebe Baderoon, Gcina Mhlophe or Phillipa Yaa de Villiers.

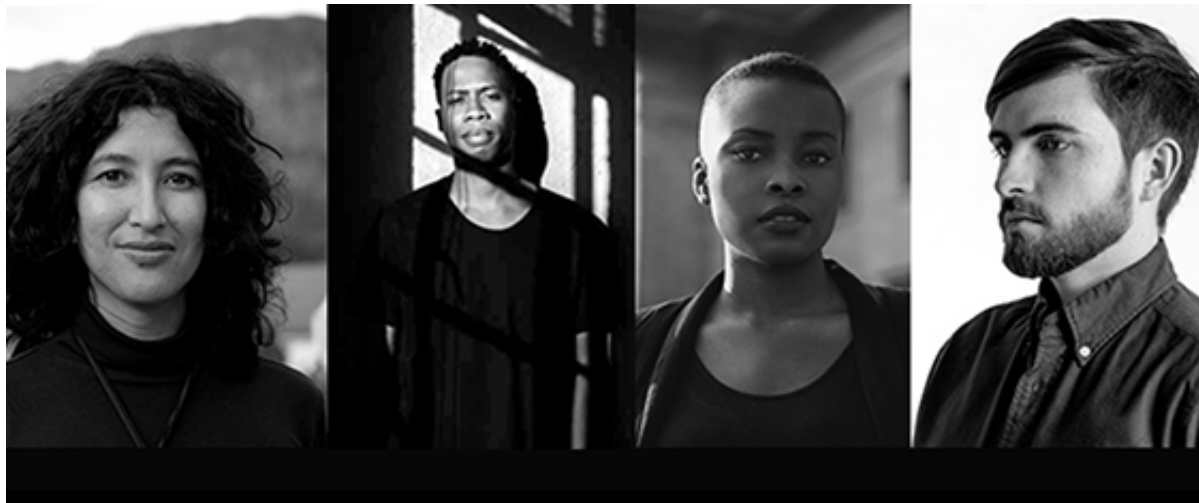
The writing tradition of South Africa today boasts a happy coexistence of the young and the old, black and white, where the late André Brink shares the stage with Keorapetse Kgositsile, Nadine Gordimer or the late Mbulelo Mzamane.

Today writers are concerned less with the evils of the past than with the challenges of the present; there is anxiety about a future which started as an expression of hope and optimism but is now being blighted by the excesses and corruption in high places. There is further concern over the unacceptably high incidences of crime, especially against women and children, rape having attained alarming statistics.

Having said that, South Africa is a land of hope where the youth – despite unemployment and the ravages of poverty and disease – look towards carving their own niche in society. There is then a mushrooming of writing of all forms by young people.

This is the way of the future.

**Mandla Langa**  
Executive Vice-President, PEN South Africa



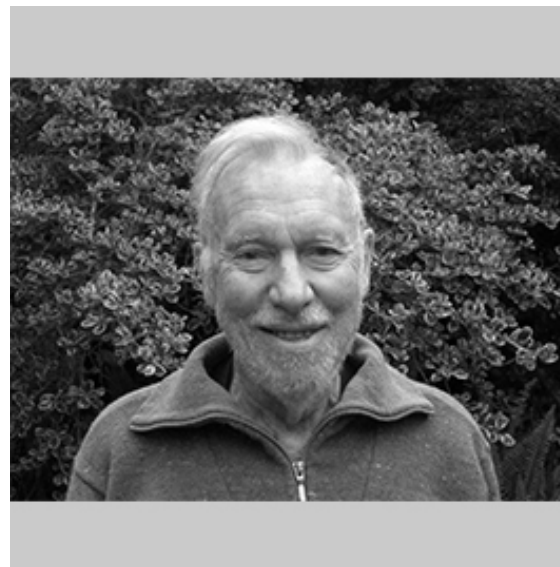
## PEN SA Student Writing Prize Judges Announced

We are excited to announce that PEN SA Board Member Gabeba Baderoon, Panashe Chigumadzi, Nick Mulgrew and Masande Ntshanga will be judging the PEN SA Student Writing Prize...[read more](#)



### World Poetry Day - Monday 21 March 2016

World Poetry Day, marked each year on 21 March, is an opportunity to celebrate poetry, the power and creativity of language and to promote reading, writing, publishing, and teaching poetry throughout the world. Read about the



### Tim Anderson - Rest in Peace

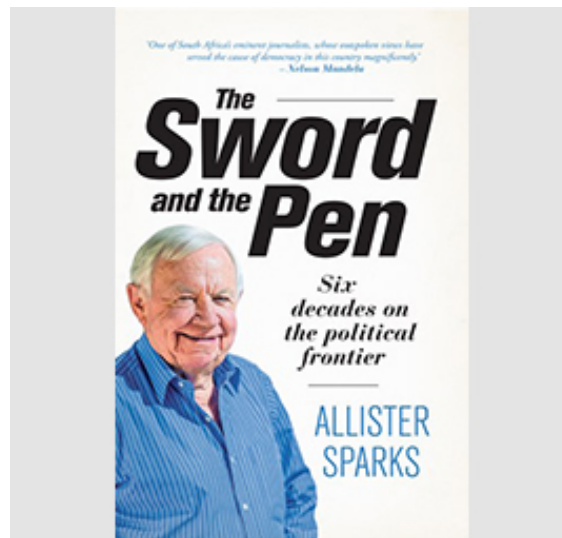
"The loss of Tim Anderson is acutely felt by all of us. He was a man of wit and integrity. He had a wonderful, warm sense of humour and was an expert at calming troubled waters. He cared deeply about freedom of expression and about PEN. His quiet contributions were

five cases being highlighted this year by PEN...[read more](#)

Poets, if you have written a poem you'd like to share for World Poetry Day send it to

[communications@pensouthafrica.co.za](mailto:communications@pensouthafrica.co.za) before Monday 21 March and we'll post it on the PEN SA website.

## NEW MEMBERS' TITLES



Allister Sparks's has published [The Sword and the Pen](#) and Fiona Khan has shared information about her latest children's book [Beneath the Baobab Tree...read more](#)

always absolutely on point and he had a wide, deep knowledge of literature in South Africa. He bore his illness with quiet stoicism. He will be much missed, but his commitment and hard work live on in the fine constitution that he drafted for PEN South Africa and for his dedication throughout the years of his long membership of this organisation. Our thoughts are with his family." - PEN SA President Margie Orford

A memorial service to celebrate Tim's life is being held on Wednesday, 23rd March at 2 PM in Cape Town. Please contact Deborah Horn-Botha on [info@pensouthafrica.co.za](mailto:info@pensouthafrica.co.za) for the details.



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

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

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## CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

Gerald Kraak Award and Anthology (Updated submission requirements)...[read more](#)

KZN Literary Tourism archive...[read more](#)

Poetry at Play: The Central Library Poetry Project...[read more](#)

The New Orleans Review's African Issue...[read more](#)

Wergle Flomp Humor Poetry Contest...[read more](#)

English Alive...[read more](#)

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## Commonwealth Writers Now Eligible for the PEN Pinter Prize

Our colleagues at English PEN have announced that the PEN Pinter prize, which was previously only open to writers from Britain, has been extended to include writers from the Commonwealth and the Republic of Ireland...[read more](#)

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## CONGRATULATIONS!

Petina Gappah longlisted for the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction...[read more](#)

Open Book festival shortlisted for the London Book Fair Excellence Awards in the category of Literary Festivals...[read more](#)

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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.

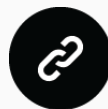
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