

PEN South Africa newsletter / Issue 15, 2018 / A review of our Cape Town event for The Prison Letters of Nelson Mandela; events, calls for submissions, and more.

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"An Enthralling Book": *The Prison Letters of Nelson Mandela* – The Cape Town Launch

The first major PEN South Africa event of 2018 was held on Wednesday 25 July, when PEN SA – along with partner organisations, The Mandela Rhodes Foundation, The Fugard Theatre, and Penguin Random House – hosted the Cape Town launch of *The Prison Letters of Nelson Mandela*, edited by Sahn Venter.

This event was a partner event to those held by our colleagues at PEN Centres in England and the United States, and was open to the public on a free-ticketed basis.

With an illustrious panel of discussants, as well as readings of letters from two of Cape Town's most talented young writer-actors, it was an evening befitting of the world's most famous writer in prison.

I like you to know that throughout the many yrs of incarceration numerous messages of good wishes & hope sent by people from different walks of life, have cut through massive iron doors & grim stone walls, bringing into the cell the splendour & warmth of springtime. No two messages are ever the same & each one has struck a special note. Yours was typical. Frankly, there are moments, like now, when I feel as if the whole world, or at least the greater part of it, has been squeezed into my tiny cell. I have comparatively more time to think & dream, obsessed with a sense of involvement & with far more friends than ever before.

– from a letter to Peter Wellman, friend and journalist

This book, said PEN SA President Nadia Davids in her opening address, which collects letters that show "the breadth and depth of Mandela's vision for South Africa" and have mostly not been available to the public, should re-invigorate and challenge people's conceptions of Nelson Mandela. "It is," Professor Davids said, "one of the most important archival collections in our country."

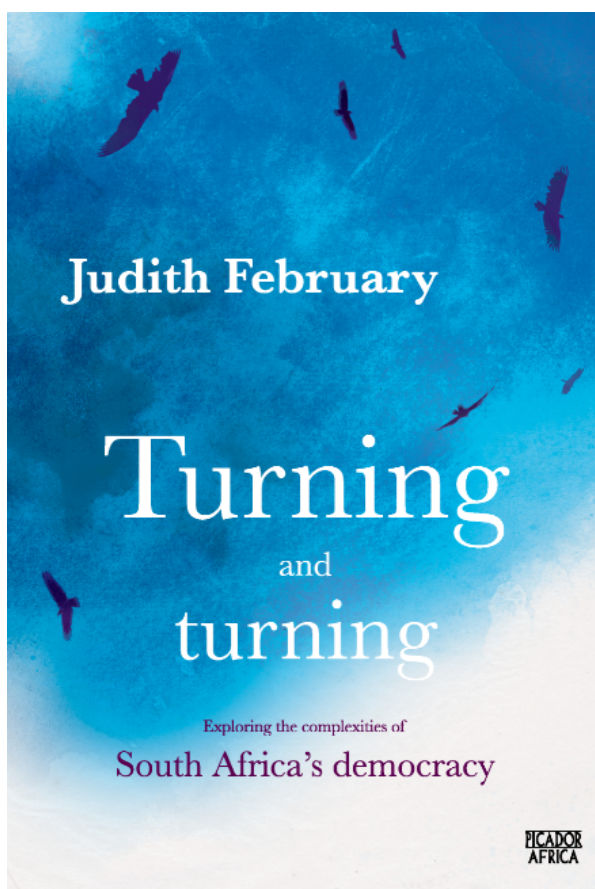
"Mandela's unflinching belief in the best of people in the worst of circumstances is not surprising," she continued. "But it's important to note his language, so deeply suffused with the poetic and imbued with a rhythm and understanding of narrative structure. I was struck by this because among the many ways to describe Nelson Mandela – icon, visionary, leader, father – the one word we won't use often is writer. But writer he was, and our most famous writer in prison."

The book also emphasises, Professor Davids added, the importance of advocacy for writers in prison, which is one of the main focuses of PEN SA and its international umbrella organisation, PEN International. "I am reminded [by this book]," she said, "of what it means to receive a letter of support, a letter that says, *You are not alone*; and, sometimes, a letter that tells those who are doing the imprisoning, *We are watching you*."

To read the full recap of the event – including more images, excerpts, and insights from Justice Albie Sachs and Professor Njabulo Ndebele – head to our website.

(Image by Nick Mulgrew)

MEMBERS' NEW TITLES



New and upcoming releases from PEN SA members include *Turning and Turning: Exploring the complexities of South Africa's democracy* by Judith February.

Please send us your new releases to newslettereditor@pensouthafrica.co.za.

WELCOME

A warm welcome to new PEN SA Professional Member, Alison Gwynne-Evans!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Check out our calendar of literary events in August by clicking [here](#).

Please submit your literary events for conclusion on our events calendar by e-mailing newslettereditor@pensouthafrica.co.za.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

NEW: [Pomes Penyeach Seeks Submissions of Poetry for Pamphlet](#) (Open deadline)

[PEN America Grants for 2018/2019 Now Open for Applications](#) (Various deadlines)

[The Oxford Brookes Poetry Centre's 2018 International Poetry Competition is Open to Entries](#) (Deadline 6 August)

[The Yale Drama Series Award for Emerging Playwrights Seeks Entries](#) (Deadline 15 August)

[Gerald Kraak Award and Anthology Deadline Extended](#) (Deadline 31 August)

[JIAS Offers Month-Long Residencies in Johannesburg](#) (Deadline 31 August)

[The 2018 Short Story Day Africa Prize, Hotel Africa, is Open for Entries](#) (Deadline 31 August)

[Apply for the 2018 Miles Morland
Foundation Writing Scholarships for
African Writers \(Deadline 30
September\)](#)

[Click here to view all calls for submissions](#)

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 let us know if your email changes so we can update our mailing list.

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