



# **The Afterlife of Words**

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PEN CANADA ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

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I will live  
to see the light  
at the end of  
the tunnel. It may  
or may not be a  
long wait.  
Whichever  
way events may  
go, I shall  
persevere.

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ESKINDER NEGA  
ETHIOPIAN  
JOURNALIST



# Introduction

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“We have no problems with freedom of expression. We can say and write whatever we want.” Seven years ago, the president of PEN Zimbabwe opened his address to PEN’s Writers in Prison Committee with these words. As a startled silence spread across the room, he delivered his punch line: “We only have problems with freedom *after* expression.”

That quip contains an important truth: governments prefer to cloak their efforts to silence dissent with righteousness. Wherever possible they hymn the praises of their constitutions’ safeguards for free speech. On paper, everyone can say anything they want. It is only when writers are foolhardy or principled enough to take such assurances literally that they learn the difficulties of freedom after expression.

It takes rare courage to ignore a tyrannical state, to keep going when friends and colleagues are threatened, jailed, or murdered for speaking truth to power. Yet every year PEN stands with scores of writers whom no fear will silence. Men and women who exercise their right to freedom of expression without regard for the consequences. People whose voices remain strong in circumstances that would render most of us mute with terror.

This report contains three glimpses of the afterlives of those who dared to remain outspoken: personal accounts from winners of our One Humanity award – an annual prize established in 2008 to honour authors whose work “transcends the boundaries of national divides and inspires connections across cultures.” Remarkably, four of the nine

winners have obtained early releases from prison sentences that totalled well over 100 years. On the other hand, Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo, was kept in a cell to the end of a terminal illness, and Raif Badawi and Ashraf Fayadh still languish in Saudi prisons as of this writing.

In these pages we also follow the afterlife of our country reports from the Americas, documents that have helped our colleagues to establish PEN centres and provided a focus for local and regional advocacy. These reports have drawn our centre into the *terra incognita* of security training workshops, with encouraging results.

More than seventy years ago, after noting the merits of Henry James and the deficiencies of Theodore Dreiser, Lionel Trilling wrote: “Dreiser and James: with that juxtaposition we are immediately at the dark and bloody crossroads where literature and politics meet. One does not go there gladly, but nowadays it is not exactly a matter of free choice whether one does or does not go.”

Trilling’s essay – “Reality in America” – appeared when Stalin’s show trials were part of the recent past and Cold War politics had not yet vitiated much of American life. Different shadows darken those crossroads today, but Trilling would recognize too well the ethnic and religious tensions, and the specious *raisons d’etat*, used to intimidate our contemporaries. He would also appreciate that for many of them it is a matter of conscience rather than a free choice to face these problems without flinching.

# President's Message

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RICHARD STURSBURG

**Dear Friends,**

**As many of you know, PEN's mission falls into three broad areas: we celebrate literature, we defend freedom of expression, and we assist writers in peril.**

*Here are some of last year's highlights:*

## **Celebration**

Our guest at the gala dinner was the brilliant, charming, and scabrous Martin Amis. In conversation with Charlie Foran, Amis enlarged on his dictum that writers should avoid clichés of the pen, the mind, and the heart. Listening to him speak about writing makes one realize how sad and limited one's own views are. I personally dread ever having to express an opinion in the future. Amis' visit was a fitting sequel to his friend Salman Rushdie's attendance at our previous gala, which marked the 25th anniversary of his first public appearance – at our 1992 gala! – after the Ayatollah Khomeini pronounced the fatwa against him on Valentine's Day 1989.

Next year's gala, with Margaret Atwood, may prove the most remarkable of all. She has certainly become now – if she was not already – Canada's most widely read, admired, and televised author. If she does not win the Nobel prize this year, there is no justice.

## **Defence**

PEN International's Congress was held in Lviv, Ukraine this year. The highlight was certainly the passage of the Women's Manifesto. Let me quote a little for its importance and its eloquence.

“For women to have free speech, the right to read, the right to write, they need to have the right to roam physically, socially and intellectually. There are few social systems that do not regard with hostility a woman who walks by herself.

“PEN believes that violence against women, in all its many forms, both within the walls of a house or in a public sphere, creates dangerous forms of censorship...

“PEN believes that the act of silencing a person is to deny their existence. It is a kind of death. Humanity is both wanting and bereft without the full and free expression of women's creativity and knowledge.”



### **Assistance**

In partnership with PEN International, PEN Canada broke new ground this year with a security workshop for threatened journalists. In December 2017 we staged a three-day security training course in Guatemala City for some of Central America's most vulnerable media workers: 16 Indigenous women who work as community radio journalists. These women work on the front lines of public interest journalism despite constant intimidation from drug cartels and other violent actors. The training taught them how to customize security plans for their daily work, how to anticipate and avoid attacks, and how to work in tandem with other journalists to improve their safety. The course was so well received that we are determined to find ways to offer it again, and expand it. In the year ahead, we will seek financing to allow us to provide workshops for larger numbers of these extraordinarily brave people.

One final note. During the Congress in Lviv, I was browsing through a collection of writing by exiled North Korean writers. A woman came over to talk to me. When I told her what I was reading, she asked what I thought of it. I said that I was very moved. The story was hers, she said; then she burst into tears.

It has been an extraordinary year. I think PEN Canada can be justly proud of the work it has accomplished.

**The  
Universal  
Declaration  
of Human  
Rights.  
Article 19.**

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Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.



# Executive Director's Message

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The past year has brought many changes. From the small but significant move into our new offices, to the much larger departure of our long-time Executive Director, Tasleem Thawar, who has moved on to work at the United Way. Tasleem worked under four presidents and shepherded the centre through several transitions. During her tenure the centre published several country reports and contributed to the founding of new centres in Honduras and India. It worked closely with other NGOs on combating SLAPP suits, improving access to information, repealing hate speech and blasphemy legislation, critiquing the auditing of charities for political activity, and the pushback to government restrictions on the media's access to federally funded scientists. Tasleem played a key role in these initiatives and also maintained close relationships with our patrons, members, and supporters. We wish her the best of luck in her new post.

During the last year, our literary calendar – bookended by galas for Salman Rushdie and Martin Amis – was as crowded as ever. In June 2017 we held a dialogue on Indigenous literature with novelists Lee Maracle and Cherie Dimaline, editor Lisa Charleyboy, and curator, artist and educator Gerald McMaster. In November Omar El Akkad, author of *American War*, and Madeline Ashby, author of *Company Town*, discussed the resurgence of dystopian fiction at one of our patron salons. A few months later, in April 2018, we hosted the Jamaican novelist Marlon James, winner of the 2015 Man Booker Prize, and David Chariandy, 2017 Rogers Fiction Prize winner, for a conversation about the shifting currents of Caribbean fiction.

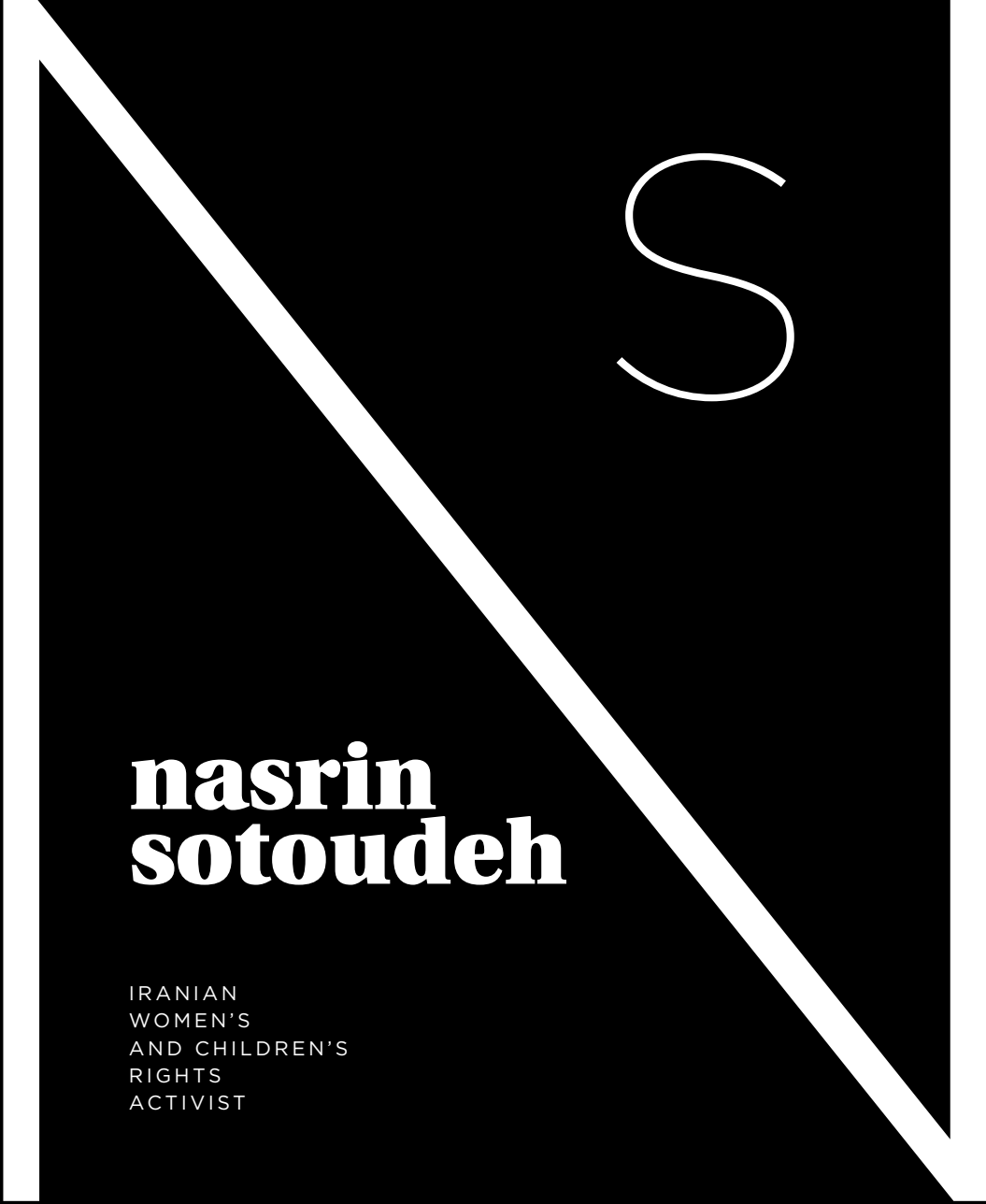
In September 2017, we hosted Adela Navarro Bello, the extraordinarily brave editor of *Zeta* magazine at Ryerson's International Issues

Discussion (IID). Her lecture on the fight against corruption in Mexico contained the following chilling observation: “Many times journalists end up doing the work of the criminal investigation authorities, which makes them very vulnerable as they face dishonest public officials who have the full power of the State on their side, or criminals who, with impunity, control their turf with guns and bloodshed. Journalists in Mexico are caught in the middle of two very dangerous forces: the bullets of drug traffickers and the pressure of the government.”

Last December, our work in the Americas took a large step forward with a groundbreaking security training workshop for community journalists in Guatemala. The project emerged from several years of related work in the Americas and was generously funded by a SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency) grant to PEN International's Civil Society Programme.

In 2018, globally, PEN International monitored the cases of 107 writers who were either imprisoned or on trial. Thirty-six have been prosecuted under anti-terror laws that are more often used to penalise criticism of the government rather than actual support of terrorism. So we were heartened by news of Eskinder Nega's release on February 14, 2018 – one day before prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned, citing a need for “deep reforms” if Ethiopia was to successfully govern its multi-ethnic population. Eskinder's courage in the face of enormous pressure is a timely reminder of why PEN's work remains so important. As he himself wrote in an email to our office, shortly after his release: “The cause of democracy anywhere is the cause of all democrats anywhere. And freedom of expression is just not possible without democracy.”

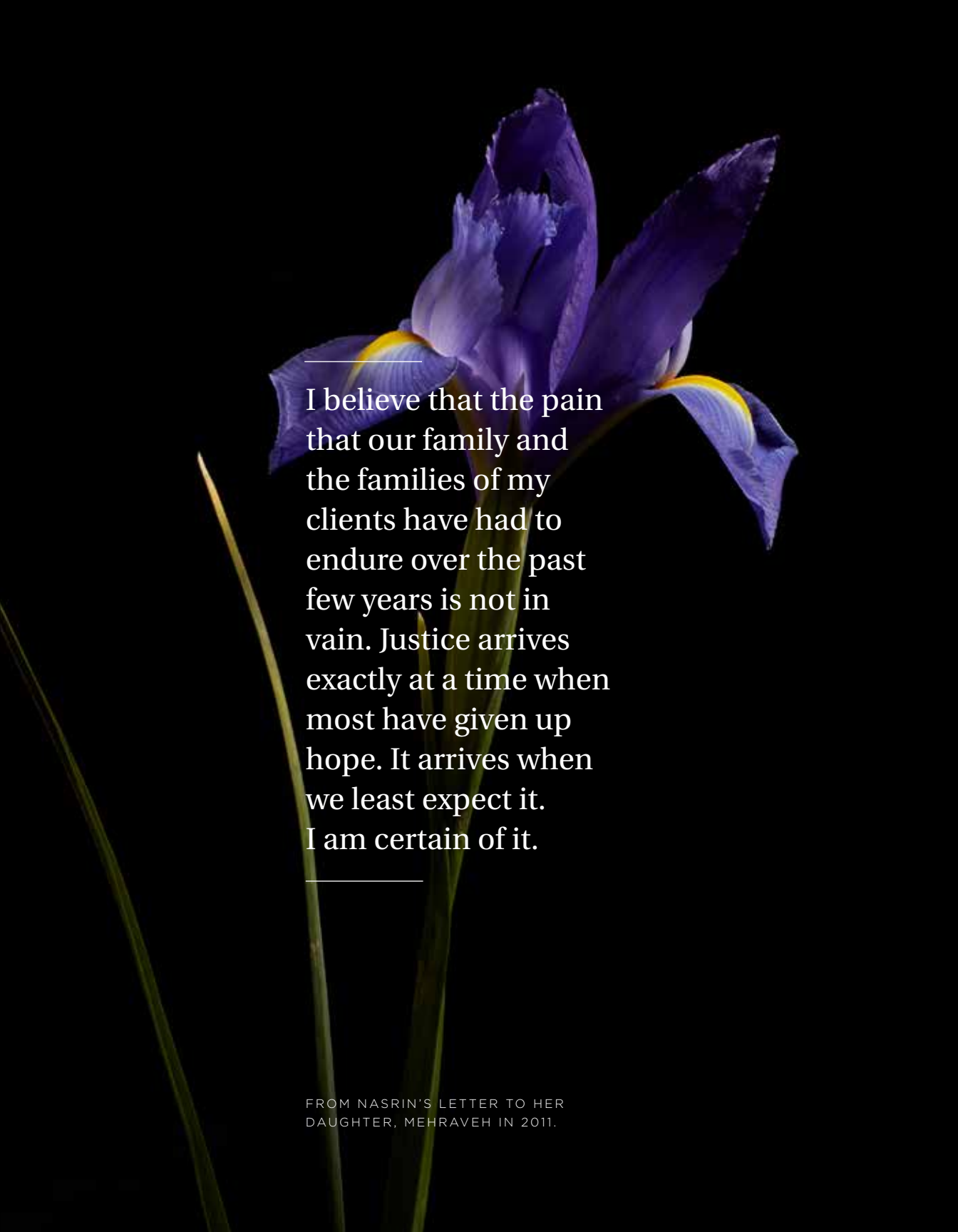
“THE CAUSE  
OF DEMOCRACY  
ANYWHERE  
IS THE CAUSE  
OF ALL  
DEMOCRATS  
ANYWHERE.  
AND FREEDOM  
OF EXPRESSION  
IS JUST NOT  
POSSIBLE  
WITHOUT  
DEMOCRACY.”



S

**nasrin  
sotoudeh**

IRANIAN  
WOMEN'S  
AND CHILDREN'S  
RIGHTS  
ACTIVIST



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I believe that the pain  
that our family and  
the families of my  
clients have had to  
endure over the past  
few years is not in  
vain. Justice arrives  
exactly at a time when  
most have given up  
hope. It arrives when  
we least expect it.  
I am certain of it.

---

FROM NASRIN'S LETTER TO HER  
DAUGHTER, MEHRAVEH IN 2011.

# Life

# Prison

# after

Like all prisoners, I found it hard to adjust to life after my release. But first let me tell you something good about what it felt like to be free again. Like any mother, I had worried about my children. When I was arrested, they were 3- and 11-years old, so I was concerned about how the lengthy prison sentence would affect them, especially their schooling and education.

But when I was released, I saw that my husband had dedicated all of his time to caring for them. They were attending all of their painting, music, and English classes. That made me really happy. Inside Evin, I had kept track of them, but seeing their reality with my own eyes, and being free again, that was a thrill.

Having said that, I still cannot say that things got back to normal right away. I had to work hard to reconnect with my children, especially my younger son who had no memories of me and still doesn't. This was normal. A great deal of my time has been spent rebuilding these connections. At times I have asked myself: has my child lost his childhood? The answer to this question has been bitter and stinging.

As for my work, I faced many difficulties there, too. I resumed my work as a lawyer two years ago, but it took me nine months to regain my licence. After my release, the Bar Association suspended my licence and I was banned from work for three years. This was very difficult to bear. I decided to stage a sit-down protest in front of the Bar Association – which had made the decision under pressure from the Security Ministry in the first place. I did that for nine months until I was able to regain my licence.

Up to now I'm still banned from leaving the country and every now and then they open a criminal case against me. In the last few months women's activities against the mandatory hijab have increased, and so have their efforts to defend their rights. I've been by their side and I will continue to be.

When the newspapers were freer I published almost 50 articles in Iranian publications. But after a while they told me that they weren't allowed to publish articles under my name. So I turned to investigations and interviews instead. I've just completed an investigation into the execution of inmates younger than 18 – which isn't allowed. I've also written a diary from my time inside Evin prison – but this hasn't been edited yet.

Organizations like PEN can help to strengthen writers. Monitoring the situation of writers when they are in prison, or even after their release, helps to reduce the government's pressure on them. In my case, for example, in addition to the positive effect it had on my spirit, the PEN One Humanity award eventually contributed to my early release.

**Nasrin Sotoudeh** is a leading advocate of women's and children's rights in Iran. In September 2010, after police raided her home and office, she was charged with "propaganda against the state." Four months later she was sentenced to 11 years in prison for "acting against national security" and "violating the Islamic dress code (Hijab) in a filmed speech." Sotoudeh held several hunger strikes to protest her ill treatment inside Evin prison. In September 2013 she was one of a small group of political prisoners released shortly before Iran's newly elected President, Hassan Rouhani, visited the UN General Assembly.



E

xile



# Writers in Exile Committee Report

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MARINA NEMAT, CHAIR

We continue to hold monthly meetings at Romero House, potluck suppers that are attended by many new members including writers from Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Iran, Turkey, and Venezuela.

In December 2017, the *Washington Post* published an op-ed that I'd written about these gatherings ("In Toronto, the Exiles Supper Club gives political refugees a home for the holidays"). A month later, the *Globe and Mail* published an op-ed by Alexander Duarte, our new Venezuelan member ("In Venezuela, Heaven Has Become Hell").

Our partnership with the Writers' Union of Canada continues to grow. They explored the lives of Writers in Exile members in the Winter 2018 issue of *Write* magazine which included "Writing: Freedom and Exile" by our Syrian member Abdulrahman Matar. We continue to provide various forms of support for our writers.

In March 2017 seven members of the network accompanied me on a visit to Ottawa where we met with Global Affairs Canada. All of our Writers in Exile journalists and writers had the opportunity to introduce themselves and speak for a few minutes

about their cases and the difficulties and challenges they, their colleagues, and their families face. I believe this was important, because at GAC, they rarely have the opportunity to directly meet people who are personally affected by various human-rights abuses in their countries and who now make Canada their home. The presence of our members and their personal testimonies put a human face on statistics and numbers.

In November I also wrote directly to Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Minister Ahmed Hussen to raise our concerns about the situation of a Kurdish-Iranian journalist who, after fleeing Iran, is currently in a difficult situation in Turkey. I have not yet received an update on this case.

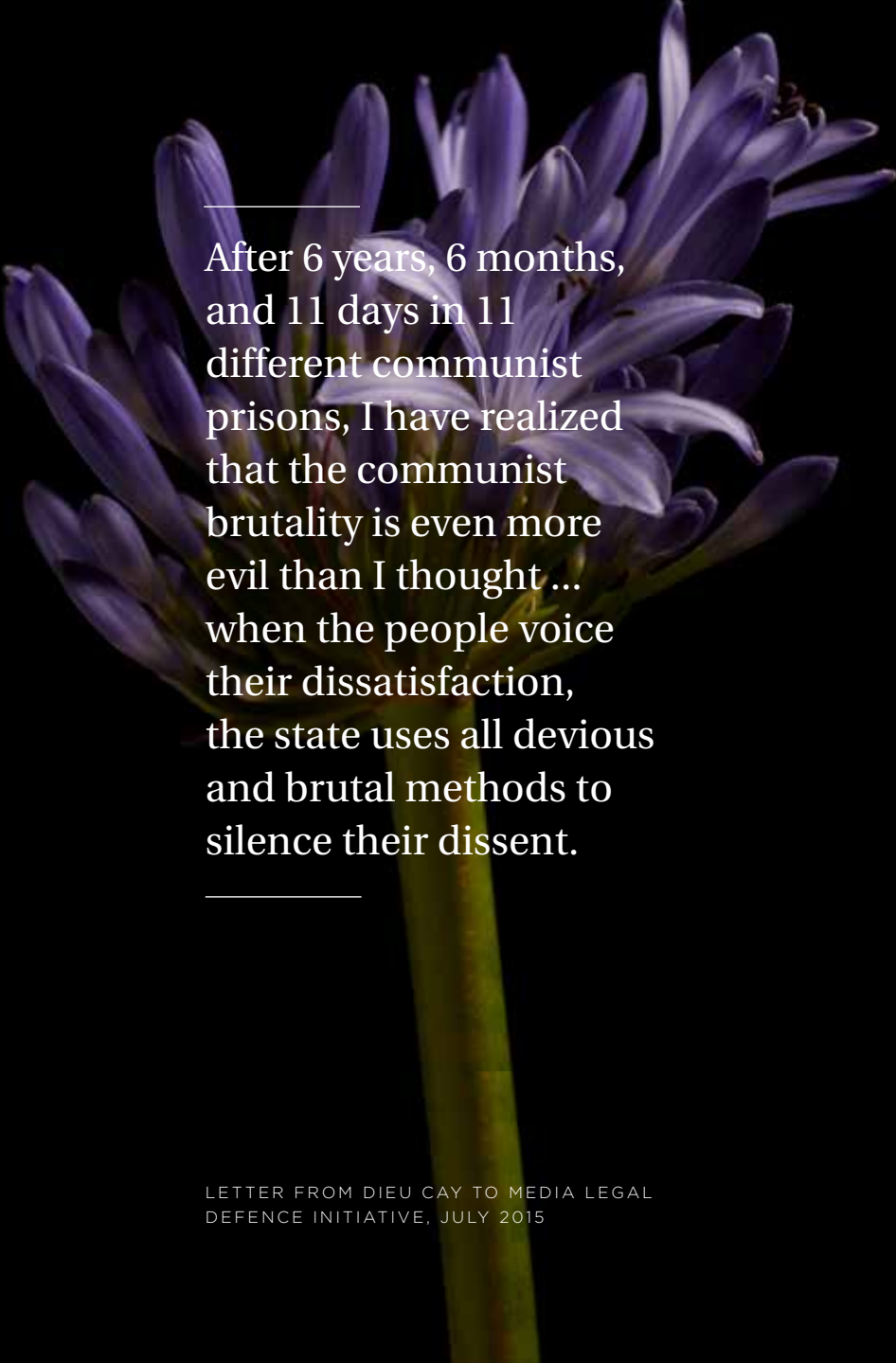
I send reports of our meetings to the PEN office. If you'd like to be added to our mailing list, please let me know.

We've had a few family reunifications this year, some of which took very long to happen. We hope for many more in the coming year.



**dieu  
cay**

VIETNAMESE  
BLOGGER



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After 6 years, 6 months,  
and 11 days in 11  
different communist  
prisons, I have realized  
that the communist  
brutality is even more  
evil than I thought ...  
when the people voice  
their dissatisfaction,  
the state uses all devious  
and brutal methods to  
silence their dissent.

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# Starting Over in a Democracy



**Three-and-a-half years  
ago I was released from  
prison in Vietnam.**

I was flown immediately to California and I have lived here in exile ever since. As you can imagine, my first year was taken up with efforts to resettle. After several medical examinations and some medical treatment, I enrolled in English as a Second Language classes. I also learned how to drive, so I could be more mobile and independent.

One of my major challenges has been how to return to the struggle for freedom of expression and democratic reforms in Vietnam even though I am so far away. I had to find a way to do this while earning a living – so that I wouldn't be a burden to my host country's welfare system. With help from my friends in the Vietnamese diaspora community I have worked periodically for Vietnamese media channels in California and Texas. Employment has been sporadic since journalism here in the US is highly competitive, especially for someone like me who is not tech-savvy and lacks experience in digital and investigative journalism.

I have, however, resumed my activism by speaking out on behalf of other bloggers who have been imprisoned back home. I have met with international human rights organizations, U.S. congressmen and policy makers, and I've participated in interviews and conferences on human rights. More recently, I

have collaborated with others to create short documentaries on Vietnam's territorial sovereignty against China's aggressive invasion in the South China Sea. The documentary can be found here: [bit.ly/2I278Ys](http://bit.ly/2I278Ys)

I have also worked with fellow activists to re-post news and articles that expose corruption in Vietnam. The Báo Tham Nhũng site ([bit.ly/2FfTyxm](http://bit.ly/2FfTyxm)) literally translates to: "Corruption News." On March 21, 2017, Phan Kim Khanh, one of our key bloggers, was arrested for his involvement with the site. The Vietnamese authorities assumed control of our passwords and shut the website down. Two months later, however, we resumed our blogging at [Vietnamweek.net](http://Vietnamweek.net)

As for my residential status in the USA, my asylum application process is still ongoing with no apparent conclusion in sight. But, compared to the uncertainty and lack of freedom in Vietnam, the challenges of this free and democratic country feel temporary and surmountable.

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**Dieu Cay** is the pseudonym used by the Vietnamese blogger Nguyễn Văn Hải. Literally translated it means "the peasant's pipe." After his arrest in April 2008 Dieu Cay faced trumped up "tax evasion" charges in a closed trial that was widely considered unfair. After completing his sentence in 2010, he was charged with a second offence of "conducting propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam" under Article 88 of the Criminal Code – a repressive provision that has been repeatedly used to criminalize free speech and imprison peaceful dissidents. He was finally released in October 2014, a year after receiving PEN Canada's 2013 One Humanity Award for his defence of human rights and democracy in Vietnam.

# Writers in Peril Committee Report

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PETER SHOWLER, CHAIR



In November 2016, PEN Canada and the University of Toronto's International Human Rights Program visited Guatemala to review its record on freedom of expression. PEN's subsequent submission to the UN's 2017 Universal Periodic Review found that the previous four years had seen an "escalating use of violence against journalists and human rights defenders, targeting women and Indigenous persons in particular." It also stated that these groups worked in a climate of "violence, fear and impunity" and often faced "stigmatization" and "criminalization."

Determined to do more than simply observe a bad situation, PEN forged a partnership with UDEFEGUA (*La Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos Guatemala*) and the Human Rights Defenders Project to stage a three-day security workshop in Guatemala City for 16 Indigenous women journalists. From

December 7-9, 2017, in 12 intensive sessions, participants learned how to analyze and mitigate the most common risks, how to draft individual security plans, and how to manage the chronic stress of violent and unpredictable work environments.

Frank Smyth, Executive Director of Global Journalist Security, led the workshop. The training was built around one of his key insights: that solidarity is security. "Bullies prefer to work alone," he emphasized, "in the darkness. They fear the light." His colleagues, Marcela Turati and Javier Garza, taught basic self-defence and de-escalation techniques, digital security, and network building strategies that would raise the political cost of threatening or attacking journalists. The workshop participants were enthusiastic about the security lessons learned during the workshop and we hope to extend the workshops to the many journalists in



Guatemala and Honduras who live with continual threats to their personal and professional safety.

Thirty-six years of war have left deep scars on Guatemalan society. The conflict normalized violence and undermined public trust in law and order. A brutal counterinsurgency in the early 1980s destroyed hundreds of Mayan villages and claimed tens of thousands of lives. In 1996 the UN officially deemed the massacres an act of genocide. Several journalists at PEN's workshops were from communities that had borne the brunt of this violence. Tragically, even today, the terror associated with security forces and international investors – such as the sexual violence at Sepur Zarco and Lote Ocho – remains the rule rather than the exception. Our workshop was a modest but important response to this awful history.

In Honduras, Wendy Funes won our annual prize for investigative journalism. Her submission,

which appears in translation on our website, was based on a four-month investigation into the alleged rapes of Indigenous girls. We also received troubling news that Cesario Padilla, a founding member of PEN Honduras, had been found guilty, along with two other students, of “usurpation” at the National Autonomous University of Honduras. PEN believes these convictions result from the peaceful exercise of the students’ rights to freedom of expression and protest.

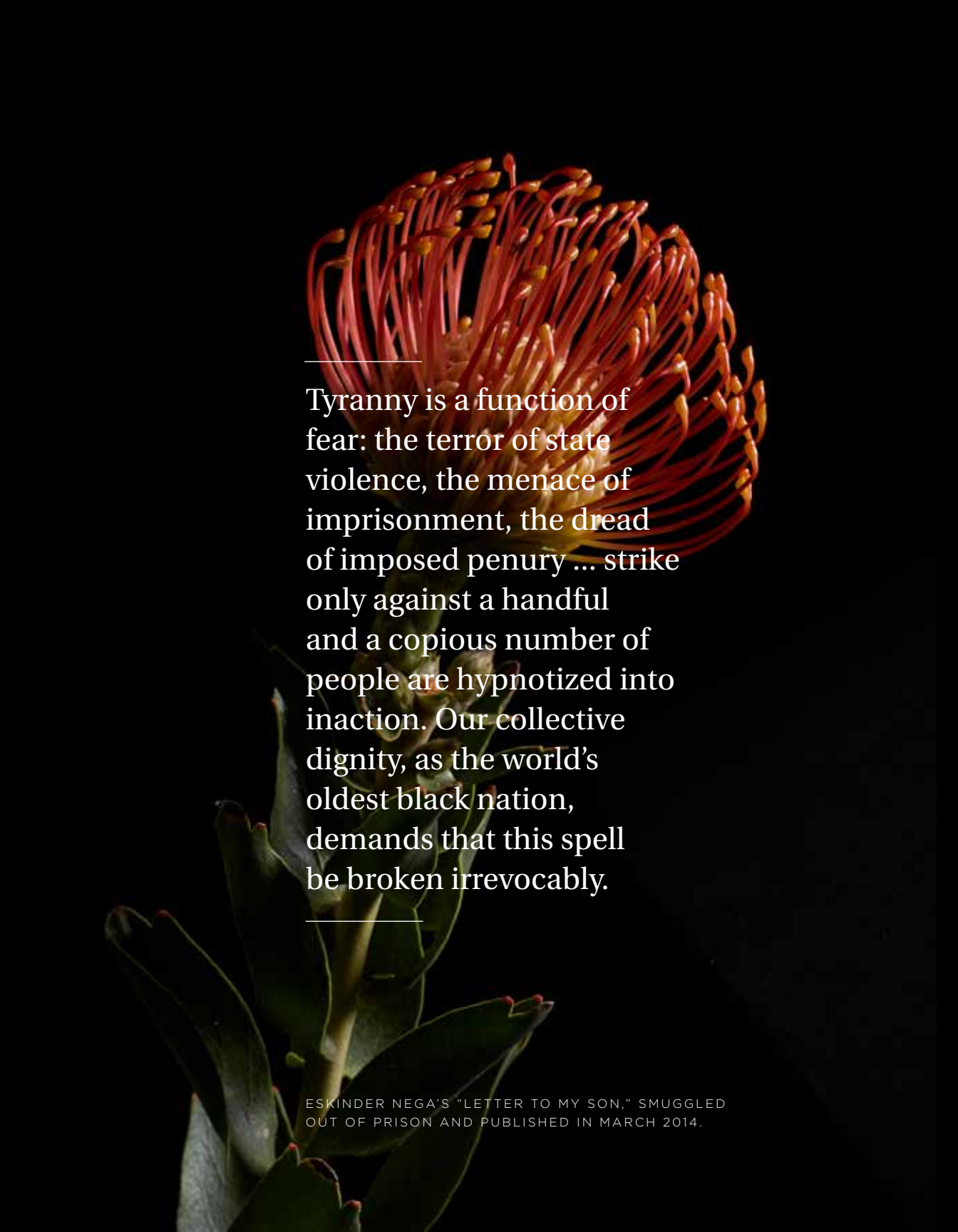
Finally, some good news. This February, Eskinder Nega, an Honorary Member of our centre, was set free from an 18-year prison sentence imposed in 2012 under Ethiopia’s draconian anti-terrorism laws – he criticized the government’s arrest of journalists and anti-government activists. Although he was re-arrested shortly afterwards, he was soon re-released. He remains free as of this writing.

N

**eskinder  
nega**

ETHIOPIAN  
JOURNALIST





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Tyranny is a function of fear: the terror of state violence, the menace of imprisonment, the dread of imposed penury ... strike only against a handful and a copious number of people are hypnotized into inaction. Our collective dignity, as the world's oldest black nation, demands that this spell be broken irrevocably.

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ESKINDER NEGA'S "LETTER TO MY SON," SMUGGLED OUT OF PRISON AND PUBLISHED IN MARCH 2014.

# I Shall

“Will you stop writing?” asked the warden, leaning forward to stress his question. “Of course not,” I replied instinctively. “It’s too late for that now. Had I agreed to stop writing, I would not be in prison in the first place. What would be the point of stopping now?”



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In 2009 the Ethiopian government issued an Anti-Terrorism Proclamation that greatly expanded its definition of “terrorism” and undermined longstanding protections on freedom of expression. Eskinder Nega, a journalist and blogger, was arrested on July 13, 2012 and sentenced to 18 years in prison for vague terrorism charges related to this proclamation. He was released in February 2018. Nega received PEN Canada’s One Humanity award in 2015.

# Laugh

He did not look up when I walked out of his office. This was not a challenge that would be taken lightly. The state was interested in far more than physical incarceration. Breaking the spirit, prevailing over the prisoner’s will, was its weightier mission. The setting for a contest of wills, one that was to eventually last over four years, had been set.

My transfer to prison-within-prison, an area reserved for the most difficult prisoners, came as no surprise. And then came the clamp down: my books were all confiscated and access to new ones was denied; pens, papers and anything that could

be written on were banned, and access to family members and friends was severely restricted. The state was intent on prevailing.

But in the end, it was not the state that was to triumph, and its failure has come to be symbolized by my adamant – and very public, I should add – refusal to seek pardon for an early release. The might of the state does not have its way all the time.

Since then I have been repeatedly asked how I persevered through the years. I have always pointed to the Bible as the primary source of my inspiration and strength. Without it I would not have made it. Then comes

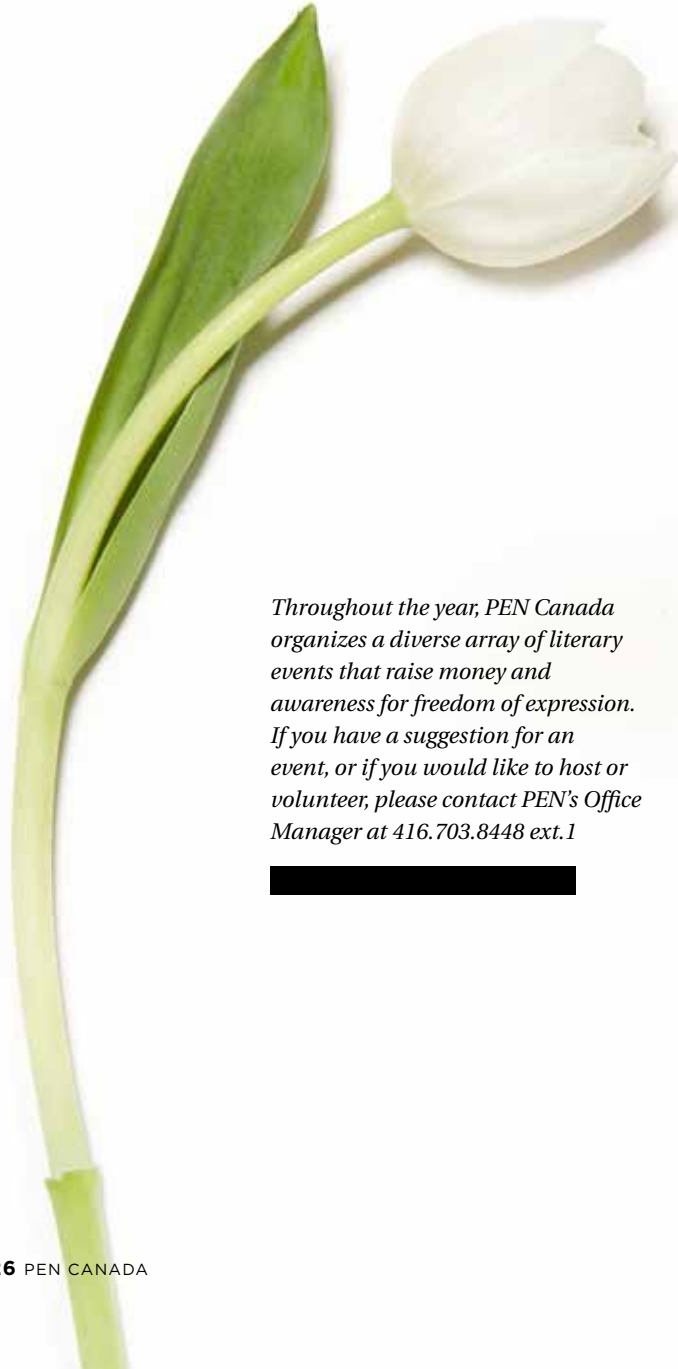
the certainty that I stand on the right side of history. On the surface, it is difficult to discern a common theme in world history. But history is really an evolutionary movement of ideas, and in democracy, as it is understood and expressed in the west, mankind finds its common endpoint. African or European, Asian or American, Christian or Muslim, Indian or Chinese will finally converge to a common destiny. Democracy, with freedom of expression at its core, can be delayed but not prevented.

I, not my jailers, shall laugh last.

# Last

# Literary Events

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*Throughout the year, PEN Canada organizes a diverse array of literary events that raise money and awareness for freedom of expression. If you have a suggestion for an event, or if you would like to host or volunteer, please contact PEN's Office Manager at 416.703.8448 ext.1*

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**PEN Gala with Salman Rushdie (March 2017)**  
Salman Rushdie interviewed by former PEN Canada president Randy Boyagoda at the Burroughes Building.

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**Blue Metropolis Literary Festival, Montreal (April 2016)**  
PEN was involved with seven events including discussions of fictional treatments of World War II, Canada's bond with Cuba after the death of Fidel Castro, twenty-first century China, the importance of history in the work of LGBTQ writers, the role of art in the conflict between Jews and Palestinians, the highs and lows of biography, and a discussion of Central European literature.

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**Indigenous Voices Rising: Toronto Reference Library (June 2017)**  
Lisa Charleyboy (editor-in-chief of *Urban Native Magazine*), novelists Cherie Dimaline and Lee Maracle, curator, author, artist, and educator Gerald McMaster discussed whether mainstream success has changed the roles of Indigenous writers within their communities.

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**Launch of Canada 150 Book  
*Glorious & Free*  
(June 2017)**

Launch of *Glorious & Free*, a book by Kim Bozak and Rita Field-Marsham profiling Canadian talent in various fields.

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**Investigative Journalism  
in a Dangerous Country  
(September 2017)**

Adela Navarro Bello, director general of the *Zeta* Weekly in Tijuana, Mexico addressed Ryerson's International Issues Discussion (IID) series. Navarro's publication is renowned for its exposés of institutional corruption, organized crime, and drug trafficking. Several *ZETA* editors and journalists have been murdered and Navarro has been the subject of multiple death threats during her 27-year career.

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**Glorious & Free?  
(October 2017)**

Panel discussion at the International Festival of Authors: Jesse Wentz, Desmond Cole, Rachel Giese, and moderator Jesse Brown discuss Canadian values and freedoms.

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**Patron Salon:  
Dystopian Futures  
(November 2017)**

Omar El Akkad, whose debut novel *American War* was shortlisted for the Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, and Madeline Ashby, author of Canada Reads finalist *Company Town*, discuss human resilience in the face of hyper-partisan politics and environmental catastrophe.

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**Code Name Sally  
(November 2017)**

Screening and discussion of a short documentary by Ari and Sturla Gunnarsson, marking the 25th anniversary of PEN Canada's covert action in 1992 to bring Salman Rushdie to a PEN benefit in Toronto.

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**PEN Gala with Martin Amis  
(February 2018)**

PEN's 2018 literary dinner was held on February 20th at The Great Hall in Toronto. It featured a video documenting PEN Canada's work with writers in Guatemala. Martin Amis was interviewed by award-winning Ontario writer, and former PEN Canada president, Charlie Foran.

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**Freedom to Read Week  
(March 2018)**

*Very Political and Unapologetically Black.* Desmond Cole, winner of PEN's 2017 Ken Fikow freedom of expression award, in conversation with Jael Richardson, founder of the Festival of Literary Diversity (FOLD).

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**Reimagined Homelands  
(April 2018)**

Prize-winning authors Marlon James and David Chariandy discuss how fiction has reclaimed representations of the Caribbean within mainstream American, British, and Canadian literature.

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# Honorary Members

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CHINA  
AND  
AUTONOMOUS  
REGIONS

ERITREA

MEXICO

SAUDI ARABIA

UZBEKISTAN

## CHINA AND AUTONOMOUS REGIONS

The 2010 Nobel Peace Laureate, **Liu Xiaobo**, was a former President and board member of the Independent Chinese PEN Centre. In June 2009 Liu was arrested for signing Charter 08, a declaration calling for political reforms and human rights. He was kept under residential surveillance, a form of pre-trial detention, at an undisclosed location in Beijing, until he was formally charged with “spreading rumours and defaming the government,” “subversion of the state,” and “overthrowing the socialism.” Liu received an 11-year prison sentence on December 25, 2009. After spending the last eight years of his life in Jinzhou prison in northeast China, with little access to friends, family, or colleagues, Liu died in July 2017. His wife – the poet and photographer Liu Xia – was only allowed to visit him once a month under the supervision of prison guards. They were forced to change the subject if they discussed anything that was deemed offensive to the state. Despite these privations, Liu’s communications with the outside world reiterated messages of peace, hope, and love. His prison poetry spoke of his love for Liu Xia and his hope for a China free from discrimination and human rights abuses. After learning of his death, PEN International President Jennifer Clement recalled the empty chair – PEN’s symbol for imprisoned writers – which represented Liu at the 2010 Nobel ceremony. She wrote: “On that day the world honoured and celebrated Liu Xiaobo’s courage as it does again today. Liu once said, ‘I hope I will be the last victim in China’s long record of treating words as crimes’. We must continue to uphold his dream.”

## ERITREA

In September 2001, 13 newspaper journalists were arrested after President Issaias Afeworki closed Eritrea’s independent newspapers, leaving only the state-run *Hadas Eritrea*. PEN Canada adopted the following as Honorary Members: **Yusuf Mohamed**

**Ali** (editor-in-chief of *Tsigenay*), **Mattewos Habteab** (editor-in-chief of *Meqaleh*), **Dawit Habtemichael** (reporter for *Meqaleh*), **Medhanie Haile** (editor-in-chief of *Keste Debera*), **Emanuel Asrat** (editor of *Zemen*), **Temesken Ghebreyesus** (reporter for *Keste Debera*), **Dawit Isaac** (writer and co-owner of *Setit*), **Fesshaye Yohannes** “Joshua” (playwright, poet, and publisher of *Setit*) and **Said Abdelkader** (writer, editor of *Admas*, and owner of the press that printed most of the independent newspapers). In September 2009, Reporters Without Borders reported that many of the imprisoned journalists were being held in metal containers or underground cells in Adi Abeito Military Prison, in Eiraeiro Prison and in the Dahlak archipelago.

In 2007, reports indicated that four of the journalists had died in custody between 2005 and early 2007: Abdelkader, Haile, Ali, and Yohannes. Their deaths were attributed to harsh conditions and lack of medical attention. Some sources indicate that Yohannes had been tortured prior to his death, including having his fingernails ripped out. In May 2007, the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights (ACPHR) of the African Union ruled that the detention of the journalists was arbitrary and unlawful and called on the Eritrean government to release and compensate the detainees.

Isaac, who spent a number of years in Sweden during the Eritrean war of independence and the border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia, holds Swedish citizenship.

In a TV interview in 2009 President Afeworki said he did not know what crime Isaac had committed and added that Eritrean authorities would release him or put him on trial. In an interview published on the website of the Swedish daily newspaper *Aftonbladet* on August 1, 2010, a senior adviser to President Afeworki said that Isaac was being held for his involvement in a “conspiracy” by a group of Eritreans “to facilitate” an invasion of the country by Ethiopia during the border war between the two

# The risks here are high and rising, and journalists are easy targets.

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countries. He declined to provide assurances that Isaac was still alive. **Seyoum Tsehaye**, a TV and radio journalist who wrote a weekly column for the newspaper *Setit*, has been held without charge or trial since September 2001.

## MEXICO

**José Armando Rodríguez Carreón** was a veteran crime reporter for *El Diario*, a daily newspaper based in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua state. He was shot at least eight times by an unidentified person on the morning of November 13, 2008, as he was about to drive his daughter to school. José had covered drug-related violence and organized crime in Ciudad Juárez and, after receiving death threats, had briefly left Mexico to live in El Paso, Texas. On his return, he refused to stop covering crime stories despite receiving further death threats. Shortly before his death, Rodríguez told the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ): “The risks here are high and rising, and journalists are easy targets. But I can’t live in my house like a prisoner. I refuse to live in fear.” In the weeks after his murder, several other *El Diario* journalists received death threats, as did other media in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua. Two prosecutors in charge of investigating the case have reportedly been assassinated. On May 26, 2011, the Inter American Press Association sent a letter to President Calderón, signed by hundreds of newspaper readers throughout the Americas, calling on him to intervene in order to ensure

that the stalled investigation into José’s murder moves forward and those responsible are brought to justice. There has been no progress on the case since then.

## SAUDI ARABIA

Blogger **Raif Badawi** was arrested on June 17, 2012 in Jeddah after organizing a conference to mark a “day of liberalism.” The event was banned and his online forum – created to foster political and social debate in Saudi Arabia – was closed by a court order. On May 7, 2014, Jeddah’s Criminal Court sentenced Badawi to 10 years in prison, 1,000 lashes, and a fine of 1 million Saudi riyals (CAD \$291,700) on charges of “founding a liberal website,” “adopting liberal thought,” and “insulting Islam.” When Badawi appeared in court to collect a written account of the verdict on May 28, 2014, he discovered the insertion of two additional penalties: a 10-year travel ban and 10-year ban from participating in visual, electronic, and written media following his release. Badawi received 50 lashes in January 2015 but has not been subjected to further punishment since. Badawi was awarded PEN Canada’s One Humanity prize in 2014.

Saudi Arabian-born Palestinian poet, artist, curator, **Ashraf Fayadh**, was arrested in August 2013, accused of “misguided and misleading thoughts” after the Saudi Arabian Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice received a complaint about him. According to



# But I can't live in my house like a prisoner. I refuse to live in fear.

reports, the complaint contended that Fayadh had made obscene comments about God, the Prophet Muhammad, and the Saudi Arabian state. Released on bail, he was rearrested on 1 January 2014 on charges including “insulting the divine self” and having long hair. He has been held in a prison in the city of Abha ever since. According to court documents seen by PEN International, during his trial held over six hearings between February and May 2014, Fayadh stood accused of numerous blasphemy-related charges, including “insulting the divine self and the prophet Mohammed,” “spreading atheism,” “refuting the Qur’an,” and “insulting the King and the Kingdom,” among other charges. Evidence compiled against him included at least 10 pages from his collection of poetry *Instructions Within*, published by the Beirut-based Dar al-Farabi in 2008 and later banned from distribution in Saudi Arabia. On 17 November 2015, the General Court of Abha sentenced Fayadh to death for the crime of being an infidel (*kufir*) following a re-trial. The court argued that Fayadh’s repentance for the crime of apostasy was a matter of the heart and should have no bearing determining whether or not the crime had been committed. Fayadh appealed the sentence. In February 2016, a Saudi Arabian court replaced the death sentence with an eight-year prison term and 800 lashes. Fayadh has further appealed against this conviction. Fayadh was chosen for PEN Canada’s One Humanity award in 2017.

## UZBEKISTAN

**Dilmurod Saidov** – aka Sayyid – was sentenced to 12.5 years in prison on February 22, 2009 on charges of extortion and forgery according to statement made by a head of the Agricultural Equipment and Tractor Park in Samarkand, who claimed that Saidov had sought to extort US\$15,000 from him. Authorities added a second charge of extortion in March and a charge of forgery in April. Saidov’s case was riddled with procedural violations but when his lawyer appealed the sentence in late 2009 after the Samarkand Region court upheld the journalist’s sentence on September 11, 2011. Saidov suffers from tuberculosis and was admitted to hospital for 27 days in mid-August 2011. His family has requested a provisional release during trial but this was rejected on the basis that he is a “dangerous criminal.” Saidov has reportedly been subjected to harsh prison conditions and psychotropic drugs during his detention. In April 2012 Saidov’s family were allowed to visit him in prison for his fiftieth birthday. They expressed concern that he was not receiving adequate treatment for his acute tuberculosis and that his health continued to worsen due to harsh treatment in prison.



# Released February 2018



## **Eskinder Nega**

### **ETHIOPIA**

In September 2011 the editor and journalist Eskinder Nega was arrested on charges brought under Ethiopia's 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. Before his arrest, Nega published a column questioning whether detained journalists were suspected terrorists and he criticized the arrest of a well-known government critic. Nega was charged with having affiliations with Ginbot 7, a banned political party, and for receiving weapons and explosives from Eritrea. Convicted on June 27, 2012 he received an 18-year prison sentence on July 13, 2012. The Ethiopian Supreme Court upheld

the conviction on May 2, 2013 in a ruling several international human rights groups described as "highly dubious." Nega was released in February 2018. His release was reportedly delayed because he refused to sign a confession. He was rearrested shortly afterwards, along with several other journalists and politicians, for allegedly meeting during a state-of-emergency without proper clearance from the authorities. Nega was released in mid-April. Nega was chosen for PEN Canada's One Humanity award in 2015.

# Past

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What is a country? Who is a citizen? Where do we belong? What do we owe one another? Why have we organized ourselves the way we have? The questions sound trite but I found myself dwelling on them recently at an Immigration and Refugee Board hearing. At the request of a writers' organization, I agreed to serve as an observer in solidarity with a writer I'd never met. For three hours, I sat in the hearing room with another representative of the writers' organization, the writer, his lawyer, an interpreter, and the adjudicator,

who interrogated the writer's harsh and tumultuous life, testing, not unfairly, apparent inconsistencies and lapses in his story. For instance, if a man receives a terrifying phone call in which his life is threatened, does he remain in his parents' house for several weeks while he awaits his travel documents? If he fears the police because they are complicit with the religious fanatics who hate his books, and if these same police abuse him in a vile and despicable way, could he not evade them by moving to another city inside his own country?

They were reasonable questions. The writer countered them with the peculiar logic and idiosyncrasy of a human life – much of which could not be substantiated. But he came from a place where the things he described were plausible and they were worse than anything my parents experienced in the Soviet Union. He'd had the bad luck to be born at the wrong time between the wrong borders. His government was as glad to be rid of him as he was to have left. He believed he was better suited to Canada. From what I could see, he was right. Even if

# The is Another Country

it was discovered that he was being less than fully truthful, I thought he was harmless. But it was as likely as not that he would be sent back. The case could be made that he had arrived under false pretences while others sat in their miserable countries or in displaced persons camps waiting to be admitted. Was it fair that he should be allowed to stay? Then again, he was already here and the country was big and could accommodate thousands like him without anyone noticing. And yet so much effort had been invested into deciding his claim. Months

of preparation. Documents filed. A room reserved. All of us assembled. The proceedings conducted with utmost gravity. Politicians defining themselves by it. Families quarrelling and becoming estranged. But the longer I sat in the room, the more arbitrary it seemed.

At the end of the three hours, the adjudicator still hadn't rendered his verdict. It was resolved that we would return in a month. The outstanding issues remained: credibility, identity, delay, objective risk, and subjective fear.

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**David Bezmozgis** is a writer member of PEN Canada and represented the centre at a refugee hearing last year. The following is an extract from his contribution to *The Displaced* (Abrams Press, ISBN: 1-4197-2948-9), a collection of work by 17 refugee writers, edited by Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Sympathizer*, Viet Thanh Nguyen.



What is free expression?

What is the relationship between  
the freedom to speak  
and the right to be heard?

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What is PEN Canada's  
conception of  
free expression?

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# Canadian Issues Committee Report

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CARMEN CHEUNG, CHAIR

*We have seen an active debate around Canada as to what constitutes free expression, and what – if any – limitations to this fundamental right can be tolerated in an open and democratic society. Interrogations of what freedom of expression means for creative and political life has informed the Canadian Issues Committee's work throughout this past year.*

## **Submission to the United Nations**

In collaboration with Ryerson University's Centre for Free Expression, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression, and Reporters Without Borders, PEN submitted a report on the state of free expression in Canada as part of Canada's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by the United Nations Human Rights Council. The submission highlighted structural challenges to free expression, including the criminalization of speech, out-dated access to information legislation, and insufficient protections at law for journalistic sources.

## **Submission to the House of Commons**

PEN delivered written submissions to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights as part of its study of Bill C-51, which, among other things, would eliminate the offence of blasphemous libel from the Criminal Code. While PEN strongly supported the repeal of blasphemous libel, it also urged the Committee to amend the Bill to repeal the offences of seditious libel and defamatory libel as well. PEN argued that the criminalization of speech has serious chilling

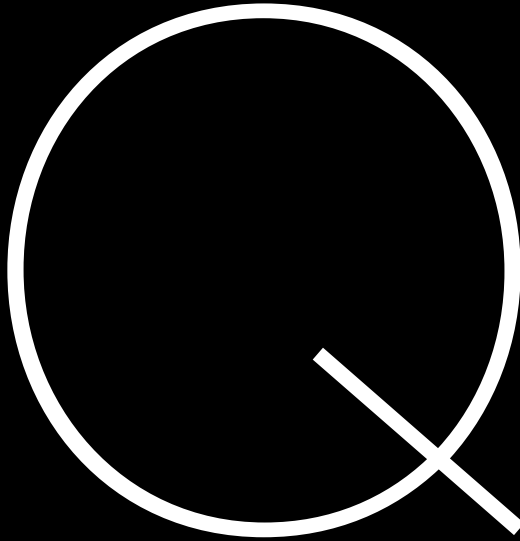
effects on freedom of expression, and criminalizing libel has particularly profound impacts on writers and journalists. PEN's submissions highlighted the unique and critical role that writers and journalists play in democratic governance.

## **Developing an internal framework for PEN's work**

A key role of the CIC is to respond to freedom of expression issues in Canada. In order to help guide the CIC, we proposed a triage system for identifying freedom of expression issues in Canada and how infringements on free expression in several different domains impact the flourishing of creative life. This research, which allowed us to develop a substantive framework for PEN's advocacy, was presented to the PEN board for its consideration.

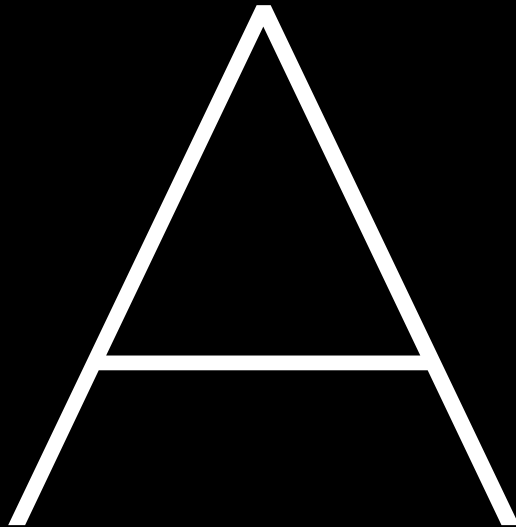
## **Acknowledgments**

The CIC's activities this year would not have been possible without the generous support of Norton Rose Fulbright, which worked closely with PEN in preparing its submissions to the United Nations and the Canadian Parliament.



**A Q&A with 2017 New Voices Award  
winner Mikko Harvey**

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Mikko Harvey is the 2017 winner of the RBC/PEN Canada New Voices Award for unpublished writers aged 17-30. The award, generously funded by the RBC Emerging Artists Project, includes a \$2,000 cash prize and mentorship from a prominent Canadian writer. Last November, we asked Mikko a few questions about his work and the state of contemporary poetry.

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**PEN Canada:** In a widely discussed jeremiad on American poetry, Mark Edmundson complained that, “At a time when collective issues – communal issues, political issues – are pressing, our poets have become ever more private, idiosyncratic, and withdrawn.” Is this fair? Has American poetry become too “oblique, equivocal, painfully self-questioning”; has it succumbed to an “imposing opacity”?

**Mikko Harvey:** I admire Edmundson’s passion but don’t totally relate to his position. For one thing, he overlooks a bunch of poets who are highly invested in collective, communal, political issues. Tongo Eisen-Martin, CA Conrad, Morgan Parker, Ilya Kaminsky (whose manuscript *Deaf Republic* is going to make waves when it’s finally published) come to mind, to name only a few excellent names. Edmundson also strikes me as somewhat dismissive of any poem that doesn’t fit into his particular and hierarchical notion of “superb lyric poetry,” for which he even offers a three-pronged formula for success. I distrust this approach to art. I begin to slowly back away from anybody who uses the word “formula” too often. Terrance Hayes says he thinks of poems not as machines but as animals. That feels truer to me, and in that context Edmundson’s desire starts to feel a little creepy. If he wants a roaring lion of a poem, cool, great. But that doesn’t mean you have to kill the squirrels. I actually prefer the squirrels (I actually am a squirrel).

Also, the amount of poetry appearing in America is staggering, which makes the kind of generalizations Edmundson makes hazardous. Poetry has a lot of problems and it’s easy to point them out, but problems lead to answers. Yes, poets have a tendency to get lost in “self-questioning” or self-absorption. This is a common stereotype about poets. But the existence of such a stereotype compels the reaction against it. Artists throughout history have created energy in this judo fashion. For example, when poets get too opaque and drift away from reality, someone like Patricia Lockwood comes along and wins the hearts of a million readers by being smart and funny. The poets then realize that what they thought was The Void was actually just their own reflection in a puddle, and recalibrate.

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**PC:** Edmundson cites a passage from *Humbolt’s Gift* in which Charlie Citrine says poets “exist to light up the enormity of the awful tangle” of America’s overpowering reality. Does this ring true for you? If so, which part of the tangle would you like to illuminate?

**MH:** Pretty grim but, yes, I’ll buy this to a degree, especially since America keeps discovering new ways to tangle more awfully. I recommend Rachel Zucker’s podcast, *Commonplace*, for discussions around this topic. In one episode Zucker interviews the poet Roger Reeves, and Reeves talks about how important it is for poetry to tell the stories

of people who are under attack. But he also emphasizes the value of doing a close-up on the faces of the attackers – not to glamorize them, but to seek to understand and expose the forces behind the attack. Different artists have different angles of access to the tangle. Based on what I’ve written lately, I would say I’m interested in looking at psychological drivers such as anxiety, ambition, and apathy. These are abstract terms but they leak into tangible actions and inactions, and currently in America they are being stretched to an extreme, or so it seems to me. A poem like “Box” takes an interest in this.

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**PC:** In 2012, the US National Endowment for the Arts found that despite an increase in literary reading, poetry had suffered the “steepest decline in participation in any literary genre” during the previous decade. A year later, a leading UK poetry publisher announced that single-author collections had become financially unsustainable. What does it feel like to write poetry in such difficult circumstances?

**MH:** Sales numbers for poetry books tend to be relatively tiny, yes. But it’s not all bad news. I briefly worked at Small Press Distribution, which has a warehouse in Berkeley, California, containing thousands and thousands of poetry books. It’s one of my favorite places in the world. And, happily, SPD has broken its own sales record every year for the past ten years. The phrase “difficult circumstances” is fitting in a sense, but it doesn’t totally square with my experience. My job was to pick books from the stacks, box them up, and mail them off to people who’d ordered them. Going through this process with my own eyes and hands

was somehow heartening. The model of poetry publishing could use some revision, but poems are still reaching people, in fact increasingly so. I suspect social media has contributed to the increase. Social media is not a perfect utopia for poetry – the fact that statistics and creepy words like “followers” are involved is unfortunate – but there’s no doubt it helps poetry travel.

I haven’t answered the question: what does it feel like to write poetry in these circumstances? To me, it feels like a secret personal playground. The fact that so little money and attention is involved only allows me to burrow deeper into the equipment. I remember when I first started writing poems I was embarrassed, so I didn’t tell anybody I was doing it. I would wait until my roommate fell asleep, then write. The room was dark and silent and I didn’t know what the NEA was. The pleasure of that innocence is gone now but new pleasures are always rushing in. One such pleasure is the ongoing discovery of poets whose writing I love. That is how you make friends on the secret playground. It probably sounds like I’m being coy with this metaphor, but these friendships really matter to me. Some of the people in the world I feel most connected to are poets I have never met before. In light of this intimacy, I end up not thinking much about whatever the studies might indicate.

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**PC:** You’ve recently been signed by Anansi and will soon be publishing your first collection of poems. What does that mean for a young poet?

**MH:** It means I’m lucky. Anansi makes beautiful books, and I couldn’t have landed in the hands of a better editor than Kevin Connolly. I hope my poems are able to go forth and make a few friends.

Having the book accepted has taken some pressure off, in a way. I put so much energy into making this book happen, and now it's happening, and I've retrospectively realized that there was never any rush to make it happen. I want to take my time writing whatever comes next. I'm usually the type to write as frequently as possible and feel guilty whenever I'm not writing. (I suspect many young poets feel this way.) But now I'd like to spend some time just reading and thinking and living, not stressing the writing as much. I'd like to get some distance between the old poems and the new poems. I love when poets change up their approach from book to book. It shows a curiosity about the art, I think, to be willing to start from scratch like that. The encouragement I've received from Anansi (not to mention PEN Canada!) has helped give me the confidence to make that my goal: to start again from scratch.

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**PC:** Several of your poems read like fragments of a surreal screenplay. Has cinema influenced you?

**MH:** The biggest influence that cinema has had on me is probably envy. I'm envious of what filmmakers are able to accomplish. After seeing a great film I briefly mourn the fact that I'm not a filmmaker, then I ask myself how I might stretch my own writing in order to achieve similar effects. Of course poetry can never do quite what film does, but the pursuit of such impossibilities can still be fruitful.

Recently I've loved Terence Nance's *An Oversimplification of Her Beauty*, Juzo Itami's *Tampopo*, Alison Maclean's adaptation of *Jesus' Son*, and Agnès Varda's *L'Opera Mouffe*, which to me basically feels like chapbook of poems in the form

of a film. I've been enjoying new episodes of *Twin Peaks*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I love the way Lynch braids surrealism and storytelling. I enjoy pretty much anything that comes out of Studio Ghibli for similar reasons. I love how reality feels just after an unreal filmic experience has ended. There is a quality to the air that is charged, brittle yet full – you feel as if you've landed on a new planet. I hope to create a version of that feeling with my poems. I don't know if I've ever succeeded.

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**PC:** Which poets would make it onto your desert island reading list? Why?

**MH:** I'm going to read this question in the bleakest possible terms, i.e. I'm stranded alone on a desert island with no prospect of escape. I would have to bring some Derek Walcott because he's so wise about waves and island landscapes. Mary Ruefle because her poems teach you how to converse with animals and plants, and this could be useful in such a setting. Maybe Eileen Myles to help me remember how the world felt back when I was in it. And Emily Dickinson – I would spend one full day with each of her poems and then quietly die in the sand.

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**Mikko Harvey** is the author of *Unstable Neighbourhood Rabbit* (House of Anansi, 2018). He lives in New York City, where he is the Joseph F. McCrindle Foundation Online Editorial Fellow at *Poets & Writers Magazine*. He also serves as an associate poetry editor for *Fairy Tale Review*.

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**Photography**

christhomaids.com  
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**Editor**

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**Printing**

flashreproductions.com  
416.742.1244

**Paper**

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