



**PEN World Voices Festival of International Literature
To Focus on Literature and Cultures of the African Continent**

*11th Annual Festival Brings More Than 100 Writers from 30 Nations to
New York in Celebration of Freedom of Expression
May 4 – 10, 2015*

New York, NY (February 11, 2015 / Updated May 1, 2015) – The 11th annual PEN World Voices Festival of International Literature will gather writers from around the globe in New York City May 4 – 10, 2015, as the Festival inaugurates a new Chairman, Colm Tóibín, and introduces a new curatorial approach—focusing on the contemporary literary culture of the African continent and its diaspora. Nigerian-born writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, winner of the 2013 National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction, will co-curate the African program alongside Festival Director László Jakab Orsós. Ms. Adichie will also deliver the annual Arthur Miller Freedom to Write Lecture on closing night. A hallmark of the Festival, the Lecture has previously been delivered by Festival founder Salman Rushdie, Christopher Hitchens, Wole Soyinka, Umberto Eco, and Justice Sonia Sotomayor, among others.

"Focusing on the African continent is an ambitious undertaking," said Orsós. "We cannot, in one week-long Festival, even come close to presenting the entirety of the riveting literary landscapes throughout Africa, but we're excited to present a select group of writers and artists who, I believe, will inspire New York audiences with their uncompromising and brilliant work. It's our privilege to put the spotlight on these writers, and it is my hope that they will challenge all of us to create art that is bravely subversive and relevant to our time."

Complementing the Africa-focused events, the Festival will offer a rich and eclectic variety of conversations, readings, workshops, and performances celebrating the power of the written word as a vital element of public discourse. Festival events will take place across New York City from lower Manhattan and Harlem to Brooklyn and the Bronx. Featuring both established and emerging writers and artists from around the globe, participants include Teju Cole, Edwidge Danticat, Mona Eltahawy, Richard Flanagan, Aminatta Forna, Rachel Kushner, Alain Mabanckou, Achille Mbembe, Nico Muhly, Sigrid Nunez, Michael Ondaatje, Luc Sante, Craig Seligman, Tracy K. Smith, and Tom Stoppard.

Launched by PEN American Center in the wake of September 11, 2001, as a means of combating American cultural isolationism, the World Voices Festival is an extension of the organization's work as a champion of freedom of expression.

"This year, on the streets of Paris and other cities, millions have stood together for unity and freedom of the press, and we offer them our heartfelt solidarity," said Festival Chairman Colm Tóibín. "The spirit of these marchers is with us at this year's Festival, as we once again resoundingly affirm the importance of the open and free exchange of ideas from every corner of the world."

The 2015 Festival kicks off with *The Future is Now*, a reading featuring commissions from writers including Tom Stoppard, Aminatta Forna, and Mona Eltahawy exploring their imagined scenarios for global culture and society in 2050. Additional highlights of the week-long Festival include an evening of original, unpublished meditations and prayers performed by writers, musicians, and artists including

Edwidge Danticat, Rachel Kushner, Colm Tóibín, and Nico Muhly. At a salon-style gathering, *In and Out of Africa*, writers and artists will mingle with guests over drinks as hosts lead conversations with the audience on issues vital to shaping deeper understanding between African nations and the West.

The Festival will also include panels exploring the African diaspora, the future of queer communities in Africa, and the vibrant poetry scenes across the continent; and a conversation on memoirs between Michael Ondaatje, Luc Sante, and Tracy K. Smith. A panel discussion will explore the impact of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, the seminal historic event that became a paradigm for silencing writers in the ensuing decades of the 20th century.

“As we continue to see ordinary citizens punished for expressing their views and journalists becoming victims of violence, our work at PEN on behalf of writers worldwide is more important than ever,” said Suzanne Nossel, Executive Director of PEN American Center. “The insightful and inspiring voices of the Festival’s participants affirm the importance of this work while also providing profound ways for audiences to engage with some of the world’s greatest living writers.”

Festival highlights include:

- *The Future is Now*: A diverse group of writers including Tom Stoppard, Aminatta Forna, Mona Eltahawy, Lola Shoneyin, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Binyavanga Wainaina, and Jackie Wang will present commissioned works exploring scenarios for global culture and society in 2050, and how our future is intimately tied to the present. At The Great Hall, Cooper Union (Monday, May 4).
- *Prayer and Meditation*: For this contemplative evening, writers and artists will read original, deeply personal prayers and meditations. Participants include Edwidge Danticat, Rachel Kushner, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, Maira Kalman, Brenda Shaughnessy, Colm Tóibín, and Nico Muhly. At The Sheen Center, Loretto Auditorium (Wednesday, May 6).
- *A Conversation: Richard Flanagan with Claire Messud*: Australia’s leading novelist, Richard Flanagan, makes his first U.S. appearance since his novel, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, took home the 2014 Booker Prize. Renowned for his magnetic personality, Flanagan will discuss the book’s harrowing account of his father’s time spent as a Japanese POW in a conversation with American novelist, Claire Messud. At the Sheen Center, Loretto Auditorium (Friday, May 8).
- *Queer Futures*: A conversation with prominent African writers will survey the landscape of African gay rights movements, challenging preconceived ideas about the role of literature in the historic struggle for human rights. Participants will include Kehinde Bademosi, Zanele Muholi, and Binyavanga Wainaina. At the Greene Space (Wednesday, May 6).
- *In and Out of Africa*: At this salon-style gathering, audiences will mingle with writers and artists over drinks as hosts Odile Cazenave and Rich Blint lead conversations on issues vital to shaping an increased understanding of the complex relationships between African nations and the West. Participants will include Adéwálé Àjàdí, Ananda Devi, Boubacar Boris Diop, Billy Kahora, Alain Mabanckou, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, and Véronique Tadjo. Co-presented with Harlem Stage, Columbia University School of the Arts Office of Community Outreach and Education, and Institute for Research in African American Studies. At Harlem Stage (Saturday, May 9).
- *Memoir and Memory*: Michael Ondaatje, Luc Sante, and Tracy K Smith examine what happens when the most intimate details of a writer’s life become the subject of his or her professional work. At the Sheen Center, Loretto Auditorium (Thursday, May 7).

- *Armenian Genocide: A Dark Paradigm*: To commemorate the centennial of the Armenian Genocide, a panel will discuss this historic tragedy and its significance as a “dark paradigm” for attempts by governments across the world to silence writers and cultural leaders. Moderated by Peter Balakian, panelists will include Maureen Freely, Nancy Kricorian, Ronald G. Suny, and Ragip Zarakolu. Sponsored by the Armenian Genocide Centennial Committee. At the School of Visual Arts, Silas Theater (Wednesday, May 6).
- *Susan Sontag, Revisited*: Four experts from a variety of disciplines will discuss how former PEN President Susan Sontag’s towering work and inspiring life has impacted their own practice and artistic expression more broadly. Moderated by Wayne Koestenbaum, panelists will include Moe Angelos, Nancy Kates, Sigrid Nunez, and Craig Seligman. At the Crosby Street Hotel (Friday, May 8).
- *Africa in Two Acts*: This two-part event features Achille Mbembe, who will deliver opening remarks on the visible and invisible political and cultural issues facing African nations, followed by a panel of writers responding to those remarks in real time. At the Crosby Street Hotel (Wednesday, May 6).
- *H.G. Adler: A Survivor’s Dual Reverie*: A panel of writers and journalists including Peter Filkins, Jeremy Adler, Daniel Mendelsohn, and Ruth Franklin will discuss Adler’s unique “dual” perspective on the events of the Holocaust. Adler is author of both *The Wall*—a fictional account of his own survival—and of *Theresienstadt 1941-1945: The Face of a Coerced Community*—an academic examination of the same event to be published in a new translation in October 2015. Moderated by Edwin Frank. Co-presented with The Jewish Museum. At The Jewish Museum (Thursday, May 7).
- *The Witnesses*: Noted African writers including Boubacar Boris Diop, Achille Mbembe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and Yusef Komunyakaa will debate questions about the value of age and wisdom in artistic expression, and discuss the importance of “elders” both within African literary scenes and in the world at large. Co-presented with The Bronx Museum of the Arts and Bronx Writers Center at the Bronx Council on the Arts. At The Bronx Museum of the Arts (Thursday, May 7).
- *African Poets: The New Generation*: Chris Abani and Kwame Dawes, editors of the recent box set, *Eight New-Generation African Poets*, will lead a Q&A on Africa’s vibrant and intense poetry scenes. Co-presented with the Nuyorican Poets Café. At the Nuyorican Poets Café (Thursday, May 7).
- *On Something Else*: In this special appearance, one of two at this year’s Festival, Edwidge Danticat exposes her “something else”—a song, a photograph, an idea—that has in some way contributed to her work and altered the trajectory of her artistic viewpoint. At the Sheen Center, Loretto Auditorium (Thursday, May 7).
- *A Literary Quest*: This popular event will return in 2015 and invite Festival audiences to wander the halls of Westbeth, the city’s oldest and largest artists community, in search of cozy, apartment-based literary readings by Chantel Acevedo, Zoe Pilger, and others. The evening will conclude with a celebration in Westbeth’s legendary gallery. Co-presented with Westbeth Artists Residents Council. At Westbeth Center for the Arts (Friday, May 8).

- *Priya's Shakti: Reality, Augmented*: The creators of *Priya's Shakti*, the popular Indian comic book about a woman who falls victim to a brutal sexual assault, will discuss the creation of this socially conscious work. The augmented reality technology used in the book will be employed to transform the venue, City Lore, into a "living comic book" for the event. Featuring Ram Devineni, Vikas K. Menon, and Daniel Goldman. Co-presented with City Lore. At City Lore (Thursday, May 7).
- *POEMobile*: New York's famous POEMobile, which projects poems onto buildings and underscores them with music and live spoken word performances, rolls into the PEN World Voices Festival of International Literature in collaboration with City Lore, Bowery Arts + Science, and School of the Arts' Office of Community Outreach and Education and Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University. Performances will celebrate a new box set of 12 African poetry chapbooks edited by Chris Abani and Kwame Dawes and New York's own celebrated poetry scene. At the Studio Museum in Harlem (Thursday, May 7) and the corner of Bedford and Madison, Brooklyn (Saturday, May 9).

Tickets for all Festival events are available at: www.penworldvoices.org

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About PEN American Center

Founded in 1922, PEN American Center is a fellowship of writers dedicated to defending freedom of expression and persecuted writers and journalists, advancing literature and literary translation, and fostering international literary exchange. It is the largest and most active of the 145 chapters in 101 countries that comprise PEN International.

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