



SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Press Release

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Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Fatima Bhutto, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Elif Shafak, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Edmund de Waal join English PEN's centenary celebrations at the Southbank Centre



Tsitsi Dangarembga © Hannah Mentz, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie © Manny Jefferson, Elif Shafak © Oliver Hess

English PEN 100 (24–26 September 2021) will feature:

- A three-day programme on themes of literature, exile, free expression, translation, activism, and solidarity, drawn from English PEN's rich history of protecting writers and readers across the world
- Writers, activists, and thinkers including **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Elif Shafak, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Fatima Bhutto, Temi Oh, Hassan Blasim, Max Porter, Margaret Busby, Nesrine Malik, Joelle Taylor, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Edmund de Waal, Philippe Sands, Ellah P. Wakatama, Sasha Dugdale, Daniel Hahn, Laura Bates, Xiaolu Guo, Georgina Godwin, Margie Orford, Nadifa Mohamed, Tice Cin, So Mayer, Kit de Waal, Tade Thompson, Ahdaf Soueif, Meena Kandasamy**
- An outdoor digital artwork by artist **Ai Weiwei** created for English PEN's centenary
- An evening of new work on themes of sisterhood and solidarity commissioned for English PEN's centenary, hosted by **Mona Arshi** and curated by **Rachel Long**

Founded in 1921, English PEN – one of the world’s oldest human rights organisations – marks its 100th anniversary with the year-long programme, *Common Currency*. The three-day **English PEN 100** festival at the Southbank Centre, also part of *Common Currency*, brings together renowned and emerging writers, readers and activists for timely debates and discussions. The themes of the programme, inspired by the [PEN Charter](#), include free speech and democracy, language and ideas, and a celebration of women.

To open the festival, bestselling author and PEN Pinter Prize 2018 winner **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** will reflect on her writing, including her latest book *Notes on Grief*, in conversation with columnist and author of *We Need New Stories*, **Nesrine Malik** ([24 Sep. RFH](#)). In *Why Toni Morrison Matters*, **Margaret Busby**, **Tsitsi Dangarembga** and **Nadifa Mohamed** will explore the legacy of the visionary writer ([25 Sep. QEH](#)). Continuing the focus on women’s voices, **Margie Orford**, **Ahdaf Soueif**, **Fatima Bhutto** and **Laura Bates** will discuss the PEN Women’s Manifesto and the founder of PEN, Catherine Amy Dawson Scott, a trailblazer for equality between genders in a literary world dominated by men ([25 Sep. QEH](#)).

The PEN movement has worked with writers forced into exile for many decades, creating ‘in exile’ centres across the world. To explore what it means to live and write in exile, acclaimed authors **Xiaolu Guo**, **Hassan Blasim**, and **Edmund de Waal** will be in conversation with broadcaster **Georgina Godwin** ([25 Sep. PUR](#)). Continuing this exploration of borders, language and ideas, writers **Sasha Dugdale**, **Meena Kandasamy**, **Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o** and **Daniel Hahn** will consider the possibility and limits of international writing, decolonising literature, and the politics of translation ([26 Sep. PUR](#)).

100 years from the inception of PEN, many events will focus on the future of writing and free expression, including an evening of specially commissioned new writing hosted by **Mona Arshi** and curated by **Rachel Long** ([25 Sep. PUR](#)); a discussion with **Temi Oh**, **Tade Thompson**, and **Ellah P. Wakatama** on the visionary powers of sci-fi ([26 Sep. PUR](#)); and **Tice Cin**, **So Mayer**, **Max Porter**, **Kit de Waal** and **Joelle Taylor** on the importance of solidarity and literary activism ([26 Sep. QEH](#)). On the final evening of *English PEN 100*, President of English PEN and human rights lawyer **Philippe Sands** will be joined by PEN Pinter Prize 2021 winner **Tsitsi Dangarembga**, writer and academic **Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o**, and author **Elif Shafak** to reflect on free expression and writing, in their own work and across the world ([26 Sep. QEH](#)).

Ted Hodgkinson, Head of Literature and Spoken Word, Southbank Centre said:

“We’re delighted to welcome English PEN, one of the world’s oldest human rights organisations, for a festival that celebrates a century of great writing and the abiding relevance of their courageous campaigning. With English PEN 100, we reflect on the pivotal role the organisation played for women writers in the UK, for free expression globally, and for readers and writers everywhere. As the Southbank Centre reopens its doors, we invite you all to join us for a lively and illuminating weekend with some of the world’s most exciting writers.”

Daniel Gorman, Director, English PEN said:

“For the past 100 years, English PEN has championed freedom of expression and literature across the world. This year, as we mark our centenary, we explore and expand on the founding themes of the organisation: language and ideas crossing borders, free speech and democracy, and a celebration of women’s voices. We’re thrilled to welcome some of the world’s greatest writers for an ambitious programme at the Southbank Centre that will continue conversations, ideas, debates that we hope will inspire the next 100 years.”

Hannah Trevarthen, Events and Partnerships Manager (Centenary), English PEN said:

“We’re thrilled to take our Common Currency centenary celebrations to the Southbank Centre for a three-day programme in which we will explore the rich history of PEN together with a diverse range of writers, activists, and thinkers. The programme will draw on PEN’s work over the past 100 years protecting writers and readers across the world, with a particular focus on writing in exile, writing in translation, and elevating women’s voices.”

English PEN 100 is part of English PEN’s year-long programme Common Currency, which features events, residencies, campaigns and conversations across the UK and Ireland. Common Currency is supported by a National Lottery Project Grant from Arts Council England, British Council, Cockayne Grants for the Arts – a donor advised fund of London Community Foundation, and PEN International.

Booking

Early booking for Southbank Centre Members from Tuesday 22 June.

10% discount for English PEN Members from Wednesday 23 June.

General on-sale from Wednesday 23 June.

Special offer: 25% off when buying tickets to 3 or more events.

For more information on the season please visit the Southbank Centre website [here](#).

- ENDS -

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Notes to Editors

Images are available to download [here](#).

English PEN is one of the world’s oldest human rights organisations, championing the freedom to write and read. We are the founding centre of PEN International, a worldwide writers’ association with 145 centres in more than 100 countries. With the support of our members – a community of readers, writers and activists – we protect freedom of expression whenever it is under attack, support writers facing persecution around the world, and celebrate contemporary international writing with literary prizes, grants, events, and our online magazine PEN Transmissions.

English PEN’s work is made possible through core funding from Arts Council England and the TS Eliot Foundation alongside the support of members, project partners and Silver PEN partners.

<https://www.englishpen.org/>

Common Currency

This year English PEN marks its centenary with Common Currency, a year-long programme which brings together writers, readers and activists for an ambitious collaboration with partner organisations for events, residencies, campaigns and conversations across the UK and Ireland.

<https://www.englishpen.org/common-currency/>
#CommonCurrency

About the Southbank Centre

The Southbank Centre is the UK's largest arts centre occupying a prominent riverside location that sits in the midst of London's most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. We exist to present great cultural experiences that bring people together and we achieve this by providing the space for artists to create and present their best work and by creating a place where as many people as possible can come together to experience bold, unusual and eye-opening work. We want to take people out of the everyday, every day. The site has an extraordinary creative and architectural history stretching back to the 1951 Festival of Britain. The Southbank Centre is made up of the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Hayward Gallery as well as being home to the National Poetry Library and the Arts Council Collection. It is also home to four Resident Orchestras (London Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, London Sinfonietta and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment) and four Associate Orchestras (Aurora Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra and National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain).

<https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/>

Keeping audiences safe on site

As the Southbank Centre welcomes visitors back, the organisation's number one priority is the safety, health and wellbeing of visitors and staff, so a number of measures to help everyone feel confident have been introduced. Full details of the Covid-secure measures can be found on the Southbank Centre website. The organisation continues to review and manage any risks and respond to any changes in government guidance.

Full listings:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie opens English PEN 100

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the bestselling author of *Americanah* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, reflects on writing and storytelling.

Royal Festival Hall, Friday 24 September 2021, 7.30pm, £15

<https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/literature-poetry/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-not-es-writing>

Why Toni Morrison Matters:

Margaret Busby, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Nadifa Mohamed

Toni Morrison, the visionary novelist and Nobel Laureate, is celebrated by writers Margaret Busby, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Nadifa Mohamed. Morrison, herself one of the most frequently banned authors in America, championed under-represented voices and was a Vice-President of PEN International.

Queen Elizabeth Hall, Saturday 25 September 2021, 1pm, £10

<https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/literature-poetry/why-toni-morrison-matters>

Literature in Exile: Writers and Absence

A discussion with acclaimed authors Xiaolu Guo, Hassan Blasim and Edmund de Waal

Chaired by broadcaster Georgina Godwin, the panellists look at what is lost and what is gained when writers are banished from their homelands. How can they engage with their country of origin – and the one that is now hosting them? The PEN movement

has worked with writers forced into exile for many decades, from the German PEN Club in exile, founded in the 1930s, through to current groups dedicated to writers expelled from Eritrea, North Korea and Iran.

Purcell Room, Saturday 25 September 2021, 3.30pm, £10

<https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/literature-poetry/literature-exile-writers-and-absence>

Dear Sister: Poems of Sisterhood and Solidarity

An evening of new work on themes of sisterhood and solidarity commissioned for Common Currency hosted by Mona Arshi

An evening of new work curated by Rachel Long, poet and founder of Octavia Collective, including poetry, dance and film especially commissioned for Common Currency and performed live by members of Octavia Collective and friends, hosted by Forward Prize-winning poet and writer Mona Arshi.

Purcell Room, Saturday 25 September 2021, 5pm, £10

<https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/literature-poetry/dear-sister-octavia-collective-live>

Women Making Change

Margie Orford chairs a discussion with Ahdaf Soueif, Fatima Bhutto and Laura Bates on the PEN Women's Manifesto and the role women play in changing the world

Founded in 1921 by Catherine Amy Dawson Scott, English PEN was a trailblazer for equality between genders in a literary world dominated by men. Scott famously wrote: 'It is the artist who tries to gradually accustom people to the possibilities of a better state of things.' From the first meetings of the PEN Club, she recruited a number of women founding members, such as Radclyffe Hall, Violet Hunt and Rebecca West, when no such organisation existed for women writers. As English PEN celebrates 100 years, the panellists talk about their writing and the role of women in pushing for change in the world.

Queen Elizabeth Hall, Saturday 25 September 2021, 7.30pm, £10

<https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/literature-poetry/women-making-change>

Visions of the Future

Temi Oh, Tade Thompson and Ellah P. Wakatama explore the visionary powers of sci-fi

Author of *Do You Dream of Terra-Two?* Temi Oh and Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning writer Tade Thompson, discuss the world as seen through sci-fi in this event chaired by Ellah P. Wakatama, the editor and publisher. Inspiration comes from sources including HG Wells, whose work foresaw developments as varied as the Declaration of Human Rights to the World Wide Web, and who was an early president of PEN.

Purcell Room, Sunday 26 September 2021, 1pm, £10

<https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/literature-poetry/visions-future>

Writers on Solidarity

Tice Cin, So Mayer, Max Porter, and Kit de Waal discuss writer to writer solidarity with Joelle Taylor

100 years on from the inception of PEN as a 'League of Nations for Men and Women of Letters', poet and artist Tice Cin, author So Mayer, writer and editor Max Porter, and novelist Kit de Waal discuss with performer and poet Joelle Taylor the importance of solidarity, ideas of literary activism, dismantling barriers and the importance of PEN today.

Queen Elizabeth Hall, Sunday 26 September 2021, 3.30pm, £10

<https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/literature-poetry/taking-stand-writers-solidarity>

The Politics of Translation

Writers Sasha Dugdale, Meena Kandasamy and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o discuss identity and international literature with Daniel Hahn

Translators Sasha Dugdale, Meena Kandasamy, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a writer and academic, discuss identity and international literature at this event, chaired by Daniel Hahn OBE, who is also a translator and author. Together they consider the possibilities and limits of international writing, decolonising literature, the dominance of English-language publishing and the question of who chooses what is and is not translated.

Purcell Room, Sunday 26 September 2021, 5pm, £10

<https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/literature-poetry/politics-translation>

Free Expression Now

Writers Tsitsi Dangarembga, Elif Shafak, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o join Philippe Sands

Philippe Sands, human rights lawyer and president of English PEN, brings a weekend of events celebrating the organisation's centenary to a close. He is joined by novelist, playwright and filmmaker Tsitsi Dangarembga, novelist and essayist Elif Shafak, and writer and academic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Together they reflect on free expression and writing, in their own work and across the world.

Queen Elizabeth Hall, Sunday 26 September 2021, 7.30pm, £10

<https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/literature-poetry/future-free-expression-philippe-sands>