



# Beyond Borders: Traveling Through Literature

International Writers in Conversation at the Bay Area Book Festival

Saturday, April 28

**10:00 - 11:15 Breaking Literary Ground: Ambitious Young Writers from Ireland**

Eimear McBride, David Hayden, Liz Nugent, moderated by Rosemary Graham

The small country of Ireland has always had an outsize influence on world literature. For the third year in a row, the festival showcases some of today's most powerful writers who come from this land of literary pioneers. Surrealist feminist author Eimear McBride creates a literary mosaic with her disjointed, artful syntax; NPR called her "one of the most exciting young talents in fiction." Of David Hayden's debut short story collection, the Guardian wrote, "Once in a blue moon, a book comes along that really is like nothing you've ever read before." Liz Nugent is a rising star who has written a dark thriller that Publisher's Weekly, in a starred review, called "an intense character study" that plays with truth.

**10:00 - 11:15 Translating Trauma**

Katherena Vermette, Winnie M. Li, moderated by Natasha Singh

Much great literature focuses on the darkest parts of being human, and writers need exceptional courage to write about trauma. Katherena Vermette, who comes from the Métis nation in Canada, writes about violence and power struggles between women in her harrowing novel "The Break," praised by Margaret Atwood as "universal." Of Winnie M. Li's debut novel "Dark Chapter," inspired by her own experience as a survivor of assault, Kirkus reviews said: "That Li was able to write this novel, as both personal catharsis and public service, speaks volumes about her inner strength. Li's novel is both a valuable social document and a riveting page-turner." This pair of acclaimed female writers will explore the question of how we process and communicate trauma with Natasha Singh.

**10:30 - 11:45 The Art of Science Fiction: Interview with Sylvie Denis, France's Queen of Sci-Fi**

Sylvie Denis, Marie Brennan

For this special event, one of France's leading science fiction writers, Sylvie Denis, travels to the Bay Area Book Festival to discuss her work and the genre of science fiction. A novelist, short story writer, critic, editor, and translator, Denis has often focused her writing on new technologies and their impact on societies. She also will explore themes of climate change and migration (her current focus) and will share her experience as a woman writing (French critical theory has had much to say, controversially, about the female literary voice). Finally, how does translation affect the presentation of literary work and science fiction especially? She will be interviewed by fantasy writer Marie Brennan, whose work Denis has translated.

11:45 - 1:00 **Wrestling with the Devil: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in Conversation**

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o interviewed by Namwali Serpell

In 1977, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was taken prisoner by the Kenyan government. For nearly a year, he was held in a maximum security facility as a political prisoner, all because of his artistic defiance of a regime. It was in this prison, under ceaseless surveillance, that he penned a novel—on toilet paper. Following the U.S. release of his memoir, "Wrestling with the Devil," Ngũgĩ will recount this fateful experience and the lasting effect it had on his literary art (which has frequently put him on the radar for the Nobel Prize), when he engages with Namwali Serpell in conversation.

1:30 - 2:45 **Fierce Originality: Eimear McBride interviewed by Sylvia Brownrigg**

Eimear McBride, Sylvia Brownrigg

With her first published novel, "A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing," Eimear McBride was compared to a feminist James Joyce in how she broke language to capture fleeting consciousness itself, in this case in the mind of a young girl struggling to remain intact amidst trauma. The New York Times called it "a future classic." NPR said, "Shattering...Be prepared to be blown away by this raw, visceral, brutally intense neo-modernist first novel." In her second, even more sophisticated novel, "The Lesser Bohemians," she also aimed "to write truthfully about female experience," this time about a consuming love affair with an older man. "Writing is painful," she told the Guardian, "but it's the closest you can get to joy." McBride comes to us from Ireland to talk about writing, life, feminism and more with novelist Sylvia Brownrigg.

1:30 - 2:45 **Women Plot the Crime**

Sara Blaedel, Anne Holt, Yrsa Sigurdardóttir, Cara Black

The plot for the perfect crime may very well reside in the minds of these three cunning women. This panel of authors will discuss what it takes—and what it takes out of you—to write a complex, compelling, and believable (but un-guessable) crime story. Come plumb the minds of Sara Blaedel (Denmark's "queen of crime"), Anne Holt (Norway's best-selling female crime writer), and Icelandic best-selling author Yrsa Sigurdardóttir, as they talk with fellow crime writer Cara Black.

1:30 - 2:45 **Utter Fascination: The Art of the Exceptionally Complex Character**

Åsa Avdic, Therese Bohman, Carl Frode Tiller, Laleh Khadivi

How do writers create complex characters? These three authors discuss how they dream up, and then capture on the page, entirely new people who are exceptionally complicated. What narrative strategies

do they use to create them? How did the characters develop in the authors' minds? Don't miss the complex characters on this panel: Asa Avdic, a journalist and breakout novelist whose debut, "The Dying Game," is a chilling version of an Agatha Christie ensemble (characters trapped and slowly disappearing) in a futuristic Sweden; Therese Bohman, whose scintillating novel "Eventide" about a middle-aged woman's life "explores complex inner worlds with great sensitivity and insight" (Kirkus); and Carl Frode Tiller with the "Encircling" trilogy, which endeavors to reconstruct a man's mind piece by piece after he loses his memory.

**3:15 - 4:30    Knots of Wonder: Stunning Short Fiction**

Gunnhild Oyeaug, David Hayden, Masatsugu Ono, moderated by Michael Holtmann

Short stories and novellas are like knots: compact on the surface, but containing intricately woven ideas within that, when unraveled, point to something much larger. How do writers do it? These three authors are world-class exemplars of the form: Norwegian short story writer Gunnhild Oyeaug, who can "produce stabs of emotion, unexpected ghost notes of feeling, from pieces so short and offbeat that they seem at first like aborted arias" (in a profile of her by *The New Yorker*); Irish writer David Hayden, whose short stories *The Guardian* calls "brilliantly disturbing and unclassifiable"; and, coming to us from Japan, Masatsugu Ono, whose jewel-like novella mixes the surreal with the profound in a story of a shy, traumatized boy overcoming the shame, anger, and sadness that silence him.

**3:15 - 4:15    The Poet's Calling: The Life & Works of Pablo Neruda**

Mark Eisner, Forrest Gander, Jessica Powell

"Pablo Neruda was many things during his life: a Nobel Laureate, a diplomat, and a fugitive, but always at heart, a poet. This panel of translators has collectively devoted decades to examining and sharing the late poet's work. Mark Eisner's new biography, "Neruda: The Poet's Calling," is a definitive account of the Chilean poet's influence, called by Kirkus "'new standard-bearer among Neruda biographies.'" Forrest Gander brought Neruda's recently discovered "lost poems"—written on napkins, receipts, and playbills—to life in his translated collection, which *The Guardian* called "'a literary event of universal importance.'" Jessica Powell is responsible for the first-ever English translation of Neruda's third book of poems, "venture of the infinite man." Hear this unparalleled panel of experts as they raise Neruda's voice and discuss his prevailing legacy.

**3:15 - 4:30    The Nature of Evil: Stories on Darkness**

Karo Hämäläinen, Steffen Jacobsen, Liz Nugent, Yrsa Sigurdardóttir

Villains allow readers to explore the darkest depths of the human psyche, from the overtly malicious to the insidiously hateful. Evil is more than a plot device—it's a universal truth. These authors harness this powerful truth in their captivating novels: Karo Hämäläinen's "Cruel is the Night," a dark locked-room mystery comedy; Steffen Jacobsen's thriller "Trophy," in which the dark, murderous pleasures of powerful men are unveiled; Liz Nugent's "Unraveling Oliver," which explores the darkness that drives lovers to violence; and Yrsa Sigurdardóttir's "The Legacy," complete with a taunting murderer and a child who witnesses murder. You won't want to miss the writers on this diverse panel as they discuss how they capture the worst of humanity between the pages of a book.

**5:00 - 6:00    Coming of Age on the Page**

Tommy Wieringa, Colin Winnette, moderated by Adam Z. Levy

Stories of self-discovery transcend time and place. Coming-of-age stories, the bildungsroman, are perennial and beloved throughout all nations' literary traditions. These authors demonstrate the durability of the genre as they introduce their dazzling new novels: acclaimed Dutch author Tommy Wieringa's multilayered story of a group of refugees and their interwoven destinies, and Colin Winnette's "The Job of the Wasp," a gothic story that proves adolescence can be a nightmare.

5:00 - 6:15 **Know Thyself: The Ultimate Mystery**

Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi, Mark Sarvas, Carl Frove Tiller

It's high literary tide mark on Saturday afternoon. Three of the smartest novelists working today discuss how fiction explodes the question of how we know ourselves. In "Call Me Zebra," partly set in Spain, Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi depicts a heroine on a Quixotic quest; the Wall Street Journal said, "Hearken ye fellow misfits, migrants, outcasts, squint-eyed bibliophiles, library-haunters and book stall-stalkers: Here is a novel for you." Mark Sarvas' "Memento Park," partly set in Hungary, was praised by Salman Rushdie as "a gripping mystery novel about art that is also a powerful meditation on fathers and sons." Norwegian writer Carl Frove Tiller has written a trilogy whodunit about a man who's lost his memory and reconstitutes himself via letters from friends telling him who he is; you can imagine how that turns out. Said Kirkus, "A wholly satisfying story about how unreliable narrators tell tales not just about events, but about our core emotions." Who are you? Come explore how we know ourselves.

Sunday, April 29

10:00 - 11:15 **Timeless: Reinvigorating the Past Through Historical Fiction**

Heather O'Neill, Linda Spalding, Adrienne Sharp, Rupert Thomson

Writing great historical fiction is an enormously challenging task for writers—so much research, woven seamlessly into a story—that rewards readers with tales that entertain and educate us at the same time. No wonder historical fiction is one of the most popular literary genres out there. Discover how it's done through this panels of authors writing about wildly diverging times. Two orphans navigate desperation in Heather O'Neill's "virtually cinematic" Depression-era Montreal. With portraits of slave owners and abolitionists, Linda Spalding captures the instability of mid-19th-century America as a divided nation tries to find its new form. Through the eyes of a vulnerable young woman, Adrienne Sharp takes us inside the glamour and darkness of Hollywood and Las Vegas in the mid-20th century. Rupert Thomson tells a love story of two women (disguised as men) in the Parisian art world whose troubled love lives are further complicated by war-torn Europe in the early 20th century.

10:30 - 11:45 **Smart Women Everywhere: Women Calling the Shots in Global Fiction**

Jasmin Darznik, Therese Bohman, Shobha Rao, Gunnhild Oyehaug, moderated by Rachael Myrow

Strong women are nothing new in literature, which has inspired centuries of women to speak up. And no woman is a victim when she's the one telling the story. From Iran to Sweden, these writers and their female characters show how it's done. Jasmin Darznik's debut novel, "Song of a Captive Bird," is an

homage to Forugh Farrokhzad, the poet many say brought feminism to Iran. Therese Bohman tells a familiar story of a brilliant woman surrounded by male fragility in her novel "Eventide." Shobha Rao creates a transcendent story of female friendship in "Girls Burn Brighter," which Vogue called "incandescent... a searing portrait of what feminism looks like in much of the world." Norwegian writer Gunnhild Oyeaug, lauded by the New Yorker as a short story master, comes a sensual and contemplative collection of gorgeous, female-centric short stories.

**11:45 - 1:00 Resist: Unlocking the Political Power of a Novel**

Margaret Wilkerson Sexton, Rodrigo Hasbún, Madeleine Thien, moderated by Mal Warwick

Books have the power to transform national consciousnesses, to reshape the world. The most powerful political novels narrow the scope of politics and current events, bringing the personal experience to the forefront of the discourse via empathetic characters. Come see three talented political novelists—Margaret Wilkerson Sexton (writing on the legacy of Jim Crow on contemporary families), Rodrigo Hasbún (whose mesmerizing, multi-voiced novel takes us into political revolutions in Latin America), and Madeleine Thien (who sweeps us into cultural revolutions in Asia)—as they explain how the novel can illuminate political change in ways that no non-fiction account can do.

**1:30 - 2:45 From the Great North to the World: New Writing from Canada**

Heather O'Neill, Madeleine Thien, Katherena Vermette, moderated by Linda Spalding

Canadian writers have long graced lists of the most beloved and critically acclaimed authors anywhere (just think Margaret Atwood, Rohinton Mistry, Michael Ondaatje). Come discover three exceptional Canadian rising stars (who also happen to be women) who have flown to us to discuss their work, including the influence of national and personal histories on it. Heather O'Neill's "The Lonely Hearts Hotel" is a portrait of two love-struck orphans against a backdrop of circus life in the Depression era. Madeleine Thien tackles two critical moments in China's history in her novel "Do Not Say We Have Nothing" (shortlisted for the Booker Prize): the Cultural Revolution and the protest at Tiananmen Square. Katherena Vermette tells a complex intergenerational story that traces seemingly disparate lives as they all converge on a single tragic incident. Don't miss these brilliant new voices from up north.

**2:00 - 3:15 Nordic Noir: The Enduring Genre of Cold Climate Thrillers**

Sara Blaedel, Anne Holt, Karo Hämäläinen, Steffen Jacobsen, Yrsa Sigurdardóttir, Randal Brandt

One of the most popular sessions at the Festival returns for its fourth year. Traveling all the way from Scandinavia and Iceland to join us today, these authors will illuminate why their books—which situate grisly stories of murder and chaos in frigid regions—have the enduring power to captivate audiences worldwide. From Denmark, Sara Blaedel will discuss her internationally best-selling and female-led Louise Rick and Ilka Jensen series. Norway's best-selling female crime writer Anne Holt will consider how her years working for police departments and as a lawyer have influenced her work. Finnish crime savant Karo Hämäläinen will let us in on how he became "a wicked and controlled writer who rarely allows his readers a moment of peace" (Toronto Sun). Hear from Icelandic best-selling author Yrsa Sigurdardóttir, who The Times UK said "is ensconced at or near the summit of Nordic crime

writing." And learn how Danish physician and thrill-master Steffen Jacobsen uses his talent for the macabre to create gripping reads.

**3:15 - 4:30 Books y Libros: A Talk with Spanish and Bilingual Children's Books Writers, Illustrators and Publishers**

Maya Christina Gonzalez, Robert Liu-Trujillo, Heather Robertson-Devine, Aida Salazar, Jennifer Torres, Maceo Cabrera Estévez

As borders tighten and DREAMers await their future, there are children who need to find themselves in the books they read. Is having brown and black skinned characters in books enough? In the age of Trump and Time's Up, how can bilingual and Spanish children's books in the US make an impact in our society? Can they help create a world where borders cannot be closed off? Children's book writers, illustrators, and publishers discuss why they create books that are geared towards a Latinx audience.

**3:15 - 4:30 Creating Home: On Finding Yourself in Another Culture**

Hernan Diaz, Rodrigo Hasbún, Tommy Wieringa, moderated by Oscar Villalon

"Home"—losing it, finding it, creating it—is one of the most fundamental themes in literature. These three authors explore the concept of home and foreignness, creating utterly captivating stories that subvert readers' expectations. Hernan Diaz, associate director of the Hispanic Institute at Columbia University, sends a youthful Swedish immigrant on a cross-country American trek in his new novel, "In the Distance," called "a potent depiction of loneliness, a memorable immigration narrative, and a canny reinvention of the old-school western." In Rodrigo Hasbún's, "Affections," a former member of the Nazi propaganda machine flees to Bolivia to find a fresh start, only to discover revolution. Tommy Wieringa's "These Are the Names" is "part fable, part murder mystery," telling the interwoven stories of a group of refugees and a good-hearted policeman—"this touching novel insistently affirms the values of civilization above tribalism and fear" (Wall Street Journal).

**5:00 - 6:30 The Power of Literature to Create a Better World: Closing Keynote with Pico Iyer**

Literature is how we forge a common good globally—by awakening a sense of empathy and openness and by stressing the things that connect us instead of what divides us. Never has this been more essential than today as politicians speak of walls and bans and as we feel distances growing wider between neighbors. Drawing upon his 32 years as a full-time writer (including 12 books spanning travel literature, biography, memoir and novels) and his 44 years as a full-time traveler, Pico Iyer will close the festival with a keynote illuminating the power of literature to create a world beyond walls. After the keynote, Iyer will be interviewed by renowned literary critic John Freeman—editor of Freeman's literary journal, former editor of the international journal *Granta*, and author of many books, including the new poetry collection "Maps." Both authors will sign books after the conversation. Note: Priority Tickets are \$12. We expect this session to sell out, so get your tickets now for this very special talk!