



Arundhati Roy © George Torode
Framed photo of Alaa Abd el-Fattah © Mosaab el-Shamy

Impact Report 2024–25

**ENGLISH
PEN**

FREEDOM
TO WRITE
FREEDOM
TO READ

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Words from the Director of English PEN

The year contained within these pages was defined by serious challenges to freedom of expression and human rights more broadly, both here in the UK and globally. We witnessed human rights emergencies, unfolding against the backdrop of the climate crisis, the weaponisation of free speech terminology by far-right groups, and the introduction of UK legislation that undermined freedom of expression and human dignity.

But this was also a year of solidarity. It has been inspiring to see how communities have responded to these emergencies, and it has been our privilege to engage on this work firsthand. This included the outpouring of solidarity for writers at extreme risk, such as the British-Egyptian writer Alaa Abd el-Fattah. We have been lucky to work ever more closely with our sibling centres, including PEN Belarus, PEN Ukraine, and PEN Georgia, and we were honoured to welcome the 90th annual PEN Congress to Oxford last year. Through this work we see the power of collective response – the power of working together and sharing.

Through this shared work and solidarity, we find hope, solace, and a glimpse of a way forward to the values outlined in the PEN Charter: ‘mutual respect’ and ‘good understanding’. We saw this in our ongoing work with Palestinian colleagues, including a visit to the UK by Palestinian bookseller Mahmoud Muna in early 2025, followed by my visit to the West Bank to meet with colleagues continuing to make and create work under systematic oppression. We see it in the pieces published by Gen Z writers as part of a new series in our magazine, *PEN Transmissions*, through our work to increase bibliodiversity in the UK through our translation support, work that achieved the remarkable success of supporting a book from its inception through to winning the International Booker Prize. And we see it through all of you, engaging with and supporting our work in deeply complex times, in community and in solidarity.

From all of us at English PEN, thank you.



Daniel Gorman
© Orlando Myxx

Celebrating courage in literature

Established in 2009 in memory of Nobel Laureate playwright Harold Pinter, the annual PEN Pinter Prize celebrates literary merit and courage, recognising the powerful intersection between art and human rights.

The 2024 Prize, judged by Chair of English PEN, **Ruth Borthwick**; actor and activist **Khalid Abdalla**; and writer and musician **Roger Robinson**, was awarded to author **Arundhati Roy**. The award ceremony, held at the British Library on 10 October, featured an encomium delivered by **Naomi Klein**.

Writer of Courage

Each year, the PEN Pinter Prize winner selects a Writer of Courage with whom to share their award – an author who is active in the defence of freedom of expression, often at great risk to their own safety and liberty.



Sanaa Seif, Ahdaf Soueif, Arundhati Roy, Naomi Klein, Lina Attalah, Omar Robert Hamilton, Mona Seif © George Torode
Framed photo of Alaa Abd el-Fattah © Mosaab el-Shamy

Arundhati Roy shared the Prize with **Alaa Abd el-Fattah** – the British-Egyptian writer, software developer, and activist, and one of the most prominent political prisoners in Egypt. Most recently arrested in 2019, he was handed a five-year sentence in December 2021. Despite completing this unjust sentence on 29 September 2024, the Egyptian authorities refused to release him, failing to account for the time he spent in pre-trial detention, in defiance of international legal norms and Egypt's criminal law. The award was accepted on behalf of Alaa Abd el-Fattah by journalist **Lina Attalah**.

Arundhati Roy also announced that she would donate her share of the prize money to the Palestinian Children's Relief Fund.

We were delighted to launch a new partnership with Faber, who will lend their support to the annual PEN Pinter Prize over the next three years. The Prize is also generously supported by Ruth Maxted.

I have rarely read such beautiful words about the meaning of victory and defeat – and the political necessity of honestly looking despair in the eye. I have rarely seen writing in which a citizen separates himself from the state, from the generals and even from the slogans of the Square with such bell-like clarity. ”

– Arundhati Roy, on Alaa's writing

When Alaa Abd el-Fattah was not released in September 2024, English PEN continued to support his family in their tireless efforts to advocate for his freedom through targeted, sustained actions including vigils, letters to Prime Minister Keir Starmer, media pieces, parliamentary engagement, working with UN agencies, and more.

At the time of this report's publication, we are relieved that Alaa Abd el-Fattah has been released from prison. His release is long overdue and a huge relief for his family.



Our new prize for poetry

Launched in 2024, the PEN Heaney Prize recognises a single volume of poetry by one author, published in the UK or Ireland, of outstanding literary merit that engages with the impact of cultural or political events on human conditions or relationships.

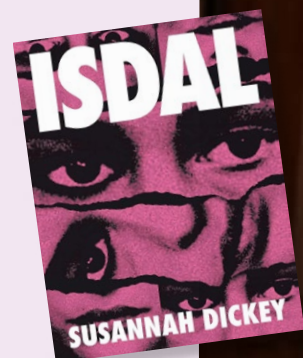
The inaugural PEN Heaney Prize was judged by poets **Nick Laird**, **Paula Meehan** and **Shazea Quraishi**, with **Catherine Heaney** joining them as non-voting Chair and representing the Estate of Seamus Heaney.

English PEN, together with Irish PEN/PEN na hÉireann and the Estate of Seamus Heaney, announced **Susannah Dickey's** *ISDAL* (Picador Poetry) as the winner of the inaugural PEN Heaney Prize in December 2024.

Of the winning title, the judging panel said:

'Susannah Dickey's *ISDAL* is an astonishingly inventive look at a cold case, that of an unidentified woman found in 1970 near Bergen in Norway. Armed with a wide variety of forms and a formidable vocabulary, Dickey explores and satirises the true crime genre, and specifically our culture's obsession with female victims.'

The PEN Heaney Prize is supported by Hawthornden Foundation and the Estate of Seamus Heaney.



Susannah Dickey © Press Eye



Our prize for historical non-fiction

The PEN Hessell-Tiltman Prize, endowed by former English PEN member Marjorie Hessell-Tiltman's bequest, celebrates the best non-fiction on any historical subject.

Avi Shlaim was awarded the PEN Hessell-Tiltman Prize 2024, for his memoir *Three Worlds: Memoirs of an Arab-Jew* (Oneworld). The winner was announced at a ceremony held at the October Gallery in London.

This year's judging panel was chaired by writer and editor **Sharmilla Beezmohun**. She was joined by **Professor Clare Anderson** and **Dr Venetia Porter**.

Chair of the judging panel, Sharmilla Beezmohun, said:

'A powerful and moving personal story providing a stunning new window on present-day politics. This tour-de-force of meticulous evidence-gathering and historical research, combined with elegant and evocative writing, is a page-turner which will live long in the minds of anyone who reads it.'

Marjorie Hessell-Tiltman was a member of PEN during the 1960s and 1970s. On her death in 1999 she bequeathed £100,000 to the PEN Literary Foundation to support PEN's work.

Amplifying Gen Z Voices

In 2024, with the support of the Norman Trust, English PEN launched a dedicated *Young Voices* strand showcasing Gen Z writers in *PEN Transmissions*, our online magazine. This generation – raised by the internet and shaped by the climate crisis and global unrest – continues to redefine how and where literature lives. In a shrinking landscape for short-form writing, Gen Z authors are reimagining the digital world we consume, and how we consume it.

Young writers are forcing us to rethink the craft, pushing the formal boundaries of existing literary ideas; it's striking how little of this work is showcased in traditional literary spaces.

PEN Transmissions is a space for amplifying voices across borders and identities, and where emerging voices sit alongside major literary figures. In researching the *Young Voices* strand, we found that many Gen Z writers were publishing work in informal spaces – social media, personal blogs, group chats – and the response to the strand by featured writers has been both passionate and clear: young authors are eager to share their ideas and work, while at the same time being frustrated by a lack of access and editorial engagement to support their early careers.



Clockwise from top-left: Simone Yasmin © Michael Godsall; Mariam Jallow © Lucy Lawrenson; Elena Barham © Elena Barham; Chloe Gong © One Grid Studio; Abhijeet Singh © Abhijeet Singh

It's such an honour (and slightly sickening) to be published in the same place as so many of my favourite writers. ”

– Jade Prince



Clockwise from top-left: Jade Prince © Jade Prince; Finlay Worrallo © Finlay Worrallo; Tallulah Howarth © Marta Zelent; AJ Layla © Mariam Jallow; Tayiba Sulaiman © Rumaisa Jilani

- 'Relishing In My Pain' – **Simone Yasmin** on the catharsis, and trauma, of performing poetry.
- 'This Intangible Thing Called Storytelling' – **Mariam Jallow** on the folklore, fear, and storytelling.
- 'Caught in the Act' – **Abhijeet Singh** on the relationship between photography and literature.
- 'To Fill the Void' – a conversation with **Chloe Gong** on how YA fiction and Shakespeare shaped her writing voice.
- 'Beatnik Snappers and Salt Bae Sprinklers' – **Elena Barham** on the the ongoing lack of access to the arts for working-class writers.
- 'Writing What We Know' – **Jade Prince** on writing Gen Z authentically for the screen.
- 'I Need to Build a Different Library' – **Finlay Worrallo** on writerly intentions and the translation of ideas.
- 'Find Your Mind' – **Tallulah Howarth** on embracing your poetic mind.
- 'Mostar's Sniper Tower' – **Tayiba Sulaiman** on memorialisation.
- 'Past and Future Death and Art' – **AJ Layla** on legacy and creative instinct.

Crafting messages of hope to imprisoned writers and their families

PENWrites is an international letter-writing campaign in solidarity with writers in prison around the world. The campaign aims to provide hope and comfort to imprisoned writers by sending them or their loved ones messages of solidarity from supporters in the UK and beyond.

For decades, the PEN movement has supported writers through this simple yet impactful act. Many individuals have shared how receiving letters of support in challenging circumstances provided moral strength, reminding them that they had not been forgotten. Others have spoken of how they were afforded better treatment in prison after receiving messages of solidarity from across the globe.



© Claudia Lancaster

To mark the annual **Day of the Imprisoned Writer**, PEN centres and members around the world come together in support of our imprisoned colleagues. Last year, English PEN partnered with independent bookshops across England to launch our first PENWrites outreach project.

Bookshops invited their local communities to take part in the campaign by displaying posters, postcards and bookmarks in-store, and sharing pictures on social media. Visitors were encouraged to write letters via our website or on specially designed postcards, crafting messages of hope and moral support to imprisoned writers and their families.

PENWrites display for Day of the Imprisoned Writer at
Pages of Hackney bookshop © Pages of Hackney



Jasmina Bidé and Meera
Ghanshamdas ©
Roundtable Books



This is such an important project when we think about freedom of expression and creativity across the world, and is very close to our hearts. ”

– Meera Ghanshamdas, Roundtable Books

Platforming Stories of Resilience from Ukraine

Last summer, English PEN welcomed prize-winning Ukrainian writer and journalist **Anna Romandash** to London as part of *Stories of Resilience*, a new research and writing project delivered in partnership with PEN Ukraine.

Before coming to London, Anna spent three months interviewing writers, academics, archivists, culture workers, and activists across Ukraine in-person and online. During her month-long residency, she developed the material compiled in Ukraine into a 10,000-word commission, featuring ten profiles of the creatives she interviewed.

While in the UK, Anna had several editorial sessions with journalists at the *Guardian* and *Channel 4 News*, benefited from complimentary membership of the London Library, and took part in events with the Ukrainian Institute in London and Irish PEN/PEN na hÉireann in Armagh. As part of the project, Anna also co-facilitated a writing workshop with members of the Ukrainian diaspora living in the UK. Upon returning to Ukraine, Anna spent another three months writing and refining the commission. The printed pamphlet has now been distributed to libraries across Ukraine.



Anna Romandash with representatives from Irish PEN/PEN na hÉireann © Simon Robinson



Anna Romandash © Natalie Godec

The Russian war continues. Yet, the destruction and damage, deadly attacks and torture no longer shock. It pains me to think that empathy has an expiration date, and to see Ukraine vanish from the world news. I think we, Ukrainian journalists, writers, and activists, together with the fellow Europeans and everyone who cares about Ukraine, can and should do more to keep Ukraine in the spotlight [...]

I hope this project shows Ukraine's resilience, and also diversity - because there are diverse voices in the book. Ukraine's arts, culture, and science have always existed, often under terrible burdens like today's war - but they persisted, and this persistence is what unites my protagonists. I also wanted to humanise Ukraine and its culture by sharing personal testimonies. Ukrainians are both hopeful and realistic, and I wanted to convey that message, too.



– Anna Romandash

Stories of Resilience was made possible thanks to the financial support of the UK/UA Creative Partnerships programme, designed by the British Council and the Ukrainian Institute.

Fostering spaces for respite, reflection, creation, and growth

Last summer, we were honoured to host **Taciana Niadbaj**, writer, poet, translator, activist, and President of PEN Belarus for a two-month respite residency in the UK. During her residency, Taciana not only took the time to visit friends, family, and colleagues but also attended events at the Southbank Centre and the Royal Court and met with fellow human rights campaigners, media, and funders.

Taciana took the opportunity to host an evening of readings by imprisoned writers in Belarus, including Nobel Prize winner Ales Bialiatski and PEN Translates award-winner Maxim Znak, and enjoyed complimentary membership of the London Library who have since added three new books to their collection following her recommendations.

Taciana's words were a beautiful reminder of how valuable the experience is for writers living under duress.

Taciana Niadbaj © Private collection



The residency allowed me to immerse myself in the vibrant culture of London. [...] It expanded my cultural horizons and renewed my strength, both intellectually and emotionally. This experience made me not only a better advocate for my peers but also a stronger and more resilient individual.

Perhaps most profoundly, the residency gave me something I desperately lacked — time for myself. In London, I reconnected with my identity as a writer and poet. I rediscovered the creative spark that had been overshadowed by the demands of daily life. During this time, I was able to prepare two books for publication and to truly breathe again.

This residency was more than a professional opportunity; it was a lifeline. It reminded me of the power of cultural exchange and solidarity, and the vital role organisations like English PEN play in fostering spaces for reflection, creation, and growth. This initiative is not just a programme; it is a testament to the enduring importance of supporting writers and cultural workers in the face of adversity. ”

– Taciana Niadbaj

Our residency programme is made possible thanks to support from Hawthornden Foundation and is delivered in partnership with Goethe-Institut London.

Addressing structural inequalities in the translation sector

Since 2022, PEN Presents has supported and showcased sample translations, funding the often-unpaid work of creating samples, giving UK publishers access to titles from underrepresented languages and regions, and helping diversify the translated literature landscape.

Heart Lamp by **Banu Mushtaq**, translated from the Kannada by **Deepa Bhasthi** was one such title. Awarded funding via the first round of PEN Presents in 2022, the rights were acquired by the publisher And Other Stories, based in Sheffield. The title was subsequently chosen for a PEN Translates award, and, two years later, Banu and Deepa were taking centre stage at the International Booker Prize ceremony having won this prestigious prize.

Heart Lamp is the first work translated from Kannada to appear on the International Booker Prize shortlist – underscoring the impact of the initiative.



Will Forrester,
Preti Taneja,
Deepa Bhasthi,
Daniel Gorman
© Private
collection

Spotlight on translators from the Global Majority

In recent years, submissions to both English PEN's translation programme and the International Booker Prize have told the same story: while the representation of authors from the Global Majority is increasing, translators from the Global Majority remain significantly underrepresented.

Last year, in the grant's third round, we were delighted to launch PEN Presents x International Booker Prize to address this disparity by funding and promoting the work of Global Majority translators so that more literature in translation, created by more people, reaches English-language readers. More information on the shortlist can be found [online](#).



© Samantha Ho

Heart Lamp *Banu Mushtaq*



¶ On days when it was impossible for Shaziya to wake up in time for the dawn namaz, she would blame it on her high blood pressure, and had a habit of saying she had no peace because of those damn tablets. ¶ Her mother used to say, 'All this is Shaitan's game. Shaitan comes early in the morning, presses your legs, drapes a blanket around you, pats you back to sleep...' Translated by Deepa Bhasthi Winner of an English PEN Award Winner of the 2025 International Booker Prize

Every book needs its champions, people that believe in its potential when it's still in its raw and most unrefined stages. For me, with my translation of *Heart Lamp*, English PEN was the first cheerleader. I don't exaggerate when I say that without the wonderful, timely, and essential support of English PEN, the chain of events that led to the book winning the International Booker Prize would not have been set in motion. ”

– Deepa Bhasthi

Thank you to all our members, supporters and partners who make our work possible.

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The Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's University, Belfast
The Writing Squad
University of Chicago (SALT)
University of Exeter
West Lodge

Free speech is under attack. I've joined PEN to show solidarity for those persecuted for speaking truth to power. 

– Naomi Pfeffer, English PEN member

If you would like to add your voice to our cause, we'd love to hear from you. Please get in touch with Charlotte Aston, Head of Development at charlotte@englishpen.org to find out more about how you can help.

With thanks to all the writers and artists who took part in our programme over the last year

KHALID ABDALLA YASSMIN ABDEL-MAGIED YÁSNAYA ELENA A. GIL RYŪNOSUKE
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Clockwise from top-left: Marjorie Ann Watts, granddaughter of Catherine Amy Dawson Scott, who founded English PEN in 1921, and Daniel Gorman © Eleanor Antoniou; Mahmoud Muna at the Union Chapel © Orlando Myxx; Filming with So Mayer and Sam Fisher at Burley Fisher Books to mark one year of the Valentines4Palestine campaign © Sim Eldem; Yassmin Abdel-Magied in the English PEN Literary Salon at London Book Fair 2025 © Orlando Myxx

At English PEN, you know that writing is always dangerous business somewhere. That's why you exist: to champion the pen over the gun and the prison cell. ”

– Naomi Klein

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