

Amnesty International

IMPRISONED WRITERS



DAILY READINGS: TOP AUTHORS READ FROM WORK THAT HIGHLIGHTS
HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES & RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Wednesday 22 August

Solidarity with Imprisoned Writers *with* Scottish PEN

Today's readings:

Aslı Erdoğan – *The Prisoner* On 17 August 2016, renowned novelist and PEN member Aslı Erdoğan was arrested at her home in Istanbul, Turkey. She was a columnist and advisory board member of the pro-Kurdish opposition daily *Özgür Gündem*, which was shut down under the state of emergency that followed the failed coup of 15 July 2016. Her arrest came alongside that of more than 20 other journalists and employees of the paper. Even after her release in December 2016, her passport was seized, and a travel ban issued because she's still not cleared of "terror" charges. The travel ban was lifted as her passport was returned to her in October 2017; however, she still needs permission from the Ministry of Interior to leave the country.

Mohammed al-Ajami - *Poem from a Prison Cell* Qatari poet Mohammed al-Ajami was arrested in Doha in 2011 on charges of 'inciting the overthrow of the ruling regime' and 'insulting the Emir' in his poetry. Al-'Ajami was initially sentenced to life in prison, reduced to 15 years on appeal in February 2013. In March 2016, PEN centres and Amnesty warmly welcomed the release of al-Ajami and English PEN continue to campaign for all other charges to be dropped.

Ashraf Fayadh – *Tense Times* Palestinian-born poet and artist Ashraf Fayadh lived in Saudi Arabia for most of his life. Initially arrested in August 2013, he was accused of 'misguided and misguiding thoughts', he was rearrested on 1 January 2014 on charges including 'insulting the divine self'. He has been held in a prison in the city of Abha ever since. On 17 November 2015, the General Court of Abha sentenced Fayadh to death for the crime of being an infidel (kufr) following a re-trial. On 2 February 2016, a Saudi Arabian court replaced the death sentence with an eight-year prison term and 800 lashes.

Ahmet Altan – *The Writer's Paradox* Ahmet Altan is an acclaimed Turkish novelist, essayist and journalist. On 16 February 2018, a Turkish court sentenced Ahmet, his brother, Mehmet, an economics professor and political commentator; and four others to life imprisonment without parole for involvement in the 15 July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. His brother, Mehmet, who was imprisoned at the same time, was released in June, but Ahmet remains behind bars.

Today's readers:

Melissa Harrison is a novelist and nature writer whose recent third novel is *All Among the Barley*. Her second, *At Hawthorn Time*, was shortlisted for the Costa Novel of the Year award.

Elizabeth Laird best-selling novel *Welcome to Nowhere* tells the story of Syrian refugee Omar and his family, and her most recent book *Song of the Dolphin Boy* focuses on the importance of looking after our oceans.

Michael Malone is a prize-winning poet and author. His most recent novel is *After He Died*.

Nick Laird worked as a lawyer for several years before leaving law to write full-time. His latest novel is *Modern Gods* and his most recent poetry collection is *Feel Free*.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALL TO ACTION:

Photojournalist Shawkan has been locked up in a brutal Egyptian prison for over four years. Tell the Egyptian authorities to drop the charges and release Shawkan immediately.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/egypt-journalism-not-crime>