



Persecuted writers find sanctuary in the U.S.

NOT LONG AFTER WRITER Horacio Castellanos Moya's novel *Revulsion* was published in El Salvador, he began to receive anonymous death threats he believes were backed by the government. Salvadorian officials reportedly were unhappy with the book's provocative look at the country's culture and politics. Forced to flee, Castellanos lived in Mexico, Guatemala, Spain and Germany before finding refuge in Pittsburgh, where he is currently a writer in residence with the Cities of Asylum program.

Castellanos, the author of eight novels and five short-story collections, says he is relieved that he can work without fear and appreciates the welcome he's received. "I have a lot of support here," he says.

Pittsburgh is one of five cities that make up the North American Network of Cities of Asylum (NANCA), which also includes Las Vegas; Santa Fe, N.M.; Ithaca, N.Y.; and Iowa City, Iowa. These

cities provide a safe haven for literary writers who can't speak or write freely—and who are often imprisoned, tortured or threatened with death—in their own countries. Established in 2001, NANCA works closely with the Norway-based International Cities of Refuge Network, an association of 19 cities and regions around the world.

The two-year North American program makes a difference "one writer at a time," says Pilar Wiley, director of NANCA. "Each person's experiences and background are different."

In addition to Castellanos, resident writers include Sarah Mkhonza, a visiting professor at Cornell University, whose fiction focuses on the injustices against women in her native Swaziland. Writers from countries such as China, Sierra Leone, Iran and Columbia also have participated in the program.

Each city provides writers with furnished housing, a \$2,500 monthly stipend and health insurance. Overall, it costs \$50,000 to \$100,000 per year to



Horacio Castellanos Moya fled his native El Salvador and now lives in Pittsburgh.

host a writer, Wiley says.

The program also helps prepare the writers for economic independence by finding publishers to translate their works—New Directions will publish an English translation of Castellanos' novel *Senselessness* next spring—and by generating publicity through readings and special events. The Pittsburgh group hosts an annual Jazz-Poetry Concert,

DEAR WRITER

What should I consider when pursuing a print-on-demand company for my manuscript?

STEP 1 IS TO define your goal. That will help determine the services you may need from a print-on-demand publisher. For example, have you written a novel with the hope it will sell in the marketplace? Or is your work a modest family history in paperback for relatives?

If the market is your focus, are you confident that your

manuscript is well-edited? Do you have great ideas for the cover design? Are you comfortable in your ability to write an eye-catching book jacket summary? POD publishers provide these and other services to help polish your work or guide the marketing of your project. There is a cost, however, for each service you select.

The POD concept requires that you self-market your product. Therefore, do your research on what skills and time demands are necessary to sell your book.

POD companies are easy to locate on the Internet, but before selecting one you might want to attend a writers conference. Talk to other writers there who have POD experience and ask for recommendations. Also, track down POD veterans from your local writ-

ing groups. Most will be willing to provide direction and share their positive and negative experiences with you.

The number and type of services you choose may result in a significant up-front dollar expense. Therefore, perform a financial due diligence before you choose a POD company. Contracts vary from publisher to publisher, so make sure you understand each paragraph of the document before you sign.

—Richard Boich

“The only impeccable writers are those who never wrote.”
—William Hazlitt, “On the Aristocracy of Letters”

70 YEARS AGO

Give those literary muscles some exercise

MOST WRITERS at the start are mentally muscle-bound, badly coordinated. There are thoughts in their heads, but when the signal comes to their vocabulary to express these thoughts, the result is stiff and self-conscious. The only cure for this is

self-massage with one's own pen or typewriter. After you have written about half a million words there comes, sometimes suddenly, sometimes slowly, a mastery not only of words, but of sentences and phrases, that makes you a different being. It is like

learning to swim or to navigate an airplane. You have conquered your element. From then on your personality, whatever that may be, goes onto paper unhampered, and thus exhilarated.

—From Henry Justin Smith, *The Writer*, October 1937

which Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka headlined last year, in the resident writer's neighborhood.

“We view the writer as a cultural ambassador,” says Henry Reese, chairman of the Pittsburgh chapter. “We try to use the presence of the writer in our community as an agent of change and dialogue.”

Though the hope is that writers can return to their homes after their residency, most can't because the situation that forced them into exile hasn't changed, Wiley says. Some writers, such as Chinese poet Huang Xiang, who was

Pittsburgh's resident writer from 2004 to 2006 and has remained in the city, are granted political asylum. Others may receive permanent visas through university appointments.

“From the get-go, we think about what will happen in two years,” Reese says. “We want to make sure the writers flourish outside of the program.”

Castellanos says he has no plans to return to El Salvador at the end of his residency. “The guys who don't like me are still in charge,” he says. “It's a difficult situation.”

—Christine Riccelli