

Press Release

BBC World News Press Office
Media Centre, 201 Wood Lane, London W12 7TQ



***Talking Books* back on BBC World News for a New Series**

Starting Saturday 19 November, 2011

Singapore. In this new series of *Talking Books* on **BBC World News**, presenter Razia Iqbal talks to six novelists about their work, their lives and what draws them to the written word. The writers include **Alaa Al Aswany**, one of Egypt's most prominent writers; feminist campaigner **Nawal Al Saadawi**; playwright and novelist **Caryl Phillips**; author **Justin Cartwright**; Pulitzer prize-winner **Jeffery Eugenides** and award-winning writer **Susan Hill**.

Presenter Razia Iqbal says: "Talking to leading writers about their ideas and how they write is fascinating. Sitting on the banks of the River Nile in Cairo, discussing the unfinished revolution with two of Egypt's leading writers, Alaa Al Aswany and Nawal Al Saadawi was extraordinary. I also felt changed in some way after my conversations about identity and politics with Caryl Phillips and Justin Cartwright. And not only is there a visceral joy in listening to writers such as Susan Hill and Jeffrey Eugenides talking about the process of writing, but a confirmation, if one was needed, of the transformative power of good literature for the writer as well as the reader."

The authors interviewed for this series are:

Episode 1: Alaa Al Aswany - 19th November

This week is the first of two *Talking Books* from Egypt. As the country moves towards Parliamentary elections following the momentous events of the Arab Spring, Razia Iqbal talks to novelist Alaa Al Aswany author of the best-selling *The Yacoubian Building* and one of Egypt's most prominent writers. Al Aswany was a vocal critique of the former Mubarak regime but post-revolution, can Egyptian writers expect more freedoms or more constraints?

Episode 2: Nawal Al Saadawi - 26th November

The second episode of *Talking Books* is a special programme recorded in Egypt with the feminist campaigner Nawal Al Saadawi (*Memoirs of a Woman Doctor, Women and Sex*). Al Saadawi was born in a remote village in Egypt in 1931. In a fiercely conservative country she has spent her life fighting for women's rights including campaigns against female circumcision, domestic violence and political exclusion. In a country where just over half the adult female population can read and write, Razia Iqbal asks how her books have contributed to her campaigns.

Episode 3: Caryl Phillips - 3rd December

Playwright, essayist and novelist Caryl Phillips (*A Distant Shore, Crossing the River*) was born in the Caribbean, but he grew up as an immigrant in the UK. After university he left the UK and has spent many years in the United States. Distance and isolation form the themes of his non-fiction and novels, which often feature outsiders. Razia Iqbal asks him how travel and life as an immigrant has shaped his writing.

Episode 4: Justin Cartwright - 10th December

Justin Cartwright (*The Promise of Happiness, Masai Dreaming*) is not a name that many recognise, but for those who read his novels he has a loyal following and his books have won a number of awards. His characters are often successful professionals whose lives have started to unravel in ways that force them to change. Razia Iqbal talks to Justin Cartwright about success as a writer and the possibilities of spiritual change in a material world.

Episode 5: Jeffery Eugenides - 17th December

Jeffery Eugenides is best known for his ethereal first novel, the cult bestseller *Virgin Suicides*, which was made into a film by Sophia Coppola. In 2007 he won the Pulitzer Prize for his second novel, *Middlesex*. Razia Iqbal talks to him about being an immigrant in the melting pot of the United States, the decline and fall of his hometown of Detroit, Michigan, and whether creative writing can be taught.

Episode 6: Susan Hill - 24th December

Susan Hill (*The Mist in the Mirror, I'm the King of the Castle*) had her first novel published in the UK at the age of 18. Since then her short stories and novels have won numerous awards and her ghost story *Women in Black* is about to be released as a film. Razia Iqbal talks to her about her writing life and how ghost stories still thrill her readers in the modern age.

Talking Books airs on BBC World News on Fridays at 21:30 and Saturdays at 19:30 (all Singapore Time).

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Notes to editors:

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Issued by:	Dunbar•Jones & Associates
On behalf of:	BBC World News
For more information, contact:	Janice Loh / Nurdianah Muhd Nur Dunbar•Jones & Associates 1 Goldhill Plaza #03-45 Podium Block Singapore 308899 Tel: (65) 6356 2830 Fax: (65) 6254 8971 Email: jloh@dunbarjones.com.sg nurdianah@dunbarjones.com.sg