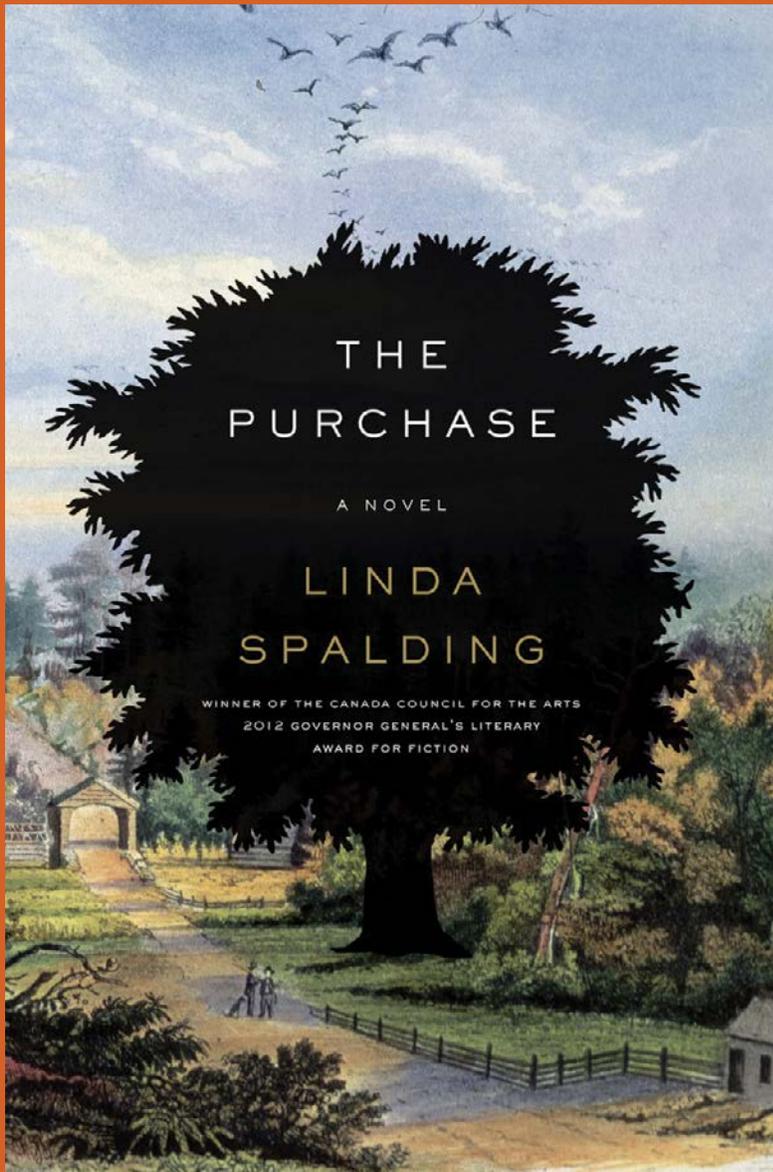




Deek Shanon



**AMNESTY**  
**INTERNATIONAL**   
**BOOK CLUB**

**JULY-AUGUST  
2015  
DISCUSSION  
GUIDE**

*The Purchase*  
By Linda Spalding

Recommended by  
guest reader  
Esi Edugyan

# Moral dilemmas

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Every day we all make choices. Ideally, our choices would be clear – choose black or white. But life doesn't work that way. Most of the decisions we make take place in the grey area, where we have to weigh the pros and cons of our actions. And we have to live with the consequences.

In 1798, Daniel Dickinson, a young Quaker widower and the protagonist of this month's Amnesty Book Club selection, sets out from Pennsylvania to Virginia to create a new life for himself, his children and his newly acquired 15-year-old orphan bride. His worldly possessions consist of two horses, a wagonful of belongings and a few land warrants for his future homestead.

When Daniel suddenly trades a horse for a young slave, Onesimus, it sets in motion a struggle in his conscience that will haunt his life forever. It also leads to a chain of events that include two murders and the family's strange

relationship with a runaway slave named Bett. Actions have consequences.

The positive and negative impacts of Daniel's decision make for a compelling novel which won the Governor General's Award for Fiction. The time and place of the story are vividly described, as are the lives of unforgettable characters.

This month's book club action focuses on the moral dilemmas and corporate accountability of Canadian mining and extractives companies operating abroad, in particular in Guatemala. We hope you will take action to hold them accountable on page 10.

Thank you for being part of the Amnesty International Book Club. If you have any questions, suggestions or comments, we'd love to hear from you. Just send us an email at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca).

– **The Book Club Team**

## Still time for reader's choice

### Do you have a favourite Canadian book that you would like to see featured in the Amnesty Book Club?

Then send us an email at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca). Let us know the title and author, and your selection could become the Reader's Choice selection for November/December of this year.

Let us know your choice by July 31, 2015. We'll review your suggestions then create a shortlist of the most popular books you can vote for. We'll email you the short list and you can vote for your favourite by the end of August 2015.



## About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than three million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person's voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

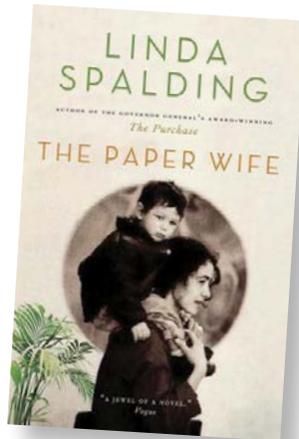
Together, we make a difference.

For more information about Amnesty International visit [www.amnesty.ca](http://www.amnesty.ca) or write to us at: **Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.**

## About this month's author **Linda Spalding**

Linda Spalding is an American-born Canadian fiction and non-fiction writer whose writing often explores world cultures and the clash between contemporary life and traditional beliefs.

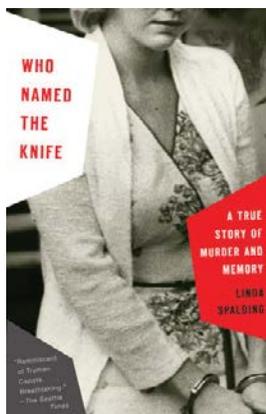
Her earlier books include the novels *Mere* (2001) co-authored with her daughter Esta Spalding; *The Paper Wife* (1996); *Daughters of Captain Cook* (1989); and the non-fiction book *The Follow* (1998), about renowned orangutan expert Birute Galdikas, one of the three female acolytes of anthropologist Louis Leakey known as "Leakey's Angels" (along with Jane Goodall and Diane Fossey). It was short-listed for the Trillium Book Award and the Pearson Writers' Trust Non-Fiction Prize.



Spalding is also well known for *Who Named the Knife* (2007), the true story of the murder trial of Maryann Acker, a teenager sentenced to life in prison for a murder committed while on she was on her honeymoon in Hawaii. Spalding, who served on the jury, tracks down Maryann 20 years later in order to re-examine the murder and the question of Maryann's innocence. The book was made into a TV movie – *Of Murder and Memory*.

An editor of *Brick, a Journal of Reviews*, Spalding has been awarded the Harbourfront Festival Prize for her contribution to the Canadian literary community.

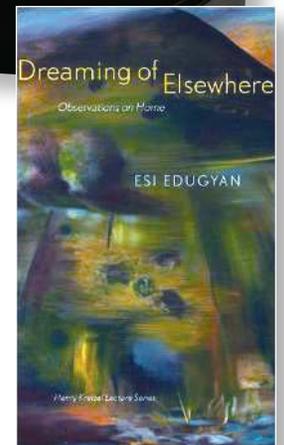
Linda lives in Toronto with her husband, Michael Ondaatje, her dog Jasper and her cat Jack.



## About this month's guest reader **Esi Edugyan**

Esi Edugyan's second novel, *Half Blood Blues*, won the 2011 Scotiabank Giller Prize for Fiction, as well as the Ethel Wilson Award, the US Hurston-Wright Legacy Award and the Anisfield-Wolf Prize for Fiction. It was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, the Orange Women's Prize, the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Writing, the Governor-General's Award, and the Rogers Writers Trust Prize.

Esi has read her work at festivals all over the world, from South Africa to China, and has attended residencies in Scotland, Iceland, Budapest, Germany, and Belgium. In 2014 she published her first non-fiction book, *Dreaming of Elsewhere*, a meditation on the relationship between home and belonging. She has taught in universities across Canada, and is at work on her next novel. She lives in British Columbia with her husband and two children.





## Esi Edugyan on *The Purchase*

*“Based in part on the author’s family history, Linda Spalding’s *The Purchase* is a compassionately told story of slavery and redemption, set in late 18th century Virginia.*

*Daniel Dickinson, a Pennsylvania Quaker, has been cast out of his community for marrying a 15-year-old orphan girl after the death of his wife. En route to a new life in southern Virginia, he attends an auction with his family, where he makes a devastating purchase: intending to buy a plow, he buys instead a young slave boy called Onesimus. It is an act that goes against the very grain of his being, and its consequences will damage the lives of everyone around him.*

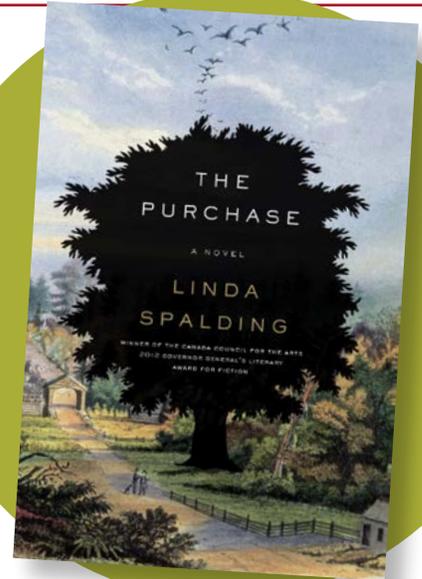
*I found myself mesmerized by this novel. From its earliest pages — from the very first sentence, even (“Daniel looked over at the daughter who sat where a wife should sit”) — one understands that this is a world kicked out of alignment, where relationships are twisted into unfamiliar shapes. Given such an opening, the essential longing of the novel cannot be anything but for a return to the natural order — an order that Daniel has been denied.*

*Daniel’s acquisition of the slave, an action rooted in confusion and error, takes on a darker significance in a faith-based world of fate and providence. That the mild-mannered Daniel is both a Quaker and a slave-owner forces us to question the gradual slide of evil: can an essentially decent person commit an act of wrongness and still hold to a moral path? Are rightness and righteousness necessarily linked? Can a wrong act lead to grace?*

*A staunch pacifist from an abolitionist faith, Daniel harbours no race prejudice and yet finds himself on the wrong side of one of the most racially repressive systems in the history of mankind. Of course, part of the power of Spalding’s elegant novel is that Daniel, historically, was not alone in his contradictions; nor is he alone in them today. For, like all historical fictions, this is a novel about who we are today, and how we chart what it is to be human today, rather than a story about a vanished time.*

*The Purchase gives face and voice to the complicated problem of individuals and power, whatever the century, and should be a caution to us all.”*

**—Esi Edugyan**



## Discussion questions from Esi Edugyan

1. *The Purchase* is a novel about the ramifications of personal choices. Daniel betrays his principles in accepting the purchase of Onesimus. Conversely, later in the novel, his daughter Mary betrays Bett in the name of her principles (by telling Dr. Howard the cause of the miscarriages). Describe the similarities and differences between these choices, and what they say about the moral landscape of each.
2. What did you make of those moments in which Daniel seems to take no action (ie. letting the Fox boys decide Onesimus' fate)? Did his passivity seem consistent with his faith, or was something else guiding it? Did you feel Daniel's passivity came from a place of strength or of weakness?
3. Ruth Boyd and Mary seem deliberate foils for each other. Discuss the nature of their relationship – the ways in which they have been set up in opposition to each other, in which they have adopted one another's roles, etc. What set of ideals does each seem to embody?
4. What did you make of Isaac showing six-year-old Bry the tree where his father was hanged? Was that a cruel act, or a merciful one?
5. Did the novel challenge your understanding of American slavery? If so, in what ways?
6. Do you believe the novel's ultimate outcome to be the result of individual action – free will – or of something closer to fate, a kind of guided action? Is Daniel's essential faith reinforced by the novel, in the end, or criticized by it?
7. Where does evil first enter the novel – with the purchase of Onesimus, or before? Is this a story of sin, then punishment? Or punishment, then sin?
8. If this novel were set today, where might it be set? If it were set in today's United States, what might be substituted for the institution of slavery? For the Quaker faith? For the racial distinctions in the novel?
9. Did you feel this was, in the end, a hopeful novel? Why or why not? What does this novel tell you about the world around you today?
10. The title of the novel reflects, in obvious ways, the purchase of Onesimus by Daniel. But it can be understood on deeper levels, as well. What other possible meanings might be ascribed to the title?
11. Is Daniel, in the end, a figure of power or powerlessness? What about Onesimus?

# BACKGROUND



James Rodríguez / MIMUdo.org

Jesusa Ixtecoc Juarez pleads for her home as it is taken apart during the forced eviction of Barrio La Union. On January 8th and 9th, 2007, the Guatemalan Nickel Company (CGN), a local subsidiary of Canadian mining company Skye Resources, ordered the forced eviction of five Q'eqchi' Mayan communities around Lake Izabal in El Estor, Guatemala. Over 800 state security forces carried out the forced eviction, destroying and even burning several huts and crops in the Indigenous communities who claim the territory as ancestral land.

## Ethical paradoxes

Daniel Dickinson is a principled man of faith. He is a Quaker and an abolitionist; but he owns a slave. Without one, how else is a man to survive tilling the soil and building a homestead? He needs help and there is no money to pay for it; he can barely feed his family. In fact he is really doing the slave, young Onesimus, a favour. Onesimus is far better off with Daniel, who at least won't beat him, than he would be with one of Daniel's neighbours. Although Daniel is almost accidentally a slave owner, he realizes that if he wants to survive, provide for his children and prosper, he needs to make compromises. He needs his slave.

*The Purchase* is a story which reveals social complexities, moral ambiguities, ethical paradoxes and provides no easy answers. These same complexities are often central to upholding and protecting human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. It states in

clear and simple terms that rights belong equally to every person.

But sometimes some of our rights may come into conflict with the rights of others, particularly in a diverse and complex society. Sometimes we think we need to compromise the rights of one group in favour of another, for the greater good of all.

These moral ambiguities, ethical paradoxes and competing rights are often reflected in Amnesty International's work on Business and Human Rights.

Does it matter how corporations generate profit? How do you balance the ways in which companies engage in economic development against the right of people to live on their traditional territories or the right to a healthy environment? Does development in the form of jobs bring prosperity to poor or under-developed communities? Are the communities really better off? How are we, as Canadians who benefit from mining investment, implicated in community struggles for justice?



The La Puya protest camp was established in 2012 by the communities of San Pedro Ayampuc and San Jose del Golfo, Guatemala, to oppose the licensing of a formerly Canadian-owned gold mine which failed to ensure adequate consultation or consent-seeking processes. The Guatemalan subsidiary, Exploraciones Mineras de Guatemala SA (EXMIGUA), is owned by American firm, Kappes, Cassiday and Associates.

## Business and human rights

The right of Indigenous peoples in Guatemala to maintain control over their traditional lands has come into conflict with mining companies in recent years. The mining companies and the Guatemalan government believe that mining is vital to economic development and provides job opportunities. They have said that mining operations are well supported by the local communities, the majority of the workforce is Guatemalan, and they have made significant investments in the local community.

Mining development in Guatemala is also seen as good for investors and most Canadians. For example, the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board holds a \$49-million stake in Tahoe Resources Incorporated. Tahoe's prime asset is the Escobal mine in Guatemala. Investors like owning shares in gold mining companies, because the returns to shareholders are generally

high. Private pension funds belonging to unions and churches also invest in mining companies such as the ones operating in Guatemala.

Canada is by far the greatest foreign contributor to Guatemala's mining sector, accounting for an estimated 88 per cent of the country's mining activity. According to the Government of Canada, more than half of all mineral exploration and mining companies in the world are headquartered in Canada. Canadian overseas mining revenue in Latin America has been estimated at US\$18.7 billion.

While it is clear that Canadian companies and investors are benefiting from the operations in Guatemala, it is not as clear that the local communities are also benefiting.



James Rodriguez / Wikimedia.org

Francisco Tiul Tut mourns the burning and destruction of his home in Barrio La Revolucion. On January 8th and 9th, 2007, the Guatemalan Nickel Company, local subsidiary of Canadian Skye Resources, ordered the forced eviction of five Q'eqchi' Mayan communities around Lake Izabal in El Estor, Guatemala. Over 800 State security forces carried out the forced eviction destroying and even burning several huts in the Indigenous communities who claim the territory as ancestral land.

## Conflicting interests

The Escobal mine has been the subject of tremendous controversy and concerns over human rights violations. In April 2013, farmers and students taking part in a peaceful protest on a public road outside Tahoe Resources' Escobal silver mine in Guatemala, were shot at and wounded by guards protecting the mine. In June 2013, they filed a civil law suit in Canada against Tahoe Resources for negligence and battery. The protesters were (and continue to be) concerned that water contamination from the mine will affect agricultural production. There is an increasing scarcity of water in the area immediately surrounding the project. They also

say that they were not properly consulted about the mine and its possible negative consequences.

The civil lawsuit, currently before the BC Supreme Court, claims that the head of security at the Escobal mine ordered guards to fire on protestors (including a child). Guards were then ordered to clean up evidence and erase video footage of the attack. Several injured men faced painful surgeries and lengthy recoveries. Several have been unable to work since the attack. They believe the Canadian mining company is responsible for what happened to them and should be brought to justice. They believe that the parent company, Tahoe Resources, should take responsibility, so they have brought their fight for justice to Canadian courts.

## Mining laws in Guatemala

The root of this controversy may be based in Guatemala's mining laws. The current laws which provide the framework for the country's mining sector do not adequately safeguard the human rights of people in communities where large-scale mines operate.

Alarmingly, community members opposed to large-scale mining development or those simply wishing to have a voice in what development activities take place in their communities, are being threatened, attacked, or even killed for standing up for their rights. Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities have protested the approvals process for new mining licences on their lands and near their homes. They want to have a say in what development activities take place in their communities.

The conflict between the communities and mining companies has been so grave that the United Nations called on Guatemala to improve its mining regulations. Although his government is responsible for authorizing some of the most controversial mining exploitation licenses in recent years, the Guatemalan President has called for a moratorium on the awarding of new licences until the 1997 Mining Law is reformed. The moratorium however has not occurred, even though Guatemalan courts have ruled that some mining licenses were awarded improperly. These rulings have also not stopped mining operations. In the midst of this, Guatemala's Ministry of Energy and Mines has recently been rocked by resignations over allegations of corruption in the awarding of mining, oil, and gas licenses.

International human rights standards require that people affected by a mining project should be consulted and informed about both positive and possible negative

impacts. Most mining operations take place in rural, Indigenous communities. International standards require additional measures to protect the lands and livelihoods of Indigenous peoples, such as making sure that their free, prior, informed consent is sought prior to granting any mining license. This currently does not happen in Guatemala.

## Canada's role

Canadian mining projects in Guatemala have increasingly come under international scrutiny because of the rise in human rights violations associated with these projects. Canada has also come under scrutiny for supporting companies despite evidence of human rights or environmental harms. In 2014, Amnesty International released a report that looked at four Guatemalan subsidiaries of Canadian mining companies. All involve turbulent histories of inadequate consultations, protest and conflict.

In the few cases where people from Guatemala and other countries have come to Canada to seek justice for human rights harms caused by Canadian companies, they have not succeeded. This is because the existing mechanisms in Canada to address corporate human rights violations overseas are inaccessible and ineffective.

To fix this accountability gap, Amnesty International is calling on the government of Canada to put in place an extractive-sector Ombudsperson with the power to independently investigate complaints and make recommendations to corporations and the Government of Canada. Canada must also provide legislated access to Canadian courts for people who have been seriously harmed by the international operations of Canadian companies.

## TAKE ACTION

### Ask Canada to be *Open for Justice*

You can support Amnesty's call to ensure that people whose human rights have been abused by Canadian mining, oil and gas companies abroad are able to seek justice in Canada. Find out more by visiting our *Open for Justice* web site [www.amnesty.ca/our-work/campaigns/open-for-justice](http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/campaigns/open-for-justice)

The screenshot shows the Amnesty International Canada website for the 'Open for Justice' campaign. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for NEWS, EVENTS, BLOG, RESEARCH, STORE, and STOPTORTURE. Below this is a secondary menu with OUR WORK, GET INVOLVED, DONATE, and ABOUT US. The main header features the Amnesty International logo and a photograph of a man in a hat. The text 'OPEN FOR JUSTICE' is prominently displayed, with a sub-headline 'photo © development and peace'. Below the header, there are social media sharing buttons for Facebook (375 likes), Twitter (123 tweets), and others. The main content area has the title 'Open for Justice' and a sub-headline: 'Let's ensure Canada is "Open for Justice" and not just "Open for Business"!'. The text explains that human rights abuses result from corporate activity and that it is difficult to obtain justice when rights are violated. It also mentions that existing mechanisms in Canada are inaccessible and ineffective. A 'TAKE ACTION' button is present, with a call to action: 'Send a message calling on your MP to ensure that people whose human rights have been abused by Canadian mining, oil and gas companies abroad are able to seek justice in Canada.' Another 'TAKE ACTION' button is located at the bottom right of the page.

### Write a letter

Using your own words, call on the President of Guatemala to reform Guatemala's mining law and bring it in line with international human rights standards. Ask him to:

- ensure that companies operating in Guatemala carry out human rights due diligence, requiring that companies consult with communities in order to understand the full range of human rights and environmental impacts of their operations
- see that companies provide meaningful information to the communities where they plan to operate, including both the negative as well as positive impacts of the proposed mine
- enter in good faith into dialogue with civil society and Indigenous peoples' organisations to establish a Mining Law reform process that is both consultative and meaningful

- reform Guatemala's Mining Law to bring Guatemala in line with its international human rights obligations, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the ILO Convention 169 on the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.

It is crucial that in any development project human rights are protected without exception.

### Write to:

President Otto Pérez Molina  
President of the Republic of Guatemala  
Casa Presidencial 6<sup>a</sup> Avenida 4-41, Zona 1  
Guatemala City, GUATEMALA

**Fax:** 011 502 2221 4423

**Twitter:** @ottoperezmolina

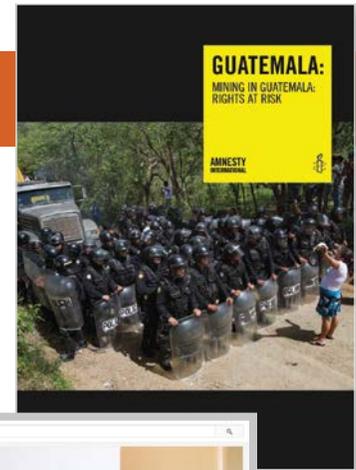
Link to e-activist: <http://e-activist.com/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=1770&ea.campaign.id=31848>

# RESOURCES

*Mining in Guatemala: Rights at Risk*: This Amnesty International report details the scale of mining conflict in Guatemala and makes recommendations for change.  
<http://www.amnesty.ca/sites/default/files/mining-in-guatemala-rights-at-risk-eng.pdf>

VIDEO: *Interview with Yolanda Oqueli - Guatemala*: Yolanda talks about the value of international solidarity for human rights defenders such as herself.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e941VoEQ7y8>

Press statement and links to wiretap evidence in Tahoe Resources case:  
<http://www.amnesty.ca/news/public-statements/joint-press-release/wiretap-transcripts-raise-troubling-questions-about-tahoe>



## COMING UP IN SEPTEMBER

### *Beatrice & Virgil* by Yann Martel

Recommended by guest reader **Charles Foran**

“My book is about representations of the Holocaust. The event is gone; we are left with stories about it. My book is about a new choice of stories.” This is how Henry, the protagonist of *Beatrice & Virgil* describes his novel-within-a novel. First published in April 2010, *Beatrice & Virgil* is an allegorical tale about how the Holocaust is represented. In the story, Henry receives the manuscript of a play in a letter from a reader. Intrigued, Henry traces the letter to a taxidermist, who introduces him to the play’s protagonists, two taxidermy animals – Beatrice, a donkey, and Virgil, a monkey.

In this innovative and intriguing work of fiction, Martel weaves the work of other writers, such as Primo Levi, Art Spiegelman, David Grossman, Martin Amis, George Orwell and Albert Camus into his own fascinating tale. The title itself is an allusion to the two main characters in Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*.

**The discussion guide will be sent out in early September**

In the meantime, if you have any questions or comments, please contact us at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca).

