



Local literary enthusiasts should be raring to go this week, for there are not one, not two, but three exciting writers coming to town. Canadian greats George Szanto and Pauline Holdstock, plus Thai-American newcomer Rattawut Lapcharoensap will all be reading from their newest works in an evening so hot, it's being called an "event."

Reading organizer Robert Wiersema wants to give Victoria a good, strong evening of literature. "It is an opportunity to see three very significant literary talents at different points in their respective careers, all under one roof," he says.

Take George Szanto—a seasoned Canadian author with several books, plays, essays and articles under his publishing belt. He has recently released *Second Sight*, the final book in his *Conquests of Mexico* trilogy. By following Jorge, a criminologist from Montreal, through three trips to Mexico over an eight-year span, each novel allows Szanto to focus on a different aspect of Mexico. The first book—*The Underside of Stones*—for example, is a more introverted look at one man's struggle with his life and beliefs while experiencing Mexico for the first time; *The Condesa of M.* explores Mexico's darker religious underworld; and *Second Sight* exposes the realms of Mexican wealth and politics. "I mostly want to show a world that is somewhat different from ours," Szanto says about his works. "I find it very difficult not to write fiction. It's a compulsion."

For her part, Pauline Holdstock must still be on a high from her recent Giller Prize nomination for *Beyond Measure*. Set in Renaissance Italy, *Measure* tells the story of a woman with skin both black and white, who arrives to serve a group of artists as both a slave and a model. "It is about [the character's] relationship to

Pauline Holdstock, George Szanto &  
Rattawut Lapcharoensap  
7 pm Saturday, Feb. 19  
Bolen Books, Hillside Centre  
Free • 595-4232

beauty and to the diversity of the world, as well as their relationships to, and rivalries with, each other," Holdstock says. "It has much to do with the way we view the world. Whether we wish to embrace it or, for whatever reasons, modify it."

*Beyond Measure* is Holdstock's fifth novel. She also recently published a book of literary essays called *Mortal Distractions*. Regarding her fiction, she says, "[It] is my way of trying to discover the barely-discernable mysteries of our existence that unsettle me."

Finally, Rattawut Lapcharoensap has earned his place in the literary world with *Sightseeing*, his debut collection of short stories. From an American who is brought to live with his son and daughter-in-law in Thailand after a stroke, to a boy who befriends a Cambodian refugee with gold teeth, Lapcharoensap's stories provide a window into the lives of modern Thai families and their struggles with poverty, illness, love and friendship. Lapcharoensap says he is drawn to the idea of national identities and how their definitions shift. "I find myself interested in the way social divisions get expressed—lived, even—in people's daily lives," Lapcharoensap explains. "Most pressing, however, I'm interested in how people often fail each other in their attempts to better their lives."

From their global perspectives, Szanto, Holdstock and Lapcharoensap guide us through new worlds and show them to us with fresh eyes—which is exactly why Wiersema put them all together. "They seemed like a good match," he says. "It will be a solid literary evening with a very strong sense of cultural interplay."

—Sarah Cignac