

# How Krzysztof Pelc wrote the story that won the 2019 CBC Short Story Prize

---

 [cbc.ca/books/literaryprizes/how-krzysztof-pelc-wrote-the-story-that-won-the-2019-cbc-short-story-prize-1.5108771](http://cbc.ca/books/literaryprizes/how-krzysztof-pelc-wrote-the-story-that-won-the-2019-cbc-short-story-prize-1.5108771)

CBC Books · Posted: Apr 24, 2019 4:17 PM ET | Last Updated: August 30, 2019

The winner of the 2019 CBC Short Story Prize reveals how he wrote *Green Velvet*.

□

Krzysztof Pelc is an author and professor of political science at McGill University in Montreal (Laura Schnurr)

Krzysztof Pelc is the winner of the [2019 CBC Short Story Prize](#) for his story *Green Velvet*.

He received \$6,000 from the [Canada Council for the Arts](#) and a two-week writing residency at the [Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity](#). His story was published on [CBC Books](#); [you can read it here](#).

The [2020 CBC Short Story Prize](#) will open on Sept. 1, 2019. To receive support and inspiration while you work on your submission, [sign up for the CBC Short Story Prize newsletter](#).

In *Green Velvet*, Pelc examines the tension between hope and fear inherent in the immigrant experience — and shows how a parents' doubt can burrow into the psyche of their children.

In his own words, Pelc discusses how he wrote his winning story.

## A friend's vision

---

"I keep a file of things that strike me. Every once in a while, when I feel like writing, I'll delve into that file and look for something to start a story. I had a friend who had told me this vision from his childhood that had stayed with me and became the seed of the story — and it's the final scene in the story.

"I had also just read this wild thing about termites and so I guess I had termites on the brain. I worked backwards and wrote it based on various things that were trotting into my mind. It became an assembly of the different things that were on my mind at the time."

[Read the stories shortlisted for the 2019 CBC Short Story Prize](#)

## Immigrant experience

---

"I wanted it to remain about this friend. I also wanted it to be about an Iranian family. I

suffer from what Chekhov called 'autobiophobia,' which is this reluctance to reveal oneself, to say too much about oneself. The challenge was for it to be both about this friend and his story but to also draw inspiration on things that I know. Indirectly this ends up being about my family and my own experience in a family of immigrants. But the hope is that it can speak to something that's greater, which is the universal idea of the immigrant experience."

## **Sense of duty**

---

"One of the ideas that interests me is the duty that generations feel to the previous generation. In this case, it's the father who feels a duty to preserve the culture of the old country and a duty towards his own mother. The young teenager in the story has a similar duty to his own father. I find that pressure across generations to be interesting."

[7 ways winning a CBC Literary Prize will change your life](#)

## **Academic approach**

---

"As an academic, my work involves political science and social science. I use large data sets, but I use these large data sets to tell stories. An overlooked thing is the extent to which being an academic, even a political economist, is a creative enterprise. I guess my love of literature in some ways informs the academic work.

"I always look for something which is a puzzle. I look for a puzzle that is then resolved and I tell my own graduate students to look for their puzzle and solve it. And when I'm writing or reading short stories, I'm also drawn to puzzles that are resolved in a satisfying way."

## **On winning the CBC Short Story Prize**

---

"I was very surprised. I was delighted. I'm very aware of how difficult it is to make this kind of selection, having sat on some selection committees myself, and so it was a humbling piece of news.

"Being a social scientist, there's a certain shyness in admitting that one indulges in reading, let alone writing, fiction. This is a bit of a 'coming out' for me as it were and winning allows me to do that. It's a bit of an affirmation. It allows me to fully have both hats going, as both a social science guy and the guy who's really into literature."

## **What's next?**

---

"I've been writing a lot of these stories. At this point I have a bit of a collection. I also have a book manuscript for a novel that I've been toiling away at in the evenings for a few years now. That's drawing to a close — I'm wrapping it up — and so hopefully I'll get to do

something with that. Undoubtedly this prize will be very helpful in allowing me to do that."

---