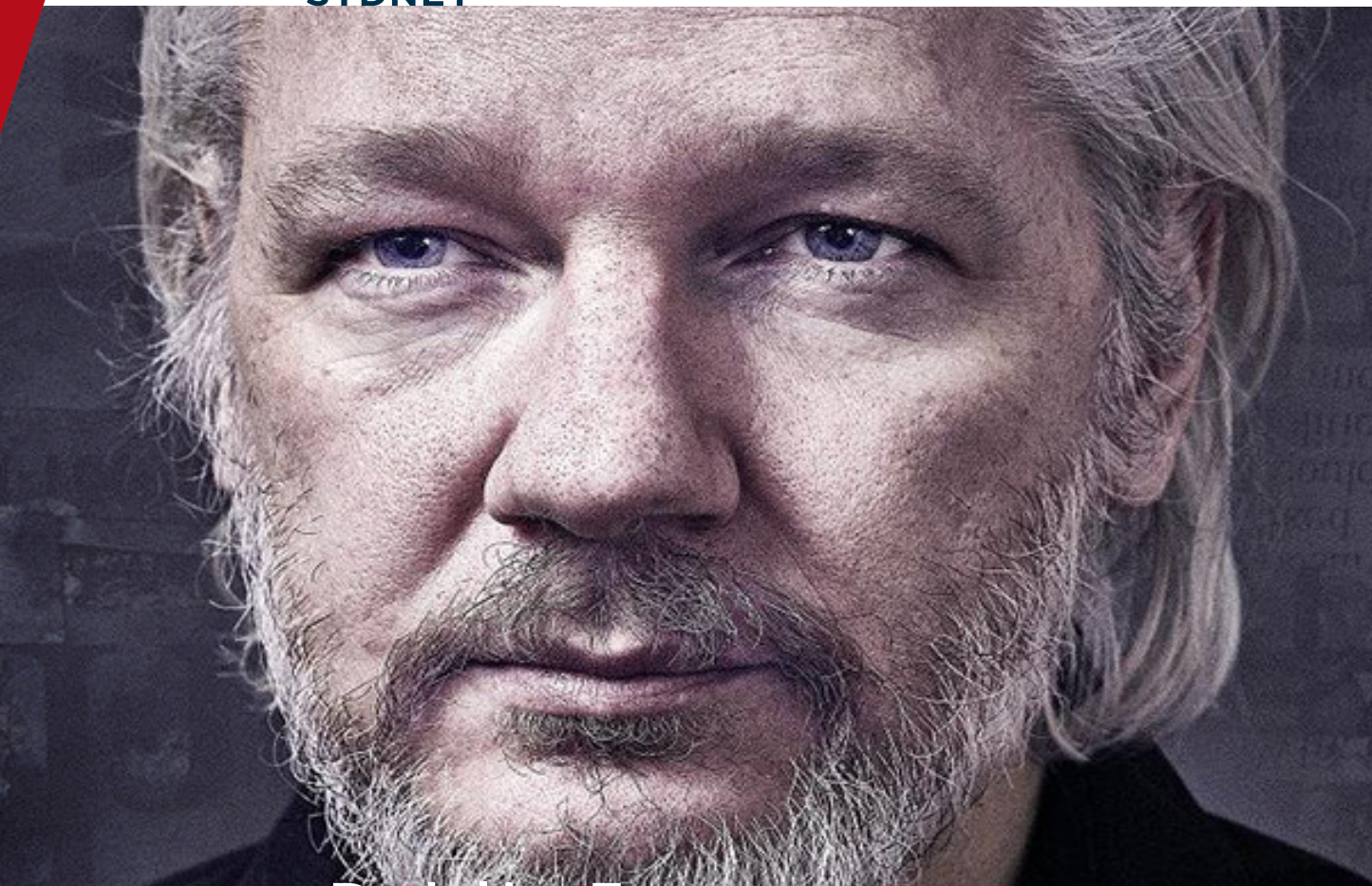


SYDNEY

# PEN magazine

November 2019



## Public Enemy Journalist Number One

- *'Democracy Peddler' - Yang Hengjun still detained in China*
- *'Fragile Minds' - Erik Jensen's PEN Free Voices Lecture*
- *'The Big Chilling Effect' - Australian Press Freedom*
- *'Changing the Conversation' - The Stella Prize*
- *International Year of Indigenous Languages*

# President's address

**I**t has been a busy six months for Sydney PEN and sadly much of our work has concerned the actions of our government authorities against Australian citizens.

The June raids by the Australian Federal Police on journalists and media organisations represented a disturbing attempt to intimidate legitimate news journalism working in the public interest. Sydney PEN joined Australia's major media bodies, such as the MEAA, in denouncing the raids and demanding a change in law to introduce positive protections for journalists and whistleblowers from the threat of warrants, searches, arrests and imprisonment for reporting the truth.

The attacks on press freedom were clear attempts to silence dissent in Australia and are part of an increasingly worrying trend. The persecution and prosecution of whistleblowers such as Witness K, Richard Boyle and David McBride, has led major media organisations to question the adequacy of our whistleblowing protections. Increasing threats to free speech in Australia were most recently exemplified by the Queensland Government's attempts to fast-track anti-protest laws. At the same time, politicians and sections of the Australian media have been using dehumanising language to mock environmental protesters and justify harsher treatment.

All of this reminds us that our freedoms are not absolute. They are under threat and they must be protected. Organisations like Sydney PEN

International, our committee and our membership base are integral to pushing back against the political class and their desire to control our national discourse.

Looking abroad, more and more details have emerged regarding the imprisonment and torture of Australian citizen Yang Hengjun by Chinese authorities. Initially detained in Beijing in January 2019, Yang Hengjun was formally charged with espionage in August. He now potentially faces the death penalty. Sydney PEN is extremely concerned for his wellbeing and is assisting PEN International and the other Australian PEN Centres to investigate his case. Sydney PEN applauds Minister for Foreign Affairs Marise Payne and the Australian Government for publicly supporting Yang Hengjun after he was formally charged and encourages them to negotiate for his release. For more details of his imprisonment, please see this edition's 'Democracy Peddler' article by Yang Hengjun's friend and former colleague, Dr Feng Chongyi.

There has been some good news regarding imprisoned Australians in Iran. Couple and bloggers, Jolie King and Mark Firkin, were arrested in Iran, reportedly for flying a drone near the capital, and detained in Tehran's notorious Evin prison for several months. In October 2019, it was reported that they were released and are being reunited with their families after charges against them were dropped. Sadly, a third Australian citizen, Dr Kylie Moore-Gilbert, has also been imprisoned in Evin prison and is reportedly in solitary confinement. The Cambridge-educated academic specialising in Middle Eastern



politics has reportedly been tried – the charges are unknown – and sentenced to 10 years in jail.

At the 2019 PEN International Congress, the Assembly of Delegates of PEN International called on the United States to ‘drop charges against WikiLeaks founder and publisher Julian Assange, who faces a lengthy prison sentence in the United States for obtaining and publishing newsworthy information’. The Assembly of Delegates further called on the United Kingdom to ‘reject extraditing Julian Assange to the United States’.

PEN International’s stance is clear: espionage laws should not be used against journalists and publishers for disclosing information of public interest. For this year’s Day of the Imprisoned Writer, (15/11/19), Sydney PEN has invited Jennifer Robinson, counsel to Julian Assange and WikiLeaks, to speak with award-winning journalist and broadcaster, Quentin Dempster at University of Technology, Sydney. This important public event is part of the Sydney PEN Committee’s determination to support persecuted writers in our region where possible.

Poet and journalist Humayun Reza was persecuted in Bangladesh for his writing and has since fled to Australia, where he is seeking asylum. He featured in our new PEN Voices podcast channel and you will find his published poetry within this magazine. You will also find in this edition the poetry of Mohammad Ali Maleki, writing from Manus Island prison where he has been detained by the Australian Government for six years.

Sydney PEN was also fortunate to entertain two international guests: Indonesian author, journalist, and Human Rights Watch researcher, Andreas

Harsono, and Filipino journalist, author and co-founder of online news website Rappler, Maria Ressa. It was an honour to meet Maria Ressa, who has risked her life for her journalistic work and her public criticism of Filipino president Rodrigo Duterte.

This year’s 2019 Free Voices lecture at the Sydney Writers’ Festival was delivered by Erik Jensen, the Editor-in-Chief of The Saturday Paper. He warned us that journalism is at its second crossroads in two decades – not one of means, but of privilege – and demanded journalists be more inclusive of marginalised voices. See inside for a transcript of the speech.

This year’s Annual General Meeting marked a period of transition for the Sydney PEN Committee, with a number of experienced members stepping down. A huge thanks must go to Debra Adelaide, Dr Sandra Symonds, Susie Eisenhuth and Gillian Appleton for their time on the committee. Debra, Sandra and Susie have been wonderful, long-serving contributors to Sydney PEN and Gillian proved herself to be a valuable and industrious committee member in her short time with us. They will all be sorely missed.

Thankfully, we have some impressive new members and writers to welcome to the committee: James Ross, Julie Koh, Suneeta Peres da Costa and Robin de Crespigny. They have already made a delightful addition to the committee with new ideas and fresh energy. Although the political forecast ahead is looking gloomy, I’m feeling excited and invigorated with such powerful and impressive actors for change by my side.

**In love, peace and solidarity,**  
**Mark Isaacs**  
***President, PEN Sydney Committee***

# From the 85<sup>th</sup> PEN International Congress in Manila, the Philippines

I arrived into Manila in the early evening, greeted at the airport by PEN Philippines representatives who bestowed a beautiful necklace of turquoise beads around my neck and by representatives of the tourism office of the Philippines government.

The full meeting of delegates from the 52 PEN centres registered for the 85th Congress of PEN international commenced at De La Salle University in Manila, in tropical humidity, on 1 October. The theme of the Congress – ‘Speaking in Tongues’ – focused on Indigenous languages of the world, in line with the UNESCO Year of Indigenous Languages. PEN Melbourne and Sydney had united to fund Tara June Winch to present on panels on this topic in light of her recently published novel *The Yield*, which centres on the vital importance of Indigenous language and its preservation to the preservation and well-being of culture and community. Sadly, Tara was unable to attend, though I took the opportunity to spruik her novel and its importance to many delegates.

On the Wednesday, Maria Ressa was beamed into the Congress on a giant screen from the US to participate in a panel on Freedom in Crisis. She in many ways led the panel, discussing many threats to freedom of expression in her home country, the Philippines, and in the online environment where social media is being used by authoritarian governments to stifle journalists who criticise them.

The Congress considered and passed resolutions on Indigenous languages in the Philippines, in Belarusia. Also passed were resolutions condemning the silencing of writers under repressive

regimes in the Asia Pacific, Crimea and Iran, and themed resolutions on threats to democracy, migration and the plight of displaced writers. Resolutions were also passed condemning the US prosecution of Julian Assange and the threat to Freedom of Expression that it represents.

Perhaps the most controversial of the draft documents delegates voted on was the ‘Democracy of the Imagination Manifesto’. The manifesto is dedicated to the celebration of writers’ capacity to overcome the limits of their own lived experience in their writing through their imagination and creativity. With the ongoing debate in Australia following the heated dispute between Lionel Shriver and leading Australian author Melissa Lucashenko, and other discussions I have had with Melissa directly and other Indigenous writers, I felt compelled to raise the issue of First Nations writers and their desire to tell their own stories and not to undergo a kind of continued cultural colonisation through non-Indigenous telling of their stories. The manifesto was amended to take into account the need for empathy in this issue and for the positive need to provide publishing opportunities to these historically under-published writers. Of all the interventions I have made at PEN International gatherings, this was one that brought me praise from many delegates from many regions.

Sadly, after discussion of an alarming undemocratic vote carried out by PEN Mexico and other behaviour inconsistent with PEN International’s Charter, Congress delegates voted to suspend PEN Mexico’s membership of PEN International. The hope is that they will either change their

behaviour, pay their membership dues and rejoin the PEN International family, or that a new centre will be formed by the many Mexican writers who have left this centre in dismay at these recent events. A new centre such as this may better serve the interests of local writers who live in one of the most dangerous countries in the world for writers and freedom of expression.

Elections saw Kätlin Kaldmaa of PEN Estonia returned for a second three-year term as PEN's International Secretary. Emanuel Pierrat of PEN France was elected Chair of the Peace Committee and has set an agenda for this Committee that includes considering displacement of writers due to mass migration and the need for PEN to condemn hate speech. Ma Thida of PEN Myanmar and Regula Venske of PEN Germany were returned for three-year terms as regular members of the Board, to be joined by new Board members Danson Khayana of PEN Uganda and David Frances of PEN America (an expat born in Melbourne). This mix is one I think lives up to PEN's Constitution, which calls for the Board to represent the geographic,

language and gender diversity of PEN's membership.

While a PEN Congress is a very sobering experience, where we discuss the dire situation for many PEN members around the world, there are some moments of joy and celebration. One that brought me most joy from our gathering in Manila was the vote to accept the newly formed PEN Malaysia into PEN International membership. This centre has been set up in large measure by the committed effort of Malaysian writer and literary organiser Bernice Chauly – I delighted in toasting her success with her on the night of this momentous achievement.

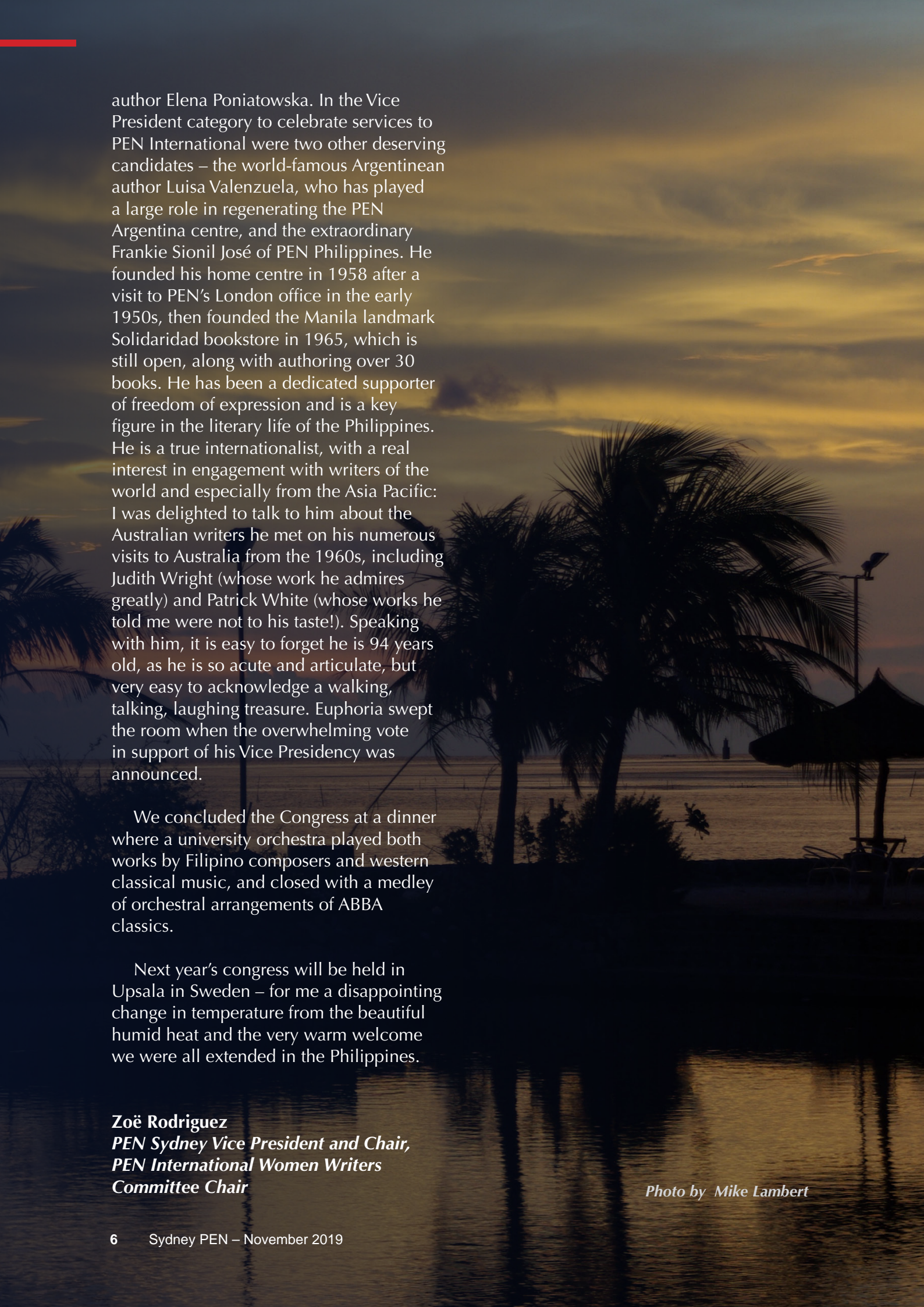
Also on a celebratory note, the PEN Board had put a record five very deserving candidates up for election as Vice Presidents of PEN International. Among the three nominated in the category to celebrate literary merit are two Nobel Prize winners – Belarusian author Svetlana Alexandovna Alexievich and Turkish Orhan Pamuk, as well as the multi-awarded Mexican-Polish



During the 85 th PEN International Congress in Manila, the Philippines.

**L – R: Zoë Rodriquez, (PEN Sydney Vice President and Chair, PEN International Women Writers Committee Chair). Kätlin Kaldmaa (International Secretary of PEN International). Tereza and her husband, 94 year old Frankie Sionil José, (elected Vice President of PEN International and founder in 1958 of PEN Philippines) at his iconic bookshop Solidaridad.**



A photograph of a sunset over a body of water. In the foreground, there are silhouettes of palm trees and a beach umbrella. The sky is filled with soft, golden light from the setting sun, reflecting on the water's surface. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

author Elena Poniatowska. In the Vice President category to celebrate services to PEN International were two other deserving candidates – the world-famous Argentinean author Luisa Valenzuela, who has played a large role in regenerating the PEN Argentina centre, and the extraordinary Frankie Sionil José of PEN Philippines. He founded his home centre in 1958 after a visit to PEN's London office in the early 1950s, then founded the Manila landmark Solidaridad bookstore in 1965, which is still open, along with authoring over 30 books. He has been a dedicated supporter of freedom of expression and is a key figure in the literary life of the Philippines. He is a true internationalist, with a real interest in engagement with writers of the world and especially from the Asia Pacific: I was delighted to talk to him about the Australian writers he met on his numerous visits to Australia from the 1960s, including Judith Wright (whose work he admires greatly) and Patrick White (whose works he told me were not to his taste!). Speaking with him, it is easy to forget he is 94 years old, as he is so acute and articulate, but very easy to acknowledge a walking, talking, laughing treasure. Euphoria swept the room when the overwhelming vote in support of his Vice Presidency was announced.

We concluded the Congress at a dinner where a university orchestra played both works by Filipino composers and western classical music, and closed with a medley of orchestral arrangements of ABBA classics.

Next year's congress will be held in Upsala in Sweden – for me a disappointing change in temperature from the beautiful humid heat and the very warm welcome we were all extended in the Philippines.

**Zoë Rodriguez**  
*PEN Sydney Vice President and Chair,  
PEN International Women Writers  
Committee Chair*

*Photo by Mike Lambert*



# Public enemy journalist number one

*Alison Broinowski*

It has been years since the US Democratic National Committee (DNC) brought suit against Julian Assange for publishing its leaked emails in 2016. It wasn't until 29 July of this year that a federal court in New York dismissed the case. The ruling upheld Assange's status as a journalist and publisher and dismissed claims that WikiLeaks' publication in 2016 of leaked

Hillary Clinton was an early enthusiast for internet freedom, which she declared would provide people with access to knowledge and create 'opportunities where none exist'. In 2016, however, WikiLeaks offered online access to Clinton's emails and to the internal communications of the DNC, which led to the failure of her campaign. Internet freedom suddenly became less equal



Democratic emails was illegal. The New York Times and Washington Post buried this highly significant story. It did not appear in the Australian media at all.

Journalism, as George Orwell recognised, is printing what someone in power doesn't want published. That's what most journalists did. Even if their words are no longer printed on a page, a few courageous reporters still do. But journalism has fundamentally changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

for some. Following the leaks, Clinton described Julian Assange as 'a traitor', although he had provided voters with opportunities and access to knowledge where none existed, just as she said. Presidential candidate Donald Trump had plenty of reasons to love WikiLeaks, given the positive impact the leaks had on his campaign. Under President Trump, however, 18 charges of espionage were issued against Assange.

'Now anyone can be a journalist', the

Guardian enthused in 2008 when Alan Rusbridger, its Editor in Chief (determined to embrace new technology), encouraged 'citizen journalism'. His views still resonated a year ago with college journalists in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with the student newspaper of Wellesley College declaring its delight that 'regardless of the outlet, the rise of technology in our society has allowed for voices of regular people to be heard by millions of people within seconds'. But by then, Rusbridger recalled, the Guardian and its American cousins had fallen out with their largest source of citizen journalism, 'as most people eventually do with Assange'. Rusbridger, however, understood the global consequences for his profession of using the US Espionage Act of 1917 to charge a foreign journalist anywhere, and warned against it.

If such concerns were aired at the Global Conference for Media Freedom in London, which ran from 10–11 July this year, they were not reported. Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs Marise Payne was present, but she did not explain and was not asked why she wasn't a speaker and why Australia was not a sponsor, or why Australia has dropped from 19th to 21st in the world index of press freedom and has more national security laws than any other democratic nation. She merely restated the mantra that a 'sensible balance' has to be found between protecting our national interest and the public's 'right to know'. Minister Payne did not comment on what recent Australian Federal Police raids on journalists' offices, metadata and travel records might suggest about that balance. The Minister condemned the murder of journalists by authorities in Saudi Arabia and Myanmar, but said nothing about Assange. Did she ask the British Foreign Secretary about him or visit nearby

Belmarsh prison, where he is being held? We might assume not.

Human rights lawyer Amal Clooney did address the conference, in her new role as the UK's Special Envoy for Media Freedom. She had advised Assange in 2013 about acquiring Ecuadorian diplomatic status to gain immunity from prosecution (which Britain refused). In her address, Clooney called on the United Kingdom and Canada, as conference sponsors, to ensure that 'more robust international mechanisms would exist next time a journalist was arbitrarily arrested or attacked', but her passing reference to Assange was edited out of the online transcripts. Clooney also listed recent attacks on journalists in Russia, China, Turkey, Pakistan and the Philippines, adding that the decline in press freedom around the world 'is not limited to non-democracies': Australia should set an example and be 'better than North Korea'. Clooney criticised US President Donald Trump as 'a leader who vilifies the media, making honest journalists all over the world more vulnerable to abuse'.

Silence prevailed among those present at the conference – who included formerly imprisoned Australian journalist Peter Grete – about the UK's recent record on media freedom. Several D-Notices directing the press against publishing certain information (now issued by the Defence and Security Media Advisory Committee) were issued in Britain this year to silence journalists' questions about the unsolved poisoning of Sergei Skripal and four others in Salisbury in 2018. The British authorities' media releases on this matter were confused, contradictory, and unbelievable, and a documentary episode of BBC's *Panorama* was no better. As for Julian Assange, ever since



he fell out with the Guardian, New York Times, Washington Post and others over redactions from the leaked US diplomatic cables (a mega-scoop that he got and they didn't) the pile-on Anglo-media attacks against him personally have been unrelenting.

Australia's dearth of public interest journalism on Assange was somewhat relieved this year by Nick Miller's coverage for Fairfax of statements by UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, who visited Assange in Belmarsh in May and raised concerns that were rejected by officials in Sweden and the US. Then came ABC's *Four Corners*, with two episodes on 22 July and 29 July about Assange's prosecution, titled 'Hero or Villain'. For 'balance' *Four Corners* has given Assange's enemies a lot of air-time for familiar allegations and smears like 'vanity' and 'megalomania'. But the 'Hero or Villain' documentary recalls that Chelsea Manning (then Bradley Manning) sought out WikiLeaks only after the US papers ignored her; that two Guardian journalists revealed the very password for the cables database over which Assange is now facing prosecution; and that Australian ministers refused to seek assurances that he would not be extradited.

Bracingly, WikiLeaks Editor in Chief Kristin Hrafnsson argues that 'national security' is actually about protecting those in power from embarrassment. He reminds those who claim Assange endangered lives that the media had 10 months to redact names. Moreover, in 2013, the Pentagon's Brigadier-General Robert Carr conceded that no one had been killed as a result of the leaked cables. Hrafnsson points to the hypocrisy of men who wage dirty wars and then turn on journalists for exposing their massacres. He says that he and two colleagues are currently being

investigated in Virginia simply for doing 'what has to be done'.

Governments whose abuses have been revealed are making a 'global pushback on free speech', Assange's lawyer Jennifer Robinson told ABC Radio National in July, adding that she and Assange have received death threats. Although Robinson met politicians in Canberra in late July, informing them about Assange's situation, Prime Minister Scott Morrison made it known that he would not raise it with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Other citizens who are not journalists are also in serious danger from our government, as shown by proceedings against David McBride, Witness K, and Bernard Collaery.

The media usually band together to defend journalistic freedom and the rights of whistleblowers. But many journalists deny that what Assange does is journalism and take no interest in what is happening to him in Belmarsh. The recent attitudes of the UK and US governments to press freedom make it more important than ever that the public is informed about what is happening to Assange while he is detained in Britain, and what may happen to him in America. If Australian journalists were doing their job, they would pursue Assange's case with at least as much enthusiasm as they and the government brought to those of Peter Grete, jailed in Cairo, Hakeem al-Araibi, arrested in Bangkok, Alek Sigley, detained in Pyongyang, and Jock Palfreeman, re-imprisoned in Bulgaria.

**Dr Alison Broinowski AM, formerly an Australian diplomat, is Vice President of Australians for War Powers Reform. She writes on world affairs and terrorism.**

**COPYRIGHTAGENCY  
CULTURAL FUND**

Commissioned with support from  
the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund.

# Women Writers Committee report

## From the 85<sup>th</sup> PEN International Congress in Manila, the Philippines

**O**n Monday 30th September, the Women Writers Committee of PEN (WWC), with participants from every continent, met in a room on the fifth floor of a building of De La Salle University in Manila. The wonderful Judyth Hill of PEN San Miguel commenced the day by delivering the sobering introduction of an empty chair dedicated to the Syrian blogger and human rights lawyer Razan Zaitouneh, who was abducted in 2013 and is presumed still to be held by the Islamic armed forces of Douma, just outside Damascus. The empty chair is, of course, PEN International's long-standing symbol for the writer who cannot be present due to imprisonment.

We covered many topics in the committee meeting, most centrally the work PEN International is doing in broadening our recent partnership with the VIDA Count in the US to collect data and analyse the (under) representation of women writers in the literary pages and major prizes in their country. A survey design to support this project was completed following the mid-year committee meeting in Bled. At the meeting of the Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee of PEN International (TLRC), held in Chiapas in Mexico this year, PEN's Latin American consultant, Alicia Quiñones, and PEN International's President, Jennifer Clement, began discussions with UNESCO about partnering with them to deliver the PEN VIDA count in Latin America, and more broadly across the world. Naturally, such a partnership is one that PEN is very enthusiastic about, as it will

only enhance our capacity to gather meaningful data and to share it with a wide audience.

Danson Kahyana of PEN Uganda, later elected to the PEN International Board, attended the WWC meeting with the special objective of raising awareness of the plight of Ugandan writer Stella Nyanzi, who has made a mission of opposing the despotic and corrupt ruler of Uganda using the impressive weapon of her imagination and words.

After every other line of protest failed, Nyanzi began to practice 'radical rudeness', calling the President, for example, 'a pair of buttocks'. She has now been jailed — not for the first time. On one occasion of imprisonment, she refused a pardon. When it was suggested



*Women Writers Committee members after the committee meeting from the 85<sup>th</sup> PEN International Congress in Manila, the Philippines.*

*Back row L - R: Maria Fres-Felix (PEN Philippines), Lucina Kathmann (PEN San Miguel), Kätlin Kaldmaa (PEN Estonia), Fatima Sillah (PEN Namibia), Inge Gaile (PEN Latvia). Front row L - R: Rose Mary Espinosa (PEN Mexico), Zoë Rodriguez (PEN Sydney).*



that perhaps she had not meant to offend the President, Nyanzi clarified that offending the President was exactly what she had meant to do.

Danson implored us to write messages to Nyanzi that he would personally take to her in prison in Uganda. He reported her mental and physical health were poor and that he felt sure this sign of solidarity would help. Over the following days the WWC collected personal messages from delegates across the world, as well as gathering A3 posters of her empty chair messages, which delegates signed. We know how important this gesture is and are so pleased the WWC could play such a tangible role in showing Stella Nyanzi she is not forgotten.

A new initiative was dreamt up in the Committee when a delegate from Gambia lamented the lack of stories written by women published in her country. She said women writers simply did not have access to publication, and therefore children did not have the opportunity to hear the perspective of women. She asked whether the Committee could recommend books. A PEN Women's Writing List was born – delegates from different countries will each nominate 10 books from their countries by women that they would encourage people to read.

At a panel on women writing in authoritarian regimes, we heard from Filipino journalists on the repression of free speech under Duterte's rule. In particular, they spoke of his attempts to silence the celebrated veteran founder of Rappler, Maria Ressa – by coincidence with whom a number of the PEN Sydney Committee had breakfasted a few weeks before Congress. In addition, we heard about the lingering impact of authoritarian rule in Myanmar, where decades of dedicated propaganda have led to a community that is not

equipped to analyse what is published by government and writers who self-censor. From Estonia, we heard of the hangover from the Soviet rule, where messages were contained in a kind of code and where women are still criticised for daring to write about topics like sex. And from one of the worst regimes in the world for writers, we heard about the incredible number of journalists and bloggers who face costly court cases and are jailed for their writing in Turkey, with laws applied inconsistently with an ambition of silencing any criticism of Erdogan or his government.

Despite the serious nature of much of what was being reported, we all delighted in the presentation from a Russian delegate who outlined for us their initiative of naming the 'sexist of the year'. Journalists send in examples of sexist language, citing a particular person's exact quote and its date and occasion. Somehow, they manage to judge these quotes and for the very worst, or at least the very worst remark in each category, be it the category of government, media etc., they create and promulgate a diploma.

The decision to host the next WWC in Myanmar alongside the TLRC was welcomed. It will be good to have committee members from the Asia Pacific more able to attend and not be restricted by the distance to Bled in Slovenia, where it has been held alongside the PEN International Peace Committee for a number of years.

The Committee will keep PEN member centres around the world informed of developments with the PEN VIDA UNESCO Count and about the WWC meeting in Myanmar, in May 2020.

**Zoë Rodriguez**  
***Chair, PEN International Women***  
***Writers Committee***

# Dream of Death

***By Mohammad Ali Maleki***

*Extract from Truth in the Cage.*

My dears, I know these stories are old:  
but please, I ask you, listen.

I was once young and happy, like you.  
I used to jump from one wall to another —  
I was so healthy and fresh.  
I came to live in peace beside you.  
I sought asylum because of my bad luck.  
But for a long time now I've felt alone in this place,  
terrorised by bad memories.

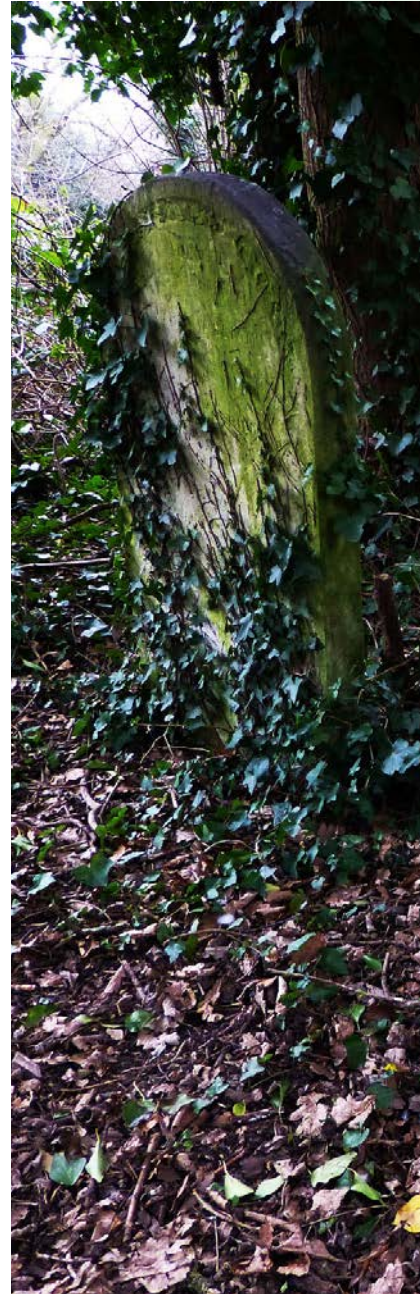
I don't know why they tortured me,  
why they cut my wings and feathers.  
They treated us like animals, they put us in a cage —  
What kind of help is that?  
It's as if they went to a feast and left us tied up,  
like livestock, outside.

They played with my mind and soul for years.  
They played as if I were a piece on a chessboard.  
In the final moment of each game  
I am always trapped.

I've lived with fear in this cage.  
At night I have no peace because of nightmares.  
The doctor said I had no choice:  
so I took the mental pills he gave me  
and sat by the fence, for hours...

And still I take those pills  
and sit by the fence for hours.  
At first my mind stops, then I dream.  
My thoughts are killing me;  
they take me to my death.

Suicide and self-immolation are always on people's minds here.  
Once this was just in our imaginations —  
But do you see how all these dreams have now come true?



*Photo by Gigi Griffis*





*Photo by Andrew Turner*

You all know what's going on  
in the Manus and Nauru hells.  
There are rapes, burnings and hangings:  
many have said goodbye to their lives.

Do you see what their mental pills do to us?  
When you see or hear us, from far away,  
you say, They're crazy, stupid people!  
Let me tell you, it's all because of those pills;  
it's not our fault.

One day, like every day,  
I took those pills: I had no choice.  
I fell deep into a dream and was sunk there for hours...  
In my dream I saw that I was dead.  
They put me inside a rotten coffin  
and shrouded me in pale, second-hand linens  
taken from the rubbish.

When they wrapped me in those linens  
my soul stepped apart —  
I was suspended in air.  
They were carrying me to the far corners of the cemetery.  
I wished I could have died beside my parents,  
died in peace, in their embrace.  
I looked for a familiar person to hold my coffin  
but there were only strangers, damning and cursing me.  
They did not care for what they held;  
they did not cry.

We came to the exiles' cemetery  
and they threw me into a hole with hate.  
There was a stony pillow under my head.  
The shrouded linens decayed on my body.  
How terrible and frightening it was.

I saw many animals make their way into my grave.  
My soul watched as they ate my body,  
leaving nothing but fragments of bone.  
Just yesterday I had talked and laughed  
but now it looked as if I had never even been human!  
They threw soil on my coffin;  
they didn't put a headstone there.  
They wrote no name and no address.  
No one in the world knew who I was.

In my dream I screamed, Parents! Know that I've died!  
I saw my parents dressed in black, because of my death:  
how deeply they cried out and wept.  
Mum tore at her face until there was nothing left  
undamaged and there were blood and tears  
flowing down her face.

Her hair had already turned white from our separation,  
even before my death. My father had begged,  
Son, what kind of migration is this?  
Now Mum fainted from sorrow, sighing,  
I have no sign of his grave!



And tears flowed from Dad's eyelashes as he moaned,  
It was our dream to see your wedding,  
but we've heard of your death instead...

I woke in horror, the dream heavy on my heart,  
wishing I had not hurt them by dying,  
by failing to have that wedding day.

Understand, please: I wish to be healthy, like you,  
to say goodbye to these damn pills.  
For three years I've taken them and now I'm deeply  
tired, hopeless and depressed.  
How do I explain the hurt of this hard, bitter life?  
I swear to God, every night I wish to die,  
and every morning, I wish not to be alive.  
Then, because my thoughts are killing me  
I have no choice but to take these damn pills!

Should I thank your government for this?  
Is this the care you give refugees?  
That you make addicts here, and mental illness?

Only God can help us.  
Put yourself in our families' shoes for a moment.  
Put your children in our shoes too.  
If this is rudeness, please forgive me;  
I make obeisance to you.  
And I ask God to forgive those who torture us —  
They know not what they do.



*Photo by Taki Steve*

---

**Mohammad Ali Maleki is an Iranian poet and avid gardener who has been living in detention on Manus Island for nearly six years. His poetry is written in Farsi and translated into English by fellow detainee Mansour Shoushtari. Mohammad uses his mobile phone to send his poems to friends in Australia who help to edit, share and publish them. All proceeds go directly to the author, who is currently raising money via a GoFundMe campaign in order to relocate to Canada under its Private Sponsorship of Refugees program. You can contribute directly to Mohammed's GoFundMe campaign by visiting <https://au.gofundme.com/f/savenasir> or purchase his book at Verity La's online bookshop <https://verityla.com/shop/>**

**COPYRIGHTAGENCY**  
CULTURAL FUND

Commissioned with support from  
the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund.

# The big chilling effect

Jock Cheetham

A notice popped up on my screen: 'Want to stay on top of the expanding surveillance state? Fill in your details below'. The Crikey website was selling me a free trial based on an issue that should concern all Australians, but most know nothing about.

I was reading about the Australian Cyber Conference (CyberCon) held in Melbourne in October this year, which disinvented (censored) two speakers who are well-known advocates for whistleblowers, Dr Suelette Dreyfus from the University of Melbourne and Thomas Drake. The conference is ultimately controlled by the Australian Signals Directorate, which apparently finds whistleblowing unacceptable.

The Australian Signals Directorate is involved in one of the biggest media freedom issues of this year, the Australian Federal Police raids on journalists in June. The first of these was on News Corp journalist Annika Smethurst, whose underwear drawers were famously inspected, along with the rest of her home, computers and phone. Her crime? Smethurst reported on a plan for the Australian Signals Directorate to spy on and target Australians within Australia.

The ABC was raided the next day. An open letter by Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) from journalists called the raids a 'grave threat to press freedom in Australia', adding that investigative journalism 'cannot survive without the courage of whistleblowers'. In this climate, 'truth-telling is

being punished'.

The big issues this year, the journalists note, include the raids, a raft of national security laws, and the prosecution of whistleblowers Richard Boyle, David McBride and Witness K. The limits placed on Australia's media freedom are increasing and the warnings of recent years about the dangers ahead are now being realised. So what can be done about Australia's slide into a national security state?

The June raids on the ABC's Sydney headquarters were related to The Afghan Files, stories which exposed allegations of unlawful killings by Australian military forces. The leaks to ABC journalists allegedly came from David William McBride, who has been charged. McBride said in The New Daily: 'It's a complex case, but it's also a simple case. It comes down to: at what point are you obliged to basically rebel against the government?'

Apparently, people rebel against the Australian Government at their peril. The Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, said in response to the raid on Smethurst's home: 'It never troubles me that our laws are being upheld.'

But what if the law is the problem? That's certainly the position of a range of bodies speaking on behalf of journalism, including its union. In its 2019 press freedom report, *The Public Right to Know*, the MEAA argued that 'in the era of overwhelming secrecy and mass surveillance, whistleblowers are paying



higher prices than ever for speaking out while journalists and media organisations navigate a minefield of new laws that criminalise more and more types of speech and publication'. The union calls for urgent reforms to disclosure laws.

Such arguments have been highlighted in the parliamentary inquiry created when the outcry over the raids grew raucous enough, the Inquiry into the Impact of the Exercise of Law Enforcement and Intelligence Powers on the Freedom of the Press. The Australian Human Rights Commission's (AHRC) submission noted that freedom of the press is guaranteed in article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and that 'search and seizure powers in relation to investigations ... [and] prosecution for breaches of secrecy provisions ... involve the limitation of the right protected by article 19'.

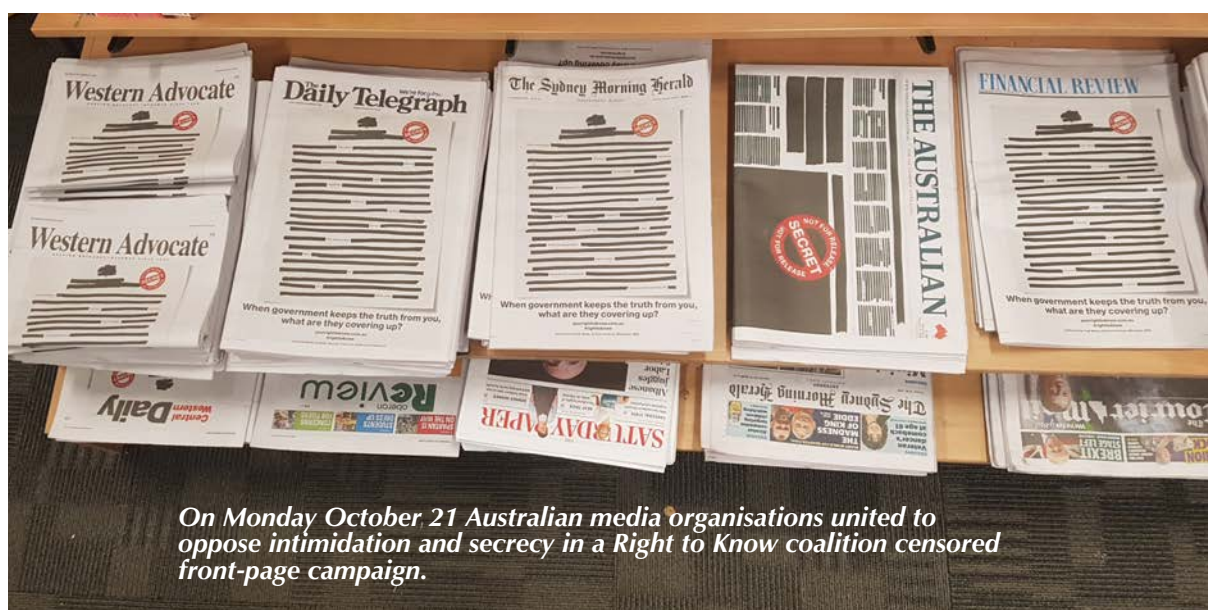
The AHRC also highlights the chilling effect of such criminal laws, a point reinforced from the media itself. According to a senior editorial figure at the ABC quoted anonymously in the *Alliance for Journalists' Freedom Press Freedom in Australia - White Paper*,

published in May, we are witnessing the 'criminalisation of journalism... There are stories that are going untold because we are concerned about putting our journalists in harm's way', including being jailed.

And so it is for journalists' sources, says Mark Maley, an ABC News manager: 'The consequences of being outed as a source are potentially criminal... There are stories that should have been told and have not been told because of a combination of the ASIO Act, the EFI Act and metadata laws. That's the chilling effect in practice.'

Last year, the federal government passed laws such as the *National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Act 2018* (EFI Act). Michaela Whitbourn wrote in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that in enacting the law 'the government introduced a general secrecy offence that allows anyone who passes on classified information received from a federal public servant – including publishing it – to be jailed for up to five years'.

Australian law does not provide clear and unambiguous protection for freedom



of the press, or freedom of speech more generally, Whitbourn noted, unlike those enshrined in the US constitution, or the superior public interest defences in the US and UK. But Australia is excelling in one area: 'Since the 9/11 attacks, Australia has enacted 75 laws related to terrorism.'

The government also passed the *Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Assistance and Access) Act 2018* (Assistance and Access Act), some say in a rush. The Alliance for Journalists' Freedom (AJF) report noted: 'The passage of the Assistance and Access Act ... gives law enforcement agencies a range of new powers to access journalists' confidential communications with their sources'.

Of course, the government and its agencies already had a lot of power before last year's acts. The UTS-based Centre for Media Transition's submission to the inquiry commented mainly on the journalism information warrants scheme introduced by the *Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Amendment (Data Retention) Act 2015* (the metadata law). The scheme means law enforcement agencies can easily get a warrant to access telecommunications data to identify a journalist's confidential source. The Centre recommends that the scheme should be 'amended to prohibit access to journalist's confidential information except where there is a serious threat to Australia's national security'. The MEAA agrees, noting: 'The metadata retention regime is a particular concern for journalists who are ethically obliged to protect the identity of confidential sources.'

In July, Dr Julie Posetti compared Australia's press freedoms to international standards as set out in the UNESCO study she authored, *Protecting Journalism*

*Sources in the Digital Age*. Australia meets just one of the 11 principles that should be met, she said.

The UNESCO study noted: 'In 2015 the Federal Government classified information pertaining to asylum seekers on national security grounds. On the same basis, in mid-2015, the Australian Government criminalised the leaking of such information.' The MEAA report concurs: 'We find these deliberate attempts to suppress reporting about the treatment of asylum seekers and the conditions of the centres to be an affront to press freedom.' Posetti said there was 'barely any light between Labor and the Coalition on these issues, and there is an opportunity for differentiation'.

The AJF includes among its seven recommendation one to bolster shield laws. It argues for an exception for journalists, instead of a defence, because otherwise 'journalists bear the heavy burden of proving that the defence is applicable'.

All that is before we get to the ongoing and age-old debate about the impact of defamation laws in Australia. The MEAA addresses the issue, as does the AJF, which stated: 'Australia's existing defamation legislation should be supplemented by the introduction of a "public interest defence" modelled on that available under UK defamation legislation'. All these issues are raised by the Australia's Right to Know coalition of media organisations, which also wants to see freedom of information law reform.

Court suppression orders are another critical area. 'The George Pell trials highlighted the suppression order issue – both for why orders are sometimes needed and also why many judges are misusing the system either to punish the media or to placate the powerful – many orders are simply nonsensical



and poorly defined', the MEAA report noted. And the AJF report said: 'Pell's trial was extensively reported overseas on sites that any Australian with an internet connection could access. The overall effectiveness of suppression orders in a modern and open society like Australia should also be further explored.'

Other important media freedom issues include the crisis in local journalism. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's Digital Platforms Inquiry found 'a significant fall in the number of articles published covering local government, local court, health and science issues during the past 15 years'. It's hard to have a free press without any press at all, which the inquiry found was the case in 21 local government areas that lacked a local or regional newspaper, of which 16 were in regional Australia. One response to this situation is greater support for the ABC across all local bureaux, in addition to responses that assist commercial media.

On a brighter side, the digital disruption that has demolished a lot of the mainstream media's sources of revenue is paralleled by the huge boom in online diversity. In this environment, The Juice Media can make a searing satirical analysis video about the East Timor bugging case involving Witness K and his lawyer, generating 750,000 YouTube views and 16,000 Facebook likes. Even a mum and dad operation (literally) working out of their lounge-room can attract funding, huge audiences and government badgering. But outlets such as this analyse existing information rather than break new information and ultimately lack the punch of mainstream media pursuing an issue collectively.

All this takes place in a global context, one which, the MEAA points out, allows impunity for murdered journalists (930

journalists from 2006 to 2016), with a one-in-10 conviction rate. The MEAA highlights nine Australian journalists murdered, including Juanita Nielsen, the Balibo Five and Roger East.

Australia is being scrutinised internationally for its lapses in media freedom. In 2014, the Washington Post examined whether Australia was becoming a national security state. After the AFP raids this year, The New Republic wrote 'when it comes to press freedom ... Australia is a dismal backwater'. And Reporters Without Borders ranks the country 21, down two spots this year, noting: 'Australia has good public media but the concentration of media ownership is one of the highest in the world ... independent investigative reporters and whistle-blowers face draconian legislation.'

The MEAA's 2019 report concluded: 'It's time to push back this tide of secrecy, intimidation and harassment – not least because it is getting dangerously out of control.' Pushing back means campaigning to change the laws. Supporting a strong ABC and measures that buttress public interest journalism remain vital. Understanding the threats that are emerging requires us to consider the national security state not just as a protector, but as a potential centre of power not always acting in our interests, but rather sometimes its own.

**Jock Cheetham is a senior lecturer in journalism at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, who worked at The Sydney Morning Herald and Fairfax Media for 13 years, and was a Walkley Award finalist.**

**COPYRIGHTAGENCY**  
CULTURAL FUND

Commissioned with support from  
the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund.

Humayun Reza

## Albatross



All sorrows shall not go into the ocean  
Near the port  
Someone is tired today  
So shall gaze at the port and locality  
Touching the seashore

Tired of thousands of travelling  
Said goodbye to friends and left alone  
The lonely bird sitting quiet  
Surrendering its huge wings of melancholy  
Sitting within the circle of water

Some shall go towards the twilight mountain cloud  
Some shall not go anywhere  
Standing still with faded yellow dead roots  
Domesticity tangled with the smell of a child's body  
Some love this maya the way life loves death

Collecting courage to ignite the flame of life  
Goes back to the fire, have you seen his eyes  
Returning, swimming through water  
Melancholy trickling down his huge wings

So tired today  
So shall gaze at the port and locality  
Touching the seashore  
All sorrow shall not go into the ocean

*Photos by Stuart Spence*  
[www.stuspence.com](http://www.stuspence.com)



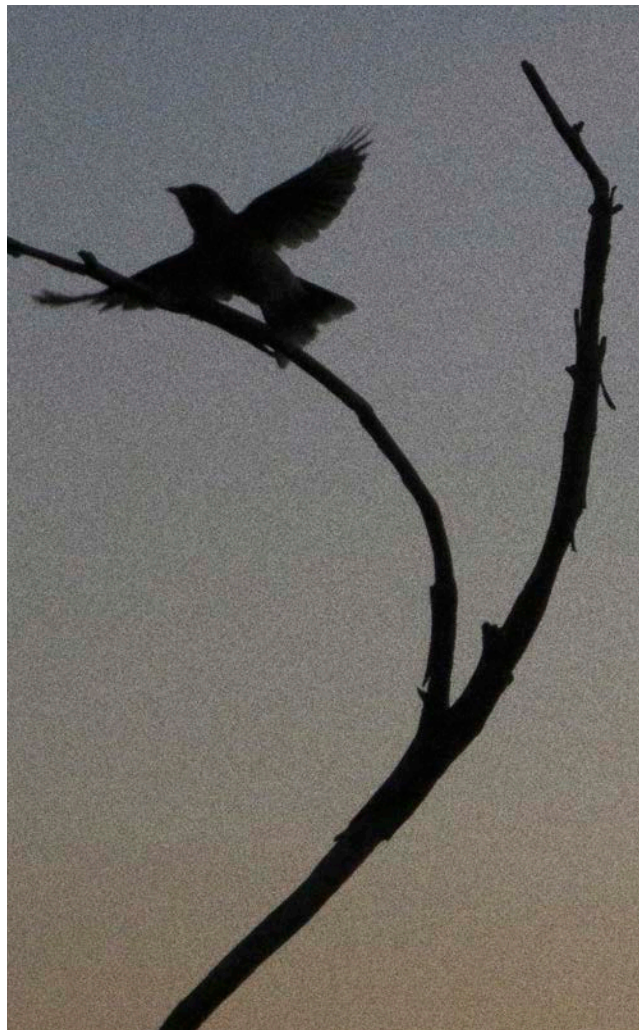


# Wings

Ah wings! once you were awake near sides  
Today you look like burnt fingers of mistakes  
In our times you were the deepest love  
Like a foggy winter river of bluish veins on breasts

Shoes and asphalt cracked maple leaves  
Cover paths like dead moonlight  
This autumn night falls on my side of the Rhein  
Lines of sleepy lonely wintry houses  
Ever awakened room-heaters, and  
Water fog gliding through glass panes

I want to reach the other side of the mountain  
Searching the way with a shaky candlelight  
A Rottweiler stares with blank, unblinking eyes  
I want to go back, oh my wings!  
Are you still awake around my sides



*Photo by Stuart Spence*  
[www.stuspence.com](http://www.stuspence.com)

**Humayun Reza was born in Bangladesh  
and lives in Sydney.  
He is a poet, a writer and a journalist.**

**COPYRIGHTAGENCY**  
CULTURAL FUND

Commissioned with support from  
the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund.

# ‘Democracy Peddler’ still detained in China despite a lack of evidence

*Feng Chongyi*

**Feng Chongyi is associate professor in China Studies at University of Technology Sydney and his current research focusses on human rights lawyers in China and united front operations of the Chinese Communist Party in Australia.**

*This article first appeared in its original version in **The Conversation** (July 23, 2019)*

## THE CONVERSATION

<https://theconversation.com/why-democracy-peddler-yang-hengjun-has-been-detained-in-china-and-why-he-must-be-released-120751>

Australian authorities have reportedly been told to stop interfering in the case of the Chinese–Australian writer Dr Yang Hengjun, who has been detained by the Chinese Government since January.



Sealed off from the outside world, without access to legal counsel or visits by relatives, Yang says he has been subjected to intensive interrogations by Chinese authorities seeking confessions for alleged crimes. Yang claims this included torture over a six-month period. He describes being held in a guarded, windowless, continuously illuminated cell without release, being routinely deprived of sleep and being forced to kneel, stand and sit in a certain position for extensive

periods of time.

Yang has now been moved to a criminal detention centre on a broader charge of ‘endangering state security’ and has now been formally arrested for ‘suspected crimes of espionage’.

Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne says Yang is being detained for his political views and should be released. The Australian media union (MEAA), of which Yang is a member, has backed calls for his release.

I have known Yang for many years – he is a former PhD student of mine – and I also believe his continuing detention is an injustice.

So, what has Yang done to elicit such lengthy detention and the extremes of torture? In a nutshell, Yang is a political dissident no longer tolerated by the Chinese communist regime. He is paying a heavy price as a long-standing critic of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Yang, aged 54, abandoned his career as a communist cadre to embrace freedom



and democracy in his middle age. Yang's career with the CCP first started in 1987, after he earned his first degree in politics from Fudan University in China. He was assigned to work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a ministry connected to the Chinese secret police. However, Yang was eventually alienated by his job and developed instead a strong interest in literature.

In 1999, Yang resigned from his post and moved to Australia with his wife and two sons to pursue his dream of becoming

Technology Sydney. Under my supervision he started his journey as a liberal scholar.

Yang's 2009 PhD thesis, *The Internet and China: the Impacts of Netizen Reporters and Bloggers on Democratisation in China*, was a timely, in-depth analysis of the complicated information warfare between the internet and the CCP regime. As part of an experiment for this thesis, Yang started his own blog (available now only on archive.org) and wrote commentaries on current affairs as a 'citizen journalist'.



*Illustration by  
Kelly Fliedner, PEN Perth*

a writer. From 2002 to 2005, he published a trilogy of spy novels in print and online: *Fatal Weakness*, *Fatal Weapon* and *Fatal Assassination*. In these novels, Yang uses his own experiences and those of his colleagues to tell the soul-stirring stories of a China-US double agent who ultimately serves the agenda of neither side. Instead, the novel's hero works for his own inspiration and conviction to serve the real interests of the people.

These novels did not bring Yang the fame and wealth he expected. They were published in Taiwan and banned in mainland China. An attempt to turn them into movies in Hong Kong also failed.

At the end of 2005, Yang enrolled in a PhD in China Studies at the University of

Since then, Yang has published more than 10 million words of online articles on this theme, earning the nickname 'democracy pedlar' and a tremendous following in the Chinese speaking world.

Yang is that rare combination of a scholar well trained in both China and the West, with a firm belief in the universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. He chose to devote his talent and passion to online journalism in Chinese languages, hoping to accelerate China's transformation toward constitutional democracy.

Several collections of his online articles have been published in print to a wide audience, such as *Family, State and the World* (2010), *Seeing the World with Black Eyes: The World in the Eyes of a Democracy*



*Pedlar* (2011), *Talking about China* (2014) and *Keeping You Company in Your Life Journey* (2014).

Yang excels at explaining the profound in simple terms. He uses moving examples from everyday life to expose the social ills of communist autocracy and promote democratic values and institutions. In particular, he provides timely analysis on all sorts of events around the world and shows the stark contrast between the harsh reality and the official rhetoric of the CCP.

Although he has maintained extensive connections with some Chinese human rights and democracy activists, Yang rarely engages in social activism. However, he has long been targeted by the Chinese security apparatus, who consider him one of the opinion leaders who has the capacity to mobilise nationwide social protests. In March 2011, they placed him in detention. He was quickly released back to Australia due to the international media campaign and the diplomatic pressure of a visit to China by the then Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard.

Following this, Yang has been more cautious in his advocacy. Since Xi Jinping's rise to General Secretary of the CCP in 2012, Yang has adopted a soft strategy, packaging his advocacy for human rights and democracy in the disguise of publicising the 'socialist core values' promoted by the CCP. Yang's new strategy prompted thousands of his followers to organise support groups via the social media app WeChat in more than 50 cities throughout China – even in Beijing,

Shanghai and Guangzhou in 2015, where human rights and democracy activists were experiencing brutal repression.

Again, in 2016, when the political environment turned from bad to worse and Yang's blogs were shut down one by one, he closed down all of the WeChat groups and substantially scaled down his online writing.

In 2017, Yang moved to New York as a visiting scholar at Columbia University and pressure on him from the CCP seemed to relax. During this time, he travelled to China several times without molestation and Chinese authorities lifted the ban on several of his blogs toward the end of 2018. This gave him the impression that it was safe for him to visit China.

But during his visit this January he was detained upon his arrival.

Thousands of Yang's supporters have been in despair, engaging in heated debates about his ordeal and its implications for political development in China.

Ignoring the international norm of presumption of innocence, the CCP regime continues Yang's arbitrary detention without trial. Both Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Minister for Foreign Affairs Marise Payne have made it clear to Chinese authorities that Dr Yang Hengjun is not a spy for Australia. They have demanded his release.

The continuing persecution and imprisonment of writer Yang Hengjun by Chinese authorities demonstrates contempt for international human rights standards. The Australian Government and public are obligated to challenge such practice by the CCP regime to safeguard the basic human rights of Australian citizens. The international community are also obligated to support this endeavour for human dignity and demand the immediate release of Yang.

# Celebrating the UNESCO International Year of Indigenous Languages

The UNESCO International Year of Indigenous Languages has been all about highlighting the crucial role languages play in people's daily lives. Of the 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages once alive in Australia, only around 120 are still spoken, and of these approximately 90 per cent are endangered. With this in mind, there has never been a more important time to promote and preserve the languages spoken by our First Nations peoples.

Many Australians are lucky enough to remember growing up in homes with bookshelves stocked – full to the brim – with exciting new stories about people and the world. Remember that joy of discovering a new book, the colourful pages filled with new words to learn, and stories to get lost in? The learning that takes place through reading in those early years is so important, not only for literacy development, but also for understanding the world and our place in it.

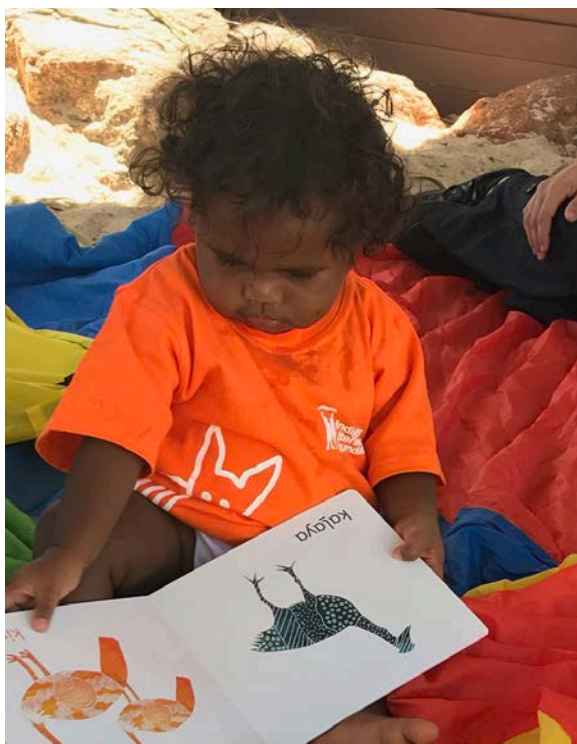
While reading is an essential part of 'growing up', this is a privileged

experience that thousands of Indigenous children living in communities across the country do not share. Access to books in many of these remote areas is scarce, and access to books in many children's first languages is even rarer.

The Indigenous Literacy Foundation (ILF) is working hard to change this. As ILF Board Director and Butchella man Glen Miller puts it, 'ILF is reconciliation in action'. Since their inception in 2004, the not-for-profit charity has gifted over 350,000 new books to over 280 remote communities across Australia. The ILF team visit remote communities in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and Kimberley in Western Australia, Central Australia, Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory and the Torres Strait Islands, to supply books as well as run their own community book publishing programs. Aware of the risks of short-term 'fly-in, fly-out' intervention from outsiders, the ILF ensure their approach to community work is on-going, flexible and engages community members. Their purpose is to build long-term, respectful relationships







with remote communities, their elders and members.

'It's so important to listen to and talk with the elders and community members, listen to what they say and respond to what they need', says Tina Raye, Program Director at ILF.

These values are integrated into their programs, which aim to empower people in Indigenous communities to choose the books they want their children to read. Teachers who have worked in these remote areas, alongside book industry experts and ILF staff members, curate a high-quality selection of books to be distributed to schools, women's centres, crèches, healthcare centres or many other parts of the community. This means the range of books that the ILF provides is culturally appropriate – with 40 per cent written by Indigenous authors and illustrators. The power of seeing their people and culture so vividly represented in these books has a huge impact on children, and is also an important step towards preserving Indigenous culture for the future.

The unique publishing projects the ILF run in their Community Literacy Program give children and community members the rare opportunity to write and publish their own books. Field trip workshops conducted by prominent authors and illustrators, such as Gregg Dreise, David Lawrence, Shelley Ware, Jared Thomas, Anita Heiss and Alison Lester, have now culminated in 90 books written and illustrated by children and community members. These books represent up to 18 Indigenous languages, helping to protect and preserve these languages, giving insight into children's experiences of growing up in remote areas, and into understandings of their culture and people. These books are important – not only for Indigenous children to read and feel empowered through – but also to spread cross-cultural understandings amongst non-Indigenous people across the country.

Students of Nhulunbuy Primary School in north-east Arnhem Land, in the Northern Territory, under the guidance of illustrator Ann James and children's book publisher Ann Haddon, created one of ILF's latest publications, *Nhā Nhunu Nhāngal?* (I Saw We Saw). This beautiful story tells the tale of the sea and surrounding land integral to the children's lives, depicted through a journey around Nhulunbuy, and is written in Dhanu, a traditional Yolgnu Matha language. The significance of this is that those students from Nhulunbuy are now published authors of a book – before even entering high school – the English version of which can now be bought in bookshops across the country.

The two-year project culminated in the book's launch on Indigenous Literacy Day in September this year, at Sydney Opera House. The students travelled more than 4000 kilometres from their remote township on the Gove Peninsula

to perform their story, alongside Gregg Dreisse on the yidaki (didgeridoo in Yolngu Matha), to hundreds of school children and guests. This annual event run by the ILF is a national celebration of Indigenous culture, stories, language and literacy. It was especially poignant to celebrate this day in the UNESCO International Year of Indigenous Languages, as students from Nhulunbuy taught the audience a few words in Yolngu Matha. Cultural awareness is exchanged through story, with Indigenous and non-Indigenous school students coming together for the day's celebration. This event also raises necessary funds for equal access to literacy resources through the interactive Great Book Swap fundraiser.



The ILF works to support Indigenous people to determine their own future, producing books by the community, for the community, in the language they choose. The organisation is committed to protecting, preserving and promoting the diverse languages spoken by the oldest continual culture in the world.

**The Indigenous Literacy Foundation is a not-for-profit charity of the Australian Book Industry. Further information is available at: [www.ilf.org.au](http://www.ilf.org.au)**





# Fragile Minds

*Sydney PEN Free Voices Lecture given by Erik Jensen*

*at the Sydney Writers' Festival, May 2019.*

A senior official in the Catholic Church once asked me why journalists hate God.

At the time, I thought the answer was obvious.

Journalists don't hate God, but they can appear to hate the Church. The institution is powerful and inscrutable. It is built on sanctimony. It has harboured and facilitated obscene criminality.

Journalists are sceptical of the Church because they are sceptical of power. And the power of the Church is outsized and largely unrestricted. It is patently hypocritical and has been used to distort democratic processes. Of course journalists mistrust it.

Recently, however, I've come to think there is something else here. The Church's power is not ordinary. It is built on something uncheckable: faith in the existence of God. In the name of this faith, terrible things have been done. Yet often these are stitched to the divine – to something that is right because it says it is.

Journalists are sceptical of the Church because they are sceptical of anything they cannot see. And God is the ultimate unseeable. It is to God that the Church defers, and if you hold with that logic there is sometimes nothing more you can ask. This is unsettling to a person whose job it is to critique and understand the structures in which we live.



The senior official told me on that phone call that the real reason I was angry was that he got paid more than I did. It was the weekend and his son was in the car. They were on the way to soccer.

- - -

This speech is about journalism and the things we cannot see. It is about the fragility of our industry – the inability to take on criticism. It is about the basic principles from which we've built our craft, and their need to be questioned and sometimes updated. This speech is about every conversation I've had that ends



with someone saying, 'Yes, but it's just what we do'.

- - -

I learnt journalism in a newsroom. I started as a cadet on The Sydney Morning Herald, straight from school, arriving in a



world that awed me and that I revered.

I remember that time with unstinting gratitude.

The lessons I learnt were handed on without fanfare or much discussion. Many of them were commonsense:

Knock on doors.

Ask stupid questions.

Don't be afraid to ask the same thing several times.

Double check spellings,

especially names.

Speak to everyone you can.

Check your facts.

Check both sides.

Ask for documents.

Work from doubt.

Serve your readers.

Others were more exotic. For instance:

You can take a photograph of anyone, so long as where you are standing is public land.

And:

It is not strictly trespass until you are asked to leave.

On starting at the Herald, I was given a code of ethics, which I read and earnestly upheld.

Across five pages, the code set out the standards from which journalists would work. There were sections on accommodation and complimentary tickets, on personal advantage and endorsement and the kinds of competitions that would be acceptable to enter.

The code had sensible entries on honesty, impartiality, fairness, independence, privacy and respect. It provided for discretion and recognised the intrusions caused by our work. Some of this wisdom was seen in practice, some less so.

The code did not engage with the issue of marginalisation, except in one section, marked 'relevance'. It stated: 'Staff will

not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief or physical disability.'

Reading it now, this section is not about engaging with or understanding difference. It is about avoiding it.

- - -

I was thinking about this again recently as I looked at – and disagreed with – a series of responses to criticisms leveled at journalism. These were the months of Steve Bannon and Serena Williams. I saw an industry in a state of heavy defensiveness.



*Photo by Helsingborgs Dagblad*

People of colour were expressing concern at how race was being covered. And journalists – almost all of them white – were refusing to listen. The industry pointed to precedent. We interview people: that's what we've always done. Everybody is skewered by a cartoon.

The status quo was guarded. There was no attempt to interrogate the ethics of our industry. It did not seem important that the absolutes being defended – that we ask questions, that we mock power – were established in newsrooms that were wholly white and wholly male, that in those newsrooms privilege of class and private education was a given.

Journalism has always worked from a place of defensiveness. It is always guarding itself – correctly – against the insidiousness of influence and power. I remember a painting at the Herald, a horrible mural by Salvatore Zofrea. On it was written, among other things: 'In moderation placing all my glory, while Tories call me Whig, and Whigs a Tory.'

The line had run in the paper's first editorial, from Alexander Pope's imitation of Horace. It sat beside the lift well and I had walked past it so often that as I went to write this I didn't need to look it up.

The premise is a decent one: the celebration of impartial reporting. Upset both sides, it said. Do not bow; do not listen when the powerful question your work. It made a virtue of criticism, but it also encouraged a writer to be deaf to it.

This might be the only industry in the world where being told you are wrong is taken as proof you are right. When the subject of your scorn is powerful, this is necessary. When they are not, it becomes an ugly kind of indifference.

- - -

Let's talk about the Serena Williams cartoon.

On September 10 last year, the Herald Sun carried a cartoon by Mark Knight. It depicted Serena Williams protesting a loss at the US Open. She was drawn as a cliché of ugly, black rage. Critics, especially in America, pointed out the racist lineage of this kind of cartooning. People of colour said the cartoon was racist.

The Herald Sun responded with belligerence. It published an editorial announcing the cartoon was neither racist nor sexist. It wrote: 'To argue the Williams drawing is racist is an attempt to defeat cartooning — and satire — with a politically-correct barrage.'

Mark Knight and his defenders maintain that racism is a question of intent. They believe an act can be stripped of its context and an image denuded of its history. They feel the authority to make these assertions for the simple reason that they have always had it. They are not impeded by the fact they have no experience of racism themselves. Indeed, they are emboldened by it.

These defenders are not just colleagues of Knight's on the Herald Sun. These views came from senior journalists across mastheads and the political spectrum.

The next day, the Herald Sun published a front page of Knight's cartoons: Daniel Andrews with his trousers down, a bucktoothed Bill Shorten picking up shit, Barnaby Joyce as a horny ram, Pauline Hanson as a cane toad. The headline was 'Welcome to PC world'. And, for the sake of clarity: 'If the self-appointed censors of Mark Knight





*Photo by Lookover 65*

get their way on his Serena Williams cartoon, our new politically correct life will be very dull indeed.' Excepting an overweight Kim Jong-un, all of the subjects were white.

The splash made two points, although it intended neither: first, one side of this debate has at its disposal entire front pages to impugn its critics; second, this is played as a zero-sum game. If you question the right of newspapers to do what they have always done, they will pretend you are saying they cannot do anything at all and that these are the only options. It is incredibly childish and it is the state of debate in this country.

The Press Council considered a number of complaints regarding Knight's cartoon. In its adjudication, the council noted 'concerns that the depiction of Ms Williams had features that may cause it to be an offensive and sexist representation of a woman and a prejudicial racial stereotype of African-American people generally, rather than an actual caricature

of Ms Williams' physical features'.

It noted specifically complaints about the depiction of Williams as being with 'large lips, a broad flat nose, a wild afro-styled ponytail hairstyle different to that worn by Ms Williams during the match and positioned in an ape-like pose'.

The Herald Sun responded that the cartoon depicted a 'highly animated tantrum'. It said Knight had been drawing in this style for several decades, for a local audience, and that the use of satire, caricature, exaggeration and humour were not intended to reflect negatively on race or gender. It is interesting to note a few parts of this: the appeal to the status quo, to this cartoon being what we have always done; and the reference to a local audience, as if the problem here is the rest of the world looking in and calling us racist.

Now, let me quote from the Press Council's finding:

*'The council considers that the cartoon uses exaggeration and absurdity to make its point but accepts the publisher's claim that it does not depict Ms Williams as an ape, rather showing her as 'spitting the dummy', a non-racist caricature familiar to most Australian readers.*

*Nonetheless, the council acknowledges that some readers found the cartoon offensive.*

*However, the council also accepts that there was a sufficient public interest in commenting on behaviour and sportsmanship during a significant dispute between a tennis player with a globally high profile and an umpire at the US Open final.*

*As such, the council does not*

*consider that the publication failed to take reasonable steps to avoid causing substantial offence, distress or prejudice, without sufficient justification in the public interest.*

*Accordingly the council concludes that its Standards of Practice were not breached.'*

What is being said here? That without racist stereotypes, the cartoonist could not do his job? That racism only exists where it is coupled with intent? That there is a public interest in airing racist views, if they are in service of some other point?

Probably, the Press Council is saying this: Mark Knight's cartoon is no worse than other racist cartoons that have been published in the past, and they were published without complaint. The fact there are more avenues now for people of colour to voice complaint, and that we are finally hearing from them, doesn't mean we need to change anything. The past is still proof of the rectitude of our industry. Nothing need shift.

Recently, on a different matter of race and the media, the playwright Nakkiah Lui said something that should be pinned up at news desks around the country. The Press Council would do well to scratch it into a wall somewhere at the office: 'Many white people – particularly white men – don't see racism as abuse. They see it as a difference of opinion.'

- - -

Last month, I was in a secondhand bookstore, and found, under a handwritten sign, a small stack of books marked 'Important Second Wave Texts'.

Partway down the stack was Virginia Trioli's first book, called *Generation F: Sex, Power and The Young Feminist*. It came out in 1996 – an early response to Helen Garner's work *The First Stone*.

Trioli's book begins with the best description I have read of the comfortable hypocrisy of newsrooms. I was struck by its clarity and the grim beats of its recognition.

'I work in the newsroom of a city newspaper', Trioli wrote. 'It's a place caught between eras. We deal in the key social and political issues of the day in a manner both concerned and



*Photo by Felton Davis*

sceptical. We appear, in print, so very enlightened. But our environment is still in many respects one of the most blokey and traditional around: like the law, it is a place of inherent male conservatism around which is wrapped the appearance of an emancipated, even morally superior, public mission.'

This paragraph stayed with me. It was vivid and uncomfortable. The next day I found a number for Trioli and called her to ask if much had changed.

'My answer to your question is no', she said. 'A hell of a lot hasn't changed. That's the paradox between public mission and behaviour. Anyone's capable of being a shit. The people who go into journalism are no more pure or honourable than anyone else. People are disappointing, people aren't saints. The elevated notion of being above it all because of your public mission – and the nosebleed that goes with that – confuses things. I guess you could call it the moral nosebleed.'

I think that's true: we think we are armed with a form of objectivity that makes us always right. This makes us prefer our own perspective over the perspective of others. We operate with a sense of remove that protects us from improper influence but also cuts us off from realities that are not our own.

In response to the rise of cheap opinion some journalists have come to view all subjectivity as suspect. There is a point at which this scepticism becomes callous – when what we doubt is other people's lives. That is the point at which a person says they experience an act as racist, and we decided we don't.

- - -

Whenever we talk about power, we talk about fragility. That is because power

is in flux. Those used to it are losing it, or feel as if they are, and they have become brittle to everything that looks like a threat. Perversely, that threat is often the least powerful person in the room asking if they could be listened to.

In the past two decades, the model that once supported journalism has collapsed. The industry has reduced in size and influence. New platforms for publishing have brought welcome new voices but have also brought an unfiltered approach to information, much of it difficult to verify, some of it mischievous and untrue.

An industry that was already brittle has become hypersensitive. It meets its critics with indignation, worried that any concession might undermine its purpose. All that is left of the old power is an apparent monopoly on truth. And yet, the desire to hold onto this makes journalism blind to where a nuanced understanding of that truth might be.

Instead, there is an eagerness to dismiss information that comes through unfamiliar channels. There is a belligerent scepticism that can border on the inhumane: tell me your experience; prove it; I don't believe you.

There is a desire to exert power: to interview a white supremacist, just to prove you can; to refuse critique for doing so, for normalising hatred, because you believe a tricky question has offered balance, or because you can point to the accepted standards of our industry and say you are telling both sides.

The ethics that test our journalism, that hold it to a higher account, are important and truly worthy. With them, however, comes responsibility. They cannot be unyielding to new, more nuanced information. The limitations of



their establishment – the whiteness of the newsrooms in which they were honed, the maleness, the wealth – need to be recognised and re-interrogated.

This won't make journalism weaker. It will make it stronger.

There is a belief inside our industry that deferring to these standards holds us to account. In reality, it's an abdication of responsibility. We point to a stone tablet on which the basic tenets of journalism were written, and avoid having to explain the vagaries hidden behind those words. We don't check our actions, we check simply that they satisfy the bald standards to which we are signatory.

I think about every death knock I have ever done, waiting on the front lawn of someone's house to ask about the loss of a loved one. I think about the intrusion on grief. I think about how I told myself we were helping to honour the memories of the person who used to live on the other side of the door. I think about the competition with other papers for these stories. I think about how little we really thought about what we were doing. It's journalism, I told myself. It's what we've always done.

I want my industry to be better than that. I want my industry to ask itself the question it is always promising to answer: 'Why?'

- - -

As I wrote this speech, a gunman walked into two mosques in New Zealand and murdered 50 people. The culprit was a white supremacist.

Immediately, the press was denying culpability. All the fragile self-protection was there, only it was worse because the denials were being made in front of bodies. The recklessness of our

discourse was on full display. The press was claiming at once to be both very powerful and not powerful at all.

Perhaps the strangest response was Paul Maley's. The Defence and National Security Editor at The Australian was at pains to make clear that the Christchurch terrorist did not read Australian news.

'Christchurch shooter Brenton Tarrant might have been born and bred in Grafton, but the ideology that inspired him came straight from ancient racisms of Europe and the fanaticism of medieval Christians', Maley wrote.

'With Australia's political class poised for a national bout of cultural self-loathing following Tarrant's Christchurch terror attack, it is worth noting there is zero evidence the man paid any attention to anything said or done in this country since 2014.'

Maley stepped through the broad topics of Tarrant's manifesto: Emmanuel Macron's election in France, the NATO-led war on Kosovo, the birth rate in the Muslim community, the Siege of Vienna. 'It's vile stuff', he wrote, 'but nowhere does it mention Pauline Hanson, Operation Sovereign Borders, Sky After Dark or any of the other right-wing villains being fitted up as accessories before the fact. The word "Australia" or "Australian" appears just 11 times'.

Maley doesn't deny Australia's Islamophobia, or the danger of stoking hatred and division. He just wants it to be known that Tarrant was radicalised by it somewhere else. It's like a gun shop owner saying someone bought the weapons next door.

Elsewhere in the same newspaper, Janet Albrechtsen wrote of the 'political ratbags' who would 'exploit



*Photo by Bernard Spragg*

cold-blooded terrorism by a white supremacist in New Zealand on Friday for their narrow-minded, illiberal political agendas’.

She warned against calls for laws to ‘penalise media outlets, and figures that consistently promote fear and hatred’ and ‘robust laws against the spread of hate speech’. She cautioned those who would ‘fall for claims that this censorship, under the ruse of clamping down on hate speech, will stamp out terrorism’.

The risk she warns of is not to people but to ideology. She sees free speech as an argument against responsibility. Like many in the press, she refuses to acknowledge the role the media plays in radicalisation.

There is an urgent desire to blame internet forums for Tarrant’s bent interpretation of the world. The bigger concern is that many of the thoughts expressed in his manifesto have

appeared, in one form or another, on the opinion pages of most mainstream publications in this country.

Tarrant is an aberration, as is all terrorism. But he is produced by a culture that has normalised hate, that is built from division, whose politics routinely exploits fear and whose press caters enthusiastically to it.

The world gets no safer in a system such as this. The Prime Minister visits a mosque, then announces an immigration cut. The journalist prepares another piece on the rights of bigots. As the lawyer Nyadol Nyuon said in the wake of the attack: ‘You can’t get to the heart of our stories, can’t understand us, can’t truly empathise, when your priority is free speech and ours is to live.’

The media hasn’t critiqued hate speech; it has cleaned it up and invited it to appear on television.

---

White privilege was first named, at least by that phrase, in 1919. The description came from the union movement. Considering it, the author Reni Eddo-Lodge wrote: 'How can I define white privilege? It's so difficult to describe an absence. And white privilege is an absence of the negative consequences of racism. An absence of structural discrimination, an absence of your race being viewed as a problem first and foremost, an absence of "less likely to succeed because of my race".'

She continues: 'Describing and defining this absence means to some extent upsetting the centering of whiteness, and reminding white people that their experience is not the norm for the rest of us. It is, of course, much easier to identify when you don't have it, and I watch as an outside to the insularity of whiteness.'

This last point is important. It gets at the argument that defines the relationship between race and journalism. It is a relationship of obliviousness. It is not that the media is not hearing this criticism. It's worse: the media is not listening. It is not listening, and at the same time it insists on its place as arbiter of whether or not another perspective is worth listening to.

Earlier in the same book, Eddo-Lodge writes that she has given up on these encounters. She describes a behaviour that elsewhere has been called white fragility. The passage articulates precisely the response journalists give to most criticism, especially criticism based around privilege:

*'You can see their eyes shut down and harden. It's like treacle is poured into their ears, blocking up their ear*



*Photo by Bart Everson*

*canals. It's like they can no longer hear us.*

*This emotional disconnect is the conclusion of living a life oblivious to the fact that their skin colour is the norm and all others deviate from it.*

*At best, white people have been taught not to mention that people of colour are 'different' in case it offends us. They truly believe that the experiences of their life as a result of their skin colour can and should be universal. I just can't engage with the bewilderment and the defensiveness as they try to grapple with the fact that not everyone experiences the world in the way that they do.'*

In many ways, I should not be giving this speech. I am worse than imperfect. I am white and I am privileged. My comprehension is limited by my experiences.



Please consider this a private reckoning, which I have written down and am reading aloud in the hope of working to be better. This is something we each must do. In journalism, the task has great urgency: the impacts of indifference, of avoiding these questions, are bloody and real.

- - -

Last year, the magazine National Geographic conducted an inquiry into its own racial biases. It commissioned University of Virginia professor John Edwin Mason to lead the process. The editorial announcing the issue was blunt: 'For decades, our coverage was racist. To rise above our past, we must acknowledge it.'

Mason found a magazine alive with cliché and condescension. He found views that reflected their time and did nothing to lead readers beyond it.

'Americans got ideas about the world from Tarzan movies and crude racist caricatures', he said afterwards. 'Segregation was the way it was. National Geographic wasn't teaching as much as reinforcing messages they already received and doing so in a magazine that had tremendous authority. National Geographic comes into existence at the height of colonialism, and the world was divided into the colonisers and the colonised. That was a colour line, and National Geographic was reflecting that view of the world.'

*Photo by Eduardo Francisco Vazquez Murillo*



Here is a moment of reckoning. The media as a whole could benefit from similar work: a proactive auditing of our coverage, a chance to be honest about our flaws and find ways to reset. This audit cannot be conducted internally. The Press Council is patently unprepared for the task. It needs to be conducted with the assistance of people excluded from our industry and in the presence of views that have been dismissed or overlooked. This is not just about race: it is about gender and class and all experiences of what the mainstream calls difference.

Until we do this work, we will continue to report from the past and find ourselves in conflict with the realities of our present.

There will be those who misinterpret what I am saying. I am not calling for censorship; I am calling for responsibility. I am asking for us to consider the impact of what we report and how we report it. I am saying the ethical bar we are clearing is not set high enough. Our code of ethics needs to be rewritten, and it not by people who look like me.

- - -

My partner is non-binary. They live outside the confines of male or female. This is the truth of who they are and it is beautiful. In many ways, however, it can be a traumatic identity. It is frequently in conflict with the gendered structures from which our society is built. In interviews, they are always asked to explain their identity. Some questions are from doubt, some from curiosity. That earlier, basic principle is being satisfied: 'Ask stupid questions. Do not be afraid to ask the same thing several times.'

But that process is one of trauma. Every time they are interviewed, my partner has to convince the journalist of their identity. They have to will their difference into being. They have to perform that which makes their life difficult, which causes them the sufferings of judgment and scepticism.

The journalists doing this are not malicious. They are indifferent, doing what we have always done, not thinking how it affects the person to whom they are speaking. If the trauma were more obvious, they might be more subtle. But they can't see it, so they blunder in and ask for proof over and over. They ask the marginalised person to do the explaining. They express doubts. They want evidence. It is taxing. Our work is not always as simple as the maxim: 'Ask stupid questions.' When we reach back to those maxims, we ignore the limited understanding of the world in which

they were written. We are pointing not to standards but to simplifications.

When I say this to colleagues, they tell me I am being precious. When my partner first told me, I said the journalist was doing their job.

- - -

To end, let me again quote Eddo-Lodge. She is talking about race, but it is a point applicable to myriad expressions of difference. It is about power and responsibility: 'The perverse thing about our current racial structure is that it has always fallen on the shoulders of those at the bottom to change it. Yet racism is a white problem. It reveals the anxieties, hypocrisies and double standards of whiteness. It is a problem in the psyche of whiteness that white people must take responsibility to solve. You can only do so much from the outside.'

In journalism, the first part of this process is listening. The objectivity we hold in such esteem needs to be turned in on us. We need to confront the anxieties that prevent us from seeing the impacts of our reporting and the shortcomings of our craft. We need to make space to believe.

- - -

**Erik Jensen is the founding editor of The Saturday Paper and the editor-in-chief at Schwartz Media. He is the author of *Acute Misfortune*, *On Kate Jennings* and *The Prosperity Gospel*.**

**COPYRIGHTAGENCY**  
CULTURAL FUND

Commissioned with support from  
the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund.

# Changing the Conversation: the Stella Prize

Kirsten Tranter

In 2011, the US-based organization VIDA (Women in Literary Arts) sparked an international conversation in the literary world by publishing a 'count' of gender balance in the world of reviewing. They revealed, in shocking coloured pie-charts, the remarkable disparity between the number of women and men reviewed and authoring reviews in major literary publications. The VIDA count proved with data what many of us already knew: women writers' slice of the pie was absurdly, maddeningly small.

This conversation had been brewing in Australia for some time. Not only were women less likely to be reviewed or write reviews, women were systematically excluded from major literary awards. Blogger Angela Meyer coined the memorable term 'sausage-fest' to describe the all-male shortlist for the Miles Franklin Award in 2009; in 2011 the shortlist once again excluded women. The Miles was not the only prize with this problem. The VIDA count inspired women to start talking and thinking about

what we could do to change things.

In 2011, a group of women authors, booksellers, arts administrators, critics, editors and publishers decided to create a prize of our own. Our goal was to scrape enough money together to create a big prize, one that could rival the major state and national literary awards, just as the UK Women's Prize for Fiction had done. We named it after Stella Maria 'Miles' Franklin, feminist and author of the internationally acclaimed novel *My Brilliant Career*, published in 1901 when she was just twenty-two years old. Franklin's preferred pen-name disguised her gender at a time when women struggled hard to be recognised as voices of equal cultural authority with men.

That struggle continues, and we envisaged the prize as an intervention in that effort, a platform from which to change the conversation and change the culture. We worked hard to build support for the Stella Prize among both men and women from the worlds of writing, bookselling, publishing and the media. We needed them to understand that this was a crucial issue for all of us, to recognize women's stories, women's writing, as being of equal value to men.

We made a stylish logo. We made postcards. We scraped together money from generous benefactors. Astonishingly, we made it real.

The first Stella Prize, a whopping \$50,000, was awarded in 2012 to Carrie





Tiffany for her novel *Mateship with Birds*. She returned \$10,000 of the prize money to be distributed among the shortlisted authors, saying that she hoped this might provide a model for other prizes and show something about the way it is possible for women to operate differently. 'It's also selfish', she claimed in her acceptance speech. 'When you give writers money, you're actually giving them time. And if I can hasten a little the next books of these women, why wouldn't I?' In recent years, the Stella Prize has raised funds to give shortlisted and longlisted authors individual financial awards.

The Stella Count, modeled on the VIDA Count, began the same year. This was followed by the Stella Schools Program, an initiative that includes workshops, podcasts and resources that aim to inspire and empower young people.

The results of the most recent Stella Count, released this September, reflect an encouraging shift towards gender equality in the literary pages. Most of the 12 publications surveyed have reached or gone beyond gender parity in terms of who is reviewing and who is being reviewed. In another positive trend, literary awards in that period have also increased their recognition of women writers.

Longlisted, shortlisted and winning authors of the Stella attest to a significant impact on their careers beyond the basic injection of confidence, including additional print runs, audio book contracts, invitations to paid work such as judging writing competitions and grants, and author talks. I talked to some of these authors to ask for their perspective on the impact of the Stella Prize.

The most dramatic story of the Stella



Prize making a difference to an author may be that of **Vicki Laveau-Harvie**.

As an author in her seventies, she who won the 2019 Stella Prize with her first book, *The Erratics*, a memoir of her dysfunctional family upbringing and its aftermath.

'I've always known I can write', Laveau-Harvie told me recently. 'It's the one thing where I feel sure of myself in life. But it wasn't something I really intended to try to share.' Over the years, she submitted work occasionally to small competitions, but never considered sending her work out for publication until she was firmly encouraged by a mentor at the Varuna Writers Centre. She entered her manuscript in the Finch Memoir Prize, and remembers the sensation of enormous victory that came with taking that step. She called a friend, she recalls, and announced, 'I've won!' She says, 'I won because I actually put a manuscript in the mailbox'.

A different victory came when *The Erratics* actually won the prize. Then disaster struck: shortly after publication, Finch Publishing closed, meaning the book was out of print within months of its release. Laveau-Harvie describes the Stella long-listing of *The Erratics* as the beginning of her 'Cinderella' publishing tale: it resulted in her securing an agent and a publishing contract with HarperCollins, who re-released the book.

‘It changed absolutely everything’, Laveau-Harvie says of later winning the Stella Prize. ‘And it made me feel much more secure in knowing exactly who I am, which is a very good thing to feel when you are the age I am...Otherwise,

**Charlotte Wood’s** novel *The Natural Way of Things* won the 2016 Stella Prize and the Indie Award for Fiction, and was shortlisted by other prizes, including the Miles Franklin.



what where all those years for when you were trying to figure out that question?’

She cites the power of the validation that came with it, not only for her but for others. ‘A number of women of retirement age have said to me, “Ok, I’ve been thinking it was too late to do this particular thing — not necessarily writing — but now I think I might.” And I say, “Well, why wouldn’t you?”’ Laveau-Harvie plans to travel to Canada with the Stella funds to research her family’s history more deeply in preparation for her next book.

**Shortlisted writers for the Stella Prize 2019 - Arts Centre Melbourne April 9th, 2019**

**L-R: Jenny Ackland, Jamie Marina Lau, Maria Tumarkin, Enza Gandolfo, Vicki Laveau-Harvie (2019 winner).**

**LDV Photography**

*Literary prizes provoke very conflicted feelings for me. I know what it’s like to be continually shortlisted (or not shortlisted at all) and never win anything, which after a while can be dispiriting when there’s so much focus on prizes as an*

*objective measure of quality (a measure any sensible person disputes). And the 'recognition' that comes from prizes is extremely variable; most prizes bring no change for a writer's book sales or profile. However, the boost to a writer's confidence and morale that a prize can bring – and more importantly the boost to an income that usually is below the poverty line – is enormously important and for me outweighs the drawbacks of prize culture.*

*The Stella Prize has been astonishing in its reach and its very practical benefit to women writers and Australia in general. Winning the Stella in 2016 changed my writing life in several ways: tripling book sales, a huge income boost, and a level of public attention that I feel helped propel me into a position of authority in cultural terms that I hadn't reached before.*

*One of the Stella Prize's most far reaching effects has been to force other prizes into acknowledging women as equal contributors to the literary ecology to male writers. It's no accident that since the Stella Prize began, the Miles Franklin has gone to a woman almost every year. This unforeseen but dramatic change is one of the Stella's greatest achievements I think.*

**Melissa Lucashenko's** novel *Too Much Lip* won the 2019 Miles Franklin Award and was shortlisted for the Stella Prize, the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards Prize for Indigenous Writing and the Australian Book Industry Awards

prize for literary fiction. Her fiction and non-fiction have won several awards, including a Walkley (2014) and the Dobbie Literary Award (1998).

*The Stella Prize has been immensely important in shifting the balance of both reviewing and prize-giving in a few short*

*years. We who want to see change – real change – must be prepared to get down and dirty, to engage in the nuts and bolts of activism and really fighting hard. The results of Stella are clear for all to see in gender terms. Now the fight must continue to consolidate that good work and push just as hard for minority voices – POC, the disabled, the Indigenous, LGBTIQ+ – to receive due recognition alongside the seismic shifts already underway for many mainstream women writers.*

**Enza Gandolfo's** novel *The Bridge* was shortlisted for the 2018 Stella Prize.

*When you are a relatively unknown writer like me, there is no one knocking on your door asking you to write, urging you to finish the novel. You have to believe in yourself and in what you are doing. Having the five Stella Prize judges, experts working in the industry, shortlist *The Bridge* from a strong field, which included some of my favourite books of 2018, boosted my confidence in myself, in my writing and in the novel. It is especially important to me that it was the Stella Prize, a prize set up to challenge the bias against women's books in other prizes and in the literary pages.*

*It is not just a prize, not just about a 'winner', but about changing the conversation about women's writing in Australia by educating readers and by challenging gatekeepers.*

**Kirsten Tranter publishes fiction and criticism and is the author of three novels, most recently *Hold* (HarperCollins). She is a co-founder of the Stella Prize.**

**COPYRIGHTAGENCY**  
CULTURAL FUND

Commissioned with support from  
the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund.



# Interview with Ruby Hamad

*PEN Sydney interviewed Ruby Hamad about her latest book, **White Tears/Brown Scars**, and how internet trolls attempt to silence women of colour.*

**W**hat are ‘white tears’, and how are they used to silence the voices of people of colour?

‘White tears’ refers to the defensive and frequently emotional way many white people respond when challenged by people of colour. It’s a performance of victimhood that frames resistance or disagreement from people of colour as aggression. I focus on interactions between white women and women of colour.

**What kind of a reactions have you seen to your writing in *White Tears/Brown Scars*?**

Most important to me is the women of colour who are thanking me for validating their experiences and giving them a framework through which to process what have been hugely traumatic periods in their lives. So far, all the reviews of *White Tears/Brown Scars* that have been written by women of colour—from young emerging journalists to experienced leading academics—have noted that what I describe has happened to them at least once also.

**Have you been surprised by any of the reactions people have had to the book?**

I am certainly surprised at how receptive so many white people have been to the book, in particular white women who I’m sure must find the material challenging to get through. I think my editor Sally



Heath summed it up best when she said to me as she was reading my first draft, ‘The terrain is difficult but it’s impossible to turn away from what you are saying’. I do think we have reached a turning point in our culture where people who belong to dominant classes are better able to sit in their discomfort a little more. It’s very much early days in the life of this book but I’m already buoyed by the amount of people telling me it has hugely shifted their worldview.

**What are the specific tactics used to troll or delegitimise women of colour online?**

When it comes from white people—whether from the left or right—there is the dismissal of our work as superficial and self-obsessed. Words like ‘idpol grifters’, ‘intersectionality’ and ‘woke’ are used as dog-whistles to frame us as hyper-focused on our ‘identity’, even when we

very much write about systems of power and material conditions. But another thing I am noticing is a lack of solidarity some women of colour get from other people of colour. There is a demand for perfection from us that is impossible to attain. Minor mistakes or oversights are used to write us off altogether rather than constructively critiqued. And then there are suffocating demands to stay within our narrow range of experience. I think racial minorities need to be very careful when we police each other because it adds to our marginalisation, further restricting us to subjective experiences. As I say in my book, the flip side of 'only Arabs can talk about Arabs' is 'Arabs can only talk about Arabs'.

### **How different are these tactics from other types of online abuse?**

Well, when white people write about racism and white supremacy I never see them get accused of 'idpol grifting'. I think the biggest point of difference is that other people are given greater leeway to express themselves, and even to make mistakes. The words of women of colour are so easily twisted—I quote Salma Hayek in the book saying we are the easiest to get discredited—to paint us as aggressive. There is an unspoken expectation that we are not permitted to disagree with those who call themselves our 'allies'. Even a mere raised eyebrow or question from us is met with disproportionate force to quickly shut us down. I have lost count how many times I have been raked over the coals for something I've written, only to sit back and watch someone else (usually a white writer) say virtually the same thing a short time later to greater praise and none of the abuse I was subjected to. It's incredible and if it hadn't happened to me so many times, I'd be sceptical too.

### **Do you feel that trolling has impacted**

### **your own capacity to write and express yourself?**

Absolutely. There are some topics I won't go near anymore because the degree of backlash, smearing and character assassination is so intense, I just don't think my career and my mental health could take it.

### **What strategies do you use to protect yourself from being overwhelmed by online abuse?**

I've been very bad at looking after myself in this respect. My main thing now is to resist engaging in online attacks on me and on my work even though the desire to correct misrepresentations and outright fabrications can be so very strong. I am redirecting my focus to those who are either supportive, genuinely curious, or even critical of my work as long as that criticism is coming from a place of good faith.

### **Do you think the rules around trolling currently employed by social media companies help or harm?**

I've kind of tried to stay out of that debate because I don't know what the answer is to be honest. But I will say this: recently I tweeted a list of some abusive names I'd been called on that very platform. My tweet was reported and my account was restricted for 'hateful language' or something similar. But when I then reported the original tweets that directed that language at me, Twitter decided they didn't violate its rules. Clearly something is not working and it's not difficult to conclude some double standards are being applied somewhere along the line.

### **What further steps, perhaps through legislative reform and freedom of speech protections, could be taken to protect minorities online?**

At the very least we need to look at who is making these decisions about what constitutes abusive online behaviour. But I'm not really sure legislation alone can protect us when the problem is clearly cultural and systemic.

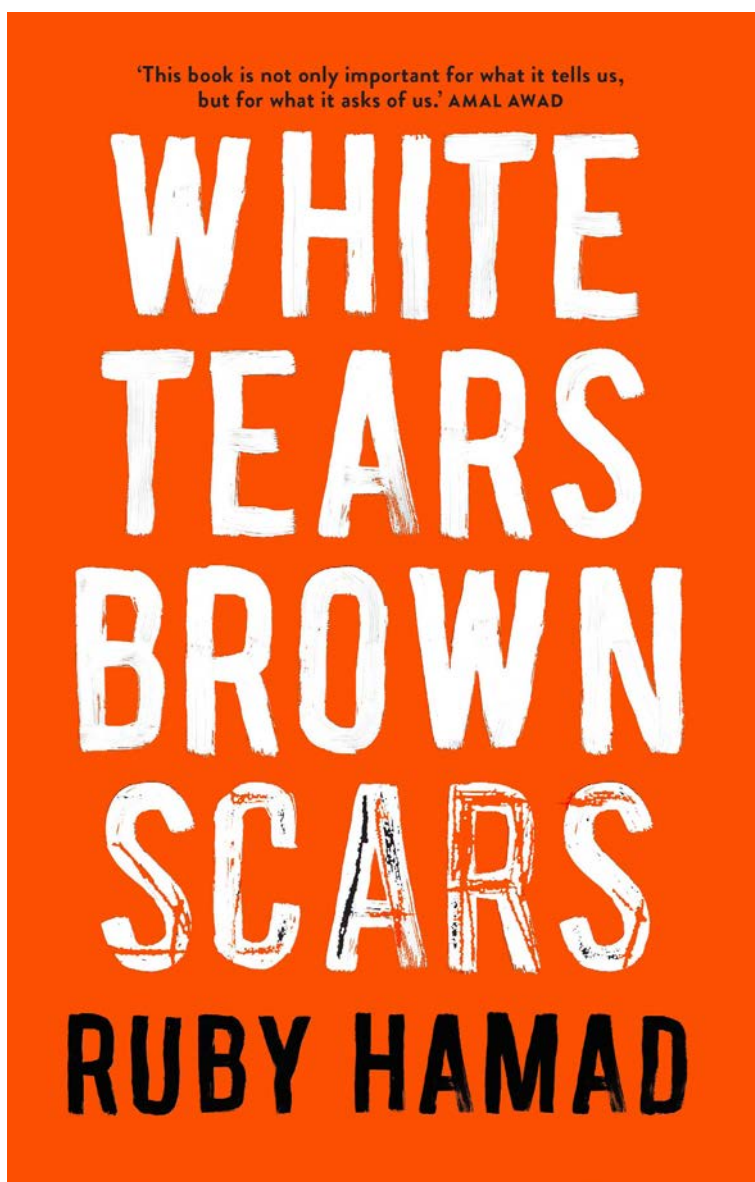
**You've spoken about how 'outrage bait' in journalism fails writers. Could you speak to that?**

I use that term to describe the 'hot take' trend of op-eds that respond to events in the news cycle, usually with a provocative headline more sensationalistic than the actual piece, and that are destined to provoke outrage.

The fast turnaround means these pieces often lack substance and complexity; as a result, they get the clicks but at the expense of the writer who is almost always a freelancer and is left to deal with the trolling alone.

**Does this model of journalism put people of colour particularly at risk?**

Absolutely. Our society has still not reckoned with colonisation or racism and until it does, then people of colour are always going to be at greater risk in public life because they are drawing attention to something many people want to keep hidden.



Ruby Hamad is a Lebanese-Syrian journalist and author who was raised in Australia. A former columnist at Fairfax, where she spearheaded the national conversation on intersectionality in feminism, Islamophobia, and racial representation in popular culture, her work has appeared in international mastheads The Guardian, Prospect Magazine, and The New Arab, as well as local outlets Crikey and The Saturday Paper.

**COPYRIGHTAGENCY**  
CULTURAL FUND

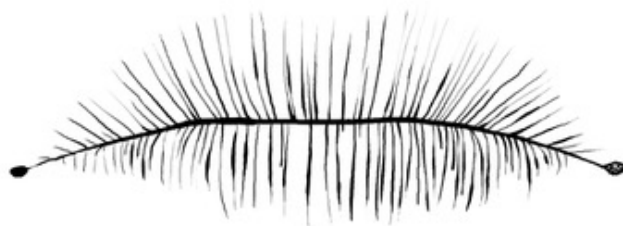
Commissioned with support from  
the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund.



# The Suspect

Adam Aitken

Illustration by Peter Sheehan  
[www.petersheehan.com](http://www.petersheehan.com)



The authorities had planned it  
that you could not speak.

Once they'd tracked you,  
you would find  
a cake of bitter pink soap  
and a bucket of rancid water.

Washed thrice, protected from enemies  
we planned it so that  
you could not speak.

They told you  
silence was a kind of peace.  
They lied, as they were  
the only voice that could speak.

The sunlight came  
beaming through the prison bars  
you know the beauty of it  
but could not speak.

To wake you  
a deity would arrive  
to curl up and incubate

under your skull.  
You would welcome her  
but could not speak.  
By noon it would be  
moving in your breast,  
by evening it would be  
turning in your heart.

By dawn it would be  
nibbling at your feet.

What is freedom you thought?  
But you could not speak.

Think of it, how it would find you,  
and finding you  
you would wash your body  
in the freezing stone,  
and finding you  
was what they'd planned,  
mission accomplished.

And by midnight  
you would have forgotten  
long gone, that human that you were,  
that human who could speak.

**Adam Aitken lives in Sydney. He is the author of a memoir, *One Hundred Letters Home* (2016), and his last poetry collection was *Archipelago* (2018).**

**COPYRIGHTAGENCY**  
CULTURAL FUND

Commissioned with support from  
the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund.

# Going Home

*A Short Story  
by Mu Lan*

In 1983, my brother was involved in a street fight between two groups of teenagers. He had gone to visit a primary school classmate who was on his way out to fight with the boys from a neighbouring district. My brother was nineteen then, loyal and nervy, never shying away from a good fight. The boys were armed with knives, shovels, spades, sticks, whatever they could find. My brother picked up a meat cleaver from the kitchen. He was tall and handsome, with rare amber eyes and wavy hair kept at a prohibited length. He'd stand out, even in peaceful times. During the fight he waved the cleaver and cut a boy's hand on the medial side, injuring his finger. 1983 was the height of the Strike Hard campaign targeting organised crime. Because of the numbers the fight fell into this category. My brother, after being arrested, was tried for the death penalty.

When I told my father that I was going to write my brother's story, he said, 'Don't you dare. You'll be killed.'

'Why would anyone bother? I'm a nobody.'

'It doesn't matter,' he said.

Indeed, an Australian passport might not protect me. Not to mention I go home every year to visit my family. The thought of being denied a

visa is enough to stop me.

But I wanted to write it for my mother. When I first started writing, she was still strong enough to be enraged by the past, and she had asked me to write about my brother. Today, she's bedridden and her





memory has largely disintegrated. When I showed her my book of short stories, she read it carefully, despite not knowing a word of English. She turned the pages one by one, with utter concentration, as though listening to solemn songs that only she could hear. I needed to write the story to honour her, to record her lifetime's worst injustice.

When the news of my brother's trial came, she said, 'If my son is sentenced to death, I'll jump off the Gate of Heavenly

Peace.' She would have done it for my brother, for me or my sister. She was an accomplished gynaecologist, gentle, kind, and she loves us more than her own life. In the summer of 1983, she cried her eyes out. Her cotton skirt was always damp from tears. Her dark wavy hair suddenly turned grey. She was forty-eight. Her roses, named Concubine Yang and Carmen, all died as if they too were heartbroken.

Thankfully, my brother didn't receive the death penalty. He was lucky enough to get away with twelve years imprisonment. On the same day, three young workers who had pulled off a waitress's bra were all sentenced to death.

My father wrote about my brother's ordeal in his memoir, which was self-published last year.



*Photo by Rose Portrait*



When I rang him, he explained that he wrote factually, without accusing anyone, although there were five paragraphs of analysis on why the Strike Hard campaign was flawed. He said if I really wanted to write about it, maybe I could write fictionally. He's very proud of my writing. After my collection was published, I did a few radio interviews, which I posted on Facebook. My sister told him about it. He started telling his friends I had been on television. I tried to correct him, but he's hard of hearing and often uses his malady as an excuse for not listening. He has stored all his papers in his study, a mysterious place so dusty that no one else dares to go in. He said when he dies the contents of the room all belong to me, including his and my mother's letters, those that hadn't been burned, in case I find them useful for my writing. He's an artist by nature but was living in a country without freedom of expression, so he's desperate for my success.

My brother is a gifted storyteller. He told me many stories about his life in prison, from the treacherous prison politics to the violent bathroom ambushes, from the thief with magic hands to the thug without thumbs, from reeking bed-sores eroding the spine to the most ingenious romances. He was granted parole and was able to 'go home' – an expression that meant freedom – after eight years, due to his good behaviour editing the prison magazine, but still his life was defined by that period. Whenever he tries to make a point, he refers to his experience in prison, as if that had been the university where he studied the encyclopedia of human nature.

It was my sister's idea for me to use a pseudonym. She was denied a visitor's visa going home recently, although she was later granted a working visa. She's travelled to many countries, working for

an NGO in post-conflict reconciliation through storytelling and listening. We're all grateful for the post in her job description, although I know she'd walk into a war zone if necessary, being most like our mother in her selflessness and bravery.

We're the lucky ones after all, because we have survived. My brother continues to be the funniest person in the world, causing explosions of laughter wherever he goes. Nowadays, he spends most of his time looking after his twin toddlers. My sister-in-law is twenty years younger than him. As a single child, she had little experience in child minding. My brother, on the other hand, was the first in our family and learnt from our mother how to care for the little ones. When the twins are exhausted, only he can put them to sleep. He'll turn out the light and tell them stories. 'It's late at night. The bear is going home. The rabbit is going home.' This is followed by a long list of animals. Their rented apartment overlooks the street. As cars drive by, their headlights sweeping over the walls, he will add, 'Even the shadow is going home. He is the last one.'

**Mu Lan is a writer and translator based in Australia.**

*Photo by Marco Verch*

**COPYRIGHT AGENCY**  
CULTURAL FUND

Commissioned with support from  
the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund.



# Soapbox populi

## Speakers' Corner, a once vital forum for free speech in Australia, clings to life in the digital age

Ross Duncan

*In a modern city, there must be a place where strangers can meet and discuss the issues of the day without fear of persecution, where the right to retain one's individuality is allowed.*

– Steve Maxwell.

Perched on a stepladder, across the road from the Art Gallery of NSW, Mr Bashful (as he likes to be known) challenges the audience with his latest musings on existential questions and social issues. His raspy voice cuts through the heckling. Nearby, Steve Maxwell, in his wide-brimmed black hat, sets up on a steel platform before launching into another lengthy discourse on Australian history and politics. Helmut Cernic appears on the scene. He beat Arnold Schwarzenegger in a weightlifting competition once, but these days prefers to share his scathing critique of Newtonian physics with anyone who will listen.

Every Sunday afternoon, between 2 pm and 5 pm, these and other passionate orators can be found in a corner of The Domain in Sydney, maintaining a tradition of free expression and public entertainment that has played out there, in shade of the Moreton Bay figs, since 1878.

While still surviving, Speakers' Corner is not what it once was. Mark the Grinner (as he is known around the soapbox) has been coming along to Speakers' Corner since the 1970s. 'You would have half a dozen different speakers [then]', he

says, 'and each one would have a crowd of between about 50 and 200'. These days the crowd consists of a handful of seasoned hecklers and curious passers-by, including slightly bemused tourists.

This year, however, a small but ambitious project called Speakers' Corner 2.0 has been organising public debates there, in the hope of breathing new life into this historic cultural institution.

Steve Maxwell has been attending Speakers' Corner since the 1980s and has recorded its history. 'In the early days, The Domain became the safety valve for the city's problems', he writes in Soapbox Oratory. 'Low wages, overcrowding and rigid class lines, meant that the worker of the city had little to look forward to.' On Sundays, hotels, shops and other forms of entertainment were closed. People were drawn to The Domain where 'they could listen to the philosophies of the day'.

For many decades, Speakers' Corner was a popular, vibrant and influential space in the intellectual, political and spiritual life of Sydney. Everything was open for debate; from Darwinism to Calvinism, conscription to communism, phrenology to the Vietnam War. Pacifists and proselytisers competed for attention,

and to be heard above the hecklers. It was also a platform for some of the best known Aboriginal civil rights campaigners in Australian history.

Speakers' Corner has been the setting of some of the most intriguing incidents in Australian civil liberties history. In 1916, unionist Donald Grant spoke in support of a fellow anti-war activist who had been imprisoned. His comment 'For every day Barker is in jail it will cost the capitalist ten thousand pounds' was taken to imply his involvement in a number of suspicious fires around Sydney and saw him charged with arson, sedition and conspiracy. He copped a fifteen-year sentence; one year, it was said, for each word uttered. He was released in 1920, went on to become a member of the New South Wales Legislative Council and was elected to the Australian Senate in 1943.

Czech journalist and communist Egon Kisch appeared at Speakers' Corner in 1934 to warn of the dangers of Nazi Germany. Despite the High Court ruling he should be allowed to enter Australia, efforts to exclude him included subjecting him to a language dictation test in Scottish Gaelic. Kisch's notoriety was only increased by the process.

Over the years, Speakers' Corner has attracted its fair share of eccentrics, such as John Webster, (known simply as Webster) whose take on politics, religion and kinky sex provoked and entertained. Upon his death, his ashes were scattered in The Domain. Sister Ada Green praised the Lord there for at least three decades, until the 1960s. She remained fond of the regular crowd, who loved to heckle her by echoing her invocation of 'Christ Jesus!' with a cry of 'Kraft Cheeses!'

William James Chidley began to frequent The Domain in 1912, wearing a white tunic and sandals. His ideas



***'Mr Bashful' (Mark Avery) has a thing or two to say as he warms up the crowd at the Speakers' Corner 2.0 Royal Rumble event 2019.***

about sex challenged the patriarchal establishment. Those who sold his pamphlet, *The Answer*, were prosecuted. Chidley himself was hounded by authorities and repeatedly committed to mental institutions.

Tens of thousands gathered in The Domain in 1916 to protest conscription, and similar numbers turned out in 1932 to decry the New South Wales Governor's dismissal of Premier Jack Lang. The Domain has remained a setting for mass rallies. In September 2019, around 80,000 students and parents gathered at The Domain to protest for action on climate change as part of the Global Climate Strike.

The relevance and popularity of the Speakers' Corner has been impacted over the years by Sunday trading, sports, television, the end of the Cold War and, of course, the internet. It is now little more than an anachronism; speakers comparable to someone tapping furiously on a manual typewriter in the age of laptops, when anyone can spout opinions from the comfort of home and potentially reach many thousands more than a few





*Satya Marar argues the case for Monarchists before a lively gathering at a Speakers' Corner 2.0 debate in September.*

picnickers in a park.

'Reach' isn't necessarily everything though, Mark the Grinner argues. 'Online, you're subject to the bubble effect; you end up in a situation where everyone who agrees with you agrees with you, and everyone else buggers off to some other site where they all agree they're all right. [Speakers' Corner] is exactly the opposite. You have a diverse range of people. Here people will disagree with you.'

Certainly, there are no nasty trolls under the fig trees. Hecklers' barbs can be cutting, but are mostly good-natured and often very funny, even if not, at times, politically correct. Mark the Grinner believes many more people, including younger generations, would engage if only they knew Speakers' Corner existed. 'People basically have to

stumble on it on as they come out of the art gallery', he says.

Tim Brunero, upon discovering Speakers' Corner, saw its potential. Thanks to a \$10,000 grant from the City of Sydney, he has been presenting a series of Sunday afternoon debates, with the blessing of the Speakers' Corner old guard. In the lead up to the federal election this year, Speakers' Corner 2.0 also provided an open-air platform for minor parties to explain their policies. It was streamed live on Facebook. On the last Sunday in September, Chair of the Australian Republic Movement Peter FitzSimons and the Australian Monarchist League's Satya Marar led teams of university students in a debate billed as the 'Royal Rumble'. Mr Bashful warmed up an enthusiastic crowd of around 100 and the event was recorded for broadcast by radio station 2ser.



Brunero says the project is still a work in progress, but he's convinced a reinvigorated and reinvented Speakers' Corner could become a tourist attraction and appeal to younger people, perhaps the more so in this digital era when '... hipsters are going back and finding heritage technologies, and the warmth of do it yourself, and grow your own, and let's have a storytelling night, where we're nostalgic for authenticity'.

We can hope there won't come a day when the last words are uttered atop a soapbox in the Domain, when the final witty heckle echoes across that lush green space and fades to silence. Were that to happen, a rich slice of Australian social history may be forgotten. Those who now keep the original Speakers' Corner alive will likely continue to turn up every Sunday afternoon and do their thing. 'We're a relic', says Mr Bashful, whose real name is Mark Avery, 'but that's not a reason not to do it'. For

how much longer, though, is uncertain. 'God know what's going to happen in the future', Steve Maxwell says. 'Maybe they'll have those holograms – you know, press a button and see Steve Maxwell. I really don't know.'

To find out more about Speakers Corner, go to [speakerscorner.org.au](http://speakerscorner.org.au)

You can follow Speakers Corner 2.0 on Facebook

**Ross Duncan is a writer and media lawyer. He is the author of the novel, *All Those Bright Crosses* (published by Picador), short stories and a variety of journalism.**

**COPYRIGHTAGENCY**  
CULTURAL FUND

Commissioned with support from  
the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund.

*Steve Maxwell, who has been a regular at Speakers' Corner for four decades, contemplates the future.*



# Breakfast with celebrated Filipino journalist Maria Ressa

**C**elebrated Filipino journalist Maria Ressa was in Sydney to take part in the 'My Crime is Journalism' panel at the Sydney Opera House's 1 September Antidote festival. PEN Sydney had hoped we might be able to host a formal event with Maria while she was here, but given her very limited time were delighted she made space to meet us for breakfast on the first day of spring. We discussed the dire situation of press freedom under Duterte's rule, and heard her very eloquent analysis of the use of social media algorithms to undermine key journalistic reporting (and criticism)

of the government. We also discussed our concerns about her safety and asked if she didn't feel frightened to the point of shying away from Rappler and its very visible role in criticism of Duterte's rule, to which she responded she had no choice. When asked if she minded being in a photo for us, she readily agreed and told us she wanted all of us on it and that she would see to it as a very adept selfie taker!

**Zoë Rodriguez**  
**PEN Sydney Vice President and Chair,**  
**PEN International Women Writers**



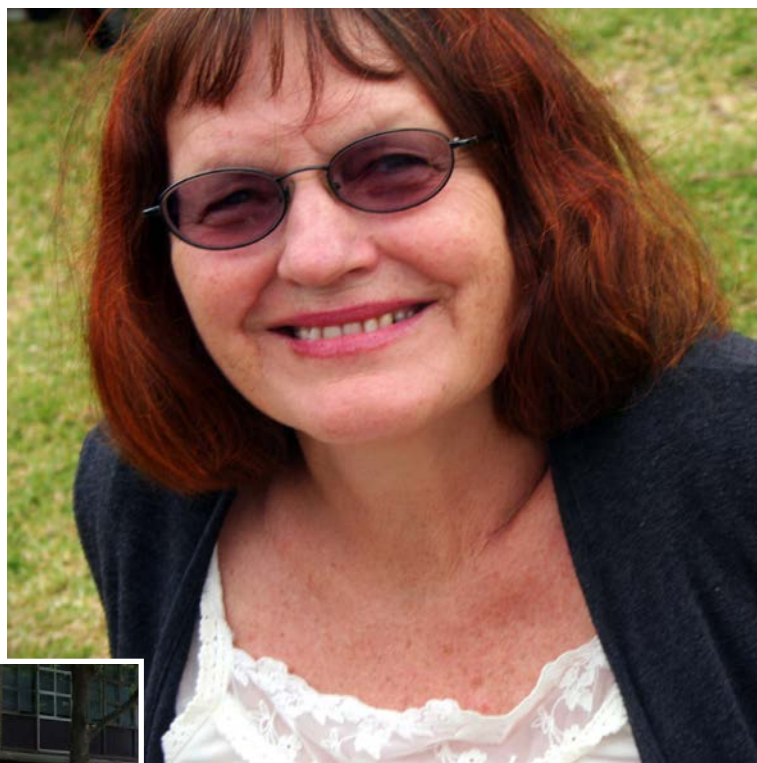
*PEN Sydney Committee members breakfasting with celebrated Filipino-American journalist and co-founder of Rappler, Maria Ressa. Sydney 01.09.19.  
L-R Maria Ressa, Robin de Crespigny, Zoe Rodriguez, Mark Issacs*



# Launch of the Rosie Scott Writers Studio

**D**r Rosie Scott, AM, was a distinguished Australian novelist, poet, essayist, critic, teacher, editor and mentor, as well as a passionate advocate for human rights and social justice.

In an obituary to Scott, her friend, the writer and academic Debra Adelaide, noted, 'The death on 4 May of Rosie Scott ... has left a deep void in Australian life. Scott was well known for her



passion for social justice, her empathy for the marginalised and dispossessed, her commitment to freedom of speech, her love of literature, and for the beauty of her own writing'.

Caring deeply about the freedom to read and to write and the power of both, Rosie Scott became a member of PEN Sydney in the mid 1990s and was elected to the Management Committee in 1999. In 2002, she became Vice-President of PEN Sydney and in 2006 she was awarded the inaugural PEN Sydney Award, which recognises members who have worked hard to promote the PEN Centre's values. In presenting the award, Angela Bowne SC (then president of PEN Sydney) said that Scott had 'shown how a writer can be a powerful activist'.<sup>1</sup>

In 2012, Rosie Scott was honoured with a PEN Life Membership Award. In

the citation for this award, Denise Leith noted Scott's extraordinary advocacy work on the treatment of those seeking asylum in Australia and in bringing this issue firmly onto the PEN Sydney agenda.<sup>2</sup>

Scott remained a dedicated member of PEN Sydney until her illness and untimely death in 2017.

Throughout her career, Scott published numerous award-winning works that reflected her social concerns, including eight novels, a play and a collection of poetry. Her final three books were generous collections, giving voice to those silenced. With Tom Keneally, she edited two collections: *Another Country* (2004), an anthology of asylum seekers' writing aimed at prompting awareness of imprisoned writers and public debate on the issues, for which she was nominated for the 2004 Human Rights Medal; and *A Country Too Far* (2013), which provides powerful and emotive viewpoints on the same theme from some of Australia's greatest writers. *The Intervention* (2015), with Anita Heiss, was Scott's final collaboration and highlighted the experience of the First Nations people of the Northern Territory.

In 2016, Dr Rosie Scott was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia for her 'service to literature as an author, and to human rights and inter-cultural understanding'. In the same year, she was also the recipient of the NSW Premier's Special Award for her 'significant service to literature as an author'.

# The Rosie Scott Writers Studio

## **The Rosie Scott Writers Studio**

was launched on 4 October 2019.

Throughout her life, Dr Rosie Scott was a tireless advocate for writers, so it is a fitting tribute that this new residency is named in her honour.

## **The Rosie Scott Writers Studio**

has been created with great care and dedication by Scott's husband, Danny Vendramini. The studio provides one and two-week residencies for Australian and New Zealand writers, permanent residents over the age of 18, and refugees and asylum seekers. Located in the World Heritage listed Blue Mountains, nestled in bushland overlooking the valley, the studio provides an inspirational space for writers to reflect and to work in peace and quiet.

## **Melissa Bruce – PEN Sydney Committee**

**To find out more about the Rosie Scott Writers Studio and the life of Dr Rosie Scott, visit <https://rosiescott.org>**

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.thesecondevolution.com/rosie/PEN\\_award\\_to\\_rosie\\_scott.html](https://www.thesecondevolution.com/rosie/PEN_award_to_rosie_scott.html)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.thesecondevolution.com/rosie/PEN\\_life-membership\\_to\\_rosie\\_scott.html](https://www.thesecondevolution.com/rosie/PEN_life-membership_to_rosie_scott.html)









# SYDNEY PEN

# magazine

## JOIN US: WE CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT YOU

*Sydney PEN is a branch of PEN International, a worldwide organisation which defends free expression, protects writers at risk, support writers in exile, promotes linguistic rights and promotes the written word in all its forms. Membership fees ensure our survival as a branch as well as support the PEN international initiative. You will also be the first to hear about our events and campaigns.*

*Sydney PEN was founded in 1931 and over the years our organisation has boasted many prominent Australian writers as part of its membership including Thomas Keneally and the late Rosie Scott.*

Join Sydney PEN or renew membership online:  
<https://pen.org.au/collections/membership>

## SYDNEY PEN

### Management Committee

Mark Isaacs (President)  
Zoë Rodriguez (Vice-President)  
Sandra Symons (Secretary)  
Jenelle Dellar (Treasurer)  
Aleesha Paz  
Emily Banyard  
Melissa Bruce  
Robin de Crespigny  
Julie Koh  
Suneeta Peres da Costa  
James Ross  
Daniel Rowland  
Dragana Zivancevic

### Life Members

Joh Bennett  
Angela Bowne SC  
Mona Brand (1915-2007)  
JM Coetzee  
Bruce Dawe OA  
Dierdre Hill  
Nicholas Jose  
Thomas Keneally AO  
Mabel Lee  
Ruby Langford Ginibi (1934-2011)  
David Malouf AO  
Frank Moorhouse AM  
Wilda Moxham  
Chip Rolley  
Vincent Serventy AM (1916-2007)  
Robert Sykes (1943-2010)  
Katherine Thomson  
Stella Wilkes MBE (1914-2008)  
Rosie Scott AM (1948-2017)

### Writers' Advisory Panel

Geraldine Brooks  
JM Coetzee  
Tim Flannery  
Kate Grenville  
Thomas Keneally AO  
David Malouf AO  
Frank Moorhouse AM  
John Tranter  
David Williamson AO

Editor  
Melissa Bruce  
Copy Editor  
Elise Newton  
Art Director  
Irina Tandy  
Printer  
UTS Printing

Sydney PEN is supported by the  
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences,  
University of Technology Sydney

Front cover photograph by WikiLeaks

COPYRIGHTAGENCY  
CULTURAL FUND

