

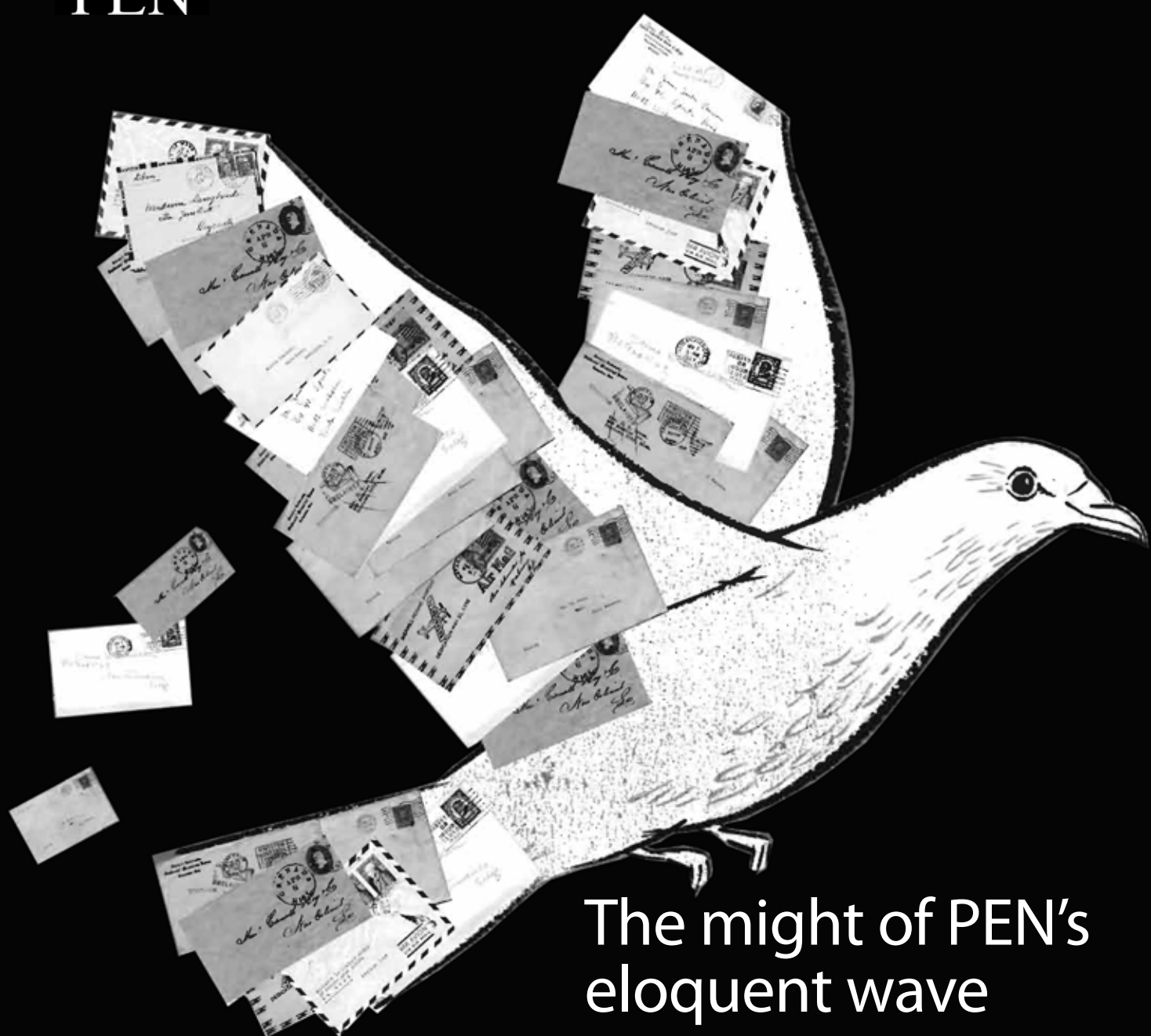
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sydney  
**PEN**

**sydney pen magazine**



## The might of PEN's eloquent wave

PEN Essay: Malcolm Knox

**Meditation on honour in contemporary life**

Profiles: Nick Jose, John Tranter, Caro Llewellyn  
Challenging notions of reporting in the modern age  
The art of hearing the voice

# Our mission is to tell the stories



Not so long ago, Sydney PEN was invited to participate in a kind of 'beauty parade' of social justice not-for-profit organisations for the chance to attract the attention, and support, of a private philanthropist. While I was honoured that Sydney PEN was included in this select group, the experience led me to think about some of the particular challenges faced by not-for-profit organisations that are focused on international issues.

Australians are relatively well informed about what's going on in the world beyond our shores. But we live in a visual culture, and some international issues lend themselves more easily to media attention than others.

Natural disasters are particularly compelling, because they are typically accompanied by images of devastation and despair. There are images from the 2004 Asian tsunami and Ethiopia's apocalyptic drought during the 1980s that I will never forget. Pictures of children suffering from malnutrition or cholera are always the most disturbing.

Susan Sontag wrote of the paradox of such images; how affluent Westerners have come to expect – and in the process become inured to – harrowing images from remote places in the developing world.

Participating in the 'beauty parade' involved preparing a detailed project proposal and a fully costed budget. Sydney PEN's proposal reflected our most urgent priority: redeveloping our website to improve communication with members and supporters, and to make it easier to get involved in advocating on behalf of writers who are in prison or suffering harassment or detention for writing something of which their government disapproved.

However, after submitting our proposal to an intermediary, I was surprised by a request for photographs to accompany our proposal.

Photographs? I asked. Yes, replied the intermediary. The potential funder wanted to see photographs of the writers, journalists and poets on whose behalf PEN advocates.

While the funder's desire to see the people we were proposing that they consider helping was natural and understandable, it was based on the rather naïve assumption

that all stories of hardship can be accompanied by relevant, and readily available, images.

This 'child sponsorship' model is completely unrealistic in relation to the people we represent. Some of the writers on International PEN's case list have been in prison for several years; the photographs that do exist are often small and grainy, and are many years out of date. The sorts of writers who are on the case list do not court publicity by making their photographs available on websites and magazines, in a way that we in the West tend to expect.

In a media environment challenging to the mission of Sydney PEN, it thus becomes increasingly important to communicate effectively, and repeatedly, what we do and where membership dues are spent.

As one of 144 local PEN centres, a portion of each member's annual dues goes directly to International PEN in London, where collectively those dues fund the research and management of the imprisoned writers case list. New cases are brought to the attention of International PEN, which vets them to ensure the accuracy of information, determines a recommended response, then issues an alert to PEN centres around the world. It is then up to individual PEN centres to decide if and how to act on each new case.

From our Sydney base, we focus our advocacy efforts on imprisoned and persecuted writers in the Asian region. We raise awareness of new cases and write letters of protest to ambassadors and government ministers. We also hold public events – from a regular Empty Chair at Sydney Writers Festival sessions to the Voices: 3 Writers lecture series – to promote literature and defend freedom of expression.

Membership helps to fund the ongoing activities of event coordination, member and media communications, fundraising and the production of this magazine.

The challenge for Sydney PEN is to continue to tell the stories of those whom we represent, those who are not free to tell their own stories in their own words.

More than photographs, we need people – members, volunteers, journalists, students – to help us tell their stories.

Virginia Lloyd

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# The power of a single letter multiplied

While the growth of cyber-activism is a phenomenon unto itself, we writers never underestimate the value of the written word that appears on the clean white page. The recipients of a letter must actually handle that letter: remove it from a post box, open it, dispose of the envelope in which it arrives and then contemplate the very paper before them. The 'delete' key involves a single simple step; ignoring a letter requires much more effort.

Sydney PEN's small, dedicated Writers in Prison Committee receives email alerts from International PEN in London, informing us of each new PEN campaign on behalf of an imprisoned writer from far flung parts of the world. Committee members here in Sydney make the often difficult decision about cases we will ask our own members to support. As often as we can, we campaign for imprisoned writers in our region, whose 'hotspots' are Burma, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Thailand.

From time to time, in particularly extreme situations, we ask members to campaign for writers from regions far from our own. In January, for instance, Anastasiya Baburova, 25, a *Novaya Gazeta* journalist, and Stanislav Markelov, 34, a human rights lawyer, were murdered in Moscow. The acclaimed journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was murdered in October, 2006, had also written for *Novaya Gazeta*, and was one of Markelov's clients.

When we asked our members and friends to write demanding those responsible for carrying out and ordering the recent killings be brought to justice, we had a passionate response that translated into dozens of letters being sent across the world. Members also wrote messages of support to *Novaya Gazeta*'s editor.

Have we received a reaction of any sort from Russia? No. Does this mean we have wasted our time? No. Why not? Quite simply, because we who have the freedom

to speak, must speak for the countless others who may not.

Closer to home we have mounted a major campaign in support of the imprisoned Burmese poet, monk and human rights activist, Maung Thura, best known as Zargana.

We have asked our members and supporters to join International PEN in petitioning the Burmese government for the immediate and unconditional release of Zargana, and of all those currently detained in Burma in violation of Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, protecting the right to freedom of expression.

How do we go about this? By orchestrating a letter-writing campaign targeting Burma's Ambassador to Australia, Australia's Ambassador to Burma and the Foreign Minister, Stephen Smith. We have requested a meeting with both the Foreign Minister and our Ambassador to Burma to discuss Zargana's situation – as yet we've had no reply. It is crucial that we maintain the flow of letters on behalf of this courageous writer who no longer has any living family close to hand.

Concentrated advocacy on the part of PEN members – including those from Sydney – has borne fruit. Dr Pham Hong Son, a Vietnamese medical doctor and internet writer, was released within about a year of being represented as an Honorary Member by Sydney PEN. The same (local) member who worked quietly in the background for Dr Son also led the case for Nguyen Vu Binh, a journalist who had been given a heavy sentence. After eighteen months of representation, Vu Binh was released under an amnesty.

And we have just received good news about two journalists, Iranian-American Roxana Saberi and Nadesapillai Vithyatharan, editor of the Tamil daily *Sudar Oli*.

PEN welcomed the release on 11 May of Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi, who had been sentenced to an eight-year



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## The power of a single letter multiplied

prison term in Iran by the Revolutionary Court in Tehran on 18 April.

A spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry said the journalist had been detained for reporting without proper accreditation. In early April, Iranian authorities finally charged her with espionage, but did not release any additional information or evidence about the charges she was facing.

However, it seems she was held solely for the peaceful exercise of her right to free expression, and therefore her detention was in violation of Article 19 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a signatory.

Although exact details about the charges against Saberi remain unknown, the BBC reported that the initial charge of "passing secret information" had been reduced to "having access to classified information," allowing for a commuted sentence and her subsequent release. She was also banned from reporting from Iran for five years.



Iranian-American journalist and writer Roxana Saberi



Nadesapillai Vithyatharan, editor of the Tamil daily *Sudar Oli*

On 24 April, Reporters Without Borders and PEN, who had campaigned on his behalf, welcomed the release of Nadesapillai Vithyatharan, editor of the Tamil daily *Sudar Oli*, who had been held by police since 26 February 2009, accused of having links with Tamil Tiger rebels.

Reporters Without Borders reports that a court in Colombo ordered his release after the Colombo Criminal Division (CCD) in charge of the investigation, as well as other departments of the police and the military, cleared Vithyatharan for lack of evidence.

Investigators spent two months going through hundreds of telephone calls made and received by Vithyatharan. Police also checked his bank accounts without finding any link with the Tamil Tigers. He left the court a free man, accompanied by his lawyer and his wife.

"Why did they need to detain me for two months over completely false accusations?" he asked. "All police services and even military secret services cleared me after checking my phone calls and my bank accounts," he told Reporters Without Borders.

"The decision of the justice system to release N. Vithyatharan is good news which should, we hope, open the way to the release of another Tamil journalist J. S. Tissanayagam, held for more than a year without proof", the worldwide press freedom organisation said.

"The fact he has been completely cleared by the security services is very positive. It seems important today that officials, including Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, should accept the consequences, and apologise for the accusations made against the journalist," the organisation added.

Just as political regimes differ, so too must our hopes and expectations for a positive outcome. While a single letter may appear a drop in the ocean, a well-executed PEN campaign can have the might and eloquence of the perfect wave.

Gaby Naher

# Burmese junta tries to silence poet

Sydney PEN has made leading Burmese poet, comedian and activist Maung Thura, known world-wide by his professional name of Zargana, an Honorary Member.

Zargana has been arrested many times by the Myanmar regime in the past and has served four years in solitary confinement in Rangoon's notorious Insein prison.

He was first arrested for mocking the government in October 1988 and freed six months later. He was a leading voice of the student pro-democracy movement, his crowd-drawing ability second only to that of Aung San Suu Kyi.

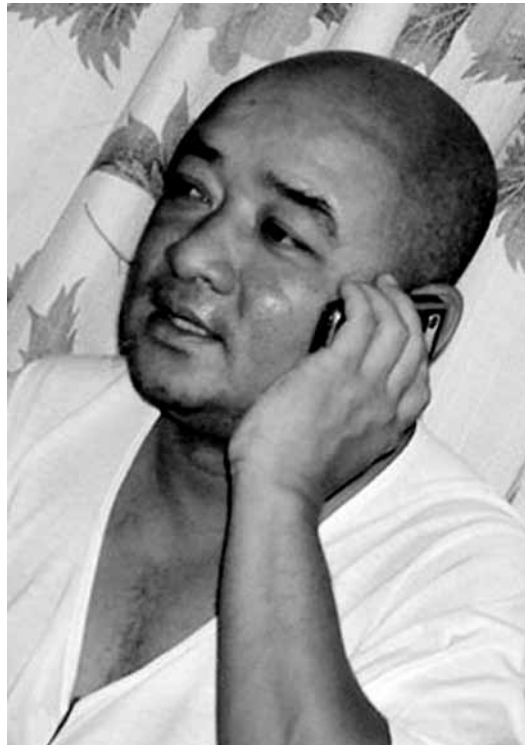
In May 1990, Zargana was arrested for impersonating General Saw Maung, former head of the military government; he served four years of a five-year sentence, during which time he was banned from reading and writing, so he scratched poems on the floor of his cell with a piece of pottery, before committing them to memory.

On his release in 1994, Zargana was banned from performing in public, his tapes and videos strictly censored by Myanmar authorities. In May 1996 he was banned from performing altogether and stripped of his freedom to write and publish.

He remained defiant, spreading his jokes by word of mouth, until his arrest on September 25, 2007, for supporting the monks in the Rangoon protests. He was released in October, and re-arrested in June, 2008 for his criticism of the

Myanmar junta's handling of the Cyclone Nargis; Zargana led a private relief effort to deliver aid to victims of the cyclone. He was charged in August with seven offences, including "defiling a place of worship with intent to insult the religion," and could be sentenced for up to fifteen years.

Zargana is believed to been targeted by the government for his outspoken criticism of the government's slow response to the cyclone, and his opposition activities. He was sentenced to 59 years in prison for his



Associated Press

Burmese poet, comedian and activist Zargana: rights violated

peaceful opposition activities and criticism of the government.

On 18 February 2009, the Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN learned that the sentence had been commuted by 24 years. He must now serve 35 years in prison. PEN continues to demand the immediate and unconditional release of Zargana, and of all those currently detained in Myanmar in violation of Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, protecting the right to freedom of expression.

Zargana's relatives have announced that they will file an appeal against his conviction before the Supreme Court. He is currently serving his term at the Myitkyina prison, in the Kachin state, northern of Myanmar.



# The art of hearing the voice



Julie Rose

I have three new translations out there on the shelves at the moment, all published last year. Two were even published in Australia which is a personal first in a career spanning more than 20 years. This, I think, says something about the greater interest in translation on the part of local publishers and not just about the inevitable globalisation of the trade.

The translations are Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, published by Random House, NY and Vintage, London; André Gorz's letter to his wife of 58 years, *Letter to D.*, published by HarperCollins, Australia (released this month by Polity Press in the UK and in June in the US); and expatriate Catherine Rey's *Stepping Out*, an autobiographical portrait of the artist as a young - and not so young - woman, published by Giramondo, Sydney.

There would normally be a book by cultural critic Paul Virilio as well since he turns out one a year and I'm never too far behind, but the translation I did last year for Polity of his latest work, *University of Disaster*, won't appear until October this year. So the current list, for once, does not include a work of theory. Yet, what scope!

On the surface, Gorz and Rey deal with the same overarching theme: how they beat the (considerable) odds to become writers, but that common thread only serves to underscore the vast differences in style, emotional register and temperament, context and resonance – all those qualities that go to make the thing we call 'voice'.

Some people talk about texture, flavour, music, taste, colour. These are all sensory metaphors for the same thing. I prefer to call it 'voice' to suggest the theatricality not only of the embodiment of personality in writing in the first place, but the whole performance of re-embodiment that the process of translation entails. Translation is rewriting – as someone you imagine the writer to be.

A writer's 'voice' in this sense is as unique as the thing produced by their vocal chords,

no matter how codified shared language and the rules of writing might be. It is 'voice' that a translator worth her salt is always trying to mimic.

Translation as an art is an art of listening that means getting into 'character' and staying there, convincingly, from start to finish. In so doing, of course, you produce your very own distinct voice, with its very own timbres and energies. Which is one reason why re-translating is a potentially endless field. The original text stands immutable, but its potential translations are as potentially infinite as the number of potential translators.

For me there's a golden rule here which is that the more distinct that 'second' voice - the voice that you the reader, who needs the translation, receives - the more intensely and successfully I, who don't need the translation, have managed to 'get' the original.

The 'successful' translation is the one where I, the translator, am completely invisible. A translator's glory lies in their own disappearance. Nothing could be more satisfying. For others. Of course, every word is mine as much as his or hers. It is a double act, after all.

Voice encompasses a whole work, from personality to meaning. 'Hearing' the other person's voice, profoundly, viscerally, and dredging an answering voice up from out of the depths is the joy of the job.

And so, obviously, every job is completely different. The challenge with Gorz, for instance, was to steer the same tense, taut course he steers between exuberance and anxiety in this rare tale of happy life-long conjugal love written all-of-a-piece, in a kind of unblocked spurt, against the louder and louder ticking of that metaphorical clock.

Translating it involved a tremendous effort of concentration to see that both the intellectual fineness and the emotional urgency were held together with as much poise as Gorz effortlessly produces. I could have said, as French effortlessly produces. Because French

allows you to deliver emotion with a kind of elegant intelligence that isn't available in conversational English. To be readable in English, that is, to be as fluid and fluent as this famous intellectual's 'conversational' - anecdotal - French, it wasn't possible to be doggedly literal in the sense of religiously following syntax and formulation. I had to exercise the translator's robust liberty to depart from the text wherever necessary - in order to remain faithful to it. We are, of course, talking very small degrees, here. This is not the place for the great departures of adaptation freighted with commentary.

Adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing: maybe translating is also doing maths, musical maths. If so, additions should be kept to a minimum according to the requirements of intelligibility, subtractions even more so, but the chopping up of syntax and the multiplying of sentences is often essential.

The narrative voice in Rey's novel was really several voices, as the protagonist ages, presenting a set of tonal transitions that were thrilling to 'play' - sometimes slipping in a tiny addition, for reinforcement, sometimes subtracting, for balance and poise. Rey shifts from the strutting defiance of the teenage runaway, through various shades of bitterness, feistiness and fragility to the craggier defiance of the dogmatic finale. The special challenge was to keep up the pace as it whips along, transforming daggy 70s French argot into daggy 70s Australian argot, and maintaining Rey's characteristically abrasive humour.

With Victor Hugo's monumental *Les Misérables*, I felt the need only very occasionally to add, for reasons you may well imagine, but never to subtract. In the description of the Battle of Waterloo, for instance, when Napoléon refers to his nemesis, the Duke of Wellington, as 'ce petit anglais', I couldn't stop my Napoléon from adding a noun: 'that little British git'. Call me a jaded modern Australian, but for me, 'that little Englishman' just didn't quite get

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## The art of hearing the voice

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*Julie Rose is an acclaimed Sydney-born translator whose translations range from Paul Virilio to Racine and Alexandre Dumas. Her most recent translations include André Gorge's Letter to D., Catherine Rey's Stepping Out and Victor Hugo's Les Misérables.*

the withering contempt with which the mere descriptive 'anglais', coloured by the 'petit', was charged in the Hugo.

Translators of Hugo traditionally never add, they subtract – massively, cavalierly, unjustifiably. That's the conclusion I reached as I read the two best-known English translations while I myself was working through the first and second drafts of my *Misérables*. I'd never read it before translating it. This turned out to be lucky, because one of the things that kept me going, at least on the difficult first draft, was the need to know what happens. Vague notions picked up from the musical and film versions bear scant relation. I raced toward the finishing line on that first draft (and sobbed mightily when I got there), revelling in what turns out to be a gripping page-turner of a thriller embedded in a much larger work about everything.

It took me three years and three drafts to bring the translation to completion. It also took three other major translations – all Virilios – as I found I couldn't go on without a few breaks from the blazing intensity of Hugo's prose.

That prose, which Rimbaud once described as 'pure poetry,' was a shock. Far from faded, stale, overblown – the things I'd feared – I found it to be amazingly fresh, sharp, even modern in its often staccato thrust. The muscularity of Hugo's rhythms, the endless tonal and discursive shifts, all handled with virtuoso ease, the prescience and brilliance and even, at times, sheer bizarreness, were downright tonic.

You might not quite seize this from those two celebrated translations I mentioned above, the first done by Hugo's friend and contemporary Charles Wilbur, which came out in 1862, not long after the original itself came out in a series of three volumes (Hugo handed Wilbur chunks as he went along). This

is the one published in the World Classics and Everyman editions, as well as the first Modern Library edition to be printed by Random House, the publishers of my version as well.

The second was done by Norman Denny in 1976 as a commission for The Folio Society and reprinted ever since as the Penguin Classics edition. I read the Wilbur while I did the first draft to double-check I didn't leave anything out, easy enough to do with such fine print and such overwhelming density of matter.

Hugo, who'd spent many years by this in the Channel Islands and read English, didn't much like the Wilbur. It drove him to declare that translation was censureship, a spin on that tired old chestnut about translation as betrayal. Wilbur is, in fact, elegant, just a little tarnished now by time. But Denny's translation must have the great Victor rolling in his grave. It's readable, true, at times pleausurably fluent, but it's not Hugo.

For one thing, it's very much shorter – by at least 100,000 words according to someone's calculation. The censorious Denny 'subtracts' for all he's worth – words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, whole swathes of Hugo are gone. You'd think censureship was going out of style. Reading the book – misreading it – as the story of Jean Valjean and co. alone, Denny shoves what he hasn't cut to the back of the book as appendices. Much of Hugo's best writing is thereby metaphorically trashed.

Reading Denny as I worked through my second draft, enraged, shored up my commitment to Hugo. I wanted to be completely faithful in this 'marriage' of translator and translatee – and I was, even to the point of reproducing Hugo's syntax and phraseology quite literally whenever that felt like the way to go. For translation is an intuitive art; sometimes it requires a bit of fiddling to be true, sometimes a faith-full fidelity.



# Australia ignores horror in Sri Lanka

I am a Sinhalese from the majority community in Sri Lanka, not from the brutalised Tamil community. I have campaigned for five decades for the right of the Tamils to live with equality dignity, and safety in the country of their birth.

I am also a concerned Australian (I have lived here for 32 years), and a member of the Socialist Alliance, the only non-Tamil organisation to support the struggle of the Tamils for justice.

The Sinhalese-dominated Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) claims it is fighting "a war on terrorism". However, what it is doing is fighting the Tamil people to force them to accept Sri Lanka as a Sinhala-Buddhist nation. To this end, it is prepared to commit genocide of the Tamils, similar to Hitler's Final Solution.

The Tamils are now facing genocide or internment in concentration camps, masquerading as refugee camps. The Tamil civilians were supposedly liberated from the Tamil Tigers by the GoSL. If they are liberated people, why keep them behind barbed-wire fences, and why are international observers, including the media and humanitarian workers, prevented from visiting these camps?

There are 154,000 Tamil civilians, some in tents, others under trees, in 24 camps, behind barbed-wire fences. The tents are for five people, but house up to 21 people. Living conditions are appalling, there is deliberate starvation, and the denial of adequate medical help.

The women and girls are raped by the armed forces, the pregnant women are aborted and some even sterilised. Can foreign observers these facts, check these allegations? No, they may not. Why? Because the Government says it is an "internal affair". We disagree.

There are some 120,000 Tamil civilians left in the Government 'safe zone' which is regularly bombed by its armed forces. Even hospitals have not been spared. The Defense Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, who is the President's brother, in an interview with British media, said that bombing of hospitals is "acceptable". This contravenes the 1st and 4th Geneva Convention, signed and ratified by the GoSL.

The UN Convention defines genocide as "an act committed with intent to destroy in whole, or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group". In Sri Lanka, this 'part' is the Tamils who live in the north and east.

The GoSL expelled all humanitarian workers and agencies, including UN agencies, from the conflict zone so there are no witnesses. More than 6,000 Tamil civilians have been slaughtered in just the past four months. Last week, the only obstetrician in the area was gunned down by the Armed Forces. But there are no witnesses, no humanitarian agencies, no journalists.

As well as using Kfir jets, bombers, multi-barrel rocket launchers and helicopter gunships, the GoSL is dropping, in addition to conventional arsenal, cluster bombs and white phosphorus bombs. The GoSL will, of course, deny this but there is photographic evidence, including leaked UN aerial photographs that leave no doubt that these banned weapons are being used.

The Foreign Ministers of Britain, France and Sweden have tried to go to Colombo to discuss the humanitarian disaster with the GoSL but were either denied a visa to enter the country or were thwarted once they arrived in Colombo.

In the face of increasing international concern at the civilian casualties, the Tamil Tigers declared a unilateral cease-fire. The GoSL refused to reciprocate saying that the offer was "a joke".

On May 21, Sri Lanka was tossed out of the UN Human Rights Council on the basis of its outrageous human rights record.

The Australian Government has failed to act in condemning a serious abuse of human rights by a country with which it shares an ocean. Commercial and geo-political considerations are clearly more important than humanitarian ones, however serious.

This is simply not acceptable, and damages the image of Australia by its failure to condemn a murderous regime.

**Brian Senewiratne**  
MD. FRCP. FRACP  
Brisbane

John Tranter

## Five Modern Myths

The Guarani Indians of Paraguay like to keep a small cork loose in their dishwashers, to 'introduce a spirit of lightness and unpredictability into what is otherwise a repetitive activity, and one tedious and unpleasant for the gods of the forest to contemplate.'

In Kota Rendang, a small fishing village on the east coast of Malaysia, the wood carvers refrain from spitting in front of the local cinema 'in case Clint Eastwood should become angry, and blunt the edges of our blades.'

Until recently the fishermen of Muckle Roe, in Scotland, used to scrub their decks with toothpaste on the night of the Summer Solstice, in order to placate the fish-goddess Fiona, she 'of the gleaming teeth'.

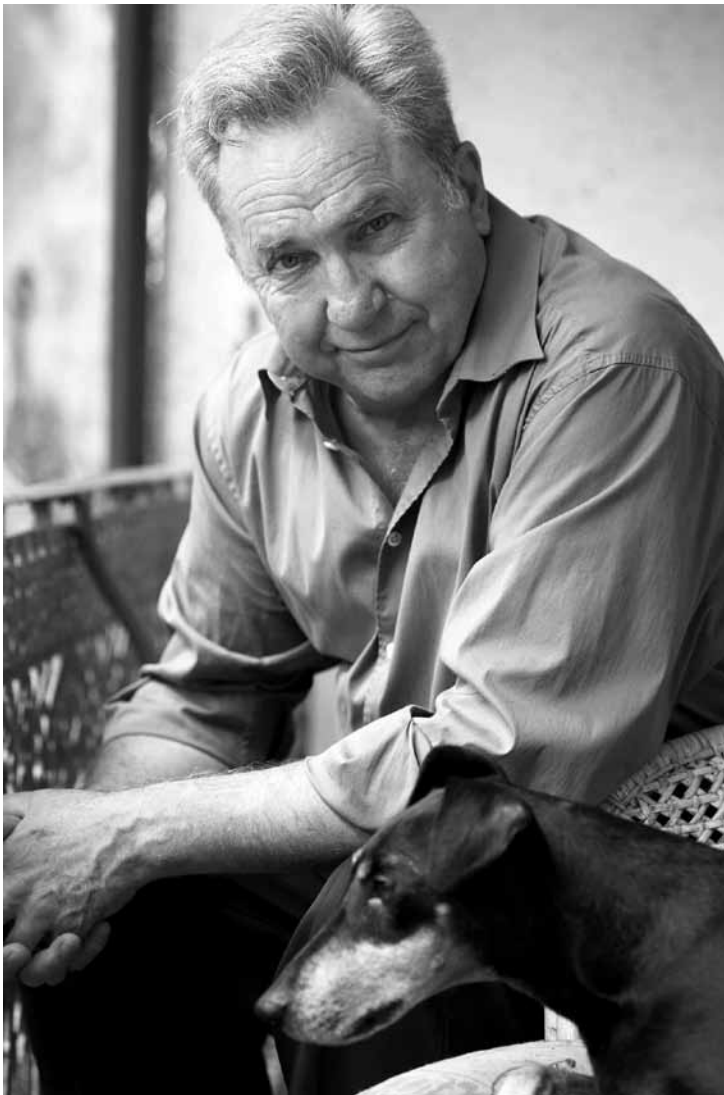
The Mongolians of Ulaanbaatar have a great respect for dwarfs, who are trained to recite poetry in a sing-song voice in front of the television news which is allowed to run silently in the background. 'A short rhyme contains the news', is their motto; using 'contains' in the sense of 'constrains', or 'keeps within the bounds of propriety'.

The stockbrokers of Lakeville, Connecticut, take care not to be seen mowing their lawns on the thirteenth of the month, in case a water spirit, the 'White Witch of Lakeville', should afflict them with cirrhosis of the liver.

John Tranter has published more than 20 collections of verse. His latest collection is *Urban Myths: 210 Poems* (University of Queensland Press, and Salt Publishing, Cambridge UK). He is the editor of the free Internet magazine *Jacket* at [jacketmagazine.com](http://jacketmagazine.com)

*See over page for profile on John Tranter*

# A life defined by poetry



John Tranter with his Manchester Terrier 'Tiger'.

Susan Gordon-Brown

On the way through the living room of his 100-year-old Balmain home, Australian poet John Tranter indicates his Scottish fold cat curled up on the floor and says, "That's McGonagall." He adds the cat was named after the Scottish poet, William McGonagall. "He was a bad poet who thought he was wonderful. He'd give these awful recitals and everyone would laugh at him." McGonagall the cat is unmoved by this. John named his cat after the Scottish poet because, "He's a clumsy cat. He's not at all good at being a cat, just like the poet McGonagall wasn't good at being a poet."

Poetry permeates all facets of John Tranter's life. He started writing poetry in 1960 at the age of 17. His teacher suggested he write a poem so he wrote 'Morning Impressions' which he submitted to his school magazine, *The Harvester*. "I won five pounds," he says proudly. "About a week's worth of wages back in those days."

He grew up an only child on an isolated farm near Moruya, NSW where he spent his days reading. He was much inspired by poet Arthur Rimbaud, who was also 17 when he started writing poetry. "I found it fascinating to read about a young person my own age deciding to devote his life to poetry. I thought, 'If he can do it, I can'."

Like John Tranter, Rimbaud was a provincial farm boy who moved to the city to pursue life as a poet.

"I saw a lot of things in common at that stage in his life," John Tranter says. Rimbaud abandoned poetry after three years and John admits that he, too, felt that way more than once. "I don't quite know why but every 10 or 11 years I just get sick of poetry and find it horrible and fake." However, he would always come back to his poetry.

Ten years and 300 poems later, he released his first book, *Parallax and other poems*. "It was well received and at that point, I realised that's what I did best."

Unlike some writers who write for a specific demographic in mind, John Tranter doesn't. "I just write the best I can for myself and hope it strikes a chord with others like me out there."

He strives to steer clear of the stereotype that poems are always about feelings and emotions.

"I think some of the worst poetry is about how people feel. Like the kind you find on greeting cards, 'I feel I love you very much' and so on." Instead, he incorporates pieces from his surroundings such as fragments of speech, movies, conversations, dreams and newspaper headlines.

But John Tranter is far from being emotionless himself. Disappearing into the house, he reemerges, cradling his 11-year-old Manchester terrier named Tiger.

"He's having a bad day today. Sometimes he has good days." Tiger has cancer of the brain and no one knows how long he's got to live. "You sit in there and have a little sleep," he says as he tucks Tiger into his kennel in the backyard. "That's the boy."

The backyard, beautiful and welcoming, could very well be a scene from his poem *Backyard*, one of his favourite poems. John Tranter was part of a younger generation of poets, "the baby boomers who were seen as the inventors of a new kind of poetry."

Unlike the previous generation, they had rock and roll influences like Bob Dylan and The Rolling Stones that provided them with a kind of intense poetry. They were, he says, open and unconventional about their poetry.

John Tranter has been on the Writers' Advisory Panel for PEN for six years. He feels strongly about freedom of speech. "It's awful that any writer should be compelled to be silent." He can relate to issues concerning free speech because his generation felt their poetic freedom was rather constricted. So they broke free.

"Rhyme, control and structure were out. Individuality was in," he says. They formed

a cohesive, radical generation. The poetry they wrote was new and anti-authoritarian, influenced by the Vietnam War.

John Tranter has come a long way since then. He started off with odd jobs sweeping floors, driving a mail van and "working in a factory drilling holes in supermarket trolleys until I developed a huge black bruise on my hand."

He says his best job back then was as a mail boy for ABC-TV when he was 20. He was even able to persuade his supervisor to get him a typewriter for "misaddressed mail" and with any spare moment he got, he wrote poetry on it.

"As far as my poetry goes, that was the most productive job I ever had. Unfortunately they promoted me and so I had to resign."

But he doesn't regret a second of it. In 1987, he eventually became executive producer of a two-hour arts program on ABC Radio called *Radio Helicon*.

He says it's hard to make a living out of poetry. "The challenge is that poetry is not very widely read, compared to novels and movies and you have to live with that." He advises that people should write poetry for their enjoyment, not for the fame or to fit a market need. "Do it for yourself."

These days, John Tranter works on *Jacket*, an online poetry publication he founded in 1997. He also works as a director and service manager at his wife Lyn's literary agency, Australian Literary Management.

He has just completed his PhD at the University of Wollongong and is currently correcting some proofs for a book of essays. On top of that, he walks the dog, feeds the cat, fixes the car and does all the domestic work – even on weekends. It doesn't look like this dedicated Australian poet will be slowing down any time soon. And as for his poetry, "I don't think I'll ever retire."

**Agilene De Villa**

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For more information on John Tranter, visit [www.johntranter.com](http://www.johntranter.com) or [www.jacketmagazine.com](http://www.jacketmagazine.com)

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# Dr Jose takes Chair at Harvard

Nick Jose lived only a block away from the bustling Tiananmen Square in May 1989. A month later, it was the scene of the horrific June 4th massacre when the People's Liberation Army killed more than 2000 protestors speaking out against the ruling Chinese Communist Party.

At the time, Dr Jose, a well known Australian author, was working in the Australian Embassy as Cultural Counsellor. He remembers the long build-up to that fateful day in June. Weeks. Months. His apartment was used as a base by many Chinese writers involved in the protests. He vividly remembers the tanks rolling down the streets of Beijing.

"They were parked at the intersection opposite my apartment. We could see them and they could see us. At one point they called out to us on their loud speaker to 'stop taking photographs'."

The Tiananmen Square killings, and the subsequent arrest and detainment of hundreds of writers, intellectuals and students by the Chinese Government gave him his first glimpse of a life without a voice.

"That was a real life experience that made me understand the essentiality of freedom of expression."

It was the arrest of Nick Jose's close friend, writer Liu Xiaobo that introduced him to PEN.

"When Liu was in detention, PEN International campaigned for him." Nick says Liu was released a year later.

Six months after Tiananmen Square when his term as Cultural Counsellor ended, Nick returned to Australia and joined Sydney PEN.

Born in London in 1952 to Australian parents, Nick Jose spent most of his childhood in Adelaide. An avid reader, he also had a keen interest in puppetry and theatre.

"But I didn't think I'd grow up and be an author. No one does."

After school, Nick wanted to broaden his horizons and so moved to Canberra to study a Bachelor of Arts. But in 1973, having received his degree with honours, Nick was desperate to travel and at 21 nothing sounded better than a job teaching English in Italy.

After only a year teaching English, further study took Nick to the UK where he completed a PhD in English Literature at Oxford University. It was here he first started publishing his short stories.

"I knew I wanted to write, I just didn't know how I could make money from it which is why I studied English."

The idea for Nick's first novel, *Rowena's Field*, came from the experiences many of his generation had when moving overseas to Europe or England, not knowing how long they were going for or whether they would come back. It was only then that writing became Nick's main focus. To support himself, he moved back to Canberra and accepted a job teaching English Literature at ANU.

But it wasn't long before the idea of teaching for the rest of his life scared Nick enough that he enrolled in a Chinese language course. "I just wanted more for my life," he says.

And so began his long love affair with China that eventually led to his position as Cultural Counsellor. Chinese culture is an obvious theme in many of Nick's books including *The Red Thread*, *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and *Chinese Whispers*.

For more than a decade after his return from China, Nick wrote fiction, completing several books in succession. In 1990, he was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award for *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, his novel set in Beijing a short time before the Tiananmen Square massacre.

The book was so successful it was revised and re-released last year. Reviewer Lyn Jacobs says, "In an era where the people of the world are struggling to overcome the

bonds of economic rationalism and political suspicion, this is significant fiction.”

At this time, (Nick went on to become President of Sydney PEN in 2002) his commitment to PEN was so intense he found little time to write. He and his colleagues on the PEN management committee concentrated on raising its profile and influence. Such an opportunity came with the MV Tampa incident in 2001.

“Very early on, we took the detention of the MV Tampa asylum seekers as an issue.” That writers and journalists were among those being detained by the Government focused PEN’s objection to the treatment of asylum seekers. The organisation believed the processing of refugees was flawed.

“The authorities failed to investigate the circumstances of these people. There was a language problem that prevented people who had just cause being heard properly.”

Nick Jose says one of the first writers PEN publicly campaigned for was Ivory Coast journalist Cheikh Kone, who had to flee his homeland after writing a series of controversial newspaper articles.

“When he arrived in Freemantle, he was taken straight to Port Headland Detention Centre. At no point in that process did anyone take him seriously or attempt to check his claims.”

In less than 24 hours, Nick and the PEN team had verified Cheikh’s story from their tiny office at the University of Technology in Sydney.

Nick believes PEN’s campaign against the Australian Government’s unjust detention of writers was so successful it contributed to the eventual breakdown of the Howard Government’s Pacific Solution.

“When journalists have to flee their country because they are doing their job why would Australia not be willing to listen?” he says. “Even the most resistant policy maker could understand their claim.”

Currently Dr Jose divides his time between



Dr Nick Jose

teaching creative writing at the University of Western Sydney and editing *The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature*, due out in August. He lives in a small apartment in Elizabeth Bay with his wife Clare. But not for long. He has been appointed Chair of Australian Studies at Harvard University starting on September 1.

What about his writing? “It’s been on the backburner since I started working on the Anthology,” he says. But he’s got a novel “creeping together”.

Harvard will allow him time to write again. He hopes.

**Nicola Phillips**

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The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature will be officially launched by the Governor General, Quentin Bryce, at Admiralty House in Sydney on Thursday, 30 July. There will be a celebratory event at Gleebooks on Friday, 31 July to which PEN members are invited. A one-day public symposium for the Anthology will be held at the State Library on Saturday, 1 August.

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# Private passion becomes professional career

Caro Llewellyn has achieved something extraordinary: her dream job in her dream city.

For the past three years, Caro has run the PEN World Voices Festival in New York, working alongside festival chairman Salman Rushdie and organising events with some of the world's greatest contemporary authors.

"I sometimes pinch myself that this is my life and that I get the privilege of working with these people. It's incredible," she says.

Now in its fifth year, the World Voices Festival is an annual celebration of international literature and cultural exchange. Each year there is a different political theme and a mixture of well-known and emerging writers from around the globe. This year's festival, themed 'Evolution/Revolution', concluded earlier this month and really raised the bar, according to Caro.

"There's a saying in New York that things take five years to get established. We had our fifth birthday and I think we really got it; it was great."

Before moving to New York in 2006, Caro worked for Random House, the ABC, the Sydney Dance Company and lastly the Sydney Writers' Festival for four years.

Anyone who attended the Sydney Writers' Festival during her tenure will know that she gave it a huge boost. Under her direction, the number of events doubled to more than 300 and attendance grew from 39,000 to 65,000.

Casual and coolly intelligent, Caro seems an unlikely heavyweight of the arts world. A single mother at 22, she did not complete university, the pressures of full-time work and parenthood proving all too demanding. Although she regrets not completing her studies, her lack of tertiary qualifications appears to have had little impact on her career although it did raise some eyebrows in New York.

"When I came over here for the job interview, they said 'It doesn't give your college qualification on your CV' and I said,

'Well no, it doesn't because I don't have any', and everybody's jaw just dropped."

Caro attributes her success to the wide range of skills she has acquired throughout her life.

"When you're doing writers' festivals, you have to be across everything. You have to know how to do marketing, you have to know books and you have to know how to write. Everything I have done has been extremely useful."

While working with the SWF, Caro gained a reputation for her ability to entice prominent authors to appear at the festival. In 2005, she famously lured Booker Prize winner Alan Hollingshurst by slipping a note and DVD under his hotel door while at a writers' festival in Canada.

A book lover from an early age, she was captivated by the works of Italo Calvino, Oscar Wilde and Colette but never imagined her passion would become her career.

"When I got into publishing, I felt I had arrived at the place I was meant to be," she says. This love of literature stems from her mother, the writer and poet Kate Llewellyn, who would drag her daughter along to poetry readings and the Adelaide Writers' Week. "I was very lucky there were books around and that mum was reading all the time. It set a great example growing up – books mattered."

Caro has tried to set the same example for her son Jack, now 20, but says it wasn't always easy. "I will never be able to thank J.K. Rowling enough because she got my son reading. He didn't really read books and all of a sudden he was locked in his room devouring them."

While working with the SWF, Caro made it her mission to increase the level of participation for younger readers. "One of the greatest gifts you can give a child is a love of reading," she says. "I was appalled by the handful of books Jack was made to read at school. Reading should be compulsory. Those important texts should be



Clive Collins

Caro Llewellyn when she was director of the Sydney Writers' Festival.

part of the groundwork of every kids life."

Since arriving in New York, her proudest achievement has been working with children as part of the PEN Readers & Writers Program. The purpose of the program is to cultivate interest in literature among children from highly disadvantaged areas through a series of workshops with professional writers.

"We get them out of school, put them in a beautiful auditorium and make it very special. To see the kids turned on by books is just fantastic," says Caro.

Another great reward has been the unexpected and overwhelming response to some of the events at the World Voices Festival, says Caro.

"We had a stampede at the Metropolitan Museum of Art for people coming to hear Paul Krugman and George Soros. Two of the guards who have worked at the museum for 20 years said they had never seen anything like it. They wanted to print T-shirts saying, 'I survived PEN 09'."

It is exactly this kind of response that allows Caro to remain optimistic about the

future of literature. "You can't watch people's enthusiasm for literary festivals without thinking that there is a need and market for good books," she says.

Caro Llewellyn says she no longer gets star struck working with the world's literary elite. "People are just like anybody else and just because they happen to be famous doesn't change whether they are a nice person or not."

She sees the most important aspect of her job as keeping writers happy, which is perhaps why so many are singing her praises. Salman Rushdie said recently, "She has been a joy to work with; selfless, unstintingly hard-working, and deeply knowledgeable." To which she simply replies, "Salman is a sweetie."

Caro says she feels at home in New York. "I adore is here. It's exciting and it's beautiful." When asked about her aspirations for the future she pauses. "It's a real problem," she says. "I don't know what else I could do because I think I have the best job in the world."

**Michael Walker**

# Writers imprisoned or under threat



Eynulla Fatullayev



Patricia Ariza



Melissa Patino

Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, every citizen possesses the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to speak and write freely and the right to seek and receive information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.

Every great achievement in literature, from fiction, poetry and drama, to essays, memoirs and journalism, is the result of the full exercise of this right.

However, in 2008, the Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN recorded 191 attacks against writers and print journalists. Here are some of them:

**Eynulla Fatullayev**, editor of *Gündelike Azerbaijan* and the Russian language *Realny Azerbaijan*, is serving a sentence of eight and a half years' imprisonment for an article published in *Realny Azerbaijan*.

There are widespread concerns that his sentence may be linked to his investigation into the murder of editor Elmar Huseynov in 2005.

Eynulla Fatullayev has suffered arrest and imprisonment on a number of occasions in recent years. At the time of his sentencing he was already serving a two-and-a-half-year sentence, handed down on April 2007, for libel and insult for an article posted anonymously on the Internet. Although the piece was attributed to him, he denies being the author.

Last year, Eynulla Fatullayev received the Human Rights Watch administered Hellmann/Hammett award in recognition of his journalism in the face of persecution.

The Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN considers the continued detention of Eynulla Fatullayev to be a breach of international standards guaranteeing freedom of expression and calls for his immediate release.

As part of its *Freedom to Write in the Americas* campaign launched in February, the Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN (WiPC) marked International Women's

Day on 8 March by celebrating the work of four women writers under threat in the region: Colombian playwright and activist, Peruvian student poet **Melissa Patiño**, and Mexican authors and journalists **Lydia Cacho** and **Sanjuana Martínez Montemayor**.

While none of the women are currently detained, they are facing state and non-state harassment that reflects on one hand the political polarisation affecting Latin America, and on the other, resistance to coverage of a topic that remains decidedly taboo in the region: sexual abuse.

**Melissa Patiño**, a 20-year-old poet and university student, is on trial for terrorism, based on her alleged involvement with a leftwing political organisation, Bolivarian Continental Coordinator (Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana - CCB), which the Peruvian authorities claim is linked to terrorist groups.

A member of the 'Círculo del sur' (Southern Circle) poetry group in Lima, she runs a poetry program on radio and cultural activities with young people. Patiño denies any political affiliations and to date no concrete evidence has been produced to back up the charges. She was detained from 29 February to 8 May 2008, when she was released pending trial. She potentially faces 20 years in prison if convicted.

**Lydia Cacho Ribeiro** is one of Mexico's leading defenders of children's and women's rights. She founded and directs a crisis centre and shelter for victims of sex crimes, gender-based violence, and trafficking. In 2004, she published a book entitled *The Demons of Eden: The power behind child pornography* that exposed tourist destinations for child sex tourism. Amnesty International USA reports her work has resulted in repeated threats against her life and judicial harassment to silence her efforts. Despite these dangers, she continues to champion the advancement of human rights for all children and women.

**Sanjuana Martínez Montemayor** has

reportedly suffered harassment, including death threats, since 2006 for writing about alleged links between child sexual abuse and the Catholic Church in Mexico. The death threats, which began in September 2006, increased in December that year following the publication of her book *El Manto Púrpura* (*Purple Cloak*), which documents alleged abuses which had apparently been covered up by the Catholic Church authorities in Mexico and the United States. The threats continued in January 2007 while she was reporting on allegations of child sexual abuse by a Mexican Catholic priest.

The harassment continues. In March 2008, Martínez was fired from the newspaper *Milenio* and the following September, she claimed one of Mexico's bookstore chains had attempted to block the sale of two of her books including *Test of Faith* which documents allegations of a pederast network with links to Catholic cardinals and bishops.

Tibetan writer and poet **Tsering Woesser** is among a growing number of banned writers in China. While not actually detained, she has suffered repeated and sustained harassment since 2004, including brief detentions, periods of house arrest, travel restrictions, loss of work, denial of access to information and communications, heavy surveillance and censorship.

International PEN's Writers in Prison Committee has condemned the restrictions imposed on Tsering Woesser, and demanded that she is allowed to live and work freely, in accordance with Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which China is a signatory.

Woesser's troubles began with her second book *Xizang Biji* (*Notes on Tibet*), a collection of short stories and prose published in Guanzhou in January 2003. The book was a bestseller in China, and was banned in September of that year for revealing opinions 'harmful to the unification and solidarity of our nation'.

On 22 June 2008 Kurdish journalist and activist **Mohammad Sadiq Kabudvand** was sentenced to 11 years in prison on charges of "acting against national security" for his Kurdish rights activism.

According to PEN's information, Mohammad Sadiq Kabudvand, editor of the banned weekly *Payam-e mardom-e Kurdistan*

and Chair of the Tehran-based Kurdish Human Rights Organization, was arrested on 1 July 2007 at his place of work in Tehran by plain-clothed security officers and taken to the Intelligence Ministry's Section 209 of Evin Prison. He was targeted by the authorities for his critical writings and activism.

International PEN considers Mohammad Sadiq Kabudvand to be detained in violation of his right to freedom of expression, and calls for his immediate and unconditional release in accordance with Article 19 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a signatory, and on humanitarian grounds.

International PEN is deeply concerned about an apparent pattern of repression against journalists and human rights activists in Iranian Kurdistan, which has been ongoing since unrest broke out in the Kurdish areas of Iran in July 2005, and was violently suppressed by the authorities. Several other Iranian-Kurdish journalists are currently detained, including Kaveh Javanmard, Adnan Hassanpour and Ejlal Qavami journalist.

Poet, journalist and librarian **Ricardo Gonzalez Alfonso** has been sentenced to 20 years imprisonment in Havana. Despite poor health, as of early December 2008, González was said to be sharing a cell with 36 non-political prisoners, which had reportedly flooded on several occasions, worsening the already unsanitary conditions.

Having previously worked as a scriptwriter for the state TV agency, González joined the independent press in 1995, working for the news agency Cuba Press. In 1998 he established the Jorge Mañach Library, an independent library specialising in journalism and set up the Manuel Márquez Sterling Journalists Society with poet Raúl Rivero to provide training to independent Cuban journalists in 2001.

Many of the Society's members were arrested along with González and Rivero in March 2003 (Rivero was released in 2004). Gonzalez's publications include *Historia Sangrada* (*A Bloody History*), *Hombres sin Rostros* (*Men without Faces*) and *Con Fines Humanos* (*Human Purposes*), the last written in prison.

In 2008, he was named Reporters Without Borders Journalist of the Year.



Lydia Cacho Ribeiro



Sanjuana Martínez Montemayor



Tsering Woesser



Mohammad Sadiq Kabudvand

For more information, go to <http://www.internationalpen.org.uk/>

# Exploring honour in contemporary life

Since 2007, PEN has commissioned three acclaimed Australian writers to each write an essay and deliver a lecture on a big issue facing contemporary Australia. Malcolm Knox delivered the first lecture on *Honour* in Sydney and Canberra on April 29-30. Max Barry will speak on *Risk* (Sydney July 15, Canberra July 21), and Larissa Behrendt on *Legacy* (Sydney November 18, Canberra November 24). This is an excerpt from Malcolm Knox's essay in which he poses questions about the incentive for behaving with honour towards others.

I will start with a footnote. It's little known that Norma Khouri, the fraudulent author of *Forbidden Love*, wrote a second book. It was due to come out as a sequel to her best-seller about having, as a young woman in Jordan, witnessed the honour killing of her best friend. The sequel was about Norma's escape from Jordan, her first impressions of the west, her love life and so on. If *Forbidden Love* was a fiction, this second book was a fiction based on a fiction. If you like, fiction squared.

The title of this second book was *A Matter of Honour*. Of course, the ironies are rich: *A Matter of Honour* was scuttled when Norma was shown to be not a Jordanese ingenue but a Chicago housewife with a history of violence and fraud. Campaigns against honour killing were undermined by Norma's lies and exaggerations. If she left one legacy, it was, in ways both intended and accidental, to bring the word 'honour' into dishonour.

The degradation of honour in the western mind had, however, occurred long before Norma Khouri. Committing violence to restore 'honour' seems barbaric, something

our cultures left in the pre-enlightenment past. To us, honour is important but not worth killing for, and not condoned by our legal system.

The apparent overestimation of 'honour' informs western perceptions of the eastern mind. Recall that in the combat phase of the second Gulf War, Americans would drive through Iraq with loudspeakers declaiming insults to Muslim virility and female purity. Hotheaded Iraqi fighters would then rush out suicidally in defence of their dignity.

In peace, our dealings with the east also make assumptions about their behaviour being not only non-western but pre-western. Take the cliché about the far-eastern obsession with 'face'. The pragmatic westerner will sacrifice his own face – what does it mean to us? – and clean up on the bottom line, using the other side's concern with honour to our advantage.

Within our own culture, 'honour' also has archaic associations. It is appended to judges and politicians; in weddings we have that most frilly designation: The Matron of Honour. Honour is a ceremonial word. On Anzac and Remembrance Days we honour





Malcom Knox

Bruce York, State Library of NSW

the dead, a verb that would mean more to them than it does to us.

To me, the word honour smells of the varnish and wormwood of school honour boards, the gilt-painted glories of the past. It belongs more to ritual than to the vernacular, a word we deploy between inverted commas.

A friend once told me that he believes the word 'reputation' is, by default, pejorative. 'Reputation' implies a façade, a lie for public consumption. Honour plays the role of a bikie gang's tattoo shop, the legitimate front for the illegitimate true business. The stretch between title and reality is good only for ironic purposes.

When I recently covered the jailing of Marcus Einfeld for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, the headline was 'A Man Without Honour'. This was only incidentally a slur on Einfeld himself. It was an ironic play on his former title as a Federal Court judge.

This tension was present at the birth of the word. 'Honour' originates in the Latin 'cursus honorum', a 'race for office'. The man of ambition would run this race, from magistrate up to governor. 'Honour' attached

to what was on public show. Yet the idea of personal honour – the trustworthiness of the individual rather than the office – was much older and more universal, albeit travelling under different names.

As Richard Nisbet wrote in his 1996 book *Culture of Honour*, the earliest human collectives depended on some agreement as to what constituted honourable behaviour. It may be codified as a bushido or warrior code, or chivalry, or an Old Testament system of values hingeing on honour and shame.

Nisbet said honour-shame societies have three common preconditions: a lack of resources, a knowledge that the profits from crime far outweigh the risks, and an absence of meaningful law enforcement.

Nisbet pointed out with that some sub-cultures today, such as mafia, bikie gangs, resistance fighters, or frontierspeople, the absence of an overriding external authority means person-to-person, look-you-in-the-eye and swap-a-drop-of-blood codes of honour persist.

The same could be said about rural, compared with metropolitan, communities. In small towns where there is no anonymity, no escape from the consequences of your actions, you are fixed by your reputation, which carries more effective weight even than the law.

But for most of the post-enlightenment urban west, honour culture has been overtaken by legal culture. We don't need codes of honour, because we have law and justice. We don't need to seal our trades with a word of honour; we have legal tender.

As the public pillars of honour – monarchy, aristocracy, clerical rank – disintegrated in Europe after 1789, it was only rational that they be replaced by a more mercantile sense of honour that radiates from the individual's behaviour. This was accentuated in the new world, in places like America and Australia. You are what you do, and a dishonoured cheque is a dishonoured cheque, no matter how high a rank you hold.

As codes of honour became less central to western life, the idea of personal integrity gained ground. This also shows our New Testament influence – 'to thine own self be true'. In an honour culture, avenging a wrong was absolutely necessary; since Jesus Christ, we are likelier to enter heaven if we turn the other cheek.

'Personal integrity', given its importance, needs unpacking. I went to a boys' private school, a church school. The headmaster



➤ *Continued from page 19*

## Exploring honour in contemporary life

would deliver a moral lesson every Friday. If I remember little of their substance, I do recall how, in the painting of the headmaster on the assembly hall wall, his eyes followed us around. He was dangerously doubled – one on the stage, speaking, the other on the wall, both of him watching our every move.

One of his talks I do remember was on integrity, which he defined as acting in a consistent way whatever the audience. A person with integrity would be as respectful towards the bus driver as to headmaster himself. If you had integrity, you wouldn't act one way for your peers and another way for your parents.

The opposite would be to be 'two-faced'. It was a pretty good lesson, and consistent with peer dynamics – there was always a special place in peer group hell reserved for 'the two-faced bastard'.

For purposes of persuasion, the headmaster asked us to imagine an Eye watching us wherever we were, and we had to be consistent in front of this Eye. Interestingly, this was about the same time that Michel Foucault was developing his theory on Panopticism, imagining us as prisoners in a yard overseen by one omniscient technological eye.

As a Christian, for our headmaster this Eye was God. God sees everything. We are all naked before God. But although it was a Christian school, we were living in an age still wiping its brow over God's death. Few believed in a literal God. Even our chaplain, fearing our scepticism, encouraged us to read the Bible metaphorically.

So we had to find God-substitutes. Inside school, the Eye was the headmaster himself, up there on the stage, up there on the wall. I tried to imagine the Eye as belonging to the greatest moral authority I knew, my great-aunt Dorothy, the family matriarch, herself a retired private school principal. I tried for a while to act at all times as if Aunt Dorothy was watching me. I was pretty sure I knew what she considered right and wrong.

Of course I failed, and soon gave

up. When I defied or disappointed Aunt Dorothy's imaginary Eye, it only bothered me temporarily and, I'm afraid, weakly.

Perhaps this was a flaw only in my character, and I was surrounded by people with more natural integrity. I often felt I was. But I was an adolescent boy. What was really building up was an awakening to the tension between the outward forms of honour and the way people actually behaved. I will give one small example, a trivial thing that has somehow resonated more as the years have passed.

At our school, we wore boaters – straw hats. When we were at a pedestrian crossing and a car stopped for us, we were required to raise our boaters to the driver. I don't recall ever being taught why this courtesy might have some substance. The driver might be in an urgent rush, so stopping for us might require some sacrifice or selflessness on their part. Putting myself in their shoes for a moment, I should raise my boater to thank them.

But no, I only recall learning from my own point of view. I should doff my boater because if I was spotted not doffing, I would find myself on detention. As there was always an Eye watching – the driver, a passing prefect, a teacher – to fail to doff was something you couldn't get away with.

So whereas the motive could have been a fine one, it was a base one. Pure pragmatism. Doff your boater, stay out of trouble.

Yet the way the school put it, the reason to doff your boater was something different again. It was, you might say, honour-driven: we doffed our boaters to promote the school's reputation in the community. It wasn't about us, or the driver: it was about the school.

This could have provided us with a valuable lesson: balancing our individual impulses against the good of the body we represented. When these needs conflicted, the institution had to be put first. This is a hard thing for a spirited teenager to take, but it had a kind of moral dignity. The school is greater

than the individual: the community overrides the rebel.

When the student and school came into conflict, a shared notion of honour could make peace between the two. The student recognises that by falling into line he has found the best of himself in sacrifice. The institution responds by upholding standards that make the student proud. The honour of both school and student are enhanced.

Yet putting the institution above the individual might be a hard thing for the teenager's parents to take. At my time in secondary school I think we had entered a new phase which has only accelerated in the decades since. The transcendent force of honour was being replaced by something else. Call it value for money. Call it user pays. Call it accountability.

The core notion of honour in such schools was corroded at first by the unreasonable inflation of fees. As prices rose, the fundamental nature of the relationship was contorted. Parents saw schools as empire builders, schools saw parents as clients. As the institutions grew, they lost much of their 'institutional' status – that is, the more they looked like businesses, the less they looked like repositories of moral authority.

Parents, paying so heavily not only for their children's education but also for the school's real estate purchases, became more demanding. They asked for value for money. They asked for guarantees. The relationship changed from one based on intangibles such as honour and reputation into one based on the commerce in tangibles and KPIs for the child. The school had to be accountable to the parents. The uniting force, which was once transcendent and ineffable, is now measurable and may be discharged.

What the parents were going through, vis-à-vis the school, was recapitulating what the French bourgeoisie had gone through vis-à-vis the old order in the 1780s, what all rising mercantile classes fight their way through – a rise in scepticism towards the ancient codes.

That scepticism is magnified in the eyes of a teenager, of course. In my case the cracks were opening between the vestments of honour – the moralising lectures, the traditions, the rules, the ranking as an 'honours' student – and the rude facts of human frailty.

If there's one thing that unites teenagers, it is the glee they take in the discovery of adult hypocrisy. If a teacher, found to be acting in an odd manner in the boarding house, is quietly asked to leave, no questions asked, no barrier to future employment, it becomes one of the lessons students learn in the hypocrisy of adults – where 'reputation' begins to grow inverted commas. The errant teacher has left, his 'reputation' is safe and he can go on to another private school, and the school's 'reputation' is safe because the scandal never got out.

You begin to see 'reputation' ironically; you are Holden Caulfield-ised. Adults are phonies – that word reputation, and its fellow travellers like honour and principle and integrity, are phony words. As much as it disappoints you, it also thrills you. It shows that you are growing up.

I was not free from this, far from it. I found that when I was placed in a position of high honour in my school, I was torn apart by the tension between my position and my rogue individuality. Because there was no self-evident notion of honour to reconcile the two, my life had a certain doubleness, and it wasn't the honourable doubleness of Clark Kent and Superman. It caused a pain that convinced me I was too weak, too fallible, to lead.

In the fiction I have written since then I have been drawn to characters who lead double lives, one in obeisance to societal requirements, the other to irresistible personal impulses. Public honour, personal corruption. The character is aware of and tortured by his hypocrisy; it is the stretch between inner and outer selves that causes his agony and leads him to tragedy.

# Challenging notions of

When SBS Dateline journalist Amos Roberts travelled to Sri Lanka earlier in the year to report on the war in the northeast of the country between the government and the Tamil Tigers, he was unable to visit the conflict zone. The Colombo authorities refuse to permit any independent journalists access to the area. Aid groups and humanitarian organisations are also routinely barred.

Despite overwhelming evidence that thousands of civilians have been killed in the last months, Secretary of Defence Gotabaya Rajapaksa, brother of the country's President, told Roberts that there had been absolutely no civilian deaths. "If you want to believe me, no civilian casualties," he said. "The world has to appreciate this, if somebody doesn't appreciate this – bad luck."

The atmosphere of impunity against journalists in Sri Lanka is reminiscent of many other nations, including Russia, Colombia, Iraq, Palestine, Mexico and the Philippines. This, in many ways, challenges the notions of reporting in the modern age. Twitter, YouTube, text messages, email, blogs and websites are sold as tools to disseminate information to the masses but the power of the state often remains overwhelming. Besides, many of these states receive covert or explicit Western-backing, making real change close to impossible.

In mid-April, after the announcement in Algeria of a dubious election win by a super power-backed despot, The Independent's Robert Fisk wrote: "It should be noted... that all the Arab presidents...are – or were – allies of the United States, including Saddam. [Algerian President Abdul Aziz] Bouteflika is another 'safe pair of hands' in charge of another front in the 'war on terror', even if the phrase is now banned by the White House."

In my book *The Blogging Revolution* (Melbourne University Press, 2008), I examine the ways in which dissidents in "repressive" regimes are using new technology to circumvent attempts by regimes to silence or

intimate them. These are brave people risking their lives to simply report the news. But there are limits to this emancipation.

Cybertarianism, according to China watcher Rebecca MacKinnon, remains a key impediment to democracy. "There is no real protection of the individual's right to freedom of expression," she writes. "People still go to jail when the powers that be decide they are too much of a threat – and there's nothing anybody can do about it."

Journalists in Sri Lanka face extreme pressure to only report the government's point of view. Rajapaksa told Dateline that reporters have a specific role in society:

"Do the correct thing - act responsibly as a citizen of this country. Look, if you take two words – 'media', 'freedom' - that's very beautiful, very nice, who can object that? I love it, the President loves it, we will support it. 'Free media', take two words - nice two words - but remember when you act you have to think of the situation that we are facing. In that situation when you take the media, they have a different role to play. They should act responsibly - they must take the country first, not these two words, 'free media'."

In an interview with the BBC this year, Rajapaksa was asked whether dissent or criticism during a time of war was treason. "Yes," he emphatically replied.

Such threats aren't solely issued in developing nations. The former presidential press secretary under George W. Bush, Ari Fleischer, said in the wake of 9/11 that Americans "need to watch what they say, watch what they do." The murder of countless journalists in Afghanistan and Iraq by American forces suggests that this policy was not merely a rhetorical device. According to the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 138 journalists and 51 media workers have been killed in Iraq since March 2003.

This kind of behaviour has a chilling effect. CPJ said in late March that Sri Lanka had joined the dubious list of countries such



Eranga Jayawardena

Editor Upali Tennakoon after he was attacked.

# reporting in the modern age

as Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and India in the “impunity index.”

This year the editor of Colombo’s Sunday Leader, Lasantha Wickramatunge, was killed and in a second attack, another editor, Upali Tennakoon, was injured. There have literally been dozens of cases of state censorship, intimidation, harassment and murder of reporters in 2009 alone.

CPJ released a report in February that forced Sri Lankan authorities to refute evidence that their government did not properly investigate the killing of reporters. At least nine journalist’s deaths remain unsolved over the last decade.

The brutal nature of the Sri Lanka regime was further revealed by the London Times journalist Jeremy Page. Banned from the country because the government thinks Britain supports the Tamil Tiger cause, the reporter wanted to investigate the use of barbed wire in the camps forcibly holding Tamils in the north. The head of the Government’s Peace Secretariat, Rajiva Wijesinha, wrote a letter to Page that personified the Orwellian nature of the state. “Unfortunately, a man from a cold climate does not realise that, in the sub-continent, barbed wire is the most common material to establish secure boundaries, to permit ventilation as well as views,” he wrote.

The situation in Russia is little better. Authoritarianism appears to have popular support, but since 2000 16 journalists have died in Russia under suspicious circumstances and countless others have been threatened and assaulted. One of those killed was Anna Politkovskaya, a brave woman I met in Sydney in 2006, and an astute chronicler of the brutal Chechnyan war. The Washington Times editorialised in February that Russia’s “gangster state” was a danger to the international order because transparency was sorely lacking.

The global community has yet to impose a workable system to punish governments who recklessly endanger journalists and members of the media. Reducing impunity must

be made a priority for leading bodies and authorities. “Those of us who can take such freedom for granted should salute [the] many colleagues who risk life and liberty every day to do their jobs”, wrote the Washington Post last November. But how should this happen practically?

It is very difficult to understand global problems if those issues are largely ignored in the Western press. When was the last time you read perspectives from Sri Lanka, Palestine, Colombia, Russia or Mexico in their own voices? For the general public to express solidarity with these seemingly distant problems, they must be allowed to breathe. Mainstream old media is unlikely to be the place for this to happen. Blogs, specialist sites and online magazines are quickly filling the gaps left by the deflated print media.

However, it is far too easy to presume that the intimidation of journalists only happens in “repressive” regimes. The Los Angeles Times reported in mid-April that South Korea was running a “not-so-subtle propaganda campaign” against foreign reporters who dared challenge the government’s plans to combat the global financial crisis. Blacklisting and legal action are two methods being employed by the democratic regime.

Just before Sri Lankan editor Lasantha Wickramatunge was murdered, in all likelihood by government-sponsored thugs, he wrote an editorial that detailed his disillusionment with the state and even predicted his own death:

“We have agitated against state terrorism in the so-called war against terror, and made no secret of our horror that Sri Lanka is the only country in the world routinely to bomb its own citizens. For these views we have been labelled traitors, and if this be treachery, we wear that label proudly.”

These are the true heroes of the journalistic profession.

**Antony Loewenstein**



Murdered Sri Lankan editor  
Lasantha Wickramatunge



Murdered Russian journalist  
Anna Politkovskaya

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*Antony Loewenstein is a Sydney journalist, author and blogger  
(<http://antonyloewenstein.com>).*

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# Freedom of speech demands freedom of information

When researching stories that relate to government, there are two main sources – information that is volunteered by politicians and public officials, and information that is leaked or obtained through informal networks of contacts. The problem with information from these sources is that the motivation for providing the information may have a distorting effect on the information. Politicians, and their staff, are generally selective in the information that they provide, while people who leak may have their own agendas. But there is a third option: Freedom of Information.

The advantage of using Freedom of Information schemes to obtain information is that it is the person who initiates the query and decides what information is relevant and useful when framing the application. Of course, there's no guarantee that you'll receive the information you ask for.

FoI, when it works, enables the journalist or researcher to go beyond the information that governments make publicly available, to delve into the facts underlying policy decisions, to dig out problems which governments may not have recognised or acknowledged, to assess the successes or failures of government actions.

However, surveys indicate FoI is under-utilised in Australia. There are a number of reasons why journalists have in the past failed to exploit FoI, but undoubtedly the key reason is that many have a negative view of FoI as a research tool and have underestimated its potential to yield results.

There is no doubt that FoI in Australia is not user friendly. Any number of critical reports have been published in recent years setting out the problems with the legislation, the way it is administered and the way it has been interpreted by courts and tribunals.

Commentators have noted that there are too many categories of exemption and that the exemptions are too broad. It has also been observed that, when determining whether material is exempt, administrators have had a tendency to err on the side of secrecy, by regarding material that falls into one of the categories as automatically and absolutely exempt, rather than making any attempt to balance competing public interests so as to do justice to the spirit of democratic accountability which was the *raison d'être* for the legislation.

It is often alleged that the administrators have a list of check boxes corresponding with the exemptions and if any of the boxes are ticked the application is refused, even

where it is plainly in the public interest for material to be published.

One of the frequent reasons for applications for access to information being refused is that they are "voluminous" or would excessively divert departmental resources, i.e. that in order to fulfil the request many hundreds of documents or files would have to be retrieved, assessed and copied.

In other instances, a researcher might be quoted charges of several thousand dollars before the material will be provided. The justification for such high fees is often the time required for locating and retrieving documents, "decision making" time, in which it is determined whether the material is exempt.

But journalists who have had success with FoI applications advise that the "voluminous" rejection can be avoided by doing preliminary research to identify the material which is required and framing the request as specifically as possible. Some researchers advise making two separate applications, the first seeking a list of what material is available relating to a particular issue, and the second requesting specific documents selected from that list.

It may be true that journalists have underestimated the power of FoI, but even those who have had a number of successes with it have nonetheless found that FoI legislation in Australia is restrictive, that public officials have construed the legislation in a way that has minimised the amount of material which they have released, and that in some instances spin doctors, other political staffers and even politicians themselves have on occasion intervened in the FoI process.

Generally, Australia is regarded as an open, democratic country. It seems to be incongruous that governments have been so cagey about allowing Australian citizens to share the information which is held on our behalf. It's interesting to compare Australia to other developed nations as to how open they are.

Since 2000, Johan Lidberg, of Murdoch University, has been conducting research in an effort to measure how Australia rates relative to other countries on its FoI performance. His research is ongoing, but the data he has published so far is not reassuring. In a paper Lidberg presented in 2005, he outlined preliminary results comparing Australia's FoI with FoI in Sweden, Thailand, USA and South Africa. For each country, Lidberg calculated a score out of 10. Australia scored just 3.5. Sweden scored the highest, at 8.2, USA scored 3.7 and South Africa 4 (the data for Thailand was incomplete).

Johan Lidberg concluded that "Australia is the worst

case in the study. It scored the lowest and its top public servants and politicians are trying very hard to project an image of a mature functioning FoI system. This is false. The study clearly shows that the Australian FoI regime is close to completely dysfunctional from a user's perspective".

Another comparative study published by Rick Snell, of the University of Tasmania, looked at the Australian FoI experience in comparison with that of New Zealand. The historical and cultural similarities between the two would suggest the FoI experience would also be similar. But in reality New Zealand is much more open than Australia.

An important aspect of the divergence between the two approaches to FoI is that, whereas Australian legislation sets down a number of categories of exemption, the New Zealand legislation emphasises the consequences of disclosure when determining whether material should be released.

This difference is illustrated by the treatment of Cabinet documents: in Australia, Cabinet documents are automatically exempt. This includes all transcriptions of Cabinet proceedings as well as any briefings prepared for a Cabinet discussion. In New Zealand, there is no such blanket exemption and some Cabinet documents are even published on the Internet.

In the last decade, FoI has been through what might be regarded as a Dark Age. This has been justified and fed by, if not actually caused by, global anxiety about terrorism, as has been particularly evident in the US. Executive Orders issued by George Bush in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Centre effectively instructed government officials to be secretive and to withhold information. But the election of Barak Obama appears to mark the beginning of an FoI renaissance.

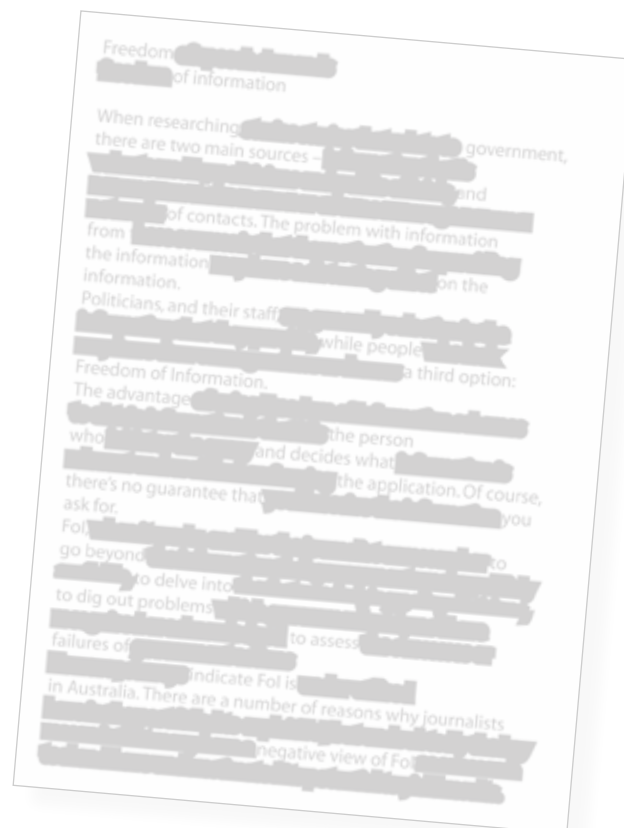
On his first full day as US President, Obama issued a memorandum which directed US department heads that they should observe a presumption in favour of disclosure. The memorandum instructs government agencies to "usher in a new era of open government".

Since that memorandum was issued, previously secret documents documenting the CIA's use of torture have been released to the media. Seemingly with the stroke of a pen, President Obama swept aside the secretiveness which characterised the Bush era.

The trend towards openness has been mirrored in Australia, although the process of reform here has been agonisingly slow and lacking in the drama seen overseas. Like the Bush administration, the Howard government tended towards secretiveness. The ALP's federal election campaign in 2007 promised greater openness and reform of FoI.

In 2008 the Queensland government released exposure drafts of new legislation in response to the Solomon Report's recommendations for reform. Around the same time, the Rudd government introduced a bill for the abolition of conclusive certificates and in February 2009, the government released an exposure draft of amendments to the Freedom of Information Act 1982.

The reforms embodied in the amending bill are modest.



They don't eliminate all exemptions, and cabinet documents will remain off-limits where the "dominant purpose" is submission to Cabinet. But the reforms do shift the bias ever so slightly in the direction of greater openness.

In addition to facilitating "pro-active publication" of government information, the amended legislation requires bureaucrats to apply a public interest test when determining whether material is exempt, rather than treating information as automatically exempt simply because it falls into one of the categories of exemption.

Unfortunately, the requirement to consider the public interest does not apply to all classes of information, some material will remain exempt.

The most promising aspect of the draft legislation is that it specifies that the egregious reasons for withholding documents cannot be taken into account when applying the public interest test.

These include possible embarrassment to or loss of confidence in the government, the possibility of confusion or "unnecessary debate", and the possibility of material being misunderstood or misinterpreted.

The removal of these arguments for refusing media access to information should facilitate the use of FoI as a camera lucida, by which government conduct can be held up to close scrutiny.

FoI is such a useful tool that it's not much of an exaggeration to say that you cannot have true freedom of speech without freedom of information. But FoI is a tool which requires training, practice and persistence. And it takes time and money.

**Inez Ryan**  
Policy Officer  
Australian Press Council

# Book of Screams

By Afeif Ismail

Translated By Dr Aida Seif Al-Dawla

If you see, while your eyes are closed,  
The image of a baby suckling at the breast of  
his dead mother,  
Then know  
That this miserable child  
Is  
From  
Darfur!

If you hear, while you are deep asleep,  
An echo vibrating in the corners of the  
universe  
Of a wailing,  
And screaming  
Of a widow being raped  
In the desert  
After earth and sky had deserted her  
Be sure, that this woman  
Is  
From  
Darfur!

If you watch, with heavy eyes  
On the screens of the world  
Leisured politicians  
Internationals  
And locals  
And Orientalists

Sharing a file that is oozing blood  
And worms  
And pus  
Be sure that  
Nothing  
Nothing  
Nothing  
Will they do!!

If you read a poem of a modern poet  
In the twenty first century  
Deserted by all the dictionaries of language  
Whose image can picture nothing  
But a desert  
Whose people since the beginning of time  
Have been sacrificed to death  
And waste  
Be sure that you are reading  
The poem of a poet  
Who tried, before committing suicide  
To write the story of his people in

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R

The International Criminal Court has  
charged Sudan's president Omar al-Bashir  
with war crimes and crimes against humanity.  
The Court accused him of complicity in a  
campaign of violence against the people of  
Darfur, in the west of the country.

Afeif Ismail Abdelrazig was born in  
Elhassahisa, Sudan, in 1962. A published  
poet, writer, playwright, artist and human-  
rights activist, Afeif arrived in Australia in  
2003. He has many works of poetry published  
in Arabic: *Traps and some Tracks* (2001), *Bet  
of the Argil* (2003), *A Passage to the Aroma of  
Invisibility* (2006), and *It's your Bird* (2007).  
His poems have been published in English,  
Japanese and German. Afeif was short-listed  
for the inaugural Kit Denton Fellowship  
for Writers of Courage in 2007, for which  
he submitted his plays *The Son of the Sun*,  
*The Labyrinth* and *The Shrouds of the Dead*.  
He was awarded the inaugural Australian  
National Playwrights' Bursary for 2008.

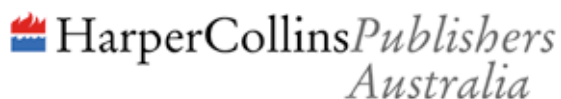
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