



sydney
PEN

sydney pen magazine



TORCH SONG _____

One poem's fight _____

for freedom in China _____



_____ JM Coetzee on benevolence

_____ Ashley Hay on absent friends

_____ Maureen Freely on Turkish fright

_____ Julian Morrow's letter from Hu Jintao



“AS A WRITER
WHO HAS THE
FREEDOM TO WRITE
WITHOUT FEAR
OR CONSTRAINT
AND FOR WHOM
SILENCE IS A CHOICE,

I WOULD FEEL
ASHAMED IF
I DID NOT SPEAK UP
FOR A WRITER
ANYWHERE ON WHOM
SILENCE IS ENFORCED”

DAVID MALOUF



contents

4	president's report Mara Moustafine
6	2020: a vision splendid Ben Saul WHY RUDD'S SUMMIT MATTERS
8	chinese whispers Yiyan Wang WHAT CHINA'S RECENT TRIALS TELL US ABOUT THE CHINESE STATE
12	stanzas without borders Chip Rolley ONE POEM'S FIGHT AGAINST SUPPRESSION
20	deep-seated ideals Ashley Hay GIVING IMPRISONED WRITERS A SEAT AT THE TABLE
26	found in translation Maureen Freely ORHAN PAMUK AND THE TROUBLE WITH TURKEY

32	who do you think we are? J.M. Coetzee THE SOCIETY WE CHOOSE
38	on punching and poetry Merv Lilley LIFE WITH DOROTHY HEWETT
42	freedom to write Jeffrey Errington GERALDINE BROOKS ON WHAT MATTERS
43	the power of many PEN MACQUARIE ABORIGINAL ANTHOLOGY
44	obituaries MONA BRAND; ERIC ROLLS; VINCENT SERVENTY; ANDREA STRETTON
46	last word Julian Morrow A LETTER FROM CHINESE PRESIDENT HU JINTAO



president's letter



Welcome to the new Sydney PEN Magazine! Thanks to the support of the Copyright Agency Limited (CAL), our magazine now has a dedicated editor and will be published twice yearly to keep you up to date with what's happening in the PEN world.

Featured in this edition are articles which highlight some of Sydney PEN's current work to promote literature and defend freedom of expression. With world attention focused on the Olympic Games in Beijing in August 2008, the foremost concern of PEN centres around the world is our global campaign for freedom of expression in China. We draw attention to the plight of 41 writers and journalists in China imprisoned for nothing more than expressing their views ([Chinese whispers](#), page 8).

A key element of PEN's global campaign is the poem "June" by imprisoned Chinese writer Shi Tao. The poem has been relaying around the world in tandem with the Olympic torch, travelling virtually on the website www.penpoemrelay.org.

As the torch has moved from country to country, the poem has been translated from one language

to another. When the torch reached Canberra on 24 April, it went live in four Australian Indigenous languages – Darug, Adnyamathanha, Ngarrindjeri and Arrernte. This innovative web-based campaign was conceived by Sydney PEN member Chip Rolley and is hosted by Sydney PEN ([Stanzas without borders](#), p12). It uses the very medium which many of the imprisoned Chinese writers have used to express their views and highlights the importance of translation in conveying ideas from one language to another.

The Sydney PEN Voices: 3 Writers Project has been the major focus of Sydney PEN's work to promote literature and highlight the important role writers play in fostering public debate on key issues. Launched in 2007, with the support of CAL, the project enables us to commission three talented writers to write a major essay on an issue facing contemporary Australia, present a public lecture on the subject and discuss it with a prominent commentator.

The first series featured Christos Tsiolkas on tolerance, Gideon Haigh on prejudice and Alexis Wright on fear. The collection of essays has just been published by Allen & Unwin,

with an introduction by J.M. Coetzee ([Who do you think we are?](#), p32).

We are delighted to announce that the 2008 Sydney PEN Voices series will feature Christopher Kremmer on greed, Melissa Lucashenko on survival and Anna Funder on courage. This year, we will be extending the lecture series to Canberra, in collaboration with Manning Clark House and with CAL's support.

Another highlight of Sydney PEN's work has been our campaign to have a PEN empty chair, representing a writer silenced because of their work, prominently displayed at all sessions of major writers festivals and literary. As Ashley Hay writes, ([Deep-seated ideals](#), p20) it is an important symbol of solidarity with writers denied the freedoms that we enjoy.

Sydney PEN's work depends on people like you. We thank you for your continuing support and urge you to help us spread the word.

– Mara Moustafine

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2020: a vision splendid

BY Ben Saul

AN AMBITIOUS PLAN TO HOST A NATIONAL CONVERSATION OF 1,000 POLICY MINDS WAS BOUND TO ATTRACT SNIPING FROM SCEPTICS.



For some, evil, ignorance, stupidity or self-interest lurk behind any extraordinary government initiative, and optimism in the capacity of government to do good has long been banished to distant recesses. Predictable pre-judgments of the 2020 Summit emerged long before it began: it would be a Labor love-in, stacked with left-wingers, plagued by too many delegates meeting for too little time, tarnished by an agenda manipulated by the government, ultimately rubber-stamping the Rudd agenda.

My experience of the 2020 summit as a member of the foreign policy panel (pithily named “Australia’s future security and prosperity in a rapidly changing region and world”) confounded all of these expectations. A profound energy, good will and public spirit pervaded the weekend, with fellow delegates prepared to listen respectfully to one another, frankly exchange their views, and work collaboratively to reach common recommendations for new policy outcomes.

While some people were disgruntled that their ideas were not taken up, in my view the Summit provided a fair process for summiteers to make their case for a good idea and seek others’ support for it. The Summit

was not an opportunity for each summiteer to rule Australia by decree.

As an international lawyer, ideas important to me fortunately attracted support: Australia should participate in strengthening global governance, including by reasserting the international rule of law and the importance of international institutions, all of which were badly damaged by the unilateralist tendencies of US President Bush and his “deputy sheriff” in Asia, former Prime Minister Howard.

These broad aspirational goals were fleshed out by concrete steps, such as encouraging Australia to ratify key human rights treaties (relating to women, torture, disabilities, and economic/social/cultural rights), play a stronger role in arms control and nuclear disarmament, and support the United Nations human rights bodies, among others. Since Prime Minister Rudd had also asked us to come up with at least one no/low cost policy idea, we recommended repudiating the illegal Bush Doctrine of pre-emptive self-defence (supported by Howard), which had undermined security in our region by making our Asian neighbours deeply suspicious.

The Government ministers who

co-chaired the panels appeared genuinely committed to the process. There was none of the arrogance which plagued the dying years of the Howard Government. The hallmark of Rudd’s ministers was a quiet modesty, a spirit of empathy for the vulnerable, and a sense that this was a government made up of approachable, ordinary human beings shorn of any sense of entitlement. The Prime Minister himself quietly circulated from panel to panel, listening carefully, but also contributing important insights to our own small sub-stream on global governance.

What could have been done differently? First, dial down the celebrities. The presence of Cate Blanchett, Hugh Jackman and other stars was a double-edged sword. On one hand, they guaranteed more media coverage than 1,000 ordinary punters would have. It is also not beyond belief that celebrities might have some good ideas. But the media was more fixated on Blanchett’s new baby than on coverage of policy ideas.

Secondly, cut out the well-known opinion-makers, ideologues and polemicists. Journalists and commentators already enjoy a platform for their opinions, and bringing them to 2020 provided further opportunity to embed stale views and perpetuate the droll, simplistic left/right warfare which obsesses columnists. That is not to suggest that new ideas cannot emanate from old warhorses, or to diminish the contributions they have made. But there comes a time when it

is reasonable to expect those people to remain quiet for a single weekend – not least to open up space for new (or softer) voices.

Thirdly, for all the slick stage management of the weekend, the limited time could have been better managed. On Sunday morning, an agonisingly dull multimedia presentation, based on soft-focus interviews with Australians living abroad, wasted much precious time. As a result, we had around 45 minutes to negotiate and finalise all of our substantive recommendations, and frame them in acceptable language, for the whole weekend’s deliberations. Not surprisingly, people got frazzled; important things were left out; unimportant things were left in; and the final texts were often inelegantly expressed.

These criticisms are trivial when stacked against the Summit’s achievements. In sifting through the recommendations, the Government will accept some, modify some, and reject others, and that process will be one important measure of success. But it is a cause for optimism that the Summit has opened up a new form of political deliberation, where one no longer need be a major donor to a political party, a CEO, trade union leader, NGO or lobbyist to meaningfully participate in our national political dialogue.

Dr Ben Saul is the director of the Sydney Centre for International Law at Sydney University, and a member of the Sydney PEN committee.

chinese whispers

BY Yiyan Wang

THE HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IS LITTERED WITH THE BLOOD AND TEARS OF WRITERS THE PARTY DID NOT LIKE.



There are many writers in prison in China; no one is certain of the exact number, what they wrote or how damaging their writings are seen to be by the Chinese Communist Party state.

Shi Tao is one example, and the recent sentencing of Hu Jia in Beijing to three and a half years' imprisonment and one year's deprivation of political rights is another instance of such political suppression. But, at the same time, Hu Jia's case is an example of the changed style in political suppression of the Chinese Party-state. It is a public show deliberately orchestrated by the authorities.

Hu Jia was convicted in an open trial in the People's Court and the authorities not only allowed his lawyer to defend him but also permitted his family to protest in public. Journalists were also permitted to take photographs and to spread the word worldwide. The government could have avoided the whole fuss by simply making Hu Jia disappear, leaving people to guess about his whereabouts. In fact, that is what the Public Security Bureau originally did to Hu Jia a few months previously.

Why did the government choose such trouble in this particular case?

In cyberspace there are many kinds of responses and explanations, ranging from passionate outrage at the injustice suffered by Hu Jia and his family to scandalous suspicions of Hu Jia being funded by the CIA. I am sure Chinese authorities knew this would happen, and it is exactly what they would want and expect.

Sentencing Hu Jia is a public performance, and a statement that enables the government to claim credit in more ways than one. It shows that the government is behaving in a law-abiding way, however hypocritical the Chinese judicial system is in the eyes of its critics. It is a warning to those who dare to challenge the state's power, especially with the Olympics fast approaching. It also says that the government is prepared to suppress political dissent, in particular the dissent of those who may gain support from outside China and who want to take advantage of the Olympics. In other words, the government is "killing the chicken to scare the monkeys", as the Chinese proverb goes.

However a question remains central: what has Hu Jia done to achieve such a heroic/villain status? His problem with the authorities is

not that he writes and publishes his political opinions but that he campaigns for human rights and picks fights with the government on a number of thorny issues, such as the aids epidemic in rural Henan, official corruption, environmental protection, freedom of speech. His case is one demanding a particular type of freedom of speech: the freedom of political dissent. That distinction is important because it determines which writers the Chinese authorities choose to persecute and how.

Here, history may throw some light on our way of understanding the matter, as is often the case with China. The Chinese state has historically had a habit of taking writers very seriously. This habit dates back to at least around 220 BCE, when the first emperor, who, as soon as he established the first Chinese dynasty, burnt books and buried writers, intellectuals, and political dissidents alive in order to establish 'the truth'.

From that history of such totalitarian practice, a special term emerged – *wenziyu* – the imprisonment of writing. In the modern era, regardless of the political ideology of



Hu Jia is currently serving a three-and-a-half-year sentence for "inciting subversion of state power".

those in power, the Chinese state has remained hostile to those who write.

The Nationalists in Taiwan shared with their Communist enemy the habit of persecuting writers and banning books until as recently as 1980. The government in Taiwan stopped persecuting political dissidents when democracy eventually emerged on the island.

On the mainland, the Chinese Communist Party started persecuting writers in the early 1940s when it was still a guerrilla force in the mountains of northwest China. It continued with the practice after it came to power in 1949. For a long time, until the 1980s, writing was politicised to the extent that not

THE DESPOTIC SYSTEM'S ROAD TO SURVIVAL

IS TO ENDLESSLY DEVOUR PEOPLE.

HU JIA

*cited during his trial as evidence
of "fabrication of rumour and slander".*

Hu Jia was charged on January 30, 2008 with "inciting subversion of state power". The Beijing First Intermediate People's Court cited five articles he wrote and published online and two interviews he gave to foreign media. Witnesses and other evidence were used merely to establish that he wrote the articles, published them online and participated in the interviews. No other evidence was cited. Hu Jia was sentenced to three and a half years in jail and an additional year's deprivation of political rights. He is one of 41 writers imprisoned in China identified by PEN.

only what one wrote but how one wrote was prescribed by the state. For several decades, no deviation or subversion of content or style was allowed, let alone the slightest hint of political dissent. Whenever words were put on paper, it only served one purpose: to sing in praise of the glory of the Party and its leader.

All emotions were forced into loving the revolution, the Party and the great leader. Consequently, writing as an act became either cowardly or heroic, because one either wrote to please or to be defiant. In between these two choices, the third way was to go 'underground', namely to write and circulate writings among the like-minded behind closed doors.

Many changes have taken place in recent decades. On the one hand, the Communist Party-state has become more 'tolerant'. Although it continues with political suppression, it has allowed the publishing industry to boom. Censorship administered by the Party state has changed drastically. It has become increasingly difficult for the government to have total control of what people write in different media, thanks to the rapid pace of globalisation and the advances in technology. As well, the Party

seems to have realised that writings do not really challenge its rule, as long as organised political activities are still under control.

In recent years, suppression has become much more subtle. China has stopped persecuting writers who have produced literary works that have been banned. Jia Pingwa (*Abandoned Capital*), Zhou Weihui (*Shanghai Baby*), Yan Lianke (*Serve the People*), for instance, remain free and able to continue to publish their work, although those above-mentioned novels are banned. The authorities place more attention on those who are seen as a threat to the legitimacy of the government. The writers in jail are political dissidents, advocating political changes. After all, it is the authorities' own power and destiny that are at stake.

Dr Yiyan Wang is Senior Lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Sydney, where she teaches Chinese literature, culture and cinema. She is the author of Narrating China: Jia Pingwa and His Fictional World (Routledge 2006).

stanzas without borders

BY Chip Rolley



On May 2, the Olympic Torch Relay arrived in Hong Kong to begin its three-month journey through every province of China toward Beijing in August. It had already travelled through Europe, North and South America, Africa, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, Australia and East Asia to get there.

And every step of the way, “a bit of poetry,” as one blogger put it, has been “doggedly chasing after [it] all across the world.”

That “bit of poetry” is “June” a short poem by the imprisoned Chinese journalist and poet Shi Tao, which has been virtually travelling around the world via the International PEN Poem Relay website www.penpoemrelay.org, a web-based campaign calling for free expression in China.

“June” roughly follows the route of the Olympic Torch (though with many more “stops”). As the poem reaches a new destination – usually a PEN centre – it is published in the languages arranged by that centre. Visitors can read the poem in the new language, hear a recording of it, and via YouTube video sometimes even see it performed in their native language. The campaign has been or-

ganised by the Sydney, Swiss German and Independent Chinese PEN Centres with programming and designing of the website provided by Sydney PEN’s website sponsor BarNet.

We were hoping it might be translated into about 60 languages. At the time of writing, we had reached 95. And in this Olympic year of world records, Drew Campbell, a member of Scottish PEN, has applied on our behalf for entry into the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

Of course record-breaking was not our goal. Rather, we wanted to raise our concerns about freedom of expression in China, not in a hectoring or abusive manner, but in a peaceful and non-confrontational way that showed our respect for Chinese culture and for literature in general – the concern that is the foundation of PEN’s advocacy for writers and freedom of expression around the world.

China has more writers in prison than any other country in the world. We wanted to open a little window: to use a writer’s words to rescue the humanity of that writer, so often buried behind statistics or lost in translation.

We knew the Olympics provided an opportunity, but also knew that confrontation and calls for a boy-

June
by Shi Tao

My whole life

Will never get past “June”
June, when my heart died
When my poetry died
When my lover

Died in romance’s pool of blood

June, the scorching sun burns open my skin
Revealing the true nature of my wound

June, the fish swims out of the blood-red sea
Towards another place to hibernate

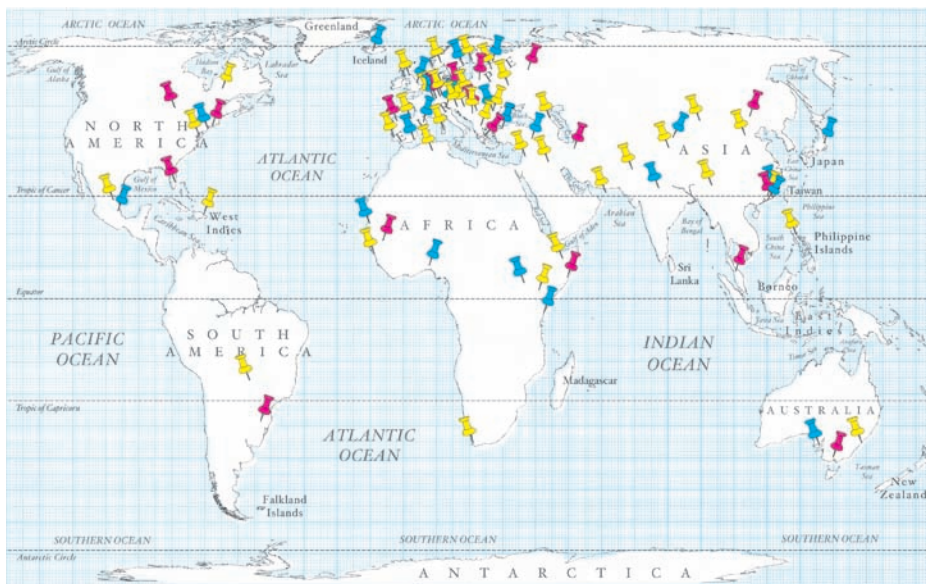
June, the earth shifts, the rivers fall silent
Piled up letters unable to be delivered to the dead

六月
師濤

所有的日子

都繞不過“六月”
六月，我的心臟死了
我的詩歌死了
我的戀人
也死在浪漫的血泊裏

六月，烈日燒開皮膚
露出傷口的真相
六月，魚兒離開血紅的海水
游向另一處冬眠之地
六月，大地變形、河流無聲
成堆的信劄已無法送到死者手中



"June" has circled the globe and been translated into 90 languages.

cott would be counter-productive. Instead, we wanted to softly awaken people's hearts to the concerns and emotions that often lie at the core of their writing life.

Shi Tao's poem came to us like a gift. I had been living in Shanghai in 2005 when he was sentenced to prison. Zhang Yu, a colleague from Independent Chinese PEN, gave me a sheaf of Shi Tao's poems, most of which were written around the time he sent the fateful email that ended him up in prison.

Shi Tao's words were quiet and meditative, but they burned with pain underneath the surface. Just a few lines captured so many facets of the China I was beginning to know,

the China that was seeping into my consciousness – the need to search for truth beneath the surface; the patience required for aspirations that must lie in hibernation; the bureaucracy that counts the dead in piles of letters.

Was the fish swimming "toward another place to hibernate" another example of China's fatalism, which so often cloaks despair? Or did it hold a hope that one day that hibernation would end?

I translated "Liu Yue" or "June" for a flier for Sydney PEN to pass out at an event. I sent my translation to the three Swiss PENs and soon there were versions in French, Italian and German. The poem moved people. They responded. Whether it had the same effect on them as it had on me I couldn't know, but soon PEN centres and other organisations included readings of it in their programs.

It had, as they say, legs. Kristin Schnider of Swiss German PEN and I only half joked that it would be great to translate the poem into as many of the world's languages as possible.

The thought tugged at me. "June" was opening up that window on the living writer behind the statistic of the "writer in prison". Soon I had the idea of combining the opportunity presented by the Olympics with the poem from a Chinese writer that we knew was moving people. We would use the Olympic Torch Relay as a model and a website as the engine to create an ongoing performance of the poem in different languages. The

translation of the poem would be visually enacted on the website using a map of the world. The poem would become a meme, propagating itself, carrying its message across borders, in and out of languages and cultures.

The task before us was daunting. At its core, our idea was simple – ask PEN centres to translate this poem into their local languages – but it needed a website that did not yet exist. How to describe it to people? There were issues of copyright – the poet's and the translators'. And there were communication difficulties. PEN is necessarily a multilingual environment, which, in addition to reminding me at every turn of my narrow, Anglo-centric upbringing, compounds the number of emails and phone calls required to successfully communicate what you need.

Finally, there was the obstacle every PEN project faces: centres largely run on a voluntary basis and few interested funders. (Whether due to skittishness about offending China, discomfort with a program not focused on Australian culture or disinterest in a project involving poetry and translation, in every application for funding the PEN Poem Relay failed.)

If it weren't for BarNet, a communications management company serving barristers, the idea would have remained in the abstract. Michael Green, the barrister who founded BarNet, instantly understood what we were trying to do. He and programmer Jack Moggach met

the technical challenges and Jack programmed the website, while their colleague Gail Fulton ensured we honoured and protected copyright.

Even so, if it weren't for Kristin's persistence and faith in the idea, I would have dropped it long before we started. She travelled to the PEN Congress in Senegal last year and presented it to PEN centres, signing up the majority of them to participate. Later, she and I split the world roughly in half and started emailing and phoning PEN centres to get them to send in translation texts and recordings, and copyright permissions.

The Basque translation and recording came in almost immediately, and from then on there was a slow but steady build. Translations to major languages, such as Spanish, German, Japanese, and Russian arrived, but also to Tamazight, Gascon, Cree, Guarani, and Afar.

Translations came in from centres only recently established in cultures torn by war: an Arabic version from the Iraq Centre and a Pashto translation from the Afghan Centre.

There was a translation to Uyghur, the people and language in Xinjiang

in northwest China and, on the eve of the protests and military crackdown in Tibet, a translation to Tibetan.

We discovered that this project became a powerful act of solidarity – from poets and translators around the world with Shi Tao and the 40 other writers and journalists imprisoned in China. Included in the relay is a translation to Haitian Creole by Georges Anglade, himself a political prisoner under the Duvalier regime in Haiti and twice forced into exile. The Spanish translation arranged by the Cuban Writers in Exile Centre based in Miami is read by Angel Cuadra, who was a political prisoner in Cuba for 15 years.

Sydney PEN's Hugo Bowne-Anderson arranged translations into Indigenous languages Arrernte and Darug, while members of Adelaide PEN connected the relay with the work reviving Indigenous languages there. Visitors to the website can hear the poem in Adnyamathanha, the language and culture of the Flinders Ranges, which has only 20 living fluent speakers, and Ngarindjeri, another South Australian language, which has not been spoken fluently for years.

Buoyed by a group on Facebook and bloggers around the world, the poem has gone "viral". It's been blogged, tweeted, dug and emailed. Renegade translations are popping up on websites all over the world and every step of the way, people have been writing to us to tell us they've been moved to tears by reading and hearing the poem.

Anna Blume, a professor in art history at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York used the poem relay in her classes, each of which has students speaking at least nine languages. "I have rarely seen an 'action' that could so well dovetail in an authentic dialectic with an event like the Olympic Torch campaign," she wrote in an email. "Hearing this poem in so many languages all at once, some of us spontaneously started to cry."

The relay allowed a student discussion about poetry, freedom of expression and human rights. "I could see that it meant a great deal to them to be able to feel something about a series of events and the global crisis of human rights that they hear about, are bombarded with, but rarely can, in their bodies and minds, connect to."

I was moved by so many moments in this project. Richard Greenthun, whose performance of his translation to Darrug, the main Indigenous language grouping in Sydney, says there is no word for June in Darug. Instead he translates it as "the coldest month", opening up a new understanding of the harsh cruelty of those events in 1989 in Beijing.

In Lugosa, one of the languages of Uganda, the word for June, Namwendwa, also means "adored" or "beloved", as it is the month after the crop harvest when family and friends visit to exchange gifts.

I had been exhilarated by the urgency of the recitation in Catalan, the rolling rhythm of Emile Martel's reading in French, and the lilting music of recitations in Kyrgyz and Pashto. And the translation to Afar moved me to tears: when I received Saleh Mohamed Hassan's audio file from Djibouti, I realised, perhaps for the first time, what had been accomplished with this project.

Hassan's translation to Afar is interlaced with a plaintive, softly sung refrain that places Shi Tao's Chinese meditation on the June 4 massacre in



Shi Tao.

In 2004, Shi Tao attended an editorial meeting of the Contemporary Commerce News, where a document was read out from the Chinese Communist Party with instructions for the media during the upcoming 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests. Shi Tao emailed his notes about the document to foreign websites offering Chinese news and information, who published his notes. He was convicted of “revealing state secrets abroad” and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Shi Tao wrote “June”, a meditation on the 1989 protests and massacre, on June 9, 2004. He is due for release in 2014.

the culture, rhythm and music of the Horn of Africa. As the *Guardian's* Books Blog put it, ours was a “virtual torch of freedom of expression, crossing continents on fibre-optic threads and microwaves” – the same threads and waves that carried Shi Tao's fateful email and allowed his jailor to track him down. When I heard it in Afar, I realised how, through the labour of poets, translators, organisers, computer programmers and lawyers, Shi Tao's poem transcended his prison walls and travelled across language, culture and place – and how many people he had moved through his words.

Chip Rolley is a life member of Sydney PEN. Visit www.penpoemrelay.org to read, hear and see the poem read in different languages around the world.

BY Hugo Bowne-Anderson

When the PEN Poem Relay hit Sydney's shores, Shi Tao's “June” had already appeared in many languages. In Sydney, it appeared in video for the first time, in English, in French, in Spanish, and also in Darug, one of the Indigenous language groups of the Sydney basin. Richard Greenthun's translation into Darug, filmed with Richard performing his translation in almost speaking-song accompanied by his own percussion, is nothing short of mesmerising. We also managed to obtain a translation by Veronica Dobson into Arrernte, the language of Indigenous clans in central Australia around Alice Springs. I made contact with Veronica via a string of tenuous connections with folk embedded in various remote communities. We spoke on the telephone once. We then communicated by post, initially a shock to someone who has been able to get in touch with almost everybody by email for so long.

This was one of the post relationships which worked out. Attempting to find a Pintupi translation, I ended up in strained communication with a chap on a remote station in central Australia via a PO box in Alice, which eventually returned most of the mail



Richard Greenthun.

sent, including a dictaphone intended for recording purposes.

In addition to Arrernte and Darug, Adelaide PEN obtained translations into Adnyamathanha, the language of the Flinders Ranges in South Australia, which has around 20 fluent living speakers, and Ngarrindjeri, the language of 18 lakinyerar (clans) of the Lower Murray, Lakes and Corong region of southern South Australia. All these projects allow people around the world greater access to Australia's indigenous languages.

Through the Poem Relay, PEN has shared with the world an accessibility to language worldwide, integrated into a system that not only supports and encourages freedom of speech, but also asserts the very necessity of that basic human right.

Hugo Bowne-Anderson is a member of the Sydney PEN young writers.

deep-seated ideals

BY Ashley Hay

IMAGINE AN EMPTY CHAIR, IN THE MIDDLE OF A ROOM, MAYBE A STAGE.



It's a symmetrical object, lines and angles as distinct as if they'd been drawn straight onto the space it occupies. There's a light above it, casting thick shadows, and accentuating the fact that its seat is unoccupied. It might be a wooden chair, like something Van Gogh painted; a metal chair, like something you'd find in a church hall: or plastic, as if it belonged more in a garden, or a design catalogue, or a meeting room with vertical blinds and stale air. Someone is just coming; someone has just gone. Someone nearby is keeping a seat for someone who's late, but will they come? An empty chair can spark myriad stories and interpretations.

In the Jewish tradition, an empty chair is set at the Seder table during Passover. Originally said to represent Elijah the Prophet, its resonance morphed through recent history to acknowledge instead those persecuted in the Holocaust, then those persecuted in Soviet Russia, then those persecuted in Iran and Iraq. In another belief system, when Lech Walesa was imprisoned during the 1980s, an empty chair was placed at the many American colleges and universities that wanted to honour him

during his detention – and an empty chair was placed in his own home church, outside Gdansk. In the cold and stony space of tombstone iconography, an empty chair represents mortality; in Gestalt therapy, it's a persona of yours with whom you want to have a conversation. And in modern art, as one curator's "quick and noncomprehensive inventory" demonstrates, an empty chair leads you out from Van Gogh towards the illusory Magritte and his floating chair, the "lonely" chair of Giacometti, the disturbed chairs of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg – all the way to the power of Andy Warhol's famous electric chairs.

For PEN organisations around the world, the empty chair has taken up another load of representation or memory. The origins of the gesture are a little indistinct, but when the London office of International PEN nominated November 15 as the day of the imprisoned writer back in 1980, an empty chair was placed at each event to specify one writer who could not be present that day because they'd been threatened, detained or imprisoned, they'd disappeared, or, in some cases, they'd been killed – as a result of their work

ILLUSTRATION – SOUMALICHTAMRONG





Ashley Hay is a member of the PEN committee. She has written four non-fiction books, and is finishing her first novel.

with words. Then, in the 1990s, PEN Canada began to include the empty chair at writers' festivals and other literary events; Sydney PEN – with Canada's permission – organised an empty chair at a session of the 2001 Sydney Writers' Festival to protest the detention of Ivory Coast writer Cheikh Kone at Port Hedland.

But it was during Simon Clews' tenure as director of the Melbourne Writers' Festival (MWF) that an Australian arm of PEN undertook its most ambitious empty chair project. In the late 1990s, Melbourne PEN organised for an empty chair to be placed at each session of that year's festival, and for the writer honoured by each chair to be particularly matched to the panel and

its topic – as if, as Melbourne PEN president Arnold Zable says, “they were another potential guest for the session.” Melbourne PEN and MWF continued their association, “and we ended up taking quite a theatrical approach,” says Zable, “setting the chair slightly apart on the stage and lighting it with a red spot. It was a very effective gesture; it was very moving. And we always included our introductory statement about the chairs in the program, so that people would know what we were doing.” By 2006, there were empty chairs at all 114 of the festival's events.

At the Sydney Writers' Festival in 2007, empty chairs featured in the full program for the first time – a gesture made even more poignant by the murder of renowned Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya just months after she'd been a guest and participant on the Sydney PEN panel at the previous year's festival.

In the wake of the organisational success of that series of chairs, Sydney PEN resolved to try to incorporate the project into as many Australian writers' festivals as possible, approaching writers from the Sydney PEN Advisory Panel, the Sydney PEN membership, and others involved in sessions particularly congruent with PEN's charter and its concerns to read a short explanatory statement and one writer's biography at the beginning of festival engagements around the country. Thanks to writers including Victoria Glendinning (Brisbane Writers' Fes-

THE SILENCING
OF WRITERS
IN ONE COUNTRY
SILENCES US ALL,

BECAUSE IT
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AS READERS,
AS WELL AS
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AS WRITERS.

SALMAN RUSHDIE

tival), Nicholas Jose (Watermark Literary Muster), Maureen Freely (Perth Writers' Festival), Geraldine Brooks, David Malouf, Lian Hearn and Gideon Haigh (Adelaide Writers' Week), and Helen Garner, Gail Jones, Dorothy Porter and Anita Heiss (Wordstorm, Darwin), audiences have heard just a little about one writer's ongoing struggle for freedom of expression in countries from Turkey to China, Russia to Burma, and beyond.

This year, at the PEN World Voices Festival of International Literature, held in New York in April, Salman Rushdie introduced an evening of readings by writers including Michael Ondaatje and Annie Proulx with an observation that the audience would perhaps have noticed "an empty chair on the stage. We've put this chair here to represent artists around the world who have been robbed of their rights to freedom from expression, and who are prevented from doing what we're doing now, prevented from talking to their readers, prevented from practising their craft without fear of persecution; writers we were not able to invite because they were not able to come. It is a reminder that the silencing of writers in one country silences us all – because it denies us of our rights as readers, as well as their rights as writers."

The project's momentum keeps growing. The chairs have been incorporated in other readings and panels

– such as Ian McEwan's event at the Sydney Opera House in March, and Paul Auster's and Siri Hustvedt's conversation at the Sydney Theatre that same month. Some festivals focus on writers in particular countries; last year's Watermark Literary Muster fell just after a series of anti-government protests and the subsequent crackdown in Burma, and their chairs honoured Burmese writers including Ko Moe Htun, editor of the religious magazine Dhamma-Yate who is serving a three-year sentence for taking illegal photographs of Burma's capital, and Zeya Aung, serving a 19-year sentence for his role in the production and distribution of an anti-government poem. This year's PEN World Voices events in New York focused on a campaign to have more than three dozen writers and journalists released from Chinese jails before the Olympics – "roughly 100 days from now," said Rushdie at the time. And current MWF director Rosemary Cameron has just agreed to "institutionalise" the practice of setting an extra place, as Zable puts it, at all her festival events this year.

When Sydney PEN approached Byron Bay Writers' Festival director Jeni Caffin about including the chair in her events, she also asked for different biographies for every session. "It means," she said, "that we'll need something in the order of 90." Unfortunately, providing enough information to satisfy those kinds of numbers isn't a problem. The latest

Sydney PEN caselist, now managed by the Sydney PEN Writers' in Prison and Young Writers' committees, features 61 different cases from 12 different countries. At the headquarters of International PEN in London, its Writers in Prison Committee now monitors more than a thousand attacks on "writers, journalists, editors, poets, publishers and others" each year. Its latest caselist, covering July-December 2007, features information on 139 of the 1009 cases that came to its attention that year.

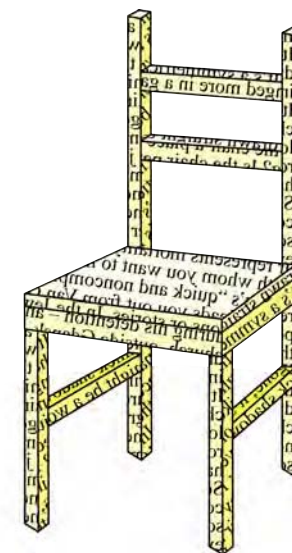
"Among them are 55 writers and journalists killed in 2007, a shockingly high figure, almost double the figure for previous years. While it is not always possible to be completely sure that the killings were directly linked to the victims' writings, it is clear that at least 18 were deliberately targeted ... [The] most dangerous place of all to be in 2007 was Iraq where 21 print journalists were murdered alongside more working in the broadcast media."

On the other side of the ledger, 94 people were recorded as having been released.

Empty chairs provide a simple but stark reminder of those who can't be where we are, and can't be doing what we're doing. In seeking to incorporate them into the conversation and stimulation that readers seek from festival programs, panel discussions, and other literary events, the project hopes not only to raise awareness of the plight of writers in other countries, but also to give pause for

thought about the space in which writers – and readers – are able to co-exist in this part of the world.

David Malouf, a member of Sydney PEN's Writers' Advisory Panel, explains it this way: "as a writer who has the freedom to write without fear or constraint and for whom silence is a choice, I would feel ashamed if I did not speak up for a writer anywhere on whom silence is enforced with all the terrible machinery of the state."



Byron Bay Writers' Festival, July 25-27; Melbourne Writers' Festival, August 22-31. For the most recent caselist of writers, go to the Writers in Prison section of the International PEN site: www.internationalpen.org.uk

found in translation

BY Sally Blakeney

THE WORK OF TRANSLATORS OFFERS A WINDOW INTO COUNTRIES WHERE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IS THREATENED, SUCH AS TURKEY.



Maureen Freely is a leading member of English PEN. Her work as a translator, most notably of the Nobel Prize-winning Turkish writer, Orhan Pamuk, has contributed to the sharing of human thought across languages and around the world. In her own writing she has sought to enlarge the English-speaking world's understanding of Turkish culture and politics, whilst making us aware of the countless threats to freedom of expression in Turkey that rarely make it into newspapers in the West.

Maureen was born in New Jersey in the United States and moved to Istanbul with her family in 1960, when she was eight. She learnt Turkish at 15 whilst attending an English language lycee for Turkish girls, completed her studies at Harvard in 1974, and has lived in England since 1984. Maureen is a regular contributor to the *Guardian*, the *Observer* and the *Sunday Times*, and is the author of three works of non-fiction and six novels, the most recent of which is *Enlightenment*.

Maureen Freely



The Canadian writer and PEN member, Margaret Atwood, has called Orhan Pamuk's novel, *Snow*, "essential reading for our times". What made you decide you wanted to translate this book, the first of four you've now translated?

Orhan and I have been friends for a long time. We went to brother and sister schools in Istanbul in the 1960s, though I knew Orhan's brother a lot better in those days. Then we all went our separate ways, until I happened onto a copy of *The White Castle* in 1990. I knew I had read a masterpiece, and because I came from the world it illuminated I was doubly moved and impressed. During the years that followed, we became proper friends, and from time to time he asked me for literary advice. One day he asked me if I might consider translating *Snow*. I was horrified, because I am not a professional translator. I learned Turkish first by listening to my friends and later by reading many books very slowly with a dictionary my constant companion, so I carry all the flaws and anxieties of the self-taught. But I longed to find a way to bring the music of Orhan's Turkish



Orhan Pamuk

into English – to cast that same spell in English. So I said yes.

What makes *Snow* "essential reading for our times"?

Its first virtue is that it is true to its roots. It is a thoroughly and unapologetically Turkish book, so much so that when I first read it, I wondered how anyone who did not already know Turkey could begin to understand it. It takes everything that has gone wrong in Turkish politics over the past fifty years and arranges for that same endgame to play itself out in a remote and impoverished border city, during a blizzard, in the space of three days.

It is essential reading for our times because it resonates. Its endgame echoes so many others.

When I was translating *Snow*, Britain and the US were just about to invade Iraq. Those who supported the invasion spoke about wanting to "give" that country democracy. Everytime I heard someone say that, I felt like giving them *Snow* to read. I wanted them to understand how

power works in countries excluded by the privileged West, and how the West looks from the outside.

Why did the Turkish press attack you for your role in bringing Pamuk's work to the attention of the English speaking world?

If you ask me, I've had a very easy ride. My friends in Turkey have had to deal with death threats, court cases, daily attacks in the press, and a steady stream of disinformation. Many are now under 24-hour police guard, and it is not something they have a choice about. It is the state that decides. Though most still speak openly about subjects that might lead to further prosecution, they must choose their battles very carefully.

Whereas I am free to speak. I've only been attacked in the press once. This was a very odd article in early 2006 in which they implied I was a "super-agent" whom Orhan had hired in his bid to win the Nobel Prize. It claimed that I had organised a secret meeting for him in Brazil, so that he could meet and hatch unholy plans with my most successful student, Salman Rushdie. Well, obviously, Salman was never my student. The three of us did spend time together at a Brazilian literature festival, but that is because we've all known each other for years.

Laugh if you like. But stories like this are very effective with the Turkish public. Most people in the

country now believe that Orhan and the other 301 defendants are traitors who sold their country to Europe to advance their careers.

What is Article 301 and how has it been used against Pamuk and other writers?

Article 301 of Turkey's new penal code allows for the prosecution of anyone deemed to have denigrated Turkishness or state institutions. It was recently amended, so that the investigation of this crime can only be carried out upon the permission of the Minister of Justice. It is unlikely that this will make life easier. The problem lies in the judiciary, which sees itself as representing the interests of the state, not the individual. There are, in any event, up to twenty laws and articles in the new penal code that severely limit free expression.

Orhan Pamuk was prosecuted by Kemal Kerincsiz of the Grand Union of Jurists. He went on to prosecute Elif Shafak and many of the other leading 301 defendants. He is himself now under investigation in the Ergenekon affair. He and his colleagues initiated the 301 prosecutions primarily to publicise themselves and their political views. Each time there was a trial, they went on television to denounce the defendants as traitors and pawns of the West who should be 'silenced' and to promote their virulent mistrust of the EU. It is one of the most successful publicity campaigns I have ever witnessed

In your latest novel, *Enlightenment*, "M", an American journalist, goes to Istanbul to investigate events leading to her former Turkish lover's arrest in the United States as a terrorist. M's attempts to establish the truth are thwarted by "the deep state". What is "the deep state"?

I would define it as a powerful elite operating inside the state: ultra-nationalist in its ambitions, fascist in its ideology, and linked with organised crime. Wherever it sees Ataturk's legacy under threat – be it from Islam, Kurdish separation, or the democracy movement – it will do whatever it deems necessary to protect the state and crush its enemies.

But that's just my view of things. If you ask people who are close to the political establishment, they are more likely to tell you that the deep state is "sloppy journalism". There's a grain of truth in this. Wherever facts are hard to come by, conspiracy theories thrive. Turkey is one of those places. But every once in a while, a covert operation backfires and the deep state leaves its fingerprints.

In the early months of this year, more than thirty members of Ergenekon, a state-sponsored terrorist group allegedly responsible for many outrages over the past few years – including the murder of a Catholic priest, a high court judge, and Hrant Dink – were arrested. Ergenekon was also (allegedly) planning to stage several false

flag terrorist incidents and assassinate several politicians, journalists, and writers, with a view to creating fear and panic, thus softening up the public for a coup in 2009. Their next victim was to have been Orhan Pamuk. They had even hired his assassin and chosen the restaurant in which they would kill him.

Why was Hrant Dink, the editor of *Argos*, a Turkish-Armenian weekly newspaper, murdered in January last year?

Dink was murdered because he wouldn't be silenced. All efforts to intimidate him had failed. Dink was not well known abroad, except in certain circles, and this makes me wonder if he was assumed to be a low-cost target. My guess is that whoever killed him did not expect the huge surge of outrage that followed his assassination.

Since his death, he's become famous in the West as the Turkish-Armenian who wanted the genocide to be acknowledged. In Turkey, he was known and loved as a democrat who wanted all of Turkey's peoples to live together in peace.

What attempt has been made to bring those responsible for his assassination to justice?

The case drags on. Dink's lawyers have complained that essential documents have been excluded. But there are also the "friends of Hrant Dink" who are still busy compiling

the twists and turns of the cover-up. On the first anniversary of his death, they organised vigils and lectures and concerts and exhibits to honour his memory and his ideals. These were well attended, despite large numbers of sharp shooters, riot police, police photographers, and spooky men in dark glasses. The more the authorities drag their feet, the more Dink's death signifies.

The Turkish government uses lengthy trials with hearings dragging out for years as an alternative to prison. What is the psychological and financial toll for those involved?

It's the psychological toll that's the worst, but because there is a long tradition of these lengthy trials, there are also traditions for dealing with them. Friends work hard to look after each other, to keep each other's spirits up. There is a lot of black humour. There has to be! And people bide their time. They might not feel free to express their views openly right now, but that makes it all the more important for them to express them privately, amongst friends. So all the most interesting conversations are behind closed doors. An-

other time-honoured tradition.

The report of the Freedom to Publish Committee of the Turkish Publishers Association says translators are prosecuted in Turkey. How important is the translator's role?

The Turkish penal code allows for the prosecution of people like me, people who take Turkish into English, but it is the translators who take works from other languages into Turkish who get prosecuted. State control on information is not what it was – it has been greatly weakened by changes in communications and information technology. There are, in addition, more than four hundred active independent publishers in Turkey, and many of them are wholly committed to bringing in ideas and histories previously marked taboo by the Turkish state. The translators most likely to be prosecuted are those whose names are on books that challenge the official state line on the Armenian genocide, Atatürk, the army, Islam, multiculturalism, late Ottoman and early republican history and the Kurds. We are in the habit of thinking of translators as invisible extras who have no thoughts

of their own, but in countries like Turkey they are part of the big picture. Without them there would be no picture at all.

You have recently completed a report on freedom of expression in Turkey for International PEN. Can you outline your findings?

Islam is not the central issue in Turkey today. The real conflict is between the assorted groups who want Turkey to democratise and those who want it to return to its old authoritarian ways. There are Islamists and secularists on both sides of this divide, and this is one reason why contemporary Turkey is so very hard to read from the outside.

But it's also hard to read from the inside. Most media outlets have political affiliations, and some do not hesitate to spread panic when it is deemed politically expedient. The secular-authoritarian wing of the media has done a great deal over the past few years to convince the secular bourgeoisie that the ruling Islamist party is only interested in EU entry because EU entry will weaken the army, thereby allowing them to "reach Iran by the back door". These papers have offered very little to sub-

stantiate that claim, but they have won the argument, at least with Turkey's secularist bourgeoisie, in much the same way that Bush convinced the American people that there was a link between Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. The old secular elites now believe that the Islamist threat is so great that the army must step in to stop it.

The courts (traditionally the army's best friends) have now begun proceedings to ban the ruling party. If this goes through, and all predictions are that it will, a democratically elected government with a 70 percent majority will be deposed by judicial coup.

When the proceedings began, the ruling party's leaders claimed that the AKP was being punished for getting too close to the truth in the Ergenekon enquiry. A news blackout has made it impossible to follow this second story closely, but as the judicial coup approaches, this could change. It is impossible to know how the power struggle will play itself out. But this is the game to watch.

To read Freely's report on Turkey, visit www.internationalpen.org.uk

who do you think we are?

BY J.M. Coetzee

THERE ARE TWO WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT HOW THE BENEVOLENT STATE SHOULD BEHAVE TOWARDS SOCIAL MINORITIES,



particularly those of its minorities with distinctive cultural and religious practices. One is that it should treat them even-handedly but distantly, stepping forward to protect them only when they come under threat. Such treatment would constitute tolerance at the lower, minimal end of the scale; 'mere' tolerance. The second way is more utopian: that in the name of tolerance the state should lead the way in encouraging respect for minority practices and generally celebrate the social diversity in its midst.

To advocates of tolerance of the second type, among whom Christos Tsiolkas clearly numbers himself, people who prefer the first type are resorting to a fine-sounding concept to cloak a desire to conserve the status quo, which is more often than not an unjust status quo. Tolerance, as Tsiolkas reminds us, is a Western concept, with a long history behind it of lessons learned from religious persecution and the resistance to persecution. Is it therefore a vain enterprise to seek to foster habits of tolerance in other parts of the world?

Let us consider the case of Africa. Most African countries are diverse

in respect of ethnicity and culture; some are even diverse in respect of religion. In most African countries the apparatus of state control is quite limited. Though principles of tolerance may be written into their Western-style constitutions, the actual exercise of tolerance depends on the temperature on the ground. When the temperature rises too high, violence may break out – murderous violence even, of the kind that we have recently seen in Kenya.

What is striking, however, is that such intercommunal violence is rare. Most of the time people of different backgrounds get on with one another, or get on well enough for practical purposes, considering how little social control there is from above, considering in particular how little policing there is of ethnic stereotyping, ethnic jokes and ethnic prejudices – in other words, how little policing there is of what people think and feel and say about 'the Other'.

What the case of Africa suggests is that, pace Hobbes, the unpoliced or barely policed state does not have to be a locus of war by all against all. In practice it tends to be something messier and more complicated: a theatre in which people of different

origins and beliefs live side by side, if not harmoniously then harmoniously enough except rarely, when everything goes to pieces and they slaughter one another.

If the rather mixed, home-grown African version of tolerance I describe has any relevance to the wider world, then the lesson would seem to be that it is sufficient, most of the time, for the state to keep out of the picture and let people get on with their tolerant or mainly tolerant lives; but on the other hand that when trouble does flare up, it would be a good idea if the state had enough policing power in reserve to save lives and restore order.

Life in the big immigrant cities of the world suggests a similar lesson. New York and Chicago in the early twentieth century, São Paulo and Cairo and Calcutta in our own times, have attracted immigrants of diverse backgrounds from far and wide. We cannot say that in these cities diversity has been joyfully celebrated. On the contrary, people have tended to cluster in ethnic enclaves and practise intermittent low-level warfare ('gang warfare') one against another. Yet, on balance, big cities are places of peace rather than war, where de facto tolerance is practised, enforced to some degree from above in the name not of virtue but merely of social order.

The aspect of tolerance that particularly concerns writers is of course free speech, and particularly freedom to express unpopular or mi-

nority opinions. When unpopular or minority opinions include, for example, the denial of things that really happened (the attempt to eradicate the Jews in Europe, the attempt to eradicate the Armenians in Turkey), or so-called hate speech, or calls to violent jihad against the West, the ideal of free speech is sorely tested.

Here opponents of carte blanche freedom are wont to distinguish between speech as the expression of ideas and speech as a form of action, as in a call to violence. This neat-sounding distinction is of course spurious, as Tsiolkas shows. One man's celebration of the suburban idyll is another man's call for the perpetuation of the status quo, no matter what the cost.

Tsiolkas identifies himself as a supporter of "radical tolerance". It is to be doubted whether many members of PEN would want to differ from him. But we should be clear about what such a position entails. It means opposition to imposed, top-down official history such as we find in Germany, to give one instance. It means opposition to the shutting down of militant Islamist websites. It may even mean opposition to the clamp-down on paedophilic images.

We must tolerate free expression, Tsiolkas argues, because in the absence of dissent a society stagnates. "This extremely blasphemous position of the outsider embodied in the always dissenting, always



J.M. Coetzee is a novelist and winner of the 2003 Nobel prize for literature.

tolerant role of the artist – a romantic concept, yes, an impossible concept, yes, a dangerous concept, yes – is essential to political and social emancipation.”

To the question of whether a society is better or worse off, in the long run, for denying free expression to those in its midst whom it regards as extreme, beyond the pale, history does not give a clear answer. So if we are going to espouse radical tolerance, it cannot be because radical tolerance has been demonstrated to yield good consequences. The example of African laissez-faire may again be relevant: what you gain in freedom from the policing of expression you may lose in the occasional pogrom.

Aside from the handy historical account that he gives of the concepts of nationalism and patriotism, Gideon Haigh's essay is notable

for its intriguing diagnosis of the malaise of the Howard years, namely as a bout of national narcissism encouraged for his own ends by a politician exquisitely attuned to the deeper mood of the electorate, “perhaps the ideal therapist for countrymen desperate to think well of themselves”, prepared to exploit the affinities between narcissism as a state of the soul and nationalism as a communal tendency.

Haigh quotes the anthropologist Ernest Gellner: “In a nationalist age, societies worship themselves brazenly and openly, spurning ... camouflage”, then goes on to link Gellner's observation with cults of memorialisation, in the celebration of ANZAC Day in particular, and hostility towards immigrant communities. He quotes Freud: “It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love ... so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness.”

Haigh takes his diagnosis of national self-absorption further, pointing out that narcissism is sometimes a way of shutting out uncomfortable feelings – in the case of white Australia, uncomfortable, undying feelings of shame attendant on the settlement and conquest of the continent. “There could hardly be a better description of the new Australian nationalism, circa 2007: shallow, thick-skinned, sure of itself, aloof from the world's problems, impervious to the suffering

of others—then retracting in angry confusion at the hint of questioning, raging petulantly when crossed, impassioned and empurpled about ‘their’ country.”

In Alexis Wright's analysis, at the bottom of much that is wrong with today's Australia lies fear. Not only has mutual fear been an ever-present factor in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, it still lies heavy on the soul of the nation.

How has fear done its dark work? First, Wright says, over the course of many years self-doubt and timorousness have been fostered among Indigenous people; whether wittingly – by ‘spell-casters’ – or not makes no difference. “You would have to be stupid not to see that Aboriginal people are suffering injury from a profound sense of betrayal by the governments of this country. This betrayal has developed a fearfulness of White Australia that has been handed down the generations.” The effect has been one of spiritual paralysis. Only when this paralysis is cured will the creative and liberating dreaming among Aboriginal people be resumed.

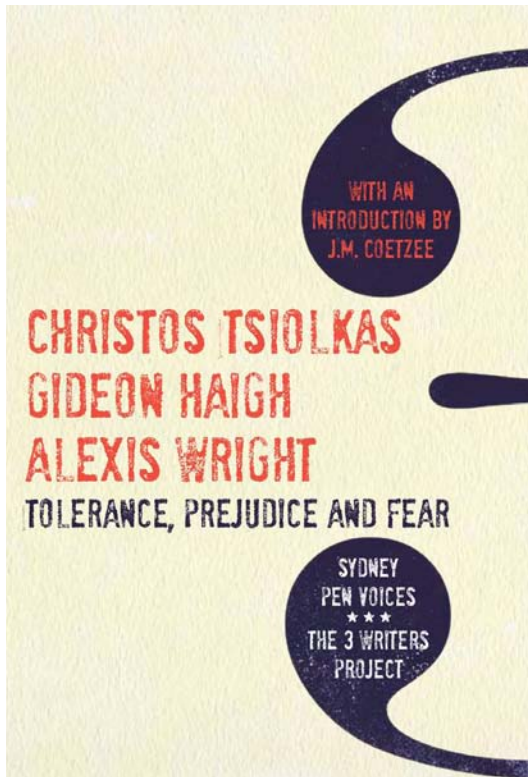
But in fact, she continues, fear afflicts all Australians. Far from being the lucky country, Australia is, in Manning Clark's words, “the Frightened Country”. On the guilty fearfulness of the settler, passed down from generation to generation, John Howard played so successfully,

making what might have been a time of prosperity and the generous sharing of prosperity across the nation into a time of self-absorbed anxiety.

Not that the anxieties of the nation are mere phantasms. The world that our children and grandchildren will inherit, says Wright, will look very different from our own. Our children and grandchildren will need writers of a new stripe, “writers closely tied to the countless millions on earth who have always lived with far less and have experienced far more fear than the great majority of Australians”.

The writer whom Wright singles out as a model for the future, particularly for what he has to say about the place of fear in the modern psyche – and not just the prosperous Western psyche – is Orhan Pamuk. Pamuk shows that “the hard work ahead of the world's independent writers” will consist in going deep into the self, to “the place where humanity makes thoughts about itself ... When it comes to the question of fear, it is a frightening journey to the place of thought which is in the geography of deep consciousness, and once writers enter this world, they may locate a spectacle of fears that will test their courage to continue describing what they have already seen in themselves.”

All three essays are deeply marked by the times. The Australia they describe is an intolerant, fearful and introverted place. Of the three,



Tolerance, Prejudice and Fear: the Three Writers Project, published this month by Allen and Unwin, \$24.95.

that by Tsiolkas is the most pessimistic. Among the Australian left, says Tsiolkas, “hopelessness, irrelevance and confusion” reign. He makes much of the impact on the left of the collapse of the Soviet empire. “This enormous transformation of history saw an ethics and a politics that defined the passion, suffering, despair and hope for millions of people across the globe disappear, become extinct.”

In this respect there are two consolatory observations worth making. The first is that from as early as 1929 the Soviet Union – not the idea of a Soviet Union but the real Soviet Union – ceased to have much to do with socialism. The second is that Tsiolkas wrote in the after-shadow of the Howard years. Whether the Rudd years will prove less gloomy for the left has yet to be seen. What is undeniable is that, as of the time of the present writing, the mood of hopelessness he describes has palpably lifted; a future again seems possible.

This article is the preface to Tolerance, Prejudice and Fear. PEN's next 3 Writers Project will feature Christopher Kremmer on greed, Melissa Lucasbenko on survival and Anna Funder on courage.

WHAT YOU
GAIN IN
FREEDOM
FROM THE
POLICING OF
EXPRESSION

YOU MAY
LOSE IN THE
OCCASIONAL
POGROM.

J.M. COETZEE

on punching and poetry

BY Merv Lilley

I'M SITTING ON AN ANCIENT WRITING CHAIR, ALL ALONE –
A WILD, SAVAGE BEAST, SCARCELY AWARE OF WHERE I AM.



It's five thirty am. Don't know the date. Dorothy Hewett, my companion for forty-odd years, is in hospital alone, facing extinction, her most dreaded fear. So much poetry and prose to write, every word of it wanted desperately by publishers and readers, grim death hanging in there saying "finished, finish up now, you have done it all now", through what health you have had, your rich innocent childlike personality has been expressed through the milk of genius you don't really know about having.

When all is said and done you think it may not be good enough, these small things you were writing, when you could sit there and write sixteen hours a day, babbling to yourself, absently accepting a cup of tea, almost without noticing, saying "Thank you, how does this sound? Do you think it's just silly? Is it really alright?"

I say, "Yes, alright. Good." You say "Did you hear what I said? Were you listening?" "I was listening." You say "I suppose you were thinking of what you said to some girl." I say, "that's what you've just put down" and so on or nothing, you writing on and on.

Now cancer cells voraciously eating below your left shoulder, district nurses and I dressing the wound from the deep knife cuts, draining, healing, too fast the nurses think. And yes, it breaks out after four months or so, and is it more cancer? 'Fraid so.

You are back in Westmead Private, where scans will tell the story today; you went in an ambulance yesterday, you vomited all the way. I was feverish with flu, could not drive you, you thought you wouldn't be able to get in our LTD, your crook knees wouldn't bend enough. But I'm bringing you home today in the LTD. I'm sweating with fever, but I'm plenty strong. I was cutting cane in this condition; last time was forty-four years ago. Finished the year wool pressing, saw every man in one shed laid down with flu. But we all got up to work again – and today I'll do the same.

I'm writing twelve months later, another article for another journal, my heart still breaking. I'm dreaming the same sort of dreams Dorothy dreamt up till the day she died; running, running, running through the countryside. I'm still automatically planning that previous future

life while I sit here this winter by the fire, where I will surely be the next winters the way the Gods are looking after me. She is immortal in our atheist chosen mortality, and I will be making efforts to keep us that way, where God is not invited in out of the cold.

I'm remembering a poem I once wrote about an incident when she and I visited Augusta, WA with the children, decades ago.

*If they should leap beneath the waves
with wild child laughter
and become mermaids where we gather
the beautiful stones of Augusta
will they come back once when lonely
and embrace us with such love
that we will cease to pace the sands forever
and be immortal too.*

I was born in Rockhampton in 1919. I've been a rural worker, freelance journalist, stockman, drover, rough-

Merv Lilley, in dark shirt at back, with Dorothy Hewett, at front, on their wedding day in February, 1960.



rider, agitator, soldier, cane-cutter, wool-presser, communist electoral director. Shipped out as fireman on coastal shipping 1950, married 9th. February, 1960 to Dorothy Hewett, poet, playwright, novelist, university lecturer; helped raise three step-sons, two daughters, Katherine and Rozanna both with doctorates in their subjects, teachers in English and Anthropology respectively.

I wrote lyrics for the bush music club in Sydney through the fifties, was disowned by the communist party after the Khrushchev Stalinist revelations at the twentieth Congress of the CPSU, having become a revisionist by literary repute for reading the document and commenting on our own leadership in like manner.

At 88 I'm still ready to punch it out with those still living. It was said in the forties that Ambrose Palmer would have cried with joy to have my left hand in his gymnasium.

Still, age does not obliterate our gifts, particularly if the brain has been preserved. It does not accept punishment willingly. I had enough nous to work that out in 1946, while right side of head was aching behind right ear for six weeks from one punch from a boxer four stone heavier than me. My gym associates should not have put a twelve stone cane-cutter boy in there with a sixteen-stone man. I was plenty fast, but failed to move my head sideways just then.

I was a carer for the ailing great Australian writer Dorothy Hewett for forty-two years. Her plaque is to

be found between those of Judith Wright and Jessie Street at Circular Quay. I'm certain I was lucky to have had the honour of being of assistance to the cause of literature in the manner told, while there were pretenders all about in the offing, looking for notoriety and literary knowledge by association with her, declaring their great 'love' for her, but particularly for themselves as robbers, one a cheque forger, all trying to replace me to get a full hand, four aces and the joker.

She left us in August 2002.

We weep and have gone on. She understood this. We have always known and believed about this becoming part of the earth, our universe.

No boxing, thanks. And for those who want to disagree with me we'll step out where the bulls bellow and snort fire, as I still want to do. A few love me for it – as she did in the dear gone days not quite beyond recall.

Merv Lilley is a poet and essayist. He is currently working on his autobiography.

FOR THOSE
WHO WANT
TO DISAGREE
WITH ME

WE'LL STEP
OUT WHERE
THE BULLS
BELLOW

MERV LILLEY

geraldine brooks

BY Jeffrey Errington

THE BESTSELLING JOURNALIST AND NOVELIST TALKS ABOUT WHAT THE FREEDOM TO WRITE MEANS TO HER.



You are a member of the Sydney PEN writers advisory panel. How important is freedom of expression to your work?

It is fundamental. Having been lucky enough to grow up in an environment of free expression it is impossible to say whether I would have the guts to have been a writer or reporter in a repressive regime. I like to hope so. But the least I can do is to add my small brick to the wall of supporting that shores up the tenuous freedoms of those who write amid risk.

Have you ever been exposed to the absence of this freedom?

Yes. Working as a reporter in the Mideast and Africa one is always aware that being detained is a risk. (I got the Mideast job because my predecessor was detained by the Iranians.) But western reporters have a certain amount of protection. Even lying on the concrete floor in Port Harcourt, I was reasonably confident someone would get me out.

What about the time you spent with Kurdish separatists?

My reporting in the Kurdish areas of Iraq during the brief uprising that followed the first Gulf War

was the best and the worst experience of my working life. When I got there, rowed clandestinely across the Tigris by a Pesh Merga guerilla, I witnessed the exhilaration of people seizing freedom for the first time in many decades. At last, Kurds could speak openly about what had happened at Halbja, they could free their family members from Saddam's torture cells – I saw evidence that first week of brutalities that beggared the imagination. It seemed to me I was doing the kind of journalism that one should be doing – bearing witness to a moment in an oppressed people's history.

You moved from your non-fiction to historical novels set across a wide historical canvas. What is your interest in these diverse historical episodes?

I'm not so much interested in particular historical episodes as I am in exploring how humans react to, and are changed by, catastrophe. Plague, war, exile, dispossession – for me it's not a matter of saying this happened or that happened as much as trying to say, if this happened, here's how it might have felt, here is how this woman or man might have reacted.

the power of many

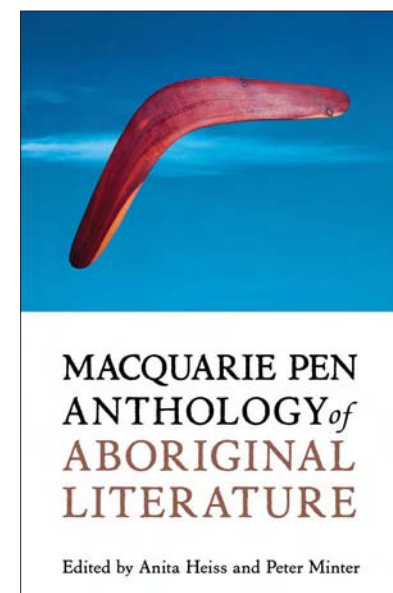
AN ANTHOLOGY OF ABORIGINAL WRITING FROM WHITE SETTLEMENT UNTIL TODAY HAD A LONG GESTATION.

In 2003, the former president and vice president of Sydney PEN – Nicholas Jose and Mary Cunnane – realised that many works by Australia's most important writers were out of print or otherwise inaccessible, and conceived a plan to remedy this. On May 7 this year, the first part of this plan was achieved, with the launch of the *Macquarie PEN Aboriginal Anthology* by Hetti Perkins, curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

The anthology's editors – writer, poet, activist, social commentator, academic and Sydney PEN member Anita Heiss and poet and scholar Peter Minter – have selected texts from Bennelong's 1796 letter through to contemporary creative writers.

The anthology includes journalism and political letters from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as an assortment of the many works that reflect the blossoming of Aboriginal poetry, prose and drama. As Mick Dodson wrote in the collection's foreword: "This volume is extremely significant from an indigenous cultural perspective, containing many works that afford the reader a treasured insight into the indigenous cultural world of Australia."

"I was flabbergasted to discover that there hadn't been a collection of Aboriginal work that covered the last 200 years of Aboriginal experience," said Mara Moustafine, outgoing president of Sydney PEN. "We are very proud and honoured to be associated with the anthology."



Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature, published this month by Allen and Unwin, \$39.95.

Mona Brand 1915–2007

Australian playwright Mona Brand was educated in Rockhampton and Sydney. She completed her first play, *Here Under Heaven*, in 1948.

Having worked in Europe and Vietnam after the Second World War, Brand married fellow writer and activist Len Fox in 1955, and both were involved with the NSW Australian-Aboriginal Fellowship and its contribution to the campaign that led to the 1967 referendum against formal discrimination towards Aborigines.

Her plays addressed topics such as poverty, race, Indochina and juvenile delinquency. One, *Strangers in the Land*, the story of a young white woman in British-controlled Malaya, was banned in England for fear of causing a breach of the peace.

Brand was often regarded as a playwright ahead of her time. Speaking to Lynn Gailey in 1995, she said that this wasn't the case – as a member of the Communist Party, which she had joined in 1947 she was “amongst a whole group of people who were ahead of their time, I was just one of them.” ASIO assembled a 379-page file on her life which she was able to read in 2002.

An outspoken woman, she commented in a *Sydney Morning Herald* interview ahead of her 90th birthday in 2005 that she “didn't want to push ideas down people's throats, but of course I suppose it worked that way.”

She was amused by the idea of

herself as some kind of “political attack dog”. “I must admit that I do most of my thinking sitting down and either knitting or darning socks,” she said. “Although darning socks has gone out of style, hasn't it?” – *Ashley Hay*

Eric Rolls 1923–2007

Sydney PEN mourns the death of Eric Rolls, writer, poet, and long-time farmer-philosopher of this country – and a past supporter of PEN and of other initiatives devoted to freedom of expression, including the Index on Censorship.

Involved up until the last with the Watermark Literary Muster at Camden Haven (Rolls was its patron), he was hugely supportive of the inclusion of empty chairs at the opening of each of its daily sessions in the 2007 program.

Coming so soon after last September's unrest and suppression in Burma, Watermark chose to highlight the plight of Burmese writers with these chairs. The Muster ran October 1–6 last year; Eric passed away less than a month later.

His work included *Sojourners* and its sequel, *Citizens*, which considered China's centuries-long relationship with Australia, and *A Million Wild Acres*, his classic description of the passions and obsessions that focussed on the settlement – and evolution – of one piece of this land, that was hailed as his masterpiece. – *Ashley Hay*

Vincent Serventy 1916–2007

Serventy was green before greenery became fashionable. He did not wear shoes until he was 11, “running wild through the bush like a brumby”. Honoured in 1996 for having fought for the environment for 50 years, he was still fighting in his 91st year, writing to the *Herald*, for example, on the horrors of whaling.

Serventy enlisted the written word and the moving picture for his many and varied battles. He wrote, or co-wrote, more than 70 books, including the acclaimed *A Continent in Danger*.

Serventy's first conservation fight was against a plan to build a swimming pool in Kings Park, Perth. The conservationists won. He was in the Great Victoria Desert in 1956, watching budgerigars drinking from a waterhole when a falcon plucked out one bird and tore it to pieces. Serventy bought a movie camera and made a documentary film, which led to *Nature Walkabout*, Australia's first television environment program.

With his wife, Carol, he campaigned relentlessly for public access to the Sydney Harbour foreshores and for the koala, wombat and shark. He railed against soil degradation, the rabbits, foxes and feral cats that kill Australian wildlife and the erosion of wetlands. His *Easy Guide to Green Living* (1990) was not just about what to put in the shopping trolley but a way of looking at the planet and the way we live, including a section on “How to protest”. – *Tony Stephens*

Andrea Stretton 1952–2007

Sydney PEN mourns the passing of Andrea Stretton, arts journalist, broadcaster and long-time supporter of this organisation. Hailed by novelist and essayist Gerard Windsor as “a guardian angel of Australian literary culture”, Stretton was the face of the ABC-TV's *Sunday Afternoon* and SBS-TV's *The Book Show* and *Masterpiece*.

A regular interlocutor at festivals and other literary events, Stretton was also an active member of Sydney PEN for many years. She organised and hosted a powerful “Day of the Imprisoned Writer” event for Sydney PEN at Gleebooks in 2003, themed around the idea of barbed wire.

Speaking at the time of her death in November last year, Sydney PEN writers' advisory panel member David Malouf paid tribute to the affection she inspired in writers: “she made them feel good. Not by telling them how good they were but by making them believe that so long as there were readers out there who cared as much as she did, and responded with so much sympathy, then the best sort of writing was possible.”

Tributes to Andrea from other PEN members can be read on the Sydney PEN website. – *Ashley Hay*



last word

BY Julian Morrow

For some years, PEN has been encouraging members to write to the President of China seeking the release of writer Nurehamet Yasin, who is currently serving a 10-year sentence for “inciting Uighur separatism” in his short story “Wild Pigeon”. Correspondence from PEN members is often ignored by the Chinese authorities, so one member was surprised to receive a reply.



HIS EXCELLENCY HU JINTAO
PRESIDENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
PARAMOUNT LEADER OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA
CHAIRMAN OF THE MILITARY COMMISSION; STATE COUNCIL
BEIJING 100032 PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Dear Julian

Thank you for your letter in relation to Mr Nurehamet Yasin. I do appreciate it when people take the time to write to me. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding, but as you can imagine I have been rather busy. You may have noticed from my letterhead that as well as being President, I'm also the Paramount Leader, General Secretary of the Communist Party and Chairman of the Military Commission, all of which makes it quite difficult to keep on top of my personal correspondence. As we say on the State Council, China doesn't just rule itself you know.

But I am sorry it has taken so long to reply to you. When it comes to human rights I do think it is important, as a matter of courtesy, that requests such as yours are declined in a timely manner. I do hope you will forgive my tardiness.

In a way, it's a good thing I have

no intention of releasing Mr Yasin, since that would have made my dawdling even more annoying.

I must admit that before your letter I was not personally aware of Mr Yasin's circumstances. We have so many inmates that, as I'm sure you can appreciate, it is simply not practical for me to keep abreast of each individual's circumstances. Your letter did however prompt me to make some inquiries, and I regret to say that in my view Mr Yasin's conviction for inciting Uighur separatism was totally proper.

To be honest, the fact that you have requested Mr Yasin's release makes me rather suspect that you are not actually familiar with his work. I mean, have you actually read “Wild Pigeon”? This is just a personal opinion, but I think it's dreadful. In particular, the whole pigeon metaphor is very tortured. If that's what freedom of expression is all about, no thanks!

(By the way, if you haven't read it, there's a copy of “Wild Pigeon” at: www.rfa.org/english/uyghur/wild_pigeon-20050627.html?searchterm=None. Please don't say you got that link from me. If I.T. finds out there's no filter on my internet browser I'll be in all sorts of trouble.)

So unfortunately I can't help you or Mr Yasin in this instance. I trust you'll understand. Now that we've got the formalities out of the way though, I'm happy to answer your other questions. Thanks for asking after the family by the way; most of the letters I receive are only about work.

Liu is getting on well. She sends her regards. Sometimes she finds being First Lady a bit dull. But I keep telling her that her work is important to promoting the core Socialist moral system. She made me promise that if she keeps all her appointments next month I'll get her the DVD of *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. Which is fine: I'm quite keen to see it myself. And put it this way: when my wife has a taste for pirated DVDs, I'm certainly President of the right country!

I keep joking with Liu that after I retire, we should become China's Clintons and she could run for President. She says she's far more electable than Hillary. I think she's got a point.

Haifeng's business career is going from strength to strength. It still annoys me that people say he only got to be President of Nutech because he's my son. I think it worries him too. But I told him to speak to

Deng's daughter and Jiang Zemin's son. They got the same nepotism crap with their companies.

As for Haiqing, she had her third wedding anniversary just recently. When she and Daniel first got together I did think it wasn't a great look for the daughter of a socialist President to marry a venture capitalist, but no-one really seems to mind now. Besides, the way Daniel's shares are performing on the Nasdaq, at least I can be confident my daughter won't be a drain on the Communist state in her old age.

The only thing I wish is that one of them would give us our first grandchild soon. I keep saying to Liu, “For everyone else in China the one-child policy is a limit, but for our kids we'll have to make it a goal!”

Anyway, I had better get back to work now. Things are rather busy coming up to the Olympics.

Thanks again for writing. I enjoyed receiving your letter, even if you were a bit critical of my government. It's a good thing you're not a Chinese citizen! But I do hope we can continue this correspondence. I find letter writing very satisfying. Everything I write at work is very dry and formal. It's great to have an outlet where I can express myself like this. I hope you will write again soon.

Yours in socialism

Hu

Julian Morrow is a member of the Chaser team, a member of PEN, and a pen pal of Robert Mugabe.

2007-2008



Donations – Thank you to: Karma Abraham, Willy Bach, Judith Barbour, Wendy Birman, Sally Blakeney, Neal Blewett, Merlinda Bobis, Emily Booker, David Bowman, James Bradley, Geraldine Brooks, Denise Buchanan, Alex Byrne, Sue Chessbrough,

Raewyn Connell, Bryce Courtenay, Jennifer Craig, Rowena Danziger AM, Maureen De Vallance Taylor, Bob Debus, Carol Dettmann, Anne Deveson AO, Joan Dugdale, Virginia Duigan, John & Robyn Durack, Gillian Elliott, Suzanne Falkiner, Anna Fienberg, Anna Fienberg, Linda Clare Funnell, Neilma Gantner, Helen Garner, Vivienne Glance, David Goodman, Katherine Gordon, Sherry Gregory, Catherine Harris, Janet Harrow, Penelope Harvey, Libby Hathorn, Ashley Hay, Anita Heiss, Myfanwy Horne, Kerry Hudson, John Hyde Page, Jacqueline Isles, Nicholas Jose, Vasso Kalamaras, Thomas Kenneally AO, Josephine Key, Anna Kumrich, Merv Lilley, Susan Magarey, Emily Maguire, Anne McCallum, Treesje McKeown, Rhyll McMaster, Alex Miller, Jane Morgan, Di Morrissey, Julian Morrow, Gaby Naher, Andrea Nield, Anne O'Donovan, Debra Oswald, Michelle Peake, Marjorie Pizer, Matthew Ricketson, Claire Roberts, Gillian Rubinstein, Fariba Salehzadeh, Virginia Spate,

Elizabeth Stead, Meg Stewart, Joy Storie, Veronica Sumegi, Daniela Torsh, Daniel Tu-Hoa, Hilary Vallance, Sue Walsh, Clare Waters, Elizabeth Anne Webby, Janet West, Susan Wyndham.

& to new members, Jessica Adams, Lee Andresen, Wendy Ashton, Adil Aziz, Judith Barbour, Merlinda Bobis, Veronica Brady, Bernadette Brennan, Michelle Cahill, Sue Chessbrough, Murray Cox, Jennifer Craig, Rowena Danziger AM, Mary Justine de Merindol, Josephine De Rossi, Jo Dey, Christopher Dusseldorp, Gillian Elliott, Paul Goldman, Katherine Gordon, Sherry Gregory, Sue Hackett, Gideon Haigh, Sandra Hall, Catherine Harris, Janet Harrow, Libby Hathorn, Myfanwy Horne, Kerry Hudson, Annette Hughes, John Hyde Page, Andrew Jakubowicz, Vasso Kalamaras, Phillip Keir, Boris Kelly, Sarah Key, Virginia Lloyd, Annemarie Lopez, Gail MacCallum, Walter Mason, Anne McCallum, Rhyll McMaster, Lise Mellor, Alex Miller, Peter Moss, Peter Murphy, Lenore Nicklin, Sylvia Petter, Annette Robinson, Rebecca Senescall, Gretchen Shirm, Judith Smith, Shelley Steel, Lynne Talmont, Christos Tsiolkas, Daniel Tu-Hoa, Annice Vass, Colette Vella, Margaret West, Sean Williams and Julian Wood.



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We acknowledge with thanks the generous grant from The Scully Fund in February 2007 and the ongoing generous support of Dr Gene Sherman and Brian Sherman AM. Thanks to James Henningham for kindly facilitating the 2007 strategic planning workshop.

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