



sydney
PEN

sydney pen magazine



WHERE EAGLES DARE

**The writers risking their lives
to fight Russia's dark heart.**



_____ Frank Moorhouse: children in art

_____ Patrick Cook: the lighter side of suppression

_____ Peter Goldsworthy: a poet's job in the age of terror

_____ Antony Loewenstein: passion and peril on planet blog



contents

4	3 VOICES
	Anna Funder <i>on courage</i>
	Christopher Kremmer <i>on greed</i>
	Melissa Lucashenko <i>on survival</i>
12	RAISING THE BAR
	Sara Whyatt
	<i>How writing a letter can change the world</i>
16	SHROUD OF DARKNESS
	Gaby Naher
	<i>An eyewitness view behind the new iron curtain</i>
21	NEWS
22	THE PETER PRINCIPLE
	Geordie Williamson
	<i>Peter Goldsworthy on fiction in a time of terror</i>
26	SUFFER THE CHILDREN
	Frank Moorhouse
	<i>Fatal flaws in the children and art protocols</i>

32	LECTURING THE LECTURERS
	Ben Saul
	<i>Threats to academic freedom</i>
34	MEDIA MONITORS
	Antony Loewenstein
	<i>Answering back in the new millennium</i>
38	THE FINE ART OF SUBVERSIVE CONVERSATION
	Gillian Serisier
	<i>A theatrical form winning hearts and minds</i>
42	STEPPING OFF AT EL DORADO
	Judith Rodriguez
	<i>PEN's 74th world congress</i>
46	LAST WORD
	Patrick Cook
	<i>Shakespeare's dirty language hides real filth: politics</i>
48	DONATIONS & MEMBERS



president's letter



'Individual courage is necessary for the existence of a democracy,' writes Anna Funder in an extract from her lecture ([Courage](#), page 4), presented this month as the third and final instalment in Sydney PEN's Voices: 3 Writers series for 2008.

Funder is writing about Russian writer Anna Politkovskaya, a chilling recent example of an individual willing to pay an enormous personal cost in pursuit of intellectual freedom.

The contraction of freedom in Russia and its abandonment of democracy is a theme of this issue of the Sydney PEN Magazine.

Our new Writers in Prison committee Chair, Gaby Naher, vividly recounts five days in September 2007, when she and her family were living in Moscow, that led to the election – and automatic immunity from potential extradition – of Andrei Lugovoi, widely suspected of the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko in London ([Shroud of darkness](#), p16).

The tension between intellectual freedom and censorship has been palpable in 2008, whether it is in Moscow, Beijing, or much closer to home. Sydney PEN raised concerns about the Senate's current inquiry

into academic freedom in Australian schools and universities, and made a submission that urged further protection of academic freedom from political interference. An adapted extract of the submission – largely written by Dr Ben Saul, Vice-President of Sydney PEN and director of the Sydney Centre for International Law at the University of Sydney – is reproduced on page 32 ([Lecturing the lecturers](#)).

While too many writers around the world face harassment, detention, imprisonment and even death, it would be remiss not to note here the welcome news of the successful release of 94 imprisoned writers over the past year. These wins are hard-fought outcomes of advocacy by PEN members around the world, coordinated and led by the Writers in Prison Committee at International PEN headquarters in London ([Raising the bar](#), p12), and the direct outcome of your support through membership and donations. (More details can be found in the report from the Bogota Congress of International PEN, [Stepping off at El Dorado](#), p42.)

Also in this issue are extracts from the other two essays that make up this year's Voices: 3 Writers series: [Greed](#),

by Christopher Kremmer (p8), and [Survival](#) by Melissa Lucashenko (p10). Allen & Unwin, a strong supporter of Sydney PEN, will publish these together with Anna Funder's essay as a single volume in 2009.

Sydney PEN is grateful to Copyright Agency Limited for its generous support of the 3 Writers series and of the magazine you are now reading.

In the context of democracy and individual courage, perhaps the last words should come from Brazilian writer Augusto Boal, who created the Theatre of the Oppressed and who was arrested in 1971 for 'cultural activism' ([The fine art of subversive conversation](#), p38):

'It is important to have clear our aim of liberation, emancipation: it is by fighting oppression in whatever form it appears that we will help to humanize Humanity. Our work has this truly civilizational essence; some barbarians want to keep societies as oppressive as they have always been, they want progress only in technology and profits, not in human rights. We, definitely, do not. We are democrats.'

– Virginia Lloyd

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courage

BY Anna Funder

COURAGE INVOLVES FACING DOWN FEAR:
WITHOUT FEAR ONE IS JUST RECKLESS, OR MAD.



Five months before her assassination in 2006, journalist Anna Politkovskaya was in Sydney for the Writers' Festival, and I went to see her there. She was direct and eloquent.

She answered questions about Russia and Chechnya, about Putin's assumption of dictatorial power and the abandonment of the fledgling democracy of the '90s in Russia. She did not, like so many writers, indulge in gestures of faux self-deprecation

to draw the conversation back to herself.

At the end came a question from the audience. The man said he admired her being so valiant, but he wanted to know what the personal price was that she paid (for living under the immediate threat of death).

Anna smiled. She said, 'Traditionally in Russia we do not talk about such things.'

The audience chuckled at her

deflection. She paused and then became, for the first time in the session, self-conscious. It was as if what she had to say was, to the extent it was about herself, almost too grandiose or self-regarding to be said with a straight face.

She drew breath. She said, 'Because the price does not matter. It does not matter compared to the cause you are trying to serve.'

She then turned the conversation

immediately to her children. 'But of course for many years my family hasn't been leading a normal life,' she said. 'There are threats to my life,' – she listed them almost as if bored to be speaking of herself again – 'I was arrested. I was poisoned. Or I had to go and negotiate during a terrorist act. When I was called to negotiate in that theatre event [the Nort-Ost siege in 2002] I got a phone call from my son who was almost screaming

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Anna Politkovskaya

– he was saying “You are going to say no! We demand you say no!”

‘My family probably suffers even more than I do,’ she continued. ‘My main concern is that my life, this situation, goes on top of the lives of my family like a bulldozer. They say to me: “When you go abroad we are so happy, all of us”.’

By now the audience was laughing again, and she was herself again, deflected. “We are happy because we don’t have to worry whether somebody has put an explosive under your car or whether somebody is standing behind the door.”

What is it that is worth more to a mother than protecting her children from fear, bereavement and, possibly, danger to themselves? Anna’s father is dead, her mother is dying and her days are numbered. For what will she leave these children, and the grandchild coming?

An individual’s dissent can be the price of freedom for the rest of us. The novelist Marilynne Robinson writes that ‘a successful auto-cracy rests on the universal failure of individual courage. A democracy relies on its exercise. I think we would be wise to learn to cherish it in one another.’

Individual courage is necessary for the existence of a democracy because, as Lord Acton famously had it, ‘power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.’

Absolute power is power unchecked – unchecked by a free press

(I mean that as shorthand for intellectual freedom generally), an independent judiciary, the separation of the executive government, the legislature and the law. It is a cycle: absolute power is power unchecked by individuals who, themselves protected by the free press, the independent judiciary and the ballot box can find the courage to say: ‘No – that is going too far.’

It is going too far, for instance, to scapegoat Jews as ‘vermin’. Or, in Australia, it is going too far to slander asylum seekers as ‘illegals’. It is going too far to lock up innocents, including children, in camps in our suburbs and deserts; it is going too far to be able to secretly imprison people by executive fiat; it is going too far to promote fables and lies about weapons of mass destruction and terrorists as a basis for sending us to war and consolidating further power. When the democratic protections are no longer in place (and sometimes when they are) it takes enormous courage for a person to ‘merely report what you have witnessed’.

That these elements – most notably the press and the judiciary, but also academics, the churches, the military even – are separate from and potentially critical of executive government means that they are the disparate guarantors of a potentially free, but also a potentially just society. A society in which there can be a fair fight between competing interests. Or, put another way, one in which the expression and recog-

nition of different needs might, ideally, allow the nurturing and respect of all its different members.

Because a society is a changing, living organism, so too these elements are always shifting in relation to each other, gaining or losing ground. But they do this in an environment which has laws as firm as Newton’s: just as gravity makes things come down, power sucks more of itself to itself. It centralises control like a magnet pulling filings from every direction, like a black hole sucking matter into itself. In order to do this without protest, power must stifle dissent.

I have spent many years examining this phenomenon – the Iron Filing Manoeuvre and the courage of dissenters – from one angle or another. I looked at it in the German Democratic Republic, where power was absolute, centralised and where speaking out against it was dangerous.

I spoke there with people who disagreed profoundly with the need for other voices commenting on and limiting centralized power. These men were, unsurprisingly, members of the ruling party and its security service. They believed that they knew what the people wanted without asking them; in fact they knew better.

They considered democratic freedoms a front for capitalists to have the freedom to buy access to power (control politicians) and to exploit workers. They were not entirely wrong – these are indeed two weaknesses of democracies: think of

Halliburton’s links with the US government; the ethanol producers or media tycoons here; ‘Workchoices’ and neoconservative disregard for a living wage generally.

But while the one-party dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic protected those in power in their uneasy seats, it came at a great human and economic cost; a cost that can be counted in lives ruined, people imprisoned and state bankruptcy.



Anna Funder is the author of Stasiland. This is an edited extract from her 3 Voices lecture, presented in November. A collection of the speeches of Funder, Christopher Kremmer and Melissa Lucasbenko will be published by Allen & Unwin in 2009.

greed

BY Christopher Kremmer

DESPITE HAVING BEEN WITH US ALL OUR LIVES, GREED REMAINS, IN A SENSE, MYSTERIOUS.



In early human hunter-gather societies, the weak clustered around the strong male, whose physical strength and aggressive, possessive behaviour provided food and a kind of protection—as long as you obeyed the strong male. With the coming of agriculture, the food cycle became more predictable and trade in surpluses created mercantile society, with priests, soldiers, farmers, merchants and workers forming the main social classes.

The enduring human concern with fairness has meant that greed is rarely welcomed, but is often tolerated.

Greedy people make things happen. They can enjoy great social esteem – even in the absence of force – if their greed benefits the weaker, but more numerous, members of their tribe, clan or nation. The cult of the provider acknowledges that the boss is a mean bugger, but he's our mean bugger and he shares the spoils of his many victories.

The entrepreneur who creates jobs; the miner who produces export income; even the self-obsessed artist or scientist who is never there for their friends, but whose single-mindedness creates essential cultural product or cures cancer; all are examples of functional greed sanctioned by society.

If the provider can source the surplus he acquires from outside the tribe (in which he is bound by the community consensus on functional greed), then the opportunities for enrichment rise exponentially, while the consequences diminish—except for the victims: those outside the group.

One could argue that modern Australia is a nation created and sustained by greed. Free land, free water, and a freewheeling attitude to the rights of others. It sounds like an El Dorado, but not exactly a recipe for developing sturdy values.

Many of the problems we confront in today's Australia are arguably the legacy of this view of land and people as resources to be endlessly exploited. But are Australians really greedier than other people?

They say charity begins at home. But if you're in need of charity and live in Australia, you might need to look elsewhere.

Occasional heart-warming media reports about acts of astonishing generosity by individual Australians encourage us to feel good about ourselves. Unfortunately, the statistics tell a different story.

A report commissioned by the phil-

anthropic Petre Foundation shows that the total value of charitable donations claimed by individuals as taxation deductions in Australia in 2004-05 was about one and a half billion dollars. For those who gave, that represented an average annual tithing of just 0.33% of taxable income.

But if you average what was given across all taxpayers, including those who gave nothing, it amounts to a minuscule 0.00032% of the average Australian's taxable income. Even allowing for the fact that some donations are not declared or claimed for tax purposes, this suggests that at the height of our national prosperity, we have become a nation of niggards.

But if you really want an accurate picture of Australian greed you need to view it in its global context.

When it comes to helping nations less fortunate than our own, Australia has become the miser of the Western world. How is it that the British, the Irish and French give twice as much as we do as a percentage of national income? Even the Kiwis give more.

We all have concerns about the effectiveness of foreign aid, and should do more to rectify its shortcomings. But if we turn our rich backs on the poor world we will deserve only contempt.

The Howard government's record in this regard was positively shameful. In 2005, it gave \$83 per head of population in foreign aid, a paltry one quarter of one percent of gross national income, and a mere \$7 more than we were giving fifteen years earlier. Pov-

erty campaigner Bob Geldof, a generally affable chap, rightly described us as "pathetic".

To its credit, the Rudd government has begun to turn that shameful performance around, increasing foreign aid by half a billion dollars in its first budget. But we need to stay the course to meet our foreign aid target of 0.7 percent of GDP by 2015, voluntarily agreed under the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.



Christopher Kremmer is a journalist and author of four books on modern Asia, including Inhaling the Mahatma. This is an edited extract from his 3 Voices lecture, presented in July. To watch the full speech, visit www.themonthly.com.au/tm/node/1150.

survival

BY Melissa Lucashenko

IT IS PERFECTLY RATIONAL FOR A NATION OF COAST-DWELLERS
TO BOTH REVERE AND FEAR THE OCEAN.



New South Wales might have been a barren and hungry country to the British who arrived between 1790 and the mid-1800s. But compared to an eight month journey aboard a tiny ship battered by storms and reeking of convict shit and puke, even the bizarre sights of eucalypts and wallabies must have been welcome. For without exception, the early colonists arriving in Australia had faced death on a daily basis long before they set foot on Cadigal soil.

Captain William Hill, commander of the guard in the Second Fleet, wrote about the value placed on his miserable human cargo by the authorities. Many of the Second Fleet's convicts had been deliberately starved to death, he said, because: 'the more they can withhold from the unhappy wretches, the more provisions they have to dispose of at a foreign market, and the earlier in the voyage they die, the longer they can draw the deceased's allowance to themselves.'

These were the immigrant founders of the modern Australian people – the callously corrupt, and the half-dead who had suffered at their hands.

If life ashore was barely tolerable

for the convicts, the soldiers over them were not treated kindly either. Captain Logan's regiment – the society that taught him to be a leader of men – was, horribly, nicknamed the 'steelbacks' from the floggings they were routinely subject to. Little wonder that Logan was to become such a hated commandant of Moreton Bay, later Brisbane. If free men were treated like stray dogs in the new colony, what could convicts, the scum of the earth, expect?

The new colonies allowed only the survival of the strongest, and of the cruellest and most hardened as well. And so the infant Australian nation was raised in a cradle cushioned with the flesh of those who wore the broad arrow.

The early Europeans fought hard to stay alive in the 'new' country. But what about the Indigenous peoples they met, fought with, learned from, lived with, conceived children with, and ultimately displaced?

Aboriginal peoples lived in 1790, as we still do today, in a vast diversity of terrains. The country around Sydney, owned and managed by the Cadigal amongst other peoples, is spectacular, rich in game and, at the point of white

contact, not particularly difficult to live off. Given knowledge conserved over hundreds of generations, and sufficient skilled hunters and gatherers to implement that knowledge, the Cadigal and their neighbours did not struggle to eat or find shelter. Unlike the British, survival was not the ruling theme of Cadigal lives.

A 1997 documentary called *The Human Race* shows a hyper-fit German survival expert and an American ultra-marathoner pitted against a desert Aboriginal man. They journey across the outback in a month-long race to see who can best live off the land while travelling fast on foot. The race is won rather easily by the Aborigine, and we are left with the lesson: even the best-prepared white man can't hope to beat an Aboriginal hunter-gatherer in his own terrain.

For all its romanticising of Aboriginal endurance, *The Human Race* does capture a central theme of traditional life. Non-initiates in Aboriginal tradition were never permitted to marry, and thus could not have children. Since initiation requires both intelligence and physical courage, it follows that both genetically and culturally, the Indigenous Australian nations cultivated men and women of extraordinary abilities for millennia.

Physical toughness still survives as an ideal in Aboriginal communities across the continent. If Australians in general are sports-mad, then Aboriginal Australia is

triply so. This valuing is a direct inheritance of the values promoted by traditional law, where full adulthood requires the public proving of your physical strength and endurance. In some areas of Australia, this physical testing of Aboriginal people is little changed since Cook.

In 'Kularta', the poet Neil Murray writes of an older Aboriginal man receiving a public punishment in a central Australian community. Unlike the young men who 'bawl like a little baby that can't shit any more' when speared, old Jungarrayi took the spear in his thigh:

*That old man never flinched
He plucked that thing out like it was a splinter
And kept on walking.*



Melissa Lucashenko is the author of four novels. This is an edited extract from her 3 Voices lecture, presented in September; watch the complete speech at www.themonthly.com.au/tm/node/1259.

raising the bar

Q&A ^{WITH} Sara Whyatt

THE OLD-FASHIONED ART OF LETTER WRITING
IS NOT DEAD – IN FACT, IT CAN SAVE LIVES.



Sara Whyatt is the Programme Director of International PEN's Writers in Prison Committee, which monitors attacks on writers, journalists, editors, poets, publishers and others, including long prison terms, harassment, threats, and even murder. The team alerts the PEN membership of urgent cases, keeps it abreast of developments on individual cases as well as global trends affecting free expression and gives advice on actions and campaigns. These include protest letters, lobbying governments, and raising public awareness. By writing to families, and, where possible, directly to prisoners, PEN members provide encouragement and hope.

How did you get involved with PEN?

I arrived at Amnesty International in 1984, after a two year stint at a Middle East News Agency and a period working for a documentary TV company working on a series on human rights abuses in Philippines.

I was working for Amnesty's Asia and Pacific Research Department, covering East Asia, and was approached by Siobhan Dowd, the then Writers in Prison Committee programme director, for advice and information on detained writers in South Korea prior to the PEN Congress held in Seoul in 1988. We became firm friends and she invited me to apply for her post when she left for New York to take up the role of Freedom to Write Director at PEN America. I joined International PEN in December 1990, while the furor

around the *Satanic Verses* was at its height, and just months before the first Iraq War broke out! I was taken aback recently when described as a "human rights veteran", but I suppose that's a fair comment.

How many imprisoned writers would you be contacted about?

It fluctuates, but in any one year we are working on 1,000 cases of writers and journalists – a figure that has remained fairly constant in recent years.

Which part of the world concerns you most?

It is not the region or country that concerns me most, but the individual who is under attack. It is where I feel that I can put PEN's power into action, that of its membership of writers helping other writers in trouble. So the countries shift. Today I would

say we are having special impact if in different ways, in Zimbabwe, Iraq, China, Turkey, Burma ... but in other years there are other focuses, such as in Nigeria around the time of Ken Saro Wiwa's imprisonment and subsequent execution, in Bangladesh when Taslima Nasreen's troubles were at their height, in the Balkans during the Yugoslav war and we were smuggling messages and aid ... the concerns shift as the situation shifts.

That said, there are two other researchers: Cathy McCann covering Asia/Middle East, and Tamsin Mitchell covering Africa and the Americas. As well as overseeing the global programme, I cover Europe (including Turkey and Central Asia) so I would say that was my particular interest.

What are some recent successes?

In Zimbabwe we are currently working with two playwrights whose play was banned, and whose troupe has been attacked. We've helped them get their play recorded onto DVD, ensuring that it can still be distributed and seen. Lydia Cacho, whose trial in Mexico for writing on child abuse was dropped last year, but who continues to live under threat from those involved in the paedophile ring

she exposed, is getting huge support from the network of PEN people.

Although there is further to go, the reduction of a journalist's death sentence in Afghanistan is a direct result of the pressure from abroad, including from PEN. Orhan Pamuk has spoken of how important PEN's support has been to him when he was under threat and then on trial in 2005. Through publishing his poetry, PEN has given the work of the Burmese poet, Zargana, a greater and wider audience, raising funds for the charity he set up for Cyclone Nargis victims – an activity for which he was re-imprisoned earlier this year.

And let us not forget the amazing and innovative campaign initiated by Sydney PEN for Shi Tao in the Poem Relay. Looking at it in strictly statistical terms, we find that in any given year we see a "positive outcome" of around 36% – that is a release or other alleviation in the situation of writers who have been subject to our Rapid Action Network (RAN) alerts.

How do you decide which cases ought to be the subject of the Rapid Action Network alerts?

The person has to be a writer/journalist whose life is at risk or is

otherwise under threat; where there are concerns about prison conditions, health concerns or where there are fears of abuse. We use them where we think mass appeals may make a court reverse a decision to proceed with prosecution.

Sometimes if a person is sentenced to a short period – say a couple of months – we use the RAN instead of Honorary Membership, as it is quicker to set into motion. On occasion we may also use the RAN for ‘key note’ cases such as that of Orhan Pamuk who was unlikely to be sentenced but where international press interest was very high and PEN was one of the key sources of information not only to the PEN membership but also to the media. We will also use the RAN where there is a pattern of killings and suggestions of impunity, such as has recently been the case in Russia and Mexico.

What is the case you’ve been most personally involved in?

I wouldn’t like to choose just one. I have met and worked for so many amazing people who have suffered the full range of attacks – from imprisonment to death threats – with varying degrees of courage, and have been privileged to be of some support to them.

However one person who stands out was Hrant Dink, assassinated in January, 2007, in Istanbul. I had met him several times and, like everyone else who came close to him, was

instantly drawn to his humour, his courage, and his true determination to bring together Turks and Armenians, to reconcile the past and move on to the future. A truly wonderful person. I met up with him and his family, two months before he died and asked his daughter “What is it like to be the daughter of Hrant Dink?” and she replied “When I was young I was so frightened. Now all I feel is proud.”

At a memorial event I told her that she had been right on both counts. There are many others writers like Hrant out there for whom we should feel both fear for them, but also great pride.

How difficult is it to do a job like yours, in which there are so few ‘wins’?

This is not as difficult as it may seem and the wins are much greater than at first sight. What I find enormously empowering and a privilege to be part of is that when I or my team learn of some terrible event happening to a writer somewhere in the world, we don’t feel impotent. We know that by simply writing a short item describing what is happening, and sending it out on the RAN or other network, by putting others onto the case, we can make a huge difference.

It doesn’t always end with a release, but most times the fact that there are people out there who care – by connecting writers with their families, by advertising their plight,

by raising their cases within the UN, the European Parliament, parliaments around the world – we are ensuring that they are not left alone and that governments cannot get away with imprisoning their critics unnoticed. Being able to mobilise such a global force of writers is wonderfully empowering.

We measure our ‘wins’ not only by the numbers of people who are freed, but also by the numbers of protest letters and articles written, poetry readings, and connections made between writers.

What was different about your job 5 years ago?

Not much different – it was September 11, 2001, that was a key date. What came after kicked off a whole new range of abuses, not only by the usual suspects such as China or Uzbekistan, but also within Europe, USA and even Australia where anti-terror laws were introduced or re-interpreted that limited free speech. The Iraq War has made it harder for those in the West to argue for democratic principles when they themselves are abusing rights.

The rise of repression in the name of religion has its roots in what happened in 2001, taking a dramatic turn in Denmark in 2005, and since then we have seen a proliferation of cases, although it has to be said that there were always some cases on our books since the ‘fatwa’ against Rushdie in 1989. This year we are looking

at the concept of ‘defamation of religion’ that has crept into the UN and other political discourse, and moves to remove speech that insults religious concepts from free expression protection. I would not have seen that as an issue five years ago.

What do you imagine will be different about it in 5 years?

I’ve been in the job too long to believe that we will have seen an end to attacks on free expression and I am sure we will still have plenty to do in 2013! However, I do feel that as an organisation, we have grown and extended, and that the PEN membership is becoming increasingly creative in the way that it approaches its campaigns, such as the Poem Relay or linking with the international literature festivals.

I see that we are getting better at highlighting the individual writer at risk as a creative writer and not only a ‘victim’ of human rights abuse. I see that PEN is making a greater link between the literature and creativity of writers, and seeing our niche in the broader human rights movement, working on what is special about us, and making a bigger impact.

For more information about the work of the Writers in Prisons Committee, visit www.internationalpen.org.uk

shroud of darkness

BY Gaby Naher

PERESTROIKA HAS COME AND GONE, BUT THE IRON CURTAIN
AND ITS THREATS TO FREEDOM REMAIN.



Sometimes you need to remove yourself from your comfort zone to better appreciate what you have. When my family and I moved from Sydney to Moscow at the beginning of 2006, I expected to find a new novel (for me) in that great literary city. What I returned with, some two years later, was nothing less than an altered consciousness.

Although I had written about the People's Republic of China and its state-sanctioned repression of Tibetans, I had only ever gained an intellectual understanding of what this repression meant. Try as I did, I knew I could not truly understand the great, dark shroud of censorship under which Tibetans lived in their own land. Living in Putin's Russia brought me a whole lot closer to that understanding. It made me cherish our fundamental right to speak, not to mention to write.

Upon returning from Russia I made a point of taking my two daughters, now aged four and six, to political demonstrations. Not because children bring colour to a demonstration and make for good images in the media, but because I wanted them to cherish the fact that in this country we do have the right

to speak. I wanted them to understand that in Russia – for all its fairgrounds, forests and exoticism – very few exercised this right and lived.

Not long after returning to Australia, I joined the Management Committee of Sydney PEN and have recently taken on the chair of its Writers in Prison Committee.

If anyone asks me why we should write these letters, in criticism of other governments, in criticism of censorship and repression, I have only one reply. Because we can.

September 16, 2007

On this cold, wet, grey (typical) Moscow day we bundle up the girls and take them on the metro into the city. Djuna is probably the only person in this city who loves the metro; she is excited by its noise, its movement, and by the people from whom she invariably elicits a smile. She has only travelled underground in Moscow a handful of times, and refers to Moscow's vital organ as 'my metro'.

Today we are travelling to the so-called home of capitalism in Russia, Tverskaya Ulitsa, on which so many of the big Western companies display their signs. Paul and Isla stride off on their long, lean legs. Djuna



and I lag behind, her little knees bumping together and her big blue eyes missing nothing. She wants to touch everything, is oblivious to the uniform grime that adorns every wall of this immense city.

In the 'perehod' that runs underneath Tverskaya, Djuna ogles a quartet of drunk-looking Goths, one of them displaying his large, white, spotted arse as he squats in front of a pretty girl. I hear my two-year-old mumbling the word 'bottom' to herself, consideringly.

To mark the turning of the season, we buy the girls new, matching hats and scarves. Isla emerges from Benetton wearing stars covering her ears; Djuna wears flowers. We go for lunch in a chain restaurant in a worse-for-wear five-storey building that used to be one of Moscow's Art Nouveau showpieces. The building had been the home of a publishing house, and the lower floors held the press itself.

When the city was being remodelled under Joseph Stalin, this magnificent edifice was eased onto massive supports and pushed seventy metres down the street. This shift denied the publishing house its view of the verdigris Alexander Pushkin, who presides over the square named in his honour.

The publishing house's proud position on a square that took its name for the founder of the Russian language had been sacrificed in favour of a wider and more impressive road to the Kremlin.

September 17

We now know for certain that Andrei Lugovoi, who has been accused of murdering Alexander Litvinenko in London by poisoning him with polonium-laced tea, will hold the second spot on the ballot paper for the extreme right's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

Should the LDP win 7 percent of the vote, come December and the State Duma elections, Lugovoi would not only be eligible for a seat in the Duma, but would automatically win the immunity that goes with the role. Putin, earlier this year, described Britain's request for Lugovoi's extradition as 'colonialist'.

The Litvinenko/Lugovoi case has been a wake-up call to me. It has shown me that the East-West divide has not been eroded in the years since perestroika. Indeed, under Putin, it is being re-established. The new cold war exists even in the compound that has become our home.

I have not been able to resist discussing the case with the more westernised Russians I know, only to receive, again and again, the same reaction. 'Who cares about Litvinenko anyway? He was a traitor'.

I knew I had reached the end of the road with my Russian teacher when we discussed the case. Her attitude was the same as that of the other Russians I spoke with.

She insisted, somewhat petulantly, that the Western media had wasted undue column inches on the traitor, Litvinenko, when they could

have been better spent eulogising the great cellist and conductor, Mstislav Rostropovich, who died earlier in the year.

'We're talking about a cold-blooded murder,' I argued. 'Rostropovich died at eighty after a long illness. Litvinenko was killed slowly and agonisingly on British soil. While we may not care about him per se, the murderer must be punished.'

My teacher just sniffed at me and gave me the 'you are a stupid foreigner who is clearly anti-Russian' look. This was a particularly depressing conversation for me as I regarded her as one of the best travelled and better-informed of the Russians I knew.

I had, up until then, tried to chat only about safe subjects with my glamorous, chain-smoking teacher Natasha. We agreed that Boris Pasternak was one of Russia's greatest writers; when I happened to mention, however, that *Dr Zhivago* was anti-Soviet the chasm opened between us. 'You cannot say this!' she was indignant. Why not? I wanted to know. 'Because Pasternak loved Russia...'

Some many weeks ago I read a *Moscow Times* editorial that suggested, tongue-in-cheek, that on paper Lugovoi was Putin's heir apparent because of the similar background they shared and the fact that ordinary Russians by then regarded him as a hero and reportedly asked him for his autograph in the street.

I laughed out loud when I read this piece and wondered, for a mo-

ment, whether I was hallucinating. Not so, not so.

September 18

At the Liberal Democratic Party's 19th congress yesterday, Andrei Lugovoi told journalists that he would not rule out running in March's presidential election. I read this and know that now, I must be hallucinating.

A Duma deputy, Vladislav Ignatov, said of Lugovoi; 'It is important that most simple Russians view him as someone who liquidated a traitor.'

The leader of the LDP, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, opened the party conference with a tirade against the West, asserting that Western models of democracy were 'designed to destroy Russia, just as they had the Soviet Union'. Russia, according to the leader, was 'a special historical case, as it had always been governed from above and not by the population'. Putin is an advocate of what he refers to as 'controlled democracy' for Russia.

September 19

If it weren't for the Pokrovsky forest, I may not know that a humane Russia even exists. In this beautiful mixed forest with its glorious stands of silver birch, Muscovites are at their very best. And their best is not chain-smoking in thousands of dollars worth of designer clothes in the city's top restaurants.

Their best is walking in the forest, singing to their sleeping babies. It is strolling with their beloved and finely groomed 'sabachkas'. Their best

is the hours they kneel in the rustic playgrounds in clearings between the trees with their children. The locals love this forest; I would wager they value it even more highly than I do and I consider it my church.

In this forest this morning I notice a black-clad youth with a broken nose wearing a leather jacket standing silently amid the trees. Is he waiting to deal drugs or lure pretty girls to their ruin? No; he is holding his right hand up to the sky. In it is birdseed and tiny, feathered creatures flutter above him. On a good day I let myself believe that *this* is Russia.

September 20

On the second day of the LDP's congress the party's leader, Zhirinovskiy, claimed that Britain was a nation of cheats and bandits and that it therefore had no right to call for Lugovoi's extradition. When a Western journalist dared refer to Litvinenko's murder, the leader screamed that Britain kept 'the whole world soaked in blood'.

Zhirinovskiy went on to tell the journalist – who was American, not British – that Britain was to blame for supporting the Bolsheviks in 1917, for financing Chechen rebels and for opening the second front too late during the Second World War.

He even took a swipe at Britain's agricultural policies saying 'Even your sheep die every day and every hour due to your sickening British policies.' He was referring to the re-

curring outbreaks of foot and mouth disease that threaten to cripple England's farmers.

Where are the women in this story? Apparently the only member of the Liberal Democratic Party who even dared suggest that Lugovoi was not the answer to their prayers was a woman. She was alone in her admittedly mild stance against the suspected murderer.

As Anna Politkovskaya wrote in her book, *Putin's Russia*, 'The shroud of darkness from which we spent several Soviet decades trying to free ourselves is enveloping us again.'

Andrei Lugovoi was elected to the Russian parliament in December 2007. He is currently a deputy of the State Duma to the Russian Federation.

Gaby Naber is a writer and the Chair of Sydney PEN's Writers in Prison Committee. To get involved, visit www.pen.org.au or email executive@pen.org.au.

in short

National Young Writers' Festival

In October, Sydney PEN Young Writers collaborated with the National Young Writers' Festival on 'China Now', a panel exploring the issues of freedom of speech in China today and the relationship these issues have with those of the past.

The panel comprised Ben Sutton, a broadcast journalist who filmed and video reports from Beijing during the 2008 Olympic games, Allyson Horn, a communications student who covered the Olympics and Paralympics, Jennifer Zheng, a Chinese writer and translator who escaped China for Australia after imprisonment and forced labour, and myself as participating chair.

Set in Newcastle at the Festival Club, a semi-converted warehouse of industry, the panel was a resounding success. The discussion began with China's treatment of the hordes of foreign media who descended on Beijing recently, and moved back in time to cover the country's history.

Most popular were the stories of foreign media watching in disbelief as computers deleted words such as 'Tibet' from emails, and absurdities such as journalists being told they were able to cover anything but, if they wished to cover protests, to first submit an application to the Chinese Government which could take weeks to process.

All this was placed in a framework of China's history as a nation which has consistently suppressed freedom of speech for its own means.

— Hugo Bowne-Anderson

Deadly awards

Anita Heiss and Peter Minter, contributing editors to the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature*, have won the award for Outstanding Achievement in Literature at the 14th Deadly Awards, held in October at the Sydney Opera House. The Deadlys celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander achievement in the arts, sport, education, health and leadership. Other winners this year include singer Gurrumul Yunupingu, basketballer Patrick Mills and actor Leah Purcell.

The anthology showcases the range and depth of Aboriginal writing in English and includes journalism, petitions and political letters from the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as major works that reflect the blossoming of Aboriginal poetry, prose and drama from mid-20th century onwards.

PEN event

Helen Garner will read from her award-winning novel *The Spare Room* at Customs House Library on December 2. This is the last reading for 2008, and a rare chance to discuss Garner's work with her in Sydney.

The monthly series began in 2006 and lunchtime crowds have gathered to hear writers including Tom Keeneally, Nicholas Jose, James Bradley, Anne Summers, David Malouf, Frank Moorhouse and Linda Jaivin.

Helen Garner, Customs House Library, 31 Alfred Street, Circular Quay, Tuesday, December 2, 12.15pm-12.45pm. Free admission; bookings essential: ph 02 9242 8555.

the peter principle

BY Geordie Williamson

PETER GOLDSWORTHY ON WHY WE SHOULD NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF LANGUAGE, ESPECIALLY IN TIMES OF THREAT.



I am sitting in a restaurant above Circular Quay – one of those lunch-time havens of suits and glamour-pusses – while Peter Goldsworthy sits across from me, summoning poetry from Auschwitz:

*der Tod is ein Meister aus Deutschland
dein goldenes Haar Margarete
dein aschenes Haar Shulamith*

Goldsworthy has stolen an hour from a hectic round of media for his first novel in half a decade, and seems surprised to find himself discussing the final German lines of Paul Celan's 'Death Fugue' in the midst of the chatter. But I have thrown him a difficult question and he is attempting an honest answer.

I had quoted Adorno's famous line that there could be no poetry after the Holocaust, and asked whether it held true for the West after the events of 9/11.

'That one poem,' he says, 'led Adorno to partly recant his position.'

Since we've been talking about the dearth of great literary responses to the attacks on the World Trade Center, I suggest that there have been some good books, but nothing which measures up to the reality of events the way Celan's poem does.

'Of course there is bad post-9/11

literature and poetry. But there will be a poem like Celan's, which is transcendent.

'Just remember,' Goldsworthy continues, 'that Celan spent years grappling with the German language and its complicity with events.'

Have I read George Steiner's *After Babel*, he asks, warming to the subject: 'In it, he argues that the German language has an inherent totalitarian aspect. There was an example he gave. Say a child was run over by a car. In English, we say "The child was run over by the car." In German, however, you would have something closer to "the child under the wheels went."'

'I don't hold with that whole [American linguist] Benjamin Whorf hypothesis, that language affects thought, but I think it's interesting.'

Has there been a similar linking of language with violence in the US, then? 'No. I'm not going to compare the American response to 9/11 with National Socialist Germany. But I think that it's fair to say that language has been used to obfuscate in the years after 9/11.'

I mumble something about Orwell and euphemism, and Goldsworthy grows animated: 'It is a

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PETER GOLDSWORTHY

place where euphemism has ruled; it always has been. [Martin] Amis has been devastating on Rumsfeld and the weird rhetorical poetry he liked to regale people with ... even an innocuous term like “rendition” has come to cover something sinister.’

Inevitably, after Rumsfeld, the conversation moves to the invasion of Iraq.

‘I found the Iraq war very problematic. It obviously had nothing to do with Al Qaeda, but he [Saddam Hussein] was an evil bastard – responsible for a million deaths at least.’

So intervening was a moral obligation for the West?

‘The best argument for the war seemed to me, ironically, to be a left-wing argument: you destroy Fascism wherever you can. And the best argument against it was a conservative one – don’t act unless you’re sure that you’re not going to make things worse.’

Goldsworthy shakes his head at the confusion. ‘You had people on the right, like Owen Harries, who were against the war. And then people on the left, like Vaclav Havel, who were for it. The difference with Havel and others like him in Eastern Europe – or, closer to home, José Ramos Horta – is that they knew what it was to live under a dictatorship.’

Although Goldsworthy acknowledges the merits of both positions, ‘you couldn’t say: I’m not going to choose. And so I supported [the invasion] initially, reluctantly. But once I saw Rumsfeld and Bush in action, I

began to appreciate the hubris – the sheer testosterone-charged hubris ... I never thought that we were choosing peace or war. We were choosing how to ensure that fewer people died. It is easy now, in retrospect, to say: who were these idiots running the show?’

Surely, though, we all made decisions based on the information we had to hand – and the media largely abdicated its responsibilities to give us a clearer picture.

Goldsworthy disagrees. ‘I don’t think that all the press abdicated their responsibility. There was Mark Danner writing brilliant stuff in the *New York Review of Books*, for example. And there was space made for opposing arguments in newspapers here, in *The Australian* and *The Age*, at least.

‘Although, TV is different. The daily breathlessness of the medium was destructive. The war was basically a televisual experience.’

So if television failed to do its job, don’t other visual mediums – film, for instance, or the kind of political theatre that has been produced in the UK – have an obligation to step into the breach?

‘Yes, but only if they are not preaching to the converted – so film I think has a reach that theatre probably doesn’t. I think that movies can change the world in ways that poetry cannot. Films can enable people to really imagine. For all the problems of the medium – its exaggerations and distortions – it does seem to hold a peculiar power. I think of a movie

like *Rendition*, which has its faults, but which allows its audience to place themselves in extreme situations.’

As a novelist, I ask, can you imagine yourself into the situations of those in power, charged with making decisions regarding military force?

‘Paul Berman’s *Power and the Idealists* is a brilliant portrait of the generation of ’68 and their rise to political prominence. One of them, Bernard Kouchner, [the former doctor and diplomat who is currently France’s foreign minister] has long been a hero of mine. I think he was on the right side in Kosovo.’

Despite everything that has happened, Goldsworthy admits, ‘I have some sympathy for people like Kouchner, who is a dedicated interventionist – he supported the Iraq War until he saw the disaster about to unfold – and yet, he’s still an interventionist ... I mean, we’re always one tragedy too late.’

But even our successful interventions, like Kosovo, seem to unravel. Even today Kosovo remains a Balkan powder-keg, doesn’t it?

‘Which brings us back,’ says Goldsworthy, ‘to the conservative position: don’t intervene unless you’re certain it will work – and you’re never certain of that, except in events such as the Second World War, and maybe not even then.’

I wonder, wasn’t World War II a similar moment, in which the Allies faced an existential threat in response to which they were permitted that total mobilisation and total response?

Goldsworthy nods. ‘Our problem in the West today, is that our existential threat rises from our response to 9/11.

‘The only way the West can fail against Islamic fundamentalism is to lose faith in the efficacy of our institutions,’ he concludes, ‘and we seem to have done just that.’

*Geordie Williamson is a critic and broadcaster.
Peter Goldsworthy's latest novel is
Everything I Knew.*

suffer the children

BY Frank Moorhouse

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S DEMAND FOR NEW PROTOCOLS ON CHILDREN IN ART IS A THREAT TO ALL CREATIVITY.



The Australian Government, through the Minister for the Arts, Peter Garrett, has instructed the Australia Council 'to address the depiction of children in artworks, exhibitions and publications that receive government funding' and to create protocols to control this funding.

I see this move as a new and dangerous development in the arts in Australia, charged with moral, philosophical and aesthetic hazard and driven by the moral panic over the nude photographs of adolescent boys and girls by Bill Henson. To put it bluntly, the Australia Council has been told not to fund artworks in the creative zone in which Bill Henson has worked or artworks which, presumably, offend the Prime Minister.

This demand for protocols is not about protecting children: it is about controlling art. It is an expression of misunderstanding of the nature of art in a Western society and an ideological distrust of art and an ill-considered reaction to moral panic. Next thing could be lists of things art may not do – a Vatican Index of forbidden decadent art.

I want to examine the edicts which came from the federal government to the Australia Council.

The first edict:

Ensuring that the rights of children are protected throughout the artistic process – from the time an artwork is created through to when it is shown.

How could any agency conceivably achieve this? It would require frequent inspections of the work in progress and the Australia Council deciding if an artwork could be displayed or published. The Australia Council would be involved in policing the arts. It would require an 'ethics unit' and 'ethics officers'.

Arts funding bodies should have as their mission 'the rights of the arts' in the best and richest sense. The Australia Council should be fighting for the rights of children to be involved in the arts both in and out of educational system.

It is important to preserve the widest possible opportunity for children to participate in the making of artworks, whether they be photographic tableaux, plays, videos, film, operas and so on.

No sane person wants to harm children, but protection is best left to Child Welfare Acts in the states; union and professional association guidelines and practices on employ-



ILLUSTRATION: GAIL MACCALLUM (FROM MADONNA WITH CHILD; FILIPPINO LIPPI)

A SHAKESPEARE
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INCEST AND
ADULT THEMES ...

FRANK MOORHOUSE

ment of children, say, as models; parental judgement; the judgement of the artist involved; and, of course, in the years of adolescence it is important to have the input of the young person involved, their estimation, and their feelings.

Should there be a 'right of repentance'? This is a moral right in the literary arts context in some countries. In France, if you had published a story or book about which at a later stage in life you had regrets you can legally have it withdrawn from publication and sale – and it can never be published again.

Perhaps the right of repentance could exist at the age of maturity for, say, child models? There are situations where this might apply and where it is feasible – a TV advertisement, for example or a display of a photograph on an advertising billboard – where a child's image becomes a problem for the child with the passing of time.

The other complication about applying the right of repentance in the current situation in Australia is that it could also imply that the parental advice or permission given in good faith for all sorts of childhood activities was liable to later legal review and even penalty.

This could be applied to parental commitments made on behalf of a child in activities such as choice of school, army cadets, scouting, religious training, medical procedures, high-risk sports, childhood discipline methods and so on.

Where is the harm from the arts? What is the predictable and measurable harm some people fear, the so-called emotional 'injury' or 'abuse'? I find it hard to name a case where an artwork has demonstrably caused harm to a child.

One criticism is that an artwork can 'objectify', say a young girl, that is, depersonalise her.

Art does objectify; it uses actual living people in one form or another to personify, to symbolise, as metaphor, as trope, as muse, as 'sign of the times', and so on. Where is the harm in this?

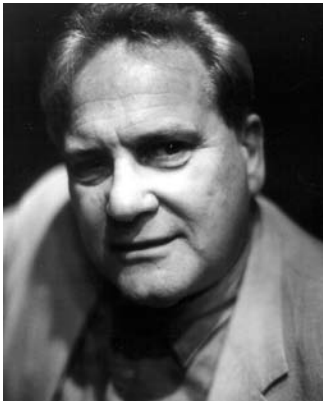
Another argument is that an artwork could bring a child into, say, ethnic contempt or ridicule. Isn't the judgment of the parent and the artist and of the child involved enough to avoid this and how is the role of the Australia Council?

In an artwork the completed 'content' is usually unforeseeable in any complex and subtle way and even after completion is then open to multiple interpretations.

The second edict:

Ensuring that everyone viewing the artwork has an appropriate understanding of the nature and artistic content of the material.

I take this to mean the application of warnings and classifications to artworks. Classification systems and audience warnings – apart from simple PG – tend to segregate art experiences by erecting aesthetically damaging and reductionist 'fences'



Frank Moorhouse is a member of the Sydney PEN Writers' Panel.

around an artwork, say, a television program, a film.

Almost by definition, originality in an artwork comes into existence outside 'standards' and a single set of 'community standards' no longer exists or should be presumed to exist.

A pluralistic, multicultural society is a profusion of standards and expectations and a range of understandings of 'reasonable'.

Classification by committee pre-judges the work on the basis of abstract reductions of content and prejudices the audience. It takes away from the creator the decision about where he or she intends the work to find an audience. In some cases it denies the creator access to an audience.

Because of the Henson affair even the Sydney Biennale was pressured

into putting up a warning about 'offensive material'.

Next year we could find that art festivals will have to have classification warnings on their programs. Australia Council inspectors will have to do random visits to make sure that exhibitions do not violate the guidelines of their funding.

Classification generally, let alone for artworks, reinforces a genteel view of language and art and carries implied moral prohibitions about the acceptability of realism and truth.

A Shakespearean play could be similarly degraded by a warning classification saying that it contains, mutilation, rape, suicide, incest, adult themes and so on. Juliet is 13 in *Romeo and Juliet*, which, as we know, contains disobedience to parents, forbidden love, homoeroticism, violence, underage sex and youth suicide.

Classification robs art of its power to shock and surprise and to offend. Some art is meant to be offensive and wishes to challenge conventional morality.

The third edict:
Protecting images of children from being exploited, including use of the images beyond the original context of the creative work.

Even if it was argued that this was desirable, how would this ever be established or policed?

All images forever move in their own ways beyond 'context' – if an artist ever has a context in mind – especially with the existence of the internet,

but also over the centuries through other forms of reproduction, manual copying, photography, postcards and appropriation or homage by other art forms, by advertising, and so on.

It is an attempt to corral artworks, to quarantine them.

The last edict:
Creating protocols which acknowledge the Australia Council's statutory role in upholding and promoting the right of people to freedom in the practice of the arts.

Creating protocols is itself an infringement of freedom of the arts, especially when they form part of the guidelines of the central, publicly funded, arts-funding body.

After drawing up these protocols the Australia Council could next be asked to police limits to the ways the national flag is treated in an artwork, the way gays are treated in artworks, the way war is depicted to avoid glorification or to avoid offence to ex-service personnel or guidelines to ensure respect for the environment.

In the recent past, we have had attempts at private member bills wanting to 'protect' the Australian flag against use in art works.

Traditionally artists have argued that the imagination does not recognise no-go areas ordered by ideology or other methods of regulation, that the imagination should be inner-directed not outer-directed.

In Australia we have accepted – and generally achieved – that funding decisions should be made on

evidence of talent and an assessment of the originality of the project; that there should be no political test. That is, funding should be made without consideration of the political or religious or personal beliefs or affiliations or 'character' of the artist; and assessment should not include any reductive analysis of content.

Traditionally, legal opinion has been against pre-publication censorship, accepting that following the presentation of his or her artwork the artist should bear the storm of discourse surrounding it – the opprobrium, praise, honour or outrage – but should not be hounded or punished by the government or its funding agencies.

The draft protocols will be circulated for public comment during November 2008, and will apply to grants issued after 1 January 2009. To read the Australia Council's summary paper, visit www.australiacouncil.gov.au

Lecturing the lecturers

BY Ben Saul

ATTACKING ACADEMICS IS ANY EASY POLITICAL HIT, BUT THEY'RE NOT DOING THEIR JOB IF THEY DON'T CHALLENGE STUDENTS TO THINK.



A last gasp of the Howard Government's Senate was to order an inquiry into academic freedom in Australian schools and universities. The inquiry was triggered partly by a complaint by a Young Liberal about the Labor sympathies of her university lecturer, and by long simmering angst about the culture and history wars, which the Coalition never quite managed to win beyond a stalemate.

In a swipe at academic writers and teachers, the inquiry is considering 'the level of intellectual diversity and the impact of ideological, political and cultural prejudice' in high schools and universities. It is also examining 'the need for teaching ... to reflect a plurality of views, be accurate, fair, balanced and in context'.

The implication that our universities may not be intellectually diverse, or may be prejudiced, is a polemical stain on the high standards of professionalism amongst Australian academics, and is driven by a handful of non-representative incidents. Australian universities are intellectually diverse and vibrant places. Scholarly merit is a core criterion in the appointment and progression of academics, and there are no barriers to entry for those who do not share a particular intellectual view.

As in any part of the community, from politicians to footballers, individual cases of prejudice can never be ruled out, but academia is no more prejudiced – and may be less so – than other sectors. Universities are founded on the ideals of academic freedom of thought, opinion and expression, and prejudice is anathema to the professional responsibilities of academics.

What is worrying about this inquiry is the potential impact of political interference on academic freedom. The autonomy of academics is necessary to ensure that they can freely develop independent critical thought and expression and contribute new insights to society. Academics must obey the law in a democratic society, but within that outer limit, political intervention should be avoided.

Academic freedom is also an important civil society pillar against authoritarianism. It can play a critical role in opposing political repression, as shown by past resistance movements in the past by intellectuals in Burma, China and France. In many countries, the slide towards authoritarianism has involved increasing restrictions on academic freedom over time.

The implication of this inquiry – that universities may be prejudiced

and lacking in diversity – has the potential to undermine academic freedom, since it sends a message to academics that they are under suspicion and that their views require policing, and encourages self-censorship.

None of this is to suggest that academics ought to be immune from criticism, but it is to caution against unnecessary interference. The existing regulation of university research and teaching is sufficient to control bias or prejudice. In research, peer review maintains rigorous academic standards and ensures that any academic who is genuinely 'prejudiced' – in the sense of making claims not verifiable by evidence or supportable by argument – will not prosper.

The academic community is also best placed to deal with allegations of misconduct, such as in the rare case where an academic subjects a student's views to ridicule or vilification. Universities already have mechanisms in place for dealing with allegations of professional misconduct.

As for teaching, there are already conventions for formulating curricula and procedures for approving new courses. Universities routinely issue evaluation forms to students, to allow feedback on courses and lecturers. New academic staff are required to undertake teaching courses. Finally, complaints can be made at any time about academic misconduct.

Students cannot, however, expect not to be challenged by views put to them by their lecturers, including by political, ideological or cultural ideas

with which students may disagree. As the noted intellectual Edward Said wrote in his 1993 Reith Lectures: 'Least of all should an intellectual be there to make his/her audiences feel good: the whole point is to be embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant.'

It is also a mistake to believe that the production of scholarly knowledge can somehow be simplistically categorised into a dichotomy of 'left' and 'right' wing perspectives in the manner which obsesses some media commentators and politicians, and sadly some students.

The focus of this Senate inquiry ought to be on how to best strengthen academic freedom from political interference, rather than to find ways of politically regulating academics. For example, parliament could legislate to protect academic freedom. Workplace agreements and employment contracts could include clauses to protect it. And university funding could be increased to relieve pressures on academic workloads, and to better enable research quality.

As in any sector involving the expenditure of public money, academics understand and expect that their ideas may be robustly contested and their performance evaluated. But academics should not be subjected to ideological attacks by a contrived parliamentary inquiry.

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

media monitors

BY Antony Loewenstein

BLOGS ARE AN ANTIDOTE TO CONTROLLED MEDIA AND CENSORED SPEECH – AND GOVERNMENTS KNOW IT.



Bloggers, writes leading conservative American writer Andrew Sullivan in a recent issue of *The Atlantic*, 'have scant opportunity to collect our thoughts, to wait until events have settled and a clear pattern emerges. We blog now – as news reaches us, as facts emerge.'

But profound limitations of the medium exist. 'Blogging suffers from the same flaws as post-modernism', Sullivan continues, 'a failure to provide stable truth or a permanent perspective.'

In the West we have the luxury of pontificating on a range of issues and our thoughts are rarely dangerous or life-threatening. We generally know the limits of debate and most people happily operate within it. Dissident bloggers are therefore few and far between. The online hatred I have personally experienced writing about Israeli war crimes is a warning to others to subscribe to a traditional narrative on contentious issues like the Israel/Palestine conflict. The alternative is distinctly unpleasant.

But this is also the reason I love blogging; its passion, and the narcotic qualities that make producing material addictive. Deeper thought is undoubtedly negatively affected,

but supposedly objective journalism, much of which pollutes the daily newspapers, is often little more than recycled press releases or pronouncements from 'official' sources.

Online media is a necessary antidote to traditional ways of producing news and views. The predictable top-down relationship between writer and viewer/reader has begun to fracture, and not a moment too soon.

The reality in the rest of the world is radically different, however. State-run propaganda, on television, print or online, is constantly served to citizens in countries with little free media. Alternatives are therefore essential. Blogs, online forums and social networking sites have become integral to the dissemination of unofficial information. We ignore these developments at our peril.

In 2007 I travelled to Iran, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Cuba and China to meet writers, dissidents, politicians, citizens and bloggers to gauge the effect of new media on their lives and the ways in which societies are moving towards more transparency. But how often do we listen to these perspectives?

September 11 should have been

the perfect opportunity for the Western media to hear the grievances of the Muslim world. Alas, with notable exceptions, indigenous voices were excluded then and still remain largely absent from the pages of the world's leading papers.

I remember talking to a senior editor at the *Sydney Morning Herald* in the months before the 2003 Iraq invasion. I asked her why the paper had featured virtually no Arab or Iraqi voices either for or against the impending war. 'Oh, I never thought of that', she replied. The underlying implication was that Arabs' opinions were somehow untrustworthy or not as valid. Little has changed in the years since.

As media companies continue their slide towards financial ruin – the *New York Times* reported in late October that its net profit fell by 51.4 per cent in the third quarter of 2008 – resources for serious investigative journalism are declining.

It would seem logical to start relying on bloggers in countries where Western journalists don't or won't visit. When was the last time we read a regular report in our media from an Iraqi blogger in Baghdad about his daily life? These dispatches are

far more vivid than a foreigner's embedded world view.

An important question is whether the web is an automatic democratiser, as is widely assumed in Western media circles and at many American think-tanks. The general consensus across the globe was that political and military meddling by Washington and London was making the job of real democrats much more



PATRICK COOK

difficult. Democracy was a term defined differently in every nation, but virtually nobody shunned the idea of more freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of the press.

As one blogger told me in Tehran: "Most of the people I know are in favour of reform, not revolution, because people are too tired to experience another revolution." I found the same message echoed throughout the countries I visited: the desire to experience incremental change without foreign involvement.

I was reminded of a comment from leading Middle East journal-

ist Robert Fisk, who told ABC TV's *Lateline* in 2005: 'The Arab world ... would love some of this shiny beautiful democracy which we possess and enjoy. They would love some of it. They would like some freedom. But many of them would like freedom from us – from our armies, from our influence. And that's the problem, you see. What Arabs want is justice as much as democracy.'

And we don't want to give it to them.

In every land I visited, bloggers were starting to unpack issues that remained largely hidden from public view. Women in Egypt were campaigning against the tradition of female genital mutilation. Activists in Cuba were highlighting the repressive nature of Fidel Castro's regime and the counter-productive policies of the US administration towards them. Opposition figures in Damascus were blogging about state-imposed web filtering.

Saudi Arabian women, blocked from driving or working in the US-backed dictatorship, were using the web to express a desire for more human rights. Iranian hip-hoppers were distributing their banned beats via file sharing software. Chinese dissidents were protesting the actions of Western multinationals, such as Google, Yahoo and Microsoft, in their dubious role assisting state censorship.

Unlike most countries in the West, where prime ministers and presidents

rarely directly communicate with citizens, a number of leaders in the rest of the world have embraced the online medium. For example, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, with all his racism and ignorance, irregularly blogs and allows comments from readers. It's hardly revolutionary in itself, but a reflection that traditional media is a filter that often confuses the message.

I was particularly struck this year by the ferocity of the Western-led criticism of China's human rights record in the months before the Beijing Olympic Games. The country's appalling abuses are undeniable, but little time was given to hear Chinese bloggers who protested the vitriolic attacks against their homeland. Such passionate defences could not just be explained as unthinking nationalism.

My reading of the Chinese blogosphere reflected a great deal of nuance in people's positions and resentment that most Western reporters refused to see past their own bias.

What was desperately needed was communication between the various players, robust and online, and language barriers could have been over-

come. This was a perfect example of a cross-cultural barrier that bloggers could have tried to bridge.

The ongoing arguments between the mainstream media and online media are tired and irrelevant. Both must survive to ensure a healthy democracy (after all, the finest investigative work today is still predominantly achieved by traditional media outlets). In the non-Western world, there is often little choice.

Empowering minorities and greater proportions of society is a key challenge for all internet users, but independent information is a resource that appeals to every interested citizen. It is the responsibility of reporters in the rest of the world to listen to these voices and not simply regurgitate 'official' sources for easy consumption.

Western media will only regain its strength and trust of viewers and readers when it challenges accepted orthodoxies. Journalism is supposed to displease authority. Blogging is one medium where respect of the media elite is (often) shunned. The situation in non-democratic regimes is similar.

Such anarchism is the future of courageous news-gathering.

*Antony Loewenstein is a journalist, blogger and author of *My Israel Question and The Blogging Revolution*. For more information, visit antonyloewenstein.com.*



PATRICK COOK

the fine art of subversive conversation

BY Gillian Serisier

TO GIVE VOICE TO THE OPPRESSED, THEATRE NEEDS TO STEP OFFSTAGE, INTO THE STREET, AND START DRAWING PEOPLE INTO THE DEBATE.



In 1971 the Brazilian military arrested Augusto Boal for cultural activism. Considered a threat to national security, his crime was the theatrical experimentation he had initiated with the Arena Theatre in São Paulo, Brazil. Boal was imprisoned and tortured, then exiled to Argentina, where he determined to find a means to readdress control and give the oppressed their own voice.

Boal published the theatrical text *Theatre of the Oppressed* in 1973. It is heavily drawn from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) by Paulo Freire, who believed that 'freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion.'

Boal saw traditional theatrical staging as a tool for suppression, in which the audience remains passive to the voice of authority. He advocated using drama to include the audience in the performance of, and therefore debate of, pertinent political discourse.

As he wrote, in an open letter in 2005: 'we are democratic, we do not want to anesthetise our audiences or

make them accept our ideas: we want to help them to express their own desires and needs, to examine their possibilities, to use theatre to rehearse actions to be extrapolated into their own reality to fight against oppression wherever it is exerted, at home or in the whole country, concerning gender, age, sex, nationalities, race or religion, in psychological relations or in social classes: we want to transform and create a better society.'

A rudimentary form of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) comprises a five-day cycle: three days of Invisible Theatre facilitated by a Joker; a day of workshopping; and a concluding Forum Theatre. Invisible Theatre is a public performance which looks to bystanders like a natural debate or argument. The actors do not reveal themselves as actors, and often non-actors will join the discussion – and thus the performance. (Boal's term for these additions is Spect-actors.)

The Joker is the invisible director, whose role is to remain neutral while pushing the debate further, and to address any inconsistencies. The Forum Theatre takes the debate back from the street, and presents the argument as a staged performance.

While the process is improvisa-

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AUGUSTO BOAL

tional, it is not to be confused with theatre sports. It is fundamental that the performance deal with important issues, and that respect be afforded the audience. All participants must remain focused on the intention and motivations of their constructed character; theatricality of costume, make-up and accent are minimal.

From 1988 to 1992, while studying at the Herbert Berghof Studio in New York, I was a member of a group of actors practicing TO. As the Iran-Iraq conflict escalated and politicians argued about invading Iraq, our leader and Joker, Nancy Ponder, decided that we should invade the minds of a seemingly unconcerned America. By late 1990 the Gulf War loomed large and in 1991 American troops invaded Iraq.

In an extended cycle, enacted at the World Trade Centre, we sought to draw attention to the physical cost the war would have on the economically disadvantaged. On this occasion our group was all women, and the theatre took place within the large area of the WTC's women's toilets.

In the midst of the normal stream of people entering and leaving the bathroom, actors A, B, C and the Joker enter separately and go into cubicles. Actor D and E enter; E is very upset and D is trying to comfort her, but they are arguing. E is trying to convince D to give her money so that she and her husband, who is D's brother, can run away to Canada. E is terrified that her husband will be killed, arguing that he only joined

up so his college education would be paid for. D responds that he knew what he was doing when he joined up, that running away is un-American and that it's not what their father, a true patriot, would have done.

A and B emerge and start washing their hands. The conversation becomes muted. A gives E a filthy look, and E explodes with emotion, screaming that her husband is going to be killed in a war they know nothing about. A says she is disgusted by the lack of patriotism. E demands to know what the war is about and why it has anything to do with her and her husband. No one answers.

C emerges from a cubicle and challenges A to explain the war. B tries to support E. D announces that she will inform the military police. The Joker steps forward and starts explaining in White House-speak the reasons why America should invade Iraq. Everyone argues against what is being said.

Interestingly, during our enactments very few non-performers joined in, however as women came into the bathroom they stayed to listen. During one of the final stagings, though we had argued for more than half an hour, no one entering the bathrooms left – everyone stayed to listen. So, while the debate was not immediately taken up, we were hopeful the ramifications of the Gulf War would now be discussed by these women. It is almost impossible to hear an argument like this and not choose a side.

This process of instigating debate

is usually carried out on three consecutive days at three different locations, then re-presented as a staged performance. However, it's flexible: the argument outlined above wasn't converted to a staged performance that I know of, and was executed many more times and in many different ways, with different performers. Unfortunately, it could still be performed today with relevance.

When oppression is characterised by silence (prison, distance, fear, poverty etc) direct debate may not be possible. In these circumstances, the aim is to facilitate debate on behalf of those who are silenced, for example an Invisible Theatre staged aboard a bus travelling to a prison, where human rights are debated.

Theatre of the Oppressed relies on the human desire to express opinion in a safe environment; whether this translates to constructive debate depends on how talented the players are and how pressing the issues. The process works because its informality allows people to engage on a personal level. They are not thinking about the discussion as a theoretical position; they are thinking about it in terms of their own lives. They are gaining insight by taking an emotionally active position.

Boal's method gained attention in Brazil and then Europe and America. Today, the International Theatre of the Oppressed and the Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed societies continue the teachings of Boal and

Freire at symposiums and theatrical events.

In Australia, the Third-Way Theatre focuses on exploring the relationship between the oppressed and the perpetrator. Artistic Director Xris Reardon utilises the methods of both Boal and David Diamond (Artistic Director, Headlines Theatre, Canada) to facilitate forums, workshops and interventionist theatre. Projects currently underway include a cycle responding to mental health stigma and discrimination, which draws on people from the community affected by mental health issues. They are also using role-playing and improvisation to explore drug and alcohol issues in high schools. The raw material the students provide is developed by Reardon into a theatrical piece.

Boal's ideal is to improve humanity. 'It is important to have clear our aim of liberation, emancipation: it is by fighting oppression in whatever form it appears that we will help to humanize Humanity. Our work has this truly civilizational essence; some barbarians want to keep societies as oppressive as they have always been, they want progress only in technology and profits, not in human rights. We, definitely, do not. We are democrats.'

Gillian Serisier is an arts writer and the Sydney editor of (Inside) Australian Design Review.

For more information visit www.ptoweb.org; www.theatreoftheoppressed.org; www.thirdwaytheatre.org; www.headlinestheatre.com.

stepping off at el dorado

BY Judith Rodriguez

MORE THAN 120 DELEGATES FROM 70 COUNTRIES UPHELD THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FREE WORD AT THE PEN CONGRESS.



The Congress in Bogotá introduced many delegates to a continent where they had not ventured before. Many were struck by the unexpected distinction of the city of Bogotá.

Tourist brochures point to the gracious colonial quarter of Candelaria: Santa Clara, a richly ornate church dating from the seventeenth century; the houses where Bolívar stayed, or where a colonial brewer turned scholar initiated scholarly work on the country's language and literature – the Instituto Caro y Cuervo. We knew Bogotá was named World City of the Book in 2007. But stepping off at the El Dorado airport introduced us to Bogotá's spectacular topography. It sits on a plateau, 2700 metres high, surrounded by hills – some of them abrupt and lofty peaks, vividly green or forested – which bring hillside resorts and viewpoints close to several suburbs.

In the more recently built areas, the planning of clustered apartment blocks has created beautiful urban vistas generous with contemporary sculpture, and with parkland following natural small streams.

The Bogotá Congress was the first in many years to take place in South America. It was an 'emergency' conference – Bogotá hosted after another

proved untenable. The genie who brought it about, poet, university professor and two-session Board member Cecilia Balcázar de Bucher, had the support of a crew of loyal students.

There were problems. On short notice, it was impossible to organise a rich showing of local and South American literature. Fewer francophone delegates than usual attended (the French sent no delegates). This would have been compensated by an eminent French keynote speaker, the poet Michel Deguy, but we were disappointed by his late cancellation.

In the event, the principal speakers were Fadia Faqir, an English novelist of Jordanian background, on 'Singing in the language of the other', 'Trans-cultural writers' and her experience as a woman writer of Arab background; and the Canadian social thinker John Ralston Saul, with a highly applauded address on 'The role of the word in re-inventing the world'.

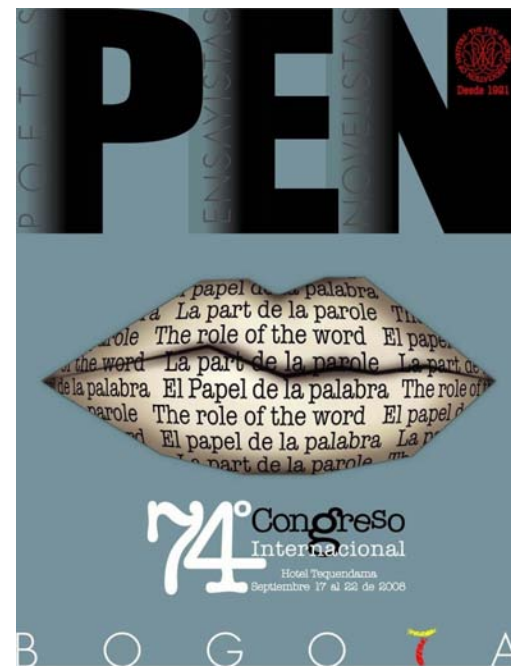
'The role of the word' – the theme of the Congress – informed two panel sessions, one by RENATA, a body which seeks to have prisoners and other disadvantaged people, some illiterate, present or write their own stories as a path to self-respect: 'The role of the word in journalism', with

Colombian and visiting writers participating; and a round-table discussion of 'The role of the word related to justice and in building peace.'

The Congress venue was the Tequendama Hotel. From the top floor hall where the General Assembly was held, we could see the walls of the bull-ring (never mentioned – and anyway out of season), and a tangle of busy streets, where we were warned it was unwise to venture alone. This did not prevent some adventurous dining out.

Two absences saddened Judy Buckrich, the Chair of the International PEN Women Writers' Committee, and me: none of our Sydney colleagues were present, and the International Secretary, Eugene Schoulgin, had just undergone an operation and was recuperating at home in Istanbul. However, International Treasurer Eric Lax delivered Eugene's report on the year and chaired the important Board meetings that take place at Congress.

Notable among the In Memoriam notices was Sasha Tkachenko, of the Russian Centre, a most courageous defender of writers and freedom of speech in his country. Many felt a personal loss and recalled the many



Poster for the 74th International Congress in Bogotá, Colombia.

campaigns – for individual writers and for the continued existence of his threatened Centre – in which Sasha ran no small risk to his own liberty.

Resolutions that were passed by the Assembly of Delegates, chaired by Internatioinal President Jiri Grusa, included crimes committed against writers and against freedom of expression in Mexico, Colombia, Cuba, China, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Russia, Vietnam, and Iran, as well as a Resolution on Religious Defamation and Freedom of Expression, responding to United Nations resolutions that change that body's traditional role away from protecting the rights of individuals, instead restricting them.

The Writers in Prison Committee recorded current membership at 67 Centres. Its 2007 overview reported support for over 1,000 threatened or attacked writers in 90 countries, 105 Rapid Action Network appeals, and the release of 94 imprisoned writers. There was a focus on Criminal Defamation Laws being used to suppress criticism of civic and military authority.

The Writers in Exile Network is now chaired by Norwegian PEN, working to new recommendations, which include emphasis on exchange of information (comprehensive reporting, and a page on the International PEN website with links to member centres) and assistance to new centres

getting involved. The reports from some of the 19 Cities of Refuge reveal very diverse strategies for helping writers to live, continue their writing careers, and surmount bureaucratic difficulties and cultural alienation.

With the election of Josep Terricabras, the Chair of the Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee moves back to Barcelona. However the Diversity website hosted by Macedonia will continue. The Committee met at Ohrid in September 2007; lent its name to support the April Festival of World Literature and Intercultural Dialogue in London; is extending an already fruitful relationship with UNESCO, which funded four speakers at its Congress meeting; and is to hold an international conference in Algeria in December. Its motion for the linguistic rights of speakers of Aromanian (a language used in the Balkans), was passed in the Assembly. The Aromanian online magazine *Network/Le Réseau/La Red* has a rapidly increasing world readership.

The Women Writers' Committee reported on the African Women Writers' conference which followed the Dakar Congress; a Central Asian Women Writers' conference held in Helsinki in August 2007; and the prospect of an Asia and Pacific conference to be hosted by Indian PEN in Mumbai, in 2010.

Elections returned Algerian Mohamed Magani to the Board and

elected Independent Chinese Yang Lian. From our region, New Zealander Nelson Wattie at his first Congress scored well in voting.

A new Vice-President was elected: the eminent Macedonian poet Kata Kulakova, who has headed the Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee with tireless industry.

I have taken on the Chairing of the Search Committee, succeeding Franca Tiberto. This Committee has now been given the responsibility of conducting not only Assembly elections, but also those of Committee Chairpersons. Next year two Chairs come to the end of their tenure – Judy Buckrich of the Women Writers' Committee, and Karen Clark, Chair of the Writers in Prison Committee. International PEN will also elect a new International President.

Workshops held near the end of the Congress looked at the qualifications required of a candidate for the position of International President – high expectations there – and on the problems and progress made in different regions.

Many participants hoped for extra sessions, but perhaps better communication between Centres and through the International PEN website now provide a way to keep talking to one another. Discussion within the "Asia and the Pacific" interest group will surely be stimulated by the prospect of a Japanese congress in 2010.

Round the formal sessions other events were arranged: a book exhibition, a party at the art collection of the Banco de la Republica, visits to museums and the Salt Cathedral (Piranesi-like interiors carved out of a long-worked and current salt mine). We also appreciated the wonderful library network – the central Biblioteca Luís Angel Arango and four peripheral key libraries (including the Biblioteca Virgilio Barca, where we lunched and presented poems with translations to the public), which service scores of neighbourhood libraries and programs to promote literacy from early childhood and in deprived neighbourhoods.

The Congress ended with a dinner at the Metropolitan Club, set in a pine forest in the spectacular hills that ring Bogotá. As dancers took the floor – an inevitable consequence of Latin American music! – there were particularly high spirits at the German-speaking table: Austria will host the next Congress, at Linz, declared the Cultural Capital of Europe for 2009.

Judith Rodriguez is a poet, a former member of the International Board and has been the Melbourne delegate to several congresses. To read more about the Bogotá Congress visit www.internationalpen.co.uk.

last word

BY Patrick Cook

PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING THAT SHAKESPEARE WROTE WAS FILTH, CONVEYED BY DOUBLE MEANINGS.



This is the discovery of one of the most enjoyable books to come my way in many a year: *Filthy Shakespeare*, by Pauline Kiernan. It seems the plays are also acutely sensitive to every aspect of human being and feeling – of course, goes without saying – but couched in bawdy.

The audience hooted, the protectors of the realm's morals laughed coarsely up the back, perhaps Gloriana herself slapped her bony thighs and told her dwarf that that was a good one; that Shakespeare is a naughty boy, I can't wait to tell Walsingham, he'll cack himself.

We must take Ms Kiernan on trust, of course, when she tells us that the Bard had more words for 'fuck' than the Eskimos had for cod. The way Ms Kiernan reads it, pretty much every active verb and most common nouns suggested carnality to the stalls in the right hands – even, or especially, the nouns and verbs Shakespeare invented when the English language lagged behind his tumescent muse. Gestures of hands, hips and thespian groin may have been employed. There may also have been tongue, acrobatics, simulated dog-knotting.

And fair enough, too. Our Will

was pitching intensely felt legends of the human condition, after all – and without an arts grant, which meant he also had to fill the house. What better way to pack the pit with attentive ordinaries than to offer them a dependable dollop of smut?

The point is that the authorities didn't mind a bit. As we all know from the film *Shakespeare in Love*, when Simon Calow stalked in with his pikemen to close the place down it wasn't because the actors were talking dirty, it was because there was a woman on the stage, rather than the regulation bloke in a frock.

This prohibition was based on the quaint notion that actresses were prostitutes, or near enough, strumpets, wantons and tarts (a suspicion that lingers to this day, frequently reinforced). It is especially quaint because contemporary accounts persuade us that the streets of London were packed from wall to wall and door to door with prostitutes, a leavening of pickpockets, and the occasional tired but happy sailor. Perhaps it was a demarcation problem.

However – and this is the other point – there was no censorship of this lewdness. Sauce for the goose and sauce for the gander both, it's

only human, isn't it; wait till I tell Burghley the one about country matters, he likes it rough.

What Shakespeare was very, very nervous about was political censorship. This did not take the form of Master Calow's pikemen knocking the scenery about and barring the doors. It took the form of the playwright having his head on the end of one of the pikes.

That was the thing about the Tudors: you were either with them or you were assisting the authorities with their inquiries, by donating your liver and lights. And that meant all the Tudors, in all their roots and branches, going way back. It was unwise to suggest that the houses of Lancaster and York might both have had a point. It would have been an act of self-harm to hint that the Henrys might have had a blind spot when it came to picking fights in order to slaughter the French.

You could throw in a bit of 'war is shocking; terrible thing war, can't argue with that, power goes to some people's heads, tyrants sometimes cop it, go mad, find the crown heavy at times', but you had to pick your wars and crowns and tyrants carefully. Any resemblance to any Tudor living or dead could not even be incidental.

And, as we know, our Will got away with it, very popular at court, always looking for the best in people and finding it, especially in Tudors. He must have had some nervous rewrites. Marlowe got involved with

politics and look what happened to him. And so it was that when Elizabeth handed in her coronet and the Stuarts came to town, Will suddenly realised that he had given enough pleasure on the boards, big kisses all round, hugs, tears, threw a few things into a bag, and took the night coach to Stratford and solid, unobtrusive citizenship. He certainly left very few scripts behind him; it took ages to cobble up a folio.

There was always the chance that if James I read a bit, he might read into Will's tales of kings the same richness of entendre that Ms Kiernan discovered, only political this time. Titillation and treason being alike in that there's a lot of it about, if you only know where to look.

That really is the point, when it comes to censorship. It's either about sex or politics, seldom both at once, and it comes in alternating waves of correctness. The trick is, probably, if you're putting out a piece of filth, trick it up as a compelling political analogy, or if you're challenging the very political establishment itself, put a shag in it. There's a lot of both about.

Patrick Cook is a cartoonist and writer who knows more words for 'global warming' than Shakespeare.

may - november 2008



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