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freedom to write, freedom to read

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New Reckonings:

Is there a future for Australian literature

Moorhouse wins PEN Keneally Award

Dissident writers given voice at International PEN Asia & Pacific Regional Conference

David Williamson's John Sumner Lecture

Alex Buzo: A life celebrated

PEN urges repeal of punitive Turkish law

PEN centres around the world have mourned the death on 19 January this year of the courageous Hrant Dink, assassinated outside the Istanbul offices of *Agos*, the Turkish-Armenian weekly newspaper he edited.

Dink, an honorary member of a number of PEN centres, was prosecuted several times for the crime of "insulting Turkish identity" under the notorious Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, the provision under which Orhan Pamuk, Elif Shafak and many other writers and publishers have been charged. Around 15 writers, journalists and publishers are currently being prosecuted in Turkey under Article 301, including Dink's son, Arat, and two *Agos* employees whose charges are being heard on 14 June.

On 3 May, the trial of publisher and prominent Turkish intellectual Ragip Zarakolu on Article 301 charges commences. Zarakolu, the director and owner of Belge Publishing House, a recipient of the NOVIB/PEN Free Expression Award 2003 and an honorary member of American PEN and English PEN, has been subjected to long-term harassment by the Turkish authorities.

Although, in some cases, the charges are dismissed (the case against Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk was thrown out on a technicality; that against Elif Shafak of insulting Turkish identity was dismissed for insufficient evidence), the very fact that writers and publishers are prosecuted regrettably marks them as prominent targets for verbal and physical intimidation by nationalist extremists. This is in part due to the use of the vague concept of 'insult' in the criminal legislation, which enables it to be very easily used against writers and publishers who have commented on sensitive issues.

The *International Herald Tribune* reported last year that, at Orhan Pamuk's trial, angry nationalists booed and jostled the heavy police escort that took Pamuk into the packed courthouse. Policemen with plastic shields escorted him from the courthouse into a minivan under a barrage of eggs and invective by angry protesters, as shouts of "Traitor Pamuk" echoed in the narrow streets.

Dink's trials were also marred by violent scenes inside and outside the courtrooms, with nationalists calling for him to be punished and heckling journalists and other observers. Pamuk left Turkey under police escort on 1 February, days after the man believed by police to have organised Dink's murder threatened him as he was taken into custody. Pamuk reportedly has no plans to return.

There have been vehement calls for the repeal of Article 301, in which Sydney PEN joined last year, but another very troubling development is the use of Article 288 of the Penal Code (interfering with the judiciary) to prosecute those who question Turkish courts' decisions in relation to Article 301 charges. Arat Dink and *Agos* editor Serkis Seropyan, for example, have been charged under Article 288 for publishing an article questioning the court's decision to sentence Dink to a six months suspended sentence under Article 301. In addition, a number of writers who have questioned the cult surrounding Ataturk have been charged with insulting his memory.

Dink's death prompted Turkish authorities to offer police protection to about 20 writers and academics but this clearly will not solve the problem that the use of the very divisive Article 301 will continue to inflame Turkish nationalists against writers and publishers in such violent ways. Sydney PEN's view continues to be that Article 301 and similar legislation which prevents writers from expressing their legitimate views should be repealed.

Angela Bowne

Moorhouse calls for rethink on the economy of the arts

At a ceremony in March, distinguished Australian writer Frank Moorhouse AM was awarded the 2007 biennial PEN Keneally Award. But it was an accolade he almost didn't accept.

"My first reaction was, of course, to be pleased," he says, "but then, uncharacteristically for me or any other writer, I had second thoughts about accepting it."

As the second recipient of the Keneally Award, Frank Moorhouse says it was the experiences of inaugural winner, Indonesian publisher and translator Joesoef Isak, that made him feel he wasn't altogether worthy.

"No Australian that I know has suffered like he had. I thought this award should really go to people like Joesoef Isak. I thought I'd led a privileged life compared to his, a very safe life."

Despite his initial reservations, Frank Moorhouse says he is proud to accept the award and hopes it draws attention to what he believes is the third major crisis of freedom of expression he has seen in Australia: sedition laws and government censorship in a post-9/11 world.

Although he says this is one of the greatest concerns facing the creative arts today, he believes the biggest issue the industry must grapple with is funding.

"The economy of the arts needs to be rethought totally because having the resources to do your work, to do your writing, to practice your art, is critical to the production of good art," he says.

Over the last 40 years, Frank Moorhouse has written 14 books, four of which have been made into films. He has won the Miles Franklin Prize; the South Australian Premier's Award for Fiction; The Age Book of the Year and the Australian Literature Society's Gold Medal.

It was in high school that he first discovered his love for short stories which he consumed voraciously in the library of his alma mater, Wollongong Tech. Among his favourites were O. Henry and Lawson, and then he read Hemingway.

"I came across a book of Hemingway's short stories in a Nowra gift shop and I bought it. It was the first hardback book I ever bought and I thought 'Wow, this is how short stories should be written'."

Taking advantage of his position as editor of the school newspaper, he began to publish his own work while also sending his stories to magazines and journals and "getting rejected".

A breakthrough when he was 17 when *Southerly* magazine, then edited by poet Kenneth Slessor, published Frank's 'The Young Girl and the American Sailor'.

"It was my first acceptance and that was a knockout. I even got paid for it! What's more, it said on the cover, '10 short stories by Frank Moorhouse and other writers'."

Despite success at Southerly and the subsequent interest from other literary journals, he was to continue to feel the pang of rejection. As he matured so, too, did the content of his work – sexual themes were increasingly explored in Australian fiction as society loosened up. It was almost 10 years before the Frank Moorhouse byline reappeared.

"You are very vulnerable to rejections. It's a dreadful word to use in the business of writing because it's so connected with emotional rejection and personal rejection," he says. "But often, if you are lucky, you're very passionate and obsessive so you keep on writing and you are not crushed by rejection."

Along with his writing, Frank Moorhouse continues to be an outspoken advocate on issues from copyright to censorship. The test case Moorhouse v UNSW in 1975 ultimately secured payment for multiple copying of writers' work in educational and other institutions and is still the leading High Court case on authorisation of copyright infringement. And while still fighting the censorship crusade today, he has also been involved in opposing the 1950s campaign to ban the Communist Party and the 1960s effort to omit strong language and sexual themes from writing.

But he is quick to point out that writers should not be politically active in the conventional sense. Rather than signing petitions and speaking at public meetings on the issues of the day, he believes writers should confine their efforts to their area of expertise.

"They should be active in defending issues around writing: not only censorship but all the other issues, negotiating resources from society, making sure that we are properly rewarded and able to do the work as well as we should be able to do it, and defending other writers, and that's what PEN is good at."

After a lifetime of campaigning for the creative arts, Frank Moorhouse was awarded life membership of PEN and appointed to the Sydney PEN Writers' Panel in June 2006.

Frank Moorhouse still awakes every day thinking about writing – and this is the ultimate test, he says. "Sometimes it's the most gratifying thing of the day, the writing time. And that's a good test of one's relationship to writing, I think. If it's not gratifying and it's not something you wake up wanting to do, maybe you should be doing something else."

Bonny Symons-Brown

Mofid Guirguis

Writers Frank Moorhouse and Tom Keneally

The PEN Keneally Award, named in honour of Sydney PEN Writers' Panel member Tom Keneally AO for his commitment to the values of PEN, was created in 2004 to recognise achievements in promoting freedom of expression, and international understanding and access to literature as expressed in the charter of International PEN.

Time to re-connect the national

In the wake of recent debate on the state of Australian literature, the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL) held a two-day conference at Sydney University in February. The conference honoured retiring Professor of Australian Literature at Sydney University and PEN Management Committee member, Elizabeth Webby. One of the speakers was Robert Dixon, who has taken up the Chair of Australian Literature at the University of Sydney.

Karl Schwerdtfeger

Professor Robert Dixon

Robert Dixon, who was formerly ARC Australian Professorial Fellow at the University of Queensland, is currently writing a book about Frank Hurley, Travelling Mass-Media Circus, *and preparing an illustrated edition of Hurley's diaries for Melbourne University Press. An extended version of this paper will be published in* Southerly, *Nos 1 & 2, 2007.*

In my brief reflection here on the past, present and future of the study of Australian literature, I see this as a time of change and risk, certainly, but also as a time when there is a potential to develop new and international trajectories in Australian literary studies.

However much we might wish it to be otherwise there will be no future growth in university resources or personnel comparable to that of the 1960s, either in Australian literature or other areas of literary study. While it appears that the number of staff and courses dedicated to Australian literature has contracted, this is in proportion to the contraction of English in general. At most universities, English has fewer staff than it did 20 or 30 years ago. There is some question about whether even the sandstone universities can still offer the coverage they once did. It is not unusual for departments to be unable to offer, say, the literature of the eighteenth century or American literature.

These are major issues to do with sustaining the traditions of the discipline of literary studies, not just Australian literature. Real growth will come from pursuing conversations with our colleagues in other areas of English. Indeed, some very good work in Australian literary studies is being written today by people who were or remain specialists in fields like Victorian literature, Romanticism, American literature, theatre history, book history, computer assisted scholarly editing, cultural studies and post-colonialism.

The idea that Australian literature must compete against an established metropolitan literary canon as it did in the mid twentieth century is no longer convincing. In my view, our future prospects are related to ways of thinking about liaisons with other fields of literary studies that are, like us, being required to change and become more strategic.

Of course, the place of Australian literature in the academy has always been fragile. Rather than accept narratives of contraction and decline, it is probably more accurate to say that the subject is entering a new phase in its development, and that in its future form – whatever that may be – it will require as much advocacy as it did at any other time in its history. We are now in a very different period to the 1980s, when public support for the humanities could still be taken for granted; when academics were busy questioning canonicity and disciplinarity in the name of difference, and using literature to practise cultural critique.

We cannot take for granted that there is a well-established taste, competence and set of values associated with literary studies now. This is not to say that the Australian canon should be taught uncritically or unhistorically, but the canon must be taught. We need to see ourselves not always, or not just, as critics, but also as advocates for literature, and ways of teaching and writing positively about it in the same way that an art gallery is responsible for exhibiting and promoting informed, intelligent discussion about its paintings.

As an academic discipline, Australian literature began, roughly, in the 1950s. During its formative period – in the 1960s and 1970s – the main concern was to establish the research tools and techniques necessary for the academic study of a national literature. This meant establishing and critically justifying a national canon; setting separate courses of study; building up scholarly resources such as bibliographies and histories of the national literature; producing reliable editions of canonical texts; and publishing biographical and critical studies of Australian authors.

The new nationalism of the 1970s inspired further development of Australian literary studies involving the consolidation of cultural nationalism at home and its projection abroad. I think of this as the weak version of the internationalisation of Australian studies. The weakness arises firstly from the institutional location, limited resources and limited number of scholars undertaking research about Australia overseas, and secondly from the fact that the dominant driver of their intellectual projects is the nation, which limits the impact that can be achieved within overseas institutions.

The frameworks developed in these earlier periods continue to sustain present and future projects in Australian literary studies; their legacies persist into the digital age. We need to maintain and develop our nation-based research projects – if we don't, who will? And we need to maintain and develop our nation-based links with overseas centres and organisations interested in Australian literature. But, as in the past, Australian literary studies must respond to the wider intellectual, political and social agendas of the present. What we

literature to world contexts

are well placed to do now is explore and elaborate the many ways in which the national literature has always been connected to the world.

Many of our major writers – Patrick White, Christina Stead, and Henry Handel Richardson, to name just a few – were very cosmopolitan people and fluent in more than one language. There are things we need to know about beyond Australia – even beyond Anglophone culture – to understand them fully. There was no sense in which White, for example, was formed as a writer by an Australian literary tradition. At Cambridge, he read Modern Languages and was trained in the method of comparative literature.

Contemporary writers like David Malouf, Peter Carey, Les A. Murray and Robert Dessaix have major reputations overseas, where they are often read very differently to the way they are read here. Australian writers and Australian literature have never been confined to the boundaries of the nation. Literary influences and intellectual formations, and the business of editing, publishing, translation, reception and reputation-making take place both within and beyond the nation. Understanding this uses the infrastructure that has been developed over the generations of Australian literary scholarship, but it takes some new turns and trajectories.

What might a transnational practice of Australian literary criticism look like? What kinds of research questions would it ask? What kinds of data, criticism and reading would we need to develop a transnational perspective?

Career Biography: a transnational literary history would use biography as a tool to grasp the long-established relation between Australian careers and transnational cultures. And it would need to consider not only those lives lived beyond the nation but also those that remained within the nation while identifying with international cultures. Think of recent work on Vance and Nettie Palmer which reveals their intense involvement in European modernism even before they left Australia.

Social and intellectual formations: a transnational literary critique can demonstrate how careers in writing are enabled by transnational social and intellectual formations such as romanticism, communism, Catholicism, feminism, spiritualism, modernism, postmodernism – and in fact nationalism itself, as the case of the Palmers again demonstrates.

Economic and industry histories: a transnational literary practice will consider how Australian writing is bound up with the international publishing and entertainment industries, including corporations, personnel, editing practices, and domains of intellectual rights.

Translation and other-language reception: a transnational critique must acknowledge the two-way street of literary translation. This has always been important to Australian writers, yet information about it is not readily available. We now have the tools – such as the Austlit database – to begin to correct this.

From Australian literature to literature in Australia: a transnational approach would involve shifting from the study of Australian literature, narrowly conceived, to something like literature in Australia, especially the history of the book and reading formations.

Genre-based studies: a transnational literary history will chart the international migration and local adaptation of literary forms, such as the novel, in relation to Australian texts and contexts.

Here, then, is a research and publishing agenda for Australian literature. The national literature we have worked so hard to bring into visibility was in reality always embedded in a series of wider contexts or horizons of explanation that we were not always able to recognise, and that now demand our attention. It has always been more cosmopolitan than we allowed, not least in the influence on Australian writers of literatures in languages other than English. Having fought and largely won the battle to mark out what is distinctively national about the national culture, we might now re-discover the extent to which it was formed through its relations to other cultures in both time and space

In my reckoning with these trends I had not meant to set up cultural nationalism and transnationalism as either a binary opposition or a chronological succession. I don't mean to imply that in the past all of our literary criticism was inwardly nationalist because it wasn't. I'm not arguing that in adopting a more cosmopolitan perspective we must cease being nationalists; or that to develop productive links with other fields of English we must stop being Australian literature specialists. I'm actually asking for something much more difficult – and that is that we should try to be all of these things at once.

Developing intra-disciplinary connections within English and adopting transnational perspectives may offer an opportunity to re-connect the national literature – and our publishing about it – to world contexts. For this reason I have very carefully chosen the punctuation in my title as a hyphen rather than a colon: 'Australian literature-International Contexts', as if to say that, in our reckoning, the two should always go together; that national literatures are relational, not singular phenomena.

Robert Dixon

Sydney University

Elizabeth Webby, retiring Professor of Australian Literature at Sydney University, was honoured at the New Reckonings conference.

Six silly things people say

Historian Jill Roe was a special guest at the New Reckonings conference. Her biography of Miles Franklin will be published by HarperCollins. Here she reflects on the writer.

Effy Alexakis, Centre for Flexible Learning, Macquarie University

Historian and Emeritus Professor Jill Roe was recently Professor of History at Macquarie University. She is director of the Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature Centre.

Some of the silly things that have been said about Miles Franklin are too trivial or bizarre for more than a mention. Probably there will always be someone who thinks Miles Franklin is a man, or that she is still alive, as happened as recently as 2004; but it is unlikely that anyone would ever again think she must be black because she was said to be native-born, as did a New York reviewer of *My Brilliant Career* in 1902. Likewise, some silly things probably can't be corrected because the myth is more fun, as with the now probably fatally blurred difference between the words 'suffragist' and 'suffragette'. For the record, neither Miles nor any other resident Australian woman, excepting Vida Goldstein from 1911, could properly speaking be called a suffragette, as there was no call for British style militancy in Australia.

That said, we have a fairly wide choice.

There are good reasons for that. One is Miles herself. It has often been remarked that you can find anything in her voluminous papers, and then the opposite. P. R. Stephensen once said "she was as paradoxical as platypus", and she put the odd thing in circulation which seems to have lasted as well. Maybe I should add that despite the riches, there are inevitably gaps in her records, for example on money matters, a subject of fundamental importance to us all. On the other hand it certainly is possible to keep too much archival material. While she did ultimately cull some of it – well thank goodness for that – it seems clear she didn't do that much.

Another basic is that the passage of time is itself an invitation to 'silly things'. Two generations have elapsed since Miles died in 1954, and almost five since she was born in 1879. A good indicator of the distance between then and now is that we just been celebrating 50 years of TV in Australia. Miles knew about the new medium but she died just a couple of years too soon to benefit.

It must be said that 'silly things' mostly come from unthinking responses to the writing life, and to the problems faced by intellectual women in Australia in her period. One of Miles' friends remarked she was "too clever for the real world"; and it cannot be supposed that absolutely everyone will love and admire such a figure, even if she is still brilliant a hundred years, and as was demonstrated in 2001, has entered the national imaginary. I have previously suggested, and maintain, that Miles Franklin was a bush intellectual, a problematic category still.

In what follows I pick up a few threads, on *My Brilliant Career*, education, politics, feminism, secrecy, and chauvinism.

No 1. It is claimed that Miles Franklin withdrew *My Brilliant Career* from publication in 1910 because of the furore it caused in the local community. Unless I have missed something, the reason she withdrew *My Brilliant Career* at this time is undocumented. However apart from the fact that her immediate family was supportive, people had had almost a decade to get over it, and although she certainly was embarrassed at the time, by then she was living in America. More importantly what evidence there is indicates that neither author nor publisher had an interest in keeping it in print any longer. There had been six editions since 1901,and there were 168 copies in stock in December 1909. But it was still selling, with 16 pounds 12 shillings royalties paid March 1910.

Although Miles' letter of instruction does not survive, it seems clear she wanted to move on, and with more work coming out, to distance herself from *My Brilliant Career*, particularly in the British market, where the suffrage theme of her 1909 novel *Some Everyday Folk and Dawn* was more topical and returns would be better, due to the system of differential royalties paid by British publishers in 'home' and 'colonial' markets.

No 2. A journalist interviewing Miles in 1903 was at pains to emphasise that she was not uneducated: "The idea that Miss Franklin is uneducated is erroneous. She has not been to school [but has had] sound private tuition", wrote Zara Baar Aronson, in 'Some Impressions of the authoress of *My Brilliant Career*' in *Home Queen* 18/12/1903, p 2. That misrepresentation of Miles' education was maybe just a mistake, or more likely a misconception, caused by the interviewee's anxiety and lack of sophistication. Of course Miles had been to school, Thornford Public 1890-94, where she was a little star, as well as having had private tuition at Brindabella. The evidence is extensive that she was well schooled in both situations, and that she had certain other advantages in the old Australia, not least a sense of place.

about Miles Franklin

No 3. Marjorie Barnard in her graceful but purely literary biography of Miles Franklin - which sources reveal she regretted undertaking – proposed that Miles was "not really a democrat". Well, if it comes to that who is, and what sort? Whatever did Barnard mean? That Miles was not a member of the Labor Party when she returned to Australia? Miles was so appalled by the troglodyte character of NSW labor politics in the 1930s that, like Edna Ryan, she took the apparently radical option of social credit in the State election in 1934; but by the late 1930s she was able to vote for an Evatt in both State and national elections, and probably did for the rest of her life. Probably what Barnard meant was that Miles began life as member of the squattocracy. But not only was Miles Franklin incorrigibly political but her politics were shaped by her father, known as ' a keen political student', active in radical Goulburn in the 1890s as a Protectionist and a councillor when the family moved to Penrith.

The later influence of first wave feminism and American progressivism is well known. Perhaps the missing variable is British liberalism, still vital in London in the 1920s, but exhausted by Barnard's day, by which time most radical Liberals had moved across to the Labor Party in England (the champagne socialists), though this was, and maybe is again, harder to envisage in Australia.

No 4. Coming to the well known idea that Miles Franklin's life was blighted by feminism, I will only say that in historical biography denigration gets you nowhere. Although it is increasingly understood that the sexual revolution did not happen all at once or in the same way at the same rate to all peoples in every part of the world, we still have a way to go in appreciating the metropolitan: periphery, rural:urban, and male: female variables which determined Miles Franklin's position. In general I conclude Miles was a child of her times in this as in so much else, and that she was forthright in coping with emerging contradictions.

No 5. It is often said that Miles Franklin was obsessed with secrecy. This is understandable, and in part justified, but Miles would retort that the difference between her and most people was that she could actually keep a secret; and it rather depends on the issue of pseudonyms. Traditional writer's rights include the right to submit and publish manuscripts under pen names, forever if they chose. It is also necessary to take into account past practices with respect to peer review and literary competitions in Miles's day. The latter required entries to be submitted in sealed envelopes under pen names, with contact address attached separately, thus ensuring the judges never knew whose work they were reading.

If Miles' undeniable penchant for secrecy was and still seems tiresome, at least its functionality, and often hilarious side, should be acknowledged.

Finally, to the sixth of 'silly' things that have been said about Miles Franklin, that she was chauvinist, in the original sense. The my country right or wrong concept. Nothing could be further from the truth. Miles had unusually wide international experience, and was a vigorous critic of governments. And she understood very well the limits of nationality.

It is in this context that the issue of race should be addressed. While in later life Miles expressed herself freely in letters – too freely for her own good – on matters of race, there are really two separate aspects to be considered.

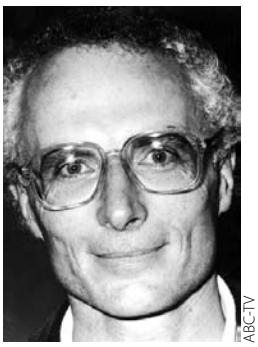
First, Miles had no problem with Aboriginality. She understood the basis of the Aboriginal cause, as it stood in her day, that is before the era of land rights; she was actually among the handful of whiteys present at the Aboriginal Day of Mourning at the Australian Hall in Sydney in 1938.

The White Australia Policy is a different and more complex matter. By the late 1940s, Australia was at the crossroads. The mass immigration program had just begun; the Asian demographic revolution was in full swing; there was lingering horror at the Japanese treatment of Australian POWs; and from 1951 until shortly before Miles' death, Australia was involved in another land war in Asia, this time in a Korea now coloured by communism. What would Australia be like if this went on, she asked?

Apart from immigration controls, she was at a loss for answers; and in fact answers lay beyond her life time. To diplomat and would-be dramatist Ric Throssell, then serving in Rio de Janiero, she wrote ruefully that "We dyed-in-the-gum and wattle British Australians are passing like the lyre-birds and bandicoots" (20 December 1950). To Throssell's mother, her friend and fellow writer Katharine Susannah Prichard, she wrote more pugnaciously that the world was in bad way. Unless mankind adopted birth control and gave up wars there was no hope. Even so, she was capable of envisaging new approaches; and David Martin, of Jewish-Hungarian extraction, was her great hope for an immigrant voice in Australian literature.

Jill Roe

A celebration of a man and his work


ABC-TV

Playwright Alex Buzo, who died after a long battle with cancer, was known for being witty, incisive and very funny.

February 18, 2007: a small crowd gathers on a sunny morning in an inner-city park. Family, friends and admirers of his work are here to pay tribute to Alex Buzo and his many contributions to Australian literature. It's a Sunday and two of Alex's young grandsons play ball as we listen to fellow playwright Ned Manning reading from Alex's last book, *Legends of the Baggy Green* (2004). His love of sport, especially tennis and cricket, is commented on by many during the day. Meanwhile, across the Tasman, the seemingly invincible Australian cricket team is losing yet another one-day series. Alex, also a keen observer of all things New Zealand – a later reading is taken from his *Kiwese* (1994) – would have appreciated the conjunction if not, perhaps, the outcome.

We move into the courtyard of Currency House for further readings, including some hilarious extracts from *The Young Person's Guide to the Theatre and Almost Everything Else*. By the time this appeared in 1988, Alex had had 20 years experience of the Australian theatre scene and his comments on it include some of his funniest work. He had set himself the goal of becoming Australia's first professional playwright after his first play, *Norm and Ahmed*, was accepted for production in November 1967. Probably still the best known of Buzo's works, *Norm and Ahmed's* depiction of the violence and racism which lurks under a thin veneer of Australian mateship, was banned in some states because of its use of 'FOUR LETTER WORDS', as proclaimed on a *Sun* newspaper banner, now preserved behind glass on a Currency House wall.

A highlight of the celebration was a reading by Harold Hopkins and Craig Menaud of Buzo's unpublished 1998 rewriting of this play as *Normie and Tuan*. Here a Vietnam War veteran (though he served as a cook rather than a soldier) accosts a young student of Vietnamese heritage. The interplay between these two works, separated by thirty years, is as fascinating as the interplay between the characters remains disturbing.

Alex Buzo's historical drama *Macquarie* was, in 1971, the first play to be published by Currency Press. Katharine Brisbane, who founded the Press with her husband, the late Phillip Parsons, recalled a launch in the Rocks featuring many theatrical luminaries and much alcohol. In an extract from the play, Elaine Hudson and John Gregg movingly portrayed Elizabeth and Lachlan Macquarie as they contemplate the thwarting of his ambitious plans for the new colony.

However, for me, the standout reading was the passage from *Coralie Lansdowne Says No* (1974), wonderfully read by Sandy Gore and Bill Conn. In later discussion, it was recalled that this play was also controversial, with 1970s feminists strongly objecting to the ending, in which Coralie says yes to an inferior male specimen, someone much shorter than her. There was consensus, however, that it remains a powerful piece and one certainly due for a revival.

Reflecting on it afterwards, I wondered if Coralie was Buzo's response to Ibsen's Hedda. Both women have grandiose dreams of themselves and their ideal lives; both are forced to compromise. But while Hedda shoots herself, Coralie ultimately accepts her fate.

Making the best of your talents and opportunities was certainly one of Alex Buzo's rules. While ultimately not able to make a living solely from his plays, writing in a variety of genres allowed him to survive as a professional writer, something still all too rare in Australia, As one of his three daughters, Laura Buzo, told us in the panel discussion which concluded the day's events, Alex was very disciplined as well as hard-working, someone who never missed a deadline. She recalled playing to the sound of him typing overhead. Given his interest in English usage – he was, for example, a founding member of the Plain English Foundation – it was not surprising to learn that Alex's children were taught from an early age never to use cliches or poor grammar.

Other speakers in the final session, 'Alex Buzo and Australian Style', included Bob Ellis, sometime member of the Buzo cricket team, and Malcolm Robertson and Ken Horler, who directed his plays in Melbourne and Sydney respectively. Of the quartet of male playwrights seen as forming the new wave of Australian theatre in the late 1960s – David Williamson, John Romeril, Jack Hibberd and Buzo – the latter was the only one not from Melbourne. His plays lacked the larrikin excesses and deliberate ockerness associated with Melbourne's Pram Factory.

His interest in language was not confined to an exploitation of Aussie vernacular but widened out to a concern with the ways in which people talk without managing to communicate. I was interested to learn that his plays were much more successful in Melbourne than in Sydney. For theatre critic John McCallum they are also the ones from the period that are most likely to survive.

Elizabeth Webby

Elizabeth Webby is a member of Sydney PEN Management Commitee.

Advocate storytellers stand up for compassion

I don't know what the book's final title will be – it's still being discussed. But I recently wrote an introduction for a collection of refugee advocates' tales. This book, like many others, will demonstrate that the detention system is still in place, is still destroying people, besmirching our national psyche and limiting our own freedoms.

Take this case: a group of Australian people who wished to show their solidarity with asylum seekers locked up in the infamous Baxter detention centre took kites to fly high into that vivid and relentless sky. But even this small gesture could not be permitted. Police arrived, kites were smashed, Kafka-esque threats of prosecution for violating air space were made. This in good old laid-back, easy-going Australia.

The advocate story-tellers of the book, whatever it's finally called, stand up for compassion – that now-despised virtue – on the days the rest of us are too busy looking at gross domestic product to pay even mental attention to gross national crime.

Here we encounter Frances Milne's involvement in a life-and-death effort to prevent the brutal deportation back to a future of imprisonment and torture of an Iranian she calls Kassabe. Or Michael Dudley's account of a woman who escaped detention on her third birthday behind the wire and stood on a cliff ready to suicide. Why? When her baby had been taken from her the week before, "The small mother had shouted, so they put her in solitary … they carted her off to an asylum." The press and public took up her case and suddenly genuine asylum was granted. We are left to ask why it was not granted earlier, and with less torment?

The advocates who tell their stories in this book-to-be – they include a number whom I know personally – are frantically busy people who have either given up other potentially lucrative business to devote themselves full time to the victims behind the wire, or who fit their work for asylum seekers somehow into the full-time professional career. As one advocate's husband explains it, even while he cries, "Christ Almighty! Not another refugee!" the moral imperative of fighting for the freedom of another human takes over, even if the fight might be futile. "Occasionally, a refugee is saved notwithstanding the best efforts of the Australian government to destroy them, physically or psychologically. Not much time to celebrate, however, because there is always another unfortunate refugee on the doorstep, figuratively speaking."

These are contemporary narratives. The system is still there and is still evil. While the former minister Amanda Vanstone was denouncing Big Brother's turkey-slapping episode, sexual abuse in her detention centres was being glossed over and explained away, as was the agony of the detainees. One advocate wrote to his local member of Parliament:

If there is something wrong
What kind of evidence do you believe?
Letters from the sufferer or
Letters from their advocate or
The tears of the sufferer or
The sweat of their advocate or
The blood of the sufferer or
The corpse of the sufferer or
A message from God?

Sorry to sound portentous, but Fellow PEN members should be aware that detainees are still being lost to a stubborn government's criminal policy.

Tom Keneally won the Booker Prize in 1982 with Schindler's Ark. *He has written seven works of non-fiction and 26 works of fiction. His novels* The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith, Gossip From The Forest *and* Confederates *were all shortlisted for the Booker* Prize. *He is a member of Sydney PEN Writers' Panel, and Sydney PEN Writers in Detention Committe. Tom was co-author with Rosie Scott of PEN's Refugee Anthology* Another Country *which includes writing by 30 detainees, refugees and former asylum seekers.*

Scully Fund gift

In February, the Scully Fund made a very generous gift of $20,000 to Sydney PEN. Thanks to the Scully Fund, and to Jack Durack who made the application, we now have $20,000 that will be put towards part-time administration. As Jack said in his letter of thanks to the Trustees of the Scully Fund, "We are particularly grateful for the trustees' generosity and prescience in considering it appropriate to make a gift principally for the administrative services so badly needed and without tying the gift to a particular project. Would you please let the trustees know that they can be confident that because of this gift, important projects of Sydney PEN will be able to go ahead when this might not otherwise have been possible."

Translators in June

We know that Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote *The Gulag Archipelago*, but who remembers Thomas P.Whitney, the book's English translator? Explore a vital art with the Australian-based translators of two of the world's greatest writers Emile Zola and Marcel Proust. Zola, the prolific author of novels that exposed the corruption of Second Empire France, was sentenced to a year's imprisonment in 1898 because of what he wrote in defence of Alfred Dreyfus. Proust's masterpiece, *À la recherche du temps perdu,* changed the landscape of the novel forever.

Zola translator Brian Nelson, Professor of French Studies at Monash University, will be joined by Proust's translator James Grieve, who is Visiting Fellow in French at the Australian National University, for a special evening organised by Sydney PEN and the State Library of New South Wales. Professor Nelson has translated and edited four of Zola's novels for Oxford World's Classics. James Grieve is the translator of volume two of Penguin's daring and controversial collaborative version of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu,* the first completely new English translation of the classic since the 1920s. Make a note in your diary so you don't miss a special insight into the invisible art that protects our freedom to read and write across linguistic and national boundaries.

Translators at the State Library of New South Wales: Wednesday 27th June 5.30 for 6.00 p.m. until 7.15 p.m..Tickets from the State Library.

Sally Blakeney
Committee member

Brian Nelson

James Grieve

Arnold Zable

Arnold Zable talks

In January, Arnold Zable, President of Melbourne PEN gave an excellent talk on ABC Radio National's Book Show. His focus on the persecution of writers was entitled "From Socrates to Politkovskaya". Socrates, condemned to death, was pressured to swallow hemlock in 399 B.C. In October 2006, Anna Politkovskaya was murdered in the foyer of her Moscow apartment. And between these two events there have been many, many more instances of writers being persecuted for expressing their views.

The transcript of Arnold's talk on 29 January 2006, is well worth reading and is available from the Book Show and online at www.abc.net.au/rn/bookshow

AGM 2007

Plans for this year's AGM have been finalised so mark the date in your diaries and, if you want to vote at the AGM, please check that you have renewed your membership. Time and place: 6pm Thursday 24 May, Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, Level 1, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney. Membership renewal forms are available on our website www.pen.org.au or by phone 1300 364 997, Fax: 02 4392 9410, email: sydney@pen.org.au

Special thanks

Sydney PEN is grateful for the support and assistance of:
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Among PEN members who attended David Williamson's *Lotte's Gift* at the Ensemble Theatre were (from front right) Geraldine Brooks, Pulitzer Prize winner and member of Sydney PEN Writers Panel, Richard Walsh, Carol Dettmann, David Williamson, Sandra Forbes, Kristin Williamson, Sue Walsh.

New members

Sydney PEN welcomes:
Alli Barnard, Angie Kahler, Anna Funder, Anna Ward, Anne Coombs, Anne O'Donovan, Ben Saul, Carol Dettmann, Carolyn Wildman, Caterina Mastroianni, Chris Andrews, Delia Falconer, Denise Buchanan, Dennis Haskell, Di Smith, Dioquinto De Vitis, Emma Greig, Fabienne Bayet-Charlton, Fiona Bascur, Gabrielle Lord, Gayle Mortimer, Gillian Rubinstein, Harry Aveling, Heather Taylor, Johnson, Hera Shey, Hilary Vallance, Imogen Kelly, Jacqueline Williams, Jane Messer, Jane Camens, Jessica Young, Joanne Carroll, Johanna Johns, John Beale, Kate Williams, Kathryn Hanly, Kay Schaffer, Lesley Beasley, Margaret Beale, Mary Beasley AM, Meg Stewart, Michelle Garnaut, Miles Merrill, Nadya Stani, Nick Landreth, Penelope Harvey, Perry Gretton, Peter Rose, Raghid Nahhas, Rosalyn Taylor, Scott Richardson, Shirley Fitzgerald, Simon Levett, Subhash Jaireth, Susan Cass, Susan Fleming Smith, Susan Mitchell, Timothy Peach, Tom Keily, Treesje McKeown, Virginia Gordon, Wendy Were

Sydney PEN blog

If you haven't yet visited the Sydney PEN blog, it is well worth a visit for its articles, postings and links to international organisations. Recent postings include the Anti Terrorism Act 2005, sedition laws and protection of journalists' sources. Make your comments on postings or start a new discussion at www.sydneypen.blogspot.com.

Mofid Guirguis

Young Writers' Committee members Jeff Errington, Richard Renshaw, Bonny Symons-Brown, Nick Landreth and Hugo Bowne-Anderson

Donations

Donations of over $2 to Sydney PEN are tax deductible. Sydney PEN is very grateful for the generous support of Alex Byrne, Alison Broinowski, Andrea Nield, Angie Kahler, Anna Rubbo, Anna Ward, Anne Deveson AO, Antigone Kefala, Barbara Brooks, Bhupen Thakker, Brett Johnson, Candice Bruce, Carolyn van Langenberg, Carolyn Wildman, Clare Waters, Curtis Levy, D Jamileh Vambakhsh, Daniela Torsh, David Malouf AO, Debra Oswald, Denise Buchanan, Denise Leith, Dennis Haskell, Dioquinto De Vitis, Don Anderson, Elizabeth Anne Webby, Elizabeth Best, Fabienne Bayet-Charlton, Gabrielle Lord, Gaby Naher, Gayle Mortimer, Geoffrey Bradshaw, Gillian Rubinstein, Jacki Weaver, James Bradley, Jan Forrester, Jane Allen, Jane Messer, Jane Morgan, Janet West, Jeremy Fisher, Jill Margo, Joan Dugdale, John Durack SC, John Tranter, Joy Storie, Katherine Thomson, Kathy Bail, Kay Schaffer, Kerry Comerford, Linda Clare Funnell, Lyn Tranter, Mara Moustafine, Maree Kimberley, Meredith Curnow, Merrilyn Walton, Merv Lilley, Neilma Gantner, Nicholas Jose, Norelle Lickiss, Patrick Gallagher, Allen & Unwin, Raghid Nahhas, Rebecca Huntley, Richard Beasley, Rosalie Higson, Rose Zwi, Sally Blakeney, Sandra Forbes, Steve Moline, Susan Varga, Suzanne Falkiner, Sylvia Lawson, Tim Herbert, Tony Barry, Treesje McKeown, Valdemar Vilder, Virginia Duigan, Vivian B. Smith, Wendy Birman, Wilda Moxham

Corporate memberships

Sydney PEN welcomes the support of corporate members. Corporate membership fees are $200 pa. If your organisation wishes to support the work of Sydney PEN, a membership form can be downloaded at www.pen.org.au or contact our Executive Officer, Kathryn McKenzie, at executive@pen.org.au or telephone 1300 364 997.
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Dissident writers strive to

Members of Sydney PEN attending the conference included Chip Rolley, chair of the conference organising committee, Nicholas Jose, member of the conference organising committee and chair of the Literature and Social Responsibility panel, Anne Summers, conference media director, and Jeff Errington and Hugo Bowne-Anderson, members of the Young Writers' Committee. Chip Rolley reports.

Zhang Yihe

Ko Un

In Chinese when someone is 60, you say their "ear is attuned". Zhang Yihe did not begin writing until she was 60 and going by the reaction of the authorities to her books, she must have perfect pitch. All three of her books – memoirs about her parents and their contemporaries – have been banned by the Chinese Government.

As the daughter of Zhang Bojun – a minister in the newly established People's Republic of China in the 1950s who was later branded during the 1957 Anti-Rightist movement as an enemy of the people and "China's number-one rightist" – Zhang Yihe spent the better part of her life being punished for her family background. When the Cultural Revolution began, she was jailed for 10 years simply because she was the daughter of Zhang Bojun.

An honorary board member of Independent Chinese PEN Centre, Zhang Yihe was to be one of 35 mainland Chinese writers at the International PEN Asia and Pacific Regional Conference held in Hong Kong in February this year; however, Zhang and 19 other mainland writers were either prevented from going or warned off attending what was a historic gathering of over 120 writers from Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Nepal, Australia, the Philippines, Europe, North America, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Less than three weeks before the conference, the General Administration of Press and Publications (GAPP) announced the banning of eight books published in 2006, including Zhang Yihe's most recent work, *Past Stories of Peking Opera Stars* (Lingren Wangshi). Zhang publicly protested, issuing two statements demanding an explanation. Amid the ensuing controversy, she was visited on more than one occasion by officials warning her not to attend the PEN Hong Kong conference.

Other mainland writers such as the Internet essayist Xiao Qiao were denied the travel permit required for mainlanders to visit Hong Kong. Still others, such as the Hangzhou-based journalist Zan Aizong, were granted permits but turned away at the border at Shenzhen. The border official didn't give Zan any reason for denying him entry. "He only said I had a problem," Zan told a Hong Kong newspaper. "But I've never been sentenced for a crime and I have never broken the law. Why am I not allowed to go to Hong Kong?"

After making representations for 40 minutes and no result, he was compelled to turn around and go back to Hangzhou. The vast majority denied participation were members of ICPC, a key centre in organising this conference, which has members both in mainland China and overseas.

The visits by the police were a very civil affair, with some writers taken to tea for their warning. The police were nevertheless stern. "Yige ye bu fang!" promised one. "Not even one will be let out!"

In the end, 15 from the mainland managed to attend, but Zhang Yihe, who has at other times travelled to Hong Kong, where her books are not banned, chose to stay in Beijing to continue her protest against the recent banning.

The conference drew an unprecedented amount of press coverage for a regional PEN conference with articles appearing in both Chinese and English newspapers in Hong Kong and Taiwan and, via the AP and Reuters wire services, newspapers, websites and blogs around the world (see the Media section at www.pen.org.au). This coverage was largely due to the crackdown on mainland writers, but also to the calibre of a number of guests including the renowned Shanghai playwright Sha Yexin; the poet Yu Kwang-chung (Yu Guangzhong) from Taiwan, revered on both sides of the straits, and particularly in Hong Kong; and the Korean poet Ko Un, twice short-listed for the Nobel Prize for Literature.

It was only the second time International PEN has held a meeting in the Asia and Pacific region and the first time one had been held in a Chinese-language territory, a point underscored by a talk, "The Turning Point for International PEN: From Western Centralism to Internationalisation", given by A Hai, a Chinese writer and member of ICPC living in Germany.

Meetings ran back to back over the weekend of February 2-5, with a number of issues-based panels on literary translation, censorship, copyright, internet publishing, and exiled writers; presentations and discussion of PEN organisational issues, including its regional programs; sessions focusing on issues for women writers in the region; strategic planning for Writers in Prison Committee campaigns; and 'salons' for readings and poetry recitation.

Participants heard about a number of dynamic programs across the region supporting literature. Japan PEN, with 1,000 members, hosts a digital library of works by members as well as working actively on issues involving women writers, the

fulfil social responsibilities

environment, human rights and other areas. Taipei Chinese PEN's bilingual quarterly of contemporary Chinese literature is in its 34th consecutive year of publication and the Philippine PEN Centre, founded by Francisco Sionil Jose, celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, and is launching five anthologies of work of writers under 35 and is exploring text messaging as a way of disseminating poetry.

The Philippine PEN Centre was joined by Nepal PEN and many others in stressing the importance of PEN working on issues relating to translation. There are almost 300 indigenous languages in the Philippines, explained delegate Vicente Groyon, with many ethnic groups and tribes having their own literary traditions, folk songs and epics. But there is no way to communicate between them, he said. "It was estimated that there were around 1000 epics, but only about 13 have been captured and translated."

The conference was already set to be a historic occasion and provide special focus on Chinese issues, but the actions of the Chinese Government guaranteed this was the case. Organisers marked the absence of those mainland writers blocked from attending with an Empty Chair (traditionally PEN's way of protesting a writer's imprisonment) at the sessions where they were scheduled to speak, and where possible, read out their prepared statements.

Zhang Yihe's first book *The Past is Not Like Smoke* (Wangshi bing bu ru yan), published in 2004, challenged official history, telling the story of her father and his colleagues' persecution during the Anti-Rightist movement – a story that would not dissipate in the memory of Zhang Yihe, who was counselled by her father to be a witness to history. In an award citation from ICPC at the time, it was praised for opening up "new ground in the Chinese language which has been dominated by authority and economics".

Due to speak at a panel on Literature and Social Responsibility, Zhang's statement was read by ICPC member Chen Maiping. Writing was her only means to self-expression, she said. "It is not an easy affair for me to live, nor can I die in peace. I can only write. I am a lonely person and writing gives me some kind of satisfaction. If you ask me why writing is important, I can only say that I do not know. For several decades, literature has been tied together with 'revolution' and 'reform'. I can't bear such responsibility. I can only recall the past. There are so many people singing praise for the society, why not allow an old woman like me to sing a little song of my own?"

The dissident Internet writer Liu Shui was also due to speak on this panel, but his Hong Kong travel permit was denied. "I also hope to fulfil my social responsibility," he said in a statement sent to the conference. "However, this is not allowed by my government." He was one of a number of writers – the journalist Gao Yu, the novelist Ma Jian among others – to emphasise the effect of China's political culture on its writers. "The Eastern people have the ability to suffer and digest their great sufferings," he said. "This kind of ability enables writers to ignore the reality and to become numb to the suffering of their people."

In a paper written for the panel on Censorship, Self-Censorship and the Writer, the exiled writer Ma Jian said that China has moved from a system of brainwashing to one that is slightly more lenient, encouraging conformity. However, the Communist Party still requires you not "deviate from the party's teaching about morals or freedom and human rights". The author of *Red Dust, The Noodle Maker* and other works criticised mainland authors who have "chosen to refrain from expressing any opinion on their own society, keeping their silence until their death". They really think there is nothing wrong with this intellectual life, he said. "Can authors really not depict their own era and still be considered authors?"

Less than a year and a half before the Beijing Olympics, this international gathering was mounted amid an array of mixed signals from the Chinese authorities. A little over a month prior to blocking these writers going to Hong Kong, the Government announced it would ease restrictions on foreign journalists in China in the lead-up to the Olympics. In November, only two months prior to the banning of the eight books, the Chinese premier Wen Jiabao made a historic speech to the China Federation of Literary and Arts Circles and the Chinese Writers Association (the official organisation for writers under the Ministry of Culture).

"Chinese writers and artists should reflect reality in society," Wen Jiabao said, "and encourage people to seek the truth". (In her public statement protesting the recent banning, Zhang Yihe said Wen's words were "still ringing her ears".)

Just days before the conference, there came yet another signal. An unnamed official from GAPP said that none of the eight books had been banned, merely criticised.

Playwright Sha Yexin seized on this statement as a back-down, saying the denial of the banning was "merely for face". The banning is a fact, he said. "This development has shown that protest against the banning has already had some effect. The Administration will not be able to again be so unscrupulous."

(Chip Rolley's report is continued on the following pages)

Gao Yu

Ma Jian

Sydney PEN is proud to have played a role in the organisation of the conference in cooperation with Independent Chinese PEN Centre, which funded the conference, and provided most of the logistical support and speakers, Hong Kong Chinese-speaking PEN, Melbourne PEN and Taipei Chinese PEN Centres.

»

Chinese writers call for

Playwright Sha Yexin was a speaker at the conference's Literary Evening, held at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which included poetry recitation by Ko Un, Yu Kwang-chung, the exiled Chinese poet Yang Lian, and others. "This development," he said, "gave mainland writers an unprecedented opportunity to stand together and loudly call for freedom of creativity." Sha, a playwright and important figure in the Shanghai literary scene, attended the conference "despite considerable pressure from culture officials in Shanghai", according to the *South China Morning Post*. His own work has been banned over the years and he took an early lead among China's intellectuals in supporting Zhang's protest, describing the official who announced the banning as "turning millions of readers at home and abroad into enemies".

"I believe silence is a kind of disgrace," he later explained. "When not one word about this emerges from the Chinese Writers Association, then I should speak out." Widespread support for Zhang ensued – including from intellectuals ideologically opposed to Zhang Yihe's work – and continued throughout the PEN meetings and its press conference.

Others are doubtful this victory will be lasting. At an event hosted by the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents Club in association with the conference, Yu Jie, the Beijing-based essayist and author and vice-president of ICPC, said that, while he was indeed able to attend the conference and speak out to the foreign media about the conditions facing writers in China, he has not been able to get published for two years running due to pressure put on publishing houses by the authorities.

"The authorities don't directly suppress writers," he said, "but target publishers, for instance firing editors, causing publishing houses to fall into a more severe self-restricting environment."

He believes that some time later this year, after the banning affair calms down, the authorities will "settle the score" with the publishing houses and editors of the banned books, especially Hunan Literature and Arts Press, the publishers of *Past Stories of Peking Opera Stars*.

Hong Kong is the only place in China that enjoys freedom of expression and freedom of the press, he said. "It's as if those of us in the mainland have our heads immersed in water and cannot breathe, but Hong Kong allows us to stick our heads above the surface of the water and, for a short time, breathe freely."

Another prominent participant, Gao Yu, a journalist twice imprisoned for her work, noted this year is the fiftieth anniversary of the Anti-Rightist movement. The books recently banned include those that have to do with this subject. In addition, literature that records actual events and raises issues such as SARS and AIDS are not able to be published. "The publishing world and the mass media", she said, "are experiencing a chill."

In an interview arranged by PEN conference organisers for the World Association of Newspapers for World Press Freedom Day (May 3), she said those who undertake real reporting in China "at the very least are subject to warning. Next they are unable to work. In the most serious cases they face arrest, sentencing and incarceration." (See www.worldpressfreedomday.org for WAN's interview.)

With the conference held on the eve of the Spring Festival (or lunar new year), traditionally an occasion for families to gather together, two ICPC members, the poet Meng Lang and the writer and editor Zhang Yu, planned to return to the mainland.

It was to be the first time in 11 years Meng Lang would spend Spring Festival with his family. Zhang Yu was to meet up with his wife who was already there and visit his elderly mother. The Chinese police, it would transpire, had other ideas.

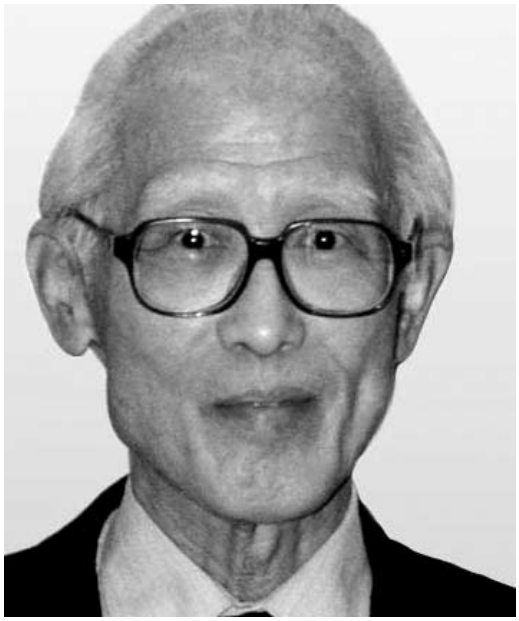
According to a report from ICPC, Public Security Bureau officials arrived unexpectedly at the place Meng Lang was staying in Shenzhen, en route to Shanghai, to interview him. Later when he arrived in Shanghai, four police cars, approximately 10 PSB police and two airport police intercepted him as he disembarked the plane. They drove him into the city and took him to a hotel room where four police interviewed him. They were interested in only one topic: the International PEN meeting just held in Hong Kong.

A poet, member of Independent Chinese PEN and member of the conference organising committee, Meng Lang repeated what he had told the police in Shenzhen: the Hong Kong meeting's discussion was actually about writers and literary activity, he said. "To build a 'harmonious society' and 'harmonious culture' [as President Hu Jintao has called for], writers should sit with writers and not always have to sit with policemen". After repeated demands by Meng Lang and after the repeated demands by his family, he was finally released at 12.30 am.

Zhang Yu, who has lived in Europe since 1981,

freedom of creativity

Yu Jie



Yu Kwang-chung

was prevented from entering China altogether, despite the fact that he is a Chinese citizen and has been to China on numerous occasions.

Optimists may see progress in these tales. Meng Lang and Zhang Yu weren't physically harmed, subjected to a humiliating body search, or thrown in jail. But all Meng Lang did to prompt four police cars and 12 police to greet him in Shanghai was to help organise and attend a regional meeting of the world's oldest writers' organisation. And if Zhang Yu, a Chinese citizen, were suspected of truly endangering state security, surely he would have been taken into custody and charged.

In the keynote speech of the conference, "Separation and Integration: Towards a Communion of Chinese Minds and Hearts", the poet Yu Kwang-chung, a former president of Taipei Chinese PEN, underscored the progress that has been made in literary culture on the mainland from the nadir of the Cultural Revolution when "literary activity practically came to a standstill". Yu cited writers such as Jia Ping'ao, Wang Meng, Wang Anyi, Yu Qiuyu, Yu Hua and Mo Yan. "In terms of fiction," he said, "it is no exaggeration to say that the above-mentioned authors are already outperforming their colleagues from Taiwan and Hong Kong."

It should nevertheless be clear from the events surrounding this conference, as well as what was revealed in testimonials during the conference itself, that China remains trapped in cycles of campaigns and crackdowns, most sharply in the sphere of reporting news, but still also in the area of literature. While there is indeed a better environment than there was 30 years ago, it cannot be good for the development of literature, much less a harmonious society, for writers to be denied the right to meet or hauled in for questioning after they do. It cannot be good for cultural development, much less a stable political economy, for writers to face banning, firings and imprisonment when they venture into topics of a sharper political nature.

A growing number of intellectuals are braving the climate and speaking out, as the members of Independent Chinese PEN have done consistently since it was founded in 2001, in the words of Yu Jie, undertaking a "moderate but steadfast approach that gradually increases the support of those inside the system and those in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan".

Existing in the unofficial nooks and crannies of an emerging civil society in China, ICPC is determined to insist that their country live up to the rights guaranteed in its Constitution. This continuing work will ensure that there is indeed a turning point for PEN in China and the wider Asia and Pacific region, and that this historic conference will not dissipate like smoke.

Chip Rolley

Suppression of feelings

Every person who has lived under mainland China's totalitarian, despotic system has experienced having their emotions suppressed. Gao Yu's experience of this started when she was eight.

Gao Yu

It was 1952 and my parents sent me to a boarding school for the children of cadres in Zhangjiakou City in Chahar, then a province in northern China. The principal, the teachers and the aunties who supervised our living arrangements all wore the same blue revolutionary cadre uniform. The school provided me with a white shirt of coarse cloth and a blue Lenin-style suit. The plaits I had from when I was at Tianjin kindergarten were cut off. Because this school had an infestation of "revolutionary insects", or lice, very soon, I had black ones on my head and white ones on my body. One time in class, I saw a black louse suddenly crawl from my bangs and I captured it. I was really afraid my classmates would see it and sneer, "You're filthy!" This is probably my earliest memory of deceit in human feelings.

In the second half of the term in third grade, the province of Chahar was dissolved and my parents took my younger brother and moved to Beijing. Because I was in school I stayed alone at Zhangjiakou. I could not even go home on Sundays and enjoy my freedom. Once when I was sick with a fever and could not go to class, Auntie Yao moved a number of sick female students into my dorm room. In the evening, Auntie Yao brought us a bucket of warm noodle soup, sent along by our classmate You Xiaoping. Auntie replenished each of our bowls with noodle soup. I ate it until my face was full of sweat. Some students who weren't sick also had some soup. The second day You Xiaoping came to see us and said: "Auntie Yao said those who had one bowl of soup yesterday are the ones who are genuinely sick. Those who had two bowls are a little sick. Those who had more are faking it." I hid my head under the quilt, so ashamed I could not bear it. I ate exactly three bowls of soup. At home, when I was sick, my mother was always happy when I was able to eat more of something and anxious when I ate less. I lost a lot of the trust I had in the teachers and aunties, who I had wanted to rely on, and I learned that I had to suppress my true feelings.

Years later, I read George Orwell's *Such, Such Were the Joys*. The painful experiences he described entering St Cyprian's boarding school when he was eight strongly resonated with me. The similarity between St Cyprian's and my boarding school was in the system. Both schools were like military camps. They stressed training the child to be able to live independently and they stifled and suppressed the development of the child's free innate nature. When a child begins expressing their true feelings, they face the strict discipline of collective life which makes them harbour feelings of fearful and shameful guilt about it.

When I was in fifth grade at Huabei West Garden School in Beijing, the winter my little brother had just entered the school, my father was seriously ill and went to hospital. My mother was too busy to attend to us and our feet froze because we didn't have new cotton-padded shoes.

After the new term began, I had fewer and fewer opportunities to see my father. After May, Mum wouldn't let us come home at all. I spent every week at school with my little brother. At the beginning of July Mum rang me and asked me and my brother how our end of term test prepartion was going. I anxiously asked her how Daddy was.

In a very calm voice, she said: "Daddy has been transferred to another hospital, a very far away place, to recuperate." I undersood completely. Tears poured out and wouldn't stop. Just then a pale and fat boy who was one or two grades below me, ran opposite me, mimicking me crying and making faces. At once, he spread the news all over the schoolyard: "Gao Yu's Dad has died." The teachers' and school doctor's eyes were full of sympathy for me and my little brother. In moments of my greatest sorrow, I think of that fat boy making faces at me and I am actually able to stop my grief and turn it into anger. Years later when in I first came across the term "The Princelings' Communist Party", I still thought of that fat kid making faces.

High school and university were an even bigger military camp and when I entered what was an even more complicated life after university, I discovered I was still supervised to a degree by the "military camp", where "silence is golden" became an article of faith for the whole society. Every one was moulded completely according to the requirements of the system. We not only lost independent personality, but became people who didn't understand what freedom was. To know freedom again requires us to thoroughly remould ourselves.

In 1980, I was a journalist and placed in the special features department of the China News

leads to loss of freedom

Service. This was an extremely specialised propaganda organ. Journalists were required to abandon the style of Xinhua, the mainland's news agency, and learn to write using the style and language of Hong Kong and Taiwan so we could place stories in overseas neutral Chinese newspapers and then into right wing papers (which now has been accomplished). We were to "condemn the Communist regime on minor issues but support it on major issues". Their system of news censorship was as stringent as Xinhua's. With fear and trepidation, we put our articles through stringent self-censorship, after which we handed them up through the system, where they would still have to go through ranks of the watchdogs, making revisions and deletions again and again.

Because I wrote a long article about the censuring of Liu Binyan's *The Second Kind of Loyalty* and the closing of *Pioneer* magazine, the head of the department who approved sending it out was fired and I myself was branded a "an element of liberalisation". In the mid-eighties, I went to Beijing to cover a story about chicken flu at a large chicken factory, which was set on fire. This was in fact the earliest case of bird flu. I sent my manuscript to the Beijing Municipal Government Agricultural Department for approval. The Director of the Agricultural Party Committee did not find any error in fact, but only suggested I not send it out. Before I returned to the China News Service, a phone call to block it was already made to the office of the editor in chief. An old editor in the special features department was really angry. He took my manuscript, put it in an envelope and threw it over to the press release section. As a result it was not only published in the *Mirror* in Hong Kong, it made the lead story in Taiwan's *United Daily News*. This incident shocked the China News Service. They investigated thoroughly but found no blame on my part.

In 1987 I interviewed Lu Dingyi, who had been admitted for a long time to Beijing Hospital, and his children. Lu Dingyi was a veteran of the Long March and was a former chief of the CCP's propaganda department under Mao. I wrote an article about Lu Dingyi and one about his wife Yan Weibing. Both had been imprisoned for 12 years during the Cultural Revolution. I first sent the piece on Yan Weibing to the special features department. Because Yan Weibing had never confessed, for six years she had been handcuffed behind her back and had no shower. Later her body shed a shell of dirt. The prisoner next to her cell had confessed, and so enjoyed first class treatment, eating steamed meat buns and chicken egg soup. The whole China News Service acted like it was faced with a formidable enemy, setting in motion the censorship apparatus in three ranks.

In October of 1988 I finally made up my mind and left the China News Service. I went to work for Economics Weekly. For the first piece I did for this paper, "Dialogue on the Current Political Situation", I interviewed Yan Jiaqi and Wen Yuankai. I never thought that eight months later in June 1989 Chen Xitong, the Mayor of Beijing, would declare the article a "political guiding principle of turmoil and rebellion" in his notorious report to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.

I believe the reason the June 4 Movement has become immortalised is that the Chinese people, including vast numbers of intellectuals, shook off their fear and extricated themselves from their "Silence is Golden" moral precept, for the first time expressing endorsement and support for the students' political demands for press freedom and against corruption, and expressing anger towards the cold-blooded government. These surging waves of emotional expression were met with bloody suppression by machine guns and tanks, and the silent majority suffers from the disease of cynicism.

Today, the Internet user is playing a leading role in its content. It is the responsibility of us Chinese writers and journalists to abolish "censorship and self-censorship" in the publication of news, because our rights as writers are not something granted or bestowed by the Party or the state. They are part of the natural rights of people. To openly and honestly express our feelings is the first step we must take. This first step began with Zhang Yihe.

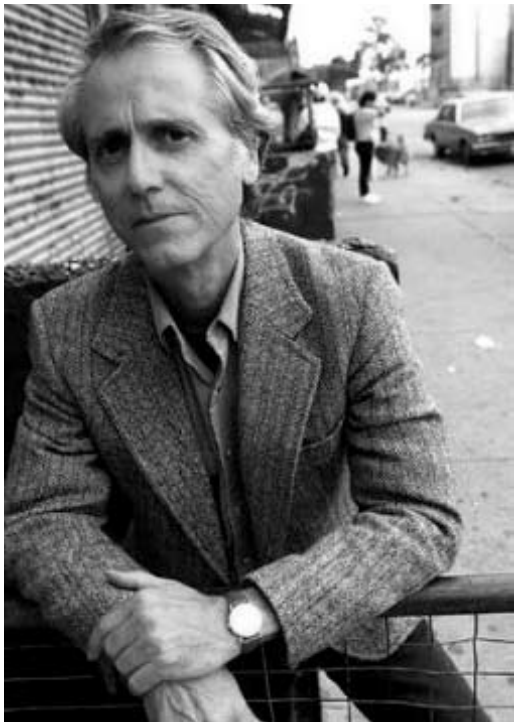
When those of us who use a pen or a keyboard stand up together and openly denounce the ugly "censorship and self-censorship system" that tramples on humanity, we are in reality creating ourselves. We can retrieve the courage and sincerity that ought to belong to human beings and thereby obtain the liberation and freedom of humanity.

Gao Yu was jailed twice, in 1989 on the eve of the massacre in Beijing and in 1994 for her reporting in Hong Kong newspapers. This is an excerpt of her speech at the International PEN Asia and Pacific Regional Conference, Hong Kong. The full version can be read on the Sydney PEN website www.pen.org.au Translation by Chip Rolley and Zhang Yu.

Voices from the underground

Jeff Errington and Hugo Bowne-Anderson, members of the Sydney PEN Young Writers Committee, attended the International PEN Asia & Pacific Regional Conference, Jeff to take part in a panel called 'Between Literature and Social Responsibility' and Hugo as a rapporteur. Here are their observations.

I recently saw a documentary about a troubled time in New York in the late 1960s. It was called 'The Weather Underground' and it followed the plight of a group of student radicals called the Weathermen who were opposing at first the war in Vietnam, then the entire state that allowed such a war to happen. Though their violent acts must be rejected, there was something admirable their commitment. Their response was extreme but they were living in extreme times. They gave up promising middle-class futures and chose to live in poverty and fight a democratically elected government that was acting badly and undemocratically. After a bomb they were building in a town house in the East Village in Manhattan exploded, killing three of them, the others knew they would have to go underground or risk being arrested. One of the members said:



The New York Times

Don DeLillo

"Underground is sort of a state of information control, rather than a place. It means having a lot of control about who knows what about who you are and where you are."

This is similar to the relationship a novelist like Don DeLillo has with society. Following this definition he essentially lives underground. He shuns interviews and refuses to elucidate upon his biography.

What I believe he is doing is creating freedom for himself as a writer. He has written "The writer must write in opposition to society and to the corporation", instead of writing for society and for the corporation. When a journalist once asked Flannery O'Connor, who wrote for society, her answer was: "The advertising agencies. They are entirely capable of showing us our unparalleled prosperity and our almost classless society, and no on has ever accused them of not being affirmative. Where the artist is still trusted, he will not be looked to for assurance."

As writers we don't write for society, and our position underground reflects this. We write away from the limelight and it may feel like an irrelevant position, when in fact it is anything but this. It is a deeply important space.

In the West it is a common complaint that novels don't mean anything anymore. What this usually implies is that writers have been overshadowed in importance by actors and sporting heroes, and all the other celebrities of the mass media. As a young writer I feel inspired by the underground presence that someone like DeLillo has carved out for himself within society. He is free to write and doesn't have to maintain a media personality that may take attention away from the novels themselves. And his writing is wonderful. It questions our society's reliance on consumerism and the mass media for meaning in our lives.

DeLillo shows how this position also has a political role in his novel *Mao II*. The novel is about a novelist Bill Gray who gets sucked in to a terrorist network. DeLillo examines the similarities between what a novelist and a terrorist do. They are both trying to influence society's consciousness, through profoundly different methods. We who find ourselves at this tangential position to our own society should take solace from this: that instead of resorting to violence we can engage with people through literature, instead of using the violent means that people like the weathermen have employed in the past.

Jeff Errington

Fighting for freedom of speech

It is one thing to hear second-hand, whether it be via media or otherwise, about the horrors of the relationship between writers and an authoritarian government; it is another thing altogether to be talking to an elderly Chinese writer through an interpreter and have him mention that he was jailed from his mid-20s to his mid-40s for writing what the Chinese Communist Party deemed to be dissident literature.

The 2007 International PEN Asia and Pacific Regional Conference was eye-opening to say the very least. As a young PEN member and a member of the PEN Young Writers' Committee, the conference affected me in two major ways.

Firstly, it allowed me to place Sydney PEN in a larger context, as part of the association called International PEN which fights for the promotion of literature and freedom of speech worldwide. Once again, it is one thing to hear of PEN centres existing in such disparate places as Nepal, Zurich and even a Chinese PEN centre which is unable to freely operate in China, Independent Chinese PEN; it is another to meet with the Presidents and other committee members of these centres and discuss the very different ways in which each and every centre necessarily functions. It is only through such dialogues you can gain a sense of the worth of what you yourself are doing.

And secondly, it forced me to realise how serious PEN's role is on the international stage. In Australia, although we have a Federal Government which seems hell-bent on silencing dissent, the curtailment of freedom of speech is not even comparable to the atrocities experienced by writers elsewhere.

In our lodging by a lake in Sai Kung, Hong Kong, Jeff Errington (chair of the Sydney PEN Young Writers' Committee) and I shared a room with Tran Vu, Treasurer of the Vietnamese Writers Abroad PEN centre, now residing in San Jose, and Hoang Hung, a poet jailed without judgement in Vietnam for 39 months for raising certain questions in his poetry. This was in 1982, the year I was born. As he says, Hung's case is far from unique in recent years in Vietnam.

The gravity of our modern times was put into perspective for me, ironically enough, via the PEN tradition of having at each session an empty chair symbolising the plight of imprisoned writers. (There will be a PEN Empty Chair at each session of this year's Sydney Writers' Festival, as there was at last year's Melbourne Writers' Festival). However, at this conference, the empty chair was anything but symbolic for, at each session, it was the chair of yet another writer who was denied access to the conference by the Chinese authorities. Twenty mainland writers were either denied permits, warned off or turned back at the Hong Kong border.

Bei Ling

Hoang Hung

Ma Jian

Fifteen or so mainland Chinese writers did make it, as did exiled writers, including Ma Jian, now forced to publish in mainland China under pseudonyms and heavily censored, and Bei Ling, who needed Susan Sontag and Madeleine Albright's help to get out of prison and out of China in August 2000. Merely meeting such people was eye-opening for a young writer who grew up in Sydney's inner city, allowing me to feel part of a global community whose interests are firmly rooted in the promotion of literature.

At the conclusion of the conference, going to Hong Kong University with Bei Ling to read English translations of his poetry to literature students was one of many events which made me feel part of this international community, particularly reading the poetry that resulted in Bei Ling's exile from China.

To say such writers inhabit a totally different world is both true and yet incredibly misleading (for to say so is to ignore the connections between our world and theirs) and this is what the conference really gave me: a feeling, a sensation I doubt I will ever be able to shake: these different worlds, the one I inhabit, the one Ma Jian inhabits, the one Hoang Hung inhabits, do not exist in their own right, there are connections and they appear in multifarious forms.

One connection appears in the common thread of the deep fear authoritarian governments have of literature and of the arts in general and their resultant suppression. Another connection is PEN: that there are right now and always will be people fighting for freedom of speech, fighting for those who have difficulty fighting for themselves, and fighting for literature in general and every this, that and the other that comes along with it.

Hugo Bowne-Anderson

The Footsteps of History and History Itself

I
The footsteps of History are no different from the one hundred steps
I impulsively took yesterday
Whether the mere ten steps I took out on the street
Or the ninety steps I took in my study without stopping
All of them seem too exact
The footsteps of History go along with my personal intoxication
Is that clear to you?
It is not according to my will
Taking ten steps, I come to a gas station where cigarettes are lit
From there I take another ninety steps
A page from my unfinished manuscript drifts before my eyes
Just like that, it forfeits the prospects of History
In my study I sit down
Listening to History's stubborn, disorderly footsteps
Secret stirrings made by rats in another room
Never stop above my head.

II
A person's effeminate steps get gradually distant
Leaving barbaric History behind
Those empty spots where no one is present, horrible chairs
Book-perusal with hair still continues
This planet breaks away from the simplest of punctuation marks
The sound of its turning is tonight's breeze
It blows away my whiskers and eyebrows
Will anyone still recognize me?
I try the added absurdity of going far away
Throwing aside a beautiful library or theater
Throwing aside even more people who are silent
My earnest expression betrays me
Makes me use a mask even more genuine
The footsteps of History are staggering
I even see its injured ankles
Everywhere in its movements, those smooth rounded joints are splitting.

III
Taking the first step I lift my own leg
Like lifting a wooden post from deep soil
A tree must endure the blind remoteness of History
The departing flood reveals its root and its wish to stay
Before it the footsteps of History swing
At no time do they go away
My world surely revolves around a purer center
With the first step, springtime descends upon me
At the next step a leaf drifts, with no shoulder to rest on
I feel myself shaken from side to side
Around my feet someone finds fallen fruits
In fact they are countless nails from my shoes
Better to let my own steps be heavier
Behind me pull forth a grove of seedlings
Pull forth a meadow that stretches out of sight
There are no footsteps to history, just a group of children rolling on the ground.

IV
Behind History the ground shows a track of muddled footprints
Are they animal? Are they human?
Are they mine after all?
Who is it that pushes History forward?
Could one so helpless as I have such power?
In this city the footsteps of History are confident
They have seen through the trap of family
And the abyss of daily life, there are no conclusions here
A wider background stretches in my field of view
History exhibits its spine of a vertebrate animal
It exhibits a mammalian face
It exhibits a whole field of disorder
Striding ahead, between the first and hundredth step
The gas station I did not use has burned to nothing
Looking back I see an empty room, filled with air of tension
Before taking another step, should I breathe out or in?

V
In a dream, a rat pack sets off a bomb at me
I run away at the speed of flight
For a time it is the very pace of History
The rats chase behind me doggedly
Room after room is tramped to pieces
Nowhere do I dare to draw a panting breath
Out on the Square, in open sunlight, I hide myself
History has its place nearby
Of course, it still casts a huge gloom
Its elephant legs, its infected skin
Each step contains elements of sharp pain
Each step carries feelings of extreme numbness
I stare at the steps it takes, but can only see
History's heedless outflow of blood
As a wounded victim, it is more considerate than I
It tears the white shirt of happiness strip after strip.

by Meng Lang

Translated by Denis Mair

Meng Lang, 45, is a member of Independent Chinese PEN Centre. Part of the underground poetry movement in mainland China in the early eighties, he attended Brown University in the United States as a writer-in-residence in the early nineties and emigrated to the US, working in Cambridge, Massachusetts as a poet and editor. His poetry is featured in numerous collections and he is the editor of Independent Chinese PEN's recently published anthology of its members' literary work, *The Poem and the Tank* (Shi yu tanke: duli zhongwen bihui huiyuan zuopin jingxuan/ wenxue juan), Hong Kong, 2007. He currently lives in both Boston and Hong Kong.

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum Library

The Japan PEN Club is justly proud of its oval-shaped four-storey black granite building designed by prominent architect Atsushi Kitagawara. Located at 20-3 Nihonbashi Kabuto-cho Chuo-ku in central Tokyo near the Kamejima River, the building looks like an elegant water drum. The board room on the fourth floor, which is furnished with a U-shaped modular pine table and 40 specially designed chairs, adjoins a spacious well equipped working area. With 1,979 members, 40 directors and four full-time employees, the Club vigorously supports Japanese literature through its publishing program.

Apart from the well established annual *Japanese Literature Today* and two editions of the marvellously helpful *Japanese Literature in Foreign Languages*, the Club encourages young writers by publishing their works. The Japan PEN Club attracts sponsorship from newspapers and other companies, enabling it to pay writers for lectures and country tours.

A big event for 2008, currently under consideration, will be a conference to assess the effects of natural disasters, such as earthquakes and tornados, on writers.

Distinguished writer Hisashe Inoue is president of the Club, Professor Shozo Fujii is Chair of the Writers in Prison Committee and Mr Takashi Atouda is Managing Director. I had the pleasure of meeting Mr Kasunari Yoshizawa, who joined the staff as Secretary General earlier this year, and his assistant Ms Keiko Miyakawa who, during the eight years she has been on the staff, has attended several International PEN Congresses. She was scheduled to take a Chinese PEN delegation to Kyoto a few days after our meeting.

When I asked Mr Kasunari Yoshizawa if Japan PEN had strong support from contemporary writers, he smiled and said there could be more. He made particular mention of revered members Kenzaburo Oe, Junichi Watanabe and Mariko Hayashi.

I also visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum Library and for bibliophiles reeling from the traumatic impact of the virtual displays in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, its library is like entering a recovery room. A comfortable and welcoming area located in the East Building, the library's stated mission is to maintain for public use a collection of materials related to the atomic bomb and peace.

Books and computer access for this purpose are readily available. By October 2006, the library's collection had expanded well beyond the original concept; it now holds a substantial range of Japanese titles together with historical, sociological, diplomatic, geographic and scientific books from many countries.

PEN member Wendy Birman with Kasunari Yoshiwawa , Secretary General, in Japan PEN Club's boardroom

But the literature section was different. Like the plants in the Peace Park outside, it seemed to me that many of the well-worn volumes on the shelves had been lovingly donated by tourists wanting to leave something creative from their own countries behind; more pristine editions are suggestive gifts of sent by travellers after returning home.

In the short time I had left, I embarked on a search for Australian titles. It was a desultory exercise, so I consulted a librarian whose response was instantaneous. She summoned a colleague to the computer and I was asked for names so I came up with a respectable number of well-known Australian writers.

All the names I mentioned were fed into the computer, but the only book they could produce was a cherished, battered copy of David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*. Please anyone who plans to pass through Hiroshima, take an Australian title for the Peace Library; others might consider sending a donation to enhance this unique collection.

The Library's address is: Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum Library, 1-2 Nakijima-cho, Hiroshima City 730-0811 Email: hpcf@pcf .city. hiroshima.jp

Wendy Birman
Member, Sydney PEN

Move towards a new

Australia's leading playwright, David Williamson, a member of the Sydney PEN Writers' Panel, delivered the fourth John Sumner Lecture on the set of Melbourne Theatre Company's revival of his 1971 play Don's Party at the Arts Centre Playhouse on February 8. Williamson reflected on more than 35 years in Australian theatre, the changing role of the playwright in that time and his outlook forthe future.

For years our vocal right has been accusing our writers and film makers of not celebrating the triumphs of the free market and being obdurately leftist in political outlook. Recently a conservative columnist, Janet Albrechtsen, even bemoaned the fact that most of our cartoonists were patently of the left. The attitude of our right wing warriors is that the free market has delivered us a living paradise, and that writers or filmmakers who suggest otherwise are seriously un-Australian. These same pundits seem to have forgotten that the free market has also delivered countless billions of tons of carbon dioxide into our atmosphere and that the carnival of consumption it's delivering to our wealthy is based on a hydrocarbon legacy that is rapidly disappearing.

After over a decade of conservative rule contemporary film, plays and novels are fast becoming an endangered species. Economic rationalists, whose agenda strongly influences our present government, have never been enamored of local creativity. For them the arts and entertainment are just another commodity to be traded at the right price, and the fact that for a huge majority of the time we watch depictions of American lives is of no consequence. Let the free market prevail is their credo and if Australians prefer to watch American product then fine.

The fact that it's far from a free market with American producers dumping their TV product at far less cost than we can ever make our own shows for, and huge U.S. film production and promotional budgets swamping local product, is of no consequence to them. The fact that seven out of eight Hollywood films lose money, indicating that they're not quite a triumph for the free market system, or indeed what the public wants, doesn't worry them either. Subsidy of any kind is anathema to their mind set and the thought that some taxpayers' money may stray into subsidising local creativity, seems to send some our right wing pundits into paroxysm of rage, especially if that creativity suggests that Australia is less than perfect.

Not long ago the playwright Hannie Rayson was attacked in a particularly vicious fashion by Andrew Bolt, the last writer in the world to deny that global warming is a reality. The attack was directed at her play *Two Brothers*. I had problems with certain aspects of the play. I felt that the probability of a Federal Government minister killing a refugee lodged in the family holiday house, was beyond my limits of suspension of disbelief, but Bolt's attack was not based on any aesthetic assessment. He was outraged that Government money had been spent on a play that suggested our government was callously indifferent to the fate of refugees on the high seas.

Greg Sheridan of *The Australian*, not normally noted as a film reviewer, laid into the Australian film *Three Dollars* from the book by Eliot Perlman. Again I had some difficulty with certain parts of the film. The transition of the middle class professional to instant and permanent poverty after his dismissal was stretching it a bit in my opinion, but Sheridan's attack was again not on aesthetic grounds. Sheridan was outraged that some Government money had been spent on a film that attacked corporate behaviour. The firm that had dismissed the central character was engaging in illicit environment despoliation.

In the case of the Rayson play, there was taxpayer money involved, but not much.

In our two main flagship theatre companies, The Melbourne and Sydney Theatre Companies, the drop in government subsidy has been dramatic. In 1980 The Sydney Theatre Company proportion of predominantly federal grants, has dropped from 47.5 per cent of turnover in 1980 to 7.1 per cent in 2006, and the corresponding figures for the Melbourne Theatre Company are 48 per cent of turnover in 1975 to 11 per cent of turnover in 2005. These are huge reductions and one of the side effects has been a dramatic decrease in adventurous but risky new Australian plays. Given that many of these plays may have something critical to say about the state of the nation, their decrease would not cause any tears to be shed in Government ranks.

In the case of the film *Three Dollars* there was a substantial amount of taxpayer's money involved, but the proposition that any subsidised local creativity should be devoid of criticism of the country or the government would be to reduce our artistic output to the kind of mentality that prevailed in Russia and Eastern Europe in the days of the communist rule when only artists approved by the ministry of culture were subsidised.

Hannie Rayson has every right to raise questions about our government's callousness towards helpless refugees. One of the worst single instances in our recent history of such callousness was the repeated refusal to allow the reuniting of a wife, whose three

right wing drama

children had drowned in a tragic attempt to reach our shores, with her bereaved husband in Australia. The cruelty of the sham Pacific solution, a blatant ploy to play on public fear and prejudice, is another low point in our national behaviour. And Eliot Perlman has an equal right to suggest that beyond the expensive spin they put on it, many corporations behave disgracefully.

The arts and its 'soft left' practitioners have been the focus of a concerted media attack, particularly in the Murdoch press. *The Australian*, in a recent extraordinary editorial outburst, showed exactly what it thought of its country's creators when it said, "Until the writers and film makers are prepared to shake themselves free of moral vanity, passengers on the good ship Australia will be increasingly disposed to hand them a paddle and pitch them overboard."

The right wing critique extends beyond artists to anyone who doesn't happen to agree we are all presently living in paradise. Endless editorials and op ed pieces have blasted the "inner city, latte drinking elites" who supposedly harbour a deep contempt for their ideal citizen, the "ordinary Australian". This ordinary "aspirational" Australian is said to enjoy the simple pleasures of backyard cricket and barbecues in his large five bedroom two storey house in the outer suburbs with his aspiration limited it seems to buying more stuff. An aspiration to enjoy the insights into the human condition, or the profound emotions aroused by our greatest artists and composers, is never mentioned.

In fact the strong inference is that anyone who isn't an "ordinary" Australian is not really an Australian at all.

This conservative love affair with ordinary Australians dates from the time John Howard found that he could lure erstwhile labor voters to his own party by incorporating many elements of the Pauline Hanson social agenda, namely fear of multiculturalism, fear of refugees, and an irritation at the thought that we had anything to apologise for in our treatment of indigenous Australians.

The tactic of calling anyone who doesn't absolutely agree with the right wing agenda an "elite" attempts to disguise the fact that the real elites in our society are the business and financial elites who wield enormous power and who set Australia's attitudinal agenda through their control of what has to be the most concentrated and tightly controlled media in any democracy on earth. Anyone who attempts to object is ritually crucified by writers who are paid heaps because they agree strongly with a right wing view of the world.

This world view in brief, is that the free market delivers what people want effortlessly and efficiently, that wealth acquisition is the only sane human preoccupation, that anyone who can't acquire wealth is simply not smart enough or industrious enough, and that the health and happiness of any country is bound up with the rate of increase of its Gross National Product. It also assumes that GNP can keep increasing for ever and its proud boast is that is that the national and global free market policies have delivered happiness, health, longevity, comfort and security to most of the world.

Artists, as well as any other thinking Australians, are entitled to attack these propositions because they're either oversimplifications or lies. The free market certainly does deliver to some people in a very big way. Those entrepreneurs and corporate employees at the top end of the spectrum are enjoying a veritable bonanza. The share of national income enjoyed by the top one percent of Australian earners has increased from five percent in 1980 to nine percent, while the top 10 per cent of Australians are 10 times richer than the bottom ten percent. The world picture is even more blatantly skewed. A recent U.N. report showed that the disparity between the world's richest 20 percent and the poorest 20 percent widened from 30:1 in 1960 to 74:1 in 1997. The oft quoted neo con assertion that globalisation has helped the poorer nations by providing employment is a blatant lie. The world's economic system ensures that the world's riches are kept for relatively few, and that concentration of wealth grows ever larger, engineered by a ruthlessness and self interest on the part of the United States in particular, that is totally at odds with its public stance as a nation trying to spread harmony and democracy to the rest of the world.

Charles Perkins recent book, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, outlines precisely the tactics he used to ensure the economic supremacy of his nation. A large part of his job was to "encourage (third) world leaders to become part of a vast network that promotes U.S. commercial interests." The tactic was to offer vast loans for infrastructure which was often grandiose and ill conceived, but which delivered large profits to U.S. construction firms. The massive debt levels that resulted ensured the debtor nations capitulated to U.S. economic, political or military needs.

While the right trumpet the virtues of "enterprise", it's greed that's the real driving force of capitalism. Our top executives have elevated their salaries to astronomical heights in the last 10 years. They take home packages of up to 400 times the average wage, which by any rational calculation is being absurdly over rewarded for their skills. And it's not good enough for our top business moguls

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Move towards a new right wing drama

to be billionaires, they want to be multi-billionaires even if the sums of money they amass can never be sensibly spent in their lifetimes.

The assertion of free marketeers, that the comfortable, safe, convenient and healthy life that is enjoyed by the world's rich is a direct result of the energy released by the profit motive, is only partly true. The free market has certainly generated a lot of wealth, however unevenly distributed, but it's often fed off discoveries that weren't fuelled by greed but by curiosity.

Isaac Newton was obsessed, not by money, but by the need to find out why and how the universe worked when he discovered the fundamental laws of physics from which so much human progress has stemmed. William Harvey who unlocked the secrets of blood circulation and laid the foundations of modern medicine, was also driven by curiosity. James Watt, who perfected the steam engine on which the Industrial Revolution was born, eventually became a wealthy man but his overwhelming motivation was to work out how to make best use of this new power source. Alan Turing, the eccentric English genius who discovered the ground rules of computation and thus enabled Bill Gates to make his fortune, was never interested in wealth. Watson and Crick's discovery of DNA wasn't motivated by the desire to become billionaires, but to work out a maddeningly complex and hugely important molecular puzzle and so increase human knowledge hugely and in the process gain prestige in the eyes of their scientific colleagues.

The story of the progress of knowledge is largely a story of insatiable curiosity, dogged determination, and the courage to withstand ridicule, institutional opposition, persecution, and sometimes poverty. And many great discoveries have been partly spurred by the desire to better the lot of humankind. The free market has very efficiently capitalised on these discoveries to bring wealth to a select proportion of the world's inhabitants, but without human curiosity, courage, determination and altruism it would never have happened.

If it is a fact that more artists consider themselves on the left of politics than the right then it might be just that human behaviour which is driven by curiosity, altruism, courage, and determination is more interesting and attractive than behaviour motivated by unscrupulous and insatiable greed.

Albrechtsen's observation that the majority of cartoonists were leftist, may be explained by the fact that ridiculing the unfortunate and unsuccessful, which would presumably be the subject matter of right wing cartoons, is not particularly funny, whereas skewering the self-serving rationalisations of the unscrupulously greedy, is.

But I'm not convinced that our conservative commentator's belief that just about all artists are of the left is valid. There's a fundamental need for justice deep in the human psyche that presses for expression when fairness and decency are violated. Most people, including artists, are angered by injustice, oppression, tyranny, wanton cruelty, corruption and rampant self interest, wherever it emanates from.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was deported from the Soviet Union in 1974 for writing *The Gulag Archipelago*, his scathing assessment of the so called worker's paradise. Elia Kazan was shunned by his former left wing colleagues for exposing the union corruption on the New York in his masterpiece *On The Waterfront*. "I'm all right Jack", a trenchant criticism of the British union movement was one of the most popular films of its era. British playwright Tom Stoppard was scathing of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe in his plays and I was subject to ostracism by many leftists for my plays, *Sons of Cain*, which looked at corruption in a fictional New South Wales labor government in the eighties, *The Great Man* which examined the loss of idealism in the labor party, and *Dead White Males* which strongly satirised modish leftist post modernism.

If there are more writers and filmmakers attacking right wing sacred cows than left wing ones, it's probably not due to the fact that all writers are inoculated against capitalism at birth, it's more likely due to the fact that the behaviour of the corporate world and of right wing governments is often patently ruthless and amoral. The effort that corporate PR puts into painting a picture of a new corporatism which adds social responsibility to its bottom line is, in most cases, blatant spin.

Top management around the world still often quote their operating manual as being *The Art of War,* by the great Chinese General Sun Tzu, and it's not just a war waged on other corporations. It's war waged by lobbyists on environmental restrictions, on fair labour laws, and on attempts by foreign governments to restrict their rapaciousness. It's a war with only one end, and it's no longer even the end of acting in the interests of the shareholders. Corporations now act in the interests of increasing the remuneration packages of their top executives. The free market does deliver consumer goods in large numbers, and often very efficiently, but it's almost a by product of the real motive of corporate leadership which is the massive enrichment of very few.

Instead of bleating about the numbers of left wingers in the arts, our well paid warriors of the right should take a hard look at the ethics of the free market and recall names like Enron and HIH, One Tel and Andersens, and the myriad multinational firms that exploit vulnerable labor in appalling conditions in the third world. Their claim that this third world employment is offering opportunity looks hollow in the light of the earlier figures I quoted on the fast

growing disparity between rich and poor nations.

But of course they won't. Our right wing press will keep asserting that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds and keep attacking any artist, no matter how faintly subsidised, who says that it isn't.

In view of this intransigence in the age of right wing triumphalism, maybe artists have just got to buckle under and be pragmatic. If right wing art will bring increased subsidy, then maybe that's the way to go.

The right's agenda of calculated neglect of the arts has been particularly hard on theatre, as the dramatic drop in subsidy shows, so let's just swallow our pride and get down to creating the kind of right wing drama that would have Andrew Bolt and Greg Sheridan nodding in approval and the government clamoring to give theatre a funding boost.

Here's the outline of my new play, *The Right Way*. It opens in a large multinational corporation where the executives are congratulating each other after the board has just ratified huge salary increases they've recommended each other. Don, the CEO, states that this is a huge victory for "aspirational" Australians. He feels his success in negotiating a 20 million plus package, will inspire young Australians everywhere to try and emulate him and in the process work harder and smarter and much longer hours to help keep Australia's growth in GNP amongst the fastest in the world. He takes his head of corporate relations, Mal, and his financial controller Mack, down to the garage to view his latest acquisition, a custom built Prius hybrid car which he plans to use on the beach run down to his holiday house in Palm Beach when his helicopter is in for maintenance.

Mal and Mack congratulate him profusely on his commitment to environmental values, and Mal makes a note on his Blackberry instructing his assistant to issue an immediate press release about Don's socially responsible decision. A stretch limousine takes the three of them to Don's private jet and the three of them fly to Don's country retreat, a 20,000-hectare farmlet in Scone in order to discuss corporate strategy. On the way Mack tells Don that there is a problem on the horizon. Company profits are threatened because the environmental watchdog is questioning their use of ten billion gallons of water per day from the underground aquifer below Sydney. The water is needed for industrial cooling and the environmental scientists have constructed their usual spurious and speculative computer model which purports to show that the practice is causing Sydney to sink at the rate of twenty millimeters per year.

Mal tells Don that they have engaged their own private scientists whose computer model has shown that in fact Sydney will rise by 1 mm per year as a result of the water removal, but their scientist's findings have been treated with great suspicion by the Marxist news collective at the ABC. Don is furious and depressed. He cannot understand why the true heroes of Australian society, those whose enterprise produces employment and sought after and vital commodities, in their case marine products ranging from the fastest and loudest jet skis in the southern hemisphere up to their luxury fifteen million dollar turbocharged motor cruiser the "Battler", are victimised by the carping whiners of the soft left. "Twenty millimeters a year," he snorts. Even if it were true it would take a 100 years for Sydney to drop two metres.

Mack makes a note on his Blackberry for his assistant to issue a press release that there is technology on the horizon which will pump hot air into the aquifer and raise Sydney up again. Don calms down, but his problems are not over. The head of industrial safety, Simon, flies in to tell them that the cheaper spray paint they switched to some years back to coat the hulls of their water craft has been found to be highly carcinogenic and that their employees are succumbing to cancer at nine times the national rate. As if that wasn't bad enough, some ABC journalist is about to run a story that company knew the spray paint was carcinogenic when they switched to its use. A huge class action is looming which could bankrupt them.

"OK," says Don, "the spray paint is a tad carcinogenic, but everything in the world of business is a matter of cost benefit and the cost benefit analysis had shown clearly that for only an extra seven cancer deaths a year the cost to the consumer of all their company's products could be lowered enough to make them accessible to an additional three point two percent of the population. Any death is tragic, but product affordability is a vital component of human happiness." His lieutenants agree. Don says that in the interests of the consumers of Australia the journalists should be offered a PR job on staff at triple his present salary.

Simon tells him that it's already been tried but the journalist kept banging on about 'integrity' and refused. Don asks if the squalid little lefty could be dealt with in other ways. Simon tells him a thorough private investigation had revealed nothing unusual about his sex life, and that in his considered opinion, the 'final solution' was just a little too risky. Things look bleak for one of the most dynamic management teams in the country, but luckily their corporate remuneration strategist, Evan, flies in and works out a golden parachute strategy for them all which will get them out of the company with huge severance deals, and in so doing assist the health of the Australian economy by making them all available to be hired by other corporations at increased salaries before the shit hits the fan.

I'll be inviting Andrew, Piers, Greg, Janet, Imre, Christopher, Miranda, Alan, and all the Federal cabinet to the opening and I'm quietly confident that if my lead is followed by our younger playwrights, then an increase in funding for the arts is not far away.

David Williamson

Women Writers listen

Women have unequal access to resources, are among the most educationally deprived, and in many countries around the world are subject to severe familial and community pressures. With a number of countries having never published a book by a woman author they remain the most marginalised in the international writing community.

The International PEN Women Writers Committee (IPWWC) was created in 1991 to address the special needs of women writers and to protect and support them. Over the years emphasis was placed on ensuring the equality of women's voices within the organisation so that International PEN consistently reflects the issues and concerns of both women and men. Today the IPWWC, whose president is Melbourne PEN's Judith Buckrich, is represented in over 70 PEN Centres and has succeeded in raising the visibility of women writers within the organisation.

Twelve years after its formation, Vera Tokombaeva, a journalist and PEN Kyrghystan member, floated the idea of holding an international meeting of IPWWC to the newly elected Australian president. Two years later in 2005 the inaugural international meeting of PEN women writers took place in Bishkek, Kyrghystan. Not only was it a first for IPWWC, but it was the first time women writers from the region (Kyrghystan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) had come together to discuss issues that related specifically to them.

The main concern expressed by these 'Stan' women was the social censorship that resulted from gender inequality. With husbands traditionally subjugating married women their only power has arisen from their role as mother within the family unit. At the same time writing about sex brings a woman's virtue into question with married woman who have done so being accused of having affairs. Writing about politics or other 'serious' issues has seen women writers being censured by their own communities. Under such conditions the women of the region are censoring themselves.

Publishers in Kyrghystan are little more than printers so that writers have to either pay for their own publications or acquire a rich sponsor. If a book finally makes print the author is responsible for distribution. With one local bookstore visited by Ren Powell from Norwegian PEN displaying only two dozen local publications amongst thousands of books for sale, the chances of their words reaching an audience are slim. Gender subjugation, self-censorship and a dearth of possibilities for publication makes the life of women writers in Central Asia disappointingly difficult.

Dr Judith Buckrich Chair, International PEN Women Writers' Committee Vice-President, Melbourne Centre of PEN

Given the number of books they see published in the West the expectations of these women were perhaps understandably unrealistic with one attendee believing their books would be published in Europe if only they could get have their work translated in English, German, or French. The visiting PEN members knew that the best they could do for their fellow writers was to avoid making unrealistic promises while focusing on practical steps to assist in whatever way they could.

With too many of these women writing in isolation what they wanted the most, apart from publication in the West, was moral support, solidarity and a sense of community with fellow women writers. They needed a communications protocol to share information about computer list servers that would be of interest to them and to be made aware of publication venues such as WordsWithoutBorders.org.

Since that meeting IPWWC has established a newsletter titled *Network*, which is published and emailed to members 3 times a year and encourages contributions from all members of IPWWC.

In 2001 an anthology was published titled *Our Voice* containing the poetry and short stories from women PEN members from around the world. The editors of *Our Voice* are currently calling for contributions for the fourth volume of the book with preference being given to women who have not had work published in any of the previous volumes.

In July this year the International PEN Congress

to the growing voices

will be held in Dakar, Senegal. The second International PEN Women Writers Committee Conference will take place for three days (11th to 13th July) after the International PEN Congress. All PEN women writers are invited to attend the IPWWC with participants being drawn from the International PEN Congress delegates and women writers from Senegal and elsewhere in Africa.

The IPWWC conference aims to define the structure and development of International PEN's strategic goals for Africa and the Middle East. It will also examine the challenges facing women writers; discuss and decide the areas of focus for the succeeding three years and the regional and local programs through which they will be realised and will draw up plans for the development and implementation of the agreed programs.

Literary sessions each evening will enable the participants to hear each other's work and act as a first step to one of the greatest challenges facing women writers – that of how to enable their voice to be heard.

Among the challenges to be discussed will be: freedom of expression and the extra problems faced by women; the threat of the law and the state as it affects women, women writers and the family; censorship and self-censorship; women's literacy and education opportunities; publishing opportunities; literary events and teaching institutions where writing is a subject; accessing 'the world'; and languages and translation

The information in this article was taken from the International Women Writers Committee web site. www.ipwwc.org. The information about the Kyrghystan meeting was taken from the article, '… And Down Will Come Baby, Cradle and All: Snapshots from Bishkek and the Central Asian Women Writer's Conference', by Ren Powell of Norwegian PEN. To find more information about IPWWC, the Kyrghystan meeting, Network, Our Voice and how to attend the IPWWC in Senegal, or join their email list please go to the IPWWC website and http://internationalpen.mindunit.co.uk

Denise Leith

Empty chairs at the Sydney Writers' Festival

At the Sydney Writers' Festival events this year, you will not be able to press Chinese monk and editor Tashi Gyaltsen on poetry emerging from Northern China. Nor will Iranian Kurdish journalist, Adnan Hassanpour, be available for a panel discussion on publishing in present-day Iran. This is not due to any lack of organisational rigour on the part of the Festival committee but rather because Tashi is serving his third year in a Chinese labour camp while Adnan has not been heard from since his reported detainment by government authorities on 25 January 2007.

For many years, PEN has sought to promote opposition to the inability of writers to freely engage their insights and experience by the tradition of the Empty Chair. At this year's Sydney Writers Festival, the plight of Adnan, Tashi and other writers will be publicised—an empty chair at each of the 250 SWF sessions will represent a writer unable to participate due to imprisonment, fear of persecution or death. Sydney PEN Young Writers' Committee will be providing details of these writers to the Festival in order to remind audiences not only of the difficulties that writers face in much of the world in writing without castigation or worse, but also the difficulty in advancing recognition of their detention and harassment.

The full SWF program is available at www.swf.org.au.

Nick Landreth
Secretary, Young Writer's Committee

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