PEN Melbourne

PEN Melbourne events at the Melbourne Writers Festival feature an empty chair to represent writers who have been killed, imprisoned, tortured, threatened, attacked or exiled for the peaceful practice of their professions

Murdered in Cambodia. Dr Kem Ley, political commentator and activist

In custody following the July coup attempt in Turkey. Hanım Büşra Erdal, journalist

Jailed for 10 years under Thai 'lèse-majesté' laws. Somyot Phrueksakasemsuk, editor and writer

Detained on Manus Island by the Australian Government. Behrouz Boochani, writer, refugee

Convicted and jailed for 'leaking state secrets abroad'. Gao Yu, Chinese journalist

Facing jail for questioning corporate practices in Thailand. Andy Hall, human rights advocate

Facing 43 years jail for being critical of Malaysian judicial processes ('sedition'). Zunar, cartoonist

Sentenced to 20 years jail for her beliefs. Iranian teacher and poet, Mahvash Sabet

PEN Melbourne at Melbourne Writers Festival
Glimpses of Ai Weiwei
Celebrating the Mildura Writers Festival
Freedom of expression crushed in Cambodia

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The activists who will be honoured by the empty chair at PEN Melbourne's events at the Melbourne Writers Festival 2016. For further details, see pages 15 to 17.

Stephanie Holt
Editor, PEN *Quarterly.* Photo: Tania Jovanovic

This double issue of the *PEN Melbourne Quarterly* is our annual Melbourne Writers Festival issue. This is our festival-mad city's highest-profile—but by no means only—literary fest, bringing international guests to join our own established and emerging writers. As always, PEN is associated with the festival through the PEN Empty Chair. An overview of the relevant events and panels can be found in this issue and the writers honoured are pictured on the cover.

Among other festivals—more intimate, more local—is the 'other MWF', the Mildura Writers Festival, which has built a strong relationship with PEN Melbourne. The *Quarterly* includes notes from Mildura, as well as an account of the festival's development, and Sianlee Harris's winning essay from its PEN Melbourne-sponsored Indigenous Writing Award, supported by CAL.

On a more humble scale, PEN's longstanding informal relationship with RMIT University's Professional Writing and Editing programs (where I teach) will be at the heart of a forthcoming minifestival being organised by Associate Degree in Writing and Editing students. This will feature, among a number of events, a PEN Melbourne panel. Notes of that event can be found on page 9.

It's heartening that PEN's message strikes such a chord with younger students and emerging writers, tapping into a passion for social justice, a desire to connect and collaborate *as writers*, and a desire to learn more, read more. (Other students have joined PEN, or volunteered to help with the *Quarterly* and other activities.)

There is some great reading but much grim news in this issue. For a change of pace, I'm looking forward to several recent releases from PEN's stalwarts. Recent notable launches include Arnold Zable's *The Fighter: A True Story*, Judith Buckrich's memoir *The Political is Personal*, and Tony Atkinson's memoir *A Prescribed Life*, written with the *Quarterly*'s multitalented designer, Lynn Smailes.

As always, members are encouraged to send work for consideration, or contact me with ideas for our coming issues. Submissions or enquiries are welcome at any time, to stephanie.holt@rmit.edu.au (please identify 'PEN Quarterly' in the subject line). The deadline for final copy for the next issue is October 31.

Christine McKenzie
President, PEN Melbourne

Dear PEN Melbourne members and friends,

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch recently reported on conditions in the Australian-run detention centre on Nauru Island stating that there is a 'wall of secrecy' around the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers and that they are being driven to 'breaking point'. This, combined with the release of documents ('The Nauru Files') by *The Guardian* that detail the daily horrors lived out by refugees in centre, should surely mean that a strategy of 'out of sight, out of mind' no longer allows Australian people to ignore or deny the cruel and inhumane treatment of asylum seekers on Nauru.

PEN Melbourne has advocated on behalf of asylum seekers for years, and has initiated several PEN International Main Cases during this time for writers in Australian detention centres with some success. The present situation is much worse. PEN has been advocating for Mr Behrouz Boochani, a Kurdish-Iranian writer detained now for over three years on Manus Island; however, it seems that our letters verifying his case have been ignored and calls for him to be granted asylum in Australia have fallen on deaf ears.

PEN Melbourne applauds the work of those who have gained access to the detention centres and are bringing the stories of the people detained there to light. It is our right to know the facts of what is being done to the refugees and their experiences in our name, financed with our taxpayer money.

Behrouz Boochani is an eloquent writer and is telling the stories of his experiences on Manus Island, as well as those others being held there whose lives are as rich and wonderful as anyone you would ever meet. Behrouz has written: 'I write from inside the experience of being a political prisoner here as well as a writer. I try to describe how people feel under torture, how a father feels in a prison, how people are when they think about suicide. I write about the small things that add up to make this prison as well as people: stories, nature, what I observe. What I see through my eyes as an imprisoned writer.'

Behrouz Boochani's writing about life on Manus Island is a powerful and undeniable testament to the horrors of being held unjustly in that place. Let's not forget that it is *not* illegal to seek asylum in Australia under the international conventions to which Australia is a signatory. Please strengthen our campaign (see page 40) by spreading the word: www.facebook.com/bringbehrouzboochanitoaustralia.

In March this year we welcomed Jennifer Clement, PEN International's president, to Melbourne, and in this *Quarterly* you will read a report of her conversations with Cynthia Troup and Zoe Rodriguez. There are many reasons to rejoice in Jennifer taking on this important and influential role in our organisation. In the report, Jennifer makes clear her top priorities for the three years of her tenure, which acknowledge the fact that she *is* the first woman in the position and thus will work to change the PEN International Charter at the Congress this year, which hasn't been done before. '(The Charter...) doesn't include gender and it doesn't include sexual orientation, and it doesn't include religion. So it seems to me that we need to add those to the Charter.'

In her second year Jennifer aims to write a manifesto on gender, as 'violence is used to silence women, to shut them up.' And in her third year Jennifer aims to implement the Vida statistics in all PEN centres. These are similar to our Stella statistics. (see www.vidaweb.org/)

Jennifer Clement's vision for change in our organisation is impressive, and brings the promise of a new dynamic to our work, much as John Ralston Saul brought to the position in his own way.

I have just read Jennifer Clement's novel *Prayers for the Stolen*, a harrowing journey into one of the darkest places for women—contemporary Mexico, dominated by drug cartels and those who trade in girls for slaves. Clement's clear, precise prose conveys the reality of modern-day Mexico and the lives of women. *Prayers for the Stolen* is just that—a long poetic prayer for justice in a country where women and girls are abandoned, abused, murdered. The novel is a devastating evocation of the stories that Jennifer Clement knows well after spending years as the president of PEN Mexico, in one of the most dangerous countries in which to practice journalism, and where she spent more than ten years listening to the stories told by and about missing women and girls. The story of Ladydi, her mother Rita, her girlfriends and their mothers who live in a mountain village, abandoned by their menfolk—who leave to make a better life and do not return—is constantly disturbing. Clement's comment that 'Mexico is a warren of hidden women' is portrayed convincingly, although the grim reality of their lives is laced with moments of black humour, fierce determination to survive, and tenderness. Clement has given a voice to these silenced ones, to the vivid characters who leap off the page, and while their stories reveal a terrible truth, humanity and compassion are at the heart of the novel. The prospects for the women are never good, but the reader is left with a sense of their humanity and resilience in the face of the evil surrounding them.

In Jennifer Clement we have a president who has pledged to bring the concerns of women to the forefront and one who is a powerful author and poet. I look forward to reading more of Jennifer's writing, and following her progressive changes to PEN International's profile, especially with regard to women and gender.

Recently, notable Australian authors and other literary associations have spoken out strongly against the Productivity Commission's proposals to remove parallel importation restrictions (PIRs) on books. If the government accepts the proposal to repeal PIRs on books, Australia's authors will lose valuable royalties, career-supporting income from overseas rights sales, and the support of a healthy Australian publishing industry.

Author Tim Winton says: 'Think: books like *Possum Magic*, *The Book Thief*, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, *True History of the Kelly Gang*, *The Slap*, *The Secret River*—all these are the fruits of a publishing culture that allowed its writers to speak to their own, a culture that nurtured these writers long enough for them to break out and of course to publish from home to the world on just and logical terms.'

The Australian Society of Authors says that the removal of PIRs on books will allow the mass importation of lower-royalty and royalty-free editions of Australian authors' books into the Australian marketplace. These editions may originate locally or overseas, and will be allowed to compete against full-royalty editions of the same books in local bookstores.

If you are a writer, illustrator, reader or supporter of Australian books consider signing the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) petition to stop parallel importation: www.change.org/p/scott-morrison-save-australian-literature-stop-parallel-importation-of-books

Many generous volunteers including the members of our committee carry on the work of PEN Melbourne. Often this work is invisible, as in the letters that are sent regularly to advocate for writers in prison, including on behalf of Behrouz Boochani in our region. Letters are not often acknowledged and responded to; however, this is the core of our project and it is vital that we continue to use the freedom we have to fight for those who, despite the danger to themselves and their families, continue to speak truth to power.

Thank you to all who support PEN.

Christine McKenzie

Are you a member? Do join us and be a part of the good work of PEN.www.penmelbourne.org

Writers in Prison Report

Irene Drumm, Writers in Prison Co-convener

The political and social turmoil in many countries around the world continues, unabated, with an escalation in some nations that has reached extraordinary levels of disruption under repressive, exploitative governments. In this climate of conflict and disorder, it is critical to continue to action PEN International systems of protest to the leaders of regimes through letters and social media, in solidarity with writers and journalists whose freedom of expression along with their liberty has been removed.

In the past few months, Rapid Action Network appeals have covered several continents, demonstrating this lack of fundamental rights to articulate an opinion and to criticise. Prohibition of those basic entitlements has eroded, and continues to erode, an individual's human right to *think*, to *evaluate*, to *comment*, to *disagree* and to present those thoughts in a public forum. The curtailment of such rights is not just endemic in countries with a structure of internal siege, but has, in some instances and to certain degrees, infiltrated societies with stable democratic principles and beliefs. Should the volume of expression be encouraged to narrow, there is always a danger that over time an obstruction of 'reality' might diminish the value of open comment in a detrimental manner. The following examples expose the limitations placed upon the media, journalists, intelligentsia, scholars and all free thinkers, with devastating consequences, in countries that will not tolerate any spoken or written exposure for opposition to authority and leadership.

Turkey

The recent failed *coup d'état* (15 July 2016) has created a broadening of the already established dictatorial command of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who declared an immediate state of emergency post-coup, which allowed the President to assume extra-constitutional and extra-judicial powers. This resulted in a massive purge of institutions and individuals. Hundreds of thousands of people have been detained and investigated, and thousands have been suspended or fired from their jobs, with an emphasis on cleansing those who might be followers of Fethullah Gülen, accused of orchestrating the coup by the Turkish government, despite no concrete evidence to support this proposal. Over 130 media organisations have been shut down: 30 or more publishing houses and a large number of radio stations, TV channels, newspapers and magazines that collectively project critical voices. The government has demonstrated that it has no tolerance for political opposition and will punish those who show otherwise.

May 2016: An Istanbul court convicted journalists Hikmet Çetinkaya and Ceyda Karan with fomenting 'hatred and enmity of a religious nature in the people via means of the press' and sentenced them to two years in prison. Their crime of reproducing cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed from the French monthly *Charlie Hebdo*, a week after the attack in Paris in which twelve people lost their lives, showed the already widely circulated image of the Prophet holding a sign reading '*Je suis* Charlie' under the headline 'All is forgiven'. The journalists disputed the charge and argued that it had nothing to do with religion *per se*, but was a protest against the massacre in Paris.

August 2016: A Rapid Action Network request to file a petition from the Writers in Prison collective to the Turkish authorities may not be well received. The petition called on them to release all writers and journalists; to dismiss the curb on freedom of expression and free speech, to cease the torture of detained citizens, not to utilise the failed coup as an avenue to jettison all those who do not agree with Turkish government policy, and to cease punishing those who have committed no crime other than voice their opinion. On the basis of the current state of affairs in Turkey it is unlikely that Erdoğan will make any concessions that liberalise the tight hold he exercises in all matters of information processing. Journalists who differ intellectually with his retracted media policy, one that fails to report the news and the state of the nation, will continue to be charged, convicted and imprisoned.

Iran

June 2016: The Kurdish-Iranian journalist and writer Mohammad Sadiq Kabudvand, is currently serving a 10-year prison sentence for 'acting against national security, by forming and managing an illegal organisation', (the Kurdistan Human Rights Organization). Kabudvand has been incarcerated since 2007 and suffers severe health problems. He is in danger of having new charges brought against him. He has reportedly received poor treatment while imprisoned and suffered solitary confinement, and his health is said to have deteriorated as a result of torture and other ill-treatment in jail. His crime is establishing a human rights organisation in Iran's Kurdish region and reporting human rights abuses.

June 2016: Iranian journalist Narges Mohammadi has had a 16-year sentence handed down by the Revolutionary Court in Tehran for fictional criminal behaviours, essentially for supporting those that, like herself, are persecuted by the state, have no rights and are frequently the recipients of false accusations. Narges is an independent journalist, an advocate for the abolition of the death penalty, and a supporter of human rights reform. She is accused of 'propaganda against the regime' for reporting violations, visiting political prisoners, and 'acting against the national security'. She has been accused of almost every civil activity imaginable to a point of complete absurdity.

Human rights violations in Iran are persistently condemned by the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Commission, as they should be. However, condemnation appears to be making absolutely no difference to the outcome, since Iranian security and intelligence forces persist in the arrest of journalists and social media activists, and the revolutionary courts continue to hand down heavy sentences.

Honduras

Honduras suffers significantly from government pressure that limits editorial freedom and punishes writers who exercise their right to form their own conclusions, report the news and criticise government. Journalists who report on 'sensitive' issues, regime corruption, human rights abuse and drug trafficking are regularly threatened, attacked and killed for their work.

June 2016: Cesario Padilla Figueroa and five other students from the National Autonomous University of Honduras have been charged with 'usurping' university property after a warrant was issued on 7 June. If convicted they will be sentenced to up to five years in prison. A report has suggested that the group was actually involved in a human rights protest. The government has criminalised social protest. This is a violation of the rights of an individual to participation in public rallies and a violation of freedom of expression.

Angola

This South West African country restricts the independence of the media. Journalists and writers are hampered by the threat of punishment for printing the truth, and can be accused of criminal defamation or insulting members of the government with accusations of corruption and offending the police, and reporting human rights violations can result in imprisonment as a punishment.

July 2016: We were introduced to the Luanda Book Club activists in April 2016. Domingos da Cruz and a group of around seventeen members, largely made up of students, writers, musicians and teachers who gathered at a bookstore in the capital, Luanda, had been accused of a variety of crimes that included 'preparatory acts of rebellion' and 'criminal conspiracy'. They have now been conditionally released. We welcome the decision and have called on the Angolan government to overturn the original convictions and sentences that violated their right to assemble as a group and the right to express an opinion.

Ethiopia

On the opposite side of the continent, in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopian journalists face a similar set of restrictions. Harassment and intimidation remain a common practice among law enforcement officials. Media outlets face significant restrictions on any coverage of anti-government protests, and the government obstructs access to numerous websites, including independent and international news sites.

June 2016: Blogger Zelalem Workagegnehu (known as Zola) was sentenced to five years and two months in prison on terrorism charges and has been detained since 2014. His appeal was to be heard on 6 July. It may have gone ahead but to date we have not heard the outcome. He contributes to the independent diaspora-based blog *De Birhan*, which covers news related to Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, as well as other news sites. He confessed to the charges laid against him under extreme duress and torture. PEN International reports that at least four journalists are currently detained in Ethiopia for supposed terrorism offences. PEN believes that these journalists have been jailed because of their critical reporting and have not committed any criminal offence. The situation for freedom of expression in the country remains highly restricted.

On behalf of PEN International and PEN Melbourne we thank our network of volunteers who support the work of our organisation by drawing attention to countries around the world who impose restrictions that violate the rights of journalists and writers and their associates; we are watching them.

EVENT
Odyssey: line by line
RMIT Literary Festival
Bella Union, Trades Hall, 2.30–9.00pm, Wednesday 14 September

On Wednesday 14 September students from RMIT's Professional Writing and Editing course will present *Odyssey: line by line* from 2.30pm until 9pm at Bella Union, Level 1, Trades Hall, 54 Victoria Street, Carlton South. One of the panels will be a PEN Melbourne panel and will focus on the journeys of refugees and their writings around this vexed issue. Christine McKenzie of PEN Melbourne will moderate and the panel will include two or three guest writers. The PEN panel will be on from 3.30 to 4.30pm. The event is free with a gold coin donation at the door to support the work of PEN.

Call Out for Short Fiction and Poetry on Human Rights Issues in Australia

RIGHT NOW is a not-for-profit media organisation committed to covering a diverse range of perspectives on human rights issues in Australia through online, print and radio media.

RIGHT NOW is currently seeking submissions of original and unpublished short fiction and poetry. While they are unable to pay contributors, they will provide editorial support for selected works, and the work will be published on an ever-growing platform.

Submission requirements: www.rightnow.org.au/submit.

PEN Melbourne's Card-Writing Group

Ann Shenfield, Writers in Prison Co-convener

In Kelly Reichardt's latest film, *Certain Women*, there's a character, a prisoner, who begs Laura Dern to write to him. He says, *I don't care what you write, just write to me.*

Just write to me. The despair and isolation that a prisoner, particularly a prisoner of conscience, must feel is hard to even begin to imagine.

About two months ago a letter from Narges Mohammadi was circulated by PEN International. Narges is a human rights advocate who is currently in Iran's notorious Evin Prison. At the beginning of our recent card-writing group meeting in early July, I read out her letter. She details the situation for herself, and 25 other women, who are also political prisoners. She writes that they are only allowed one visit with a family member per month. But her main focus is on the routine use of solitary confinement, which is applied in order to elicit confessions. It's not hard to imagine that room from her letter, soundless and dark. No one wants to imagine those places and how they must affect the psyche; *psychological torture* is what Narges calls it.

I admit, this could be seen as a less-than-uplifting start to the card-writing group's meeting, but my intention was to highlight the pervasive isolation that so many of PEN's imprisoned writers and human rights activists must endure.

But as it happens, unlike the character's lines in the Laura Dern film, what we write to those on PEN's case list does matter. It matters a great deal because we don't want to make anyone's situation worse as a result of what we've naively written. But that doesn't invalidate the authenticity of the act of writing, or that of reaching out. And besides, it's easy enough to write with the guidelines in mind.

The point of our cards is to let those writers who have been unjustly imprisoned know that they haven't been forgotten, that even from this remote place their names are still being spoken.

There were six of us at the last meeting; it was a cold, bleak Melbourne morning but we wrote 37 letters. Judy Horacek kindly donated a box of her own cards that are beautiful and apposite. And, as the pathetic fallacy goes, somehow by the afternoon it seemed marginally less bleak.

The card-writing meetings are friendly grassroots gatherings where we seek only to offer support, from one writer to another. There's no expectation that we'll ever receive a reply. The cards are sent simply as a gesture of solidarity. And hope.

The group will meet again on Thursday 29 September at The Moat (under the State Library of Victoria, enter from Little Lonsdale Street) at 10.30am. The coffee's good and everyone's welcome!

Dear members of International PEN,

I'm writing this letter to you from the Evin Prison. I am in a section with 25 other female political prisoners, with different intellectual and political point of view. Until now 23 of us, have been sentenced to a total of 177 years in prison (2 others have not been sentenced yet). We are all charged due to our political and religious tendency and none of us are terrorists.

The reason to write these lines is, to tell you that the pain and suffering in the Evin Prison is beyond tolerance. Opposite other prisons in Iran, there is no access to telephone in Evin Prison. Except for a weekly visit, we have no contact to the outside. All visits takes place behind double glass and only connected through a phone. We are allowed to have a visit from our family members only once a month.

But it is the solitary confinement, which is beyond any kind of acceptable imprisonment. We—25 women—have detained in total more than 12 years in solitary confinement. Political prisoners who are considered dangerous terrorists are held in solitary confinement indefinitely. Retention in solitary confinement can vary from a day up to several years.

However, according to regulations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, holding prisoners in solitary confinement is illegal. Unfortunately until now, the solitary confinement, as a psychological torture, has had many victims in Iran.

During 14 years long activity of the Center for Human Rights Defenders, the Center have published and held many protests against the use of this kind of punishment. But unfortunately the solitary confinement is still used against many of Iran's political prisoners. The solitary confinement is used to get forced and false confessions out of the defendants. These false and faked confessions are used against the defendants during the trials. Many of the detainees in the solitary confinement are suffering from mental and physical health problems and the injuries will remain with them for the rest of their life. As a matter of a fact, the solitary confinement is nothing but a closed and dark room. A dimly confined space, deprived of all sounds and all light that can give the inmates a sense of humanity. Personally, I have been in solitary confinement three times since 2001. Once during my interrogation in 2010, I suffered a panic neurotic attacks, which I had never experienced before.

As a defender of human Right, who has experienced and have had dialogues with many people detained in solitary confinement, I emphasize that this kind of punishment is inhuman and can be considered psychological torture.

As a humble member of this prestigious organization, I urge all of you, as writers and defenders of the principles of free thought and freedom of speech and expression, to combat the use of solitary confinement as torture, with your pen, speech and all other means. Maybe one day we will be able to close the doors behind us to solitary confinement and no one will be sentenced to prison for criticizing and demanding reforms. I hope that day will come soon.

Greetings and Regards

Narges Mohammadi

Prison Evin, May 2016

PEN Melbourne's two 2016 International Women's Day events

Judith Buckrich

This year we were privileged to present two extraordinary women, Jennifer Clement and Judy Maddigan at the Wheeler Centre for International Women's Day.

PEN President Jennifer Clement in conversation 4 March 2016

On March 4 we were delighted to host International PEN President Jennifer Clement at the Wheeler Centre as part of or International Women's Day celebrations. She was in Australia to participate in the PEN Sydney Free Voices series, and managed visits to Adelaide and Melbourne. Elected President of PEN International in late 2015 at the PEN Congress held in Québec, she is the first woman President since PEN's 1921 formation. Jennifer is a celebrated poet, novelist and memoirist whose works have been translated into 24 languages.

Human rights issues feature prominently in her work. In 2014 she was awarded the Sara Curry Humanitarian Award for her novel about the disappeared girls of Mexico, *Prayers for the Stolen*.

She has an ambitious advocacy agenda for her PEN International Presidency in wanting women's voices better heard, seeing this as part of the broader motivations of PEN to ensure that writers are not silenced.

Cynthia Troup talked about her novel *Prayers for the Stolen*, her work as President of PEN Mexico fighting for the rights and safety of Mexican journalists, as well as her ambitions for PEN International in her Presidency. The following is a report of that conversation, and Jennifer's talk with Zoe Rodriguez in Sydney.

speaking about *Prayers for the Stolen*

Basically, in Mexico nowadays we have something we call narco literature, now considered a genre, and I was noticing that almost all the narco literature was about men and this was also true in the media. The story about the drug lords and the violence was also very male driven. I was interested in trying to understand what was happening to the women in Mexico and how the violence was affecting them. So the beginning of the research for that took ten years—the first two years I spent interviewing the women of drug traffickers, which was fascinating and incredible. I was constantly thinking of Hannah Arendt, and the banality of evil because all this is driven by the most base capitalism. There's no ideology. There's nothing behind it.

So, for example, I would interview one woman who was the wife of a very important pilot of a drug trafficker who's now been caught, whose nickname was la Barbie because his hair was very blonde like a Barbie doll. One of my favourite questions was to ask these women 'Well, what does he buy you?' I thought that would be a good question, and she said 'Ah you know, he is so incredible, because he flew me to San Antonio Texas and bought me a leather jacket.'

And I thought, how many people have died because of this leather jacket?

But anyway, I did all that research, still not knowing exactly what I would be doing although I did write journalistic pieces on narco culture. Then I heard this story about what was happening in Mexico in the state of Guerrero which is where the poppies are grown and the state-of-the-art heroin labs are. I spoke to a woman in Mexico City and I said to her, how are things in Guerrero? And she said 'Oh, you know, they are stealing all our girls.'

She told me about how they would see SUVs coming in the distance with these gangsters looking for girls to steal. And what they were doing was digging holes in the ground and when they'd see the SUVs in the distance they would hide their girls in these holes and cover them up with leaves or things like that. In my mind immediately I saw a rabbit warren and I saw graves for the living girls. I couldn't let go of that image. I knew the book would be about the most vulnerable women, who are these girls.

At the same time, what I learned from going to the field and talking mostly to mothers was that they also were making their daughters ugly. They didn't want their daughters to be noticed and they have an expression 'stay in the shade'—don't be seen, don't go out in the sun and don't let people see how lovely you are or how feminine you are. So they would say that a boy was born when a little girl was born to deflect any attention because these people are waiting for these little girls to grow up before they steal them. So, if they know there's a pretty girl and she's only four years old, they'll be waiting for her to get to eleven or twelve or thirteen, a good age to traffic these little girls …

In Mexico all kinds of people are being stolen, not just girls. Many workers in the fields and in the crops are stolen to pick the marijuana or poppy crops. One thing that they all talk about a lot in Mexico is the tunnels, the great tunnels, that they build—imagine the manpower that it took to build those tunnels. Where are those men? We suspect in Mexico that when they finish the tunnels they are killed.

We have a lot of IT people missing in Mexico because obviously these people's ranches and state-of-the-art heroin laboratories that exist in Guerrero all want internet service and Facebook and sending things and they have to print …

And we also have many, many doctors who are missing. There's so many people missing in Guerrero that there's groups that walk through the countryside with long metal probes and put them in the ground and smell the tip of the probe to see if it smells like a cadaver …

We definitely have a breakdown of the legal system, a breakdown of the police system—they're both very corrupt, and that is our responsibility. The fact that there is complete impunity is Mexico's responsibility. We have at least a hundred journalists killed, twenty-five missing, and already four killed this year.

But the truth is also that there's no way Mexico can solve this problem without decisive action from the United States. So we're in this terrible marriage where we really can't solve our problems and this has to do with the tremendous consumption of drugs in the United States, the fact that drugs, taking drugs and anything to do with drugs is criminal behaviour, when I believe it should be a health issue and not a criminal issue.

And then we have the tremendous bringing of guns into Mexico—legally, illegally. The latest statistic from a study done at the University of Santiago is that if the guns were not coming into Mexico, 47% of US gun dealers would be out of business …

In many ways this is also a PEN question. I think PEN is such a remarkable organisation. I've been a member for 22 years. I was president of PEN Mexico, and I really do deeply believe in the power of literature, and so then to have actually that power come into my life and for me to experience it personally has been really extraordinary …

So it was interesting to suddenly have this happening in my life, that a book that's a novel would make law-makers in Washington want to talk to me about the research that went into writing it. And it's so weird to be defending and talking about people that don't even exist, that I invented. And to see the book in the bookcases in Congress is very special. So that happened in terms of something to do with reality around the novel.

The other thing that happened was, because I had started out doing research on women and drug traffickers I knew very well where the girls were being trafficked to. It ended up being such an important part of the research. So, in the novel I'm able to have a girl trafficked and return home.

Jennifer Clement (at left) and Judy Maddigan

I've never met a girl that returned. I know somebody who says that he has just met somebody about a year ago that was returned, but I never have. But thanks to that research I was able to explain where the girl in my novel, Paula, had gone.

And in Mexico what happened that was extremely strange and completely unexpected was once the book had come out, our very important news magazine published the chapters of the novel about the ranches on the border of Mexico as news. So it wasn't in the cultural pages or the literary pages or the book review pages …

speaking about her PEN Presidency

The presidency lasts three years. I don't know if you've been to a PEN Congress, but it's the most exciting place, to look up and see a sea of people from all over the world, of every colour and every kind of costume. Everybody there working for freedom of expression. Most people paid to get there out of their own pocket. A lot of them living in exile. A lot of them living in fear. Some have been tortured. Some have been jailed. So, I always have thought, ever since it happened, that the most exceptional people voted for me. It's really a great privilege.

As the first woman president I feel that I can't ignore that I am that person. So for me, I think what I'm going to do is, I'm going to—in the first year at the congress in September—change the PEN International Charter, which hasn't been done. And I think it needs to be updated because at the moment it says that members of PEN will dispel hatreds to do with class, race and nationality. So, it doesn't include gender and it doesn't include sexual orientation, and it doesn't include religion. So it seems to me that we need to add those to the Charter. I think that adding gender will be quite easy. I think religion will also be easy. I think it will probably be trickier to add sexual orientation.

And in the second year the aim will be to write a manifesto on gender. And what does this have to do with PEN? The idea is that gender violence is a form of censorship, and that is the route that it would take and be in line with what PEN stands for. And I believe it. Violence is used to silence women, to shut them up.

And then the third year, implement the VIDA statistics in all PEN centres. You already have them in Australia in the form of the Stella statistics, which is amazing, because most countries don't have it. It is a way to monitor how many books by women are being reviewed, how many books by women are being given prizes. And I know for example in Mexico the leading literary news magazine has so few women—one of them doesn't even have a single woman on the board of the magazine—women are secretaries, and so I'd like to do that.

'International Women's Day 2016: Judy Maddigan and the Victorian Women's HERitage Centre', 7 March 2016, The Wheeler Centre

Three days later, also at the Wheeler Centre, Judy Maddigan—past speaker in the Parliament of Victoria—spoke about the establishment of the new Women's HERitage Centre Victoria, which will celebrate and support Victorian Women's History and Heritage. She spoke about the long (and ongoing) fight for women's equality in Victoria, which was the last state to allow women to stand for parliament.

PEN Melbourne at the Melbourne Writers Festival

PEN Melbourne presents The Empty Chair each year at several Melbourne Writers Festival events. The Empty Chair statement is read out by the chair or host of selected events. On stage is an empty chair and the text reads as follows:

The Melbourne Centre of PEN International advocates for writers who are at risk in many countries around the world. In 2015 PEN International's world-wide Case list included 1054 writers.
PEN actively campaigns on behalf of these writers who have been detained, imprisoned, tortured, forced into exile and in other ways silenced for the peaceful practice of their professions and in violation of their right to freedom of expression. PEN calls for the investigation and prosecution of those who murder writers, a crime that is growing in frequency worldwide. The Empty Chair on the stage today is for a writer who cannot share this platform because of these circumstances.

This year The PEN Empty Chair will be acknowledged at the following events:

Australian Asylum



Madeline Gleeson and Robert Manne, with Esther Anatolitis; Fed Square, Sunday 28 August, 1pm

The Empty Chair is for Behrouz Boochani. Mr Boochani is a Kurdish-Iranian writer and asylum seeker who has been incarcerated in the immigration centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, for over three years. While the PNG government has granted refugee status to Mr Boochani and he is currently nominally 'free' to move around the island, the situation on Manus is highly restrictive and potentially dangerous. PEN International maintains Mr Boochani should be permitted to have his case heard in Australia, and to have it expedited as soon as possible. To be held in limbo for such a long time, is tantamount to imprisonment, and a prolongation of indefinite detention.

From Distant Wars to Our Shores


Arnold Zable with Melissa Cranenburgh; Ballarat, Saturday 27 August, 10am

The Empty Chair will be for Behrouz Boochani (see the note above).
Arnold Zable is a respected advocate for social change, giving a voice to Australia's underclass in his work. His new book, The Fighter, tells the story of an ex-boxer living in the shadows of his mother's post-Holocaust trauma.
How do wars elsewhere impact Australian lives?

Protest and Rebellion



Molly Crabapple and Eliza Vitri Handayani with Omar Musa; Fed Square, Friday 2 September, 1pm

This Empty Chair is for British migrant rights activist Andy Hall, who has charges against him in Thailand and is currently facing court for exposing the use of slave labour by corporations. Mr Hall faces charges of criminal defamation and computer crimes in connection with a report published by Finnwatch in 2013. If convicted, he could face up to seven years in prison. PEN International believes that the charges against Hall are directly linked to his peaceful and legitimate work as a migrant rights advocate and calls for all charges against him to be dropped immediately and unconditionally.

Goenawan Mohamad on Indonesia


Goenawan Mohamad with Jennifer Lindsay; Fed Square, Saturday 3 September, 2:30pm

Goenawan Mohamad has been at the forefront of Indonesian intellectual and artistic life for over 50 years.

This Empty Chair is for Chinese veteran dissident journalist Gao Yu convicted of 'leaking state secrets abroad'. Gao's 7-year sentence has been reduced to five years, the remainder of which she will be allowed to serve outside of prison. PEN is concerned about recent developments regarding Gao Yu, in particular her ongoing ill-health, and urges Chinese authorities to ensure that she is provided with appropriate medical treatment, and that all access to her medical insurance be restored. PEN requests that Gao Yu be permitted to travel to Germany for medical treatment, for which she has already been granted a visa. The recent destruction of a garden structure at her home and alleged beating of her son are seen as attempts to intimidate Gao.

Australian Citizenship




Fatima Measham, Abdi Aden and Peter Mares with Jonathan Green; Fed Square, Saturday 3 September, 4pm

Join political experts Abdi Aden, Peter Mares and Fatima Measham as they combine personal experience with critical examination to dissect citizenship and equality.

This Empty Chair is for Malaysian political cartoonist Zunar, who faces a long-term prison sentence after posting tweets condemning the jailing of an opposition leader in Malaysia. The Malaysian government is going to enormous lengths to silence dissent and debate, and lock up its critics.

A House without Windows


Nadia Hashimi with Amanda Smith; Fed Square, Saturday 3 September, 11:30am

This Empty Chair is for Iranian teacher and poet Mahvash Sabet, who is currently serving a 20-year prison sentence in Evin prison, Tehran. She is one of a group of seven Bahá'í leaders known as the 'Yaran-i-Iran' ('Friends of Iran') who have been detained since 2008 for their faith and activities related to running the affairs of the Bahá'í community in Iran. PEN International is calling on the Iranian authorities to release Mahvash Sabet and all other writers imprisoned in Iran solely for exercising their right to legitimate freedom of expression.

Asia-Pacific Narratives





Briohny Doyle, Lawrence Lacambra Ypil, Rajith Savanadasa and Cath Ferla with Angela Savage
Fed Square, Saturday 3 September, 5:30pm

What does it mean to live in the Asia-Pacific in a literary context?

The Empty Chair is for Thai writer and editor Somyot Phrueksakasemsuk, who is currently incarcerated in Bangkok's Remand Prison, where he is serving a 10-year sentence following his conviction on charges of *lèse-majesté* under Article 112 of Thailand's Criminal Code. PEN is concerned that Thai authorities continue to use *lèse-majesté* laws to criminalise free expression, and urges the government to adopt an amendment to Article 112 of the Penal Code in order to ensure that Thailand meets its international obligations to protect freedom of expression.

Holiday in Cambodia


Laura Jean McKay with Kalyan Ky; Springvale Library, Saturday 3 September, 2pm

The Empty Chair is for Dr Kem Ley, a scholar, researcher, writer, prominent critic of the government and advisor to PEN Cambodia, who was killed on 10 July 2016 in Phnom Penh. The murder of Dr Ley is a deeply disturbing development in the deteriorating climate for freedom of expression in Cambodia, a cause for which Dr Ley worked relentlessly. Many observers regard his murder as a political assassination.

Juliet Jacques: Trans


Juliet Jacques with Amy Middleton; Fed Square, Saturday 3 September, 11:30am

At 30, Juliet Jacques underwent sex reassignment surgery. In the gripping and intimate *Trans: A Memoir*, she recounts her search for self-definition in a world where transgender identities are often unacknowledged, misunderstood or worse. She invites us on her personal journey.

The Empty Chair is for Turkish journalist Hanım Büşra Erdal, who has been taken into custody following the 15 July coup attempt in Turkey. PEN is deeply concerned that alongside the legitimate investigations and detentions related to criminal conduct during the attempted coup, the authorities are using the state of emergency to further silence any and all critical voices in the country. As of 28 July, arrest warrants have been issued for 42 journalists including Erdal, in addition to 47 former employees of *Zaman* newspaper. Three news agencies, 16 TV channels, 23 radio stations, 45 papers, 15 magazines and 29 publishers have been ordered shut.

Arnold Zable of PEN Melbourne will also participate in a panel discussing one of the most urgent and meaningful concerns at present for all Australians.

Can the Refugee Narrative Be Shifted?





Madeline Gleeson, Abdul Karim Hekmat, Jamila Rizvi and Arnold Zable with Ruby Hamad
Fed Square, Sunday 4 September, 11:30am

From media to politics, Madeline Gleeson, Abdul Karim Hekmat, Jamila Rizvi and Arnold Zable deconstruct the public perception of refugees and asylum seekers. How can we shift the narrative—and the language we use when talking about asylum seekers—to become more welcoming and positive? With Ruby Hamad.

Supported by Save the Children and PEN Melbourne

Far from Melbourne, another MWF brings writers and readers together, aided by a long tradition of food, hospitality and conversation. From small beginnings, come new relationships, new explorations, new opportunities.

Looking Forward to July

Donata Carrazzo

From the 14 to the 17 of July this year I'll be attending the Mildura Writers Festival. In fact, I have been involved in this event since it officially began in 1995.

In this article I want to explore how this small annual literary festival has been of benefit to the regional city of Mildura and to the wider community.

After my marriage to Stefano de Pieri in 1991 we moved to Mildura, my birth town, to work with my family in the Grand Hotel. We set up a cellar restaurant there and began our lives in the world of hospitality.

We are both lovers of the arts, but what was on offer in Mildura was limited. From 1961 to 1978 the city had hosted an International Sculpture Triennial, but by the time we got there things were dull and uninspiring culturally.

This prompted us to set up our own event. Stefano was a close friend of the poet Philip Hodgins. In 1994 he agreed to come to our restaurant with the poet Robert Gray to give some readings to interested locals.

The event attracted more people than we could accommodate so we had to go to a larger space. There clearly was a hunger in the town for more than motor sports and the footy.

Philip, who had been diagnosed with terminal leukaemia was nevertheless full of passion for poetry and literature, his own and others. He wanted to help set up a festival with us. We had a hotel, access to function spaces and an eager audience. Philip had an incredible network of contacts. Thus began the first MWF in March of 1995 with guests Helen Garner, Les Murray, Kerryn Goldsworthy, Peter Goldsworthy, Janet Shaw, the American poet Paul Kane and Philip.

As Dr Sue Gillett notes, 'MWF (has become) distinctive in terms of its programming. There are no parallel sessions which means that all attendees are potentially able to go to all sessions. This creates a greater sense of community amongst festival goers as they are able to share and compare their experiences in a more in-depth way than is possible at larger/city festivals.' There are opportunities to eat together, sit down and chat with your favourite writer and for writers themselves to talk more deeply with each other about their craft.

Les Murray, patron of the Mildura Writers Festival. Photo: www.artsmildura.com/Writers-Festival

Les Murray, Festival Patron: On the Benefits of Being Daggy

Giver of Poetic Gifts

Our most enduring and prized guest over the years has been the poet Les Murray. Undoubtedly a genius, expected to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature and not easily categorised, but known for being critical of the establishment, he had this to say about the virtues of the festival:

> I'd say the great one is want of fashion. Distance and the lack of regard our elites have for the rural community, keeps the heavy hitters of fashion from making frequent contact with Mildura. They have to be specially invited and none of their peers are likely to attend or support them.

He is not a fan of the commercial festivals which abound with critics, journalists and other trendsetters. He says he prefers to stay away from urban events.

> My preference is for what I'd term civilian attendees. Mildura is richly supplied with these, and the surrounding region from which so many come draws benefit. It can't fail to bring civilisation to a remote part of Victoria which otherwise might very well depend on TV and video. Or even less.

Les has attended the festival since it began and intermittently over the years. He's a champion of the bush and he generously composed a suite of poems about the region called The Sunraysia Poems which came out of his first few visits to Mildura. This has memorialised the city and its surroundings through poetry that may never have been written had the festival not occurred.

Dr Sue Gillett: Putting Students in the Middle of the Action

Dr Sue Gillett is a senior lecturer of Creative Writing at La Trobe University, Bendigo. This year she will be returning to Mildura with a group of students as part of the Writers in Action program which is an intensive 'block-mode' subject that embeds participants in the MWF as critics, journalists, researchers and bloggers. 'The purpose is to take education out of the classroom and integrate students' study of writing, ideas and communication into a larger, dynamic and concentrated context.'

She affirms that she personally loves to go to festivals in regional centres. 'There is more attention to the specifics and the meanings of place than at city locations. There is also a greater concentration and cohesiveness.' The MWF challenges 'stereotypical thinking about rural and regional areas as being non-cultured.'

Giving Writers Time to Write; Hanging with The Locals

The MWF Writer in Residence program was inaugurated last year with a month long visit by New Zealand resident Tracy Farr, an author longlisted for the Miles Franklin. It is open to writers working in any genre to propose a project that will enhance the regional or national cultural landscape.

We accommodate our writers in a small cottage close to town and also give them a writing space, $1000 for expenses and food vouchers. Tracy was able to work on a draft of her second novel as well as conduct a workshop with aspiring writers. Part of the residency requires writers to attend and participate in the festival.

Nick Gadd is the recipient of the residency this year He is a novelist, essayist and blogger, with a particular interest in psychogeography and the hidden histories of urban and suburban places. He will be engaging with locals to find stories about ghost signs in the CBD and hopes to uncover some of its unofficial stories and secret histories. He has asked to hear from Mildura locals about curious buildings, odd aspects of landscape and architecture, abandoned places, weird stories, and intriguing traces of the past—anything that would not be included in a conventional history or tourist guide.

This exercise is sure to uncover some fascinating material that will also draw in locals who may never have come to our festival before.

Philip Hodgins: Gone But Never Forgotten

Philip Hodgins died in August of 1995. The Philip Hodgins Memorial Medal is an award that has been presented since 1997 in the form of a cash prize and a sculpture made by local artist, Jim Curry. It is awarded each year to a consistently outstanding Australian writer. Recipients have included Clive James, Kate Jennings, Sonya Hartnett, Luke Davies and many more.

There is only one judge who holds the post for three years. Judges have included Morag Fraser, Judith Beveridge and Peter Goldsworthy.

Over the last decade a highlight of the award has been its presentation by Philip's daughters Anna and Helen who also each read one of his poems.

Mildura is now associated with this award and its benefits to literature generally cannot be estimated.

Collaborations: Stories That Need To Be Told and Need To Be Heard

PEN Melbourne advocates on behalf of silenced and persecuted writers and promotes the role of literature in mutual understanding. For several years the MWF and PEN Melbourne have worked together with interesting outcomes, most notably the Mildura Indigenous Writing Award. Bruce Pascoe judged the inaugural award last year giving the prize to each of the nine participants. This year PEN was able to find the funds to secure Tony Birch for a workshop with local Indigenous writers in anticipation of the award so that they can get support for their work and be able to tell their stories with confidence.

I hope this account has shown the multiple ways that a small regional literary festival can benefit a range of people and the art form that brings them together.

PEN Notes from Mildura: PEN Mildura Indigenous Writing Awards 2016

Chris McKenzie, PEN Melbourne President

The Mildura Writers Festival has to be one of the best writers festivals in Victoria—authors and audience members come together over three days and evenings to listen, discuss, converse and to eat fine food together. PEN Melbourne is delighted to continue our relationship with the festival and in particular, with the generous support of funding from the Copyright Agency, to develop writing workshops with the local indigenous communities, and to offer the PEN Mildura Indigenous Writing Awards.

The 2016 PEN Mildura Indigenous Writing Awards were presented during the festival in a packed auditorium by author and teacher Tony Birch. In talking about the awards Tony recalled the PEN workshop that he had facilitated in Mildura earlier this year. He mentioned an activity that had deeply affected him when he had 'paired' participants to go off and tell each other about a significant memory of place. When the participants came together each person retold their partner's story. We were all drawn into the power of these stories, particularly those of the elders in the group. It is the persistence of these stories that strengthens the community and broadens our shared knowledge.

PEN thanks and congratulates all those who contributed their work to the PEN Mildura Indigenous Writing Awards this year. The work was judged by award winning writer Bruce Pascoe. In awarding the main prize to Sianlee Harris for 'Memories', Bruce commented that it was 'an exceptional story… (that) works on many different levels and the writing is of a very high standard; a truly worthy winner. Everyone will get pleasure from reading this evocation of youth.'

Of the other contributions Bruce said, 'Patricia Sistergirl Johnson had three entries but *Hunting with Granny Rosie* and *Special Banana* were wonderful poems and are highly commended. All entrants deserve special praise for the serious topics they've tackled and the depth of feeling evident in the writing. Congratulations to the Aboriginal community of Mildura and thank you for sharing such intimate stories with me.'

PEN Melbourne is pleased to publish Sianlee Harris's 'Memories' in this issue and in our next we will publish Patricia Sistergirl Johnson's 'Hunting with Granny Rosie'.

From left: Narelle Baxter, Tony Birch, Patricia (Sister Girl) Johnson (Highly commended), Sianlee Harris (PEN Melbourne Mildura Indigenous Writing Award 2016), Brian Hunt, Sandra Stewart, Patrick Lawson and Chris McKenzie.

Copyright Agency
Cultural Fund

Biscuits and cowboys and emu eggs and red dirt. Such is the stuff of childhood, uncertain, essential. PEN Melbourne is delighted to present the winner of the PEN Melbourne Mildura Indigenous Writers Prize.

Memories

Sianlee Harris

Nothing warps time quite like childhood; I read that somewhere at some time. It is probably true, too. A lot of things get bent and distorted when trying to recall all of those places, faces and names from when I was a child. Memories. Sometimes they can be like a swirling haze of light and sound that dances through my wakefulness and tugs at my chest. At other times, memories can cause my breath to hitch and my heart to sink, much like the feeling of being torn from a bad dream in the dead of night. It is funny what we remember and what we forget; I remember lot of things, and other things have fallen away like ashes from a smouldering log. Sometimes memories come rushing back, like the torrents of a flooded waterway: harsh, slightly violent, but always natural.

I can still recall how the warm sun felt like a soft caress on my skin when I would sit out in the backyard with my dear old grandfather, my short legs swinging from the old rusted chair that was set against the homogenous brick wall of the upgraded mission housing. He shared milk and biscuits with me and smoked tobacco from his old wooden pipe. We both tried to fight off a shiver from the cool autumn air; his tweed overcoat deterring the chill much better than what I was wearing. He was a stoic, silent man but there was no need for many words between us; we did not need to speak for I loved him and he loved me and that was all that mattered.

He was fiercely protective, though he had grown old and frail by the time I came to know him in my short life. My father often spoke of how his father was a tough, hard man, yet I rarely saw that side of him; it seemed as if all of that melted away when he was around me. I must have reminded him of his own daughter (whom they all say I resemble, even in adulthood) because he was seldom present in the moment. His memory must have stretched back far before she had passed away. I oft times wonder if he brought her milk and biscuits too; sadly, I will never know for certain.

I still remember the way that my father's strong hand shook as he gripped my own small hand tightly on the day we buried my Poppa, his Dad. I wore this black dress with pink and purple flowers that embellished the oversized collar and Nanna gave me one of her small handkerchiefs; she looked so sad and brittle. Afterwards, my stomach grumbled and my voice was croaky as I did not speak nor did I eat. Instead, I walked a circular path around the old gum tree that stood defiantly in the front yard, trailing my fingers over the roughness of the bark. I walked until I was tired and then sought respite in my mother's lap. To this day, the sun has not quite felt the same as it did in my youth, when my Poppa would give me a tin mug full of milk and a handful of broken biscuits.

It was not all sad sunshine for me, I should point out; no, sometimes there was the happy rain. I am still reminded of how the thick droplets drenched and drowned the low hanging leaves that got tangled in my short cropped hair this one day. We were looking for emu eggs as a whole family when the rain set in over the red dirt country. Red country that was speckled with dark stones. YaRnta kiira. I ran through the bush laughing and trying to catch my breath; not caring that my clothing had been soaked through. The earth underfoot gratefully drank of the rain and I kicked off my rubber thongs. The wet ground was much easier to run over barefooted, despite the occasional pang from a particularly jagged stone or two.

My Dad was still walking and searching for a nest while Mum kept an eye on us kids back at the clearing where the car was parked, the grey clouds overhead fooling us into thinking that the afternoon was much later than it was. If me and my sisters had have stopped our running a moment, the cool breeze would have stung our flesh; but we were too busy laughing and trying not to step on the rocks.

My lungs would ache, because of my affliction, as air filled them, so I would stop a little while to catch my breath. Lifting my face to the heavens, the raindrops pattered over my closed eyelids, my nose, and chin; my mouth, faintly agape, caught some droplets. I imagined a moment that I was in another place or another time; that there was no makeshift tin house to return to at the end of our day. That I could stay there and twirl around in the downpour until I was dizzy and came crashing back to the red dirt. However, it was not long after that that Dad had returned with his pillowcase filled with emu eggs; excitedly, we ran towards him to examine his haul.

We went looking for eggs frequently as I grew up, so it still causes me some amazement that this one instance sticks out in my memory. As with activities that I partook in On Country, my school events were regular occurrences. I recall the very first time I had ever attended one of the school discos; it was some kind of costume party. I vaguely recall the stares and the whispers as I walked into that school auditorium. The lights were dimmed that evening to create a festive ambiance; the main point of entry allowed the light from the setting sun into the hall. Multicoloured lights flashed in time with the overbearing bass of some popular song or another as it filled the room; countless small children chased one another around the dance floor.

I sat against the wall on those plastic seats that are conjoined and slightly unstable, with my feet swinging as they dangled in the air, not touching the polished wood floor. I kept checking the shiny buttons on my cowboy costume; they were new and dazzling and I felt like a hero. All of the other little girls were wearing pretty dresses. They looked like princesses. I did not. I donned a vest, chaps and cowboy hat, my plastic six-shooter firmly placed inside my plastic holster in case something unforeseeable and unfortunate should happen. I could protect the princesses and rock stars. I could be like the heroes I saw on the old Western films; like the heroes in the books my brother read.

I was by no means an outgoing child; I rarely spoke and would rather be reading Archie comics and playing with my small, indistinguishable army men and button collection. So being at a school disco was actually a huge deal for me. Once I plucked up the nerve to move from the wall and chase one of the other children around, I felt a little better; but when the other children asked me why I was dressed the way I was, I felt self-conscious and sat back down (after receiving two dollars for participating in the costume competition). No one told me little girls needed to be princesses; no one told me little black girls couldn't be cowboys.

Tony Birch with Sianlee Harris, winner of the PEN Melbourne Mildura Indigenous Writing Award 2016.

I ignored the taunts and the laughter and put my prize money in my jeans pocket; the two-dollar coin was new and shiny, like the buttons on my vest. After the party was over and we made the drive to the outskirts of town, I pretended to be asleep in the back seat of the car. My Dad carried me inside, slung over his shoulder; he spoke to me as he carried me, knowing I feigned slumber. I slept in my costume that night and I don't think I ever wore it again; if I did, I can't recall.

Warped time. I don't know about all of that, but I cannot be entirely sure that these events happened the way that I remember them. What I do know decidedly is that my memories carry me forward and give me a sense of the person I am; who I was. They offer me a sense of belonging to a place and a time. After all, how much of who we are is from our memories, and how much is in our hearts and character? That is a question for another time because, right now, I'm going to find my father and ask him how he remembered these things not only as a participant but as an observer to my childhood.

About Sianlee Harris

Sianlee Harris is a Paakantyi woman from Wilcannia, New South Wales. She has been working in education for ten years and has a specific interest in recording and teaching Indigenous languages and histories. She currently works for La Trobe University in Indigenous student services.

'For me, the Indigenous events at the Mildura Writers Festival are important for a number of reasons. They are integral to promoting and sustaining inclusivity and representation of Aboriginal writers. Being part of this overall event is an important way for our stories to be heard in a forum that is held in high esteem in the local area; I enjoyed it immensely. I was proud to be included in a group of writers I have known and respected for some time now. It is my hope that the award and workshops gain more recognition and popularity in the years to come.'

I Stand in the Sun
(i. m. Mahmoud Darwish)

Judith Morrison

I stand in the sun
the warmth of your poems
a saga to walk with
become a sage—
You, a refugee from
your language, a refugee
from your childhood
smites the land
of your ancestors—

I listen to your voice
carried by the wind
from across the ocean.
You have given instructions
to poets to hold language
to its memory; its time in exile.

If I am to say, I want my heart
to bleed for you; what am I saying?
I try to live in the poetry of your exile
but I am not exiled. My language
does not search for its memory;
it is always present.
I am part of the 'other' to you.
Yet the geography of myself,
waits at the border to watch
you reclaim your narrative

I do not want the sun to set

Poem for Baghdad from Australia

Di Cousens

Crying, lighting candles
laying flowers
at the place where the bomb was—
the explosion still ringing
in the ears of my friend.

Baghdad means—paradise lost.

من أستراليا إلى بغداد

بكاء، شموع مضاءة
أزهار تغفو حيث وقعت
الفاجعة،
لم يزل الانفجار يدوي
في أذن صديقي.

لا تقل لأحد
بغداد جنّة الأرض.

By:
داي كازنز
Translated by:
أحمد هاشم

Ahmed Hashim reads these poems, in Arabic, at the site of the bombing.

Al Krada in Laylat Al- Qadr in Ramadan 1437 A.H

Ahmed Hashim

What a wonderful life
… And it continues
Fire, and the universe became darker as if the creation
Did not start yet!

We go to collect the corpses, carbonised,
Remnants of lovers, their chains and rings.
All corpses.
Not a helper for this mud which is blown
By the spirit, melted
On the people—in the gusts of darkness.
We breathe the soul of our brother's clay.
One of us found a ring, his
Mother knew it, we found his corpse.

A yellow beard is watching his work
The officials are saying 'how bad'.

Can his memory be erased?
And we, here is the bitterness of the age
Flowing over.

We search and
Find a youth's chain, a wedding ring,
An eyelash of a virgin.
This girl's earring was her birthday gift
This boy's finger has not yet touched his bride.
The colour of these nails is evidence
To know the corpse.

In this atmosphere,
Even one look is enough to forget
One thousand kisses from the women
You have loved in your life.

Alone, clay sees itself after
catastrophe.

God with the angels were
Busy

Download the Koran.
What a wonderful creation
What a miserable end.

الكرادة في ليلة القدر.. رمضان 1437 ه

ما أروع الحياة
.... وهكذا
نارٌ، وأظلم الكون وكأن الخلق
لم يبدأ بعد!
بدأنا ننتشل الجثث، متفحمة،
بقايا سلاسل عشاق وخواتم، كلها
جثث.

لا معين لهذا الطين
الذي نفخ به الروح، ساح
على بعضه في هبوب الظلام
أخذنا نتنفس أرواح طين أخوتنا
أحدنا عثر على خاتم، عرفته
أمه، وجدنا جثة.
اللحى الصفراء تتربص بينما دمى
الكراسي تسعى لمحو الذاكرة (تشجب....)
ونحنُ، هنا تطفح مرارة العصور، نسعى
لنجد سلسلة شاب، خاتم زفاف، رمش
فتاة بكر، قرط طفلة هدية عيد
ميلادها أو اصبع صبيا
ينبض أو أظافر عروسة مطلية بلون.. دليلا
لنعرف جثة. تحت هذه اللغة، رمشة

لا أكثر، رمشة تقلع ألف قبلة من شفتيك
زرعتها نساء مررنَ على حياتك.

وحدنا، طينٌ يرى حاله
بعد الفجيعة
ولا معين.

كان الذي بدأ اللعبة وملائكته منشغلين
بتنزيل الكتاب
ما أروع الخلق
ما أتعس النهاية.

By:
أحمد هاشم

'If there is no free speech every single life has been lived in vain.'
Ai WeiWei (tweet)

Glimpses of Ai Weiwei

Sue Jackson

What makes an artist an activist? An activist a celebrity? A celebrity a poet? Shapeshifting Chinese artist Ai Weiwei embraced these and more personas, at his recent National Gallery of Victoria exhibition. A complex portrait unfolds and distorts, one glimpse at a time.

I have a confession to make. Heading off to the Andy Warhol and Ai Weiwei exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), I knew nothing about China's Ai Weiwei. My visit left me both more enlightened and more baffled. Enlightened, in that I learned to my delight that activism is integral to Ai's art: he has been harassed and imprisoned for his commitment to free speech. But baffled, too, because the exhibition seemed all over the place, vast in scope but lacking any obvious historical, chronological or linear frame of reference. And as for the man himself, masterful across so many media, Ai came across as chaotic, constantly shape-shifting and ultimately elusive.

I exited the NGV off balance; I just couldn't pin him down. It was only as I delved deeper into Ai's past that I realised this reaction might well be what Ai was after, because for him art is simply 'a tool to set up new questions, to create a basic structure that is open to possibilities.' What follows are some of the possibilities I glimpsed about Ai's activism and the turbulent times through which he has lived. Apart from presenting these diverse aspects of his work in a roughly chronological order, I have tried to relinquish my desire to place him in context, to pin him down. Instead, in keeping with the flavour of the exhibition, I am letting the divergent sides of this complex man speak for themselves.

The Provocateur

Ai Weiwei, *June 1994*. Photo: Sue Jackson

Ai took this photo at Tiananmen Square on the fifth anniversary of the infamous riots of 1989, when government troops killed a disputed number of pro-democracy protestors and arrested thousands of others. Ai's fellow artist (now wife) Lu Qing is captured in an act of personal freedom and defiance. Dressed as she is, in a white top and dark skirt, Lu's image instantly brought to mind the 'Tank Man'. The morning after the riots, the tiny figure of that unknown protestor, dressed in a sparkling white shirt and dark pants, stood alone in the deserted square facing down the tanks. That single picture, flashed around the world, came to represent the invincibility of the human spirit.

Similarly, although many artists, including Ai, were excluded from official galleries post-Tiananmen, their art flourished in the Chinese underground. *June 1994* is just one example.

The Hooligan

Ai Weiwei, *The Hooligan (finger)*. Photo: Sue Jackson

This photo is one of a series in which Ai is featured 'giving the finger' to a range of national icons around the world, including those in his homeland. As his friend put it, in Alison Klayman's documentary *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry*, shown at the NGV: 'The Communist party are just hooligans really. Ai has a hooligan side so he knows how to deal with hooligans.' Undoubtedly giving expression to that side of himself, in 2001 Ai was involved in a daring piece of performance art. Eight people, with Ai being the last, took turns standing in front of a large sign in Chinese characters. There each of them said simply, in their own dialect and direct to camera: 'Fuck you, Motherland.'

The Media Wizard

Ai is a huge fan of social media, even though in his homeland he has often been obliterated from it. In his TED talk of April 2011 (delivered via a secretly filmed video, since he was not allowed to attend) he argued that

> the internet is the most valuable (invention), as it is the only way people can associate with each other … We can use the internet and the new technology to communicate with the young and to have a broader discussion to make the changes (needed).

Ai first started blogging—daily—in 2005. But in May 2008, after a 7.9 magnitude earthquake rocked Sichuan province, destroying seven thousand classrooms, he stopped for a whole week.

Like so many of his compatriots, Ai went into mourning, especially for the school children, whose brightly coloured backpacks peppered the rubble. As allegations of corruption and 'tofu construction' began to emerge, Ai determined to visit the site of the disaster to see for himself. Once there he was stonewalled by officialdom, the Post-Quake Reconstruction Office simply asserting that 'the death toll is a secret'.

But Ai refused to be fobbed off and instead utilised his blog to recruit volunteers to join him going door-to-door throughout the province and interviewing families. Eventually, they tallied the true death toll—a horrifying 5,212 students, all of whose names they learnt. Finding out these names was all-important to the artist, who believes that 'a name is the first and final marker of individual rights, one fixed part of the ever-changing human world.' Before this work was closed down and he was charged with inciting the overthrow of the government, Ai managed to post every single name on his blog. Although his Twitter account was also subsequently closed, Ai was still able to find ways to circumvent China's 'great internet firewall', tweeting the name of each dead child as their birthday rolled around.

At the Melbourne exhibition, the lost Sichuan children were commemorated via a small monitor in a prime location, which continuously circulated their details. They have also been famously memorialised elsewhere, for example in September 2009 when, for an installation entitled *Remembering*, Ai had the entire facade of Munich's Haus der Kunst covered in backpacks.

The Idealist

On one occasion during his time in Sichuan, Ai was so badly beaten that his injuries eventually necessitated brain surgery, in Germany. On his return to China, he submitted numerous petitions and suits against the police, to which he received no official response. Determined not to give up, the artist returned to Chengdu, capital of Sichuan, where the assault had occurred. There he blitzed government departments city-wide with his submissions, all the while broadcasting the ensuing responses and non-responses via Twitter. Ai did this because he remains adamant that 'You can't just say that the system is flawed. You have to work through the system and show it in all of its detail; that's the only way you can ultimately make a critique.'

The Pragmatist

In 2011, to his horror, Ai learnt that the Chinese government had issued him with a $2.4 million fine for the 'economic crime' of tax evasion. As news of his plight spread via social media, locals took to throwing money over his front gate (to finance an appeal for a proper administrative review and an open trial). Money also flooded in from all around the world.

By the time the appeal closed, (mostly small) loans had been received from 29,400 people, every single one of whom received a beautiful handmade IOU—a tiny art work in itself. The stamp and the layout were designed by Ai, who then joined five hundred volunteers to stamp and adorn the receipts with impeccable calligraphy.

The Iconoclast

Ai Weiwei, *The Iconoclast (pot drop, Lego)*. Photo: Sue Jackson

Ai has always been vocal in his abhorrence of (past and present) Chinese governments' indifference to, and destruction of, the country's cultural tradition and artefacts. This work is from a series of pictures featuring Ai, apparently intentionally, dropping and smashing a Han Dynasty urn. I can attest to the image's shock value: I couldn't get it out of my mind.

The Traditionalist

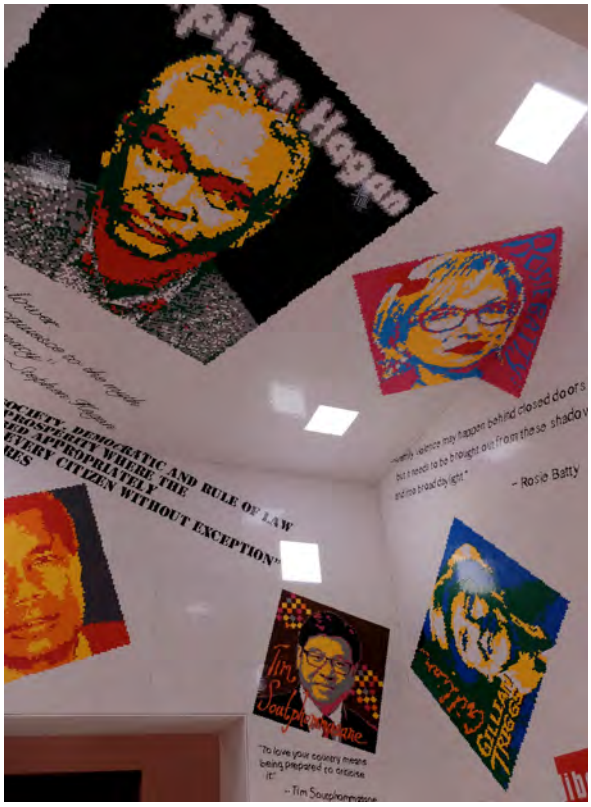
Despite the cutting-edge contemporary feel to his work, and his reputation for eschewing traditions, Ai is a deeply traditional man at heart. A powerful example of this was the subject matter and the creative process for one of his most popular works—the sunflower seeds installation that opened at London's Tate Modern in 2010. This work was never 'really' at the NGV. But because the video presentations were so integral to the exhibition and were so long, overly inclusive, minimally edited and mesmeric (I watched the one about the thirty stages of sunflower seed production from beginning to end), I came away with a strong sense of the seeds' presence. It is almost impossible for me now to believe that I never actually saw them 'in the flesh'.

For this work, Ai commissioned over a thousand artisans in the town of Jingdezhen, a thousand kilometres from Beijing, to make millions of tiny hand-painted porcelain replicas of sunflower seeds. The town, which had an ancient tradition of producing prized porcelain pieces for the royal court, was revitalised by this five-year-long contract. In the documentary, Ai expresses his determination to try to find a further commission to keep the workers employed and their traditional skills alive.

The Rockstar

In 2011, Ai was detained without charge, and although he was released after 81 days, he was told repeatedly while incarcerated that a ten-year sentence was likely. On his release, Ai's work took an unexpected turn. He began a collaboration with the musician Zuoxiao Zuzhou to produce a heavy-metal single called 'Dumbass'. What prompted this shift Ai explains in these words: 'During my detention the conditions were very restrictive … the only available release … [was] music. The only songs I knew were the revolutionary ones. It is the same for many Chinese people; we had to memorise every red song. Creating [our own] music is the way to break through that situation.' In the video clip promoting the single, impeccably dressed prison guards walk shoulder-to-shoulder with Ai as, unkempt, he paces a confined space—exactly as he did all day long during his detention. Eyes are trained on him as he eats, sleeps, goes to the toilet and shaves his head. Then suddenly the atmosphere changes. It's show-time! And out of the darkness Ai emerges, a plump, shaven-headed Dr Frank-N-Furter look-alike, strutting his stuff and belting out the 'Dumbass' lyrics through a pillarbox-red lipsticked mouth.

The Nationalist



Ai Weiwei, *Letgo Room* (Lego various). Photo: Sue Jackson

Ai understands peoples' love of country. For the Australian show, Ai used over 3 million plastic blocks to create the Letgo Room, whose name references the Lego company. In the months preceding the exhibition, the company had provoked outrage globally at its refusal to accept Ai's order for Lego pieces on the grounds that they did not want their products used to make a political statement. Not to be thwarted, after registering his protest, the artist simply substituted 'fake' bricks donated by the public. And when Lego eventually reversed their decision, Ai rightly claimed it as 'a victory for freedom of speech'.

This outcome seems particularly apposite in that the Letgo room is dedicated to Australian grassroots activists, all champions of human rights and freedom of speech. I was pleased at the inclusion of Norrie May-Welby, the first person in the world to be recorded as having non-specific gender.

It was also a surprise and a thrill to see Hana Assafiri, owner of our local Moroccan Soup Bar, appropriately honoured for her tireless activism on behalf of marginalised women, many of whom get their start working in her restaurant.

The Poet

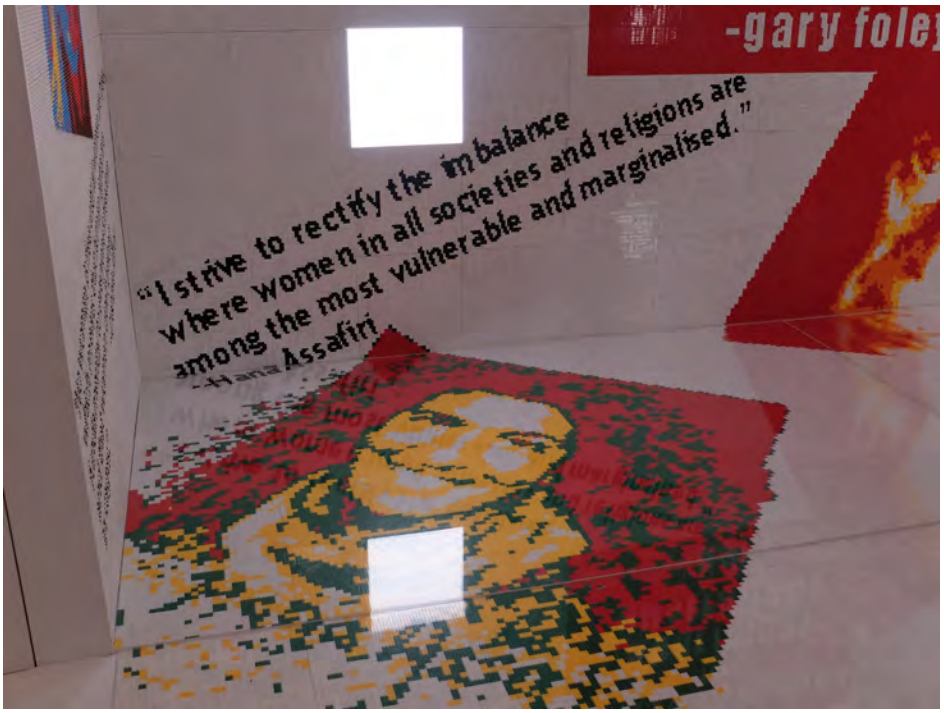
Ai Weiwei, *With Flowers*. Photo: Sue Jackson

After his release from detention in 2011, Ai's passport was revoked. His studio was also under constant surveillance. In a playful gesture to brighten the lives of the watchers, Ai began each day by adorning a bike parked outside his studio with fresh flowers. Soon his neighbours joined in this poetic protest, something that would undoubtedly have pleased the artist, for whom 'Poetry … is almost like a religious feeling'. The work based on this protest is entitled *With Flowers 2015*. Gradually the images of the flowers, circulated on social media and the internet, led to the development of a movement called Freedom for Flowers, with the result that Ai's passport was eventually returned to him.

The Prodigal Son, The Aesthete, The Naturalist—these are just some of the other intriguing possibilities I glimpsed at Ai Weiwei's exhibition. But tempting though it is, I will leave further analysis of this complex artist/activist for another time. However, there is one thing I am sure of, and perhaps it is the most important of all: Ai always stands by his belief that 'For each person to earnestly cherish their rights is the essence of civil society.'

Moroccan Soup Bar

Some years ago Sue Jackson won a restaurant reviewing competition, writing about Hana Assafiri's Moroccan Soup Bar. Just to give you the flavour, in case you need encouragement to visit, here it is.



Ai Weiwei, *Hana Assafiri* (Lego). Photo: Sue Jackson

I can be in Marrakech in five minutes.

Perhaps that's not quite true, but whenever I visit my local cafe, the Moroccan Soup Bar, with its strident colour scheme of yellow, ochre and cobalt blue, its enticing Arabic music, its decorations of multicoloured jars of pickled vegetables, huge brass coffee pots and terracotta gourds and its cramped ill-assorted tables I'm instantly transported to a Moroccan street cafe.

And when the proprietor, the bold, wild-haired beauty and social activist, Hana Assafiri, handing us glasses of sweet mint tea, sits down at our table and enquires with intense interest (even though we are her thirtieth customers that evening) what we would like to eat, we are always happy to put ourselves in her hands.

Before we know it, a bowl of fresh unleavened bread and plate of hummus, pickled pink turnip and carrot, green olives, smoky cauliflower and coriander-scented artichoke hearts are delivered to our table. We've learnt to resist the temptation to order the delicious classic soups as starters. They are so big they inevitably turn into 'finishers', and we don't want to miss what comes next.

The standout of the luscious Middle Eastern mains is the legendary chickpea bake, topped with caramelised slivered almonds, with yoghurt and tahini on grilled pita (how do they stop the pita going soggy?).

If we still have space left, the sweet pastries, served with tiny cups of inky black coffee, include delectable items like cigar-shaped pistachio baklavas drenched in syrup and almond meal biscuits with date filling.

So, if you can cope with no meat, no alcohol, no written menu, eating with a spoon, and close proximity to other diners, and enjoy healthy, cheap, tasty food, and a great welcome and atmosphere, hop on your magic carpet and glide to the Moroccan Soup Bar.

Language, Shame and Secrets in Postwar Sri Lanka

Ruins
by Rajith Savanadasa
Hachette 2016

Bev Roberts

A middle-aged, middle-class couple from different ethnic backgrounds, at a low point in their relationship. A rebellious, moody teenage daughter demanding an iPod. A twenty-something son, drifting since university, drinking, clubbing, dope-smoking … A familiar scenario perhaps, but one that instantly becomes unfamiliar when located in Sri Lanka, at the time when the long and increasingly brutal civil war between the Sinhalese government and the rebel LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) has been savagely brought to an end.

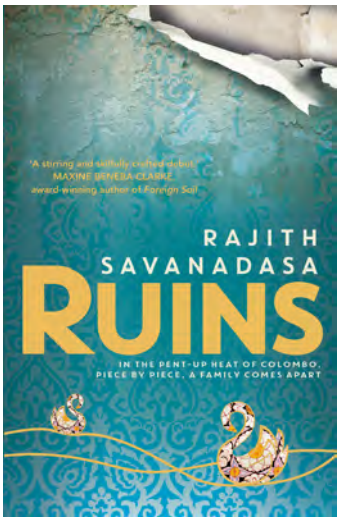
I approached this book expecting to be at a disadvantage, aware that my knowledge of Sri Lanka was shamefully sketchy. Apart from one day in Colombo on my first sea voyage a very long time ago, I've never visited the country, and what I knew about it wasn't much above the trivia level. I did know slightly more about that ugly, protracted civil war, but my information was entirely derived from Western media—certainly not the most critical or objective sources.

It's a mark of the extraordinary quality of Rajith Savanadasa's writing that I now have a new and surprisingly deep understanding of his home country.

Savanadasa moves effortlessly between the minutiae of domestic life and the grand scale of tragic national events and history. His writing is deceptively light, with a sly humour, and his control of narrative and dialogue is firm and assured. It's hard to believe that such an accomplished work is the writer's first book.

On one level this multilayered and complex novel creates an intimate picture of a Colombo family in the first decade of the 21st century. But on deeper levels it also explores the social and political impacts of the war on Sri Lankan society, and the numerous divisive factors in that society—ethnicity, language, religion, caste, extremes of affluence and poverty. Savanadasa's formidable achievement is to have exemplified all of this through one small family.

The Herath family: Manoratne (Mano) who is Sinhalese, his Tamil wife Lakshmi, their teenage daughter Anoushka, twenty-something son Niranjan, and Latha, the family's servant. They each contribute to the unfolding of the story with every chapter told by one person, a literary device fraught with danger but used by Savanadasa in a masterly way to create a convincing if disturbing picture of this apparently ordinary family.



Rajith Savanadasa

Mano is a sad man whose life has sunk into mediocrity and frustration. He fears he has lost his wife's love: she is 'forever angry with me. Not so much angry as disappointed.' And his job, as editor of an English-language newspaper, is becoming increasingly depressing under the heavy hand of government censorship.

> I just had to do my job, print the sort of things fed to us by the ministries—about the LTTE and their expatriate rump pulling wool over the eyes of the UN and the so-called humanitarian agencies, about the hidden imperialist agendas of the west.

He is ashamed of his capitulation, but aware of the consequences of publishing truthful reporting, the alternative to propaganda: 'They'll call us bloody traitors and then [we] will be pushed into a white van, get beaten to a pulp and end up in some paddy field with bullets in our heads.' Strangely, Mano seems unaware that much of his wife's 'disappointment' comes from seeing the anti-Tamil reports published in his name, public expressions of his complicity in the propaganda war.

Lakshmi's Tamil identity is very much in the foreground, a problem rather than a simple fact. In her life as the wife of a Sinhalese and mother of children who identify as Sinhalese, her status has always been ambivalent. She is perpetually anxious and insecure. Mano's family strongly disapproved of his marriage to 'one of them' ('Whose side are you on?' he was asked) and continue to treat Lakshmi as inferior. His own feelings remain ambivalent. Remembering their criticism of her dark skin, he admits to himself 'I wished I had married someone a couple of shades lighter.'

He and the children are continually made aware of Lakshmi as the 'other' in their midst, and thus their own otherness. They become defensive, trying to deny her difference. Mano reflects, '[Lakshmi] is very tough, like the rest of her kind—not that I think of her as a Tamil. My wife was like a Sinhala woman in every way.' And reassures his daughter, 'Your mother is a high-caste Tamil … same level as us.' Even Latha, when asked if her employer is Tamil, replies 'Yes. But she's just like a Sinhala person.'

Anoushka is an almost caricature moody teenager, mad about rock music (the 'really raaa! tracks with a heap of bleeped-out fucks in the lyrics').But there is a dark edge to her life; she is becoming a friendless misfit and is bullied at school. She has a difficult relationship with her mother that is more than standard teenage angst: she's recognising that having a Tamil mother is affecting her own status, the reason for rejection by her peer group. Although aware of caste as well as ethnic differences and taboos, Anoushka is closer to Latha than to her mother.

Niranjan hasn't been able to settle back into life in Colombo after his years in Sydney studying economics at UTS. He talks grandly of being involved in 'a start-up company' but has no money and is rebuffed by a rich uncle when he asks him for two and a half million rupees as 'venture capital'. His life is aimless, restless: he spends most of his time away from home, drifting into what his mother fears are 'bad ways' (which she worries may be caused by her 'Tamil-ness').

As an uneducated village girl and a servant, Latha has lowly status but is a pivotal figure in the narrative and the life of the family. She has been with them for more than twenty years, since she was about fifteen or sixteen, and considers their house her home. Her first words, which open the book, are 'This family is good. That's why I work for them.' As the story develops it is obvious that her faith is misplaced, and she is ultimately shocked by the reality of the family's attitudes towards her—even her special Anoushka: 'After all these years looking after her, doing everything for her, she didn't even think of me as a friend.'

In and through all these lives we can find the ruins of the book's title, and they are many: the ruinous state of the country by the end of the war; the ruin of a multicultural society—the enmity between Sinhalese and Tamils; the ruin of traditional society as global culture takes over, especially evident in the generation gap; and what seems to be the impending ruin of the Herath family with conflict between parents, and between parents and children.

The war is always present, taken for granted after 26 years. But its presence seems oddly muted, or surreal, like an Orwellian manufactured conflict. The war zone is remote from Colombo, vaguely located in 'the northern jungles'. News of battles and casualties is limited to 'the usual reports of how many Tigers had died'. Even when there's a minor threat to the city by a couple of planes on an LTTE bombing raid, the general response is reflected in Anoushka's blasé comment: 'Someone was probably going to die, but it was never anyone we knew.'

Most of the Herath family are openly supportive of the government's campaign to destroy the Tamil enemy, and seem cruelly oblivious to Lakshmi's feelings. She is forced into unhappy silence, hiding her Tamil sympathies while desperately trying to find the truth about events in her home region. This is symbolised by her concern for a young Tamil man reported missing and her obsessive need to search for information about his fate. Eventually, when the announcement of the end of the war is celebrated throughout the city, for her 'Everyone's happiness was my pain.'

Lakshmi's enforced silence, the suppression of her language, is a reflection of the discriminatory policy of the central government that suppressed the Tamil language and was a contributing factor to the civil war. From colonial times Sri Lanka had three dominant languages—Sinhalese, Tamil and English. In 1956 a government law declared Sinhalese the official national language, downgrading Tamil to minority status. This denial of linguistic rights was a denial of civil rights for the Tamils:

> 'It was the Sinhala-only policy of '56 that caused the problems. All the official documents are in Sinhala. All the police and army people are Sinhala. We can't get any good jobs. We have no authority. We'll always be second class citizens in this country.'

For almost half a century, the fight for language equality was part of the fight by the LTTE against the subjugation of the Tamil people.

In her life in Colombo, Lakshmi's first language is a shameful secret, hidden behind the educated English she speaks—a secret that everyone in her family is aware of but rarely mentions. The same secrecy applies in the office where she works. Once when making a phone call she discovers the person who answered spoke only Tamil, and she quickly hangs up. 'I couldn't speak Tamil in front of everyone. They'd know exactly what sort of place I came from.'

'Everyone' includes her husband and children. And 'place' isn't just geographic. The corrosive effects of linguistic discrimination are evident when Niranjan is telling a friend a story about a former schoolmate, a Tamil:

> 'Arnolda's sitting there, going, "Inga waanga ponga peenga… "'
>
> 'Is that your idea of Tamil?'
>
> 'Kara kara, kuru kuru, kiri kiri … '
>
> 'You should know the language, bro. Your mother's Tamil, right?'
>
> '… It's hideous. I hate it. And my mum is hardly Tamil … She's like one of us.'

Later in the book there is a more-disturbing instance of the impact of language on the family. A reformed Niranjan is making changes to his life, and one of them is beginning to learn Tamil. He hasn't told his mother because she 'would be weird about it'. But he decides to tell his father.

> He took a little while to respond. 'Really? Why do you want to learn Tamil?'
>
> 'Why not? I know your language but not [mother's] …'
>
> 'So you two can talk secrets in front of me?'
>
> 'You can learn it too.'
>
> 'I don't want to learn Tamil.'
>
> 'Why not?'
>
> The response didn't come immediately. [He] made me wait for a while and when he broke the uneasy silence he did it by changing the subject.

As only the best fiction can, *Ruins* has taken me into the life not just of the central characters but also of their culture.

Behrouz Boochani on Manus Island

Arnold Zable

After over three years in immigration imprisonment—in effect—on Manus island, Kurdish-Iranian journalist Behrouz Boochani, along with 900 fellow asylum seekers, is still marooned on the island. The situation has changed significantly since the full bench of the PNG Supreme Court ruled on 26 April this year that the centre is illegal and should be closed down. As in the past, I have joined forces on behalf of PEN Melbourne with tireless refugee advocate Janet Galbraith of Writers Through Fences in drafting a new PEN International campaign letter on his behalf. Published opposite, it contains some of the latest details on his case.

The situation continues to shift and change. At the moment Behrouz is one of a number of emblematic cases being tested in the Supreme Court in Port Moresby. The Turnbull government appears to be stalling. While Behrouz is finally free to move about the island, and has made welcome contact with Australian journalists and refugee advocates who have travelled there, he reports that the men are becoming increasingly agitated and depressed at their ongoing state of limbo. Their high hopes in the wake of the Supreme Court decision have been eroded. It is now four months since the decision.

Given their three long, arduous, punishing years of incarceration—which included the murder of fellow Kurdish-Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati, and the death through medical neglect of Hamid Khazaie—the men are yet again moving towards breaking point.

Our new PEN International campaign letter is currently being edited and assessed by PEN research offices in London. Meanwhile we continue to be in touch with Behrouz, to support him, and read and occasionally help edit his extraordinary accounts of life on the island. In addition, he is now contracted to complete his harrowing and vitally important book, which gives a powerful and poignant insider's view of the past three years of imprisonment.

Here is the draft of new campaign letter on behalf of Behrouz Boochani, most recently redrafted in July 2016. It contains a reminder of the critical details of Behrouz's case:

Please join PEN Melbourne and PEN Sydney's campaign on behalf of Behrouz Boochani

Behrouz Boochani has shown great courage and endurance in a situation that the United Nations has stated is tantamount to torture. PEN's most recent campaign letter states: 'This is a matter of urgency, since every day of continued uncertainty and limbo, compounds the trauma experienced by Mr Boochani. People can only endure so much before they are broken.' Go to the fb page and strengthen our campaign by spreading the word:

Please go to www.facebook.com/bringbehrouzboochanitoaustralia

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PEN International, the worldwide association of writers with members in over 100 countries, is writing to express our continued concern and alarm in relation to the case of journalist Mr Behrouz Boochani, a member of Iran's Kurdish minority.

Behrouz Boochani has been held in Australia's offshore Manus Island Regional Processing Centre (MIRPC) Papua New Guinea (PNG) for over three years. He was detained when the boat he was travelling in with fellow asylum seekers, was apprehended at sea by Australian authorities in mid-July 2013. He requested asylum in Australia, as was his right under Article 1 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees as amended by the 1967 Protocol. Mr Boochani reports that he was forcibly moved from Christmas Island, Australia, to Manus Island, PNG, without his asylum case being considered.

PEN International and a coalition of human rights groups launched an international campaign on behalf of Behrouz Boochani in September 2015. Despite numerous approaches to the Australian government and relevant ministers and departments, there has been no response to the campaign letter.

Since then, the status of asylum seekers held in immigration detention in PNG has changed significantly. On 26 April this year, the full bench of the PNG Supreme Court ruled that Australia's regional processing centre on Manus island was illegal, since the asylum seekers who were seeking asylum in Australia were forcefully brought into PNG under Australian Federal Police Escort and held at the MIRPC against their will.

Mr Boochani was recently conferred refugee status by PNG immigration authorities, even though he had refused to give his case to them. Mr Boochani remains adamant that his case be given to Australian immigration.

PEN International is alarmed that despite the Supreme Court's ruling, Behrouz Boochani remains on Manus Island. Despite being nominally free to move about the island, Behrouz Boochani reports that he still faces restrictions in his movement. The only way out of the centre is by an arranged bus ride to the main town of Lorengau—access to the centre is out of bounds since it is on a naval base. Refugees are body searched when they leave and return. Mr Boochani reports that 'this island is not safe' and that 'we can not leave the island because we don't have any visa or travel documents.' In effect Mr Boochani remains marooned on Manus Island and his future is on hold indefinitely.

PEN International maintains that based on the obligations the Australian Government has incurred in shipping Behrouz Boochani off to PNG, and based on the April 26 decision by the PNG Supreme Court, Mr Boochani should be permitted to have his case heard in Australia, and to have it expedited as soon as possible. To be held in limbo for such a long time, is tantamount to imprisonment, and a prolongation of indefinite detention.

PEN Cambodia: Recent Reports from Sreang Heng

introduced by Arnold Zable

PEN Melbourne and PEN Cambodia share a close relationship. Among PEN Melbourne's initiatives is work with our sister centre in sponsoring writing workshops and literary prizes, and in contributing to the cost of PEN Cambodia delegates attending PEN International congresses. I was privileged to run workshops with Cambodian writers in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Battambang in successive years, from 2013 to 2015. The key person in ensuring the success of these initiatives was the president of PEN Cambodia, Sreang Heng. A university lecturer, educator and human rights advocate, he is a dynamic and skilled organiser, driven by a passion for social justice, freedom of expression, and a more democratic and less corrupt Cambodia.

This involves political risks. Recently those risks have increased considerably. Sreang has pointed out that the political situation in Phnom Penh has deteriorated. He says: 'We have been so stressed in Cambodia since late last year when independent analysts, scholars and civil society workers have been under attacks, arrests, jailing and killing.'

Sreang has written two alarming reports for PEN International, which we include below. He also reports that PEN Cambodia continues to encourage literature in Cambodia, and the training of writers. This has included, over the past six months, a two-hour radio program which broadcasts interviews with writers and literary scholars—of great value since, as Sreang reports, PEN has had difficulty in getting support from local authorities for their community programs.

Sreang says 'Politicization penetrates into every aspect of social political structure in the country.' He goes on to say that after losing 22 parliamentary seats in the 2013 election, Hun Sen has become more hostile towards civil society groups, who have been turning to opposition parties for an alternative option.

PEN Melbourne joins PEN International in expressing alarm over these developments and the repression of advocates and writers pursuing alternative views, and a more democratic Cambodia.

Freedom of expression in Cambodia under attack

Extracted from a report to PEN International by PEN Cambodia: 20 July 2016

PEN Cambodia and all of its members have been saddened by the death of Dr Kem Ley, a scholar, a researcher, a writer and an independent analyst, who was assassinated on Sunday morning July 10th, 2016 in the capital city of Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Over the years, Dr. Kem Ley was working relentlessly to promote freedom of expression in Cambodia by taking part in activities of many NGOs and civil societies, training many young analyst groups with primary purpose to fight for a better respect of human rights in Cambodia. And he often shared his research findings to the Cambodian general public in form of report writings and short stories, radio talk-shows and discussions on TVs, workshops and conferences.

(Left) Assassination of Kem Ley. Photo: supplied. Wipe your tears; continue your journey. Dr Kem Ley 1970–2016..

Dr. Ley also worked as a director of several NGOs and a member of Board of Director of a number of several civil society groups and NGOs in Cambodia. (I have also worked with him for some of these NGO/Civil Society groups). And he offered to be my mentor whenever I worked on PEN Cambodia's action plans and project activities for Civil Society Project being supported by PEN International (funded by SIDA) in the last few years. Although he received many threats to take his life many times, and some government officials (who like him) told him to leave the country, Dr. Ley did not shrink in front of the threats and said that 'Cambodia is our mother, why we have to leave for somewhere else? If they attack us and they make us suffer, we just clean our tears and continue to walk forward.'

His last comments on a report entitled 'HOSTILE TAKEOVER' by Global Witness on July 7th, 2016 about 'How Cambodia's ruling family are pulling the strings on the economy and amassing vast personal fortunes with extreme consequences for the population' have been publicly suspected/ regarded as the main cause of Dr. Ley's assassination (although the government denied this suspicion).

His passing away has been a heart-breaking loss for all of us in the whole nation, many oversea Cambodians and international organizations and agencies that Dr. Ley used to work with around the world.

As for me, I myself do not feel safe in Cambodia now.

As a research scholar and writer, I have joined round-table discussions and radio talk-shows, and joined field trips with Dr. Kem Ley and his research groups many times. We often met and shared views and insights in public on current social and political situation in Cambodian today, especially issues relating to violations of human rights and the imposition NGO law and prohibition of public gatherings by the government and how to promote public awareness through capacity-building and public education in the country.

My photos and my speeches (voices in radio talk-shows) with Dr. Ley have been shared in public in social media. And thus the public attention has turned to me as people expect me to be another 'good' commentator instead of him. This makes my images become a focus of the government.

To be honest, since last year, I often received threats through private anonymous phone calls (that no numbers appeared), calls through messenger and writings in my Facebook pages telling to immediately stop speaking about social issues (particularly wrongdoings of government officials and their drug dealings, deforestations, land grabs, corruption and violations of human rights and so on). Dr. Ley once told me that he received same things. Despite all these threats, I did not expect any killing as it happened to Dr. Ley. In my previous report, I did mention something about possible danger that may happen.

Photos: Sreang Heng (left) with Dr Kem Ley (right) at a dinner meeting with Dr Ley's research group and during a radio talk-show.

Social-political rights and freedom of expression under serious threats in Cambodia

Extracted from a report by PEN Cambodia

Currently, a certain restrictions have been imposed by the government:

1. Limiting activities of Civil Societies and NGOs

In 2015, the government imposed NGO Law to control Civil Societies and NGOs—and increasingly trying to limit their activities and thus oppressing them. In that, they are also trying to monitor independent media industries including social media exchanges and published Medias that do not belong to them. This includes censorship on phone call exchanges of the people.

2. Crackdowns on opposition party

Two parliamentarians were severely attacked in sunlight by a mob groups known as military personnel and youth associations affiliated with the ruling party.

Parliamentary members and a senator of opposition party have been jailed with no regard of their immunity.

Now, about 10 officials of opposition party have been imprisoned for their protests for political rights and their opinions and concerns over the government's secret border solution with Vietnam (its neighboring country), social issues, deforestations, criminal acts of many government officials in dealing drugs, corruption, land grabs and violations of human rights.

3. Crackdowns on Students

A number of students have been arrested and jailed for their critical views and movements to mobilize the Cambodian general public against the government's plan to destroy large areas of jungles for timbers in form of hydro-dam development. Some have been jailed for their critical views against criminal acts of government officials.

4. Crackdown on Civil Societies and NGOs

In recent weeks, five workers of Civil Societies and NGOs have been accused of joining in hiding the case of sexual scandal of the deputy head of the opposition party, Mr. Kem Sokha, when they helped provide advices and legal services for the lady involved, Miss. Sremom, when she sought their advice/assistance.

As a matter of fact, many Civil Societies groups and NGOs become targets of the current leaders, who have been accusing them of supporting and assisting the opposition party after their party lost 22 seats in 2013 national election

5. Crackdowns on independent political and social development analysts

Independent analysts who are researchers, scholars, lawyers and experts from different specializations, particularly social, political, legal and economic fields become targets of the government leaders and their officials for questioning and analyzing the government policies relating to corruption, drugs, violations of human rights, lack of irrigation systems and poor healthcare in the country. I myself may be one of those persons who are targeted.

Recently, a rights activist, who is the former president of Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) and now working as an independent social-political analyst, Mr. Ou Virak, has been facing a legal charge with an accusation of 'defaming' the ruling party for his comments on the case of sexual scandal mentioned above. Mr. Virak criticized the act of censorship and a series of recording phone-call conversations arguably regarded as the voices of the two lovers (Mr. Kem Sokha and Miss. Sreymom).

As hinted by government officials concerned, many other social-political analysts, commentators and government's critics have been listed for legal charges—for their critical views against the government.

All this results in fear and self-censorship among writers, authors, scholars and intellectuals, researchers, social activists and school teachers in the country.

Position of PEN Cambodia

We, PEN Cambodia, regard what Cambodian government has been doing now as an oppressive act to political rights and freedom of expression in this country. We see all these things as main concerns that need to be settled.

The attacks on parliamentarians, the arrests and imprisonments of parliamentarians and members of opposition party, students and civil societies groups for their critical views against all forms of violations in this country are acts of oppressions, limitation of human freedom and disdaining human dignity.

These are obvious acts of obstructions to intellectual growth and the process of building democracy in Cambodia—the country severely ravaged in recent tragic past by horrible regime of Pol Pot's 'Killing Fields' (that cost several millions of lives and million others living in trauma).

Recently, PEN Cambodia has postponed some of its planned literary activities (being supported by Civil Societies Project of PEN International), particularly public forums and discussion workshops in order to avoid any possible problems that may result from participants' critical discussions. At the moment, we just keep organizing training workshops and PEN Clubs at schools.

Under threat, Ou Virak (far left) and four of the many political prisoners detained in Cambodia (from right) Ny Sokha, Ny Chariya, Nay Vanda and Lim Mony. Source: www.licadho-cambodia.org/political_prisoners

Honorary members of PEN Melbourne

Anne Bihan has lived in New Caledonia since 1993. She was a guest poet/translator representing New Caledonia at the 2008 Franco-Anglais Poetry Festival, and was subsequently invited to work with berni janssen, coordinator of the A&PWN (Asia and Pacific Writers Network).

Seedy Bojang is a journalist and writer from The Gambia. After the closure of independent newspapers in The Gambia, Seedy was briefly employed by the government-supported Gambia newspaper. His employment was terminated because he would not write articles supporting the government.

Büşra Ersanlı is a professor and former head of the International Relations at Marmara University, Turkey. Arrested in October 2011 on the charge that lecturing to the Political Academy of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) was 'leading an illegal organisation', she faced up to 22 years jail. Nothing has been heard of her since her trial in July 2012. Her students have produced a protest video, **'**Freedom to Büşra Ersanlı**'**.

Wajeha al-Huwaider, a writer and women's rights activist from Saudi Arabia, has often been a lone voice for women's rights, campaigning for women to be allowed to drive cars and against their treatment as second-class citizens. After facing kidnapping charges that were later dropped, on 15 June 2013 she and Fawzia Al-Oyouni were sentenced to prison for ten months for *takhbib* (inciting a separation between a husband and wife), with an additional two-year travel ban. They are appealing against the conviction.

Lucina Kathmann is an International Vice-President of PEN and has had a long association with the San Miguel de Allende PEN Centre in Mexico. She helped establish the PEN Women Writers Committee. She has travelled through Kurdistan, including into Iraq with Kurdish writers who had been in exile from their homeland.

Iryna Khalip was arrested on 19 December 2010 after she reported on demonstrations connected to the Belarusian presidential election. Severely beaten and held in isolation by the Belarusian State Security (KGB) for one month in Minsk, she was then placed under strict house arrest. In May 2011, Khalip was handed a two-year suspended sentence and lost her appeal case in July 2011. Charges against her were dropped last year. Iryna Khalip was awarded the 2013 PEN/Pinter Prize for an International Writer of Courage.

Natalya Radina, a Belarusian journalist and editor of human rights website www.charter97.org. After a beating and KGB jail term she claimed political asylum from the UN High Commission for Refugees in Moscow. Since August 2011 she has lived the difficult life of a refugee in Lithuania where Charter97 is now registered. In November 2011, the Committee to Protect Journalists presented Radina its International Press Freedom Award for courageous journalism..

Rosa Vasseghi faced years of repression in Iran and has made a new life in Melbourne. She is the author and illustrator of eight children's books, a painter and an organiser of musical gatherings, and is currently completing an Iranian cookbook. In 2009, she published her book *Where is the justice? Stories from behind closed doors*, which documents the stories of women and girls persecuted in various countries.

Ragıp Zarakolu Turkish human rights publisher and 2012 Nobel Peace Prize nominee, was charged under Turkish law with 'aiding and abetting an illegal organisation' and jailed for nearly six months. He was released pending trial on 10 April 2012 and possible jail term of 7-15 years. In December 2013 Zarakolu arrived safely in Sigtuna, Sweden, an ICORN city of refuge.

We remember honorary member **Zhang Jianhong 1958–2010**. The prominent poet, playwright, editor and author died 31 December 2010. Independent Chinese PEN (ICPC) considers Mr Zhang Jianhong (Li Hong) as a victim of contemporary literary inquisition in China and one of the worst cases since China started its policy of 'reform and opening-up' in the late 1970s.

PEN Melbourne Membership Application

☐ I agree with the PEN charter

☐ I wish to become a PEN member / an associate* member

MEMBERSHIP OF PEN IS OPEN TO ALL QUALIFIED WRITERS, EDITORS AND TRANSLATORS
WHO SUBSCRIBE TO THE AIMS OF THE INTERNATIONAL PEN CHARTER
WITHOUT REGARD TO NATIONALITY, LANGUAGE, RACE, COLOUR OR RELIGION.

DATE _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____

I enclose a cheque (no cash please) for:

☐ Annual Membership fee (waged) $75

☐ Annual Membership fee (unwaged) $40

☐ Optional donation for:

Writers in Prison $ _____

Women Writers Committee $ _____

Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee $ _____

*Associate members need not be published writers.

ADDRESS: PO BOX 373 | FAIRFIELD | VIC 3078

PHONE: 9482 6134 after 7pm.

PEN Melbourne

PEN International Charter

The PEN Charter is based on resolutions passed at its International Congresses.

PEN affirms that:

1. Literature knows no frontiers and must remain common currency among people in spite of political or international upheavals.
2. In all circumstances, and particularly in time of war, works of art, the patrimony of humanity at large, should be left untouched by national or political passion.
3. Members of PEN should at all times use what influence they have in favour of good understanding and mutual respect between nations; they pledge themselves to do their utmost to dispel race, class and national hatreds, and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace in one world.
4. PEN stands for the principle of unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations, and members pledge themselves to oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression in the country and community to which they belong, as well as throughout the world wherever this is possible. PEN declares for a free press and opposes arbitrary censorship in time of peace. It believes that the necessary advance of the world towards a more highly organised political and economic order renders a free criticism of governments, administrations and institutions imperative. And since freedom implies voluntary restraint, members pledge themselves to oppose such evils of a free press as mendacious publication, deliberate falsehood and distortion of facts for political and personal ends.

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