

INTERNATIONAL PEN WOMEN WRITERS' COMMITTEE



Dr Judith Buckrich, Chair of the Committee

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September 2006 Newsletter

Editors: Chiara Macconi and Lucina Kathmann

FROM PEN CENTRES

AFRICAN WRITERS ABROAD:

SABLE 'Africa' issue, edited by African Writers Abroad members, includes poems from women in Chad, profiles Susan Kiguli, President of FEMRITE in Uganda and teenager Bridget Mbazi, a Rwandan refugee living in Leeds, England, plus an interview of Sudanese born Taghred Elsanhoury who took her camera to Darfur, narrated and produced a documentary.

MACEDONIA:

Last year's edition, *Macedonian PEN Review 2005*, was dedicated to the women writers, members of the Macedonian P.E.N. Centre: Maja Bojadzievska, Gordana Mihailova Bosnakoska, Svetlana Hristova Jocik, Kata Kulavkova, Olga Arbuljievaska, Elizabeta Seleva, Vera Cejkovska, Jelena Luzina, Lidija Dimkovska and Jadranka Vladova. In the foreword of the Review, the Editorial Board wrote:

The wide scope of genre interests of these authors, including poetry, prose and essays, testifies on the expansion of feminine letters within the framework of Macedonian literature. They make a special contribution towards affirmation of poly-semantic and multilayered Macedonian literature.

The authors presented here are renowned names in contemporary Macedonian literature. The Editorial Board of the Review presents its modest contribution towards their wider affirmation abroad.

PERU:

In July 2006 the Women Writers Committee of PEN of Peru published the first edition of *Scriptura*, a poetry review and presented it at the Lima

Book Fair. For copies contact Marita Troiano, Carpe Diem Press, ardetroya@hotmail.com or carpediemeditora@gmail.com.

SCOTLAND:

Scottish PEN's event for International Women's Day was: *Women Translated by Women*. Scottish PEN members Tessa Ransford, Christine de Luca, Bashabi Fraser, Antonia Swinson, Anna Crowe and Morelle Smith read from their translations of women writers from Bangladesh, Catalonia, Scandinavia, former East Germany, Albania and Italy.

WOMEN WRITERS IN PRISON

Woman Publisher Imprisoned in Iran

Dr. Saghi Bagherina, publisher of the economic and cultural newspaper *Asia*, has been sentenced to six months in prison, charged with publishing "propaganda for activist groups opposed to the Islamic Republic."

Dr. Bagherina, who is the wife of the prizewinning editor in chief of *Asia*, Iraj Jamdishi, appealed her original verdict and sentence, but according to Fars, the governmental news agency, the sentence was upheld on July 31, 2006 by Branch 27 of the Supreme Court of the Revolution.

This is not the first woman of letters to be detained by the government of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. On August 4, 2005, shortly after he assumed the presidency, woman writer, women's rights activist and Kurdish PEN member Dr. Roya Tilooi was detained and taken to prison. She was released on bail on December 21, 2005 and fled the country.

For more information about Saghi Bagherina

<http://www.iranpressnews.com/source/015044.htm>

Turkey: The trial of author Elif Shafak is set to open on September 21. Shafak was arraigned on charges of "insulting Turkishness" under the notorious Article 301 of the Turkish criminal Code.

She spent her childhood in Spain and after studying political science in Turkey, she held teaching positions in the United Kingdom, Turkey, and the United States. Her publications include both novels and essays, among them *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*, her first book published in English, *Bit Palas*, and *Mahrem*, which won the Turkish Writers' Association Best Novel of the Year Award.

Metis Publishing House website: <http://www.metiskitap.com/Scripts/>

This case is one of many Turkish authors and publishers who are being tried for crimes against the State under the Turkish Penal Law and the infamous Article 218, under which Perihan Magden was charged and

acquitted in July, 2006 for having turned people against military service. Another case is that of Pinar Selek, sociologist, who was accused of planting a bomb, when in fact the explosion came from a gas leak. That did not keep the prosecutor from bringing her to court and asking a life sentence. She was recently found innocent after over two years of harassment.

ACHIEVEMENTS

FROM BULGARIA

The Day Was Born by Mariela Baeva is a finalist for Glimmer Train's Open Fiction Winter 2005-2006 Top 25 Winners and Finalists.

Set in 20th century Bulgaria, the book explores a number of contemporary issues. Among these are socio-political change, drug abuse, and organised crime. The events spiral around the country's transition to democracy. At the heart of the story are the troubles of different generations of the same family. The personal and the political are intertwined while the narrative is both tightly-focussed and wide-ranging.

Mariela Baeva - mtb@cablebg.net

FROM MEXICO

Exile Notebooks, A poetry collection by Nedda G. de Anhalt, first publication of Mexico City PEN Center, explores the personal geography of the author's memory. Cuba is never named but is called The Island.

Jennifer Clement comments:

“There are places that do not exist; they have no point of intersection, no latitude or longitude, and they cannot be found in any atlas. But we know some of these places better than places that exist. We all travel through the nonexistent worlds of Gulliver, of Oz and of Wonderland. Like the imaginary worlds, the maps of our childhood and the memories of the places we dream of can be more vivid than any known place in the material world.”

“There is graveyard in *Exile Notebooks*. It is the 7,700 square nautical miles of sea between Cuba and Florida, one of the saddest places in

the planet. Nobody knows how many people have drowned there. Some say hundreds and others think it is thousands. This is where the rafts go down. In the poem *Balseros*, Anhalt writes, in a tone that seems like the innocent rhyme of a child, these unnerving lines: *We were four, now we are three.*

“The book is a tribute to Nedda de Anhalt’s memory of the island and what has happened to Cuba under the brutal regimen of Fidel Castro.”

(Jennifer Clement’s full text from a recent presentation is available. Write:lucina@unisono.net.mx.)

FROM NIGERIA

Unoma Azuah's debut novel, "Sky high Flames", won this year's (2006) Urban Spectrum National Best Novel Award by an African born writer. Ms. Azuah is a member of PEN Nigeria. The Urban Spectrum National Best Black Books award is based in Denver, Colorado, U.S.A.

More info:

<http://www.urbanspectrum.net/entertainment/book-review.htm>

FROM SCOTLAND

Tessa Ransford, **Scottish** PEN’s President, will become President of the Institute of Contemporary Scotland in 2007.

Anne Clarke’s book of poetry, *Breathing Each other In*, was recently published by Blinking Eye Press.

Jenni Calder’s *Scots in the USA* was published earlier this year.

Margaret Elphinstone’s latest novel *Light*, will be published in September while Louise Welsh’s new novel is titled *The Bullet Trick*.

Anna Crowe’s book of translations of the Catalan poet, Joan Margarit, *Tugs in the Fog*, is the Poetry Book Society Recommended Translation for Winter, 2006.

Alison Prince’s novel, *Jacoby's Game*, comes out in September. In 2005 Alison was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Literature for services to children's literature.

Agnes Walker is working on a transcription of an early 18th century hand-written herbal, a very rare book belonging to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons in Glasgow, to make it available on the internet.

Tessa Ransford, Beatrice Colin and Morelle Smith took part in Scottish PEN /Artists in Exile Glasgow translation event of Poetry Postcards. Poems by writers domiciled in Scotland were translated from Arabic, Farsi, French, Italian and Albanian, into English and illustrated.

FROM AFRICAN WRITERS

Sefi Atta, winner of the 2004/5 David T.K. Wong Prize, received the first Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa for her book, *Everything Good Will Come*. The prize of \$20,000 is funded by the Lumina Foundation.

Kadija George received a “STARS OF SIERRA LEONE AWARD” in June, 2006. The award honours the achievements of Sierra Leonean women.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, winner of the 2002/3 David T.K. Wong Prize, published her second novel in August, called *Half of a Yellow Sun*, it is set during the Biafran War. She encourages others to post their ‘Biafra’ story on her website

www.halfofayellowsun.com

POETANDO

Susan Blanshard

POSTCARD FROM HANOI

Confucius Temple has two roofs, yin and yang,
a chinoiserie of flying eaves and clay tiles.
Dragons decorate the beams with power and fortune
but the bodies are placed so that the entire beast cannot
be seen. Dragons must not be shown in their entirety,
they must always disappear into words or water.
In the smoky shadows of temple eaves, relics of Ghost,
its chill bones digging up umbilicus & abacus of these words...

*Do not look unless it is in accordance with the rites;
do not listen unless it is in accordance with the rites;
do not speak unless it is in accordance with the rites;
do not move unless it is in accordance with the rites.*

- CONFUCIUS
The Analects XI 1.1

Susan Blanshard currently lives in Hanoi where she runs a series of Cafe Writer's Workshops. She is author of *Sheetstone: Memoir for a Lover* (Published by Spuyten Duyvil, 2006) and of the forthcoming novel 'Sleeping With the Artist' and volumes of poetry 'Evidence of Obsession' and 'Perfume River' selections of which are published in *The World's Literary Magazine*, *Projected Letters*.

Sarah Lawson

FOREIGN EXPERT

I'm an expert - it's written in the contract -
And classes sit at my feet four days a week.
Outside the classroom I revert to ignorance.
The lady selling roasted melon seeds
Has to hold up fingers for the price.
Even the obvious abacus is no good,
Although all over town everyone plays
That rectilinear rosary,
Noisy as ping pong
On all the city's counter-tops.

Banners shout across the street
Messages to everyone but me.

Sarah Lawson was born in Indianapolis in 1943 but has lived in London for many years. She taught at the University of Suzhou in Jiangsu Province in China in the early 90s, and then over the next decade sporadically wrote poems about the experience. These have just been collected in *All the Tea in China* (London, 2006).