



INTERNATIONAL PEN WOMEN WRITERS' COMMITTEE

IPWWC News

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Dr Judith Buckrich, Chair of the Committee

judy@judithbuckrich.com

www.ipwwc.org

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From the Chair

Upcoming Women Writers' Conference in Senegal

The Dakar IPWWC Conference on July 11 and 12 following the Congress has been well publicised and registrations have closed, but if you want to come and are a Congress delegate or can pay your way please contact Karen Efford or myself immediately. Karen.Efford@internationalpen.org.uk or buckrich@bigpond.net.au

Hong Kong Regional Conference 2-4 February.

I recently returned from the Hong Kong Asia and Pacific Regional Conference where I had the pleasure of meeting many women writers from the region. We held two meetings at which we discussed what is happening to women writers in China, the Philippines, Nepal, Taiwan and Hong Kong and the survey being conducted by the Writers in Prison Committee and the Women Writers' Committee on the treatment of women writers in prison and generally how their treatment differs from male writers.

The second meeting drew attention to the effect of the place of women in Chinese society on women writers. It was important to be reminded that women writers must often cope with context and that it is difficult for them to discuss their work separately from life generally. We were reminded that Chinese women live in a society that still practices the abortion of female foetuses and sees women as second class citizens. As well there is the added dimension of the official denial of these things. Where does this leave women who are trying write about what is happening in their country? Living in fear of repercussion is simply part of their writing life. Censorship and self-censorship are equal difficulties for women who risk imprisonment and isolation.

It was a great honour to meet so many women who have been imprisoned or risk imprisonment for their writing and we hope that they may be able to attend more such meetings. But attendance at these meetings is not without risk. Twenty of the mainland Chinese writers (including several women) who were invited to

Hong Kong were not able to attend either because they were denied visas or were not allowed to cross the border, even when they had a visa. Some writers were harassed when they arrived home.

Volume 4 or *Our Voice* anthology

Our Voice Volume 4 is now closed and I will be sending the contributions to Argentina in the next weeks, thanks to all contributors.

About Poetando

The editors have decided in the name of sanity to publish poetry sent to 'poetando' in its original language only.

Our translators

Ricardo Gustavo Espeja

Argentine colleague Ricardo Gustavo Espeja, who has published in several anthologies of poetry and short stories, is a specialist in near eastern peoples and cultures, especially the Kurds. Though he is not Kurdish himself, he has been elected an honorary member of Kurdish PEN for his helpful work, both of scholarship and translation. He also has done many translations for the International PEN Women Writers Committee.

Mariam Karim

Mariam Karim-Ahlawat writes novels and short stories both for children and adults. She has a read-aloud story column in the magazine Parenting, which she illustrates herself, and a column on education and social issues in the Times of India Pluses. She has been a teacher of French language and literature in India. She also does translations for the IPWWC.

Lucina Kathmann

As well as being an advisor to the Chair, Lucina Kathmann also translates for the IPWWC

Call for manuscripts

The Avon Foundation is calling for manuscripts for their Inter-American Poetry and Short Story Competitions 2007, open to women who live in Argentina

and all the countries of the Americas. Both competitions have the support of the OAS and the Ministry of Culture of Buenos Aires.

Send literary work before July 2. It must be in Spanish and unpublished. There is no limit of how many stories or poems can be sent. The decision will be made known in September and the prizes will be bestowed in a public event in November.

Prizes:

Short Story: First prize \$3500 US dollars, Second prize \$2000 and third prize \$1000, plus diploma and medal.

Poetry: First prize \$1800 second prize \$1000 and third prize \$500, diploma and medal. Honorable mentions at the discretion of the jury.

To participate consult

www.fundacionavon.org.ar or write fundacionavon@avon.com

From Centres

Finnish PEN Centre

Central Asian women writers' conference August 2007.

The Finnish PEN Women Writers' Committee is organizing a meeting for Central-Asian (and international) women writers in August 2007. The meeting will take place on Saturday & Sunday 17th and 18th of August, 2007 & the place will be cultural centre Caisa, right in the middle of beautiful Helsinki.

If you would like to attend please contact the coordinator of the meeting, Rita Dahl. Rita.dahl@helsinki.fi

PEN of Mexico activities

By María Elena Ruiz Cruz, president of PEN of Mexico City

PEN Mexico publishes and presents its first two books

In 2006 PEN of Mexico published its first two books, *Exile Notebooks* by Nedda G. de Anhalt, which was presented in the Fine Artes Palace in Mexico City on Sept. 5. *Animal Without Time* by Eduardo García Aguilar is the second.

PEN Mexico in the Guadalajara Book Fair 2006

At the International Book Fair in Guadalajara 2006, November 30-December 3, at the International PEN stand, PEN of Mexico presented 25 books and a magazine by a total of 20 authors. Of those, there were 9 women writers with 13 titles.

Awards and Publication

From the Americas

Cuban Writer in Exile Receives Award

Mariela Gutiérrez, member of the Cuban Writers in Exile PEN Center and a professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies at the University of Waterloo in Canada, was granted the University of Waterloo Award for Excellence in Research, she is the first woman to receive this award in the 48 years that it has been given. Mariela's research on Afro-Hispanic studies and Latin American female writers, especially the Cuban writer Lydia Cabrera, has garnered her other awards at her university, including the Distinguished Teacher Award in 2003 and the Outstanding Performance Award in 2004.

Mexican Writer Receives National Award for Novel

Martha Cerda, President of PEN of Guadalajara and former chair of the International PEN Women Writers Committee, has just won the Jorge Ibarguengoitia National Prize for Literature for her unpublished novel *Señuelo*, (Bait). The prestigious prize includes a money award and publication by La Rana, the publishing house of the state of Guanajuato, Mexico.

From India

Scholarship awarded to Indian poet and writer

Sampurna Chattarji, the only Indian writer present at the Highlights Writers Workshop at Chautauqua, New York, was the recipient of the 2006 Highlights Foundation Scholarship for children's writers. In 2007 her first poetry book, *Sight May Strike You Blind* has been published by the Sahitya Akademi

(National Academy of Letters), New Delhi. Edited by Keki N. Daruwalla, one of India's foremost poets writing in English. In his forward to the book he writes, "Chattarji works within the radius of her intuition. Hers is a poetry of subtle impressions, far-off correspondences (but never far-fetched!), dissimilar images moulded into a poetic whole. She experiments fearlessly."

From Europe

Translation in Bulgaria of Franco-Macedonian writer

Stefani Sen Senar, author of *The Decree*, was born in France to a Macedonian mother. She has studied 'balkanology' at the INALCO, in Paris. She is particularly interested in the period of Ottoman domination. Her novel *The Decree*, published in Macedonia in 2005 (Kultura), in France in 2006 (Dorval), and Bulgaria in January 2007(BON) with a preface by Predrag Matvejevitch. She "invents a particular singular writing in *The Decree* poetic but political, historical but demystifying. A tour de force ... a bridge between the two Europes." By Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, literary critic with the newspaper *Le Monde*.

From Scotland: awards, prizes and shortlistings

Anne Lorne Gillies was awarded the Ratcliff Prize for her book "Songs of Gaelic Scotland" (Birlinn, 2005) This is a prestigious academic award, given annually for "a contribution by an individual to the study of folklore and folklife in Great Britain and Ireland".

Aimee Chalmers edited 'The Singin Lass: Selected Work of Marion Angus', published by Polygon in (August 2006). She will also be reading from 'Drift o Rain on Moorland Stane: The Poetry of Marion Angus' at StAnza poetry Festival, St Andrews, Scotland in March 2007. Music specially composed by Richard Ingham to complement Marion Angus' poems will be played by the Heisenberg Ensemble.

Last year **Alison Prince** won the Literary Review Grand Poetry Prize of £5,000, for the second time.

Tessa Ransford's poetry pamphlet *Shades of Green*, on environmental themes, was shortlisted for the 2006 Eco-Creativity Award, given for creativity with ecological aims.

Alison Miller's novel *Demo* was shortlisted for the Saltire First Book of the Year Award. (2006)

Dilys Rose was winner of the 2006 McCash poetry competition with the poem Sailmaker's Palm which is part of a new collection, *Bodywork*, due out in summer, 2007.

From Africa

Gambian writer, **Dayo Foster**, receives international publishing deal. Debut novelist, Dayo Forster, is the first Gambian woman to receive an international publishing deal. Her first book, *Reading the Ceiling* will be published by Simon and Schuster in Spring 2007. Dayo Forster's novel is a remarkable achievement: fresh, funny, cosmopolitan and original, it paints a compelling portrait of the modern African experience for women. Dayo Forster was born in The Gambia and now lives in Kenya.

Landmark for Women Poets from the Caribbean and Black Britain

Five women poets, **Dorothea Smartt, Raman Mundair, Rommi Smith, Seni Seneviratne** and **Khadijah Ibrahiim**, will be published during Spring/Summer 2007 by Peepal Tree Press, the home of challenging and inspiring literature from the Caribbean and Black Britain. All five women demonstrate strong, dynamic, individual styles and voices. Peepal Tree Press challenges Britain's poetry establishment by demonstrating their confidence in the work of five British born women of colour - a challenge that no other poetry publisher in Britain has dared to undertake.

Kadija George of African Writers Abroad PEN Centre announces 2nd SABLE International LitFest - in The Gambia!

The 2nd SABLE International LitFest takes place 13-15 July 2007 in The Gambia, West Africa.

As SABLE LitMag features writers of colour from across the globe, we decided that it was only right for SABLE LitFest to travel throughout the world, too! Writers taking part in the 2nd SABLE LitFest include a stream of internationally, renowned writers, such as the esteemed award winning Nigerian novelist, **Buchi Emecheta**, and the equally renowned, award winning poet, **Jack Mapanje**, from Malawi.

From Australia

Rosie Scott receives inaugural Sydney PEN Award for services to PEN.

In November 2006 Sydney PEN member, **Rosie Scott** received the inaugural Sydney PEN Award for services to PEN. Awarded on the Day of the Imprisoned Writer 'in recognition of her outstanding support and commitment to the aims, values and ideals of PEN.' Rosie was given a beautiful engraved pen,

donated by Jane Morgan who will also give one to future winners of the award.

From Italy

The other look: feminine reflections on the literature of Trieste and the Eastern Border of Italy

The annual Conference of the PEN-CLUB Trieste was held in October, 2006 and included one session devoted to the feminine literature in the areas across Italy's Eastern Border. In the introduction, the poet **Marina Moretti**, a Member of the Board, stressed the value of the feminine literary expression in terms of peaceful civilization, in regions in which language and writing have played a mayor role in the definition of identities. Furthermore, it was reported how women could succeed in mediating cultural issues between different ethnic components. With the co-ordination of journalist **Marina Silvestri**, many scholars belonging to different national groups - **Vanessa Begic, Elis Daghenghi Olujic, Elvira Maison Prenz, Irene Visintini, Gabriella Ziani** - reported on their research work on a wide specimen of women writers writing in different languages (Italian, Slovenian, Croatian, German, Jewish), in a changing historical environment, which has seen the emerging of Nationalisms from the ashes of the former Central European culture, shared by all ethnic groups in this area before World War I. The arousal of nationalistic thinking was fostered by the disruptive energy of two World Wars, by Fascism in Italy and Communism in former Yugoslavia.

WiP & IPWWC Survey

The Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN, in consultation with the International PEN Women Writers Committee, is conducting a survey to analyse the impact of gender on the practice of the right to freedom of expression. A report on the findings of this project will be produced in the latter part of 2007 and will be used to inform PEN's future activities for women writers. PEN members, and women writers who have recently been subjected to attack are invited to fill either of the questionnaires.

Questionnaire I is for women writers/journalists who have been arrested, imprisoned or otherwise attacked in the course of their professions The deadline is 30 May 2007.

Questionnaire II is for women writers/journalists who have not had direct experience of attack, but who are from countries where freedom of expression is suppressed.

To obtain the questionnaire please contact wipc@internationalpen.org.uk

Some women writers in prison

VIETNAM: writer and journalist Tran Khai Thanh Thuy

Writer and journalist Tran Khai Thanh has been subject to serious harassment and sustained interrogations about her Internet writings since 2 September 2006. Her case appears to be part of a pattern of organised and widespread police harassment of dissident writers and human rights activists in Vietnam since August 2006, apparently in the lead up to the Asia-Pacific Economic Forum (APEC) summit held in Hanoi from 12-19 November.

Tran Khai Thanh Thuy (pen names Nguyen Thai Hoang and Nguyen Thi Hien) was briefly detained for her Internet writings, followed by three weeks of daily interrogation sessions. She was again briefly detained on 11 October and interrogated about the essays 'The Grotto', 'Self-Narration' and 'Dialogue' written after her detention in September. She was also reportedly brought to an open 'People's Court', in which members of the public are forced to participate in the abuse and humiliation of those accused. She is now believed to have been placed under effective house arrest and has been banned from publishing her writings on-line.

SLOVENIA: writer Breda Smolnikar still on trial

Breda Smolnikar has been taken to court by five elderly sisters (age 75 - 93) completely unknown to her, who made up “that the heroine in my book completely copied their mothers love life and took me to court for ‘their mother didn’t do such terrible things’. Absurdly – I didn’t know their mother at all! They won the law suit and I was sentenced unreasonably harsh and humiliating – I was forbidden to print and sell the book ever again. Besides – I was obliged to eliminate and removed all copies of the book from public. For each and every copy of this book, that could be found on the market, I would have to pay 210 € penalties per day. After that sentence I withdrew all the books from all the bookstores in Slovenia. The book was no longer for sale and they were all removed.”

The elderly sisters tried very hard to find the ‘incriminating’ book, since all books were removed from the selling shells. They succeeded. “For this one solely book, that they managed to find, the court fined me with near 140.000,00 €. More than the impossible amount of money, I was deeply hurt because I had to publicly apologize to plaintiffs in the national newspapers, stating that was not the kind of woman, described in my tale.”

The case is currently being with the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia. All the interventions made by the International PEN Centre have not helped, for our legal system as well as the government have failed to react so far. Although the public has expressed its disapproval regarding the lack of

freedom experienced by the Slovene artist in several occasions, the legal system and the government continue to ignore the problem. Fear has found the way into Slovenian artistic community and artists find it necessary to protect themselves by using that famous American phrase: “The story, names, characters and events described in this book are fictional” in their books.

Breda Smolnikar met the participants of International PEN Congress in Bled in 2005.

TRENDS IN WOMEN’S WRITING AROUND THE WORLD

Trends in Women’s Writing in English in India

by Sampurna Chattarji of the Indian Centre of PEN

When I sat down to write this piece for NETWORK, I had absolutely no idea where I would begin. And then I realised that a good place to start would be by asking those who engage on a daily basis with writers – ergo publishers. And so I dashed off a rather-frantic email to the Editors of some of the key publishing houses in India – all of who happen to be women! ... they responded immediately in the midst of all their professional, personal and celebratory commitments – calling up from New Delhi (where most of them are based), messaging information, digging out seminal texts and reading out pages over the phone, and mailing across some vital insights on trends in women’s writing based on their individual and not inconsiderable experience in publishing. For all this, a big thanks to Anita Roy (Zubaan Books), Anushka Ravishankar, Sayoni Basu (Scholastic) and Vatsala Kaul (Penguin India).

I found a picture emerging that reaffirmed quite a few of my own observations as a woman writer in India. Firstly, children’s writing in India has been almost exclusively a woman’s preserve: and while male authors do send in full-length novel submissions for the middle-graders in the detective and fantasy genre, “the babies are left to the women!” There are a few exceptions of-course.

Vatsala Kaul of Penguin India once edited a hugely popular children’s magazine *Target*, published by the India Today group through the eighties up until the early nineties. The women writers of the generation that contributed to *Target* were, according to Vatsala, “mavericks” who deftly “avoided the cutesy, starry, pink trap – and were very sensitive to gender issues as well as to stereotyping.” Some of those writers – Poile Sengupta, Margaret Bhatt, Sigrun Shrivastav and Paro Anand – are still writing for children. They were also, according to Vatsala, “the pioneers of writing specifically for Indian children and getting away from John, Jane and a dog called Spots.” By writing humorous, universal stories against an Indian milieu, they probably helped provide an alternative to the Enid Blytons and Three Investigators that children like me devoured!

Today no self-respecting kid in India reads Enid Blyton as much as Harry Potter. And so perhaps in response, the offerings for children by women writers is looking increasingly varied.

Anita Roy emphatically believes “there’s been something of a sea-change in Indian women’s writing.” While earlier women writers stuck to ‘women’s subjects’, increasingly, you find their presence in genres as diverse as travel writing and detective fiction.

Kalpna Swaminathan is the author of a crime-fiction series featuring the woman detective Lalli and the author of many other kinds of books, some in partnership with Ishrat Syed, together this team is known by the pseudonym Kalpish Ratna – their latest collaboration being *Nyagrodha: The Ficus Chronicles*, a “magical retelling” of the Panchatantra, one of India’s most favoured resources when it comes to good old-fashioned stories with a moral. Best of all Kalpna does all this writing – and she is amazingly prolific – in her off-hours from being a busy surgeon based in Mumbai!

On the poetry front, things seem bright despite a lack of interest in poetry titles and the demon of self-publishing. Sahitya Akademi (India’s National Academy of Letters) gave women’s poetry in English a huge fillip by launching a couple of schemes to commemorate its golden jubilee in 2004. One scheme led to the collection of women’s poetry in two-in-one volumes (poets Anna Sujatha Mathai and Priya Sarukkai Chabria have come together in one such). The second is the Navodaya scheme for women poets under 40 who have not had a poetry book out.

Other interesting writers include Shivani Singh who writes historical fiction such as *The Raja is Dead*; Abha Davesar “writing boldly and confidently about sex and sexuality”; Priya Sarukkai Chabria writing the sci-fiction novel *Or Else...* set in the 24th century ... and *A Life Less Ordinary*, in which Baby Halder, a domestic servant, writes the story of her own life, a story of survival and courage. This last has been published by Zubaan, an independent house that grew out of Kali for Women, Indian’s first feminist publishing house set up by writer and publisher Urvashi Butalia. ‘Zubaan’ – an Urdu word, has multiple layers of meaning. Literally, it means ‘tongue’, but it also means ‘speech’, ‘language’, ‘dialect’. In other words here is a publishing house that offers women writers a platform to express themselves, to speak, to be heard. And while feminist houses like Zubaan, Women Unlimited and the Kolkata-based Stree concentrate on ensuring an output of serious academic work in gender studies, translations and fiction, it is the mainstream publishers who have jumped on the bandwagon of ‘chick lit’ – popularized by none other than *Bridget Jones’s Diary!* ... “‘chick lit’, whilst not producing great literary texts, shows younger women writing about the lighter things in life, about modern urban realities”, ... “a picture is emerging where the oppressed, repressed, child-married, dowry-harassed, frustrated

housewife is giving way to empowered, professional, confident heroines who are not afraid to admit to their flaws, whilst not being entirely limited by them.” The one genre that continues to stay neglected is that of short fiction. But this article, dealing as it does only with women’s writing in English in India, leaves 21 other languages to be explored.

--Sampurna Chattarji, 2007 Mumbai, India

Poetry in the Mirror
A vision of feminine lyric writing in Venezuela in the last 40 years. In homage to Julio Miranda.

Taught by Mharía Vázquez Benarroch

Organized by PEN of Venezuela in alliance with the Book Bank

Duration: 4 sessions Hours: 5 to 7 pm on Thursday

Dates: October 19, October 26, November 2, November 11, 2006.

Objective: To make known the powerful and multifaceted chorus that lyric writing of Venezuelan women has become in the last 40 years. An overview of the themes, motives and circumstances which make it different, giving rise to a literature with a new impulse in the affirmation of the feminine.

Contents:

- a. The lover, singular and multiple (María Calcaño, Emira Rodríguez, Enriqueta Arvelo, Mariela Álvarez, Ana Enriqueta Terán, Verónica Jaffé).
- b. Writing one’s body, one’s house and internal exile (María Auxiliadora Álvarez, Maritza Jiménez, Jacqueline Goldberg, Sonia González).
- c. Brevity as the extension of a poem, as the reiteration of fertile silence (Cecilia Ortiz, Edda Armas, Margarita Arribas, Laura Charco).
- d. The archetypal splendor of devastated love (Hanni Ossott, María Fernanda Palacios, Manon Kubler, The generation of the 80s).
- e. Ritual versus the asphyxiating customs of domesticity (María Clara Salas, Reina Varela, Margara Rusotto, Blanca Streponi).
- f. The metaphoricization of existential hopelessness: the woman coelacanth, the moss woman, the vampire woman, the saint (Helena Vera, Miyó Vestrini, Yolanda Pantin, Patricia Guzmán).

RENCONTRE 2006 – International PEN dialogue
‘Les femmes dans la littérature aujourd’hui’
Christine De Luca

Do women writers bring something distinctive to Scottish poetry? Do we address different subject matter, from a different perspective or have a different use of language from men?

In the recent anthology *Modern Scottish Women Poet*’ the editor Dorothy McMillan reminds us that the voice of women poets was hardly heard in Scotland before the 1960’s. For example women poets barely featured in anthologies. She suggests that women poets in Scotland today have broken down the barriers and have found their place, more or less.

She does not argue that Scottish women poets have tended to use language differently but she does point to themes or subject matter where the voices are distinctively female. She mentions four such themes:

Nature: here the woman’s voice is about respecting the otherness of nature as well as valuing its perceived beauties.

Public events: whether war or calamity, the female has something distinctive to say, particularly in that intersection between the private and the public.

And of course, love. McMillan suggests all Scottish women are in the shadow of Robert Burns as the great love lyricist, but women too have woven love poems. Increasingly they are giving themselves permission to write about love, sometimes about the less than romantic, more gritty type of relationship. But Scots don’t find it easy to be confessional.

Perhaps in particular they write about motherhood: some in homage to mothers and grandmothers and community, some exploring the pitfalls of such relationships. And the experience of motherhood itself.

There is little rampant feminism but there’s plenty of confident female writing

which ensures that our voices will be heard in the future. Hopefully there will be no need for an anthology specifically for women poets in the future.

How close are we today to that future?

Some facts:

PEN's membership in Scotland has almost identical numbers of male and female writers listed at 120 each!

Publishing & publishers' nominations for prizes: 4 UK examples

Carcanet (mainly poetry publishing, mainly but not exclusively contemporary):

Of 375 listed authors with initial A-K (ie a sample), 78 are women **(21%)**

Peterloo (mainly contemporary poetry) Of 119 listed authors, 30 are women (25%)

Bloodaxe (more leading-edge contemporary poetry but also prose) Of 150 listed authors with initial A-K (ie a sample), 66 were women (44)

Pan MacMillan Prize winners eg Booker nominations, Whitbread, Forward poetry prize, Geoffrey Faber Memorial prize etc) from 1995, 16 of 63 listed were women (25%)

Literary festivals: 2 Scottish examples

The Edinburgh Book Festival in 2005 - a range of authors drawn from all genres and from all over the world were invited, but for every woman taking part there were two men. And this despite a female director and a fairly gender-balanced board of directors. (33%)

Similarly, at the recent 2006 Stanza Poetry Festival: Scotland's biggest poetry festival, 64 poets are listed in the catalogue. Of these again only 1 in 3 are women. (33%)

And where names are highlighted to advertise these festivals, an even slightly lower percentage of the names are female. I would, however, be surprised if these festivals did not find that their audiences were often more female than male.

And, more light-heartedly, in relation to the public display of poets' work The Canongait wall of the new Scottish Parliament features a mosaic of inscribed slabs of poetic texts, beautifully cut into a range of stone slabs of varying geology. There are 24 texts (so far) and not one of them is from a female writer, nor does any refer to women.

These facts exemplify something I fear is still all too typical. Somewhere along the line, quantitatively at least, women's writing is less visible than men's. Perhaps we don't write as much? (And juggling family and work commitments might justify that). Perhaps we don't put forward as many manuscripts to agents and publishers? Perhaps there are gatekeepers in the publishing world who make decisions which validate men's writing more than women's? Perhaps what we write is less sellable?

While we recognise there were real barriers historically to women having manuscripts published (some women adopting male pseudonyms to get round this problem), it is difficult to see why there should be any such barrier in the contemporary

(western) world.

Perhaps it is similar across other art forms such as music or the visual arts?

(I remember with some fascination when in Paris in mid 1990's visiting the Louvre, Musée D'Orsay and the Gallery of Modern Art in that order and being so shocked at the lack of art by women, even in the Gallery of Modern Art that I wrote a poem!)

Just recently, possibly the best-known contemporary female visual artist in Britain, Tracey Emin, was involved in making a TV programme about women artists. This programme explored the phenomenon that prices for art by females are lower than for their male counterparts. However what she found most shocking was that, when she interviewed people as they went into the Tate Gallery in London, asking them to name 3 women artists, not one could meet the challenge! Invisibility again it would appear. (Sadly Ms Emin is known more for her self-confessed drinking and swearing than for her art: which perhaps tells us something about the all pervasive 'celebrity culture' in the UK today!)

In all forms of writing it must be important to have a re-balancing of the male/female output, acceptance and valuing: whether in literary writing or in writing which explores the experience of women in history, or in contemporary society through journalism and the media.

Broadly I think women bring to writing what they bring to other aspects of human endeavour: balance, openness, willingness to listen and empathise, unwillingness to rush to a quick decision. They are journalists, critics, travel writers and biographers. They are poets, dramatists and short story tellers. They write novels in a range of genres: science fiction, detective & crime, fantasy, historical, romance and so on. And they write copiously for children. But they often want to write about daily and domestic lives, the value of relationship, the links across generations and societies. Often the strength is in how it touches on the humanness within us and transforms how we feel and act.

Compared to men, Scottish women writers may not have so much publishing success, so many nominations for this or that glittering prize, but I hope and believe that, today, they are moving in the right direction without compromising what they want to write about or how they write it.