

To: SA PEN Members
E-Newsletter No. 7/2014 – 04/05/2014



**THE SOUTH AFRICAN CENTRE OF
 PEN INTERNATIONAL**

A World Association of Writers

P O Box 732, Constantia, 7848, Cape Town
 Nonprofit Organisation Registration Number 069-564-NPO
 SARS Tax Exemption Reference No. PBO930031735

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www.sapen.co.za or <http://www.facebook.com/southafricanpen>

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Book Launches – *Holding Back* by Gus Ferguson & *Heaven* by Douglas Reid Skinner – 8th May & 14th May 2014, Cape Town

SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH POETRY SERIES

GUS FERGUSON has published eight collections of poems, two books of cartoons and two popular books for children. He edits the poetry journal, *Carapace*.

"With a few magical strokes of the pen—in both his poetry and cartoons—Gus Ferguson gives us a unique vision of the world. His whimsical musings on aspects of living and loving, on growing old and enlightenment, and the lot of spouses, poets and publishers, combine wit and wisdom, playfulness and profundity. His is a truly original and universal voice, a vital contribution to South African poetry." **MARCIA LEVESON**

HOLDING BACK : New & Selected Poems
 GUS FERGUSON (Left Field Poetry, 2014)
 ISBN 978-0-620-60115-3 96pp, R150

HEAVEN : New & Selected Poems, DOUGLAS REID SKINNER (Left Field Poetry, 2014)
 ISBN 978-0-620-60116-0 96pp, R150

THE
BOOK LOUNGE

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LEFT
FIELD
POETRY

invite you to the launch of

Holding Back : New & Selected Poems
 GUS FERGUSON

Heaven : New & Selected Poems
 DOUGLAS REID SKINNER

DOUGLAS REID SKINNER has published five collections of poems and one book of translations. Using a wide range of forms and styles, he explores the uncertainty and transience of being, striving to understand what it means to be human through poems of childhood, family, landscape, history, politics, memory, time and death.

"A life's work comes together here, brick slotted to brick, all cohering. From early to late this is poetry that has the courage, artistic as well as moral, to see things exactly as they are." **J M COETZEE**

VENUE The Book Lounge
 71 Roeland Street
 Cnr Buitenkant &
 Roeland Streets

DATE Thursday 8th May 2014

TIME 5.30 for 6pm

RSVP booklounge@gmail.com
 or Tel 021 462 2425

out of left field : from an unexpected source or direction

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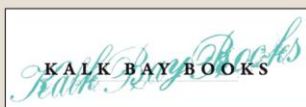


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invite you to the launch of

Holding Back : New & Selected Poems

GUS FERGUSON

Heaven : New & Selected Poems

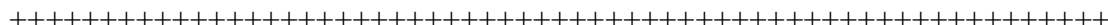
DOUGLAS REID SKINNER



VENUE Kalk Bay Books
Majestic Village
124 Main Road
Kalk Bay 7975

DATE Wednesday 14th May 2014
TIME 6 for 6.30pm
RSVP events@kalkbaybooks.co.za
or Tel 021 788 2266

out of left field : from an unexpected source or direction



Book Launch – *Twelve + One*, 8th May 2014, Johannesburg

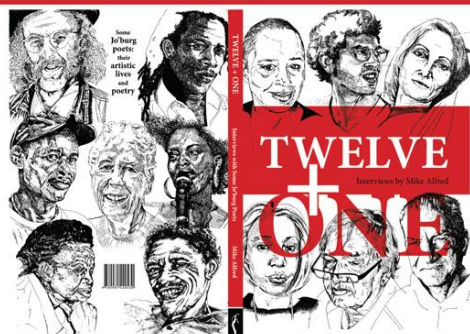


BOTSOTSO

invites you to the launch of

TWELVE + ONE

a collection of interviews conducted by the well-established poet Mike Alfred with 12 other Joburg based poets.



The interviews cover the lives and artistic development of Jane Fox, Frank Meintjies, Philippa Yaa de Villiers, Ike Mboneni Mula, Gail Dendy, Ahmed Patel, Lebohlang Nova Masango, Lionel Murrcott, Makhosazana Xaba, Siphwe ka Ngwenya, Mandi Poefficient Vundla, Allan Kolski Horwitz as well as Mike himself.

Each interview also contains several poems which illustrate the core themes and styles of the poet.

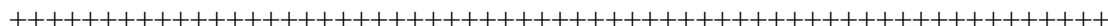
TIME
6 for 6.30pm

DATE
8 May 2014

VENUE
Wits Writing Centre
(in the same building as the Wartenweiler Library)
East Campus,
University of the Witwatersrand

The launch will be addressed by **Prof Keorapetse Kgotsile**
(Poet Laureate of South Africa)

Join SA PEN members Gail Dendy, Philippa Yaa de Villiers and Keorapetse Kgotsile at the launch of the anthology *Twelve + One*.



Book Launch – *Sister Moon* by Kirsten Miller, 15th May 2014, Amanzimtoti

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Notice of SA PEN electronic AGM – 29th May 2014 – and call for executive committee member nominations

An email has been sent out advising all members that the SA PEN electronic Annual General Meeting will take place on the 29th May 2014. Please contact the Secretary at rudebs@icon.co.za if you did not receive the email.

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Franschhoek Literary Festival - 16th to 18th May 2014

Event no. 33. Friday, 16th May 16-17.00

SA PEN event – the importance of reading. Margie Orford (Chair), Carole Bloch, Mark Heywood and Elinor Sisulu.

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SAVE THE DATE – the next PEN Dialogue event will take place on the **19th May**, at The Book Lounge, Cape Town. The theme of this event will be *Politics of Publishing and Bookselling*.

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March & April letter from John Ralston Saul, International President, to the PEN membership

April 22, 2014

Dear PEN Members, Dear friends,

I hope you won't mind a more personal monthly letter. I am just back from Burma, now Myanmar, for the first time in a quarter century. From 1980 through much of the '80's I was often there, in different guises, writing on the terrible situation. The military dictatorship, in power since 1962, had dragged a naturally rich country down into poverty. They had somehow removed Burma from the map of the world. It was hard to visit, legally or illegally. The maximum stay was one week. Rangoon – now Yangon – was crumbling. Almost no one wrote about the situation in the media or in books – a handful of Burmese in exile, like Wendy Law-Yone; a Swedish journalist out of Bangkok, Bertil Lintner; a few others including myself. None of us were welcome after a few critical articles.

This return visit was of course quite different. I met with our former Writers in Prison case, Aung San Suu Kyi, and had a long complex discussion with senior government officials. Most important, I spent a lot of time with the members of our remarkable new Myanmar PEN Centre led by Dr. Ma Thida, another former PEN case, as were Myo Myint Nyein, and Nay Phone Latt, both also on the Centre's Board.

There is no denying that much has changed. There are independent publications and publishers. There are new roads and buildings, including an entire new capital city, and investments of all sorts, in part from returning exiles.

Free speech is of course a more fundamental yet delicate element of any civilization. It requires fair laws, governmental restraint, solid public structures and independent enforcement.

Last year PEN International's Publisher's Circle held a workshop in Yangon to help emerging Myanmar publishers. This March we took up these issues again. I was travelling with John Makinson, Chair of Penguin Random House, Jo Lusby, head of Penguin in China and for part of the time Marketa Hejkalová of Hejkal publishing, member of the PEN International Board.

It was clear from our meeting with Myanmar publishers that they feel held back by a shortage of literary translators – whether to and from international languages or among internal languages. Translator programs exist to help on this front and we agreed to focus on this. We also sat down for a day with PEN members to hear about their situation, with many thanks to the British Council.

Ma Thida took me to meet U Win Tin, in hospital, the great journalist who had spent 19 years in terrible conditions in prison for his part in launching the democracy movement in 1988. In his mid 80's, calm, speaking with an optimistic clarity, he has been a remarkable model for others. For all of us. A moment ago, while writing these words about my few days in Myanmar, I learned that he had just died. And yet he is fixed in my mind as one of those rare examples of humans whose strength of character, ethical solidity and intellectual clarity,

allowed him to rise above suffering and so be able to stick to his course.

One of PEN Myanmar's most important initiatives is to travel in groups to small towns and cities and invite local writers to come to a public place and read their works. We went in the back of a truck to Shwepyitha Township. A small library filled up with old and young, women and men. We all sat on the mats, legs folded underneath. One after another, people rose, many who had probably never thought it possible to stand in public and read their work. This was the most moving, and yes, uplifting moment of my trip to Myanmar.

People are probably tired of hearing me say that literature and freedom of expression are one and the same thing. Inseparable. And that free expression is as much about reading as writing, listening as speaking. Yet, there it was, all wrapped together in a tiny library in a provincial town in Myanmar.

* * *

We flew to Naypyidaw, the rather surreal new capital. John Makinson, the Canadian Ambassador Mark McDowell, Nandana Sen and myself, met first with the Minister of Information, Aung Kyi, and the Deputy Minister, Ye Htut. Both are key figures in the changes underway, Aung Kyi was the Government's initial link to Aung San Suu Kyi. And Ye Htut is the principle voice of the government, constantly engaging in public argument. It was a long and complex meeting. PEN International's messages had to do with problems in both the press Law and the new Printers and Publisher's Law; with the existence of criminal libel Law based on a 1861 British Law. Libel should

not be a criminal offence. There is a need for an access to information law. The copyright law is weak. Myanmar needs to sign the international copyright law. Four journalists have been arrested under a 1923 secrets act in confusing circumstances. The case should simply be dropped. And we discussed at length the shutting down of access to Rohengya where there are ethnic problems and violence.

On all of these fronts there were reassurances or disagreements. But it was a proper conversation and we will continue to press these issues. Our central message is that reforms work when they are fair, clear, firm. Transparency is the key.

Finally, we had a good meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi in her parliamentary office. Of course there are now a multitude of political issues on the table. But having been involved in the initial taking up of her case when she was first detained, I felt this meeting was in one sense the completion of a circle.

What will happen next is quite a different matter. All of us must be careful not to draw rapid conclusions about the situation in Myanmar. It would be foolish to deny that there have been enormous improvements. On the other hand, the military have ceded no essential element of power. And so things could go either way. Our obligation is to keep working with our colleagues on the ground for a strengthening of fair laws impartially enforced. And transparency.

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From Yangon I went to Bangkok to see our Thai PEN Centre and to meet some of the new generation of Thai writers.

But first a few words on two of Thailand's most remarkable figures, with whom I became friends almost forty years ago. Sulak Sivaraksa is thought of as the leader of the Engaged Buddhists movement in South East Asia. He is a wonderful writer of Buddhist philosophy aimed at social justice and peace. Over the decades he has been arrested, in disfavour, spoken out against dictators at great risk, in exile, unjustly charged by military strongmen and, of course, a PEN Honorary member. He lives in Bangkok, but by chance when I was in Yangon he was there, celebrating his 83rd birthday. He remains as forceful as ever, still speaking up and writing for causes which parallel the PEN Charter. Still unbending, unstoppable. And it was an honour for me to make the toast to him at the celebration organized by the Myanmar literary figure, Ko Tar.

In Bangkok I stayed in Klong Toey slum with Father Joe Maier, the wonderful slum priest who has worked with Buddhist monks and Imams for half a century in this enormous dock area. He created the first AIDS hospice in Thailand, runs schools, health programs. Above all, he has always stood up for these people. He also publishes stories about the slum dwellers.

Thanks to the publisher, Trasvin Jittidecharak, I was able to sit down with some of Thailand's successful younger writers, translators and

publishers, including Uthis Haemamool, who is the incoming editor of *The Writer*, an important literary magazine. Others included Zakariya Amataya, Pahd Pasiigon and Anuk Pitukthanin.

The next day I met with Thai PEN. It is a busy centre which concentrates on literary criticism and plays a role in an important literary prize, the S.E.A. Write Award. For some time the leadership of the PEN Centre has been made up of senior academics. I had a fascinating conversation with the current president, Professor Thaweesak Pinthong and two former presidents, Professor Soranat Tailanga and Professor Trisilpa Boonkhachorn. We talked about the importance of building up a regional approach involving Thai, Cambodian and Myanmar PEN. There is a dramatic need for cooperation and mutual support. There are refugee questions, free expression questions, translation challenges, the need for exchanges and other kinds of mutual support. The Myanmar and Cambodian Centres are fully engaged at the international level and we hope that Thai PEN will engage with them in a balance of writers, publishers, and academics of all generations on those essential literary and free expression issues.

Best wishes to you all,

John Ralston Saul
International President

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Had a book published recently? Attended or participated in a Festival? Won an award? Achieved a personal milestone of note? The compiler would welcome any news of your activities for future issues of the SA PEN e-newsletter. Please e-mail your contributions to rudebs@icon.co.za.

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Forthcoming events

- ❖ **Chipping Campden Literature Festival** – 6th to 11th May 2014.
www.campdenlitfest.co.uk
- ❖ **The dancing in other words Spier Poetry Festival** – 9th & 10th May 2014.
Stellenbosch. www.spierpoetryfestival.co.za
- ❖ **London Radical Bookfair & Alternative Press Takeover 2014** – 10th May 2014. London. www.londonradicalbookfair.wordpress.com/
- ❖ **Franschhoek Literary Festival** – 16th to 18th May 2014. www.flf.co.za. **SA PEN Event** to be held on the 16th May
- ❖ **SA PEN Dialogue** – Politics of Publishing and Bookselling – 19th May 2014
- ❖ **Kingsmead Book Fair** – 24th May 2014, Kingsmead College, Johannesburg.
www.kingsmead.co.za/bookfair
- ❖ **South African Book Fair (formerly the Cape Town Book Fair)** – 13th to 15th June 2014, Cape Town. www.capetownbookfair.co.za
- ❖ **National Short Story Day** - 21st June 2014. www.shortstorydayafrica.org
- ❖ **National Arts Festival** - 3rd to 13th July 2014, Grahamstown.
www.nationalartsfestival.co.za. **SA PEN will be participating in an event.** Details to follow.

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Members' Publications

Heaven: New & Selected Poems by Douglas Reid Skinner

Douglas Reid Skinner has published five collections of poems and one book of translations. Using a wide range of forms and styles, he explores the uncertainty and transience of being, striving to understand what it means to be human through poems of childhood, family, landscape, history, politics, memory, time and death.

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