

Newsletter

2003

CENTER FOR WRITERS-IN-EXILE—AMERICAN BRANCH

AUTUMN

In the balmy fall weather, surrounded by a multitude of multicolored, wondrous autumn leaves, we seem to forget the countless weather-related horrors of late, but hey, that's the way it should be. Again I must begin with a humble apology: the Newsletter is a bit late, but we'll make up for the delay with more substance.

By the time you read this, the 69th epoch-making Congress will be history. Mexico City is hosting the event where a new International President, **Jiri Grusa** will be elected. In addition, several Chairs and Board Members are to

Notes from the President

be elected too, the PEN Charter amended, Rules and Regulations expanded, etc. almost everything is about to be changed. The program, featuring the theme: "Cultural Diversity and Freedom of Expression" also heralds exciting moments/hours indeed. Our Winter issue will provide a detailed report for you.

Our WiPC has been busy as usual sending telegrams, faxes, e-mails to various governments on

behalf of imprisoned or harassed colleagues. Since our Honorary Members have luckily been released, we shall elect new ones: **Victor Ivashkevich** of Belarus and **Amir Abbaz Fakh-ravar** of Iran. (Background information will follow).

2003 is closing soon; don't enter the new year with a debt: send your dues of \$45.00 to Ms. Iryna Dybko and your address change and activity reports to me.

If we run out of time once more, I wish you in advance a joyous holiday season and all the very best.

Clara Gyorgyey

Annual Spring Meeting 2003

Respectfully submitted
by
Dorothea T. Weissman

May 16, 2003 in the **Thornton Wilder Room of Yale Club of New York.**

The meeting was called to order at 5:15 P.M.

Present were: *Tadeusz Chabrowski, Eugenia Dimer, Anna Frajlich, Vladimir Gutkovskiy, Clara Gyorgyey, Vasyil Makhno, András Márton*

(*guest*), *Felix Reinstein, Stanislav Sokolov, Boris Vetrov, Dorothea Tsung Weissman.*

President Gyorgyey opened the meeting; explained the reasons for the delays (inclement weather) and went on with announcements. Both Honorary Members have been released.

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NEW MEMBERS

Annual Spring Meeting 2003 (Cont.)

The Bled Conference is an annual event in May hosted by the Peace Committee of PEN which was founded by the Slovenian PEN Center 20 years ago. The Slovenes are kind, gentle people living in a beautiful country of snowcapped mountains and green fields. Bled, the capital, is a small resort town built around a lovely lake with a small island on which nestles a monastery. The serenity and charm of the place seemed to cast its spell on the meeting itself.

The themes were: "Brave New World" (Huxley) and "An Eye for an Eye and the Whole World Will Go Blind" (Gandhi). The first theme was elaborated on by the Portuguese poet, *Casimiro de Brito*, in his keynote address. He was joined by *Kjell Olaf Jenson* of Norway, *Edvard Kovac* of Slovenia, each bemoaning the multitude of ecological crimes and the fact that the TV screen and computer have signaled a return to the cult of the image that characterized the Middle Ages. French PEN President *Sylvestre Clancier* spoke with Gallic clarity opining that what the world needs most in these difficult times is fraternity.

The distinguished Hungarian playwright, *Miklós Hubay* cited a part from Huxley's novel where a genetic

New ones to be elected. WiPC's report was discussed. Alarming events in Cuba; action planned. Faxes sent to India, Pakistan, Ukraine, Turkey, Iran, Cuba, China and

Vietnam to protest. — Financial report was read. — Membership drive was announced. — Announcement of the Mexico Congress. — Cultural news read. — Members

reported about their activities and recent books. — Materials from London were distributed. The meeting adjourned at 6:45 P.M.

Report on the Writers' Conference in Bled, 2003

manipulator describes Polish, French and German languages as dead tongues. He spoke of his fear of the disappearance of small languages. *Thor Williamson* of Iceland, *Andrej Detela* of Slovenia, *Mirko Mirkovich* of Croatia and *Philippe Pujas* of France reiterated the same

idea peppered with a few political references.

The following day was devoted to the Ghandi theme. *Ana Blandiana* of Romania, in her customary passionate, lyrical style pointed out the divine contradiction between "Pax vobiscum" and "I have not come to bring peace, but the sword." In the same spirit, *Teresa Schna* of Portugal called for a militant pacifism to counter violence or apathy. Both *Claudine Helft*, a French poet, and Bosnian writer *Zdenko Lesic* warned against the eternal cycle of violence.

In general it was a mighty pleasant meeting. The beauty of the setting cast a balm on the spirit. The weather too cooperated: it was balmy, sunny, idyllic. Our welcome was warm, hospitable, and efficient; the food and booze were lavish and delicious. Everything seemed to combine (as does the country itself) the best of both East and West.

Elizabeth Csicsery-Ronay

Preliminary Program Objectives: The Congress aims to reflect the diversity of languages and literatures, especially of the Americas, and as such will include some rarely-heard literary voices. At the same time, the Congress seeks to expand PEN's presence in Latin America and strengthen the collaboration between the new

69th International Congress, November 22–29, 2003, Mexico City

PEN Centers in the various countries of Central

and South America.
General Themes: Cultural

Diversity and Freedom of Expression.

Official Activities: Assembly of Delegates and Meetings of Committees.

Literary Activities: Round Tables and Readings by Special Guests in the Palacio de Bellas Artes, National Archive, Diego Rivera Mural Museum and other venues. Detailed report in the next Newsletter.

News of Our Writers-in-Prison Committee

Here are some disquieting statistics compiled by the London office of WiPC:

The compiled story of six months, from January to June, 2003

Writers and Journalists

Killed: 10, disappeared: 13, in prison: 214, on trial: 254, threatened: 31, released: 27!!!

- The crackdown in Cuba led to a rapid arrest of over 80 dissidents in March;
- Of the 80 no fewer than 34 writers and journalists were sentenced to long prison terms.
- Incarcerations continue on a large scale in Vietnam.

News

No consensus was reached at the 47th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. PEN was represented by **Lucina Kathmann** and our own **Dorothea Tsung Su (Weissman)**. Their report is heartrending. Just one example: each year 2 mil-

lion girls between the ages of 5 and 15 are introduced into the commercial sex market. Violence accounts for more death among them than ill health, even cancer. Solidarity between the sexes is urgently needed.

The American PEN Center granted the 2003 Barbara Goldsmiths Freedom to Write Awards to Tunisian writer **Zouhair Yahyaoui** and Cuban journalist **Bernardo Arevalo Padron**. These awards honor international literary figures who have been persecuted or imprisoned for exercising or defending the right to freedom of expression.

Residence for writers at the bucolic Le Chateau de Lavigny near Lausanne, Switzerland, is offered again. For application forms and conditions contact our President.

Announcing The David T.K. Wong Short Story Prize for Fiction. It was won by **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** from the PEN Centre USA West for the story: "Half of a Yellow Sun." Deadline for the next competition is the Fall of 2004.

Vermont Studio Center 2004 — Residencies are offered again to our members. The fastest way is to visit their website: www.vermontstudiocenter.org. You can also write to VSC. PO Box 613, Johnson, VT 05656.

The American Library of Congress awarded the \$1 million Kluge Prize to the 76-year-old **Leszek Kolakowski**, the noted Polish philosophy professor who now lives in retirement in England, teaches an annual course for Polish students at Oxford University. Author of over 30 books, Kolakowsky writes in Polish, French, English and German.

Our loyal friend **Kate Barazetti** has sent us again the headlines about abuses against women around the world. The following were excerpted from the last 4 months' releases:

- RWANDA: 14-year-old girl sentenced to lashes.
- TURKEY: death threats to police rape victims.
- INDIA: dowry demand leads to death of bride.
- ARAB STATES: 5 million girls are missing in schools.
- MEXICO: 258 Juarez Women were murdered since 1993.
- KENYA: 650 documented allegations of rapes against UK forces.
- GREECE: no justice for trafficking victims who suffered police rape.
- IRAQUE: over 400 women had been kidnapped and raped.
- PHILIPPINES: several children are on death row.
- SLOVAKIA: lack of government action on forced Roma sterilization.
- SOUTH AFRICA: the greatest challenge to war on AIDS is "machismo."
- BRAZIL: US cancels all HIV programs.

Newsletters from the Taipei, Japan, Burma, and Esperanto, and other centers are available upon request.

- We are hoping an Afghan and an Iraque PEN Centre will be established soon.
- In Mexico there will be a new Chair elected for the International WiPC
- The 5th International WiPC Conference will be held in May, 2004 in Barcelona.
- In the months following the Congress there will be an Iranian, Columbian and Turkish Campaign scheduled.
- **Trevor Mostyn** of the English PEN visited Egypt this year and met with our former Honorary Member, the long-imprisoned writer and professor **Saad al-Din Ibrahim**. They met in Maadi, a tree-lined suburb of Cairo where he now resides with his wife Barbara — a far cry from the more than a year jail-time in the horrible prison of Torah. Dr. **Ibrahim** is back in his own form by now.
- **Jutka Eموke Barabas**, the hard-working Chair of our WiPC is taking a leave of absence because of health reasons. Pres. **Gyorgyey** will be working with Prof. **Stasys Gustautas** on cases, for the time being, but if any of you would like to give us a helping hand, it would be greatly appreciated.

Your Activities

The listing below is in order of receipt of the news item. If you want coverage here advise our President of your activities, new publications, awards, or any events that might interest our readers.

Our most loyal and generous Argentina/Israel-based member, **Jose Moskovits**, has been instrumental in the wide-spread celebration/commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Numerous books and other publications, along with a beautiful commemorative stamp, had been issued in Argentina as a result of his painstaking organization and generosity. Thank you for sending us the material.

Since 2000, Dr. **Roman V. Kuchar** has been publishing a highly successful periodical, *Literary Mosaics* (Verkhovyna - "The Highland,"), an outlet for writings of fellow Ukrainian authors. Members are encouraged to send material to Dr. Kuchar: P.O.Box 335, Victoria, KS 67671.

Executive Member, **Nina Kossman** was accepted as member of the American PEN Center in May. Congratulations. We hope you won't neglect us though!

The Bowery Poetry Club of New York City announced the release of their latest tome: *Swimming in the Ground*, An Anthology of Contemporary Hungarian Poetry in English. It presents works of our members; **Gabor Gyukics**, a noted poet is co-editor/translator. The editors conducted several readings in New York and vicinity. Best wishes for further success.

Teodor Volynsky has seen the publication of his latest volume of poetry and stories about his hometown Kiev, titled: *Ruin is Running over the Waves* (New York: Gstanislav Company, 2003). Keep up the good work.

Simon Kontorovich-Lempert published his sixth book in America, *Three Beginnings; Sky. Earth. Man* (Hartford, CT: Komwest Publishers, 2003), both in English and Russian. Bravo, Simon.

The International Library of Poetry bestowed upon our Executive Member, **Boris Vetrov** the Editor's Choice Award for outstanding achievement in Poetry. Our sincere congratulations, dear Boris.

Our London-based poet **Eva Salzman**'s poem "Brooklyn Bridge" was featured as "the poem of the day;" it is from the collection *One Two II* (London: Wrecking Ball Press, 2003), a Poetry Book Society Special Commendation, which also earned the author a Writer's Award from the Arts Council of England. Her earlier collections are *The English Earthquake* by Bloodaxe and *Bargain with the Watchman* by Oxford Press. Best wishes for many more kudos to come.

Anatole Shepievker is announcing the release of his new volume in Odessa in the Ukraine: *The New Times*, a collection of 45 short stories written in Russian. He is ready to publish his commentaries about Kabbala, incantation and other manifestations of spiritual life entitled: *Commentary* at the end of this year. Good luck!

Felix Reinstein, formerly of St. Petersburg, was named "Poet of the Year, 2003" by the International Society of Poets; he also won the Spring Convention Award, including International Poet of Merit Silver Award Bowl and the Bronze Commemorative Medallion. Mr. Reinstein's poems have appeared in numerous anthologies and literary periodicals both in the USA and in Russia. Bravo!

We are happy report about the latest collections of short poems and stories of our Executive Member, **Manuel Duran**. These artistic, elegant, slim volumes are gems: *The Secret*, a short story, *Listen! The Wind!* and *Take no Prisoners* are collections of poems; each published in St. Petersburg, Florida by the Bright Waters Press. We hope to read scores more, soon.

Board member, **Anna Frajlich-Zajac** visited her native Poland last summer, she had 4 poetry readings in Warsaw, Krakow and Torun, delivered a talk "Writing Polish in America (sponsored by the Polish PEN Center) and, last but not least, she had an opportunity to visit two Nobel Prize Laureates, our Vice-President **Czeslaw Milosz** and, also in Krakow, **Wislaw Szymborska** and her friends, talking about poetry. Despite his age (92) and recent losses (wife & younger brother), Mr. Milosz is strong in spirit and very active as a writer and a moral mentor. He regularly publishes books, gives talks & interviews. According Ms. Frajlich, his recent poems are of exquisite beauty, immense wisdom and depth. We are grateful to Anna for the photos she is sharing with our members.

Professor **Adam Makkai**, the distinguished Hungarian poet will be honored in mid-November in New York's Waldorf Astoria; he is receiving the august "George Washington Award" for his life-long achievements. We are very proud of you, Adam, and wish you good health and many kudos like this.



Czesław Miłosz and Anna Frajlich in Krakow, Poland
July, 2003



Wisława Szymborska and Anna Frajlich
July, 2003

In Memoriam

We regret to inform you of the passing away of Mr. **Abram Katsnelson**, a fine Ukrainian poet, on August 21 this year. He was 90-years young. A few months before his death he was still busy publishing a large volume of poems. We shall miss him and express our sympathy to his family.

On May 5th one of our Center's oldest members and former Treasurer, Dr. **Laszlo Varga**, Member of the Hungarian Parliament, a distinguished lawyer, journalist, writer and playwright, died suddenly in an accident; he was 92-years young, in full strength and vigor. A truly great human being, he epitomized decency, humanism and patriotism. He repatriated to Hungary in 1998. — His state funeral was attended by thousands of people. We carry your memory with us, Laci. May you rest in peace.

New Members

We are delighted to welcome among us the following new members. Their introduction and literary activities will be presented in the next Newsletter.

Boris A. Kushner, from the Soviet Union, Pittsburgh, PA

Daniie Babushkin, from the Soviet Union, Brooklyn, NY

Leonid M Vaysman, from the Soviet Union, Los Angeles, CA

Leonid Dayen, from the Ukraine, Louisville, KY