

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XXIII Number 3, March 2015

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, March 26th, 7:30 PM. Monthly Meeting. We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. (This is just south of the corner with San Pasqual. Signs will be posted.) We will be planning our activities for the coming months. Please join us! Refreshments provided.

Tuesday, April 14, 7:30 PM. Letter writing meeting at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty.

Sunday, April 19, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "My Father's Ghost is Climbing in the Rain" by Patricio Pron.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi All

Happy Spring-this past weekend marks the beginning of this season and daylight savings time is here!

Rob is editing his volumes of photos and video from his December Middle East trip and we plan to have whoever is interested over to view it. Stay posted...

BTW, I read an interesting article in the New Yorker magazine about the anti-nuclear nun Stevi sends cards to in prison. Here's the link: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/03/09/break-in-at-y-12>

Con Cariño,
Kathy

RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

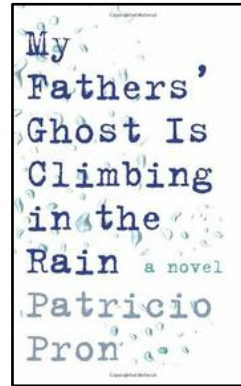
Keep up with Rights Readers at
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>

Next Rights Readers meeting:

Sunday, April 19, 6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore

695 E. Colorado, Pasadena



BOOK REVIEW

By MARCELA VALDES
JULY 5, 2013
New York Times

What Did You Do in the Dirty War?
My Fathers' Ghost Is Climbing in the Rain

by Patricio Pron

In the 1970s, during the years that Argentina's last military dictatorship was busy raping, torturing and killing thousands of the country's citizens, a large obelisk in Buenos Aires was adorned with this menacing piece of advice: - "Silence is health." That dictatorship ended in 1983, but no one recovers quickly from a bludgeon, especially not a child. The Argentine novelist Patricio Pron was born in 1975, a year before the Dirty War began. The nameless narrator of his artful novel "My Fathers' Ghost Is Climbing in the Rain" isn't merely silent; he's erased.

For eight years he has been living in Germany, popping paroxetine, benzodiazepines and sleeping pills until his mind is shot through with gaps like a censored letter. Lest we forget we're dealing with damaged goods, Pron makes the novel's very structure as perforated as our man's memory. Holes appear in its numbered fragments — a missing No. 8, say, or an elided 17 — whenever the narrator hits a snag. When he gets sick, the sequence turns feverish: 22, 11, 9, 26, 3.

Only when his father sinks into a coma, in August 2008, does this bruised soul finally return to Argentina. There he finds a photograph that disturbs his willful amnesia: Dad in sideburns next to a woman who is not the narrator's mother. Below the photo lies a folder thick with clippings about a recent missing-person case: 60-year-old Alberto José Burdisso has disappeared from the town of El Trébol; decades earlier his sister, Alicia, vanished during the military dictatorship.

"You don't ever want to know certain things," the son thinks, staring at the photo of his father and the woman, "because what you know belongs to you, and there are certain things you

never want to own." Reason enough to eat another Xanax.

But having discovered Dad's interest in Alberto and Alicia, the protagonist must find out: Who are these siblings? Why did they disappear? How is his father connected to them? And what, exactly, was Dad doing during those crucial years when Argentina's democracy imploded? Suspense swells through the early sections, as Pron nests mystery within mystery, carefully tending the big enigma: What trauma drove the narrator to Germany, and into the fuzzy comfort of pills?

For a while, our biggest clue is an elaborate metaphor about a car accident: "Once, my parents and I had an accident that I wasn't able to or hadn't wanted to remember: something crossed our path and our car spun around a few times and went off the highway, and we were now wandering through the fields, our minds blank, that shared experience the only thing uniting us. Behind us there was an overturned car in a ditch on the side of a country road, bloodstains on the seats and in the grass and on our clothes, but none of us wanted to turn around and look back, even though that was what we had to do and that was what I was trying to do as I held my father's hand in a hospital in the provinces."

Looking back. In one form or another, that's the central action in lots of novels by today's young South Americans — talented writers who grew up in the age of Operation Condor, when clandestine atrocity was as common as Coca-Cola. In books like "Perla," by Carolina De Robertis, and "Ways of Going Home," by Alejandro Zambra, a generation is gazing into the past. In all of these books, silence is an infection, and coming-of-age requires airing the secrets of dictatorship. More often than not, that cure involves investigating one's own parents.

What makes Pron's novel unusual is how far its inquiry overlaps with reality. "The events told in this book," an epilogue informs us, "are mostly true." Alicia and Alberto José Burdisso were real victims. Pron's own parents belonged to the Iron Guard, a leftist group fanatically devoted to the populist leader Juan Domingo Perón. In "My Fathers' Ghost Is Climbing in the Rain," the narrator's father starts a revolutionary newspaper and his mother knows how to make a Molotov cocktail.

These parents rank, in other words, among Argentina's vanquished, and Pron is brilliant on the topic of growing up in the aftermath of heroic collapse. What's more, Mara Faye Lethem's translation gets his tone of numbed resignation just right. "No one in my generation had fought," the narrator thinks. "Something or someone had already inflicted a defeat on us and we drank or took pills or wasted time in a thousand and one ways as a mode of hastening an end." Watching a video of his father recounting his old professional exploits, the narrator feels crushed by both pride and impotence.

Perhaps that's why the son's private project — the search for two missing persons and for his father's clouded past — turns explicitly into a "political task." The prodigal son gathers the mantle of revolution, and he admonishes his peers to do the same. All Argentines born in the 1970s, we're told, should "solve" their parents' pasts. Social crimes, he insists, should not be recounted through ordinary detective novels; one must create "an unfinished puzzle" that forces readers to become active in the search. Normal plot resolution is "condescending."

But even if one takes Pron's novel on its own terms, abandoning the desire for conventional plotting, a serious problem remains. Though his self-appointed task is to track down, as far as possible, the historical truth of his father and Alicia, in practice he avoids any uncomfortable details about his father's participation in the Iron Guard. Instead, he gives us broad strokes of history that are barely better than those available on Wikipedia.

In fact, all of the historical actors in the novel feel like translucent ghosts. None of them, except Alberto and Alicia, even get names. There's more information about Alberto Burdisso's love life in the 2000s than there is about his father's or his mother's or Alicia's - political activities.

On his Web site, Pron says he resolved the ethical difficulties of writing about family events by giving his parents veto power over his manuscript. In the end, his parents didn't kill the book (instead, his father submitted commentary to be posted on Pron's site), but I can't help wondering if that dangling veto cowed the project nevertheless. If that's the case, the pollution of silence reaches even deeper than Pron's narrator suggests. After all, many people in South America still don't want anyone to

know exactly what they were doing in the 1970s and '80s. As a relative once told me, "These things still have repercussions" — social ones if not judicial.

Yet despite its failings, Pron's novel haunts me. Its unsentimental account of what it was like for a child of defeated leftists to grow up in Argentina in the shadow of the 1970s turned my heart upside down. Every night as a young boy, the narrator dreamed about tortured animals. And every morning, before driving his children to school, the father went out alone to start the family car, hoping it wasn't rigged with a bomb.

"In the past," Pron's narrator recalls, "we had lived in a country called fear with a flag that was a face filled with dread." Though his political search yields little more than dust, he gives us a fierce portrait of the damage done to Argentina's children. He gives us the testament of the child, not the parents. That's not the story Pron declares himself to be after, but it's a potent one nevertheless.

Marcela Valdes has written for The Nation, The Washington Post, NPR.org and other publications.

AUTHOR BIO



Patricio Pron, born in 1975, is the author of three story collections and four previous novels, and he also works as a translator and critic. His fiction has appeared in *Granta*, *Zoetrope* and *The Paris Review*, and has received numerous prizes, including the Juan Rulfo Short Story Prize, the Jaén Novel Award, and the 2008 José Manuel Lara Foundation Award for one of the five best works published in Spain that year. He lives in Spain.

SECURITY WITH HUMAN RIGHTS

by Robert Adams

AIUSA released the following press release on March 18, 2015:

New Amnesty International Poll Shows Anger at U.S. Surveillance

The United States' mass surveillance of internet and mobile phone use flies in the face of global public opinion, according to a new poll published today by Amnesty International. The release marks the launch of a worldwide UnfollowMe campaign, a global initiative calling on the leaders of the U.S. and UK - as well as their close allies - to ban indiscriminate mass surveillance and intelligence sharing.

The poll, which questioned 15,000 people in 13 countries across every continent, found that 71% of respondents are strongly opposed to the United States monitoring their internet use. Meanwhile, nearly two thirds said they wanted tech companies like Google, Microsoft and Yahoo to block governments accessing their data.

The majority of U.S. citizens (63%) are against their government's surveillance scheme compared to only 20% in favor.

"International public opinion clearly supports the scale back of mass surveillance," said Steven W. Hawkins, Executive Director of Amnesty International USA.

"If he wanted to, President Obama could halt surveillance programs that are jeopardizing the privacy of tens of millions of people around the world—he has the authority. He mandated limited protections for non-citizens more than a year ago, but they still haven't come to fruition.

"Despite the President's promises of reform, mass surveillance could prove to be a permanent scar on the USA's human rights record, just like unlawful drone strikes and impunity for CIA torture."

In June 2013 whistle-blower Edward Snowden revealed that the U.S. National Security Agency was authorized to monitor phone and internet use in 193 countries around the world, collecting 5 billion records of mobile phone location a day

and 42 billion internet records – including email and browsing history – a month.

“We’ve got agencies looking through webcams into people’s bedrooms. And they’re collecting billions of cell phone location records a day,” whistle-blower Edward Snowden said on Amnesty International’s blog today. “They know where you got on the bus, where you went to work, where you slept, and what other cell phones slept with you.”

KEY FINDINGS

The enemy within?

- In the United States, less than a quarter of U.S. citizens approve of their government spying on them.
- Likewise, only 20% approve of technology companies giving the government access to data like emails, messages and social media activity.
- Among Americans aged 60 or above, the number drops even more -- only 13 percent approve of their government spying on them / nearly 75% disapprove
- Half of U.S. citizens polled approve of spying on foreign national inside the United States
- In contrast, when it came to people living around the world, support for surveillance drops 14 points, to 36% of U.S. citizens polled
- Opposition to U.S. mass surveillance strongest in Brazil, Germany
- Strongest opposition to U.S. intercepting, storing and analyzing internet use came from Brazil (80% against) and Germany (81%)
- Key US allies also oppose surveillance
- The United States shares the fruit of its mass surveillance program with Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom under the Five Eyes Alliance. Even in these countries, more than three times as many people oppose U.S. surveillance (70%) as support it (17%)

- Tech companies under pressure to help, not hinder, privacy rights
- People also think tech companies like Google, Microsoft and Facebook have a duty to secure their personal information from governments (60%) as opposed to providing the data to the authorities (26%)

Surveillance at home

- In all 13 countries covered by the poll, people do not want their own government to intercept, store and analyze their phone and internet use. On average, more than twice as many people oppose surveillance by their government (59%) as those who approved (26%).
- Most opposed to mass surveillance by their own government are people in Brazil (65%) and Germany (69%). Spain (67%), where reports that the NSA tapped 60 million Spanish phone calls were met with outrage in 2013, also topped the opposition table (67%).

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE
Gao Zhisheng
CASE CLOSED!
by Joyce Wolf

Group 22 received a message last week (March 18) from the AIUSA China Co-group telling us that Amnesty International had closed their case file for our adopted prisoner of conscience Gao Zhisheng.

Amnesty believes that further public campaigning for Gao would have little impact and might even be counter-productive. Amnesty made the decision to close Gao's case in consultation with his family.

Following Gao's release from prison in August 2014, his political rights were suspended for one year, in accordance with China's Criminal Law. The police monitor his daily activities and he cannot travel outside of Urumqi, where he now lives with his wife's family. "He also cannot issue, publish, or distribute comments,

literature, or audio and visual products, inside or outside of China's borders, that are considered harmful to the nation's honor or interests, or are otherwise harmful to society. Should he be found to have broken these rules, he could be subject to further punishment, or even investigated for criminal liability," the AIUSA China team stated.

Gao's wife, Geng He, who lives in the U.S., reports that his health has improved in recent months since his release from prison. At that time he was in terrible physical and mental condition because of years of torture and solitary confinement. He still has serious problems with his teeth, and he is not allowed to travel anywhere for the dental treatment he needs. But now he can speak coherently and his mood is optimistic. He is able to spend a lot of time reading. (Radio Free Asia: <http://www.rfa.org/english/women/recovery-02092015110136.html>)

Geng He sent Amnesty the following message: "Thank you very much to Amnesty International for its concern for Gao Zhisheng's case in the past few years. Gao Zhisheng's ability to leave prison alive and to go home was inextricably linked to Amnesty International's concern - it was your practical actions that brought hope and encouragement to human rights activists who have suffered gravely in prisons and their family members. Your help and support will bring glory to human rights work. Once again we thank you for your help and support!"

Amnesty International started campaigning for Gao in 2008. Named one of China's top ten lawyers in 2001, he incurred the wrath of the authorities for his bold defense of human rights cases, in particular, members of the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement. In 2006 he was arrested and given a suspended 3-year sentence for "inciting subversion". He was "disappeared" in 2009, shortly after his wife and children escaped to the U.S. China refused to reveal his location or status until December 2011, when China announced that Gao was beginning a 3-year prison term in Shaya Prison in remote northwestern China.

Group 22 adopted Gao's case in 2010. Since then we have tried to do actions for him nearly every month. We wrote letters to Chinese authorities, collected signatures on petitions, thanked our U.S. officials for efforts they made in his behalf, and encouraged his wife and family with our

support. Many Group 22 members read Gao's 2007 book, "A China More Just", and some of us watched the documentary about him, "Transcending Fear".

Now that Amnesty has closed Gao's case, our Group 22 efforts in his behalf are ended. But as individuals we can still support his wife and family. If you are on Facebook, please "like" the Gao Zhisheng page at <https://www.facebook.com/GaoZhishengLawyer>.

Group 22 will of course continue to support Amnesty's work on human rights in China.

My personal thanks to all who have participated in Group 22's work for Gao Zhisheng. It is my heart's desire that I may one day write another newsletter article announcing that Gao Zhisheng has at long last been reunited with Geng He and their daughter and son.

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Cameron Todd Willingham

Earlier we looked at the case of Cameron Todd Willingham's execution in 2004. That case is now in the news again. John H. Jackson, prosecutor for Mr. Willingham's case, has been formally accused of misconduct by the State Bar of Texas.

Nine arson experts found that the forensic case used to convict Mr. Willingham lacked credibility, but Mr. Jackson had a jail-house snitch, Johnny Webb, testify that Mr. Willingham confessed to putting lighter fluid around the house and then setting the fire. Mr. Webb was granted both a reduced sentence and financial aid for his testimony, one of the two main pillars - along with the faulty forensic evidence - that was used to convict and execute Mr. Willingham. Mr. Willingham's defense also did little to help him. His lawyers called one witness, a babysitter, who said Mr. Willingham loved his children. One would think in a death penalty case the defendant's lawyers would do much more for their clients, but as we've seen in other cases, this is not true.

When new forensic evidence was established, it was not included in the court files by Mr. Jackson, and after the Texas Forensic Science Commission found the prior evidence to be

faulty, then-Governor Rick Perry replaced the board's chairman and two other members.

The Marshall Project, a nonprofit, nonpartisan news organization, works on criminal justice cases they believe need to be investigated. This group and the Innocence Project have worked to bring posthumous justice to Cameron Todd Willingham. Mr. Webb told the Marshall Project that he "lied on the man because I was being forced by John Jackson to do so," and that he was told, "'You're either going to get a life sentence or you're going to testify.'" Mr. Willingham's stepmother, Eugenia Willingham, has worked for Mr. Willingham's posthumous exoneration. She said that Mr. Willingham said Mr. Webb told him, "Johnny Webb has told me they're going to make him testify against me." Although Mr. Jackson has been accused of misconduct, Ms. Willingham said she doesn't want him killed, but she would like him to do some prison time.

If John H. Jackson is found guilty, his punishment could range from 'no discipline' to 'disbarment.' He retired in 2012. After learning more about Mr. Webb's testimony, Eugenia Willingham said, "I just didn't know stuff like this existed in the United States of America."

Indeed. What kind of justice will be served for Cameron Todd Willingham?

Worldwide future for the death penalty

Ivan Šimonović, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, believes that worldwide the death penalty is used too often against the poor and marginalized, especially in the drug trade. One hundred sixty countries have either abolished the death penalty or do not practice it, and in the past six months Chad, Fiji and Madagascar have joined this list. Audrey Gaughran, Director of Global Issues for Amnesty International, says that with the addition of Fiji, the number of countries that have abolished the death penalty is now 99, and with Madagascar, the number will climb to 100. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights will hold several regional seminars to discuss moving away from the death penalty this year.

Once again, Pope Francis has spoken out against this death penalty. Quoting Dostoyevsky, he said, "To kill for murder is a punishment incomparably worse than the crime itself. Murder by legal sentence is immeasurably more terrible than murder by brigands." In the United

States, 59% of white Catholics support the death penalty.

Perhaps with the UN, Pope Francis, and groups like Amnesty International working to abolish the death penalty, more people's hearts will soften and heal and the death penalty will be seen as murder and not justice.

Whom to Execute

"War is Hell." William Tecumseh Sherman
Men and women join the military for a variety of reasons and sometimes end up in war zones. Since 2001, the United States has been engaged in active war via the Global War On Terror, GWOT. With our all volunteer military, many of the men and women in uniform have served multiple deployments to the war zones.

Irritable Heart - American Civil War; Shell Shock - WWI; Battle Fatigue - WWII; Post Traumatic Stress Disorder - Vietnam War to the present. All of these terms describe the after effects some combat military personnel experience. According to the National Center for PTSD statistics, 20% of the military personnel who have served in the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan and up to 30% of our Vietnam War veterans have experienced PTSD. Now in the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters of war, military personnel also can suffer from traumatic brain injuries (TBI) thanks to the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). When these people commit capital crimes, should the death penalty be one of their possible sentences?

In 2009 in a Fordham Law Review article, Anthony Giardino, a lawyer and former Marine, said that veterans who have service-related PTSD and TBI should not be sentenced to death or executed. He argues that when a veteran has a PTSD experience, his ability to understand that acting in a militaristic manner can be impaired. This argument is further explored in a 2010 article by Hal S. Wortzel and David B. Arciniegas, mental health experts. Their findings suggest that military training and combat along with the traumatic experiences of war may have an impact on aggression and behavioral control. Mr. Giardino said that while some courts do consider war trauma experienced while sentencing veterans, "Many courts, however, would rather ignore this elephant in the room than confront the reality that the combined effect of government-sponsored military training and combat exposure transforms men and women into

something quite different from their former selves."

Whether or not to sentence veterans suffering from PTSD at the time of their capital crimes came to the fore with the case of Eddie Routh, the man who killed 'American Sniper' Chris Kyle. He was found guilty of the murder and sentenced to life without the possibility of parole.

The Greeks wanted their warriors to come back behind their shields or on them. With our medical advances, we have many more combatants coming back from the battlefields. When meting out justice to our warriors when they commit capital crimes, those people in control of our justice system may benefit from remembering how combat can change our brothers and sisters who serve in war zones.

As Sister Helen Prejean says, "People are more than the worst thing they have ever done in their lives."

To read more on PTSD, go to

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/PTSD-overview/basics/how-common-is-ptsd.asp>.

Something new

I focus on executions and death penalty news in the United States. This month I decided to look into the number and locations of known executions in the rest of the world. The most recent information is for February - 86 men and two women: Afghanistan - one - hanging; China - seven - perhaps injection; Iran - 53 - hanging; Jordan - two - hanging; Pakistan - four - hanging; Saudi Arabia - 18 -beheading; Somalia - 1 - firing squad. For the names of those executed, their dates of execution, and their crimes, go to <http://www.capitalpunishmentuk.org/world.html>.

Stays of Execution

March

2	Kelly Gissendaner	GA
5	Rodney Reed	TX
10	Brian Terrell	GA
18	Randall Mays	TX
24	Donnie Johnson	TN

Executions

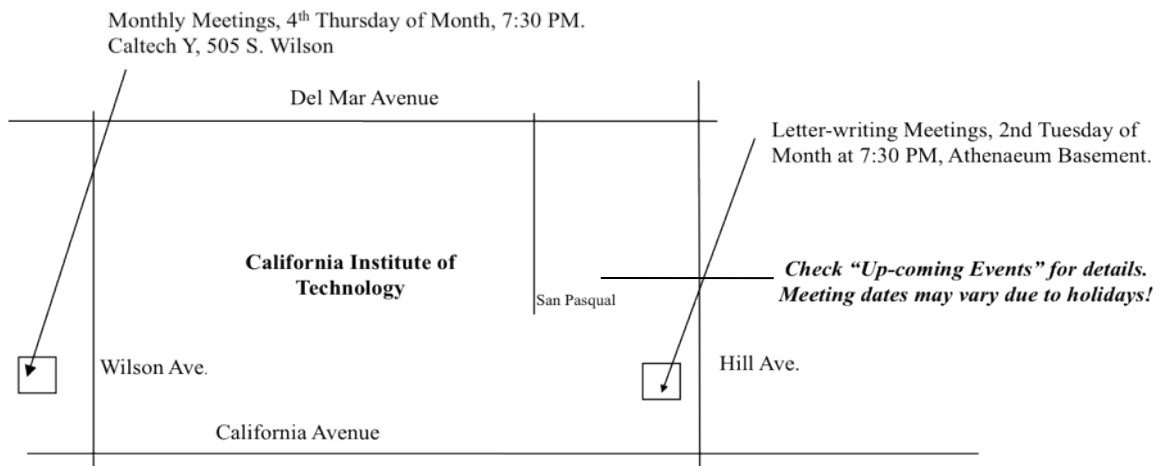
March

11	Manuel Vasquez	TX	Lethal Injection 1-drug
17	Cecil Clayton	MO	Lethal Injection 1-drug

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

UAs	10
POC	5
Total	15

To add your letters to the total contact aigp22@caltech.edu



From the 210 exit on Lake Avenue, head south, turn left on Del Mar
 From the 110 continue on Arroyo Parkway north, turn right on California
 Street parking is generally available.

Amnesty International Group 22
 The Caltech Y
 Mail Code C1-128
 Pasadena, CA 91125
www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>



Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.