

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XX Number 3, March 2012

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, March 22, 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 10, 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 15, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "The Tiger's Wife: A Novel" by Téa Obreht.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hello all

I'm writing this tonight while listening to the rain outside hitting the windows. Spent most of today working at the American Diabetes Association Diabetes Expo at the convention center downtown, where LAUSD Nursing Services had a table. We demonstrated Sugar Savvy – Rethink Your Drink. Did you know a 20 oz Gatorade has 9 tsp of sugar (4 grams per teaspoon) and a regular Coke has 10 tsp or 39 grams? Just like tabling for Amnesty except diabetes instead of death penalty!

This Sunday we're discussing a book written by an activist Afghani woman, Malalai Joya. Amnesty has this action for International Women's Day (which was March 8, but better late than never!) on their website. It is pertinent to the issues of women's rights in Afghanistan and what will happen when the US leaves, as we plan to do by 2014. <http://tinyurl.com/79lw7jj>

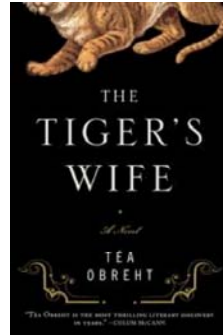
This book is timely in view of the recent tragic event in Afghanistan (unfortunately, one of many) where civilians were massacred. I remember shortly after 9/11 when our group viewed a presentation from RAWA, the group mentioned in this book. Sonali Kolhatkar, now a radio host on KPFK, 90.5 FM, was involved with this group and brought the plight of Afghan women to our attention.

Thanks to Joyce for helping me get this newsletter done this month as this year the workload has increased but personnel have not!
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 15, 6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore

695 E. Colorado Boulevard
In Pasadena

The Tiger's Wife

by Téa Obreht

REVIEW

By Ron Charles

Washington Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, March 8, 2011; 10:14 PM

Tea Obreht's swirling first novel, "The Tiger's Wife," draws us beneath the clotted tragedies in the Balkans to deliver the kind of truth that histories can't touch. Born in Belgrade in 1985 - no, that's not a typo - she captures the thirst for consecration that a century of war has left in that bloody part of the world. It's a novel of enormous ambitions that manages in its modest length to contain the conflicts between Christians and Muslims, Turks and Ottomans, science and superstition.

The story, which demands a luxurious stretch of concentration, works on two levels that initially seem unrelated but eventually wind around each other evocatively. In the present day, the narrator is a young doctor named Natalia, who travels 400 miles on a "goodwill mission" to inoculate orphans at a monastery in a town now separated from her home by a new border. Just as she arrives, she gets word that her beloved grandfather, also a physician, has died while coming to help her. His death is not a surprise - she alone knew he had cancer - but the circumstances strike her as odd.

Obreht has lived in the United States since she was 12, but she creates a vivid sense of this war-torn region (we're never told exactly where all this is taking place). Her thoughtful narrator must navigate the land mines - literal and political - that still blot the countryside. Natalia's

world is a steampunk mingling of modern technology and traditional tools - cellphones and antibiotics alongside picks and poultices.

But what confounds her medical work at the monks' orphanage is a conflict of values, which touches on the novel's most interesting theme. While Natalia administers vaccines, a group of ragged people is digging in a vineyard behind the monastery. They're not gardening; they're looking for the body of a cousin abandoned 12 years ago during the war. One of the men is convinced that if they can properly rebury this relative, the sickness affecting their village will abate. Natalia, of course, would rather these superstitious men allow her to examine and treat their children, but she also appreciates their need to recover and sanctify the remains of the dead. Indeed, she now feels the same obligation.

This activity in the present is only the novel's skeleton; the meat of the book is supplied by the lyrical stories Natalia remembers from her grandfather. These tales take place in a time of isolated villages inhabited by craftsman, traveling peddlers and healers. That "The Tiger's Wife" never slips entirely into magical realism is part of its magic - its agile play with tragic material and with us - because, despite Natalia and her grandfather's devotion to science and rationality, this is a story that bleeds into fable with the slightest scratch.

Two semi-mythical characters dominate her grandfather's reminiscences, stories flecked with macabre humor that sound at times like Balkan versions of Isaac Bashevis Singer. One is "the deathless man," the nephew of Death himself, who came originally to heal but eventually to carry the souls of the deceased to the other side. Again and again, her grandfather crossed paths with this mournful but congenial man, whose story he never allowed himself to fully believe.

The other character is a deaf and mute woman, viciously abused by her husband, who befriended a tiger in the woods. It's a big, violent, romantic symbol, like Melville's whale, a fiery orange canvas onto which any number of meanings might be projected. Natalia claims that "everything necessary to understand my grandfather lies between two stories: the story of the tiger's wife and the story of the deathless man," but his relationship to these mysterious characters yields only more evocative questions. Indeed, it has to be said: There are times when

"The Tiger's Wife" reaches more for affect than for coherence.

But the reception for this book couldn't be more encouraging. Well-deserved praise has been accumulating ever since Obreht published a chapter in the *New Yorker* almost two years ago, and now that we have the whole, its graceful commingling of contemporary realism and village legend seems even more absorbing.

Also, its sentiments are refreshingly un-American. Anxiously youth-obsessed, we've always been awkward and weird about death; our rituals for grieving and commemorating are still chaotic and ad hoc. But "The Tiger's Wife" never strays far from the desire of desperate people to do right by the dead, no matter how much time has passed.

"What shall we bury?" is the plaintive cry in towns repeatedly bombed and burned. Scattered bones must be collected, washed and put to rest. The Balkans' legacy of living amid so much carnage and desecration has produced what Obreht calls "the delusion of normalcy, but never peace." That sounds grim and depressing, but conveyed in storytelling this enchanting, it's the life you remember.

AUTHOR BIO



Téa Obreht was born in 1985 in the former Yugoslavia, and spent her childhood in Cyprus and Egypt before eventually immigrating to the United States in 1997. Her writing has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *Zoetrope: All-Story*, *The New York*

Times, and *The Guardian*, and has been anthologized in *The Best American Short Stories* and *The Best American Non-Required Reading*. Her first novel, *The Tiger's Wife*, will be published by Random House on March 8 2011. She has been named by *The New Yorker* as one of the twenty best American fiction writers under forty and included in the National Book Foundation's list of 5 Under 35. Téa Obreht lives in Ithaca, New York.

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Gao Zhisheng

By Joyce Wolf

No news is not good news, at least in the case of Group 22's adopted prisoner of conscience. Missing since April 2010, human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng was reportedly admitted last December to Shaya Prison in a remote part of Xinjiang, but Chinese officials have not permitted his family to contact him.

China passed a new law on March 14 that legalized the practice of detaining suspects in secret locations. A last-minute amendment requires the police to notify the suspect's family within 24 hours, but they don't have to specify where the suspect is being held, or for how long.

Other parts of the new law replace provisions of the criminal code enacted in 1996 and could actually improve the rights of some detainees such as juveniles and mentally ill persons. Evidence extracted with torture will not be admissible in court.

From the Los Angeles Times:
http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/world_now/2012/03/new-china-detention-law-torture-government-critics.html

But lawyer Liu warned that the changes are significant only if they are followed adequately. "Once they feel a threat to stability," he warned of security forces, "they will abandon any legal procedure." Liu was detained last April after calls for an Arab Spring-style revolution in China triggered a widespread crackdown on dissent. His client Ai Weiwei was detained for 2 1/2 months at about the same time without charges being filed.

China's courts are strictly controlled by the ruling Communist Party, which, according to human rights groups, has often used allegations of "endangering national security" to silence its critics. Outspoken bloggers, activists and petitioners have been regularly placed in "black jails," unofficial holding pens in hotels and apartment blocks under the watch of plainclothes security agents.

"Already, many thousands of people in China are being held in secret and are at great risk of being tortured," Catherine Baber, deputy director of Asia Pacific for Amnesty International, said recently.

A bit of good cheer: Group 22 received inquiries from two people wanting to take action for Gao Zhisheng. Thank you to Donald from Pasadena and William from North Carolina! It's great that you are joining us in our efforts for Gao.

Have you visited <http://freegao.com>? The site has news, photos of Gao and his family, and a petition you can sign.

This month let's write to the Minister of Justice. This is the fourth time that Gao's brother is petitioning for permission to have contact with Gao. Let's show that we are supporting him!

Here's a sample letter that you can use as a guide. Postage to China is \$1.05.

Minister of Justice
WU Aiying Buzhang
Sifabu
10 Chaoyangmen Nandajie
Chaoyangqu
Beijingshi 100020
People's Republic of China

Dear Minister,

I am deeply concerned about Gao Zhisheng (高智晟), a Beijing-based human rights lawyer who was detained in Shaanxi Province on February 4, 2009. Since April 20, 2010, he was subjected to enforced disappearance.

On December 19, 2011, he was admitted to Shaya Prison in a remote area of Xinjiang.

I urge you to ensure that Mr. Gao is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment while he is in custody, that he receives whatever medical treatment he may require, and that he is able to contact his family and lawyers. His brother, Gao Zhiyi, is now petitioning the authorities for the fourth time to ask permission to contact Gao Zhisheng.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I look forward to hearing from you regarding the current status of Gao Zhisheng.

Sincerely,
[your name and address]

Please also send a copy to:
His Excellency Ambassador Zhang Yesui
3505 International Place, NW
Washington, D.C. 20008

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

March: The month that contains not only St. Patrick's Day but also International Women's Day! Go Woman! And do not ever think the advances we women have made are GIVEN to us. Be vigilant, now and forever!

The SAFE California Campaign

No new news about the SAFE CA Campaign at this time. Of course, the one thing we can continue to do is consider a contribution. Education will be the key to a successful campaign, and as we all know, education is not cheap. But as saying goes, "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance." And ignorance will be a mighty opponent to this ballot initiative.

To help the SAFE California campaign, give money. Donations can be mailed to

SAFE California Campaign

237 Kearny Street, #334

San Francisco, CA 94108

or you can go online

https://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1265/p/salsa/donation/common/public/?donate_page_KEY=8141.

Look for more information as I get it. You can also go to the SAFE California Facebook page or to the campaign's website:

<http://www.safecalifornia.org/home>.

Worldwide Executions, Women and Capital Punishment

I was thinking I'd like to know more about the death penalty worldwide, and I found a site from the UK. The site features interesting information about executions and monthly tracks them around the world. For 2012, only January and February stats are available.

Our friends in Saudi Arabia beheaded nine people during this time, mostly for murder but also for drugs. Iraq hanged 69 people - terrorism. Iran busily dispatched 45 for crimes related to drugs, rape, murder and armed robbery. China's line on the chart was blank and that sent me on a search. It seems China does not release its execution numbers. I did, however, find an article

<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2012>

[/03/interviews-before-execution-chinas-death-row-reality-show-axed-from-air/](#)) explaining that the 40 million TV fans who have been tuning in to the "Interviews Before Execution" reality show will be without it after five years of watching because of 'internal problems'. And here I thought I was grossed out by what I think might be US reality shows.

Along with other interesting information, the UK website also has a list of women worldwide who have been executed from 2000 to the present. Go to <http://www.capitalpunishmentuk.org/women.html> if you'd like to see. I guess in the spirit of equality, the author of the page ends with, "My own research shows the vast majority of respondents of both sexes do not feel that women should be treated more leniently than men." Love that equal opportunity, eh? March = women's month, oh yeah.

Death Penalty Abolition Worldwide Since 1961

Amnesty International has an interesting interactive world map

(<http://www.amnestyusa.org/abolish/worldmap/>)

with a timeline that goes from 1961 to 2010. Just clicking from one decade to the next, I could see the transformation in thinking about and acting on the death penalty throughout the world. In 1961, a very small area of land carried the "Abolitionist for All Crimes" color, but by 2010, the "Retentionist" color had eroded, and while not all countries have abolished the death penalty, the number has grown significantly. Check this map out and see where in the death penalty world the USA stands.

Bryan Stevenson: We need to talk about injustice (a TED talk)

My little Roku box is supposed to let me see TED talkson my TV, but alas, the other afternoon when I left work early thanks to this pesky cough that kept me awake the night before, the stream for TED would not flow. The talk I wanted to see was Bryan Stevenson's We Need to Talk About Injustice. As I wandered through websites looking for some grist for my death penalty mill, I came across the link to Mr. Stevenson's talk. While he deals with a variety of topics, he also discusses the death penalty.

"It's interesting, this question of the death penalty. In many ways we've been taught to think the real question is "Do people deserve to die for the crimes they've committed?" and

that's a very sensible question. But there's another way of thinking about where we are in our identity. The other way of thinking about it is not "Do people deserve to die for the crimes they commit?", but "Do we deserve to kill?"

To see Mr. Stevenson's entire TED talk, go to http://www.ted.com/talks/bryan_stevenson_we_need_to_talk_about_an_injustice.html.

Life Without the Possibility of Parole for Minors

During the week of March 18, the US Supreme will hear arguments on whether it is cruel and unusual punishment to sentence juveniles to life in prison. The Court's focus will be on two separate cases involving men who were 14 years old when they committed murder. Now Evan Miller is 23 and Kuntrell Jackson is 26.

According to the ACLU, approximately 2,570 inmates who committed crimes as minors are sentenced to juvenile life without parole (JLWOP).

Here are the results of a poll (from March 17, 2012, when I took it) that appeared with the article about Mr. Miller and Mr. Jackson.

Quick Poll

Should a 14-year-old convicted murderer face life in prison without parole?

Yes: 57.71% No: 42.29%

To see an interactive map of the US that shows the number of inmates serving JLWOP, go to <http://www.endjwop.org/the-issue/stats-by-state/>. I checked out California first.

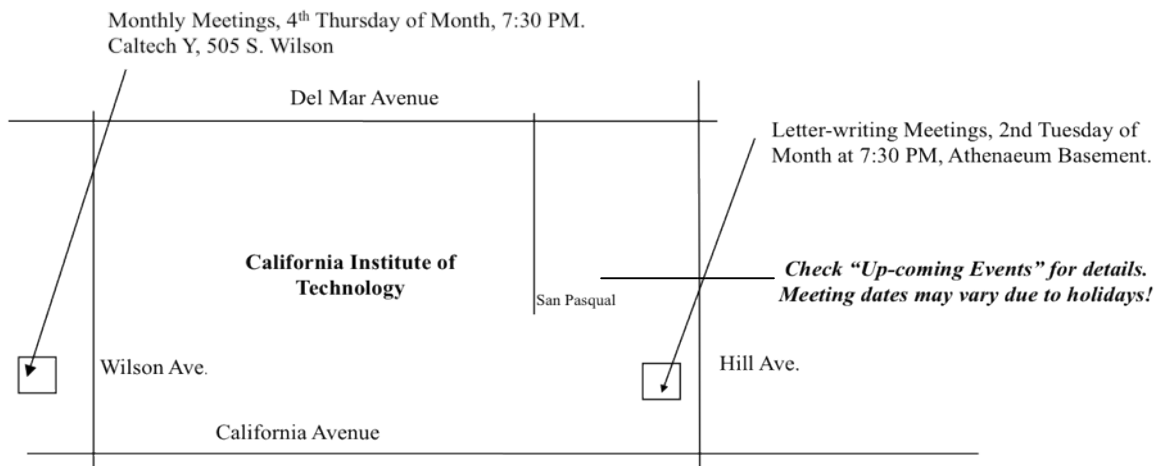
Stays of Execution

February 2012		
28	Anthony Bartee	Texas
March 2012		
6	Michael Ryan	Nebraska
8	Dustin Briggs	Pennsylvania

Executions

February 2012		
29	Robert Moorman	Arizona Lethal Injection
29	George Rivas	Texas Lethal Injection
March 2012		
7	Keith Thurmond	Texas Lethal Injection
8	Robert Towery	Arizona Lethal Injection
15	Timothy Stemple	Oklahoma Lethal Injection

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT	
Death Penalty	3
UAs	12
POC	5
Total	20
To add your letters to the total contact lwkamp@gmail.com .	



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.