

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**SUMMER BREAK: No Monthly Meeting Thursday July 24 or Thursday August 28.**

**Tuesday, August 12, 7:30 PM.** Letter writing meeting at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. In the summer we meet outdoors at the "Rath al Fresco," on the lawn behind the building. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty

**Sunday, August 17, 6:30 PM.** Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. For August we read a mystery, "Death and the Penguin" by Ukrainian author Andrei Kurkov.

## COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hello everyone,

[Kathy is on vacation. She'll return to writing her column next month.]

Stevi and Alexi started a new project for Group 22 to do some local community outreach for Amnesty. Alexi set up a table at the Pasadena Farmers Market on Saturday, July 12. She reported that it was a positive experience. Group 22 will be permitted to table two Saturdays per month, and Alexi is organizing a schedule for volunteers to set up and staff our table. Email us at [aigp22@caltech.edu](mailto:aigp22@caltech.edu) if you would like to help or would just like more info.



Hope you are all having a wonderful summer!  
Best regards,  
Stevi and Joyce

## RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

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

Next Rights Readers meeting:  
Sunday, August 17, 6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore  
695 E. Colorado, Pasadena

## Book Review

### *A penguin so adds to a funeral*

*Andrei Kurkov watches with increasing gloom as post-Soviet Ukraine comes to resemble the chaotic world of Death and the Penguin*

Review by Amelia Gentleman  
*The Observer*, Saturday 7 April 2001

### Death and the Penguin

Andrei Kurkov

translated by George Bird

Andrei Kurkov is dismayed to see how the portrait of post-Soviet Ukraine created for his political satire *Death and the Penguin* has come so close to reality. As a writer, he had a moment of satisfaction when he began to see how neatly life was imitating art, but it was a fleeting sensation, quickly overwhelmed by a sense of gloom.

Contract killings, executed journalists, rampaging political corruption and an environment of profound moral chaos fuel the plot of Kurkov's novel, creating a humourously bleak picture of Ukrainian life. The absurdities of the lifestyles enjoyed by the new mafiosi and the criminal elite are evoked with the cheerful narrative simplicity of a children's fable. But a glance at the news emerging daily from Ukraine gives a sour edge to the comedy.

The novel's publication in Britain comes as political crisis continues to unfold in Kiev - a thickening scandal, fermenting on contract killings, an executed journalist and political corruption. The chaos surrounding the beheaded opposition journalist Georgy Gongadze and continuing speculation over the possible involvement of President Leonid Kuchma in his death make the extraordinary events of the novel seem unremarkable. Kurkov was encouraged by his Russian publishers to boost sales by classing his work as a detective-

thriller, but its events are too surreal to unwind according to standard thriller rules.

The novel's hero, Viktor Zolotaryov, is a frustrated writer whose short stories are too short and too sensation-free to be published. When a newspaper editor offers him a new job as star obituarist, paying \$300 a month to write 'snappy, pithy, way-out' pieces, he agrees. His brief is to select powerful figures from Ukrainian high society and prepare mournful articles in readiness for the possibility that they might suddenly die. Initially, Viktor craves recognition and is despondent that none of his articles ever gets into print ('Not only had none of them died, but not one had so much as fallen ill,' he observes).

But then the unexpected death of a senior politician after falling from a sixth-floor window ('Was cleaning it for some reason, although apparently it wasn't his. And at night,' the sinister newspaper editor comments) triggers a clan war of killings and Viktor's obituaries are suddenly in demand. It is only later, when he discovers that his pieces are neatly filed in the editor's office - marked with dates for imminent publication although their subjects remain alive - that he becomes uncomfortable about his role in the eruption of violence unsettling the city.

The obituarist assumes a pragmatic approach to the uneasy morality of his work - accepting the money and getting on with it. This approach is one which Kurkov believes many Ukrainians have been forced to adopt, and his book is free of any censure for the way characters behave. 'People have got used to the corruption. People here are flexible and they accept the new rules and don't dwell on moral questions. They just watch what everyone else is doing and try to find their own ways of deceiving others to make money for themselves to survive,' he says.

Viktor's blossoming career is watched with melancholic disapproval by the gloomy figure of his pet penguin, Misha, adopted a few months earlier from the impoverished city zoo. In the cynical atmosphere of post-communist Kiev, the penguin is the only being which inspires in Viktor real affection, a devotion which drives him to organise a heart transplant for his ailing pet, purchasing, at great expense, the heart of a four-year-old child.

Kiev is a city of constant power cuts, a place where dollar bribes must be handed out before ambulance men can be persuaded to ferry dying men to hospital, and where hospital staff have

no medicines to ease patients' pain, let alone cure them. This is a place where once-distinguished scientists do not have enough money to buy potatoes; it is also a place where criminals will pay \$1,000 a time to hire penguins to add class to their glitzy funeral parades.

Kurkov's description of the gangster underworld is strengthened by first-hand experience. 'Some of my friends in publishing were killed and one of my film producers was murdered shortly after the film was finished. Moments like these let you know what kind of society you are living in,' he says.

The silent, sad penguin is the key to understanding the novel as a portrayal of post-Soviet chaos, says Kurkov. 'The penguin is a collective animal who is at a loss when he is alone. In the Antarctic, they live in huge groups and all their movements are programmed in their brains so that they follow one another. When you take one away from the others he is lost.

'This is what happened to the Soviet people who were collective animals - used to being helped by one another. With the collapse of the Soviet Union suddenly they found themselves alone, no longer felt protected by their neighbours, in a completely unfamiliar situation where they couldn't understand the new rules of life.'

Kurkov retains a sliver of optimism. 'I still have hope, otherwise I would emigrate,' he says. But even though he remains in Kiev, his readership is growing much faster in the West than at home. 'People here don't read much now. People are very poor - they can't afford to buy so many books.'

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<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/apr/08/fiction.reviews/print>

## Author Biography



Author: Andrey Kurkov

Andrey Kurkov was born in St Petersburg in 1961. Having graduated from the Kiev Foreign Languages Institute, he worked for some time as a journalist, did his military service as a prison warder in Odessa, then became a writer of screenplays and

author of critically acclaimed and popular novels, including the bestselling *Death and the Penguin*. Kurkov has long been a respected commentator on Ukraine for the world's media, notably in the UK, France, Germany and the States.

<http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/authors/andrey-kurkov>

**PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE**  
**Gao Zhisheng**  
by Joyce Wolf

It looks as though Gao Zhisheng might actually be released on the scheduled date of August 7! Radio Free Asia interviewed Gao's wife Geng He (who now lives in the U.S.) on July 3, and she reported that Gao's relatives in China had spoken with prison officials. Here is a quote from the English translation of the interview posted on <http://www.chinaaid.org/2014/07/rfa-will-gao-zhisheng-be-truly-free.html>.

Geng He said, "I talked to his older brother on the phone last night. He said that he finally got through to Shaya Prison by phone and asked, 'When can you allow us to visit Gao Zhisheng?' The person answering the call said, 'No need to come to visit him. He will be released on Aug. 7 after finishing his time in prison.'

"His older brother said, 'But we still need to pick him up from prison.' The person said, 'The prison will need to communicate with Beijing about the specifics of his release. You just wait for further notice at home.' That's all we've heard so far."

So it appears that Gao's release will not be a straightforward matter. In another interview with Radio Free Asia on July 8, Geng He said that Gao's brother and other relatives were under a lot of pressure from the government. They have been instructed to wait for further notice. The brother told an RFA interviewer not to ask him any questions, because he could not tell the interviewer anything now.

The above post on the China Aid website concludes with these words from Pastor Bob Fu:

Bob Fu said, "Given that the overall rule of law in China has been taking a significant backslide in the past few months, we are deeply concerned about attorney Gao's situation. I believe that tens and thousands of

people throughout the world are hoping for his freedom and will continue to monitor his situation as well.

"In August, if the authorities continue to force him into 'disappearance' or take actions to limit his freedom, it will cause an angry response from the whole world.

"Recently, some influential non-profit organizations in Britain and some foreign media approached me about this case, and they are all very concerned about attorney Gao's pending release in August. I shared with them what I'd heard from Gao's family, including Shaya Prison's response that they would 'need to take orders from Beijing' and their forbidding of Gao's family to pick him up from the prison upon his release.

"Many people across the globe care about attorney Gao. I have attended meetings in more than a dozen of different regions in America this year, big or small, and every time when I spoke at a meeting, many American people in the audience would ask, 'How is brother Gao doing?' 'How is attorney Gao doing?' They are all anticipating his release."

Group 22 is certainly eagerly anticipating Gao's release! Please join us in the sustained effort on his behalf. Go to the Group 22 page for Gao Zhisheng, choose one or more of the suggested officials to write to, and follow the guidelines. <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/GaoPOC/GaoZhisheng.html>, or just type 'amnesty caltech gao' into your browser's search box.

Thank you!

**SNOWDEN REPORTER GLENN GREENWALD SPEAKS IN L.A.**

by Laura G. Brown

Glenn Greenwald began his recent Los Angeles speech by saying that in May of 2013, he met an anonymous informant (who turned out to be Edward Snowden) in Hong Kong to see proof of NSA abuses. Was it really just over a year ago? It seems so long that we've been worrying about egregious spying by the NSA. But if it seems long to us, it must be interminable for Snowden, who is now living in Russia rather than risk coming back to spend his life in a cell, said Greenwald, who won a Pulitzer Prize last year for reporting Snowden's story. I saw this civil rights lawyer and author June 19 at the Aratani



Theater talking about what's new in US surveillance and his book, *No Place to Hide*.



Most of the crowd was between 10-20 years younger than me, and I wondered whether Greenwald's message was lost on them. The 20-somethings I know seem to think privacy

is some kind of dusty relic belonging to another era. They share their information continually through Facebook, texting, and other media so as not to be uncool or left out. Their attitude about Big Brother is a shrug of the shoulders...they might not like their "brother," but he's part of the family, so they have to learn to get along with him.

During his speech, Greenwald took on the attitude of people who say, "I don't care if the government is spying on me. I'm not doing anything wrong, so I have nothing to hide." The flipside, he pointed out, is that people who value privacy are somehow suspect. While people who don't threaten the status quo are generally left alone, "The measure of a society is how it treats its dissidents," he said, and in times of upheaval, such as in Mubarak's Egypt, dissenters have been targeted and killed. Meanwhile, he complained about NSA supporters like Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who said: "The NSA only collects the type of information found on a telephone bill." Actually, under FISA, passed in 2008, agents are allowed to listen to Americans' phone calls without a warrant. Greenwald calls this "suspicionless search" and said its chilling effect leads people who feel they are being watched to make behavioral choices they think others will approve of. "Surveillance breeds a compliant, easy to control population."

Unfortunately, little has changed since Snowden's revelations. A few pieces of "toothless" legislation have been passed while the NSA's tactics continue unimpeded. The best impetus for change is that big tech companies like Yahoo and Google are pushing back against government spying so they won't lose customers, an effort that offers real hope, Greenwald said, because while the US cares little about individuals, it does pay attention to Silicon Valley billionaires. (Well, there was one principled individual who challenged the

surveillance state and succeeded, he recalled – Edward Snowden.)

Greenwald closed with an idea aimed at the Generation Xers who are so blasé about privacy. He offered them his email address and asked them to send him their Facebook and email passwords, along with the passwords for all the other sites they use. "You have nothing to hide, right?" he asked. No one has met his challenge yet. People must actually care about their internet security, right?

## DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

### The Good News Rolls In

Wednesday, July 16, Judge Cormac J. Carney of United States District Court, ruled on California's death penalty. He said that a death sentence in California results in something that "no rational jury or legislature could ever impose: life in prison, with the remote possibility of death." We in California don't execute quickly enough.

While California law provides an automatic appeal process for all death sentences, carrying out these appeals is problematic. Death row inmates may wait three to five years to be assigned a lawyer since all of them are indigent and thus eligible for court-appointed lawyers. After that, it will take the lawyer as many as four more years to go through all of the trial records and to file an appeal. Because the State Supreme Court hears only 20 to 25 death-penalty appeals per year, the inmate will wait an additional two to three years for his or her case is scheduled for oral arguments. Then another three to five years can be added for state habeas corpus petitions for claims, such as ineffective assistance of counsel. What this creates is a situation where the punishment does not deter future crime nor does it serve as retribution.

Former governors George Deukmejian, Pete Wilson, and Gray Davis have supported an initiative, Death Penalty Reform and Savings Act of 2014, to streamline the path to executions. This would include speeding up the appeals process. Implementing this would be quite expensive. Additionally, according to an article

in the New York Times, half of the California death sentences reviewed by a federal court were eventually vacated which means the sentence was invalid. The number of signatures for the initiative fell short for the 2014, but supporters of the initiative are planning on dusting it off for the 2016 ballot. One argument used is that Proposition 34, the initiative to change the death penalty to life in prison without parole, failed. However, that proposition failed with a vote of 52.8% to 47.2%, a very narrow margin. We have to see how this plays out given the recent ruling.

For now, let's celebrate Judge Cormac J. Carney's decision and know the discussion will continue.



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For a primer on the death penalty, go to "Everything you need to know about executions in the United States"

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2014/05/01/everything-you-need-to-know-about-executions-in-the-united-states/>

### Global Executions

Least we become too joyful, a recent study noted that globally executions rose by 15% in 2013. China continues to keep its death sentences and executions hidden behind the veil of 'state secrets' but is thought by Amnesty International to be the world's biggest state executioner. Excluding China, 80% of the executions worldwide were carried out in Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. Executions in Iran and Iraq have increased to 369 and 169 respectively for 2013 from 314 in Iran in 2012 and 40 in 2011 in Iraq. Five other countries comprise the execution posse: Bangladesh, North Korea, Sudan, Yemen, and the United States. Egypt has been on a capital punishment spree, sentencing 529

supporters of deposed President Mohamed Morsi to death.

Amnesty International secretary general Salil Shetty said, "We urge all governments who still kill in the name of justice to impose a moratorium on the death penalty immediately, with a view to abolishing it." In the United States, eighteen states and the District of Columbia have done just that.

### Execution Commuted

July  
10 Tommy Waldrip Georgia

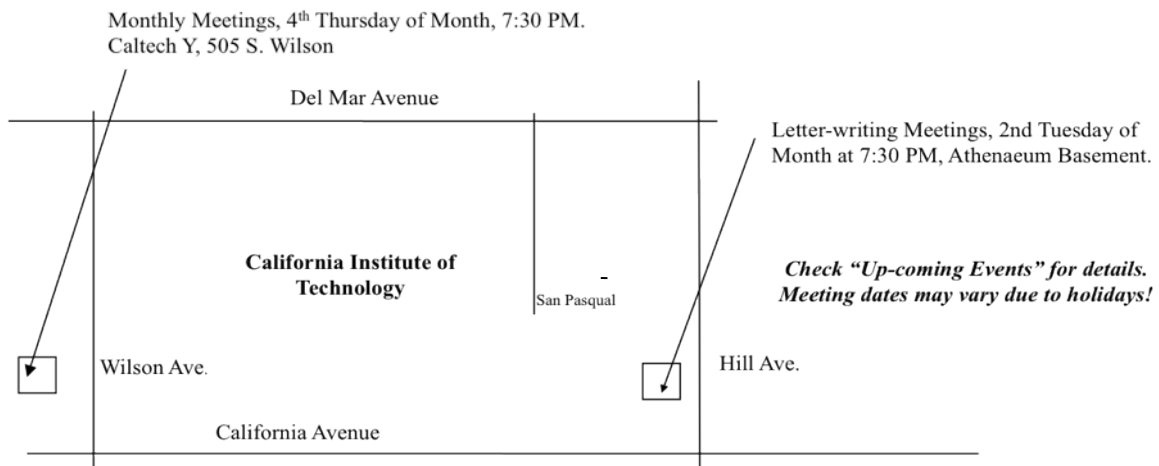
### Stay of execution

July  
2 Ronald Phillips Ohio

### Executions

July  
10 Eddie Davis Florida  
Lethal injection 3-drug  
w/ midazolam hydrochloride  
16 John Middleton Missouri  
Lethal injection 1-drug  
pentobarbital

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT	
UAs	18
POC	4
Total	22
To add your letters to the total contact <a href="mailto:aigp22@caltech.edu">aigp22@caltech.edu</a>	



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  
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