

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday, July 10, 7:30-9:00 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 next to the building. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty.

Sunday, July 15, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* This month we read a short novel, "My Cat Yugoslavia" by Pajtim Statovci.

Note: We're taking a summer break and won't have any Thursday monthly meetings in July or August. Letter writing and book group meetings will continue as usual.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

Welcome to summer, an educator's favorite time of year!

LAUSD school year ended June 8th, for which Alexi and Kathy are thankful...it's been a busy year. I assume that Paula and Stevi will have the summer off as well.

Amnesty Group 22 will not have monthly meetings in June, July, and August but letter writing and the book group will continue.

There's been a lot in the news lately about border issues and immigration. Amnesty has an action here on the issue of families who seek asylum at the US/Mexico border being separated.

<https://act.amnestyusa.org/page/25820/action/1>

Also see this article in the June 28 New Yorker by Jonathan Blitzer: *The Government Has No Plan for Reuniting the Immigrant Families It Is Tearing Apart.*

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-government-has-no-plan-for-reuniting-the-immigrant-families-it-is-tearing-apart>

Laura Bush wrote a Washington Post op-ed: "Separating children from their parents at the border breaks my heart".

https://wapo.st/2yh5MrB?tid=ss_mail&utm_term=.19957c3cbfd0

Kathy



Next Rights Readers Meeting

**Sunday, July 15
6:30 PM**

**Vroman's Bookstore
695 E. Colorado Blvd
Pasadena**

**My Cat
Yugoslavia**

by Pajtim Statovci

REVIEW

By Liam Hoare, April 28, 2017

[www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2017/04/18/pajtim_statovci_s_my_cat_yugoslavia_reviewed.html]

In *My Cat Yugoslavia*, a Talking Feline Is Only One Kind of Queer

By Pajtim Statovci

A man walks into a gay bar and there he meets a talking cat. "I noticed the cat across the dance floor," Bekim, the lonesome, dislocated narrator of Pajtim Statovci's compelling and altogether beautiful debut novel *My Cat Yugoslavia*, tells us. "I had never seen anything so enchanting, so alluring. He was a perfect cat" with gleaming fur and muscular back legs. "Then the cat noticed me; he started smiling at me and I started smiling at him, then he raised his front paw to the top button of his shirt, unbuttoned it, and began walking towards me."

Bekim is the youngest son of a broken family who, with his parents, came as a refugee from Kosovo to Finland in the early 1990s. He was a disturbed child who grappled with darkness and nightmares. His father, Bajram, was violent and once hired a Turkish imam to exorcise evil spirits from Bekim's body. *My Cat Yugoslavia* opens with Bekim as a twentysomething college student cruising for a hookup online.

Meeting this sexy, snarky, spunky talking cat changes Bekim's life. In spite of his cruelty—"Gays. I don't much like gays," the cat reveals at the bar, causing Bekim to wonder why he's there in the first place—Bekim begins to tell him everything about his life, where he had come from, and what it's like to feel as if you're always being scrutinized. It is fair to say Bekim falls head over heels for this cat, and this encounter—which leads to the demanding,

tempestuous creature moving in and then out of his apartment—sets in motion Bekim's return to Kosovo and an inevitable facing of his past.

Statovci, only 26 years old and himself born into a Kosovar Albanian family that migrated to Finland when he was only 2, has said that his choice to insert a talking cat into *My Cat Yugoslavia* was done "to explore stereotypes we have about ethnic, sexual, and religious minorities." By this, he not only meant that animals tend to have certain characteristics or qualities ascribed to them, but also that societies create a kind of hierarchy of animals in the same way as people continue to be distinguished and oppressed on the basis of weakness or undesirability.

This image of a talking cat within human society is also a way of examining the displacement and denigration that comes with being a Muslim Kosovar refugee in Western society, and a queer person in a culture with certain sexual and gender norms. "Maybe it was because I left the war and the destruction that followed it somehow stole my personal history and inserted another history in its place," that I wrote the novel in this magical realist way, Statovci has said. War and displacement "silenced my voice and made me smaller, took away my right to not be a part of the world that was being presented to me, 'the world in ruins,' the right to define myself outside the imagery that other people had when they heard about where I came from."

Perhaps because this is a literary debut, Statovci's magical realism and use of symbolism can sometimes come across as heavy-handed. The novel's construction—with Bekim's narrative interwoven with that of his mother, Emine—is not as sophisticated as it could be. Still, *My Cat Yugoslavia* is inventive and playful. It tells us a great deal about what it might feel like to be an outcast twice-over, to be at the bottom of the heap not just in one society but two, to experience, as Bekim says, a loneliness "so brutal that sometimes it felt as though nobody knew I even existed."

My Cat Yugoslavia's is also elevated by the quality of the writing (aided, to be sure, by David Hackston's elegant translation from the original Finnish). There is something truly wonderful about a debut novel where the sentences themselves are as beguiling, the metaphors as imaginative ("its dry skin rattled like a broken amplifier"; "his viscid sweat oozing between my fingers like egg white"), and

the eye for detail as sharp as Statovci's.

As a portrait of a gay refugee, Statovci writes as well about unemotional hookups—"He gripped my wrist in his palms and pressed his thigh against my groin, as though he was afraid I might say something like I fancied him or ... how I understand him"—as finding love:

I didn't answer. He glanced quickly out of the window where the evening was beginning to darken and turn red. What if I stopped loving him or what if he could no longer bring himself to say it, or what if he fell in love with someone else or got a job on the other side of the world? Anything could happen. He could die.

... "Don't think too much. That's your problem."

He moved his hand on my stomach; his fingertips felt warm and soft and his skin smelled of sliced almonds.

Then I said it too, because it would have been sheer madness not to say those words to a man like that.

At a time when there is a shortage of empathy for refugees both here and in Europe, Statovci's queer perspective on the search of rootedness in *My Cat Yugoslavia* is wonderful and original—and much welcome, too.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



PAJTIM STATOVCI was born in 1990 and moved from Kosovo to Finland with his family when he was two years old. He currently lives in Helsinki, where he is studying comparative literature at the University of Helsinki and screenwriting for film and television at Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture. *My Cat*

Yugoslavia is his first novel.

[www.penguinrandomhouse.com/authors/2144539/pajtim-statovci]

Security with Human Rights

By Robert Adams

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA REACTION TO U.S.-NORTH KOREA SUMMIT

06/12/2018

According to President Trump, human rights were discussed during the summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Francisco Bencosme, advocacy manager for Asia Pacific at

Amnesty International USA, issued the following statement:

“While we welcome news that President Trump raised human rights at the summit, Amnesty International urges the U.S. government to continue to push for urgent reforms in North Korea. Human rights should not be a footnote in any engagement with Kim Jong Un, but rather a crucial component in negotiations between the two countries.

“There are no ‘great winners’ when North Korea continues to commit systemic, widespread, and grave violations of human rights, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity. It must close its prison camps, where up to 120,000 people continue to be held; protect freedom of expression; and reunite families separated through displacement during the war, forced disappearances, or abductions.”

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Jerry Givens - Insight of an executioner

“Biggest mistake I ever made was taking the job as an executioner. Life is short. Life only consists of 24 hours a day. Death is going to come to us. We don't have to kill one another. “

~ Jerry Givens - Virginia's department of corrections - executioner from 1982 to 1999 who administered the death penalty to 62 inmates, some by lethal injection and some by electrocution.

Governor Brown: Grant Kevin Cooper a Reprieve and Test the DNA

Governor Brown is completely within his powers under the California Constitution to grant a reprieve to Kevin Cooper and convene an innocence review.

The evidence that needs to be tested has not been subjected to advanced DNA analysis. The same San Bernardino County law enforcement offices *that destroyed evidence pointing to other suspects* refuse to allow new, state-of-the-art testing on the remaining evidence.

Please email Governor Brown at governor@governor.ca.gov and make a follow-up phone call to his office at (916) 445-2841. Make sure to mention that you want to see a reprieve for Kevin Cooper and that the evidence

should be tested using state-of-the-art DNA analysis. You can also go to http://org.salsalabs.com/o/1265/p/dia/action4/common/public/?action_KEY=23068 to contact the Governor.

Recent Exonerations

Vernon Horn - State: CT

- Date of Exoneration: 4/25/2018

In 2000, Vernon Horn was sentenced to 70 years in prison for murder and robbery at a New Haven, Connecticut delicatessen. He was exonerated in 2018 after cell phone evidence concealed by police was discovered that showed he was not involved.

Anthony Jakes - State: IL

-Date of Exoneration: 4/30/2018

In 1993, Anthony Jakes was sentenced to 40 years in prison after falsely confessing at age 15 to a murder in Chicago, Illinois. He was exonerated in 2018 based on evidence that police kicked and beat him until he confessed.

Jean Dorval - State: NJ

-Date of Exoneration: 4/30/2018

In 1996, Jean Dorval and Duquene Pierre were sentenced to 60 years in prison for murder and aggravated assault in Union County, New Jersey. Pierre was acquitted at a retrial in 2016 based on evidence that he and Dorval were out of state at the time of the murder and in 2018, the prosecution dismissed the charges against Dorval.

Marquis Jackson - State: CT

- Date of Exoneration: 5/3/2018

In 2000, Marquis Jackson was sentenced to 45 years in prison for murder and robbery at a New Haven, Connecticut delicatessen. He was exonerated in 2018 after cell phone evidence concealed by police was discovered that showed he was not involved.

David Robinson - State: MO

- Date of Exoneration: 5/14/2018

In 2007, David Robinson was sentenced to life in prison without parole for a murder in Sikeston, Missouri. He was exonerated in 2018 based on evidence the real killer had confessed and two jailhouse informants admitted they falsely implicated Robinson.

Rosean Hargrave - State: NY

- Date of Exoneration: 5/14/2018

In 1992, Rosean Hargrave was sentenced to 30 years to life in prison for the shooting of two

corrections officers in Brooklyn, New York. He was exonerated in 2018 based on evidence that the lead detective had fabricated evidence in other murder cases.

John Bunn - State: NY

- Date of Exoneration: 5/15/2018

In 1992, John Bunn was sentenced to seven years to life in prison for the murder of a corrections officer in Brooklyn, New York. He was exonerated in 2018 based on evidence that the lead detective had fabricated evidence in other murder cases.

Dontia Patterson - State: PA

- Date of Exoneration: 5/16/2018

In 2008, Dontia Patterson was sentenced to life in prison without parole for a murder in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was exonerated in 2018 because police and prosecutors had concealed evidence implicating the real killer, and his defense attorney had failed to fully investigate the case.

Freddie Joe Lawrence and Paul Jenkins

- State: MT - Date of Exoneration: 6/1/2018

Freddie Joe Lawrence and Paul Jenkins were each sentenced to 100 years in prison for robbery, kidnapping, and murder in Montana City, Montana. They were exonerated in 2018 by DNA tests that identified the real killer.

Johnny Tall Bear - State: OK

- Date of Exoneration: 6/11/2018

In 1992, Johnny Tall Bear was sentenced to life in prison for murder in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He was exonerated in 2018 by DNA tests which showed that the witness who identified him was mistaken.

Source: The National Registry of Exonerations

<http://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/>

Stays of Execution

June

21 Clifton Williams TX

Stay granted by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals on June 5, 2018 to permit Williams to re-litigate his claim of intellectual disability under *Moore v. Texas*. The Texas courts had previously denied his claim, applying the "Briseno factors" that were declared unconstitutional in *Moore*.

27 Angelo Fears OH

Rescheduled for October 17, 2019 by Gov. John Kasich on September 1, 2017.^

^ On September 1, 2017, Ohio's Governor Kasich issued a statement and an updated execution schedule, which changed the execution dates for 19 of 26 condemned prisoners who had scheduled dates between September 2017 and September 2020. The execution schedule for these 26 prisoners now extends through April 2022.

Executions

No executions this month. (HOORAY!)

Take Action - Robert Van Hook

Write a letter, send an email, call, fax or tweet:

- Opposing the execution of Robert Van Hook, and calling for his death sentence to be commuted;
- Noting that the trial court did not hear the full mitigating evidence of the defendant's abusive and dysfunctional upbringing and the impact that this had on his life, mental condition and conduct;
- Explaining that you are not seeking to excuse violent crime or to downplay the suffering caused.

Contact this official by 18 July, 2018:

Governor John Kasich,
Riffe Center, 30th Floor,
77 South High St.

Columbus, OH 43215-6117, USA

Email: www.governor.ohio.gov/Contact/ContacttheGovernor.aspx

Twitter: @JohnKasich

Phone: (614) 466-3555

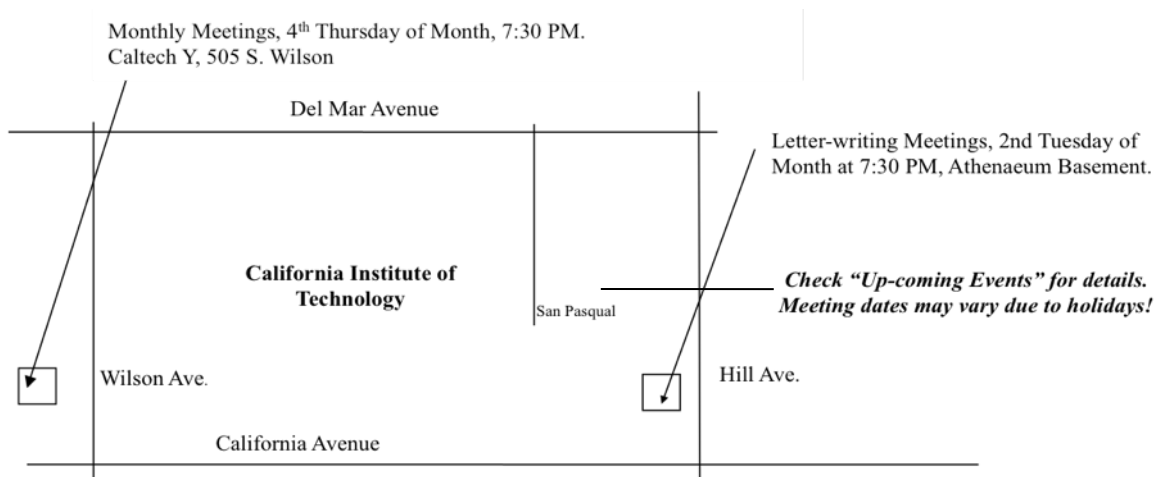
Salutation: Dear Governor

If you take action, you can let Amnesty USA know at <https://www.amnestyusa.org/report-urgent-actions/>. Be sure to note that this is *Urgent Action 116.18*

It is so important to report your actions because AI USA records the actions taken on each case--letters, emails, calls and tweets--and use that information for their advocacy.

GROUP 22 JUNE LETTER COUNT

UAs	21
POC	6
Total	27



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.