

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, September 26, 7:30 PM. Monthly Meeting. We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. Our guest speaker this month is Dr. Nurnisa Kurban from the group UyghurLA (UyghurLa.org), whose members work to raise awareness of the internment of the Uyghur people by the Chinese government in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China.

Tuesday, October 8, 7:30-9:00 PM. Letter Writing meeting at the Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. (This will be our last meeting of the summer 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, October 20, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group. For September we read the novel "A Boy in Winter" by Rachel Seiffert.

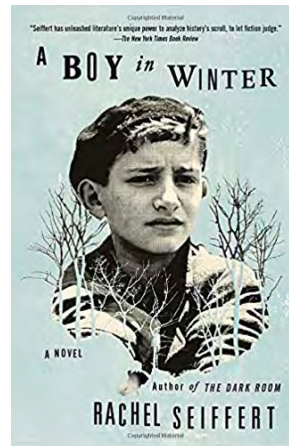
COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hello All,

This is Joyce, writing the column since our group coordinator Kathy has been extremely busy this month. On Thursday we will have our first Monthly Meeting after our summer break. Thanks to Kathy for arranging the visit of a guest speaker from the Uyghur Los Angeles group.

Tashpolat Tiyp, the former Uyghur president of Xinjiang University, was sentenced to death in a secret trial. Subjected to an enforced disappearance in 2017, he has been arbitrarily detained since then. No information has been made available about charges and proceedings against him, and his current whereabouts remain unknown. Amnesty International fears that his execution may be imminent.

At our Thursday meeting, you can sign a petition for Tashpolat Tiyp. You can get more information and send your own letter by downloading Urgent Action 119.19: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/urgent-actions/urgent-action-uyghur-academic-faces-execution-china-ua-119-19/>



Next Rights Readers Meeting

**Sunday, Oct. 20,
6:30 PM**

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

***A Boy in Winter*
by Rachel Seiffert**

REVIEW

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jun/07/a-boy-in-winter-by-rachel-seiffert-review>

In a final review written shortly before her death earlier this month, Helen Dunmore acclaims a vivid account of mercy and peril in Nazi-occupied Ukraine.

Rachel Seiffert is known for her sensitive and unsparing focus on history, and the way people's lives are corroded or even maimed by the past that gave them birth. Her last novel, 2014's *The Walk Home*, explored the grim heritage of Scottish sectarianism through characters trapped in roles they did not choose and sometimes could barely endure. The boom of the Protestant marching drum, ominous or enticing, resounded through its pages. Seiffert brilliantly dramatised the loneliness of those who cannot conform, or cannot wipe from their minds what has gone before them.

Now, in her new novel, *A Boy in Winter*, she returns to a history that clearly preoccupies her imagination and was the subject of her earlier *The Dark Room*: the experience of living in and under the Third Reich. Daughter of a German mother and bilingual in English and German, Seiffert writes with authority. She has remarked that as a child she absorbed from film, TV and the playground a disturbing awareness that there was something wrong in being German. But how could this be, when these same Germans were her loving and beloved family? This early contradiction has given a precious double vision to her interpretation of the impact and aftermath of Nazism.

A Boy in Winter is set in Ukraine in 1941, after the retreat of the Soviet army. Incoming German

forces are greeted with bread and salt by Ukrainian peasants who have endured Soviet collectivisation and now hope they will survive this latest occupation. They have been reassured by leaflets dropped from German aeroplanes that the invading forces have “no quarrel with those who live a peaceful life, with those who wish Ukraine to prosper”. Civil order must be established, railways must be repaired and new routes opened to carry armies and supplies. A German engineer, Otto Pohl, has arrived to take charge of a road-building programme. He is uneasy about having become, for expediency, a Nazi party member, but comforts his conscience with the belief that he is not really part of “what the soldiers do”. Within the first few pages, Pohl learns that the rounding up of the region’s Jews is at least as high a priority as his road.

This roundup and its aftermath are described with hallucinatory vividness, in a way that is filmic and exterior rather than penetrative. A confused crush of people mill about, repeating rumours, struggling to control terror with practical interpretations of what may be happening. “Didn’t I say it’s a ghetto they have planned for us?” “Yes, three days’ travel, remember?” Through his boarding house window, Pohl witnesses the soldiers’ offhand brutality, and the fissure of doubt within him deepens.

The “boy” of the novel’s title is 13-year-old Yankel, who decides to flee with his youngest brother, Momik, rather than be caught by the soldiers. The two children are the pivot of the novel and other characters are defined by their contact with the brothers. Seiffert does not analyse the provenance of an act of mercy, or the roots of cruelty. Yasia, the farm girl who initially feeds and protects the children, does not realise for some time that these may be “Jew children”: it is their youth and “fineness” that compel her. Even Yankel, both decisive and helpless, remains opaque. The story of the boys is told in an intensely physical manner, through the weight of Momik, tied in a blanket to his big brother’s back, or the suck and slipperiness of marsh, the warmth of a newly peeled egg.

Ukraine, a land of black, fertile soil, farms, orchards and marshland, becomes as vital as any human character in the novel. This territory is a breadbasket, yet the instinct of its invaders is to disrupt, damage, destroy. Seiffert never belabours her point, but instead demonstrates the sheer illogicality of a control system that turns the growing of food into a dangerous

negotiation of curfews and restrictions. To endure is the only strategy, but it will not help the Jews who have been herded into a factory for dispatch.

Yankel and Momik must be persecuted, like all other Jews, because the Third Reich privileges this everyday, routine mercilessness. Pohl, driven out of the burrow of self-delusion he has dug for himself, commits an act of mercy almost in spite of himself. Seiffert’s cool tone never wavers, and her spare, beautiful prose is a joy to read. One flaw is that while her characters are intensely present physically, they are less available to the reader emotionally. This can lead to a certain detachment, where engagement might have made a very good novel into an outstanding one.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/rachel-seiffert>



Rachel Seiffert was born in 1971 in Oxford to German and Australian parents, and was brought up bi-lingually. She has lived mostly in Oxford and Glasgow, and after a short period living in Berlin, has now moved back to England. Her first novel, *The Dark Room* (2001), explores the legacy of Nazi guilt in Germany through the related stories of three 20th-century Germans. It was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction the same year, and won a Betty Trask Award in 2002. Her second book is a collection of short stories, *Field Study* (2004). Rachel Seiffert has worked in film and community education and currently writes for a living. In 2003 she was named by *Granta* magazine as one of twenty 'Best of Young British Novelists'. Her latest novel is *Afterwards* (2007).

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Sister Helen Prejean

We all know of Sr Helen Prejean for her riveting book (and movie) *Dead Man Walking: The Eyewitness Account Of The Death Penalty That*

Sparked a National Debate and her tireless work to abolish the death penalty. September 7, 2019, we in Pasadena and the surrounding communities had the privilege and joy of hearing her in an interview at All Saints Episcopal Church. She's on a book tour pitching her new book *River of Fire: My Spiritual Journey*.

Sr Helen said her latest book is a prequel to *Dead Man Walking* because it explains why she embarked on her journey into the lives of people on death row. She said Vatican II was her wake up call, and when she was 40 years old (she is now 80 years old which for me at least infuses life into 'the golden years'), she realized that (and here I paraphrase) faith without action was not a reality of her faith thus she wanted to put her faith into action. Prior to Vatican II, women who entered the convent had nothing to do with what profession they would follow for the rest of their lives. After Vatican II, she became an activist.

As she talked, I realized the free-wheeling speech pattern Sr Helen has is really one of rapier wit and deep compassion. She poked a little humor at the Catholic Church regarding the Vietnam War. She said that if the USA had dropped condoms on Vietnam instead of Agent Orange, the bishops would have been against the war immediately. It is that same wit that keeps her focused on her mission to abolish the death penalty.

Sr Helen devotes herself to one person on death row at a time. She gets to know the person, his family, his spiritual life, his backstory. I think this is what allows her to realize fully "people are more than the worst thing they have ever done in their lives." And she goes with each of these human beings to his execution.

What she takes away from these encounters is the lack of justice: wealthy people rarely if ever are condemned to die in the USA. Although California Governor Gavin Newsom has signed an executive moratorium on executions, LA County's District Attorney Jackie Lacey continues to call for the death penalty. Sr Helen heralds Pope Francis's stand on the death penalty. He has said that the Catholic Church has 'matured' in the way it sees the death penalty and has had the Catechism changed to say, "The death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person," with the addition that the Church "works with determination for its abolition worldwide." Now with that said, in 2018, 53% of

USA Catholics continued to favor the death penalty. Sr Helen believes that many Christian religious people who support the death penalty see God as identified with 'the law' and if 'the law' supports this type of punishment, then it must be okay because if it's against the law then it's against God. Sr Helen subscribes to a God who is interested in compassion and justice. One important question for Sr Helen is 'who is our neighbor?' followed by 'who do we love?' When dovetailed with compassion and justice, these seem like good questions for us to consider.

When asked her thoughts on the re-imposition of the Federal death penalty, Sr Helen said she has an upcoming article where she will discuss this in full. I will be sure to look for that article.

Sr Helen started the interview off with a bang by giving us our 'call to action'. First she said for us to call Governor Newsom to thank him for his moratorium on the death penalty: 916-445-2841. She followed this with a shout out to Jackie Lacey since she continues to call for the imposition of the death penalty in cases, so we should call her and tell her to stop this because of the governor's moratorium: 213-974-3512. She suggested we learn about Reimagine Justice with the Vera Institute of Justice at <https://www.vera.org/research/reimagine-justice>. She also mentioned Prism Restorative Justice, <https://www.prismjustice.org/>, a group Brother Dennis, one of our speakers last year, works with.



Ah yes, Sr Helen Prejean is an inspiration. And when I had my minute of time with her, I told

her she reminds me of Molly Ivins. We both agreed we miss Molly, her insights, and her wit, and as I walked away, Sr Helen called after me, "Molly Ivins Can't Say That, Can She?" What a wonderful moment.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania, like California, has a moratorium on executions. The state's last execution was in 1999. Now lawmakers are considering joining 20 states plus the District of Columbia in abolishing the death penalty. Since the death penalty was reinstated in the late 1970s, 441 death sentences have been handed down, and more than half of them have been seen as flawed. In the 155 cases in Philadelphia, the reversal rate is 72%. One problem is that most of those who find themselves in trials that involve the death penalty have court-appointed lawyers who work with limited funds. Assistant Federal Defender Timothy Kane wants to convert the death penalty sentences to life imprisonment. Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner who won his 2015 election on an anti-death penalty platform noted that 82% of the current death row inmates are African-American. African-Americans make up only 11% of the state's residents.

Perhaps the five Democrats and two Republicans on the state Supreme Court will rule on the side of abolition, but they have not said when they will rule on this subject.

Maybe the number of US states to abolish the death penalty will rise to 21 - plus the District of Columbia.

Recent Exonerations

[Matthew Ngov](#) - State: CA

- Date of Exoneration: 8/14/2019

In 2013, Matthew Ngov was sentenced to 57 years to life in prison for a gang-related murder in Long Beach, California. He was granted a new trial because the trial judge refused to allow evidence that corroborated his defense. In August 2019, Ngov was acquitted at a retrial.

[Scott Godesky](#) - State: PA

- Date of Exoneration: 8/19/2019

In 1997, Scott Godesky was sentenced to life in prison for murder in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. After a co-defendant recanted, his conviction was vacated and he was acquitted at a retrial in 2019.

[Dontae Sharpe](#) - State: NC

- Date of Exoneration: 8/22/2019

Dontae Sharpe was sentenced to life in prison for murder in Greenville, North Carolina in 1995. He was exonerated in 2019 after the principal witness recanted and a medical examiner said the victim's wounds were not consistent with the trial testimony.

[James Blackmon](#) - State: NC

- Date of Exoneration: 8/22/2019

James Blackmon pled guilty in 1988 to the murder of a college student in Raleigh, North Carolina, and was sentenced to life in prison. He was declared innocent by a three-judge panel in 2019 after the state's innocence inquiry commission found that Blackmon's confession was almost certainly false and that he was likely out of state when the attack occurred.

[Charles Jackson](#) - State: OH

- Date of Exoneration: 8/29/2019

In 1991, Charles Jackson was sentenced to 30 years to life in prison for murder and attempted murder in Cleveland, Ohio. He was exonerated in 2019 after police reports discrediting the only two prosecution witnesses were finally disclosed by the prosecution.

[Ricky Kidd](#) - State: MO

- Date of Exoneration: 9/13/2019

In 1997, Ricky Kidd was sentenced to life without parole for a double murder in Kansas City, Missouri. He was exonerated in 2019, after the prosecution's chief witness recanted his identification of Kidd and new evidence pointed to the real killers.

Executions

September

4	Billy Crutsinger	TX
	Lethal injection 1-drug (pentobarbital)	
	Years From Sentence To Execution - 16	
10	Mark Soliz	TX
	Lethal injection 1-drug (pentobarbital)	
	Years From Sentence To Execution - 7	

GROUP 22 SEPTEMBER LETTER COUNT

[To be reported next month. We worked on special AIUSA Banned Books actions for journalists and bloggers.]

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Narges Mohammadi and Gao Zhisheng

By Joyce Wolf

Jean-Christophe of Amnesty Belgium, who has been coordinating efforts for **Narges Mohammadi**, emailed on September 7:

" I do hope you had an energising summer and are all still up to fight for the unconditional release of Narges. The bad news is that, as far as I know, there is no real and concrete change to her condition.

The little good news is that Narges actually does know about our collective effort!! And it does help her to keep up.

She wrote a letter for us. I just got it from her husband Taghi (it was in Farsi. Taghi & his translator Hassan put it in French to me). I have just translated it into English :

'First of all, I would like to thank my colleagues, human rights defenders, at the Amnesty International, for their efforts and support. Secondly, given the situation in Iran, I wish, as a human rights activist, to express my opposition to the embargo and the war against my country.

I am sentenced to heavy and unfair sentences because of my activities in favour of human rights, the abolition of the death penalty, and against sexual discrimination, against torture, against imprisonment in the isolated area of the prison. I'm against war and violence. I will always act on behalf of civil society and its organizations that are, in my view, the pillars of democracy and human rights. The path to democracy and human rights in my country, Iran, is through the civil society, not through war or violence.

The development of non-governmental organizations and civil society institutes has been one of my concerns for twenty-seven years.

I was a member or founder of 11 non-governmental organizations. I'm convinced that this path is more effective than other paths to democracy.

Mohammadi Narges

Teheran, Evine Prison , August 2019' "

Jean-Christophe suggested to all the groups working for Narges that we send recent news and photos to him by mid-October, and he would gather them to demonstrate the global concern for Narges. Huge thanks to Stevi for choreographing a group photo at our Group 22 letter writing on Sep. 11. I'll send it to Jean-Christophe and post it on Twitter #FreeNarges.

August marked two years since **Gao Zhisheng** was forcibly disappeared, with no word at all of his whereabouts from authorities in China. Amnesty published a tribute to Gao Zhisheng by his good friend and fellow activist Teng Biao, some of which I quoted in our August newsletter. Here are Teng Biao's concluding words:

Gao Zhisheng is not "one of" the bravest lawyers in China, he is indisputably "the" bravest one.

...

In the 13 years after that [2006] kidnapping, Gao Zhisheng has never experienced a day of freedom – he has been either missing, locked up or under house arrest. When Gao was finally seen in public again, he looked old and frail. Most of his teeth were missing. I looked at the photo and could not stop crying.

But time and time again, even after each kidnapping, each imprisonment and torture, Gao Zhisheng refused to surrender.

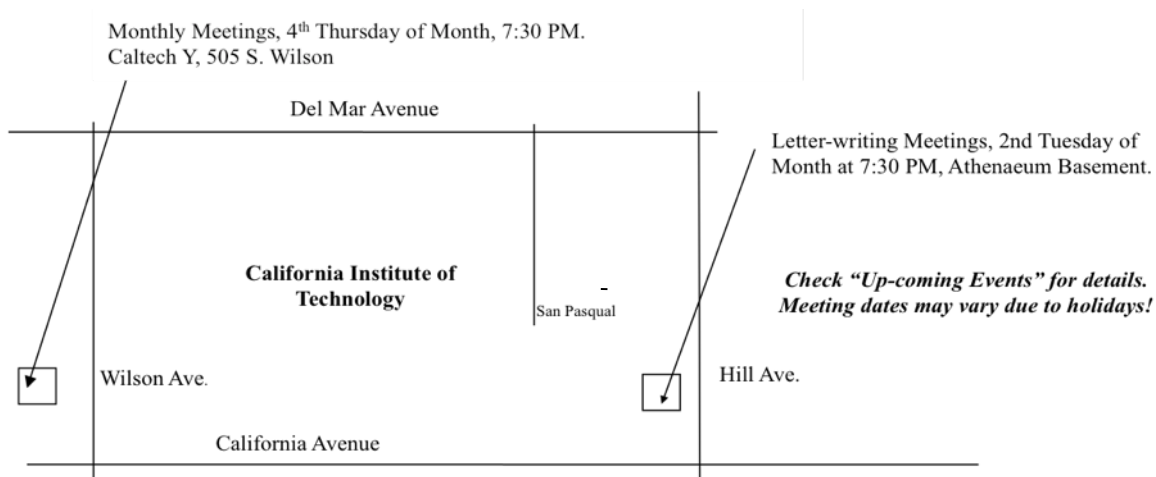
When he was held in a cave in 2016, he found out that the American Bar Association (ABA) refused to publish my book. He wrote an article to criticize them and to condemn any organization that pandered or succumbed to China's authoritarian power. Even at his most vulnerable, he refused to be silenced.

In August 2017, Gao Zhisheng went missing again and has not been heard from since. His family and loved ones have never stopped worrying about him.

We continue to look for Gao. We hope that we will soon find his gentle smile, his extraordinary strength, his unrelenting spirit in his fight for human dignity and his refusal to accept defeat.

Read the entire article at

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/08/bravest-lawyer-china-gao-zhisheng/>



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/

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