



Sheng Xue chosen as PEN Canada City of Edmonton Writer in Exile

TORONTO: March 23, 2009 — The poet, journalist and editor Sheng Xue has been chosen as the PEN Canada City of Edmonton Writer in Exile for 2009/10.

Sheng found her literary calling early in life, writing poems as a teenager to ease bitter memories of her childhood in Beijing during the Cultural Revolution. In 1967, at the age of five, she and her younger sister were sent to live with relatives in the countryside after their parents were blacklisted by the Communist party. Life outside the city was harsh. Sheng was often cold, hungry and bemused by the discrimination she faced. “[It] was so miserable, so hopeless,” she later recalled, “I didn’t know what I could do; I didn’t know what was the meaning of my life. So I started to write poems for myself.” She returned to Beijing in 1971, completed her education there, and worked a magazine journalist before leaving China in August 1989, shortly after the violent suppression of the Tiananmen Square protests in which she had taken part.

Since coming to Canada, Sheng has worked as a print, radio and television journalist, movie actress and editor. She is a regular columnist for Hong Kong’s *Trend Magazine*, and a correspondent for Radio Free Asia and Germany’s Deutsche Welle Radio. A prominent member of PEN Canada’s Writers in Exile network, she is one of four co-authors of *The TAXI Project*, an original play written as part of a PEN Canada collaboration with the Art for Real Change Collective. The play is a heartfelt examination of the complex political and personal choices which have led many exiles to seek a new life in Canada. After a successful two-week run at Alchemy Theatre in Toronto in 2008 it is scheduled to tour high schools and Universities across southern Ontario in spring 2009.

Throughout her career Sheng has remained a committed political activist. She has spoken of her writing as a “responsibility to tell the truth, to help victims and their families and to try my best to promote democracy and human rights in China.” In 2000, Sheng received the Canadian Association for Journalists award for investigative journalism for a *Maclean’s* feature on “Snakehead” gangs who traffick thousands of poor Chinese into Canada each year. The feature also won a National Magazine award. In 2005 she won the Journalism and Media Award from the National Ethnic Press and Media Council of Canada. In 2001 Sheng published, a book-length account of China’s most notorious smuggling case. *Unveiling the Yuan Hua Case* was immediately banned by Beijing’s Propaganda Ministry and quickly became a bestseller in expatriate Chinese communities around the world. Last year the United Writers Press in Hong Kong published *Lyricism from a Fierce Critic*, a collection of Sheng’s essays, and *Seeking the Soul of Snow*, a collection of her poems. Both collections have been banned in China.

Sheng is the 2009 International Writer in Residence at the Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University. She was the 2007 Writer in Residence at Carlton University, Ottawa. She will be PEN Canada City of Edmonton Writer from September 1, 2009 to August 31, 2010.

Background

The City of Edmonton’s Writer in Exile program is a joint initiative of PEN Canada, the Edmonton Arts Council, the University of Alberta, the Edmonton Public Library, the Writers Guild of Alberta, LitFest and Athabasca University. It receives support from the Canada Council.

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