

## Letter from Kate Clanchy FRSL MBE

### *To the Council, Staff, and Management Committee of the Society of Authors*

This is a letter about Joanne Harris, Nicola Solomon, the staff and Management Committee of the Society of Authors, and their dealings with me and Sir Philip Pullman since August 2021. It is my initiative but it is written with the knowledge and consent of Sir Philip. It is an independent work: I am not part of any group. I am a member of the Society of Authors.

This letter is addressed to Council members because it is about Sir Philip's resignation and the office of President. I am aware Council Members have no formal powers, so I am writing to you simply as fellow writers who care about writing and the Society in the hope of having your advice. It is addressed to the Management Committee and staff because it is about you and the crisis you found yourselves in last summer and find yourself in again now. It is a letter, rather than any more formal document, first because the Society of Authors has no structure to address all of you, yet I believe you should all be included; and second because it is not a complaint seeking redress but genuinely an attempt to help at a difficult time. My case, according to recent articles in the *New Statesman* and the *Guardian*, has caused fear and silencing across the book industry. As the *Guardian* put it '*Harm has been done, and now everyone is afraid.*' I hope to help to break this silence. I hope you may agree with some of the points I make in the letter, but I am grateful simply for your attention.

This letter lays out what happened to me and Sir Philip last summer in careful detail in a narrative form which I hope makes some of the twists and turns of Twitter comprehensible. I have provided Twitter evidence with screenshots which are unfortunately heavy in digital memory. I have therefore supplied a link to an appendix of these at the end of each section: if you click you will see the original tweets. Other items are hyperlinked, either to the original source or to dropbox, documents, including a commissioned forensic social media report from the established private detective agency *Are They Safe*. In addition, there is a list of Sections and page numbers.

*This Letter is copied to:*

Nicola Solomon and all members of staff of The Society of Authors

Joanne Harris and all members of the Managing Committee of the Society of Authors

The Council of the Society of Authors.

## Sections and Page Numbers

<b>Background:</b> an online discussion the Society of Authors should never have entered August 1 <sup>st</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	Page 3
<b>The Public Linking of the Position of the Society of Authors with Prof Sunny Singh</b>	
9 <sup>th</sup> August: Inappropriate Tweets	Page 6
10 <sup>th</sup> - and 11 <sup>th</sup> of August: SOA Statement and Press Release supporting Prof Singh against Sir Philip Pullman	Page 7
<b>Private Bullying and Harassment by Joanne Harris</b>	Page 9
<b>A Lack of Due Diligence: The Story of Racial Harassment.</b>	Page 11
<b>A Lost Chance to Review:</b>	
My Complaint of 30 <sup>th</sup> of August	Page 15
Connection with SOA Meeting about Sir Philip Pullman of 9 <sup>th</sup> September	Page 16
<b>Picador: An Appropriate Focus for the Society of Authors</b>	Page 17
<b>Freedom of Speech</b>	Page 19
<b>Finally: a summary and request</b>	Page 20

## Background: an online discussion the Society of Authors should never have entered

**August 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

*( we should not) incite hatred, nor engender the threat or use of violence....  
it is crucial to distinguish between meaningful criticism and gratuitous harassment which  
degrades or intimidates a person or group*

### **SOA Joint Statement on Online Harassment with PEN**

*We deplore bullying, trolling and personal remarks.*

### **SOA Dignity and Respect Policy**

*Even with her neon lit white savioury fuckery, this is grade A shit.*

*Yo Scots who tell me you are different from the imperialist racist English, come get this one.  
(of teacher Gareth Baynam 6 followers)*

Professor Sunny Singh on Twitter, August 4th -5th 2021

In October, 2020, The Society of Authors put their name to [a statement on social media](#) harassment alongside several international PEN organisations. 10 months later, a debate began on twitter about my book, *Some Kids I Taught and What They Taught Me*.

This debate was on important topics, and I accepted many of the criticisms offered and incorporated them into the new edition of my book. I believe it is essential for authors to debate and criticise. I also strongly believe in anti-racism: indeed I have given much of my life to this cause. However the informative and literary part of the debate was soon exhausted and extreme personal accusations started to be made: I was said for example to be a eugenicist, a racist, an ableist and a fascist. I soon found myself unable to reply because I was breaking down: this angered my critics more.

The debate was heightened by very frequent posting. For example Professor Sunny Singh tweeted on the topic more than a hundred times a day for more three weeks. Her rhetoric was particularly absolutist e.g. *you write dehumanising shit for 288 pages and win the Orwell Prize for it. (7<sup>th</sup> August) (1)* and she shut down, rather than opened up, literary discussion by using threatening personal language such as:

*When people harmed by Clanchy's writing tell you how harmful and hurtful her book is and you still show up on their mentions to talk is it's 'generous and thoughtful' you are adding the the pain caused. You are not only complicit but actively causing more harm. Just STOP! (sic) (8<sup>th</sup> August) (2)*

She likened teachers who defended my book to child abusers and racists:

*The harm they must do to children of colour in schools is unimaginable. (3)*

and incited her followers to 'pile on' when she was challenged. When a teacher with 6 followers defended my book in calm terms on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, for example, she tweeted 'Yo Scots who tell me you are different from the imperialist racist English, come get this one'

When he blocked her, she put his name and photo on Twitter on her 35k follower account under the heading *'This is a teacher. The harm he does to children'*. (4)

Prof Singh also brought a rhetoric of violence to her discussion of the publishing industry which she accused of institutional racism. She several times compared herself to Emmet Till, a victim of lynching. (5) and stated that situations similar to the discussion round my book lead to 'extreme violence'. She used threatening, war-like language about people who defended my work : *...they're really hanging their hypocritical, bigoted asses up to the sun* and, in discussion with Monisha Rajesh, promised revenge

*The numbers of writers who have exposed themselves as bigoted fucks is amazing. Still a useful way to collect receipts for the future.* (6)

By the 7<sup>th</sup> of August, in short, this seemed to be a discussion slipping away from what the PEN declaration calls 'meaningful criticism' and into 'gratuitous harassment'. Moreover, there was no membership interest for the Society of Authors: I was not a member and nor were any of the other prominent voices. Yet in the Guardian on the 11th of August, 2021, Joanne Harris said this debate was 'very hard for the staff of the SOA to resist entering', and several members of the Management Committee also did so.

Joanne Harris, Chair of the SOA Management Committee, often acts as the public face of the SOA on Twitter and should perhaps have been especially mindful of the PEN declaration, particularly when, as she said several times, she had not read my book (7). However, she chose to enter the discussions on the morning of Saturday the 7<sup>th</sup> of August and agreed the book was *'problematic in so many ways'*, and soon afterwards, that it was representative of *'how bad things were in publishing'*, (8). On Sunday the 8<sup>th</sup>, she published a 'fable' on twitter echoing some of the views of Professor Singh in order to caricature me as ignorant, cruel and patronising. She accepted compliments for her *'subtweeting dance of the seven veils'* and a *'Well played Joanne'* from Prof Singh. (9)

It might be constructive for the SOA to consider together why this debate was so tempting for the SOA and if, for example, a clearer social media policy might help with such decisions in the future.

[Link to Appendix 1](#)



**Sunny Singh** @ProfSunnySingh · Aug 9, 2021



UK publishing is a hostile environment for writers of colour. This is a structural issue not an individual one. However it is perpetuated and reinforced by individuals and organisations.

For example, tell me why should I - as a minoritised writer - trust @Soc\_of\_Authors?

**Philip Pullman**  
@PhilipPullman

Replying to @katecmorrison @johncosgrove405 and 6 others

2. What is your personal emotional, psychological, ethical investment in writing it?  
3. Can someone else tell this story better? Is it someone else's story to tell?  
4. What does YOUR telling of the story do? Does it replicate prior violence, oppression/injustice? Does it provide new understanding or insight?  
5. What is your power balance/imbalance as a writer to the subject matter?  
6. Finally, should you write/publish this at all? As with most ethical questions, the key is not can one but should one.

**Philip Pullman**  
Lifetime term  
since 1884

The **Society of Authors** is the UK's largest trade union for all types of **writers, illustrators and literary translators**, at every stage of their careers.

17 109 406



**Joanne Harris** ✓  
@Joannechocolat



Replying to @ProfSunnySingh and @Soc\_of\_Authors

Sunny, I can't tell you who to trust, but know that the @Soc\_of\_Authors is trying hard to listen to and amplify marginalized voices. We'd be happy to talk to you about the best ways to make progress. Maybe you could DM me?

10:06 AM · Aug 9, 2021 · Twitter Web App

## The Inappropriate Public Linking of the Position of The Society of Authors with Prof Sunny Singh

### 9<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> of August:

*We do not get involved in individual debates or disputes between authors*

*We understand that authors will disagree from time to time but we hope that views are debated with dignity and respect,*

SOA Dignity and Respect Policy

*You are interrogating someone from a position of authority, and implying that they don't have the right to say anything you disapprove of. I don't like it.*

Philip Pullman, to Sunny Singh Twitter 5th August

*SHUT THE FUCK UP and stop whitesplaining race to me. He was likening ME and my colleagues to Isis and the Taliban.*

12th August Monisha Rajesh on Twitter

*Me waiting for Philip Pullman to apologise for calling us terrorists*

9<sup>th</sup> August, Chimene Suleyman on Twitter (with image)

*Because we will fuck her over. Because that is how we show power*

Sunny Singh on Twitter 7<sup>th</sup> August 2021

### 9<sup>th</sup> August: Inappropriate Tweets

One of the problems of social media is keeping proper boundaries between personal and professional lives. This is especially so on twitter.

On the Monday the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 2021 Sunny Singh tweeted a provocative statement about the Society of Authors and a photograph of the President, Sir Philip Pullman. Professor Singh suggested that both the SOA and Sir Philip were perpetuating racism and making her unsafe..

Joanne Harris replied to this tweet within minutes, quoting the Society of Authors and speaking for it in a 'we', as we see above Her tone was friendly and intimate and the invitation to direct message suggested special access and privileges. This crossed boundaries and lead the SOA into the debate on the side of Prof Singh and against her target in the tweet, the SOA's' President.

A short while later, another comment on the thread suggested that Sir Philp should be 'criticised' and 'fired'. Joanne Harris' reply again used 'we' of herself and the SOA

*'I'm looking into how best we can help. We're taking this very seriously.'*

This statement was 'liked' by the SOA. (1)

Joanne Harris continued to answer as the SOA throughout Monday the 9th, entering into a discussion about self-publishing with another 'we. (2) She also continued to undermine Sir

Philip with ambiguous statements which appeared to come from the SOA. For example, when Sir Philip posted an apology, she replied to it with a statement which seemed to suggest the matter was not ended, and that Sir Philip needed to be brought to a more formal meeting. This suggestion was also ‘liked’ by the SOA. ( 3)

Frequently – and she tweeted several times an hour, all day – Joanne Harris’ orotund replies to tweets sounded sensible in themselves, but served to legitimise divisive and partial statements by others. For example, it sounds reasonable for Joanne Harris to be tweeting about censorship and publisher’s rights, but when you note that her tweets are in reply to statements that Sir Philip Pullman had ‘outed himself as a racist misogynist’, (4) they are not so reasonable, whether Ms Harris was writing as a representative of the SOA or simply as a colleague who expected to work with Sir Philip again.

Again, it might be helpful to think if a stronger social media policy would help to avoid such situations in the future.

### **10<sup>th</sup>- and 11<sup>th</sup> of August: SOA Statement and Press Release supporting Prof Singh against Sir Philip Pullman**

Early the next day, Tuesday the 10th of August, the Society of Authors reinforced their support of Professor Singh in her dispute with Sir Philip by sending out a statement of position email to the Management Committee. This statement quoted Prof Singh’s twitter provocation of the previous morning: ‘*UK publishing is a hostile environment for writers of colour*’ as a received truth. The email went on to distance the Society from Sir Philip:

*Philip Pullman is halfway through his second and final five-year term as SoA President. President is an honorary position only: he does not play any part in the governance of the SoA....*

So unusual a statement naturally rapidly became news. It was leaked to the Bookseller and then to the Guardian. The Society was obliged to post it [as a news item on its website and as a press release](#). .

[In the Guardian, Joanne Harris](#) commented directly on the story on behalf of the SOA. This further reinforced the side the SOA was taking, and her own preeminent position within the Society.

There is no precedent for the Society of Authors issuing a statement against their own President, or for the Chair discussing him disparagingly in a newspaper interview. The mere existence of this story smeared Sir Philip with the suggestion of some equally egregious crime. Sir Philip’s actual comments had been as follows:

On the 9th of August, Sir Philip had replied to a tweet about not reading Ayn Rand on principle with the comment (5)

*‘Someone who thinks that it is not necessary to read a book before condemning it? What a shameful attitude. It would find a comfortable home in Isis or the Taliban.’ (5)*

Sir Philip realised that he was replying to a mistaken thread shortly afterwards, apologised, and deleted the tweet. The tweet was not directed to Prof Singh, Monisha Rajesh or Chimene Suleyman. However, Prof Singh screenshotted the tweet and put it in her own timeline, as if it had been addressed specifically to her. (6) Chimene Suleyman and Monisha Rajesh amplified this story with similar tweets. Sir Philip apologised fully again. (7) The Guardian press release did not carry this side of the story. This story damaged the public reputation of the office of President as well as Sir Philip himself.

It is easy to see why the three critics objected to Sir Philip's analogy – I would not have chosen it – but some of Prof Singh's metaphors used at the same time, such as '*grade A shit*', '*neon lit white savioury fuckery*' and '*hanging up their asses to the sun*' could also be seen as inflammatory. The SOA principle is

*To celebrate freedom of expression....Our members have a multiplicity of views and they are free to exercise them however uncomfortable we might sometimes find it.*

And this needs to be applied equally to all members, otherwise they are breaking another firmly stated principle:

*We do not get involved in individual debates or disputes between authors*

The Society perhaps needs to consider how it might adapt this policy to meet the new difficulties caused by social media.

[Link to Appendix 2](#)



## Private Bullying and Harassment by Joanne Harris

**9<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> of August 2021:**

*The Society of Authors is committed to promoting professional behaviour throughout all its activities, and to tackling and preventing bullying.*

### **SOA Dignity and Respect Policy**

*Fuck your performances of white innocence..*

*Where is the apology to Monisha, Chimene, me? Oh wait, we don't exist in her world, do we?*

*Repulsive.*

These were just a few of the comments placed by Professor Singh late on the evening of the 9th of August beneath a heartfelt apology I had placed on Twitter. (1)

At 10.42, Joanne Harris, who had been commenting as the SOA all day added the reply:

*'I think that those who have received abuse as a consequence of all this would prefer a direct apology, and a promise to do better.'*

Early the next morning, Tuesday the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, Joanne Harris repeated this instruction to me in an unsolicited direct message. (2)

*'I would suggest that you word a very short, simple and direct apology to the three main women in this conversation saying just this:*

- a) You're very sorry for what has happened to them as a consequence of your words*
- b) That you now realise the harm that you have inadvertently caused and*
- c) That you hope to do better in future*

*.....This isn't really about you: the anger and dissatisfaction with the industry's attitude to race was waiting to erupt at some point and you just happened to be the trigger this time. Please consider what I have said, and then step away and practise self-care.'*

I had never corresponded with or met Joanne Harris and assumed therefore that she was contacting me on behalf of the Society of Authors, though I didn't understand why, as I wasn't then a member. It is disturbing to have messages directed to one in public and private at the same time, especially from someone you do not know and especially in an unclear semi-official capacity, because pressure and power seems to come from all around. I politely declined Ms Harris' offer.

A few hours later, at 13.57, Professor Singh availed herself of Joanne Harris's offer to DM her (we know this because the Professor later published her messages on Twitter). (3)

Professor Singh wanted me to 'get off twitter ' and compose an apology to her personally

*'I wish she'd just sit with the discomfort instead of flailing to push it away which just makes it harder. None of us need her to apologise this instant – it will be more meaningful once she's had a chance to reflect. '*

(In fact, I had not commented at all on twitter): Minutes after receiving Prof Singhs' message, Joanne Harris messaged me to tell me

*‘a lot of people (including some of the WOC who have criticised you) are really concerned about you at present. ‘*

I informed her, truthfully, that they were right to be concerned and that I was suicidal. Joanne Harris then offered me Society of Authors ‘mental health resources’.

Ms Harris truly thought that she was acting for the SOA it is hard to understand why she thought that interfering in my case personally was appropriate and accorded with the society’s principles of not interfering in disputes between authors, or with the SOA principles of dignity and respect. The effect of her messages was not to help but to make me feel bullied. I do not believe an apology to Prof Singh was warranted and do not think the SOA should have pressured me to provide one, especially in such a short time frame. When I politely refused I should not have been pressured again. The suggestion that I was mentally unwell because I had not complied was not helpful or appropriate. None of these actions were in the spirit of the Society’s Dignity and Respect policy.

The new systems of personal and public messages that social media offer us cause many new levels of offence, and confusion between official and personal capacity. The Society of Authors might benefit from a clearer, tougher code of conduct around them. An independent review might help to advise on this.

[Link to Appendix 3](#)

## A Lack of Due Diligence: The Story of Racial Harassment

*As an organisation, our expertise lies in the small print*

### **SOA: Our Approach To Debates And Disputes Between Authors**

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> – August -13<sup>th</sup> August**

Professor Singh was not, as I believed at the time, asking me on the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup> of August to apologise for having written a book she did not like. I believe she had a much more serious accusation in mind, and so did Joanne Harris. They had a specific meaning for ‘harm I had inadvertently caused’. They meant that I had caused Prof Singh and other critics to be racially abused online. They thought I had done this by appearing to be distressed. My distress was said to be ‘white women’s tears’, performatively shed in order to have black people assaulted, in particular violence on Prof Singh. My effort aided by Sir Philip in the role of ‘white knight’. He was alleged to have links to the American ‘alt-right’ who were stirred by my plight, intensifying the attacks. (1)

This story is abhorrent to me and I believe it to be untrue. However you may check all my tweets made in this period in the attached report. There are not many of them: if I appear in this letter to be very quiet it is not because I am hiding things I said. I was quiet because I was often too unwell to understand what was going on. That is one reason it was so important to me to understand this story and how it arose.

To help me, I commissioned a forensic social media report on the three women’s Twitter accounts and my own from July to September the well-established firm *Are They Safe*. [The link rather than the document is here](#) as the report is very large. The report was prepared using the highest current standards of analysis and evidence.

The report shows that there was much support for, and almost no trolling of, Sunny Singh, Monisha Rajesh and Chimene Suleyman during the entire period July – September. In the specific period around Sir Philip’s tweet, between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of August, there was no harassment whatever of Prof Singh and Monisha Rajesh except that which they contestably self-reported, such as Sir Philip’s tweet. The Instagram accounts of Sunny Singh, Chimene Suleyman and Sunny Singh were open throughout this period: they also show no harassment and a great deal of support.

The story, then, seems to have grown solely from a thread on Chimene Suleyman’s twitter account which appeared late in the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> of August. I had this thread investigated fully and the story behind it is as follows. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, Ms Suleyman tweeted a thread of angry statements about me. The second tweet ran, in its entirety:

*‘The forcefield round whiteness is impenetrable. You can literally show them the list of racist tropes used about kids and with a straight face they will look into your eyes and tell you it doesn’t exist and you are the bad person’ .*

For 5 days this tweet attracted little attention, but on the 8th of August it was extracted from its thread and retweeted by a high follower US account named @NightmareVision. @NightmareVision specialises in retweets mocking ‘progressive’ views with film images and is followed by US alt right activists. @NightmareVision attached a mocking gif of a forcefield to Chimene Suleyman’s tweet and within a few hours this image had attracted a string of nearly 20 replies. These mocked Ms Suleyman as a ‘whitey’, made fun of her Turkish origins and claim to be Black, and added more offensive gifs to plays on the word ‘forcefield’, This was a disgraceful and appalling event and I condemn it unreservedly. (2)

However, there is no link nor any common followers between me, Sir Philip and @Nightmare Vision. Nor did @NightmareVision extract the tweet because he was following the UK debate on my book. Anyone reading the thread can see that the participants do not know what the ‘tropes’ are or there is a book involved. The participants have no connection or knowledge, either, of Professor Sunny Singh or Monisha Rajesh, nor do they address them, nor did any of the trolls involved go on to enter the discussion at a later time or to address any of the three women again. The thread is self-contained and self-referential and seems most likely to have arisen from a twitter word search for the word ‘whiteness’. The existence of this thread should not be connected to me or Sir Philip. Nothing we did or said attracted the attention of @NightmareVision: he was most likely interested in Ms Suleyman’s contentious language and the chance he saw to mock it.

Nevertheless, it must have been an immensely upsetting event for Ms Suleyman. Early on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, she posted some screenshots from the @NightmareVision thread on her twitter account using the title *‘Someone posted the Cl\*nchy thread to an incel forum’*. (3) This made a misleading connection to me and my book because it suggested that the whole thread had been transferred to @NightmareVision, when in fact it was a single tweet, and by someone acting for me, an event which had not occurred. It was an inaccurate allegation but not one that Ms Suleyman was making formally or in the press: she was sounding off, quite understandably, on her personal Twitter account. Ms Suleyman would have expected any newspaper who planned to report the story to check the small print and run a verified version: she would never have expected her indignant hyperboles to have made it unchecked and wholesale into a newspaper of record like the Guardian. But they did, because the Society of Authors made the bridge for her. It happened in this way.

On the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, Chimene Suleyman and Prof Singh in conversation made an unevidenced link between me, Sir Philip and @Nightmarevision. Prof Singh tweeted: (4)

*(publishing) industry people incited that abuse. Kate saying she was frightened, Philip comparing us to Taliban and Isis.’*

Chimene Suleyman added a remark extending @NightmareVision thread to Prof Singh’s allegation against Sir Philip

*Philip Pullman likened us to ISIS....There's been a co-ordinated attack by the far right on us since Friday, which gets emboldened by language like this, and silence from Picador and co*

Joanne Harris then echoed and amplified this alarming claim in a popular tweet, asking the whole 'book world' to stand against the 'abuse' by speaking up, presumably on twitter.

*Wholehearted support and love for the POC who have received disgraceful racist abuse for highlighting some of the prejudice and injustice within our industry. Come on, people of the book world. Don't look the other way. We can do so much better than this. (5)*

This might have passed as personal comment, except that the next day, the 10th, as we have seen, Joanne Harris felt the need to build on this tweet and sent out the statement to the Management Committee which was subsequently leaked. In this statement, she framed the 'abuse' story as 'we (the SOA) have witnessed the impact on authors who have spoken out so eloquently then had to endure such an array of responses'. Joanne Harris then gave an interview amplifying her statement to the Guardian for the article which appeared on the 11<sup>th</sup>. This article rudely referred to Sir Philip as 'Pullman', accepted as fact the idea that Sir Philip's tweet had caused the 'harm' of 'racist abuse', and apologised for him.(6)

Pullman, who has been the SoA's president since 2013, praised *Some Kids I Taught and What They Taught Me*, calling it "humane, warm, decent, generous, and welcoming". In a now deleted comment, made in response to a tweet he wrongly thought to be about Clanchy, he wrote that those who do not read a book before condemning it would "find a comfortable home in Isis or the Taliban". Authors of colour who criticised Clanchy, including Chimene Suleyman, Monisha Rajesh and Sunny Singh, went on to receive racist abuse from social media users. Pullman has now tweeted an apology for the harm he caused, admitting that his tweet was a "mistake".

<sup>2</sup>  
Lucy Knight the Guardian 11th August

The Guardian is a newspaper of record and adheres to broadsheet standards: it checks its facts. In this case, though, it relied on the word of the Society of Authors. This is understandable: the Society has a considerable reputation for probity. Nobody would believe that the Society of Authors would smear its own president with an allegation of inciting alt-right racist violence without any evidence, so the Guardian relied on the Society's due diligence. Many other news outlets, charities, and individuals, including the magazine *Bad Form*, then relied on the Guardian. Publishers and writers rallied to Joanne Harris's call to 'not be silent' in the face of 'abuse' with letters and petitions. A vast and profoundly defamatory scandal arose, one which endures to this day, but at the base of it all was no more than two screenshots misleadingly inserted into tweets, one attaching Sir Philip's tweet to Prof Singh, one linking @NightmareVision's thread to my name. It was not at all difficult to

see that they were misleading, but I believe that The Society of Authors, the organisation whose ‘expertise lies in the small print’ had not checked either of them before going to the Guardian. I fear, in fact, from the time frame, the result, and from the null results of a formal data subject request I made to the Society, that they had attempted no due diligence at all.

If so, why not? The twitter thread did not need a forensic report at that time: everything was visible and could have been checked within a couple of hours. Help could have been extended to Ms Suleyman and reports of trolling made to Twitter. This might have served to calm her fears as well as making sure the Society was putting out only reliable information. Similarly, the Society should have verified, then and later, the three women’s claims of attacks on their private email accounts. These is a very serious crimes: a sympathetic, thorough, substantiation could only have been a helpful process to the three claimants, and the Society of Authors surely an appropriate organisation to offer it. Without such authentication, though, the SOA should not have endorsed the claims to the Guardian, because, serious as the story is, it is equally serious as a slur.

I have given much of my working life to anti-racist work and have a well-documented and unblemished thirty year teaching record, open to inspection by the Society of Authors at any time. It is defamatory to say that I orchestrated racial abuse, not just of me but of my students, disadvantaged young people of colour who found themselves objects of disgust and patronage, their words and testimony discarded for no evidenced reason. My teaching practice has been destroyed as a consequence of this libel. My family, recently bereaved, had to listen to me being denounced as a racist on the BBC news. I suffered a breakdown and came near suicide.

Sir Philip Pullman, too, is a real, feeling person who at the time of these accusations had given the Society eight years of unpaid service, showing great personal integrity as he did so. To be accused of links with the American alt right and orchestrating racial abuse is an appalling attack on the values he has exhibited through a lifetime, and a deep hurt from people he had treated as friends. His treatment also damaged perceptions of the office of President.

As I write, the Society is engulfed in a very similar scandal. I believe that the issue of how the Society should respond to threats to authors, online or otherwise, and how such threats should be substantiated and reported, would benefit from outside, independent, investigation and advice and a refreshed code of conduct.

#### [Appendix 4](#)

## A Lost Chance to Review:

### My Complaint of 30th of August 2021

On the 30th of August, Joanne Harris published a blog post urging '[white feminists](#)' to [apologise](#) in general. She reused much of the language she had used to me in her previous message.

*'But this isn't about you. No-one cares why you caused harm. All that matters is that you did.'* (24)

In the evening she chose to advertise the blog on twitter under a version of my book title.

*For the late crowd. Some Mistakes and What They Taught Me.*

This tweet put me under pressure. Recognising a return of my suicidal feelings, I wrote to Joanne Harris on direct message to beg her to remove her tweet. She denied any connection with me. I wrote

*It is a reference to my book title and designed to connect your post with my book. You posted it even though I had made you aware I was experiencing suicidal thoughts. It is a cruel thing to do.'*

Joanne Harris simply replied '*No, it isn't.*' Half an hour later, I begged her again to take the post down, telling her plainly that it was increasing my suicidal thoughts. She wrote

*'I think your reaction is irrational – neither the tweet nor the post are about you – but I have no wish to cause you distress. For that reason -and that reason alone – I'll take down the tweet. Now please try to practice self-care'*

Then Joanne Harris blocked me. The next day, she mocked me publicly on twitter with Chimene Suleyman : '*I must have written a Rorschach Test!*' .

Suicidal thoughts are not rational, and I believe that Joanne Harris should not have mocked mine. This exchange seemed so far removed from ordinary humanity and courtesy, and made me feel so at risk, that I immediately contacted Nicola Solomon at the SOA to make a complaint. You may read [the correspondence here \(with the permission of Nicola Solomon\)](#) My complaint did not go well. My perception was that there was delay and prevarication. More seriously, because of its processes, the SOA could only offer me an investigation for my complaint about Joanne Harris which reported to Joanne Harris, though I asked clearly and courteously for a more anonymous process. In the end, as you may read, I gave up because I did not think fairness was obtainable, and I am writing this letter now in part because I cannot imagine getting a fair hearing from the existing complaint processes.

Most modern complaint processes in unions, public bodies and charities, have ways of appointing independent people to arbitrate complaints against senior officers. ACAS advises several different routes. It is problematic that Society of Authors seems to lack such a process. The Society might find it constructive to discuss if one is needed: in the meantime, an independent arbiter would perhaps be helpful in my case.

### **Connection with SOA Meeting about Sir Philip Pullman of 9<sup>th</sup> September**

I did not know when I sent my complaint that the Society of Authors Management Committee was [planning a meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September](#) to discuss the complaints against Sir Philip Pullman. This entire meeting, from what I have learned of it, seems hasty and one sided and demeaning to the office of President. It is also hard to see how it might meet ACAS guidelines.

But even the most irregular of meetings should not have been allowed to go ahead when Joanne Harris was under investigation for a closely related complaint like mine. She should have been recused. I therefore suggest that it is possible that some of the prevarication around my complaint may have been allowed in order to permit Joanne Harris to continue to chair the meeting about Sir Philip.

More widely, it seems regrettable that Nicola Solomon did not take up my suggestion of bringing an outside observer to look at my complaint. The actions of the Society of Authors in the second week August of 2021 were hasty. Considered outside observation could surely only have been helpful.

This haste also meant that the Managing Committee did not have time to consider ways in which the Society of Authors, and Joanne Harris in particular, might themselves have whipped up the scandal for which the meeting was blaming Sir Philip. The meeting brought disrepute to the Society via press reports in Private Eye, and in an effort to cover up, it seemed to me that Joanne Harris was untruthful on twitter.

It might be helpful to reevaluate that meeting now with the help of disinterested advice.

[Appendix 5](#)



## Picador: An Appropriate Focus for the Society of Authors?

*We lobby against morality clauses in both private and public... we ask all authors to speak up against them.*

### **Society of Authors**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, echoing and responding to Joanne Harris's call for action, my publisher Picador announced (30)

*We have been listening to the responses to what we said about Kate Clanchy's *Some Kids I Taught and What They Taught Me* and we want to apologise profoundly for the hurt we have caused, the emotional anguish experienced by many of you who took the time to engage with the text, and to hold us to account.*

*We realise our response was too slow. We vigorously condemn the despicable online bullying of many of those who have spoken out. This has no place in our community.*

*We understand that readers wish to know specifically what will be done about the book, we're actively working on this now and we will communicate this as soon as possible*

In November, Philip Gwyn Jones, the Publisher of Picador, gave an [interview to the Telegraph](#) and stated

*'If I have regrets about our conduct during the Clanchy affair, it's that we weren't clear enough in our support for the author and her rights.'*

However, following another campaign of twitter Gwyn Jones apologised and Picador tweeted on December 10th.

*We vigorously condemn online bullying of Chimene Suleyman, Professor Sunny Singh and Monisha Rajesh whose readings of Kate Clanchy's *Some Kids and What They Taught Me* were instructive and clear-sighted and we are devastated by the ongoing pain experienced by them.*

Following this, the rights to all my books – and I had been published with Picador for 26 years and won major prizes in every genre - were returned to me.

I have spoken to many writers who were alarmed about these events, not only because of the evident cowardice of a renowned publishing house agreeing that it was '*instructive and clear sighted*' to call its Orwell Prize winning book '*288 pages of dehumanising shit*', but because it seemed to signal a change in publishing tort.

For more than a century, books had been held to be only able to harm those they recognisably falsely portrayed, and a work would only be pulped or rewritten if this had been proven to be the case. In my case, no complaint had been made. On the contrary, the young people portrayed in *Some Kids* were very happy with their portrayals, [and had said so publicly](#). Picador turned against my book because 'harm' had been said to be done not to the subjects but to the adult readers of the book. This troubled many writers because such a subjective measure could be said to apply to any work.

In fact Picador's action seemed very much like a morality clause: something the Society of Authors campaigned against. But in this case, the Society of Authors, through Joanne Harris,

had campaigned for the writing community to protest to Picador about my book. They had told the Guardian that words in it had caused the harm of racial abuse. The evident contradiction here causes ongoing problems for the SOA. [In a recent article in the New Statesman,](#) for example, Nicola Solomon was asked about morality clauses and my case. Unable to argue why Picador's behaviour was not a morality clause, she said instead that I was beneath the notice of the SOA.

*'Far more concerning than a case like Clanchy's, (Solomon) argued (whose books continue to be published, and who is free to say what she likes on Twitter), are less headline-grabbing developments such as publishers' "morality clauses".'*

Nicola Solomon did not give a reason why my case was 'less concerning' but went on to infer one:

*'If you're a children's writer, and you turn out to be a paedophile, I would have sympathy with a publisher who wanted to drop your books.'*

Singling me out in the press in this way means that, though I am now a member, I do not feel confident in asking the Society for help. In many ways I feel I have become, as Joanne Harris suggested I should in her messages to me, a scapegoat for the 'entire publishing industry' in 'sackcloth and ashes'. This isn't just unfair to me, but also an unsustainable and discreditable position for the Society of Authors. I believe it would be more helpful for the Society to review its position on morality causes and their interaction with social media, and I think that independent advice would help them to do so.

## Freedom of Speech

*We will always intervene with publishers on freedom of speech issues*

### **Society of Authors**

*A culture in which harassment has become the norm across the ideological spectrum...not only harms those directly affected, but damages public debate*

### **SOA Joint Statement on Online Harassment with PEN**

It is untrue that I may, as Nicola Solomon stated, ‘say what I like’, on Twitter or elsewhere. On the contrary, I experience punishments for speaking, ones which I believe would chill most writers. When I wrote a piece [for Prospect](#) magazine in November, for example, Picador asked me not to publish it. I did so against the threat of losing my books because I believed it was right and necessary to write about ostracism and suicidal ideation. I believe that most writers in the Society of Authors would feel restricted by such threats.

A year after the events, any editor commissioning me or journalist writing about me must run a gamut of threats, foul language and extreme accusations. When Gaby Hinsliff wrote an article about me for the [Guardian on the 18th of June](#), for example, Prof Singh renewed her unsubstantiated claims that threats from the ‘alt right’ result from writing about me. *Credible threats to my safety have gone up significantly since August 2021 and get worse with each article. (1)*

Gaby Hinsliff’s article also mentioned that I had lost both my parents to Covid. Prof Singh responded with a tweet about me and Sir Philip. *‘thinking of running a competition to describe the weepy lady writer and her ineffectual white knight’ (2)* When her followers responded with sexual remarks and analogies to vomit and cheese Prof Singh tweeted ‘yowzah’ and many emojis of applause.

I believe that Prof Singh’s recent tweets reflect a critical environment in which as the SOA/PEN declaration puts it, ‘harassment has become the norm’, and public debate is as a result degraded. With such degradation comes a chilling of all writers’ freedom of thought and expression.

In February, Sir Philip Pullman resigned his post of President because, as he stated clearly, he did not feel able to speak freely while he continued in office. As I write, the post of President continues to be vacant and the Society is convulsed in yet another terrible and personal row about free speech. This distresses me greatly, and though this letter has been months in the making I have thought long and hard before sending it today because, as I said at the start, it is an independent statement which does not come from a group and I do not want confusion over that.. I do not want, moreover, to add to the burden on SOA staff. It was also exceptionally difficult, given the antiquated constitution of the Society, to see how to place my statement. In the end, I decided to send my thoughts as a letter, from a writer to other writers, and hope that it would be received in the constructive spirit that it was sent. This may be the worst of times, but perhaps it is also the best to come together and ask for change.

### [Appendix 6](#)

## Finally

I hope I have demonstrated to you, as a Management Committee as Council, and to Staff, that a serious problem has occurred over my case in the Society of Authors, and that the current procedures for complaints have not proven adequate to it.

In my opinion, the Society of Authors entered a dispute when they should not have done, and publicly took the side of Prof Singh in a partial way. They supported Prof Singh's allegations against Sir Philip Pullman and me to such an extent that they forgot their dignity and respect policy and commitment to due diligence and endorsed an unverified story to the Guardian. This unverified story turned into a slur: as result, Sir Philip has had to resign from the Society and the whole office of President is in question. A *de facto* morality clause from my publisher was something the Society might have campaigned against: instead they found themselves an important voice in calling for it. This leaves the Society with ongoing difficulties as they attempt to defend free speech.

My view is that the Society's best course forward would be to appoint a legally skilled, independent, person or persons from outside the Management Committee to study everything that has happened here, produce a report, and advise on an outcome. However, I have no doubt the Society contains many different views. My hope is that not that you, as a Council, Staff, or Management Committee member, will endorse everything I have said in this letter, but that you will agree that the Society of Authors faces a problem with which it could benefit from disinterested, independent help and will write to Nicola Solomon to say so.

Yours faithfully

Kate Clanchy MBE FRSL

August 24<sup>th</sup> 2022