



## Disappearing languages: the 1960s

*He who loses his language loses his world... In what language would you say,  
'Fhuair a' Ghaidhlig bàs'?*

Iain Crichton Smith, member, Scottish PEN

By the 1960s many writers in Scotland were increasingly concerned with issues of language and identity.

Poets writing in Gaelic and Scots, such as Sorley Maclean, Iain Crichton Smith, J K Annand and Robert Garioch, reawakened interest in writing in Scotland's neglected languages. Others, such as George Mackay Brown who returned to his native Orkney in 1964, illuminated areas of Scotland often considered marginal.

In a European context, there was a growing concern with languages under threat which culminated in the formation of International PEN's Translation and Linguistic Rights committee in 1978.

It took another 18 years before UNESCO's Declaration of Linguistic Rights was adopted. Scottish PEN, alongside Catalanian PEN, played a key role in achieving this.

The International Writers' Conference held in Edinburgh in 1962 brought together writers from Scotland, England, Holland, Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, Poland, Greece, Australia, the USA, India, Israel and Ceylon, among whom were many PEN members.

Today Scotland has many languages. Scottish PEN has run projects and translation workshops which foster creative exchange and help incoming writers to find a voice.

PEN works to encourage and support translation as well as to ensure that endangered languages do not disappear.

