



Natural to the Scottish character: the 1990s

All my experience as a woman of Scottish background leads me to believe that the principles of PEN are especially natural to the Scottish character with its independent mindedness, its will to sincerity in public affairs, its sense of our unquestionably being born free.

Muriel Spark, honorary member, Scottish PEN

Women writers everywhere have always had to struggle to make their voices heard.

The Women Writers section of International PEN was formed in 1991 and Scottish PEN formed its own group soon after.

By this time, Muriel Spark, born and raised in Edinburgh, had long been acknowledged as a major novelist. Women were increasingly producing varied and thought-provoking work, among them fiction writers Agnes Owens, Elspeth Davie, Margaret Elphinstone, A L Kennedy, Ali Smith and Janice Galloway, and poets Valerie Gillies, Janet Paisley, Dilys Rose, Christine De Luca (now Edinburgh's Makar) and Tessa Ransford, who founded the Scottish Poetry Library and was Scottish PEN president from 2004-07.

In 1997, Scottish PEN hosted the International PEN Congress for the third time. This brought to Edinburgh writers from all over the world to discuss themes of identity and diversity. Among many topics discussed were the particular problems faced by women writers. The Congress highlighted, in *The Scotsman's* words, 'this little country's dedication to big issues of free expression'.

In 2001 the Scottish PEN Women Writers Committee produced a striking poster listing 100 Scottish women writers of the past, many neglected and some forgotten.