



Newsletter – 21 August 2006

This is the 92nd in a series of occasional newsletters from the Victoria University centre of the International Institute of Modern Letters. For more information about any of the items, please email modernletters@vuw.ac.nz.

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1. New Zealand's top young poet

Alisha Vara from Christchurch is the winner of the 2006 Bell Gully National Schools Poetry Award, organised by the Institute of Modern Letters. A year 12 Student at Rangi Ruru Girls' School in Christchurch, Alisha received the prize at an awards ceremony in Wellington on Friday. She wins \$500 cash, a 12-month subscription to leading literary journals *Sport* and *Landfall*, a year's membership of the New Zealand Society of Authors and the New Zealand Book Council, and \$50 Booksellers Tokens. Rangi Ruru Girls' School is also a winner, as the prize also includes \$500 to spend on library books.

On first reading, judge James Brown knew Alisha's poem was going to take some beating. "Although other poems also impressed me, 'strawberries strung on lines' withstood all challengers," he said. "It is so accomplished that it wouldn't look out of place in the pages of literary magazines such as *Landfall* or *Sport*." Alisha and the other nine award shortlistees took part in a poetry masterclass on Saturday with James

Brown, fellow poets Chris Price and Bernadette Hall, and IIML director Bill Manhire, then attended a performance of *Under Milk Wood* at Downstage.

In addition to attending the poetry masterclass, each of the shortlisted poets wins a 12-month subscription to the literary journal *Sport*, a 12-month membership of the New Zealand Book Council, \$50 Booksellers Tokens and \$100 cash. The winning poems, a press release and a full judge's report (which also announces commended and highly commended poems in the award) are available at <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/modernletters/activities/schools-poetry.aspx>

2. Sport, art and literature

An interesting interchange between the worlds of art, literature and sport took place across the Tasman recently, according to the *Melbourne Age*. Peter FitzSimons was at an exhibition opening, standing out in the crowd like the former Wallaby he is. The gallery director caught sight of him and it was clear by the look on his face that he was puzzled by the big man's presence. A big lug in a room full of luvvies. The champagne was drunk, the speeches were given, the toasts were made. And somehow the director got talking to the author of the bestselling *Tobruk*. FitzSimons told him that he had just finished his 17th book. "He looked at me," FitzSimons reports, "and encouraged me to read another."

Many thanks to Graham Beattie for this story.

3. Sunday Star-Times Short Story competition 2006

The *Sunday Star-Times* Short Story Competition is now calling for entries from emerging and experienced writers. The competition has two divisions: one for secondary school students (to be judged by Graeme Lay) and an open section (judged by Owen Marshall). The open division winner will receive \$5000, have their story published by the *Sunday Star-Times* and Random House, win a laptop computer and \$500 worth of books from Random House. The secondary school winner will receive \$750, have their story published in the *Sunday Star-Times*, get \$100 worth of books and enjoy a work experience day at Random House. There will also be a prize for the best unpublished writer – a Random House Experience with fiction publisher Harriet Allan, and \$200 of books. The entry form will be published in the *Sunday Star-Times* each week until the competition closes on September 15, 2006. Stories must be no longer than 3000 words.

4. The expanding bookshelf

Two former students of Harry Ricketts' Creative Non-fiction workshop have launched books in recent weeks.

Nathan Hoturoa Gray's *First Pass Under Heaven* (Penguin) is an account of his 4,000 kilometre trek along the Great Wall of China. See: <http://www.greatwalldvd.com/>

And Richard Shallcrass's memoir *Family Silver* (Victoria University Press), launched by David Caygill, brings together two stories: the author's personal life and career with Treasury, and the major economic reforms of the 1980s. See: <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/vup/recenttitles/familysilver.htm>

5. Erbs

We saw a *New Yorker* advertisement for the television show *Weeds* the other day. "Weeds," it said. "Putting the herb into suburb." This reminded us of something that has always been troubling. Why do Americans, faced with those things we cultivate and mostly use in cooking, always drop the aitch? It can't be a French affectation. They don't do the same with the word "hotel". One theory that occurs to us is that there used to be plenty of Herbets, and thus Herbs, in North America. Maybe there's some deep need to maintain a key distinction between human and vegetable? We would, of course, welcome more convincing explanations. If you have one, feel free to send it to modernletters@vuw.ac.nz, with "Herb" in the subject line.

6. Lives in brief

From 30 August-12 September the New Zealand Book Council presents a series of events featuring touring international writers Stella Rimington, Dava Sobel, Celestine Vaite, Anna Funder and Markus Zusak. Sandwiched in the middle of the series are two New Zealand writers who have explored unusual ways of putting lives real and imagined on the page. Chris Price's *Brief Lives* is an eccentric biographical dictionary of real and imagined characters. Martin Edmond has written *The Autobiography of My Father*, a memoir about the attempt to research and write a biography of the artist Philip Clairmont, and most recently, *Chronicles of the Unsung*, a memoir in four parts. A pre-event taster by Martin Edmond appears in Great Lists of Our Time (below). 'Our Brief Lives' is chaired by Bill Manhire at City Gallery Wellington on 6 September, 12.10-1.10 pm. Online bookings and further information about this and other Book Council events in September are at www.bookcouncil.org, or phone 499 1569.

7. Huia recognised

This year Te Waka Toi has instigated a new award, Te Tohu Kaa te Waka Toi, which recognises an individual who is making a significant positive difference to the development and retention of Maori arts and culture through their chosen art form. The inaugural recipient is Robyn Rangihua Bargh (Te Arawa, Ngati Awa) for publishing and literature. Along with husband Brian, Robyn founded Huia (NZ) Ltd as an independent publishing company in 1991. In 1995 Huia initiated the Huia Short Story Awards which have given an opportunity to hundreds of Maori writers to try their hand at writing. Huia has also organised writer workshops to provide opportunities for skill development and networking. Robyn is also Deputy-chair of Taki Rua Productions and Chair of Booksellers New Zealand.

8. Speak up

Aficionados of performance poetry can check out the Word Collective's latest extravaganza, 'Newtown Spoken Word- Winter 06' at the Newtown Community and Cultural Centre, Friday 25 August at 7.30 pm. It's an open mike night, but the organisers have high expectations: "The open mike poets have lifted their game – they are now operating at a level worthy of the huge audiences we expect, they are confident, charismatic, and relevant- if you come along expect to hear something that will change your view of Wellington and its inhabitants."

9. The play's the thing

The Adam Playreading Series, which aims to provide a bridge between new New Zealand plays and their eventual production, is currently underway at Downstage, with yesterday's offering being Vivienne Plumb's fine roadtrip drama, *The Cape*. Two more readings remain: *The Human Engine*, by IIML Scriptwriting graduate Philip Braithwaite (Sunday 27 August) and *Finding Murdoch* by Margot McRae (Sunday 3 September), both at 3pm. Tickets are \$8.

10. From the whiteboard

“There are three necessary elements in a story – exposition, development, and drama. Exposition we may illustrate as ‘John Fortescue was a solicitor in the little town of X’; development as ‘One day Mrs Fortescue told him she was about to leave him for another man’; and drama as “You will do nothing of the kind,” he said.”

Frank O'Connor: *The Lonely Voice*

11. Go wild

The six-week 'Wild Creations' residencies give artists an opportunity to work in some of the most beautiful areas in New Zealand. They are open to practising artists in any artform or cultural tradition, and are chosen from one of over 20 significant conservation sites throughout New Zealand. The Department of Conservation hosts the artists during their residencies and Creative New Zealand provides a stipend of \$5000, plus up to \$2000 for travel and materials, to each artist. Applications close 31 August. For more information contact Anastasia Turnbull at the Department of Conservation (04 471 3182 oraturbull@doc.govt.nz) or Helaina Keeley at Creative New Zealand (04 4980702), helainak@creativenz.govt.nz

12. Mixing writing and politics

The Wellington Branch of the New Zealand Society of Authors is inviting professional writers to a panel discussion at which representatives of most of the parties represented in Parliament will address issues raised by writers and writers' organisations. It takes place in the Large Gallery, Level One, Turnbull House, 11 Bowen Street, Wellington at 7.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 3 October 2006. Writers interested in attending are asked to rsvp to Maggie Rainey-Smith, challengerp@xtra.co.nz. Entry costs \$3 for NZSA members or \$5 for non-members to cover refreshments. If you have an issue you would like the panel to address please send it to nzsa@clear.net.nz attention Liz Allen, executive director.

13. Recent web reading

Maoriland

http://www.vuw.ac.nz/vup/Mark_Williams_WritersonMonday.pdf
<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/vup/recenttitles/maoriland.html>

Brief Lives

http://www.leafsalon.co.nz/archives/001036stephanie_de_montalk_on_chris_price.html

A Cambridge philosopher considers the world of verse
<http://www.dpmms.cam.ac.uk/~tf/poem16.html>

Can friendship survive ideas?

http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article.asp?aid=12201067_1.html

Johnny Scape

<http://www.spokenword.co.nz/media.shtml>

A proper book group

http://blog.susan-hill.com/blog/_archives/2006/8/16/2235547.html

Just what it says

<http://www.davidbyrne.com/>

American readers and the world

<http://www.buchmesse.de/en/index.php?content=/en/brancheninformationen/news/13781/content.html>

world poetry festivals

<http://www.edmontonpoetryfestival.com/globalpoetry.html>

maternity poetry

<http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk/review/pr96-2/szabo.htm>

UK goes creative economy (help!)

<http://www.cep.culture.gov.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=main.viewSection&intSectionID=334>

Walt Whitman exhibition

<http://www.npg.si.edu/exhibit/whitman/onelife2.html>

Kirsty Gunn

<http://www.encompassculture.com/weblog/?id=49&month=200607>

Charles Bukowski poetry reading

http://www.laist.com/archives/2006/08/17/a_gorilla

Grass's Nazi past

<http://edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/08/11/germany.grass.ap/index.html>
<http://books.guardian.co.uk/news/articles/0,,1844757,00.html>

Man Booker longlist 2006

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/news/articles/0,,1844564,00.html>

Simon Armitage goes to the opera

<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/edinburgh2006/story/0,,1841068,00.html>

Philip K Dick

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ewcp6Nm-rQ>

Something's coming

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Against_the_Day

A novel with your double decaf latte?

<http://www.calendarlive.com/printedition/calendar/cl-et-starbucks14aug14,0,2970202.story?coll=cl-calendar>

Second novels

<http://www.newsday.com/features/booksmags/ny->

[etnove14850936aug14.0,3061996.story?coll=ny-books-print](http://www.nybooks.com/story/etnove14850936aug14.0,3061996.story?coll=ny-books-print)

The Da Vinci post-mortem
<http://www.artsjournal.com/artswatch/20060814-21474.shtml>

Literary spam
<http://www.smh.com.au/news/technology/its-the-dickens-of-an-email-con/2006/08/20/1156012410945.html>

The elements
<http://www.privatehand.com/flash/elements.html>

Wellingtonista
<http://wellingtonista.com/>

So you want to be a writer?
<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200608u/writing-advice>

Michael Martone and other contributors' notes
http://lbc.typepad.com/blog/summer_2006_michael_martone_read_this/index.html

14. Great lists of our time

Martin Edmond's Taxi: Friday, August 11, 2006

(Our thanks to Martin for permission to reprint this from <http://fluvial.blogspot.com/>)

The Curator of Cambodian Art at the Denver Museum, name of Bunker, she looked like a cross between E Annie Proulx and Madelaine Albright and walked with a limp. Art Gallery of NSW to Sydney University.

A Japanese psychologist who specialises in coaching trauma victims who have to give evidence in criminal trials. A small, extremely alert, birdlike woman who said that Recovered Memory Syndrome does not exist in Japan. University of NSW to the City.

A Czech-born, German speaking, Swiss orthodontist here for a conference. We talked about that variety of homesickness which does not know where home is. City to Darling Harbour.

Two drunken Russian mafioso who'd been at the opening of a boutique in Double Bay and spent the ride to the City discussing recalcitrant employees and amenable strippers.

Two Prison Architects from Melbourne who were extremely stressed by the manifold demands of their work. City to the Airport.

A Dancer with a little-girl voice, wrinkled hands, grey thighs, and pink feathers at ankle and wrist. She inadvertently left a perfumed feather behind on the front seat.

Surry Hills to Kings Cross.

A woman and a man who'd been dining out together and were now going back to his place for a tryst. She called her husband and children as we drove along, setting him straight on details needed for the Census form and reassuring her kids that she loved them and would see them in the morning. Crows Nest to Bellevue Hill.

Two half cut Crim/Businessman picked up outside a car yard in Parramatta Road. They were going to a pub in Balmain but, when they realised Jean would not be there, changed their minds and went to the Airport instead, hatching nefarious schemes to destroy rivals and defraud governments all the way.

A Spanish girl with a broken elbow and wrist, sustained when she fell off her bike as she simultaneously rode, texted a friend on her mobile phone and attempted to apply balm to her lips. She was delirious with morphine but her friend got her home. RPA Hospital in Camperdown to Marrickville.

Two drunken young men who'd just cleaned up big in an illegal poker game. Though they were het boys, they spoke to each other in lover's talk as they planned further clean-outs. St Peters to Paddington via Surry Hills.

Two aging, serious music fans who'd been to hear the Arctic Monkeys at the Enmore and meticulously deconstructed the gig on the cab ride home. St Peters to Kogarah.

Two young smarties on their way to a Christina Aguilera album launch. One of them had that day discussed farting on set with Toni Collette; they other was involved in the buying and selling of pearls from Broome. Glebe to Kings Cross.

A garrulous Irish IT guy who spent the first part of the ride abusing the government and the second, after I'd been stopped by the police for speeding, abusing cops. As they wrote out the tickets (there were two, I hadn't filled out my worksheet properly) I found myself explaining the derivation of the word 'fiction'. City to Potts Point.

A Saudi man with three beautiful daughters and one son, whose wife rode on ahead with the son in another cab, here with his family on holiday: a man of grave courtesy, impeccable manners and the air of a slightly weary prince from another age than ours. City to Glebe.

A mother and daughter, seemingly identical apart from the difference in their ages, 'of Middle Eastern appearance'. I could not tell if they were Arabs or Jews and didn't dare ask. City to Brighton le Sands.

A large, long-haired man of indeterminate occupation who'd worked, on and off, for 25 years in Chile. Very well informed about both banking and politics but veiled, veiled ... Darlinghurst to Brighton le Sands.

The Head Caterer at the NSW Houses of Parliament, a big, beautiful Fijian man called Joseph. We spoke about Fiji and he knew every place I had been there, some of which are very out-of-the-way. Invited me to come and dine at Parliament with him one day, and bring my sons. Macquarie Street to Kogarah.

On Wednesday when I took over from the day driver, an Ecuadorian, he showed me a love-note a fare had given him and said: This taxi has holes in the floor, but Queens ride in it ...