



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF

MODERN LETTERS

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

Newsletter – 16 November 2006

This is the 98th 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. Stand by your desks

People who have visited or studied at the IIML will be familiar with the Janet Frame / *Landfall* desk that graces the foyer, with portraits of Frame, *Landfall* editor Charles Brasch and Frame's poetic ode to the desk hanging on the wall above (<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/modernletters/reading/frame.aspx>). The scarred and venerable desk now has a counterpart (or colleague) over in the university library: Patricia Grace has donated the desk at which she wrote for 20 years to the Beaglehole Room, where her papers are also housed. Grace was Writer in Residence at Victoria University in 1985, and bought the desk the following year, finally abandoning her habit of writing at the kitchen table after the acquisition of a computer.

2. Fearnley Burns

We hear that Laurence Fearnley will be taking up New Zealand's longest standing writing residency, Otago University's Burns Fellowship, in 2007. 2006 seems to have been a good year for Fearnley, who completed an MA in Creative Writing at Victoria

back in 1997. She has published a novel, *Degrees of Separation*, that draws on her experiences with the Artists to Antarctica programme. Her previous novel, *Butler's Ringlet*, was serialised on National Radio. And she spent a month on a writing fellowship in Tasmania, where she attended a conference on Antarctic writing.

3. From the whiteboard

Are the characters, then, to be constructed to formula – the formula pre-decided by the plot? Are they to be drawn, cut out, joined, wired, in order to be manipulated for the plot? No. There is no question as to whether this would be right or wrong. It would be impossible. One cannot 'make' characters, only marionettes....Characters pre-exist. They are *found*. They reveal themselves slowly to the novelist's perception – as might fellow-travellers seated opposite one in a very dimly-lit railway carriage. The novelist's perceptions of his characters take place in the course of the actual writing of the novel. To an extent, the novelist is in the same position as his reader. But his perceptions should be always just in advance.

— Elizabeth Bowen, 'Notes on Writing a Novel' (The complete essay is here, with (free) registration required: <http://narrativemagazine.com>)

4. Young poets

Students shortlisted for this year's Bell Gully National Schools Poetry Award were flown to Wellington for a masterclass; now young poets can enter a competition that could take them even further afield. US journal *The Kenyon Review* has announced that the Patricia Grodd Poetry Prize for Young Writers is now accepting submissions for the 2007 contest. High school 'sophomores and juniors' throughout the world are invited to submit their poetry by 30 November 2006. There is no submission fee, and the winner receives a full scholarship to attend the *Kenyon Review's* Young Writers workshop in 2007. For details visit the web site at <http://www.kenyonreview.org>

5. Sidebrow and Fieldstone

Sidebrow (<http://www.sidebrow.net>) is an online and print journal dedicated, say its editors, 'to innovation & collaboration'. It is currently seeking fiction, poetry, art, essay, ephemera, found text, & academia, as well as creative responses to current posts and ongoing projects. Submissions are evaluated 'both as stand-alone set pieces & as points of departure for establishing multi-authored/multi-genre works. Submissions that re-imagine, depart from, or explore the interstices between posted pieces are highly encouraged,' say the editors. *Sidebrow's* inaugural print anthology will appear in 2007. Although all projects will remain open beyond the publication of this anthology, the deadline for inclusion in this first print edition is 15 January. Projects to date include: Post-Hole, a multi-author, multi-genre menagerie of grotesques; the Letters Project, reviving the epistolary novella; and the Page 24 Project, a chapbook concerning and consisting exclusively of page 24s. Submission

details may be found at <http://www.sidebrow.net/2006/submit.php>.

The *Fieldstone Review*, an online journal based at the University of Saskatchewan, is also accepting submissions of poetry, short stories and creative non-fiction/personal essay between 15 September and 15 January. For more information visit www.fieldstonereview.usask.ca

6. Beattie's blog update

In our last newsletter we promised to provide a working link for former publisher Graham Beattie's Book Blog. It got off to a flying start, after the initial hiccup, with Beattie's interview with Fergus Barrowman about *The Cowboy Dog*, the newly released novel by Nigel Cox that has been puzzling and astonishing New Zealand readers with its audacious relocation of the Wild West to the Central Plateau of the North Island. And there's already plenty more where that came from.

<http://beattiesbookblog.blogspot.com/2006/11/nigel-coxs-cowboy-dog-our-first.html>

7. The expanding bookshelf

Four very different books appear this month from graduates and staff of the IIML. Damien Wilkins' long-awaited novel *The Fainter* is now on the shelves; Lynn Freeman's interview with the author can be found at www.radionz.co.nz/audio/national/art/damien_wilkins. On Tuesday Awa Press launched the tenth title in their essay series – *How to Catch a Cricket Match*, by Harry Ricketts, teacher of the creative non-fiction workshop. Also released this week is *Miranda's Alphabet* a children's alphabet book and wall cards written by Miranda Harcourt and her husband – and 1998 MA graduate – Stuart McKenzie, published under their own South Coast Press imprint. And the fourth title is *The Gentle Art of Rotting*, the first book of poems by Ross Hattaway, graduate of the Original Composition course at Victoria, and resident in Ireland since 1990. The book is published by Seven Towers (www.seventowers.ie).

8. A little more expansion

At the beginning of November this year's MA students submitted their end-of-year folios for assessment. Among the 30 completed manuscripts are stage plays and screenplays, novels, short-story collections, volumes of poetry, and a memoir. Many of New Zealand's leading writers are acting as external examiners for this year's folios – some of which will be coming soon to a bookshop or theatre near you. Meantime we hear of two novels from the 2005 MA workshop which will appear in 2007: Mary McCallum's *The Blue* will be published by Penguin, and Natasha Judd's *Lessons to Learn* by Cape Catley. Excerpts from *The Blue* and from the reading journal Mary McCallum kept during the MA workshop, as well as a short story by Natasha Judd – then writing under the surname Leitch – can be found in *Turbine 05*:

www.vuw.ac.nz/turbine

9. More evil advice?

Those of you with a satirical or comedic bent – or just a streak of pure malice – are reminded that we are still seeking your suggestions for our list of evil advice to tourists in New Zealand. We emphasise that no tourists will actually be harmed in the making of this list, but four newsletter readers will win \$50 book tokens for the ‘best’ pieces of evil advice. The competition is open to newsletter subscribers only, and entries should be sent to modernletters@vuw.ac.nz before 15 December: If your evil genius requires inspiration, samples of evil advice for tourists in Britain can be found in our 10 October newsletter, available here:

<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/modernletters/activities/archived-newsletters.aspx#2006>

10. BBC World/British Council International Playwriting Competition

Entries are now open for the 2007 competition. Applicants are invited to write a radio play of about sixty minutes on any subject of their choice. The contest is open to any writer who is not normally a resident of the United Kingdom, and there are two main prizes given: to the best play written in English as a first language and to the best play written in English as a second language.

The prize-winners will each receive £2500 sterling and a trip to London to see their plays being recorded and to attend a prize-giving evening. All writers whose plays reach the judges' final shortlist will receive BBC goodie bags as well as getting feedback on their plays from the BBC's team of professional readers. In 2001 Philip Braithwaite was the Overall Winner and Regional Winner for Asia and Pacific for his play *Blood*. He went on to complete an MA in Scriptwriting at the IIML in 2003. Entries close on 30 April 2007, and full competition details can be found at www.bbcworldservice.com/competitions.

11. Young (and old) playwrights

The Young and Hungry Arts Trust is currently seeking to commission playwrights of all ages to create work that is acted, designed and appeals to 15-25-year-olds. They are currently calling for submissions for 60-minute play ideas based around the festival theme of 'Revolution.' The deadline for submissions is 15 December. Playwrights can be any age and come from any or no experience of playwriting. For a registration form, and full information on how to make a submission, email youngandhungry@xtra.co.nz

12. Recent web reading

Belles étrangères sidebar

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/10/09/opinion/edjohnston.php>

Viggo Mortensen, publisher

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/01/books/01viggo.html?ex=1320037200&en=e6ac650594c4e65b&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

Spelling with Curtis

http://nymag.com/daily/intel/2006/10/village_voicer_outspells_famou.html

Difficult second novel

http://www.boston.com/ae/books/articles/2006/11/04/o_is_for_obstacle/

Narrative magazine

http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/books/291301_narrative07.html

Hare on Broadway

<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/features/story/0,,1945835,00.html>

New Pynchon

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20061111.wpynchon1111/BNStory/Entertainment/home>

The non-English patient

<http://www.signandsight.com/service/1029.html>

Emily Perkins goes to Auckland

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/travel/story/0,,1922103,00.html>

Six word stories

<http://wired.com/wired/archive/14.11/sixwords.html>

Dilbert games

<http://www.dilbert.com/comics/dilbert/games/index.html>

The wonders of rhyme

http://dilbertblog.typepad.com/the_dilbert_blog/2006/10/good_news_day.html

The European Academy of Poetry

<http://www.europoesie.com/aboutus.html>

Griet (2003 MA) Dierckxsens goes to the Ivory Coast

<http://nomad-griet.blogspot.com>

Fan.fic

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,1933977,00.html>

Oor Wullie

<http://www.thatsbraw.co.uk/Oor%20Wullie/OW-Page.htm>

Lorrie Moore short story

http://www.newyorker.com/fiction/content/articles/061106fi_fiction

Presidential word cloud

<http://chir.ag/phernalia/preztags/>

A how to write book

<http://www.scottmccloud.com/makingcomics/>

Neil Gaiman on writers' wills

<http://www.neilgaiman.com/journal/2006/10/important-and-pass-it-on.html>

Allen Curnow reading

<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoet.do?poetId=133>

Reading and writing in kiwiland

<http://www.lire.fr/enquete.asp/idC=50621/idR=200>

Saying and spelling

http://blog.oup.com/oupblog/2006/11/by_anatoly_libe.html

Frederick Seidel

<http://frederickseidel.com/>

Dead poets' society

www.poets.org/graves

13. Great lists of our time

From the Horse's Mouth: A Guide to Useful Critical Terminology for MA (Page) Novices

Being a list of statements uttered during Damien Wilkins' MA workshop 2007, compiled by Rebecca Lancashire.

To the MA students of 2007 and beyond, we offer our humble guide. If you're feeling devoid of intelligent-sounding comments, instead of staring at the harbour or at your inadequate notes, simply refer to the all-purpose Number 3, or even Number 15 . . .

1. I was looking at the simulacra, the nullification of consciousness – Rob
2. She's not a meta-text Rob, she's a real person – Damien
3. Say... if you took it out, it wouldn't be there . . . – Nick
4. Even at that point, I would enjoy a firework – Amanda
5. It's a bit . . . get your bloody hand off it – Rebecca
6. Recycling is good for the planet but not necessarily for your folio – Nick

7. Rob to Rachael: I think you are more secure in your masculinity than I am...
8. Ha! - Damien
9. Obviously it's metrosexual, but I may have been over-reacting – Anon
10. If I was a poem, I would want to be this poem – Michelle
11. Just make up your mind about it then – Amanda
12. I don't usually do dreamy shit – so I thought, fuck it – Therese
13. Having heard all that, I hate it – Damien
14. Let's get back to ground-zero in terms of writing your novel – Damien
15. It's tension, tension, tension – what is it? It's the meta-text – Rob
16. Crikey Therese, you'd better get a wriggle on – Therese
17. Sometimes the ideas I have are real dumb – Damien
18. The rape scene forms a natural climax . . . – Michelle
19. I just thought, get back to your knitting – Pip
20. Awww. I liked the bit with the dog – Rachael
21. Isn't it one of those just-lie-back-and-listen-to-the-words poems? – Rebecca
22. What's this 'une baguette' business? – Pip
23. The Colombo Syndrome (where the novel's plot mystery is revealed in a clunky climactic scene) – Damien
24. I wrote that after my mother died – Therese
25. It actually happened but it wasn't me (on acid, cantering naked around a golf course) – Michelle
26. Are we all going to have a group hug? – Sarah
27. I wouldn't be in a house where there was even a *chance* of a patched gang member moving in. (Damien) Where's your bloody sense of adventure? (Pip)
28. I've had a thought. I think you should change track. Make it a children's book. Lots of illustrations. – Damien on Pip's memoir about women in gangs

29 'Oh, just shoehorn it in!' – Damien on making a scene fit