



## Newsletter – 8 September 2006

This is the 93rd 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](mailto:modernletters@vuw.ac.nz)

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### 1. A multiplicity of angels

We hear *Are Angels OK?*, the book of the project which sent ten New Zealand writers on 'blind dates' with top physicists, is about to go into a second printing. The book is generating a lot of activity around the country this month, with Glenn Colquhoun Tony Signal, Bill Manhire, Dylan Horrocks and Chris Price reading from and discussing the project (see item 4. below for event details). And the burst of angelic energy continues into next month, when Witi Ihimaera offers 'The "Are Angels OK?" project: Writing "Dead of Night", a dissertation on the life and death of the space-time continuum' as his inaugural professorial lecture at Auckland University (4 October, 1 pm, MLT3, Science Centre, 38 Princes Street).

### 2. ‘Erbs, anyone?’

In response to our puzzled item on the American pronunciation of the word 'herbs', our New York correspondent suggests a possible explanation:

'According to Bill Bryson many of these [words] come from Olde English - and you find herbs were pronounced 'erbs in 1740 and it stuck in the US and the UK changed. It may not be with this one but it's often the case.' Any other suggestions are still welcome.

### 3. Shurely Shome Mishtake?

We notice that the September *North & South* claims at the head of its "Review" section:

"Judged New Zealand's best magazine book review pages in the 2006 Montana Book Awards."

This is very puzzling. According to the Booksellers New Zealand website ([http://www.booksellers.co.nz/mba\\_reviewer.htm#Finalists06](http://www.booksellers.co.nz/mba_reviewer.htm#Finalists06)) to everyone we know who was at the Montana New Zealand Awards evening, the shortlisted books pages were the *New Zealand Listener*, *North & South*, and the *Dominion Post*. And the declared winner on the night? Well, the *Dominion Post*. Some of us saw its books pages editor, Guy Somerset, ascend the stage to accept the award. For a moment we wondered whether some low, legalistic game of definitions was happening here. Perhaps *North & South* was the only magazine among the finalists? But no, last time we looked the *Listener* was a magazine. Puzzlinger and puzzlinger.

### 4. Two incredibly busy weeks in New Zealand

#### 8-10 September: **The Press Christchurch Writers' Festival**

A plethora of local and international stars in a packed programme this weekend.

<http://www.chchwritersfest.co.nz/index.html>

#### 9-17 September: **Picture Perfect by Ken Duncum**

Circa Theatre, Wellington

The world premiere of a new play by IIML Scriptwriting director Ken Duncum. Jenny and Alex have an amazing futuristic entertainment system. At first it provides solace and comfort, but soon Jenny becomes obsessed ... and then the technology begins to malfunction, and so does the family.

<http://www.circa.co.nz/whatson/index.htm>

#### 10 September -**Two or three dimensions of recent New Zealand sculpture**

2pm, City Gallery Wellington, free admission

Poet and curator Gregory O'Brien considers the work of Elizabeth Thomson, which marries the two-dimensional concerns of a painter with the three dimensional preoccupations of a sculptor.

11 September

**- Writers on Mondays presents The Next Page (2)**

1 pm, City Gallery Wellington, free admission

Our season of emerging talent from the IIML continues with another ten writers for the page: this week Craig Cliff, Giovanna Fenster, Tom Fitzsimons, Emma Gallagher, Anna Horsley, Mary Macpherson, Kate Mahony, Lucy Orbell, Sue Orr and Abby Stewart read, chaired by Bill Manhire.

**- Anna Funder**

6 pm, City Gallery Wellington, \$15 non members, \$12 students, \$10 members  
The New Zealand Book Council presents the award-winning author of *Stasiland*.

**- Poetry Cafe with Dinah Hawken**

7.30pm, Bar Bodega, Wellington (free admission)

Dinah Hawken's latest book, *One Shapely Thing*, was published in April. She convenes the Writing the Landscape Workshop at the Institute of Modern Letters.

12 September – **Markus Zusak**

6 pm, City Gallery Wellington, \$15 non members, \$12 students, \$10 members  
Markus Zusak discusses his acclaimed novel *The Book Thief* with Bernard Beckett.

13 September - **Are Angels OK? A Performance**

5.30 pm, National Library Auditorium, Wellington (free admission)

Poet Glenn Colquhoun and physicist Tony Signal talk with Bill Manhire about their successful collaboration in the 'Are Angels OK?' 'literary physics' project.

15-17 September - **Going West: The truth about stories**

Titirangi Memorial Hall, Auckland

With Paula Morris, Richard Nunns, Patricia Grace, Glenn Colquhoun, Gregory O'Brien, Chris Price, Anna Funder, Dylan Horrocks, Kate Camp, Jacqueline Fahey, Tusiata Avia, Karlo Mila, Roger Hall, Ian Wedde and more  
[www.goingwest.co.nz](http://www.goingwest.co.nz)

18 September - **Writers on Mondays presents Short Sharp Script (1)**

1 pm, City Gallery Wellington, free admission

Scriptwriting is in the spotlight this week as professional actors give rehearsed readings from plays by writers taking the MA (Script) workshop, chaired by Ken Duncum. Five scripts, one lunch-hour, and always one of our fastest-moving and most unpredictable events! This session features work by Veialu Aila-Unsworth, Mike Borgfeldt, Sam Bradford, Katie Conaglen and Ben Hutchison.

**- Launch of NZ Book Month**

12-2 pm, Aotea Square (Auckland), Cathedral Square (Christchurch), Parliament steps (Wellington)

[www.nzbookmonth.co.nz](http://www.nzbookmonth.co.nz)

20 September:

- **'Beauty!' - Landscape and Tourism (Ian Wedde)**

5.30-7pm, National Library Auditorium, Wellington, free admission

2006 Fulbright Travel Award recipient Ian Wedde launches his new novel *The Viewing Platform* and discusses his Fulbright experience in the US. (Register your interest in attending to [info@fulbright.org.nz](mailto:info@fulbright.org.nz) by Monday 18 September.)

- **Around the World in 90 Minutes**

7-8.30 pm, Raye Freedman Arts Centre, Epsom Girls' Grammar School, Auckland, \$20

Discovery Channel's 'Dangerman' Geoff Mackley; Nathan Gray, who walked the length of the Great Wall of China; Ian Robinson, who has ridden across Mongolia and Tibet on horseback; and Karen Goa, who tackled India on a motorbike and Canada in a 1956 Chevrolet.

20-23 September - **Festival of Maori Writing**

Various locations, Wellington

Featuring Patricia Grace, Cliff Curtis, Katerina Mataira, Alistair Te Ariki Campbell, Dallas Tamaira and Warren Maxwell, James George, Mika and more.

[www.huia.co.nz](http://www.huia.co.nz)

21 September - **Poetry Society reading with Chris Price**

8 pm, Turnbull House, Bowen St, Wellington

Chris Price presents her verse essay on Einstein, Rilke and Charlie Chaplin from *Are Angels OK?*

## 5. Talking books

The popular LeafSalon blog has for sometime featured discussions between New Zealand writers, publishers and readers on a variety of book-related topics, including a recent vigorous thread that begins with a request for some NZ novels to read and evolves into a discussion of creative writing workshops (see the posting titled 'Library Smut'). Now LeafSalon has created a stand-alone forum where book enthusiasts can debate to their hearts' content, albeit with (we hope) more decorum than has recently been displayed in political circles. And from Monday the New Zealand Book Month website will add a blog by IIML director Bill Manhire, starting with a discussion of the growth of creative writing programmes. With all this virtual reading to keep up with, we hope everyone will still find time to read some actual books.

[http://www.leafsalon.co.nz/archives/001039library\\_smut.html](http://www.leafsalon.co.nz/archives/001039library_smut.html)

<http://www.leafsalon.co.nz/forum>

<http://nzbookmonth.co.nz>

## 6. Janet Frame online

Even Janet Frame now has an official presence in cyberspace, with the launch of the website of the Janet Frame Literary Trust. The site features news, rights information and biographical material. The Trust states firmly, 'we have not opted for bells and whistles, and we do not expect to include any interactive features or animation in the foreseeable future.' Nevertheless it looks set to be a useful and informative place for Frame fans. <http://janetframe.org.nz>

## 7. Zero tolerance vs. linguistic freedom

Not an item on freedom of speech, but on liberty in punctuation. UK linguistics professor David Crystal has taken on Lynn Truss's hugely popular 'zero tolerance guide' to punctuation *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* in a new book called *The Fight for English: How Language Pundits Ate, Shot, and Left*, which features a picture of a panda under a road sign showing an exclamation mark on the cover. 'Crystal, a former colleague of Truss who once advised her that a book about punctuation would never sell, condemns the author for joining the ranks of "linguistic fundamentalists",' says the *Guardian*. Those interested in hearing more of David Crystal's views on language can catch his series of public lectures at Victoria University later this month:

20 September – The Stories of English

21 September – Language Death: Writing the Obituary of Language

27 September – The Future of Language

All lectures are in Maclaurin Lecture Theatre 101, at 6 pm.

[http://observer.guardian.co.uk/uk\\_news/story/0,,1863807,00.html](http://observer.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,1863807,00.html)

## 8. Scarecrow wins on both sides of the ditch

A couple of 'firsts' for Christchurch-born Wellington-resident, Leon Davidson. After winning the non-fiction category at this year's NZ Post Book Awards, his first book, *Scarecrow Army: The ANZACS at Gallipoli*, has now also won the Children's Book Council of Australia's Eve Pownall Award for Information Books. As far as we know, this is the first time a children's book has scooped comparative categories on both sides of the Tasman. *Scarecrow Army* and Leon's second book; *Red Haze: Australians and New Zealanders in Vietnam*, are published by Melbourne's Black Dog Books.

[www.det.wa.edu.au/education/cmis/eval/fiction/bookweek/bw7.htm](http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/cmis/eval/fiction/bookweek/bw7.htm)

## 9. Lonely hearts club band

We stress that we have never answered one, but wish to point out to any lonely-hearted newlist members that the *London Review of Books'* rivetting Personals are available not only in the print magazine but also on their website. Samples below, but go here if you want more:

<http://www.lrb.co.uk/classified/index.php>

**Not all that wheezes is asthma.** Laryngologist and weekend taxidermist (M, 61) seeks attractive F to 70 with changeable pulmonary function for long distance running, evening tango classes and CPR. Box no. 16/04

**6.10 am, January 19, 1977.** Snow falls for the first time on West Palm Beach. The snow spreads to Fort Lauderdale by 8.30am, continuing south to Miami and Homestead. At Crandon Park Zoo, heat lamps are brought in to protect the iguanas. True story. Man (35) incapable of making any point whatsoever would like to meet woman to 40 for nights of awkward smiles and petering off mid-sentence. Box no. 16/05

**I am not as high maintenance** as my highly polished and impeccably arranged collection of porcelain cats suggests, but if you touch them I will kill you. F, 36. Likes porcelain cats. Seeks man not unused to the sound of sobbing coming from a bedroom from which he is strictly prohibited. Tell me how attractive I am at Box no. 16/08

**Week 3 - Day 2.** Breakfast: small piece of fruit (for example an apple), two crispbreads with one tablespoon low-fat soft cheese and one sliced tomato. Lunch: one wholemeal pita bread with a quarter small pot reduced-fat hummus and crudités, one small banana. Dinner: 47 chocolate cakes, anguish, despair, bile, hatred, a small pot of low-fat fruit yoghurt. Post-divorce comfort eater and sex therapist (F, 38). Box no. 15/03

## 10. Recent web reading

Laugh and/or weep

<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/4950283.asp?gid=74>

Booknotes and playlists

[http://www.largeheartedboy.com/blog/archive/book\\_notes](http://www.largeheartedboy.com/blog/archive/book_notes)

Poem Cube

[http://www.secrettechnology.com/poem\\_cube/poemcube.html](http://www.secrettechnology.com/poem_cube/poemcube.html)

Gerald Murnane

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,20137289-5001986,00.html>

Attila the Stockbroker

<http://www.attilathestockbroker.com>

Short story comp (if you have a spare 20 euro)

<http://www.williamtrevorshortstory.com>

Religion and science

<http://www.salon.com/books/int/2006/08/23/shermer>

A love letter

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2087-2330457,00.html>

Watching poets work

[http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2006/08/27/peeking\\_over\\_the\\_shoulder\\_of\\_a\\_poet\\_at\\_work/](http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2006/08/27/peeking_over_the_shoulder_of_a_poet_at_work/)

Kathleen Jamie crosses the Atlantic

<http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/story/444620p-374443c.html>

Character-go-round

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/core/Content/displayPrintable.jhtml?xml=/arts/2006/08/27/bobbrown.xml&site=6&page=0>

Colourless green ideas

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colorless\\_green\\_ideas\\_sleep\\_furiously](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colorless_green_ideas_sleep_furiously)

Endless Toby Young

<http://www.tobyyoung.co.uk/>

Oulipo

[http://believermag.com/issues/200609/?read=article\\_beha](http://believermag.com/issues/200609/?read=article_beha)

Dancing on ice floes

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,923-2337239,00.html>

Ugly writers

<http://www.vqronline.org/articles/2005/winter/almond-pretty-authors-make/>

The Australian Book Review puts much of itself online

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~abr/>

Eggcorns

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~abr/>

A sense of humour?

<http://service.spiegel.de/cache/international/0,1518,434399,00.html>

Poet's corner

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,542-2341446,00.html>

Advice to poets

[www.poetryfoundation.org/features/feature.onpoetry.html?id=178592](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/features/feature.onpoetry.html?id=178592)

Public poetry and 9/11

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/>

Southern odyssey

<http://www.nzlive.com/en/articles/southern-odyssey>

7800-and-something 18th century metaphors for the mind

<http://mind-metaphor.stanford.edu/>

## **11. Great lists of our time**

From *Brief Lives*, Chris Price, Auckland University Press 2006:

*Other Dictionaries*

The dictionary of lapdogs that have witnessed significant moments in history.

The dictionary of small men with ginger moustaches who share a propensity to abuse their wives.

The dictionary of entomologists, lepidopterists and others who prefer the teeming world of insects.

The dictionary of Imelda Marcos's shoes.

The dictionary of failed hopes and lost toys.

The dictionary of landfill.

The dictionary of the highest branch.

The dictionary of the women sometimes referred to as trophy wives.

The dictionary of seeds that have colonised new islands after travelling there in the digestive tracts of birds.

The dictionary of failures of judgement.

The dictionary of parsons' children.

The dictionary of lost guitar picks.

The dictionary of all the stones ever taken home from the beach.

The dictionary of hooklines and their origins.

The dictionary of women's feet in pre-eighteenth century painting.

The dictionary of everything biographers never unearthed.

The dictionary of single buttons (perhaps my favourite dictionary).

The dictionary of excuses for not participating in team sports.

The dictionary of the Best Hundred Books Called *Summer Lightning*.

The dictionary of insults and jibes.

The dictionary of entrails and gulls flying by.

The dictionary of mutant genes and their expressions.

The dictionary of poems containing the three consecutive words 'watched her walk'.

The dictionary of dictionaries – this, above all, I would like to see.