



**INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
MODERN LETTERS**

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

Newsletter – 13 June 2007

This is the 109th 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. Tricksters, Conjurors, Skydancers

An IIML project initiated back in 2003 is about to bear fruit. DVDs featuring leading writers Joy Cowley, Margaret Mahy and Jack Lasenby are to be distributed free this week to all New Zealand secondary schools and also made available to public libraries. They were launched at the National Library of New Zealand last night.

The DVDs feature interviews with all three authors by Kate De Goldi. The authors read from their work and speak openly about their influences, their beliefs and their writing for young people. They also build a picture of New Zealand's literary and social history and the importance of story and language in a full human life.

The DVDs are accompanied by a substantial lesson resource for teachers, which makes strong links between the English curriculum and New Zealand literature.

Tricksters, Conjurors, Skydancers is a not-for-profit collaboration between New Zealand Post, the Ministry of Education, and the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University. It might well be the first in a projected series of interviews with New Zealand writers. Watch this space.

2. Hemi goes to Harvard

We hear that the poems of James K Baxter will be on the academic menu at Harvard this northern autumn – or maybe we should say this fall. Poet and critic Stephen Burt, who is about to take up a post there plans to include him in a world poetry course. We think this may be the first time a New Zealand poet has been taught inside the hallowed halls, but if we are wrong we are very happy to be corrected.

3. Great myths of our time

We feel moved to share Radio New Zealand's 2 June news announcement that Janet Frame's *The Goose Bath* has made the shortlist for this year's Montana New Zealand Poetry Award.

'A collection of poetry by one of New Zealand's best-known writers, the late Janet Frame, is a finalist in this year's Montana book awards. *The Goose Bath*, which was published posthumously last year, is the first new Frame title in 20 years. She died in 2004, aged 79, after a long battle with cancer.

The Goose Bath is a collection of poems found after her death in a bath Frame used for washing her pet geese.'

Should you need a postscript to this wonderfully literal piece of misinformation, you can check out the current whereabouts of the original goose bath by scrolling down the home page of the Janet Frame website: <http://www.janetframe.org.nz/>

In October, Random will also bring out Janet Frame's unpublished novel, *Towards Another Summer*. Says the publisher's website: 'Frame rejected the pressure to publish *Towards Another Summer* in her lifetime, because she claimed the story was "embarrassingly personal". And indeed she does turn her unflinching eye on herself, foibles and all; often enough the joke is at her own expense.'

4. Why is poet Andrew Johnston so busy?

One of the reasons poet Andrew Johnston is so busy is because he is the judge for the 2007 New Zealand Post National Schools Poetry Awards. This means he is reading a record 420 poetry entries.

This year, along with the \$1,000 first prize (\$500 to the winner and a \$500 book grant to their school library), one of the ten shortlisted poems will be set to music and recorded by musician Barnaby Weir of The Black Seeds and Fly My Pretties.

The winner of this prize – who may not be the overall winner – will be invited to spend a day with Barnaby in his home studio in Raumati and then to attend the recording at Trident Studios in Wellington. If the winner lives outside the Wellington region, the prize will include flights and accommodation for the student and an accompanying adult.

More information about the awards here:

<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/modernletters/activities/school-poetry/about-poetry.aspx>

5. The Expanding Bookshelf

Congratulations to Natasha Judd, whose first novel *Lessons to Learn* (Cape Catley) was launched last night at the Takapuna Library by Dame Cath Tizard. Tash wrote the first draft of *Lessons to Learn* in the 2005 MA workshop. Her novel follows the fortunes of Charlotte, a young New Zealander who travels to Korea as a teacher of English. In a Korean language school she finds herself dealing with the past she has tried to leave behind. More information here:

http://www.capecatleybooks.co.nz/index_files/Lessons.htm

Congratulations also to IIML colleague Damien Wilkins, who has followed his Montana-shortlisted novel *The Fainter* with a book of short stories, *For Everyone Concerned*, a gathering of fables, satires, notes to self, and short shorts. See

<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/vup/recent%20titles/foreveryoneconcerned.htm>

There is also word of new novels by Maggie Rainey-Smith (*Turbulence*)

http://www.randomhouse.co.nz/newsroom/PRESS_RELEASES/Turbulence%20PR.pdf

and Barbara Else (*Wild Latitudes*)

http://www.randomhouse.co.nz/newsroom/PRESS_RELEASES/Wild%20Latitudes%20Press%20Release.pdf

Meantime, IIML lecturer and Montana shortlistee Chris Price has begun blogging on the NZ Book Month site – <http://nzbookmonth.co.nz/> – where (until 5.00 pm tomorrow, June 14) you can still vote for your favourite Six Pack finalist.

6. Maori Detective and the Boogie Fever

Congratulations to Kelly Kilgour, who completed the scriptwriting MA with Ken Duncum in 2003. Kelly is a member of the team Good Times which for the second year in a row has won Wellington's 48HOURS short film competition.

Good Times, who won in 2006 with the horror short *The Baby Farmer*, were given grindhouse ('a 60s or 70s exploitation film') as their genre and made a blaxploitation tribute film called *Maori Detective and the Boogie Fever*. The story features strippers, uncontrollable dancing, jive talking, and the coolest Maori detective yet put to film. (Sounds quite like an IIML workshop.) *Maori Detective and the Boogie Fever* won

Best Film, Best Script (David Brechin-Smith, Sam Kelly, Kelly Kilgour), Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Cinematography and Most Thrilling Moment.

The 48HOURS filmmaking competition gives teams just 48 hours to make a film, from idea to completion. There were more than 130 teams competing in Wellington this year. Judges include prominent filmmakers Jonathan King (Writer/Director of *Black Sheep*), Robert Sarkies (Writer/Director of *Out of the Blue*), and Vicky Pope (Producer). Now *Maori Detective and Boogie Fever* will represent Wellington at the national finals, screening live on C4 at 8:30pm on 1 July. This screening features the best short films made from nearly 500 teams competing in six different cities. The Grand National Winner will be decided by home viewer text voting and will receive more than \$36,000 worth of prizes.

7. Favourite poems

Many poetry readers will know about Robert Pinsky's **America's Favorite Poems** project, which he established when he was US poet laureate. You can visit the Favorite Poems website here: <http://www.favoritepoem.org/theproject/index.html>

Craig Potton publishers – <http://www.craigpotton.co.nz/> – are planning to publish a book of New Zealand's 100 favourite poems. Public vote seems to be the main thing, and you can vote for your own favourite poem, via the Sunday Star Times, here: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/sundaystartimes/0a22360.html>

We plan to vote for poets who are still alive, and perhaps even living in New Zealand.

On the anthology front, also look out for *Dear to Me*, a collection of poems chosen by 100 New Zealand celebrities, which is being published by Godwit as a fundraiser for Amnesty International on Montana Poetry Day.

8. From the whiteboard

‘What a heavy oar the pen is and what a strong current ideas are to row in.’

Flaubert

9. Motions normal

IIML director Bill Manhire and Auckland composer Eve de Castro-Robinson have written *These Arms to Hold You* – a work for children's voices and orchestra which premiered to acclaim in the NZSO's recent ‘Made in New Zealand’ concert. The text incorporates a collage Bill has compiled from Plunket nurses' comments in some 30 Plunket Books from several generations. Commissioned by the New Zealand Plunket Society, *These Arms to Hold You* celebrates 100 years of Plunket and will be performed around the country during June by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and the Lyrica children's choir. Concerts will take place in Auckland, Hamilton,

Dunedin, Christchurch and Wellington. The poet and composer will give pre-concert talks at the Auckland and Wellington performances (June 16 and 23).

Concert details here:

http://www.nzso.co.nz/the_concerts/subscription_tours/subscription_tour_3#serie2

10. Ice is nice

2007 is International Polar Year and promises to advance our understanding of how the Earth's remote polar regions impact global climate systems. A number of connected festivals will be held internationally. For example, the 2007 Canberra Readers and Writers Festival (Friday 21 - Sunday 23 September) will feature authors, books and discussions about global warming, polar regions, explorers, ice and everything else cool. Here in Wellington the Royal Society has organised some polar entertainments for July:

Wine and Ice at the Paramount

Authors Peter Carey and Craig Franklin

Tuesday 3 July 2007

Come on a spectacular virtual trip to the Antarctic with our inspirational guides Peter Carey and Craig Franklin. Introduction by Gareth and Jo Morgan, who are planning their own Antarctic adventure.

Dr Susan Solomon

Wednesday 4 July

Renowned for discovering the cause of the ozone hole over Antarctica and author of *The Coldest March*, about Scott's Expedition to the South Pole. Introduction by editor of the *New Zealand Listener*, Pamela Stirling.

Poet Bill Manhire and Artist Dick Frizzell

Thursday 5 July

Lynn Freeman, Arts on Sunday presenter for Radio New Zealand National, talks to Bill and Dick about their experiences visiting Antarctica through Antarctica New Zealand's Artists programme.

All events are at the Paramount Theatre, 25 Courtenay Place, Wellington. Tickets cost \$15 for each session, and include a complimentary glass of wine from 5.30pm. Each session runs from 6.00pm to 7.00pm. Tickets are available from mid-June from the Paramount box office, in person, or by phone on 04 384 4080.

These events are organised by the Royal Society in association with Antarctica: 50 Years on the Ice, a conference celebrating New Zealand's involvement in the Antarctic.

11. More ice

New Zealand artists, children's author Tessa Duder and multi-media artist and Arts Foundation Laureate Ronnie van Hout, are the two successful recipients of the 2007-08 Artists To Antarctica programme.

Auckland-based Duder and Melbourne-based van Hout will travel to Antarctica in October or November this year to take part in the programme. A joint initiative between Antarctica New Zealand and Creative New Zealand, the scheme is open to artists who are either prominent in their field or are highly-regarded emerging artists.

Past writer recipients include Bernadette Hall, Chris Orsman, Margaret Mahy, Laurence Fearnley, and Bill Manhire.

Meantime, the universities of Canterbury and Tasmania plan to host two conferences which examine Antarctica from a cultural perspective. The first will be at Canterbury 4-6 September 2008. Drawing on the arts, social sciences and humanities, the conference will focus attention on the ways we perceive and represent the southernmost continent. The Christchurch conference will be followed in 2010 by another at the University of Tasmania in Hobart. Speakers will include: Elena Glasberg, Christy Collis, Francis Spufford, Klaus Dodds, Jonathan Lamb and Margaret Mahy. For more information, visit

http://www.engl.canterbury.ac.nz/extra/imagining_antarctica.shtml

12. A competition

To celebrate Montana Poetry Day, Friday 27 July 2007, the New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre, in association with Auckland University Press, is seeking the best digital transformations of poems by six well-known New Zealand poets. Entries are due by 4 July, and the winning designer gets an iPod Nano. Full details here:

<http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/digital/contest07.asp>

13. Another competition

The 30 June deadline is nearing for this year's BNZ Katherine Mansfield Short Story Awards. Natasha Judd (as Natasha Leitch) won the premier award in 2003 with a story which eventually generated her just published novel *Lessons to Learn* (see item 6 above). There are Novice and Young Writers' categories as well as a 'Premier' category. More information here:

http://www.bnz.co.nz/About_Us/1,,3-34-482,00.html

14. Lazarus tips

The Wellington branch of the New Zealand Society of Authors invites you to hear Ian Wedde talk about *Chinese Opera*, a novel he started twenty years ago and then put aside, only to take up recently when he discovered a way back into it.

Upper Chamber, Arts Centre, 61-69 Abel Smith Street, 27 June, 7.30 pm

15. Recent web reading

ScriptMagnet

<http://www.scriptmagnet.com/nz/>

Stalin

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znRrGfMc700>

Erasure poems

<http://erasures.wavepoetry.com/index.php>

Australian drought

<http://pics.livejournal.com/trixtah/pic/00016dzg>

A rejection letter

<http://www.ursulakleguin.com/Reject.html>

The Picture of Everything

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

Separated by a common language

<http://separatedbyacommonlanguage.blogspot.com/>

Chris Price

<http://beattiesbookblog.blogspot.com/2007/06/genre-busting-book-shortlisted-for-both.html#links>

Bob Orr poem

http://www.listener.co.nz/issue/3500/artsbooks/8957/poem_up_north.html

Ginsberg pics

<http://jacketmagazine.com/33/ball-photos.shtml>

21st-century proverbs

<http://www.nzbc.net.nz/2007/06/word-up.html#links>

A short story

<http://chasemeladies.blogspot.com/2004/08/your-severed-foot-would-look-good-on.html>

Great lyrics of our time

<http://www.mankyrecords.com/lyrics.htm>

Nice magazine

http://www.quarterlyconversation.com/TQC_8/Summer07.html

Bede's World

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

Paris Hilton prison diary

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-oe-kenney5jun05,0,4717524.story?coll=la-opinion-righttrail>

Birthday Trollope

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

Antarctic rugby haka

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X9ROpx59Nc>

Graeme Tetley on writing Out of the Blue

<http://www.archivesearch.co.nz/default.aspx?webid=ONF&articleid=23520>

Summer movies

<http://www.newyorker.com/arts/2007/06/11/SummerMovies2007>

A Humument

<http://www.rosacordis.com/humument/>

Paying for a babysitter

<http://www.artforum.com/diary/id=15449>

An e-panel on literary translation

http://emergingwriters.typepad.com/emerging_writers_network/2007/06/reading_the_wor.html

The death of poetry

http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/06/a_rather_exaggerated_report_of.html

The Paradelle

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradelle>

Paula Morris interview

http://www.leafsalon.co.nz/archives/001139rappin_with_paula.html#more

Twitterlit

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

Iowa fiction readings archive

<http://at-lamp.its.uiowa.edu/virtualwu/index.php/archive/titles/C5/>

Iowa poetry readings archive

<http://at-lamp.its.uiowa.edu/virtualwu/index.php/archive/titles/C4/>

Easy French poetry

<http://learnfrenchinboston.com/podcast/>

Allen Curnow reads

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

Richard Ford interview

<http://www.lumiere.net.nz/reader/item/1074>

16. Instead of a list

These days the Guardian books blog - <http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/books/> - prints a weekly poem, and has a happy band of regular visitors who debate the merits of the poem in question. We thought readers might like this recent exchange, when a poem by Tobias Hill was up for discussion.

OvidYeats

Comment No. 477766

April 23 20:20

Dublin/irl

The authentically tousled Tobias is a slick pith taker, whose talent shimmies on-page like Graham Norton down a red carpet. He manages to vividly convey the emotional void in a register of isolation and calm elemental eye.

Hill's still, dispassionate and god like inhabitation of language has led him to a course plain grain he transubstantiates - by canny the innate instinct of a man who knows his craft - into an immense stylistic achievement.

The 'I' deployed in this poem is the lyric eye alert to language and the reader detects Hill's debt and pledge to the main, Ho.

A unique London humanity is being voiced here, honeytoned and alluring, possessed by an essential electric eel effect of mild passing shock, daring we tease or put to undue critical test, the poetic quality of this god of sound.

That the heartbreakingly coiffured home counties chap has the main Ho as his imitative template is clear. Hill ably fulfills the Horace maxim of plain words uniquely juxtaposed and in seamless craft, the bolting of individual words has such powerful sheen of sophisticated wickery, we enchanted by Tobias - whose natural ability is evident in this noughties 'man and boy' conceit, - can be but only sheathed and touched by the caressing rib of his poetic denier.

In a language urbanely, knowingly and shod displaying the full range of tricks in the poetry box.

As per his Ho's instruction, he starts simple and keeps it so, his first two words eminently average, one a pretty fresh introduction of the word 'laptop' the uncreative bore would moan was most unpoetic, but which the crafty conner would blather incessantly on about as making all the difference, engaging in poetry for his own enjoyment, first and foremost.

The second level pith taker would claim it was language forcing itself into usage, and the moaners are only those with lesser talent and skill than the achingly gorgeous mind of the Hugh Grant of contemporary poetry.

'laptop cauls...unflattering and glutinous' and my fave 'embracing their collision.'

In this poem, we see Hill working in the second stage of poetic composition, analogous to the second level of awareness, experience and ability as delineated in the poetic belief-systems of three poets. Wordsworth, Amiri Baraka and Heaney.

Heaney took Wordsworth's owl call metaphor and developed it into his well and water analogy, that the first stage of a poet's career is a wholly imitative act.

Heaney begins with Wordsworth's tale in Ballads, of the most Homeric poet of his generation, trying to do owl calls in the Cumbrian deeps as a child, how he tried and tried and tried, and at the point of jacking in, realised his first call. This is analogous to the very first time one actually writes a 'real' poem. Until this point our efforts are just a mining of and into the unknown.

Heaney uses a well analogy, that our first return at the well is the winding up of an empty bucket of air, until one time the bucket sinks and bingo, the real thing is brought up and the wannabee's passed the first stage in a fragile business where a foot of stress makes all the difference.

I will leave Baraka out of it and if I was Muldoon would inexplicably veer off with the word 'call' and develop an argument of incredibly tangent psychosis, boring you with my pointlessness. But I am not Paulie and shall not be all fizz and no knickers. This level of imitative owl calling or drawing real water from the well, is the frequency that most stuff that is considered the quality of it's day gets churned out on and the advent of google as an aid to sensing out how original our wordplay is, adds a rough, but increasingly accurate idea the really talented lying messiah would pimp up to create a space of linguistically scientific dimension in which contemporary compositional methods could be examined, where instinct and internet can work as one in the quest of writing a perfect poem. One in which as close to ever two words a possible is giving returning a zero yield from the scarily huge amount of electronic printed matter constitutes the noughties library of Alexandria.

One previously absent, but which can seriously tweak and tighten stuff up, change the syntactic core on which the poet drapes, from a cliché ridden dull read to one which the eye will gallop in intense interest, due to fulfilling the golden Ho rule about dexterous combinations allowing one to express themselves eminently eloquent. So full marks so far for the face a million middle aged spinisters devote their shrine too, Toby's mug the object of adoring focus from a lonely London soul, Hill's siblings in his wider human family, who seem a rag bag of inferred failure, the sisters and brothers haunting his verse as the tragic invisible weight anchoring this gust of excellently crafted wind, piss and chips, life's shit, get over son and the world is yours..

The sheer weight of numberless realities, existing in a path-quilt of extreme inversion. 10 million people and more, none with time enough in the day to take on the tiniest fraction of the separate realities charging this mass of people.

The macaronic socialisation, civitas in extreme, citizens in cardboard boxes, sopping in the gardens of Hampstead billionaires, begs the obvious question, where's the humanity?

The reason this poem is successful at connecting with us on a human level is, I suspect, because Hill has chosen his material judiciously, and we are hearing the voice of a man whose identity is that of London.

Hill is the genuine voice of Southern England and so the market and poetic arena in which he is in the process of claiming as his patch on the poetic playground, can never be seized by the boys and gals up North, who attach themselves to Ted and Bill, isolated and alone not due to the weight of anonymity and weariness a city the size of London can create in a sizeable bulk of it's populace, but because the align with the spirit of the outdoor goddess where concrete and condoms are notable by the absence.

The most gifted of amoral critics with long and successful careers in fraud and full time lying, whose poetic core cast Hill's intellectual weight as possessing an equal measure as that of his namesake Benny the green bore has to acknowledge a high quality of come hither grace creating the kaleidoscopic sheen that sucks us in and takes us on a roller coaster of mildly pimped up lingo.

Should the mind seeking to bash Hill for no reason other than to give into one's desire for indulging in wanton wordic assaults impelled by the jolt of jealousy, say 'pimped up' it would do so carefully, pointing out this act of selection is one primarily of experimentation, seeking to discover if the mistress of custom coding the orality codex of noughties utterance has coined or is in the process of alloying this word into one with which a neutral connotation can also be inferred. Hill shows off his associative cognisance of how to execute the great stylistic piece, a maestro whose accomplishment is the sheer gloss of crafted detachment holding our gaze, the tug and undertow of his Anglo-Saxon word cord the umbilical gravity in absent linguistic lagan, the etymology of the iron-age rivet, muffled and pared back to the use of consonantal assonance only.

The full blast of Wodin's word-forged are tempered, his guttural brute, vovely hammer riveting the apical lanaguge in unmistakable place, but only in the hint and sigh of the underlying syntax, the track on which the dexterous Tobias gets down and dirty as I imagine a Highgate hairdresser to get, tossing in an odd 'piss' dampening the stakes and marking out the conversational quality of quotidian utterance in this deft piece of professional jolting and anchoring of the reader in a whirl of time, image and association.

Written by a man who knows the ache for upward flight, as evidenced in the ending, Hill on an upsinging note, all plangent potential, attempting to escape the drag of the poems clearly cynical fabric and detrius fromed in a city witted scene, sketched by an old pro who knows his Ho.

With an 'I' and weight in his favour at the table where his gift clocks on and spoors a kind of verse which marks him apart from his closest 'rivals,' Patterson and Armitage. And whilst slipping back into the mind of Muldoon one can blubber on about the fibrous difference in mass between the re-claiming of cynicism from a negative connotation to one whose charge is affirmational, which is why this poem only gets B+ and not straight A.

If Tobias was in the thrid zone of poetic awareness, the poem would be more sympathetic to his co-working human fellows, but there is too much evidence to the contrary and the ending was a damp herring, a red squib to fox, Hugh Grant at his most ruthlessly foppish and charming, only after a Yeatsean hole to fill with the de-tangling and precise re-branding of ghostly cynicism, into an enobling human truth which enters the mind of the reader despite, rather than, the surface narrative material of Toby's material.

A flotsam and jetsom of grimy detail, rendered seductive by the sheer quality of sound behind the noun, verb and conjoining words offered to us as a snapshot of fatherly wisdom.

Hugh and a small boy on Hampstead Heath flying a kite, world weary Hugh with slender talent coupled to the luck of a lottery winner, the man rendered appealing as a grain of truth and beauty in the oyster and tripe of London's fishy literary myth, where the mind roams freely with Jack Kerouac and the Dali Lama, to swing with John and Paul, hanging on every word of the latest Man gods, solving and salving humanity's original wound of sin and ungodliness with a few 'yeah yeah yeah's', upon which the small party gathered round his white piano, would commune as one

with the goddesss, Robert Graves brokering a deal with Yoko and Linda, both agreeing to a truce for the sake of global peace.

O what a sheer web in which to tangle and synapse, imparting a tall wisdom tale from the hood whose money shot denouement urge the boy 'disconnect,' in order to acheive what cannot be, owning London, making it your own, which Hill here very clearly has done, plucking and pleating dingy quotidian ephemera, coupled to a cockingly snoot register the critic can never prove, but whose hinted 'other' is the folk whose dream of conquering London came to nothing. The 'clerk..sous chef...underwriters, auditors and clerks..'

Hill appearsz to be more than hinting here, I detect the register as an ill-concealed, non-concern for this tragic bunch of humanity he seeks and succeeds in breathing to life, a cast of literate and sociological bums clutter Hills pastoral pastiche of second level composition.

Manatau

Comment No. 477805

April 23 21:04

So - you feel iffy about the poem then?