



**INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
MODERN LETTERS**

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

Newsletter – 30 May 2007

This is the 108th 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. Last orders

Applications are now being accepted for our second trimester workshops – but if you are thinking of applying, you should hurry. Workshops in writing for children, poetry writing, and writing about the natural environment (both poetry and creative non-fiction) are all available. Notes on the individual workshops follow later in this newsletter. Further information is available from the IIML by phone (463.6854) or email (modernletters@vuw.ac.nz), but the key things to know are the application deadline (10 June), and that we do not accept email applications except in very special circumstances.

2. Workshop tips

Our MA students have been lucky enough lately to meet the writers Richard Ford and Eliot Weinberger in masterclass workshops. (Eliot Weinberger also found time to give a seminar on literary translation.) Now we are looking forward in our 2007 masterclass series to visits from Hollywood screenwriter and Jack Nicholson award-winner Linda Voorhees and UK poet and novelist Lavinia Greenlaw.

A conversation about Richard Ford's post-Wellington appearance at the Auckland Writers' Festival is posted here: <http://www.lumiere.net.nz/reader/item/1044>. But for those who want to peek into his Victoria masterclass, it now has a rich afterlife in reports from Susan Pearce and Mary McCallum posted at LeafSalon: www.leafsalon.co.nz/archives/001135masterclass_with_richard_ford.html#more

Neither Susan nor Mary mention the novelist's remarks about the editorial process. "My editor at Knopf comments on about 85% of my sentences, and I maybe accept his advice on about 15% of what he is sensitive to." Gulp. And other observations we recall? Well, asked about his feelings when he finds his work being studied on university courses: "A university course, a syllabus, is just a formal kind of word of mouth." Ford also commended "moral curiosity", and said to treat advice about writing sceptically. "For everything I say to you, some remarkable writer is saying or doing the exact opposite."

3. Children's Writing Workshop

This workshop introduces you to key craft skills as well as to the magic of the imagination. It is led by well-known children's writer Eirlys Hunter, and among other things offers an insider visit to one of New Zealand's best-kept secrets, the National Library's astonishing Children's Book Collection. There are also stimulating workshop guests – in 2006 these included children's literature guru Kate de Goldi and Margaret Cahill from major children's publisher Learning Media. During the 12-week course you will find yourself reading favourite authors such as Margaret Mahy, Maurice Gee, E Nesbit, and Astrid Lingren, alongside writers you may not have met before like Jan Mark, David Almond, and Louis Sachar. The course reader, designed especially for this workshop, is a treasure trove of ideas and inspiration.

Most of all, you will find yourself writing. By the end of the course you will have produced a folio of new work, work which will often have grown out of the exercises which are so important in the early workshop meetings.

Eirlys Hunter writes: "In 2006, exercise work led to a huge variety of stories including: *The Do List for the Unshrivelled* (which begins 'Dear Whippersnapper, I used to be young and short but unfortunately I ate my leeks and crusts...'), *The Thief*, about a girl whose family lives in a caravan in a camp ground in Taranaki; *Golden North*, about a boy who lives with his aunt in Alaska; a story about a highly-trained chicken called Nuggets and a fantasy called *Aphra and Fennel*. Everyone wrote (at least) the text for a picture book and the beginning of a novel for older children.

Everyone surprised themselves. I must also mention that the **Writing for Children** class enjoys a high standard of afternoon teas!”

There is a course prize – to which Maurice Gee has generously lent his name – for the best workshop folio. You can read more about Eirlys Hunter at <http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writers/huntereirlys.html>

4. The two cultures and a new prize

Last Friday at the Auckland Writers’ Festival, the Royal Society Prize for Creative Science Writing was officially launched. There are prizes of \$2,500 in each of two categories: fiction and creative non-fiction. Entries will be shortlisted by the IIML and the winners judged by Radio New Zealand’s Kim Hill.

The competition springs from the energies and popularity of the *Are Angels OK?* project, which brought together many of New Zealand’s leading writers and scientists. (For more on *AAOK?* see <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/vup/2006titleinformation/areangelsok.htm>)

In 2007, the competition theme, which applies to both categories, is climate change. Entries will be judged on their literary merits, and the extent to which they are likely to engage the reader. Winning entries will be published in the *NZ Listener*.

For further information and conditions of entry, go to <http://www.nzlistener.co.nz/page/3024/competitions.html> or to <http://www.rsnz.org/events/creativesciencewriting/index.php>

And for any UK readers interested in the wonderful spaces of sci-art, take a look at this poetry and science competition where the winning poem is going to be bounced off the moon: http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/poetry/article1839649.ece

5. Writing the Landscape

This could be exactly the launch site for anyone wanting to enter the Royal Society’s new competition (see last item). **Writing the Landscape** aims to foster writing about the natural environment by encouraging workshop members to try a range of approaches and styles. If you haven’t written poetry before, this might now be your chance. If you have been searching for a way of writing the personal essay (memoir, exploration, travel) without becoming unhealthily self-absorbed, here is where you will find a way forward. The workshop is led by Dinah Hawken, a poet and writer who has always placed the natural world at the heart of her writing. Like other IIML courses, **Writing the Landscape** has a stimulating and unique course reader, plus visits from writer guests; and it often includes extra-curricular pleasures such as “field work” in environments like the Botanical Gardens or Matiu/Somes Island.

Dinah Hawken's first book of poems won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, and she is now the author of six books, including *Oh There You Are Tui!: New and Selected Poems*. You can read about Dinah and sample her work at the New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre: <http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/hawken/index.asp>

6. The expanding airwaves

Ken Duncum, who directs the IIML's MA in Scriptwriting, has a radio play being broadcast on Sunday June 3 (Radio NZ National, 3.00 p.m.). *Straight Man* is part of the ninth International Festival of Drama, and according to the *Listener* is "a tale of how a man's relatively peaceful existence with his second wife is thrown into disarray by the arrival of her ex-husband, an annoying stand-up comedian."

We also hear it whispered that Ken's play *Picture Perfect* (staged at Circa in 2006) has been optioned by John Barnett of South Pacific Pictures.

7. Big news for poetry

The 17 May Budget has established a government-funded New Zealand Poet Laureate Award to recognise writers who have made an outstanding contribution to New Zealand poetry. The new award replaces the Te Mata Estate New Zealand Poet Laureate scheme which has hitherto been administered by the IIML. The award will have its home in the National Library of New Zealand. A laureate will be selected biennially and receive an award of \$50,000, while the laureate's working papers and published work will be preserved in the National Library's National Digital Heritage Archive and in the collections of the Alexander Turnbull Library. The timing of the first award will be announced later in the year. Meantime, we understand that Jenny Bornholdt's Te Mata laureate collection, *Mrs Winter's Jump*, will be published by Godwit in late June.

8. Where credit isn't due

Now, a small test. Which acclaimed New Zealand writer has just had a book published without Creative New Zealand assistance – even though a note in the book itself thanks CNZ for their publishing grant? Publishers have their print deadlines, and funding agencies have their decision deadlines, and sometimes the twain don't meet. Likewise, it would seem, some literary judgements.

9. Poetry Workshop

Our second trimester poetry workshop is led by prize-winning poet and IIML lecturer, Chris Price. Chris's poetry collection *Husk* won the Montana New Zealand Best First Book Award for Poetry, and she is also the author of *Brief Lives*, a hybrid

book which mixes poetry, short fiction, and the essay. For many years she was editor of *Landfall*, and is now editor of the IIML's online literary magazine *Turbine* (<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/turbine/>). As in other workshops, exercise work leads to an end-of-course folio, and there are class visits from major contemporary poets. In previous years, workshop members have had their work produced in chapbook form by the Wai-te-ata Press, and there has been the opportunity to see workshop poems realised (and hung in a group exhibition) by graphics students in Massey University's expressive typography course. The specially designed course reader is probably the most interesting and wide-ranging anthology of contemporary poetry available in New Zealand.

10. A message from Viola Beadleton's Compendium

“Just had to tell you that I'm involved with the production of a new literary magazine! It's entirely unlike any other literary magazine ever to be seen in this country before!

Here is a link to the website:

<http://www.wellingtonwriters.com/viola/>

Pass the link on to anyone you know who might be interested in submitting or subscribing to it.”

11. Screen chickens

Big congratulations to Briar Grace-Smith, writer in residence at the IIML in 2002, whose work is heading for the silver screen. Pandora Film from Frankfurt, the company that backed *The Whale Rider*, has chosen to support the filming of Briar's *The Strength of Water*. The film, about twin children living on a Northland chicken farm, will be shot around the Hokianga starting in August. It's due for completion midway through 2008.

12. Pipped at the post (not)

Our congratulations to Lloyd Jones, who has won the 2007 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for his novel *Mr Pip*. Even now he is flying back to the Sydney Writers' Festival, where among other commitments he will appear with Fergus Barrowman, James George, and Charlotte Grimshaw in a session focussing on the increasingly international reach of New Zealand Literature. May we all bask in his fame.

More here:

http://www.swf.org.au/index.php?option=com_events&task=view_detail&agid=80&year=&month=&day=&Itemid=141

and here: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/books/new-zealander-wins-commonwealth-writers-prize/2007/05/28/1180205139205.html>

and here:

http://www.commonwealthfoundation.com/news/news/detail.cfm?id=324&cat_id=45

13. Grant extension

The new NZ Mental Health Media Grants programme launched in March by the Mental Health Foundation and Like Minds Like Mine has extended its closing deadline by two weeks due to late enquiries from interested applicants. The new deadline is Wednesday 13 June, 2007. The purpose of the NZ Mental Health Media Grants is to reduce the incidence of stigma and discrimination through the production of informed media projects.

There is a total grant pool of \$50,000 with grants of up to \$12,000 in each category:

Category 1: media professionals (print, radio and TV journalists, photo-journalists, freelance writers, documentary film makers).

Category 2: creative media projects (artists, writers, musicians, community groups and those with an interest in mental health).

To find out more, or get hold of an application pack, call the Mental Health Foundation on phone: (09) 300 7010, email: info@mediagrants.org.nz or visit the grant website: <http://www.mediagrants.org.nz/>

14. Recent web reading

The best novels you've never read

<http://nymag.com/arts/books/features/2007/32390/>

Are you Salvador Dali?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXT2E9Ccc8A>

Chocolate Dali

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rK4Bh_arF-E&NR=1

Best first lines

<http://www.litline.org/ABR/100bestfirstlines.html>

Excess

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

Quirkology

<http://www.richardwiseman.com/quirkology/tests.html>

The colour changing card trick

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voAntzB7EwE>

Weirdo conventions writing aid

http://www.themorningnews.org/archives/news_you_can_use/weirdo_convention_writing_about_subcultures.php

Master and Margarita website

http://cr.middlebury.edu/public/russian/Bulgakov/public_html/

Make a bio box

<http://www.smcm.edu/users/lnscheer/lecture%20web%20pages/102biobox/biobox.html>

Margaret Atwood's life as a poet

<http://www.library.utoronto.ca/canpoetry/atwood/write.htm>

Quite a lot of Kenneth Rexroth stuff

<http://www.bopsecrets.org/rexroth/>

A little light plagiarism

http://www.mediabistro.com/galleycat/authors/several_figures_directly_included_in_speech_58670.asp

Book blogs and books pages

<http://www.calendarlive.com/cl-ca-bloggers13may13,0,4637710.story?coll=cl-home-more-channels>

The life of the mind

http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2007/05/21/070521taco_talk_menand

Politics and poetry

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200705/s1923188.htm>

Loveable old poet/tyrant

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,2083066,00.html>

Grace Paley poem

http://www.newyorker.com/fiction/poetry/2007/05/28/070528po_poem_paley

Share the joy

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

Books in public places

www.bookcrossing.com

George Saunders

http://www.newyorker.com/fiction/features/2007/05/28/070528fi_fiction_saunders

David Mitchell

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,329927265-110738,00.html>

Another Foreskin's Lament

<http://maudnewton.com/blog/?p=7635>

Poetry and Sincerity

<http://www.lumiere.net.nz/reader/item/1041>

Auckland Writers' Festival

<http://beattiesbookblog.blogspot.com/2007/05/auckland-writers-and-readers-festival.html>

<http://cclblog.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.lumiere.net.nz/reader/arts.php>

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/event/index.cfm?c_id=1500897

15. Great lists of our time

Every year, English teachers from across the USA submit their collections of actual analogies and metaphors found in high school essays. Here are some recent winners...

1. Her face was a perfect oval, like a circle that had its two sides gently compressed by a Thigh Master.
2. His thoughts tumbled in his head, making and breaking alliances like underpants in a dryer without Cling Free.
3. He spoke with the wisdom that can only come from experience, like a guy who went blind because he looked at a solar eclipse without one of those boxes with a pinhole in it and now goes around the country speaking at high schools about the dangers of looking at a solar eclipse without one of those boxes with a pinhole in it.
4. She grew on him like she was a colony of E. Coli, and he was room-temperature Canadian beef.
5. She had a deep, throaty, genuine laugh, like that sound a dog makes just before it throws up.
6. Her vocabulary was as bad as, like, whatever.
7. He was as tall as a six-foot, three-inch tree.
8. The revelation that his marriage of 30 years had disintegrated because of his wife's infidelity came as a rude shock, like a surcharge at a formerly surcharge-free ATM machine.
9. The little boat gently drifted across the pond exactly the way a bowling ball wouldn't.
10. McBride fell 12 stories, hitting the pavement like a Hefty bag filled with vegetable soup.
11. From the attic came an unearthly howl. The whole scene had an eerie, surreal quality, like when you're on vacation in another city and Jeopardy comes on at 7:00 p.m. instead of 7:30.
12. Her hair glistened in the rain like a nose hair after a sneeze.
13. The hailstones leaped from the pavement, just like maggots when you fry them in hot grease.
14. Long separated by cruel fate, the star-crossed lovers raced across the grassy field toward each other like two freight trains, one having left

Cleveland at 6:36 p.m. traveling at 55 mph, the other from Topeka at 4:19 p.m. at a speed of 35 mph.

15. They lived in a typical suburban neighborhood with picket fences that resembled Nancy Kerrigan's teeth.

16. John and Mary had never met. They were like two hummingbirds who had also never met.

17. He fell for her like his heart was a mob informant, and she was the East River.

18. Even in his last years, Granddad had a mind like a steel trap, only one that had been left out so long, it had rusted shut.

19. Shots rang out, as shots are wont to do.

20. The plan was simple, like my brother-in-law Phil. But unlike Phil, this plan just might work.

21. The young fighter had a hungry look, the kind you get from not eating for a while.

22. He was as lame as a duck. Not the metaphorical lame duck, either, but a real duck that was actually lame, maybe from stepping on a land mine or something.

23. He was deeply in love. When she spoke, he thought he heard bells, as if she were a garbage truck backing up.

24. It was an American tradition, like fathers chasing kids around with power tools.

25. The ballerina rose gracefully en Pointe and extended one slender leg behind her, like a dog at a fire hydrant.

(With thanks to the Norton-Urry information network. And if you would like to wade through even more bad metaphor, go here:

<http://www.stumbleupon.com/tag/analogies/>)