



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
MODERN LETTERS

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

Newsletter – 8 May 2007

This is the 107th 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. Sportswriter on screen

News just in from *Variety* magazine is that HBO are planning a six-hour mini-series of Richard Ford's trilogy featuring novelist-turned-sportswriter-turned-real-estate-agent Frank Bascombe. It's to be directed by James Mangold (*Walk the Line*) and written by Mark Bomback (*The Tourist*). Closer to home, *Dominion Post* readers will have seen Jennifer Levasseur's interview with Richard Ford in Saturday's paper. Levasseur and her partner Kevin Rabalais also interviewed Ford back in 2001 for their book *Novel Voices* (Writers Digest Press 2003), which includes interviews with Ernest J. Gaines, Ha Jin, Charles Baxter, Siri Hustvedt, William H. Gass and others. In 2001, the pair were research students at Victoria (Jennifer in the IIML's MA programme, Kevin in the School of English).

For another encounter with Ford at home, see:

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,1879440,00.html>

2. Elemental, my dear Weinberger

Eliot Weinberger continues his exploration of the creative possibilities inherent in fact in his new book *An Elemental Thing*. In it Weinberger explores a diverse range of cultural traditions to create a kind of serial essay on an astonishing array of topics, from the wind and the rhinoceros, Catholic saints, and people named Chang, to the Mandaean on the Iran-Iraq border and Blake's Tyger, as well as a poetic biography of the prophet Muhammad.

Weinberger is also a translator, most notably of Mexican Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz and more recently the Chinese poet Bei Dao. His own piece 'The Stars', 'a reverie on what's up there', has been translated into several languages including Maori.

Translator Piripi Walker will join Eliot Weinberger in reading from this piece when he appears in Wellington. A link to a radio interview with Weinberger and a representative of the Mandaean sect appears here (see the second item on the page):

<http://www.wnyc.org/shows/lopate/episodes/2007/04/19>

3. Up close and personal

All of this serves as a reminder that both writers can be encountered first-hand in Wellington this month. Eliot Weinberger appears in conversation with Ian Wedde on Thursday 17 May, 6 pm, at City Gallery Wellington. Richard Ford talks with Damien Wilkins on Wednesday 23 May, 6 pm, at Rutherford House, Lecture Theatre 1 (Bunny Street entrance), with complimentary drinks & nibbles from 5.30 pm. Tickets cost \$8 (single event), or you can see both writers for just \$10. They are available from Vicbooks (Kelburn and Pipitea campus shops), tel 0800 370 370 or email pipitea@vicbooks.co.nz.

4. Creative science

We spotted a rather unexpected superposition of science and poetry in a recent Radio New Zealand email reminder about interview repeats from Kim Hill's Saturday Morning programme:

'On Saturday 21 April at 6.06pm in Great Encounters, you can hear a repeat of Kim Hill's interview from last Saturday with Nobel Prize-winning physicist Alistair Te Ariki Campbell.'

We're not sure if this represents a collapse of the wave function -- but New Zealand writers who are more au fait with science (or willing to become so) will soon have the chance to test their skills on a scientific theme. A new prize for creative science

writing will be launched at the Auckland Writers and Readers Festival on 25 May. The prize is offered by the Royal Society of New Zealand in partnership with the *NZ Listener* and the International Institute of Modern Letters, and we'll publish full details later this month.

5. New Zealand Post Book events

New Zealand writers for children and young adults are on the move this week in the lead-up to the announcement of the New Zealand Post Book Award winners in Wellington on 16 May. For the national programme of events with shortlisted authors and others, see:

http://www.booksellers.co.nz/nzpb_fst_events.htm

6. Storylines Festival of New Zealand Children's Writers and Illustrators

Top international writers and illustrators will appear in the 14th annual Storylines Festival, around New Zealand from 5-10 June. Australian maestro of the graphic novel, Shaun Tan, and talented UK children's writers Mal Peet and John Boyne are international special guests in a line-up that includes around 50 of New Zealand's leading children's writers, illustrators, storytellers and performers. The Festival gives children a chance to meet the authors and illustrators on free Family Days at the Wellington Town Hall, Puke Ariki in New Plymouth, and for the first time ever in Kerikeri, all on Saturday 9 June, and Auckland's Aotea Centre on Sunday 10 June. Adult fans and aspiring writers also have their chance to meet and hear Shaun Tan, Mal Peet (and John Boyne in Christchurch) at the Heritage Hotels Seminar Series run in conjunction with the Storylines Festival in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. For more details about the Storylines Festival contact festival manager Crissi Blair on festival@storylines.org.nz

7. Yeats plates

It seems that poetry pursues Andrew Johnston, editor of *The Page* (www.thepage.name) wherever he goes. We recently received a message from him about a trip to the New World supermarket in Lower Hutt, where he emerged to find a poetic numberplate on the car parked next to his. The plate was SLIGO, and above and below were these words:

Cast a cold eye on life, on death
Horseman pass by

These are of course the final lines from one of the last poems of W. B. Yeats, 'Under Ben Bulbin'; and they are engraved on his simple tomb in the churchyard of

Drumcliff, in the poet's native Sligo. In this context, perhaps they also offer a cryptic commentary on New Zealand driver behaviour.

8. The exhibitionists

Te Papa's writing team takes the microphone at the Poetry Café in Porirua next week. The national museum employs an array of local writers, including James Brown, Mary-Jane Duffy, Adrienne Jansen, Kerry Jimson, Te Ikanui Kapa, Michael Keith, Frances Samuel and Frith Williams. They'll present a sampler of their non-work-related output, which includes poetry, scripts, fiction and non-fiction. They're in action on Monday 14 May, 7.30pm, at the Cruz Café & Bar, Serlby Place, Porirua (opposite Countdown, next door to Video Shop). Entry is free.

9. Dora Malech reads

Visiting US poet and IIML MA convenor Dora Malech will be the guest at an open mic night next Friday, 18 May at 128 Abel Smith St, Wellington. We're advised you can byo wine as well as poetry, prose or 'scripty stuff' to read in the open mic part of the evening. Here's a link to one of Dora's poems, recently published on the Poetry Foundation's website:

http://www.poetrymagazine.org/magazine/0507/poem_179577.html

10. NZ Book Month

There's a whole lot of blogging going on at the NZ Book Month website. Among the contributors is 2005 MA graduate Mary McCallum, who has posted a brief extract from *The Blue*, the novel she worked on that year, forthcoming from Penguin. The end of this week sees the launch of online voting for this year's Six Pack competition. The shortlisted entries will be loaded on to the NZ Book Month website for the public to read; five finalists will be chosen by a panel of judges, and the sixth by the vote of New Zealand readers. The Six Pack 2007 will be in the shops at the beginning of September, price \$6.

11. From the whiteboard

A reality check from W. H. Auden, republished in *The Times* to mark the centenary of his birth:

'It is a sobering experience for any poet to read the last page of the Books section of the *Sunday Times* where correspondents seek to identify poems which have meant

much to them. He is forced to realise that it is not his work, not even the work of Dante or Shakespeare, that most people treasure as magic talismans in time of trouble, but grotesquely bad verses written by maiden ladies in local newspapers; that millions in their bereavements, heartbreaks, agonies, depressions, have been comforted and perhaps saved from despair by appalling trash while poetry stood helplessly and incompetently by.'

12. Writers in residence

Writing residencies seem to be springing up all over New Zealand at present. Vincent O'Sullivan is currently spending a year in Alexandra, Central Otago as the inaugural recipient of a residency offered to 'selected writers, artists and musicians in recognition of their considerable contribution to New Zealand's culture'. Novelist, short story writer and poet Owen Marshall has just been announced the inaugural recipient of the Woollaston writer-in-residence programme, newly established by the New Zealand Society of Authors and Nelson winery Woollaston Estates. Marshall will be based at the winery throughout June and will feature in a number of events in the Nelson/Tasman community. Meanwhile the first Rotorua Writers' Residency has gone to the versatile Vivienne Plumb, who plans to work on short stories while there. Plumb's career as a playwright also seems to be on a roll: her new play 'The Cape' has productions scheduled for Wellington (August) Auckland (November) and Christchurch (around June, 2008).

13. A few words from Zach Savich

Those who met or were taught by Zach Savich in this summer's Iowa Poetry Workshop at the Institute will be glad to know that he is (in his own words) 'doing honest work as a test marker! And painting!' He is also doing his best to reverse the tide of linguistic imperialism by using Kiwi expressions such as 'flash' and 'sweet as' – at least whenever he sees Alice Miller, the 2005 IIML graduate currently studying for her MFA at Iowa. In the spirit of reciprocity, we pass on the US diner slang that features on the card Zach sent us, although it's not specified what era the slang comes from. (For more, see Great lists of our time, below.)

Cluck and grunt: ham and eggs
Sinkers and suds: doughnuts and coffee
The gentleman will take a chance: the man has ordered hash
Burn the British: toast an English muffin
Hounds on an island: hot dogs on a pile of beans
On a raft: on toast
Tube steak: hot dog
Fightin' tools: silverware

14. A wee Scottish poetry joke

Currently doing the rounds on the Internet:

Tony Blair is visiting an Edinburgh hospital. He enters a ward full of patients with no obvious sign of injury or illness and greets one.

The patient replies:

Fair fa your honest sonsie face,
Great chieftain o the puddin race,
Aboon them a ye take yer place,
Painch, tripe or thairm,
As langs my airm.

Blair is confused, so he just grins and moves on to the next patient. The patient responds:

Some hae meat an canna eat,
And some wad eat that want it,
But we hae meat an we can eat,
So let the Lord be thankit.

Even more confused, and his grin now rictus-like, the PM moves on to the next patient, who immediately begins to chant:

Wee sleekit, cowerin, timorous beasty,
O the panic in thy breasty,
Thou needna start awa sae hastie,
Wi bickering brattle

Now seriously troubled, Blair turns to the accompanying doctor and asks, 'Is this a psychiatric ward?'

'No,' replies the doctor, 'this is the serious Burns unit.'

15. Recent web reading

Granta's best of US

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,2063392,00.html>

Vocabulary calculator

<http://www.plenilune.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/vocabulary.asp>

Diminishing reviews

http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-op-connelly29apr29_0,4970757.story?coll=la-news-comment-opinions

A Lorine Niedecker selection

<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/niedecker/poems.html>

Woof woof tui

<http://www.whangareinativebirdrecovery.org.nz/woofwoofvids.html>

Political reading

<http://www.whatisstephenharperreading.ca/>

Celebrity workshop

<http://tls.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,25338-2640432,00.html>

Paula Morris interviews

<http://www.lumiere.net.nz/reader/item/954>

<http://www.tbi.co.nz/article.php?sid=4436&mode=thread&order=0>

A Wikipedia overview of Best NZ Poems

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

16. Great lists of our time

US slang of the 1920s

<http://local.aaca.org/bntc/slang/slang.htm#M>

The author of this list comments that ‘The twenties were the first decade to emphasize youth culture over the older generations, and the flapper sub-culture had a tremendous influence on main stream America; many new words and phrases were coined by these liberated women.’ Many are still in use, but others now seem somewhat quaint.

Ab-so-lute-ly - affirmative

All Wet - describes an erroneous idea or individual, as in, "he's all wet."

And How - I strongly agree!

Applesauce- an expletive same as horsefeathers, As in "Ah applesauce!"

Attaboy - well done!; also Attagirl!

Baby - sweetheart. Also denotes something of high value or respect.

Balled Up - confused, messed up

Baloney - nonsense!

Bank's Closed - no kissing or making out - i.e. - "Sorry, Mac, the bank's closed."

Bearcat - a hot-blooded or fiery girl

Beat it - scam or get lost

Beat one's gums - idle chatter

Bee's Knees - An extraordinary person, thing, idea; the ultimate

Beef - a complaint or to complain

Beeswax - business, i.e. *None of your beeswax.*"
Bell bottom - a sailor
Berries - That which is attractive or pleasing; similar to bee's knees, As in "It's the berries."
Bible Belt - Area in the South and Midwest where Fundamentalism flourishes
Big Cheese - The most important or influential person; boss. Same as big shot
Big six - a strong man; from auto advertising, for the new and powerful; six cylinder engines
Bimbo - a tough guy
Bird - general term for a man or woman, sometimes meaning "odd," i.e. *"What a funny old bird."*

Blind Date - going out with someone you do not know
Bluenose - An excessively puritanical person, a prude, Creator of "the Blue Nozzle Curse."
Bootleg - illegal liquor
Breezer - an convertible car
Bronx Cheer - A loud spluttering noise, used to indicate disapproval. Same as raspberry
Bull - (1) a policeman or law-enforcement officer including FBI (2) nonsense (3) to chat idly, to exaggerate
Bull Session - Male talkfest, gossip, stories of sexual exploits
Bum's rush - ejection by force from an establishment
Bump Off - To murder, To kill
Butt me - I'll take a cigarette

Caper - a criminal act or robbery
Carry a Torch - To have a crush on someone
Cash - a kiss
Cash or check? - Do you kiss now or later?
Cat's Meow - Something splendid or stylish; similar to bee's knees; The best or greatest, wonderful.
Cat's Pajamas - Same as cat's meow
Chassis - the female body
Cheaters - Eyeglasses
Check - kiss me later
Ciggy - cigarette

Clam - a dollar
Copacetic - Wonderful, fine, all right
Crush - An infatuation

Daddy - a young woman's boyfriend or lover, especially if he's rich
Dame - a female
Dapper - a Flapper's dad
Darb - An excellent person or thing (as in "the Darb" - a person with money who can be relied on to pay the check)
Dead soldier - an empty bear bottle
Deb - an debutant
Dick - a private investigator

Dogs - feet
Doll - an attractive woman
Dolled up - dressed up
Don't know from nothing - don't have any information
Don't take any wooden nickels - Don't do anything stupid
Double-cross - to cheat, stab in the back
Dough - money
Drugstore Cowboy - a guy that hangs around on a street corner trying to pick up girls
Dry up - shut up, get lost
Ducky - very good
Dumb Dora - a stupid female

Earful - enough
Edge - intoxication, a buzz. *i.e. "I've got an edge."*
Egg - a person who lives the big life

Fall Guy - Victim of a frame
Fire extinguisher - a chaperone

Fish -(1) a college freshman (2) a first timer in prison
Flat Tire - A dull witted, insipid, disappointing date. Same as pill, pickle, drag, rag, oilcan
Flivver - a Model T; after 1928, could mean any old broken down car
Flapper - A stylish, brash, hedonistic young woman with short skirts & shorter hair
Fly boy - a glamorous term for an aviator
Frame - To give false evidence , to set up someone

Gams - A woman's legs
Get a wiggle on - get a move on, get going
Giggle Water - An intoxicating beverage; alcohol
Gin Mill - An establishment where hard liquor is sold; bar
Glad rags - "going out on the town" clothes
Gold Digger - A woman who associates with or marries a man for his wealth
Goofy - in love

Hair of the Dog - a shot of alcohol
Handcuff - an engagement ring
Hard Boiled - a tough, strong guy
Hayburner - (1) a gas guzzling car (2) a horse one loses money on
Heebie-Jeebies - The jitters
High-Hat - To snub
Hit on all sixes - to perform 100 per cent; as "hitting on all six cylinders"
Hooch - Bootleg liquor
Hood - hoodlum
Hooper - Dancer
Horsefeathers - an expletive ; same usage as applesauce
Hotsy - Totsy - Pleasing

It - Sex appeal

Iron - a motorcycle

Jack - money

Jake - OK, as in , "Everything is Jake."

Jalopy - Old car

Jane - any female

Java - coffee

Jitney - a car employed as a private bus. Fare was usually five cents; also called a "nickel"

Joe - coffee

John - a toilet

Joint - an establishment

Juice Joint - a speakeasy

Joint - A club, usually selling alcohol

Keen - Attractive or appealing

Kisser - Mouth

Left holding the bag - (1) to be cheated out of one's fair share (2) to be blamed for something

Level with me - be honest

Line - Insincere flattery

Live wire - a lively person

Middle Aisle - To marry

Mrs. Grundy - A priggish or extremely tight-laced person

Moll - A gangster's girl

Neck - Kissing with passion

Nifty - great, excellent

"Now you're on the trolley!" - Now you've got it, now you're right!

Nobody Home - Describes some one who is dumb

On the lam - fleeing from police

On the level - legitimate, honest

On the up and up - on the level

Orchid - an expensive item

Ossified - a drunk person

Owl - a person who's out late

Palooka (1) a below-average or average boxer (2) a social outsider, from the comic strip character Joe Palooka

Pet - Same as neck, but more so

Piker - (1) a cheapskate (2) a coward

Pill - (1) a teacher (2) an unlikable person

Pinch - To arrest

Pipe down - stop talking

Pushover - A person easily convinced or seduced

Putting on the Ritz - after the Ritz hotel in Paris; doing something in high style

Rag-a-muffin - a dirty or disheveled individual

Razz- to make fun of

Real McCoy - The genuine article

Ritzy - Elegant (from the hotel)

Rubes - money or dollars

Sap - a fool

Says you - a reaction of disbelief

Scram - Ask someone to leave immediately

Sheba - A woman with sex appeal (from the movie Queen of Sheba) or (e.g. Clara Bow)

Sheik - A man with sex appeal (from the Valentino movies)

Shiv - a knife

Sinker - a doughnut

Speakeasy - An illicit bar selling bootleg liquor

Spifflicated - Drunk. The same as canned, corked, tanked, primed, scrooched, jazzed, zozzled, plastered, owled, embalmed, lit, potted, ossified or fried to the hat

Spiffy - An elegant appearance_

Spoon - to neck, or at least talk of love

Struggle Buggy - the backseat of a car. A parent's worst nightmare

Stuck On - Having a crush on

Swanky - Ritzy

Swell - Wonderful. Also: a rich man

Take for a Ride - To drive off with someone in order to bump them off

Tin Pan Alley - the music industry in New York, located between 48th and 52nd street

Tomato - a female

Torpedo - A hired gun

Upchuck - To vomit when one has drunk too much

Wet Blanket - a solemn person, a killjoy

What's eating you? - What's wrong

Whoopee - To have a good time

You slay me - that's funny

