



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MODERN LETTERS

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

Newsletter – 13 May 2008

This is the 123rd 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. Great societies

Here at the IIML we're proud not just of our MA programme and the many books that flow from it, but also of our targeted undergraduate workshops, which bring together writers with strong and particular interests. Some of these are familiar enough – our short fiction and poetry workshops, for example. Others are even more focussed.

Each year, Dinah Hawken teaches “Writing the Landscape”, which concentrates on writing about the environment. If you want to read an unsolicited endorsement, try [here](#).

You’ll have to wait until 2009 for Dinah’s next workshop, but in the July-October semester, you can choose between workshops in children’s writing with Eirlys Hunter, in creative non-fiction with Harry Ricketts, or in poetry with Chris Price. The Ursula K. LeGuin quote on the Children’s Writing Workshop brochure might apply to any of these courses: “There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories.”

Applications for next semester’s courses close on 3 June. For more information about any of them, email modernletters@vuw.ac.nz.

2. The New Zealand Post National Schools Writing Festival is back

In August this year some of our top writers and creative writing teachers will lead small-group writing workshops and seminars for young poets, fiction writers and scriptwriters. Open to all Year 12 and 13 students studying in New Zealand, the Festival is free to attend. Participating writers this year include the IIML’s MA programme leaders Kate Duignan, Ken Duncum, and Bill Manhire, Victoria University’s Writer in Residence David Geary, novelists Elizabeth Knox and Kate De Goldi, and poets Hinemoana Baker, James Brown, and Paula Green, who is also the judge of this year’s New Zealand Post National Schools Poetry Awards. The Festival is hosted by the International Institute of Modern Letters over the weekend of August 23-24 at Victoria University.

If you would like more information about the Schools Writing Festival visit [here](#) or email the Festival coordinator – kirsten.mcdougall@vuw.ac.nz

3. Extras

We are delighted to learn that Fergus Barrowman, publisher of *The Vintner’s Luck*, has just flown to France where he will play the part of a French peasant on the set of Niki Caro’s version of the novel. We would be interested to know what other small parts New Zealand publishers might one day play in movie versions of their authors’ work. In response to this very enquiry, Barrowman writes: “I also see myself as ‘Third Policeman’ in the film of Hugh Price’s *Plot Against New Zealand*. But I think someone else may have to step up as ‘Sex Club Client’ in the film of *The Book of the Film of the Story of My Life*.” Publishers with particular screen aspirations, are welcome to contact us. We will broadcast their hopes and follies as widely as we can.

4. Unusual film idea

With the world of film in mind, we are happy to report a note recently spotted in the IIML *Visitors’ Book*, which resides on the Janet Frame/Landfall Desk. Signed by

David Geary, it sits just below the signature of the Hon Pete Hodgson, Minister for Tertiary Education, who visited us several weeks ago.

“I hereby bags the right to writing a short silent film in which Janet Clutha (Frame) saws the legs off her desk to get it to an agreeable writing height, but has to continually wedge various slim household objects under various legs to stop it wobbling. She eventually throws a wobbly herself and karates the desk in two! – thus dispelling the myth that her tenants were the ones to divide it . . . Thank you, Landfall Desk – you have given me so much, and have so much more to give – weave on you secret spider!”

The myth Mr Geary refers to is described in Chris Cochran’s conservation report [here](#). For some reason, we also recall that some months before she died Janet Frame was asked what she would do were she to win the Nobel Prize. “I would buy back the railways,” she said. Take a bow, Michael Cullen!

5. Robin Dudding RIP

He might have enjoyed the irony. Robin Dudding died two days before he was to receive his Honorary Doctorate from Auckland University. The degree ceremony went ahead in any case, with an air of celebration that Robin would have got plenty of embarrassed pleasure from. The university orator orated, co-degree recipient Vincent O’Sullivan spoke generously of Robin’s work as an editor, and daughters Ruth and Anna accepted the degree and doctoral gown on his behalf. Robin might also have been surprised by his own immediate afterlife. Among others, the *Dominion Post*, the *Sunday Star-Times*, and the *NZ Listener* have run extensive tributes.

Steve Braunias has also made some fine observations [here](#). Of course, Robin's real literary after-life is to be found in the writers whom he fostered and the fine work he brought to print (including work represented in the IIML’s *Best New Zealand Poems 2003*). Ave atque vale.

6. Slips of tongue and pen

Not since Keith Holyoake suggested on television that Charles Dickens wrote *On the Origin of Species* have we come across such a nice mistake as the World War One poet accidentally devised by a recent reviewer (Graham Brazier) in *Canvas* magazine. Would you please welcome to the world of twentieth-century verse . . . Winifred Owen. It turns out that the mistake is hardly unique. [Findagrave.com](#) also has news of Winifred.

7. Michael Palmer

US poet Michael Palmer gave a large audience a great deal of pleasure last week in his Monday lunchtime presentation at Wellington’s City Gallery. He gave even more to those fortunate enough to attend his Master Class at the IIML, in an afternoon session one workshop member described as “both relaxed and intense”. Catharina

van Bohemen reports on both events at the close of this newsletter. A brief interview with Lynn Freeman can still be heard on the Arts on Sunday [download page feed](#).

8. The long arm of KM (1)

Established and mid-career New Zealand creative writers are invited to apply for the New Zealand Post Mansfield Prize 2009. As well as a scholarship of \$100,000, the prize offers a six month residency in Menton, France, where Katherine Mansfield lived and wrote during the latter part of her life. The current recipient is the IIML's Damien Wilkins. Applications close on 27 June. More information [here](#).

9. The long arm of KM (2)

The BNZ Katherine Mansfield Awards for new short stories are back. Entries close on 30 June, and there is much more information [here](#). If you hunt around the site you can read the stories by Emma Gallagher and Craig Cliff, IIML graduates who were also winners of the novice writers' section in 2006 and 2007 respectively.

10. How to write your first feature

Ken Duncum, the IIML's director of scriptwriting, chairs a practical discussion about how to present your first feature film for funding and development. On the panel will be the NZ Film Commission's Hone Kouka, award-winning writer Briar Grace-Smith, and Matt Saville.

NZ Film Archive, 84 Taranaki Street, Wellington – Thursday 15th May.
Drinks from 7.00 p.m. Starts 7.30 p.m. \$5 koha at the door.

11. The expanding stage

Ken Duncum's stage play *Cherish* keeps on keeping on. It won the Best New New Zealand Play category at the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards back in 2003, was published (by [VUP](#)) in 2004, and in 2006 was produced in New York by Nicu's Spoon Theatre Company. Now it has opened in Edmonton, Canada, to strong reviews. Writes Darren Paul in the *Edmonton Correspondent*: "The wisdom of King Solomon can't touch this child custody mess. . . . *Cherish* keeps twisting and turning, and changing the audience's mind about what it's asking of them. The struggle over the unborn child tests relationships to, and beyond, their breaking points and everyone has a burden to bear. . . . *Cherish* is a real stroke of success, and a play with as contemporary and poignant themes as any. Audiences are presented with a finely detailed finely delivered show that will ask to be taken home with them."

12. The expanding bookshelf

Victoria graduates are productive at the moment. Amy Brown, inaugural winner of the Biggs Poetry Prize, will see her first book, *The Propaganda Poster Girl*, (VUP) launched at the IIML this Thursday. Chris Orsman's third major collection of poems, *The Lakes of Mars*, has just appeared from AUP. As well as work dealing with Antarctica and family, it includes the [poem](#) Chris wrote while Writer in Residence at Victoria in honour of Nobel prizewinner Maurice Wilkins.

Chris Orsman's one-time classmate Emily Perkins also has a new book, "a dark and sensuous tale" called *Novel About My Wife* recently out in the UK, where she is soon to appear at a number of literary festivals. Back in the world of poetry, Emma Neale's handsome anthology, *Swings and Roundabouts: Poems on Parenthood*, has just been published by Godwit. And Rebekah Palmer's latest children's picture book *Little Blue Penguins*, illustrated by Megan McKenzie, is out from Scholastic.

13. From the whiteboard

"One of the great rules of art: do not linger."

—André Gide

14. Book Capital bid

We understand that Wellington's bid to be selected by UNESCO as World Book Capital for 2010 has gone ahead. Competing cities are now confirmed as Guadalajara, Lisbon, Ljubljana, Riga, and St Petersburg. The Guardian recently ran a piece about Amsterdam, the 2008 World Book Capital. Read it [here](#).

15. Scriptwriting award

An Australian won it last time. The International Academy of Television Arts and Sciences now awards the Sir Peter Ustinov Television Scriptwriting Award each year. The competition is designed to motivate non-American novice writers under the age of 30, and offer them the recognition and encouragement that might lead to a successful career in television scriptwriting. Entrants are asked to create a completed half-hour to one-hour English-language television drama script for a family audience. The submissions deadline is July 15. More information and a downloadable entry form [here](#).

16. The Fern and The Thistle

A press release from the Scottish Poetry Library:

“New Zealand is about as far as it’s possible to get from Scotland. Yet there are strong cultural links between the two nations, and a new initiative is bringing them together [online](#).

Organised by the Scottish Poetry Library, *The Fern and The Thistle* will feature writers based in Scotland introducing their favourite New Zealand poets. The SPL hopes this will evolve into a poetry exchange, giving New Zealand readers the chance to discover Scottish poets in their turn.

As well as discovering New Zealand poetry online, Scottish readers will be able to borrow some of the best contemporary New Zealand poetry – the Scottish Poetry Library has recently acquired a new collection of over 60 books, thanks to funding from Creative New Zealand, and will be adding to this collection over the next few years.

The Fern and The Thistle will be launched with a live reading from Scottish and New Zealand poets Andrew Johnston and Gerrie Fellows, at the Scottish Poetry Library in Edinburgh (29 May) and New Zealand House in London (28 May).

Despite extraordinary developments in communication and a constant coming and going between Scotland and New Zealand, both countries remain ill-informed, generally, about each other’s literatures, especially poetry. The Director of the Scottish Poetry Library, Dr Robyn Marsack, is a New Zealander born and bred, who saw a modest but significant way of altering this situation.

Dr Marsack said: *New Zealand and Scotland have a great deal in common, and it seems timely to exchange our poetries as both countries, in their own ways, learn to celebrate their culturally diverse communities –their linguistic heritage and expansion, the new, imaginative interpretations of the old ‘fern’ and ‘thistle’.*

17. Four poems that recently caught our attention

[Craig Cliff in *Snorkel*](#)

[Frankie McMillan at *Blackmail Press*](#)

[Dora Malech at the *New Yorker*](#)

[Paul Muldoon in the *TLS*](#)

18. A new Text

A new issue of TEXT, the Australian journal which specialises in the teaching of writing, is now available [here](#). There is also a new website for Australian postgraduate writers (and supervisors) [here](#). The site is still under construction, and welcomes responses, criticisms, suggestions.

19. A couple of upcoming Wellington readings

On Monday 19 May, Lindsay Rabbitt is guest poet at the NZ Poetry Society's monthly reading. The meeting is at Leuven Belgian Beer Café, 135 Featherston St, Wellington, at 7.30 p.m. It is open to the public, and entry is by gold coin donation.

On Thursday 22 May, Mary McCallum, author of *The Blue*, is reading at Massey University's Wellington campus. The reading is 6.00 - 7.00 p.m. and will be followed by refreshments. Venue: 5D16 (Wellington Campus, Wallace Street, Entrance A, Block 5 –access through 'The Pyramid' – Level D, Room 16).

20. Recent web reading

[Big book prize](#)

[Dinner with Henry Miller](#)

[A brief survey of the short story](#)

[Poetry faqs](#)

[The museum of unworkable devices](#)

[Thoreau's blog](#)

[Sinking ships](#)

[The Modernist Journals Project](#)

[Asemic writing](#)

[A rabbit a day](#)

[Pasifika poetry](#)

[Mary McCallum has a blog](#)

[So does Fifi Colston, who has been blogging on children's publishing down under](#)

[Bridget van der Zijpp is blogging, too](#)

[Obama's muse](#)

[A rather good poetry anthology](#)

[Big book prize](#)

21. Great lists of our time

From *The Annotated Mother Goose*, eds. William S. Baring-Gould & Ceil Baring-Gould, Bramhall House, 1962:

“...in 1952 Geoffrey Handley-Taylor of Manchester, England, published a brief biography of the literature of nursery rhyme reform in which he wrote that:

“The average collection of 200 traditional nursery rhymes contains approximately 100 rhymes which personify all that is glorious and ideal for the child. Unfortunately, the remaining 100 rhymes harbour unsavoury elements. The incidents listed below occur in the average collection and may be accepted as a reasonably conservative estimate based on a general survey of this type of literature.

“8 allusions to murder (unclassified), 2 cases of choking to death, 1 case of death by devouring, 1 case of cutting a human being in half, 1 case of decapitation, 1 case of death by squeezing, 1 case of death by shrivelling, 1 case of death by starvation, 1 case of boiling to death, 1 case of death by hanging, 1 case of death by drowning, 4 cases of killing domestic animals, 1 case of body snatching, 21 cases of death (unclassified), 7 cases relating to the severing of limbs, 1 case of the desire to have a limb severed, 2 cases of self-inflicted injury, 4 cases relating to the breaking of limbs, 1 allusion to a bleeding heart, 1 case of devouring human flesh, 5 threats of death, 1 case of kidnapping, 12 cases of torment and cruelty to human beings and animals, 8 cases of whipping and lashing, 3 allusions to blood, 14 cases of stealing and general dishonesty, 15 allusions to maimed human beings and animals 1 allusion to undertakers, 2 allusions to graves, 23 cases of physical violence (unclassified), 1 case of lunacy, 16 allusions to misery and sorrow, 1 case of drunkenness, 4 cases of cursing, 1 allusion to marriage as a form of death, 1 case of scorning the blind, 1 case of scorning prayer, 9 cases of children being lost or abandoned, 2 cases of house burning, 9 allusions to poverty and want, 5 allusions to quarrelling, 2 cases of unlawful imprisonment, 2 cases of racial discrimination.

“Expressions of fear, weeping, moans of anguish, biting, pain and evidence of supreme selfishness may be found on almost every other page.”

As reported in [Harriet: the Poetry Foundation's blog](#)

22. Catharina van Bohemen reports on Michael Palmer

“In my notebook it says, it is the time of mutations, laughter at jokes, secrets beyond the boundaries of speech.”

These words from Michael Palmer's *Sun* suggest something of the elliptical and experimental nature of his poetry which he read at the first of the *Writers on Mondays* meetings at the City Gallery on Monday May 5th. He read mainly from his latest collection, *The Company of Moths*, work which was elusive, musical, political; indeed a theme Palmer returned to throughout his week in Wellington was how the poet

“talks to the world” in the face of daily “long distance slaughter.” Afterwards, Bill Manhire asked him about his willingness to offer a context for each poem. Palmer replied that the explanation was a bridge – especially at a public reading – between writer and reader, a way of showing how a poem begins with an experience that is not just words. He spoke of the fugitive nature of a poem: although the work of solitude, it is also always a collaboration of at least two consciousnesses, and one which resists absolute meaning.

At the MA Master Class he developed his thoughts about the role of the poet, and the “purpose and necessity” of the lyric as a response not only to the tumultuous political events of the last hundred years, but also to private upheaval. He quoted Theodore Adorno who said that any poetic utterance after the Holocaust was impossible. The traditional lyric splintered: it reflected global fracture, and the poetry that grew from this fracture has necessarily been a re-formation of structure, voice, nuance, meaning, a poetry based on breath, heart-beat, silence as well as words. As a translator of French, Portuguese and Russian, he referred to Apollinaire, Mandelstam and Paul Celan as well as his own contemporaries, Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan, and emphasized the cross-fertilization that has occurred not only in poetry but also in music and dance. Michael Palmer himself frequently collaborates with dancers and artists.

This was his first visit to NZ so he was also interested in our poetry: he compared with delight similarities not only in the lifespans of Robert Creeley and Hone Tuwhare, but also surprising resonances of voice and style in Tuwhare’s “Rain” and Creeley’s “The Rain”. A final pleasure for him – and for all those present at an absorbing afternoon – was Rachel O’Neill’s reading of her new poem ‘Life Immemorial Part 3’. Rachel is a member of the 2008 MA workshop.