



## INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MODERN LETTERS

*Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao*

### Newsletter – 22 June 2011

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This is the 170<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:modernletters).

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#### 1. The festival that lasts for weeks

Writers on Mondays is back – this year curated by Bernadette Hall, and once again hosted by Te Papa. If you're interested to hear any of the following writers, check out

the [programme](#).

Airini Beautrais, Jenny Bornholdt, Bernadette Hall, Hinemoana Baker, Emma Barnes, James Brown, Kate Camp, Geoff Cochrane, Jennifer Compton, Anna Jackson, Anna Livesey, John Newton, Kerrin Sharpe, Dinah Hawken, Pat White, Charlotte Randall, Laurence Fearnley, Albert Belz, Briar Grace Smith, Tanya Moir, Hamish Clayton and Patrick Evans.

We are delighted that the poet and musician [Joy Harjo](#), who is visiting in August to lead a masterclass for our MA students, has kindly agreed to be part of Writers on Mondays as well. She will appear in a special session on August 15<sup>th</sup>, chaired by Patricia Grace.

## 2. Chemical world

The Royal Society is about to announce this year's Creative Science Writing Prize. Here's how it goes.

“I unhem creation a little, to work out the stitch”

So wrote poet Vincent O’Sullivan in the anthology [Are Angels OK?](#) regarding Marie Curie’s work on radiation 100 years ago. Chemists unravel and unpick our world down to its simplest form in order to comprehend its mysteries; society bears the consequences that arise.

In 1911 Marie Curie was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry and now, a hundred years on, we celebrate the contribution of chemistry to the well-being of humankind. You are invited to write about chemistry and our world. Length: 1,000–2,500 words. There are two categories, fiction and non-fiction. A prize of \$2,500 goes to each category winner. Arrangements will be made for winners to attend a presentation function in Wellington in November 2011, all expenses paid.

For more information, go [here](#).

There are also plans to produce an e-book, bringing together the work of prizewinners from recent years in a convenient and readable format. The IIML is proud to be a partner of the Royal Society and the *NZ Listener* in supporting these awards.

## 3. Better late than never

Outside of our Twitter feed, it can take us a while to catch up with the news, but big congratulations to Pip Adam & Lynn Jenner, who have received the best first book awards for fiction and poetry in the NZ Post Book Awards. And congratulations, too, to Laurence Fearnley, whose novel *The Hut Builder* is shortlisted in the fiction category. Harry Ricketts, with co-editor Paula Green, is also there in the non-fiction category for *99 Ways into New Zealand Poetry* - the book which led Michael Hulse to write in the winter issue of *New Zealand Books*: "New Zealand has been punching

above its weight for decades in the art of poetry, and shows no sign of stopping". And he hasn't even seen [\*The Best of Best New Zealand Poems\*](#) yet.

The shortlist announcement for the NZ Post Book Awards is [here](#) and winners are announced in Wellington on July 27th.

#### **4...But no one seems to care**

It's troubling that the shortlists have barely been noticed by main stream media - the lesson we must learn is that the Book Awards as they are currently conceived have no actual news value. There has been lots of discussion about the length of the fiction list, and about the absence of some contenders, but it's mainly been in blogs and social media. The most missed title among bloggers and tweeters was Patrick Evans's *Gifted*. And the Twitter world also picked up a remark first posted, if we recall correctly, on Beattie's Blog: "The Book Awards are fast becoming the Wellywood sign of the book world . . ."

Some of the discussions of the Book Awards have been happening [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).

We hear murmurs from various quarters about the need - long-standing in our view - for a set of book awards that aim solely to acknowledge literary merit. We will be happy to join in any murmurings likely to result in action.

#### **5. Paying back the ocean**

Congratulations to [Rachel Sawaya](#), who has won the World Wildlife Fund's Ocean:Views award with her short story "Paying Back the Ocean". You can read her winning story, and work by other finalists and winners, [here](#). Rachel is in the IIML's Masters program this year, and occasionally writes about her workshop experience in her [blog](#).

#### **6. Another prize (\$500), but this time we gave it**

Actually, just look [here](#) and all will be revealed.

#### **7. High cuisine at the IIML**

Poet and Fulbright Scholar Lesley Wheeler will be leaving New Zealand in a couple of weeks. She's been here to further a larger research project on poetry and the various communities and networks that foster it these days. Along the way, she's kept a blog, where recently she was surveying first books of poetry by IIML graduates - testing to see what they might have in common. We were especially struck by all the food Lesley spotted. "Piles of food everywhere: samosas, Spam, grapefruit, bacon, wild

lettuce, manuka honey, tea, black pudding, Tui beer, rice wine, figs, mutton pie, chanterelles, ginger biscuits, mangoes, gin, coconuts, Big Macs, and more." She and her partner Chris Gavalier (an expert on superheroes!) made a stimulating visit to our MA class, and have generously contributed to our forthcoming [Exercise Book](#). We've enjoyed having them here in Wellington, and wish them all the best. You can read Lesley's blog [here](#) and we recently spotted this interesting web-document in which [Chris and Lesley interview one another](#).

## 8. And another farewell

"Speaking of my creative writing class (one of my favorite topics) I just checked my e-mail and got a nice message from one of my fellow creative writers wishing me safe travels and that she'll miss me at that party they're having this Friday. How nice of her to send that. Another reason why that class was my favorite class of all time."

This time, farewell to [Alex Kamyk](#). We're glad you enjoyed studying with us.

## 9. McKenzie Country

Hannah McKie's [McKenzie Country](#) finishes its run next Saturday 25 June. We loved it, and were especially impressed by what strong parts Hannah has written for women. Which reminds us, there's an interesting recent blogpost by Wellywood Woman on women dramatists (as opposed to screenwriters) that includes an interview with [Page Left](#), the writing and production group that Hannah is part of.

## 10. To be or not to be, that is the question

And look what follows *McKenzie Country* at BATS. Starting on Tuesday 28th June is Gavin McGibbon's [Hamlet Dies at the End](#), a new satirical comedy about a group of would-be actors turning Shakespeare's finest into its absolute worst. We can personally guarantee the comedy. The PhD group had the pleasure and privilege of being involved in a read-through of an early draft last year. You're not supposed to laugh too much in an academic environment. But we did.

## 11. SPACLALS

It's one of the least charming acronyms in the world, but spell it out and it's a lot happier. SPACLALS means South Pacific Association of Commonwealth Language and Literary Studies, and this year the organisation is having its annual conference at Victoria University, starting on Thursday. The conference theme is "Reading and Writing in the Pacific". You can find out more about it [here](#). But a few things we think worthy of note: Patricia Grace is giving the keynote address on Thursday morning; that same night there's a special reading and book launch at [Te Papa](#) while

Saturday morning sees the launch of the Albert Wendt special issue of *The Contemporary Pacific*. Last but not least, Tina Makereti is giving a paper, "Woven narratives: the unfurling of story", on Friday morning.

## 12. Slice of Heaven

Hinemoana Baker, Jenny Bornholdt, James Brown, Bill Manhire and Greg O'Brien will be [reading poems](#) at Te Papa as a complement to the [Slice of Heaven exhibition](#) that has been running there for some time. Slice of Heaven charts the history of twentieth-century Aotearoa New Zealand, and the poems being read have been chosen to accompany that history. The show's creative director, playwright [Dave Armstrong](#), will host the reading.

Te Papa, Thursday 30 June 2011, Level 4 Espresso, 6.30pm. Free entry.

## 13. The Close Readers

*Group Hug*, the first album from The Close Readers is now entirely at your service. There's a handy [website](#) where you can download it or buy the CD. Or, if you live in Wellington, Slowboat Records on Cuba Street should be your destination. There's also a [blogsite](#) where Damien has posted quite a lot of background about the project. And something especially for IIML students and graduates: several of the tracks feature backing vocals by Clare Moleta.

## 14. More writers online

[Charlotte Randall's Facebook page](#):

[The NZ Book Council's Noel Murphy has a blog.](#)

"My name is Noel Murphy. I've been a bookseller, publisher and now a born-again Geek."

[The blog at VicBooks](#) is turning into a good and necessary read.

[Rachel O'Neill has revamped her website.](#)

[Sarah Laing is tweeting](#)

## 15. Twitterknitter

We'd had the great pleasure recently of watching a DVD of the Danish TV series *The Killing*, so often compared to [The Wire](#) – so that when we saw the press release about its novelisation by UK crime writer [David Hewson](#), we tweeted about the main character's notorious jersey/sweater/jumper: "The Killing's about to be, ahem,

novelised. But how can a novel do Sarah Lund's Faroese jersey?" Within a couple of minutes we received a Tweet back from David Hewson himself: "Knit one purl one?"

Our Twitter life is usually much less interesting than this, but you can [follow us here](#).

## **16. The expanding bookshelf**

Our favourite Australian writer is [Cath Vidler](#) who edits the online journal [Snorkel](#), and her first book [Furious Triangle](#) is about to come out from the wonderfully named Puncher and Wattmann. The launch, for anyone who can make it, is at "Benledi", Glebe Library, 186 Glebe Point Road, Glebe NSW 2037, 2.30-4.00 pm, Sunday 26 June. We plan to raise a trans-Tasman glass of fine New Zealand wine.

Sarah Quigley's new novel *The Conductor* continues to get lots of good media coverage. Latest is this [Q & A piece in the NZ Herald](#).

## **17. Seamus Heaney seminar**

John Dennison, a graduate of Victoria and Otago Universities, and currently at the University of St Andrews, will be presenting a seminar on the prose poetics of Seamus Heaney. His paper is called "The Interesting Case of Heaney, the Critic, and the Incarnation". John argues that Heaney's commitment to the restorative function of art "is that of a post-Christian transcendental humanist, rather than an apophatic, post-modern Christian." Thursday 23 June in Von Zedlitz 802, at 12.10-1.00 pm.

## **18. Viggo Mortensen**

While we remember, big thanks to Viggo for his recent, quiet donation to our [project scholarships fund](#). He has been a good friend to us. Several recent New Zealand books have his invisible presence somewhere behind them.

## **19. 2011 CLL/NZSA Research Grants**

This is a reminder that you have until *1 July* to send in your applications for the CLL/NZSA Research Grants.

The Copyright Licensing Ltd/ NZ Society of Authors Research Grants provide assistance to writers who wish to undertake research for a fiction or non-fiction writing project.

One of the awards will be based at the Stout Centre in Wellington. The Stout Centre is kindly offering an office free of charge for the recipient, along with access to the Victoria University library. The other grant is 'open', so that the writer may research anywhere in New Zealand at their own discretion.

Each grant is worth \$3,500, and must be used for research in New Zealand. For an application form please contact the [NZSA National Office](#).

## **20. Recent web reading**

[Jen Campbell's brilliantly funny Weird Things Customers Say in Bookshops](#)  
Or [here](#).

[An interview with Whiti Hereaka](#) in the new online issue of Tu Mai

[Want to write a sestina? Here's a template](#)

[Steal like an artist](#)

[Sam Hunt loves Best of the Best NZ Poems](#) - including the girl from Te Kuiti

[75 years of the Iowa Writers' Workshop](#)

[Hotel reviews in haiku form](#)

[Famous Opening Lines from Novels Updated for the Modern Age](#)

[The decline of the pseudonym](#)

"[Bill is very friendly](#) but uses Jedi mind-control to erase most particulars of the meeting from my memory"

[A short story writing competition](#)

[Facebook and its dangers for young writers](#)

[Poetry & Translation: The Art of the Impossible](#)

[Unpublished David Foster Wallace interview surfaces](#)

[Sarah Laing considers Twitter](#)

[Tom Fitzsimons on New Zealand's moment at the Frankfurt Book Fair](#)

[The importance of science journalism](#)

[George Saunders discusses creative writing programs](#)

[The Caselberg Trust's new Creative Connections Residency 2012](#)

## 21. Great lists of our time

### Things That Are Not Actually Normal But Seem Sort of Normal After 2.89 Years in New York City

the person next to you at the laundromat removing all his clothes and putting them in the washer  
drop crotch pants  
leggings as pants  
pantyhose as pants  
denim underpants as pants  
no pants whatsoever  
jeffrey campbell "lita"  
scott schuman  
six dollar well drinks  
people vomiting in public  
people defecating in public  
people fornicating in public  
people weeping in public  
yourself weeping in public  
marriage proposals from cab drivers  
referring to a friend's \$1,000/month studio apartment as "an awesome deal"  
when your landlady lets herself into your apartment and wanders around looking at stuff  
when your landlady lets herself into your apartment and wanders around looking at stuff while you are in the apartment  
when your landlady lets herself into your apartment and wanders around looking at stuff while you are in the apartment, wearing only your underwear  
being paid to: write other people's personal emails, raise their children, locate their yacht-cleaning service, order their cufflinks, find insurance for their ferraris, execute their google-image searches for things like "friendship" and "health" while they are sitting behind you asking you to describe the google images and you are like "do you want to just look at the screen" and they are like "no, just tell me what it feels like to you" and then a week later they tell you their astrologer said to fire you  
styrofoam takeout containers  
when they try to put your coffee in a paper bag with napkins  
standing next to bjork at art happenings  
overpowering urges to do lasting physical harm to people who walk slowly on the sidewalk  
people who dye their tiny dogs various colors  
people who dress their tiny dogs in halloween costumes  
people who put their tiny dogs in purses

From [here](#).

\* \* \*

## **Supporting the IIML**

The International Institute of Modern Letters was established at Victoria University in 2001 to promote and foster contemporary imaginative writing. Our founder, philanthropist Glenn Schaeffer, continues to contribute to IIML activities in a range of ways.

While not everyone is able to match Glenn's level of support, we value all those who have helped us to foster the development of emerging writers – for example through scholarships, prizes, and grants. We would welcome the opportunity to talk with you about continuing your support for the IIML, for example through a gift in your will.

All gifts are managed by the Victoria University Foundation, a registered charitable trust established to raise funds in areas of strategic importance to the University, such as the IIML.

For further information on how you can provide philanthropic support to the IIML, please contact our Director, Bill Manhire, Ph: 04 463 6808, Email [bill.manhire@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:bill.manhire@vuw.ac.nz), or Diana Meads, Fundraising Manager, Victoria University of Wellington Foundation Ph: 0800 VIC LEGACY (0800 842 534), Email: [diana.meads@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:diana.meads@vuw.ac.nz)