



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MODERN LETTERS

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

Newsletter – 16 March 2011

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This is the 166th 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.

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1. Graeme Tetley

Graeme Tetley was going to visit our MA Scriptwriting workshop today. Instead on Monday we learned this [sad news](#). Graeme has been a good friend to us over the years, as he has to all who wrote, or hoped to write, for film and television in New Zealand. At the IIML he supervised individual students, took part in folio assessments, visited workshops, and contributed to our [Writers on Mondays](#) programme - just a small part of a busy and generous working life.

There is a screenography [here](#), and a very interesting *Onfilm* interview with him (October 2006) can be read online. There he says of himself:

"I write about what it may mean to live in these mad, beautiful - sometimes cruel - islands. I spent the first half of my working life as a teacher. I still believe that knowledge and understanding are worthwhile ends: that human affairs are interesting, sometimes heroic, though not always edifying. And I believe that ultimately the truth does set us free.

I would not write about something that I had not used all my being to try to understand. And I would not write about something that, on balance, I considered to be only hurtful, destructive, untruthful or exploitative. Or boring."

A [Facebook memorial page](#) has been set up for Graeme. His funeral will be held this Friday at 3pm at St James Church in Lower Hutt.

2. Yvonne du Fresne

We are also sad to learn of the death this last weekend of Yvonne du Fresne. Yvonne du Fresne's chief early encouragers were Robin Dudding of *Islands* and Chris Hampson of Radio New Zealand, and her collection of short stories, *Farvel*, one of the first fiction titles published by Victoria University Press back in 1980, makes a special point of acknowledging their support. *Farvel* was a voice- and subject-discovering book for du Fresne. Its stories come to us through the eyes of a small child, Astrid Westergaard, growing up in a Danish family in the Manawatu in the 1930s, a time when all the classroom maps were still covered in British Empire pink. *Farvel* is thus about the discovery of both personal and national identity. Bill Manhire wrote in his introduction: "Like the oldest Norse tales, the *Farvel* stories have all the flair and pace of oral narrative But a better way of describing their effect might be to borrow the image of embroidery which appears so often in them. *Farvel* is like a tapestry, with fresh scenes being added story by story until at the last the richness of a complex picture is revealed. And Yvonne du Fresne's language can be like a needle flashing in and out of linen. Her writing has the intense, controlled exuberance of one of her Danish women at work on a piece of tapestry - human energy directed well."

Yvonne du Fresne went on to publish more books, novels as well as short stories, and a fuller account of these (along with a Writers in Schools interview) is posted on the [NZ Book Council's website](#).

A study of her work - [For Was I Not Born Here?: Identity and Culture in the Work of Yvonne Du Fresne](#) - was published last year.

A service for Yvonne will be held at the Cockburn Street Chapel, cnr Cockburn Street and Onepu Road, Kilbirnie, Wellington on Thursday, 17 March at 2pm.

3. What are we bid?

The charity Variety is auctioning a yet-to-be-written poem by Bill Manhire as a fundraiser for children in Christchurch. Anyone anywhere in the world can bid for the poem, which the poet has agreed to shape according to the needs and wishes of the successful bidder.

When last we checked the top bid was \$1,260, which is way below the \$2,500 bid for Manhire's "Luck: A Villanelle", auctioned some ten years ago, and the \$7,000 bid at an NZSO charity auction last year.

Like they say, you have to be in to win. [Here's where to go](#) – by 8.00 pm this evening.

4. Capturing Canadians

We're very pleased to have captured two Canadian poets – Griffin Prize winner Roo Borson and poet-physicist Kim Maltman – for a [lunchtime reading at Te Papa](#). The pair are in Wellington for the launch of the Confucius Institute, and will be reading from and, ahem, introducing their *Introduction to the Introduction to Wang Wei*, an audacious experiment in poetry and cultural translation. [Here's](#) how one reviewer described the book when it was first published:

"A book 10 years in the making is, like a good single malt, worth savouring. That's particularly true for *Introduction to the Introduction to Wang Wei*, given the time invested by the poets Roo Borson and Kim Maltman and the artist Andy Patton, who form the poetry collective "Pain Not Bread." Their decade-long project of scholarship and improvisation, aimed at recreating the spirit of Chinese poetry of the late Tang dynasty in new, original poems, has resulted in as rich a collection as you'll find in this, or any, year. The poets of the late Tang, Wang Wei (699-759), Li Bai (701-762), and Du Fu (712-770) perfected a formal lyricism, closely tied to the brushstroke paintings of the period, that has survived in a remarkably pure form for over 1,200 years. These poems of rain, silk, and loss have seeped through imagists like Pound and Yeats into the very bloodstream of modern poetry. (The themes cross the millennium with ease, since the Tang poets lived in a time of angst and upheaval remarkably similar to our own.) As they explain in the afterword, Borson, Maltman, and Patton have studied many translations of the original texts, mastered scholarly literature on the poems and their context, and reincarnated the tones and flavours of the late Tang in their own original work."

Friday 25 March 2011 at The Marae, Level 4, Te Papa, 12.15pm-1pm
Free entry. Introduced by Bill Manhire.

5. The very dangerous Annie Proulx

Annie Proulx is in NZ over the next few weeks, doing some research for a new novel and promoting her latest book. She'll be doing [public events](#) in Auckland, Dunedin, Wellington and Hastings. Michele Hewitson interviewed her for the [Herald](#) while Philip Matthews talked to her for *Your Weekend* (not online, as far as we can tell). She told Matthews how much she had enjoyed her time at Wellington's Writers and Readers Week some years ago – in particular, a good party at Jenny Patrick's, with Rita Dove and others singing round the piano. Our own party memories are somewhat vague, but we do recall a wonderful panel involving Kate Grenville, Carol Shields, Keri Hulme, and Annie Proulx. Keri Hulme was talking about her novel *Bait* and the difficulty she was having in killing off a couple of characters who needed to die but whom she had lived with for many years. "Give them to me for the weekend," said the ruthless Proulx.

6. Some upcoming readings and launch events we'd quite like to get to

Vicbooks and Victoria University Library invite you to join them at Te Taratara a Kae in Victoria University's Rankine Brown Library to celebrate the release of: *AUP New Poets 4* by Harry Jones, Erin Scudder & Chris Tse. Published by Auckland University Press, RRP \$24.99. Thursday 17th March 5pm - 7pm. This is a free event. The book will be available to purchase.

Robert Sullivan, recently returned to New Zealand from Hawaii, will read his work next Monday at the NZ Poetry Society's monthly meeting. Until recently, Robert directed the creative writing program at the University of Hawaii; he has just published two new poetry collections, and is also an editor of the online journal, [Trout](#). With Anne Kennedy he edited the 2006 issue of [Best New Zealand Poems](#). Monday 21 March, 7.00pm, The Thistle Inn, 3 Mulgrave St, Thorndon. Open mic and a \$5 entry fee (\$3 for members).

Poetry reading: '[Helen Cubed](#)' - Helen Lehndorf, Helen Heath and Helen Rickerby at The Ballroom Café, Newtown. Sunday 20 March, 4-6pm. With open mic. For more info, contact [Neil Furby](#).

Please join Harry Ricketts, Lydia Wevers and Vicbooks to celebrate the publication of *Strange Meetings: The Poets of the Great War* by Harry Ricketts (Chatto & Windus). Wednesday 23rd March, 5.30pm - 7.00pm, at Vicbooks, Student Union building, Kelburn campus. Refreshments provided. Eftpos available.

Bill Manhire and MA graduate Simone Kaho are among those reading at [Titirangi's Festival of Music](#) on Thursday 31 March.

7. War poetry

We recently came across a copy of Eileen Duggan's 1940 book *New Zealand Poems: In Honour of the Centennial of the Dominion of New Zealand*. The book was printed in the UK by Unwin Brothers, Woking. A small sheet listing 18 misprints is tipped in before the Contents page, with this small, oddly charming note at its head: "The errors in typography and punctuation are due to war conditions. No proofs were risked at sea."

8. A nest of singing birds

It's a bit of a mystery where all this musical stuff has come from – except of course for the obvious fact that here at the IIML we are all amazingly musical.

Chris Price, just departed for Menton, has been a member of *Waiting for Donald* (mostly doing percussion, as on several YouTube clips) while she and partner Robbie Duncan sometimes turn into an act called *Palindrome* "blending poems with improvised and looped guitar, percussion and vocals." You can hear a sample [here](#).

Then there's Damien Wilkins, aka *The Close Readers*, who has produced what looks - and sounds - like it will be a stunning CD when it's released in a couple of months' time. There's more information, along with free downloads, [here](#).

And more of Bill Manhire's words are back, courtesy of Norman Meehan and Hannah Griffin, in April performances. *Making Baby Float* is mostly lyrics specially written for Meehan, though there are one or two poem settings as well – including, even if rather hard to imagine, the full text of "1950s". There are performances at Massey University (Palmerston North campus) on April 6, and in Victoria University's Hunter Council Chamber on April 14. The latter performance is being recorded for DVD release.

As for Ken Duncum, he's at it, too. Here's an extract from an interview he did with the Big Idea last year, as a lead-up to production of his *Great Gatsby* adaptation:

"You are famous for always including music, usually rock bands from the 60s and 70s in your plays, what should we expect here?"

"When I write plays I think about what kind of music the characters would listen to, what defines them. Fitzgerald coined the term the Jazz Age, but he didn't actually know a lot about jazz, yet he managed to create the era of 'yellow cocktail music'. In The Court's production there will be a piano onstage, and the piano is important part of the play. This will be a great night out – it has comedy, romance, tragedy, music and dancing. I've written a song: 'A Jazz History of the World', which is a song and dance number. There's another song that will be quite key too: 'Poor Butterfly'. It's a jazz standard and I found a terrific smoky Judy Garland version. The song was strangely apt with exactly the right kind of vibe."

9. It's almost Margaret Mahy's 75th birthday

We aim to turn the radio on for this. Mahy Magic (Radio New Zealand National, Sunday March 20, 7.35pm) is a documentary that celebrates the inimitable MM on the eve of her 75th birthday. It features rehearsals for Mahy Madness, a theatre piece written by Jo Randerson and produced by the National Children's Theatre, as well as the children's responses to the work and Mahy at home in conversation with Randerson.

10. Edwin Morgan International Poetry Competition

[This](#) looks like one of the few competitions around at the moment that doesn't cost *too* much to enter.

11. The expanding bookshelf

We missed Jo Thorpe's new book [in/let](#) in last December's end-of-year rush. Others didn't, though. If you want to see what Tuesday Poem founder Mary McCallum feels about Jo's work, go [here](#).

Gregory O'Brien launched the book, and here is [Maggie Rainey-Smith's account](#) of the evening.

Jo will be reading with this year's Randell Cottage French writer in residence, Yann Apperry, 6-7 pm, Monday 21 March, at the Millwood Gallery, 291b Tinakori Road, Thorndon. More info [here](#).

Yann Apperry will also be in Palmerston North, Dunedin, and Christchurch in the next week or so. More info [here](#).

12. Futuna Chapel anniversary

Poet Greg O'Brien and poet and architect Gerald Melling are among those contributing to this weekend's 50th anniversary celebrations of the Futuna Chapel. We've been reading about the celebrations in the [Dominion Post](#), and Craig Cliff has posted a relevant [poem](#). In fact, there's another poetry connection. Futuna's architect was John Scott, whose son Jacob Scott - among many other things - carves the tokotoko for the [New Zealand poets laureate](#).

13. Recent web reading

[Poet Laureate Cilla McQueen is judging the Schools Poetry Awards](#)

[National Poetry Day is back](#)

[A "consensus cloud" on the books everyone should read](#)

[There's a new Blackbox Manifold](#)

[The Irish poetry diaspora](#)

[The power of lonely](#)

[What Poets Can Teach Lawyers](#)

[Geoff Dyer - "On Being an Only Child"](#)

["Plenitude may narrow the mind" - browsing online vs browsing in bookstores](#)

[Pain Not Bread](#)

[Big Scottish cheese bard](#)

[The President's Speech](#)

[Old photos re-enacted by the people in them](#)

[Bill Manhire is feeling a bit sad](#)

[Craig Cliff goes to Sydney](#)

[A mash-up artist explains his creative process.](#)

14. Great lists of our time

Some common *kigo* ("season words") used in Japanese haiku

SPRING

February

March

April

Beyond the border of this world

Warm

Spring mist

Spring haze

Blossoms

Cherry blossom viewing

Bush warbler

Sweet sounds

Frogs

Skylark

Hinamatsuri (Girl's Day) Doll Festival
Hanamatsuri (Blossom festival, celebrating the birth of Buddha)

SUMMER

May
June
July
Hot
Hotness
Hot day
Wisteria
Iris
Lotus
Rainy season
Little cuckoo
Cicada
Tango no sekku (festival for boys)

AUTUMN

August
September
October
Grapes
Scarecrow in early paddy field
Typhoon
Thunder
Milky Way
Moon
Singing insects
Nashi pear
Peach
Persimmon
Apples
Shining leaves
Falling leaves
Rice harvest
Autumn festival
Visiting
Small welcome-fires
Dancing

WINTER

November
December
January

Cold
Coldness
Fallen leaves
Dry leaves
Ice
First snow
Snow-viewing
Daikan (“great coldness”)
Fugujiru (“Sea-devil stew”)

Found at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kigo>

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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, or Diana Meads, Fundraising Manager, Victoria University of Wellington Foundation Ph: 0800 VIC LEGACY (0800 842 534), Email: diana.meads@vuw.ac.nz