



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF

MODERN LETTERS

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

Newsletter – 8 December 2006

This is the 99th 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

1. Rugby script wins Embassy Trust Prize	1
2. More scripting success	2
3. Writing workshops (1): Short Fiction	2
4. Writing workshops (2): Creative Non-Fiction	2
5. Other lives	3
6. The loss of Oz Lit?	3
7. The next half dozen	4
8. ‘Tis the season to be jolly (1)	4
9. ‘Tis the season to be jolly (2)	5
10. But wait, there’s more	5
11. Last call for Evil Advice!	5
12. Recent web reading	6
13. Great lists of our time	7

1. Rugby script wins Embassy Trust Prize

An overland trip that never was — from London to South Africa to watch the 1995 World Cup — is the genesis for this year’s Embassy Trust prize-winning film script, *Into Africa*. On Wednesday Brendon Simpson was awarded the 2006 Embassy Trust Prize, which recognises a high potential in an emerging scriptwriter at the Institute of Modern Letters. He says, ‘It’s a trip that me and a group of friends planned, to travel through Africa to see the 1995 World Cup, but never got around to. We researched it, but it was way too dangerous. But I’ve always wondered what would have happened if we had done it. It’s about how four guys, who don’t actually like each other much at the beginning, are thrown together by different circumstances and how they bond through the trip.’ Brendon Simpson has just completed the Institute’s MA (Scriptwriting) with Ken Duncum, as part of which he was mentored by leading New Zealand film writer Graeme Tetley (*Out of the Blue*). He is in discussions with a producer about gaining funding to see the script produced.

2. More scripting success

Increasing numbers of MA scriptwriting graduates are finding development opportunities for their film or theatre scripts and/or obtaining work on television series. Writer/director Ed Lynden-Bell has just completed filming his feature *The Last Great Snail Chase*. At least two films are in development through the New Zealand Film Commission: *Tha Nui*, by Brian Hotter is one of two films (out of about 100) to make it all the way through the First Writers' Initiative and receive development funding, and Matthew Saville's *Bollywood Boys* is also in progress. *The Baby Farmer* by Clean Slate (including Shahir Daud and Kelly Kilgour) was the Wellington winner of the 48 Hour Film Contest and came third nationally. A number of theatre productions, including plays by Gavin McGibbon (*The After Service*), Whiti Hereaka (*It Ain't Nothing But..*) and Kelly Kilgour (*It's A Whanau Thing*) have hit the boards in New Zealand, and Matthew Saville's *Kikia Te Poa* was produced in Australia. In the world of the small screen, at one point this year 50 percent of the storylining team for *Shortland Street* were Victoria graduates, with Renata Hopkins, Kelly Kilgour and Leonie Reynolds seated around the 'table of pain'. *Insiders Guide To Love* scooped the 2006 TV Awards, 'Love' being a prequel to the equally successful *Insiders Guide To Happiness*, which originated as Peter Cox's MA thesis back in 2002. And last but by no means least Shahir Daud was named winner of the award for Best News and Current Affairs Editing at the Qantas Television Awards.

3. Writing workshops (1): Short Fiction

A reminder that the deadline for applications to our 2007 short fiction workshop is this coming Monday. We are saying farewell to workshop convenor William Brandt, who is moving overseas, and the convenor of the Short Fiction Workshop in 2007 is Susan Pearce. Susan is a fiction writer and has an MA in Creative Writing from Victoria University. Her short fiction has been published in *Sport*, *Turbine*, *Metro*, and in the HarperCollins collection *Creative Juices*. Her first novel, written with the help of funding from Creative New Zealand, is close to completion. She has been external reader for this and other IIML workshops for five years, and has tutored for the Bell Gully National Schools Writing Festival. She has convened writing workshops elsewhere in Wellington, as well as her course 'Developing a Writing Habit', which teaches strategies for getting words on the page.

4. Writing workshops (2): Creative Non-Fiction

We've decided to extend the deadline for applications to the Institute's Creative Non-Fiction to 2 February, so if you were thinking of applying, there's still plenty of time. Creative Non-Fiction is sometimes called 'the fourth genre', or the literature of reality. The term refers to any kind of nonfiction writing which uses the techniques of narrative fiction. In practice, this tends to mean the memoir, the personal essay, the biographical sketch, travel writing, and other kinds of prose life-writing. In this course, students will explore a full range of Creative Non-Fiction possibilities - but will also be able to focus on a particular area of interest. The convenor of the Creative Non-Fiction Workshop is Harry Ricketts, Associate Professor in the School of

English, Film and Theatre, whose publications include *How To Live Elsewhere*, part of the Four Winds Press essay series, *The Unforgiving Minute*, an acclaimed biography of Rudyard Kipling, *Talking about Ourselves*, a book of interviews with New Zealand poets, *People Like Us*, a volume of short stories, several collections of poems, and an anthology of New Zealand comic verse. He is also co-editor of the review journal *New Zealand Books* and the *Listener* theatre critic for Wellington.

Application forms and course information for both workshops are available from the International Institute of Modern Letters, 16 Waiteata Road, Kelburn (tel 04 463 6854) or visit www.vuw.ac.nz/modernletters/creative-writing/undergraduate.aspx

5. Other lives

An earlier newsletter noted that some New Zealand authors have living literary avatars in other countries (as opposed to random folk who happen to share the same name). We've just stumbled across another example: 'Lloyd Jones is the author of *Mr Vogel*. A former farm-worker, newspaper editor, chamber-of-horrors employee and lecturer, Lloyd lives in Llanfairfechan, on the north Wales coast. Following a bout of alcoholism which nearly killed him, he set off on an epic walk around Wales, the inspiration for his novel, *Mr Vogel ...*' We don't know whether *Mr Vogel* bears any resemblance to *Mr Pip*, but an interview with 'our' Lloyd's double is at www.readysteadybook.com

6. The loss of Oz Lit?

Back in September Bill Manhire offered some thoughts on the rise of creative writing courses in Australia in his New Zealand Book Month blog. Judging by recent reports from across the Tasman, Australia is losing interest in its own literature. *The Australian* notes that there will soon be only one chair in Australian literature left at an Australian university, and even that is under threat. Some suggest that creative writing is to blame. 'Students today seem far more interested in becoming writers than studying them,' says the article: 'while creative writing courses flourish, the number of undergraduates studying Australian literature has fallen away dramatically on some campuses. Next year, the University of Sydney may have no students taking up the country's only honours program in Australian literature.' The teacher of that programme, Elizabeth Webby, is due to retire. When asked if she could think of other countries 'whose academics have so little time for their native literature,' she said: "Oh no, I don't think it's true of anywhere else." Although she then added that it might be true of New Zealand. Another commentator insists that 'the rot set in when academics who "abased" themselves before the altar of literary theory acquired institutional power and "captured literature departments in the '80s".'

Meanwhile a long article by Mark Davis in the tenth anniversary issue of Australian journal *Heat*, published last month, anatomises the decline in literary publishing across the ditch in recent years, putting it down to globalisation and the advent of accurate reporting on sales figures through BookScan, among other factors. Then again, over at the *Australian Literary Review* (also published by *The Australian* these

days), Genevieve Tucker detects some signs of hope in the 'litblogosphere' (see the article 'Online, everyone's a critic'). As they say on reality tv, you be the judge.
http://nzbookmonth.co.nz/blogs/bill_manhire/archive/2006/09/10/289.aspx
<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,20836160-5001986,00.html>
www.theaustralian.news.com.au/index/0,,25132,00.html

7. The next half dozen

New Zealand publishers and booksellers were clearly hoping to forestall a similar decline the local industry when they initiated New Zealand Book Month, which had its first outing this year, and is already on the hunt for talent to promote in 2007 through its Six Pack Competition. *The Six Pack* gives six established and/or aspiring writers the chance to be published in a high profile anthology. The winning authors receive \$5,000 each in prize money, but will also see their work in every secondary school, public library and bookstore around the country. Writers of adult fiction, adult non-fiction and poetry are eligible; pieces must be between 5,000 and 10,000 words (or 10-15 poems). The organisers hope that non-fiction writers will also step up the plate for the 2007 publication and send in travel articles, feature articles, essays etc, and that novelists will send in excerpts from larger, unpublished works. The deadline is 7 March 2007; to download entry forms and criteria visit www.nzbookmonth.co.nz

8. 'Tis the season to be jolly (1)

The awards season has been in full swing in recent weeks, bringing happy news for 2007 to a select group of writers. Here at Victoria University, playwright Dave Armstrong will be Writer in Residence. Armstrong has twice won the Best New New Zealand Play at the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards, as well as the award for Best Comedy Script at the 2003 AFTA Television Awards. He co-wrote the prizewinning play *Niu Sila* with Oscar Kightley, and his most recent stage play, *King and Country*, has played to sold-out houses around New Zealand. Dave Armstrong is also a prolific writer for television: he co-created and co-wrote two series of *Seven Periods with Mr Gormsby*, and his other scripting and editing credits include *Skitz*, *The Semisis*, *Shortland Street*, *Spin Doctors*, and *Bro'town*. The residency is jointly supported by Victoria University and Creative New Zealand.

Expatriate New Zealand poet Andrew Johnston will return to take up the 2007 Stout Research Centre Fellowship in order to write a critical study of contemporary New Zealand poetry. Johnston, a former books editor for the *Evening Post*, has for some years lived in Paris, where he works on the International Herald Tribune, and produces an excellent international poetry weblog, *The Page*. His own website includes samples of his poems and essays, and his fourth collection of poems, *Sol*, will be published by Victoria University Press in March.

www.thepage.name/
<http://andrewjohnston.org/index.htm>

9. 'Tis the season to be jolly (2)

Our congratulations also go to other writers who have been the beneficiaries of pre-Christmas cheer from various sources, including Stuart Hoar (Meridian Energy Katherine Mansfield Fellowship), IIML graduate Tusiata Avia (who received a Creative New Zealand project grant and a Pasifika Emerging Artist Award in quick succession), Tze Ming Mok (recipient of Creative New Zealand's Red Gate residency in Beijing and an Arts Foundation New Generation award), Taika Waititi (Arts Foundation New Generation award), and of course the 'big three', Patricia Grace, Vincent O'Sullivan and Judith Binney, who received this year's Prime Minister's Awards for Literary Achievement, worth \$60,000 each.

10. But wait, there's more

Travel writers and poets hoping to get a piece of the award action are advised that three very different awards are currently calling for entries. The annual Cathay Pacific Travel Media Awards take place in March 2007. Entries for the writing and photography awards close on 2 February 2007. Entries for the book award close on 23 December 2006. Find out more about the awards, prizes, entry criteria, forms and previous winners at www.travelcommunicators.co.nz.

Dunedin's annual Robbie Burns Poetry Competition celebrating the Scottish bard's birthday, invites entries on the topic of Dunedin Railway Station, which celebrated its centenary earlier this year. There are categories for published poets, non-published poets and the McGonagall - "The World's Worst Poet". Entry forms appear in the *Listener*, or may be collected from Dunedin City Council. The deadline is 8 January.

The second annual International Spenserian Stanza Prize is a competition for those who enjoy composing poetry in strict forms: sestina and villanelle obsessives, take note! The competition is open to students (both undergraduate and graduate) enrolled at the colleges and universities of the world. Entries should follow the nine-line, rhyming form of the Spenserian stanza, should be written in English, and should be between one and fifteen stanzas in length. They may take any subject. Entries should be submitted 'not later than Lady Day (25 March) 2007'. Details at www.english.cam.ac.uk/spenser/stanza/

11. Last call for Evil Advice!

On the subject of travel, this is our last call for entries to our 'Evil Advice' for tourists in New Zealand competition. Entries close next Friday, 15 December, and four \$50 book tokens are up for grabs for those who can supply the wickedest tips for the unwary tourist. Those needing a reminder about the kind of thing we're after can take a look at our 10 October newsletter:

www.vuw.ac.nz/modernletters/activities/archived-newsletters.aspx

12. Recent web reading

Poetry prizes in Canada

www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20061120.wxpoets20/BNStory/Entertainment/home

Top US MFA programs

www.associatedcontent.com/article/79637/the_top_mfa_programs_in_creative_writing.html

A New York literary conference

<http://poetryfoundation.org/dispatches/dispatches.feature.html?id=178860>

An electronic literature anthology

<http://collection.eliterature.org/1/>

Grandiloquent dictionary

www.islandnet.com/~egbird/dict/r.htm

Book sniffing

http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/11/smells_like_literary_spirit.html

Miss Snark

<http://misssnark.blogspot.com/>

Article on literature by email

www.dailylit.com/find.php?authors=A-C

New book review blog (mostly NZ children's)

<http://agnereading.blogspot.com/>

A book list of book lists

<http://librariansplace.wordpress.com/2006/11/16/other-lists-other-opinions/#more-183>

William Faulkner's vampire movie

www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/cl-et-scriptland15nov15,1,3340370.story?coll=la-headlines-entnews%3D1%3Dtrue&ctrack=1&cset=true

Love in the LRB

www.nytimes.com/2006/11/21/world/europe/21personals.html?ref=books

Big city semaphore

www.nytimes.com/2006/11/21/arts/21sema.html?adxnnl=1&ref=arts&adxnnlx=1164229277-cVKYaHotHu5ZoiszyjNSGw

What I have (a great list of our time)

www.iht.com/articles/2006/12/05/opinion/edmoranis.php

If you have a head for heights
www.ezprezzo.com/crazy pics/rollercoaster.html

George Saunders: Borat - the memo
www.newyorker.com/shouts/content/articles/061204sh_shouts

University publishing
www.bookdepository.co.uk/WEBSITE/WWW/WEBPAGES/viewarticle.php?type=publisher&id=33

Anti-travel
<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/travel/story/0,,1730709,00.html>

Alison Lurie on Alice Munro
www.nybooks.com/articles/19693

If you have a novel but no agent...
http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20061206/ap_on_en_ot/books_sobol_prize

Planet Blitcom
www.newstatesman.com/200612110045

13. Great lists of our time

The Forbes Fictional 15 - Forbes's annual rich list of fiction's very wealthiest. This year's selection includes a duck, a wizard, a Nigerian prince and even a plumber. Aggregate (fictional) net worth? \$111 billion.

Oliver "Daddy" Warbucks
Montgomery Burns
Scrooge McDuck
Richie Rich
Jed Clampett
Mr. Monopoly
Bruce Wayne
Tony Stark
Prince Abakaliki of Nigeria
Thurston Howell III
Willy Wonka
Lucius Malfoy
Tony Montana
Lara Croft
Mario