



Newsletter – 25 September 2006

This is the 94th 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. Lost and found in translation.....	1
2. That was our mistake	2
3. The news from Iowa	2
4. Turbine calling.....	3
5. Writers on Mondays: the finale	3
6. Documentaria	3
7. Writing politics	3
8. Script to screen	4
9. Maori Writers National Hui.....	4
10. Advanced editing workshop	4
11. Recent web reading.....	5
12. Great lists of our time.....	5
13. Letter from Iowa, by Alice Miller	7

1. Lost and found in translation

Vincent Moleta is a Wellington-born writer, publisher, translator and literary historian who has lived in Australia since the 1970s. In 1985 he founded the Aeolian Press, which now concentrates on Italian literature in translation and won the Premio Nazionale per la Traduzione in 1997 for Luigi Pirandello: *Sicilian Tales*. After 27 years in the University of Western Australia's Italian Department he founded the Fontecolombo Institute in rural WA (www.fontecolombo.com.au). In 2004 he was knighted by the Italian government in recognition of his contribution to Italian culture overseas. This Wednesday, 27 September, Vincent Moleta will discuss poetry and translation and read from his latest book; Umberto Saba, *Poetry and Prose*. He appears in conversation with Greg O'Brien from 5 – 6 pm at the International Institute of Modern Letters, 16 Waiteata Rd, Kelburn. All welcome, but please RSVP to modernletters@vuw.ac.nz. Greg O'Brien's review of the Saba volume appears here:

www.shearsman.com/pages/magazine/back_issues/shearsman60/obrien_saba.html

2. That was our mistake

Readers may recall our puzzlement (in the last newsletter) at the fact that the September issue of *North & South* listed itself as having won the award for best magazine book review pages in the 2006 Montana Book Awards. In fact the claim was legitimate - although the *Dominion Post* was overall winner of the award for Best Review Pages, *North & South* took the magazine subcategory, one of eight(!) subcategories in the new-look reviewing awards. Our apologies to *North & South*.

3. The news from Iowa

2005 MA graduate Alice Miller has settled into the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she seems to be taking maximum advantage of the courses offered by its high-powered faculty. She writes:

'I have Brenda Hillman for my poetry workshop. She encourages us to revise our poems obsessively. She urges us to consider what attracts us to particular words, lines, or phrases, and asks us to consider every aspect our poems scrupulously, down to the last scrap of punctuation. Many people here talk about how crucial it is to take risks in your poetry – take risks, and be prepared for them to backfire.

'Each week a packet of every class's poems comes out, and we all get carried away with our red pens. Despite various rumours that the workshop is extremely competitive, our class tends to be constructive and supportive. Brenda claims to run an 'anti-workshop workshop', discouraging competitiveness and ego, and she seems to be pretty effective.

'We also take seminars here, and because I'm not working, I've gone a little overboard with these. There are too many marvellous options, and I figure that I'd best make the most of them! My first seminar is with Robert Hass, who visited New Zealand earlier this year...'

Alice's letter from Iowa appears in full as the last item in this newsletter.

The IIML is also offering a taste of the Iowa experience in Wellington this summer with workshops in fiction and poetry convened by US novelist Curtis Sittenfeld and poet Zach Savich. The deadline for applications is 10 November, and course information and an application form are available from the IIML, ph (04) 463 6854, fax (04) 463 6865, email modernletters@vuw.ac.nz or see www.vuw.ac.nz/modernletters/documents/CREW256Iowa_summer06.pdf.

4. Turbine calling

A reminder that we are still considering prose and poetry by emerging and established writers for the annual edition of *Turbine*, the online journal of the IIML. The deadline for submissions is 21 October; for submission guidelines, and to view back issues of the journal, go to: <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/turbine/>.

5. Writers on Mondays: the finale

Following a month of great audiences for the thirty writers completing the MA in Creative Writing at Victoria University, our 2006 series of events at City Gallery draws to a close next Monday with a visit from two Australian writers, the reviewer, arts broadcaster, poet and novelist Cath Kenneally and poet Ken Bolton. It's been a lively and varied season, and we're grateful to City Gallery for providing a congenial space in which writers can connect with audiences. Bolton & Kenneally will appear in conversation with Greg O'Brien, and the event takes place, as usual, from 1-2 pm. Admission is free, all welcome.

You can sample work by and read a long interview with Ken Bolton at: <http://www.austlit.com/a/bolton-k/index.html>.

Cath Kenneally's novel *Room Temperature* is a portrait of a working class girlhood in beachside Adelaide, through hippiedom and harshness in Tasmania, through the birth and development of children, to the struggle of breaking free from a violent partner. *Australian Bookseller* called this 'a sensitive and though-provoking portrayal of one woman's escape from an inherited legacy of domestic violence.' Some poems by Cath Kenneally can be found here:

<http://www.eaf.asn.au/otis/cktp.html> .

6. Documentaria

The DOCNZ Documentary Film Festival opens today in Wellington (25 Sept – 4 Oct), then moves on to Christchurch (12-15 Oct) and Dunedin (26-29 Oct). For full programme listings see www.docnz.org.nz/.

7. Writing politics

The Wellington Branch of the New Zealand Society of Authors is inviting professional writers to a panel discussion between spokespeople on the arts from all sides of the House. The discussion will focus on issues affecting the professional lives of New Zealand writers. Representatives of most of the parties represented in Parliament will address issues raised by writers and writers' organizations at Turnbull

House, 11 Bowen Street, Wellington on Tuesday, 3 October from 7.30 pm Writers interested in attending are asked to notify Kevin Cudby, of the NZSA Wellington Branch committee. Ph (04) 938 1103 or email msg@kevincudby.com. Entry costs \$3 for NZSA members or \$5 for non-members to cover refreshments. And if you have a burning question you'd like addressed, send it to director@nzauthors.org.nz.

8. Script to screen

Script to Screen invites writers of feature film scripts to apply for one of a series of writer-focused Script Read-Through Workshops with professional actors to be held in 2007. Closing date for submissions is 5pm Friday, October 6th 2006. The script read-through sessions offer screenwriters a forum for the discussion and analysis of working drafts. Each workshop will be dedicated to a single project and will be held in a closed environment. For more information and application details, contact Rebecca Kunin at Script to Screen on (09) 360 5400, or rebecca@script-to-screen.co.nz.

9. Maori Writers National Hui

The 2006 Maori Writers National Hui aims to give a global perspective on the industry and opportunities for Maori writers. Maori writers working in all areas of literature and the writing industry will gather together in Wellington on 6 – 8 October to attend the hui, which features keynote speeches from Witi Ihimaera, Bill Manhire, Hirini Moko Mead and others. There are workshops in fiction, film, performance, lyric writing, and storytelling, and publishers' forums will see representatives from New Zealand publishing houses bring their advice and commentary to the table. Evening functions are open to the public and will feature top Maori writers and musicians. The hui takes place at the Mercure Hotel, Wellington from 6-8 October 2006.

Registration forms for writers are available from www.maoriart.org.nz and evening functions cost \$10. To register or purchase tickets, contact Kylie Tiuka at Toi Maori Aotearoa. Phone: 04 801 7914. Email: events@maoriart.org.nz.

10. Advanced editing workshop

The Local Publishers' Forum Wellington is offering a one-day course for editors with experienced editor Anna Rogers. Anna will cover a wide range of topics such as the role of the editor, editing non-fiction (and a little on fiction), common errors and pitfalls, handling 'isms' (sexism, racism etc), treatment of the author, blurb-writing, etc. There will be hands-on editing exercises and examples, but also plenty of time for questions and debate. The course will be held either on Tuesday 31 October or Wednesday 1 November from 9am–4pm at Turnbull House, Bowen Street, Wellington. The course fee is \$120 waged \$90 unwaged. To register, contact Peter Dorn, email peterd@astra.co.nz or tel (04) 499-0544.

11. Recent web reading

Shuker on-line

<http://www.lumiere.net.nz/reader/arts.php>

<http://myspace.com/carlshuker>

<http://blog.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendID=104638422&blogID=167482882&MyToken=93bc51c2-51a9-450f-bab5-17ef1e90439b>

Scary advertising

<http://www.mum.org/Lysol48.htm>

Questions for poetry

<http://garysullivan.blogspot.com/2006/07/questions-for-poetry-how-can-poetry.html>

When Bill & Nigel went west

http://nzbookmonth.co.nz/blogs/latest_news/archive/2006/09/15/372.aspx

The oddest English spellings

http://blog.oup.com/oupblog/2006/09/it_is_easy_to_g.html#more

The Emily Dickinson Random Epigraph Machine

<http://www.logopoeia.com/ed/>

True life misery

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1877502,00.html>

Tyrant Ted?

<http://news.scotsman.com/entertainment.cfm?id=1336682006>

12. Great lists of our time

All the plants of the Bible:

Acacia

Almond

Aloe

Apple

Balm of Gilead

Barley

Bean

Black cumin

Blight or blasting

Bramble

Broom

Calamus
Cane
Caper
Carob
Cassia, cinnamon
Cattail
Cedar
Coriander
Cotton
Cumin
Cypress
Dill
Dove's dung
Ebony
Fig
Flax
Flowers of the field
Frankincense
Galbanum
Gall
Garlic
Gourd
Grape
Gum resin
Gum tragacanth
Henna
Hyssop
Laudanum
Laurel
Leeks
Lentil
Lign aloes or aloe wood
Lily of the field
Lily of the valley (Various)
Mandrake
Melon
Millet
Mildew (Various fungi)
Mint
Mustard
Myrrh
Myrtle
Nettles
Oak
Olive
Onion
Palm
Papyrus
Pines
Pistachio

Plane tree
Pomegranate
Poplars
Reed
Rose of Sharon
Rue
Rush
Saffron
Sorghum
Spikenard
Stone pine
Styrax
Sycamore fig
Tamarisk
Tares
Terebinth
Thistle
Thorn
Thyine
Tumbleweed
Walnut
Wheat
Willow
Wormwood
Yeast

This list courtesy of Old Dominion University... and listlady Cath Vidler.

<http://web.odu.edu/webroot/instr/sci/plant.nsf/pages/allbibleplantslist>

13. Letter from Iowa, by Alice Miller

Last week some friends and I drove out of the city to a corn maze. This was my first truly Iowan experience, bush-whacking through the corn in the last gasps of summer humidity. The bush-whacking was our own improvised addition to the maze – it all seemed entirely appropriate given our already curious experience of the Midwest.

All my other adventures have occurred within Iowa City, in and around the Writers' Workshop. The Workshop consists of a hundred writers, evenly split between fiction and poetry. The students come from all over the US – California, New York, Georgia, Louisiana, Virginia, New Jersey. I don't think I've properly met a genuine Iowan for the six weeks that I've been here. (I did, however, briefly run into a rugby player from Porirua).

For some of the people here it's the first time they've been surrounded by writers, and there's no shortage of excited, inspired talk – many wonderful ideas merging and colliding. Lots of the poets share a love for the same writers (O'Hara, Ashbery, Dickinson, Stevens), and there are always new recommendations for reading. Sometimes, impassioned exclamations of 'you must read this!' lead to you finding

that book in your pigeonhole the next day. There's a pretty incessant – and sometimes rather relentless – social scene here, and too many readings and parties for me to attend all of them in good conscience!

The city is a lot prettier than I expected; every street is framed by large, leafy trees, which are now starting to turn crunchy. The humidity is slowly phasing out, leaving a slightly chillier, overcast autumn. Iowa City's a liberal student town, with an overwhelming student population, and an abundance of bars and cafes. And it's a creative place. Zadie Smith was here a couple of weeks ago, and listening to her talk about what she loves about reading – the potential to inhabit other worlds and ways of thinking – made me want to lock my door and curl up with a stack of novels.

I have Brenda Hillman for my poetry workshop. She encourages us to revise our poems obsessively. She urges us to consider what attracts us to particular words, lines, or phrases, and asks us to consider every aspect our poems scrupulously, down to the last scrap of punctuation. Many people here talk about how crucial it is to take risks in your poetry – take risks, and be prepared for them to backfire.

Each week a packet of every class's poems comes out, and we all get carried away with our red pens. Despite various rumors that the workshop is extremely competitive, our class tends to be constructive and supportive. Brenda claims to run an 'anti-workshop workshop', discouraging competitiveness and ego, and she seems to be pretty effective.

We also take seminars here, and because I'm not working, I've gone a little overboard with these. There are too many marvelous options, and I figure that I'd best make the most of them! My first seminar is with Robert Hass, who visited New Zealand earlier this year. He is married to Brenda Hillman; they're both visiting faculty at Iowa this semester. His seminar is on the 'longish' poem. It's a wonderful class, and involves Bob waxing lyrical on issues of art and mortality through the work and lives of Whitman, Rilke, Pound, Eliot, Neruda, and others.

Then there are the other workshop seminars. I'm taking Jim Galvin's class on James Wright and James Merrill, which looks at the similarities between these two very different writers. Galvin is a unique and rather remarkable teacher, and I'm now far more appreciative of some of Wright's poems than I was previously. I'm also taking a class with Cole Swenson on ekphrasis, which aims to help us generate work by exposing us to a variety of artistic inspiration – galleries, theatre, dance, film – and discussing our writing process. This proves useful in the slightly artificial scenario we find ourselves in, expected to generate poems on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

Finally, I'm also taking a translation workshop in the International Writing Program. The program brings writers from all over the world to write and translate their works into English. As students, not only do we meet many amazing international writers, but we get to trudge through the fascinating, fraught process of side-by-side translation with some of them. I'm going to be working with an Albanian poet and a Bangladeshi short story writer.

There are two typical responses from people here when I say I'm from New Zealand. One is 'I hear it's so pretty there,' and the other is 'oh, Lord of the Rings!' Often one

of these follows the other. I'm also sometimes asked whether I'm deeply homesick because Iowa has no kangaroos. Some friends of mine here have discovered that the sentence: 'the ducks parked in the dark of the yard', is particularly useful to demonstrate the ridiculousness of the New Zealand accent. I think I'm the only international student in the workshop, so I'm a pretty easy target. Actually, I'm fortunate that there's a New Zealand writer, James Norcliffe, visiting in the International Writing Program. He's a useful port of call when I'm despairing about American mall culture, or when I feel like my 'R's might be getting too pronounced.

The culture shock has been slight, but occasionally I notice we're a long way from New Zealand, and particularly the mountains and ocean. On our way to the corn maze, we took a wrong turn and found ourselves driving through cornfield after cornfield – an excess of flat land and a sea of corn. On the margins of this little town brimming with writers, there are glimmers of the sort of Iowa you might expect.