



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MODERN LETTERS

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

Newsletter – 7 September 2011

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This is the 173rd 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. Awards and awards

We don't know what's left for current MA student Gemma Bowker-Wright. She won the [Sunday Star-Times short story competition](#) in 2010, and now she's won the 2011 BNZ Katherine Mansfield Award. You can read her story online on the [Awards website](#), along with Owen Marshall's judge's report. Media seemed to think that Gemma's interest in both science and literature was pretty unusual – if true, that's a bit depressing.

We were pleased to see Emma Martin and Patrick Fitzsimons on Owen Marshall's highly commended shortlist; and Chris Howe and Abby Stewart among Rachael

King's highly commendeds in the novice section.

And special congratulations to Marama Salsano (MA 2010) winner of Best Novel Extract at the [Pikihuia Awards](#).

We were also chuffed to see Bill Manhire receive the second Nigel Cox Unity Books Award, which goes to someone who Jo McColl and Susanna Andrew consider to have 'an exceptional way with words.' The award was made in a surprise announcement after the [Writing Your Heart Out](#) event (aka Jungle Rock Blues launch) in Auckland on August 29.

The award itself? Bill says it feels like a real one. 'You don't apply for it - and suddenly you find yourself holding a voucher for \$1,000 of Unity book tokens.' Bill is the second recipient. The inaugural award, in March 2010, went to poet Geoff Cochrane.

2. When Joy Harjo came to town

Last month Joy Harjo came to Wellington to lead a master class for our students, and to give some public presentations. She coincided with the first snows, plural, in 35 years. We asked poet Hinemoana Baker to pen a note on her time here . . .

The snow had begun while we were still warm in Patricia Grace's lounge nearby, but by the time we were waiting to go on to Hongoeka marae it was falling in heavy, square flakes, making a checker-board of Joy Harjo's jet-black hair and painting a white trail down the back of my long, black overcoat. We stood under the sheltering waharoa, Joy huddled under Bernadette Hall's umbrella, our kaikōrero, Apirana Taylor, pressing our freezing noses to his. Alice Te Punga Somerville, her mum and sister were as cold and excited as I was. Dick Grace had said he'd never known snow on their marae. As we took the first steps through the white swirl towards the whare, climbing the rope of the karanga from the hosts, our breath turning white in front of us, it became clear this was going to be a special visit in more ways than one.

For me, and perhaps many others, a highlight of Joy's visit was her appearance at Te Papa for 'Writers on Mondays'. Joy read and sang her poems, she spoke freely about her ancestry and ancestors and was very generous in conversation with host Patricia Grace. For those of us who also love Patricia's work, this rare public appearance by her was a fantastic bonus. Joy's traditional flute music opened the event, and to close Joy read the full text of 'For a Woman Becoming' – a blessing and coming-of-age story she wrote for her grand-daughter. Joy's Tuesday night performance was very nearly cancelled, with many keen audience members having to turn back when their cars began sliding on their icy driveways and streets. Those of us who made it – including MP Hone Harawira – were thrilled we did. Joy broke out her saxophone and read widely from her considerable body of work.

Some of Joy's words will stay with me. One poem ends: 'Let the canoe carry what you cannot bury' (Joy is a keen waka paddler). During the master class at the IIML she talked about how form puts the 'stop signs and give-way signs' into a poem. And she mentioned that she has a deep interest in the poem as ceremony, and how we

construct a poetic house for the spirit of the poem to live in. She said that when she was young ‘ . . . poetry came to teach me how to listen, to learn grace, to learn discipline.’

3. When Santo Cilauro comes to town

When we can, we like to share our good fortune. We're especially happy when our master class visitors can do public events. Later this month, in a special presentation, Santo Cilauro will be in conversation with the IIML's Ken Duncum. Santo's screenwriting credits include iconic Australian feature films *The Castle* and *The Dish*, as well as a long history of much-loved TV comedy series from *The D-Generation* through *Funky Squad* and *Frontline* to *Thank God You're Here*. His many talents include producer, actor, author (co-author of the hilarious *Jetlag Travel Guides*), comedian and internet phenomenon. Santo's career, particularly as a partner in Working Dog Productions, provides an inspirational model for all writers wishing to take control of their own creative and professional lives.

Venue: The Film School, 86 Vivian Street, Wellington

Date and Time: Thursday 17th September, 7.00 pm

4. Another master class

On Saturday August 20th, ten Year 12 and 13 students from around New Zealand gathered at the IIML to check out our harbour views and take part in a day of poetry workshopping. The masterclass was the culmination of the 2011 National Schools Poetry Award judged by Cilla McQueen, New Zealand's most recent Poet Laureate. The morning session was led by the poet, Bernadette Hall, who is currently co-convening the Masters program at the IIML. The students tried their hand at one or two exercises, and then discussed two poems by Joy Harjo who had visited the university just the previous weekend. Each student presented two of their own poems to the group for critiquing. The last job was for each to edit a chapbook, no more than six poems from those that had been presented. The chapbooks will be circulated on line.

There were two sessions in the afternoon, one taken by the Nelson poet Louise Wallace and the other by James Brown of Wellington. Each student took home a handful of books and a poster, gifts to encourage them to continue with their writing.

Student responses to the workshop have been gratifying. A typical example: “I'd really like to thank you for the whole weekend, it was all so wonderfully organised. I had such a blast, and I feel really lucky to have been given the opportunity to work with such lovely people and great poets! I've been glued to the books we were all given, they're great! It's all made me decide that I definitely want to continue with poetry.”

The students' poems have been promoted on a [dedicated website](#), and widely through social media. A pamphlet of the short-listed poems has also been sent out to

all participating schools. Eden Tautali's winning poem, 'Nan', has appeared on urban poster sites throughout New Zealand.

5. Great lists of our time

We've put this month's great list further up the newsletter, so you don't miss it. It's both a list and a many-handed poem with a Hone Tuwhare connection. It was written by members of an early stage dementia group in Purchase, New York. Apparently the group used Hone Tuwhare's poem 'Rain' as a model, and produced the following work called 'Sun'. There is more about the composition process, and about the Alzheimer's Poetry Project, [here](#).

Warm
Bright
Hot
Light
Different throughout the day.
Orange
That's a hot container.
I have to bend over the tools
and make it go where I want to.
Come here, sunny.
Like a hot shower or a hug.
Smells like an ocean breeze.
Smells like an orange.
Don't leave tangerines out.
Sometimes it could be a grapefruit.
Sounds like water dripping over a dam at low tide.
Sounds like light.
Hot as hell.
Hot as the dickens.
Warm as a pussycat.
The sun at dawn is bright as a new baby.
Even if it's a girl?
Especially if it's a girl.
Babies are babies.
Orange.
Sky bright.
I guess I have to wake up earlier.
It may be white.
Tastes like Orange Aid.
The sun at noon is light as fire.
Lime in a coconut.
Feels like a smile.
Sounds like a kiss.
What about in the summer?
Midday like a burning fire.
Hot, uncomfortable.
Need your shade.

Need your shades.
And your suntan lotion.
And your air conditioner.
Summer is coming soon.
The sun at dusk it gets redder and redder.
It's going out.
The sun is setting.
Who tastes the setting sun?
The midnight sun is black as tar.
The sun tastes like death.
Who looks out their window for the sun at midnight?
We could look for the moon.
We could chop it up into sections, like an eclipse
the shape of the sun on the moon.
Brilliant minds we ought to turn them on.

6. Situations Vacant

Fancy a year writing at the IIML? One where we make encouraging noises in the corridor and pay you to write? Yes? Then you should know that applications for the [2012 Writer in Residence](#) position close on 30th September. If successful, you would be the 34th Writer in Residence at Victoria. [Robert Cross's photographs](#) of past writers are on our website.

7. An Albert Belz round-up

Our 2011 Writer in Residence, Albert Belz, continues to have a busy year.

His play, *Raising the Titanics*, is the opening production at Auckland's new Q Theatre, and runs 7-17 September. Meantime his 'Gothic tale of love, lust and betrayal', *Yours Truly*, opens at Basement Theatre, central Auckland, on September 30th.

And asked by the *Sunday Star-Times* last weekend to name his top inspiration as a writer, Albert went immediately to comics writers:

'When I try to think of theatre that has truly inspired my own work to greater heights, sadly, I got noth'n. This is likely due to my almost non-existent attention span, which doesn't sit well in the slow-burn world that is the typical three-act play. I rarely go to theatre because, more often than not, I find myself wishing I was just about anywhere else (and theatre is a very expensive place to be when you'd rather be anywhere else). Ultimately, this is why film, anime and comic book writers have done more to inform and influence me as a playwright than any playwright I can think of.

I find myself simply more willing to engage with something that includes big, bright, bold pictures. Of these writers Alan Moore and Garth Ennis stand out. Their ability to take the seemingly mundane and make it extraordinary or take the extraordinary and

infuse it with depth is what has kept me consuming just about anything they scribe. Comics are also designed for lazy readers like me who can't be bothered devoting time to the "descripty bits" and would rather just get on with dialogue and story. Garth Ennis's dialogue was sometimes sublime and any playwright looking for a lesson on "how to write modern dialogue 101" should go to their local comic specialist and buy the entire Preacher series in trade paperback now.'

You can check out who has inspired other NZ playwrights, including Eli Kent and Dave Armstrong [here](#).

8. A couple of approaching deadlines

The [Royal Society's Creative Writing Science Prize](#) closes on Friday 9 September.

Nominations now close on 16 September for the [Script Writers Awards NZ 2011](#).

9. A very nice way to spend the summer

The Iowa Workshops go ahead again this year in January and February. They are always led by recent MFA graduates of the Iowa Writers' Workshops. Some of the workshop leaders, like Curtis Sittenfeld and Dora Malech, go on to be very well known. Here's a [pdf](#) with details of this summer's workshops.

Application deadline is 9 November.

10. John McAuliffe reading

Irish poet John McAuliffe, on a lightning visit to Wellington, will be giving a special poetry reading on Victoria's Kelburn campus on Monday 19th September. John co-directs the Centre for New Writing at the University of Manchester, and is also an editor of [The Manchester Review](#). His most recent poetry collection, *Of All Places*, is published by [Gallery Press](#)

Time and date: 4.00 pm, 19 September

Place: 8th-floor seminar room, Von Zedlitz Building, Kelburn Parade

11. The expanding bookshelf

Chris Price has just published, gulp, a \$5,000 book. All is explained [here](#).

Twelve Minutes of Love – Kapka Kassabova is about to publish a tango book. It looks like it will have a [sound track](#).

Bird North – 'an intense, necessary book'. [Breton Dukes](#) is about to publish his first

book of stories. Great Dylan Horrocks cover, too.

'*Tongues of Ash* stands out and stands firm because almost all the poems are embedded in, but also arise from, specific places in the landscape. They are trustworthy poems, where personal response to place is observant, clear and thoughtful. They tell no more or less than is needed to make a good poem and the telling is consistently light-toned and respectful' – Dinah Hawken writing about [Keith Westwater's debut poetry collection](#).

12. Treading the boards

Kate Morris's new play [Sketch](#) has just opened at BATS. It's being brought to the world by those remarkable [Page Left](#) people. You can check out Kate's own website [here](#).

April Phillips's prize-winning [Bonking James Bond](#) has just had its premiere production in Auckland with the Ellerslie Theatrical Society. Followers of [Writers on Mondays](#) may remember a lightly rehearsed reading of it in our 2010 series at Circa.

And big congratulations to Desiree Gezentsvey, whose play *Nuclear Family* has been named as one of the two winners of the [Moondance International Festival competition](#). The play recently finished a much praised run at the Edinburgh Fringe, where it was named one of the top 100 must-see shows, repeating its Adelaide success. You can check out some of the reviews [here](#).

13. Those writing festivals keep on coming

[Titirangi's Going West](#), everyone's favourite boutique festival, has survived the arrival of the super city. This coming weekend sees a focus on Allen Curnow, who would have turned 100 in 2011. Dinah Hawken, Spiro Zavos and Steve Braunias are among the many writer guests.

The [Whanganui Literary Festival](#) takes place the following weekend, 16-18 September, and includes sessions with Elizabeth Knox, Elizabeth Smither and Bill Manhire.

The Nelson Arts Festival, 7-24 October, also has a big literature showing – including appearances from Laurence Fearnley, Vincent O'Sullivan and Charlotte Randall. More details [here](#).

And over the last week of October, there's the Tauranga Arts Festival, which also has a substantial writer component – Lloyd Jones, Jenny Pattrick, Fiona Samuel and Elizabeth Smither, among others. Fuller information [here](#).

14. Recent web reading

[Elizabeth Knox's fine new website](#)

[Kate Camp is blogging from Berlin](#)

[Tusi Tamasese's press conference](#) at the Venice Film Festival

[Kate De Goldi wins The Corine International Book Prize](#)

[Best British Poetry](#)

[Axon's first issue is now online](#)

[US creative writing MFA rankings: the top 50](#)

[Philosophical chatbots](#)

[Cream Torpedoes: Bill Manhire on recent poetry in New Zealand](#)

['Novelist Has Whole Shitty World Plotted Out'](#)

[2012 - learn to write for television with Dave Armstrong](#)

['Poor.Old.Tired.Horse.' 1962-68](#)

[UK publisher proposes an annual "Crap Blurb prize"](#)

['Unfortunately I don't think that Houdini's last cryptic trick was to come back from the dead, sign your book, and make you a whole lot of money.'](#)

[Praising Laurence Fearnley](#)

[From the Edinburgh Festival: Ewan Morrison on the end of books](#)

[The inaugural ScienceTeller Festival is coming to Dunedin](#)

[Pip Adam dines out](#)

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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