

a fine line

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NEW ZEALAND POETRY SOCIETY

NOVEMBER 2006



NEW ZEALAND POETRY SOCIETY
Te Hunga Tito Ruri o Aotearoa

WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF
CREATIVE NEW ZEALAND ARTS
COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND
TOI AOTEAROA
& LION FOUNDATION

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NEW ZEALAND POETRY SOCIETY
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PRESIDENT

James Norcliffe

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NOVEMBER MEETING
Saturday 18th November

2006 Anthology Launch
and Silver Jubilee

Turnbull House, Bowen St,
Wellington

(Please note change of day and time)

Editorial

Laurice Gilbert

Greetings from your new editor. In place of a Front Page Essay this month, I'm taking the opportunity to introduce you to the New Look Poetry Society. Those of you who have read James Norcliffe's President's Report from the AGM will know I have taken on the job of National Coordinator. This came about quite suddenly, when three paid contractors resigned within the space of a month, leaving us with the need to fill the posts of Editor, Webmaster, and Secretary. As luck would have it, I was having creative differences with my then employer and when the committee offered me the task of integrating the three jobs I accepted the challenge.

And what a challenge it is. My highest priority is to ensure that the Society benefits its members. It seems obvious, but I think some of that has been lost in the need to pay people to work for us. There have been more paid than unpaid workers, and not all of those being paid were members of the Society. I am, and I intend to ensure that in future any funds paid out will go to those who declare their commitment to making it work by being members.

I plan to revive the traditional form of Wellington meetings for the benefit of our local (and any visiting) members by reintroducing the sharing of poetry between attendees, as well as of guest poets. That was the original purpose of setting up the Society, and the basis of its Wellington-centric origins. It won't be an open mic. though. There are plenty of those around now, which there weren't when the Society started. This will be a Members' Mic., and pre-registration will be required in order to read.

Editorially, I would like to have a space in the newsletter for Letters to the Editor. I want to hear from you, and I want this to be an interactive magazine that you look forward to receiving. Additionally, I will give preference to reviewers and essay-writers who belong to the Society.

I truly want this to be a national organization, and will be making contact with members outside Wellington, to set up an affiliation arrangement that is yet to be finalised. This has been on the project list of the committee for a couple of years, and we see it as something a single administrator is best placed to have oversight of, once I've got the other jobs sorted out. I would be very happy to have expressions of interest from organisers of regional groups with a view to setting up mutually beneficial arrangements.

That's a start, anyway. It won't happen overnight (but it will happen).

On another note, it has been 25 years since the Society was incorporated. We are treating this year's Anthology Launch as a chance for a celebration. I hope many of you will join us, whether you have an entry in the collection or not. It's a great opportunity to meet other poets in a convivial setting (i.e. with free wine).

I owe Gillian Cameron a huge thank you for acting as Interim Coordinator while I was overseas and for tidying up the files before handing them over. Gillian has also updated and added to the website significantly, and continued to take care of it while I settled into my new role. I'm grateful to Lynn Davidson for agreeing to one last magazine, and to Jane Harris for looking after the website for just a little bit longer. Both Gillian and Helen Heath, an earlier administrator and current committee member, have been most welcome mentors and great support.

This is the last issue for this year. Next year, the magazine will be published in odd, rather than even, months, starting with January's issue. That's because running the International Poetry Competition is a full-time job in May, and I won't have time to get a magazine out for June.

Post Script: It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Jeanette Stace, on 2nd October. As you will read later in this issue, Jeanette was a valued and much-loved member of the Poetry Society, with many years of service behind her as a committee member. She was the gracious hostess of Windrift, and the hard-working judge of the 2005 Junior Haiku section of the NZPS International Competition, which attracted the highest number of entries ever. I will miss her ever-friendly presence at Wellington readings, and extend the deepest sympathy to her family.



Quotation of the Month

I gave up on new poetry myself thirty years ago, when most of it began to read like coded messages passing between lonely aliens on a hostile world.

Russell Baker



From the National Coordinator

Laurice Gilbert

Many thanks to the incomparable Sarah Maxey for the new design of the magazine, and for her patience in teaching this computer-phobic editor to manage it.

My first poetry-related outing after I took up the new position as National Coordinator was in response to the kind invitation of former editor, Lynn Davidson, to attend the graduation reading of her students at Whitireia Community Polytechnic. There were eight students of various ages and nationalities, including China, Malaysia, and Niue, and from all over New Zealand.

As the poets introduced themselves and said what poetry means to them, I was reminded of my own first public reading: the excitement, the nerves, the sad relief when it was all over.

I found myself writing down lines I wish I'd said, like this line from an ode addressed to a doomed tree: "The wind will pass and not stop for a chat". Hearing this at home, the man in my life (better known as a hunter than as a poet) was prompted to reflect: "When the wind whistles through a tree, who's doing the whistling?", a reminder that even to the uninitiated, poetry can leave you with more to wonder about.

In early October I attended the opening of a startlingly successful hybrid exhibition of ikebana and haiku (and a few bonsai), at the Japanese Cultural Centre. Jeanette Stace coordinated the contributions of Windrift poets to the Wellington chapter of Ikebana International, whose members used them as inspiration for their extraordinary designs. Jeanette was one of several who had haiku chosen to inspire arrangements, and hers was illustrated with river stones, bright red gerberas and an unfurling ponga stalk. This was a masterpiece of construction, as were all the arrangements.

I also managed to squeeze in Howltearua at the Southern Cross Garden Bar and Restaurant. This is a Word Collective event, with the inimitable Craig Ireson and Glen Maw in full presentation mode. A fascinating mixture of poetry, songs, stories and skits was offered at the open mic, and the guest performer was a band, Softly Softly. The poetry was composed largely of a retro 60s beat motif, only with more laughs, and is suited for younger contributors than I, but I might give it a go next time anyway.

My final non-NZPS event before publication was an evening with the New Zealand Society of

Authors, on Politics and New Zealand Writers, at which arts spokespersons from each of the major political parties answered questions from writers on such subjects as the Author's Fund, Radio NZ and TVNZ's contracts, and various copyright issues. I have the full transcript of my notes on the meeting available at info@poetrysociety.org.nz if anyone is interested.



From the Committee

Gillian Cameron

Laurice Gilbert has now taken over the reins as National Coordinator and Editor, and is brimming with ideas. Laurice says she has discovered a passion for organising – long may it last!

You may be wondering what your Committee gets up to in their "spare time" (LOL). Well, here is a quick whiz round the traps.

James Norcliffe is holidaying in Iowa. No seriously, he is hard at work as a Fellow on the International Writing Programme at the Iowa Writing School as you will see from his letter from America. Yeah, write!

Ralph Proops is an IT chap. His first collection of poetry *Guild of Scavengers* has just been published by Earl of Seacliff Art Workshop (part of their mini series). If you have ever wondered what Ralph looks like check at:

www.earlofseacliff.co.nz/GuildOfScavengers and you won't be any the wiser.

Helen Heath is testimony to the truism that if you want something done give it to a busy woman. Not only is she part of the NZSA mentoring scheme, but she has also set up a business selling eco-friendly women's products (<http://www.redrag.co.nz>)

Gillian Cameron works part time in the public sector and, once she has handed over her NZPS hat and wand, is aiming to write heaps (famous last words). Particular interests are creative non-fiction and poetry.

Helping the committee is Annabel Henderson-Morrell. Annabel is the Assistant Editor for the NZPS magazine and Assistant Editor of this year's anthology, *tiny gaps*. She works full time in arts marketing in Wellington and is a published poet.



From the Web Mistress

Gillian Cameron

We have recently transferred the website over to a new contents management system – IT jargon for 'any dummy like me can now go in and change what is on the site'. I have had fun creating and un-creating pages, waving my web mistress wand and pressing the 'submit' button! Makes you wonder what is in the minds of IT persons when they create this language, doesn't it? Well, wonder no more. It's all about power!

If you haven't been to the site recently, go and take a look-see and while you're there click on the members' section (top menu bar). You will be asked to register and will be sent a new password. Please do this – there are very few members registered so far and there will be more and more members-only content in future. Already, there is a chat board and a poem workshopping facility.

The haiku pages are lovely, thanks entirely to our wonderful haiku editor, Sandra Simpson, who does a fantastic job and updates all the information monthly. Alas, I am passing my magic web mistress wand over to Laurice to wave. As always, email info@poetrysociety.org.nz if there is info or news you think should go on the site.



From The President

LETTER FROM AMERICA

James Norcliffe

This is an incredible place. Physically it's very beautiful with huge spreading trees everywhere, a slow broad river, an iconic capitol with a gold dome, and timeless brick architecture. The town is small, perhaps the size of Timaru, but with wide streets and good shops - including one astonishingly good bookshop, The Prairie Lights, and several terrific second-hand bookstores. One has seven bays of wall to floor poetry! Quite a variety of cafes and bars as well.

The Iowa Writing School is world famous. Each year now one of the graduates from the Victoria University programme spends a year here. This year it's a poet, Alice Miller. I've also met a young writer called Jenna Sauer who is an alumnus of the Christchurch School for Young Writers. My own programme is the International Writing Programme. It brings to the city about

30 international writers as Fellows each year for three months. This year there are poets, novelists, short fiction writers, dramatists and film makers from all around the globe: Senegal, Albania, Libya, Palestine, Afghanistan, Armenia, Uruguay, Denmark, Germany etc, etc. This year I am the only native English speaker.

As you can imagine this a fascinating community. Our programme is very full - packed with dinners, receptions, talks, bureaucracy, seminars, readings and presentations. Quite a number of acculturating trips as well and the Americans are quite candid about this aspect. Thus we have hiked in the woods, visited a huge mall (read Porirua + ice skating), and visited Des Moines (2.5 hour drive) to visit schools, listen to a seminar and visit the magnificent art gallery financed by local squillionaires. It was stocked with most of the Great Names of 20th Century. Even the building was designed by I.M. Pei.

There's also lots of down time for writing and thus far I've managed to complete the third book in the Gleam sequence. I thought it would end it but things are not quite resolved. I'm currently having fun with a comic novel for younger readers and writing the occasional poem as well as putting together texts for presentations.

The literary life here is very rich. There are about 60,000 in the town and university and most of them seem to be published poets. The Prairie Lights has readings just about every other night, most of which are recorded live on a wonderful local public broadcasting station, and there are other readings scattered about. Zadie Smith was in town last week and T. C. Boyle is here tonight. Robert Hass is currently on the staff.

All in all, I'm coping.



Rent a Poet

Gillian Cameron

We sometimes get enquiries, particularly from schools around competition time, for the names of poets available to run poetry workshops for students. We have now set up an on-line register of poets available for hire (click on side menu bar Rent a Poet). This is restricted to members only. If you want to advertise your poetic and other writing talents, please email info@poetrysociety.org.nz with your contact details and a short description (35 words max) of the sort of poetic activities you can offer e.g. performances, workshopping etc.

A Warm Welcome to:

Natalie Browning, Hamilton
Mike Evans, Plimmerton
Arthur Nahill, Auckland
Heidi North, Wellington
Megan Orme-Whitlock, Wanganui
Sam Reece, Wellington
Danica Waldin, Christchurch
Clare Ward, Kaikohe



News

Heartiest congratulations to Margaret (former President and Committee Member, and current Anthology Editor) and Johan Vos, on the birth of their first child, Alexander Johannes, b. 11/10/06. With any luck, Alexander's first poetic outing will be at the Anthology Launch on 18th November (however briefly).



OBITUARY

Laurice Gilbert and Nola Borrell

JEANETTE STACE

26.3.1917 - 2.10.06

low tide
I walk to you
across the sky

This was Jeanette's beautiful - and well-chosen - haiku included in the official notice of her death.

Jeanette Stace died peacefully at the Mary Potter Hospice, Wellington, on the 2nd of October, just under 3 weeks after she suffered a major stroke with paralysis of her right arm and loss of speech. Up until the time of the stroke she was leading an independent life, actively involved in writing and peace activities.

Jeanette was a regular and welcome attendee at Wellington Poetry Society meetings, and it was with much sadness that the news of her death was spread through the poetry community. Her funeral on 6th October was attended by many of her poetry and peace work associates, and her family shared some of her poetry and haiku with those assembled. Here is a transcript (with permission) of her friend Nola Borrell's contribution to the service:

Jeanette the Poet

'I bring the sadness, affection and appreciation - much appreciation - of Jeanette's many friends in the poetry and haiku community.

'The names of the NZ Poetry Society & Jeanette Stace are almost synonymous. Since the mid 1980s Jeanette has had terms as Secretary, Treasurer, and Organiser of the international competition. She worked on the annual anthologies as co-editor, judge, co-selector of poems, promoter, and a less attractive task - storer of boxes of books. She was our informal historian; 118 Cecil Road, later 58 Cecil Rd, Wadestown was the address for the Poetry Society for a long time.

'She won many awards for her poetry, especially haiku, and was published in NZ & overseas. Her work was translated into Japanese, Croatian, Russian and French. Not that Jeanette would have told you that. One of her grandsons didn't know that a haiku about him won a major prize in a Poetry Society competition.

'Haiku writing was Jeanette's special interest. She actively promoted it. Her home was the venue for the Windrift Haiku Group. She was a member of the Zazen email workshop. She helped organise a national Haiku Festival last year and lead a workshop. (We didn't know she was nearly 88.) You can see her haiku inscribed on a boulder on the Katikati Pathway. This week one of her haiku is part of an Ikebana - Haiku - Bonsai Exhibition in Wellington.

in my hand
the smoothness
of the river stone

'Actually, she was planning to help with a Haiku workshop this weekend.

'We will greatly miss her perceptive comments and practical common sense, her love of living and wisdom, and above all, her humour.

'Who will answer our questions now?

'Who will write quirky haiku to delight us?

'Jeanette
we read your haiku
to comfort ourselves'

NZPS involvement

Jeanette first became involved in the middle eighties, and in Sept 1986 she became 'an extremely efficient and unflappable Treasurer' (Harry Ricketts, President's report, May 1989). She was unofficial Secretary by 1989, and was made official in 1990. Bill Sewell's President's report for 1991 picked Jeanette out for special mention,

saying: '[she] more than anyone else has the affairs of the Society at her fingertips, and can be turned to in any emergency.'

In 1990 Jeanette was one of the guest poets, and in 1991 she took over the running of the International Poetry Competition for two years. She retired as Secretary at the 1993 AGM, and was presented with a walnut plate for her work. However, she remained a committee member and was co-organiser (with Fiona Farrell) of 1993's annual poetry workshop, as well as continuing with correspondence in the absence of a replacement Secretary. By September 1994 she was back fully into the secretarial role, until replaced by Elizabeth Crayford.

Jeanette co-edited the following Poetry Society anthologies: *Frosted Rails*, 1990 (with Harry Ricketts), *Balancing on Blue*, 1991 (with Bill Sewell), *Ginger Stardust*, 1992 (also with Bill Sewell)

Jeanette finally resigned from the committee in 1999, at a mere 82 years old. She never complained about her age, or indeed confessed to it. In 2005 she judged the Junior Haiku section of the Competition, and thoroughly enjoyed reading through and selecting from over 1000 entries, the highest ever received in this section.

As well as her long involvement with the NZPS, Jeanette published extensively in both NZ and overseas: she contributed to the two New Zealand haiku anthologies, and published her own collection, *Across The Harbour* (Bearfax Publications). She hosted Windrift, and was a member of Zazen, an Australasian email haiku group started in July 2000. One of her haiku is engraved for posterity in a boulder on the Haiku Pathway in Katikati:

one at each end
of the park bench
a man a woman

Tributes

'She was so energetic and did so much for poetry in NZ. She will long be remembered.'

'It is so sad to think that Jeanette is no longer here. I loved her sense of humour, her energy and her compassion. She was such a "whole" person; warm and welcoming, humble and understated and she made you feel "special". I'll never forget being loaned a pair of Jeanette's togs so that I could accompany Nigel and Jeanette on one of their swims. On the way home we stopped for a little picnic. Jeanette was never "false." Her haiku were "her haiku". She'll leave a real space. I'm glad *A - Zazen* has a "chapter" of Jeanette's inimitable haiku.'

'Jeanette will be sorely missed by everyone who came in contact with her. She was a warm, amazing, gentle person.'

'The Haiku world will miss her contributions and encouragement.'

'She was a very special person - and will remain so for me and many others... In her own quiet way she inspired many in their poetic efforts, me included.'

'I'll remember Jeanette for her warm and friendly nature from the years I spent with NZPS, and how she was always welcoming and supportive.'

'such sad news'

'Jeanette was the heart & soul of NZ Poetry Society when I first discovered it.'

'Her friends - including Windrift members - will also very much miss Jeanette and her great spirit and her hospitality. I predict we will be saying in our workshops, "Now what would Jeanette say about this haiku?" She was always generous in her acceptance and support of people, and I will miss that delightful sense of humour. Jeanette has been a key person in the haiku world, and in earlier years in the NZ Poetry Society.'

From Beverley George, Editor of *Yellow Moon*:

'My condolences on the passing of this fine poet. I am sure she will be deeply missed.'

he is diagnosed
with a rare disease
as if there were not
enough common ailments
to choose from

Jeanette Stace Wellington New Zealand, in
Yellow Moon 19, 2006

coming nearer
the wail of sirens
the sudden stop

Jeanette Stace
tapping the tank
1999 NZPS Anthology



ADDITION TO LAST ISSUE'S OBITUARY OF LEICESTER KYLE

Catherine Mair

dying man

(a found poem for the late Leicester Kyle)

*thanks for your note & creation. the latter is
as your son said hard to describe but it has
a curious fascination that makes one stare.
I look forward to the account of your
caravanning trip. my own life has become
rather circumscribed for reason of infection
risk or blood loss or exhaustion. carol is a
tremendous help & through her it is largely
that I remain in such comfort & intellectual
potential. I've been able to start writing
poetry again beginning with some of the
visions under chemotherapy - these can
be awesome mixes of biblical myth &
symbolic contemporary presentations of
my traumas & experiences at the fringes
of mortality. these are your words. I am
your scribe.*



Upcoming Events

For a complete list of regional events, and to track down the poetry meeting in your town, please go to the NZPS website: <http://www.poetrysociety.org.nz>

VISIT OF POETRY TRANSLATOR

The Embassy of Poland is sponsoring a visit to New Zealand by Marcel Weyland, who has translated Poland's most-read book, an epic poem called *Pan Tadeusz*, into English. Marcel was awarded the Order of Merit by the Polish Government for his work on translating 200 years of Polish poetry into English.

Marcel will be touring New Zealand in November. He is reading at the Polish Embassy in Wellington on 7th Nov. Anyone interested in attending this (it is an invitation only event), please contact: info@poetrysociety.org.nz

I am also organizing a chance to meet Marcel and hear about the work on 8th November, and would welcome expressions of interest in joining this meeting.

There will be public events in Auckland (11th November, at the Polish Museum) and Dunedin (24th November, at the Dunedin Art Gallery/Otago Settlers Museum - contact Tim Pollack at the DCC for more details.). You can find out more

about Marcel Weyland at:

www.polart2006.com.au/pages/arts_literature
and details of *Pan Tradeusz* on Wikipedia.

NELSON

An exhibition at the Suter Art Gallery showcases work by John Pule and Sofia Tekela-Smith. Pule is an accomplished painter, poet and novelist and was honoured in 2004 with the prestigious Laureate Award from the Arts Foundation of New Zealand. Entitled *We can all go together – Brown Eyes Blue*, the exhibition runs from the 5th of October to the 12th of November.

TAURANGA

Tauranga Writers' 40th Anniversary

Celebrations are already being planned for June 2007, when the Tauranga Writers group turns the big 4-0. A three-day-long birthday bash will be held in the Bay, including a Small Press and Self-Publishing Book Fair.

They'd love to hear from anyone who has been associated with New Zealand's longest running writing group, or those who have contributions or suggestions to make.

For more details, please contact Jenny Argante, phone 07 576 3040 or email: secretary@taurangawriters.org.nz

WELLINGTON

Howltearoa

The Word Collective's regular open mic night, with a featured poet taking the lead. This first-Monday-of-the-month event is fast becoming a Wellington institution, in a post-modern letters kind of way. For more info, give Craig a call on 027 242 3453 or get on the mailing list: wordcollective@gmail.com

Please e-mail any updates, amendments & additions to your regional poetry events to:
info@poetrysociety.org.nz



Overheard

"You don't need a degree to write poetry, but you do need an inclination." (*Wally Potts*)



Haiku Newz

CONGRATULATIONS

International Haiku Calendar Competition 2006

Ernest Berry is sole NZ representative with a runner-up award in a field of 686 entries from 18 countries. Judges' criteria: Quality as haiku, originality, relevance to assigned month. Calendar: \$US13 or UK6.50 pds from Snapshot Press, PO Box 132, Waterloo, Liverpool, L22 8W2, UK.

Penumbra Contest, US

Again the winning Ernest Berry is among the finalists in the Tallahassee Writers' Association contest.

high desert
i'm surrounded
by a fly

merry-go-round
my girlfriend waves
at everyone

Fire Pearls: Short Masterpieces of Human Passion

Another NZ honour: Pat Prime, Bernard Gadd and Andre Surridge have tanka accepted for this forthcoming anthology which will include nearly 400 poems from 50 poets representing 10 countries.

Herb Barrett Award Haiku Contest 2001

Never believe your precious submission has vanished. Ernest Berry heard recently that his haiku submitted in 2001 was given an Honourable Mention in the above contest. Here it is:

empty room
a blowfly
fills it

COMPETITIONS & SUBMISSIONS

Kokako Tanka Competition: 2 copies of each tanka with name and address on 1 copy only.

Entry fee: \$2/tanka or \$5/3 tanka in NZ; overseas entries \$US1/tanka or \$US3/4 tanka. Make cheques/money orders to 'Kokako'. Entries to: Kokako Tanka Competition, c/- Patricia Prime, 42 Flanshaw Rd, Te Atatu South, Auckland 8, New Zealand. Cash prizes totalling \$NZ450 and winning tanka published in Kokako 6 in April 2007. Closes: December 31.

Haiku Presence Award: 2 copies of each haiku with your name and address on one copy only. Entry fee: £5/\$US10 for up to 5 haiku; additional entries £1/\$US2 per haiku. Entries to Martin Lucas, 90D Fishergate Hill, Preston PR1 8JD, England, UK. Cash prizes totalling £200. Winners published in Haiku Presence.

Closes: October 31.

James W Hackett Award: Entry fee: £3/\$US6 for up to 3 haiku; and £1/\$US2 per haiku thereafter. Entries to Hackett Award, Newton House, Holt Road, North Elmham, Norfolk NR20 5JQ. Prize of £70 and one year's free subscription to The British Haiku Society. Winning poems published in Blithe Spirit.

Closes: November 30. Full details from the website: www.haikusoc.ndo.co.uk/comp

The Betty Drevniok Award: Limit of 3 haiku per person. 3X5 cards with one card including author's name, address and telephone number in the upper corner. Entry fee: \$US5 for up to 3 haiku. Entries to The Betty Drevniok Award, c/o Ann Goldring, PO Box 97, 5 Cooks Drive, Leaskdale, Ontario, Canada L0C 1C0. Cash prizes totalling \$C175.

Closes: November 30. Full details from the website: www.haikuoz.org/competitions

Peace Haiku in memory of Sadako Sasaki: Mevsimsiz Publishing House in Turkey (www.mevsimsiz.com.tr) plans to publish 1000 Haiku for Peace in August 6, 2007 in English and Turkish. Writers are invited to submit 10 or more haiku, published and/or unpublished.

Seasonal words: Dr Gabi Greve, Japan, invites NZ haiku poets to contribute to a NZ saijiki at the World Kigo Database. His invitation is prompted by an article by Vanessa Proctor on seasonal words on the NZPS website.

WINDRIFT, WELLINGTON

In abundance at our August meeting, ingenuity and humour, word play and our not-so-secret love of metaphor. (Who needs rules!) We found haiku not only in sea and sky, sun and southerly, but also in acupuncture and flying rocks, earthquake and ear-muffs, shaving and gumboots.

In my cold age
Razor emptying
Snow falls

Neil Whitehead

my gumboot
her story
of the white-tailed spider

Jeanette Stace

three little girls
dressed in mother's skirt
one woman

Sally Holmes Midgely

winter night
the sound of quarrelling --
the night grows colder

Veronica Haughey

Afterword from Neil Whitehead, briefly home from Japan and up-to-date with the meaning of 'haijin': A real master or expert, and usually only applied to those in the past, not present day writers. This writer will be more careful!

OVERSEAS NEWS

Haiku Pacific Rim Conference: Matsuyama, Japan in April, 2007, in honour of the 140th celebration of Shiki's birth anniversary.

President of Australian Haiku Society: Newly elected is Beverley George, Editor of Yellow Moon.



Notice Board

IIML Iowa Workshop (Poetry Stream)

This summer (January/February 2007), the International Institute of Modern Letters is again running its creative writing workshops facilitated by a recent graduate of the famed Iowa Writers' Workshop. Each course will be limited to 12 participants and will involve two x three-hour meetings per week, plus plenty of reading and writing expected!

Details of the poetry stream follow:

'Chaos and control in poetry, with Zachary Savich':

'Through exercises and readings in traditional and experimental forms, the workshop will explore how wildness and order co-exist in poetry. Zachary Savich's poems have appeared in journals such as *The Colorado Review*, *Seneca Review* and *Fourteen Hills*. He has taught at the University of Iowa and with the University of Washington's Creative Writing Programme in Rome.'

Contact the IIML for further information:

Phone: (04) 463 6854, or email: modernletters@vuw.ac.nz

Deadline for applications is 10th November

Frontseat

It's worth staying up late on a Sunday night to tune in to TV One and catch Frontseat. You can watch all sorts of interesting arts news that doesn't seem to make it to primetime. And they'd love to know what ideas you have up your sleeve – there's a page on their website for submissions, so let them know what creative areas need more coverage! Go to: www.frontseat.co.nz/have_your_say/story_ideas/index.php



Publications

The first issue of *Aotearoa Ethnic Network* journal has gone live and features an interesting article entitled 'Pasifika Hip Hop Poetry Doing the Healing'. Written by Rev. Mua Strickson-Pua, a.k.a REV MC, it includes poems from his up-coming collection, *Matua* (Pohutakawa Press).

<http://www.aen.org.nz/journal/1/1/strickson-pua.html> (source – AUP Poetry News)

Kokako 5* (ed Patricia Prime & Owen Bullock)

This issue features the work of many of New Zealand's most active and accomplished haiku poets including John O'Connor, André Surridge, Helen Bascand, Sandra Simpson and Ernest Berry. It also has a number of fine overseas contributors such as Amelia Fielden, Christopher Herold and Marshall Hryciuk. As well as haiku, senryu and tanka, there is a substantial section of haibun and renga. \$20 for two issues within New Zealand; \$25 overseas. Contact: Patricia Prime, 42 Flanshaw Street, Te Atatu South, Auckland 8 (Cheques to 'Kokako').

Where poets gather Tauranga Writers (Tauranga Writers)

Subtitled '10 Voices From the Bay of Plenty', this is a collection of poems and original music on CD by the eponymous ten writers, all well-known in the poetry community.

Overnight Downpour Andrew Fagan (HeadworX)

Out in September was the fourth collection of poetry by Andrew Fagan, the former Mockers' singer/songwriter. Andrew Fagan lives in Auckland and continues to write songs and work in the music business.

Secret Heart Airini Beautrais (VUP)

Launched in October, this is the first full length book of poetry from Airini Beautrais: a collection of autobiographical prose poems. Airini is a Wellington-based writer and member of folk/rock group The Raskolnikovs.

Book Month Bonanza

The first ever NZ Book Month has had its success validated in the form of a best-seller. *The Six Pack* went straight to the top of the pops, reaching number one on the Booksellers NZ Bestsellers list and bumping Maurice Gee from prime position. This special book was the result of a competition judged blind, which resulted in a real mix of New Zealand writing. You can find the collection in a bookstore near you, or read more about it and the six authors (now each \$5000 the richer), at the official website: <http://nzbookmonth.co.nz/>



Submissions

Sport

Formerly published twice yearly between October 1988 and November 2003, Sport is now published annually. Submissions from New Zealand writers or with a New Zealand connection are welcome. Submissions sent by mail must be typed and include a stamped, self-addressed envelope: PO Box 11-806, Wellington, New Zealand. Email: fergus.barrowman@vuw.ac.nz Please note: If submitting by email, please ask before sending attachments; unsolicited attachments will be deleted unread.



Residencies

Randell Cottage Writers Residency 2007

The Randell Cottage Writers Trust is once again calling for applications from New Zealand writers for the Creative New Zealand Randell Cottage Writers Residency 2007. The tenure will be from 2nd April 2007 to 28th September 2007.

The successful applicant will receive a monthly stipend for the six months of the residency, and reside in the historic Randell Cottage - located in Wellington's central city suburb of Thorndon. Applicants must be New Zealand citizens by birth, registration, or residency, and should be

writers whose work has already been published and well received.

The project proposal the writer submits may be in any genre, including: fiction, poetry, drama, biography, other literary non-fiction, writing on arts topics.

For further information, application forms and guidelines visit their fabulous new website: <http://www.randellcottage.co.nz> or email: Randell@writerstrust.co.nz Applications close on Friday 24th November



Congratulations

COMPETITION RESULTS

Results of the 3rd Bravado International Poetry Competition 2006, judged by Tony Beyer:

1st Prize: Return of the Matariki
Jan Hutchison

2nd Prize: Training Ground
Bruce Rankin

3rd Prize: bird talk
Karen Peterson Butterworth

Highly Commended:

Synaesthesia	Alice Hooton
The country I never visited	Margaret Vos
and the tapa says	David Best
Mr Li's Spectacles	Janis Freegard
Stroke	David Lyndon Brown
Being Nobody	Michael Harlow
Talk of Snow	Sandra Simpson
Biography of dancer	Margi Mitcalfe
The trees will tell you	Helen Lehdorf
Family Photo	Karen Peterson Butterworth

Congratulations to all the successful poets, six of whom are members of the NZPS.



Websites

BOOKCROSSING – THE WORLD'S BIGGEST FREE BOOK CLUB

Does the idea of releasing a book into the wild and tracking its progress amongst other book lovers around the country, or the world, sound like fun to you? Then sign up to be a BookCrosser and you'll never have neglected tomes lying on

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It's a global phenomenon with almost half a million members, and a great website packed with reviews, tidbits and active forums.

<http://www.bookcrossing.com>

FUTUREME.ORG

The premise is simple. The site is an email form, which you fill out and then set the date – for any time in the future. It's the electronic version of a time capsule, or a message in a bottle. I tell 'future me' whatever it is I want to and then the website will send it out automatically. This could be as prosaic or as life-changing as you wish.

Set up in 2002 by two friends, over 330,000 letters later, the site has become so successful that a book will now be published of the emails which have been marked 'public'. Some of these can also be viewed on the website, though apparently only about 10% of the letters submitted are ever chosen by the writer to be subjected to the public gaze. A place for love letters, goal setting, problem poems, revenge? Co-founder of the site, Jay Patrikios said trawling through the letters made him realise what an optimistic bunch we humans are. "They really do think they're going to lose 30 pounds [about 13 and a half kilos]. Most end in 'I love you' - and that's to themselves," he said.

<http://futureme.org>



Reviews

inside the mirror - The Red Moon Anthology of English-Language Haiku 2005, edited by Jim Kacian and the Red Moon Editorial Staff, Red Moon Press, PO Box 2461, Winchester, VA, 22604-1661 USA

Nola Borrell

Here are both achievement and delight. The Red Moon annual anthology, a major undertaking, now in its 10th year, has well-and-truly arrived. It is a selection of haiku and related forms published in English in the world in the preceding year: over 150 poems (haiku and senryu), 27 linked forms (haibun, renku and rengay) and 7 essays.

Initially, over 2500 haiku by over 1800 authors

mainly from haiku journals and books and the internet were nominated by 11 editors. Editors include such well-established haijin as Caroline Gourlay, George Swede, Carolyn Hall, Dee Evetts and our own Ernest Berry. (No, you're not allowed to nominate your own work!) The nominated haiku were put on an anonymous roster and voted on by the editors. A statistical challenge, apart from anything else.

The final responsibility fell to Jim Kacian, Editor-in-Chief and owner of Red Moon Press. (Some of you will recall him as guest speaker at the national haiku gathering in Picton in 2000).

Not surprisingly, 'the mirror' reflects a variety of content and perspective. The haiku section includes over 80 US authors with 13 from UK. Japan has 4; Canada, Australia and Canada have 3 each (Ron Moss is identified as NZ, but Australia may object); and most of the other 7 countries have one representative. This may not only be a matter of statistically higher numbers of haiku published in US but also reflect the leadership and influence of the American haiku community.

The well-selected opening haiku will draw you in.

what else
do I need to know ...
pine trees growing from stone

Kay F Anderson, US

An overwhelmingly high percentage of these poems can be identified as senryu. There is seldom a disappearing self as in 'to hear it, / not to hear myself, / waterfall' (Tripi). That does not prevent them from offering insight and moments of wonder and recognition. A popular format is the comparison haiku: an observation of physical nature linked with human nature.

crescent moon -
the child swivels
on her mother's hip

Dru Philippou, US

a small white cloud
clings to the mountain
first day at school

Greg Piko, Australia

Those three New Zealanders who survived the rigorous process are Greeba Brydges-Jones, Barbara Strang and Ernest Berry (3 haiku).

lung x-ray
the weight
of a shadow

Greeba Brydges-Jones

new year
a pain
in a new place

Barbara Strang

fundraiser
the inflated price
of her kiss

Ernest Berry

The Anthology's section of linked forms has mainly haibun: short (from 1/2 page to 1 1/2 pages) and most with only one haiku. They are simple, clear, direct, conversational, and nearly all tell a personal story. Some authors write movingly of birth, painful memories, illness and death - but read too about a window washer (Judson Evans, US), flowers on the grave of a mouse (Gary LeBel, US), and a tomato-stealing squirrel (Jennie Townsend, US).

Jim Kacian has a 15 page "around the world as briefly as possible" with observations and reflections, including his visit in 2000 to the Katikati Pathway, 'the single most important physical monument to what we are up to, and the only place in the world so far where English-language haiku is carved in stone'.

I found the section with essays particularly fascinating. Lee Gurga, US, poses the question 'what kind of haiku are worth reading?' Leading the way: 'its ability to touch our hearts' followed by skilled choice and arrangement of words, sound, rhythm or cadence, use of the pivot line, and 'seasonal consciousness'. Lee Gurga laments the decline in the 'feeling for flow' in contemporary American haiku.

Josh Hockensmith, US, in 'Outside the Lines' considers a haibun written by leading US poet John Ashbery, not on the physical natural world, but on the way the mind works. He does point out some radical differences between Ashbery's haibun and contemporary writing, but given the number of haiku in *inside the mirror* that offer thoughts or reflections, this mode of writing doesn't seem quite so remote! E.g. tall pines - / I'll never be ready/ to go home (Michael McClintock, US); raking leaves -/ all the apologies/ I've never made (Paul David Mena, US); 62 candles -/ such beautiful memories/ of things I regret (Billie Wilson, US).

Ken Jones of Wales, in 'Finding the Heart of Haiku' critiques most contemporary haiku for offering no more than 'attractive word pictures here, a bit of a chuckle there, and elsewhere some clever verbal footwork'. He sets up four categories of haiku (existential, simple imagery, contrived cleverness and heavy symbolism) and classifies a large number of contemporary haiku and also a classification of classical Japanese haiku. His conclusions highlight the extent to which the West has drifted from classical haiku - or, if you like, established its own version of the haiku form.

Paul Miller, US, takes issue with the claim of a haiku poet who says s/he writes only from direct experience ('In Defence of Craft'). Ruth Yarrow, US, questions why Americans write so few war haiku. Gary Snyder, US, tells of his experience as student and poet in Japan in 'The Path to Matsuyama'; and David Grayson, US, has 'Notes on Modern Art and Haiku'.

The design and layout of this anthology are of a high standard. There's a fine amount of space around haiku - 2 or 3 at most to a page. The font is large and clear. There's even a Jackson Pollock painting *Blue Poles* (1953) on the cover.

Buy or find a copy if you can. Traditional price: \$A16.95 plus p & p.

Nola Borrell is a Wellington poet, and past secretary of NZPS. She co-organised Haiku Festival Aotearoa 2005.

Take a Leap by Jenny Clay, published by Nikau press, 2005. ISBN 0-473-10415-6 RRP: Unknown.

Heidi North

This is the first collection of poetry by Jenny Clay, an intimate book of reflections, both whimsical and serious about the world.

There is an 'I' voice throughout the work, and while one cannot assume that an 'I' narrator is the author's own voice, the first poem is about ancestors, 'They came,' and ends in the lines: "I thank you /for making the journey" suggesting that in this case, the 'I' is Clay. The personal photographs dotted throughout also add to this intimacy.

Clay's style is modern and sparse, with small lines and pared down punctuation, letting the language speak for and tease itself. The words hang images in the air. The taut language works at best to really spark images. In 'Wind':

Giggling wind
reverses umbrellas
undresses
the street

But at other times there is an almost overworked quality. The poetry feels a little self-aware. While not a themed collection, a thread throughout is the subject of poetry, and Clay's awareness of herself as an author. As in 'Shopping List': "Apricot sherbet, /and clothes pegs/to hold my poem / together." And I feel that this, inside the 'I' narrator, is when she falters a little and loses the freeness found in the other works.

However, this idea of writing poems on "The Poet" will put a smile on the face of anyone who has ever done a creative writing course, as Clay has, having graduated from Whitireia's Creative Writing course in 1999:

ego-stroking during note taking
of running complaints.

Later she will sell
her poem
for undisclosed millions

And I think the most receptive audience to this collection will be other writers or people also aware of the complexity of making poems and dealing with the author/poem relationship.

Undoubtedly a poet of images, and also a visual artist, it is no surprise that Clay's best work rises out of her use of juxtaposition of images. She has a sharp eye for detail and the absurd. In 'Great Barrier':

a dried puffer fish
hung on a branch
Halloween mask
with swollen
Mick Jagger lips.

The humorous poems really appealed to me. In 'Updating the Fairytales'

Cinderella was making sushi
in the kitchen
and a meteorite flew in
giving cheap travel
to alien planets
where she found prince charming.

Her best poems are the ones that speak for themselves, letting the images do the work. 'Dying for Colour' stands out for me as one of the strongest in the collection, an uneasy look at the process of making red food colouring.

There are many ways
to kill for colour...

The title, *Take a Leap*, seems to imply Clay's own leap in publishing a volume of poetry, and while I commend that brave act, at times this collection feels to me, while readable, rather light.

I would like to see her work pushed more in the direction of images, and perhaps away from the self-reflective voice. After this first 'leap' I will be interested to see the progression of Clay's voice to follow.

Heidi North is a Wellington actor and writer. Most recently she has completed the IOWA Poetry workshop at the IIML, Victoria University.

Classic New Zealand Poets in Performance, edited by Jack Ross and Jan Kemp, Auckland University Press, Paperback with flaps, 2 x audio CDs, 160p, \$45.00

Harvey Malloy

This anthology is a real treat. The editors Jack Ross and Jan Kemp have selected and presented on two CDs, material from the Waiata Recordings Archive, collected in 1974, and the Aotearoa New Zealand Poetry Sound Archive, completed in 2004. For the first time we have an anthology that allows us to hear how New Zealand poetry has evolved.

As soon as the book arrived in the post I popped the CDs into the car stereo and for the last few weeks I've been driving around listening to A.R.D. Fairburn, Charles Brasch, Allen Curnow, Denis Glover, James K. Baxter, Hone Tuwhare, Janet Frame, Fleur Adcock, Lauris Edmond, Peter Bland and Kevin Ireland (to name a few). It's great to listen to the poems a few times and then to go back to the book and read them on the page.

The CDs provide an invaluable record of poets becoming comfortable with their local accents rather than reciting their work as if they were sitting an English elocution exam. Mason seems very comfortable with his own kiwi accent whereas Baxter's performance of 'Poem in the Matutiki Valley' reminds me of the Northumbrian accents of my childhood. What's great about the anthology is how hearing a poem can make you sit up and pay fresh attention to it: Louis Johnson's reading of 'Words for Blair Peach' made me want to go back and read more of his work. Some voices I find off-putting— Charles Brasch's highly affected BBC Home service voice makes me cringe and Dennis Glover sounds a bit dodgy when he reads 'The Magpies.' I've always enjoyed Elizabeth Smither's soft, memorable reading voice and Hone Tuwhare's reading of 'Rain' and 'cummings' brings out the musical cadences in his

work.

There are a few odd omissions which may be due to no recordings of the poets being made for the Aotearoa New Zealand Poetry Sound Archive. Given Bill Manhire's influence on our poetry why has he not been included? And while Keri Hulme is known primarily as a novelist a record of her marvelous reading voice would have been a welcome addition to the CD. Still, these are minor quibbles in an anthology that would make an ideal Christmas present for anyone you want to introduce to NZ poetry. I've heard that a second anthology of contemporary voices is in the works and I for one can't wait.

Harvey Molloy is a Wellington writer.

fluid, Karen Peterson Butterworth, no. 6 in the Earl of Seacliffe Art Workshop (www.earlofseacliffe.co.nz) mini-series, 24pp, 2006, no price given; *Up Over Alpha*, David Patterson, (ed) Anne French, tributes by J K Baxter, John Ross, John Patterson, Steele Roberts, 2005, \$19.95, 80pp; *Snapshots of a mind*, Alan Papprell, Alan Papprell (papprilla@clear.net.nz), 52pp, 2005, \$10.

Bernard Gadd

fluid is literally a pocket book with a glossy card cover featuring a photo of the writer. Much the best poems in this collection are in the haiku/senryu, including the sequence "The Cataract Operation". The other poetry tends to be conventional, full of metaphor and personification, though I can see the verbally lean "nothing" and "girls can do anything" appealing to many readers:

... yes girls
can do anything but most often
end up doing everything for bugger-all

But the haiku are often vivid, wry

april breeze
the artist paints a rainbow
no longer there

or moving:

at the barbecue
sipping cold wine
news of my brother's cancer

Up over Alpha is an interestingly unusual book. It's a selection of poems by a young man who died tramping at the age of 19 in 1958. Covers

and art in the book are also by Patterson. Younger brother John Patterson has transcribed the poems from ms or print and Anne French has selected and arranged them in order. Two impressions stand out. The first is that despite its age, this collection is quite modern in its language and the style of poetry. There are relics of older fashions of poetic vocabulary and of histrionic imagery and metaphor: "Oh foul womb-hole" (a crater!) and references to Classical myths. But his concern more often is to find words and images for landscapes and for the effort of traversing them: and this is the other major impression, the focus upon mountain climbing and tramping. Often both the more dated and the modern poetry are side by side. "This beach is fearful place" offers the rather dull

Behind are hills, sheep-bearing
Grass-grown, scattered with funds,
Familiar variation.

But the poem's start has power and clarity

When the sea's vicious pulses
Rage up the steep stones
And suck shortly back.
Wind whips back the breakers
In hissing sheets of spray.

It's not so much verbal echoes that you hear in this poetry but a similar sense of landscape and weather as you find in Alistair Campbell, Baxter, Glover, even the odd Curnow poem. For readers hoping for more than tramping and landscape there are poems like "Lamb to the slaughter", a vivid moment when a sheep escapes at the slaughter house 'And came bleating wretchedly up past the line of its fellows' bodies' till three sixteen year old hands 'with shouts of delight twisted back/ Its head, and inexpertly hacked at its throat'. Plenty to think about there. "Panic-song of the college council" is light verse about a university trying to combat a plague of Leftist students. "A dream" has the feel of the surreal as the narrator stands 'Outside the glass door' which 'no one comes to open and let me in'. "Samson" is a very strong little poem

The living bones will break
and the screws of the rack
And the strong neck will tear
the unstrangling noose ...
And wrenching apart with his hands the pillars
of doom
Sampson will live.

The collection ends with poems in tribute to Patterson, one by John Ross who was among those who bought the bodies of the writer and a companion down after their death, a couple of mediocre efforts from Baxter, and two strong poems by younger brother John Patterson whose elegy "We do not cry" has long been a favorite of mine. Anne French supplies an introduction and John Patterson a biography. The cover art and black and white art in the book are all by the author. French asks the inevitable question: "Would David Patterson have continued to write poetry if he had lived?" Libraries should have this collection.

Snapshots of a mind is a collection of poems of reminiscence and memory. The opening series, "Durie Hill Poems", follows a boy's growing up and school days, their games, places, people, and pubescent years

Proving manhood we tied buckets to our feet and,
dragging them, swam ever-increasing distances,
Our shoulders taut [Breaking the Ice]

The rest of the poems are "Memories" and "On Wikitoria Road - memories of Putiki". These cover a wide range of topics and afford some quintessentially kiwi images:

Driving north in Winter I always know
where I am by the smell of ensilage.
Matamata's sour,
like old milk, biting through the window
[Driving by the Ensilage]

These are very accessible poems and their topics and writing will widely appeal. Many of the strongest are in the first sequence. Blurry snaps from the family album add to the snapshot feel. Papprell makes no bones about it - he has produced his own collection. And indeed none of these collections acknowledges any fund provider, reminding that most New Zealand poetry is paid for, one way or another, by the writer, and that Creative New Zealand funds chiefly the work of a cosseted, mainly academic, few. I hope many readers will enquire from Alan how to buy his collection. It's already in our local library.

Bernard Gadd is an Auckland poet, playwright and fiction writer.



Out and About

Picton Poets October Meeting

Sandy Arcus

The Poet-tree has now taken root in Ernie and Triska's Cottage, and at each meeting poetic flowers will be plucked at random and read anonymously. There were Kris Kristofferson's poignant lines in 'Me and Bobby Mcgee'; Eileen Duggan's 'The Farming Nation' (she of Marlborough origins); the satirical 'Glugs of Gosh' (C J Dennis) recited by Ernie, which some of us felt was even better than Lewis Carroll, and should be compulsory reading for MPs; Alice's off the cuff 'St John in the Wilderness' (rather close to home in a couple of respects); Robert 'Snow' Dunn's 'The Phantom Canoe', about the Mt Tarawera eruption; Ruby, fresh from The Airing Cupboard, introduced us to Barbara Strang's section in *The Unbelievable Lightness of Eggs*, a recently published collection of light poems and verse - and *Duck Weather* got in there somewhere, too; Sue and Ruby combined on a Poetry and Motion entry (greenery and goldfish) in the local Union Parish Fair flower show, and Sue, in spite of being stuck for a rhyme for 'smelly', delivered her rhyming account of the preparations (congrats for getting 3rd place!); AND "Kathy Used to Walk in a Shaky Way". We concluded with ten minute preparations of verses about insects - and worms!



Talk Poem

Anne Tucker

To a Mouse

On Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough, November 1785

by Robbie Burns

Wee, sleekit, cow'rin, tim'rous beastie,
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
 Wi' bickering brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,
 Wi' murd'ring pattle!

I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion
 Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor earth-born companion,
 An' fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whiles, but thou may thieve;
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen icker in a thrave
 'S a sma' request;
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,
 And never miss't!

Thy wee bit housie, too, in ruin!
Its silly wa's the win's are strewin!
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,
 O' foggage green!
An' bleak December's winds ensuin,
 Baith snell an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare and waste,
An' weary winter comin fast,
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,
 Thou thought to dwell,
Till crash! the cruel coulter past
 Out thro' thy cell.

That wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble
Has cost thee mony a weary nibble!
Now thou's turn'd out, for a' thy trouble,
 But house or hald,
To thole the winter's sleety dribble,
 An' cranreuch cauld!

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes o' mice an' men
 Gang aft a-gley.
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain
 For promised joy.

Still thou art blest, compared wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But och! I backward cast my e'e
 On prospects drear!
An' forward, tho' I canna see,
 I guess an' fear!

Glossary

- bickering brattle = hurrying scamper
- pattle = plowshare
- A daimen icker in a thrave = An occasional ear in twenty-four sheaves of grain
- big = build
- snell = bitter
- But house or hald = Without house or home,
- thole = bear
- cranreuch cauld = hoar-frost
- thy lane = thyself alone
- a-gley = amiss

Glossary and version of poem from James Boswell & Robert Burns: Sons of Ayrshire

<http://www.stockton.edu/~kinsellt/litresources/ayr/mouse.html>

“To a Mouse” opens in the rhythm of the fast-beating heart of a small animal in panic. The strong stresses at the beginning of each word in that line establish in the reader’s body the mouse’s state and makes us receptive to the empathy that Burns has for his ‘fellow mortal’.

The power of the poem lies in its use of rhythm and its strongly empathetic voice. The mouse is addressed in homely local dialect – the language of emotion, of intimacy, and of family, rather than that of reason, science, and rationality. In ‘poor beastie’ and ‘Thy wee-bit housie too in ruin’ the diminutive lengthening of words are tones you might use to comfort a child about a broken toy.

But Burns also uses standard iambic English, the language of education, reason and formality, pausing in the second stanza to stand back a moment and reflect on the situation, until in the eleventh line of that stanza, the iambs dissipate into the steady stresses of ‘poor earth-born companion’; rhythm and meaning once more combining to create emotional emphasis.

The sympathetic voice is so compelling that by the end of the poem, we the readers too feel ‘no thy lane’ (not alone) in the difficulties in life. Not only do other humans face difficulties but so do other living creatures and the poem helps connect us to them.

Burns has been criticised as merely anthropomorphising animals in his poems and he is probably incorrect in implying foresight to the mouse in the second-to-last stanza. But the mouse is in fact more of a ‘fellow mortal’ than Burns ever knew. On a letter-by-letter basis, the genes of mice and men are 85 per cent the same, and of genes linked to diseases, 90 per cent are the same, one of the reasons for the mouse’s ubiquitous use in medical research.

And while both scientists and non-scientists in the 20th century have been particularly wary of anthropomorphising animals, there is increasing knowledge about our common genetic ancestry and the mammalian part of our brain: it is thought by some biologists that some of the emotional translations we make for animal behaviour, particularly for those of other mammals, are likely to be appropriate – the impetus for nest-making in mice and home-making in humans may come from the mammalian brains we have in common.

It is argued that human social intelligence (through the cerebral cortex that other animals don’t have) has evolved via the projection of

feelings and reactions on others in order to predict and understand them. This may be why we are so ready to see faces in inanimate objects such as trees or the moon, or to attribute retribution or reward behind the forces of nature, and it may even be the foundation of animism and other spiritual beliefs and religions.

Burns may seem to fall prey to his own biology by projecting his own feelings on to the mouse, but it may be the more accurate observation to not deny consciousness and emotion to other mammals and yet, as he does in the final stanza, still allow for that uniquely human intelligence that places the past in a context and worries about the future:

Still thou art blest, compared wi’ me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But och! I backward cast my e’e
On prospects drear!
An’ forward, tho’ I canna see,
I guess an’ fear!

Anne Tucker is a Wellington poet



Kiwi Haiku

outgoing tide
my mother’s togs
a year loser

Catherine Mair, Katikati

Richard von Sturmer will be Kiwihaiku Selector for 2007 issues of *a fine line*. Our warm appreciation to Barbara Strang of Christchurch for her careful work. Please send your kiwihaiku to Richard, 18 Crocus Place, Remuera, Auckland. Email address: rvonsturmer@yahoo.com

JANUARY DEADLINE IS DECEMBER 17