



Magazine
April 2006

New Zealand Poetry Society

Te Hunga Tito Ruri o Aotearoa

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☞ This Month's Meeting ☞

April 17th 7.30pm
Southern Cross Garden Bar
Open Mic for all.

Are Angels Okay?
Helen Heath

You could be forgiven for not knowing that 2005 was the world year of Physics. However a group of creative writers and physicists are working to change that. Physics is about to get poetic.

'Are Angels Okay?' is a collaborative project headed by Bill Manhire as Creative Director and Paul Callaghan as Science Director.

Helen Heath spoke to two of the poets involved in the project: Glenn Colquhoun and Chris Price:

HH:

The language of science has many unusual metaphors, fresh images and turns of phrase. How can poets produce work that does more than just steal tempting language?

GC:

Every topic has tempting language, there is probably no original language, we steal from everywhere – why not physics? It's about putting the needle through you and putting the needle me and tying the knot. Poems pick up your voice, language and interests, I might cheat off it but it will cheat off me. Poetry is equally as elegant as science with strong forms and language.

HH:

Poets, no matter how intelligent, cannot learn physics comprehensively over a short period of time. Does that matter and why?

CP:

Well, we poets are not in a position to match the expertise of our scientific colleagues: but the object of the exercise, as I understand it, is to bridge the gap between the world of the specialist and the world of the layperson. To reflect on some of the scientist's insights into the world and the way it works in ways the layperson, who is unlikely to read the scientific literature, might find accessible.

Poetry and science are different activities with different goals. Newton, for instance, described poetry as 'ingenious nonsense', a view with which many contemporary scientists would probably concur! Should poets despair, then, of such a project? I don't think so.

We expect different outcomes from poetic experiments to scientific ones. In poetry it's permissible to privilege subjective experiences (what the philosophers and neuroscientists like to call 'qualia', defined as 'the introspectively accessible, phenomenal aspects of our mental lives') as much as the 'facts' upon which we can all agree. Better to look to what poetry and science have in common, which is a sense of wonder at the infinite richness of the physical universe – including our human selves - and a tremendous curiosity about its processes.

This is the territory in which poet and scientist might share similar preoccupations, even as our modes of access are quite different.

I attended a couple of lectures on the electrical properties of neurons, and was given a quick introduction to Brownian motion, phase transitions, and a number of other ideas which left my head reeling. Rather than beginning with a clearly defined concept, I'm finding my way towards poems by exploring a fairly broad territory. I take the justification for this methodology from Einstein, who apparently once said, 'If we knew what we were doing, it wouldn't be called research, would it?'

HH:

Muriel Rukeyser talks about physicists providing "a language of process...language of the kind of life that is not a point-to-point movement, but a real flow in which everything is seen as deeply related to everything else." Has this project given you a language of process?

GC:

I am fascinated by equations, I find them succinct and mysterious and they hold a huge amount of information. At their core is a relationship between two, three, maybe four things. Equations are sexy. They are a code, which is one of my pleasures in poetry. Maths is a language and mathematical theorems can be translated just like any other language.

HH:

Will the average reader understand or pick up on any references to theories of physics in your work? Does it matter and why?

GC:

I am hoping people will get a sense of resonance; they don't have to understand everything. Perhaps they will find something in the rhythm, the music, or an image - and respond.

This is not 'An Explanation of Physics for my Father'; it is my response to physics. I want to preserve a sense of 'you have to work to get in'. In the past I've written democratic poetry - connecting with people who don't usually like poems but these new poems are more 'poetry poems' there is more of an air of mystery in the poem, matching up with the mysteriousness of physics. They are mostly understandable but they have a few loose ends - deliberately so, the topic lends itself to that.

Listen to the "Are Angels Okay?" lectures online at: <http://www.radionz.co.nz/nr/programmes/areangelsok>

Suggested further reading:

A Quark for Mister Mark: 101 poems about Science, eds Maurice Riordan & Jon Turney, Faber.

Helen Heath is a poet living on the Kapiti Coast

☞ From the Editor ☞

There were some excellent sessions with poets at the New Zealand Post Writers & Readers Week at the International Arts Festival in Wellington last month. Audiences packed the Embassy to hear the wonderful poetry of Robert Hass (a brief review of the session in this mag) and the generous and powerful poetry of Simon Armitage - what a treat to hear him read in his West Yorkshire accent. There were readings by our own fabulous Tusiata Avia, Bill Manhire, Ian Wedde, Brian Turner, Cilla McQueen and Hinemoana Baker. Janet Frame's second book of poetry, *Goose Bath*, selected by Bill Manhire and Frame's niece and executor, Pamela Gordon, was launched in a session called 'Beyond the Edge of the Alphabet'. Frame spoke of poetry as "the

highest form of literature because you can have no dead wood in a poem".

Trying to buy the book in a rush of enthusiasm after the session started to feel a bit like a Kirk's sale frenzy. But more fun and, in the end, just funnier. We had a lust for words pulsing through our veins as we nudged people out of the way to get our hands on the last Robert Hass book. I think most of us were after owning that thing that poetry offers - the capturing of that intangible 'something' on paper. Getting the words right. In fact, just getting the words, or, as Seamus Heaney would have it, making "a raid upon the inarticulate".

☞ Upcoming Events ☞

Te Mata Estate Literary Festival 2006

Te Mata Estate, in association with Victoria University's International Institute of Modern Letters, is gathering together its Poets Laureate for a glittering night of fine words in the newly refurbished Hawke's Bay Opera House, in Hastings.

The event will be held on Saturday, May 6, 2006. Taking part in the night will be Bill Manhire, Elizabeth Smither, Brian Turner and Jenny Bornholdt. The fifth Poet Laureate, Hone Tuwhare, is unable to make the evening, but good friend poet Glenn Colquhoun will read Hone's poetry on his behalf. These established poets will be joined by young Hawke's Bay poet, Russell Kale, who was a 2005 finalist in the Bell Gully National Schools Poetry Award.

The previous evenings at Te Mata have always combined words, wine and food and this night will do the same. The evening will start with fine finger food and Te Mata wine in the new foyer. Then the audience will repair to the Opera House to hear the poets under the stunning fresco ceiling. There will a break in the middle and at the end poets and audience will mingle in the foyer. There will be an opportunity to talk to the poets and to buy autographed copies of their books.

The price of a ticket is \$30, which includes a complimentary glass of Te Mata Wine and the finger food. There will also be a cash bar operating selling Te Mata wine and non-alcoholic drinks."

Tickets are available from Creative Hastings, phone 06 878 9447 or E-mail: artcentre@clear.net.nz or from the festival director at: kthorsen@clear.net.nz

Report from NZSA

The Poetry Now Festival - Ireland

Bill Manhire will participate in *The Poetry Now Festival* at Dun Laoghaire, Ireland by giving an evening reading, teaching a poetry Masterclass and taking part in a broadcast for RTE. Information on the festival can be

found on:
http://www.dlrcoco.ie/Arts/festival_pn_2006sched.htm
Report from NZSA

Taumarunui Writers Group poetry workshop

The Taumarunui Writers Group is holding a Poetry Workshop to be led by well-known New Zealand poet, Riemke Ensing on Saturday 6 May, 10am - 4pm. Fee: \$60.

Emphasis will be on reading and writing poetry. Poets are invited to submit work beforehand to Riemke. Venue: Wilowe Fields, 14 Ongarue Back Road, R D 6, Taumarunui. <http://www.wilowefields.co.nz> Tea/coffee provided, plus lunch for "out of towners". For further details please contact Kiri Rodwell: phone 07 896 6274 email kiri.rodwell@ihug.co.nz

Poetry Raumati

Meets the last Tuesday of the month, 7.30pm. Venue: Mahara Gallery, 20 Mahara Place, Waikanae. Open Mike. For further details, please contact Bill or Veronique Morris: phone 04 902 2384 email wazzo@paradise.net.nz

Poetry Café Porirua

Meets every second Monday of the month, 7:30pm. On Monday 10 April they're meeting at The Club Bar, Titahi Bay and will be featuring **Alison Wong & David Chan**, as well as an open mic with great prizes.

Wellington Storytellers Cafe

A regular event for all storytellers and story-lovers to share a feast for the heart and soul on the first Tuesday of every month. Located at the Art Gallery of the Wellington Community Arts Centre, 61-69 Abel Smith Street, Wellington. For \$5 you get "coffee, tea and munchies to boot!" Contact (021) 687 627 for more information or email storytellers.cafe@buzz.net.nz

Poetry Studio Wellington

Have a Go! Open Mike! All Welcome! Free Admisson! Every Sunday afternoon from 3pm to 5 pm at Bluenote (phone 04 801-5007) corner of Cuba & Vivian Streets, Wellington. For more information, contact Steve Booth: phone 04 477-0156. Email poetrystudio@paradise.net.nz to get a weekly email update.

Upfront spotlighting women poets

Upfront is back! This is our third year, and it's time for a slight change. This year there will be four Upfront

evenings on Tuesdays. The dates are as follows (put them in your diaries now):

Tuesday 28 March; 30 May; 26 September; 28 November

The evening will kick off at 7.30 with open mic readings. Bring 2 or 3 poems and put your name on the list when you come in. You may have never read your work in public before, or you may be a celebrity in your own lifetime - it doesn't matter: we want you! There will be 3 invited poets reading each evening.

On 28 March our guest readers are: Emma Neale, Carolyn McCurdie, Sue Wootton.

Where? Upstairs lounge at Cobb & Co (corner Stuart and Cumberland Streets).

Drinks are available at the ground floor bar. Gold coin donation please.

We provide a forum for women poets to read their work, but our audiences are made up of men and women who love poetry. Bring a friend. All welcome!

☞ A Warm Welcome to ... ☛

Darcelly Muyembi - Christchurch
Tobit 'Keji Adebeshin - Auckland
Brian Ward - Timaru
Anne Faulkner - Wellington
Leila Claypoole - Wellington
Anne Tucker - Wellington

Quotation of the Month

"The poem is/ A plank laid over the lion's den."

James K Baxter

☞ Other News ☛

A session with Robert Hass

Bill Manhire chaired the one-hour session with American poet Robert Hass at Writers & Readers Week in Wellington. Among other things, in his introduction Bill spoke of Hass' ability to catch the ordinary moment and make it extraordinary.

When Hass got up to speak, he approached discussion of his own work by way of mentioning the work of other poets. He quoted, by heart, from a Manhire poem, 'A Death in the Family' and spoke of how the lines *His face is gone golden with the dusk/ You would think he burned, he burned* have stayed with him. He also mentioned Seamus Heaney, Czeslaw Milosz, Issa and Walt Whitman. It seemed a graceful

acknowledgement of the debt that all writers owe to their fellow writers, current and past.

Robert Hass has published four books of poetry: *Field Guide*, *Praise*, *Human Wishes* and *Sun Under Wood*, edited poetry anthologies and translated the poetry of Nobel prize-winning Czeslaw Milosz and the haiku masters Basho, Buson and Issa. From 1995 to 1997 he was Poet Laureate of the United States.

Hass' thoughts on what makes a writer would have resonated for writers new and experienced, "You have to be willing to be awkward and stupid" and "Writers are people who can stand their first drafts". Known as a writer who explores human history, solitude, family and nature in exquisite detail, his work is both accessible and intelligent. His long poem about Bush's War was powerful, moving and angry but also quite beautiful.

You can't really rejoice and you can't really despair when taking in the content of Hass' poetry. In the end it left me feeling very much in agreement with Hass who articulated his preoccupation with "the mystery of how gorgeous and how terrible life is".

Sonnet

A man talking to his ex-wife on the phone.
He has loved her voice and listens with attention
to every modulation of its tone. Knowing
it intimately. Not knowing what he wants
from the sound of it, from the tendered civility.
He studies, out the window, the seed shapes
of the broken pods of ornamental trees.
The kind that grow in everyone's garden, that no one
but horticulturists can name. Four arched chambers
of pale green, tiny vegetal proscenium arches,
a pair of black tapering seeds bedded in each chamber.
A wish geometry, miniature, Indian or Persian,
lovers or gods in their apartments. Outside, white,
patient animals, and tangled vines, and rain.

Robert Hass

Report by Lynn Davidson

Tuwhare: a great night out at the Festival

I had the great pleasure of attending the New Zealand International Arts Festival's production of *Tuwhare*. The *Tuwhare* show and CD (released May 2005) was modelled on the previous project *Baxter*, also directed and produced by Yates for the 2000 New Zealand Festival. Hone Tuwhare's poems have been set to contemporary original music written by some of New Zealand's top musicians. It was commissioned by Toi Maori Aotearoa as part of a celebration of the finest work in contemporary Maori art. Charlotte Yates says: "I first

met Hone Tuwhare in April 2004 at his crib in Kaka Point. We talked for six hours without interruption. ... The whole time I was there he used words joyfully, as if they were exquisitely made tools or toys, constantly shuffling and nudging them into different positions to see where they landed, looking at them this way and that in the light, rolling them around in his hands. It was profoundly pleasurable to listen to. It sounded like music to me."

The musicians all approached the task of setting Tuwhare's poems to music in very different ways. From the simple but effective recitation or rap by Dean Hapeta set to a reggae backing to Goldenhorse's interpretation of "O Africa" which, although a great pop song, could only be described as treating the poem as a leaping off point. Some songs, like Hapeta's "Speak to me, brother" and McGlashan's version of "Rain" every word could be heard, had its own space and served Tuwhare's work extremely well.

Rawiri Paratene's narration had a real affinity and warmth of presentation. It was also critical in the logistics of setting up each group between songs. Paratene joked about wanted to play Tuwhare if and when a biopic is made about him, which I would love to see! Some of the narration was a bit too long, presumably to allow for the band set up. Highlights of the night included: "Spring Song" by Whirimako Black and "Rain" by Don McGlashan, both haunting and melodic.

And which is Tuwhare's favourite? According to documentary director Lala Rolls (who provided the beautiful accompanying video for the show) it is Graham Brazier's version of "Friend", of which Tuwhare said "God, what a beauty! ... Sounds like Louie Armstong!"

For more about the project and to view the short documentary, view:

http://www.maoriart.org.nz/noticeboard/general/tuwhare_cd#1

CDs are available at all leading music shops or online at: <http://store.nzmusic.com/cd/37473>

Report by Helen Heath

☞ Haiku News ☞

Congratulations

Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Haiku Contest
Congratulations to Sophia Frentz (13), Sandra Simpson, Ernest Berry and Andre Surridge. Sophia's haiku was **top youth poem**. It was painted, along with others, on a silk banner hung from cherry trees as part of an art installation. Her poem also appeared on a poster in

Vancouver's many buses. A second haiku by Sophia, as well as one by Sandra Simpson, was among the top 30 (in a field of 1,000 haiku).

stopped in traffic -
on my window
cherry blossom

Sophia Frentz

cold morning
amongst the blossoms
our pink fingers

Sandra Simpson

on her kimono
glistening in the moonlight
a scented blossom

Ernest Berry, Highly commended

his pregnant wife -
buds swell
on the cherry tree

Andre Surridge, Highly commended

Visit Vancouver Cherry Festival website to see what can be done with cherry blossom. www.vcbf.ca

Presence 27 Best-of-issue Award

Andre Surridge and Cyril Childs were 2nd equal. An honour! This award is based on readers' preferences.

autumn -
yellow circles of grass
where the circus stood

Andre Surridge

fog-filled harbour
someone somewhere drives
a nail through it

Cyril Childs

Other Awards

8th Suruga Baika Literary Festival. Sandra Simpson, Honourable Mention

Haiku Poets of Northern California Haiku Contest.

Ernest Berry, 2nd

Hawaii Educational Association Haiku Contest.

Ernest Berry, 1st in season category; 1st in humour category

3rd Annual Zen Garden Haiku Contest. Ernest Berry, 5th and 3 commended. And an extra for the winning Ernest Berry: Three of his haiku were chosen for this year's *Red Moon Anthology*, USA.

Windrift

How much ambiguity? When should a haiku become a tanka? Are puns acceptable? Always questions. Windrift's February meeting wrestled - once again - with 'what is a haiku?' The haiku in this report were chosen by Ariana Te Aomarere. They elicited a lively discussion.

showoff V8 fishtails
round corner
flash downpour

Bevan Greenslade

The haiku is unexpected and witty, and pinpoints a moment, but we hesitated. Said Bevan, "I'm allowed to be free with the haiku form because I haven't the foggiest idea what it's about". Well, not nearly as foggy as he pretends.

And what about this haiku:

Branches underline
Hiroshima Christmas snow
Heavenly fallout

Neil Whitehead (sent from Japan)

We were challenged. Work for the reader. Clever. A pun? A whole story? Branches do underline snow. But did 'branches' have wider significance, perhaps as part of a natural monument? (e.g. The big 300 year old camphor tree near Kokutaiji Temple).

On to summer haiku:

summer morning
the tui doesn't wait
for daylight

Jeanette Stace

pansy bed
the many faces
of love

Irene Ruth

Irene's haiku, along with 3 others, was published in *Valley Micropress* Jan/Feb, 2006.

Karen Butterworth introduced one-lined haiku with reference to Jan Bostok's article (see haiku page on NZPS web site). Karen gave us three rules: Three word groups or phrases which mean substantially the same when read from start to end or end to start, no punctuation and no epigrams.

ebb tide summer visitors departing

Lynn Frances

Our next Meeting/workshop:

Thursday 20 April, 1 pm, at Jeanette Stace's home, 58 Cecil Rd, Wadestown. All welcome. For further information contact:

Jeanette Stace 04 473 6227. njstace@actrix.gen.nz
Nola Borrell 04 586 7287. nolaborrell@xtra.co.nz

Competitions

April 30. 8th Hoshi-to-Mori Tanka Grand Prix.

Theme: sound. Tanka must be 5-7-5-7-7 syllables, written on one side of a postcard or back of an envelope. On the other side write your name, address, birthdate, gender and occupation. Entry: Free. Winning tanka will be sung and recited at the award ceremony in July. Money prizes. Send to Secretariat, 8th Hoshi-to-Mori International Tanka Contest, 806-3 Yamada, Toyama-chou, Yasufusa-gun, Chiba-ken 299-2203, Japan.

May 30. NZPS Haiku Contest. Two copies of each haiku on separate pages. Entry fee: \$1/haiku; for NZPS members every 5th haiku is free. Winners and selected others will be published in an anthology. Top five haiku/senryu will be awarded \$100 each. Name and other details only on entry form. Also: Junior Haiku Section.

June 15. Harold G. Henderson Awards. Up to 10 unpublished haiku. Submit each haiku on three separate 3" x 5" index cards, two with haiku only, the third with haiku and author's name, address, phone number and/or e-mail in the upper left-hand corner. Please designate as 'haiku' on each card. Entry fee: \$1 per haiku, U.S. funds only. Winning haiku will be published in *Frogpond* and on HSA web site. Prizes: \$150, \$100, \$50. Send to Henderson Haiku Contest, c/o Marlene Egger, 7527 S. Brighton Way, Salt Lake City, UT 84121-5316.
June 15. Annual Gerald Brady Memorial Awards for Senryu. Up to 10 unpublished senryu. Submit each senryu on three separate 3" x 5" index cards, two with the senryu only, the third with senryu and author's name, address, phone number and/or e-mail

in upper left-hand corner. Please designate as 'senryu' on each card. Entry fee: \$1 per senryu, US funds only. Winning haiku will be published in *Frogpond* and on HSA Web site. **Prizes: \$100, \$75, \$50.** Submit to: **Brady Senryu Contest, c/o Marlene Egger, 7527 S. Brighton Way, Salt Lake City, UT 84121.**

Publications

World Words

World Words is a new poetry collection from HeadworX, by the Wellington writers' group Writers International (NZ), the first multi-ethnic writers' group in New Zealand. Contributors include new and established poets and fiction writers: T M Schaefer (Germany), Kevin Cudby, Riemke Ensing, Mark Pirie, Ron Riddell, L E Scott, Yilma Tafere Tasew (Ethiopia), Basim Furat (Iraq), Jo Patti, Rosalie Carey, Puri Alvarez (Spain), Mavis Boyd and others. (160 pp. RRP \$34.95) Available from selected bookstores or from Addenda Limited, Auckland, email: ntaire@addenda.co.nz

a heady brew

a heady brew has been published by Poetry Café, celebrating the mix of poets who have read there over the years. A selection of works from 65 writers, it is available from Poetry Cafe for \$15. Copies may be ordered from Linzy Forbes: phone 04 237 5453 email linzy@paradise.net.nz

Read a review of *a heady brew* in this magazine.

Submissions

Landfall

Landfall contains literary fiction and essays, poetry, extracts from work in progress, commentary on New Zealand arts and culture and much more. Deadline for the November issue is 10 July. Send contributions to: The Editor, *Landfall*, Otago University Press, Box 56, Dunedin. landfall@otago.ac.nz

Banks Peninsula Anthology

Call for Submissions for an Anthology about Banks Peninsula.

Poetry and prose (fiction and non-fiction), both published and unpublished, along with appropriate extracts from archival letters and diaries and suggestions are currently being sought for an anthology celebrating the spirit of Banks Peninsula.

Coral Atkinson and David Gregory will edit the book, which is to be published by Canterbury University Press in 2007.

Please contact Coral on atkinsoc@ihug.co.nz or David on david.j.gregory@xtra.co.nz for more detailed guidelines and a submission form.
Report by NZSA

Stylus Poetry Journal

Stylus Poetry Journal, a quarterly ezine, welcomes submissions of haiku and related forms. Haiku (6 max), tanka (3 max), haibun (2 max). Send to Janice Bostok, 260 Campbell's Lane, Dungay, NSW 2428, Australia. Include a bio of approximately 40 words. Email: janbos@dodo.com.au

Writers Café UK

Writers Café UK is seeking submissions from New Zealanders of any ethnic origin to feature on a web page specifically for Kiwi writers. Stories of no more than 500 words (though links to longer pieces will be considered), poems and other frippery can be sent to: kiwiwriterscafe@yahoo.co.nz

Authors and Artists

Contributions from freelance authors, illustrators, photographers and performers are a highly valued source of material for Learning Media Te Pou Taki Korero. Many New Zealand authors have had their first work for children published in our resources and we are keen to encourage new authors and artists.

For submission guidelines view:
<http://www.learningmedia.co.nz/nz/online/authorsartists/>

Residencies

Jack Kerouac Writer-in-Residence Project

Applications are open for the Fall of 2006 through Summer of 2007 residency periods. Next year will mark the 50th anniversary of *On the Road* and Jack Kerouac living in the historic Orlando home on Clouser Avenue. Jack Kerouac lived in this home at the time *On the Road* made him a national sensation. The Kerouac House, as it has come to be known, is now a living, literary tribute to one of the great American writers of the twentieth century. Like all the other places in Kerouac's nomadic journey, he didn't live here long. But the home represents a critical juncture in Kerouac's life, when he made the transition from a 35-year-old nobody writer, to the bard of the Beat Generation. For application forms (due 30 April 2006), click on the "information" button:
<http://www.kerouacproject.org/>

Report by WCC's No 8 Wire

The AMP Scholarship Programme

Those with "courage, passion, determination and commitment" are rewarded by the AMP Scholarship Programme each year - previous recipients range from glass artists and scientists to ballet dancers and actors. Seems about time a few poets apply! Up to a dozen AMP Scholarships of up to \$5,000 are awarded annually and up to two AMP Premium Scholarships of up to \$25,000 are awarded over two years. Applications are now open for the 2006 round.
<http://www.amp.co.nz/templates/Page.aspx?id=2640>

Reviews

Three Regrets and a Hymn to Beauty, Ian Wedde, Auckland University Press, RRP \$21.99, ISBN 1 86940 349 5

When I first read the title of Ian Wedde's new book *Three Regrets and a Hymn to Beauty* I couldn't help but think of the film title *Four Weddings and a Funeral* before anxiously pushing this thought away. The title of the book is in fact a composite of the titles of the first two of the five long poems that constitute the book: 'Three Regrets' and 'A Hymn to Beauty: Days of the Year'.

'Three Regrets' begins:

This poem will mimic ordinary speech
so well, you won't tell the difference,

even though ordinary speech would never say
something like that . . .

This discursive "ordinary speech" is contained within the formality of couplets and even put on display:

. . . I can have my day

project-managed by human resource clerks,
I can put a two dollar coin in the slot machine

showing the banality of both the words and the
experience, before saying:

ordinary speech doesn't have the cunning

to trapeze around the end of a line of poetry
stranding 'or' on the other side of the hyper-
dramatic line

'I can choose to be reborn'.

As the poem rolls through the gentle hill country of enjambments and line ends, “a grey, slab-shaped mountain” appears in a way that wouldn’t happen in either ordinary speech or experience. The three parts of the poem expand out like a jazz riff not just on the nature of language but on the nature of experience, probing in different ways how the one relates to the other.

In the second poem ‘A Hymn to Beauty: Days of a Year’ each 11-line stanza says “Happy Birthday” (with two exceptions) to someone famous from the worlds of both high art and popular culture. Happy birthday is one of the last few ritualised salutations on a particular occasion left to us to make, yet it’s informal, equalising, and intimate; each day is the birthday of someone and in the popular media there is often a list of which famous person has their birthday that day. In Wedde’s poem, the beginning of each stanza is a new start in the language of everyday and of popular song or culture, but the conclusion incorporates philosophical, poetic and religious texts. At the same time, the poem circles back on issues such as space exploration, earth exploration, the science of cloning, politics – wearing it all lightly with puns like:

as Guglielmo Marconi sends a message from
England to France:
one needs to be tuned into his way of thinking

Wedde couples big things – history, philosophy, the Bible, poetic tradition – with the popular, the contemporary, the everyday, the ordinary. Like the bower bird he refers to in ‘Three Regrets’, whether it is a flower or a bit off a plastic pen, if it fits, he uses it and it becomes part of a virtuoso declaration. Reading this book you’re in the company of a witty and learned mind, engaged with every aspect of living, expressing itself in poetry that seems like a natural exhalation like breathing, so wedded are the form and line with the voice.

The other day I was listening to Michael Cunningham author of *The Hours* being interviewed on Kim Hill. In speaking of Walt Whitman he said great writers “see the profundity in the world around them”. Made me think of Ian Wedde. Maybe I was *supposed* to think simultaneously of *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

Anne Tucker has just completed a year being mentored on the New Zealand Society of Authors 2005 mentor programme. She has had poems published in *Poetry New Zealand*, *New Zealand Listener* and *Spin*.

Duck Weather, Barbara Strang, Poets Group (Christchurch), RRP \$19.95, ISBN: 0-9582191-3-3

I can’t recall when I first ‘met’ Barbara Strang’s poetry. Certainly it was a long time ago as she’s been an

increasingly important part of the small magazine and haiku scenes in this country for the last ten to fifteen years.

The surprise about *Duck Weather* is not the quality of the poetry then, but the number of (especially early) poems left out of it. That’s to be commended I guess. A poet of such high standards that only the best of the best is allowed republication, and anything — even if it’s exceptional — is omitted if it doesn’t precisely fit the overall shape of the book. To be commended, but . . . I feel uneasy that we’re not shown *more* of Barbara Strang here, despite the book’s 84 pages. Perhaps it’s a reflection of the state of affairs in Christchurch poetry at present. It’s so difficult to get a book published - the lack of proximity to the major sources of publicity - that when a debut volume is eventually achieved we’re likely to be dealing with a developed, mature practitioner, rather than a poet-in-progress *a la* the annual IIML protégées.

Such a poet has their own voice or voices. This is Strang’s most characteristic: *Once, on a back porch / at Ohai, I caught / a small brown creature // and held it in my cupped hand. // I always thought whistling frogs / were native—they fitted in (from ‘Settler Culture’.)*

This voice comprises a number of interacting elements. Firstly, the personalised tensions between the sentences and the short lines and verses (the more stable structures over which the sentences are thrown — to paraphrase Robert Frost). Secondly, a craft-orientated use of wit/intelligence. Not a display of cleverness, but a deft manipulation of concepts, expectations and attitudes — the involvement of readers in that way. Specifically, here, the degree of congruence between *held it in my cupped hand* and the later *fitted in*, and the purposeful delay in implying the identity of (rather than directly identifying) the *small brown creature*. Thirdly, particularity or specificity. Eg, *at Ohai*, or the earlier *Nichol St* (Invercargill). Highlighting the last two especially, the poem ends in ironically controlled, exaggerated detail:

Now I find that in 1875
Mr W. Perkins shipped them
from Tasmania in a bottle

and liberated them into a
drain at Alexandra St, Greymouth.

They spread along the
south bank, Grey River—
it took longer to reach the other side.

It takes an intuitive, even knowing poet to identify two of her most characteristic devices and use one to push the other that bridge too far/not too far — to the edge of self-

parody. And all this at a comfortable pace, medium volume and with crystalline clarity of sound and semantics.

Other reactions? Bill Manhire's comment on the back cover re Strang belonging to a possible "South Island School" seems to me both too broad (in terms of locality) and too narrow (in terms of identity) to be critically useful. In contrast, James Norcliffe's commendation sums it up nicely: *A significant new voice in New Zealand poetry.*

John O'Connor's seventh book of poetry, Ha Peke Tuna / A Sack of Eels, will be published by Hallard later this year.

Winterless North, Rosalie Carey, 2004, RRP \$10.00 ISBN: 0-476-01297-X

Winterless North is divided into sections as follows: Up North/ Protests Poems/ Gentle Poems/ Serious Poems / And silly. "Basically speaks for itself" reads the introduction, as though Rosalie Carey wants us to feel comfortable with the apparent simplicity of her work and these divisions. But then, it is never that easy with poetry is it? Inevitably, Carey's section titles only serve to emphasise those poems that cross boundaries or fail to sit calmly in their assigned categories. A poem that celebrates the 'gentle' or the personal becomes at once a counterpoint to a poem of 'protest' – reminding any reader that protest is what we engage in when the things we celebrate come under threat. Often it is Carey's 'gentler' poems that set heavier, finer notes than those she declares to be loaded.

I recently had an argument with a person over what she saw as the particularly 'silly' nature of New Zealand poetry; in everything she found an empty domesticity, a lack of weight, an indulgent simplicity; where she wanted depth and serious politics I argued for the validity of poems about scarves and kitchens – I think because declining pretence, and writing the 'domestic sensibility' has a resonance about it that reflects the reality of the New Zealand lifestyle. And it is when she is most honest, most connected to real experience, as in poems like 'The River' (*There's a lion down there / my grandmother said / fearful of the unfenced bank ... we swam happily till Alison / sat on an eel – scary / as imaginary lions*) that Carey's voice emerges.

She delights in the simple observation of nature: *I run from window to window/ seeking elusive gems.* The same personal excitement fuels her poems of protest, however the more generalised her politics, the more she struggles to find her voice. Only when she introduces a personal anxiety or risk do these protest poems begin to feel their way to originality. In 'Death in Life' Carey bravely confronts her fear of the time when *others must decide / what I shall eat and drink – choose my clothes and my books / (if I'm still able to read)*, a fear that

corresponds with the opposing joy she takes in her lucid engagement with life and landscape.

Carey's poems don't demand an intense reading; I can imagine them read aloud in small town pubs. Light and silly (and some *are* silly: *An adventurer from Nicaragua/ brought home for his wife, a pet jaguar...*) they suggest that the act of writing and enjoying poetry extends beyond the boundaries of intensity and intellectualism imposed by some readers. If Carey can surrender her desire to fill up the category of 'serious poems,' and begin to write more with a personality that is attentive to detail – she might begin to plant the excitement of imaginary tigers in every river, and in doing so, prove the legitimacy of poems gentle and silly.

Fiona Clark is a Wellington writer. She has just completed the Iowa Poetry workshop at the IIML, Victoria University

Vibrant with words – The letters of Ursula Bethell.

Edited by Peter Whiteford.

Victoria University Press, 2005. RRP \$49-95

Call me a nosey parker but I love reading other people's mail, and *Vibrant with words – The letters of Ursula Bethell*, edited by Peter Whiteford, fulfilled my bad letter reading habits on every score. There is everything here – from descriptions of an English India ("...be careful to put on Topees before getting out of the train."), to letters to the N.Z. famous (Charles Brasch, Toss Woollaston, Eric McCormick, Eileen Duggan, etc), not to mention the tragic and courageous correspondence at the very end of Ursula's life when she was in great pain, dying of cancer of the jaw. ("All I want to look at now is my crucifix & the flowers friends bring & the bare trees against the changing sky...")

Mary Ursula Bethell, often signing off as 'Ursie' in her younger days, lived 1874 – 1945, and her reputation as a poet was small at first, but has been gathering momentum and importance as the years have gone by.

Her father, Richard Bethell, emigrated to New Zealand in 1852. Born in England during a sojourn there by her parents, Ursula spent her childhood in New Zealand, before being sent to attend schools in Oxford in the U.K. and Geneva. She spent the years between 1885 – 1908 in the U.K. and Europe, and after returning to New Zealand she lived at 'Rise Cottage' – 10 Westenra Terrace in the Cashmere Hills in Christchurch – until 1934, when she moved from there after the death of her great friend and companion who also lived at Rise Cottage, Effie Pollen.

At Rise Cottage she kept a beautiful garden (Toss Woollaston worked in the garden during his younger years) which inspired her to begin writing

poetry and at fifty-five years of age her first collection, *From a Garden in the Antipodes*, was published under a pen name. Much of her landscape verse, which reflects an intense spirituality for the land and the pleasures of the natural world, feels totally modern even today.

If you are already a fan of Mary Ursula's you will lust after possession of this book, otherwise it is a fascinating introduction to her work and life, philosophies, and doubts and joys.

She was a devoutly religious woman, but through her letters you receive a great sense of her intelligence and wit, although she had a tongue like a lash if her friends tried to go against any advice that she wholeheartedly believed was good for them. ("I am going to use plain language because I think you need it. It would be no kindness to slur over matters with a girl who is in danger of making a very serious mistake...")

The collection is a heavy one, not easily carried with you on a bus or train ride, as it is almost 400 pages. The cover shows a 'poetic' photo of the younger Ursula wearing a lace collar with her hair pinned up, showing off her pointy, sometimes interfering nose in profile.

The inside features a useful chronology of her life, annotations, some photos, a very comprehensive bibliography, and even an index of biblical references; besides also containing really good sized print and a most satisfactory arrangement of the letters.

Ursula was a prolific letter writer, her letters were obviously an important means of communication with those she held dear, and Peter Whiteford has made a great selection that gives us a good taste of the many facets of her complex personality.

Roughly two thirds of the letters in the collection were written after Effie Pollen's death on 8th November, 1934. It is obvious from what Ursula wrote that she loved Effie deeply. They had lived together for thirty years as friends and companions – who knows what their relationship may have been if they had been alive today, removed from the social constraints of that period. She called Effie her "Little Raven" and wrote to Monte Holcroft that she felt she had "even lost God" after Effie's sudden death.

This published correspondence is an important insight for readers of the woman and the poet, offering all her complexities and problems, loves and hates, and strong emotions. We know from reading Ursula's letters that she had high ideals and high expectations of everyone, but I think that this published selection of her letters by Peter Whiteford would have met with her approval. This one is worth owning.

Vivienne Plumb is a poet, playwright and fiction writer. She is currently writer in residence at Massey University.

Nefarious – poems and parables, Vivienne Plumb, HeadWorx, RRP \$19.95

In bygone days, when life was nasty, brutish and short, death had a tendency of wonderfully focussing the minds of writers. Like the author of the Middle English poem *When the Turf is Thy Tower* who doesn't pull any punches: all the care we lavish on our looks and our two storey pads is destined for one thing only – a horizontal hole in the ground.

To modern Western sensibilities this is all a bit too macabre. Mortality is now controlled: the dearly beloved is viewed in a funeral home, embalming has taken care of the smell of a rotting carcass and a casket replaces the ugly coffin.

So it was with much interest that I read Plumb's collection *Nefarious* dedicated to her son William who died in 2002. Although Plumb says she wasn't consciously writing about death, a subconscious rumination on life-in-death and death-in-life seeps through the first and last sections of the collection. Like the *Tower* author she posits – but sotto voce – two realities.

Take, for example, the title poem. An innocent excursion to a picturesque fly-fishing spot is for an American visitor just that. For his New Zealand companion, however, it is the scene of the crime – from the man sitting in the back seat of a red Cortina *eating crackers* (or is it *hiding the evidence?*) to the narrator sitting on *dry rocks the colour of bones* and *swatting the midges* as she writes. Meanwhile the innocent visitor wanders off upstream in search of a good spot unaware that he has become *an unidentified lone angler in/the distance./A little model figurine* ripe for the plucking.

Similarly, in *The Shelter*, life is delicately balanced. During the duck-shooting season a man and a woman wander through *narrow/ necked birch trees* and he shows her how to tie *the hangman's knot*. Later they lunch at a pub and he busies himself with constructing a *precarious/ miniature shelter/ on the surface of our slatted table*.

In *The Some Unusual Subfossil Bird Remains* the weight of all the living presses down on the dead and dying. One response is to pull up the drawbridge and sit the siege out. I have passed by Dry Riser Inlet signs on buildings countless times without realising their significance: that water is pumped up them only in the event of an emergency. Now I can't pass by without thinking of Plumb's poem of the same name where ritual, habitual behaviour (like fire drills) is used to keep emotions safely at bay.

Yet these poems are far from depressing. Plumb has a light touch. Through the mapping of sensory details, of everyday minutiae, we are given surprising and often funny ways of looking at things.

In the middle sections of the book – *The Alternative Plan* and *How to Read Rain* – are a series of teasing prose poems, some set in a recognisably rural New Zealand landscape. Mrs Lucy Clancy ponders out loud the tricky question of drawing up a friendship contract with a cow to which the cow categorically answers no as it cannot hold a pen (*The Brown Cow*).

Human and other animals slide ineluctably past each other. Elaine, flying on a bird, is brought unceremoniously down to earth by her mother standing by the goal posts wearing an ivory satin church suit and telling her ‘how many times have I told you not to accept lifts from strange birds.’ Trevor, the primate keeper, frustrated by the condescending attitudes of humans to other primates, finally reacts and is forced to take an early vacation.

My only real quibble with the book is the cover. What does a (mostly) white cow with three-fingered hooves have to do with *Nefarious*? Rather confusingly, it seems to refer to *The Brown Cow* who has eschewed writing altogether and is most unlikely to want to be digitalised! However, this is only a small quibble. *Nefarious* more than demonstrates Plumb’s considerable ability to plumb the depths, as it were, and bring its treasures to the surface.

Gillian Cameron is a past president of the NZPS and a founding trustee of the Randell Cottage Writers Trust. Last year she completed the Creative Non-Fiction course at the IIML

Flying Against the Arrow, Jan FitzGerald, Wolfedale Publishing, 2005, \$24.95, ISBN 0-473-10341-9

Flicking through this volume, it was the quiet warmth of the lines that drew me in, closer and closer to their hearth. Jan FitzGerald is closely attuned to the natural world and its elements. These poems have a strongly seasonal flavour, reflecting the ebb and flow of life. This is most obvious with poems entitled ‘Beginning of a Summer’, ‘Winter Blues’, and ‘Spring’, but is, nevertheless, a theme present throughout this collection.

I was also struck by her love poems, whose lilting joy is expressed with a light, tender touch. This touch manifests in the sensual *I wake / to the texture & weave / of you* (‘Warmth’) and in the images she evokes of her physical environment, which set the scene for what follows: *In a season / when trees play Strip Jack Naked / to the last card* (‘Flying against the Arrow’) and *when night shifts / in her feathers* (‘Against the Day’). The language is pared back, almost spare, and precise. It aims for, and finds, the essence of the situation. The poems are largely unencumbered by punctuation, allowing the taste of each word to linger. This makes for very pleasurable reading, even though the subject matter of some of the poems is anything but. Where this is the case, as in ‘Agent Orange is

not for Drinking’, ‘Anzac Day (Tauranga)’ and ‘Palliative Cares’, the poems neither preach nor rage, but speak quietly and carefully, invoking sadness and empathy rather than discomfort.

The lines *There’s healing / in the closeness of wood* (‘Wood’) not only illustrate how her engagement with the natural world gives rise to powerfully tactile and sensual poems, they also hint at another of the themes of this collection: healing. This theme encompasses healing gleaned, I imagine, from her work in hospitals, as well as her own healing from the grief at the deaths of her parents and husband. These are not what I would call uplifting, but are, nevertheless, as gentle and tender as her love poems. The poem ‘Dying Woman’, for instance, begins *Bend over me, moon / like a lover* and ends with *kiss me....* What is perhaps a deep and underlying resilience is laid bare in ‘Wolf Woman’ (*I will stand / in the face of fire / and roll in its ashes*).

This is a volume that I will return to again and again – particularly on wind-swept, rainy days, when the elements are at their most visible around me and I delight in savouring the *clasp of evening / lick of rain* (‘Fireside’).

Philippa Tucker lives in the Wairarapa. She recently participated in the poetry stream of IIML’s summer course, the Iowa Workshop.

Daymoon by Robin Fry, Headworx, ISBN 0-476-10129-7, RRP. \$24.99

Robin Fry and fellow poet Harry Ricketts packed out Unity books on the night of their joint book launch last year. Poet Stephanie de Montalk did the honours, and while I can’t remember exactly what she said about Robin’s poems, I certainly remember her excitement. I’d never heard of Robin Fry, but that night I stood in a queue and bought her book.

What made me do it was the twinkle in Robin’s eye as she read the poem about anxiously watching her grandson climb a tree and whether she could take *the full weight/of four years falling*. There was the same twinkle when she read a rather funny poem about giraffes which notes that one of them is *unaware that she resembles/ a retired geography teacher /in the antipodes*. Then, either she read, or I opened the book to, ‘That Day’ which is about someone dying whom I take to be Fry’s mother. Here the no-nonsense person is still evident but the humour is replaced by a sense of the disturbing and absurd that points to a deeper vein, *A cockroach ran/ like a dodgem car/about people’s feet*. This poem works especially well for what it doesn’t say – the raggedness inside the poem and at its end had me re-reading it immediately.

Not all Fry’s poems are like that, though. Some, it seems to me, are far too tidy. In ‘At the border’, *Customs stop her at the border/order her to unpack/ her*

heart, and I really wished she'd left the heart out of it. It was clear when the woman began unpacking her *home, her first friend/ceanothus* that this was no ordinary bag. Sometimes the tidiness extends to images or descriptions of place which involve wind and rain and, dare I say it, moons. I like her work best when we step out thrillingly from under the plum tree in the poet's Petone garden without knowing where we're going.

...batten down
watch the ground
for surprises springing
or earth tremor.

Petone

Unexpected things happen in poems like that, a man's *face bursts into bloom*, a bird *swallows the garden whole*, and a chicken neck bought for the cat has a head on it. There are odd-ball characters, too, like the bushwoman (based on an Eileen Duggan poem) that develop Fry's gift for the tragi-comic: *They always come to visit when it's rained an' the house/ stinks of old cat's piss*. And we glimpse a dark border of weather and war, old age and death, fairy tale witches and absent lovers.

Throughout the collection, Fry's poems are accessible to the reader. They are usually based around a single image or event and then woven with a narrative that gives a way into the poem and lets you move around inside. Fry's world, though, is not as cosy as it seems. The title, *Daymoon*, refers to the unsettling and intriguing effect of the moon you catch sight of in the daytime, which is an image Robin Fry returns to and certainly describes her writing at its best.

Mary McCullum is a journalist and poet who last year completed Victoria University's Creative Writing MA with a novel, *The Blue*.

a heady brew, poems from Poirirua's Poetry Café,
Inkweed, 2005
ISBN 0-9582346-6-3

a heady brew brims with poems from Porirua's Poetry Café, held the 2nd Monday of each month at the CRUZ Sports Bar and Café. One expects certain somethings from pub poetry. In the half-dark, with a pint of Lion Red at the left elbow, ones ears perk up at the feral rather than mannered, strident rather than subtle . . . more Baxter than Manhire. The book promises a heady brew, so I approached it with certain expectations: politics, death, sex, transgressions, quality enough not to turn me off my beer, but enough slips in tone to assure me of its homemade, egalitarian nature.

The mix of poets is vibrantly multicultural and the voices consistently look out at the wider world or, in Robin

Fry's 'On The Wing', fly over it in the poem and look down at London, Berlin, *The dessert glare/of Karachi*. Basim Furat, an Iraqi poet living in exile in Wellington, expresses the limbo state of the refugee in 'my rank: defeated': *For my mother: the chore of waiting/ until waiting itself became skilled at waiting*. Closer to home, Glen Colquhoun, in Koha, tells of his journey as a pakeha man into Maori culture, eating kina and rotten corn and finishing with the sly reversal, *I think I have been colonised*.

The big-name poets give the book a quality seal-of-approval: Hone Tuwhare, Alastair Te Ariki Campbell, Fleur Adcock. Adcock tells of her mother's death from her *hot London study,/ trying to get my voice to work/as Marilyn held the telephone/over your dead face*.

Tuwhare slips into sensuous mode with 'Yes': *it cheers me/when you move with/ purpose: animal*. But it's the well-known but not yet super-famous poets who give the book its strength. Lynn Davidson's 'how to eat cape gooseberries', *sun-warmed/ and one by one/ stay close/ to where you found them* is a standout. At a recent Jenny Bornholdt reading, Damien Wilkins commented on how important first lines are. I'm more of a last line girl myself and Davidson nails the poem with *they're fruit and should be/ taken lightly*. There's another great ending in Lynda Chanwai-Earle's poem 'Gasp', about the Russian seaman who went down with the Mikhail Lementov in 1986: *Always loved Svetlana in that aqua dress*.

So there's the sex, death, politics, transgressions enough to keep the reader alert, and quality. This book does live up to its promise of being a heady brew.

Johanna Aitchison is a Wellington poet. She has been published in *Sport*, *Landfall*, *Jaam* and *Turbine* and published a collection of poetry, *Oh my God, I'm Flying*, in 1999 She is working on her second collection, *A Long Girl Ago*.

🔗 Websites 🏠

The Red Room Company

Yes, they're Australians, but this website is well worth checking out to check an eye on what's happening poetry-wise over the other side of the ditch. The Red Room Company is a non-profit organisation which "aims to create, produce and distribute poetry, by new and emerging Australian writers, to the public, in unusual ways". And judging by their recent campaigns, you'd have to say they're certainly achieving this goal! Selected airport and cinema toilet doors are now going to be plastered with submitted new Australian poems as part of an initiative that replaces the usual annoying advertising in those places that are "both very public, and

uniquely private”. Have a look at the site for a full list of the poems, artwork and locations...
<http://www.redroomorganisation.org/>

Some other good sites:
www.vuw.ac.nz/modernletters/bnzp
www.bbc.co.uk/cult/hitchhikers/vogonpoetry
www.cordite.org.au/
www.softblow.com/

Out & About

Bay of Plenty - “Exchanges”: an event for the Tauranga Arts Festival

On Labour Weekend the *artStudio* in Mount Maunganui held an exhibition in conjunction with the Tauranga Arts Festival that involved five artists and five poets: five poems were written in response to five artworks and five artworks were painted in response to five poems. Gerald Gibbard co-ordinated the paintings and their display in the gallery, whilst Owen Bullock (editor of *Bravado*, *Spin* and *Kokako*) co-ordinated the pairing of artists and poets: Elizabeth Berrigan/Owen Bullock, Bev Griffiths/Dave Robertson, Timo Rannali/Marcel Currin, Richard Smith/Sandra Simpson, Sharen Watson/Catherine Mair. The poets read their poems beside the artworks at *artStudio* over the weekend, with the exhibition running for a further fortnight.

The six poets clearly worked well with their respective artistic partners and gave thoughtful readings. The six voices were distinct and identifiable, and it was clear to see that their poems had been motivated by the artworks, and that the artists had conveyed creatively the poets’ words in their responding works. Visitors to the gallery had an open view of the artworks with the poems beautifully printed and placed beside the paintings. Reading the poems beside the paintings made one question the aesthetics of “what is a poem”, and how each artist translated the poem onto canvas was compelling viewing. It was interesting to see what motivated the poetry and just as fascinating to see how the artists had responded.

In “Coromandel Cacti” Bev Griffiths presented a complex and vibrant picture; several of Dave Robertson’s accompanying haiku picked out images from the painting, here are just two:

painting	behind
glasses	
the crowd scene	safe to
watch	
bodies brush against each other	the photo being
taken	

Elizabeth Berrigan’s painting “walk through flowers” was a delicate, imaginative painting in response to Owen’s poem of the same name. Timo Ranalli’s “Finally, into the Promised Land” explored a visit to his native Finland with a multitude of images that were both stimulating and intelligent. Marcel Currin’s response was a poem entitled “Angels play jazz”; the diversity of his talent showcased in his intense compact lines. The landscape by Richard Smith, called “Coast Road”, was responded to with Sandra Simpson’s poem by the same title. Sandra used language economically and creatively to challenge norms and comfort zones in her poem “Icebergs”, which Richard responded to with a seascape. Sandra’s poem is quoted in full:

ICEBERGS
(for Harriet)

She lives largely below deck,
but during the voyage her hair
loosens and she absorbs the motion
of a new tide. The moon is guinea-bright,
the sails spiked with scents she is
powerless to describe

this keening in her blood, the deep
terror that are icebergs, nothing
diverts from her true course

south

beside the slow churning river, her heart
flutters, a green parakeet. She straightens
her apron

the land holds back
her touch foreign
but they learn to relax
in each other’s company

here be an orchard, there a whare
the long whistle of a washing line
dragons on the horizon.

Sharen Watson’s painting “Singing”, witty and controlled, was responded to by Catherine Mair’s poem “singing” – Catherine has a confident control over the craft of poetry and submitted a Malayan poetry form, the pantoum, in response. The images in Sharen’s second painting, “Coromandel”, were appealing and Catherine’s poem, also called “coromandel”, stood up well to repeated readings.

The exhibition showed passion and craft. Intensity, energy, insight, surprise. Wit and grit. Stimulating language and ideas. It will be interesting to watch the future of these artists and poets to see where they journey on the continuum between inspiration and energy.

Report by Patricia Prime

Lower Hutt - 2006 Poets Pub kicks off with laughter

Robin Fry kicked off the 2006 season of Poets Pub at the Angus Inn on Monday 13th February. She shared a rich tapestry of language, topics, rhythm and rhyme, including these profound insights from 'A journey of giraffes', '...a moving file / with no attachment to place / ...they are the journey.' Robin also read 'Ready and waiting' a poem succinct in its imagery of the domestic moments born in the hours between the set-up and commencement of, a party. Later we heard of the futile benefits of an 'Eating Colour' diet, '...the local council built a motorway / straight through my house,' the speaker, still alive at 120, says.

Laughter continued in the 'open mic' session when Graham Wolfe tickled our funny bones with his original poem about possums; performed Sam Hunt style, bar the waving right arm. Another regular Mary McCabe read her satirical work on receiving a letter from a Real Estate Agent, and Stephen Douglas, the convenor, touched us with his philosophical thoughts in 'Temporary Place'. 'I hear my soul warming to this spot / ...it is a temporary place / and there is no primary state for being here.'

This year Poets Pub desires to continue harvesting its warm and inviting atmosphere. It's a place to grow and encourage poets from all levels, ages and walks of life. It's a 'free entry' community sponsored poetry reading happening on the first Monday of each month from 7.15pm at the Angus Inn, Murphy's Bar (use entrance Waterloo Road) Lower Hutt.

For more information contact the convenor Stephen Douglas (Ph: 04 5699904, email DouglasSR@xtra.co.nz), or Hutt Valley Community Arts (Ph: 04 5683488, email office@hvca.org.nz) "We like new faces and new poems," Stephen says, "so come along to Poets Pub; share your poetry and meet other writers."

Report by Kyla-Jayne Rajah

☞ Competitions ☞

NZ Poetry Society International Poetry Competition

Here we are again, well into another international competition. We have both new judges and some old friends in our line-up this year, and they've assured me

they're looking forward to the job. Our prize pool is as good as ever, and for next year's anthology we have already attracted the interest of Margaret Vos, who did a splendid job of selecting 2005's inclusions. Our willing judges are:

Open: Chris Orsman (Wellington)

Open Junior: Anna Jackson (Wellington)

Haiku: Cyril Childs (Dunedin)

Junior Haiku: Catherine Mair (Kati Kati)

The closing date for 2006 is 30th May – this later closing date proved highly successful for the junior entries in 2005, and increased the numbers of entries significantly. We look forward to further growth in numbers in 2006.

As always, the details and entry forms can be found on our web site: www.poetrysociety.org.nz in case you lose the forms included in the first newsletter for the year.

Contrary to the apparent grumbles in my Front Page Essay about the running of the 2005 Competition, I enjoyed the process enormously last year. I got to read a lot of great poetry, and read every entry until the last week, when the volume became too great for me to manage in the time available. I look forward to reading poems from familiar names, as well as being the first to enjoy emerging poets daring to share their work. It's a great privilege to do this work. Write on!

Laurice Gilbert

2006 Competition Secretary

7th Annual Tupelo Press Poetry Contest for First Books of Poetry

Entries are currently open to submit a previously unpublished, full-length poetry manuscript between 48-80 pages. This is the first time this competition has been open to non-American citizens. Judge's Prize: \$3,000. Entries (inc \$25 fee) must be postmarked between January 1 and April 15, 2006. For more details, check out: <http://www.tupelopress.org>

Landfall Essay Competition

The purpose of the competition remains as it was at the outset: to encourage New Zealand writers to think aloud about New Zealand culture, and to revive and sustain the tradition of vivid, contentious and creative essay writing in this country. Perhaps its time for the prize to go to a piece highlighting the strength of poetry in New Zealand at present? The winner receives a prize of \$2500 and a year's subscription to Landfall. Entries will be accepted from 1 May 2006, until 5pm, 16 June 2006.

The Margaret Reid Prize for Traditional Verse

Most genres accepted, i.e. “any that has been popular for at least 50 years”. Cash prizes total \$3,500. Entry fees are US\$6 for every 25 lines (or part thereof). No restrictions on previous publication, prize-winners from other contests welcome. Deadline: 30 June 2006. For more information: <http://poetrycontests.exactpages.com> (source- NZSA)

The 4th Annual Tom Howard Poetry Contest

A “premier literary competition for original creative writing in poetry or verse in any style and on any theme”. Cash prizes total \$3,500. Entry fees are US\$6 for every 25 lines (or part thereof). No restrictions on previous publication, prize-winners from other contests welcome. Deadline: 30 September 2006. <http://tomhowardpoetry.bravepages.com> (source- NZSA)

12th Atlanta Review International poetry competition

Grand prize: \$2,006, plus many other awards up for grabs. Poems must not have been published in a nationally-distributed print publication. Entry fee: \$5 for the first poem, \$3 for each additional. Entries must be postmarked by 12 May 2006. Have a look at the website for further details: <http://www.atlantareview.com/win.htm>
Report from NZSA

3rd ZEBRA Poetry Film Award

The ZEBRA Poetry Film Award offers a platform for a dynamic poetic genre within the short film, developing into an independent art form somewhere between literature, film and new media, giving filmmakers and poets from around the world the opportunity to exchange ideas and define positions. From 11 to 14 October 2006 an international jury will decide the winner of the 3rd ZEBRA Poetry Film Award, whose total prize money amounts to 10,000 euros. The deadline for receiving entries is 15 June 2006. The registration form and rules of entry are at: <http://www.zebra-award.org>

‘The Plant Room’ by Anna Smaill
From *The Violinist in Spring* (Victoria University Press, 2005)

Daily to work, I am treadled down,
lowered in the dumb waiter
until the shadow is cast
that cuts the world in half,
so we can pretend to keep them separate.

Light. Dark. Daily it works.
I am resigned to this assignment.
It is usual, an encampment
on the foursquare concrete plain
with nothing but the machine for company.

It is stubbornly silent.
Despite the beat and whirl of gadgets,
the clamour of the cooling,
the pressure it exerts on air,
it does not indulge in language.

Yet it demands so much.
At some points in the anatomy
it is cold to touch, beaded wet.
At others, it’s breath
will break your skin with heat.

I tend to the machine, pander to its ways,
bathe it, flick the brush
that frees its back from dust.
Without my aid, it might be lonely.
I am reflected in its eye.

We are of the same colour – though
its girth is of a solid seamless blue
that shines, and I unclot this overall
each day – we may have kinship.
The superiority of the machine is this:

at its heart it is no more complex.
Intensities are graded right along the frame,
at apexes and corners no arrest,
just the input output of its work.
It is such an enviable efficiency.

Against it I furnish a shameful store,
tilting at the effort, my skin too bare.
And inside, at particular parts,
the glare of entropy
clumped in brain and heart.

In hope I slip my hand behind the meter,
I try to learn the secret of its steady tick.

Every now and again, when I was editing *Landfall*, I'd come across a piece of work by a new writer in another magazine that would make me think, now *here's* something. This reaction was usually accompanied by a stab of envy that the work had gone to the opposition, not to me. I'd given up *Landfall* by the time Anna Smaill's first poems appeared in *Sport*, but I can still remember that moment of recognition: now *here's something*.

I think the main thing that struck me then was the obvious care for the sonic qualities of the work. You have to go back to Andrew Johnston's poems to find a similarly acute ear for the melody and rhythm of the vowels and consonants. Not surprising, then, that Johnston has selected Smaill's 'Little Song' for his edition of *Best New Zealand Poems 2005*

(www.vuw.ac.nz/modernletters/bnzp): it's a poem in which the sound of the words seems to run a few steps ahead of meaning, pulling it onward like an eager child, in the manner of some of Johnston's own recent work.

Smaill is a terrific observer of the botanical world: there are small but perfectly formed poems in *The Violinist in Spring* that paint the mushroom and the fig with the luscious accuracy of the best 19th century specimen artists. Sometimes the poems feel as though they're painted on bone china – good for holding delicate morsels, but you wouldn't use them for steak and chips, or risk putting them in the dishwasher. 'The Plant Room' offers a tougher taxonomy, though, one that feels anchored as strongly in the world observed by the poet as the one her language creates.

Listen to the music of this poem. *Daily to work, I am treadled down* with its inverted syntax, calls to mind (while slipping in an extra syllable) John Donne's *Batter my heart, three-personed God*. Listen to the full (*much, touch; parts, heart*) and slant-rhymes (*wet, breath; brush, dust, colour*) that trickle through the stanzas; the way the vowels and consonants trip along in a line such as *In hope I slip my hand behind the meter*. Note the sly pun that sees the poet learning her craft in that final couplet, the secret of the meter/metre's *steady tick*, and the way it sends you back to reconsider the third stanza, in which the machine merely *exerts pressure on air*, but *does not 'indulge in language*.

Anyone who's read Michael Cunningham's recent book *Specimen Days* will experience a sense of recognition with 'The Plant Room': the speaker's relationship with the machine resembles that of the boy Lucas, who comes to believe that the machines he tends have a message for him. But our narrator is also a Persephone, lowered daily into a dark and wordless underworld where she must tend the machine-god like a concubine. Like the myth, the poem sets the entropy of the organic world against the *enviable* efficiency of the immortals. In it, we see the overalled apprentice practising her craft. But the poem also understands that

craft is both essential and insufficient for a world that has both brains *and* heart.

Chris Price is a Wellington poet and tutor at the IIML.

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roadside stand
the last lilies
before sunset

Sandra Simpson, Tauranga

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