

## **A very fond farewell**

*Who wants to live only one boring little single life? Reading allows you to live hundreds of lives.*

Lydia Wevers

It is with much sadness that Aratoi reports the death of long-serving Board member Lydia Wevers.

Amongst many other commitments, Lydia had a long list of academic achievements, publications and made major contributions to New Zealand education and community services.

A self-described compulsive reader, Lydia was an accomplished scholar specialising in New Zealand and Australian literature and was a leading literary historian and critic. She taught at universities in Europe, Britain, Australia and most recently Victoria University Wellington.

Among her many roles, the Emeritus Professor served time as the Director of the Stout Research Centre at Victoria University, Chair of the National Library Trustees, Chair of the Guardians of the Turnbull Library, Vice President of the New Zealand Book Council, as a member of the Arts Foundation Laureate Awards and the Arts Board of Creative New Zealand. Aratoi was privileged to have Lydia as a member of its Board of Trustees for the past eight years.

In the 2006 Queens Birthday Honours, Lydia was awarded the Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to literature. In 2014 the Royal Society awarded her the Pou Aronui Award for her dedication to promoting New Zealand studies, literature, and art and in 2017 she was made a Royal Society Te Apārangi *150 women in 150 words* laureate, celebrating women's contributions to expanding knowledge in New Zealand.

In 1953, as a three-year old, Lydia and her family immigrated to New Zealand from Hengelo, a small town in the Netherlands. The family settled in Masterton where her Architect father, Mattheus Wevers quickly made a name for himself and is attributed with bringing modernism to the Wairarapa. From a young age, Lydia was a ferocious reader - so much so that Masterton's public library brought in a special rule that allowed her to borrow 12 books instead of the usual two.

Lydia is well known for her contribution to many writers and readers festivals over the years. She has edited and written many anthologies and books on literary topics, including *Traveling to New Zealand: an Oxford anthology*, *Country of Writing: Travel Writing and New Zealand*, *Reading on the Farm: Victorian Fiction and the Colonial World*. More recently she edited Aratoi's publication *50/Fifty: 50 years of Aratoi* (2019).

In her time on the Aratoi Board, Lydia made a massive contribution. Her considered and wise counsel, her no-nonsense approach, her wit, and her wicked sense of humour were greatly appreciated.

We have been so blessed to have had the opportunity to know and work with her. We will cherish the memories of her wisdom and intellect, her considered opinion and generosity of spirit. The pleasure of her company will be sorely missed by everyone who knew her, and particularly by Aratoi, which has lost a board member with a deep understanding of the importance and meaning of such institutions.

The Aratoi Board and staff will miss her presence dearly. Our thoughts and sympathy are with Lydia's family.

When author Janet Frame died in 2004, Tom Scott drew a cartoon with an angel saying, 'The writer Janet Frame is at the gates, Lord...' and God responds 'Set a place for another angel at my table...' We know another place will be set.



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