



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MODERN LETTERS

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

Newsletter – 9 October 2009

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This is the 147th in a series of occasional newsletters from the Victoria University centre of the International Institute of Modern Letters. For more information about any of the items, please email modernletters@vuw.ac.nz.

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1. Leigh Davis (1955-2009)

The New Zealand poet and merchant banker Leigh Davis has died. Davis made a stir, when he arrived on the literary scene in Auckland in the 1980s, with an MA thesis that took a revisionist approach to Allen Curnow's place in New Zealand's literary landscape, and a poetry collection, *Willy's Gazette*, that extended the tradition and the form of the sonnet sequence in New Zealand, and won the 1983 award for Best First Book of poetry. Davis went on to produce virtual and physical books combining visual art and poetry, and an art installation, *Station of the Earth-Bound Ghosts*. In 2008 he appeared in a panel on art and poetry at New Zealand Post Writers and

Readers Week in Wellington. Davis's online work can be found [here](#), and there's a tribute on the blog of fellow poet and publisher [Alan Loney](#).

2. Calling next year's writers

It's time to get serious about producing that first book or script: the application deadline for the MA in Creative Writing at the IIML is nearly here. Writers of fiction, poetry, scripts and creative non-fiction wishing to spend 2010 honing their craft at Victoria University should have their applications in by 1 November. If you want to find out a bit more about who we are and what we do, visit our website. Check out our [showcase page](#), where a selection of graduates share their experiences of the MA and outline what they're doing now. For a snapshot of the 2009 scriptwriting students, visit our [MA profile page](#), and for that crucial application information, start [here](#).

3. Bruce Mason shortlist

2008 MA (Script) graduate Miria George is one of five writers who have just been shortlisted for New Zealand's most significant national theatre award, the Bruce Mason Playwriting Award. Previous winners include many of this country's most celebrated writers, and the others on the 2009 shortlist are Pip Hall, Eli Kent, Arthur Meek and Thomas Sainsbury. The prize is a \$10,000 full-length play commission, and this year's winner will be announced at Downstage Theatre on 6 November.

4. The trophy cabinet

Our congratulations to 2005 MA (Page) graduate Alice Miller, winner of the Premier category of the [2009 BNZ Katherine Mansfield Awards](#), judged by Dame Fiona Kidman. Miller who as Glenn Schaeffer fellow recently completed an MFA at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, had to fly back from Boston to accept her \$10,000 prize last Monday. This year she was also awarded the Louis Johnson Writers' Bursary from Creative New Zealand to support the completion of a poetry manuscript; and last year she was co-winner of the *Landfall* Essay Competition. What's next – a novel, perhaps, or a play?

5. Tips for young writers

Winner of the Young Writer category in the Mansfield Awards was Emma Robinson of Palmerston North's Awatapu College, who receives \$1500. Robinson's English teacher, Jane Esmond, and her school principal were present at Monday night's award ceremony in Wellington to accept the \$1500 prize that goes to the winner's school, which will also be provided with a New Zealand writer to host a creative writing workshop. The judge for this category, Kate De Goldi, commented:

‘I am sure, too, that the better stories had at their back – somewhere, sometime, somehow – and usually against all the odds – an alert, an involved, a passionate English teacher: a teacher who has drawn attention to the craft aspects...by showering their students with examples of the form, by unpacking the meat and technique of story, by insisting on story’s singular gift to us: the chance to see again and again in myriad forms, what it is to be human...’

We note that Jenny Bornholdt also made an allusion to the role of energetic teachers in her judge’s report for this year’s [New Zealand Post National Schools Poetry Awards](#). Kate De Goldi’s checklist of the craft qualities that helped her sort the special stories from the also-rans is reproduced in item 17 below, for the benefit of secondary teachers and students – and emerging writers of any age. Her full report can be found [here](#).

6. Continuing Education: short fiction

This November Susan Pearce, who has taught the Short Fiction Workshop at the IIML in recent years, will lead a short fiction workshop for Continuing Education. The course examines some fine examples of short fiction, and participants will undertake guided writing exercises to help develop their style and subjects. It covers all stages of the writing process, from the composting and germination of ideas to key points for publishing, and investigates aspects of the craft such as point of view, structure, dialogue and voice. This course is limited to 12 students, and will be held at the Institute of Modern Letters on consecutive Saturdays (14, 21, 28 November) from 10am-4.30pm. There’s an earlybird discount for those who book before 31 October. For further information on this course and to enrol visit the [Community Continuing Education](#) website, email ceed@vuw.ac.nz or phone 04 463 6556.

7. From the whiteboard

‘I write two pages of arrant nonsense, after straining; I write variations of every sentence; compromises; bad shots; possibilities; till my writing book is like a lunatic’s dream. Then I trust to some inspiration on re-reading; and pencil them into sense.’

Virginia Woolf

8. What makes us human?

The Forum, a BBC World Service weekly discussion show that brings together acclaimed thinkers to explore and challenge thoughts and ideas from outside their own discipline, is recording a series of programmes in Australia and New Zealand during October. New Zealand’s contribution addresses what makes us human, the human heart and human values.

Those taking part include teacher and writer Bernard Beckett, who will draw on his latest novel *Genesis* to uncover what differentiates us from machines; bio-engineer Peter Hunter, who will explain how applying engineering and mechanical principles to construct a virtual model of the human heart could lead to the development of personalised medicine; and former politician and now public policy professor, Dr Marilyn Waring, who will argue that our understanding of value has to be widened to include ‘cultural wellbeing’, focusing on people and their families to maintain the wellbeing of the planet.

Members of the public are invited to join the audience for this live recording of The Forum presented by Bridget Kendall at Soundings Theatre, Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand, at 11 am tomorrow, 10 October. The programme will broadcast on BBC World Service on Sunday 18 October, 19:00 GMT and on Radio New Zealand National later in the year.

9. Politics and writing

This Monday, 12 October, politicians and writers will gather to debate issues affecting the working environment for New Zealand’s professional writers, in an event organised by the NZSA, which will be represented by current president Tony Simpson. The participating politicians are: Hon Jim Anderton, Hon Steve Chadwick, Catherine Delahunty, Hon Peter Dunne, & Paul Quinn. The debate takes place from 7.30-9.30 pm at the Thistle Inn, 3 Mulgrave Street, Wellington.

10. Tsunami relief

The Laughing Samoans comedy duo of Eteuati Ete and Tofiga Fepulea’i is to perform a special show to raise funds for the victims of the earthquake and tsunami that devastated Samoa last week. The Laughing Samoans Greatest Hits Tsunami Appeal show will open at 8pm on Friday 16 October at the Wellington Opera House with tickets only \$20 each, on sale through [Ticketek](#), tel 0800 842 538. All proceeds will go to the Red Cross.

11. Unity live

New Zealand Book Month is in full swing, and a full list of events can be found [here](#). Two events at Unity Books Wellington caught our attention. On Wednesday 20 October the bookshop will host ‘An Elegy for Alistair’, a reading by writers and friends in remembrance of poet Alistair Te Ariki Campbell, who died last month.

And on Thursday 29 October, IIML Senior Lecturer Damien Wilkins joins other New Zealand writers at Unity for readings from the newly published *Penguin Book of Contemporary New Zealand Short Stories*. This event is part of New Zealand Book Month and starts at 6pm. Contributors, including Wilkins, Fiona Kidman, Jo Randerson, Duncan Sarkies and Anna Taylor, will read an extract from their short story featured in the collection, and then answer questions from the audience.

12. Does poetry matter?

Ian Wedde, the current University of Auckland Creative New Zealand Writer-in-Residence at the Michael King Centre, poses the question ‘Does poetry matter?’ at a seminar to be held at 6.30pm on Wednesday 21 October, at the Theatre OGGB3, Business School, at the University of Auckland. Pondering this question, we were reminded of claims in a recent book by [Michael Holzman](#) that the study of poetry, and the New Criticism of William Empson in particular, had a significant influence on the practice of espionage via the career of James Jesus Angleton. Angleton, the first head of the Counter-intelligence Staff of the CIA, was a Yale graduate who had corresponded with major poets of the period.

Then we received a notice that Victoria University criminology PhD candidate Laura Ranger would be giving a presentation this week that offers ‘a criminological analysis of offender narratives and the relationship between masculine value systems and sexual violence against children’. Some readers may remember Ranger as the author of a widely praised poetry collection, *Laura’s Poems*, published in 1995 by Godwit when the author was only 11 years old. It went on to win the Aim Children’s Book Award, 1996 for Best First Book, as well as LIANZA’s Elsie Locke Award. As far as we know Laura Ranger hasn’t been publishing poetry lately, but it seems her close reading skills are now being applied to narratives of a different order. Both of these career paths suggest that poetry may have more uses than is commonly supposed. As to whether it *matters* – well, we leave that to Ian Wedde.

13. Your work here?

The deadline for submissions to the IIML’s online literary journal *Turbine* is fast approaching, so if you’ve been thinking of sending us some work, now’s the time to act. Poems, stories, and creative non-fictions may be submitted by 23 October to turbine@vuw.ac.nz - but please check out our [submission guidelines](#) first.

The guest editor of *Blackmail Press 27*, David Eggleton, is inviting all poets, and especially poets of Polynesian and Melanesian heritage who may be living outside of New Zealand, to contribute English-language poems on Polynesian & Melanesian related themes of any kind. Send poems by email in the body text or MS Word attachment to: bmp27@blackmailpress.com, marked Attention David Eggleton - Guest Editor.

14. Best New Zealand Poems 09

New Zealand poets and publishers are reminded that they may submit poetry published during 2009 to be considered by editor Robyn Marsack for the annual edition of *Best New Zealand Poems* until Monday 21 December. Send published books and copies of poems in magazines to *Best New Zealand Poems*, International

Institute of Modern Letters, Victoria University of Wellington, PO Box 600, Wellington 6140. *Best New Zealand Poems 09* will be launched in early April 2010.

15. Writing across cultures

Writers teaching in some of the world's top Creative Writing programs will talk about how they mentor students and important aspects of craft in an event titled 'Writing Across Cultures' in Hong Kong, 9-11 March 2010. Instead of academic papers, 'provocateurs' will talk for four or five minutes about aspects of craft and teaching writing then open the discussion to the audience. A roundtable on the first day will focus on teaching creative writing in the academy. The next day will focus on teaching creative writing in English in Asia.

'Writing Across Cultures' will feature representatives from top writing programmes in Australia, the United States, Britain and the Asia-Pacific region, including Iowa, the University of East Anglia, San Diego, Adelaide, Melbourne and Guangzhou: For the full programme and registration details visit the [website](#).

16. Recent web reading

[Hilary Mantel wins Booker Prize](#)

[Don Paterson wins Forward Prize](#)

[Writing advice](#) (some of it from Don Paterson)

[Charles Brasch's books](#)

[Richards Powers' *Generosity*](#)

[How to show a movie](#) (Wellington, 14-15 November)

[New Zealand e-books](#)

[What is poetry good for?](#)

[Poetry and film](#)

[Poetry and fiction](#)

[Nicholson Baker interview](#)

[Marilynne Robinson interview](#)

[Don Paterson interview](#)

[Dora Malech has a website](#)

[The late Ivor Cutler has a website](#)

[Reading short story collections](#)

[Not reading New Zealand fiction](#)

[The City Lights No Contest](#)

[Jackson Pollock](#)

[Katherine Mansfield flies the Tasman](#)

[The pirate Prufrock](#)

[Bill Knott on "association copies"](#)

[Blogging from Iowa](#)

[World's largest paintbrush](#)

[A vital accessory](#)

[Museum of Animal Perspectives](#)

[Aesop's capable crow](#)

[Habitable polyhedron](#)

Cath Vidler's Upside-down Corner

[Upside-down lyrics](#)

[Upside-down Mona Lisas](#)

[Upside-down hotel room](#)

[Upside-down hot air balloon](#)

[Upside-down gardening](#)

[Upside-down goose](#)

[Upside-down writing](#)

[Upside-down lightning](#)

17. Great lists of our time

Kate De Goldi's short fiction craft checklist (from her 2009 BNZ Katherine Mansfield Awards, [judge's report](#), Novice Writer category):

*technical accuracy in both subject and form (I like to think grammatical inaccuracy is not a fatal flaw, but the horrible fact is that it often does diminish a story's effectiveness, it prevents it communicating)

*story architecture – a shapeliness to the story's development

- * an avoidance of cliché, in either language or ideas
- * imaginative use of language – fresh, startling imagery, muscular nouns and verbs; ways of describing and characterising that make me pause and re-appreciate, think anew
- * believable characterisation
- * credible dialogue
- * a variation in sentence length and rhythm – sentence-making that has music
- * writing that shows rather than tells
- * a sense of place
- * a narrative ‘voice’ that commands attention, that persuades, that makes me want to read on and on, no matter what is – or isn’t – happening...

* * *

Supporting the IIML

The International Institute of Modern Letters was established at Victoria University in 2001 to promote and foster contemporary imaginative writing. Our founder, philanthropist Glenn Schaeffer, continues to contribute to IIML activities in a range of ways.

While not everyone is able to match Glenn’s level of support, we value all those who have helped us to foster the development of emerging writers – for example through scholarships, prizes, and grants. We would welcome the opportunity to talk with you about continuing your support for the IIML, for example through a gift in your will.

All gifts are managed by the Victoria University Foundation, a registered charitable trust established to raise funds in areas of strategic importance to the University, such as the IIML.

For further information on how you can provide philanthropic support to the IIML, please contact our Director, Bill Manhire, Ph: 04 463 6808, Email: bill.manhire@vuw.ac.nz, or Diana Meads, Fundraising Manager, Victoria University of Wellington Foundation Ph: 0800 VIC LEGACY (0800 842 534), Email: diana.meads@vuw.ac.nz