



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MODERN LETTERS

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

Newsletter – 14 May 2010

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This is the 155th in a series of occasional newsletters from the Victoria University centre of the International Institute of Modern Letters. For more information about any of the items, please email modernletters.

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1. American Masters at City Gallery (1)

US writer [David Vann](#) is best known for *Legend of a Suicide*, a remarkable book of stories set around his father's suicide. This genre-defying work - a fictionalised memoir - has been named in numerous Best Books of the Year lists in the UK, US and Australia. It is a bestseller in France, and has been translated into many languages. American writer Lorrie Moore praised the book for its 'luminous narrative art'. David has also written two other memoirs connected with his disastrous adventures as a sailor.

More recently, his account of the Northern University of Illinois shooter, Steven Mazmierczak, who killed five students, won the 2009 AWP Non-Fiction Prize. His novel, *Caribou Island*, will be published next year. (Kim Hill's December 2009 [interview](#) with David Vann is still available on the Radio New Zealand website.)

This month David Vann will teach a masterclass for our 2010 MA (Page) and PhD students. He will also appear in a special event presented by the IIML at City Gallery on Wednesday 26 May at 6pm. The event is free and open to the public: early arrival is recommended to secure a place.

2. American Masters at City Gallery (2)

Another significant American writer arrives to teach a masterclass at the IIML in the first week of June. Lee Gutkind is widely known as the 'godfather of creative nonfiction'. 'Creative nonfiction stories,' in Gutkind's definition, 'are dramatic, true stories that use scene, dialogue and close, detailed descriptions - techniques usually employed by poets and fiction writers - to examine and explore a variety of subjects: politics, economics, sports, race relations, family relations, the arts and sciences and more.'

Lee Gutkind is the founding editor of *Creative Nonfiction* magazine and prize-winning author or editor of more than a dozen books, the most recent of which is *Almost Human: Making Robots Think*. His forthcoming book is a memoir, *Truckin' with Sam*, co-written with his son.

Lee Gutkind appears in conversation with the IIML's Creative Nonfiction workshop leader Harry Ricketts in a public event at City Gallery on Thursday 3 June, 6pm. This event is also free and all are welcome.

3. Essential gifts for a novelist

'Kingsley could "do" the sound of a brass band approaching on a foggy day. He could become the District-line train entering the Edgware Road station. He could be four wrecked tramps coughing in a bus shelter. (This was very demanding and once led to heart palpitations.) To create the hiss and crackle of a wartime radio broadcast

delivered by Franklin Delano Roosevelt was for him scant problem. (A tape of it, indeed, was played at his memorial service, where I was hugely honoured to be among the speakers.) The pièce de résistance, an attempt by British soldiers to start up a frozen two-ton truck on a windy morning “somewhere in Germany,” was for special occasions only. One held one's breath as Kingsley emitted the first screech of the busted ignition key. His only slightly lesser vocal achievement—of a motorbike yelling in mechanical agony—once caused a man who had just parked his own machine in the street to turn back anxiously and take a look. The old boy's imitation of an angry dog barking the words “fuck off” was note-perfect.’

— [Christopher Hitchens on Kingsley Amis in *Vanity Fair*](#)

4. Ghost doubles

We have written before about New Zealand writers and their doubles. James Brown and Michael Jackson have famous musical counterparts, while Gregory O'Brien's essay, ‘After Bathing at Baxter's’ (first published in *Sport* and available online at the [New Zealand Electronic Text Centre](#)) surveys the world of Baxterian doubles. We had also tracked down Brian Turner's poetical US equivalent, and Vincent O'Sullivan's rather decadent and mysterious ghost double in an 1890s writer who was once a friend of Oscar Wilde. Wilde wrote of him: ‘In what a midnight his soul seems to walk! And what maladies he draws from the moon!’ More can be found about the older O'Sullivan [here](#)

And just this week, in the aftermath of Paul Millar's well-received biography, we discover another novelist called [Bill Pearson](#). As for our own Bill Pearson, the [NZETC has a good blog](#) about his online presence.

5. Writers on Mondays

We're told people have been phoning Te Papa to find out when Writers on Mondays is back. We begin the 2009 series on 12 July with an event featuring Victoria's first Creative Writing PhD graduate, the redoubtable Marian Evans, talking with Lydia Wevers about women in film. Other events include Paul Millar talking about Bill Pearson (see above), and a launch of Norman Meehan's album *Buddhist Rain*, which sets Bill Manhire's words to music. We'll release the full programme next month, but for those who can't wait, a downloadable version is available now on the [IIML](#) website.

6. One More on the Gravy Train

VUP is about to announce the forthcoming publication of a new novel, his first in 21 years, by Patrick Evans, Professor of English at Canterbury University. We understand that there is a clause in Evans's contract confirming his [long-held belief](#)

that all VUP authors, especially IIML graduates, have to pass a beauty test when their manuscript is accepted. Apparently the wording runs something like this:

Makeover

19. The author shall undergo, at the author's own expense, a standard makeover, comprising a physical training programme with a licensed instructor, a new wardrobe purchased from approved fashion retailers, hair extensions, and any other measures which in the publisher's opinion are necessary.

The word is that, like so many before him, the desperate author has signed his contract. We recommend that all suggestions for Professor Evans's improvement programme be sent directly to Professor Ken Strongman who, as Pro-Vice Chancellor (Arts) at the University of Canterbury, 'granted me the leave and funding that enabled completion of this project'.

7. *Best New Zealand Poems 2010*

Once again we're on the hunt for the best poetry published by New Zealanders this year, in order to pass it on to the editor of *Best New Zealand Poems*. Poet Chris Price is making the selection for 2010, and this is a reminder to publishers that if you wish your writers' work to be considered, all you need to do is send one copy of any book or magazine published this year to

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New Zealand

Online journals may wish to draw new issues to the editor's attention by sending a link to [modernletters](http://modernletters.org).

Poets, if you think your publisher may not have submitted your work, check with them, and if not, you may submit it to the address above. Remember, though, that we don't consider unpublished work: visit our [submission guidelines](#) for further information.

8. International test match

Poets are invited to submit a poem of not more than 150 words celebrating aspects of life in and around the game and sport of cricket, in settings of backyard cricket, beach cricket, club cricket or social cricket. The genre may be narrative, epic, dramatic, satirical, lyrical, elegy or verse fable – and the prize is \$2000. Entries will be accepted from any citizen residing in full member registered ICC countries – Australia, England & Wales, New Zealand, South Africa, West Indies, India, Pakistan, Sri

Lanka, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe – must be received by 1 September 2010 (there is an entry fee of \$20). [For full details and application forms visit here.](#)

9. A day in the life of the Auckland Writers and Readers Festival

Among the many interesting events to explore at the [Auckland Writers and Readers Festival](#) tomorrow (15 May), [Damien Wilkins appears in conversation](#) with Colm Toibin, and *Sport/VUP* editor [Fergus Barrowman talks literary magazines](#) with *Granta* editor John Freeman and Australian literary journalist Ben Naparstek.

10. Three days in Wellington

Meanwhile, Wellington seems to be staging a writing festival one day at a time. Those who missed Jenny Bornholdt's reading at Massey yesterday can catch her in Writers on Mondays later in the year. Tomorrow literature talks to art at City Gallery when Elizabeth Knox reads 'The Love School' and Jo Randerson reads *Through the Door*, both literary responses to artwork by Séraphine Pick. A questions and answer session will follow the readings and the artist will also be present. (Adam Auditorium, 2 pm, free entry.)

Poets Gerald Melling and Geoff Cochrane appear (with support from musician Terry Shore) on Sunday 16 May, 4-6 pm at the Ballroom Café, cnr Riddiford Street and Adelaide Road, Newtown. The café is running readings on the third Sunday of each month. For more information contact [Neil Furby](#).

On Monday 17 May 2009 MA graduate and Randell Cottage Fellow Pat White is the guest reader at the Poetry Society's monthly event at the Thistle Inn, Molesworth Street – this also begins with an open mic session from 7.30 pm.

11. The expanding bookshelf (1)

Not one but three new books by Victoria creative writing graduates will be launched at Unity Books on Thursday 20 May. Pip Adam's short story collection *Everything We Hoped For* shares the limelight with two poetry collections: *The Moonmen* by Anna Livesey and *Mapping the Distance* by Ingrid Horrocks. All three are published by Victoria University Press.

12. Film shorts

[A 48-Hour Film](#) co-written by David Geary and IIML MA (Script) graduates, Kelly Kilgour and Sam Kelly was selected as a Finalist for the V 48 Hour Film Wellington Finals and shown with all the other finalists at the Embassy Theatre last week. It was also in the running for best of the genre - Time Travel, and screened on C4 in early May. The title of the film is *Take Me Back* and the production company is Good

Clean Pants. Watch the grand final on C4, Thursday 20 May at 9.30, to find out the overall winners.

13. In development

Meanwhile, in the slightly larger budget department, the New Zealand Film Commission Early Development Fund has picked up *The Graduation* by 2004 MA (Script) graduate Matt Saville. The project receives \$15,000.

14. The expanding bookshelf (2)

[Tina Makereti's](#) short story collection *Once Upon a Time in Aotearoa* will shortly be published by Huia. *Once Upon a Time in Aotearoa* explores a world 'where mythological characters and stories become part of everyday life. Old and new worlds co-exist, cultures mingle and, if we are lucky, magic happens.' The book began life as Tina's 2008 MA folio, and she will appear with 2006 MA graduate Craig Cliff in a Writers on Mondays event during August.

15. National Poetry Day

With a new sponsor, New Zealand Post, National Poetry Day 2010 will this year be held on Friday 30 July 2010. Coordinator for National Poetry Day 2010, Siobhan Harvey, is calling for applications for registration of and funding for National Poetry Day events. [Contact her](#) to request a Registration and Funding Application Pack or write to Siobhan Harvey, P O Box 125 135, St Heliers Post Office, Auckland 1740. The application deadline is Friday 21 May.

16. The expanding bookshelf (3)

Last month Kerry Popplewell launched her first collection of poems, *Leaving the Tableland* (Steele Roberts), at the Tararua Tramping Club in Mt Victoria. Sausages and tomato sauce were served from a primus. Kerry has taken a number of courses here at the IIML, and one of her workshop teachers, James Brown, launched the book, describing Kerry as 'an Emily Dickinson who just got out a bit more'. You can read Helen Rickerby's blog post and a poem from the book [here](#).

17. The expanding library

We were grateful to receive about 50 more books into our postgraduate library thanks to Peter Shadbolt's wife Mary. Peter, who died last year, took a number of courses

here at Victoria. Mary kindly donated his poetry collection for the use of future students.

18. Re-stage

Last seen in the 2010 New Zealand International Arts Festival, *He Reo Aroha* returns to Circa Two, Wellington, for a very limited season to celebrate Matariki 2010. Written by 2008 MA graduate Miria George & Jamie McCaskill and directed by Hone Kouka, the play runs from 16-26 June. [Book here](#).

19. Twittering on

You can now follow us on [Twitter](#).

Recent tweets include:

Weird to think that Cliff Richard had to do [this](#) so that Sylvia Plath could do [this](#).

One of the bad ideas? The ultimate road movie, anyway. Kerouac's [On the Road](#) starts filming in August.

"Every place mentioned in any Mountain Goats song" - [a Google Map](#).

Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle. Grant Buist tackles Denis Glover's "[The Magpies](#)"

Writers' working methods in a 3-storey house: Emily Dickinson, John Keats, John Cheever etc. But check out [Victor Hugo!](#)

Ha! you egg! [Here's a great poem](#) - bound to become a local classic.

"Death's finger is freelance": [Gregory Corso's "Bomb"](#), animated.

[Make a great mistake](#). Go on now.

Russian cousins. The [young Winston Peters](#) bursts into song.

20. From the whiteboard

'To do a poem justice, explain what makes it unique; to get a poem noticed, explain what makes it typical.'

— Stephen Burt

21. Horse in the gallery

In the final leg of the surprisingly long-running Dylan Thomas (the racehorse) story we've been following in recent posts, [Gregory O'Brien's poem](#) has now appeared [on horseback in Australia](#).

The author comments:

'This must be just about the end of the 'Dylan Thomas' saga. Quite a journey for a poem, in fact. All that's left is to have the poem running in the Melbourne Cup this year. I suppose that's probably the horse equivalent of *Best New Zealand Poems*.'

22. Horseplay on stage

Ken Duncum has been braving giant [waves in Menton](#) but at the Maidment Theatre in Auckland his play about a putative meeting between two giants of NZ literature has been enjoying smooth sailing. You can read [Kate Ward-Smythe's review](#) of *Horseplay*.

23. Takahe Poetry Competition 2010

Takahe's 2010 poetry competition will be judged by James Norcliffe, and comes with a first prize of \$250 and a second prize of \$100. Two runners up will receive one year's free subscription to *Takahe*. Unpublished poems up to 50 lines long on any theme will be accepted. Entry Fee: \$5 per poem. Entry forms can be downloaded from the [website](#). Each poem should be printed on one side of A4 and posted to: Takahe Poetry Competition 2010, PO Box 13-335, Christchurch by 30 September 2010. (No email entries accepted.)

Results will be published in Takahe 71 (December) 2010.

24. Recent web reading

[Five questions for David Vann](#)

[Lorrie Moore on David Vann](#)

[New Yorker fiction podcasts](#)

[David Foster Wallace's word list](#)

[Mark Twain's trivia game](#)

[A short biography of The Jackal](#)

[Emily Dickinson's garden](#)

[Why no one reads Humanities research](#)

[The twettle](#)

25. Great lists of our time

A selection of New Zealand grasses from the [New Zealand flora database](#).

Bigtop love grass
Great quaking grass
Purple-eyed grass
Fringed signal grass
Fountain grass
Shivery grass
Gulf barnyard grass
Paradoxa grass
Panic grass
Polargrass
Pincushion grass
Radiate fingergrass
Reflexed salt grass
Coastal immortality grass
Spangle grass
Early hair grass
Star grass
Gopher-tail love grass
Floating sweet grass
Molasses grass
Himalaya fairy grass
Switchgrass
Paddle grass
Perennial beard grass
Tumble windmill grass
Japanese carpet grass
Yellow nut grass
Unbranched umbrella grass
Whiskey grass
Woolly cup grass

* * *

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