



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MODERN LETTERS

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

Newsletter – 25 May 2011

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This is the 169th 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. **Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!**

Forgive us if we make a fuss about our second trimester workshops. The university’s new application deadlines are putting the pressure on.

If you’d like to apply for our Children’s Writing Workshop with Eirlys Hunter or our Poetry Workshop with James Brown, **you need to do so by next Sunday, June 5th**. Bear in mind that if you have any problems with the university’s online enrolment system, you will not be the first person to whom this has happened –you can phone or

[email](#) us for help: (04) 463 6854. In particular, because the university enrolment deadline is 31st May, you may receive an automated email advising you will have a late fee to pay if you have not completed your own application by then. Please ignore this but ensure you have applied by 5th June.

Each course consists of 12 three-hour workshops meeting weekly over a three-month period. You also have the opportunity for one-on-one meetings with the workshop leader, and a number of guest writers visit the workshop. At the end of the course, you submit a folio of original writing for assessment.

2. Children's Writing Workshop

This workshop introduces you to key craft skills as well as to the magic of the imagination. It is led by well-known children's writer [Eirlys Hunter](#), and among other things offers an insider visit to one of New Zealand's best-kept secrets, the National Library's astonishing Children's Book Collection. There are also stimulating visits from guest writers – these have included children's literature guru Kate de Goldi and Margaret Cahill from major children's publisher Learning Media.

There is not a long list of set texts, but you will find yourself reading favourite authors such as Margaret Mahy, Maurice Gee, E Nesbit, and Astrid Lingren, alongside writers you may not have met before like Jan Mark, David Almond, and Louis Sachar. The course reader, designed especially for this workshop, is a treasure trove of ideas and inspiration.

By the end of the course you will have produced a folio of new work, though the folio writing grows out of the exercises which are important early in the workshop sequence.

More information [here](#).

3. Poetry Workshop

This is convened by leading poet [James Brown](#), who is also a member of the writing team at Te Papa. James's poetry is widely anthologised; you can get a sense of his views on poetry from his introduction to the online anthology [Best New Zealand Poems](#), which he edited in 2008. He has held writing residencies at Victoria and Canterbury universities, and has been shortlisted for the Montana Book Awards three times. Poets who have got their start at Victoria include Jenny Bornholdt, Dinah Hawken, Kate Camp, Hinemoana Baker, Cliff Fell, Tusiata Avia, Michele Amas, Airini Beauvais, and James himself.

There is more information about the Poetry workshop [here](#).

4. Poets' voices

[The Best of Best New Zealand Poems](#) was barely wheeled into the shops before it started getting rave notices – including from Sam Hunt on Radio Wammo. Now you can hear most of the chosen poems read by the poets themselves. Not all audio is posted yet, but a lot of it is. Go [here](#) and see what's available.

And a reminder that Bernadette Hall is editing the 2011 issue of *Best New Zealand Poems*. Bernadette is scanning every horizon she can find for published poems (in print and online) by New Zealand writers, but it's inevitable that some work will escape her notice. If you want to be sure she considers your published work, feel free to send it to her as follows: Bernadette Hall, Best New Zealand Poems, Institute of Modern Letters, Victoria University, PO Box 600, Wellington.

5. Awards and prizes corner

We're delighted to see Craig Cliff (MA class of 2006) finally getting the attention he deserves. As most readers will know, he has just won the best first book award in the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for his short story collection *A Man Melting*. The judges wrote that they 'chose this highly entertaining and thought provoking collection of short stories for their ambition, creativity and craftsmanship. Confidently blending ideas that frequently weave outlandish concepts with everyday incidents, the prose is skillfully peppered with social observations that define the world we live in. The eighteen short stories are truly insightful and amplify many of the absurdities around us, reflecting our own expectations, fears and paranoia on the big questions in life. This book is of the moment, and is rightly at home on a global platform. Cliff is a talent to watch and set to take the literary world by storm.'

There must have been something in the air (or the baking) in that 2006 MA workshop, since it has produced several other successful short story writers – including [Sue Orr](#) and [Anna Taylor](#).

We also hear this morning that [Kate Camp is off to Berlin](#). We looked up the German word for 'Bravo' in our handy German dictionary, and it just said: *Bravo!*

Then there are Lawrence Patchett and Kirsten McDougall, who have won more books (via Unity \$1,000 book tokens) than they will ever be able to carry home in the [Long and the Short of It competition](#).

Expat New Zealand poet, printer and editor Alan Loney has received the \$10,000 [2011 Janet Frame Literary Trust Award](#).

And we note that the NZ Post Finalists are announced next Wednesday, 1 June. As usual we're hoping for the very best news in the best first books categories.

6. Public art corner

Wellywood is one thing (see [here](#) and [here](#)) – but not everyone loves the proposed Katherine Mansfield sculpture either. Consider this recent tweet from VUP editor [Fergus Barrowman](#): ‘Biggest cringe factor: the Wellywood sign or the [Katherine Mansfield statue](#)?’

7. The real Wellington

Here’s an amazing poem by an 11-year-old that recently came our way. Really, it puts all that Wellywood stuff to shame.

WELLINGTON WAS BUILT

It took the grey of shadows.
It took the cold of winter.
It took the rain from floods,
and weather was made.

For the buildings,
it stole the height of giraffes,
it stole the prettiness of a peacock,
it stole the basic of a coat of new paint.

It grabbed the green of hungry caterpillars,
it grabbed the moisture from under the sink,
it grabbed the darkness from caves
and the bush was made.

For its bays
it grasped the deepness of bottomless pits,
it grasped the shallowness of puddles,
it grasped the icy feeling from Antarctica.

It picked warmth from the equator,
it picked colours from soils and sands,
it picked coldness from ice
and its people were made.

‘Wellington Was Built’ is by the extremely talented [Maisie Reweti-Gould](#), who was in the news recently for other reasons. We hope she keeps on writing – and being such a thoughtful citizen.

8. The expanding bookshelf

We were pleased to see that journalist, screenwriter and now novelist, Bianca Zander, has just done a two-book deal with US publisher William Morrow. Her first novel *Ghost Teeth* will be published in 2012. Some readers may remember Bianca's enterprising fundraising message from our September 2007 newsletter:

'Dear booklover

Earlier this year, I took visiting writer Curtis Sittenfeld's wonderful Iowa workshop Starting and Building a Novel. Well, the workshop worked. I'm now almost 60,000 words into the first draft of my novel. It's going well, it's exciting. It's what I've always wanted to do ... But juggling work and writing is proving to be difficult. Okay, impossible. I really want to get a first draft finished by the end of the year, which means writing fulltime or else ... !

So I've come up with the idea of asking people to sponsor me to write – a page, a paragraph or a sentence.

Details of how to sponsor and an extract from the novel are on my website [now deleted].

I'd really appreciate it if you'd take a moment to look. Oh, and please pass this on to all your bookloving friends. Kind regards Bianca Zander'

Barbara Strang's *The Corrosion Zone* has just been published – 'a rollercoaster ride through grief and loss to redemption'. More information [here](#).

And Janice Freegard's first full book of poems, *Kingdom Animalia*, has just appeared from Auckland University Press. More information, including launch pics, [here](#).

9. McKenzie Country

We'd go anywhere to see Michele Amas act after her recent performance in *August: Osage County* at Circa, but we really, really want to see her in Hannah McKie's upcoming play, 14-25 June, at BATS. Hannah wrote *McKenzie Country* (brilliant title!) as part of her IIML Masters year in 2008, and it won the David Carson-Parker Embassy Award. More [here](#).

10. More hurry, hurry, hurry

Entries for the NZWG Television Script Competition close midday on Friday 27 May.

Prizes: up for grabs are short-term internship placements with top NZ television production companies. The recipients of these will be selected by the companies themselves from the ten finalists and the exact nature of these internships will be worked out with the recipient. It could be a seat at their writing table or working with a development exec on a project etc.

Each year this competition is about giving you an opportunity to show how good you are and to create opportunities for you. Each year the guild has been approached by producers and production companies wanting the contact details of the finalists in our script competition. This year the format is television and we already have interest from TV producers and production companies. So show us your best scripts for a captivating new show or create for yourself an excellent spec script as a calling card.

An entry form with terms and conditions is attached is downloadable from the [NZ Writers' Guild website](#).

11. Victims of Lightning

Bill Manhire will be reading at [Lembas this Sunday](#).

12. From the whiteboard

'If you want to write a historical novel, learn to use Bygonese.'

— David Mitchell

13. Isola Bella

Chris Price continues to keep her Menton journal. Here are a couple of recent excerpts, the first dated 3 May, the second 11 May.

Reading backwards is a fine thing. By means of it one realises, eventually and again, the personal truth of Shakespeare's notion that there is nothing new under the sun, and refreshes one's sense of one's own ignorance. Things by other writers that seem original turn out to be knock-offs: for instance, I have just encountered Christopher Smart's 1763 'My Cat Jeoffry', even more fresh and wonderful than the Peter Reading poem I liked so much that I clipped it from the *TLS* to put in the poetry reader for students, and on which the Reading poem clearly and closely – I now discover – models itself. Perhaps every educated English person or *TLS* reader knows this, but until now I did not, imagining the Reading poem to be an entirely invented pastiche. Not only that, but one's own productions also turn out to be, if not knock-offs, then at least unconsciously influenced by things one has not even read, thanks to the mysteries of tradition and transmission. I had not read David Foster Wallace (*Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*) or Francis Ponge (prose poems) when I wrote *Brief Lives*: now I see that indirectly they were among my masters. I am gradually discovering that there is a long tradition of digressive writers to whom I belong by both temperament and practice – not a mainstream, certainly, but a respectable tributary. At present I am anticipating the discovery that Thomas Browne is another of my ancestors. And to filling that great ancestral missing link, Montaigne. As for Kit Smart, he may have suffered from religious mania, but he

instantly enters my pantheon. I wanted to put the book down and not spoil the effect by reading anything else.

*

The lost cello concerto of Katherine Mansfield

would contain
the sound of two moths dining
on a fur coat somewhere
in Hamburg
and the flare of the match
as they lit their small
postprandial cigars

a child's sullen sandals scuffing
the dirt outside her own
back door
and that intermittent flutter
which is the fear
of two women in a villa

the irritation of English rain
the light-fingered scurry of
green lizards and from the summer's
busy till the unremitting sound
of attention joyfully paid.

I have left for last the sound
of sobbing which is
the cello's special remit
because it's not motif
or theme, but underpinning,
invisible stays and struts
and infusion of the wood's
warm breath, the smell
of cedar, wax
and orange blossom
the high-strung bass note
of horsehair
on catgut.

14. Blogs and websites

[Sport](#) has a nifty new website to go with its big new issue

Poet and essayist [Ashleigh Young](#) has started a blog – 'Not sure what it's about, yet, exactly'

Self-described feral historian [Jenny Robin Jones](#) has also launched a website:

And a heads-up that on June 2 instead of the usual book launch wine and cheese event, Lawrence & Gibson and Richard Meros will release a deluge of material on this [website](#). The collective will cram YouTube book readings, interviews with authors present and past, an essay on artist-oriented collectives and the launch of an online store into a one hour period.

15. NZSA Asian Short Story Competition

This inaugural competition is now open for entries. Entry is open to New Zealand permanent residents who are Asian or of Asian ethnicity. Short stories will be in English, and the theme is open. Stories will ideally contain some Asian content, though not necessarily be set in Asia.

The minimum length of entries is 2,500 words, and the maximum length of entries is 3,500 words. There is a total of \$5,000 in cash prizes. First prize: \$3,000. Second: \$1,000. Third: \$500.

A shortlist of 5 will be announced on 21 October. Winners will be announced at a function in Auckland during November 2011. We will be providing assistance to the three prize winners to cover any costs incurred (return domestic flights and one nights' accommodation) in attending the awards ceremony.

The competition deadline is **30 August 2011**. For information and forms please [email](#) or visit [here](#).

16. Recent web reading

[Birthday presents for Bob Dylan](#)

[Lots of free stuff at Open Culture](#)

[Great poem by Michele Amas on the Tuesday Poem site](#)

[Tina Makereti goes to Harvard](#)

[Jo Randerson's dream page](#)

"There are stories here I'll simply never forget" - [review of A Man Melting](#) in The Short Review

[Angela Carter's Parker Hulme screenplay](#)

[Tom Waits writes a letter](#)

[Sam Hunt chats about The Best of Best New Zealand Poems](#)

[Bookstore compulsions](#)

[Closing soon: the NZ Poetry Society's International Poetry Competition](#)

[Graham Beattie loves Sarah Quigley](#)

[Tales for Canterbury](#) - includes a few people we know, plus someone called Neil Gaiman

The trouble with Franzen: "[A masterpiece of Swiss fiction](#)" does not have the same ring"

[Frances Mountier, class of 09, publishes from work-in-progress](#) (pics too!):

["Harmless things you might see in some weirdo's garden"](#)

[It's time to nominate the next NZ poet laureate](#)

[Meet scriptwriting graduate April Phillips](#)

[A prize-winning parrot](#)

["Wild dreams of paradigm shifts"](#) - Damien Wilkins' intro to Great Sporting Moments is online on the new Sport website

[Going West has survived the creation of the Auckland Super City](#)

[An Hour with Vincent O'Sullivan](#)

[Our contribution to the Wellywood sign industry](#)

17. Great lists of our time

We think this has probably been doing the rounds for a while. But since it's new to us, maybe it will be new to you, too.

The Washington Post's Mensa Invitational has once again invited readers to take any word from the dictionary, alter it by adding, subtracting, or changing one letter, and supply a new definition.

Here are the winners:

1. **Cashtration** (n.): The act of buying a house, which renders the subject financially impotent for an indefinite period of time.

2 **Ignoranus** : A person who's both stupid and an asshole.

3. **Intoxicaton** : Euphoria at getting a tax refund, which lasts until you realize it was your money to start with.
4. **Reintarnation** : Coming back to life as a hillbilly.
5. **Bozone** (n.): The substance surrounding stupid people that stops bright ideas from penetrating. The bozone layer, unfortunately, shows little sign of breaking down in the near future
6. **Foreploy** : Any misrepresentation about yourself for the purpose of getting laid.
7. **Giraffiti** : Vandalism spray-painted very, very high
8. **Sarchasm** : The gulf between the author of sarcastic wit and the person who doesn't get it.
9. **Inoculatte** : To take coffee intravenously when you are running late.
10. **Osteopornosis** : A degenerate disease. (This one got extra credit.)
11. **Karmageddon** : It's like, when everybody is sending off all these really bad vibes, right? And then, like, the Earth explodes and it's like, a serious bummer.
12. **Decafalon** (n): The grueling event of getting through the day consuming only things that are good for you.
13. **Glibido** : All talk and no action.
14. **Dopeler Effect**: The tendency of stupid ideas to seem smarter when they come at you rapidly.
15. **Arachnoleptic Fit** (n.): The frantic dance performed just after you've accidentally walked through a spider web.
16. **Beelzebug** (n): Satan in the form of a mosquito, that gets into your bedroom at three in the morning and cannot be cast out.
17. **Caterpallor** (n.): The color you turn after finding half a worm in the fruit you're eating.

The Washington Post has also published the winning submissions to its yearly contest, in which readers are asked to supply alternate meanings for common words.

And the winners are:

1. **Coffee**, n. The person upon whom one coughs.
2. **Flabbergasted**, adj. Appalled by discovering how much weight one has gained.
3. **Abdicate**, v. To give up all hope of ever having a flat stomach.

4. **Esplanade**, v. To attempt an explanation while drunk.
5. **Willy-nilly**, adj. Impotent.
6. **Negligent**, adj. Absentmindedly answering the door when wearing only a nightgown.
7. **Lymph**, v. To walk with a lisp.
8. **Gargoyle**, n. Olive-flavored mouthwash.
9. **Flatulence**, n. Emergency vehicle that picks up someone who has been run over by a steamroller.
10. **Balderdash**, n. A rapidly receding hairline.
11. **Testicle**, n. A humorous question on an exam.
12. **Rectitude**, n. The formal, dignified bearing adopted by proctologists.
13. **Pokemon**, n. A Rastafarian proctologist.
14. **Oyster**, n. A person who sprinkles his conversation with Yiddishisms.
15. **Frisbeetarianism**, n. The belief that, after death, the soul flies up onto the roof and gets stuck there.
16. **Circumvent**, n. An opening in the front of boxer shorts worn by Jewish men

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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