



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MODERN LETTERS

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

Newsletter – 10 September 2010

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This is the 160th 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. Earthquake weather

Our sympathies are with all our writer, bookseller, festival and university colleagues, and indeed everyone in Canterbury whose lives (and shelves) have been shaken up

this week – [the photos](#) of Canterbury University offices and library are a salutary reminder to Wellingtonians about what may happen if the big one hits here. Some of the writers from the cancelled Christchurch Writers' Festival are popping up elsewhere: Unity Books are today presenting Simon Winchester in both their Auckland (12.30 -1.30 pm) and Wellington (6 pm) stores. For more information ph (09) 307 0731 (Auckland) or (04) 499 4245 (Wellington) or visit the [Unity Books website](#).

2. Advanced short fiction workshop with David Vann

Multi-award-winning author [David Vann](#) is one of the most admired contemporary practitioners of both fiction and creative non-fiction. His book *Legend of a Suicide* won awards in the USA and France, and appeared on 25 'Best Books of the Year' lists worldwide. London's *Sunday Times* called it "a modern American classic." His novel *Caribou Island* will appear from Penguin UK in January, and *Last Day on Earth: A Portrait of the NIU School Shooter, Steve Kazmierczak* will appear in the US next September. David Vann also writes for numerous international newspapers and magazines including the *Guardian*, the *Observer* and the *Atlantic Monthly*.

Earlier this year David Vann taught a successful masterclass at the IIML and appeared to a full house as part of Writers on Mondays. Now we're very pleased to announce that he will return to teach a special 300-level advanced short fiction workshop at Victoria in March-June 2011. The class is limited to only ten participants. For information, application forms and course dates phone 463 6854, email the [IIML](#) or visit our [website](#).

3. Iowa

Two other gifted American writers, recent graduates of the prestigious Iowa Writers' Workshop, will be offering 6-week intensive workshops at the IIML this summer from 6 January to 18 February 2011. Thomas Fox Parry will lead a fiction workshop exploring 'courage and tenderness in language, story and meaning', and Alan Felsenthal's poetry workshop will examine the poetics of various modern poets and use writing experiments to work within constraints of the poem. Enrolment is restricted to 12 students per workshop. Applications close on 9 November 2010. For further details and application forms, [email](#) or see our [website](#).

4. Follow the plot

Remember: for our latest news and an unstoppably interesting range of reading, you can follow the IIML on Twitter. If you're not already following, you've just missed a short story in 33 tweets by the mysterious and faintly threatening Tane Thomson – but you can still [visit](#) to catch up and follow on.

5. Poetry and music 1

We hear that Irish poet-physicist Iggy McGovern is to play a mysterious, disembodied role in U2's 360° tour. Apparently new visuals have been filmed to go with the group's performance of 'One', the song they have been playing at each of their concerts since 1992. These include a learned hand writing on a blackboard a series of mathematical equations involving the number one. The hand in question belongs to Professor McGovern.

6. Poetry and music 2

Meantime, as part of Bill Manhire's last desperate attempt to become a famous rock star, the CD *Buddhist Rain* will be launched at a free public concert at Te Papa's Soundings Theatre, Thursday 23 September, 7pm – 8.30pm, with a live performance by Norman Meehan, Hannah Griffin and Colin Hemmingsen. Wine, books and CDs will available from 6 pm, and all are welcome. More information [here](#).

7. Poetry and food

The latest edition of *New Zealand Books* says that brilliant food writer David Burton has 'a secret life as a published poet of some note'. Our appetite for gossip is piqued. Is there a secret pen name? Can anyone enlighten us?

8. 'Correct' usage

Something for the language obsessives: next week Australian linguist Kate Burridge talks about the way 'standard English' develops. Here's the description for her lecture 'Blooming English — "in forme of speche is change"':

'Language can never be fixed. All aspects of the system — sounds, words and grammar — are constantly on the move and the clues to where they are heading lie in the variation we find in everyday speech. Often these clues lurk in the linguistic features that many regard as wrong, bad or sloppy — linguistic pinpricks such as *funner*, *youse*, *between you and I*, *mischievous*, *gotten*, *alternate* ("other"), *penultimate* ("greatest"), *yeah-no*, *to verse* ("to compete against") and so on. Many of them will drop by the wayside, it's true, and some will remain variation. But there will also be a number that catch on and eventually make their way into the repertoire of Standard English in the future. To draw on a garden metaphor — today's weeds may well become tomorrow's cherished garden varieties.'

Kate Burridge will deliver her lecture at the Memorial Theatre (Student Union Building), Victoria University on Tuesday 14 September from 6-7pm: all welcome.

9. Postscript to the writer's journey

Scriptwriting guru [Christopher Vogler](#) (author of *The Writer's Journey*) seems to have enjoyed his experience with the 2010 MA (Script) workshop in the masterclass he presented at the IIML at the end of August, judging by the happy note we received from him after he got home. 'You and your students certainly sent me off in a good mood,' he wrote, adding that he left with 'a good feeling of optimism about the future of storytelling. I saw a lot of emotion there and desire to express the unique stories of the places they come from.' He was also struck by the story of [Janet Frame's writing desk](#) (which lives just inside our front door), and remarked that 'I could see you were showing me a bit of life, a place that's breathing people in and out.'

10. Radio New Zealand drama

Radio New Zealand Drama has decided on the six winners in the 2010 Student Shorts 15-minute play competition, and four of them are members of the current MA Script workshop. April Phillips, Sam Burt, Nathan Crocker and Maya Hammarsal made it through a process in which entries were assessed 'blind' (the readers didn't know who had written the scripts until the final decisions had been made). Radio New Zealand will buy the winning plays, help the writers get them ready for production, record and broadcast them. The plays will also be available on the RNZ website.

11. Mash-up corner

'No Michaels were harmed during the making of [this composition](#).' We liked the mash-up whizz who grabbed work by Michael Palmer, poet, and introduced it to the prose of Michael Palmer, thriller writer.

This set us wondering about other possibilities. For example, there's [Peter Robinson](#) and a [crime-writing one](#) who has recently been touring NZ, and who apparently once, many years ago, published a slim volume of verse (in fact, there are quite a few Peter Robinsons – e.g. [the NZ painter](#)).

Other namesake homonyms are the [US poet Janet Holmes](#) and Victoria University [Linguistics Professor Janet Holmes](#) and the two poetry-writing Brian Turners, [one from the US](#) <http://www.hereandnow.org/2009/11/brian-turner/> and one from the [Republic of Oturehua](#). It's nice to wonder what a mash-up of Iraq and Central Otago might look like. The ultimate mash-up, though, would be one that took the wise sayings of [US basketballer Damien Wilkins](#) and blended them with the glorious prose of [this Damien Wilkins](#).

12. The expanding bookshelf

Kapka Kassabova's third novel, *Villa Pacifica*, is published this month by Penguin. Set in the South American rainforest, it centres on a shelter for trafficked animals, and features an international cast of characters whose lives unravel along with their good intentions. Kapka Kassabova completed an MA in Creative Writing at Victoria University in 1997; she currently lives in Edinburgh. You can read more about *Villa Pacifica* [here](#).

13. Edwin Morgan (1920–2010)

We were very sad about the recent death of Edwin Morgan, the remarkable Scottish poet. You can hear him read one of his greatest hits. 'The Loch Ness Monster's Song', here <http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoet.do?poetId=1682>. We very much like the story about his poem, 'The Subway Piranhas', apparently commissioned for the Glasgow underground system, yet never used:

Did anyone tell you
That in each subway train
There is one special seat
With a small hole in it
And underneath the seat
Is a tank of piranha-fish
Which have not been fed
For quite some time . . .

For all the fun, poetry was a life-informing and serious calling for Morgan. Here is IIML director Bill Manhire's contribution to *Eddie @ 90*, the recent birthday book presented to the poet on the occasion of his 90th birthday (a digital version of the full book of tributes from friends and fellow writers can be read [here](#)):

One of the real pleasures of my life as a teacher has been the occasional opportunity to introduce Edwin Morgan's poems to undergraduates. The best one of all has been 'Message Clear', a poem that (year after year) baffles a hall crammed with 300 first-year English students, and then comes to life – and clearly into view – when you read it to them. It's as if you've done something magical, simply saying the words aloud.

The poem that stays with me most, however, is one called 'Cinquevalli'. I think I first heard Edwin Morgan say the words aloud in Edinburgh in 1981, and that the reading was somehow associated with an exhibition based around Alexander Moffat's Poets' Pub painting. Can this be true? I certainly heard him read the poem a decade later when he was a guest, 12,000 miles away from home, at Writers' and Readers' Week in Wellington, New Zealand. Maybe the poem goes on being present to me because I liked so much hearing the word 'Cinquevalli' being repeated over and over in the poet's Glaswegian accent. The sound itself was both exotic and homely.

Of course, I liked the poem's subject matter and its central figure. Cinquevalli is an acrobat and juggler, and his poem plays with all those ideas of performance that we like to associate with poetry and perhaps especially with the extraordinary range of Edwin Morgan's own writing. We watch Cinquevalli contrive all sorts of

dazzlements. He can twirl a plate of soup on his forefinger, fly from a trapeze (he sometimes falls), and juggle disparate items like a bowler hat, a walking-stick, a cigar and a coin. Yet now that I look at the poem again, contemplating just how many years Edwin Morgan has been juggling words, the line that strikes me most is a simple one, quite without dazzlement or display:

There is no deception in him. He is true.

14. Father Familiar

Katydid, written by Lucy O'Brien (winner of the Embassy Trust Prize in Playwriting 2006) has just finished a successful run at BATS (see [Theatreview's write-up here](#)). Hard on its heels comes a new play by 2006 MA (Script) graduate Branwen Millar, which premieres in Wellington next week. *Father Familiar* is billed as 'a Pinteresque story of an estranged father who reappears in his daughter's life,' in which 'tensions explode like bad Christmas crackers [and] grievances fly like orange plastic reindeer'. Written specifically for actors John Bach and Mel Dodge, and directed by Stephanie McKellar-Smith, the play opens at BATS on 15 September, and runs through to 2 October. [Email](#) or tel 04 802 4175 to book.

15. Poetry and (our) community

Lesley M. Wheeler, professor of English at Washington and Lee University, will conduct research at Victoria University in 2011 as a Fulbright Senior Scholar. Professor Wheeler's research will centre on her new scholarly study *Poetry and Community in the 21st Century*, which explores how virtual connections and virtual communities affect local poetry scenes. She chose Victoria University because of its creative writing programme, and its connections with the Iowa Writers' Workshop. During her five months in the country, Professor Wheeler anticipates going to 'a lot of poetry readings, interviewing people, looking at archives and really getting the lay of the land.'

16. It ain't easy

A one-day writing conference in Tauranga next month promises to discuss the pros and cons of being a writer in New Zealand, and to consider whether success (whatever that might mean) is possible in this small market. 'No Easy Options? Being a Writer in New Zealand' runs on Saturday 16 October at the Baycourt, Durham Street, Tauranga. It's aimed at 'writers, publishers, distributors, editors, creative writing tutors, and anyone else interested in the contemporary New Zealand publishing scene', and its keynote speakers are writers Emily Perkins and Steve Braunias and publisher Christine Cole Catley. For further information and bookings contact Nyree Sherlock ([email](#) or phone 07 577 5376) for details. For information about speakers contact Jenny Argante ([email](#), tel 07 576 3040 or txt 027 316 31 93).

17. From the whiteboard

‘Beckett says tears are liquefied brain. Poems had better come from that same place. Beckett knew very well how to laugh, but the laugh had last gasps in it. One writes poems as one lives, with full attention to the partiality of things.’

— Heather McHugh

18. Writers in residence

It’s the time of year when writing residencies are on offer. Here’s a round-up of some current opportunities.

Wellington

The Victoria University/Creative New Zealand Writer in Residence position offers 12 months (February 2011 – January 2012) in the very lovely writing room here at the IIML with a stipend of \$50,000 (plus holiday pay). Applications are due by 30 September. [For more information visit](#)

Auckland

The Michael King Writers’ Centre offers four residencies next year. Authors receive a stipend, free accommodation and studio working space at the Michael King Writers’ Centre in Devonport, Auckland. The 2011 residencies are:

- The Summer Residency, eight weeks from January 12 (stipend \$8,000)
- The Autumn Residency, eight weeks from March 14 (stipend \$8,000)
- The Maori Writer’s Residency, eight weeks from May 12 (stipend \$8,000)
- The University of Auckland Residency, six months from July (stipend \$30,000)

Applications for the summer and autumn residencies close on 8 October. The Maori Writer’s Residency and The University of Auckland Residency are pending confirmation of funding: provided funding is confirmed, the closing date for applications will be Tuesday 7 December for The University of Auckland Residency and Friday 17 December for the Maori Writer’s Residency. [See the website](#) for more information.

Hamilton

The University of Waikato/Creative New Zealand Writer in Residence 2011 is tenable for twelve months normally from February, with a stipend of \$45,000. The writer is required to live in Hamilton during the tenure of the award, but will sometimes be able to make use of the Michael King Writers Retreat in Opoutere. Enquiries to Dr Sarah Shieff, telephone 07 8562889 extension 8425 or [email](#). Closing date for applications is 1 October 2010; for more information and to apply, visit [here](#). (Vacancy number: 300249).

Christchurch

The Ursula Bethell / Creative New Zealand residency offers the writer up to twelve months at Canterbury University with a stipend of \$57,480. Applications close on 17 October. Visit the university's [job vacancies pages](#) for further information.

19. A writing studio

If a modest, self-funded room of your own in Wellington would suit your purposes, The Johnston St Studio in Wellington is looking for a new writer to join the current four members, all IIML graduates (Bill Nelson, Chloe Lane, Asha Scott-Morris and Rachel O'Neill). The inhabitants say it is cosy and quiet — and power, heating and internet are included in the \$30 rent. [Contact Bill Nelson](#) if you're interested.

20. The writers' room

On Wednesday 15 September two recent Victoria University Writers in Residence appear in the latest Wellington Writers' Room event. Writer/producer and novelist Paula Boock (*The Insiders Guide, Time Trackers, Until Proven Innocent*), and playwright and screenwriter Dave Armstrong (*Spin Doctors, Skitz, Seven Periods with Mr Gormsby*) will join creator/director Thomas Robins (*Freaky, The Killian Curse, Reservoir Hill*) to discuss the perils and thrills of making television drama - from being a gun for hire to actually creating your own shows. Drinks at 6.30 for a 7pm start at the New Zealand Film Archive, 84 Taranaki Street, \$5 koha appreciated.

21. Recent web reading

[Anatomising the long poem](#)

[Arsworms, bundletails and dandyprats – 17th-century slang](#)

[The Otago Daily Times likes Lynn Jenner](#)

[NZ filmmaker Kathy Dudding 1961-2010](#)

[Sexism at the *New York Times*?](#)

[A cure for the apostrophe](#)

[How to write a short story](#)

[Mister Pip goes to St Andrews, Scotland](#)

[Shoot the bear. Don't shoot the bear,](#)

[Alex Turnbull writing competition](#)

[Two Nelson artists are the same person](#)

[The judge's report - Stephen Stratford on the NZ Post Book Awards evening](#)

[Craig Cliff: man of mystery](#)

[An interesting bag](#)

[Head Dust: on reading fiction](#)

[Possible lessnessess](#)

[A murder in Dunedin: the *New Yorker* visits New Zealand](#)

[Jenny Diski does her bit for Tony Blair](#)

[Man Booker Prize shortlist](#)

[How to open a new book](#)

[August Kleinzahler sorts out the Australians](#)

[Spot the Wikipedia: Michel Houellebecq's new novel](#)

[Daily penguins](#)

[Copyright versus creativity](#)

[Heart of Darkness in pictures](#)

[How to find Chad Taylor](#)

22. Great lists of our time

A list of donations received at the Canterbury Museum during the months of April, May and June 1871 (from [Papers Past](#), hat tip: Laurence Fearnley):

Mr T. Locke Rakaia – One hawk, one little rail.

Mr Samuel Barker, through Dr Barker – One saddleback.

Mr E.D. Hepworth, Leithfield – One long-tailed cuckoo.

Mr G.L. Mellish, Kaiapoi – One piece of North Island pumicestone.

Mr James Snoswell, Lyttleton – Specimen of ambergris, taken from a ling.

Mr M. Murphy – One swamphen, variegated plumage.

Dr Barker – Blubber-knife, made of flint, formerly used by the Morioris of the Chatham Islands.

Master W. Edgar – One bird's nest.

Mr N.T. Patterson, Chatham Islands – One Moriori stone implement.

Mr Langley Bell – One stormy petrel, two silver, one copper coins.

Messrs G. Coates and Co. – 18 copper coins.

Mr J.F. Armstrong – Specimens of pea iron ore.

Mr M.H. Hart – Two specimens of rock, from the Malvern Hills.

Mr A. Hamill – Two feral guinea pigs, albinos.
 Mr J.B. Hill – Five specimens mudfish, from Westland.
 Mr A. Isaacs – 10 specimens of different qualities of kauri gum, one weta in spirits of wine.
 Hon. J. Hall – One bittern, three harriers.
 Mr J.C. Miles – Portion of shells and bullets from the Gate pah, iron sand from the beach near Tauranga.
 Mr J. Deans – One small rail.
 Master E. Hawkes – One Maori adze.
 His Honor the Superintendent – Five specimens of ores and minerals from Westland.
 Mr C.G. Tripp, Orari – Specimen of brown coal from Black Birch Creek.
 Mr William Smith – Tow silver, three copper coins.
 Mr W.B. Buller – One Taraha (Maori spear).
 Mrs Cowlshaw – One boomerang, one stone adze of the Natives of Australia.
 Captain Claugstoun, Orari – One South American land rail.
 Mr W. Walker – One photograph (pigeon letter, Paris).
 Mr R.W. Fereday – Fresh water shells from Lake Guyon.
 Mr James Draper Snowdon – Collection of New Zealand lizards, skull of feral boar.
 Mr John Williams – Four eggs of the Californian quail.
 Mr George Reeve – One bittern.
 Mrs Charles E. Fooks – One fossil from the Great river.
 Rev J.T.H. Woehlers, Ruapuke – One skin of young mutton bird, three eggs of young mutton bird.
 Mr J. Day, Sumner – One thornback skate.
 Philosophical institute of Canterbury – Collection of New Zealand grasses.
 Mr Thomas Ranft, Brunnerton, Grey River – Collection of rocks, ores, and minerals of that district.
 Dr Birch, E.I. Army – Three copper coins, two specimens of China grass grown in India.
 Mr J.D. Enys, Castlehill Station – 17 silver coins and 1 gold coin.
 Dr J. Haast (for Geological Survey of New Zealand) – 316 geological specimens, 280 fossils (from The Malvern Hills).
 Mr John Meykle – One little landrail.
 Mr H.C. Cameron, Kowai – Skull of porpoise.
 Mr J. White – One bronze medal.
 Mr J.G. Hawkes – Collections from Weka Pass Creek, specimens of rock crystal.
 Mr H. Ross, Oxford – One wood lizard.
 Mr W.B. Bray – Woman's dress, Doum palm nuts, snail shells, geological specimens, from Upper Egypt and Nubia.
 Mr W. Buller, F.L.S., Wanganui – Six pigeon feather mats, five Maori implements in stone and wood, one carved Maori figure, collection of South African ferns, 10 specimens of Natural History, New Zealand, five Polynesian implements and ornaments.
 Dr Nedwill – One Fiji spear.
 Mr T. Bradwell – One Swedish silver coin.
 Mr T. Day, Sumner – One shag.
 Mr Th. Kent – One armadillo.
 Mr T. Inglis – Vegetable caterpillars.
 Mr E.H. Dobson, Purau – One Maori stone adze.
 Mr Jos Day, Sumner – One cuttle-fish.

Mr A.D. Allan, Little River – Three green lizards.
Mr H. Parson – One Chinese picture, two Chinese figures, carved in stone.
His Honor the Superintendent – Portions of two Maori skeletons.
Dr Barker – One black rail.
Colonial Museum, Wellington, from Dr Hector, F.R.S. – Casts of three moa eggs cast of large mere, casts of two heitikis.
Mr Th. Teschmaker, Otaio Station – Two wetas.
Mr Alex Smyth – Deposits from a cave in Long Bay, Banks Peninsula.
Mr H.R. Webb, Lyttelton – One copper case.
Mr J. Jackson, Christchurch – One silver coin.
Mr G. Lambert, Southbridge – One avocet.
Mrs R.W. Fereday – Collections of tropical butterflies and beetles.
Mr Ed. Sealy - Three water-colour drawings, by John Gully.

* * *

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