



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MODERN LETTERS

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

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This is the 136th 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.

1. Andrew Mason.....	1
2. Colossal shrimp	2
3. The strength of water	2
4. In walks Paula	2
5. Let's talk about sex.....	3
6. The Intricate Art of Actually Caring.....	3
7. Death and consolation	3
8. Big Bill Shakespeare.....	3
9. Actors/crew wanted	4
10. Extended play at L'Affare.....	4
11. Robin Hyde at the National Library.....	4
12. Disorderly Burns	5
13. From the whiteboard.....	5
14. Canterbury tales	6
15. Andrew Mason: a tribute by Fergus Barrowman	6
16. Recent web reading	7
17. Great lists of our time.....	8

1. Andrew Mason

Writing and publishing circles in New Zealand have been mourning the loss of one of the unsung heroes of the industry, editor Andrew Mason. Victoria University Press publisher Fergus Barrowman, who spoke at the tribute to Mason in January, described him as 'the best books editor I ever worked with', and said he would call on Mason for the 'big, difficult editing jobs'. He also reminded those present that 'During his time as Literary Editor of the *Listener*, Andrew took special pleasure in the publication of fiction and poetry, and put a great deal of effort into nurturing writers, something he kept up later in a private capacity.' That support continues: he reportedly left money in a trust to help young writers.

Mason was working on a history of the New Zealand State Literary Fund before he died, and we'll hope to see at least a portion of that in print at some point in future. Fergus Barrowman's full tribute is reproduced in item 15, below. Other tributes to Andrew Mason can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

2. Colossal shrimp

Poet and journalist and IIML MA graduate Tom Fitzsimons is responsible for eliciting a fine piece of stage patter from Leonard Cohen on his recent tour of New Zealand.

In a piece in the [Dominion Post](#) on 17 January, discussing sightlines and handrails and the problems facing shortish people at the Cohen concert, Tom ventured the opinion that the 74-year-old singer 'is said to be of limited stature himself'.

Leonard Cohen alluded to this remark towards the end of his show. 'It is true,' he said. 'I cannot always be seen by the naked eye. But I've been offered a job: I'll be the colossal shrimp and lie down next to the colossal squid.'

Baffled readers and concert-goers will want to know that Wellington's Te Papa had recently become host to the aforementioned [colossal squid](#).

3. The strength of water

When Briar Grace-Smith was Victoria University Writer in Residence back in 2003, one of her major projects was to write the film script for *The Strength of Water*, which had its premiere in Rotterdam on 29 January, and screens this Sunday at the Berlin International Film Festival. Briar workshopped the script at the Sundance Directors and Screenwriters Labs in Utah and the film was developed further at the Binger Institute in Amsterdam. It was shot on location in and around the Hokianga region and is set in a secluded Maori community. [Screen Daily](#) describes *The Strength of Water* as 'not as commercially exuberant as the similarly-themed *Whale Rider*', but praises its 'quiet polish and emotional honesty'. It's the first film for director Armagan Ballantyne, and will be released in New Zealand later this year.

4. In walks Paula

This week we welcome Paula Boock to the building as 2009 Creative New Zealand/Victoria University Writer in Residence. While Paula plans a long-overdue return to the page during her residency, much of her recent work has been seen on the small screen – and her latest production airs on TVOne this Sunday at 8.30pm. *Until Proven Innocent* is a feature-length drama based on the true story of the crusade to free David Dougherty, who was accused and convicted of a rape which, it was eventually proved, he didn't commit. *Until Proven Innocent* was written and produced by Paula Boock and Donna Malane, whose production company is [Lippy Pictures](#).

5. Let's talk about sex

It's sometimes said that the two big topics of literature are sex and death, and the next two weeks in Wellington offer plenty of both. Next week Kate de Goldi (young adult fiction novelist) and Leda Swann (romance novelist and member of the Romance Writers' Association) will talk about how to write (and how not to write) a great sex scene, whether it be for young adults or a general audience, and ask what constitutes the truly awful or a step-too-far. The discussion kicks off after a short AGM for the Wellington Branch of NZSA (PEN New Zealand Inc) at 7.30pm in the Upper Chamber at Toi Poneke Wellington Arts Centre, 61-89 Abel Smith Street on Monday 9 February.

6. The Intricate Art of Actually Caring

A play opening the following night as part of the Wellington Fringe Festival also goes beyond the bedroom door – literally. As the publicity puts it: 'Meet at Glover Park. Walk to Eli's bedroom. Take your seats. Witness: Two boys, hanging out, drinking beers, riffing on Wellington, popular culture and girls. The death of their friend sparks a journey to Jerusalem, and the bedroom becomes a car, the North Island, and James. K Baxter's grave.' *The Intricate Art of Actually Caring* is a new play by Eli Kent (2008 Chapman Tripp winner, Outstanding New Playwright of the Year, for *Rubber Turkey*). It promises to explore James K. Baxter's prophecy of a country void of love, asking - has what he preached come to pass? Perhaps those who attend the panel the night before the play opens will already have the answer. The play runs Tuesday 10 – Sunday 22 February (no show Monday), with two shows per night at 7.30pm and 9.00pm. The performance takes place in Eli's bedroom - meet at Glover Park (off Ghuznee Street) \$12 Full / \$10 Fringe Addict. [Book here](#).

7. Death and consolation

A more erudite approach to the topic of death will be offered by Hans Baltussen, a Senior Lecturer in Classics & Ancient Thought from the University of Adelaide, at Victoria University next week. He will discuss the writings that can broadly be classified as consolations, and how they resonate with modern audiences and their experience of grief and mourning. In Greco-Roman times the consolation developed into a quite sophisticated genre and a form of psychotherapy, as it offered many arguments aiming to alleviate grief. The paper will offer some examples in which consoling words are offered to illustrate how human experience preserved in historical records can present helpful as well as challenging perspectives on death and bereavement. It's on Wednesday 18 February at 11 am in the Classics Museum, 5th Floor, Old Kirk building, Kelburn Campus.

8. Big Bill Shakespeare

In a year that will reportedly see every one of Shakespeare's *Collected Works* read or performed somewhere in New Zealand, Victoria University's Summer Shakespeare starts with one of the biggies. *Henry V* boasts a cast of more than 30 actors, and its director David Lawrence promises thrilling battle scenes and a play that will strike a familiar chord with today's audiences. 'In our times of soaring oil prices and crunching credit,' he says, 'this play is a reminder that history does indeed repeat.' The season runs from 13-28 February at the Amphitheatre, 77 Fairlie Tce. Bookings at [Downstage](#), tel 04 801 6946.

9. Actors/crew wanted

2009 MA (Script) workshop member Sugu Pillay is looking for actors and crew for her play *Serendipity*, a drama about the Sri Lankan Civil War and its effects on a New Zealand family, set in present day New Zealand. There are roles for Tamil, Pakeha and Maori characters. Interested actors should email director Browyn Tweddle (Bronwyn.Tweddle@vuw.ac.nz) for audition details, including some info about your most recent theatre experience. Potential production crew should contact production manager Ahi Karunaharan (ahilandro@gmail.com). The play runs from 17-28 March at BATS Theatre.

10. Extended play at L'Affare

It seems that writers are taking over the cafes and bars of Wellington this summer - and we trust their audiences' conduct will be less disorderly than that of the Burns devotees described in item 12 below. Tuesday's packed and entertaining reading at the Jimmy featured plenty of fictional disorder, but the audience restrained itself to enthusiastic applause. Later this month the literary caravan moves on to Cafe L'Affare, where three poets will be sharing their 'other sides', or as the publicity puts it, 'the south side, the lean side, the mean side, the B-side'. James Brown, Jenny Bornholdt and Bill Manhire offer poems they've never before read in public at L'Affare, 27 College Street on Thursday 26 February from 6.30-8.00pm. Tickets \$8.00 (Book Council Members), \$10.00 non-members. Door sales only, and entry includes a free drink.

Kate Camp, previously advertised in this event, has been obliged to withdraw, but fans should note she'll be reading for the Poetry Society on 16 February at the Thistle Inn, 3 Mulgrave Street. The evening begins with an open mic reading at 7.30pm - in which a little disorder may be only appropriate.

11. Robin Hyde at the National Library

Also on 26 February, across the other side of town at the National Library, an event featuring the poetry of Robin Hyde starts at 5.30 pm with a reception before moving to the auditorium. The event has been organised to mark the Turnbull Library's recent acquisition of a collection of manuscripts and photographs relating to Robin Hyde. This was purchased from her son Derek Challis, who will be a participant,

alongside current poet laureate and Hyde scholar Michele Leggott, and Stout Research Centre director Lydia Wevers, who will both chair and contribute to the session. As well as readings of Hyde's poetry, we're told the session will include a new poem from Michele Leggott – maybe [this one](#), posted on the laureate's website last year?

12. Disorderly Burns

Robbie Burns had his 250th birthday just a couple of weeks ago, on January 25, prompting worldwide celebrations. Readers will enjoy perusing the Burns Night recipes posted [here](#), but we do not recommend the neaps, far less the Cullen Skink. We have also been learning about the Burns statue in Dunedin's Octagon. It transpires that Dunedin's is one of four identical statues: the first was unveiled in Central Park, New York; the others are on the Thames Embankment and in Dundee.

The Dunedin unveiling was carried out by Burns's own great grand-niece on 24 May 1887 (Queen Victoria's birthday), and the estimated 8,000 spectators were treated to band music, including 'A Man's a Man for A' That' by the Engineers, plus a very long speech by Sir George Grey. Later that evening there was a notable banquet.

The Wanganui Herald (26 May 1887) reported thus: 'The Burns Statue banquet was almost a fiasco through the exuberance of some of those present. The first disturbing note was struck by Mr Sligo, who, in proposing the toast of Parliament, said the people had expected little from it, and they had got it. With one thing they (the people of New Zealand) were greatly disappointed and annoyed, and that was that the House had not seen its way to reduce the number of its own members. (Cheers.)' There was much subsequent uproar, and the evening went on in a drunken, disgraceful and disorderly manner. The Otago Witness's full account of the day's events is available on the National Library of New Zealand's excellent [Paperspast site](#).

Some three years earlier, the unveiling of the Thames Burns statue had been even more fraught. On a day when rain fell in torrents, Lord Rosebery made a particularly sodden speech, after which a number of Scotch workmen attempted to force their way into the temporary enclosure from which they had been banned. The police repulsed them, noted the *New York Times*, 'with such vigor that at one time the disturbance threatened to create a panic and nearly amounted to a riot.' The Scotch workmen were joined by a larger mob, who began to sing 'A Man's a Man for A' That', and a saturated Lord Rosebery took his leave. 'Other speakers who attempted addresses after Lord Rosebery's precipitate departure were unable to make themselves heard; the crowd, once having formulated the idea of singing a Scotch song, would listen to nothing else. Apart from this incident, the whole affair was dismal and depressing in the extreme.'

13. From the whiteboard

Inspiring bold John Barleycorn!
What dangers thou canst make us scorn!

Wi' tippenny, we fear nae evil;
Wi' usquebae, we'll face the devil!

— Robert Burns

14. Canterbury tales

Wily Publications is soliciting submissions of poetry and short prose (up to 2000 words) for an anthology featuring writings about Canterbury - coast, plains and high country. Fiction and non-fiction (eg memoir), current and historical works are welcomed. Work may be previously published, but not anthologised. Submissions must be typed, double spaced (poetry may be single spaced), on one side of A4. Include your name, postal and email addresses, along with a statement of ownership of copyright and a stamped self-addressed envelope. A small payment will be made for accepted work. Send submissions to Canterbury Anthology, 37A Holly Road, Christchurch 8014 by 28 February.

15. Andrew Mason: a tribute by Fergus Barrowman

Andrew was the best book editor I have worked with. In his work at Bridget Williams Books and Auckland University Press, and as a freelancer for Victoria University Press and many other publishers, he had an important hand in some of the most significant New Zealand books of our time, books like Judith Binney's *Redemption Songs*, Geoff Park's *Nga Uruora*, Michael King's *Penguin History* and many many others.

Andrew had all of the qualities necessary in a great editor. He brought an immense general knowledge to the table. He had the ability to hold a large complex verbal structure complete in his mind and to move amongst its parts. He had a devil's eye for detail. He insisted on putting in the time and going as far he needed to bring a book to its full potential. To me that could sometimes feel like a mixed blessing, but it wasn't; it was simply Andrew doing what was necessary.

Andrew was an editor writers loved to work with. In the care and attention he gave to their work, and in the way he would bring them along with him, he left many writers feeling as if they'd experienced a masterclass, and he usually left them better writers. He combined the ability to think like a writer with a personal modesty that allowed him to inhabit the author's voice rather than impose his own. Writers have told me how Andrew would identify a problem in their work – often a problem they were guiltily half-aware of and were hoping to get away with – and leave them with the feeling that the discovery of the solution was their own.

Something else that a number of writers have said to me is that Andrew's formality of manner and dry style, especially as an email correspondent, made the intimate process of intensive editing less threatening and intrusive than it can so easily be. And then, that the generosity of attention that Andrew paid their work would transform in time into lasting friendship and affection.

I've sometimes felt a little guilty for giving Andrew the big, difficult editing jobs, because I knew how well he could do them, even while I also knew that he would love to be editing more fiction. During his time as Literary Editor of the Listener, Andrew took special pleasure in the publication of fiction and poetry, and put a great deal of effort into nurturing writers, something he kept up later in a private capacity. A particular pleasure for me was seeing the several stages of transformation he helped Stephanie de Montalk to discover in her lovely Polish novel *The Fountain of Tears*.

Andrew escaped one of the big traps an editor faces, which is of becoming so helplessly self-conscious that fluent writing of one's own becomes impossible. I used to enjoy his emails, which would always start on topic but often include asides on the state of New Zealand literature or the book trade – Andrew being one of those who always remembered that those are two very different things. Several times I tried to get Andrew to write me an essay, drawing on both his analytical skills and his personal experience, for instance on the last years of Reed Publishing in the 1970s, or on the huge changes and growth in the New Zealand book world in general in the 1980s, or on a particular writer he worked with closely, but he would turn me down, telling me on one occasion that he didn't want to put himself in anything he wrote, reminding me on another that these days he preferred to keep his head below the parapet.

But he did find a project to his taste in an orthodox history of the New Zealand State Literary Fund, from its inception in the 1930s, just up to the point at which he became involved, and for the last couple of years I have had to tell a number of disappointed writers that, no, I couldn't hire Andrew to edit their book because he was fully engaged in writing one of his own.

The three finished chapters which I read in October are terrific. They total 30 odd thousand words, and take the story up to 1951, at which point Andrew told me the main policies and behaviours were in place and story became more straightforward. These chapters are beautifully written, marshal a great amount of detail, and are rich with apt quotation. There are deft portraits of characters like Joseph Heenan. And there is delicious comedy in the story Andrew tells of the committee becoming captured by the fantasies of some determined applicants.

As an editor and publisher I've learned a great deal from Andrew, who was always generous to me with time and advice. I especially valued his support during the founding and early years of *Sport* literary magazine. Andrew's contribution to New Zealand literature and scholarship was very large. Because it was made as an editor, it is less well known than it deserves to be. Because he was Andrew, he would probably think that was all right. Andrew will be warmly remembered and sadly missed.

16. Recent web reading

[Hinemoana Baker interview](#)

[Trying to make a hundred](#)

[Short story competitions](#)

[The Yeats trail](#)

[Getting rid of the laureate](#)

[Poems for the first 100 days](#)

[Where to find a yodel when you need one](#)

[Writers' other lives](#)

[A mathematical poem](#)

[Cell-phone novels](#)

[The Wellington book for Wellingtonians](#)

[Cliff Fell/Kate Walker video poem](#)

[Mansfield on line](#)

[Young American poets read](#)

[Bridport Poetry Prize](#)

[Wildcare Tasmanian Nature Writing Prize](#)

[Fish Publishing International Poetry / One Page Short Story Prizes](#)

Early attempts to promote Australian and New Zealand writers [here](#) and [here](#)

[Writers' guide to making a digital living](#)

[Saltgrass](#)

17. Great lists of our time

Messier objects: some astronomical objects which resemble, but are not, comets. From French astronomer and comet-hunter [Charles Messier's list](#) of non-comet objects, first published in 1771.

Crab Nebula

Butterfly Cluster

Ptolemy Cluster

Lagoon Nebula

Wild Duck Cluster

Great Globular Cluster in Hercules

Pegasus Cluster

Eagle Nebula
Omega Nebula
Trifid Nebula
Sagittarius Cluster
Sagittarius Star Cloud
Dumbbell Nebula
Andromeda Galaxy
Triangulum Galaxy
Winnecke 4
Orion Nebula
De Mairan's Nebula
Beehive Cluster
Pleiades
Whirlpool Galaxy
Ring Nebula
Sunflower Galaxy
Black Eye Galaxy
Little Dumbbell Nebula
Bode's Galaxy
Cigar Galaxy
Southern Pinwheel Galaxy
Radio Galaxy Virgo A
Owl Nebula
Pinwheel Galaxy
Sombrero Galaxy

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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