



The Exercise Book. Edited by **Bill Manhire, Ken Duncan, Chris Price and Damien Wilkins.** Wellington: VUP (2011). RRP: NZ\$35. Pb, 222pp. ISBN: 9780864736857. Reviewed by **Marisa Cappetta.**

The Exercise Book was compiled through a canvassing process; teachers throughout New Zealand were approached for their favorite creative warm-up workouts. Each exercise is written by individual contributors and this delivers a rich diversity of techniques, voices and styles.

For students taking their first creative writing class, this book offers insight into the purpose of the writing exercise as well as the exercises themselves. For experienced writers, there are activities for stimulating

the imagination and breaking old habits, for script writing, rewriting and much more. I've tried a few and they definitely generated forward momentum for me as a poet. *Research and Experimentation* by writer Marian Evans is a particular favourite of mine as it engages the writer in a series of kinetic experiments which are then recorded, giving a fresh approach to the language of the senses. *Song Titles* by poet Jenny Bornholdt also produced surprising results. Song titles are recorded on one side of the page and used as starting points. In general, I found that such approaches offer ample latitude to allow the writer to steer in different directions.

The naïve graphics and square, friendly format recall a 1950s school exercise book which I find pleasingly retro and, like all good manuals, it stays open on the table making reference convenient. Overall *The Exercise Book* poses opportunities to play, explore and experiment with new ways of seeing and of expression. It's a welcome addition to my collection. I've carried it around me since I got it and it's become quite dog eared – the sign of a valuable reference book.