

He writes novels in French and lyrics in English, and has a passion for music, but Randell Cottage's newest talent is not afraid to admit defeat.

By **Nikki Macdonald.**

Yann Apperry is far less intimidating than his curriculum vitae might suggest.

The 38-year-old French author of five novels, one children's book, several plays and screenplays and writer of song and opera lyrics has just arrived in New Zealand to take up a five-month residence at Thorndon's Randell Cottage.

His cartoon huge eyes are still heavy from jetlag, but the laptop is already open on the desk, classical music filters through the speakers and the heater is on full bore.

In fact, he's the one that's intimidated: by a cottage in which every room has a desk demanding creativity; by the pressures of geographic exile; by the burden of being an award-winning writer.

"It doesn't get easier and I thought it would . . . ideas are getting harder to catch and transform into words. It would be nice to be free of it.

"To me writing is only extraordinary, and it really is, when you're really in it, but then there's the rest of the time, when you're hoping for it, or thinking about it. Or trying to forget it, when you've finished a piece. It haunts you. You're either in or out.

"The last novel I really had to pull out of silence, pull out of darkness. And it was tough and I hated the whole thing, but in the end the novel started to exist, and I was happy with it after a while.

"But this whole process of pulling something into existence can be so hard that you wonder why bother."

Maybe it's the jetlag talking. Or the fact that, three days in, he's had to abandon plans to spend the residence finishing a novel he started a few months ago.

"I just reopened the file and it doesn't seem to be breathing any longer."

The son of a Breton poet/journalist and an accidental Greek film star (his American mother was talent-spotted on a Greek beach holiday, aged 17), Apperry published his first novel at 24. Brought up bilingual, he writes novels in French, and lyrics and plays in English.

On the tip of his tongue



Yann Apperry has abandoned plans to spend his residence at Randell Cottage finishing a novel.

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Robbed of his initial idea, he hopes to find inspiration in Wellington, which he calls "Honolulu meets San Francisco, but under a Briton sky and climate".

Apperry has always been inspired by different cultures – he's presently based in Berlin and past novels have been set in Italy, Bosnia, California and 1930s Germany. But don't expect a novel about New Zealand.

"You can never really tell how a place will affect you, until it appears in your writing, and that may be 10 years down the line."

Music is Apperry's second passion, and he's hoping also to collaborate with New Zealand musicians to produce a musical/spoken word performance based around the journey of an itinerant worker in depression-era New Zealand.