

WETEWETE TE WHEKE!

Release the Kraken

1.

(Tīmata)

In the old times, i ngā wā o mua, Māori lived in an ancestral homeland known today as Ra’iātea in French Polynesia. We were already the youngest of the world’s many peoples, having previously moved from Taiwan into the Pacific. During an incredible 300 year period between 950 and 1250 AD we, the potiki, the youngest, populated every inhabitable island within a triangle that extended to Hawai’i in the northwest to Easter Island in the northeast and developed a regular pattern of trading and diplomatic missions between the Marquesas, New Caledonia, Vanuatū, Sāmoa, Fiji, Tonga and the Cook Islands.

Then we made the vertiginous drop southwest to Aotearoa.

As well as physically travelling an ocean below our ancestors also psychically travelled a sea of stars above, navigating from one star cluster to the next. Among the constellations they particularly looked out for were pillar stars, also called zenith stars, which reached their highest points over destination islands: for instance Rehua or Antares above Rarotonga; Puanga or Rigel on top of the Solomon Islands; bright Takurua or Sirius above Ra’iātea itself.

Tonight I make the parallel of star voyaging with the history of literature in Aotearoa New Zealand because our literary ancestors, whether they came from Polynesia or further away were, similarly, navigators. Of our Pakeha tipuna, Allen Curnow wrote in “Landfall in Unknown Seas” 1942, that they felt that simply by sailing in a new direction they could enlarge the world. Among those writers was Katherine Mansfield who, in travelling back and forth between, came to a moment of insight. In Prelude, 1916, she wrote, “Oh, I want for one moment, to make our undiscovered country leap into the eyes of the Old World. It must be mysterious, as though floating. It must take the breath.”

Forty years later, when Māori writers came along like Hone Tuwhare, David Ballantyne, Jacque Sturm, Rowley Habib, Patricia

Grace, Bruce Stewart, Api Taylor, Dun Mihaka, Pat Heretaunga Baker and Renee - and Albert Wendt and Marjorie Crocombe among others from the Pacific - that's what we wanted to do too. Our point of difference with our Pākehā colleagues was, though, that we were already from here, and so our kaupapa was different. We were not one, we were not many but, collectively, we wanted to make the Maori and Pasifika worlds leap into the Pākehā New Zealand world - and maybe that Old World too.

To proceed: although this year is the 100th anniversary of Katherine Mansfield's death, it is a later pillar star that we celebrate tonight: Janet Frame, 1924-2004.

Last year's speaker, Tessa Duder, said Frame comprised with Mansfield and Margaret Mahy, the troika of New Zealand's most internationally-acclaimed and greatest writers. Several attempts were made to obtain Nobel Prize recognition for her. Three writers, three women, and when you think of Keri Hulme and Eleanor Catton, both Booker Prize winners, as well as Patricia Grace who won the Neustadt International Prize and Fiona Kidman who is a Chevalier d'Ordre Des Arts et des Lettres - not to forget Tessa, also, who has international renown - you could be forgiven for asking where are the men.

Pat, Fiona, Tessa and former NZSA Chairman Mandy Hager are our special guests tonight: please welcome them.

2.

(Whakangā)

Nā reira, kei te tu ake ahau ki te mihi ki te whare, tena koe, koutou kia haramai ki te mahi, tena tātou. Ngā mana whenua o Te Whānganui a Tara, Te Atiawa, Ngāti Toa-Toa Rangatira, Taranaki Whānui ki te Ūpoko o te Ika a Māui, tena koutou. Nga mana, nga iwi, kui ma, koro ma, hoa ma, nau mai, kua tae mai.

My name is Witi Ihimaera - him from Waituhi - and this lecture series honouring Janet Frame is a partnership between the New Zealand Society of Authors and the Janet Frame Literary Trust. It was inaugurated by Owen Marshall in 2007, and subsequent lectures have

been delivered by luminaries Gregory O'Brien, William Taylor, Joy Cowley, Marilyn Duckworth, James McNeish, Gavin Bishop, Daphne De Jong, Philip Temple, Joan Rosier-Jones, Bernard Brown, Chris Else, David Hill, Paula Morris and Tessa Duder. The lecture is normally given by the New Zealand Society of Authors' President of Honour and the past speakers precede me as a powerful demonstration of the range of writing accomplishment since our whakapapa began.

But at the time I started to write in the late 1960s Janet Frame was the bright star, the most breathtaking literary stylist living in New Zealand, and I patterned my first book *Pounamu*, Pounamu 1972 after her first short story collection *The Lagoon* 1951. Within the exclusive Pakeha publishing arena of the time, who better to emulate than her? The following year, in my first novel *Tangi*, 1973, I adopted Frame's modernist em-dash to indicate when characters were speaking. Actually, I hadn't wanted to use speech markings of any kind because I felt they trapped and imprisoned Māori thought within all their floating 66's and 99's, but that's an argument I lost back then. However, in my 50th Anniversary edition of *Tangi* this year they are finally gone, part of the continuing decolonisation process I embarked upon those many years ago in the attempt to evolve, out of the Western European novel, the Māori novel. Maori never spoke in quotation marks then - or now.

I turn to acknowledge the Verb Festival because when the question of where to give this lecture came up, I asked, "Can I do it at Verb?" Even though I have lived for many years among the JAFAS of Auckland I am still a Wellingtonian who is not living in Wellington at the moment. Nga mihi ki a Paul Diamond, National Library, NZSA President Dr Vanda Symon and Anahera Gildea speaking on behalf of Verb, for making tonight possible, thank you.

You will have noticed the empty chair. It was the reason why I accepted the Honorary Presidency of the NZSA. The NZSA is the māngai mātua mō ngā aronga ngāio o te kaituhi. While we are best known in this country as the principal representative for the professional interests of writers in New Zealand - we also protect basic rights and freedom of expression for all writers internationally; we support World Courage Day. So whenever I see the empty chair I start to weep because it reminds me that writing is also about those

who are oppressed for what they write - and for the people they represent.

My surname Ihimaera, for instance, is a transliteration of the word Ishmael and comes from the time my tipuna, who were adherents of the Ringatū, fought the New Zealand Government during the New Zealand Wars. Ishmael of course is the ancestor of the Palestinian people so you will realise why I strongly support humanitarian intervention in Gaza. And why I am so proud that the NZSA, through its affiliation with PEN International, called four weeks ago for protection for writers and journalists there and “an immediate ceasefire, the protection of civilians, including the release of all hostages and the end of the siege on Gaza.” We said that “Indiscriminately harming innocent civilians is unacceptable, whether it is the result of attacks by Hamas or bombardments by Israeli forces.”

In some countries you can be executed for being a writer as was Kyaw Min Yu for pro-democracy activities in Myanmar in July this year. Other writers must live in exile as does Salman Rushdie, but that did not stop him being stabbed on stage in New York in August 2022.

In New Zealand you can have rocks thrown through your window as I have had or be assaulted as I have also been. On the other hand, writing can also save your life - as it did Janet Frame’s when *The Lagoon* was published on the eve of her impending lobotomy operation.

The empty chair also represents the manaakitanga from those in New Zealand who are in the room for those who are not. Eight branches from Northland to Southland have recently agreed to establish a ninth Māori branch. It’s going to be set up in Gisborne and the East Coast next year. I’m biased I know but noted historian and mōteatea anthologist Apirana Ngata is in our whakapapa as a major writer, historian Monty Soutar lives in Manutuke, anthropologist and historian Anne Salmond used to live on Riverside Road and my sister Pol runs the Kaiti Hub for the writers who will be the cooks for the hui. Which is why I also need to thank NZSA Vice President Tracy Farr and the Wellington regional members who have been responsible for the logistics tonight including the kai, wai and waiata. The people at the back and in the kitchen are who’s important: no cooks no hui.

I circle back to that metaphor of canoe voyaging. In those ancient days it was not sufficient for waka to individually travel on voyages of discovery. Collectively they had to develop a way of sharing the information about their voyages when they returned to home base at Ra'iātea. At their centralised temple precinct of Taputapu-ātea - an ancient whare wānanga dedicated to teaching esoteric knowledge - they restructured their curricula to enable the matriculation not only of ariki-priests but also ariki-navigators. Once fixed in the memory, the information was calibrated to the appropriate stellar guidance systems. They called their science tātai arorangi, astronomy.

Very soon, the curricula spread to specialised houses and guilds throughout Polynesia where crews could be celebrated. Their oral accounts were recorded as karakia: islands and number of days sailing between; dangers encountered and where; signs in the currents, weather and migrating bird life and ocean life indicating the land aimed for was within reach.

Thus, when our ancestors advised, “Me mātau ki te whetū i mua i te kōkiri o te haere, before you set out on a journey be sure you know the stars,” they were referring to the physical repositories of mātauranga now mapped - up there - in the heavens above us. After all, the gods stalked these newly-discovered places. The stars were not mere burning balls of gas, but ātua, each with their own rich story. And so myth systems about the stars enriched the knowledge to be passed on.

As far as our literary history is concerned, think of this precinct, the National Library, as Taputapu-ātea: here in this building are our tātai arorangi, the heritage documents of the Treaty of Waitangi and Aotearoa New Zealand. And think of the Verb Festival as our gathering of literary ariki-navigators where we will celebrate their new-found wisdoms. A team of young programmers Rangimarie Sophie Jolley, Trinity Thompson-Browne, Damien Levi, Rosabel Tan and Chris Tse, are presenting 26 events in over 23 venues by over 160 participants. It's About Us, is a day of storytelling at Pātaka; Kaituhi Matawhao features Patricia Grace talking to Anahera Gildea on the craft of story writing and how she does it; Whitireia publishing graduates are holding a wānanga; Behrouz Boochani is presenting a book club; and indigenous-led publishing is the focus of a kōrero

presented by Huia Publishers and Australian Magabala Books. I really want to drop in to the session on Takatāpui Love Stories, First and Only with the wonderful Emma Wehipeihana and listen to Kaituhi Chronicles as they discuss potentials of indigenous futures:

The future is ours for the taking, but what shape will it take?

The whole city will be celebrating on Saturday the 10th Year of Litcrawl with sessions spilling out into the streets. The talkfests will be every bit as colourful as the old ancient arioi celebrations.

Everything is new but nothing is new. Everything is old but nothing is old. Ra'iātea is past but also present indicative. Time shifts space. Wellington has become the new Ra'iātea where we can share our potential. Tātai arorangi will blend with the literary sciences, tātai tuhinga.

Forward, beyond our ancient-futures, infinity awaits.

3.

(Tango manawa)

Let me now introduce the wheke, the octopus.

I will begin by way of a Māori writer this time, a pillar star who obtained as much international renown as Janet Frame and others mentioned thus far - but in Anthropology. He is Te Rangi Hīroa, Sir Peter Buck, who wrote *Vikings of the Sunrise*, 1927 and whom English Professor Joan Stevens said was one of the best practitioners at that time writing in English in New Zealand. When I was a young man I was totally awed by his accomplishments as the Renaissance man of the Pacific, dux, politician, athlete, doctor of medicine, DSO for heroism in World War One. In the 1970s I tried to set up a Te Rangi Hīroa Fellowship between a New Zealand University, the then East-West Center and Bishop Museum in Hawai'i - and Yale University where Te Rangi Hīroa had been a visiting professor in 1932. I also wrote a new kind of marae-play, *The Two Taniwha*, about his relationship with Apirana Ngata which was performed on marae on the East Coast and at Parihaka in the Taranaki. The play was based on the letters he and Ngata wrote to each other, as important to Māori as those of Katherine Mansfield are to Pākehā.

The kraken, in Greek mythology was a cephalopod of tremendous size and strength, a huge squid or octopus, born from the titans Oceanus and Ceto. It's actually a great symbol in Māori and Pasifika mātauranga too. In one story, the octopus was venerated by Rai'ateans and had a royal title: Tumu-ra'i-Fenua. She appears in the Kupe story as the wheke who destroys nets and is thus chased to Aotearoa by Kupe: in this way was Aotearoa discovered. But the real story is that the fishermen were poaching in Tumu's waters and taking the food away that she used to feed her young. She led Kupe and his poachers away and over the horizon so as to protect her children and her traditional feeding area, good on you Mum.

Te Rangi Hīroa used the image of the wheke to symbolise the questing voyager spirit of the ariki-ancestors. It's body comprised Ra'iātea: and it's tentacles reached up and over the equator, eastward and westward and south down past the Cooks to the Chathams and us.

His map could also stand for our own questing spirit as we, Māori, Pakeha and others have evolved our country through its literature.

This hasn't been easy, and Pat, Fiona, Tessa and Mandy and others in the room have their own stories of the challenges they faced. In the case of him from Waituhi, his began when he was a 15 year old schoolboy at Te Karaka District High School and read an anthology of New Zealand literature in which there was a story about Māori that was so poisonous he threw it out the window and got caned for it. He had the same illuminating moment that African writer Chinua Achebe when he realised that, "Although fiction was undoubtedly fictitious it could also be true or false."

I was 25 when I sought a publisher for my first book, Pounamu, Pounamu only to be asked, "Who will read your book?" "Māori will," I said. "But Māori don't read books," he answered. Well, that book has never been out of print.

My career began in the 1970s when identity formulation in New Zealand was by default Pākehā. I took upon myself the identity of a Māori writer, unequivocally so, and began to write across the Māori-Pakeha binary divide, seeking the same Waitangi outcomes for literature as Whina Cooper wished to obtain in politics when she led the great Land March from Te Hapua in the north to Parliament in 1975. My novel *The Matriarch* was written against the background of

the Springbok Tour in 1981 as well as out of crucial indigenous consciousness-building experiences with Aboriginal politics during my life in Australia from 1976 -1979. In a wider global context none of us writing on the global stage at the time were alone - I recall Al Wendt, Epeli Hau'ofa and Haunani Kay-Trask in the Pacific, Ngugi wa Thiongi'o, Marcia Langton, Sam Selvon, Lee Maracle and many others I met personally. We were an alternate writing collective creating a whakapapa when we, the Empire, began to Write Back.

But here's the thing: Writing Back as a trope could be applied in other ways. For instance, among Pākehā writers in New Zealand it was something of a habit - but deployed for other purposes. For instance my mentor Noel Hilliard wrote *Māori Girl*, but as a Pakeha writing sympathetically about Māori. Others just really wanted this country to be better than it was: Ian Cross wrote *The God Boy* to combat our provincialism. CK Stead and Allen Curnow were among anthologists attempting to update New Zealand's view of itself. James K Baxter sought a new Jerusalem here, and both Vincent O'Sullivan and Maurice Gee wrote against the prevailing historical tropes in their work.

In my own generation Fiona Kidman spoke up for New Zealand women in *A Breed of Women*; the trajectory of our careers nationally and internationally are similar, we have books currently published in the French market - I have five, she has six - and I like to think we are hitched to the same star. Ian Wedde wrote *Dick Seddon's Great Dive*, Bill Manhire was our *Everyman*, Michael King our historian. In those days New Zealand was an exciting evolving culture. Denis Glover could write: "I do not dream of Sussex downs or quaint old England's quaint old towns. I think of what may yet be seen in Johnsonville or Geraldine." Anybody here from Johnsonville? What do you look like now! We were as much attempting to divorce ourselves from a British state of mind as we were trying to work out an atamira for New Zealand as a future construct.

Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* at the beginning of the 21st Century, however, seemed very much the requiem of a dream, the demise of that or any other moemoea. But Elizabeth Knox, Lloyd Jones and others - Sam Hunt kept taking to the road - and the country kept producing new writers and poets. There arose writer-directors

like Gaylene Preston and Lee Tamahori in film and television and Briar Grace Smith and Hone Kouka on stage. Selina Tusitala Marsh, Paul Cleave, Whiti Hereaka, Catherine Robertson, Tina Makareti, Brannavan Gnanilingam and the brilliant Tusiata Avia began their flights - Tusiata's into the eye of the Savage Coloniser.

Ever since, well, what New Zealand did you want? Utopian or dystopian, here, there or elsewhere, real or imaginary, which history, which home truths or reflections from abroad? It all depended on what writer you read. It all depended on what you wanted to hear.

4.

(Hikoitanga te hā)

I cut to the present. This year him from Waituhi has been celebrating his 50th Anniversary as a novelist, things are always darkest before they become totally black.

But let me share with you what the year has been like. It began in November 2022 by visiting Ra'iātea, always the starting point of my external navigations, and then the Tahiti Writers Festival where I paid tribute to Kanak writer Dewe Gorode and supported my dear friend, poet Flora Devatine.

The career as a writer doesn't stop simply because you are travelling. I wrote the introduction to my latest anthology *Nga Kupu Wero* in the Mayor's Office in Ruahine. Patricia Grace said recently that when she first began reading she never found herself in a book. In *Nga Kupu Wero* young readers today will find 60 pieces of non-fiction writing and essays. The companion volume *Te Awa O Kupu* has 80 poets and creative writers showing young readers who they are and could be. Not just Māori but all of them, tatou katoa.

From the word as wero, I came back to Aotearoa to hook up with a television company from France - I hate appearing on television but they were making a programme for Arte which broadcasts throughout Europe and it's important for New Zealand writers to be seen overseas not just here, you're all so damn good. I then launched in May at the Auckland Writers Festival with co-editor Michelle Elvy the anthology called *A Kind of Shelter*. This was the word as rongoa, as medicine or

healing balm. We invited 68 contributors to tell us what future they saw hanging on the horizon? In the book you will also find a 2-part interview I conducted with Anne Salmond and Aparecida Vilaça, anthropologist and advocate for the Wari people of southwest Amazonia. There are also other international writers in kōrero with New Zealand writers on what is happening to the planet.

My diary tells me I was then off to Australia to talk with young Tongan writer Winnie Dunn on *Escaping the Frame: Writing the Story of the Spider*, at the Brisbane Writers Festival. The 2023 Australian Voice Referendum was very much on my mind and that of Aboriginal friends: the vote was as you will recall unsuccessful. Unlike New Zealand, Australia and Aboriginal people have a long way to go.

I guess it would be better to say mine has been a working celebration, all good, I'm a farmer's son, Dad taught me how to work, and, well, I just had enough time to correct the final page proofs of *Tangi* before hopping on the plane and sobbing all the way up to the Northern Hemisphere. The book is about a young man's relationship with his Dad. The new iteration is not any better than the first in 1972 or second in 2004 except there's more mātauranga in it, more tikanga in its methodology and more te reo. It's a book representative of the mature writer, richer, wiser than him from Waituhi used to be and I'm so glad he took the opportunity to do it.

Sometimes, having an international career is all about being consistent about where you travel and who you have as fellow navigators - you build a greater capacity for the future. I flew to Stockholm in June and then travelled to Finland to give talks to the New Zealand Studies Association, my fourth visit with them. Actually, I like to keep an indigenous profile in overseas publications also; my long interview on my book *Navigating the Stars* was published in *Wasafiri*, the UK's leading magazine for international contemporary writing earlier this year and another will be published soon in the *Griffith Review*.

Patricia Grace and I have a strong and important critical base in Germany, they love Pat over there, so a short trip later I was at Gutenberg University, Mainz, for their two-month long Big Read of *The Whale Rider* in German. I didn't understand a word they were saying.

It was then back to Aotearoa for a short moe and to see my two daughters and three mokopuna - and to find an invitation from a Brazilian publisher to join a book series by indigenous Amazonian writers; I mean do I look Amerindian? If so, Nani Mini is to blame for my high forehead and hooked nose. I am hoping to launch my book in the middle of their rainforest, maybe next year or the year after.

There was also a contract from Ethiopia to publish *White Lies* in an Amharic Semitic edition. Africa has always been a major destination for my work - *The Whale Rider* is still a class set text in Kenya's education system I think - so I try to keep the African connection going.

The next trip was scheduled for Canada, where a special season of Ihimaera films - *Whale Rider*, *Mahana*, *Kawa* and *White Lies* - was organised at the Presence Autochtone Film Festival in Montreal. I have been building capacity in Canada for many years; for instance I taught for quite some time at the Banff Center - Paula Morris does that now.

Then it was down to Santa Barbara in the USA as special guest at the international IRSCL Congress on Ecologies of Childhood, another of those television things that I hate - a televised talk at the Carsey-Wolf Center and finally a visit with the indigenous Coast Salish people.

I arrived back home for another sleep and launched the te reo version of *Pounamu*, *Pounamu*. Eleven translators have given the book a kakahu of kupu, it is resplendent in te reo - even better than the English version, which makes me very cross. A tiki tour of festivals followed to Christchurch, Whanganui, Dunedin and Nelson where younger writers have showed me up as they will again tonight, all good. It's been fun but one appearance sometimes turns into three or six.

There are, however, compensations. At Motueka two weeks ago, a one hour seminar turned into three hours, but they gave me a kai of tītī, mutton bird and puha. My stomach went "What the heck," and hasn't been the same since, I would happily have gone on for six hours. Heoi anō, I have had just enough puff to get me over the Nelson bar and back to Pōneke. Yay, as mokopuna Jamie might say, Papa home now.

Following tonight I will put my iPad down to go to school at the Takiura Maori Language Institute to learn te reo - but not so I can speak it. Rather, to write in it, to continue my decolonisation engagement with the Western European alien novel text. The title of the novel will be I Waenganui, Between, a situation I seem to have been in all my life. I owe at least one novel in te reo to Dad and Nani Mini and, well, all of them.

5.

(Wetewete te wheke)

Release the kraken!

In the 2010 movie Clash of the Titans based on the Greek myth of Perseus, the God Zeus uses these words to release a fearsome sea monster. The future is yours for the taking, but what shape will it take?

Over the last year of travel I have been able to make an audit of that possible future, of writers and writing in New Zealand and, the lockdown notwithstanding and the final election results still forthcoming, man oh man:

International literary, arts or film events may be bigger and have more prestige but they are not necessarily better than ours;

You can walk through the centre of Montreal and find, maybe two bookshops; Amazon and kindle have become the ubiquitous online suppliers of the book to your tablet or through the mail. Here in Wellington there's five bookshops plus three secondhand along the Cuba Street strip - three in Newtown - and all busy. Bring back Vicbooks!

Lockdown may well have been the catalyst for our literary opportunism and reinvention. By depriving us of overseas artists and writers it has forced us to think inside the box and discover our own amazing talent. Janet Frame, in her Autobiography, said that the direction of her fiction was "towards the Third Place, where the starting point is myth." Has that been our new starting point, new myths for a new kind of peoples for a different set of futures?

We've become a country truly fascinated and supportive of our own New Zealand, Oceanic and Rim writers. We have a Poet Laureate. A Reading Ambassador. Every year there are Prime Ministers awards in fiction, nonfiction and poetry. Playwrights are represented by Playmarket with their own Bruce Mason Playwriting Award; Film and television scriptwriters by the New Zealand Film Commission and Writers Guild, growing new writer-directors to follow Taika Waititi. The Storylines Trust supports writing for children with Notable Book Awards including the Margaret Mahy Medal and others honouring Betty Gilderdale, Gaelyn Gordon, Katerina Te Hei Kōkō Mataira, Joy Cowley, Tom Fitzgibbon, Gavin Bishop, Tessa Duder and Janice Marriott - no wonder we have built such a regard for children's literature today in this country and internationally. Our mokopuna only stand in good, imaginative and safe dreams because they have had writers who have fought for recognition for children and young adult literature.

Our main universities all have annual writer fellowships. Huia and the Maori Literature Trust provide the Huia awards and have just inaugurated a Keri Hulme award; they also run the Te Papa Tupu incubator. Other providers include the Arts Foundation and residencies like Randall Cottage, Hone Tuwhare Trust, Michael King Centre, Katherine Mansfield Birthplace Trust, Beatson Fellowship and Robert Lord Cottage in Dunedin. The Chatham Islands now has a residency, how good is that; I'm booking myself in for 2025.

As for the NZSA, well, modesty disallows me from listing the types of support and kind of professional infrastructure we provide to New Zealand writers. But I can tell you that our kūmara tastes just as sweet. Do join up and discover for yourselves the collegial fellowship available. You are not alone in all your fears about whether you can do it; you can.

Our premier annual literary event is the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards with the Jann Medlicott Acorn Prize for Fiction. Overseas, there's the Menton residency in France and Creative New Zealand residencies in Berlin and to the University of Hawaii in association with Fulbright New Zealand.

Creative New Zealand is the major supporter of writing in New Zealand and also provides publishing subsidies for New Zealand

books that otherwise might not be published. Independent and self-publisher imprints are therefore flourishing everywhere, jostling with the main commercial publishers in evolving the New Zealand story.

Writers are eligible under the Library Lending Right Scheme for a return on books borrowed. The NZSA spearheaded this scheme many years ago and we are now tackling, among other things, Artificial Intelligence and Copyright.

Once upon a time New Zealand audiences were ageing. But young audiences are turning up to see the stars of their generation at festivals in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Booktown Featherston, Nelson, Gisborne, Taupo, Queenstown, Whanganui and Akaroa. The Kupu Māori Festival takes literature to the marae in Rotorua. Read New Zealand tours writers to tens of thousands of schoolchildren. The same same but different festival acknowledges that often the New Zealand story is a different kind of beast for LGBTIQ+ writers and readers.

The suppliers of literature have expanded to include internet platforms like Newsroom and Stuff. A word from Steve Braunias or Paula Morris and you can become a bestseller - or not.

The best news for all New Zealanders is in the new diversity of our writers. The annual Te Matatini kapahaka competitions puts our singing word front and centre and captures the largest arts audience on television. Huia publishers and the new Te Rau Kotahi Pukapuka Trust spearhead writing in te reo. The Trust is a truly unique operation: its international offerings like Paolo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* have just had their first New Zealand publication ever - but in te reo, hardcase.

As for pillar stars, new stars are appearing where they never were seen before. Catherine Chidgey keeps making history. Chris Tse is phenomenal along with Carl Nixon, Josie Shapiro and Fiona Farrell, the list is endless.

Among Māori writers are Becky Manawatu with a new book next year, the fabulous Airana Ngawera and my whanaunga Monty Soutar - both Airana and Monty have been at the top of the bestselling charts for months - crime stars J.P. Pomare and Michael Bennett and poet Tayi Tibble who has scored American publication. Michelle Rahurahu, Anahera Gildea and Essa may ranapiri will appear later

tonight, transcending the binaries previously there to provide truly eye-popping boundary-crossing work. Along with them have appeared historians, critical thinkers and writers Alice Te Punga Somerville, Tina Ngata, Nadine Ann Hura and Anahera Gildea: they have followed in the paths of Moana Jackson, Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, finding ways for us forward by providing restorative justice to our histories as we move through to the final decolonisation process. Tino rangatiratanga awaits.

Other recent anthologies committed to Asian and LGBTIQ+ writing show us that, there too, are other strong currents swirling through our ever widening inventory of story. Novelist Emma Ling Sidnam has hit the bestseller charts now - you'll hear from her tonight also.

As my fellow anthologist Vaughan Rapatahana has said to me, "The awa o kupu, the river of words is already overflowing its banks." New Zealand has become WritersRUs.

6.

(Tihei mauriora)

Wetewete te wheke, release the taniwha!

An octopus is not just an octopus. It's a way of thinking about our world, it is a royal matua, Tumu-ra'i-Fenua. I like to think that she has tentacles to encompass a wider kaupapa, that hold us up to her Makatiko-bum eyes and asks: "What do you see?" - gives us a brisk shake - "No, what do you *see!*" The Mosque bombings made us rethink our values and, hopefully, to become more humanitarian. The Parliamentary incident not far from here brought us up sharp to fake news and the weaponisation of words. The wars in the Ukraine and now in Gaza are not video games. Climate change above and beyond that was, and still is, not of our making, has made us realise that we have a very precious oceanic environment to look after. Next steps? Well:

Whakarongo ake au ki te tangi a te manu nei...

The next fifty years are yours. You have never been alone. It's always been about whakapapa, growing the pūtea.

Therefore become kaitiaki, become humanitarian. You must look after yourselves. You must also look after the world because that too is looking after yourselves. The human odyssey must go on and on.

Tui, tui, tuituia! Tuia i runga, tuia i raro, tuia i roto, tuia i waho...

Listen to the voices of the past, they are calling you to unite, unite in humankind. Unite with the skies above, the earth below, the sea surrounding. Turou Hawaiki!

Tuia i te here tangata ka rongō te Ao, ka rongō te Pō...

You are not a global village, you are a global iwi. Join together all your descent lines from the past to all the genealogies you possess and twine them fast as you go on into the future.

Tuia i te kawae tangata ka heke mai i a Hawaiki Nui, Hawaiki Roa, Hawaiki Pamamao, ki te Hono I Wairua, Ki te Whai Ao ki te Ao Mārama.

You have your own truth, write it. You have your own dreams, walk them. You are the potiki, the youngest, you don't have to listen to the older siblings, as the last-born you have nothing to lose - you can do anything. In a world where international instability is becoming increasingly the default and autocratic decisionmaking controls all of us, your job is to maintain the axis. Enlarging our world may be the only way you have of saving it. Break the calabash if you have to. Become exponential thinkers, talkers, walkers to find ways forward and fast.

Chant your way through the light.

Chant your way through the darkness.

Kia hora te marino, kia whakapapa pounamu te moana, Kia tere te karohirohi i mua i tou huarahi.

May the calm be widespread, May the ocean glisten like greenstone, And may the shimmer of sunlight ever dance across your pathway.

Ends