

NEW ZEALAND AUTHOR ANNUAL 2025



NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY OF AUTHORS TE PUNI KAITUHI O AOTEAROA (PEN NZ)

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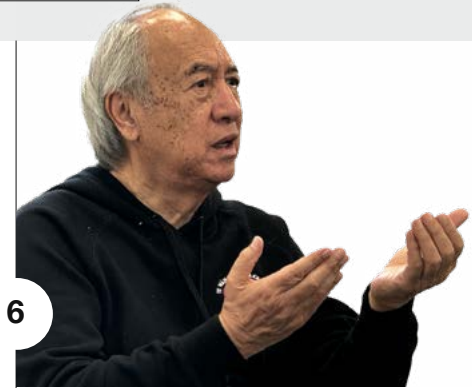
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COVER: Polly, painting by Diana Curtis

Welcome to the *New Zealand Author* (NZA) end-of-year annual that will be available digitally and in print. We've chosen a selection of articles and essays from 2025 issues of NZA for your reading pleasure.

In NZA's Issue 343, we covered The Coalition for Books' **Read Local, Buy Local** campaign. This digital campaign's focus is on encouraging readers to buy or borrow New Zealand books by New Zealand authors. At a time when things are pretty tough for writers and publishing in general, it's something positive for the sector and will be a visible campaign next year.

Stacey Clair, Coalition Manager says, "The Coalition for Books' final campaign for the year hones in on our kaupapa to champion New Zealand books by New Zealand authors. Read Local aims to engage our entire book sector to encourage readers to pick up homegrown stories from their local library or bookseller; why not build your summer reading stack or buy your bookish loved ones stories from across the motu? There are so many incredible storytellers from Aotearoa writing lyrical, stark, magical, uncompromising, heart-breaking, delightful, hilarious, insightful books and we want Kiwis to get behind them this holiday season (and beyond!)."

In other positive news, PANZ has announced that it will assume responsibility for the Whitireia Publishing Course. This decision was a response to the closure of the programme, announced earlier this year, and follows a PANZ council vote to formalise a partnership with Whitireia, ensuring the continuation of the Graduate Diploma in Publishing (Applied) and preserving a vital pathway into the New Zealand publishing industry.

It is New Zealand's only full-time, industry-led publishing qualification and, from 2026, will welcome a capped intake of 20 students for next year. The course will need a minimum of 15 enrolments, and the sector has been asked to promote the course far and wide. It's a fabulous course, with students working directly with publishers, editors, designers, booksellers and authors to bring real books to life.

As PANZ President Eboni Waitere says, "This course has been a puna mātauranga – a spring of knowledge – nurturing skilled graduates who are already shaping our industry. PANZ is proud to invest in this talent, ensuing a vibrant future workforce. From editing and project management to publishing, marketing and sales, our graduates' skills make a remarkable impact across sectors."

I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the ongoing dedication and hard work of CE Jenny Nagle and Claire Hill in National Office; our beloved president, Vanda Symon, and all those who generously give their time to the National Board; with thanks to designer Di Curtis; and the great work of NZSA branches. Kia kaha!

Tina Shaw

editor@nzauthors.org.nz



NEW ZEALAND

AUTHOR

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AOTEAROA (PEN NZ INC)

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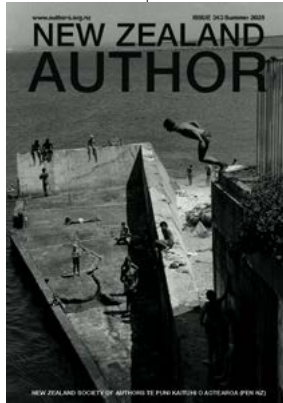
—JENNY NAGLE—

Welcome to the 2025 *New Zealand Author Annual*. As we moved to digital editions of our quarterly magazine, we pledged to produce an annual physical artifact, to record the activities, themes and key pieces of the year. Sincere thanks to NZA editor Tina Shaw and designer Di Curtis for this selected edition, as well as the four fine magazines they produce during the year.

Overarching themes of this year have been the impact of AI copyright infringement and licensing; hearty advocacy for authors' rights and incomes around the Public Lending Right (PLR); submissions to Minister Goldsmith's Amplify Arts Strategy and Labour's new arts policy; championing literacy and local content; and participation in collaborative industry campaigns, corralled by The Coalition for Books around New Voices (emerging writers), #Read Local, Buy Local, Te Wiki o te reo Māori and Pasifika campaigns, Winter/Summer Reading catalogues, and the launch of New Zealand's first book sector strategy, Mahi Tahī.

The year also delivered compounding disappointments: the absence of any

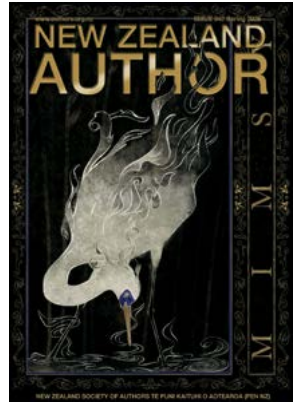
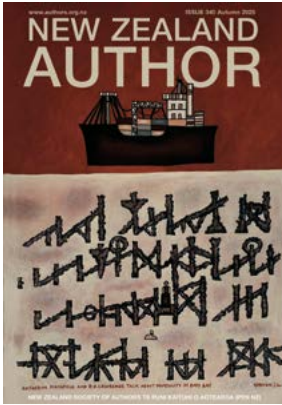
mention of books in Amplify, which excluded the PLR reform featured in its draft; the reluctance by MBIE to include AI regulation in its 2026 review; the gut-wrenching withdrawal as Country of Honour from Bologna 2027 when zero support could be secured; further decline in literacy rates; and the dismal paucity of investment in the book sector.



"It is concerning that this low ranking may be used to justify a continued low level of investment in the book sector."

The recent release of the Audience Atlas survey from Creative New Zealand seemingly used performance data for the book sector: measuring the number of people who attended a book launch or writers festival, that rendered the book sector the lowest in audience uptake of all art forms. Surely, *reading a New Zealand book* is participation in our artform? That was not measured. It is concerning that this low ranking may be used to justify a continued low level of investment in the book sector.

NZSA's 2025 President of Honour Charlotte Grimshaw pointed out the division and dangers in modern journalism and shapeshifting facts in an AI post-truth world; and we see from our monthly PEN posts the increase in



censorship, misinformation and threats to freedom of speech around the world.

Worldwide, writers seek to maintain integrity through Authored by Humans advocacy in this rapidly evolving landscape.

Despite it all, wonderful books and writing is being published in Aotearoa, and you continue to show great resilience. I wish all our members a safe and happy summer. We have record membership, so thank you sincerely for your continued support of NZSA. Thanks to our President Dr Vanda Symon, our board members, representatives, branch committees and office holders across the regions keeping our network and society active, relevant and vibrant; to partners Ngā Kaitiaki Māori and Next Page for your outreach and burgeoning programmes; at national office to our interns Luke and Tane for your contribution, and thanks to Claire and Meghan for keeping us glued together.

The NZSA research project early this year, funded by the Mātātūhi Foundation, produced a history of the first New Zealand

book awards, and NZSA can be proud of its history and the establishment of those two awards in the 1940s that have afforded recognition and encouragement to New Zealand writers ever since, and established a tradition of excellence.

“...and we see from our monthly PEN posts the increase in censorship, misinformation and threats to freedom of speech around the world.”

You still produce world-class writing across all genres and NZSA will continue to campaign for PLR reform and copyrights, and lobby for the practical things that will eventually create a tipping point to elevate New Zealand books and writers. For #Read Local, Buy Local to truly flourish, we need a weekly book show on National Radio or TVNZ; parity of investment in books and writers; an annual national

READING campaign, more adaptations of New Zealand books to screen, and support for export initiatives.

That’s what I want in my Christmas stocking. ■

“Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope ... a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity.” – Kofi Annan

Extraordinary THINGS

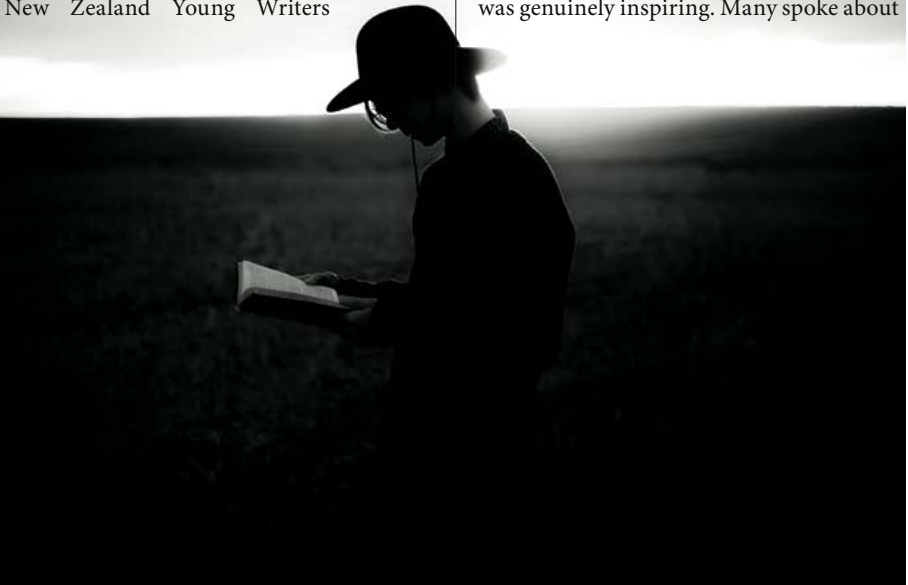
Jessica Thomas on young writers finding their voice in Aotearoa.

Kia ora, I'm Jessica, your National Youth Board Representative with the New Zealand Society of Authors Te Puni Kaituhi o Aotearoa. As I near the end of my PhD and reflect on the years I've spent immersed in creative writing – from my Master's studies through to my own manuscript work – one thing has become abundantly clear: young writers in Aotearoa are doing extraordinary things. And it's a privilege to support them through NZSA.

This year, I had the joy of attending the New Zealand Young Writers

Festival in Ōtepoti Dunedin – a vibrant, energising celebration of emerging voices. Over 50 young writers from across the country gathered for a long weekend of creativity, curiosity, and community.

The programme was packed with workshops, panel discussions and a warm, welcoming Open Mic session that gave space for brave, thoughtful and powerful storytelling. Whether poets, novelists, playwrights or essayists, these young writers brought an honesty and energy that was genuinely inspiring. Many spoke about



“What struck me most was the generosity in every interaction: young people holding space for one another and celebrating each other’s voices.”

writing through grief, identity, joy and hope. Others explored the craft itself – how to write better sentences, how to take risks, how to share their work for the first time. What struck me most was the generosity in every interaction: young people holding space for one another and celebrating each other’s voices.

It reminded me why this mahi matters, and why NZSA is committed to uplifting writers at every stage of their journey.

That sense of community is also at the heart of Next Page Aotearoa, our revitalised national platform for young writers, formerly known as Pens and PJs. Writing can feel like such a solitary pursuit, especially for those just finding their feet, but it doesn’t have to be. Next Page aims to make the writing path less lonely and far more connected. My hope for Next Page is that it can be a place where young writers can share opportunities, events, encouragement and celebrations contributed by our wonderful readers.

We host workshops – our recent webinar with Siobhan Harvey was an incredible masterclass in finding and applying for residencies, university programmes, grants and awards – and we hope to expand into in-person meet-ups soon. Most importantly, we want young writers to feel seen, supported and welcome. ■

NZSA LAURA SOLOMON CUBA PRESS PRIZE

The winner will receive a cash award as an “advance” of NZ\$1000 and a publishing contract supplied by The Cuba Press. The Cuba Press will edit, design, print, market, distribute and promote the book and ebook and pay standard author royalties. The NZSA Laura Solomon Cuba Press Prize will pay for the book production and printing.

The NZSA Laura Solomon Cuba Press Prize is an exciting new award for writers holding New Zealand citizenship or who are permanent residents of New Zealand. The prize, which celebrates the life and work of the writer Laura Solomon, is open to published and unpublished authors who are invited to enter manuscripts written across genres, i.e.: fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, drama or children’s writing, to be judged within the criteria set by Laura Solomon, for new writing with a “unique and original vision”.

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THE NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY OF AUTHORS
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TO SIR *With* LOVE

Donna McLeod reports on Ngā Pae Rewa Pū Kōrero – The Uprising of Storytelling Hui held on Labour Weekend, Te Awhina Marae, Motueka.

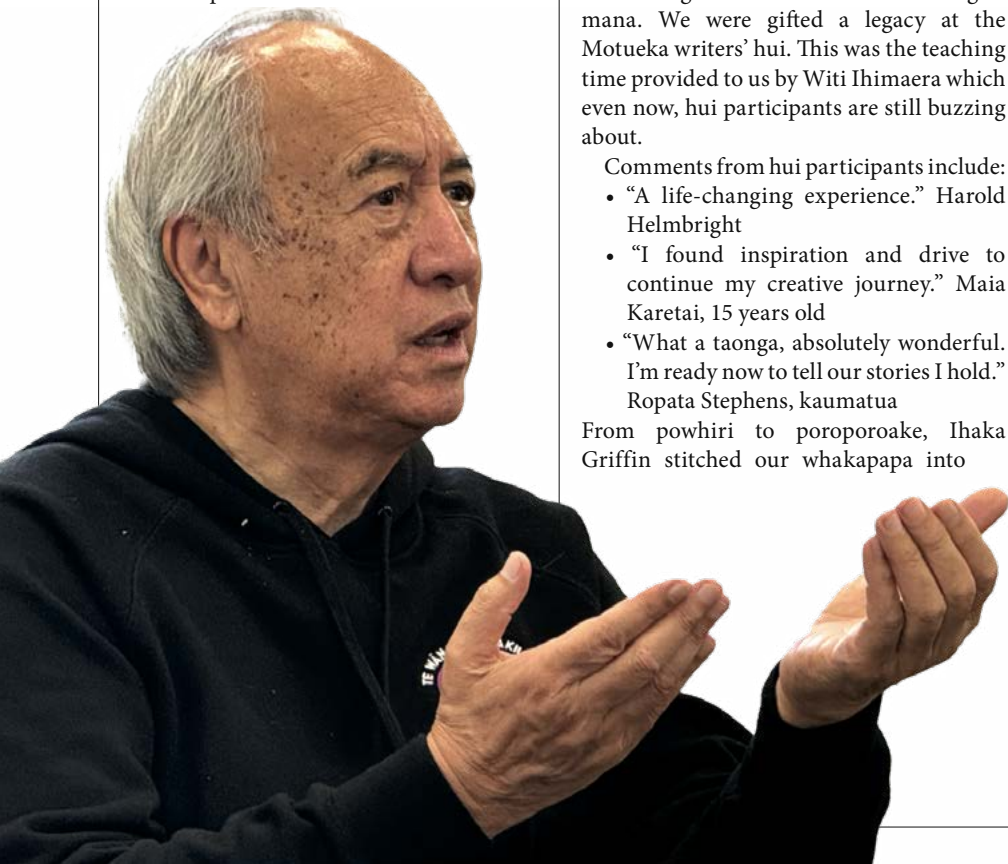
How does one encapsulate space? The space of creativity, the creative space within te aō Maori? The

space where a master stands before you gifting not three but six continuous hours of teaching? We witnessed one standing in mana. We were gifted a legacy at the Motueka writers' hui. This was the teaching time provided to us by Witi Ihimaera which even now, hui participants are still buzzing about.

Comments from hui participants include:

- "A life-changing experience." Harold Helmbright
- "I found inspiration and drive to continue my creative journey." Maia Karetai, 15 years old
- "What a taonga, absolutely wonderful. I'm ready now to tell our stories I hold." Ropata Stephens, kaumatua

From powhiri to poroporoake, Ihaka Griffin stitched our whakapapa into



our whare turangapeke. Nuki Takao and Renee Kahukura Iosefa held our mana whenua tikanga. And Taan Corbett held our space at te maatu. Hine Kere lead our kaimahi.

Make no mistake, Nga Pae Rewa Pū was a gathering of Māori writers, and the uprising of our stories. Motueka is the heartland of the Nelson Tenth, a perfectly appropriate place for our hui. As such, we have rich, personal stories to tell. We are a small town but one that has nurtured the likes of Ben Brown, Michael Bennett, Becky Aranga, Nuki Takao, Mat Tait, Stef Harris, Craig Willie Fransen, Renee Kahukura Iosefa, Hamish Bennett, and many other published writers, filmmakers and creatives.

As well as his generous teaching time, Witi graciously picked up the wero of tears and frustration from Renee, Nuki and Becky Manawatu asking for mentorships. And you came, Sir, as did 30 writers who whakapapa Māori, to Te Waipounamu, or

live on the whenua. Kaumatua and rangatahi, established writers, and others looking for their words.

This was a first for many attending a gathering of Māori writers. Workshops included writing in te reo Māori and writing stories of the whenua and about iwi. A conscious attempt was made to embrace our community in the hui so that our art was not seen as something rarefied or remote. In this regard, we hosted Hamish Bennett one evening for a screening of his film to an enthusiastic audience of 80 which was facilitated by Doug Brooks. In addition, a warm and entertaining gala dinner for 120 was held at which readings by hui participants took place throughout the evening.

We are grateful to our sponsors the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, NZSA, Whakarewa Trust, Wakatu Incorporation, Te Awhina Marae, Motueka High School, our kaimahi and whānau. ■

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New Voices

A new initiative aims to highlight promising local talent.

In June, the Coalition for Books announced the inaugural New Voices of Aotearoa, an initiative that aims to showcase up-and-coming, must-read, brilliantly talented authors of Aotearoa New Zealand adult fiction and non-fiction. The Coalition is proud to present this group of storytellers as 2025's New Voices of Aotearoa:

Wellington essayist **Una Cruickshank**; Raglan journalist, videographer and nature writer **Kate Evans**; Gisborne trapper, environmentalist and author **Sam Gibson**; Auckland actor, producer, radio host and author **Matt Heath**; Christchurch editor and writer of techno-thrillers, science fiction, fantasy and non-fiction **Judy Mohr**; Wellington novelist **Olive Nuttall**; Wellington tāngata

turi-raised anthologist and novelist **Michelle Rahurahu** (Ngāti Rahurahu, Ngāti Tahu–Ngāti Whāoa); Auckland novelist and reviewer **Josie Shapiro**; Auckland writer and arts worker **Saraid de Silva**; and Auckland television screenwriter, producer and author **Gavin Strawhan**.

The initiative, funded through the generosity of the Mātātūhi Foundation and selected by a panel of six judges, shines a light on 10 emerging Aotearoa authors. It will be an annual competition initiated by the Coalition for Books and aimed at amplifying and nurturing recipients for their career potential. A little like the *Granta's* Best of Young British Novelists.

The 2025 New Voices represent writers from various genres, backgrounds, whenua and publication journeys, each showcasing

“...the initiative shines a spotlight on the 10 best new voices in Aotearoa writing each year, making it easy for readers to know who to look out for in store and online.”

the breadth and depth of literary talent in Aotearoa.

The public will be able to identify the New Voices of Aotearoa recipients' books as they'll be stickered to that effect in bookstores.

Manager Stacey Clair is currently in discussion with Public Libraries of New Zealand and some festivals regarding events and ongoing activity throughout the year for the authors, so there'll be plenty more noise to draw attention to the New Voices of Aotearoa.

Coalition for Books Chair Melanie Laville-Moore says the initiative shines a spotlight on the 10 best new voices in Aotearoa writing each year, making it easy for readers to know who to look out for in store and online.



"New Voices of Aotearoa is a dynamic new promotion aimed at identifying, nurturing and increasing readership and sales for brilliant new emerging writing talent. These up-and-coming authors, whether writing in fiction or non-fiction for adults, have been selected for their ability to engage readers with page-turning, entertaining, moving, 'right now and what's next' books."

To qualify for New Voices of Aotearoa the nominated authors must have published their first

book in print between March 2024 and June 2025, or have their second book scheduled for publication before December 2025. Nominations were public this year via the Coalition website, and will be again in 2026.



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Ashes *to* Ashes

*Graeme Lay shares a special moment
at the property of the late Frank Sargeson.*

Literary history was repeated on 30 November 2024 when the ashes of the late Devonport writer Kevin Ireland (1933–2023) were added to those of the late Takapuna writer Frank Sargeson (1903–1982) at the Sargeson property at 14A Esmonde Road, Takapuna.

Members of the Frank Sargeson Trust and supporters gathered on a damp Saturday afternoon to conduct a moving ceremony that commemorated both these renowned writers.

Frank Sargeson lived and wrote at the

Esmonde Road property from 1931 until his death 51 years later. A young aspiring poet, Kevin Ireland was befriended and mentored by the much older Sargeson and in 1957–8 lived in an army hut at the rear of the property. Here the young Ireland learned to live and work as a writer, with Sargeson next door as a living example of the craft.

After Sargeson's death, his literary executor, Christine Cole Catley, set up the Sargeson Trust, whose aims were to preserve Sargeson's house as a literary museum and support young writers in their

“We held your body in a paper bag no bigger than a bull’s scrotum/and took turns jigging you out under a loquat tree.”

careers. Ireland later became a member of the Frank Sargeson Trust.

Several years after Sargeson’s death, his ashes were retrieved by Sargeson trustee Michael King, from the funeral company where they had been held since his cremation in 1982.

On a Tuesday in June 1990, several members of the Frank Sargeson Trust gathered at the writer’s house and his ashes were scattered under a loquat tree at the front of the property. Later, Kevin Ireland published a poem describing this event, calling it ‘Ash Tuesday’ ... *We held your body in a paper bag no bigger than a bull’s scrotum/and took turns jigging you out under a loquat tree.*

Kevin Ireland’s widow, writer and editor Janet Wilson, brought Kevin’s ashes to 14A Esmonde Road. Present at the house were current members of the Frank Sargeson Trust, including chair Elizabeth Aitkin-Rose, niece of the late Christine Cole-Catley. Members were there primarily to select the recipients of the Sargeson Fellowship for 2025.

The rain abated and the Sargeson trustees and supporters gathered at the front of the house for a ceremony. Led by Wilson, Ireland’s ashes were scattered in turn by those present, under the same loquat tree where his mentor Sargeson’s had been “jigged out” back in 1990.

The symmetry of the event was very moving. After many years, Frank and Kevin were together again. Ashes to ashes. ■

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Intensely PERSONAL

*We asked Airini Beutraais to share her thoughts
around writing personal essays.*

IMAGE: FUNKYFOCUS FROM PIXABAY

When I think about my collection of essays *The Beautiful Afternoon* (Te Herenga Waka University Press, 2024), one of the questions I ask myself is: Do I wish I hadn't written it?

At WORD Christchurch festival in 2024, I ran a creative non-fiction workshop called "Naked on the Page". I gave the workshop that name because that was genuinely how I felt, both writing this book and having it published.

There is a sense of exposure in the personal essay that is different to what I have experienced with poetry and with prose fiction. Poetry has the advantage of form: it is fragmented by nature, it can move easily between narrative and lyric modes. A reader of poetry does not necessarily expect coherence or fact. "It's just a poem" is always a plausible defence. Fiction has a built-in mask, or even an entire costume. A lot of fiction is, of course, non-fiction, but few fiction writers are willing to admit to the full extent of this. A lot of autobiography is also fictional, but a similar reluctance applies here. Whether or not it is openly discussed, in any literary genre, relationship to truth is always a primary consideration, for writers and for readers. Giving something the name "essay" creates higher expectations of honesty than "poem" or "story". "Personal essay" comes with the expectation that a text will be sharing personal truths about its author.

I would be lying if I said it was easy to put this book out into the world. It does feel intensely personal, for me. There is stuff in there that makes me physically cringe when I think of other people reading and critiquing it. There is also a lot that was taken out, and a lot that I chose not to write from the outset. I think it is important to only include as much as feels necessary to the purpose of each essay. However, the omissions and out-takes now seem like potential beginning points for possible future directions. Could the material that has been excluded find its way into words, in another form?

I think that memoirists often write their stories because they have not been able to have their version of events acknowledged in any other way. To my mind, the personal essay goes a little way along this path, but not as far. If the memoirist is hiking deep into the forest, the essayist is standing at its edge, looking into the trees, and asking, "What kind of forest is this? How far might it go? Is this even a forest at all?"

One of the advantages of the essay form is that it allows for not knowing. An essay writer does not have to come to any kind of conclusion. The essay is a fertile testing ground for ideas. I began each of these essays feeling that I had a fairly concrete opinion on my subject. In each instance, my opinions were unravelled to some degree. This unravelling continued after the essays were completed.

With any creative work one has to know when to stop, and like the artist putting down the paintbrush before the painting is ruined, the essayist has to save and close before things get overstated, overly drawn out, or saggy. But an essay is a snapshot of a person's thoughts at a particular moment in time, and regardless of what anyone may claim to the contrary, our thoughts change, sometimes rapidly.

It has only been 14 months since *The Beautiful Afternoon* was released, and already I have found that I disagree with myself on a number of points. For example, I have softened up on theology. In my essay 'Wicked Pack of Cards', which explores my relationship with tarot, I write about moving away from Christianity and towards pagan earth-based spirituality. As a single mother, and having experienced some negative responses from others around me

having left my children's other parent, I felt strongly that I did not belong anywhere near a patriarchal, monotheistic religion in any of its forms. However, I feel more at peace with my Christian roots now. Interestingly, working with tarot has helped me with this. Traditional tarot decks draw heavily on Christian symbolism and associated mythology. The church I grew up in was not big on symbols of any kind (which I discuss in the essay), but it comes out of a tradition rich with them. The Bible itself is full of symbolic motifs and layers of meaning. Furthermore, I am still guided by the values I was raised with, such as simplicity, honesty, integrity, doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. Writing 'Wicked Pack of Cards' was a waypoint in an ongoing journey. I have learned that spirituality is deeply personal and individual: it is not something I can allow others to prescribe or define for me, and it is not something I can confine to a single set of ideas. In a sense, I have come full circle back to the Quaker concept of a one-to-one relationship between a person and God.

"As a single mother, and having experienced some negative responses from others around me having left my children's other parent, I felt strongly that I did not belong anywhere near a patriarchal, monotheistic religion in any of its forms."

As well as disagreeing with myself, I find there are subjects where I still oscillate in my views. The first essay in my collection, 'Life of Leisure', deals with the problem common to most writers, of the struggle between creative expression and the need to make a living. I am the sole earner in a low-income household. I have what could be described as a "squiggly CV". As I describe in the essay, I still have an inner accountant who beats me with a figurative stick every year at tax time, and whenever I get a royalty statement. I wrote about a conversation with a careers counsellor who compared writing that doesn't generate reliable income to "playing golf", and while I have talked to people who have been aggrieved on my behalf, I still find that comparison useful. In some ways, it lowers the stakes and that feels reassuring. I am very uncomfortable with the idea that I am writing anything for morally lofty or noble

reasons, or reasons of legacy. I would love to have more conversations about the economics of creativity. If the personal is political, then it is also economic.

Despite my continually changing positions, I stand behind what I have written in *The Beautiful Afternoon*. If I began this work now, it would be a different book that eventuated, but I think the same goes for every book. I don't think any of us are the same person we were two, five, 10 years ago, and I see this as a good thing.

I see the essay as a form that is best suited to purposes such as opening up a conversation, testing ideas, exploring concepts and asking questions. There are crossovers with other forms and genres: the personal essay may also be memoir. Talia Marshall's *Whaea Blue* could be described as a memoir in essays. There might be a hybridisation with fiction – David Coventry's *Performance*, a novel, contains essayistic fragments throughout. Another hybrid form is the verse essay, one of several approaches to the long poem. One of my favourite pieces of writing ever is Anne Carson's *The Glass Essay*, which intersperses meditations on, and quotations from, Emily Bronte, with personal material about the end of a romantic relationship, and caring for ageing parents.

The essay also has its limitations as a form: there are things it can't do on its own. It can't

tell the full story or the “whole truth”. It may be able to tell “nothing but the truth”, but there will often need to be things that are ironed out or reshaped for the sake of simplicity or expediency. It can’t give an exhaustive account of a subject.

There are also things that an essay does not have to do: present a clear opinion, avoid an opinion, or come to a conclusion. It does not have to be linear or to follow a particular structure. It does not have to inspire, entertain or titillate. It does not have to appeal to everyone. It does not need to be perfect. *The Beautiful Afternoon* has had mixed reviews. I have had a sense that reviewers might have wanted to read something less hairy, something less contrasting, something less packed with quotes from mostly pre-1930 texts. But I wrote the essays I wanted to write. I went into the topics I wanted to investigate. I could have written something more marketable, and palatable, but it would not have been true to who I am as a writer, and it would have been

more difficult for me, because that is not how my brain works. It took me two years to write these essays because of all the meandering I did, and because I find it hard to organise and summarise my thoughts. I wonder if I needed to write things down because I wasn’t able to sort out these ideas inside my head?

Importantly, these essays went through a rigorous editing process. My editor, Anna Knox, was excellent to work with. It’s important to remember that in all writing, it’s not something most of us do entirely alone – everything published by a traditional publishing house has had a second pair of eyes (at least) and hands on it. The essay form probably calls for more editing than other forms (such as poetry and fiction) because of the need to tease out ideas, and because of the flexibility of its structure. We may think we have expressed something in a way that makes sense, but it’s entirely possible a reader may think otherwise.

The answer to my question about writing a collection of essays is no, I don’t wish I hadn’t done it. I don’t know if I will do it again, and if I do, I won’t approach it in the same way. Steve Braunias recently described the essay as the “dreariest form in modern New Zealand literature”, and that may be true. But I also think it is one of the most versatile forms, and perhaps the most useful to explore, as a writer. I encourage anyone who feels drawn to writing essays to do it. ■



FOSTERING Learning

*Lesley Marshall reports on the life and death
of a remarkable man, Hungkar Dorje Rinpoche.*



The Tibetan writer, educator and philanthropist Hungkar Dorje Rinpoche was born around the time I started high school. He never got to go to school. His family – nomadic herders – lost all their wealth and lands during the upheaval of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and his mother was left with five children to take care of on her own. He said later: “All we had to eat were yoghurt in the summer and tsampa in the winter. We never saw any other kind of food as it had become so scarce. Our stomachs were always longing for the taste of bread and rice, but we were very fortunate just to have the yoghurt or tsampa.”

Education was definitely not possible. “I was nine years old before I began to learn to read and write. It was a time when everyone lived in great fear, so that they didn’t dare study Buddhism or perform Buddhist rituals. The only time we could study was secretly in the middle of the night. At that time, there were no schools in Golog, let alone monasteries. A monk wearing Dharma robes was never to be seen.” Then, as Buddhist practices were permitted again, he saw all the monks emerging in their robes, and “monastic communities suddenly appeared like a carpet of flowers on the green pastures”.

Despite this difficult start, after being recognised as a reincarnation of Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje, he began studying Buddhist philosophy – firstly in Tibet, and later in

India. He joined a monastery in Golog region that had started out as a nomadic institution in a yak-hair tent and now was settled in one place, though this was in a world of snow lions, snow leopards and wild yaks. Some years later when the abbot died, Hungkar Dorje replaced him and he began a life dedicated to teaching and the care of his community.

“I was nine years old before I began to learn to read and write. It was a time when everyone lived in great fear, so that they didn’t dare study Buddhism or perform Buddhist rituals. The only time we could study was secretly in the middle of the night. At that time, there were no schools in Golog, let alone monasteries.”

Having missed out on learning for so long, he was determined local children wouldn’t suffer the same lack, so he built a school for them. However, fundraising for the materials and the actual process of building was very difficult: “It is also especially difficult to maintain what has been built. In the depth of the winter, the sharpness of the cold weather at that high altitude is like a sharp sword; one can actually see the cold crack the ground open and split rocks.”

Despite that, more schools followed, with the aim of fostering learning, and of promoting the Tibetan language and culture. He also established a medical centre and library. His monastery became a magnet for adult learners, and on Lung Ngon’s website you can still read his invitation to the annual Winter Retreat, due to begin on 2 December last year and finish on 18 March 2025. But long before that retreat started – in September 2024 – he had already vanished.

As the retreat continued without him, rumours circled. Finally, in early April, local officials showed his Lung-Ngon monks a

certificate confirming his death in Vietnam, though there was no information about how he'd died. The monastery, always under tight Chinese supervision, then issued a statement that he'd been on retreat in Vietnam and had died of an unnamed illness.

However, Hungkar Dorje's so-called retreat in Vietnam hadn't been for religious refreshment, but more a flight for his life, following interrogations by Chinese officials. These officials accused him of not being sufficiently accommodating when the monastery was forced to accept a visit from the Chinese

"Both fear that the cremation is intended to destroy any evidence of how he really died."

Communist Party-appointed Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu, who is not recognised by the Dalai Lama.

Hungkar Dorje presumably spent the next six months hidden in Vietnam, but this sanctuary proved insufficient to withstand the cold winds of Beijing. On 25 March Vietnamese officials, in collaboration with Chinese agents, arrested him at his hotel. Four days later, still in custody, he was dead.

Although five of his monks were allowed to come to Vietnam, permission to view his body or repatriate him was refused. Tenzin Yangzom, from International Tibet Network said, "We are now in a race against time. Sources confirm that Chinese officials are actively preparing for Tulku Hungkar Dorje's cremation in Vietnam – with strict conditions: no photos, no videos, and no public."

Topjor Tsultrim, from Students for a Free Tibet, added, "Around the world, Tibetans are fearing the worst: that Tulku Hungkar Dorje was abducted, tortured, and killed by Chinese agents for his efforts to preserve Tibetan culture, language, and religion." Both fear that the cremation is intended to destroy any evidence of how he really died.

Meanwhile Hungkar Dorje's community are forced to do their grieving in secret – Chinese officials have interrogated and detained local Tibetans who shared photographs and posts on social media mourning his death.

But the grieving and celebration of a life extremely well lived cannot be suppressed by brutality, and here in New Zealand we should also celebrate this remarkable man, and support Tibetans around the world who like him are trying to keep their culture alive.



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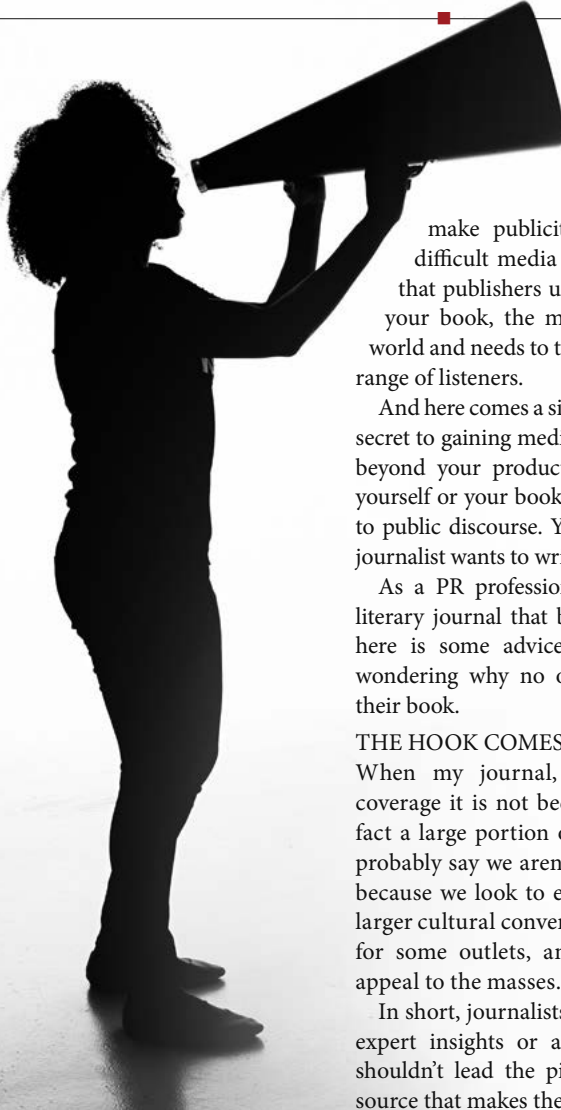
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Beyond *the* Book

Emily Makere Broadmore offers some advice for authors wanting to be more media savvy.



Simply having published a book isn't news. Your book itself, unlike the music or film industry, doesn't lend itself to the sort of newsworthy elements which make publicity achievable in an increasingly difficult media environment. Just like the reality that publishers ultimately need to make money off your book, the media too works in a commercial world and needs to tell stories that will appeal to a wide range of listeners.

And here comes a simple yet critical piece of advice: the secret to gaining media coverage as an author is to think beyond your product (your book). You're not selling yourself or your book – you're offering valuable insights to public discourse. You need to find the story that the journalist wants to write, or RNZ actually wants to cover.

As a PR professional and editor of a strange little literary journal that both gains publicity and sells out, here is some advice to all those wonderful writers wondering why no one wants to talk to them about their book.

THE HOOK COMES FIRST

When my journal, *Folly*, secures national media coverage it is not because we're a literary journal (in fact a large portion of the literary community would probably say we aren't – but that's another story). It is because we look to ensure that *Folly* becomes part of larger cultural conversations, provides a bit of clickbait for some outlets, and is pitched and positioned to appeal to the masses.

In short, journalists need a compelling current angle, expert insights or a unique perspective. Your book shouldn't lead the pitch; it should be the fascinating source that makes the larger story possible.

Recent examples of *Folly* pitches include us jumping on a cultural moment in the *Sunday Star-Times* (about why literature can bring the left and the right together), and an email to Reading Room which said something like “Hey, would you take a story about sex in Wellington?”

The lesson? Your book might be your purpose, but it shouldn't be your pitch.

FINDING YOUR HOOK

For authors seeking media coverage, consider the following:

- What larger conversation does your book contribute to?
- What current social issues does your work intersect with?
- What unexpected elements might intrigue, or be clickbait worthy?
- What local or timely connections can you make? Is there a local angle here?

In PR we call this *finding the newsworthy elements*. And what that is exactly will depend on which outlet you plan to pitch to and which editor or journalist you are contacting. For instance, Jesse Mulligan wouldn't have had us on RNZ Afternoons to discuss the sex lives of Wellingtonians, but he was keen to have a political debate about the worsening social divide between the left and the right. Wellington's Radio Active, by contrast, took a pitch that had a strong local angle, and *The Post* was keen to write about the spaces where writers write in Wellington.

This is a different way of thinking, but once you turn your mind to the idea of newsworthiness, ideas will begin to flood in. As a starter, set up some Google Alerts for the themes or topics that play out in your book, follow journalists who cover related subjects, and watch news trends that connect to your work. Think beyond the typical arts media – try to identify stories that fit within the media coverage for the social, business, lifestyle, technology sectors. Through this you will

soon create a running list of potential stories, and will begin to see how your book can shoehorn into the public narrative.

Consider these possibilities:

- A local history book becomes newsworthy by revealing previously unknown connections between current city developments and historical events
- A novel attracts coverage by highlighting contemporary social issues through historical fiction
- A poetry collection gains attention by connecting to mental health awareness month
- A children's author secures interviews by discussing changing reading habits of youngsters in the digital age.

The hard truth in this is that your book isn't the story, and you are probably not even the story, but somewhere in your pages is a story. Publicity of your book is the byproduct of having provided a newsworthy pitch to the media.

MAKING NEWS

Once you have identified a list of potential stories and outlets best suited to them, you need to find a suitable journalist. Consider the plight of our modern journalists – these people are overworked and fielding pitches all day. Engage meaningfully with each journalist as an individual, and provide value by ensuring your pitch is newsworthy, bespoke, and clear. To be frank about what I mean by bespoke, don't send the same email to every journalist and don't write a press release.

Remember: focus on finding those larger narratives around your book, and let your book be the fascinating evidence that makes your newsworthy pitch possible. Start building your media connections early, maintain them consistently, and think beyond the book to find the story that needs to be told. ■

Buy *The* Book

Repeat offender David Hill shares his thoughts on book reviewing.

The first published book review I wrote was for the long-defunct *Auckland Star*. It assessed a biography of Robert Burns, and appeared on a winter Saturday afternoon, with my name in four-point font at the end. I was paid 10 shillings and sixpence. That's right: half a guinea.

Nearly 60 years later, there's been the odd change in the book reviewing world. Online has mostly replaced hard copy, and I offer thanks to local sites like *Reading Room*, *The Sapling*, *Spinoff* Books and others which keep the associated conversations going. But it's bleak to see how nearly all our newspapers and many magazines have largely given up on reviewing the printed word. Bizarre, really: you'd think a habit of reading would work in their favour.

Ten years back, our small provincial paper ran a weekly half-page of book reviews. Now ... zilch. The same with metropolitan dailies. Author profiles, yes. Usually they tell you where the writer sits at the laptop (diverting); where the new book's idea originated (intriguing); how author manages demands of family and full-time job (humiliating for us oldies). But the book itself mostly goes unanalysed.

More gratitude, therefore, to the *Listener*, plus literary mags like *Landfall*, *Takahē*, et al. who still offer such discussions. And a 180-degree flip to fume over the demise of the marvellous *New Zealand Review of Books*, our only hard-copy

source of numerous lengthy reviews, after Creative NZ's inexplicable, idiotic decision to end its funding.

In another medium, thanks go to Booksellers Aotearoa New Zealand, the collective of shops and publishers who provide \$75 in book vouchers as payment for reviewing a book on National Radio's *Nine to Noon*. That comes to about \$1500 of vouchers per month. Well done, I followed good people. (Okay, such reviews seem to be followed by a spike in sales, which benefits the donor. But it's a considerate gesture.)

Alas, not all outlets acknowledge that reviewing equals work. The odd one honks "Your payment will be a copy of the book." No, thanks. A review takes me some five to seven hours of reading and writing. If the book sells at \$37 – well, you do the maths. If it's an uncorrected proof copy, and/or one you've agreed to do only because a desperate editor tells you every other reviewer has refused ...

So thanks also to the websites and titles mentioned earlier which pay for the reviews they run. It's appropriate. It's professional.

Apart from the help it gives with power bills, why do I review books?

Because it's part of the general discourse, the trade talk of our writing world. An unmentioned book is an unfinished thing. "A writer only begins a book. A reader completes it," declaimed Samuel Johnson, 300 years back. Right on, Sam, and a reader who also evaluates it completes things a few degrees more. Reviews help draw

"But it's bleak to see how nearly all our newspapers and many magazines have largely given up on reviewing the printed word."

books to public attention. They imply that the written word is significant; merits a considered evaluation. They help maintain the status of our trade.

I review also because it makes me read work I might not normally read. And – of course – because it's good for my own stuff.

Reviewing makes me read and write analytically, forensically almost. "Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written," said Thoreau. Reading to review means careful attention to another author's style, skills, substance, as well as their sags and stumbles. That has to be good for your own attempts. It develops another skill set: conciseness, balance (I hope), context, summaries that avoid spoilers. It's a silent dialogue with other practitioners.

And there's another, minor but special reward, which Roger Hall evokes splendidly in *The Book Club* – the smell of a new book when you open it for the first time and inhale that bouquet of glue and clean paper.

I review New Zealand books. Should I? Some authors I respect won't do so; they're concerned about factions and cronyism. Okay, there are close friends I won't write about, simply because they're close. But otherwise, who better to assess a work than a fellow tradie, someone familiar with the nuances of the form and the society in which it's set? We can be local guides. And as writers, we know something of the labour and hope that go into any book. Plus we can do the job a whole lot more elegantly than some of the non-authors who write responses.

Iain Sharp suggested a few years back that New Zealand reviewers were too kind to local books; that our comments would have more impact if a

fresher, even frostier air breathed through them. Pertinent point. Certainly I was impacted by one local judgement on a book of mine. It ended with "...This is just so unconvincing and patronising, so second-rate." Plenty of cool air there. And no, the sentence isn't engraved on my memory. Chiselled into it, more like.

I guess I do err on the side of charity with local authors. Carelessness makes my eyes narrow. Perceived arrogance, indifference towards the reader make my brow lower. Otherwise I'm overly aware of that labour and hope I mentioned two paragraphs back. Anyway, writing an evisceration is too easy, too much of a cop-out – though I'll happily make an exception for overseas aberrations such as Jeffrey Archer.

I've had some fascinating responses to reviews. I lost a debate with a Wairarapa devotee of Stephen King, who knew SK was the world's greatest literary stylist, and only arty-farty snobs like me denied it. One novelist demanded I take out a full-page notice in *The New Zealand Herald*, apologising for reservations I'd expressed about her opus. One poet told me I

was a louse on the locks of literature (great alliteration, but a straight steal from Tennyson). I've been told that I'm just jealous. Then there are the unsettling times when an author actually thanks me for the review.

If John Milton (who'd probably be writing steampunk fiction these days) was right, and a good book is the precious life blood of a master spirit, then book reviews can offer a transfusion, to reader, author, publisher, and others in our trade. I hope to keep my tiny share of those transfusions dripping. I hope also to find a better closing image for the next thing I write. ■



The New Zealand Review of Books Pukapuka Aotearoa was a quarterly broadsheet dedicated to long-form reviews of local books. It was launched in 1991 by the Peppercorn Press Trust and ceased with the Summer 2019 issue. Missed by many!



(L-R) Bobby Yarra, Ron Riddell, Saray Torres

LA CASA *del* Poeta

Ron Riddell and Saray Torres have been working to establish an International Writer's Residency in Medellin, Colombia.

There is often a great deal of stimulation and inspiration for writers when they come into contact with a different culture or country, especially those that are home to different languages. From La Casa del Poeta in Medellín, Colombia, comes a call for adventure in the world of contemporary literature.

When I first came to Colombia in 2001 to attend The Medellín International Poetry Festival, the largest festival of its kind in the world, I knew only a few words of Spanish. Twenty years or so later, I can speak the language reasonably well. What is more, the process of translating a number of my books into Spanish has given me a greater appreciation of the wider nuances and meanings that are possible when transposing from one language and cultural context to another. Some of my work, although first written and published in English, gains another, often fuller dimension in Spanish. Coming to Latin America has given such a lot, both as a person and as an artist.

At the time, Colombia was still in the grip of a 50-year-old civil war and Medellín was still controlled by drug cartels and mobsters. Many people in New Zealand warned me against going. Indeed, at that time some countries would not allow their poets to attend the festival because of the risks to life and limb. In 2001, on average, 17 people a day were being killed in the violence.

However, I was fortunate. I did get assaulted during the festival in 2001 yet the “mugging” was a pretty tame affair. In the street outside the festival hotel, a middle-aged man accosted me, asking for money. I will

never forget the look of disappointment that came over his face when I emptied my pockets. I had no words of Spanish to explain my lack of cash but it didn’t matter. He could see that crumpled pieces of paper on the ground were poems not bank notes.

People often ask me where I live and why I divide my time between New Zealand and Colombia. It cannot totally be explained by the call to lead a life in literature of Pacific-Latino horizons. In 2001, I also had the good fortune to meet Saray Torres, who had worked for many years as a translator, organiser and presenter for Prometeo, the organising committee behind The Medellín International Poetry Festival. Later in 2001, I returned to Colombia and made her a proposal, which she accepted. We got married in Medellín in 2002 and later that same year moved to Wellington to live.

In Wellington in 2003 we launched The Wellington International Poetry Festival, based on the Medellín model. We ran it for only three years but gained a lot of experience in the process. Basically, we had insufficient funding to

continue and we were light on human resources, which is another critical factor in sustaining not-for-profit cultural ventures. In addition, audiences for poetry in New Zealand are significantly smaller than those in Colombia.

Being a writer is no easy vocation anywhere, especially in the context of a country like New Zealand, a small and isolated community that lies within the vastness of the Southern Ocean. Attending international literature events opens doors,

“Many people in New Zealand warned me against going. Indeed, at that time some countries would not allow their poets to attend the festival because of the risks to life and limb.”

often in ways we might least expect. People, ideas and cultures connect: hands are shaken, new friendships made. International dialogue is helpful, for instance, in the various ways that writers from different countries and cultures can help each other with their work. Following my attendance at the Hanoi International Poetry Festival in 2019, my work was translated into Bengali, French and Uzbek and I was invited to a number of international poetry festivals and events. In 2024 I attended several international events in New York, Costa Rica (where my most recent book was published in a bilingual edition) and Colombia.

One of the most inspiring and challenging aspects of being a writer and artist in a war-ravaged country like Colombia is the privilege and opportunity of being able to play a role in the peacemaking process. Among many other things, art and literature are means of metamorphosis, of societal transformation. The many annual poetry festivals in Colombia have played an

important role in this transformation. This role has been recognised internationally: for example, in 2006 The Medellin International Poetry Festival was awarded the Alternative Nobel Peace Prize.

Poetry has helped to change one of the most dangerous and violent cities in the world into a culturally vibrant and internationally interactive metropolis. There is a depth of appreciation of literature and arts here in Colombia which is often humbling and certainly educative. There is the sense that literature is about expanding the realms of human experience and consciousness.

In 2008, Saray and I bought a tumbledown old colonial house in Prado Centro, a central suburb of Medellin, which is now classified as Patrimonial Nacional (National Heritage). This house has become La casa del Poeta, which we use as our base of operations, activities and community actions. We are committed to giving something back to the community, not only the local but also the international community.

COURAGE DAY

NOVEMBER 15

COURAGE DAY IS THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE IMPRISONED WRITER

Courage Day is an opportunity to recognise and support writers who resist repression of the basic human right to freedom of expression and who stand up to attacks made against their right to impart information.

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If you would like to plan an event or activity on Courage Day, such as a reading from an imprisoned writer at your local library, please contact our national office at

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You can find out more by going to

<http://authors.org.nz/freedom-of-expression/courage-day-and-the-empty-chair-campaign/>

We are driven by the desire to share and help other writers who live across other borders and frontiers. This plays importantly into the thinking behind La Casa del Poeta as a host venue for our international writer-in-residence plan.

This residency will present a host of opportunities for community engagement, both locally within Colombia and internationally, through cultural and educational organisations such as casas de cultura, schools and universities. We will make our extensive local and international networks available to visiting writers, which will facilitate the opening of new intercultural horizons, experiences and perspectives. The residency will also provide the opportunity to interact and work creatively in inter-media contexts (viz. the sharing of ideas and

“We are driven by the desire to share and help other writers who live across other borders and frontiers.”

creative practices and performances with other artists, musicians, and film-makers).

There is a lot of preparation work still to be done. With the support of the Medellin City Council, we have embarked upon a full renovation of the house and their ongoing support is promised. At the same time and in the first instance, this initiative also depends on a groundswell of interest and support from our colleagues in Aotearoa. Accordingly, we would welcome any feedback and ideas you may have to

offer. The email address for Ron is: riddell.ron@gmail.com and for Saray: sarayauk@gmail.com

In 2024, we were honoured to have our first Writer in Residence in La casa del Poeta, the US writer and publisher, Bobby Yarra, an associate and memoirist of the Beat Poets. ■

“Attending international literature events opens doors, often in ways we might least expect.”

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Peddalling *through* HISTORY

*How Nancy Wake – and a stubborn streak
– took Maria Gill to France.*

During the 2020 lockdowns, I began writing a novel about Nancy Wake's spy work in France as part of my thesis for AUT's Master of Creative Writing degree. While many biographies, adult novels, two picture books, and several documentaries recount Wake's wartime experiences, I believed her story deserved to reach young adult readers too. She was brave, driven and inspiring – the kind of woman I wished I'd known about as a teenager.

To create vivid settings, I scoured Google Maps, zooming and pinching the screen to study landscapes. I read first-hand accounts of climbing the Pyrenees and devoured every spy memoir I could find. By the end of the year, I had a complete manuscript. But my non-fiction writing style had crept into the novel and it took four more years – and many rewrites – before a publisher accepted the book.

Throughout that time, I longed to see Nancy Wake's France. I wanted to walk where she strolled with her little dog Picon in Paris and Marseille, couriered radios for the Resistance in Toulouse, and crossed the Pyrenees. I wanted to visit the Auvergne region, where she parachuted in and helped the Resistance defend Montluçon, and to cycle the route she took to retrieve a vital radio after their radio operator buried it and destroyed the codes under attack by 8000 Nazi soldiers.

At the same time, I was researching a new book set in northern France, loosely based on a true story. I applied twice for the Menton residency and several grants to make the trip happen. With fingers crossed, I sent off my applications ... but received nothing.

Still, I wasn't ready to give up. I wasn't chasing a free holiday – I planned to work, conduct field research, and use Nancy Wake's story and the memorial bike ride as publicity to connect with readers. My biggest challenge wasn't just funding – it was also convincing my husband, who thought the trip a waste of money.

Most people would have let that dream go, but tenacity – or stubbornness – pushed me to book tickets to Paris. I told him afterward.

"How will you pay for it?" he asked, clearly unimpressed.

"I'll write articles, claim tax expenses. It's a work trip."

Then, in a moment that echoed Wake's own story, a gift landed in my lap. My Aunt Nan and mother contributed money to help fund the journey.

There was one more problem: while France no longer had Nazis around every corner, it's not always safe for a woman to cycle alone in the countryside. Thankfully, my son and his Irish girlfriend offered to come with me.

Limited accommodation options made planning the bike route difficult. Unlike Wake, I wasn't about to cycle 24 hours straight. We planned to ride only four to five hours a day. Or so I thought ...

Reality hit hard. Over five days, we followed Google Maps, which led us along "paper roads" that turned out to be muddy fields, rutted tractor paths and farm tracks beside grapeseed paddocks. Punctures arrived with downpours, and our raincoats proved inadequate. We often arrived 10 hours later – freezing, soaked and exhausted.

After that, we avoided paper roads and stuck to proper roads. Cars zoomed past at 110–130 kph, and the route often twisted up steep climbs and down hairpin descents. I'd wisely hired an electric bike, much to the chagrin of my 20-something companions, as I zipped past them uphill.

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Despite the challenges, the experience gave us a deeper appreciation for what Nancy Wake endured. We rode over cobbled streets, through quaint villages and past ancient churches. Like Wake, we couldn't stop until we reached our goal – in our case, our next accommodation – hence the 10-hour rides on two of the days.

In Montluçon, I hired a car so we could drive to Vichy, where Wake and the Resistance celebrated liberation – and where she learned the devastating news that the Nazis had executed her husband.

We also drove to Fragnes to find the chateau where she spent her final months of the war. The building looked untouched since then. I could imagine her upstairs, gun cocked, ready to fight as Nazi troops marched unknowingly past.

Other key places on our itinerary included Cosne-d'Allier, where she first parachuted in and later blew up a bridge to block German forces, and the Forest of Tronçais, where she hid and fought alongside the Resistance. I wrote notes in my diary about what I saw, heard, and felt, and took many photographs – material I would pore over when I worked on the novel again.

Afterward, we spent several days in Toulouse, where Nancy met with Resistance leaders – including the one who helped her escape a French prison and attempted to get her to freedom before being betrayed by a mole in their network. In the bustling Pink City, I walked along the canal to the Departmental Museum of Resistance and Deportation, which houses wartime diaries, artefacts and tributes to leaders like Marie-Louise “Francoise” Dissard, who sheltered Wake during her escape.

In Perpignan, I retraced Wake's steps through the cobbled streets to the safe house where she delivered escapees before handing them over to agents who guided them over the mountains. From there, we took a bus to Villefranche-de-Conflent. In the distance, we saw the snow-capped Pyrenees where Nancy escaped into Spain. We had hoped to ride the famous yellow train into the mountains but missed it by an hour. Instead, we explored the historic village and sampled local cheeses.

My son and I continued to Marseille, where Wake

had lived with her husband Henri Fiocca. I'd worried about visiting, given the city's high crime rate. Wake was horrified by its decline when she returned decades later with a film crew. But I felt safer than I had in Perpignan – it had visible policemen everywhere.

The site of her former apartment was next door to the Palais Longchamp, a grand neoclassical monument Wake never mentioned in any biography. She seemed less concerned with buildings and more focused on the people she loved, worked with, or lost.

Walking toward the port and La Canebière, where she witnessed King Alexander I's assassination, we spotted Rue Henri Fiocca – a street named after her husband, the only visible memorial to him.

My son left the next day, hoping to spend his last Anzac Day in England. I caught a train to Paris, then Amiens. As I arrived, an announcement welcomed Australian and New Zealand visitors for Anzac Day commemorations.

Confession: I didn't attend the dawn service. I wanted to, but the idea of walking the streets alone at 2.30am to catch the shuttle to the Australian memorial didn't feel safe. When travelling solo as a woman, self-preservation always comes first. Instead, I trained to Albert for a church service at Notre-Dame and visited the Musée Somme 1916.

Next, I hired a bike (lesson not learned) to visit Maricourt, the setting for my next story. Once again, I found myself on paper roads. The seat wobbled and sank, and I worried I was lost or trespassing. By the time I arrived, I was cold, grumpy and over it. I took just two photos, skipped the key cemetery, and snapped a roadside graveyard before speeding back – cars flying past at 120 kph.

Back in Paris, I explored the gardens where Wake walked to meet her journalist friends. Once again, I was struck by the grandeur she never mentioned – palaces, statues, wide boulevards. As a resident, she may have tuned them out. As a tourist, I was awed.

I returned home with photographs, diary entries, fresh memories – and a deepened respect for Nancy Wake. That trip will shape how I rewrite her story. Real-life research adds specificity, texture and truth to fiction. It's invaluable. If only more writers had the resources and opportunities to travel for their stories. ■

“Back in Paris, I explored the gardens where Wake walked to meet her journalist friends. Once again, I was struck by the grandeur she never mentioned – palaces, statues, wide boulevards.”

GRANTS, RESIDENCIES AND TAX EXPENSES FOR WRITERS

- Planning research for a historical novel? Apply for a CLNZ | NZSA Research Grant (\$5000) and consider the Whiria Te Mahara NZ History Grant (up to \$12,000).
- Seeking an international residency? Explore the Katherine Mansfield Menton Fellowship, Creative New Zealand Fulbright Pacific Writer's Residency, Michael King Writers Centre Australia Residency, Berlin Writers' Residency, or the New Zealand-China writing exchange with the Shanghai Writers' Association.
- What expenses can you claim from IRD? On research-related days: flights, accommodation, local transport, museum entry fees, and meals (only the portion above your usual daily costs). Keep receipts!



Theft *by* Audio

Scott Bainbridge shares his experience of copyright breaches in true-crime podcasts.

T rue-crime stories have fascinated audiences for years. Heck, it's what got me into writing books. The emergence of true-crime podcasts has added a different take, enabling these stories to be shared on a modern platform. The success of international crime series like *Serial* and *Bear Brook* in the US, and *The Lady Vanishes* in Australia, have led to significant advances, even resolution in some of these cold-case mysteries. It is no wonder this method of storytelling has increased in popularity. It is just a shame it doesn't work here; we don't do it well. People have cottoned on they can pay \$600 at PB Tech or Rock

Shop for a basic microphone and podcast start-up kit, and jump on the bandwagon from their own home office. Their results are far from professional.

Skilled podcasters undertake months or years of research, trawling through thousands of pages of police and court documents, and they locate and attempt to interview often hostile subjects to create their series – effectively the same processes I follow when writing my books.

Many New Zealand amateur podcasters are not creative. Instead of carrying out their own groundwork they steal from existing work and present others' ideas as their own. I know this because I have come

across podcasters quoting chapter excerpts from my books practically verbatim, and conveying my opinions and conclusions without my knowledge or consent. This is a breach of copyright.

Now, this might just sound like a case of sour grapes ... if I feel that strongly about it, why don't I just create my own podcasts? Unfortunately, I am of an age where technology has surpassed me and I am too old to learn and too impatient to embark on such a journey. I do acknowledge this method of storytelling is the way of the future and I can see a time when the number of true-crime podcasts surpasses books. This isn't a bad thing.

I am not conceited enough to say that just because I have written about a particular crime I own that crime. Anyone can cover it. In fact, I welcome it if a podcaster or another author covers a case I have written about and can progress it further. However, I expect them to do their own research and come up with their own conclusions.

I am sick of people using my work to tell the story.

I usually find out later, when an episode is already out there on the airwaves, as the offending podcaster tends not to ask permission or contact me. Here is an example. Sally (not her real name) from Wellington created a podcast series about missing people, including cases I had covered in my books *Without Trace* and *Still Missing*. I was interested to hear what she had to say, thinking she had uncovered new information but, to my horror, she virtually just read random paragraphs from my chapters, replicated those interviews I had

done, and played out scenarios I had come up with. The only points she came up with herself were factually incorrect. At no time were my books ever referenced as a source – and worse, she never consulted me out of courtesy or asked permission to do so.

Sally had also set up a related website from which I was able to send a strongly worded email. I waited for several days and received no response.

Fuming, I contacted my then-publisher for advice in anticipation they would initiate legal action. While they agreed Sally had blatantly breached copyright, they were reluctant to commit to a legal battle, but as it was clear I was not going to back down, they hesitantly offered to go 50-50 with me on legal costs. I consulted a lawyer and, for a cost, he sent Sally a threatening letter and my publisher sent a stern email.

Shortly afterwards, I received a call from a tearful Sally who said she was dumb. I replied she was not dumb, because she had the capacity to put a podcast together and that took some creativity, but she had not done her due diligence. I asked what right did she have to take my work and present it as her own. She had not given that any thought but agreed to delete her podcasts straight away. Sally offered to pay me half my lawyer's fee, but I learned *Stuff* were also on the warpath. They noticed she had taken images from their website without paying the appropriate licences. I knew *Stuff* would not be as forgiving as me.

While it was a harsh and costly lesson for Sally, for me it was a gift that keeps on giving.

I come across these kinds of breaches at

“... I have come across podcasters quoting chapter excerpts from my books practically verbatim, and conveying my opinions and conclusions without my knowledge or consent.”

least twice a year. Just last month, I had a YouTuber shut down for airing an episode of a series he created where, again, he took research, quotes and conclusions directly from one of my other books, including images I had to pay a graphic designer to reproduce for me. I was grateful YouTube takes such breaches seriously. Next day, the offender contacted me to apologise, but begged me to reverse my complaint as it left a negative strike on his account. Like Sally, he didn't understand the problem.

It is getting beyond a joke, and has made me wary and vigilant.

Times have changed since my run-in with Sally. Recently, I reached out to my publisher on a similar matter and, while they sympathised, they suggested I consult a lawyer and report the breach to Copyright Licensing New Zealand (CLNZ). This time, there was no 50-50 offer. I was on my own, and this is where my next gripe starts.

I thought there might be adequate support available to me to help mount a legal challenge when such breaches arise. There isn't. Now, I have a foot in the door to the Australian and American markets. In preparation for this story, I reached out to some of my true-crime peers overseas to find out what happens in their countries if they endure copyright breaches of their work. While those I talked with have not had this misfortune, they are comforted by the fact their publishers and in-house lawyers are on-hand and prepared to initiate a fight.

Each time this happens to me, I am directed to report the incident to CLNZ, the organisation which helps authors, publishers and artists in all kinds of copyright matters. Initially, I took this to mean CLNZ is there to support me as an author and advocate on my behalf over copyright breaches.

Unfortunately, this is not the case. Reporting a breach involves the offer of a 15-minute free consultation with a lawyer who tells me to ... contact a lawyer. Um, isn't that what you are? Plus, I get sent their templated "cease and desist" letter to send which is as effective as a wet bus ticket.

I regularly hear "copyright breaches are a grey area". It is a convenient excuse to hide behind. My examples are pretty clear-cut. What I would like to see is authors or owners of work that is blatantly copied being proactively supported. Most publishers have in-house lawyers or easy access to them. CLNZ have lawyers attached who I am sure are

capable in taking up a case, although I do understand they are a non-profit organisation, but this is something that should be within their scope.

I hate readers to think that grumpy old Bainbridge is on one of his rants. I wrote this to warn writers that copyright breaches are occurring, although I really don't know how big the problem is in New Zealand. There is a process to fight it, but it is costly and something you have to do on your own. I love my profession and I have written 10 books, but I am not a millionaire; I still have a day job. Engaging a lawyer is an inconvenient burden, but it is one I will bear to protect my work.

I don't mean to discourage would-be true-crime podcasters either. The legit ones do a marvellous job, and are just as enthralling to follow. My advice is to get out there and do your own work. Request the files under the OIA, do the challenging interviews, reach your own conclusions. Do that and you are bound to make a difference. You have no right to use mine.

Rant over.

Don't get me started on AI. ■



WRITING IN TROUBLED TIMES:

Lost illusions *and* authenticity

*Below is an extract of the 2025 Janet Frame Memorial Lecture
given by Charlotte Grimshaw in October.*

I think we can all agree the times in general are troubled. And they're troubled in our area of concern today: the state of New Zealand literature.

I've included "authenticity" in my title because as writers, we face significant problems. In the current global climate, we need to strive that much harder to preserve our unique, local cultural identity. New Zealand art in all its forms has become more important as a national taonga than ever.

I have included the phrase "lost illusions" in my title, first as a tribute to Balzac, because my ambition as a fiction writer was always to create, with my interlinked novels and short stories, my own fictional *Human Comedy*.

Let's talk about the general state of the nation.

New Zealand literature is facing serious challenges. We've had to adapt to digitisation and commercialisation, the decline in bookshops, the increasing dominance of social media and screens, and lately the drop-off in the numbers of children reading. There is now very little space given to books in print media. Many of us are worried by New Zealand universities' relentless cutting of the humanities, and in these times of austerity, the lack of serious investment and funding for the arts.

We currently have no entity to champion direct investment. Books were not even name-checked as an art form in Amplify, the new Arts Strategy. Literature is only art form where all funding comes from contestable Creative New Zealand funding rounds. So there's a lack of investment in books and reading when we have a literacy crisis.

But the interest in reading and writing is steady. A 2025 ReadNZ survey recorded that a healthy 87 per cent of New Zealand adults read a book in the last year, up from 85 per cent in 2021. That is a committed book-reading public.

We have dynamic new independent publishers; we have strong attendance at literary festivals and creative writing courses; we have the Ockham Book Awards and the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults. High quality online websites have taken the place of print media reviews and literary criticism.

Aotearoa has a great lineup of established writers and poets, and many exciting and diverse new ones. I am told, anecdotally, that Gen Z thinks books are sexy. They value physical books; they are returning to libraries, and they consider books to be cool. This is obviously heartening and important. The future can still be bookish.

The latest, insidious threat to the creative individual, to the individual artistic voice, is AI.

As one UK publisher put it to me, “For artists, AI is a horror show.”

Our major problem, most obviously, is the theft of copyright.

As we all know, AI breaches the rights of writers by scraping creative work, learning from it and reproducing it. What it produces has a human source, but its humanity is lost. Individual voice and copyright are lost.

This is theft. It is fundamentally anti-democratic and inhumane. It’s damaging to artists and to our culture. The problem needs to be faced, and it’s not an easy issue to solve, because the technology is evolving all the time. It’s not going away, and the challenge is regulation. We have already seen that the big tech companies are not concerned about the rights of artists, nor about the rights of individuals per se.

In March, I discovered that my books are among titles that have been used in LibGen, an illegal pirate site AI companies have been using for machine learning. I joined other writers protesting to Meta, and heeded NZSA’s advice, which includes joining an international class action lawsuit to protect copyright, adding a No AI Training notice on the copyright pages of books, and certifying

that my books were written by a human.

AI will have excellent uses, in medicine, say, or engineering. But it is recognised, even by AI itself apparently if you ask it, to be an existential threat to humans, and to our environment. We’re facing a situation in which we have to fight to preserve the elements that make us human: the detail, the relational aspects, our individuality.

The challenge arises at a difficult time. It coincides with the international rise of autocratic politics, the erosion of democracy and a decline in the rules-based order. Overseas, the combination of populism with social media has resulted in the undermining of journalism, of science, of educational institutions, of authorship itself – all bastions of independent thought.

It seems dystopian. The times are troubled, and action is needed. Public discourse itself appears to be under threat.

All over the world, writers and artists are recognising the threat that AI poses to their work and are fighting back.

In May, 400 British artists wrote to the Prime Minister urging him to protect copyright. As they put it, “We will lose an immense growth opportunity if we give our work away at the behest of a handful of powerful overseas tech companies, and with it our future income, the UK’s position as a

NZSA SHAW WRITER’S AWARD

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To find out more go to
<https://authors.org.nz/nzsa-shaw-writers-award/>

creative powerhouse, and any hope that the technology of daily life will embody the values and laws of the United Kingdom.”

We in New Zealand should be demanding that our government protect copyright too.

In July this year, 40 of the world’s largest organisations of publishers, producers, performers, authors, and other rights-holders protested to the European Commission that the European Union AI Act’s implementation measures “fail to address the core concerns [of] our sectors – and the millions of creators in Europe which we represent.”

The NZSA website has continually updated information and advice for our authors about the issue. Generative AI poses a real threat to our work. Without any license, the technology has already been used to mine vast amounts of copyrighted work. The sources are used to produce material that can compete with human-authored books. Litigation is ongoing, and courts are having to apply existing copyright law to completely novel technologies and situations.

In September, technology company Anthropic agreed to pay US\$1.5 billion to a group of authors to settle a lawsuit about its use of their books to train its AI model without consent or compensation. As NZSA has noted, however, and I quote:

[The] ruling sets a precedent that, provided you buy your first copy, then scanning and ingesting it for AI training is fair use – no-license-required. In other words – don’t pirate – but after that, please feel free to take works for your machine. Therefore the settlement doesn’t “weaken” the fair use defence – at least not for AI

training. It does weaken the fair use defence for piracy. But as to AI training, the decision is the opposite and a major blow to rights holders: [the judge] decided the fair use defence for AI training lay squarely on the side of big tech.

Judges are being forced to apply copyright laws to technologies that weren’t around when they were made. Is training an AI using copyright-protected works permitted? Who is liable when AI-generated works copy pre-existing styles without attribution or consent? The problem everywhere, including here, is that we don’t have sufficient regulation ready. The government has released a document

called “New Zealand’s Strategy for Artificial Intelligence: Investing with Confidence”, which is vague and hasn’t given writers and artists confidence. Governments need to move urgently to legislate licensing of content to train large-language models.

The situation is fast-moving, so any attempt to set down “where we as writers are at with AI” very quickly becomes out of date. Apart from suing for copyright infringement, other solutions undertaken by international writers’ and artists’ groups include lobbying for governments to regulate AI, and campaigning for a rigorous system of licensing, and for education. In New Zealand the Copyright Licensing Authority has lobbied for creative and publishing rights, for the protection of Māori intellectual property, for the management of licensing, for artists’ rights to opt out of data mining, for education, transparency and regulation. MBIE has said they will save AI regulation for Stage 2 of the review of the Copyright

“As we all know, AI breaches the rights of writers by scraping creative work, learning from it and reproducing it. What it produces has a human source, but its humanity is lost. Individual voice and copyright are lost.”



Act, maybe in 2026 or 2027. Apparently, there will be a discussion paper out this month. The issue requires collective vigilance and resolve – and optimism too. Writers need to watch this space and engage as much as we can. AI is not extra-terrestrial; it's created by humans. Perhaps humans can rise to the challenge and regulate it.

Some writers are defending the use of AI in their work. Call me old-fashioned, but I find the idea depressing. The traditional model is that we're all influenced by the canon, but we don't plagiarise; we rely on our own original talent. Using AI must surely corrupt value judgments about talent. And I assume it potentially involves plagiarism.

Australian writer Trent Dalton was quoted in the *NZ Herald* recently talking about the potential degradation of human creativity. He said, "You need all that emotion and complication to write a half-decent book. AI just steals the shiny finished product." Australian authors are actively opposing a copyright exception for AI training. Thomas Keneally put it well:

"It's not copy-charity. It's not copy-privilege. It's not copy-indulgence. It's copyright. And our right has been taken away by ignorant people who don't realise what copyright is."

It's not just a copyright issue. The implications for education are disturbing. Learning to read and write is central to learning how to think. Education, robust conversation and journalism are fundamental to democratic culture.

So, the robots are here. The risk is the loss of individual voices and sensibilities, the erosion of culture, the downgrading of language, of originality. It's a problem for diversity and freedom of speech.

As writers we should all pitch in to raise our individual voices against undemocratic forces: whether they are political, rapacious tech companies or machines.

The microcosm expands out and out, into the world, and the forces we're up against have the same characteristics. We are sentient individuals with rights. In standing up for those rights, we act for our collective good.

The state of the literary nation may be troubled, but let's be optimistic about New Zealand writing. We need to defend it and keep it human.

Remembering the great Janet Frame, let us celebrate our unique New Zealand voices. And let us each value our own authentic understanding of "celebratory". ■

<https://soundcloud.com/nz-society-of-authors/nzsa-live-charlotte-grimshaws-2025-janet-frame-address#t=23:47>

SCHEDULE OF DATES FOR NZSA PROGRAMME, AWARDS, GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS 2026

FEBRUARY	1	NZSA Mentor Programme DEADLINE (adult)
	5	NZSA StartWrite subsidised programme OPENS
	9	NZSA Youth Mentor Program OPENS
	20	Kaituhi Māori Mentorship Programme and Kupu Kaitiaki Programme for Kaituhi Māori OPENS
MARCH	1	NZSA CompleteMS OPENS
APRIL	7	NZSA Youth Mentor Programme DEADLINE
	10	Kaituhi Māori Mentorship Programme and Kupu Kaitiaki Programme for Kaituhi Māori DEADLINE
	24	Youth Programme results back from panel
		Late April – CompleteMS reminder
MAY	1	CLNZ NZSA Schools Scholarship writing competition OPENS
	22	CLNZ NZSA Research Grants OPENS
	29	NZSA CompleteMS DEADLINE
JUNE	12	CLNZ NZSA Writer's Award OPENS
	19	CLNZ NZSA Research Grants DEADLINE
JULY	1	CLNZ NZSA Schools Scholarship writing competition DEADLINE
	17	CLNZ NZSA Writer's Award DEADLINE
	24	Peter and Dianne Beatson Fellowship OPENS
AUGUST	7	NZSA Shaw Writer's Award OPENS
SEPTEMBER	4	Peter and Dianne Beatson Fellowship DEADLINE
	18	NZSA Shaw Writer's Award DEADLINE
OCTOBER		NZSA Janet Frame Memorial Lecture by Fleur Beale
		NZSA 2026 President of Honour
NOVEMBER	TBA	Laura Solomon Prize OPENS
DECEMBER	1 Dec	NZSA Mentorship Programme OPENS

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