



2020
SCHOOLS
PROGRAMME

SUPPORTED BY THE FREEMANSBURG FOUNDATION
AUCKLAND WRITERS FESTIVAL
WAIWHI O TĀMAKI
WRITERSFESTIVAL.CO.NZ

Poems

–Karlo Mila

The Ward

When I came to the end of my life as I knew it

and I could live no further,
not in any way that was known to me,

let me tell about that.

A deep dark drink of charcoal swirl: doctors, nurses, drips.
Emergency Room. It tasted like a black beach – Waitākere – in
my mouth. Made the white pills whirl in my stomach,
back-track, come out again, without killing me. Black magic.

White hospital sheets. Blank canvas days. Unfolding endlessly
out in front of me, waiting for me to mess them up.
A cleaner vacuuming around my bed-feet each morning. Alarm.

All my outside world-words
were pegged on a clothesline
blowing in the wind without me.

I was inside.
Very quiet.
In pajamas.
All day long.

Slowly the poems started to trickle out:

a dribble

a tear-drop

a nose-bleed

a gush

a running river

an ocean.

Now I can trace my way
back to myself
by following that flow –

each word writing me
back into being.

Each stanza
piecing me back together
in a way that made sense to me.

Each poem writing me back into the world.
into a rhythm I could recognise.

Every word choosing me
until I became a story
that I could bear
to live in.

What Some of Our Words Mean

We come from people
who sang to the gods
and then listened
through the openings
in the objects
waiting for a reply.

We come from people
who can travel between
this shore
and those ones.

[**vaka / waka**].

Even now there are blood vessels
who can anchor in,
the other world.

Heavy-weights.

Who can speak,
the tongued language
of the passed.

Hold a whole
community safe
with their
gravitas,
on choppy water.

Oracle us
back to the
future.

[**taula / taura**]

We who believe

that even without
the biological obvious
of DNA in our bodies,
our ancestors
are always within us,
waiting to be received,
waiting to be
breathed
through us,
into the world of light.

[tupuna]

We will spend a lifetime
trying to remember who we are,
and live what that means.

The departed,
fresh on our faces.

The next breath
in a long line
of who has been
the making of us.

The chosen ones
who connect
the future
to the past.

The chosen ones
who create
everything
that is possible
for those
who will come.

[mokopuna]

Waka Whakapapa

He lay alone the head of the fish
a rata tree, trampled by the moa
a dark log, a mokopuna asleep,
a human tree dreaming.

He was at the end of his light
all his stars had fallen;
only the glow worms at Waimapihi
remained. He called out to his tipuna
to remember him.

Turi and Rongorongo,
Hauptipi the son of Haunui-a-Pāpārangi
came with karaka berries and kumara:
Aotea, a boat laden with abundance
with hands that lick the ebbing tide.
Te roku-o-whiti forward flying
through the dark tunnels of buried streams,
Te roku-o-whiti quivering like a bird's wing
through dark awa
drained into tunnels
piped with river gates
where eels can't swim free.
He awa aitua.
Buried far from sight and memory.

Through these dead channels,
the Aotea came for him,
and as the boat
sped on riverbed,

the awa awakened
to who they were,
not only the grandchild
asleep.

For the shadow of Uenuku
had come for him.
Diminished his light.
For he had entered the crayfish's lair
where stands dread
and was fighting for his life.

Turi and Rongorongo
began to chant the awhiau-hi
Ka u, ka u ki uta
Ka u, ka u ki uta
Ka u, ki tenei whenua tauhou

Tongariro guardian of tears stood over him
and said, it is from here your whakapapa flows –
fed by the cold heart of a glacier
he was plunged into the depths of that deep
he heard the mouth of the river speak.

You are a teardrop of Ranginui
the loneliness of Ruapehu is at your source
Ruapehu who can subdue
the great fish of Maui-Tiki-Tiki a Taranga.

And the shark inside of him
transformed into a taniwha

Turi looked on and said:

You are the waka that moves between worlds
and we shall come ashore in you.

For the time has come to surface
to the world of being.

You will lay our burdens at Pātea
and flow effortlessly from mountain to the sea.

You shall eat the heart of this strange land.

You shall eat the heart of the world of light.

ABOUT THE WRITER



Karlo Mila went to Palmerston North Girls' High School, Tonga High School and Awatapu College. She didn't have a strong idea about what she wanted to do after high school, but knew she wanted to help people. Karlo never dreamt she'd be a published author. At the library at Awatapu College she discovered *Her Blue Body*, *Everything We Know* by Alice Walker, and the political and personal writing resonated deeply with her. Karlo's advice to aspiring writers is to write the way you talk and to write the literature that you want to read.

An extract from *Read The World: Volume Five*

The Auckland Writers Festival is grateful for the support of the Freemasons Foundation