

THE SHAPE WE'RE IN: STEPHANIE JOHNSON

The University of Auckland Free Public Lecture
Auckland Writers Festival 2021



It's quite a brief to be given, isn't it? – the last twenty years of literary endeavour in Aotearoa. And like anyone given that brief, this lecture will no doubt be coloured by my own tastes and prejudices – and I ask in advance that you forgive me for that. I have a little over 30 minutes. Half an hour to cover twenty-two years! I am reminded of my fiftieth birthday party, where after several glasses of wine I thanked friends for coming but forgot to thank certain important people who were very distressed by the omission. There will be writers, publishers and booksellers I leave out, and if I do, it's not necessarily because I do not respect or enjoy them and this time I can't blame the wine.

In 1988, the late Peter Wells and I gathered a group of writers, publishers, booksellers, and general literary types together to form the Auckland Writers Festival, which ran for the first time in 1999. A glance through the pages of that first programme demonstrates that many of the big names in NZlit then are still with us now – guests included Tessa Duder, Maurice Gee, Briar Grace Smith, Renee, Catherine Chidgey (who that year had won the Montana Book Award), Witi Ihimaera, Shonagh Koea, Lloyd Jones, Vincent O'Sullivan, Anne Kennedy, Albert Wendt, Peter Simpson, David Herkt and Michelle Leggott. It also included a number of writers who are sadly no longer with us – Michael King, Rosie Scott, Bill Payne, Arthur Basting, Gordon McLauchlan,

Margaret Mahy, and of course my dear friend Peter Wells. Writers do die, just like everyone else. At least, they die physically. As Sue McCauley said to me after Rosie Scott's death in 2017, the good thing about your writer friends dying is that they leave bits of themselves behind on your bookshelves.

That first festival, ably managed by Penelope Hansen, was a much more modest affair than the extravaganza that Anne O'Brien and her team now provide. There were international guests: Luke Davies and the late Dorothy Porter from Australia, Kate O'Riordan from Ireland, Lawrence Block from America and the controversial Felipe Fernandez Armesto from Britain. And there were of course audiences, tiny in comparison to contemporary throngs. In a sense, we had to educate Aucklanders as to what a writers festival was, even though there had been attempts in the past to establish such a thing. As long ago as 1936 there was an author's week, and other attempts in later decades to involve local audiences with local writers. Never the less, some people thought that our festival was for writers only. Some would have agreed with Auckland-born, early-mid twentieth century writer Henry Walpole who remarked 'An author, talking of his own works...is to me a dose of ipecacuanha'. For those who don't know what ipecacuanha is, the Shorter Oxford defines it as 'a low or creeping plant causing vomit.' There were writers who themselves had this opinion.

Our original intentions were not to make people vomit, but to provide a venue outside the universities where people could come together to be inspired by ideas. And these ideas, just as in recent festivals, were to spring from every field of human endeavour – scientific, culinary, horticultural, poetical, political, literary, from the visual and dramatic arts.

Another early and amply realised ambition was to build a bridge across the Tasman and involve Australian writers. We were perhaps more generous towards scribes from the Big Red Rock than they were to us, and in that regard we were also swimming against what was by then a strong tide. In her book *The Expatriate Myth* Helen Bones remarks, 'If New Zealanders and Australians tend to ignore each other's books nowadays it is most likely the result of the subsequent triumph of their respective cultural nationalisms.' Even if you know nothing of the history of our relationship, the 'nowadays'

and ‘subsequent’ will tell you that it was not always so. Much earlier in the twentieth century our literary culture was more entwined. In the early mid-twenty-first century it is those ‘cultural nationalisms’ that drive us further apart.

If I was to pinpoint one major change in our respective cultural nationalisms, which is not really the brief of this lecture (!) I would say that as Australia looks more towards Asia and the United States, we look more towards the Pacific. We also look harder and more honestly at ourselves, and at who we really are. Those of us growing up in the mid-twentieth century had very few children’s books that were written by New Zealanders and set here. It was a confusing time to grow up as a reader because we were rarely reflected back at ourselves. This was not as much of a problem as you might expect. Thinking about yourself was discouraged because it encouraged narcissism and selfishness. The great egalitarian ideal, politically and personally, engaged with the principle of the common good. Even so, many of us were inculcated with an idea that the centre of mainstream culture was eighteen thousand kilometres away in a certain other tiny island nation that had far less sheep and many more people. Generations of us set off for that country, imbued with the certainty that if we made it there, we could make it anywhere, and that those left behind would applaud us.

New Zealand writers living overseas would sometimes write harshly about the country they had left behind – how lonely and isolated it was, how boring, how conservative, how cruel the drab inhabitants were to dazzling intellectuals, namely themselves. For that reason, perhaps, some did not hear the thunderous applause they so longed for. Others found the distance enabled them to express their love and curiosity for their homeland and fared better in New Zealand bookshops. A famous example of that is Witi Ihimaera, who, over a six-month period in London in 1970, completed his first collection of short stories ‘Pounamu, Pounamu’ and two novels, ‘Tangi’ and ‘Whanau’.

The second festival ran in 2001, two years after the first, because we were not sure that Aucklanders would come if we ran the festival annually. It might be too much, too soon. That year New Zealanders included Kevin Ireland, Elizabeth Knox (who’s *The Vintner’s Luck* had at that stage been on the best-

seller lists for a year), Alan Duff, Kate De Goldi, Annamarie Jagose, Deborah Challinor, Owen Marshall, Marilyn Duckworth, Sia Fiegel, Greg McGee, James Griffin (creator of *Outrageous Fortune*) and also Martin Edmond, who jetted in from Sydney. Green MP Nandor Tanczos talked to British poet Benjamin Zephaniah, Carole Beu talked to American Margaret Wertheim, who had just published *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace*, billed as a history of space from Dante to the Internet. The internet!

It seems extraordinary now, but then, only twenty years ago, we had no real perception of how much the internet was going to affect every aspect of our lives, especially the part that pertains to the written word. The invention of Facebook was three years away; the emergence of Kindle Direct Publishing wasn't until 2007. Around that time I was often asked to take part, as I know many writers were, in debates about the death of the book. It seemed that publishing as we knew it was on death row. It seemed that readers waited on the literary levee, about to be swamped by dirty water, drowned in written work by anyone in possession of any semblance of literacy. It seemed that traditional publishers were to lose their posts on the sea wall, where they had previously to a greater or lesser extent protected us from inane, poorly written, poorly researched and just plain bad work.

The technological revolution coincided with a new idea doing the rounds – or not so new. I first heard it from an academic and feminist poet in the eighties, but she hadn't invented it. It was an idea that gained traction and influence at the same time as the internet infiltrated our lives: 'There is no such thing as bad writing.' It was a notion that had the weight and heft of the earlier death of the playwright. It was the death of the writer... or was it, actually, the birth of millions upon millions of writers? The academic may have been right. It is a difficult idea to debate, without one side accusing the other of anything from elitism, cultural imperialism, non-binary prejudice, racism and sexism. One man's poison is one woman's bread and wine, and vice versa. To adhere to standards is a waste of time.

The idea that must survive, and will survive, is that each reader has an opinion of what makes good or bad writing. You might love rapidly written romance, she might like a novel that took the writer a decade to create, he might enjoy graphic violence, they might like tepid tales of middle-class

adultery. Some readers devour the likes of *The Da Vinci Code* or *Fifty Shades of Porn*, others would biff them into the paper recycling, deeming them not good enough even for the op shop.

Taste in our reading is often dictated by genre, and more broadly by whether or not generally, or just at that point in time, we prefer literary or commercial fiction. This divide is one that increasingly blurs and can be further defined by so called 'high end commercial fiction' and commercial fiction that is not high end, and often defined by its detractors as 'pulp' or 'trash'. Famously, Grahame Green divided his novels into serious works and what he called 'entertainments'. Carl Nixon's recent *The Tally Stick* is a shining example of a brilliant, beautifully told, high-end commercial novel.

One of the early criticisms that Peter Wells and I fielded in the early years of the festival was that we were 'too commercial'. This charge was laid by those who were involved in literary endeavours fully funded by the state in other parts of the country. Here in Auckland, viewed by certain individuals as a cultureless wasteland of car yards and fast food outlets, we depended not only on – in those days – a small amount of state funding but also, as the festival does now, sponsorship from private enterprise, generous patrons and ticket sales. We needed big authors to bring in the punters, which had the flow on effect of helping to finance events that concentrated on local writers. We purposely mixed panels of international and local writers so that audiences could discover books that were being written right under their noses, as it were.

And we could say that this paid off, though not so arrogantly as to think it was the festival that engineered this change. Only a few years ago, booksellers would tell you that New Zealand fiction stayed on the shelf, that it was difficult to move, that readers were more interested in books that were written and set elsewhere, that people were looking for escape. Now that is not so true. Readers do want to read New Zealand books. They particularly want to read work by Maori writers. After its publication in 2019, *Purakau: Maori Myths Retold*, edited by Witi Ihimaera and Whiti Heraka, was reprinted four times to meet local demand. Becky Manawatu's *Aue* has been on the best-seller list for over a year and collected many awards, including the Ockham and Ngaio Marsh. Patricia Grace, Tina Makariti, James George, Keri

Hulme, Alan Duff, Briar Grace-Smith, Nick Lowe, J.P. Pomare, Kelly Ana Morey, Paula Morris, Renee, Tayi Tibble, Apirana Taylor – these are only a small selection of names that are familiar to the reading public. There is a big push for books to be published in Te Reo, not only translated works but works that originate in the language. Concern is expressed that too much emphasis is being put on translation; that proficient speakers and writers should be creating their own work. For many years now, publishers have been on the lookout for Maori writers, and far from holding prejudice against them, as is the common misconception, these writers may encounter a gentler, more nourishing reception than generally experienced. Gone are the days of any idea of Maori writers operating in some kind of gulag.

I imagine that some of you are bristling. How dare I, a Pakeha, make this call? I can only answer that this view comes from long observation, reading, and also an overwhelming sense of relief that we have finally got there. It took a while.

This focus on Maori writing is having some interesting knock-on effects on some younger writers, who for ease of reference (though I loathe the term) I'll call non-Maori. There is currently, a sense of unease, almost paralysis. If I am not Maori, then who am I? What can I say that has any relevance to who we are now, here? What am I allowed to say about Maori, if I am not Maori?

In the last decades of the twentieth century and into this, non-Maori writers were often exhorted not to include Maori characters or issues. It is something that I personally and publicly reject – how could I write novels set in New Zealand that didn't have Maori characters? To me, that seemed the epitome of racism. Was I supposed to pretend Maori didn't exist? I have never received any public criticism for creating Maori characters, but I have been aware of other writers going out of their way to obey the edict. They self-censored. As I remarked in my 2019 social history 'West Island', future scholars may look back on mainstream work of this period with bafflement and confusion, and suspect these writers of a degree of racism that they didn't possess. In other words, this self-censorship may have the very opposite effect of what those writers intended. I am not saying these writers were wrong to do what they did – they were not. They were doing what they felt comfortable doing and it cuts both ways. I remember Witi Ihimaera

reworking some of his earlier novels with the express purpose of fleshing out some of his Pakeha characters, now that he knew more about us.

Among the names I mentioned a moment ago was that of J.P. Pomare, an excellent young writer living in Melbourne. He serves as an introduction to thinking about crime writing in New Zealand, and how it is undergoing a vibrant and powerful renaissance. Crime writing in our country has a proud history, beginning of course with Dame Ngaio Marsh. In more recent decades Christchurch writer Paul Cleave has dazzled here and abroad. His debut *The Cleaner* is one of New Zealand's best-sellers ever, both at home and on more distant markets. In the 1990's Paul Thomas, dubbed by Craig Sisterson as the 'godfather of Kiwi crime writing', gave us three novels centred on Maori detective Tito Ihaka. Thirty-one year-old Aucklander Ben Sanders, a kind of enfant terrible, whose first three novels were written while he was still at university, has gone from strength to strength. Greg McGee had us all fooled when he presented two novels written by a mysterious woman called Alix Bosco; Fiona Kidman picked up the Ngaio Marsh Award for her moving and closely researched novel *This Mortal Boy*. Both Fiona and Greg had, if you like, gone sideways from their respective professions as literary novelist and television writer into writing crime novels.

If I return to the days that I sat wide-eyed listening to an elder tell me there was no such thing as good or bad writing, I also recall the emergence of another idea, which was 'Genre is dead.' Nay, it never was, but for a while the notion was intoxicating. What if we did away with it, what if a novel formed its own shape in the reader's mind, with ingredients drawn from any and all genre? Support for this idea came from many quarters, not least from writers of crime and romance who were tired of being regarded as lesser figures than their more literary compatriots. Roll the clock forward a few decades, though, and genre is just as strong as ever.

Among the best of our literary writers are the extraordinary linguists Charlotte Randell and Tracey Slaughter. Because of the dense proficiency of their language, their books could never be regarded as commercial fiction.

Literary writers may envy genre writers for the lack of scrutiny applied to their work. A recently published commercial novel by a New York Times

best-selling New Zealander has a Maori family casting the ashes of a deceased relative into the ocean. Nobody, as far as I know, has batted an eyelid. Genre writers are often not seriously reviewed, nor, as the very successful Nicky Pelligrino has commented, find themselves in line for arts council grants or residencies. Ah, the beleaguered literary writer will counter, but look at your sales figures! Look at the size of your print runs! Look at your bank balance!

Alas, for many genre writers, their incomes are as limited as their more lofty peers. Books will take off, or not. In recent years publishing companies have taken some serious hits.

The origins of these hits are many, beginning with the Global Financial Crisis in 2008. This resulted in serious contraction of publishing houses. You may be aware that Janet Frame sent an early novel to forty publishers before it was accepted. These days you might struggle to find forty publishers. Here in New Zealand much beloved Reeds was sold to Pearson, and lost the use of its imprint. Internationally, UK publishing house Hodder and Stoughton became part of Hachett Livre; Random House absorbed at least ten independent publishers and is now itself aligned with Penguin. When that first happened, it seemed to many of us as unlikely as the Pope getting into bed with Queen Elizabeth. There was serious rivalry between those of us published by either Penguin or Random, and also a sense of loyalty. During the twenty years of the AWF, many independent publishers have emerged – Makaro Press, Huia Publishers, Te Papa Press, Upstart Press and Mary Egan Publishing are just a few of many home-grown examples. These companies offer hope to writers and variety to readers, filling the gaps with books that major international publishers may not be willing to take on.

Another serious challenge to traditional publishing is, of course, the internet, that of potential audiences having countless alternatives to buying and reading books. In 2005 Facebook had six million users, currently it has 2.80 billion monthly users. There is also the phenomenon of self-publishing, which further saturates the reading market. Amazon's Kindle Direct, as I learned recently to my cost, makes many alluring offers to writers – you get all the money, not just the ten percent due after the earning out of royalties. You can run your own advertising campaign, but you pay for every click made by a

prospective reader whether or not the book is bought. Closer examination will show that the books that really make money are books that are about making money. Fantasy and Romance writers may also do well, but they often publish vast quantities of rapidly written volumes. Steff Green, a New Zealand paranormal romance writer of over thirty books, is on record for saying that she makes \$200,000 a year.

Self-publishing can be the beginning of a stellar writing career with writers being picked up by trade publishers after proving themselves on the self-publishing scene. Waikato writer Julie Thomas had this experience in 2013, when she published 'The Keeper of Secrets' on Amazon Kindle and Smashwords. After 45,000 downloads the novel was picked up by HarperCollins New York, and she has gone on to publish other books with them. Conversely, there are dark tales of writers manipulating the figures so that their books present as best-sellers. Often, when readers are told a book is a best-seller this will persuade them to buy the book also. Ditto the book prize lists – I am saddened every time I hear someone say that they only read prize lists – which very often reflect current fashion and the judges' tastes, rather than their actual worth.

Self-publishing is not exactly new. Barry Crump, for example, self-published some of his own books as B.C Productions. Food writer Annabel Langbein self-publishes but may trade on her already substantial public profile. Steve Braunias's Luncheon Sausage, which publishes his own works as well as some by other writers, may also benefit from the fact that its proprietor is renown. An unknown self-published writer is likely to struggle to get above the clamour and be noticed.

All of the above has not necessarily dampened writers' enthusiasm for sending manuscripts to traditional publishers. Penguin Random New Zealand receives about 600 submissions a year – and this includes fiction, non-fiction and children's books, with the vast majority being fiction and works for children. In recent times the company has published around fifty books per annum, with most of those coming from already established writers or work that has been commissioned.

University presses also receive many submissions, and occupy a necessary

place in the nation's literary health. As an example, Victoria University Press averages at about one submission a day, publishes around thirty books a year and many of those subsequent books from previously published writers. Sometimes, here in the city of caryards, fast-food joints and the Auckland Writers Festival, we hear moaning about how VUP publishes everything that comes out of the Institute of Modern Letters. This is not true. The figure sits more at around fifteen percent. Most famous of these published graduates is Eleanor Catton, who went on to win the Booker Prize with 'The Luminaries.' A glance over the short lists for the Ockham Prize demonstrates the continuing critical success of VUP particularly in poetry and fiction. This year Pip Adam's shortlisted novel *Nothing To See* is VUP, as is Airini Beautrais' *Bug Week*, as is Catherine Chidgey's *Remote Sympathy*. Poets Hinemoana Baker and Tusiata Avia and essayist Madison Hamill also hail from VUP. What is going on? Fergus Barrowman, publisher since 1985, obviously has a mysterious winning formula.

Poets in the audience will be relieved that I have at long last mentioned the word 'poets' and I'm sorry it's taken me so long. It is more of a sin than it could be because poetry in the past decade has also had a vibrant renaissance. We have had collections from much loved and respected poets such as Anne Kennedy, Michelle Leggot, Bill Manhire, David Eggleton and Ian Wedde, and debuts from poets that have startled and amazed, such as Hera Lindsay Bird, Gregory Kan and Tayi Tibble. Poetry readings around the country are well patronised and lively. It seems that this is not just a national phenomenon – around the world poetry is being rediscovered as a way of intimate communication and entertainment for time-poor people.

Our recent experience of the pandemic has made many of us less time poor. It would seem reading in general has been rediscovered. Bookshops are seeing unprecedented demand, not only for internationally published books, but for books written by New Zealanders, as noted above. Children, too, are apparently reading more, which is something that those of us in the business are very glad about – not only those of us that write for children.

The 2005 Festival heralded the arrival of the dedicated and marvellous Jill Rawnsley, who began in the same role as Penelope Hansen had occupied – festival manager – but whose role adapted fairly quickly to festival director.

In 2010 Jill introduced the now very successful section of the festival designed specifically for children, the School's Programme, which has had the flow-on effect of creating audiences. Numbers of readers grew up with yearly attendances at our festival, having been bussed in as kids and now attending as individuals. In 2010, New Zealand children's authors were Anna Mackenzie, Des Hunt and the late lamented William Taylor. Storylines, a festival designed specifically for young readers, was already in existence and we were mindful of not stepping on their toes. This year, and only partly because we are mostly talking to one another and not so much to writers from overseas, the schools line-up is stellar: Bernard Beckett, Weng Wai Chan, Catherine Chidgey, Paula Green, Dominic Hoey, Dan Salmon and Shilo Kino among many others.

The writing of memoir in a small country like ours comes with the added risk of offence. Over the years we have had many panels and workshops on the genre, where the question is posed – how much of our lives do any of us actually own? If Covid had not hit, last year's festival would have brought us Linda Burgess, who bravely wrote *Someone's Wife*, a memoir of her childhood and marriage to All Black Robert Burgess. In that lost event, she was to share the stage with Rose Lu, whose 'All Who Live on Islands' was certainly one of my reading highlights of 2019. I would have loved to have heard these two consummate writers, diverse in age, race and style, discuss their practice and approach. This year's festival is rich with memoir: Ghazaleh Golbakhsh will take us to Iran, prize-winning Behrouz Boochani shows us the horrors of Australian detention camps, Sue Kedgley and Ngahuia te Awekotuku talk about their journeys as feminists, Charlotte Grimshaw shows us what it was like to grow up as a Stead – and this is only a small sample.

If poetry is having its day in the sun, then so is memoir. It could be interesting to muse for a moment on why that might be so but before I begin, I'd like to recall for you how I was as a young writer. It wasn't until after my fourth book was published that I agreed to do an interview, and only because this was a contractual agreement with my publisher. Until then, and still now, in my heart of hearts, I believed that it was of no consequence who had written the book, or who had painted the picture or directed the film. What mattered was the work of art itself. Plainly, at this point in time, this is firmly

against the zeitgeist. The world is full of monologue, whether it's on twitter or Facebook or the printed page. We are wary of those who speak for those who they are not. Even writers as luminary as Australia's Tom Keneally has stated that he would never again, as he did in his 1972 novel *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, assume to speak on behalf of what he wasn't, in this case Aboriginal. The writer's provenance may overwhelm imagination, artistry and humanity. But if a book purports to be a memoir, then we can go some way to believing it to be true – or at least, to believe that it is written in an authentic voice.

Authenticity assures us that the writer knows the subject. Is this then, also a result of the changing nature of research? Twenty years ago, when the internet was in its infancy, research was a lengthy process by means of libraries, archives and personal contact with people who may have experienced the subject or theme of the work. All of this took time. Writers were respected not so much for who or what they were, but for what they knew. Now it is a much faster road to knowledge, although not necessarily as reliable a one. The researcher has a narrower focus – enriching discoveries made accidentally along the way may not be so abundant. This, coupled with the current mania for provenance, has altered the role of the writer. In its most extreme expression, we could believe that writers may only write about their individual selves, their own race, their own gender, their own experience. I am not alone in feeling an overwhelming grief at this possibility.

A significant change in the years since we started the festival is the proliferation of writing courses. The University of Auckland and Victoria University offer the most prestigious of these, with places hotly contested. Twenty years ago the Auckland course was in its infancy, taught by Witi Ihimaera, Mike Johnson and myself, and attracted writers such as Tom Sainsbury and Linda Olssen, who went on to have brilliant careers. Since then the course has come of age under the tutelage of Paula Morris, who has produced writers such as Ruby Porter, Rosetta Allan, Gina Cole (who has gone on to single-handedly invent a whole new genre – South Pacific Science Fiction), Rose Carlyle, Caroline Barron and Amy McDaid. Victoria University's IML, initiated by Bill Manhire and now headed by Damian Wilkins, himself an excellent writer, produces year after year, prize-winning authors as noted above.

Because of these courses, the quality of submissions to publishers has improved. But there is a drawback too, in that second submissions from writers may not be as good as the first, since the writer is now functioning without the support of classmates or teacher.

I have, to this point, not even begun on non-fiction, history, the essay – another form having a moment in the sun – or art writing. It seems to me that we have been in rude health in all of these genre for a long time. If we could time travel backwards exactly ten years to the 2011 festival, we would enjoy Mary Kisler with her *Angels & Aristocrats: Early European Art in New Zealand*, Frances Walsh with *Inside Stories: A History of the New Zealand Housewife 1890-1975* and Douglas Lloyd Jenkins showing us how we have dressed since 1940. Steve Braunias and Jane Ussher took us to Antarctica and Peter Simpson discussed Leo Bensemann's place in our art and literature, a talk that had been originally intended for Christchurch Art Gallery but was cancelled because of the earthquakes. Flip forwards to the riches curated by Anne O'Brien in this year's festival and a small sample shows Frances Walsh again, taking us to sea via the Maritime Museum; Patrick Reynolds and John Walsh taking us on a tour of our city's architecture; Dame Claudia updating our understanding of the Treaty and Alan Duff taking a leaf from Australian Stan Grant's *Talking to My Country* to give us 'Conversations with my country'.

It is a difficult thing to judge, but it seems to me that we have our culture and our nationality firmly under the microscope. This can only be a good thing. As the world opens up post-Covid we may not only go out into it but also receive guests and new immigrants knowing more clearly who we are.

In the last minutes remaining, I would like to make some predictions for the next twenty years, or perhaps, a closer future. The quarterly *New Zealand Books* will rise from the ashes – the cancelled funding to the treasured and vitally important magazine is shameful and appalling. Paula Morris's brainchild, the Academy of New Zealand Letters, will grow in reputation and influence. ebooks will continue to form a substantial part of the market, up from the current 24%, but people will continue to treasure the printed word. There will be a plethora of books on anxiety and over-thinking, subjects that

are already on the upward sales incline. There will be shelf after shelf of thinly disguised memoir purporting to be novels. There will be a pandemic of novels set during Covid and depending on how many other viruses arrive out of our broken world, this could become as absorbing a setting as the Second World War was for earlier generations. Writers Carl Nixon, Rose Carlyle, Catherine Chidgey and Ben Sanders will have their names in brighter lights and bulging bank accounts. Poets will go forth and multiply poems, massively. Another New Zealander will win the Booker. I'm not saying who. Books written in Te Reo will proliferate as more and more of the population speak the language. The urge for diversity will fade because we will have arrived there, with bells on.

New Zealand literary culture can only develop and grow. Two decades from now, those who stand here in our place, will have many reasons to celebrate.

Stephanie Johnson.