

18,974 Kilometres

Dazzling kaleidoscopic images that will probably stay with me for the rest of my life. Thousands of brief scenes stored in my memory 18,974 away, between February and April 2023. My time in the Randell Cottage. Some are already part of the story I am writing. Others are as yet untouched, awaiting their turn to feed into my pages, round out my creations, enrich my characters.

In addition to these memories stored away in my hippocampus, there are the photos and videos recorded on my phone. I look at them often. I remember every one of these moments because I really experienced them, they are images that have really stayed with me. I wasn't thinking about some future text, the way I habitually do, no, I was there, fully present, I genuinely took the time to live those moments with all five of my senses.

During my residency I hadn't managed to write, I mean to really write, to plunge myself body and soul into writing, instead I made notes about impressions and thoughts. This resistance to getting down to real writing was also because I wanted to stay in that in-between state, outside of the literary space, because I was too busy absorbing these landscapes and faces into my sense memories. I wanted to stand at the border that separates reality from fiction, to revisit the images that were living within me. It was as if I didn't want them to be replaced by the ones I needed to invent for my novel. It was too soon to fall into a fictional universe, I wanted to stay on this island, on the bottom right-hand side of the map of the world, with all the people who were making my stay a time of absolute calm and fulfilment, in these places that imprinted themselves on my retinas over the two and a half months.

Faces and places. First the faces that were at the core of everything, that were there every time I needed to ask a question, to organise my timetable, my work, my visits, not just for my creative work but also for practical matters. My deepest thanks to Jean, Éric, Christine, Lise, and Claire for your hospitality and your generosity, for your individual talents.

And there are other faces, ones that enlightened me with their experience, their scholarship, their friendship, or just by being there at particular moments during my stay.

And places. Wellington obviously, but also the landscapes I gathered up on my travels through both islands, marvelling at the volcanoes, the lakes, the glaciers, beaches, mountains, forests, springs, rivers, fields, rocks, animals, trees and flowers.

And then all the sources of information. The museums, libraries, and archives, all over New Zealand, so very well organised and so welcoming, where I got to know my characters. Yes, however strange that may be, whenever I was doing research to invent fictional characters, I felt as though I was seeking out traces of people who had really existed. I looked for them and I found them. I discovered where they were born and grew up, their houses, their possessions, their lives. As I read through documents about the women who had truly lived through important events, History with a capital H, my novel revealed itself to me. From the stories of

these women, the destinies of my characters took shape before my eyes, I was just making notes to piece together later.

And finally, words. Words of that special English, that unique language born from the settlers encountering the island and its first inhabitants, against the ever-present background of flamboyant nature. And of course Māori words, their magnificent musicality, their spirituality and their rhythms.

A few words about the miracle of writing:

Just before I applied for this residency, I had gone to Egypt at the invitation of the Institut français. I had given a musical reading in Alexandria of my novel *Trésor national* and taken part in some panel discussions. During my trip, I learned that New Zealand soldiers had spent time there before leaving for Gallipoli. When I got home, I saw the call for applications for the residency and replied to it.

But in Egypt I had discovered something else as well that would be linked to this project: the house of the great poet Constantin Cavafy who wrote:

You said: "I'll go to another country, go to another shore, find another city better than this one." [...]

You won't find a new country, won't find another shore.

This city will always pursue you.

You'll walk the same streets, grow old

in the same neighborhoods, turn gray in these same houses.

You'll always end up in this city. Don't hope for things elsewhere:

there's no ship for you, there's no road.

[*"The City"*, trans. E. Keeley]

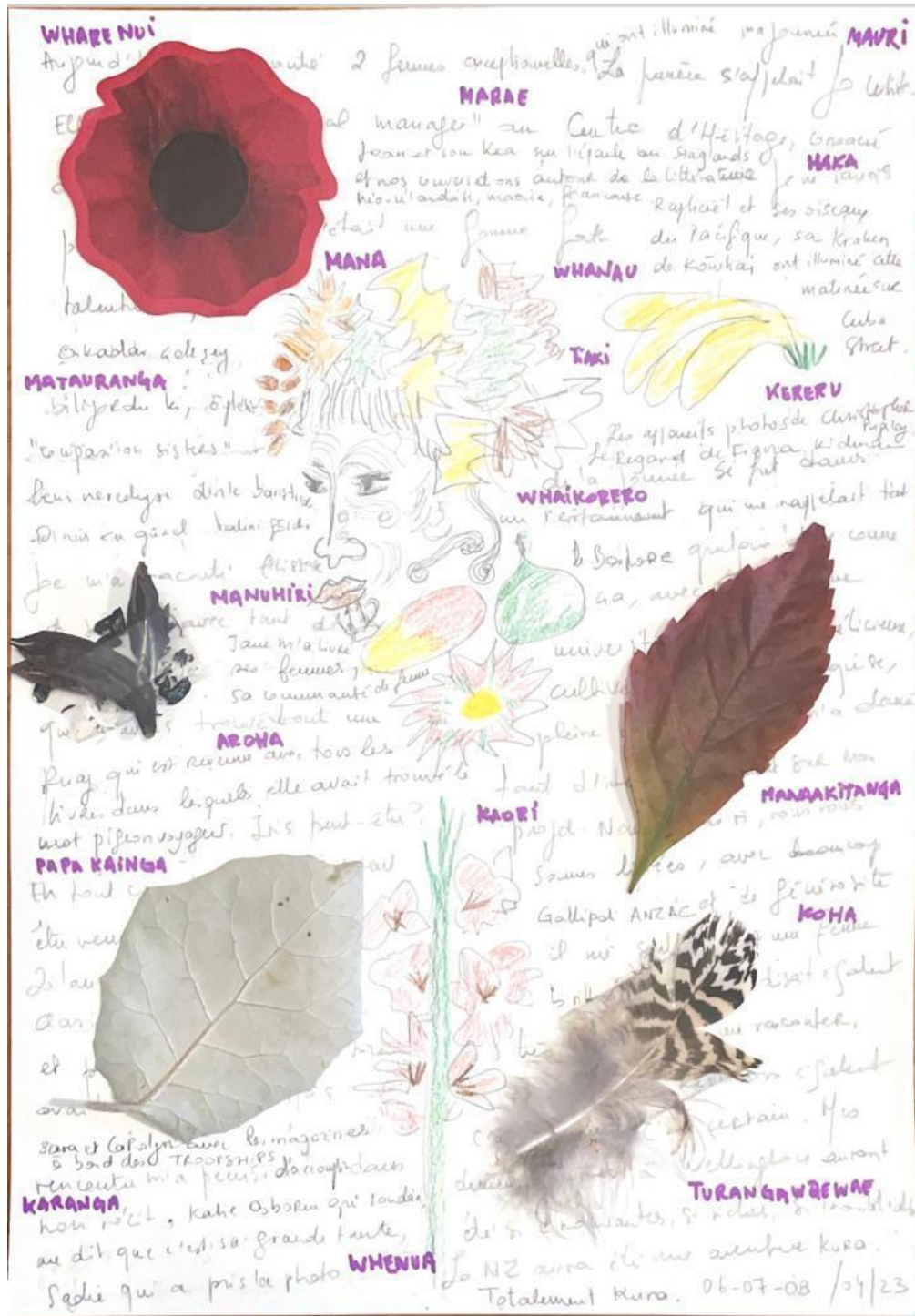
A year later, in the midst of writing "my Kiwi novel", I recall these lines – that I had known for a long time – and the wheel comes full circle. So "There's no ship for me, there's no road." Yes, I'm writing this novel as consolation for being exiled. I went to the other side of the world in order to write about that distancing, so that my characters can retrace that journey, in reverse: Gallipoli, Alexandria, Wellington (along with my two cities, Paris and Istanbul of course). So I needed to go all that way to return to a place that is dear to my heart, the terrace at my parents' house, where I would look out at Gallipoli, a landscape that is deeply anchored in New Zealand and Turkish collective memories, a foundational myth for both countries. I had looked at that peninsula from our family home for 25 years, sensing that there was something to be written about the two nations' shared history, without imagining for one second that one day I would go and look at the other hemisphere to write that something.

Nor could I have known before I came to Wellington how much the two landscapes are alike, with their mad winds, their wild coastlines, their changing light, their misty hills. And how closely they are linked by natural elements: 48 hours after I landed, the planet let loose and my

native Turkey was shaken by "the quake of the century" and Aotearoa was subjected to "the cyclone of the century". As if the Anatolian Fault ran through the centre of the planet and connected the two volcanic countries. Sitting stunned in my cottage, where I had come to write about events that had run through the war in the two countries, I followed the news of the two natural catastrophes. Throughout this time, the planet rumbled and roared, reminding us that we must have peace at all cost if we are to survive. More strongly than ever, I remembered the epigraph I had chosen for my application:

War is an obsession of old men, who send the young to fight.
Homer, *The Iliad*, book 22: written 3000 years ago, probably at Gallipoli.

My warmest thanks to those who shone their light on my stay (in order of meeting): Christine Hurley, Lise Bourguet, Nick Hurley, Claire Wastiaux, Sian Robyns, Eric Soulier (Conseiller Culturel et Scientifique), Jean Anderson, Madame l'Ambassadrice Laurence Beau, Cherie Jacobson and Nicola from Katherine Mansfield's house, Winston Roberts of the National Library, Neil Harrap, Cécile Bonnifait, Franck Monnet, the Alliances Françaises and Ambassade de France teams, Jeremy Macey, Robyn Skrzynski, Rita ..., Christopher Pugsley, Fiona Kidman, Sarah Wilkins, Scott ..., Adrienne Bushell and all the members of the Trust and the Jury, Helen Osborn, James Norcliff, France Grenaudier-Klijn, Raphaël Richter-Gravier, Sara Coterall, Helen Osborne, Antoinette Cor, Miria ..., Whiti Hereaka, Antonio Viselli, Jane Tolerton, Isabelle Poff-Pencole, Yves-Louis Dorsemaine, Lucy Alabaster, Carolyn Carr, Jo White and former residents Florence Cadier and Karin Serres, as well as my very dear friend Caroline Deruas, and my husband, who travelled 18,974 kilometres to join me.



A modest little creation, an illustrated index, so to speak. A little collage, a mental graphic map of something yet to come, pinned above my Paris desk 18,974 kilometres from where it was made, a drawing workshop at the City Art Gallery in Wellington, one Sunday afternoon in the southern autumn.

Translated by Jean Anderson