



NEW ZEALAND BOOK COUNCIL  
Te Kaunihera Pukapuka o Aotearoa

(NZBC, n.d.[d])

*Nae easy, stranger:  
Surrender to the sky-  
your heart of anger*  
JAMES K BAXTER

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## King, Michael

### IN BRIEF

Beloved writer, historian and biographer Michael King contributed enormously to New Zealanders' understanding of themselves and their history. He won a wider range of awards for his books, journalism and television work than any other New Zealand writer. These include the Prime Minister's Award for literary achievement in 2003 and the Montana Medal for non-fiction. Beginning his career in the 1970's by writing Maori history and biography, he more recently wrote about what it means to be Pakeha. He died in a car crash at the pinnacle of his publishing career, just after releasing his *Penguin History of New Zealand*, which has sold in excess of 50,000 copies.

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### FROM THE OXFORD COMPANION TO NEW ZEALAND LITERATURE

King, Michael (1945-2004), writer, historian and biographer, recounts his early childhood in his 'selective and ethnic autobiography' *Being Pakeha: An Encounter with New Zealand and the Maori Renaissance* (1985); and the development of his professional life in the sequel *Hidden Places: A Memoir in Journalism* (1992).

Together these display the twin threads of King's writing life: his commitment to being a professional writer, scholarly yet accessible to a wide public; and his desire to account for the difference ethnicity has made in his own life, as well as to the history of New Zealand, which has driven his many efforts 'to make Maori preoccupations more intelligible to some non-Maori New Zealanders'.

During the late 1970s-early 1980s Pakeha scholars of Maori issues were frequently viewed with deep suspicion. The self-justifying rhetoric of *Being Pakeha* thus at times sounds like special pleading; King's contributions to social history, 'Maori' history and to biography have nonetheless been substantial.

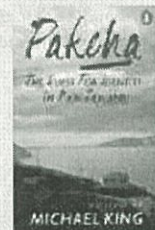
King was born in Wellington. His family was Irish and Scottish: his elders nurtured their ethnicity through Catholic ritual, and longing for their 'old countries', with their ancient pasts and their mournful songs. From an early age, King set himself a different task, encountering the New Zealand histories which lay all around him, in the archaeology and terrain of Paremata.

His interest in the local was fostered by immersion in classics of New Zealand writing such as James Cowan's *The New Zealand Wars*, with its skirmish-by-skirmish account. He studied history at Victoria University (BA 1967) and the University of Waikato (MA 1968); and then joined the staff of the *Waikato Times*, where he was assigned to cover Maori issues. This brought him into close contact with the Tainui tribes and their power base at Turangawaewae marae in Ngaruawahia.

King's knowledge of Maori protocol and access to a wide range of Maori informants were crucial to his writings throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. These included *Moko: Maori Tattooing in the 20th Century* (1972), with Marti Friedlander's elegiac photographs of surviving kuia with moko, and *Maori: A Photographic and Social History* (1983). King's strongest work in this 'Maori' period was in the two biographies *Te Puea* (1977) and *Whina* (1983), the lives of two charismatic Maori leaders.

He draws admiring but not uncritical portraits of both women, deftly weaving oral testimony with documentary archive material, thereby revealing as much of the times in which Te Puea Herangi and Whina Cooper lived (and which they sought so much to influence) as of themselves.

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King's later biography *Frank Sargeson* (1995) deploys the same skill for lively narrative, coupled with access to the [Sargeson](#) archives and correspondence, as well as to numerous friends and enemies whose recollections flesh out the heroic narrative of the birth of Pakeha literature in New Zealand, in which Sargeson was as significant to his culture as Te Pūea and Whina were to theirs.

The Sargeson biography, together with the eagerly awaited edition of Sargeson's salty correspondence which is to follow it, climaxed King's work of the 1980s and 1990s, when he shed the mantle of being champion and chronicler of exclusively Māori figures and culture. Those decades saw him account for his own ethnicity in *Being Pakeha* and tackle the wider question of the nature of Pakeha New Zealand cultures.

As with his Māori writings, King answered these questions by studying representative figures: Sargeson; E.H. McCormick; Andreas Reischek, the Austrian naturalist of King's *The Collector* (1981); and King himself. His interest in the lively yet typical life made him an ideal contributor to the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, for which he wrote the life (among others) of Tommy Solomon, the so-called 'last of the Morioris'.

This led further to the revisionist history *Moriori: A People Rediscovered* (1989) and the photojournalist essay (in collaboration with the photographer Robin Morrison) *A Land Apart: The Chatham Islands of New Zealand* (1990). King has published also a wide range of populist histories and touristic picture books, tribute to his passion for his country, as well as indicating the projects still necessary for New Zealand professional writers to secure even an adequate income. He held the Katherine Mansfield Memorial Fellowship in 1976 (see Patrick White), writing fellowships at Victoria University in 1983 and at Waikato in 1994, the Sargeson Fellowship in 1995 and the Burns Fellowship in 1998.

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Comments on Companion Entry

Michael King is not working on a collection of Frank Sargeson's correspondence, as is incorrectly stated in the *Companion entry*

Author entry from *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, edited by Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie (1998).



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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Michael King was the 1976 recipient of the [Meridian Energy Katherine Mansfield Memorial Fellowship](#). One of New Zealand's most long-standing and prestigious literary awards, the fellowship is offered annually to enable a New Zealand writer to work in Menton, France.

*Te Pūea* received the New Zealand Book Award for Non-Fiction at the 1978 [New Zealand Book Awards](#).

He was twice awarded first place at the [Goodman Fielder Wattie Book Awards](#): first in 1984 for *Maori: A Photographic and Social History*, and second in 1990 for *Moriori*.

In 1994, he was the [Waikato University Writer-in-Residence](#), and in 1996, he was the [Buddle Findlay Sargeson Fellow](#). He was also the 1998 [Robert Burns Fellow](#) at the University of Otago in Dunedin. He shared the same residency in the following year with [Paula Boock](#).

*Being Pakeha Now* (1999) was 'written to replace *Being Pakeha*. Part memoir, part apologia, part celebration of a country and its peoples, it is an exciting and controversial journey into the hinterland of the national psyche.'

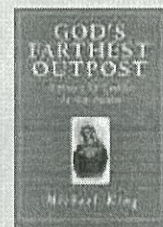
He was named [Reviewer of the Year](#) at the 2000 [Montana New Zealand Book Awards](#).

King's biography of [Janet Frame](#), *Wrestling with the Angel* (2000), won the Montana Medal for Nonfiction, the Montana Award for History and Biography (which he shared with Gregory O'Brien), and the Readers' Choice Award at the 2001 [Montana New Zealand Book Awards](#). It also won the 2001 [Nielsen BookData New Zealand Booksellers' Choice Award](#).

In *Tread Softly: For You Tread On My Life* (2001) Michael King examines the issues that confront biographers. What is compassionate truth? What obligation does the biographer have to their subject - and their readers? What should biographers bear in mind as they set about their task? The book is a collection of King's writing on biography - some previously published, some written especially for this volume.

*An Inward Sun: the world of Janet Frame* (2002) reveals in words and pictures the world of Janet Frame as never seen before. Many of the photographs are from Frame's own albums and are published for the first time.

*In At the Edge of Memory: A Family Story* (2002) Michael King investigates a mystery that had engaged





his extended family for over half a century: A man turns up in New Zealand in the early years of the twentieth century as if out of nowhere. He admits to no past, only to a present and a future; and he reinvents himself as a Catholic businessman. However, eventually the pressure of living with a repressed truth becomes too great...

*New Zealanders at War: A New Zealand Classic* (2003). 'Like it or not, New Zealanders have to acknowledge that warfare has dominated their national experience.' The book does not glorify war, instead it attempts to capture war's privations and squalor - and to describe how ordinary New Zealanders responded.

In 2003, Michael King was awarded one of the inaugural Prime Minister's Awards for Literary Achievement for nonfiction. The other winners were Janet Frame of Dunedin for fiction; and Hone Tuwhare of Kaka Point in South Otago, for poetry. Each writer received \$60,000. The awards are aimed at New Zealand writers who have made an outstanding contribution to New Zealand literature.

*The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Penguin, 2004) won the Readers' Choice Award at the 2004 Montana New Zealand Book Awards. It was also a finalist in the history category. At the same awards ceremony, King was named Reviewer of the Year for a second time. *The Penguin History of New Zealand* also won the 2004 Nielsen BookData New Zealand Booksellers' Choice Award.

A second edition of *Being Pakeha Now* was published by Penguin in 2004.

*Splendours of Civilisation, The John Money Collection at the Eastern Southland Gallery*, published in 2006 by Longacre Press features text by Michael King. King has documented Money's life, placing him within the generation of twentieth century artists, writers, composers and academics who helped weave the cultural fabric of New Zealand.

#### Obituaries

##### Memorial Service for Michael King and Maria Jungowska

A public memorial service to celebrate the lives of Michael King and Maria Jungowska was held on Saturday 17 April at midday at Te Papa in Wellington.

##### Tragic loss for New Zealand literature

The death of biographer and historian Michael King in a car accident near Maramarua yesterday is a tragic loss for New Zealand literature, says William Taylor, president of the NZ Society of Authors.

His enormous contribution to New Zealanders' understanding of themselves and their history was recognised when in 2003 he was awarded the inaugural Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement for non-fiction. The other winners were Janet Frame for fiction and Hone Tuwhare for poetry. The awards are aimed at New Zealand writers who have made an outstanding contribution to New Zealand literature.

William Taylor says, 'Michael King's contribution to New Zealand society and culture has been incomparable. In his recording of the history of our country and its people he leaves us all a legacy of lasting worth. The country mourns the loss of Michael and his wife, Maria Jungowska. The writing community of our nation stands in his debt. We extend to their families our deepest and heartfelt sympathy.'

Michael King was an active member of the New Zealand Society of Authors for 29 years, and president from 1979 to 1980. He worked tirelessly on behalf of other writers, particularly in relation to the Authors' Fund. For the past four years he was a mentor in the NZSA Mentoring Programme, assisting beginning writers to improve their craft.

(NZ Society of Authors (PEN NZ Inc) )

##### Michael King Leaves Priceless Legacy

Creative New Zealand mourns the loss of Michael King, who died with his wife, Maria Jungowska, in a car accident yesterday. He has left New Zealand a priceless legacy of his writings about the country that he loved, says Peter Biggs, Chair of Creative New Zealand.

'This is a devastating, cruel loss and our deepest sympathy goes to Maria's and Michael's families,' Mr Biggs says. Michael was one of our foremost chroniclers of New Zealand's history and its people. He was also an incredibly generous man whose insights into New Zealand's past and present society have illuminated our lives.'

In October last year, Michael King was one of three outstanding New Zealand writers to receive the inaugural Prime Minister's Awards for Literary Achievement. Fiction writer the late Janet Frame and poet Hone Tuwhare were also recognised.

Displaying his customary generosity, Michael King said of winning the award for non-fiction: 'Ever since I discovered New Zealand literature in my late teens, I have admired immensely the work of Janet Frame and Hone Tuwhare. To receive this award in their company was the greatest compliment I could have.'

At the same time as he received the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement in non-fiction, his *Penguin History of New Zealand* was published. This became a bestseller and has sold more than 50,000 copies since its publication.

'Michael King - through his writings, his scholarship and his generous spirit - has made us understand



more clearly what it is to be a New Zealander,' Mr Biggs says. And ultimately, his life has made us better New Zealanders. We all mourn his passing.'

(Creative New Zealand)

#### Michael King's Death a Tragic Twist says Publishers

Michael King's publishers, Penguin New Zealand, is mourning his loss as news of the car crash near Maramarua killing him and his wife Maria Jungowska was announced today.

At the pinnacle of his publishing career, Michael King's latest book, the Penguin History of New Zealand has sold in excess of 50,000 copies since its publication in October last year. A special hardback edition will be published in June.

'The success of the Penguin History says a huge amount about Michael - his profile and his reputation as one of our very finest writers and historians. He is held in deep admiration not only by his publishers, but by thousands of New Zealanders,' says Penguin Publishing Director Geoff Walker.

'It is a tragic twist of fate that his death should come just when his health was on the mend and his new book has been such a huge success.

'His death is a huge loss. We had discussed a number of other books together. In fact we had, within the last week, made an agreement to publish his memoirs,' says Walker. 'Michael was excited by the idea of the memoirs.'

In a career spanning thirty years Michael King had won a wider range of awards for his books, journalism and television work than any other New Zealand writer.

These include the Prime Minister's Award for literary achievement in 2003, the Montana Medal for non-fiction and the Wattie Book of the Year prize twice.

The scope and breadth of Michael King's work is impressive and unique. Beginning his writing career in the 1970's by writing Maori history and biography, he had more recently turned his attention to writing about what it means to be Pakeha.

Michael King is also acknowledged as one of the country's leading literary biographers. His biography *Wrestling With The Angel, A Life of Janet Frame* was both a critical and commercial success. Michael was awarded the Montana Medal, the booksellers choice award and the readers choice award for this book in 2000. Published in the UK, USA and Australia, it has sold in excess of 15,000 copies in New Zealand alone.

Michael King was continually broadening his range of writing. He wrote over thirty-four books including *Moko; Being Pakeha Now; Mori Mori; Frank Sargeson A Life; At The Edge of Memory; New Zealanders At War; Death Of The Rainbow Warrior; Wrestling With The Angel, A Life of Janet Frame* and *The Penguin History of New Zealand*.

Walker, who has known Michael King since he was eighteen, says 'Everybody who knew Michael King in a personal sense valued his warmth and his generosity. He was always helpful and was wonderful at maintaining friendships over the long-term. When his health permitted he was the life and soul of the party. He will be enormously missed.'

Penguin Group (N.Z.)

#### Book Publishers Association of New Zealand pays tribute to Maria Jungowska, wife of Michael King

Maria Jungowska was born in London to Polish parents on 28 April 1949 and emigrated to New Zealand as a child. She was educated in Auckland at Monte Cecilia and at Baradene. She went to the University of Auckland where she took an MA degree and later trained as a teacher at Auckland College of Education. She taught in Palmerston North but began working in publishing, principally with Lansdowne Press. In 1984, she joined Hodder & Stoughton as an editor. She became an integral part of a talented triumvirate with Bert Hingley and Tom Beran during a halcyon period of local publishing in the late 1980s, until she and Michael King decided in 1993 that Opoutere on the Coromandel would be their permanent home. Close to the calm sparkling harbour waters and surrounded by the wildlife they both loved, Maria established her own publishing consultancy - Scope Publishing Services - and continued to assist many publishers and authors.

Those ten years with Hodder & Stoughton were filled with significant publishing achievements and Maria's distinctive characteristics and skills contributed immensely to that successful decade. As an editor and colleague, she was conscientious, creative, inspiring, tenaciously loyal and incredibly hardworking. Above all, she was great fun to work with.

Maria was kind, considerate, and sensitive to the feelings of others, indeed, one of the most compassionate and caring people imaginable. She was also highly intelligent and had a delightful sense of humour. She was a gentle person, but she had very high moral standards and could be tough-minded when occasion demanded. Most importantly, authors and friends always respected her opinion and were ultimately grateful for her unique perception and meticulousness.

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