**The Making and Unmaking of New Zealand**

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The nineteenth century is the century in which New Zealand “happened”.[[1]](#endnote-1) In the early 1800s—in the wake of James Cook’s Pacific voyages, and buoyed by the European occupation of Port Jackson—wild and transient scatterings of sealers and whalers began to materialize on this country’s coastlines. By the turn of the following century, New Zealand had achieved the settled respectability of young nationhood. The country was on the verge of upgrading its status from that of British colony to that of dominion; it boasted a founding treaty, a substantial settler majority within an overall population of close to a million, a cluster of cities furnished with museums and universities and scientific institutes, and an expanding bookshelf of published histories and works of a literary tone. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that New Zealand—seemingly designed according to careful and confident principles, with the intention that it should become a “better Britain”—unfolded seamlessly and triumphantly throughout this period. The settlement of an already-inhabited place is as much an imaginative business as one concerning the physical occupation of a territory, and it is very much a fraught and ongoing business too. Settlement is effected through *writing* in the first instance—in the form of maps, laws, proclamations, surveys and land transactions—which is to say that in a settler-colonial place, writing has “instrumental purpose” and is “bound up with the imposition and extension of European power”, as Peter Gibbons has put it (38). In order to secure itself, settlement also requires frequent and habitual restatement, with these restatements in turn acquiring and requiring new inflections over time as cultural climates change and settler-Indigenous relations shift. In light of this, textual traces from the initial periods of contact and settlement—the volumes on that bookshelf—might be expected to provide view-shafts onto the dreamwork and uncertainties that have underpinned the idea of New Zealand from the beginning, and that persist within and characterize the present.

Drawing on my experience in teaching and constructing a range of undergraduate courses at the University of Auckland, this chapter surveys key pre-twentieth-century New Zealand texts and points towards possible pedagogical strategies for their use. It encompasses a broad array of genres, charting a trajectory through the work of writers who grapple with tensions arising from the collision of Enlightenment ideals of progress with Indigenous presences. Among other things, these writers document patterns of engagement between Europeans and Māori, the foundational role of violence in the founding of a new place, and anxieties about the land and its transformation. Aware of their own position as witnesses to history-in-the-making, they are keenly interested not just in the present and the recent past but in the future, too—in what the prospective New Zealand might look like, in how viable this prospect is, and in the cost of collateral damage inflicted on the way. As many of these writers reveal, the nineteenth century was a time of massive upheaval for Māori, characterized by an escalation of inter-tribal warfare, severe population decline, and brutal and pervasive changes to existing landscapes and social structures. They also signal that we cannot expect to recover nineteenth-century Māori experience through standard revisionist practices, since understandings of this period held by iwi (tribal groups) are unlikely to map neatly onto European ones. The chapter concludes by pointing towards recent cultural productions and critical-creative projects that attest to unfinished business with this phase of New Zealand’s past.

Arrival scenes constitute important points of departure in settler-colonial contexts. As well as reminding students that the onset of settlement is by no means a singular, decisive event, representations of the country from the perspective of sea and shore invert land-based ideas of place, denaturalizing and dislocating settlement as both process and outcome. As is the case in Australia, the archive of European voyage material relating to New Zealand is extensive and relatively accessible. Several accounts survive in published form, documenting experiences that are of interest for interweaving literary and ethno-historiographical concerns.

My focus here is on two ‘arrival’ texts that work particularly effectively in the classroom. The first, *A Voyage Round the World* (1777), was published by George Forster, a German naturalist who sailed on board Cook’s *Resolution*.[[2]](#endnote-2) Forster’s *Voyage* recounts the ship’s six-week-long sojourn in Dusky Bay in 1773 and is perhaps best known for its landmark passage, modelled on Virgil’s *Aeneid*, which describes scenes of European industry and zeal, and concludes with an exclamation about the rise of arts and dawn of science “in a country which had hitherto lain plunged in one long night of ignorance and barbarism!” (105-06). As a provocation, this passage can be used to invite students to develop nuanced readings of the patterns of interaction between Europeans and Māori detailed in the *Voyage*. Students readily perceive that Forster’s dramatic and much-quoted sentiments are largely at odds with his preceding commentary and with his qualifying coda, which forecasts the collapse and ruin of the makeshift European settlement. Cross-cultural “mis-taking” (of tools as weapons and weapons as tools, for instance) occasions traumatic violence in the *Voyage*, and for the most part Forster seems reflexively attuned to the unfolding situation: it is possible to perceive him straining to make sense of occurrences and coming up against the limits of his own understanding. A more fundamental set of interpretative challenges can be posed when students read the *Voyage* alongside Barry Barclay’s 2005 book *Mana Tuturu: Maori Treasures & Intellectual Property Rights*. Barclay affords a means of framing encounters of the kind described by Forster—as well as the reconstructive and appropriative recording technology of the European writing system itself—as “queer” (8) and “troubling” (30) conduct on the part of the visitors.

Cook’s men were in the grip of scurvy when they limped in to Dusky Bay. Tantalizing questions of affective disturbance are thus raised by the *Voyage*, and in light of Forster’s somewhat paradisiacal description of the country, it is fruitful to read his account in conjunction with Jonathan Lamb’s *Preserving the Self in the South Seas 1680-1840* (2001). The *Voyage* has also attracted recent scholarly attention as a touchstone for historical re-enactment studies. Vanessa Agnew, for example, uses Forster as the key case study in her 2004 *Critical Inquiry* editorial, drawing in turn on *Cook’s Sites: Revisiting History* (1999), a return to Dusky Bay published by Mark Adams and Nicholas Thomas. These authors juxtapose written discussion of Forster’s experiences (and their own) with contemporary photographs of the landing-site landscapes—still marked by the *Resolution*’s axes and saws—and of the original voyage journal itself. Adams’s images of the journal-as-object are particularly valuable as a teaching resource. Hand-written in ink-blotched skeins of cursive script, bearing tentative sketches of coastlines and aerial cartographic visualizations, and photographed within the setting of its long-time home in the Berlin State Library, the journal serves as a material reminder of the role of pens, ink and paper (as well as institutions of writing themselves) in constructing new world places. Such images render visible for students what the European system of writing “was” when it made landfall in New Zealand. Once students are able to *see* the writing on the page, in the form of marks and notations, gridded columns and rows, they begin to read the page itself as the expression of a planar and rectangularizing vision—as a certain “distribution of the sensible”, to use Jacques Rancière’s formulation. Such an understanding of the re-ordering or world-making force of writing itself supplies a crucial basis for any investigation of settler-colonial literature. Indeed, by considering the distance of Forster’s writing from our own (in terms of its hypotactic syntax, inconsistent spellings, non-regulation use of apostrophes and so on), students are able to historicize European writing practices and conventions—to find themselves encountering a communicative technology that is, itself, still visibly under construction.

The second “arrival” text of note is Augustus Earle’s *A Narrative of a Nine Months’ Residence in New Zealand* (1832). Earle was an English artist and an intrepid traveller who seems to have set himself the goal of maximizing every opportunity on offer. Unlike other visitors of this period, he was under no professional obligation to veil these experiences: his written account contains reference, among other things, to sex, guns, cannibal feasts, warrior heroes and mean-spirited men of the cloth. Again, supplementary texts supply a range of interpretative paradigms for Earle’s writing. The context of escalating tribal warfare and the “secret” of cannibalism have been investigated in an excellent essay by Alex Calder (*The Settler’s Plot* 37-60) while the physical, temporal and psycho-geographic terrains traversed by Earle may be compared with those detailed in the letters and diaries of the Reverend Samuel Marsden, the founder of the Church Missionary Society in New Zealand. Like Earle’s text, Marsden’s is eminently readable, and students soon discover that the discernible shifts in its metaphoric patternings repay careful inspection.

As Calder’s article makes clear, Earle furnishes not only a colourful and entertaining tale, but also a suite of important early New Zealand paintings; his artistic oeuvre has been published in numerous books and is widely available online.[[3]](#endnote-3) These images correspond closely to the events and scenes recounted in the *Narrative*, enabling students to assemble a vivid picture of the milieu in which Earle lived and worked. As is the case with Forster’s journal, these images are useful for developing classroom discussion of how so-called ‘new world’ places are written through. Earle’s 1828 painting of Kerikeri, for instance, depicts the decade-old mission compound as a tiny stockaded island of Englishness within a larger, as-yet-unreconstructed landscape. Not only does the picture register the lack of an agronomic patchwork spreading out across the hills behind the mission station, but it testifies to the defiant and dominant presence of a Māori burial shelter—tell-tale signs that the missionaries have made only halting progress. Other images—such as Earle’s careful sketches of tattooing procedures and architectural structures—offer representations of Indigenous inscription systems. For this reason, it can be particularly instructive to frame Earle’s work with excerpts from Deidre Brown’s *Tai Tokerau Whakairo Rākau* (2004), or from Penny van Toorn’s *Writing Never Arrives Naked* (2006). As van Toorn proposes, and as Brown implies, it is crucial to attend to practices such as carving and textile production in order to move beyond simple binaries that posit “literacy” and “illiteracy” (or “non-literacy”) as evolutionary poles. Such a focus makes manifest elements of an existing Indigenous sensible order, offering pedagogically-important counterpoints to European writing of this period.

The impossibility of ever having arrived “properly” is centrally at issue in F. E. Maning’s *Old New Zealand* (1863). A beachcomber or “pakeha Maori” who deals with the period after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, Maning is deeply concerned with what might be termed the groundlessness of the grounds of European settlement, and he has come to be recognized as perhaps *the* key figure in the writing of nineteenth-century New Zealand. The same complexity that attracts professional academic researchers to his work can, however, make Maning a challenge in the undergraduate classroom, not least because of the choppiness of his tone (which is jokey, flippant, vituperous, sombre and melancholy by unpredictable turns), the contradictoriness of his sentiments (which were subject to concerted revision by Maning himself over the course of his writing career), and the shifty use of narrative masks. I encourage students to embrace these difficulties: Maning is difficult because “New Zealand” is difficult, and the value of his writing is that it can shake from us any sense of complacency about this place. As well as dealing extensively with the question of land transactions and the legalities of settlement—Maning was, himself, a judge in the Native Land Court—his work supplies a number of concepts and phrases which characterize bedrock problems connected with settler-colonialism as enterprise and ideology. “Trying back”—the vain hope that things might be put on the right footing if only you could start over—is a key trope in his writing, as is the predicament of being “tapu’d”, or marked by the prior-peopled place in such a way that you are not (and cannot ever again be) rightfully “yourself.”

A number of dedicated scholarly articles offer treatments that can be incorporated into the classroom programme in order to assist students in working with Maning’s writing.[[4]](#endnote-4) It can be extremely effective to ask students to apply the “silent film” treatment to his work by producing a sequence of storyboards for a chosen incident or anecdote in order to convey the historical mood and to draw out the humour.[[5]](#endnote-5) The ‘awkward scrapes’ (123) of Chapter IV, for instance, work especially well in this regard, enabling students to mobilize their knowledge of cinematic, dramaturgic and comedic techniques in order to raise questions about the text itself as a performance piece. Another helpful strategy is to set Maning’s *Old New Zealand* alongside missionary printer and amateur naturalist William Colenso’s 1865 essay “On the Maori Races of New Zealand.” Both of these texts operate in ethnographic modes of sorts, and they were written at the same juncture in the country’s history, on the eve of war in the Waikato and at a time of acute tribal population decline. The polite, dispassionate distance of Colenso’s prose, however, throws Maning’s discursive mode into sharp relief. Deformed by tensions that surface as a result of recognition that incompatible sensible orders are at play, *Old New Zealand* evokes conditions of proximity and entanglement in which confident European schematizations and easy distinctions between fact and fiction come unstuck. Drawing these two texts together also offers a useful basis for consideration of the role of public writing in settler-colonial contexts. Both Maning and Colenso actively work to instruct and construct a New Zealand public, and the felt urgency in their writing testifies to an underlying public pedagogical state of crisis that remains palpable in this place.

 With these foundational ideas in play, it is possible to develop a teaching syllabus in any number of directions. The thread of satire, for instance, can be traced through Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon, or Over the Range* (1870). Describing a Darwinian society the name of which is an anagram of “nowhere”, this novel holds a distorting mirror up to settler culture itself and puts European institutions (the law, government, family, formal education, language and writing itself) under the microscope. With utopias and dystopias in view, it is possible to task students with tracing the direct influence of Butler’s ideas on the twentieth-century writings of figures such as George Orwell and Gilles Deleuze. As Lamb has shown, Butler’s novel can also be read in the context of contemporary claims to the Waitangi Tribunal, and of the persistent and contradictory “utopian and Machiavellian possibilities of this new country” (80). *Erewhon* can also be compared and contrasted with George Chamier’s *Philosopher Dick* (1891), another back-country South Island novel which offers a dystopian critique of settler society. Chamier’s writing amplifies the “Native Question” (that is, the question as to the place of Māori in the country-to-come) that is debated by Maning and Colenso. His anticipation of what Slavoj Žižek has termed “tarrying with the negative”, and his investment in the “uncanny returns” that arise through the sublimation of Māori presence are discussed in a 2006 essay by Sean Sturm. This essay also offers diagrammatic representations of settlement processes and ideological structures (the range of relations posited between “nature and the Natives”; the mathematics of settler positivism; the symbolic geography of
the South Sea bubble”) which can be applied to other-nineteenth century texts, or used as a basis for students to devise schematizations of their own—or as a prompt for student reflection on the positing power of diagrams themselves.

Satire is traceable, too, through the work of New Zealand-born poet Jessie Mackay. “The Charge of Parihaka”, for example, first published in 1889, reworks the classic Tennysonian model in order to retell the story of the Imperial invasion of a Taranaki community in 1881 which was met with pacifist resistance by its Māori inhabitants. As Jane Stafford and Mark Williams have noted (65), Mackay’s verse derives its effect from playing the occasion against the mode, exposing the limits of existing literary forms for making sense of events within a settler-colonial place, and it registers slippages in imaginative identification (Mackay’s sympathy for the victims of colonial dispossession, which is a result of the radical liberalism of her Scottish background, is at odds with her own position in antipodean society). At the same time as they rehabilitate the critical reputations of Mackay and other writers of the so-called “Maoriland” period such as Alfred Domett—the author of the epic poem *Ranolf and Amohia: A South-Sea Daydream* (1872)—Stafford and Williams chart influential twentieth-century debates over the value of writings of the nineteenth century. Such interest in historicizing processes of canon-construction makes their book a valuable classroom resource in its own right.

 For pedagogical purposes, one of the most pertinent late-nineteenth-century texts is Lady Barker’s *Station Life in New Zealand* (1870). As a compilation of letters sent by Barker to family in England during her residence on a sheep station in North Canterbury between 1866 and 1868, this text highlights the workings of gender, class and ethnicity in the early writing of New Zealand. It can be used to induce students to reflect upon *who* is able to write a new place into being (that is, what kinds of people possess the time, schooling, resources, inclination, and real or imagined audience to undertake such a task), and what modes are at their disposal. Official settlement in Canterbury was already underway by the time Barker arrived, and while she laments her own position as a latecomer, her correspondence nevertheless offers a thickly descriptive record of practical and symbolic developments in the writing of place: draining swamps, surveying and burning off territory, laying roads, carving out farms, establishing churches, schools, communities, and libraries. *Station Life*’s surface plotline of picnics and parties suggests an atmosphere of comfortable conviviality. Barker’s book, however, is by no means a story of easy progress, and it is not just that its tone frequently verges on self-deprecating parody of settler hardihood (Calder, *The Settler’s Plot* 6). The nor’-west wind howls through much of the narrative, carrying with it the distinct possibility that settlers and their belongings will be dislodged, and real misfortunes and privations abound. Barker’s infant son dies; she and her husband lose half their flock to a snowstorm and face starvation and hypothermia themselves; Barker is thrown from her horse and must re-set her own broken shoulder; she and her husband eventually concede defeat and return to England (shifts in Barker’s use of the term “home” are revealing). Settlement is supposed to be hard work, but it is rarely documented as being unachievable on a personal (which is also to say metonymic) scale—as a tale of affliction and blight. In light of the 2010-11 Christchurch earthquakes, which levelled much of New Zealand’s second-largest city and shook the surrounding Canterbury region, the book’s locus makes it particularly valuable as a settler commentary on the question of the sustainability—or, indeed, survivability—of settlement.

The ongoing currency of the concerns manifest in early New Zealand writing, which is attested by the wealth of recent scholarly publications dealing with this period, is evident in other cultural formations too. It is possible, for instance, to track nineteenth century New Zealand through the literature and film of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Such an itinerary might take in Jane Mander’s *The Story of a New Zealand River* (1920), Ian Wedde’s *Symmes Hole* (1986), Maurice Shadbolt’s *Season of the Jew* trilogy (1987-93), C. K. Stead’s *The Singing Whakapapa* (1994) and Eleanor Catton’s *The Luminaries* (2013), as well as films such as Geoff Murphy’s *Utu* (1983), Jane Campion’s *The Piano* (1993) and Vincent Ward’s *River Queen* (2005). This terrain is supported by some strong secondary resources, including Linda Hardy’s essay “Natural Occupancy” (1995), and Stephen Turner’s “Being Colonial/Colonial Being” (2002). As a concluding point, however, I would gesture towards two contemporary creative-critical projects which work in a comparable vein to *Cook’s Sites*, and which are readily available as online resources. These projects open productive new lines of inquiry into the writing of nineteenth-century New Zealand and they seem to “speak” in compelling ways to a twenty-first-century classroom. I would add that integrating into a teaching syllabus texts that engage with—and yet move beyond—the bookshelf serves to challenge conventional distinctions between primary and secondary sources (and between canonical texts and their “others”), and offers models for expanded modes of student engagement. In particular, this material lends itself to the elaboration of image-text or digital media or other performative or applied critical-creative responses to nineteenth-century writings, motifs and concerns.

The first of the two projects, entitled *Wastelands*, draws together the threads of abandonment and collapse that are traceable through the writings of Barker and Forster, and the satirical threads that are woven through the writings of Maning, Butler and Mackay. It comprises text written by Stephen Turner, an Auckland-based academic, to accompany *A Ride in the Darkness*, a 2010 exhibition of contemporary photographs of sites and icons of failed nineteenth-century settlement. Both in the photographs and in the written text there is a concerted doubling at work. Ann Shelton’s dazzlingly high-colour coffee-table-book landscape images are mirrored, Rorschach-like, along vertical axes of symmetry, while Turner’s text, which is presented in the format of a newspaper, comprises two distinct—although visually indistinguishable—strands. One of these strands draws upon and emulates conventional modes of settler historiography, fielding a lexicon of proper nouns, dates, geographical distances, statistics and other “empirical” data. The second strand offers an abstractive meditation on absence, loss, negation and processes of collapse. As the text proceeds, the historiographical material comes under increasing strain, eventually becoming marked by explosive incursions from the abstractive material which cannot be contained within its own apparently circumscribed paragraphs. Recalling a version—and vision—of nineteenth-century New Zealand that has largely come to be excluded from official twentieth-century rewritings of this place, and registering pressure-points that underlie a troubled sensible order, Turner requires readers to “try back” in order that they might face (and thus be re-faced by) the constitutively unstable ground of settlement.

The second contemporary project that works especially well for teaching purposes, *The Great South Road in Twenty Steps*, is an online multi-media and documentary film venture that is currently under development. The co-constructive nature of this project, which is emphasized by its curators, sociologist-poet Scott Hamilton and filmmaker Paul Janman, means there is opportunity for students to contribute to the work-in-progress. Hamilton and Janman revisit a major infrastructural development that dates from the time of Maning’s and Colenso’s writings: the Great South Road was constructed in the 1860s, under the order of Governor George Grey, to facilitate the movement of Imperial troops and ammunition into the Waikato for the purpose of subduing the local tribes. Critiquing “the road” as a metaphor for progress and space of settler desire, the project investigates the spatiotemporal re-ordering of place that is effected through European modes of inscription, and it highlights the foundation of the country on military emergency and settler unease. The project addresses itself both to a local community and to a wider international audience. Because it problematizes the sublime mountain-scape trope that has been deployed since the nineteenth century to market New Zealand to the world, it creates a somewhat abrupt and jarring break in the classroom for students who half-believe this country *is* Middle Earth, or the picture postcard perfection of a “100% Pure” Tourism New Zealand advertisement. Such disruption is an intentional strategy on my part, related both to Maning, who demands that we “see” this country as the impossible place that it is, and to a vast body of writings on New Zealand literature, history and culture which smooth or render palatable that which is properly difficult. At the same time as it invites interrogation of these representations, the Great South Road project searches for an historically-inspired poetics of place within a terrain cross-hatched with competing stories. The project insists that divisions between past, present and future are necessarily “indistinct” (Mikaere 320), and that the task of reading nineteenth-century settlement—and of recognizing Indigenous perspectives on this history—must be approached with an expansive understanding of the multitude of forms that writing may take.

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1. New Zealand, the name given to the country in the mid-1640s after the visit of the Dutch seafarer Abel Tasman, is the appellation that I use throughout this chapter because the country was conceived and constructed as New Zealand by the nineteenth-century writers whose work I discuss. In other words, this name signals a short history of place which actively writes over a much longer Indigenous history. The Māori name for this country is Aotearoa, a term whose earliest recorded use is in George Grey’s 1855 *Polynesian Mythology and Ancient Traditional History of the New Zealand Race*. At the time of European arrival, Māori possessed no name for themselves as a people or a political collective but referred to Europeans as pākehā, meaning foreign or pale-skinned, while Europeans initially referred to Māori as ‘the New Zealanders’, later adopting this term for themselves as a sign of identification and belonging. See Turner and Stafford and Williams for discussion of the political implications of these slippages in naming. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See Thomas and Berghof (xiii-xxvii) for discussion of unresolved questions of authorship and attribution connected with the *Voyage*. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Selected paintings by Earle are reprinted in Murray-Oliver and Brown, and are available online. See for example <<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/artwork/605/a-corner-of-australia-at-kerikeri> > 2 January 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. See for example Boswell, Calder, “Introduction” to F. E. Maning’s *Old New Zealand and Other Writings*, and *The Settler’s Plot*; During and Turner. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. My thanks to Alex Calder, in whose own classroom I learned and applied this strategy. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)