The Colonial Newspaper as a Stepping Stone for the Victorian New Zealand Writer: A Case Study of Louisa Alice Baker

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Introduction

Colonial New Zealand was an essentially Victorian creation, which meant that Pākehā society evolved in an age of mass literacy. Tony Ballantyne argues that “the construction of a colonial culture depended on accessing books, building institutions, and creating forums in which the value of literature could be debated,” and Keith Scott speaks of a “one-medium society,” in which “[t]he printed word was everything.” Indeed, within just a few decades after the arrival of the first immigrant ships in New Zealand, libraries and newspapers proliferated to a degree that was quite astonishing for such a relatively small population and economy. New Zealand’s first public library had already opened in 1841, and a further 262 were founded over the next 33 years. At the same time settlers began to fulfil their own literary ambitions. Whether in the form of short stories appearing in newspapers and periodicals or classic Victorian three-decker novels, which were still mostly published overseas, their creative labours testify to the cultural importance of literature to the growing nation. In this context newspapers played a key role and provided a basic infrastructure in colonial New Zealand’s cultural landscape at a time when local book publishing remained limited and focused primarily on niche areas, such as school books, official publications, almanacs, local histories and directories as well as cookery and gardening books. Through a case study of the early writing career of Louisa Alice Baker (1856–1926), who came to New Zealand with her family through the assisted immigration scheme and settled near Christchurch in 1863, this paper analyses what it meant to write and publish, or rather attempt to publish, in late Victorian New Zealand. In particular, it explores the importance of the colonial newspaper as the initial platform for the professional New Zealand writer as well as the tension between colonial authors and centres of power.

Why did local and regional newspapers constitute such a fundamental element of colonial print culture and of social connection in nineteenth-century New Zealand? Firstly, after the early phase of religiously and politically motivated printing and publishing, which was essentially self-publishing, commercial publishing only began with the establishment of newspapers. In the guide *Book & Print in New Zealand* (1997), Ross Harvey reminds us:

Newspapers assume special significance in the New Zealand publishing context. Unlike the situation in Britain, where book publishing was established well over one century before newspapers were produced, in its New Zealand colony newspapers came first. [...] The 1860s and 1870s saw the founding of the major dailies, most of which are still publishing today.

By 1858, there existed 28 newspapers and a further 181 were founded in the gold rush period over the following two decades. Given the increased population, improved infrastructure and communication links, such as the arrival of the telegraph provided in the mid-1860s, newspapers were an integral part of settlement culture. Publishing local and international news, they allowed colonists to keep in contact with a larger world of anglophone print culture. Secondly then, one cannot stress enough the cultural work newspapers performed, as they provided “crucial spaces for conversation and contestation” instead of being solely a medium for transmitting ‘objective’ information.

In an essay on “The Local Press” read to the Gore Literary and Debating Society in 1884, its author emphasised the newspaper’s progressive power and educative value and declared, “If there is a man who does not read the papers, the current reviews and magazines, such a man is only partially alive.” As the example of Louisa Alice Baker will show, newspapers as well as periodicals were also important outlets for writing and the development of early New Zealand literature. More than that, Roger Blackley refers to newspapers as “the colonial literature par excellence.” Among the many
journalists that helped give newspapers their literary nature, Louisa Alice Baker was a forerunner, initiating as she did several innovations in New Zealand journalism, while also leaving a rich legacy as a colonial novelist.

‘Dot,’ ‘Alice’ and ‘Alien’

When I was living in a small East Coast fishing town I saw how French sardines were made. The sprats were caught, dressed, and tinned in the local factory, and labelled there – the labels were sent from France. So it seems with the colonial artists, they are bred under the Southern Cross, held cheaply there – and labelled in London.

—Louisa Alice Baker

The various pseudonyms under which Louisa Alice Baker wrote reflect the different personas she assumed as a professional writer. As ‘Dot’ she revolutionised the children’s page of the Otago Witness, while she initiated a similar transformation of the ladies’ page as ‘Alice.’ The adoption of the pseudonym ‘Alien’ as a novelist highlights her sense of alienation and displacement as a colonial woman writer who could not publish her work in her New Zealand home, but was compelled to move to London in order to pursue her literary career. Moreover, ‘Alien,’ arguably, suggests her dilemma as a professional female writer in a male dominated environment, of which Baker would have been highly sensible as an increasingly militant feminist.

Though largely forgotten nowadays, Baker was “the most prolific New Zealand novelist of her time” and the first Pākehā woman succeeding in making a career out of writing novels. Between 1894 and 1910, she published sixteen novels and one book of short stories under her pseudonym ‘Alien,’ first with the publishing house Hutchinson and later with Fisher Unwin, Constable, Digby Long, and Isbister in London, while nearly half of her novels also achieved publication in either New York, Chicago, or Philadelphia, and many ran to second editions.

Born in the English town of Aston in 1856, Baker immigrated with her family to New Zealand in 1863 and settled in Christchurch, where she was educated and began submitting stories to newspapers as a young girl. At the age of 18 she married the 33-year-old John William Baker, a house painter by profession as well

as amateur Greek scholar. The couple had two children, Jack and Ethel, born in the 1870s, a period during which Baker continued producing literary texts and published stories such as “Fickle Jack” and “Grandmother’s Story” in the *Otago Witness*. Her marriage was unhappy and Baker left her husband in 1886, moving to Dunedin with her daughter. Although Louisa and John did not divorce, they were never reconciled.\(^{13}\) Yet Baker’s personal experience was obviously an important creative source to her, as loveless marriages are a recurrent subject in her novels.

Her move to an independent life in Dunedin allowed Baker to pursue her career as both journalist and writer. She began to work for the *Otago Witness*,\(^ {14}\) a popular illustrated weekly newspaper, assisting the editor, William Fenwick. Baker transformed the children’s page and was responsible for the development of ‘Dot’ and ‘Dot’s Little Folks Page,’ which became an institution and outlived her tenure of the role by several decades, being carried on by the *Otago Daily Times* after the *Witness* stopped publication in 1932. The historian Keith Scott recently published a 576-page monograph on the column, “the first Facebook,” as he puts it in *Dear Dot, I Must Tell You* (2011). According to Scott, Baker inaugurated “the longest-lasting, largest and most influential correspondence column in any New Zealand newspaper, ever,” making the figure of ‘Dot’ “one of the most influential personalities in New Zealand journalism.” His assessment does not fail to appreciate Barker’s original contribution: “Successive Dots would come and go, but the character Louisa Baker created remained constant. Her influence went beyond the children.”\(^ {15}\) Above all, the ‘Dot’ created by Baker proved such a success, because Baker managed to establish a special bond and dialogue with New Zealand’s youth and, moreover, invested the page with an educational value.

‘Dot’ invited young readers to submit letters to the paper, addressing children throughout the Otago region for the first time on 16 July 1886:

> DOT will be pleased to receive short letters from juvenile correspondents on any matters of interest to themselves, – short stories of pet animals, descriptions of their favourite toys, their parties, amusements, &c. The letters to be written by the


\(^{14}\) The *Witness*, named after the *Edinburgh Witness*, was established as a four-page fortnightly newspaper in 1851, three years after the founding of Dunedin. At first, it struggled financially with only 210 subscribers in 1855, but was printing 4,500 copies a week by 1864 and became very stable during the gold rush period. The introduction of illustrations at this time, initially engravings and later photographs, further enhanced the paper’s popularity (National Library of New Zealand, “Otago Witness,” *Papers Past*, 2009, December 28, 2013, http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=CL1.OW&essay=1&e=--------10--1----0--)

\(^{15}\) Scott, *Dear Dot*, 29, 42.
children themselves, and addressed “Dot,” care of the Editor, and to be published in the page devoted to “Our Little Folks.”

The first letter ‘Dot’ received was from her own son Jack, recounting an exciting boat trip with his uncle and cousins, and in the following week, under the heading “Ethel’s Reward,” her daughter described her joy in receiving a “Chatterbox” after an illness. Baker emphasised that “Dot will never find any matter that interests the children too trivial to attend to, and hopes before long to be regarded as their friend.” Subsequently, children sent her letters telling her about such things as their friends and pets, birthday parties, and short trips, but they also shared their problems and frequently asked her for advice. Some correspondents added self-consciously, “You must excuse this, as it is my first letter, but I hope to write a better one next time. – Yours truly, Maria Johnson (aged 11 years);” other juveniles praised the children’s page, “I always read ‘Our Little Folks,’ and long for the Witness as much as father and mother.” Baker thus introduced an interactive forum for young readers and writers, the success of which probably went far beyond its creator’s imagination. Nicola Cummins mentions “Dot’s Little Folks’ Literary and Debating Club meetings,” for example, and writes that from 1899 to 1906 “Otago Witness records show four thousand Little Folk had sent in money to purchase the official badge.” In 1911, on the occasion of the Otago Daily Times jubilee, Baker reminisced fondly about her time as ‘Dot,’ referring to it as “one of [her] pleasantest literary experiences.”

As ‘Alice,’ Baker also restructured the paper’s ladies’ page, similarly inviting correspondents to submit letters as well as short pieces of verse or prose. The diverse nature of the letters she received is mirrored in her “Answers to Correspondents”: to ladies under the nom de plume “Perplexed Ones” ‘Alice’ replied, for instance: “I gave you my idea on the subject once before. I think the whole proceeding very unmaidenly,” while she admitted to another lady, “I have had no experience in candying lemon peel.” Sometimes her answers appear somewhat officious, as when she told “One of the Audience”: “You have not complied with the universally accepted newspaper rule that all MS. shall be accompanied by the

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20 It is estimated that by 1936, the year of the fiftieth anniversary of ‘Dot’s Little Folks’ page, “there had been ten thousand active members and an unknown number of passive members and interested bystanders.” In her article Cummins also underlines the importance of weeklies in promoting social cohesion (“The Disruptive Witness: A Dunedin Boilermaker and the Manufacture of Cultural Capital,” Script & Print 29 [2005]: 69–70, 71).
name of the writer.”

Her column was not limited to this dialogue with her correspondents, but a substantial part was devoted to Baker’s own letters and original literary work. The thematic red thread was largely dictated by her moral feminism, hence her articles often revolved around subjects like “Happy Homes,” “Young Wives,” or “Lovers,” which Baker frequently discussed by drawing on examples from literature by well-known authors such as Tennyson, Dickens, Thackeray, or Eliot. Her own poems and short stories, such as “Chalk,” which was serialised in 1886, are similarly infused with social morals. According to Terry Sturm, “[i]t would be hard to underestimate the importance of these local journalistic outlets […] as initial testing-grounds for aspiring popular authors.”

Indeed, during the early 1890s Baker turned to tread new ground, working more ambitiously on her literary career and producing her first novel, later published as *A Daughter of the King*. Arguably, the dialogue that she started with her readers as a journalist affected her choice of genre as a novelist. All her literary output was written as works of popular fiction; that is, she devised her books as romances with a mass-market appeal.

In 1899, Australian author Henry Lawson gave the following, now-famous warning to aspiring colonial writers:

> My advice to any young Australian writer whose talents have been recognised, would be to go steerage, stow away, swim, and seek London, Yankeeland, or Timbuctoo – rather than stay in Australia till his genius turn to gall, or beer. Or, failing this – and still in the interests of human nature and literature – to study elementary anatomy, especially as it applies to the cranium, and then shoot himself carefully with the aid of a looking-glass.

Struggling to find a publisher in New Zealand, Baker probably acted on similar advice when she set sail for England in 1894 with her daughter. The *Tuapeka Times* commented in 1895: “Just 12 months ago this lady, who had for some years been a valued contributor to the colonial press, conceived the idea of tempting fortune at Home. She had a novel three-parts written, which she believed to possess virtue, and the ambition seized her to try and get it published in London.” It was an understandable ambition, since it is doubtful whether she would have achieved publication in New Zealand at all. Furthermore, a novel is always artwork and commodity at once, and given that Baker sought to earn her living as a novelist, a limited domestic circulation and absence of overseas recognition would have militated against her commercial success.

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24 Sturm, “Popular Fiction,” 496.
A variety of factors made it difficult for colonial authors to publish domestically. First, the Pākehā reading public displayed a persistent preference for British publications, as settlers, generally speaking, still aimed at replicating a distinctly British way of life. Second, the few colonial publishing companies were reluctant to take risks with unknown local authors. As Sturm points out:

Until the Second World War there were no publishers who regularly published novels, though firms which had established themselves earlier in the century (like Reed, and Whitcombe and Tombs) had occasionally included a popular novel in their lists [...]. After the war, however, there was a significant expansion of local publishing, and both firms began to publish fiction on a more regular (though still small-scale) basis.27

The commercial difficulties of publishing books in nineteenth-century New Zealand should not be overlooked. Competition from Britain and Australia was fierce and printing overseas routinely remained the cheaper option. As late as 1892, printers complained, “It costs more to convey a newspaper to some of the remote inland districts than to the uttermost parts of Europe.”28 New Zealand publishing was for a long time dominated by the two firms Sturm mentions: Whitcombe & Tombs and Reed, the former owing their success largely to non-fiction publications. Founded in Christchurch in 1882, Whitcombe & Tombs achieved independence within New Zealand and from Britain by specialising in educational publishing, issuing schoolbooks tailored specifically to New Zealand conditions.29 Apart from the fact that literature and fiction were never the mainstay of the colonial printer and publisher, newspapers likewise exasperated local authors by ill treating them financially. The New Zealand poet Blanche Baughan remarked that local newspaper editors “are doubly damaging national literature … they are (1) obliging us to send our exquisite productions to England forsooth! And Australie and (2) they print doggerel, since they needn't pay for...

27 Sturm, “Popular Fiction,” 496.
29 Noel Waite describes Whitcombe & Tombs not only as “New Zealand’s most significant publishing house,” but as “The Octopus” because of the diversity of its business activities. Combining the roles of printer, publisher, and bookseller, Whitcombe & Tombs played a dominant role in the developing New Zealand book trade. According to Waite, their “bookshops became gateways to New Zealand print culture – both providing and limiting access – and their rapid spread was indicative of the emergence of a national market for printing and publishing. [...] The firm’s rapid growth from regional to national to international publisher seems sufficient basis for a more modest claim to the stability and independence of a national book trade” (“The Octopus and Its Silent Teachers: A New Zealand Response to the British Book Trade,” in Worlds of Print: Diversity in the Book Trade, edited by Catherine Armstrong and John Hinks [New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 2006], 13, 16, 30).
it. Why we should fill their columns for nothing I do not see.”30 As a result, many New Zealand writers submitted their literary work to the Sydney Bulletin, which provided a major outlet beyond the local newspapers, and generally offered higher payment, even for reprinted material.31 Another option for Pākehā writers was to send their work to British publishers like Macmillan, which had launched its successful Colonial Library in 1886 with Lady Barker’s Station Life in New Zealand. Macmillan, however, rejected about ninety-two per cent of the manuscripts submitted and generally regarded colonial authors as “interchangeable among their various colonies in providing frontier adventure in exotic settings.”32

Since publication in London meant reaching the widest possible audience, Baker’s decision to move and settle in the imperial metropolis seemed a sensible career step. John Barnes elaborates on the colonial writers’ complicated position: “Publication in the colonies meant small circulation and lack of critical interest. The writer who could not go to London had to rely upon the sympathetic discernment of the distant publisher’s reader and the book editor. Recognition of one’s work by English readers could transform one’s reputation in the colonies.”33 This transformative power of international publication is exemplified by Robbery Under Arms by the Australian novelist ‘Rolf Boldrewood,’ first serialised in the Sydney Mail from 1882 to 1883, then published as a three-volume novel in London, but only attracting attention and winning acclaim in Britain and the colonies when it appeared in Macmillan’s Colonial Library in 1889.34 Baker experienced the benefits of London publication when she succeeded in publishing her first novel with Hutchinson in 1894. The company was a relative newcomer at this point, as George Thompson Hutchinson had only started his own business in 1887. Hutchinson seemed quite receptive to colonial literature from early on. Among the first two titles published under his imprint was a collection of short stories titled In Australian Wilds. The reason for his interest in colonies may be traced back to his own biography: after his apprenticeship to Alexander Strahan, Hutchinson worked as a salesman for the publishing house of Hodder and Stoughton, which involved three round-the-world trips, during which he also met his future wife; they married in Melbourne in 1886. Hutchinson’s first major

31 The Bulletin published about 400 New Zealand poems and 145 New Zealand-based stories in the 1890s, offering, moreover, access to larger literary debates for many Pākehā authors (Trainor, “New Zealand Writers,” 316).
34 Ibid.
success with a new novel took place in 1894 with the publication of *A Yellow Aster* by ‘Iota,’ the pseudonym of Irish-Australian novelist Kathleen Mannington Caffyn. While Hutchinson successfully published magazines as well as non-fictional works, it was clearly popular fiction that made the firm’s reputation.  

Baker’s 1894 publication of her first novel set the publishing pattern for all her novels in the nineteenth century, as Hutchinson published a further five of her novels from 1895 to 1899 subsequent to *A Daughter of the King*. Unlike cheap colonial editions, Baker’s publications at Hutchinson were tastefully designed. *A Daughter of the King* features golden sunrays on the spine and a sun in gold against a black background on the front. The colour composition of *The Majesty of Man* (1895) is gold against blue and the one of *In Golden Shackles* (1896) gold against red with ornaments in black. On the advertisement page of *A Daughter of the King*’s first edition, Hutchinson described the novel as “An Original and Powerful Story:”

**A DAUGHTER OF THE KING.** By Alien. In crown 8vo, buckram, gilt, 6s.

This story, while upholding the sacredness of marriage – true union of souls – gives a picture of the wedded state without love. It deals not only with the physical but also with the spiritual side of the question, and while of general interest, will appeal especially to readers of “The Story of an African Farm.”

Hutchinson obviously tried to build on the commercial success of Olive Schreiner’s popular ‘New Woman’ novel, first published in 1883. It was no unlikely marketing strategy, though, as there is indeed a striking number of parallels between Schreiner’s young heroine Lyndall and Baker’s unconventional protagonist Florence, who is trapped in a remote parish on the Canterbury Plains in a loveless marriage, but eventually manages to escape to Melbourne. In addition, Hutchinson marketed the novel within the general context of popular colonial fiction and literature of exploration, taking into account the increasing desire for adventure and exoticism among readers in late Victorian Britain. The other texts that are listed on the advertisement page include, for example, “New African Story: The Adventures of Leonard Vane” or “My Cousin from Australia” by Evelyn Everett Green.” A look at some of Hutchinson’s further publications in the 1890s suggests an opening up of distant lands and Empire to a home readership, at a time when, as Bill Bell argues, Victorian literature witnessed “increasing efforts to represent a declining empire in favourable terms.”

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period include: *The Coming Colony: Practical Notes on Western Australia; Round the Compass in Australia; The Life and Times of Sir George Grey, K.C.B.* (who was Governor successively of South Australia, New Zealand, and Cape Colony); *A Diplomatist’s Wife in Japan: Letters from Home to Home* (which ran to several editions and included over two hundred illustrations); or *Intimate China: The Chinese As I Have Seen Them* by Mrs Archibald Little.

Baker’s fiction was greeted with warmth by British reviewers, particularly by the religious press. In fact, according to Sturm, “much of her popularity probably derived from its regular recommendation of her work.” Indeed, the selection of “press opinions” about *A Daughter of the King* reprinted on the first pages of her second novel, *The Majesty of Man*, evidence that a reviewer of the *Christian World* as well as one of the *Methodist Recorder* recommended her novel “cordially” and “warmly,” while the *Church Family Newspaper* described it as “A tale of considerable power, with many thrilling incidents and pathetic details.” This judgment was echoed by the *Christian Leader*, which congratulated ‘Alien’ “on an admirable performance.”

Reviews reproduced in the publication of Baker’s third novel, *In Golden Shackles*, continued the trend of highly favourable press reviews by such papers and magazines as the *Athenaeum, British Weekly, Literary World, Manchester Guardian, Liverpool Mercury, Glasgow Herald*, and *Gentlewoman*, to name a few. Her novels apparently sold well in England, as Hutchinson advertised the “third and cheap edition” of *A Daughter of the King* (“in Crown 8vo, cloth, gilt. 3s 6d”) on the first pages of *In Golden Shackles*. Again, miscellaneous press opinions are reprinted, one of them declaring, “This very original story. So good is it that its clever author is almost certain to have a great future before her - *Lady’s Pictorial*.”

Paradoxically, Baker’s New Zealand reviewers were more ambivalent and not always favourably inclined. In 1894, *The Star* printed a critical article titled “Yellow Asterics from New Zealand” on her first novel:

> Our London correspondent has sent a brief notice of Mrs Baker’s “A Daughter of the King,” a work which has been awaited with some interest by colonial readers and critics. […] The story altogether fatigues one rather; yet the authoress could write a really good novel if she would avoid “Yellow asterics” and “problems.” […] It is fair to add that the reviewers of “A Daughter of the King” are distinctly encouraging, though most of them condemn its plot.

By contrast, a “Book Notice” published by the *Otago Witness* in 1895 on the colonial edition of *The Majesty of Man* spoke most highly of Baker’s first two

38 Sturm, “Popular Fiction,” 500.
40 ‘Alien,’ *In Golden Shackles* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1896), n.p. The grammar and spelling of this excerpt is partly unconventional, to say the least (it should be the *Lady’s Pictorial Magazine*).
41 “Yellow Asterics from New Zealand,” *Star*, November 16, 1894, 4.
novels: “In *A Daughter of the King*, ‘Alien’ gave evidence of power, originality, and rich promise; and in her second work, *The Majesty of Man*, she has amply vindicated her claim to attention, liberally satisfied the hopes entertained.”

In “Anglo-Colonial Notes” from London printed in the *Otago Daily Times* in 1896, the “many New Zealand admirers of Mrs Baker (‘Alien’)” were moreover notified that “[n]o fewer than 1000 copies of Mrs Baker’s last novel – ‘The Majesty of Man’ – were ordered for New Zealand alone.” Despite such indications of an overall positive reception in New Zealand, openly scathing criticism of Baker’s work appeared in *The Evening Post* in 1908, for instance, in response to one of her last novels, *The Perfect Union*:

> “Alien’s” earlier work, so far as we know it, is of an ornate and fanciful style, characterised by sentimentalism and lack of solidity. Her characters talk as men and women never talk even on the stage – in transcendental Bostonian platitudes. There is very little human nature in the book before us, but there is much fantastic theorising and a sad lack of spiritual insight. […] But for the fact that the novel makes a certain appeal to New Zealanders we would have passed it over without notice.”

Kirstine Moffat writes that “by 1925,” however, “Baker’s English and American popularity began to filter through to New Zealand,” where she had initially been much less widely read than overseas, mainly because of poorly arranged distribution by her British publishers. When *The Evening Post* reported on Baker’s tragic death from severe burns in 1926, she was remembered as “a most courageous woman, beloved by all who knew her” and indeed “a prolific writer.” Furthermore, the article informed readers:

> For many years after her arrival in England, Mrs. Baker was reader for a well-known firm of London publishers. Her judgment was profound, and her work was highly valued; in this capacity she discovered considerable talent, and “made” many novelists for this firm – people who, in the years that have since passed, have become well known in the literary world.

As a reader, Baker was perhaps able to render possible, for some, the way to publication, which, as a writer, had not always been easy for herself, but had demanded sacrifices, such as moving away from New Zealand and leaving her son behind. The article in the *Evening Post* concluded by pointing out one of the paradoxes in Baker’s life: “London never really suited her health.”

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Not unlike fellow New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield, Baker never severed her ties with her home country. After having settled in London, she still turned to New Zealand for creative inspiration, frequently investing the landscape with symbolic value. When she started to abandon New Zealand as a setting for her novels in the early twentieth century, her work became less complex and intellectually demanding. In addition, Baker maintained her connections with the *Otago Witness*, which serialised her story *A Child of the Pakehas* in August and September 1898, for example. From 1903 onwards, she also contributed a weekly column called “Alice’s Letter From England” to the *Otago Witness*. Significantly, Baker’s last completed work was an article on New Zealand, ready to be sent to the *Witness* a day before her death on 22 March 1926. Thus, Baker cultivated a lifelong professional link with newspapers, where she started her thriving writing career. For Scott, Baker presents “an important figure, not just in women’s writing in late Victorian New Zealand, but in the history and development of creative writing in this country overall.” In addition to being a popular and commercially successful New Zealand novelist in England, who was generally well received by the press, Barker may have also helped further colonial writers to get noticed by a metropolitan public in her capacity as reader at a London publishing firm. Reviewing her own career as a novelist in a 1902 interview given in London and reprinted in the *Otago Daily Times*, Baker noted her achievements with evident satisfaction: “It has been very gratifying to me to have accomplished my aim of being acknowledged both in England and New Zealand as the New Zealand novelist, and as it is other people, especially acknowledged critics who apply that term to me, not I who claim it, I think I may feel that I have fairly won it.”

**Conclusion**

The Pākehā society was born modern, Traue states. He argues that British settlers brought with them “fully developed instruments of modernity” and could thus “transform New Zealand into a neo-Europe within fifty years.” But importantly, Traue emphasises: “The settlers’ needs had been shaped by another manifestation of modernity, the reading revolution which began in the previous century, and for a significant number of them extensive reading of a wide range of printed materials had become a necessity of life.” Reading and writing in this context also provided a link to the imagined community of British culture, and thus a central reference point for the nineteenth-century Pākehā population in order to construct their sense of belonging to a home, which at that time

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49 Scott, *Dear Dot*, 85.
was still undoubtedly rooted in a country over ten thousand miles away. In the beginning, the young New Zealand economy lacked the infrastructure and skilled labour to compete in any way with large-scale bookselling and publishing companies overseas. Later in the century, after utilitarian printing and publishing had ceded to commercial practices, the dominance of British publications and the Pākehā readers’ general preference for them made it difficult for colonial authors to gain a foothold in the literary market, even though local newspapers and magazines offered a prominent platform for New Zealand writers and their literary endeavours. While British companies in the late Victorian period could no longer ignore the importance of the Australasian market, they mostly continued to accord colonial authors only a marginal place in their publications. Even authors like Louisa Alice Baker, who successfully published both in England and America, complained bitterly that “a story with an English setting is of three times the value in London, commercially, of one with a colonial background.”

Yet, in her time Baker was hailed as “a colonial George Eliot,” and managed to earn a living through her novels and freelance writing, prolifically contributing to the publishing landscape of her two ‘home countries.’

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52 Quoted in Sturm, “Popular Fiction,” 496.