

## Jane Mander, 1877–1949

*Philip Steer*

Jane Mander is a novelist whose work was published between the World Wars. She overcame the geographic isolation of her birthplace and the limitations of her education to pursue academic studies and a literary career overseas. Leaving New Zealand on a scholarship in her thirties, she published six novels while living in New York and London. She was also a prolific journalist, reviewer and literary critic for various New Zealand newspapers, and she continued these roles on her return to New Zealand in the early 1930s. Her novels set in New Zealand are unique in their evocation of the north of the country during colonial times, and they comprise an early critique of the puritanical aspects of New Zealand society. They were initially received coolly in New Zealand because of their moral content, but she eventually gained recognition in her lifetime for her first novel and it is for this that she is still well known today.

Mary Jane Mander was born in the township of Ramarama in the province of Auckland, New Zealand on 9 April 1877, the eldest of the five children of Francis (Frank) Mander and Janet (nee Kerr). Frank's father, John Mander, had emigrated with his wife, Jane, in 1847 as a member of the first detachment of New Zealand Fencibles. The Fencibles were a group of retired soldiers on British Army pensions, assisted by the New Zealand government to settle around Auckland in return for the promise of their military services in the event of conflict with Maori. Frank was born at Onehunga, Auckland in 1848 and the family settled at a farm in Papakura, Auckland four years later. Despite his family's poverty, Frank's entrepreneurial skills meant that he owned one hundred acres by the time of his marriage. Janet's parents had emigrated with her, aged two, and her three siblings in 1857. After two years, the Kerrs settled at Ramarama, south of Auckland. Although their house was ransacked soon after by Maori during the New Zealand Wars, the family remained there and Frank married Janet in Ramarama on 18 May 1876. Soon after their marriage, Frank turned from farming to the logging of kauri, a valuable hardwood tree that grew in forests to the north of Auckland. This career was to dominate family life until Mander was a teenager.

Frank's pursuit of kauri resulted in the Manders moving at least twenty-nine times, with Janet responsible for creating a home in often trying conditions and often at short notice. Frank initially worked at Awhitu, at the southern end of the Manakau Harbour, but in 1883 the family moved north to Wellsford.

While there, Mander began to attend primary school. A year later, the family moved to Port Albert on the Kaipara Harbour. From there, they moved to isolated Pukekaroro, where Mander may have attended Kaiwaka School and was later to set her first novel. At age nine, Mander moved to Point Ernie, at the head of the Kaiwaka River, where the family stayed long enough for her to make friends with other residents. From Point Ernie they returned to Port Albert, but after a short time they moved again to Mangere and Mander began to attend Onehunga School in March 1889. Three years later, the family returned again to Port Albert.

Such a nomadic lifestyle meant that the family possessed only a few books – among them Shakespeare, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Milton, *Jane Eyre* and the *Bible* – and Mander learnt portions of them all. By 1892 Mander had reached the end of her primary schooling, and the combination of her father's financial insecurity and the lack of a district secondary school spelt the end of her education. However, back in Port Albert she took a position as a probationary teacher at the primary school and was supported in her own study by the principal, George Reid. Moving to Avondale in 1896, Mander taught at primary schools and, after studying at night school, passed her teacher's exams in the same year. Four years later, the family moved for the final time to the northern town of Whangarei; at this point Mander left teaching to concentrate on her writing.

Once in Whangarei, Frank became interested in local politics. In 1902 he successfully stood in the Marsden electorate for the opposition Reform Party. To support his candidacy, he purchased a local newspaper at the same time, the *Northern Advocate*. Despite journalism being a male-dominated profession at the time, her family connections meant that Mander was able to become involved in the production of the newspaper. She worked primarily as a sub-editor and journalist, but lent a hand wherever necessary. In 1905 her family moved into a house built by Frank, and Mander commandeered its rooftop gazebo as her writing room. There she was able to write regularly, although virtually nothing from this time appears to have been published.

The workload of the newspaper took its toll on Mander, leaving her increasingly exhausted during 1906. For a break she travelled to Sydney in 1907. She was entranced by Sydney society, experiencing an artistic community for the first time. While there she met writers and artists, took music lessons, studied French and continued to write. She returned to New Zealand at the end of the year and became editor of the *North Auckland Times*, based in Dargaville. She was to use her experience here and with the previous paper for her third novel. After her Sydney experience, Mander's feelings of isolation from intellectual society were heightened. She found a tenuous connection to such society through subscribing to the monthly New

Zealand journal, *The Triad*. The late arrival of one issue prompted her to write a letter to the editor (1 December 1909), in which she bemoaned the 'brain-numbing, stimulus-stultifying, soul-searing silence' of her community. This, combined with her lack of success as a writer to date and her awareness of passing time, drove Mander to return to Sydney in 1910.

In Sydney, Mander stayed with William and Ada Holman. William was prominent in the New South Wales Labor Party and later became Premier, while Ada, a journalist, was involved in the feminist movement. Through them Mander became immersed in an intellectual environment of literary debate, socialism and social concern. At this time she wrote several articles for the New Zealand socialist publication, *The Maoriland Worker*. She used the pseudonym of 'Manda Lloyd,' possibly to prevent any embarrassment to her conservative politician father. While in Sydney, Mander was told of the Journalism School commencing at Columbia University. It was of particular interest because it was open to women and because it reserved places for students who had not matriculated. Mander determined to attend it and, refusing a scholarship in German at Sydney University, she returned to New Zealand to gain her family's support.

Mander eventually persuaded her father to let her go to Columbia and provide her with an allowance, and she sailed for New York via London in 1912. She took with her the draft of a novel, which was rejected by four London publishers during her stay of three weeks. Mander's disappointment was tempered by her enjoyment of London's cultural scene, and the visiting Russian Ballet in particular. She entered Barnard College at Columbia in September 1912, where she was required to complete two years' course work prior to being admitted to the journalism programme. Taking a wide range of papers in the humanities in her first year, she came at the top of her class in all but History. The combination of a heavy workload, her limited financial resources and the fact of being older than her fellow students meant that Mander did not become involved in extra-curricular activities at Barnard. Nevertheless, she formed close friends with many fellow students in Whittier Hall, her dormitory. Friendship with one student, Kathy Davis, led to Mander's joining their family for the summer of 1913, where she was able to write as and when she wished. Other close friends were Esther and Rose Norton, members of a wealthy family who provided her with an entrance to New York's upper classes. When Mander left Whittier Hall, Esther moved into a flat with her. Mander was also the chaperone to both girls when they visited France in 1914, a trip they were forced to abandon following the outbreak of World War I.

During 1915 Mander's academic progress slowed, due in part to the difficulty of supporting herself through part-time work but also to the tension

between her desire to write and her approaching journalism studies. During the summer of 1915 she became involved in the campaign led by Mrs Carrie Chapman Catt for the New York referendum on women's suffrage. Mander supported the principles of the campaign, and also saw it as a way to make a name for herself, thereby enhancing her career as a writer. Eloquent and possessed of loud voice, Mander soon became an established figure on the hustings. As well possessing these talents, she was a figure of interest because of New Zealand's reputation for pioneering social legislation. Her interest in social reform also led Mander to take up a brief research project into the care of young prisoners at Sing Sing Prison. Burned out from the strain of work by the end of 1915 and living on the breadline, Mander ended her studies.

Mander next found work with the National Guard Relief Committee while the United States prepared to enter World War I. Soon becoming bored with the poorly paid job, she next took up a job with the Red Cross controlling the finances of its workrooms on Manhattan Island. Although the work was exhausting, she nevertheless found time to be involved in New York's cultural life. In particular, moving flats to Greenwich Village in 1917 brought her into contact with the nascent amateur theatre movement. She was a supporter of the Washington Square Players and became a founding member of its spin-off, the Theatre Guild of New York, in 1919; she also subscribed to the Provincetown Players, who produced the first work of Eugene O'Neill and Susan Glaspell.

Mander continued to write, and in early 1917 she finished the draft of another novel. Although her workload prevented her from revising it, a friend who knew the United States manager of John Lane persuaded her to send it to that publisher as it was. They forwarded the typescript to London with a recommendation that it be published. Mander was notified in 1918 that her novel had been accepted, providing she made several minor cuts, and that it was to be published in spring 1919. Mander was the only new author taken up by John Lane that year. The post-War situation meant that the appearance of the novel was delayed; *The Story of a New Zealand River* eventually appeared early in 1920 in New York and six months later in London.

*The Story of a New Zealand River* is set in the north of New Zealand in the environment of kauri milling that Mander had known as a child. It begins with the arrival of the recently married Alice and Asia, her young daughter from a previous relationship, at the isolated mill town of Pukekaroro. Her new husband, Tom Roland, owns the mill and runs it with his friend, David Bruce. Alice takes an immediate dislike to Bruce that she is unable to correct due to her rigid sense of decorum and correctness, despite discovering that she has been gravely mistaken in her assumptions about his character. Alice struggles

to cope with her marriage – Roland is sexually demanding and lacks understanding – and with the isolation, taking strength from the friendship of Mrs Brayton, a long-time resident who has made her house into an oasis of Englishness. Alice and Bruce come to love each other but she remains in her marriage and their relationship continues to be chaste; they even save Roland's life when they discover he has taken an overdose of laudanum following a financial setback. As time passes, Bruce and Mrs Brayton work to combat Alice's puritanism, which they see as preventing her from enjoying life and achieving emotional maturity. Her moralistic outlook is shaken by two events in particular: firstly, when her philandering husband confronts her and Bruce with his knowledge and acceptance of their relationship, and secondly when Asia decides to live with Allen Ross, a married man. Alice comes to a more humane perspective, and she is liberated from her marriage by Roland's death in an accident. This allows her to marry Bruce, and they move from Pukekaroro to the city of Auckland.

*The Story of a New Zealand River* was widely reviewed in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. Many reviewers commented on its maturity for a first novel, and were attracted to the uniqueness of its New Zealand setting. On the other hand, its length attracted some criticism, with Katherine Mansfield demanding in *The Athenaeum* (9 July 1920), 'Why is her book not half as long, twice as honest? What right has she to bore her readers if she is capable of interesting them?' The sexual references and the questions of morality raised in the novel generally went unremarked, but in Mander's home town the Whangarei Public Library initially placed the novel on their discretionary shelf, where it was accessible only by application to the librarian. The largely positive reception encouraged Mander to continue writing despite the book's modest sales.

Mander continued to earn a living in New York by working part-time and by submitting articles to magazines and periodicals. The occasional use of friends' cottages away from the city allowed her to write in a more conducive atmosphere. Faced with the challenge of producing her second novel, she was heavily influenced by a discussion with Ralph Block, a scenario reader for the motion picture producers, Goldwyn Company. He argued that she should write with an eye to movie adaptation, for a story that was filmed would both gain her recognition and increase her earnings. Mander wrote her next two novels with this in mind, something she later regretted. Her economic circumstances also forced her to work quickly, as her inscription in the Alexander Turnbull Library copy of her second novel, *The Passionate Puritan* (1921), attests: 'This book was written in one month, which may explain why it is what it is.'

*The Passionate Puritan* is much shorter than *The Story of a New Zealand River*, but it shows significant continuities in setting and theme with the earlier novel. Both are concerned with a central female character who discovers that her moral principles are inadequate for the tragedies and passions of everyday. The heroine is Sidney Carey, who is sent to the new school at the northern New Zealand mill town of Puhipuhi to complete her teacher training. She is intelligent, beautiful and aloof but conventional in her morals. Respected in the town, she soon becomes friends with the mill's charismatic owner, Jack Ridgefield, a Maori woman, Mana Tahere, and an itinerant Englishman, Arthur Devereux. She and Devereux fall in love, and they begin a secret relationship that Carey insists be chaste. Later she is rocked by the discovery that Devereux is married, but he is able to placate her with his tale of an unfortunate marriage and impending divorce proceedings. However, she is further alienated from him by a discovery that leads her to the mistaken belief that he has also been having an affair with Tahere. The novel is notable for two significant set pieces of description, the tripping of a dam in order to float kauri logs down to the mill, and a bush fire that breaks out and threatens the mill and the village. The two lovers are eventually reconciled, after Carey realises that conventional moralism is unable adequately to account for their situation.

The novel was also widely reviewed, and Mander praised particularly for her depiction of the New Zealand setting and for the strength of her characterisation. As the reviewer in *The New York Times Book Review and Magazine* (12 June 1921) said, 'The minor characters, of whom there are many, all show striking freshness and vitality in their presentation, even when the reader gets but a glimpse.' However, critics in New Zealand were not so complimentary as they struggled with the moral aspects of the novel. *The Dominion* (9 September 1922) commented, 'It is a pity Miss Mander does not give us a story of New Zealand country life, which would be free from the sex problem motif which has been over-prominent in the present story and its predecessor.' These concerns began to turn New Zealand readers against Mander's fiction, although her distance from the country delayed her awareness of it.

Mander continued to live in New York during 1922, dividing her energies between work, her next novel and writing contributions to magazines and periodicals. She was visited by her younger sister, Annie, a nurse who had obtained work at the Presbyterian Hospital in New York for several months. It was the only occasion in her twenty-year exile that Mander saw one of her family. Apart from this interlude, Mander was increasingly enervated by her work routine and the sheer noise of the city. Her third novel, *The Strange Attraction*, was published in 1922 but she was frustrated by the

growing sense that she had not fulfilled the promise of *The Story of a New Zealand River*. Mander felt the need for a change of scene, both to reinvigorate herself and to provide fresh inspiration for her work, so she sailed for London in 1923.

*The Strange Attraction* continues Mander's interest in the north of New Zealand and spans the period from the 1912 elections to the outbreak of World War I. The novel begins with the arrival in Dargaville of Valerie Carr. She has come in order to assist her childhood friend and admirer, Bob Lorrimer, with the running of the local newspaper, the *Dargaville News*. Carr is twenty-six, beautiful and estranged from most members of her the upper class 'Remuera set' family because of her unwillingness to conform to their petty moralism and snobbery. She meets and falls in love with a renowned Australian writer and critic, the handsome Dane Barrington, who is living in self-imposed exile following the social fallout from his second divorce. They begin a secret relationship, but on principle Carr refuses to marry him. Meanwhile, the newspaper becomes involved in the election campaign, supporting the opposition candidate. Barrington is instrumental in his eventual success, having written a series of brilliant editorials in the place of Lorrimer, who contracted pneumonia. After the election Barrington and Carr are secretly married – her sole concession to conformity – but she continues to live with Barrington only on weekends until they are discovered. At this point she moves in with him and eventually gives up her job, but they divide the house between them to maintain their individuality. The relationship gradually deteriorates as the shadow of war looms and Barrington's health problems cause him to become more aloof. He is diagnosed with cancer, and ends their relationship with a letter asking Carr to leave so that she might follow her ambitions into the wider world.

The critical response to *The Strange Attraction* followed the pattern of her previous novel. Reviewers in the United Kingdom and the United States were generally positive, emphasising the setting and the psychological depth of the plot. In New Zealand, however, she continued to be criticised for her treatment of sexual morality. The *Evening Post* (1 September 1923) stated, 'The *Post's* London correspondent regrets the combination of what one may call the "sex" novel and the New Zealand bush country as unnecessary and misleading.' The criticism led Mander to respond from London with a lengthy letter to the *Auckland Star* (9 February 1924) that set out many of her views about fiction. She defended her treatment of sexual issues by comparing it to the work of European writers such as D.H. Lawrence, and accused her critics of compromising their artistic judgment by writing with 'an isolated and perhaps provincial average person' in mind. She also defended her characters against the charge that they did not represent New Zealand

society truthfully, arguing that characters should be judged on whether they are plausible rather than whether they are likeable or representative. She concluded with a plea for artistic freedom:

If an artist stops to consider any section of his public, or what his friends would like, or what his publisher would like, or anything at all but that inner light inside himself, he ceases to be an artist and becomes a purveyor of goods.... I am simply trying to be honest and to be loyal to my own experience.

Mander was far from ready to return to New Zealand and what she perceived to be the provincialism of its literary culture.

Having arrived in London in 1923, Mander was introduced to the literary scene by her publisher, John Lane, and his wife. The city proved something of a spiritual homecoming to her, as she soon met literary figures such as publisher Victor Gollancz, and writers Rose Macaulay and Rebecca West. However, London also posed financial difficulties for Mander and she began where she had left off in New York, writing articles and short stories for newspapers and magazines. She became a London correspondent for New Zealand newspapers from 1924, writing regularly for *The Sun* (Christchurch) from 1924 until 1929, and for *The Sun* (Auckland) from 1929. Her articles ranged in subject from London's cultural life to items of more general interest for readers who still thought of London as 'Home'. She also became a manuscript reader for John Lane, a job she despised for the low quality of material she was forced to read. She wrote at a later date, 'I have learned first-hand what I knew second-hand that the muck that is finally seen in print is as nothing to the muck that gets written but not published.' [*The Samoa Times* (9 November 1924)] One of the bright spots of the job for her was reading the early work of *Georgette Heyer*, as a consequence of which the two became good friends.

Mander was in London while she wrote her fourth novel, *Allen Adair* (1925). She was also labouring under the twin discouragements of the criticism of her previous work in New Zealand and the fact that New York publisher, Dodd, Mead and Company, had allowed their option on it to lapse. *Allen Adair* is also set in the north of New Zealand, but differs from her previous work in focusing on the gumfields rather than the kauri forests and in having a male protagonist. The central character, *Allen Adair*, has disappointed the social aspirations of his father by his failure to graduate from Oxford and his inability to hold down a desk job in Auckland. He instead obeys his love of romance and the outdoors by leaving the city and travelling north, becoming the boatman for a Dargaville store that services the widespread rural community. After leaving that job, he takes up the option of



running a store in Pahi to service the diggers of kauri gum. He later brings back a wife from Auckland, Marion Arden, who struggles to reconcile her urban perspective with the isolated setting. Adair gradually prospers in his job, but he and Marion become estranged because they cannot understand each other. He instead finds emotional solace in friendship with a reclusive gumdigger, Dick Rossiter. It transpires that Rossiter had taken the blame for a murder and fled England, but his name is cleared with the death of the perpetrator. Marion eventually persuades a reluctant Adair to move to Auckland, but his grief over leaving the gumfields is tempered by the possibility of visiting Rossiter in England.

*Allen Adair* was Mander's favourite of her novels after *The Story of a New Zealand River*. Her biographer, Dorothea Turner, argues that the novel was Mander's last attempt to reconcile her New Zealand audience, offering it as 'an olive branch and as an ultimatum. Here was a book that could shock nobody, but if her country continued indifferent to books about itself she would shift the scenery.' [86] Mander deliberately avoided the sexual topics that had previously upset New Zealand critics and it received a more positive response from them as a result. In *The Sun* (6 November 1925) it was described as 'one of the truest New Zealand books ever written.' Ultimately, however, the stratagem proved unsuccessful, for the novel did not sell well in New Zealand. Mander remained caught between the continuing distrust of her moral agenda and a more generalised disdain for indigenous fiction characteristic of the time, and it was her last novel with a New Zealand setting.

Mander's health began to decline during 1925. Exhausted by her work and disillusioned by the fate of *Allen Adair*, she began to suffer from boils. This was to plague her for the remainder of her time in London, but she found a temporary respite when Leonard Moore, her agent, made his house on the Welsh border available for her for a time. Nevertheless, Mander's lack of financial security meant she was forced to continue her punishing work schedule. In particular, her New Zealand newspaper columns required her to read and review large numbers of novels. Through these columns, Mander had also become something of an icon for New Zealand writers wishing to succeed in London, and they often contacted her. It was in this way that she began a long friendship with Monte Holcroft, novelist and long-time editor of the *NZ Listener*. Their first meeting occurred when he visited her Chelsea flat seeking advice; she told him to return to New Zealand while he could still afford the ticket. Mander's flat had also become the focal point of a group of literary acquaintances, including the Australian writer Vernon Knowles, and she hosted a literature and art discussion group attended by a dozen professional women. Having abandoned New Zealand settings for her fiction,

it was to her experiences in New York that Mander turned for the subject of her next novel, *The Besieging City: A Novel of New York* (1926).

*The Besieging City* is set in New York during World War I, and its heroine is the English-born but Australian-raised Christine (Chris) Mayne. While she struggles to survive on the pittance she earns working for the Red Cross, her social circle is centred on New York's moneyed elite and it is with her interactions with this group that the novel is largely concerned. Mayne desires to be a writer, and becomes friends with Lincoln White and Redman Feltz, who are involved in establishing a new journal, *The Weekly Critic*. Her upper class friends also include Myra Delaye, whom she once kissed on impulse but now wishes to dissociate herself from, and the beautiful Fay White, who is never content despite the opulence of her lifestyle. Mayne falls in love with Gerry Lloyd, an architect who has returned from working as an ambulanceman in France. They conduct a secret relationship, but he is unable to accept her refusal to marry him or to moderate her friendships with other men. Mayne becomes known for her acerbic columns in *The Weekly Critic*, but she struggles with New York and its frenetic pace. In particular, she is rocked by the suicides of Delaye and Fay White. Eventually, she breaks up with Lloyd and leaves New York for post-War France.

*The Besieging City* elicited a mixed critical response. It was seen to be either a realistic portrayal of New York or anti-American in its sentiment. The portrayal of the city was agreed to be convincing, but the structure of the novel was generally faulted for falling short of being a unified whole. The review in *The Times Literary Supplement (TLS)* (26 August 1926) stated of the characters, 'As isolated types they are successful, but in a connected narrative there is no cohesion in their relationships, and the general impression attained is that the fabric of the book has been hurriedly woven in order to embed in the story some clever character sketches.' The same review also faulted the construction of the protagonist, Mayne, arguing that the attractiveness of her personality 'is lost sight of in her immense egotism.' As with her previous novels, Mander's financial reward for the book was insignificant and she continued to have to depend on journalism as her primary source of income.

The pressure of Mander's financial circumstances and work demands continued to affect her health. During the writing of her next novel, she was suffering badly from boils. *Pins and Pinnacles* (1928) was primarily motivated by the desire to complete her contract with her publisher, Hutchinsons. The situation bore similarities to that surrounding the writing of her second and third novels, for *Pins and Pinnacles* was also the product of a deliberate attempt to write a popular novel. Mander hoped that the higher sales of a more populist novel might grant her some breathing space from journalism in

order that she might achieve a more literary standard with her next work. However, *Pins and Pinnacles* failed to catch the public imagination. Mander was forced to abandon the writing of novels for the time, and although she later resumed her writing it was to be her last published novel.

The plot of *Pins and Pinnacles* is set in 1926, and largely centres on the relationships between the inhabitants of several neighbouring houses in Chelsea. The houses are owned by one of their inhabitants, John Craik, a wealthy businessman who sustained shell shock in World War One and is now subject to paranoia. He has been friends since childhood with publisher Paul Daley, who also lives there and is instrumental in releasing Craik from the clutches of his grasping mother and sister and sending him on a holiday to South America. Adjacent to Daley lives Mirabel Heath, a book illustrator who is recovering from a disastrous marriage, but they have only met once and he is apparently uninterested in women. Daley befriends Julius Vaughan, the young author of a book of fantastical tales entitled *Pins and Pinnacles*, and Heath is hired as its illustrator. She and Vaughan are introduced and become friends, with Vaughan proving to be both charismatic and egotistical. Daley and Heath eventually meet through the efforts of Vaughan and her admirer, Anthony Field, who is a successful poster artist and landscape painter. The four become friends, playing bridge together weekly and spending time at Heath's summer retreat. Craik returns and becomes increasingly jealous of Daley's friendship with Heath, which has become a secret engagement. Craik ultimately tries to kill Heath, but shoots Vaughan instead before killing himself. The novel concludes with the recovery of Vaughan and the marriage of Daley and Heath.

Following the limited success of *Pins and Pinnacles*, Mander continued to write for New Zealand newspapers and read manuscripts for a living. She also became the English editor of Harrison of Paris, a private printing press founded by two of her friends from New York, Monroe Wheeler and Glenway Westcott, and financed by wealthy American Barbara Harrison. Harrison of Paris specialised in producing high-quality limited editions, focusing on typography, paper and illustrations. Mander's role was to see their publications through the press. One of her particular projects was the reproduction of the original 1692 English translation of Aesop's *Fables*, for which she studied the original extensively in the British Museum and saw the project through to publication.

By 1931, Mander was struggling with living in London as she had done earlier with New York. Mentally she was oppressed by the noise of the city, her financial stresses and the difficulty of publishing her novels. She was also disillusioned by the inherent advantages enjoyed by younger British writers that she felt she lacked with her colonial background. Money from her father

allowed her to cease manuscript reading for almost a year and she left London for Shropshire during the summer, spending the time writing. The break benefited her health and she completed two books. By the end of 1931, however, she had run out of money and had to return to manuscript reading. Nothing came of her latest creative work, however, and Mander became increasingly homesick so in September she sailed for New Zealand. While she was concerned about whether she would experience intellectual society in New Zealand, especially in comparison to London, she looked forward to living in Auckland with the support of her family and her father's promise to release her from financial worries so that she could write again.

These hopes were not to come to fruition. While en route to New Zealand, Mander's mother died after a long illness. On her arrival, Mander consequently became her elderly father's caregiver, partly out of obligation to her siblings who had performed the role during her absence, but she was unhappy at the prospect. Mander also discovered that her father was not as wealthy as she had been led to believe, and the financial freedom she had been promised was not in fact forthcoming. He had invested in property, and the Depression had severely diminished rental incomes. She had been met with some acclaim by the New Zealand media on her return, being recognised as an established writer, and it was again to journalism that she turned in her need to earn money. She became acquainted with Jock Gillespie, editor of the *The Mirror* (Auckland), who offered her some freelance work. In March 1933, Mander also began giving radio talks on a range of topics related to her overseas experiences. In a similar vein, she entered the guest speaker circuit and spoke to women's groups. These measures ensured she maintained a relatively high public profile, but they were a distraction from her desire to write another novel.

Mander was also distracted by her family obligations. Her father was demanding, and she also spent some time caring for her sister-in-law. Furthermore, when they could no longer afford it, Mander had to take the place of her father's housekeeper. A further frustration came when, at the age of eighty-four, Frank Mander decided to move house. The new property was discovered to require a large amount of refurbishment, further tightening the purse strings. Mander's sister, Carrie, had been under psychiatric care but the need to economise meant that she came to live in the new house as well. Her father placated Mander with the promise of money from an investment that would fall due in the following year, but for the time being she was unable to write. Out of the little money she did earn, Mander sent what she could to Holcroft and his wife. They had maintained their correspondence, and Mander was keen to see that he pursue his writing career despite the intense pressures that the Depression placed upon them.

The following year, Mander's father decided to take her on an extensive holiday around the South Island. While in Christchurch she visited John Schroder, the editor of *The Press*. He commissioned some articles from Mander, and she gained further work on her return to Auckland. Gillespie provided Mander with a regular book page in *The Mirror* (Auckland), paying two guineas per article. The money was welcome and she was able to read according to her own desires, but the task of reading up to twenty novels each month proved another barrier to Mander's own fiction. Her anxiousness was exacerbated by the accomplishment of many of the contemporary English novels she was reviewing. Her anger mounted against her father for what she saw to be his miserliness, and she secured two hours for writing each morning after issuing him with an ultimatum. At this time she was working on a novel she had begun while in England, set on the Welsh border in 1932, but nothing more is known of it.

Since her return to New Zealand, Mander had been sent a large number of manuscripts from aspiring writers desirous of her advice on their prospects for overseas success. She expressed her disappointment with the majority of the work she had received through an extensive series of articles in *The Press* on New Zealand novelists, novels and short stories. In her November 1934 series, 'New Zealand Novelists: An Analysis and Some Advice,' she castigated the majority of aspiring writers for belonging to the 'New Stupid,' a 'half-baked, wrongly educated, pretentious, cinema-polluted mongrel lot.' She criticised their belief that writing was a way to earn money and the consequent commodification of fiction. Mander identified certain recurrent faults in New Zealand writing of the time:

[I]ncongruous dialogue; a poor sense for character; a poor sense for significant incident, or no ability to make small incident significant; sentimentality; a tendency to moralise, and a preoccupation with 'right and wrong'; agitation about accuracy, the absolute truth; no distinction for style. [10 November, 17]

Mander also condemned the philistinism of the popular reaction to art, arguing that judgments about the morality of art in New Zealand tended to be made by those without any understanding of art. For the serious writer, she advocated years of experimentation and the need to develop a love for language and its precise use. Author Ngaio Marsh responded with gratitude in *The Press* (22 December 1934), likening Mander to a midwife buffeting the unbreathing child of New Zealand literature in the hope of bringing it to life.

In a further series of articles for *The Press* in December 1934, Mander considered the likely opportunities for New Zealand writers and the barriers against their success. She thought that New Zealand provided a suitable

environment, and its writers possessed the skills necessary, for writing short stories, action novels, family novels of colonial settings, 'novels of the soil' and simple love stories. However, she did not think that New Zealand society had developed 'that mysterious something in a race that stimulates the higher type of writer.' [1 December, 17] She was particularly critical of New Zealand society and its disregard for its artists, arguing that it had betrayed the intellectual heritage of the original settlers with its persistent desire for conformity. She asked rhetorically what roused enthusiasm in New Zealand and sarcastically concluded that 'the answer seems to be that for women it is cake-making, and for men chest development.' [15 December, 17] Such comments reflected her own frustrating circumstances, where the demands of her work left Mander exhausted by the end of 1934. She was granted a brief respite with a holiday in the Bay of Islands over the summer before returning to her domestic obligations.

Mander's involvement in the New Zealand literary community extended to friendships with other writers in Auckland. In particular, she became friends with Frank Sargeson and he worked in the Mander garden to supplement his income. Mander was enlisted in 1935 to help with the organisation of the New Zealand Authors' Week, an event to be held in April of the following year. She was responsible for compiling the biographies and bibliographies of New Zealand authors for a book to celebrate the week, *Annals of New Zealand Literature: Being a preliminary list of New Zealand authors and their works with introductory essays and verses* (1936), edited by Johannes Carl Andersen. During the winter, Mander became troubled by neuritis in her right arm, a condition that left her unable to type. After rest proved unsuccessful in restoring her health, she underwent thrice-weekly electrical treatment for several months.

The Authors' Week was a public success, and during it Mander gave an extensive talk on post-World War I New Zealand authors. She finished the week exhausted by the frantic reading she had done in preparation for her talk. Meanwhile, her domestic situation had become worse, with her sister's mental health deteriorating and her father also falling ill. Mander's own health began to deteriorate under the strain, with neuritis continuing to trouble her. The added complication of an eye problem meant that she could not read for a time. Mander nevertheless continued to review books for *The Mirror*, as well as giving a series of ten radio talks on 'Women Through the Ages.' Mander resigned from *The Mirror* at the end of 1936 and was able to recuperate to some extent during the summer. Later in 1937, she briefly returned to writing for *The Mirror*. In the same year she was offered a job by the New Zealand Broadcasting Service to help run a women's programme, but her domestic demands meant that she had reluctantly to decline.

From the beginning of 1938 until the end of 1939, Mander wrote a monthly book page for *The Monocle: The New Zealand Monthly Magazine* (Wellington). Most significantly for her own literary aspirations, however, was the 1938 reprinting in London and New Zealand of *The Story of New Zealand River*. This received a high level of publicity in the New Zealand media, with lengthy reviews in newspapers by Monte Holcroft, Frank Sargeson and C.R. Allen. The book was recast as something of a landmark of New Zealand writing, and thus began to establish its enduring reputation. However, sales were affected by the New Zealand publisher's decision to delay the release of the book until after their sale, with the consequence that it was still unavailable at the time the reviews appeared. During this period Mander also began memoirs of her time in London and New York, but did not proceed beyond an abortive beginning.

Mander continued to care for her father, and in 1941 she again became nurse for her sick sister-in-law. This was a commitment that prevented her from working for most of the year. At the end of 1941, her sister-in-law died and her brother, Bert, suffered a breakdown. Mander consequently cared for him as well, and by the time he had recovered she was ill herself. She had contracted conjunctivitis which not respond to treatment, and was rendered unable to read or write for eight months. In 1942, her father suffered a stroke that left him bedridden and from that point his health deteriorated until he died on 27 August of that year. After the funeral, Mander collapsed from emotional exhaustion.

The following year, Mander moved to a small apartment of her own in Auckland where she lived for three years. While she enjoyed the sense of liberation without her sick father to care for, her poor eyesight limited the amount of newspaper work she could do. At the same time she felt her creative impulses overwhelmed by the magnitude of world events as World War II unfolded. As her health deteriorated, she decided to move to Whangarei to be near her younger siblings. However, before the move occurred she suffered a stroke that left her in care for three months. Once in Whangarei, she suffered another stroke that again left her bedridden. Mander never fully recovered her health and she died in Whangarei on 20 December 1949 aged seventy-two.

Jane Mander's posthumous critical reputation has been characterised by ambivalence. Interest has largely focused, as in her lifetime, on *The Story of a New Zealand River*, which has been reprinted several times. It has become established as a significant early text of New Zealand realism, with its depiction of the landscape and the relationship between place and characters. Recently, this view has been re-examined from a number of perspectives and some critics now question the extent and validity of Mander's portrayal of the

landscape. More generally, feminist critics have emphasised Mander's depiction of her central female characters and their opposition to the constraints of New Zealand society, but they have also criticised her negative portrayal of some female characters, particularly Marion Adern in *Allen Adair*. Mander was also at the heart of controversy in the 1990s with accusations that *The Piano* (1993), a movie directed by New Zealander Jane Campion, borrowed from *The Story of a New Zealand River* without acknowledgement. The ongoing debate over Mander's status was most recently highlighted by the publication of a 1998 biography. The response was divided between those who see her as a pioneer of New Zealand literature who struggled against the odds and those who believe that she was uncommitted to New Zealand and that her writing became increasingly anachronistic.

## LINKS

[Auckland City Libraries](#)

[New Zealand Book Council](#)

[New Zealand Electronic Text Centre \(NZETC\)](#)

[New Zealand Literature File](#)

[Te Ara. Encyclopedia of New Zealand 1966](#)

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## PAPERS

Jane Mander's papers, including correspondence, typescripts and clippings of her journalism and reviews of her work, are held by Special Collections, Auckland Central City Library. Correspondence is also held at the University of Auckland Library and the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.