

The Rise and Fall of the "Man Alone"?

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THE RECOGNITION OF THE "man alone" as phenomenon and motif in New Zealand literature, it seems obvious enough, is attributable to John Mulgan's novel as the work which first both designated and depicted that particular kind of character in New Zealand writing. Even so, Mulgan's *Man Alone* (1939) precipitated that recognition only by chance, and not by any conscious insight of the author. He, after all, thought of his novel as "Talking of War," but as Paul Day relates, Henry Kerby, managing director of Mulgan's publishers, Selwyn and Blount,

stood out for a change of title, sending three possibilities to choose from:

1. 'A Man Alone'
2. 'Escape from Death'
3. 'Living Space'

Mulgan chose the first, with the omission of the article. But it was not his title.¹

Thus the novel got its title virtually fortuitously; moreover, that title did not at once lead to recognition of the theme.

The "insight" that nominated the title as identifying a kind of character pervasive in New Zealand writing came several years later. In 1940, for instance, when the New Zealand government, marking the centenary of the Treaty of Waitangi and the inauguration of British rule in the country by commissioning a series of New Zealand Centennial Surveys, published Number 10, E. H. McCormick's *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, the author was right up to date in including *Man Alone* for brief

consideration,² but he did not apparently notice anything critically epoch-making in the title or in the central character as illuminating other and earlier manifestations of the "man alone" phenomenon. By 1959, however, when his *New Zealand Literature: A Survey*, "based on *Letters and Art in New Zealand*,"³ was published, he could declare that Mulgan's Johnson "is the 'man alone', the solitary, rootless nonconformist, who in a variety of forms crops up persistently in New Zealand writing — as the 'hatter' of mining yarns, as Philosopher Dick, as Arawata Bill, as the Shiner of Lee's sketches."⁴ Thus the idea of the "man alone" as a pervasive phenomenon and theme in New Zealand literature took twenty-odd years to gain the imprimatur of the country's premier literary historian, or at the least, to be acknowledged by him in print.

Almost certainly this length of time was partly occasioned by the publishing fortunes of *Man Alone*. Selwyn and Blount brought the novel out in October 1939, just as World War II began, and in the following year lost all its unsold stock as a consequence of the *Luftwaffe's* blitz on London.⁵ Thus the novel was just about strangled at birth, but luckily for its fortunes, it was a New Zealand novel and of more than passing interest to New Zealanders, and one of them, "New Zealand's most enterprising publisher, Blackwood Paul (who had known Mulgan), undertook a new edition of the book"⁶ in 1949. In this venture he was assisted by the New Zealand State Literary Fund,⁷ and so ten years after its initial publication *Man Alone* came home to the country where it was most likely to be appreciated.

Just how much it was at first appreciated is a little difficult to discern. C. K. Stead, for example, remarks that: "I came on the book in the Mt Albert Grammar School Library in 1949. . . . No one recommended it to me and I don't recall having heard it discussed."⁸ Still, there it was, already in the school library in the year of its re-publication. Moreover, although Stead as a sixteen-year-old schoolboy had heard no discussion of it, James K. Baxter's review in *Landfall* in December 1949, notes "two good and capable reviews of this novel, the first a radio broadcast by John Reece Cole, the second by James Bertram in *The Listener*. . . ."⁹ Apparently *Man Alone* was receiving attention, but per-

haps only from the literarily *engagé* readers, who are likely to be relatively few in any society and not a large number in New Zealand's small population, notwithstanding its book-buying propensities. Then, too, the novel was not reprinted again until 1960, which suggests a "fit audience . . . though few" at first, but thereafter the demand was apparently steady and reprintings frequent, certainly through the sixties.

It appears most likely that the perception of *Man Alone* as embodying a particular motif thought to be pervasive in New Zealand literature developed slowly through the influence of critics whose *mana* perhaps complemented an unconscious national male wish. Probably Robert Chapman contributed most significantly to the process in his "Fiction and the Social Pattern: Some Implications of Recent N.Z. Writing," published in *Landfall* in March 1953. Among much else of compelling interest, he suggested that the social pattern of growing up male in New Zealand is characterized by a period of rebellion when,

in the general strain of parentally unguided adjustment, some extra shock may prove too much for the individual. . . . Then . . . one arrives at the point of departure for the New Zealand odd man out, the New Zealand bachelor, the social stray, the 'Man Alone'. The lessons of male companionship, the dominant mother, the emphases of latent homosexuality and family conflict, all join to produce for many an insuperable barrier to companionship with women and to marriage.¹⁰

In exemplifying this view Chapman cites many other novels besides *Man Alone*, but none which pre-dates it. For him, it seems, Mulgan's hero typifies one possible response to "the distorting weight of a [social] pattern he [i.e., the 'man alone'] does not understand. . . ." ¹¹ Chapman thus goes far to generalize the applicability of the "man alone" idea: he records its place in post-World War II New Zealand as a social reality (but not the only one), and identifies it as a motif recurrent in New Zealand fiction of the period.

A little over a year later, in June 1954, in the context of poetry James K. Baxter had more to say about the "man alone" in the third of his Macmillan Brown Lectures at Victoria University College, as it then was. The series of three he entitled *The*

Fire and the Anvil, and in the third lecture, on "Symbolism in New Zealand Poetry," he roundly asserts:

The dominant symbol, however, of New Zealand literature has not yet been touched on: *Man Alone*. I take the name from the title of John Mulgan's novel. The symbol, no doubt, is characteristic in all modern literature; but in New Zealand prose and verse it has taken on a local colour and a central importance. The 'Man Alone', whether young or old, lives on the fringe of society, often eccentric, sometimes criminal, aware of acute isolation from every social aim. He is the central figure in most of Sargeson's work; and appears regularly in the work of every other prose writer of note. I intend to discuss the symbol mainly in its occurrence in New Zealand poetry.¹²

In the discussion which follows Baxter appears indebted to Chapman's essay, but he takes up a point only touched on there and develops its significance for his own purposes. Chapman remarks of the writer of fiction that "the more exactly he probes for the nerve ends of life here, the less likely he is to be read as long as a great many of his potential public are trying to forget, to ignore, to cover their defects."¹³ In fact, Chapman argues, the writer is likely to draw down on himself the reprobation and acrimony of society, and "has probably been saved from becoming a scapegoat so far by the smallest of his audience."¹⁴

Baxter elaborates this idea of fiction writer as outsider and extends it to the poet by suggesting that "The *personae* . . . which the poet wears are variants of the central role of *magus*, the *Man Alone* who, by the performance of a symbolic ritual attains to forbidden knowledge." He goes on to suggest that this condition is not really morbid, but reflects "rather the condition of solitude essential for the performance of a ritual act" (*FA*, 63). The taking on of this role, however, is not at all comfortable, and creates an anxiety which

seems to derive from the artist's awareness that his activity is regarded with indifference or even hostility by the society in which he lives. The symbol of *Man Alone* is thus objectified as the hobo, the social outcast, standing for the outcast energies, both criminal and creative, which the artist tries to reintegrate in his view of the world. The hero of Sargeson's *That Summer*, Bruce Mason's Firpo in *Summer's End*, Denis Glover's *Arawata*

Bill, and many less obvious *personae* in prose and verse fall into this category. The hobo or eccentric, however, has not chosen his role of isolation: it has been forced upon him by his inability to cope with the pressure to social conformity. (*FA*, 63-64)

For Baxter, then, the artist is a conscious "man alone," whereas other "men alone" are unconsciously so, having been extruded into that condition by the pressures of the circumambient society. Their conditions are sufficiently alike that they "must share in some degree the same tensions." One consequence of this affinity, as Baxter points out, is that "The act of sympathy with the *Man Alone* who has incurred the disapproval of society is a basic element in many works of art . . ." (*FA*, 64). To this point I intend to return later, as well as to the implicit idea of the "man alone" as hero.

For the moment, however, I emphasize the development, as it may be called, of the "man alone" idea in the few years after the re-publication of *Man Alone* in New Zealand. Taken up by Chapman, it is said to illuminate an aspect of social reality and of New Zealand's post-war fiction; building upon him, Baxter elevates it to the "dominant symbol" of New Zealand literature and applies it particularly to poetry, and more generally elaborates its relation to the position of the literary artist in New Zealand.

It is worth noting, nevertheless, that not all who were aware of the existence of Mulgan's *Man Alone* allowed that it embodied a theme as significant as the "man alone" has been asserted to be. Baxter himself in reviewing the novel in *Landfall* in December 1949, did not do so. Although he recognized "Johnson's personal isolation, his place on the outskirts of society, perpetually a spectator"¹⁵ and was reminded of Camus's *The Outsider*, he also opined that Johnson had "looked for a 'place in the sun' and been defeated — partly by economic circumstances, partly by some inertness in himself which casts a chill over all his relationships, freezing the springs of feeling and action."¹⁶ Thus, in this view of *Man Alone* Johnson approaches the status of a tragic protagonist, who must take some responsibility for his own predicament. Here in 1949 Baxter is at a considerable distance from his 1954 view of "man alone" as the dominant symbol of

New Zealand literature. Chapman's essay seems a probable if partial explanation for the change in Baxter's view.

Before Chapman's essay M. H. Holcroft in *Creative Problems in New Zealand* (1948) remarks on *Man Alone* without allowing much to the eponymous theme. He writes:

And if you think of the few novels that have been influential in our literature you will notice something interesting, and possibly significant, about their titles. They reveal, unmistakably, a preoccupation with the land, its strangeness, its emptiness, its baffling qualities and challenging appeal. Consider these titles: *The Heart of the Bush*, *The Story of a New Zealand River*, *The Land of the Lost*, *The Greenstone Door*, *Man Alone* and *Cliffs of Fall*. In the best of these novels, *Man Alone*, a large and important part of the book — its major crisis — concerns the hero's wanderings and sufferings in trackless forest. It is as if the author, feeling at last the compulsion of a landscape which has been encroaching upon his story, turns abruptly to face its shadow and mystery.¹⁷

For Holcroft, Johnson's predicament is not so much social as environmental: although nominally an immigrant he is at one with New Zealanders, who will "not become secure in their inner lives until they feel around them an environment of the imagination in which the familiar and the strange are brought into a balanced relationship."¹⁸ It is the function of artists to create this environment, and *Man Alone* is part of the endeavour.

J. C. Reid is another "pre-Chapman" critic of *Man Alone* who allows no pre-eminence to the eponymous theme. Discussing the novel in 1946 in *Creative Writing in New Zealand: A Brief Critical History*, he finds "many good things"¹⁹ in it, but observes also that: "It seems to fail in its absence of pity, its acceptance of the rule of (at best) instinct in man, and its mood of gloomy stoicism. There is no room for things of the spirit in Johnson and his like, nor in the society they would build."²⁰ For this latter sentence, Chapman in his article reproves Reid as having "mistaken the writer's report of symptoms and his diagnosis for the writer's prescription." He adds, too, that:

At even a first reading of Frank Sargeson's *That Summer* or John Mulgan's *Man Alone* one cannot but be struck by the writers' attitude of unjudging pity for their driven and socially

damned characters. That pity proceeds from the writers' sense of the deprivation of things of the spirit in their characters' lives, if Mr. Reid wishes it put in those terms, things of the spirit such as charity, humanity, and joy. The lack of these qualities or their distortion by the social pattern is what makes victims instead of whole people out of the subjects of the writers.²¹

Reid's remarks, however, as well as Chapman's reproof raise a central issue concerning *Man Alone* and the "man alone," which Baxter's early review also touches on; it is the issue of moral responsibility. As a scholar and editor of Victorian English literature, Reid might well have replied to Chapman that authors besides Mulgan had pitied characters of their own creation whose lives were short on charity, humanity, and joy, but had nevertheless not absolved them of moral responsibility for the course of those lives. Pip in *Great Expectations* may come to mind, as well as various characters, major and minor, in George Eliot's novels; both she and Dickens, but she especially, have an abundance of pity for their unfortunate characters, which however, does not in their view absolve those characters from suffering the moral consequences of their own decisions — they cannot simply blame society but are held responsible for themselves, in spite of adverse circumstances.

Reid, in fact, did not reply to Chapman, but a number of other people did — by letters to *Landfall*. H. O. Pappé, in particular, argued that while Chapman placed the novelists he surveyed "in the context of *humanitarian liberalism*,"²² he had failed to note that they did not endow their works with the redeeming quality inherent in that context:

Great literature is closely tied up with the good life, i.e., man's ability to overcome his external limits through grace, goodness, or intellectual endeavour. The awareness of the social pattern without the redeeming quality which transcends it falls short of the humanitarian liberal tradition. The great liberals were moved by a sense of dignity and pity for those who were helpless and uneducated victims of appalling conditions. In a comparatively comfortable world such as contemporary New Zealand they would have appealed to the innate moral potential in individuals rather than generally excused shortcomings as conditioned by the present state of education and social possibilities.²³

This point is of interest because it seems related to those made by Baxter in his lecture on "Symbolism in New Zealand Poetry," that the artist "must share in some degree the same tensions" as the "man alone" and that "The act of sympathy with the *Man Alone* who has incurred the disapproval of society is a basic element in many works of art. . . ." One consequence of this sharing and this basic element is that writers of "man alone" literature manifest a sympathy for and very often an approval of their central character which may be difficult for readers, especially outside of New Zealand, to understand. Were a reader to ask, "What will this 'man alone' contribute to society, what sort of society would we have if we all lived as 'men alone'?" the answers would very likely be "Nothing" and "None." This seems to be true of Johnson in *Man Alone*, of Arawata Bill in Glover's poem, and of others; somebody else, not the "man alone," has to create the society which, however deficiently, usually provides the context for the "man alone" to indulge in his whimsical mode of life. As some of my students have said after reading Mulgan's novel, Johnson's life is in some ways very appealing: no ties, no responsibilities — he does what he wants a lot of the time. Even Arawata Bill has to get his supplies from somewhere, and that somewhere is the society which is a mere convenience to him. Nevertheless, in spite of what can easily be construed as selfishness in the "man alone," the tone of the literature in which he appears is consistently sympathetic and approving — indulgent an acerbic critic might say.

A perception of this aspect of "man alone" perhaps underlies some of the points made by Kendrick Smithyman in his *A Way of Saying: A Study of New Zealand Poetry*. There he argues that "formerly acceptable myths have broken down,"²⁴ and among these he includes the "man alone" as one of several manifestations of "the myth of the primitive" (*Smithyman*, 19). This myth is in Smithyman's view an aspect of "a romantic strain in New Zealand writing" against which the reaction is "*anti-romantic* writing, an inverse romanticism which does not break away from romantic principles" (*Smithyman*, 3). Although Smithyman is talking about poetry, his argument seems applicable more generally. When he writes that "Our primitive is a

protean figure, sometimes the Maori, sometimes the pioneer, at times the outcast or Man Alone . . ." (*Smithyman*, 19), he amplifies in a discriminating way McCormick's 1959 view of "the 'man alone,' the solitary, rootless nonconformist, who in a variety of forms crops up persistently in New Zealand writing — as the 'hatter' of mining yarns, as Philosopher Dick, as Arawata Bill, as the Shiner of Lee's sketches."

Perhaps after all the "man alone" is the romantic hero adapted to an originally colonial literature. Certainly, Philosopher Dick, alias Richard Raleigh, is a romantic, as well as educated, emigrant from England, and his romantic notions quite irritate Mr. Stead, the manager of Marino station for whom Dick works as a high-country shepherd and who is otherwise fully appreciative of Dick's sterling qualities:

"Yes, Raleigh is a right good fellow," replied Mr. Stead, "and I like him in many respects, but he is too cynical, and he is quite lost here. Absurd! a man of his parts and accomplishments fooling away his life tailing sheep. He gets into a morbid state, too, and becomes very unsociable. I have no patience with such foolishness. . . ." ²⁵

Although Mulgan's *Man Alone* seems vastly different from *Philosopher Dick*, the difference is perhaps more temporal than anything else. C. K. Stead in his article, "John Mulgan: A Question of Identity," remarks that "Every fictional mode is a stylization of experience, and every stylization is in its way, I suppose, a romanticizing. It is only the degree and kind of romanticization we quarrel over and which constitutes the critical issue between literary fashions" (*JM*, 269). *Man Alone*, in fact, seems to exemplify Smithyman's point that the reaction to the romantic strain in New Zealand writing is "anti-romantic writing, an inverse romanticism which does not break away from romantic principles." This, indeed, is very close to a point that Stead makes in his article, about the "Mulgan revolt, son against father" (*JM*, 271). Picking up on his earlier comment about romanticizing, he remarks, "All these elements go into the making of *Man Alone*. It is a dour picture of the New Zealand of that time. . . . But it is in its way also a romantic view of New Zealand, a piece of frontier mythologizing . . ." (*JM*, 274).

For Smithyman the "counter-current" to romanticism in New Zealand writing is "the *academic*," wherein he notes: "A primitive yet urgent difference between romantic and academic practice lies in writers' attitudes toward language" (*Smithyman*, 4). He also asserts that "... New Zealand poetry progresses from being dominated by romanticism towards the academic temper; from provincial to regional" (*Smithyman*, 4-5). If these ideas are adapted to the "man alone" theme, it is possible to see in C. K. Stead's short story, "A Fitting Tribute," a progression to an "academic" view of that theme. At the outset it is worth noting that the story has a thoroughly New Zealand, and indeed Auckland, milieu, but was first published in *The Kenyon Review*, a prestigious journal which emanates from Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, U.S.A. This rather establishes "A Fitting Tribute" as not provincial but regional writing; the implied judgement of the editors of *The Kenyon Review*, that the story is internationally comprehensible, is attested to by the many other New Zealand readers whom it has delighted, not only in English but translated into several other languages.

Stead must have had a lot of fun writing "A Fitting Tribute" because in it he has satirized so many elements in New Zealand life, all the way from the biggest, best, or in this instance, most efficient "in the Southern Hemisphere"²⁵ syndrome to Anzac Day officiousness and public wrangles about the most appropriate style for commemorative statuary. One of his targets seems to be the "man alone" idea, for very early in the story, by the second paragraph, the narrator cites an editorial in the *New Zealand Herald* newspaper which roundly declares of the story's hero, "No one knew Julian Harp. Julian Harp knew no one. A privileged few watched his moment of glory; but he died as he had lived, a Man Alone..." (*AFT*, 219, Stead's ellipses). This is the start of a mythologizing and falsifying process which is what motivates the narrator, Harp's girl-friend and mother of his illegitimate son, to reveal the facts about "the National Hero" (*AFT*, 219), as Harp has become known since disappearing into the wide blue yonder flapping his wings on the first ever purely man-powered flight.

One of these facts is that Harp was nothing like even the pictorial representations of him produced because of the lack of actual photographs. As the narrator tells it,

... all the local Annigonis have got to work and done what they call impressions of him and I can tell you quite honestly the more praise the picture gets the less it looks like Julian. They all dress him up in tidy clothes and cut his hair short and some of them have even put him in a suit and tie and stuck his hair down with Brylcreem. Well if it's important to you that your local hero should look like a young army officer I'm sorry but the fact is when I knew Julian he was one of the most disreputable looking men I had seen. (*AFT*, 222)

His unkempt appearance, which would so affront New Zealand society's expectations of a national hero, is but the outward index of a personality likely to be equally repugnant to that society. Of all this the narrator is quite aware, and duly cautious; she knows that what New Zealand wants is a native archetype that it can flesh out on its own terms, not an inconvenient reality that will disappoint all its deepest desires. The "Man Alone" of the *Herald's* editorial is a convenient starting point for the national mythologizing, and the narrator feels obliged to tell her story confidentially in order to avoid being flattened by the juggernaut of conformity to the terms of a national myth. As she says of Harp at the end of her narrative, "He belongs to the public and the public makes what it likes of him" (*AFT*, 237).

The facts are quite otherwise than the public makes of him, for Stead has created in Julian Harp a *persona* (in Smityman's terms) calculated to be the least likely to evoke the kind of sympathy, approval and indulgence generally extended to a national hero, whether a Brylcreemed young army officer type or a "man alone." Harp's appearance by itself is utterly subversive to any identifying of him with either:

His clothes never seemed to fit or match, and he never went near a barber. Every now and then he would reach round to the back and sides of his head and snip off bits of his hair with a pair of scissors but that was all. I think he had given up shaving altogether at the time but he didn't have the kind of growth to make a beard so he was what you might call half way between clean-shaven and bearded. He wore a rather tattered raincoat done

right up to the neck, and . . . he kept it on and buttoned up until I began to wonder whether he had a shirt underneath. (*AFT*, 222-23)

In addition to presenting this scruffy exterior, Harp is eccentric in ways quite different from those tolerated in the more usual "man alone." He does not pit himself against the bush, like Mulgan's Johnson, nor against the mountains, like Glover's Arawata Bill. He wants to live in town, and not just in the suburbs, but "right in the busy part of the city . . ." (*AFT*, 223). Grafton is as far out as he will go, and the Auckland Domain is all his countryside. He is subversive to the *status quo*, but cannot quite pull off his subversion; his "Subvert the Press Campaign" in which he writes letters to the newspapers under many different *personae* is aimed at bringing down the Government, but Harp loses control of his multiple *personae*, rather as some novelists report that they do of the characters they create: ". . . he wrote his letters in a sort of daze, almost as if voices were telling him what to write, and what each letter said seemed to depend on the person supposed to be writing it instead of depending on what Julian himself really wanted to say" (*AFT*, 225).

Besides failing as a subversive, Harp displays other foibles unlikely to endear him to his countrymen. He so likes the look of the house he lives in that "He used to cross the street sometimes early in the morning and sit on a little canvas stool and stare at the house. He said if you looked long enough you would see all the dead people who had once lived there going about doing the things they had always done." When forced to work as his money runs low, he takes a job as a hospital orderly, "but when they put him on duty in the morgue he left because he said he didn't like seeing the soles of people's feet" (*AFT*, 228). On Anzac Day he ties a red table cloth to a broom handle and waves it out of an upstairs window over the parade; when challenged by an officious member (presumably) of the Returned Services Association as to what he means by waving a red flag over the Anzac Day parade, "Julian said it wasn't a red flag it was a table cloth and that made the man angrier" (*AFT*, 224). All in all, Harp is not a "man alone" of whom people are likely to say "The boys like him'. . . 'He's a good fellow,'" as they do of Mulgan's

Johnson.²⁷ Much as a reader may enjoy Julian Harp and laugh at and with him, he knows that in truth Harp would be a pain in the neck to have around, and indeed, to be around. Harp and his peculiarities are a constant provocation to ordinary society, and a far cry from the romantic eccentricities admired in the more typical kind of "man alone."

In creating his anti-myth anti-hero and having him characterized as a "man alone," Stead is challenging in a highly "academic" way the whole idea of the "man alone" in New Zealand writing and the romanticisms which attach to him. Of course Julian Harp bears comparison with that other great wing-making flyer, Daedalus, but he is also the ingenious Kiwi do-it-yourselfer in his scrounging of umbrella parts and church truck in order to achieve his whimsical goal of man-powered winged flight. Harp is also that writer of cranky letters to the press, and his "Subvert the Press Campaign" is as capricious an endeavour as his attempt to fly, but in imagining the many *personae* of his letter writers and being finally carried away by them, Harp displays the attributes of the true creative artist — gone a little awry, perhaps. Unlike the characteristic kind of "man alone," who is usually a country dweller or a bushman, Harp is urban and likes the bustle of city life — he declines to be alone. He is, too, a manifestly sexual being, which Stead complains of Mulgan's Johnson for not being (*JM*, 269). In "A Fitting Tribute," then, Stead's intent seems to be all against depicting Harp as a "man alone," but society wants to see him as one, in the same false way that it wants to see him as short-haired and Brylcreemed. Just as the latter reality does not exist, so Stead seems to be saying the "man alone" does not exist. He is a figment of society's romantic fantasizing.

Stead's interest in debunking the "man alone" concept comes up again in his novel, *Smith's Dream*,²⁸ though not without some interesting difficulties. He himself has said of the work: "The novel offered a fairly simple moral proposition. That you can escape political and social responsibility by getting away and being a 'man alone' in the bush is the old New Zealand dream — Smith's dream — and it is false. There is no escape." Notwithstanding this "fairly simple moral proposition" — and even that

“fairly” is an interesting modifier — Stead ended the first, hard-back edition of 1971 with Smith alive and walking toward a girl on a sunlit beach who represents a “fuller, more affirmative life.”

He changed that ending for the paperback edition of 1973 by converting the concluding vision into a dream which fades as Smith wakes to reality and leaves the sheltering hut where he has spent the night to be shot dead with a bullet in the back of the head fired by a Special X man. In discussing the two endings, Stead says of the first that in it Smith “is a survivor, a modern Crusoe” and he adds that in Mulgan’s *Man Alone*: “I was struck by its concluding sentence: ‘*There are some men, this fellow said, you can’t kill.*’ That was the spirit in which I wrote *Smith’s Dream* and the justification for its first ending” (*JM*, 287). These remarks are curiously at odds with those quoted earlier about “a fairly simple moral proposition” and the falseness of the dream of escape by becoming a “man alone.”

What seems to have happened is that Stead, notwithstanding his capacity to scrutinize the “man alone” idea in an analytical “academic” way, is not totally immune to the “romantic” appeal of the national myth. His “moral proposition” for the novel requires his protagonist to proceed inevitably to disaster, or perhaps tragedy would not be an inappropriate word, but in the first ending, at the very last moment Stead blinks this inevitability in favour of that surely “romantic” vision of a “fuller, more affirmative life,” which equally surely is impossible under the conditions predicated in New Zealand by the end of the novel. In doing so, Stead is not unique among novelists; something similar seems to occur in George Eliot’s *Adam Bede*, for example, where logically the village community of Hayslope should be shattered for all time by the events of the novel. But George Eliot has too much emotional investment in that novel particularly to countenance that disintegration, and in the end she does not allow unpitiful consequences to follow inexorably from deeds, but mitigates the tragedy to contrive a happier ending for her protagonist.²⁹

If indeed Stead did succumb to the “romantic” appeal of the “man alone,” the reasons are perhaps as much national as personal. The personal have to do with his first encounter with *Man*

Alone: "In John Mulgan's novel I had stumbled by chance on something which was simultaneously 'modern' and New Zealand. On the imagination of a sixteen-year-old already engaged in writing it inevitably had a powerful effect" (*JM*, 269). The national reasons lie deeper; the "man alone" looks suspiciously like one of those archetypes of the collective unconscious of which the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung has written. Arguably within his context, the "man alone" is a type of hero, which in a society like that of New Zealand where egalitarianism is the ideal means that he is an ordinary sort of man who becomes extraordinary and "heroic" by escaping or evading the pressure to conform to egalitarian norms by opting out as a "man alone." In Jung's terms this hero-making process would be an unconscious activity, which perhaps accounts for the approval and indulgence extended to the "man alone" by authors in whose work he crops up, and by readers more generally in New Zealand. When the hero-making and the hero as "man alone" are consciously scrutinized, as in "A Fitting Tribute," then his clay feet and the falsity of the myth are exposed, for the "man alone" is not going to function heroically to lead any society out of the wilderness — in fact, quite the reverse.

Such is the case in *Smith's Dream*, but in the first ending Stead seems still to be caught up in the collective and unconscious New Zealand response to the "man alone," whereas his "moral proposition" for the novel requires the revelation that "the old New Zealand dream. . . is false." Indeed, is worse than false in embodying the potential to precipitate a nightmare, which is what *Smith's Dream* and Smith's dream become — most effectively with the revised ending, the "conscious" and "academic" one as it may be called.

Whatever the validity of these conjectures, Stead's analysis of the "man alone" motif must surely promote other critical examinations of it. What their outcomes may be is difficult to prognosticate; will the society which seized so eagerly upon the "man alone" now exchange unconscious hero-worship of him for conscious demythologizing? Will it perhaps come to recognize that the "man alone" phase of New Zealand writing embodies an ultimately immature ideal, and move on to something more

worthy? Responses, if any, lie in the future, and they may not be to these questions. At all events, the "man alone" motif does not now seem so easily extensible in time as McCormick posits, nor quite so readily to function as the "dominant symbol" that Baxter suggests. It is, in short, overdue for radical re-assessment and its future is likely to be vastly different from its past as a concept in New Zealand literature and New Zealand society — in fact, it may not survive at all.

NOTES

- 1 *John Mulgan*, Twayne's World Author Series, 58 (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 92.
- 2 *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, New Zealand Centennial Surveys, 10 (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940), pp. 178-80.
- 3 McCormick, "Preface," *New Zealand Literature: A Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), n.p.
- 4 McCormick, *New Zealand Literature*, p. 130.
- 5 Day, p. 96.
- 6 Day, p. 96.
- 7 James K. Baxter, "Reviews: *Man Alone*," *Landfall*, 3 (December 1949), 367.
- 8 "John Mulgan: A Question of Identity," *Islands*, 7 (April 1979), 268. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in my texts as *JM*.
- 9 Baxter, "Reviews: *Man Alone*," p. 374.
- 10 "Fiction and the Social Pattern: Some Implications of Recent N.Z. Writing," *Landfall*, 7 (March 1953), 26-58; rpt. in *Essays On New Zealand*, ed. Wystan Curnow (Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books N.Z. Ltd., 1973), p. 89.
- 11 Chapman, p. 95.
- 12 *The Fire and the Anvil: Notes on Modern Poetry* (Wellington: New Zealand University Press, 1955); rpt. in *James K. Baxter As Critic*, select. Frank McKay (Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books N.Z. Ltd., 1978), p. 62. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in my text as *FA*.
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- 15 "Reviews: *Man Alone*," p. 374.
- 16 "Reviews: *Man Alone*," p. 375.
- 17 *Creative Problems in New Zealand* (Christchurch: The Caxton Press, 1948), p. 24.
- 18 Holcroft, p. 25.
- 19 *Creative Writing in New Zealand: A Brief Critical History* (Auckland: The Author, 1946), p. 60.

- ²⁰ Reid, p. 60.
- ²¹ Chapman, p. 96.
- ²² "Correspondence," *Landfall*, 7 (June 1953), 150.
- ²³ Pappe, p. 151.
- ²⁴ *A Way of Saying: A Study of New Zealand Poetry* (Auckland: Collins, 1965), p. 19. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in my text as *Smithyman*.
- ²⁵ [George Chamier], *Philosopher Dick: Adventures and Contemplations, or, A New Zealand Shepherd*, 2 vols. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1891), I, 16-17.
- ²⁶ "A Fitting Tribute," *Kenyon Review*, 27 (Spring 1965), 279-301; rpt. in *New Zealand Short Stories*, Second Series, ed. C. K. Stead (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 234. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in my text as *AFT*.
- ²⁷ *Man Alone* (London: Selwyn and Blount, 1939); rpt. (Auckland: Longman Paul Ltd., 1969), p. 207.
- ²⁸ (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1971; pb. 1973).
- ²⁹ See J. S. Diekhoff, "The Happy Ending of *Adam Bede*," *ELH: A Journal of English Literary History*, 3 (September 1936), 221-27, for partial support of this view.