

War, Homecoming and Genre: John Mulgan's 'Man Alone' and Jack Kerouac's 'On the Road'

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At first glance there appears to be little similarity between John Mulgan's *Man Alone* (1939) and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957). One is a New Zealand realist novel that appeared just on the outbreak of World War Two, the other an American confessional text that articulates the emergence of a post-World War Two counterculture. Nevertheless, despite obvious differences in context, style and tone both novels share a thematic concern with the reintegration of veterans to civilian life. Both narratives focus on a male protagonist recently returned from global conflict who expresses unease regarding their environment and an inability to be at home within it. Kerouac manages to allay these anxieties by using the tropes of the pastoral romance, specifically the Western, which enables his war-haunted veteran to effectively resettle America. Mulgan's text, in spite of utilizing similar pastoral tropes, expresses continuing anxiety about its veteran protagonist's ability to reintegrate into civilian society and make New Zealand home. While *On the Road* offered a radical refashioning of prose that was hugely influential internationally throughout the second half of the twentieth-century, the same cannot be said of *Man Alone* despite its pervasive influence in New Zealand culture. Nevertheless, a comparison between Mulgan's novel and Kerouac's reveals the former's innovative use of genre since *Man Alone* uses the tropes of pastoral romance designed to facilitate settlement and belonging to highlight its protagonist's continuing inability to settle. Considered side by side, *Man Alone* and *On the Road* highlight the role that genre can play in the processes of becoming 'at home' and the different ways post-war societies have represented the reintegration of veterans in different eras and different nations.

Both *Man Alone* and *On the Road* are novels profoundly shaped by war. The original title of Mulgan's text (which the author described in a letter to his parents as 'Hemingwayesque') was *Talking of War*. This was changed by his publishers in favour of the Hemingway-inspired *Man Alone*, which references a character's dying words in *To Have and Have Not*: 'A man ... One man alone ain't got. No man alone now ... No matter how a man alone ain't got no bloody-chance.'¹ Mulgan's story begins with Johnson having concluded service in World War One, finishes with him fighting in the Spanish Civil War, and is haunted by the lingering presence of large-scale conflict. In one area that Johnson attempts to farm after his arrival in New Zealand, 'There were a lot of memories of the war' and the valley is 'haunted by strange men who had been to the war.'² The war is ever-present but never spoken about, save for the character Thompson, with Mulgan noting that 'They had, most of them, been to the same places and done the same things, but they didn't want to talk about them'.³

The war is a similarly insistent yet avoided subject in *On the Road*. Like Mulgan's protagonist, Kerouac's Sal Paradise is a returned veteran, in this case of World War Two, and there is little overt discussion of the war, which nevertheless haunts the text in a series of 'returns', such as when Sal travels through Washington D.C. and is met with 'Great displays of might lined along Pennsylvania Avenue' for Truman's second term inauguration. At the sight of 'B-29s, PT boats, artillery, all kinds of war material that looked murderous in the snowy grass', the car Sal travels in becomes a 'battered boat' recalling Sal's oblique references to his wartime journeys at sea.⁴ Similarly, the first ride that Sal hitches on his first journey west is on a dynamite truck, which recalls the first mission Kerouac took with the Merchant Marines.⁵ Although the dominant response to Kerouac's novel has been to emphasize its 'aimless travel, women, car stealing, reefer, bop jazz, liquor and pseudo-intellectual talk', an early review in the *New York Times* suggests the relevance of the war

when it likened *On the Road* to that ‘testament’ of the Lost Generation, Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*.⁶ The review acknowledges that there is no technical or philosophical similarity between Kerouac’s and Hemingway’s novels, but it nevertheless implies that both books are capable of summing up a generation defined by the trauma and disillusionment of global war.⁷

Much of Hemingway’s fiction deals with actual conflict whereas *Man Alone* and *On the Road* focus on the experience of veterans returning to civilian life.⁸ The protagonists in both texts register a profound unease regarding their ability to feel at home, whether in England or New Zealand for Johnson, or in America for Sal, and this is registered primarily as a discomfort regarding the environment. Alex Calder has noted the way this preoccupation links *Man Alone* with the Western, a defining characteristic of which is a preoccupation with land, and Kerouac’s novel displays a similar influence.⁹ In the Western, the natural environment is represented as a looming, frequently menacing presence which the protagonist ‘tames’ through successfully making it his or her home, often domesticating it through the establishment of a homestead. At its heart, the Western is a narrative of colonization and settlement, of laying claim to the land and becoming at home in an initially hostile and foreign environment. For protagonists who are veterans experiencing alienation from civilian life, the tropes of the Western offer a way to resettle an environment that is both familiar and strange, and to feel at home within it.

Kerouac’s novel begins with Sal Paradise expressing his feeling that ‘everything was dead’ and that his life in New York ‘with its millions and millions hustling forever for a buck among themselves’ is ‘stultified’.¹⁰ When Dean Moriarty arrives in New York, he presents Sal with a vision of the ‘real’ America accessible in the West. Sal’s first impression of Dean is a ‘young Gene Autry – trim, thin-hipped, blue-eyed, with a real Oklahoma accent – a sideburned hero of the snowy West’.¹¹ Dean has just come from working on a ranch in Colorado and he confidently insists that ‘we know America, we’re at home’.¹² Sal, however, is not ‘at home’ and his journeys are in large part an attempt to gain access to and settle in an authentic version of America. Before setting out cross-country from New York to the West Coast, Sal eagerly researches the pioneer journeys of the past ‘savouring names like Platte and Cimarron’.¹³ Sal’s journey is an initiation into Dean’s version of America. He must first pass through areas that contain ‘only cute suburban cottages of one damn kind and another’, then navigate the commercialization of American identity during Cheyenne’s Wild West Week, which sees the town filled with ‘fat businessmen in boots and ten-gallon hats, with their hefty wives in cowgirl attire’.¹⁴ Sal laments these as ‘absurd devices’ that the West has fallen back on ‘to keep its proud traditions’, but when they eventually leave the suburbs and towns behind and enter ‘a great forest of viny trees’ Sal longs to escape the ‘mireful drooping dark, and zoom on back to familiar American ground.’¹⁵ This initial encounter with an unfamiliar and wild America provokes anxiety for Sal who explains that ‘This was a manuscript of the night we couldn’t read’.¹⁶ Sal’s task is to learn to read the ‘real’ America, the wild America of the West, in order to feel as confidently at home as his cowboy friend who claims to be able to ‘go anywhere in America and get what I want because it’s the same in every corner, I know the people, I know what they do’.¹⁷

The New Zealand setting of *Man Alone* means that it does not employ the more obvious tropes and vocabulary of the Western to the same extent as *On the Road*, which is filled with references to characters such as Montana Slim and Big Slim Hazard, the ‘magnificent Rockies’, the desert and ‘cowboys in the night’.¹⁸ Despite lacking the obvious trappings of the Western, Calder’s analysis of *Man Alone* amply demonstrates similar thematic concerns and narrative structure. Like Sal, Mulgan’s protagonist Johnson expresses feelings of malaise at the start of the novel and he must similarly enact a series of journeys to find a place in which he might belong. Johnson is English but decides against returning to his native country

after the war when he is billeted with some New Zealanders who talk of their home as ‘a pleasant and well-to-do country’.¹⁹ In the period ‘just at the end of the war’, the prospect of migrating to an unknown country on the other side of the world with no money is described as ‘slight beside everything else that had happened to him in the last four years of his life’ and Johnson is seduced by the way the New Zealanders talk of their home as if it were ‘the only country in the world’.²⁰ As Dean does for Sal, these New Zealand soldiers present Johnson with a vision of a ‘new country’ that he might settle and make home.²¹

Following the trauma of war, both Mulgan and Kerouac register their protagonist’s desire to belong, which sees Sal romanticize what he refers to as ‘the Fellahin’, cultures that he perceives as living more authentic lives than his own. After falling in love with Terry, a young Mexican woman, Sal embraces the pastoral lifestyle he associates with the Fellahin. Although working the land makes his fingertips bleed and his back ache, Sal finds it ‘beautiful kneeling and hiding in that earth’ and he rests on a ‘pillow of brown moist earth’ while birds sing an accompaniment to his labours. Sal becomes ‘a man of the earth, precisely as I had dreamed I would be’, expressing a new found sense of indigeneity that the repetition of the word ‘earth’ illustrates, and he is convinced that he has found his ‘life’s work’.²² Sal’s experiences on the road enable him to establish a strong sense of belonging in America after a period of alienation and he is able to transfer the perceived authenticity of the West to the East. After meeting an old man whom he calls ‘the Ghost of the Susquehanna’, Sal takes the wrong road on the Ghost’s advice. It is this wrong road that reveals something new about America. Sal describes thinking,

all the wilderness of America was in the West till the Ghost of the Susquehanna showed me different. No, there is a wilderness in the East; it’s the same wilderness Ben Franklin plodded in the oxcart days when he was postmaster, the same as it was when George Washington was a wild-buck Indian-fighter, when Daniel Boone told stories by Pennsylvania lamps and promised to find the Gap, when Bradford built his road and men whooped her up in log cabins.²³

This concept of Eastern wilderness is couched in terms distinctly familiar and domestic; the settler project might involve experience with wild and unfamiliar environments, but its purpose is to render America home. The search for ‘IT’ that propels Sal and Dean into constant peregrinations across the country leads them both back to the domestic hearth. Sal’s wistful wish that ‘someday we’ll be able to live on the same street with our families and get to be a couple of oldtimers together’ comes partly true: Dean heads back to his home in California where his wife and children await, and Sal head back to his home in New York where he finds ‘the girl with the pure and innocent dear eyes I had always searched for and so long’.²⁴ Thus the two American frontiersmen head home for the ranch.

Man Alone similarly represents its protagonist’s attempts to become ‘a man of the earth’ through living off the land and forming a relationship with a woman perceived as ‘Fellahin’.²⁵ The scene at the river with Rua, the Maori wife of Johnson’s business partner Stenning, utilizes similar tropes to Kerouac’s representation of Sal’s pastoral idyll with his Mexican lover. Johnson rests in sand that is ‘warm and soft’, and following intercourse with Rua he feels ‘stronger and more alive’.²⁶ However, Johnson’s attempts at agriculture and his affair with Rua are far less success than Sal’s, ending in disaster when the land proves inhospitable to farming and when Johnson accidentally murders Rua’s husband after their affair is discovered. The pastoral elements of Mulgan’s text are accompanied by a relentless realism that Kerouac’s lacks, which makes *Man Alone* both myth and anti-myth. This explains why one critic can suggest that *Man Alone* is a ‘romance’ while another can praise Mulgan for

delivering an 'authentic' depiction of the New Zealand scene and for his care 'to show things as they really are.'²⁷

Like the British settlers lured to the new colony by New Zealand Company propaganda, Johnson arrives in his new home with expectations not entirely congruent with reality and it is Mulgan's representation of this disillusionment that creates the novel's sense of truthfulness. Gazing out at Auckland from the deck of his ship after an exhausting six-week journey from Europe, Johnson is confronted by 'red iron roofs straggling down to the shore' and when he accompanies another soldier to a pub on the wharf, 'There was a quiet and sickness over everything'.²⁸ A returning soldier whose home is Auckland tells him that the city is 'the Queen of the North', adding that 'This is God's own, this country', but these assertions are undercut by the descriptions of the man's 'shrunken and pock-marked and unhealthy-looking' face.²⁹ He describes spending two nights billeted at the wharf before sailing for the war that were 'cold as death', prompting Johnson's surprised response, 'I didn't think it was ever cold here.' The soldier's reply clarifies any misconceptions of New Zealand as a balmy South Seas paradise: 'It's cold enough sometimes in winter, mate'.³⁰

Man Alone is ruthless in its reimagining of New Zealand. While colonial texts such as Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872) wax lyrical about the sublime natural landscape, lingering lovingly over valleys 'blue with evening shadow', hillsides 'brilliant with the sunset gold', 'beautiful water', 'the ineffable purity of the air' and 'the solemn peacefulness of the untrodden region', with Butler even going so far as to insist that the 'beauty of the scene cannot be conveyed in language', Mulgan's novel draws attention to a physical landscape that is ugly rather than superlatively gorgeous, and that is less a paradise than a dystopia.³¹ The country is described as 'cheerless', opening out 'like the raw edges of a wound', fields are 'as flat and dull as the back of your hand' and on the scrub hills there is 'little grass and no life'.³² This version of New Zealand could not be further from the hyperbolic nineteenth-century depictions of the landscape, nor from what Allen Curnow characterizes as the 'sentimental twilight' of works such as Edith Searle Grossman's novel *The Heart of the Bush* (1910), which describes the female protagonist as a 'miraculous fairy' in her 'bower' (actually a tent) amidst a 'wild solitude of shaggy banks and Alpine water and rocks'.³³

With the pessimism inspired by World War One and the Great Depression, and a strong dislike of the fey and the feminine, it is little wonder that Mulgan's concept of New Zealand seemed more real to the literary nationalists than anything that had gone before. Thus the majority of early criticism describes *Man Alone* as a truthful product of 'the realism with which a whole generation of writers, here and abroad, were treating their experience'.³⁴ After decades of literature depicting a fairyland of dewy dells and picturesque Pink Terraces, during which concepts of New Zealand were based primarily upon representations of 'a limited number of locations and specific subjects, especially mountains, lakes, glaciers, fiords and forests (or "bush")', presented as "beautiful", the arrival of *Man Alone* meant the country finally had a novel 'that tells the truth about New Zealand'.³⁵ James Bertram was so enchanted by the authentic New Zealand represented in Mulgan's text that he positioned himself within it, concluding his review of the novel by revealing that he read it while travelling, albeit in a train, 'through some of the rough bush country it describes so well, to an accompaniment of Maori conversation and the clinking of beer bottles'.³⁶ C.K. Stead's comment similarly emphasizes the novel's ability to accurately reflect the real: 'It's rare, dour, sober truthfulness enacts a phase in our national history and catches certain truths about our national identity'.³⁷

The apparent truth represented by the novel's realism is, however, accompanied by a romantic fantasy, which Stead somewhat reluctantly acknowledges by following his description of the novel's 'truer' representation of New Zealand and its 'political dimension with international implications' with the suggestion that *Man Alone* 'is in its way also a

romantic view of New Zealand, a piece of frontier mythologizing.³⁸ Both Stead and Vincent O'Sullivan have noted certain inconsistencies within the text, with the latter highlighting its thematic contradictions by arguing that 'there was more emotional montage in the novel than a present-day reader might easily detect.'³⁹ O'Sullivan suggests that Mulgan's depiction of a dystopic New Zealand society is entangled with the British society that he lived in as he wrote the book, and that the novel's socialism springs from the looming war in Europe rather than conditions in New Zealand. Stead argues that the ambiguities at the heart of the novel are the result of Mulgan's expatriate experience and the competing claims of 'here' and 'there', noting a certain confusion within the text between collective action and the values of independence.⁴⁰ However, these thematic contradictions can be explained in terms other than the biographical since the dominant thrust of the novel's realism is accompanied by romantic ideologies. According to Bertram, the bare realism of *Man Alone* 'breaks decisively with the narrow English literary tradition' to create a novel 'with a healthy smell of cow-pasture drowning the scents of the old English garden', but it is precisely this heady scent of agricultural New Zealand that inclines it towards pastoral romance.⁴¹ If Mulgan's unflinching representation of a dank, damp and dull New Zealand might seem to work against the fantasies of romantic pastoralism, Calder shows how the novel's preoccupation with a harsh environment, silence and death align it with the Western, a particular form of the pastoral which Jane Tompkins defines as satisfying 'a hunger to be in touch with something absolutely real.'⁴² The Western answers 'a powerful need for self-transformation. The desert light and the desert space, the creak of saddle leather and the sun beating down, the horse's energy and force – these things promise a translation of self into something purer and more authentic, more intense, more real.'⁴³ The need that Tompkins describes is precisely that which defines literary nationalism, so it is not surprising that *Man Alone* met with such acclaim.

Calder's discussion of *Man Alone* in *The Settler's Plot* is the first extended investigation of the novel's debt to the Western, which is a particular version of the pastoral romance, and elucidates the way that Johnson's flat characterization relates to the Western's attention to physical presence rather than psychological depth. Calder cites a moment during the Queen Street riots as Johnson is on the run and 'sentence after sentence does little more than register a bodily action or impression'⁴⁴:

He rested, taking his breath. It was not long before he grew cold again and, with the cold, stiffness returned to his legs and the throbbing to his head. He would have to move on, but first of all he felt through his pockets and found his tin of tobacco and papers. He rolled himself a cigarette clumsily in the darkness and smoked it carefully between thickened and dry lips while he made his plans.⁴⁵

Johnson is self-reliant and independent, not inclined towards owning property despite constant advice to buy a farm, physically active rather than intellectually engaged, and decidedly uninterested in domestic life. He rides and walks through isolated landscapes, battles the weather and the unforgiving environment, steers clear of cities, never settling down for long and never saying much. In short, he is the strong, silent type; a John Wayne or a Clint Eastwood.

Fredric Jameson argues that the novel is a form defined by its layering of residual ideologies preserved as genres, so that the novel is effectively a sedimented form that allows the social contradictions of its moment to be read.⁴⁶ This concept of the novel form suggests that *Man Alone*'s topsoil is realist while deeper layers preserve the ideologies of romance that Stead, Calder and Patrick Evans identify. In *Man Alone*, the dourly truthful realism representing an 'authentic' New Zealand interacts with mythologizing romance, revealing

that as hard as the new generation of literary nationalists strove to set themselves and their literature up as something new and authentic during the decades between the 1930s and 1960s, the revolution they represented was only stylistic; nationalism has always been a concern in New Zealand literature, the only thing that changes is the form that nationalism takes.

As *Man Alone* relentlessly demythologizes concepts of New Zealand as a scenic wonderland or a 'land of milk and honey', it creates another sort of myth which is no more real than the utopian visions of pastoral paradise peddled by earlier writers, but which answered a need to replace colonial culture with one deemed 'indigenous' to New Zealand. The sense of the real created by *Man Alone*'s corrective stance might be thought of in terms of the 'romance of realism', romance being, according to Northrop Frye, a method of approaching a wish-fulfillment dream through a plot based on adventure. Following Stenning's death, Johnson flees into the wilderness and his struggle to survive in the inhospitable landscape has generally been read as part of its realist correction of pastoral fantasy, but it is in this episode that *Man Alone* is most purely a Western, as it plays out the classic theme of man against the elements. As Johnson prepares to leave, a wind rises from the east that blows 'with a steadiness and strength that meant a gale and rain' but like a true cowboy 'He did not worry about this now'.⁴⁷ The laconic descriptions of Johnson continue: 'He did up his kit-bag and swung it on to his shoulder and pulled his hat down over his eyes, knowing that he was ready to go'.⁴⁸ With pack and horse prepared, Johnson sets off for the bush,

where for a hundred miles no one lived or travelled, where there were no paths nor animals except birds, but only high bush-hills and rivers going down to the sea. He knew that if he was lucky and could live through this, to come out months later away on the far side of the island, he would still need then to have luck with him, but might win, nevertheless, this game that he was playing. It was a gamble that he liked to think of. It would need not courage, but patience and endurance.⁴⁹

Johnson heads for the Kaimanawa range as 'the only hills that were deep enough and lonely enough for his purpose now'.⁵⁰ This range of mountains runs 'like a backbone to the island, its ridges grim and bleak and forbidding, the peaks snow covered in winter.' It is a 'lost part of the country and unknown except to odd prospectors who went into it sometimes'.⁵¹ The hardships of the landscape are matched by the elements: as day breaks and Johnson travels up the mountainside a bad gale threatens and it begins to rain.

Johnson lets his horse go free and enters a realm in which his mettle will be tested. He moves 'against the weight of wind and rain, and he knew what was against him'.⁵² Even the mist is described as something substantial 'driving against him'.⁵³ On the next day the gale has strengthened, 'with heavy rain in the wind now' and Johnson is 'chilled and wet through and foodless'.⁵⁴ Pushing on, he arrives at 'a strange and desolate country', a 'waste of scarred and pitted desert, bare of all growth for long stretches, loose scoria and pumice powdered to sand by years of weathering, and lifting now, as the gale came violently, so that it rose in swirling clouds that wrapped him round and blinded him'.⁵⁵ This is the Rangipo desert, 'the waste area where long before the volcanoes of the mountain had burned and embedded the forests, and the loose volcanic sand, played on by years of driving winds, had given no home for anything to grow'.⁵⁶ This is 'a legend-haunted country, dreaded by the Maoris', and Johnson remembers being told 'how long ago the first natives of the country had been driven down here by invaders to die and after that there were stories of Maori tribes caught by snow and starved to death in these same deserts'.⁵⁷ Although once the desert had apparently been home

to packs of savage dogs, 'they, too, died away in that lifeless area, and it was left as barren and desolate as ever'.⁵⁸

After struggling blindly forward against the elements that prevent him from even seeing the ground beneath his feet, Johnson arrives 'to what he knew must be the heart of it all, Onetapu, the place of the shivering sands'.⁵⁹ Here he is 'caught in something that is wild and furious and stronger than himself':

The wind came no longer directly against him, but eddying and whirling in gusts of sand and storm so that he could hardly stand or go forward in any direction. The silence and quiet of the mountain-side was gone and in its place came a sighing and moaning of wind and sand as it stirred in the corridors of the desert, more mournful and more frightening than anything human that he had known. He fought this for a long time, both the feeling of terror and the force of the storm, baffled and angry, going sometimes forward or being swayed to left and right, stumbling and falling, going on his hands and knees, until at last he caught the shelter of a pumice bank and stayed there, burrowed into it, with his back against the shelter and the rain and sand blowing over him. He was exhausted and if snow came, he told himself, ready to die.⁶⁰

Johnson's experience in the desert is very similar to those of protagonists in nineteenth-century New Zealand writing who find themselves in a gothicized landscape that recurs as a Maori realm threatening to Pakeha. In H.B. Marriot Watson's *The Web of the Spider: A Tale of Adventure* (1891), Palliser, a settler and proficient bushman, becomes lost in the forest of Te Tauru and suffers a similar demoralization as Johnson: 'the horror of the place had gnawed into his soul, and lurked there, mordant. He now saw how it had come to be regarded as the home of the *Taniwha*, the place of death.'⁶¹ Philip Steer points out that even though this moment of existential dread inspired by the Maoriness of Palliser's surroundings suggests the alienation of settlers from New Zealand, 'Palliser's survival and eventual triumph overwrites this uncertainty with the relegation of Maori to the past.'⁶² The subtitle of Watson's novel is revealing since plots based on adventure that involve wish-fulfillment are integral to romance. In romance, the hero represents the ideals of his or her time, while the villain represents the threats to their ascendancy. In the case of settler romance, the hero represents colonial ideals of civilization, with Maori representing the primitive forces that threaten the success of the colonial project. This threat can be actual, such as in the novels about the New Zealand Wars, or it can be symbolic, such as through representations of a threatening landscape. Like Palliser, Johnson survives his period of disorientation in a haunted environment, the Maoriness of which is thus established as being firmly in the past. The preeminence of Pakeha is further reinforced when in the morning Johnson discovers a 'coach-road' through the desert along which travels a service car.⁶³

While the language used to describe the New Zealand landscape is appropriate to the local environment, there are moments when it veers into vocabulary just as suited to an American Western. The 'lonely' 'coach-road that crossed the plains' and 'the mountain range' in the distance add up to the atmosphere of the West, as does the campfire Johnson makes, although the tea-drinking and damper-eating harkens more to the Australian tales of the outback than the American tradition.⁶⁴ It is precisely at this moment, when the Western vernacular creeps into the New Zealand narrative, that the text displays particular concern regarding the authentic. As if to counter the imported textual elements, Mulgan stresses the genuine New Zealandness of the bush. Johnson makes his fire on the edge of 'the real bush which closed heavy and damp and dripping', and on the same page this typically moist environment is described as 'real bush ... not the mountain-bush of birch-trees that he had seen on Ruapehu,

but deep, thick, and matted, great trees going up to the sky, and beneath them a tangle of ferns and bush-lawyer and undergrowth'.⁶⁵

Johnson's experience of 'going deep' into the real New Zealand bush, 'so deep, he told himself, that he might never come out again' is to be found in New Zealand romances such as Satchell's *The Toll of the Bush* (1905), which 'grants a kind of gothic life to the natural world of the colony, especially where it lies beyond the effects of human intervention.'⁶⁶ Like Mulgan, Satchell describes his protagonists penetrating 'Deeper and deeper ... into the primeval solitudes, where no man had come perchance since the beginning of the world.'⁶⁷ This immersion in the real is disturbing, revealing as it does the land's ability to resist inhabitation, but it also facilitates the processes through which the settler becomes indigenized. Satchell's protagonists are positioned as being the first to enter an untouched New Zealand thus displacing Maori as the indigenous population. Connecting with the 'real bush' is a way of getting closer not just to nature, but, in the words of Linda Hardy, to 'natural occupancy.'⁶⁸ An early vignette by Katherine Mansfield illustrates how immersion in the bush – even that in the Wellington Botanic Gardens – can translate the settler identity into something far older and more authentic:

I turn from the smooth swept paths, and climb up a steep track, where the knotted tree roots have seared a rude pattern in the yellow clay. And suddenly, it disappears – all the pretty, carefully-tended surface of the gravel and sward and blossoms, and there is bush, silent and splendid. On the green moss, on the brown earth, a wide splashing of yellow sunlight. And everywhere that strange indefinable scent. As I breathe it, it seems to absorb, to become part of me – and I am old with the age of centuries, strong with the strength of savagery.⁶⁹

Transformative moments such as this, in which the colonist as interloper is replaced by the settler as natural occupant of the land, recur throughout early New Zealand writing. *Man Alone*'s corrective stance thus coexists with a mode of representation belonging primarily to colonial literature.

The natural world in New Zealand literature is something to be feared and longed for: on the one hand, it represents threat; on the other hand, it represents a way of 'becoming native.' This explains why Johnson's ordeal provokes both terror and something akin to a feeling of comfort. Five days into the 'real bush' Johnson feels 'surrounded and drowned in the hills and bush, safe and alone and submerged'.⁷⁰ Johnson sinks further into this enveloping environment when he makes camp for winter in 'the depths' of a 'great valley'.⁷¹ This period of immersion in an authentic New Zealand environment is Johnson's initiation rite, the process through which his status as interloper can be transformed into one of natural occupancy. Furthermore, the desire to merge with the land recurs throughout the Western genre and indicates, as Tompkins notes, that the obsession with land is finally metaphysical. In Owen Wister's Western novel *The Virginian* (1902), the protagonist admits that 'Often when I have camped here, it has made me want to become the ground, become the water, become the trees, mix with the whole thing. Not know myself from it. Never unmix again.'⁷² Johnson gets as close to the land as he can, burrowing inside it to fashion a cave in which he attempts to last out the winter. Adding to the realism of the novel is Mulgan's care to represent the difficulties that Johnson experiences in his new natural lifestyle. Unlike the competent cowboy hero of the Western, who rarely misses a shot or displays ineptitude in physical tasks, Johnson is not a good marksman and frequently misses the birds he aims at. He attempts to set traps for the birds to save his ammunition 'without much success' and, remembering that he had heard of men eating fern-roots, he attempts this as well, 'but could not find anything that seemed like food. He guessed that someone who really knew the ways

of the bush could have found them, but he was unsuccessful.⁷³ In the 'dark loneliness of the bush' Johnson loses sense of time and feels within himself 'a great solitude, a feeling which had never troubled him before in the long periods of his life that he had spent alone. There was a heaviness of the bush that pressed upon him, and weighed him down, until the sound of his own voice was startling to him'.⁷⁴

The encounter with the 'real' depths of the New Zealand environment threatens the cohesion of self but also provides the experience through which a new sense of self is engendered. It is the civilized European identity that is threatened in the bush, and, if its hardships are overcome, an authentic New Zealand identity is constructed to replace it. Johnson is literally stripped of his old self, becoming so thin 'that the bones of his hands and arms showed through the flesh'.⁷⁵ His 'desire never to move from where he was' sees him lapse into a state of 'half sleep' in which 'even to go and hunt birds was an effort to him. He fought this weakness until he knew that he could only fight it by going on, and, if he could come through, emerging into the world again'.⁷⁶ This re-emergence is a re-birth. Johnson leaves his sanctuary carrying nothing but his rifle and wearing clothes that he has roughly mended with flax. The journey out is torturous and he is eventually deprived of his gun in a fall into the river that almost costs him his life. This baptismal immersion sees him press on into the landscape, foodless and extremely weak, but increasingly at one with the natural world. Climbing on his hands and knees as 'the bush grew dark around him', Johnson's head 'was at first very clear and his senses seemed alert and over-sensitized so that he could hear each sound from the patter of rain in the leaves to the rustle of small birds'.⁷⁷ Johnson has shed his identity as transplanted Englishman and earned his natural occupancy. Once an inept bushman, Johnson is now so skilled that the rangy Bill Crawley, whose hut Johnson discovers, suggests that he take up bush-ranging.

Oddly enough, despite Johnson's survival and Bill's insistence that 'You could do well for yourself with a good horse in the Bay', he decides that the only way to avoid capture by the police for Stenning's murder is to leave New Zealand.⁷⁸ The trope of pursuit aligns him with even more closely with the cowboy, particularly the Australian version of the cowboy, the iconic figure of Ned Kelly whom Bill Crawley mentions when he insists on Johnson's fitness for becoming a bushman. Johnson suggests that the authorities no longer tolerate gangs but Crawley disagrees, citing the recent example of a man who 'Rode around the Wairarapa for days on end with a gun, broke gaol and all. Fellows out looking for him shot each other by mistake. They didn't shoot him'.⁷⁹ Crawley suggests that Johnson would be even better at being a fugitive than Kelly and the Wairarapa man since their downfall is usually drink or women; Johnson, in contrast, is 'a steady fellow'.⁸⁰ Johnson's steadiness is borne out by the fact that he successfully travels north to find his old friend Peterson, whom he asks for assistance in getting a ship out of the country. Kerouac's protagonist eventually finds a secure sense of identity and belonging through Western mythology, returning to a New York City that has been re-imagined as an Eastern version of the West in which he is successfully able to reintegrate into civilian society. Mulgan's hero is far less successful in this reintegration. After escaping New Zealand he returns to Britain where he is as much an outsider as ever, and he eventually abandons civilian life in order to serve in the Spanish Civil War. Despite using tropes associated with the Western, Mulgan withholds the key feature that allows it to facilitate a sense of belonging to a wilderness rendered home: the eventual return to the homestead.

One of the key differences between *Man Alone* and *On the Road* is the tenor of the times in which they were written. Kerouac wrote his book during a time of significant growth and optimism in the United States. The country played a decisive role in ending the Second World War, cementing its status as a global superpower, and in spite of initial fears of a post-war recession, the economy was steadily growing. Superhighways and supermarkets began to

appear and consumer goods were increasingly abundant. There is an unmistakable ebullience in *On the Road*'s tone, a sense of celebration of America's freedom and opportunity, which is in stark contrast to the tone of *Man Alone*, which is marked by a supreme pessimism related to the Great Depression and the events in Europe heralding World War Two. The different social and historical contexts informing the two novels guarantee marked difference even as they share preoccupations with war and the reintegration of veterans to civilian life. Kerouac's novel eagerly embraces Western mythology and works towards rendering its initially alienated protagonist one who is truly at home in America. *Man Alone* is far more hesitant about this, meaning that it uses a genre associated with the processes of successful settlement and belonging in order to convey a story about one man's failure to settle and belong. By the end of the book, Johnson admits that he 'could never live anywhere again. He had tried to live and settle and things had happened to him. Now he could not do that again'.⁸¹ If, as so many critics suggest, *Man Alone* does contain a certain truth about New Zealand, this truth seems to be related to a suspicion that it is resistant to settlement. When asked in the novel's final pages, 'You're a New Zealander?' Johnson's response is to simply state 'I've been in New Zealand'.⁸²

¹ Cited in Vincent O'Sullivan, *Long Journey to the Border: A Life of John Mulgan*, Auckland, 2003, p.192. For more on Hemingway's influence on *Man Alone* see Trixie Te Arama Menzies, 'John Mulgan: A Man You Can't Kill', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 8 (1990), pp.74-5.

² John Mulgan, *Man Alone*, 4th ed, Auckland, 1990, p.28.

³ Mulgan, p.29.

⁴ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, New York, 1991, p.122.

⁵ For more on World War II and *On the Road* see Erin Mercer, *Repression and Realism*, New York, 2011, pp.231-48.

⁶ David Dempsey, *New York Times*, 8 September 1957, p.4.

⁷ Gilbert Millstein, *New York Times*, 5 September 1957, p.27.

⁸ In America, following World War II, the veteran was identified in Willard Waller's 1944 book *The Veterans Come Back* as 'our gravest social problem' since their experiences with the military and combat positioned them as 'a threat to existing institutions.' A 1946 *Life* editorial highlighted the economic problems of reintegrating veterans and suggested that this posed an 'unprecedented situation' for the nation. According to *Life*, the only way to avoid disaster was to limit financial assistance, suggesting that veterans need 'genuine rehabilitation, to be trained and helped into good jobs and into stations in society where they do not need pensions. Except in cases of extreme disability, pensions are really confessions of failure.' See Mark David Van Ells, *To Hear Only Thunder Again: America's World War II Veterans Come Home*, Lanham, 2001, p.23; and 'The Veterans', *Life*, 5 August 1946, p.36.

⁹ Alex Calder, *The Settler's Plot: How Stories Take Place in New Zealand*, Auckland, 2011.

¹⁰ Kerouac, pp.3, 9, 96.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.109.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.17, 30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.30.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.143.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.109.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.27, 43.

¹⁹ Mulgan, p.7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Kerouac, pp.87-88.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.95.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.231, 278.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.88.

²⁶ Mulgan, p.108.

²⁷ Patrick Evans, Foreword to *Man Alone*, Auckland, 1990, p.iv. J.M.B. Bertram, *Flight of the Phoenix: Critical Notes on New Zealand Writers*, Wellington, 1985, p.41.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.7, 9.

- ²⁹ Ibid., p.8.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Samuel Butler, *Erewhon and Erewhon Revisited*, New York, 1927, p.16.
- ³² Ibid., pp.18, 25, 72.
- ³³ Allen Curnow, *Look Back Harder: Critical Writings 1935-1984*, Edited with an Introduction by Peter Simpson, Auckland, 1987, p.47. Edith Searle Grossmann, *The Heart of the Bush*, London, 1910, p.182.
- ³⁴ Bertram, p.42.
- ³⁵ Peter Gibbons, 'Cultural Colonization and National Identity', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 36, 1 (2002), p.10. Bertram, p.42.
- ³⁶ Bertram, p.42.
- ³⁷ C.K. Stead, 'John Mulgan: A Question of Identity', *Islands*, 25 (1979), p.269, reprinted in *In the Glass Case: Essays on New Zealand Literature*, Auckland, 1984, pp.74-96. In recent years, the 'certain truths' about national identity to be found in Mulgan's novel have been increasingly contested. Originally seen as a heroic model of New Zealand masculinity, the figure of 'Man Alone' exemplified by Mulgan's novel, which appears throughout New Zealand writing in such disparate forms as the stoic narrators of Sargeson's early stories and Barry Crump's Good Keen Man, has increasingly been revealed to have arisen from anxieties provoked by circumstances that negate the secure identity provided by, in the words of Alistair Fox, 'subjectification to originary culture.' The stereotype of the self-sufficient, stoic Kiwi bloke whose affinity with the land represents the type of indigenization that Alex Calder terms 'pakeha turangawaewae' has been revealed by Fox as a compensatory defense against 'the anxieties to which antipodean circumstances have made them habitually prey.' See Alistair Fox, 'Inwardness, Insularity, and the Man Alone: Postcolonial Anxiety in the New Zealand Novel', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 45, 3 (2009), pp.263-73 and Alex Calder, *The Settler's Plot*.
- ³⁸ C.K. Stead, *Kin of Place: Essays on 20 New Zealand Writers*, Auckland, 2002, pp.164-65.
- ³⁹ O'Sullivan, *Long Journey to the Border*, p.196.
- ⁴⁰ C.K. Stead, *In the Glass Case*, pp.74-96.
- ⁴¹ Bertram, pp.38, 42.
- ⁴² Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*, New York, 1996), p.3.
- ⁴³ Ibid., p.4.
- ⁴⁴ Calder, p.225.
- ⁴⁵ Mulgan, p.63.
- ⁴⁶ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Ithaca, 1981, p.144.
- ⁴⁷ Mulgan, p.128.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p.129.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., p.130.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p.131.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Ibid., p.134.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., p.135.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.135-6
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., p.136.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., p.136.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p.136.
- ⁶¹ H.B. Marriott Watson, *The Web of the Spider: A Tale of Adventure*, London, 1891, p.79.
- ⁶² Philip Steer, 'History (Never) Repeats: Pakeha Identity, Novels and the New Zealand Wars', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 25 (2007), p.128.
- ⁶³ Mulgan, p.137.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid, pp.138-9.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., p.230. Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature 1872-1914*, Wellington, 2002, p.238.
- ⁶⁷ William Satchell, *The Toll of the Bush*, cited in Stafford and Williams, p.224.
- ⁶⁸ Linda Hardy, 'Natural Occupancy', in Suvendrini Perera, ed., *Asian and Pacific/Inscription: Identities, Ethnicities, Nationalities*, Bundoora, 1995), pp.213-27.
- ⁶⁹ Margaret Scott, ed., *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks*, Volume 1, Wellington, 1997, p.171.
- ⁷⁰ Mulgan, p.139.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.

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- ⁷² Owen Wister, *The Virginian*, New York: London, 1902, p.280.
⁷³ Mulgan, p.141.
⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.141-2.
⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.142.
⁷⁶ *Ibid.*
⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.148.
⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.157.
⁷⁹ *Ibid.*
⁸⁰ *Ibid.*
⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.196.
⁸² *Ibid.*, p.204.