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A World Like This: Existentialism in New Zealand Literature

Dale Christine Benson

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Let us insist again on the method: it is a matter of persisting.

The Myth of Sisyphus, by Albert Camus
Abstract

A World Like This: Existentialism in New Zealand Literature

Literary existentialism has evolved unevenly in New Zealand since the late-nineteenth century. In this thesis I will define and trace the pre-existentialism of the early pioneers and settlers, which originally emerged as a Victorian expression of their experiences in an unpredictable new environment. Then I will describe how during the 1930s, 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s some of their descendants modified their world-view with ideas popularly associated with French literary existentialism, including notions about the individual’s freedom and responsibility to act in an unmediated universe. Finally, I will conclude that references to existentialism are relatively rare in contemporary New Zealand literature because in a predominantly secular society the struggle to survive in a godless, indifferent universe has been absorbed into New Zealand writers’ continuing preoccupation with the necessity of fellowship.
Prefatory Note

Generally I have followed the grammatical and bibliographical forms recommended in the Style Book: A Guide for New Zealand Writers and Editors. Except when quoting an author who marks dialogue with single inverted commas or who uses no speech marks at all, I have used double quotation marks to signify conversation. For a quotation within a quotation, I have used single inverted commas. When dealing with bibliographic information not covered by the Style Book, such as the formatting of a film reference or of unpublished information, I have relied on Kate L. Turabian’s A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 5th ed.
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A summary will have to do: fine professionals all, their kindness, generosity and conversation have made persisting a lot easier.
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Introduction

Existentialism is a scarecrow only for imbeciles. Although it is, in fact, an error in classification, it wrongs no one.¹

Existentialism has seldom been studied at the tertiary level in New Zealand as other than a feature of Modern and Post Modern trends in European and American literature, and it would be impossible to isolate a pure example of that elusive philosophy in New Zealand’s literature. Even so, it is possible to trace the history of the New Zealand fiction that anticipates or responds to existentialist concepts, especially in relation to the literary topos of the Man Alone. Beginning with a general definition of the word existentialism, I will go on to describe New Zealand’s version of what became, during the middle of the twentieth century, an increasingly popular literary movement. Because so few of the writers I consider were professional philosophers, I have chosen not to criticize their narratives as philosophical treatises. Thus, while I do sometimes point to the source of ideas adapted to New Zealand conditions, I have avoided philosophical jargon. Instead I have described the existentialist mood that some writers connected with New Zealand have evoked, over the years, in some of their narratives.

Any definition that can stretch around the Christian and atheistic extremes of existentialism, including such diverse thinkers as Saint Augustine (one of the earliest precursors of the existentialists), Blaise Pascal, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, and, more recently, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus (whose fiction and philosophical works popularly represent modern existentialism), will have to be very elastic indeed. Even so, there is a concern for the existence of the self-conscious individual that connects the writing of all the men listed above – a concern equally evident in a range of New Zealand narratives.

William Barrett in Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy explains that while Plato and Aristotle posed the question What is man?, Saint Augustine, in his Confessions, asked Who am I?. With this self-conscious question, Saint Augustine altered the focus of Western thinking from that of the objective third person to that of the subjective first person. Barrett calls this a decisive shift:

The first question presupposes a world of objects, a fixed natural and zoological order, in which man was included; and when man’s precise

place in that order had been found, the specifically differentiating characteristic of reason was added. Augustine’s question ... stems ... from an acutely personal sense of dereliction and loss, rather than from the detachment with which reason surveys the world of objects in order to locate its bearer, man, zoologically within it. Augustine’s question therefore implies that man cannot be defined by being located in that natural order, for man, as the being who asks himself, Who am I?, has already broken through the barriers of the animal world.²

Barrett also maintains that modern Western history, from the Middle Ages to the present, has been profoundly affected by the decline of religion and the rise of science in the West.³

Walter E. Houghton, in *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*, quotes from J. S. Mill’s diary entry for 13 January 1854 an example of the resultant mid-Victorian doubt:

Scarcely any one, in the more educated classes, seems to have any opinions, or to place any real faith in those which he professes to have .... It requires in these times much more intellect to marshal so much greater a stock of ideas and observations. This has not yet been done, or has been done only by very few: and hence the multitude of thoughts only breeds increase of uncertainty. Those who should be the guides of the rest, see too many sides to every question. They hear so much said, or find that so much can be said, about everything, that they feel no assurance of the truth of anything.⁴

Houghton points out that while the doubts expressed by Mill would not sound out of place in the twentieth century, which is also characterized as an age of uncertainty, no mid-Victorian would ever describe the Victorian era as Bonamy Dobrée described the 1930s:

All the previous ages ... had something they could take for granted, and it never occurred to the older writers that they could not take themselves for granted. We can be sure of nothing; our civilization is threatened, even the simplest things we live by .... In our present confusion our only hope is to be scrupulously honest with ourselves, so honest as to doubt our own minds and the conclusions they arrive at. Most of us have ceased to believe, except provisionally, in truths, and we feel that what is

important is not so much truth as the way our minds move towards truths.\(^5\)

According to Houghton, the Victorians were unlike Dobrée in that they never doubted their eventual ability to discover rational answers to all mysteries.

It can be inferred that New Zealand, a British colony in the South Pacific populated mainly by the British, was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries affected by the Victorian doubts summarized in the excerpt from Mill’s diary. Because the writers of several early New Zealand novels and short stories emulated Victorian forms and ideas, it can be further inferred that the doubts they explicitly or implicitly expressed in their fiction would have been closer to those summarized by Mill, the Victorian rationalist, than to those of Dobrée, who expressed the modern European’s doubt in *everything*. Thus, the doubts produced by rational inquiry and the doubts generated by uncertainty in *any* method of inquiry are revealed in two related types of existentialist fiction in New Zealand.

The fundamental difference between what I have called the “pre-existentialism” of New Zealand’s early pioneers and settlers and the existentialism of later writers is their respective attitudes towards contingency and the human condition. The early pioneers and settlers regarded their failure to thrive in their new environment as evidence of their personal inability to cope with the hardships of pioneer life; they doubted that they could live up to the ideal envisaged in the rationalism they espoused. Later existentialists, by contrast, were intellectually convinced that failure was inevitable due to human mortality; the symptoms of their crises (their feelings of uprootedness, isolation and alienation), were inherent in the human condition. Despite the essential difference between pre-existentialism and existentialism, the similarity of their symptoms makes it possible to surmise that the pre-existentialism which grew out of New Zealand’s pioneer experience in the nineteenth century prepared a fertile seed bed for the thorough-going existentialism which developed in France and spread throughout the Western world around the time of the two world wars.

Both New Zealand’s pre-existentialist and existentialist narratives are characterized by the kind of doubt that Fyodor Dostoyevsky dramatizes in *Notes from Underground* when he emphasizes the arbitrary nature of the universe and cautions that rational thinking will encourage people to rely on generalizations that will inevitably disappoint them. Dostoyevsky’s fundamental doubt in the rationality of the Universe was utterly opposed to the Victorians’ optimism: if the nineteenth century had witnessed

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the decline of religion and the rise of science, then the twentieth century proved that
science could not adequately satisfy questions about the human condition. Deprived of
their traditional hope in God, and having learned through experience to doubt their
modern faith in science, many (including migrants to New Zealand) recognized that they
had to rely wholly on themselves when deciding their values and their destinies.

Because it was distinctly influenced by the Victorian conventions that the
pioneers and settlers had brought with them, New Zealand’s pre-existentialist fiction
bears little stylistic resemblance to modern existentialist literature. Yet a handful of
articulate Men Alone like Richard Raleigh in George Chamier’s *Philosopher Dick:
Adventures and Contemplations of a New Zealand Shepherd* (1891) and A *South Sea
Siren: A Novel Descriptive of New Zealand Life in the Early Days* (1895), Hugh
Clifford in William Satchell’s *The Land of the Lost* (1902) or Cedric Tregarthen and his
adoptive father, Purcell, in *The Greenstone Door* (1914), also by William Satchell,
could be described as beginning to engage with existentialist themes. In a society with a
strong Myth of Progress, a faith that settlers would tame the bush and create a Britain in
the South Seas, these men swim against the current: they are depicted as deracinated,
isolated and alienated, symptoms that are commonly associated with the existentialist
mood.

Unlike the pioneers and settlers who populate the early fiction, however, some
of the Men Alone in New Zealand narratives of the 1930s debunked the Myth of
Progress when they struggled constantly against a recalcitrant Nature and yet could not
prosper. Probably created independent of existentialist influences but sharing a common
source in Hemingway, they are transitional figures between the pre-existentialism and
existentialism of New Zealand’s literature because they arrive at patterns similar to
those of Albert Camus without ever realizing their existential freedom. There are
obvious similarities between Johnson in John Mulgan’s *Man Alone* (1939), Bill in Frank
Sargeson’s “That Summer” (*Penguin New Writing* nos 17-19, 1943-44) and Meursault
in Camus’ *L’Etranger* (1942): all three are drifters and their narratives place a particular
emphasis on their present tense sensations as well as their inability to evaluate them.
While the first two do have some existentialist qualities, Mulgan and Sargeson were
more concerned to use them as a focus for criticism of New Zealand during the
Depression. Camus used Meursault’s passive drifting and impoverished language to
suggest the meaninglessness of *everything* in a world without transcendent values.

When Dan Davin and Guthrie Wilson were producing novels from the mid-
1940s and throughout the 50s, both novelists were aware of existentialist concepts. That
they disapproved of them is evident in the events depicted in their novels. In *Cliffs of
Fall (1945), for example, Davin set up an existentialist situation to study its implications and then demonstrated through the Raskolnikov-like Mark Burke that, carried to its ultimate consequences, atheistic existentialism leads to murder and suicide. After Cliffs of Fall Davin settled into writing narratives that were governed by assumptions of a godless, determined world, as in the Mick Connolly short stories collected in The Gorse Blooms Pale (1947). Later, Davin would be less concerned with the determined fate of individuals than with how successfully they directed their own lives. Over the years his underlying assumptions modified so that the early determinism which Davin often ameliorated with tidy, happy endings had, by the time of Breathing Spaces (1975), matured into an appreciation for the necessity of accommodation to the imperatives of modern existence.

Like Davin, Wilson seemed to disapprove of existentialism. Unlike Davin, he did not moderate his reservations about what he thought were its nihilistic consequences. The protagonists of The Feared and the Fearless (1954) and Strip Jack Naked (1957), for example, recite popular existentialist dogma as they personify supermen. While they live beyond the confines of morality, however, Wilson’s supermen are hapless victims/criminals whose lives are inexorably governed by their backgrounds and experiences. Their existential “freedom” leads them inevitably to murder and self-destruction.

Other writers of the time seem to have been more positively influenced by existentialism. A comparison between two treatments of the Stanley Graham murders, one by R. M. Burdon in Outlaw’s Progress (1943) and the other by Erik de Mauny in The Huntsman in His Career (1949), shows that as awareness of fashionable post-war existentialism grew among New Zealand writers, it changed the focus of their narratives from exposing the causes of violence to allowing characters to accept responsibility for their own destiny. Like Johnson, the protagonist of Burdon’s novel is a victim of the Depression. Unable to see himself as a criminal after shooting the man he thought was threatening his farm, Marley seeks shelter in the bush, which he perceives in existential detail. Marley’s fate, however, resembles that of the murderers in Davin’s and Wilson’s novels: because Marley had killed someone, he too is hunted and killed. Erik de Mauny’s treatment of the same story in The Huntsman in His Career shows that he was favourably disposed towards Sartre’s ideas. Two of its main characters are victims, Cleaves of his underprivileged upbringing and Milsom of the Depression. In Villiers, however, the third main character who hunts and kills Milsom, de Mauny has created a Man Alone who becomes conscious of his existential freedom to choose his own destiny at the same time as he is aware that he must live within society. Villiers is the first
existentialist in New Zealand literature who is neither mentally imbalanced nor so alienated that he is a threat to society.

Although not a New Zealander, Greville Texidor should be considered with New Zealand's literary existentialists because most of her writing was accomplished in New Zealand. Symbols of hopeless struggle to climb insurmountable barriers in *These Dark Glasses* (1949) and other of her stories seem to be a pessimistic restatement of Camus' definition of the absurd. Unlike Camus, however, Texidor could find no cause for happiness in what she perceived to be a meaningless world.

*A Gap in the Spectrum* (1959) by Marilyn Duckworth reads as if she had been influenced by Sartre's novel *Nausea*. Although the author has said that she had not read any existentialist literature prior to writing it, she explains the similarities with "Existentialism was in the air". The protagonist, Diana Clouston, wakes up to an existentialist situation in London: suffering from amnesia and convinced that she comes from Micald, her "sense of insecurity grew. This was a world of extremes. Anything could happen.... Anything, anything". When Diana learns to take responsibility for her destiny away from the protective confines of her former home in pleasant but lukewarm New Zealand, she reverses the journey of the early Men Alone. She also highlights the similarity between the pre-existentialist Men Alone and the characters of modern existentialist fiction.

That Redmond Wallis was acquainted with some of Sartre's ideas is confirmed by the explicit references to Sartre in the dialogue of *Point of Origin* (1962). That he found them encouraging is confirmed when the protagonist declares his existential freedom at the end of the novel:

The city is a graph, the Square origin, and I a point. This time
and this place is my point of origin.
I begin to plot my curve.\(^6\)

The protagonist in Graham Billing's *Forbush and the Penguins* (1965) also learns to value his existential struggle. When the introspective Dick Forbush realizes that the Antarctic environment is utterly indifferent to the existence of the determined creatures that live there, he falls into a suicidal depression similar to that of the protagonist of *Philosopher Dick*. Both survive, but for different reasons. Dick Raleigh, the pre-existentialist, is reminded by a heavenly voice that his life is a precious gift. Dick Forbush despairs that he has no control over his destiny until he realizes (without

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the aid of a supernatural voice) that consciousness of his impending death implies his freedom to hasten it. Unlike the penguins, his destiny is not completely determined.

Albert Wendt makes an explicit reference to Camus’ essays in his first novel, *Sons for the Return Home*, (1973) and he ends the novel by connecting the legend of Maui to Camus’ myth of Sisyphus. Both the protagonist and Camus can imagine the happiness of the individual who struggles towards the heights.

I will briefly discuss other New Zealand narratives that have engaged, to differing degrees, with existentialist concerns. As New Zealand became increasingly settled, however, the prime reason for the pioneers’ and settlers’ feelings of isolation and alienation was invalidated: their seemingly arbitrary environment had become predictable. Even so existentialism has not completely faded from the literary scene in New Zealand. That individuals should take responsibility for their own destiny is taken for granted in much contemporary literature. Yet in New Zealand there are still reminders of Camus’ interest in how to survive the indifference of the universe because, throughout his writing career, he unconsciously charted one of the central concerns of New Zealand’s Victorian literary tradition: the necessity of fellowship.
Chapter One
The Early Man Alone

He asked himself what joy he had in life, and for what purpose did he exist. Poor solitary waif, adrift on dark and troublous waters, ever contending in an aimless and useless struggle.¹

Although the title of John Mulgan's *Man Alone* (1939) has come to signify a familiar figure in New Zealand literature, Johnson, the novel's protagonist, is not the first of this country's Men Alone. Several characters like Edward Crewe in W. M. Bain's *The Narrative of Edward Crewe; or Life in New Zealand* (1874), the station hands in G. B. Lancaster's collection of stories *Sons O' Men*, (1904) Richard Raleigh in George Chamier's *Philosopher Dick: Adventures and Contemplations of a New Zealand Shepherd* (1891) and *A South-Sea Siren* (1895), Hugh Clifford in William Satchell's *The Land of the Lost: A Tale of the New Zealand Gum Country* (1902) or Cedric Tregarthan and Purcell in Satchell's last novel, *The Greenstone Door* (1914) anticipate Johnson's response to his social and natural environment, and all have been labelled, retrospectively, as Men Alone.

In studies which describe some of the attributes common to the males who populate New Zealand's early literature, E. H. McCormick, Joan Stevens, H. Winston Rhodes and Lawrence Jones (among others) have helped to formulate a definition of the early Man Alone.² After briefly surveying their ideas, I will suggest that some of the characters they describe could be further defined as pre-existentialist Men Alone. For example even though the above excerpt from *Philosopher Dick* has obviously emerged from the Victorian tradition of New Zealand's European pioneers and settlers, its evocation of Raleigh's feelings of uselessness and isolation presages the existentialist atmosphere which would suffuse later narratives. In his criticisms of settler society and its transplanted values Raleigh anticipates later protagonists who, particularly in the narratives tinged with the existentialist ideas which were popular around World War Two, question the *a priori* meaning of everything as they learn to claim responsibility for themselves and their destiny. Finally, I will focus on *The Greenstone Door* because

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the protagonist of Satchell's novel unquestionably anticipates the similarity between some of New Zealand's Men Alone and characters in existentialist fiction.

i.

In his long essay *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, commissioned by the Department of Internal Affairs for the New Zealand Centennial Survey in 1940, E. H. McCormick scrutinizes a wide range of writings and graphic art. While he does not label the solitary males he finds there as Men Alone or speculate about the ontological causes of their isolation, in his analysis of *Philosopher Dick* McCormick does describe Raleigh as "déraciné." He also characterizes Raleigh's isolation and consequent alienation from station society in terms that would later identify him as a Man Alone:

Conditions of isolation with their disintegrating effects on the mind were sufficiently common. [Raleigh] revels for a time in his solitude and independence of the world of affairs, finding satisfaction in 'communion with Nature' and in art. But this mood soon yields to one of melancholy — Raleigh has learned the bitter lesson of personal insufficiency: 'In vain would he strive to rouse himself from this miserable dejection; seek for relaxation in his books, call in aid his philosophy, or fly to his beloved palette.' And as these sources of strength and assurance fail him, he loses touch with his former associations: 'The outside world had lost all interest for him — it had almost ceased to exist to his distempered mind.' And he concludes that he has abandoned civilisation, now endowed with all the attractions of the remote and the discarded, 'To make a fool of myself; to bury myself in the wilderness; to seek for solitude, misery, and privation at the farthest end of the world.'

In 1959 McCormick published a revised version of *Letters and Art in New Zealand*. Entitled *New Zealand Literature: A Survey*, his later book focuses solely on literature but does not add much to his original description of Raleigh. Yet when McCormick describes Johnson as "the 'Man Alone', the solitary, rootless nonconformist, who in a variety of forms crops up persistently in New Zealand writing" he unconsciously summarizes the qualities that relate Johnson to Raleigh.

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When Joan Stevens relates Johnson to Raleigh, she does so intentionally. In the first two chapters of her book *The New Zealand Novel 1860-1965*, Stevens efficiently categorizes New Zealand's early novels into four general types, "recording", "exploiting", "preaching" and "interpreting", with the early Man Alone who criticizes pioneer and colonial society emerging in the last. She defines "recording" novels as the least sophisticated type because they do no more than record pioneer or early settler experiences for consumption by the English book-buying market. An "exploiting" novel is directed at the same market but, as it combines lurid details of battles, cannibalism and heroic exploits, it is far more sensational. While a "preaching" novel does attempt to understand and interpret various social problems (the wickedness of intoxication, for instance), its explicit purpose is to teach solutions to those problems. An "interpreting" novel is different in that it is not overtly didactic. According to Stevens, it attempts to interpret "something to somebody".6

Stevens notes that some important themes that would continue to appear in New Zealand literature emerge from a colonial "interpreting" novel. Thus Raleigh, critical of the "Staunch Pioneers" and recognizing his need for human companionship in *Philosopher Dick*, may be considered one of the first of New Zealand's interpretive Men Alone. Later Johnson, in *Man Alone*, would also realize the importance of fellowship.

H. Winston Rhodes also mentions the Man Alone motif in his book *New Zealand Novels: A Thematic Approach*, yet he is not so much concerned with dividing early novels into categories as with exploring their themes. Beginning with his characterization of the early pioneer or settler as a "displaced person" (surely a close relative of McCormick's déraciné hero), Rhodes adds what has come to be recognized as the principal cause for the development of New Zealand's Man Alone:

> The themes of alienation and isolation are likely to become dominant in the emerging literature of any country in which settlers have made the great migration and for a generation or two remain strangers, unable to identify themselves completely with the land of their adoption.7

Rhodes then names Mulgan's *Man Alone* as a novel imbued with this sense of isolation and alienation.8

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Lawrence Jones in *Barbed Wire and Mirrors: Essays on New Zealand Prose* finds Men Alone throughout New Zealand's early fiction. While the earliest Men Alone he mentions do not conform to Stevens' definition by explicitly or implicitly criticizing the pioneer mystique or colonial society, they do share two qualities which anticipate Johnson: they are usually alone, and they are tested by the wilderness.

In his chapter about the novel in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature*, Jones considers the protagonist of W. M. Baines' *The Narrative of Edward Crewe* an early Man Alone, even though Crewe is what Jones calls an “unthinking adventurer”, one who considered the wilderness as “simply something to plunder for money and adventure, a place in which to hunt pigs, catch fish, cut timber, dig gum, and mine gold”. Crewe's exploitative attitude towards the environment pervades *The Narrative of Edward Crewe*. In the excerpt below, for example, he assesses the value of the land that he passes through during his first long journey within New Zealand:

> Before the ‘pakeha’ came land was of no value. How could it? when there were no buyers or sellers of the commodity; when watery insipid ‘Kumara’ with a chance bed of ‘Taro’ and gourds were the only plants cultivated, and these in Lilliputian quantity. What is the use of land if nothing is done towards its cultivation?

Later in his narrative he describes an area cleared of kauri:

> When a kauri forest is cut down, the land becomes a waste, as nothing of much use to the settler will grow where the great trees have stood.

Although Crewe’s tale about his adventures and how he makes his fortune seems distant in mood and intent from the angst-filled thoughts of Raleigh or from the slowly awakening self-consciousness of Johnson, he is a precursor to both. Even as an “unthinking adventurer” Crewe darkens the pioneers' optimistic Victorian assumptions about the beneficence of Nature and the inevitability of progress when he suggests that

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settler exploitation of the land renders it unproductive, thereby introducing an idea which would develop in New Zealand's later Man Alone fiction.

According to Jones, another type of Man Alone who gets his fullest treatment in the early fiction of G. B. Lancaster is the pioneer hero. The Men Alone in Lancaster's 1904 collection of short stories, *Sons o' Men*, are similar to Edward Crewe in that they view the environment in terms of its usefulness to the pioneer or settler. Lancaster's Men Alone, however, adhere to a rigid code of manly behaviour and mateship, quite different from Edward Crewe's heedlessly adventurous lifestyle. As is apparent in the excerpt below from "The Backbone of the Country", in Lancaster's world the sons of men are shaped or destroyed by nature:

The back-country is a stern mother to the sons that she has borne. Time by time will she strain them, and burden them, and test them, until each separate spirit stands up, confessed in strength, or goes under, passing out from her power. But those that are true men love her for the want of ease she gives them. 13

If the mountains are the backbone of the South Island so, too, are some of the men who work around them. Lancaster's story describes the exhausting labour of a group of musterers on Mindoorie Station who attempt to bring thousands of sheep down from the mountains where they have been trapped by snow:

Between Mindoorie and the South Pole lie ten more sheep-and-cattle stations, where a man can take his pleasure and his pain, and break his limbs or his word as he does in softer lands. But Lane's men loved Mindoorie, and they loved him; and they loved best of all, guarding it as a regiment guards its colours, the truth that Mindoorie's savage mountains and scarred flats were won, foot and inch and mile, by pluck paid down. 14

Two of the attributes of the Man Alone evident in the excerpt above, his rough mateship with other men and his love for the land which he has won through hard work, have become conventional. Barry Crump, some of whose autobiographical fiction I will describe in Chapter Nine, is perhaps the most recent and popular perpetuator of the Man Alone tradition.

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Although not a pioneer hero, the protagonist of William Satchell's melodramatic novel *The Land of the Lost* is also tested by the wilderness.¹⁵ According to Jones, Hugh Clifford is a New Zealand version of the Victorian romantic hero who has fled England and emigrated to New Zealand to escape his mother's badgering about an unclaimed inheritance; he wishes to know what kind of a man he really is.¹⁶ Clifford's education is complicated by the machinations of a wicked uncle and various improbable villains, yet Satchell's narrative about undeserved hardship staunchly endured ends happily: Clifford gains his rightful inheritance after he has survived the testing of the wilderness, represented by the gumfields and the plots of his enemies. By the end of the novel he has acquired in 'the land of the lost' the Man Alone's characteristic self-reliance. Yet because Satchell's novel is a Victorian romance, Clifford is finally able to settle into society once he has earned the love of a good woman.

According to Jones, "only rarely in this early fiction is the Man Alone used to criticize or question the values of his society rather than to act them out and affirm them".¹⁷ One such Man Alone, however, is the protagonist of *Philosopher Dick*. Raleigh is more sensitive to and critical of his environment than the heedless adventurer, the pioneer hero or the conventional romantic hero. Most importantly, he is also more self-conscious than any of the Men Alone already considered. Unlike Clifford, Raleigh does not overcome undeserved hardship, is not prevented from gaining his rightful inheritance by a wicked uncle and is not unjustly accused of a crime. On the contrary, from the beginning of the novel Chamier makes it clear that Raleigh deliberately invites and then learns to regret his isolation from society. As in *Sons o' Men* and *The Land of the Lost*, Raleigh will be tried and then refined by his encounter with nature. And as in *The Land of the Lost*, the protagonist's education will be the central theme of the novel. Yet when Raleigh is tested by his rugged life as a boundary walker in the mountains, he fails to adapt to his lonely lifestyle. Unlike Satchell's conventionally romantic narrative, Chamier's novel shows how Raleigh matures from an assured, yet naive, young man to one who is aware of his own limitations, the limitations of scientific and philosophical theory and the limitations of his romantic view of escaping civilization in order to achieve, in the wilderness, a kind of splendid isolation. Raleigh will learn that alienation from society leads to despair.

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¹⁷ Jones, *Barbed Wire and Mirrors*, p. 300.
From the beginning of *Philosopher Dick* Raleigh is out of step with settler society. In the following excerpt from his journal, he mocks some of the settlers' established ideas about his liberal education:

My refusal one Sabbath evening to attend divine service for the third time, after having undergone family prayers twice, a collect lesson, and Sunday-school the same day, caused quite a consternation in that pious household .... my godless bringing up was bemoaned in tears. My good aunt put it all down to the evils of a foreign education; to the want of the Bible and of wholesome discipline. What could be expected from outlandish schools, where infidel teaching prevailed, cricket was unknown, and flogging was not allowed? It jarred against all her notions of propriety that any English boy should have been so neglected.18

That Chamier does not wholly support either the settlers and their values or Raleigh’s independence from them becomes evident when the narrator implicitly compares Raleigh to one of the “knock-about hands” at Marino Station:

[Jim Flash] was a broad-shouldered, red-faced, and dissipated-looking young man, with a loud voice, a vicious eye, and a habit of showing his white teeth when he smiled. By his own account, he had been very badly brought up, and he was rather proud of it. He had been expelled from a public school, had been called upon to retire very early from the navy, and had taken his passage to New Zealand concealed in an empty waterbutt. His *forte* was horse-racing; it was also his weakness.19

Unlike the unsavoury Flash, Raleigh is the sort of man who would risk his life to fetch a doctor to examine an injured station hand. Says Doctor Valentine,

‘Where is Raleigh? We want him. Now, there’s a brave fellow, if you like. That was a plucky ride across that torrent; and I don’t think that I should have ventured here had it not been for him.’20

Yet Raleigh is a flawed hero. Stead, the station manager, explains why in his reply to the doctor:

‘Yes, Raleigh is a right good fellow’ ... 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

20 Chamier, *Philosopher Dick*, p. 16.
with such foolishness. I don't think he has one idea about bettering his condition. 21

Despite Chamier's generally satirical treatment of both the protagonist and the settlers whose notions of proper behaviour Raleigh has offended, *Philosopher Dick* is unequivocal in its portrayal of the dangers of Raleigh's anti-social tendencies. Early in the novel a conversation between Raleigh and Doctor Valentine introduces the Man Alone's characteristic avoidance of women, which avoidance I will describe more fully during the discussion of Mulgan's *Man Alone*. As the consumptive doctor says to Raleigh,

'Buxom young women and I have parted company long ago .... I've not the heart—I've no longer the constitution—for that sort of thing. All I care for now is rest and ease, and to stop coughing. I might add, the company of a true friend like you. Indeed, my dear Dick, I look forward to you coming to stay with me with all the bright anticipations which at one time I used to give to objects of fleeting passion. A true and tender friendship is the best of all attachments.' 22

Later, the doctor and Raleigh would exchange stories about their unsuccessful affairs with women as they reinforce for each other the notion that male platonic friendship is superior. 23 Significantly, the doctor does not suggest that Raleigh should shun all companionship. In Chapter Four the omniscient narrator details the unhealthy effects which excessive loneliness have had on the protagonist. Beginning with a description of Raleigh's natural enjoyment of the solitude which allows him to learn the ways of the wilderness, to practise his music and painting and to read widely to expand his ideas, Chamier goes on to trace the protagonist's gradual addiction to isolation. Raleigh would become increasingly impatient of company and eventually suffer from ghastly imaginings. In the last sentence of the chapter the narrator summarizes the lesson to be drawn from Raleigh's isolation: 'Solitude had wreaked its baneful influence upon him, and was fast driving him to despair.' 24

Yet *Philosopher Dick* does more than report and then moralize over Raleigh's misanthropic rejection of station society. Raleigh's lengthy conversations with Doctor Valentine, as well as his letters to the doctor and entries in his journal, exhaustively

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analyze his decision to avoid people. Early in the novel, for example, Raleigh explains his way of life to the doctor:

'I am not a pessimist,' said Raleigh; 'and I neither revile nor repine at existence, because I feel how useless it is to do so .... But at least we may regulate our conduct somewhat according to our tastes, and live up to our own idea of happiness. I came out all this way to be free, and I find that there is no such thing. Still, since absolute independence is not to be had, I must keep up the illusion of it; so people call me 'an original'.'\textsuperscript{25}

The narrator does not comment on the facile romanticism implicit in Raleigh's ideas. Nor does the narrator comment when Raleigh parades his Victorian confidence in Science as he calmly describes the effects of scientific principles on the mysteries of Nature:

'Nothing remains which the crucible of modern science cannot disintegrate, or that the critical spirit fails to expose. We pry into the secrets of nature until we discover that there are none—the Unknown is not solved, it simply disappears.'\textsuperscript{26}

In his journal Raleigh embraces the bloody implications of Darwin's principles:

To fight is one of the first laws of nature. All animated existence is a conflict. War and bloodshed are 'necessary evils,' nor is there the slightest reason for believing that they were first introduced into the world with the original sin. They belong, on the contrary, to the very essence of the 'eternal fitness of things.' The most useful and beneficial institution in the glorious constitution of our universe. All animals (excepting man) are armed for the good fight; either to prey on the brotherhood, or for defence against insidious attacks, or for mastery in their own family relations. Creation is an armed camp, and the work of slaughtering its principal occupation.'\textsuperscript{27}

Again, the narrator allows these comments to pass without analysis.

The following passage from Raleigh's journal is significant not only because it shows Raleigh interpreting his experience without the narrator's oversight, but because it constitutes an early debunking of the Victorian myth that human progress is inevitable:

\textsuperscript{25} Chamier, \textit{Philosopher Dick}, pp. 64-65.
\textsuperscript{26} Chamier, \textit{Philosopher Dick}, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{27} Chamier, \textit{Philosopher Dick}, p. 206.
I purposely fled from the Old World—a world (such as I saw it then) that was discordant and un congenial to me—a world made up of trivialities, bustle, greed, sensuality, and emptiness—a world in which I wandered forth, listless and solitary, as a stranger lost in the whirl of some great city. I foolishly expected that a new country, wide and bountiful, oppressed with no burdens, hampered with no restrictions, but fresh and fair from the hands of God, would afford much happier conditions of life and progress. I indulged in the ordinary silly enthusiasm of young thinkers. To be free! ... I promised myself to analyse my thoughts, to look into my heart, to acquire the highest wisdom.

'And all our knowledge is, ourselves to know.'

But it is not so. The knowledge of ourselves will reveal us as nothing—nothing worth knowing. Within the inmost recess of our own minds there is no realm to explore, no secrets to unmask. We peer in vain within our consciousness of self—our inward being. We can distinguish certain features and tendencies, such as unsatisfied longings, distracted imaginings, a fire of passion, a yearning for sympathy or a bitterness of hate—beyond that all is a blank, the dark impenetrable mystery of the soul.

The end of the passage is particularly significant because it surveys the grounds for the emergence of the existentialist mood in both New Zealand's early fiction and in twentieth-century Western literature in general. For a romantic young man like Raleigh, whose perceptions of reality do not match the hopes that society has instilled in him, it is impossible to know anything with certainty. Thus Chamier's protagonist anticipates the existential difficulties that Diana Clouston would have more than sixty years later as a stranger in a big city in Marilyn Duckworths's A Gap in the Spectrum.

The joyless excerpts from Raleigh's journal are characteristic of a man worn down by his rugged existence as a boundary walker, one who gains little relief from human companionship. The climax of the novel occurs after the protagonist has endured an exhausting chase of a flock of sheep which had been attacked and scattered by wild dogs. Horrible evidence of 'the eternal fitness of things', which Raleigh had earlier celebrated, confronts him when he finally finds the sheep dead at the bottom of a ravine: the sheep had instinctively fled the dogs which had instinctively chased them. According to the narrator Raleigh is overcome by self-pity:

He asked himself what joy he had in life, and for what purpose did he exist. Poor solitary waif, adrift on dark and troublous waters, ever contending in an aimless and useless struggle.

His relief would be

To die! A momentary pang for eternal relief. There, at his feet, lay the gaping chasm; a ready grave awaiting him. One step further, one bound into space, and all would be over. ... Then from out the cavernous profundity he heard a voice calling to him—calling to him to come.²⁹

Just before Raleigh plunges over the brink, however, “a small still voice” speaks to him, “in thrilling accents” and calms “the tempest of his soul”. With a message echoing the biblical cadences of Carlyle’s Sartor Resartus, the voice reminds Raleigh that he must not “‘cavil at the universal law’” by killing himself and rebukes him for his “‘rage of despair’” over self-inflicted miseries:

‘Around thee all is benign and beautiful; the resplendent heavens above, the majestic snow-clad mountains, the sounding waters, and the waving woods. Thy much-loved nature smiles upon thee, and thou hidest thy face in the dust; she hails thee with gladness, and thou answerest with tears and craven groans.’³⁰

Although the prohibition against murder which Raleigh’s “small still voice” declares will be expressed in different words as it emerges from different phases of New Zealand’s evolving literary tradition, the prohibition itself will remain essentially the same:

‘Remember! ... [your life] was a gift of Heaven, Pause, madman! Reflect! Thou canst not offend against any of the ordinances of nature without incurring retribution. Every breach of the moral law brings its punishment, even in small things, as thou knowest; and would thou then brave them all, commit the irreparable crime, and appear before thy Creator as a murderer?

Arise; be up and doing! Let thy conscience be thy guide—it will not fail thee.’³¹

The heavenly voice which sounds in the preceding excerpt will become the expression of the individual’s conscience in later novels which assume the absence of God. For example, in Dan Davin’s Cliffs of Fall, Guthrie Wilson’s The Feared and the Fearless and Strip Jack Naked, Redmond Wallis’ Point of Origin and Graham Billing’s Forbush and the Penguins, the voice of the protagonist’s conscience implicitly signals that the murderer or self-murderer will be punished with execution or suicide.

²⁹ Chamier, Philosopher Dick, pp. 239-240.
³⁰ Chamier, Philosopher Dick, p. 241.
In an early New Zealand novel like *Philosopher Dick*, however, Heaven intervenes to dissuade Raleigh from suicide. After he has listened to the heavenly voice Raleigh does not plunge into the chasm, he faints. Tiny, his faithful sheepdog, then rouses him with a lick on the face. According to the narrator,

That dumb expression of love struck a sympathetic chord in his heart, and relieved the agonising tension of his overstrained feelings. He covered his face with his hands, laid his head on the ground, and wept.\(^{32}\)

When a description of the aloof mountains in refulgent Victorian prose completes the despairing, then elevated, then sentimental scene just described, it anticipates another convention which would echo through New Zealand's Man Alone fiction. In *Philosopher Dick* nature views the human dilemma impassively:

A flow of golden light burst upon the scene and immersed it in glory, a luminous haziness hung over the deep ravines and crept in soft shadows round the rocky spurs, while the lofty mountains gathered their purple mantles round their rugged breasts and from their cold clear heights looked down in sadness on the glowing expanse below.\(^{33}\)

Later I will explore Barry Crump's similar portrayal of nature in *A Good Keen Man*.

After his crisis Raleigh is ready to welcome the company of others, and the remainder of Chamier's novel describes how the protagonist learns to value human companionship until, despair abated, he resolves to join Doctor Valentine in town. Chamier anticipates a conventional happy ending when he portrays Raleigh enjoying society's respect, and, the narrator hints, preparing to extend his friendship with Alice, the novel's modest and virtuous heroine.

As Stevens comments, "the novel is a shapeless holdall, exasperating and baffling, but full of good things", adding that one of its main inconsistencies is Chamier's portrayal of Raleigh's personality.\(^{34}\) At the beginning of the novel Raleigh's satirical point of view allows Chamier to examine settler notions. By the end of the novel, however, Raleigh seems to accept the settler values against which he had railed so articulately.

I suggest that what Stevens identifies as an inconsistency is, in fact, a convention of New Zealand's Man Alone fiction. As in *Philosopher Dick*, the protagonist of Wallis' *Point of Origin* will exile himself from conventional society only to marry into it at the


\(^{33}\) Chamier, *Philosopher Dick*, p. 244.

\(^{34}\) Stevens, *The New Zealand Novel*, p. 23.
end of the novel. Although later Men and Women Alone will tend to seek fellowship with individuals rather than within a social group, the concept remains the same: as it is proclaimed in the Bible, repeated by the narrator of *Philosopher Dick* and implied by Mulgan in *Man Alone*: "It is not good for man to be alone." That the Men and Women Alone of New Zealand's fiction generally either return to society, strengthened, or die alone when they cannot overcome their alienation from others indicates that the need for fellowship is one of the most potent themes in New Zealand literature.

In *A South-Sea Siren*, the sequel to *Philosopher Dick*, Raleigh is once again the cynical observer. Although in *Philosopher Dick* Raleigh learned to value fellowship, he cannot truly belong to conventional society or enjoy a conventional happy ending until, in the sequel, he has learned to negotiate the gap between his ideas and society's. Future Men Alone, like those in Dan Davin's later novels who decide to live as fully as possible in what they perceive to be a limiting environment, will also learn that they must accommodate themselves to their situation. Chamier implies that Raleigh has begun this process of accommodation when he seals his friendship with Alice with a kiss. By going to Wellington to take up a position as a newspaper reporter, he will become a socially acceptable inquirer into the ways of society. At the end of the novel Alice anticipates that they will meet again: after her parting *au revoir* she tells Raleigh that she and her father are also moving to Wellington.

*Philosopher Dick* and *A South-Sea Siren* are important to the beginning of this study of New Zealand's literary existentialism because they contain the first sustained examination of an early Man Alone. Although Raleigh is déraciné and spends much of the first novel isolated and alienated from society, and although the clash of Raleigh's rationalism and his romantic wish for isolation nearly drive him to despair, he does not succumb to his distress about what he perceive to be the purposelessness of existence. After all, the plots of both *Philosopher Dick* and *A South-Sea Siren* operate according to popular Victorian conventions which assume the value of fellowship and the transcendence of God's law. By the end of these two nineteenth-century novels, Raleigh's acceptance of Darwinian theories about the survival of the fittest has been tempered by experience, and he has learned that he cannot survive alone. Jones distinguishes Raleigh from most of the early Men Alone who affirm settler values because, although Raleigh continues to criticize these values, he eventually learns to

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work within them. Although the conscious accommodation of the Man Alone to his situation is a characteristic I will later identify in New Zealand's existentialist literature, Raleigh would be more accurately defined as a pre-existentialist rather than an existentialist Man Alone. From the confines of his conventional settler society, Raleigh definitely considers himself to be a free-thinker — in later narratives, a prerequisite qualification for the development of an existentialist world-vision. As a 'solitary waif, adrift on dark and troublous waters' Chamier's protagonist introduces into New Zealand's early literature a kind of pre-existentialist anxiety. Yet Raleigh cannot be described as an existentialist: he is too closely bound to the a priori conventions governing the Victorians' world-view to accept that he must assume complete responsibility for his destiny in a Godless universe.

When Stevan Eldred-Grigg adapted Chamier's novel to The Siren Celia he caricatured Raleigh's Victorian response to the world, explaining in a brief acknowledgement of his sources that he had used Chamier's text "in a variety of ways, sometimes verbatim, more often modified and turned to new purposes". Unlike Jean-Paul Sartre in Nausea, Albert Camus in The Outsider or many other of the existentialist thinkers of the modern era, Eldred-Grigg could not be described as exploring existentialist concerns such as how individuals should comport themselves in an indifferent universe or how they establish meaning. Yet his novel illustrates the effect that these concerns can have when they have been absorbed into a society's view of what it perceives to be reality. Thus in Eldred-Grigg's twentieth-century version of the young man's journey towards maturity, Raleigh will not necessarily live happily ever after; his experiences will not teach him how to lead a virtuous and useful life in society. Instead they will teach him that while his destiny is utterly unpredictable, he must take responsibility for his actions.

Eldred-Grigg carries some of the Victorian ideas which are implicit in Chamier's novel to their logical but absurd conclusions. When, for example, Sir Dionysius remarks in The Siren Celia "I find little to distinguish ... between ladies and sheep", his comment amplifies the preference which Raleigh and Doctor Valentine had expressed for male companionship in Philosopher Dick into a deep-seated contempt for women. The author's satirical tone likewise accentuates the European settlers' belief in their right to occupy and control the new colony. Thus while Raleigh mentions only in passing the settlers' displacement of the Maori, in The Siren Celia the ironically named Lady

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36 Jones, Barbed Wire and Mirrors, p. 300.
38 Eldred-Grigg, The Siren Celia, p. 29.
Cerulean observes calmly that she is "a wholehearted advocate of race extermination". Eldred-Grigg treats the ideas espoused by the vicar's daughter, Miss Smith, with the same broad satire. Although her position requires that she dedicate her life to helping people, the sight of working women "with arms like boiled beef" doing their washing as their children "squalled in the mud beside them" fills her with disgust. She has yet to be convinced "of the moral or economic necessity" of the working classes. After several similarly unconscious expressions of hypocrisy, Miss Smith's romantic wish for isolation (with a companion) mocks Raleigh's earlier descriptions of the ennobling properties of Nature:

"My truest desire is solitude. Or rather, peace and tranquillity alongside some friend with whom I might find myself in moral and spiritual accord. To sojourn among the mountain crags with such a soulmate, or to walk the salty strand in such company, would always be my greatest pleasure."

Yet not all of the characters in Eldred-Grigg's novel are as unconscious of their hypocrisy. Unlike Philosopher Dick, which questions colonial habits and values even as it retains essential assumptions about how people should live in a God-directed world, The Siren Celia deliberately debunks not only the settlers' conventional pieties but also the notion that any kind of virtue is possible. Thus, when the Celia of the title remarks "I am such a free spirit, am I not? ... Free to be despised" she is perhaps the best example of a character who realizes the consequences of her actions. Her self-awareness is likewise apparent when she asserts,

"Every man steals ... it is only a matter of asking what he steals. Every law is unjust. It is only a matter of asking what group of powerful men has imposed the injustice, and what profit they make from its enforcement. Making the law or breaking the law there is no difference."

Later, Mrs Raleigh would remark about the farmers who have trusted her son and bought poor land:

"They have been told lies and believed them. If they had been told the truth our paddocks would be empty, and so would our account in the

bank. Let us keep lying to them, but tell the truth to ourselves. The chief
truth, after all, is that we are prepared to live with lies."43

Mary compresses this flattening of moral values even further when she writes in a letter
to her sister, Alice: "We are all thieves and liars."44

But of all of Eldred-Grigg's deliberate changes to the disposition of Chamier's
two novels about Raleigh, the greatest adjustment becomes apparent in their respective
endings. At the conclusion of A South-Sea Siren Raleigh leaves Sunnyvale with the
promise implicit in Alice's au revoir. At the end of The Siren Celia it is Alice who rides
away. When she says "'I have no idea where I shall go from here ... or who I shall meet
on the journey'", her parting words express the kind of twentieth-century uncertainty not
evident in Chamier's nineteenth-century romance. Unlike that of Alice in Chamier's
novel, her "'Au revoir'" does not anticipate a happy reunion.45

William Satchell's The Greenstone Door appears more obviously governed by
the conventions of nineteenth-century popular fiction than either of Chamier's two
novels about Raleigh.46 Yet despite the sensational aspects of a plot which evokes Maori
cannibalism in lurid detail and employs a hidden limestone rock formation as a magical
portent of the future, The Greenstone Door anticipates later New Zealand narratives
which consider the human predicament in a world without God as more than a lesson
about the detrimental effects of turning one's back on society and its Creator. This is not
to suggest that Satchell deliberately employs Purcell, a late-Victorian version of the
Byronic hero who is alienated from his past, from conventional society and from God,
to debunk the settlers' hypocrisy as Eldred-Grigg uses Raleigh in his version of A South­-
Sea Siren. Such a claim would be hard to support: the main plot of Satchell's novel
concerns the extraordinary schooling of an orphan towards virtue and manliness and is
happily resolved; the novel's tragic sub-plot maintains the Victorian convention that
alienation from society will lead to death. Yet while Purcell's agnosticism and conscious
commitment to the lost cause of Maori sovereignty are unquestionably part of his
characterization as a tragic nineteenth-century hero, when he expresses himself in terms
that would not look out of place among the existentialist writings of Albert Camus, he
definitely moves a step closer to this country's version of an existentialist hero.

45 Eldred-Grigg, The Siren Celia, p. 320.
46 William Satchell, The Greenstone Door (1914; rpt. Dunedin: Whitcombe, and
Tombes, 1914).
During most of The Greenstone Door Cedric Tregarthen, Purcell's foster-son, functions as a stock Victorian hero in a plot which E. H. McCormick describes as "more improbable and melodramatic than ever". After Purcell has spectacularly saved him from a Maori war party, Cedric grows up without any knowledge of his connections to a noble family. He is educated to the level of a Victorian gentleman: his foster-father teaches him languages, science, philosophy and boxing and encourages him to travel to Auckland to experience the colony's version of the "grand tour". In the main plot, which employs many of the conventions of a popular nineteenth-century romance, Cedric meets Helenora in Auckland, falls in love with her, and then temporarily loses her affections.

In the second half of The Greenstone Door, however, a tragic subplot based on historical events swallows the main plot. Cedric changes from a rather two-dimensional romantic hero to a protagonist who, according to Stevens' description of the Man Alone, tries to interpret his situation. When Cedric learns about his noble origins his pride will not allow him to accompany Helenora to England because, while there, she will associate with the baron who had disinherited his father. By remaining in New Zealand and then by thrashing the Brompart brothers, whose land agent father sponsored Cedric in Auckland, Cedric declares his independence from the hypocritical and greedy English. Disappointed in love, he nearly allows his sexual feelings for Sarah Brompart to sully his ideal love for Helenora. But Cedric leaves the city and follows the well-trodden path established by other nineteenth-century heroes who have sought solace in the wilderness:

Solitude was what I desired. I was sick of the noise and bustle of the town, the never-ending hurry for wealth so incomprehensible for me. I wanted to be alone with myself .... Depend upon it, there is no medicine for the mind that is sick equal to a lonely tramp amid new scenes. The physical effort, not violent but continuous, the health-giving air, the deep, dreamless, well-earned sleep—theese are the things that renew the body and refresh the soul.  

As Cedric seeks Nature's cure for heartache, he also evaluates the effect on the Maori of the steady influx of European settlers who want to appropriate their land:

Left to himself, with the knowledge he had already gained, the Maori might have gone on, accumulating strength with the passing of the

48 Satchell, The Greenstone Door, p. 239.
generations, until at length he was fitted to march side by side with his white brother. But the inrush of emigrants brought him daily into closer contact with them; the pace they set him was too swift; the grandeur of the temple of civilisation ceased to inspire, and now appalled and oppressed him. He hesitated, stopped and drew back, and even if war had not intervened to blot from the land the last traces of his labours and ambitions, it is doubtful if he would ever again have essayed the road, the first steps of which he had trodden in such hope and delight.49

Based on the previous excerpt, Cedric could certainly be considered an interpretive Man Alone. Yet a comparison of Cedric with his foster-father will show that the younger man has more in common with Baines' adventurous Edward Crewe, Lancaster's pioneer heroes or Satchell's earlier Clifford, than he has with Purcell who not only interprets his situation but is prepared to accept complete responsibility for it.

At first glance, however, Purcell seems a very unlikely precursor of New Zealand's existentialist Men Alone. In the excerpt below, for example, his fight to protect the sleeping Cedric from a Maori war-party bent on revenge is pure melodrama:

Scorched by the flames, perspiration streaming from his face, but uninjured with the child still safe in the bend of his arm, the dauntless white man caught his spear in a fresh grasp and looked with steady gaze at approaching death. No single arm could withstand even for a moment the multitude that now came against him. Only a miracle could save him.50

When Cedric compares his foster-father to one of the heroes of a novel by Alexander Dumas, his portrayal is of a romantic hero:

To me the career of Purcell remains a romance as deeply clothed in mystery as that of the Man in the Iron Mask. Whence did he come, and why? What tragedy was it that cut one so brilliant off from his kind and thrust him into the arms of savagery? All his actions, from the moment I knew him, were those of a man who had definitely determined his manner of life from that time forward; nor can I confidently say that I ever saw in his manner evidences of regret for a life he had left behind him. He had a warm heart for individuals, but I have sometimes thought that his attitude towards mankind was misanthropic and that an intellectual impatience with man's social systems might be at the root of his choice of the simple strenuous life.51

51 Satchell, The Greenstone Door, p. 41.
Yet the excerpts above also introduce Purcell's most heroic and, ultimately, his most tragic quality: like the doomed individual Camus describes in his interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus, Purcell will struggle until he dies for what he believes to be right. He will continue to resist the British authorities who are bent on acquiring Maori land. After he provides the Maori with arms to help them check settler expansion, the British army will execute him a traitor.

What makes Purcell into the kind of Man Alone who lives (and dies) in a way that anticipates the existentialist ideas later to be espoused by Albert Camus is his conscious decision to fight against insuperable odds to save the Maori from extinction. At the beginning of The Greenstone Door, Satchell presents Purcell's fight for justice in terms of Victorian melodrama and recounts all the unlikely, sensational details of his heroic actions with gusto. Towards the end of the novel, however, Purcell anticipates the lucid awareness of personal responsibility that would characterize an individual like Meursault just before his execution in Camus' The Outsider. In the following excerpt from the letter Purcell penned to his foster-son on the eve of his own execution, he explains to Cedric his choice to help the Maori in their fight against European domination:

From the point of view of the patriot I am doubtless a monster, but considered as merely a human being it may be that I have my redeeming points .... I am not under any illusions as to the result of the war; nor do I expect to achieve any good by allying myself with the native cause. But for thirty years these have been my people, and for thirty years their country has been my home. I shall not go far afield, and you need expect from me no deeds of derring-do; but I should be a sorry knave if I deserted my friends in their need, or failed to strike a blow in defence of those I love.52

During World War Two Camus would express similar ideas:

I realize that it is not my role to transform either the world or man: I have neither sufficient virtue nor insight for that. But it may be to serve, in my place, those few values without which even a transformed world would not be worth living in, and man, even if ‘new’, would not deserve to be respected.53

52 Satchell, The Greenstone Door, p. 358.
The Purcell who chooses to support his friends in a battle they cannot win also anticipates the "absurd conqueror" whose words Camus would record in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

'Conscious that I cannot stand aloof from my time, I have decided to be an integral part of it. This is why I esteem the individual only because he strikes me as ridiculous and humiliated. Knowing that there are no victorious causes, I have a liking for lost causes: they require an uncontaminated soul, equal to its defeat as to its temporary victories. For anyone who feels bound up with this world's fate, the clash of civilizations has something agonizing about it. I have made that anguish mine at the same time that I wanted to join in. Between history and the eternal I have chosen history because I like certainties. Of it at least I am certain, and how can I deny this force crushing me?"\(^5^4\)

Although the passages from Satchell and Camus seem to promote similar ideas, there can be no question of direct influence. *The Greenstone Door* was published at the very beginning of World War One, and its plot and characterization emerge from the Victorian certainties of the nineteenth century. Camus wrote from the opposite end of the world and expressed twentieth-century misgivings about human destiny at a time when World War Two seemed to threaten total annihilation.

In summary, although *The Greenstone Door* is governed by nineteenth-century forms and conventions, Purcell's alienation from settler society and conscious acceptance of his responsibility to support his Maori family and friends clearly make him a precursor of New Zealand's existentialist Men and Women Alone. In the next chapter I will trace the development of the Man Alone from Purcell to Johnson, who, although remarkably similar to Meursault in Camus' *The Outsider*, does not finally accept responsibility for his destiny in an indifferent universe.

Chapter Two
John Mulgan’s *Man Alone*: Between Two Myths

“There is a better day coming. Every year the settler is extending his landmarks and rooting himself like the trees he displaces. As the gum goes he advances. I see the apple orchards and the vineyards of the future ... The men we know — the reckless, the hopeless, the unhappy — are gone to their appointed places. I hear the voices of the children at play among the thick-leafed trees. I hear the mothers singing at their work. Over all the land rests the peace of God.”

The Gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labour.

According to Kendrick Smithyman, New Zealand writing has “usually been characterized by a pervasive conservatism and conformity which so operates that whatever changes occur come about as evolution rather than revolution”. At first glance, John Mulgan’s *Man Alone* (1939) appears to contradict this assertion: until the 1930s New Zealand fiction was moulded by its reliance on borrowed Victorian conventions, and compared to Chamier’s *Philosopher Dick*, Satchell’s *The Greenstone Door* or even to Alan Mulgan’s *Spur of Morning* (1934), *Man Alone* seems all the more radical in its portrayal of New Zealand in strictly New Zealand terms. A more searching look reveals, however, that John Mulgan’s novel contains enough evidence of the assumptions and concerns of New Zealand’s early writers to suggest its development from their Victorian tradition.

In the first section of Chapter Two I will trace three conventions which New Zealand’s early writers adapted from Victorian literature, through several works by Alan Mulgan, to his son’s *Man Alone*. Much of Alan Mulgan’s prose and poetry resembles earlier New Zealand writing in that it maintains the convention that nature is a creation designed for human benefit. It also upholds the popular notion that true love will conquer all obstacles. Although John Mulgan would subvert both of these ideas, their

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very importance to the plot of *Man Alone* points to their source. It is, however, John Mulgan’s insistence on a third convention, the necessity of fellowship, that definitely relates his novel to earlier New Zealand narratives and indicates how potent an influence the perceived need for fellowship has had on New Zealand literature.

Even so, *Man Alone* clearly acquired some of its modern qualities from Ernest Hemingway’s early fiction. In section ii I will explain John Mulgan’s emphasis on describing things in New Zealand rather than British terms as more than a simple reaction to works by his father. In my opinion *Man Alone* also reflects the younger Mulgan’s response to the style Hemingway developed to express his attitude towards the human condition, a style which profoundly influenced later existentialist writers. Although a handful of New Zealand’s wartime and post-World War Two writers would later modify Camus’ and Sartre’s ideas to suit their narratives about learning to survive in an uncertain modern world, Hemingway’s influence on *Man Alone* makes it the first New Zealand novel to approximate the style and substance of modern existentialist fiction.

In the third section I will compare *Man Alone* with *The Outsider* (1942) by Albert Camus to demonstrate that because Hemingway influenced both Mulgan and Camus, they produced remarkably similar novels. A comparison of their protagonists will reveal, however, that Johnson is not quite a modern existentialist hero because Mulgan presents him, ultimately, as a victim of New Zealand’s economic situation.

Since the publication of *Man Alone* commentators have disagreed about the extent to which it reflects the literary tradition of New Zealand’s early writers. James Bertram claims in his 1940 review of *Man Alone* that John Mulgan’s novel “breaks decisively with the narrower English literary tradition that has so often proved cramping to the New Zealand novel in the past”. More recently in *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature* Patrick Evans describes Mulgan’s reaction to that “narrower English literary tradition”, particularly as it appears in his father’s work, in nearly apocalyptic terms:

*Man Alone* doesn’t simply bounce off the father’s writing; it tries to repel it, to extinguish it, to burn it out and destroy it completely, and all it

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represents. Because of this determination to burn out a false way of seeing, Johnson’s story seems calculated to destroy forever anything positive about New Zealand.5

Paul Day expresses a similar idea, only more moderately, when he maintains in both of his short biographical and critical studies entitled John Mulgan that one of the underlying purposes of Man Alone is to describe New Zealand more realistically and critically than had been attempted in earlier novels. According to Day, Man Alone provides a corrective view of the “last falsified mutations” of the pioneers’ and settlers’ nineteenth-century faith in the perfectibility of human endeavour as they appear in writings by Alan Mulgan.6

In an essay about the relation of Spur of Morning to Man Alone Day suggests that “the shape and flavour of [Spur of Morning] sank in [John] Mulgan’s subconscious” so that when the younger Mulgan was planning his own novel, Spur of Morning “acted as a negative stimulus: he was driven to do something different from what his father had done”.7 By comparing the two novels Day shows that they evoke completely opposite views of New Zealand:

Where Alan describes with care the middle and upper-class stratum of New Zealand life, rubbing elbows with those who are sources of power and wealth, his son limits his vision to the predicament of the have-nots; and in particular to the rural have-nots.8

According to Day, one of the most dramatic differences between the two Mulgans is evident in their treatments of the riots which take place in their respective novels. In Spur of Morning Alan Mulgan portrays the police and artillerymen as powerful and disciplined in comparison to the “mob” of striking workers they chase from the street. In John Mulgan’s portrayal of the Queen Street riot, by contrast, Johnson is an innocent bystander who is caught up by the crowd; through his point of view the reader is able to observe the brutality of the authorities and the violence it provokes.9

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Like all of the commentators quoted above, C. K. Stead would agree that *Man Alone* is more modern than earlier New Zealand narratives because it accurately describes a limited setting and the experiences of an ordinary man, without ornamentation. Modern, too, is the way in which the reader is encouraged to search for meaning because the author's intention is not made explicit. Yet Stead would question Bertram's assertion that *Man Alone* breaks decisively from the Victorian tradition of New Zealand's early writers. He would also moderate Evans' insistence on the revolutionary nature of *Man Alone*, asserting instead that New Zealand's Victorian tradition is still evident in John Mulgan's specific subversion of aspects of that tradition. After comparing the motivation behind *Man Alone* to the reaction of one generation of poets to the next in England, Stead concludes that John Mulgan's novel does not inaugurate a revolution in New Zealand's literary tradition but instead is part of an evolutionary process in New Zealand's poetry and prose. In Britain poetic forms evolved from Victorian grandiloquence into a Georgian movement, which expressed small truths in a rural setting and realism in war or an urban setting, before developing into a Modernist reaction against some of the Georgian poets' tendency to quaintness and sentimentality. In New Zealand the romantic and melodramatic details of an early novel like Satchell's *The Greenstone Door* would give way to the Georgian realism of a novel like Jane Mander's *The Story of a New Zealand River* or to the more sentimental Georgianism of Alan Mulgan's *Spur of Morning*, which would give way to the careful delineation of likely events and the understatement characteristic of works by John Mulgan or Frank Sargeson.

Stead's remarks explain why Alan Mulgan may be described as a transitional figure between New Zealand's Victorian tradition and *Man Alone*. Although Alan Mulgan's prose and poetry are more realistic than New Zealand's earliest Victorian writing, they are nonetheless examples of what Stead calls "bad" Georgian writing: with their clichéd late-nineteenth-century language and reliance on images of a cosy England, they are unsuitable for the description of a raw young country distant from where the term "Georgian" originated. Stead draws an analogy between Auden and John Mulgan: while Auden was influenced by the American modernists Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, the poems of Auden and his followers show that they were really the "inheritors of the Georgian realist tradition"; similarly, *Man Alone* indicates that while John Mulgan adapted a lot of his technique from Ernest Hemingway, his description of Auckland's

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atmosphere of sickness and of the sterility of farm life owes more to his reaction to his father’s inaccurate depiction of New Zealand.11

The most cursory of surveys reveals that Alan Mulgan is not a New Zealand version of either Thomas Carlyle or of H. Rider Haggard. Mulgan senior did not load his writing with descriptions of his protagonists’ musings about the human condition; nor did he incorporate into his novels sensational descriptions of the fantastic events that motivate the plots of many of New Zealand’s early narratives. There is no passage in Alan Mulgan’s works where the protagonist is saved from suicide by a “small still voice” as there are in Chamier’s *Philosopher Dick*. Nor is there a description similar to Satchell’s evocation in *The Greenstone Door* of Purcell’s heroic (and extraordinarily unlikely) single-handed combat to save the orphaned Cedric Tregarthen from a horde of blood-thirsty Maori. Instead Alan Mulgan’s writings tend to evoke mostly comfortable images of New Zealand culture and scenery which the author often compares to the older culture and gentler scenery of “Home”, by which he always means Britain.

From Alan Mulgan’s earliest days as a writer, England was usually his subject or the standard by which his subject was judged. Although his constant looking back to England causes Alan Mulgan to seem, nowadays, an old-fashioned writer, his early *Three Plays of New Zealand* were once considered to be “modern”. According to Professor James Shelley in his preface to the first edition, playreading as popular entertainment had faded during the nineteenth century because of the mid-Victorian taboo on theatre and because the novel had supplanted it. But when plays began to follow the lead set by Henrik Ibsen and dramatically represent social and psychological problems, Europe experienced a “modern dramatic revival”. Alan Mulgan’s plays, with their “Barrie-esque elaboration of stage directions into descriptive passages, and the amplification of the customary foreword into Shavian commentaries upon the intellectual intentions of the plays” were “modern” because they were among the first plays in Australasia to adapt Ibsen’s new ideas.12

As intimations of Europe’s “modern dramatic revival”, Alan Mulgan’s *Three Plays* critically examine the assumptions of colonials who think of England as “Home”. According to Shelley, the *Three Plays* dramatize the “re-valuations involved in the struggle between the memory of old traditions and the presence of new conditions”.13 Each of the plays turns on this “re-valuation” process to reveal how the protagonists

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either succeed or do not succeed in resolving the conflict between old and new. Later, C. K. Stead would call this conflict “a tension ... in the mind of every New Zealander between ‘here’ and ‘there’”. 14

Shelley’s “re-valuation” process and Stead’s “tension” are both aspects of the gradual disappointment of New Zealanders’ faith in their nineteenth-century Myth of Progress. Put very simply, the early pioneers and settlers were inspired by the idea that, over time, they could recreate Britain in New Zealand. And they thought that the new Britain would be superior to the old country which they remembered nostalgically. Inevitably, when New Zealand did not become a better Britain, New Zealand’s literature reflected their sense of disappointment.

Over the years Alan Mulgan’s writing demonstrated his belief in the myth. Even though his early plays explore the idea that some will not succeed in resolving the conflict between old and new, on the whole they imply that “here” will eventually become more like “there” and that, in the meantime, “here” is not such a bad place. This is the theme of the first play of Mulgan’s trilogy. For the Love of Appin concerns the tension between the warm and bitter memories that its protagonist holds for the highland village where he was born and the effect these memories have on his life in New Zealand. When Angus Buchan must provide hospitality for the son of the laird who dispossessed his family of their traditional land in Scotland, his tragic early life is juxtaposed with his hard but moderately successful life on his own land in New Zealand. It is implied that New Zealand, unlike Scotland, has allowed him the freedom to prosper.

The tension caused among the members of another farming family by the differences represented by “here” and “there” is the subject of The Daughter. In the second play of the trilogy “here” means never-ending work on John Baily’s dairy farm, while “there” represents his wife’s more leisured past, with its associations of money, higher education, culture and the dream to visit “Home”. Alan Mulgan uses detailed stage directions to insure that the reader or audience understands how Grace, the daughter, and John, her father, have been affected by dairy farming:

[Grace Baily] is a young woman of nineteen, well-developed in figure, and handsome in face, but with a noticeable touch of commonness in her handsomeness. 15

[John Baily] is heavily built, round-shouldered, and rather dour in

15 A. Mulgan, Three Plays, pp. 29-30.
manner. He was a handsome and attractive man once, but twenty years of dairy farming and mortgages have told on his looks and his outlook on life. There is a physical resemblance between father and daughter.\textsuperscript{16}

Opposed to the daughter and father in this well-made play are the mother, Margaret Baily, and her son, Geoffrey:

[Margaret Baily] is faded, but retains the remnants of beauty, and a certain indefinable distinction subtly out of keeping with her surroundings.\textsuperscript{17}

[Geoffrey Baily] is a tall, rather rough youth, who in appearance resembles his mother more than Grace does, and has a touch of her refinement.\textsuperscript{18}

Thus Alan Mulgan explicitly contrasts the daughter’s commonness and the father’s dourness to the mother’s distinction and the son’s “touch of refinement”.

Between these two pairs is David Forrest who, as Alan Mulgan’s stage directions suggest, symbolizes the mother’s cultured past and her dreams of “there”. At the same time, Forrest embodies a successful citizen of “here”:

[David Forrest] has an intellectual, humorous and kindly face, and you can take him for a man who has done that difficult thing, made what the world calls a success of life without making a failure of himself. His manner is gracious, quiet and easy.\textsuperscript{19}

Forrest nostalgically remembers college days when he and Margaret Baily “used to talk about a trip Home”. But she could not make the trip, marrying instead a dairy farmer who inhabits a world bounded by “cows, cows, cows” and the price of butterfat. Over the years, Margaret Baily has transferred to her daughter all her hopes for a future defined by the wider horizons of “there”. Grace resembles her father, however, and cannot appreciate her mother’s values. When Forrest admits that he exchanged home and children in order to “get on” and remarks that dairy farmers are “surrounded by beauty”, Margaret Baily realizes that as a town-dweller he can never fully understand why she, a dairy farmer’s wife, feels trapped by farming life.

Because he shares both his parents’ lives, only Geoffrey can reconcile “here” with “there”. The play ends when, according to the stage directions, Geoffrey embraces

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16} A. Mulgan, \textit{Three Plays}, p. 33.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} A. Mulgan, \textit{Three Plays}, p. 29.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} A. Mulgan, \textit{Three Plays}, p. 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} A. Mulgan, \textit{Three Plays}, p. 33.
\end{itemize}
his mother. The reader or audience will know, "by the way she surrenders to him ... that she realises he understands". 20

In The Voice of the People, the final play of the trilogy, it is implicit in the staging that the protagonist, George Bromley, M. P. assumes "there" to be superior to "here". Although events in this satirical drama about colonial politics demonstrate that the protagonist lacks even a rudimentary knowledge of Britain's history (as Bromley puts it, "what have we got to learn from the past?") the picture of King George among his photographs and New Zealand prints reminds the reader or audience that "Home" is not forgotten. 21 The play's answer to Bromley's question is an ironic "nothing" — except how to avoid substituting demagoguery and blackmail for democracy in a new country determined to be politically freer than Great Britain.

Two female characters reinforce the lesson behind Mulgan's play. Bromley's sister, Miss Rachael, "who keeps house for her brother ... and worships him" contrasts with Beatrice Galbraith, who is "pretty, brisk and businesslike". 22 The two women represent opposing political systems, the first based on patronage and the second on the choices of an informed public. The Voice of the People concludes ironically when the M.P.'s demagoguery leaves him open to Galbraith's influence: she will blackmail him — in the name of democracy.

To a limited extent, Alan Mulgan's expression of his feelings for England is controlled by the mode he employs to describe them. For example, his "modern" and interpretive plays are naturally more ambivalent about England's charms than his poem, "The English of the Line". There is no "tension ... between 'here' and 'there'" in "The English of the Line" because this patriotic narrative poem is unequivocal in its praise of the ordinary English soldiers. Alan Mulgan republished the poem during World War II because, as he states in his forward to the wartime edition, a "reaffirmation ... about the achievements of English regiments is desirable". The excerpt below declares explicitly that the colonials owe a "debt" to Britain:

All through the swaying years of strife, of which we are the fruit,  
The English labourer left his fields — unrecking, poor and mute —  
And plodding after glory, ploughed a furrow deep and true,  
In the soil of hope and freedom, that has

20 A. Mulgan, Three Plays, p. 50.  
21 A. Mulgan, Three Plays, p. 57.  
22 A. Mulgan, Three Plays, p. 61.
cropped for me and you.
So when we sailed four years ago, we came
to pay a debt,
For the wide unhampered land of God in
which our lot is set.23

Based on the poem and the three plays already considered, Alan Mulgan’s works can be divided into two different categories of writing. The first variety is descriptive, tends to be uncritical of the subject depicted and includes narratives such as Home: A Colonial’s Adventure. Spur of Morning, however, belongs in the second, interpretive category of Alan Mulgan’s writing and conveys a more complex reality, often with irony and ambivalence.

Home: A Colonial’s Adventure is an account of Alan Mulgan’s first trip “Home”. Like “The English of the Line”, it contains none of the “tension” identified in the plays. When J. C. Squire summarizes Home: A Colonial’s Adventure as “a moving and beautiful piece of prose” in his preface to Mulgan’s book, he unconsciously indicates that the author’s attitude towards England (and perhaps his own as well) is sentimental rather than critical:

[Alan Mulgan] is, doubtless, a little blind to our faults, and rather kind to our virtues. He sees our country (which he expected to be much more industrialized) as we see it and know it; he sees ourselves as we hope ourselves to be, tenderly glossing over, perhaps, the defects of our qualities.24

A Pilgrim’s Way in New Zealand also belongs to the category of Alan Mulgan’s descriptive writing. As a travelogue of New Zealand, it is similar to Home: A Colonial’s Adventure in tone and theme because in both books the author is the narrator/guide for the reader who sees New Zealand or England through his eyes. Both books provide the reader with remarkably similar comparisons of the New Zealand bush and English woodlands. In A Pilgrim’s Way in New Zealand, for example:

[The New Zealand bush] is thicker and grander, but more sombre. The tangle of undergrowth makes progress away from the tracks slow. On the ground there is less light; even with a cloudless sky overhead it seems like early evening in the depths of the forest, and if you stand near the

straight columnar bole of a large kauri, the cathedral-like effect is heightened.\textsuperscript{25}

Years earlier, in \textit{Home: A Colonial's Adventure} Alan Mulgan identifies similar features:

The English wood is very different from the New Zealand bush. Majesty, often darkened into gloom, is the characteristic of the bush. Into the real forest little light penetrates; you walk — when you are not obstructed by thick undergrowth — in a cathedral-like twilight, past great trunks that serve as pillars of the green roof.\textsuperscript{26}

While the two previous excerpts describe the New Zealand bush in terms that would have been appreciated by Alan Mulgan’s British readers, they do not demonstrate its untamed and unpredictable nature. Later I will describe how John Mulgan’s view of the bush in \textit{Man Alone} is both grimmer and more modern.

\textit{Spur of Morning} also contains untroubled descriptions of New Zealand’s wilderness. The passage below which describes a bush walk taken by several of the novel’s characters comes from a chapter whose very title, “‘Over the Hills and Far Away’”, is a hazy cliché:

In the heart of the bush they drank from a little stream that trickled over a bank of dripping fern, and sat down for a few minutes in a tunnel of lovely twilight. Great trees almost met overhead, and the edge of the bush, with its dense growth of trunk and creeper, faced them like a wall .... They sat in silence for some minutes, as in the hush of a cathedral.\textsuperscript{27}

In \textit{Home: A Colonial's Adventure in England} and \textit{A Pilgrim's Way in New Zealand} Alan Mulgan tends to evoke the beauties of England and New Zealand uncritically, whereas in \textit{Spur of Morning} he often allows his characters to interpret what they are viewing. Squire would characterize both of the travelogues as “tenderly glossing over” England’s (or New Zealand’s) defects. The principal difference between the travelogues and \textit{Spur of Morning} is that although the novel seems to affirm the cultural values of upper class England, it also criticizes them. As I will demonstrate presently \textit{Spur of Morning} treats some of the English who emigrate to New Zealand, as

\textsuperscript{26} A. Mulgan, \textit{Home: A Colonial's Adventure}, p. 93.
well as some of the New Zealanders who worship all things English, with considerable irony.

For Frank Sargeson, however, *Spur of Morning* was entirely too dependent on the assumptions Alan Mulgan had inherited from Britain and then retained. In a parody of *Spur of Morning* entitled “Spur of Moment”, Sargeson’s protagonist first patronizes and then measures rough, working class New Zealanders against the studious and athletic boys of a boys’ college modelled on an English school:

Working on the wharves Andrew saw life in the raw — sweat and poverty and dirt, foul language and coarse habits, but fortunately there were other things. Even these degraded men had their virtues. Now, if they had had the advantages of a College education! Andrew thought wistfully of the happy days that were passed — the boys with their upturned faces in the smile of the morning — the cheerful tasks of scholarship, and football in the honey-coloured end of the afternoon.28

A little later in the parody, Sargeson’s Mulganesque narrator explicitly measures New Zealand against England — and finds New Zealand deficient:

Away across the seas was England — Home! There were slums and poverty and squalor of course, but so much that was gracious and refined. How different was his own country by comparison! There was the bush certainly — the cathedral-like bush, the great tops of forest giants wearing their chaplets of clematis. But was the bush enough?29

As if in answer to the protagonist’s question, Sargeson carries the comparison between New Zealand and England to absurd lengths at the end of his parody: the protagonist prevents himself from seeing any more “life in the raw” by jumping from the wharf. He drowns, “serenely confident that he had chosen the better path”. In *Man Alone* John Mulgan implicitly criticizes what he considered to be his father’s unrealistic view of New Zealand and England by refusing to admit any idealization of New Zealand’s scenery or society. In “Spur of Moment”, with its deliberately mixed metaphors and a protagonist whose sentiments are wholly inappropriate to his suicide, Sargeson’s feelings about Alan Mulgan’s style are far more apparent.

Despite its susceptibility to Sargeson’s mordant humour, however, the interpretive *Spur of Morning* could be seen as a “sport” in comparison with the travelogues. As such it is similar to Chamier’s *Philosopher Dick*, which I describe in Chapter One as an early interpretive novel published when New Zealand’s writers were

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29 Sargeson, “Spur of Moment”, p. 56.
still recording (and embellishing) their accounts of life in a new land. The two novels also share a similar purpose: both are constructed around the education of a young Man Alone. Like Raleigh, Mark Bryan begins *Spur of Morning* as a wrong-headed hero who must learn to live comfortably in society. While Raleigh is “too cynical” and “very unsociable”, Bryan is “angular”, intolerant and a prig. Raleigh develops a reputation for bravery and intelligence; as a politician, Bryan earns a reputation for integrity. Raleigh’s wish for solitude nearly drives him to despair before he resolves to rejoin society and learns to value toleration and moderation; Bryan’s political idealism costs him his seat in Parliament before he learns enough tolerance to maintain a relationship with a woman whose father stands for everything he despises.

*Spur of Morning* may be a sport among Alan Mulgan’s descriptive and uncritical writings, yet along with *Philosopher Dick* it helps establish a pattern of exile and redemption among New Zealand’s Men and Women Alone who will gradually become more self-aware and take more responsibility for their destiny in New Zealand’s mid-century narratives. In *Point of Origin*, for example, Redmond Wallis will combine aspects of *Philosopher Dick* and *Spur of Morning* with references to Dostoyevsky and Sartre: the protagonist will question the purpose of his existence, exile himself from conventional society, despise his girlfriend’s family and nearly commit suicide. And like *Spur of Morning*, *Point of Origin* will return to its nineteenth-century roots when its ending implies that the combination of the protagonist’s talent and ambition, with his love for his girlfriend and rejoining of society, will lead to his prosperity. In Albert Wendt’s *Sons for the Return Home* with its explicit references to Camus’ brand of existentialism, although the protagonist will make his way back to his family, he will also realize that he cannot stay. He will accept the unsuccessful end to his romance and will continue, nonetheless, to move forward.

But long before Wendt’s protagonist enacts his existentialist response to modern, unpredictable life, Alan Mulgan’s Bryan merely questions the *status quo* before settling down to a conventional existence. In the chapter entitled “The Rebel”, for example, Bryan is summoned to the head-master’s office for offending his high school class mates and teacher when he refuses to support the British Empire’s role in the Boer War. The narrator uses this opportunity to describe the benefits of the head-master’s “Oxon.” education:

[The head-master’s] soft voice did not conceal a ring of authority, the voice of a man brought up to rule and, outwardly at least, sure of himself. Many a boy, coming to school from a home where speech was thick and heavy, had unconsciously caught his tone and taken into the world
something of that suave superiority of manner, to the benefit of himself and his associates.\textsuperscript{30}

The narrator goes on to explain that the head-master was “a conspicuously successful importation” compared to some of the masters from England who could not adapt to New Zealand’s less rigidly-defined education system and were shocked to find that they had to “teach classes where the son of a barrister sat beside the son of a navvy”.\textsuperscript{31} That the narrator and presumably, Alan Mulgan, understand and accept the existence of a class barrier between England and England’s colony is conveyed by the narrator’s further comment about the head-master: once he had arrived in New Zealand, he “set himself quietly to adapt his English public school ideas to this cruder society”.\textsuperscript{32}

Alan Mulgan also uses Bryan’s acquaintance with the Trents, an easy-going and cultured English family, to develop the idea that the most successful immigrants to New Zealand are well-bred people who have learned their old-world civility and self-assurance through interaction with members of their own class at England’s better universities. Even when the head-master favourably compares New Zealand boys to English boys at school, the standard of comparison is the English upper class. The head-master preferred, for example, “the manly independence of the boys — bigger and more enterprising than their English prototypes, so much more ready to meet emergencies because they had always to do things for themselves”.\textsuperscript{33}

Evidently, Alan Mulgan’s narrator and the head-master in \textit{Spur of Morning} place a high value on an upper class English education. That value is not conferred automatically, however. The narrator does not treat Roger Overton, an English journalist, as sympathetically as either the head master or the Trents. The exclusivity of Overton’s attitude to class and education prevent him from adapting to New Zealand’s “cruder society”. According to the narrator,

He had a way, too, of saying, ‘Now, in England,’ followed by a comparison of scenery and customs, or of beginning a remark with ‘You people he-ar,’ which ruffled his hearers to an extent of which he was blissfully unconscious.\textsuperscript{34}

Philip Armitage, a New Zealand anglophile who believes that anything English is superior to anything colonial, hero-worships the unpopular Roger Overton. Yet unlike

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} A. Mulgan, \textit{Spur of Morning}, p. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{31} A. Mulgan, \textit{Spur of Morning}, p. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{32} A. Mulgan, \textit{Spur of Morning}, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{33} A. Mulgan, \textit{Spur of Morning}, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{34} A. Mulgan, \textit{Spur of Morning}, pp. 160-161.
\end{itemize}
Overton, whose attitudes and actions the narrator definitely presents as ridiculous, Armitage’s youthful prejudices are portrayed in such a way that they evoke an indulgent kind of irony. By the end of the novel Armitage has learned the value of England’s cultural tradition in a New Zealand setting.

In his review of several of Alan Mulgan’s works, Dennis McEldowney suggests that Armitage may be “at least partly a self-portrait of Alan Mulgan”. Certainly the patriotic feeling for England which Alan Mulgan expresses in Home: A Colonial’s Adventure are consistent with those exhibited by Armitage in Spur of Morning. At the beginning of Home: A Colonial’s Adventure, for example, the narrator partly explains his attitude towards England when he recalls that during his childhood, on “English mail day”, letters and newspapers “fed our love of Home, especially of England”. Although Alan Mulgan’s ancestral “Home” was really Northern Ireland, where his father originated, Alan Mulgan was born in New Zealand. Even so, he recalls that “England and English were always before my eyes — the English Army, the English navy, English statesmen, English power throughout the world”. The narrator of Spur of Morning describes Armitage’s New Zealand upbringing in similar terms:

From the very first his days had been encompassed with a warm nimbus of England’s glory. There were battle pictures in the illustrated weeklies; glorious coloured plates of British and Indian regiments in the Boy’s Own Paper; and ... many books reflecting England’s greatness, but few of her shame. The whole atmosphere of his upbringing ... was one of conventional acceptance of all that Empire implied.

In his review of Alan Mulgan’s works, McEldowney explains that by the time the author wrote Spur of Morning he “had sufficient detachment to laugh a little at the enthusiasms of Philip Armitage, without in the least repudiating (or even recognizing) the Englishness pervading his outlook”. McEldowney may be correct that Alan Mulgan pokes fun at his younger self in Spur of Morning, yet he fails to acknowledge the extent to which the author questions in his novel the automatic superiority of all things English. Nor does he give Mulgan sufficient credit for attempting to analyze the legacy of New Zealand’s Myth of Progress.

35 Dennis McEldowney, “Alan Mulgan”, Landfall: A New Zealand Quarterly 18, no. 3 (September 1964), 231.
36 A. Mulgan, Home: A Colonial’s Adventure, p. 6.
37 A. Mulgan, Spur of Morning, p. 19.
Unlike the "modern" early plays, which explore the transition between old and new only in a relatively comfortable rural background, *Spur of Morning* observes the effects of New Zealand's Myth of Progress in town and country and shows that, for many, life is hard. For example, early in the novel the narrator describes Auckland, where Bryan was born, as "a straggling, quickly-growing city, running up from the sea and spreading itself out over many hills, a city superbly beautiful in site, but without plan". While the houses of Auckland's well-to-do inhabitants are not beautiful, they do suggest comfort and solidity. Bryan's street, by contrast, is in a poorer section of town and is "drab". Words like "withered" and "ill-arranged" describe a nearby shop whose "contents were a standing invitation to the Chinese to open next door". When Bryan's political conscience leads him to become a Minister of Parliament in the Braxton Liberal government, the reader travels with him through urban slums and meagre back-blocks farms to learn that not all people in New Zealand enjoy New Zealand's progress.

In an essay that describes how the Myth of Progress is reflected in New Zealand's literature, Lawrence Jones states that, although Alan Mulgan questions the myth in *Spur of Morning*, he does not finally renounce it. When Bryan and Armitage travel by train through the countryside to attend political meetings, their perceptions of what they see are governed by their particular prejudices: Bryan, whom Jones describes as a "rampant cultural nationalist" visualizes, not the wealthy property owners who occupy huge tracts of the country, but a nation made up of small holdings. According to the narrator, Armitage sees the rough farms as "the seed of civilization, the heart of endeavour" because he loves England's older culture. In other words, Armitage visualizes them as the beginnings of a new tradition like England's. Although Bryan and Armitage have different visions of the country's future, the narrator reports that their thought "converged into one channel — nation building". According to Jones this agreement resolves the tension inherent in the novel's central theme, that sooner or later (and *Spur of Morning* seems to indicate later) New Zealand will outgrow its unbeautiful childhood and develop a unique culture which is nonetheless related to Britain's.

Although Alan and John Mulgan reacted to the Victorian tradition differently, that both are descendants of the tradition can be determined by tracing through their works the evolution of three conventions retained from New Zealand's nineteenth-century literature. Unlike his father, who mostly romanticized what he considered to be

the real New Zealand, John Mulgan modernized these conventions or overturned them. The first convention takes two forms, depending upon the writer's attitude towards the wilderness. Some novels or short stories describe nature as beneficent and characters find solace or strength in the wilderness, particularly during long, solitary walks. Some of the early narratives reveal the influence of Darwin's theories about the survival of the fittest when they describe the wilderness as a tester of men, and their protagonists survive experiences in the bush to rejoin their fellows as better men. The second convention is that true love will triumph, leading to a happy ending when the main characters will marry and become useful members of society. But the third convention, that fellowship is important, is definitely the most significant. Although the first two conventions have become less influential in serious literature since authors have tended to view nature as indifferent rather than beneficial and have questioned the very possibility of true love, the majority of New Zealand's Man or Woman Alone narratives still support the belief that, in order to survive, individuals must value fellowship.

There are several early Men Alone who support the convention that lonely communion with nature is beneficial. Edward Crewe, the protagonist of W. M. Baines' *The Narrative of Edward Crewe* (1874) is one of the earliest when he claims

> there are few seasons so conducive to untrammelled and hopeful thought as when walking alone on a road, where, free from distracting surroundings and with greatly unoccupied senses, the mind obeys the will.41

Crewe's praise of walking as an aid to thought is echoed by the narrator of Chamier's *Philosopher Dick* who describes Raleigh's attraction to the life of a boundary walker. Satchell's *The Land of the Lost* and *The Greenstone Door* also specify the benefits of solitary walking, the former when Clifford seeks independence in the gumfields of Northland and the latter when Cedric eschews civilization to walk home while he considers the state of his heart.

Not all of the early writers believe that lonely communion with nature will yield well-being, however. In *Philosopher Dick* for example, Chamier questions the health-giving properties of too much solitude in the wilderness when Raleigh is nearly driven to suicide by his joyless existence as a boundary walker. Chamier, Satchell and G. B. Lancaster portray several of their minor characters as living in degrading circumstances as a result of their isolation in the bush, far from the civilizing influence of society.

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As New Zealand writers adopted the late-Victorian move towards Realism into their narratives, the convention that nature is beneficent faded slowly and irregularly from New Zealand literature. *The Greenstone Door*, for instance, is a mixture of Victorian melodrama and Darwinian theories. A combination of old and new is also evident in G. B. Lancaster’s 1904 collection of short stories, *Sons o’ Men*. Among the stern and sentimental celebrations of mateship in Lancaster’s stories is the Darwinian notion that while some men are weakened or killed by their wilderness experience, others survive and thrive. Thus the back country setting of Lancaster’s stories is a “stern mother” who will “strain”, “burden” and “test” men who will either “stand up, confessed in strength” or “go under”.

Lancaster’s back country highlights the difference between the bush in New Zealand’s early novels and short stories and in the later narratives. Generally, in the early prose, Nature is almost a character by herself: she tests men and allows them solace. As the pioneer heroes of New Zealand literature became more like modern Men Alone, however, writers portrayed the wilderness they faced as indifferent to their struggles.

There are early hints of the move towards Realism in even such a minor melodramatic novel as *The Land of the Lost*. Although Satchell’s novel has an improbable plot peopled with stock Victorian characters, according to E. H. McCormick “Satchell reveals himself as an exceedingly minor Thomas Hardy, his Wessex the north of Auckland.” In the excerpt below the omniscient narrator of *The Land of the Lost* provides a backdrop that is Hardyesque in its cosmic view of the gumfields:

> Night takes another turn of his wheel. The lights in the scattered shanties are going out one by one. The sound of the scraping dies away. The moreporks fly soundlessly across the dreary scrub lands.

Alan Mulgan, however, did not share the Realists’ perception of Nature as indifferent to the human struggle. On the contrary, *Spur of Morning* and *A Pilgrim’s Way in New Zealand* describe the New Zealand wilderness as beautiful and yielding bountiful fruit to the hard-working farmer, manufacturer or entrepreneur. While Alan Mulgan’s writings demonstrate that he was aware of hardship and poverty in New Zealand (in *Spur of Morning* the protagonist observes both as he learns how to be a

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politician), Alan Mulgan’s emphasis, particularly in *A Pilgrim’s Way in New Zealand*, is on the positive and comfortable aspects of life.

That John Mulgan’s view of nature was different to his father’s is apparent when I compare *A Pilgrim’s Way in New Zealand* to *Man Alone*. The epigraph of Alan Mulgan’s travelogue comes from a poem by the popular New Zealand poet Jessie McKay. With its anthropomorphized portrait of morning, mist and water, McKay’s poem summarizes what John Mulgan would have objected to in his father’s writing:

Land of the morning, Kiwa’s golden daughter,
Land of the fleet-foot mist and the singing water.45

According to Day, however, while the son had remonstrated with his father about parts of the earlier published *Spur of Morning*, he was never less than polite in his comments to his father about the books he helped prepare for publication.46

In *A Pilgrim’s Way in New Zealand* the narrator/guide’s description of the primeval forest to an imaginary visitor to New Zealand is accurate, yet John Mulgan would have considered it incomplete. When Alan Mulgan reports “here is the New Zealand forest at its richest — the enormous trees, the density of the undergrowth, the prodigality of trees of many kinds and the clear streams whispering between banks of ferns” and mentions how difficult the early pioneering must have been, his description does not extend to the suffering or accidental death that were an essential part of it. Instead, the narrator/guide claims that “the forest has one great virtue — there is nothing deadly in it”, which is true if “deadly” is restricted to a few poisonous plants.47 In *Man Alone*, by contrast, John Mulgan describes matter-of-factly how easy it was for a back blocks farmer to die when his

axe slipped into his leg below the knee one day when he was out at the back, splitting fence posts. He bled to death, and lay for a week before anyone thought of looking for him, and when they found him the blood was black and dry where he had crawled half-way up the track to home, and there were flies on him.48

Where father and son differ most is in the purpose each attributes to the bush. Although in *A Pilgrim’s Way in New Zealand* Alan Mulgan’s cautionary words about the cutting down of the Waipoua State Forest for short term profit indicate that his

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attitude to the wilderness is far removed from the exploitative spirit evinced by an early pioneer adventurer like Edward Crewe, he still likens the wilderness to a cathedral. John Mulgan, by contrast, does not describe the bush in terms of anything created by or for human beings. Instead of the anthropomorphized images of New Zealand that Alan Mulgan offers to his readers, in *Man Alone* the reader looks through Johnson’s eyes at an insensible Nature. Although for both writers the bush is almost impenetrable (according to Alan Mulgan it is a “tangle of undergrowth”, and walkers are obstructed by “dense growth ... like a wall”, and according to John Mulgan it is “deep, thick, and matted”), the father’s forest is prodigious while the son’s wilderness is not grand but terrible. During Johnson’s flight through the bush in *Man Alone* to escape the consequences of his accidental shooting of Stenning, he soon realizes that there is every possibility that he may not survive:

This was real bush that he was going into now, 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, the ground heavy with layers of rotting leaves and mould.49

When the narrator records Johnson’s decision “that if he were to endure through the next three months he must have warmth and shelter for himself”, John Mulgan’s image of New Zealand extends well beyond his father’s borrowed and comfortable images to include the country’s lethal qualities.50 The narrator’s report of Johnson’s refuge in a small, damp and uncomfortable cave confirms the different views that the father and son maintained. In *Man Alone* Johnson’s survival of his escape though the bush is a matter of luck; rather than growing stronger, he nearly succumbs to exposure and starvation. In the excerpt below the narrator’s description of Johnson’s sojourn in his rock shelter does not mention the health-giving properties of the wilderness which Baines and Satchell praise and which Lancaster celebrates for those strong enough to survive:

Johnson lost all real count of time there in the dark loneliness of the bush. There was sound all the time, of the river running, and birds from early morning to the owls calling at night, but he felt 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

49 Mulgan, *Man Alone*, pp. 138-139.
50 Mulgan, *Man Alone*, p. 139.
the bush that pressed upon him, and weighed him down, until the sound of his own voice was startling to him.\textsuperscript{51}

Day describes Johnson’s time in hiding as “the testing ordeal of survival in the bush — an ordeal that clears his sight and purifies his resolve”\textsuperscript{52}. As such it resembles Raleigh’s deliberate self-exile in \textit{Philosopher Dick}, because in both novels the protagonists nearly perish. Yet \textit{Man Alone} is different from any of the narratives already discussed (including \textit{Philosopher Dick}); the narrator who relates Johnson’s passage through the bush does not assign any meaning to his efforts to survive.

John Mulgan subverts a second Victorian convention which can be traced from New Zealand’s Victorian tradition. In many early and more contemporary New Zealand narratives, romantic love often resolves plot complications so that the main characters find happiness.

In the novels dealing with the most isolated frontier situations, women are not significant (although there is an implicit hope for their future civilizing influence). In \textit{The Narrative of Edward Crewe} women are irrelevant to Edward’s adventures: women were simply not heroes or explorers in pioneering situations. Women are similarly marginal figures in Lancaster’s sketches about the “sons of men” because the main theme in most of these stories is how mateship helps men to survive. Walt summarizes the status of women in \textit{Sons o’ Men} when he says in “Such a Girlie”,

“A dog means er lot t’a chap .... ‘N a hoss means er lot. ‘N a mate means more’n both. But there’s times when a chap wants a girl—what’ll mean more’n all—‘n he’d go ter blazes willin’, t’ get her. ‘N maybe he’ll go t’ blazes ef he don’t git her.”\textsuperscript{53}

However, in \textit{Philosopher Dick} and its sequel \textit{A South Sea Siren}, the love story is indispensable to the resolution. Alice Seymour is virtuous and hard working, and her exemplary behaviour helps Raleigh to rejoin society. \textit{A South Sea Siren} concludes with the promise of their marriage.

Much the same can be said about the ending of \textit{The Land of the Lost} except that after Clifford resolves the mystery over his inheritance and he and Esther plan to live happily and prosperously as members of their settler society, Satchell uses Jess Olive to anticipate that society. In an inspirational statement that connects the romantic resolution of Clifford’s difficulties to a more general smoothing of New Zealand’s

\textsuperscript{51} Mulgan, \textit{Man Alone}, pp. 141-142.
\textsuperscript{52} Day, \textit{John Mulgan}, New Zealand Writers and Their Work, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{53} Lancaster, \textit{Sons o’ Men}, p. 233.
pioneer roughness, the author mixes inevitable social progress with optimistic religious faith, thereby summarizing the Myth of Progress which John Mulgan would later debunk:

“There is a better day coming. Every year the settler is extending his landmarks and rooting himself like the trees he displaces. As the gum goes he advances .... I see the apple orchards and the vineyards of the future .... The men we know — the reckless, the hopeless, the unhappy — are gone to their appointed places. I hear the voices of the children at play among the thick-leafed trees. I hear the mothers singing at their work. Over all the land rests the peace of God.”

In *The Greenstone Door* Helenora is a less than ideal heroine: she attempts to break Cedric’s heart in revenge for his father’s disappointment of her mother. But like Raleigh, Helenora has learned tolerance by the end of the novel. After the requisite misunderstandings between the romantic leads, Helenora helps Cedric to recover from the mental breakdown caused by his part in the Land Wars and Purcell’s execution. The defeat of the Maori closes the Greenstone Door in the sub-plot. Yet the main plot is more happily resolved when the romantic leads realize the extent of the tragedy of the Maori/Pakeha conflict and forbear from further revenge against each other. Satchell concludes his novel by joining the end of the Maori/Pakeha conflict with the resolution of Cedric’s romantic troubles: “And so at last for us two also the Greenstone Door was closed.”

Romantic love is equally crucial to the resolution of *Spur of Morning*, where two romantic pairings underpin the importance of traditional standards set in England and demonstrate that the characters have, indeed, developed into well-rounded New Zealanders even as they affirm New Zealand’s Myth of Progress. Thus Bryan, after initial dislike, falls in love with Sylvia Feldon, the daughter of a wealthy squatter whose huge station and purchased political power he despises. While Bryan will probably always dislike Feldon and what he represents, by the end of the novel his ideals have been tempered with a realistic view of New Zealand as it really is, and he has gained enough tolerance to accept that Sylvia’s values do not resemble those of her father. By the end of the novel Sylvia also has learned that the wealthy squatters’ imitation of the English landed gentry has no more value for her than the circumscribed, intellectually stifling original she observed in England and that her father, who has financed another

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candidate who has little chance of winning in order to lessen Bryan's chances of re-election, merits the contempt that Bryan holds for his money and position.

Alan Mulgan uses the romantic joining of a second pair of characters to bring his novel to a conventional conclusion. When Philip Armitage and Barbara Blaize fall in love they resolve the "tension ... between 'here' and 'there'" implicit in Armitage's uncritical worship of "Home". Barbara is the daughter of cultured English people who "were perfectly sure of their position .... Their dignity never worried them, because they never thought of its being slighted". Barbara's dignity is likewise unaffected by the fact that she may have to work for a living. She resembles Bryan's head-master when her marriage to Armitage demonstrates that old and new can be reconciled in New Zealand.

Sylvia's friendship with Barbara allows Alan Mulgan to compare their backgrounds, which comparison provides another indication of his fundamental belief in the New Zealand Myth of Progress. For example the narrator describes Barbara's father who, after a nostalgic moment spent reminiscing about "Home", disciplines himself mentally and goes off to mend a fence saying, "A good land this, a beautiful land — and in the making!" The Colonel's opinion of Sylvia's father, which opinion Sylvia will soon hold as well, is a cautionary corollary to his statement of New Zealand's Myth of Progress: Feldon has "a smattering of culture, and more money than is good for anyone. He represents a dangerous element in this country — power without tradition."

Unlike Chamier, Satchell and Alan Mulgan, however, John Mulgan subverts the convention that romantic love will overcome all obstacles. Day asserts that there are no romantic relationships between any of the males and females in Man Alone and goes on to describe some of the novel's unloving male/female relationships. First there is the soldier whom Johnson meets on the ship to New Zealand: he is unconcerned that his family must wait while he and Johnson go into Auckland to drink. Then there is Johnson himself, new to Auckland and lonely: he does not establish even a casual sexual relationship with the woman Day describes as a "melancholy tart". Later Johnson chooses not to marry Mabel, the young woman he casually dates while working at Blakeway's dairy farm. When Mabel's father explains that in order to "get a bit of land" Johnson must marry and then sublimate everything to the acquisition and improvement

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56 A. Mulgan, Spur of Morning, p. 103.
57 A. Mulgan, Spur of Morning, p. 101.
58 A. Mulgan, Spur of Morning, p. 104.
of a farm, Johnson’s reluctance recalls Raleigh’s lack of ambition in *Philosopher Dick*. Chamier and John Mulgan even describe their protagonists’ reluctance to “getting on” in similar terms. Stead, the station manager in *Philosopher Dick*, is critical of Raleigh: “I don’t think he has one idea about bettering his condition.”60 The narrator of *Man Alone* twice makes a similar comment about Johnson, but without Stead’s disparaging tone, when he reports that “Johnson listened desultorily, having no ambition” about sharing a farm with either Scotty or Mabel.61 Day’s assertion that Johnson’s relationship with Mabel succumbs to “the predominant fact of life in New Zealand: that normal human relationships must give way to considerations of money”62 marks one of the most fundamental differences between Chamier’s and John Mulgan’s novels. While Raleigh will inevitably marry Alice, *Man Alone* will end without a happy pairing of the hero and heroine.

Extending Day’s list of unromantic male-female relationships in *Man Alone*, there is the long-term marriage of Mabel’s mother and father. It seems comfortable enough, but that comfort has been won only after years of hard work governed by economic considerations. Johnson’s brother and sister-in-law, his brother nervous about Johnson’s past and his brother’s wife “pale and mean with dislike”, appear to be happily married with children. Yet nervousness and meanness are not part of a conventional description of a romantic union, nor does their response to Johnson foreshadow a conventionally happy resolution to his troubles.

The most important male-female relationship in *Man Alone* is between Johnson and Rua. Like the relationships just mentioned, it is not romantic and certainly does not lead to a happy ending in any conventional sense. Unlike Cedric in *The Greenstone Door*, whose sexual feelings for Sarah threaten his ideal love for Helenora and lead to his solitary walk through the wilderness, Johnson does not try to avoid a sexual liaison with Rua. Soon after their relationship begins, however, Johnson fears that she will threaten his position at Stenning’s farm.

Although both express it very differently, *Sons o’ Men* and *Man Alone* share the frontier (later the Hemingway) view that women should inhabit the margins of men’s lives. Walt in *Sons o’ Men* describes women as a complication — either glorious or infernal. When the narrator summarizes Johnson’s thoughts about Rua it is apparent that, like Walt, Johnson thinks of Rua as a complication. Unlike the farms hands Walt had described earlier, however, Johnson is not willing to “go ter blazes” to get her:

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60 Chamier, *Philosopher Dick*, pp. 16-17.
61 Mulgan, *Man Alone*, pp. 91, 92.
[Johnson] did not want trouble. He was not afraid of it, but he did not want it. In the life which he had there now, with Stenning and the farm, he did not want to be disturbed by Rua, who did not matter to him at all.\textsuperscript{63}

In her article “John Mulgan: A Man You Can’t Kill” Trixie Te Arama Menzies argues against a facile assumption of John Mulgan’s sexism in \textit{Man Alone}. She sees Rua as “one of the best (if not the best) Maori women characters created by a Pakeha writer, a man at that”, and regards her relationship with Johnson as more than simply an example of the protagonist’s alienation from love. She also emphasizes Rua’s position as a Woman Alone on Stenning’s farm. Explaining her behaviour as natural to a Maori who is genuinely happy only among her own people, Te Arama Menzies points out that Rua is the sole provider of cash on the farm and that her cows provide the only fresh milk. Describing Rua as “a survivor” Te Arama Menzies effectively moves Rua from the margins to the centre of \textit{Man Alone}.\textsuperscript{64}

Both views of Rua, as a centrally important character or as a marginalized female, can be supported by events in the novel. Rua’s actions nearly cause Johnson’s death. They lead to his flight from New Zealand and to his eventual joining of the International Brigade in Spain. They also lead to the novel’s “happy” ending when Johnson becomes one of the “men ... you can’t kill” because he had learned to endure hardship. Evidently, Rua is an important motivating force in the plot. On the other hand the frontier or Hemingwayesque view of Rua as merely a complication, a view which Johnson himself maintains, corresponds to the idea that John Mulgan uses the Johnson-Rua relationship to subvert the Victorian convention that romantic love is part of a happy resolution. In no way does Rua resemble a Victorian heroine: compared to any of the heroines already discussed, she is ignorant, sulky and slatternly. Furthermore, Rua does not help Johnson by telling the authorities that he had killed Stenning accidentally, in self-defense. She returns to the protection of her family, instead.

In summary, the development of a distinctive voice with which New Zealand writers could describe their social and physical environment was uneven. Alan Mulgan, for example, was reacting against the verbosity and sensationalism of some of New Zealand’s earlier writers when he tried, in the manner of the English Georgian poets, to portray his country more realistically. Yet because he directed his descriptions of New

\textsuperscript{63} Mulgan, \textit{Man Alone}, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{64} Trixie Te Arama Menzies, “John Mulgan: A Man You Can’t Kill”, \textit{Journal of New Zealand Literature} 8 (1990), p. 77.
Zealand at British readers, even his “modern” ideas were expressed in terms they would understand. In *Man Alone* John Mulgan also wrote about New Zealand, but in strictly New Zealand terms. His novel could still be described as evolving from his father’s work, however, because three of the conventions that are important to the plot of *Man Alone* are also evident in several of the nineteenth-century Victorian-influenced narratives already discussed, as well as in *Spur of Morning*. Although John Mulgan subverts two of the conventions that Chamier, Satchell, Lancaster and Alan Mulgan used to govern their plots, debunking the belief that nature is beneficent and that love will resolve the protagonists’ difficulties, as we shall see he maintains the vital importance of fellowship, even as he gives it a more modern interpretation. Thus, while John Mulgan’s *Man Alone* is distinctly more modern in style and mood than anything produced by his father, both of the Mulgans could be described as transitional between the Victorian tradition of New Zealand’s early writers and the Modernism that would exert an increasing influence on New Zealand’s post-World War Two literature.

Both Johnson’s realization of his need for fellowship and the title of the novel about him suggest the merging of Victorian and Modern influences in *Man Alone*. Not only does Mulgan’s novel recall the tendency of early writers in New Zealand to describe the adventures and vicissitudes of Men Alone characters who spend time in the wilderness before they rejoin society to pursue productive lives, but it also summarizes the dying words of Harry Morgan, the protagonist of Ernest Hemingway’s *To Have and Have Not*. In this section I will trace some of the modern characteristics of John Mulgan’s novel specifically to Hemingway’s early prose and more generally to the Modernism that Hemingway helped to shape.

When Morgan says “No matter how a man alone ain’t got no bloody chance” he seems to be restating, in Hemingway’s terms, one of the lessons that New Zealand’s early writers retained from the Victorians, that as an irredeemable loner Morgan is doomed to die. In a letter to his father, Mulgan himself describes the novel he was writing as “Hemingwaysque”. James Bertram who attended Oxford with Mulgan in the early 1930s would agree and draws a connection between the title of Mulgan’s

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novel and Morgan’s dying speech in Hemingway’s *To Have and Have Not*, noting that *Man Alone* “owes more than its title to Hemingway”.67 Ian Milner, who also knew Mulgan at Oxford, likewise suggests the importance of Hemingway’s influence when he remarks in his memoir that “John admired Hemingway as a writer and as the creator of a machismo-charged hedonistic lifestyle that in some ways he sought to make his own”.68

Yet contemporary Leftist critics of *To Have and Have Not* did not see Hemingway’s novel as suggesting a Victorian moral so much as a Marxist one. In his essay about Hemingway as the “gauge of morale” of the 1930s, Edmund Wilson explains that Leftist critics greeted *To Have and Have Not* as “a new revelation”, summarizing their interpretation of its significance as “Harry Morgan is made to realize as he dies that to fight in this bad world alone is hopeless”.69 This is quite different from the moral contained in *Philosopher Dick*, the ending of which ensures the maintenance of conventional society. Leftist writers in the 1930s, by contrast, wanted to demonstrate their commitment to the anti-bourgeois cause. Thus, although Mulgan’s protagonist resembles his Victorian predecessors in that after his ordeal in the wilderness he learns to appreciate fellowship, Johnson is also a hero for the 1930s: unlike Raleigh, he will never become part of an oppressive society. The Johnson who has learned to value “going somewhere with people” and “doing something together”,70 first with fellow “have nots” during the Auckland Queen Street riots in 1932 and then with Leftist combatants during the Spanish Civil War, is last seen in retreat with a band of rebels.

New Zealand commentators support a range of views as to Mulgan’s main purpose in *Man Alone*. Bertram’s account of their education at Oxford University in the early 1930s suggests that Mulgan was affected by the Marxist ideas in the air at that time: “Politically [Mulgan] had moved sharply to the left, as had many of us in these gloomy years.” According to Bertram not only were “the signs of distress plain in London”, but “abandoned factories and shuffling dole queues underlined economic crisis” further north.71 According to Day, however, *Man Alone* is more of a case study of

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"the land and people of New Zealand".\textsuperscript{72} C. K. Stead's assertion that Day minimizes the politics in what is essentially a Marxist novel ("Mulan's hero is innocent of politics, but his novel is not") is more inclusive than either Bertram's or Day's views because it emerges from his opinion that Mulgan's novel is "simultaneously 'modern' and New Zealand"\textsuperscript{73}.

While the plot of \textit{Man Alone} supports Day's interpretation of Mulgan's purpose, it will also sustain Stead's more political view. In the much longer Part One, the reader is able to observe and interpret the New Zealand environment and society through Johnson's eyes as he travels the country as an itinerant worker between the wars. Part Two is shorter, less detailed and takes place in Europe. There Johnson will fight for the survival of his mates because, having survived his arduous wilderness experience in the tradition of New Zealand's earlier Men Alone, he has learned that "a man spends too much time alone".\textsuperscript{74} A comparison between the protagonists of \textit{Man Alone} and \textit{For Whom the Bell Tolls}, confirms what Stead labels as Johnson's political innocence. Unlike Robert Jordan, who will choose to die for a political cause even though he is aware of the mixture of naïveté and dishonesty that motivates his fellow rebels, Johnson has no firm political convictions. His announcement to O'Reilly, "I like you, Jack .... I like the fellows you go around with. If you're going that suits me", suggests that Johnson will go to Spain in simple appreciation of that most characteristic of New Zealand needs, male fellowship.\textsuperscript{75} Johnson's experience in Part One of the deprivation caused by the Depression and his accidental part in the Queen Street riots also justify Stead's more political approach as they gradually make the protagonist more aware of economic and political conditions. And in Part Two, although Johnson has gone to Spain to be with his friend, by the end of the novel he is a symbol of the solidarity of men.

Yet whatever the novel's purpose, the final paragraph of \textit{Man Alone} clearly leaves room for hope about Johnson and the human condition:

[Johnson] didn't seem worried or unhappy. He was just sitting there. This fellow guessed he came through alive, but he didn't see him again. Myself, he said, looking back and considering quietly a war that was not very satisfactory, all things quietly considered, myself I find one

\textsuperscript{72} Paul Day, "Mulan's \textit{Man Alone}", \textit{Comment} 6, no. 4 (August 1965), p. 16.
\textsuperscript{73} C. K. Stead, "John Mulgan: A Question of Identity", \textit{Islands} 7 (April 1979), pp. 272, 269.
\textsuperscript{74} Mulgan, \textit{Man Alone}, p. 206.
\textsuperscript{75} Mulgan, \textit{Man Alone}, p. 204.
satisfaction knowing Johnson is still alive. There are some men, this fellow said, you can’t kill.  

Unlike Hemingway’s *To Have and Have Not*, (in which Morgan dies alone and in agony), or *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (at the end of which Jordan awaits his death in almost the same position he occupied at the beginning of the novel), the ending of *Man Alone* with its similar attempt to present Johnson as a legend is very nearly happy in a Victorian sense. Johnson may not marry, but he has learned to appreciate fellowship. He has escaped the consequences of his killing of Stenning, and he may even have survived the Spanish Civil War. 

Yet despite the difference between Mulgan’s and Hemingway’s views on the human condition, *Man Alone* generally recalls one of the central tenets of Hemingway’s style. That is, Mulgan adheres to what many modern writers have characterized as Hemingway’s brand of “truth telling” by attempting to describe things as they are and not imposing on the reader assumptions about how they appear to him. In the following excerpt from *A Farewell to Arms*, after Gino has professed that “what has been done this summer cannot have been done in vain”, Lieutenant Henry’s explanation of his own avoidance of patriotic rhetoric is a classic definition of “truth telling”:

“I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.”

Aside from a few exceptions which I will presently describe in detail, where the narrator’s point of view is uncharacteristically abstract because it extends well beyond Johnson’s limited perceptions, the view that Mulgan presents of New Zealand between

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the wars is a literal one which definitely avoids the kinds of words Henry would find embarrassing. It is only near the end of the novel when Johnson discusses going to Spain with O'Reilly that he indicates his mocking awareness of some of the abstract notions surrounding the Spanish conflict:

‘You got to fight fascism,’ Jack O'Reilly said, ‘wherever it is.’
‘Sure, I know. Spain or here, you got to fight it.’
‘You know as well as I do,’ O'Reilly said, ‘you know well enough what it’s all about.’
‘Sure, we’ll go out and burn some churches and rape some nuns,’ said Johnson, grinning.

‘It’s O.K., Jack,’ he said. ‘I know which side I’m on.’

Hemingway’s brand of truthtelling is also evident in the epilogue when the narrator lists the facts of his meeting with Johnson and recounts where Johnson had been:

It was the late summer of 1937 when I met Johnson. He was at Jarama before that and afterwards at Brunete. He was at Teruel and on the Ebro. He was at Calaceite and on the Aragon front.

While Johnson is clearly a descendant of New Zealand’s Victorian Men Alone, James K. Baxter suggested in a lecture delivered at Victoria University in 1954 entitled “Symbolism in New Zealand Poetry” that the figure of the Man Alone is “characteristic in all modern literature”. Richard Lehan confirms why when he explains in A Dangerous Crossing: French Literary Existentialism and the Modern American Novel that people in the modern world are cut off from their old way of life:

In this fragmented world, one must construct himself once again, find new meaning, a new routine, a new system of moral and social values, a new way of measuring everything, including social status. Until there is once again a way of life which one can take for granted, every situation is unique and the individual lives estranged from everyone else, in an absurd and grotesque world.

78 Mulgan, Man Alone, p. 204.
79 Mulgan, Man Alone, p. 207.
Lehan could be describing New Zealand’s nineteenth-century pioneers and settlers, many of whose assumptions about the human condition were challenged by their new environment or by new scientific discoveries. Yet because the early immigrants were able to manage their responses to the environment with their faith in the Myth of Progress and other hopeful assumptions retained from Britain, they were transplants rather than individuals wholly cast adrift who had to live existentially as Lehan describes.

A comparison between *Man Alone* and “Old Wars”, a poem Mulgan published in 1935, will support the suggestion that Mulgan’s work is transitional between New Zealand’s early and modern literature. In the poem the narrator asks an old soldier to describe his experiences in World War One:

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Thinking there would be war again
I said to Johnson, old-timer,
sitting in the sun half sleeping,
Tell me of the war that you fought in ....

Tell me of the war-days, I asked him,
not of the camps and laughter that I know,
but tell me of the trenches and the fighting
and the men you killed when you were young ....

They’ll be no war, said Johnson, no need
for talking of the days when I was young:
I am grown old, he said, no more the fighting
nor the long march and fever of recall. 82
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The narrator of *Man Alone* is likewise curious:

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Now I was interested in this war and, indeed, in any war, and I tried to
get him to talk about it, but he wouldn’t talk much ....
‘You can see war any time you want to,’ Johnson said. ‘There’s a
lot of war about in the world to-day. A few years ago now, it was
different. Then it was an old man’s story. It was the sort of thing you’d
sit around the fire and tell stories about.’ 83
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That “Old Wars” is an early expression of some of the ideas that Mulgan would later develop in his novel is suggested when, for example, both describe war as “an old man’s story”. Mulgan first submitted *Man Alone* to Selwyn and Blount with the provisional title, “Talking of War”. The publishers, however, suggested “A Man Alone”, “Escape

82 Day, “Mulgan’s *Man Alone*”, p. 16.
from Death” or “Living Space”. Man Alone got its title when Mulgan chose the first suggestion, but dropped the indefinite article. ⁸⁴

Yet Man Alone is clearly more modern than “Old Wars”. The sonorously formal and prescriptive voice of the poem’s narrator accentuates the informal neutrality of the narrator of the novel. The narrator of the poem is as reflective as the old-timer Johnson “sitting in the sun half sleeping”, even when his questions evoke disturbing images of World War One. The introductory dialogue of Man Alone, by contrast, is more modern in its immediacy: the narrator’s and Johnson’s speech patterns are differentiated; they are interrupted by pauses and speeded by contractions, as they would be in conversation or in the dialogue in Hemingway’s fiction.

Another similarity to Hemingway’s fiction is the lack of authorial comment in Man Alone. Unlike Chamier in Philosopher Dick or Satchell in The Greenstone Door, Mulgan seldom expounds on Johnson’s thoughts, dialogue or actions. Except for appearing in the first-person narrative shell at the beginning and the end of Man Alone, the third-person narrator who relates Johnson’s story is usually invisible. Yet there are inconsistencies when the narrator augments his literal recounting of Johnson’s perceptions. In Part One, mostly an impersonal account of what Johnson sees and does, the narrator sometimes comments on the wider implications of the protagonist’s experience. For example,

That was the last of the good years, though Johnson didn’t know it at the time — 1930, when everyone had money and the war was long over and never coming again. What’s a Wall Street crash down there, or reparations with the summer coming in and the price of butter fat still good? ⁸⁵

In the three introductory paragraphs of Part Two the narrator provides a bird’s-eye view of the war in Spain and details the changes wrought in Johnson’s personality by his experiences. The narrator begins Chapter XIX with a panoramic view of the harvest, then switches to Johnson’s perception of his brother’s thoughts as they had been expressed in a note, then recounts Johnson’s memory of his visit to his brother and sister-in-law, then records Johnson’s understanding of their probable attitude towards him, then summarizes Johnson’s internal dialogue about his reasons for leaving and finally reports Johnson’s conclusion: “each time I move ... I carry less”. ⁸⁶ The second

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⁸⁵ Mulgan, Man Alone, p. 39.
⁸⁶ Mulgan, Man Alone, p. 197.
paragraph of Chapter XIX moves abruptly from the narrator's impersonal view of Johnson to a comment directed at the anonymous listener introduced in the excerpt above: "You could have seen him standing there hatless and brown and thin, Johnson going on for forty." 87

Aside from these intrusions, the teller of Johnson's story could be Johnson himself. For example, as Johnson becomes more perceptive, the narrator's account of his activities echoes this faithfully. Thus the narrator's summary of Johnson's journey to the Thompson farm with Scotty at the beginning of Chapter III is bare and unemotional:

When they left Blakeway's that Saturday, they took their packs into Huntly and hired horses there. It was too late to start out that night so they slept at a little hotel and got off early in the morning. When they had ridden all morning, they began to climb out of the Waikato Valley and the dairy country into the fern hills. The sun was hot and the clay road winding up the ridges was dusty. 88

Yet after Johnson's trek through the wilderness, after he has learned the importance of fellowship and is leaving New Zealand on the Stamboulos, the narrator's speech is lyrical:

Southward and to starboard the blue mountain sides of the long Coromandel Peninsula ran steeply down into the water. The cliffs of the Barrier island were smooth rock and, above, hills of straggling bush and half-cleared scrub. The sun, going down in the west behind them, caught the cliff faces and the dark blue of deep ocean water below them. The swell came lazily across the Pacific. It had travelled a long way. It welled up in great rolls, that were lifting the ship's bow as they came, going on towards the land. In front the horizon curved round with the emptiness of sea going into the distance. Up forward, leaning on the rail, Johnson was watching this. It was the last of New Zealand that was passing them by. 89

The first excerpt is a Hemingwayesque description of action and scenery: as matter-of-fact as the hot, bare road on which the two men travel. The second is closer to Albert Camus' lyrical representation of what Meursault saw and felt while awaiting execution at the end of The Outsider (a comparison I will explore more fully in the next section),

87 Mulgan, Man Alone, p. 197.
88 Mulgan, Man Alone, p. 25.
89 Mulgan, Man Alone, pp. 185-186.
and it demonstrates Johnson’s melancholy appreciation of the New Zealand that he must leave.

Obviously, Johnson has changed between the first and second excerpts. The reader does not know this because the narrator or author of *Man Alone* states that Johnson is sad, but because the imagery demonstrates his sadness. Thus, in the manner of Hemingway, Mulgan maintains a modern distance from his protagonist by using the environment as an objective correlative for Johnson’s feelings. Like Johnson, the ocean swell “had travelled a long way”. Like Johnson, the ship moved with the waves. Like Johnson’s unforeseeable yet inevitable future, the horizon in front of him “curved round with the emptiness of sea going into the distance”. While Chamier would have commented on the significance of the scene and elaborated on Johnson’s thoughts, the narrator of *Man Alone* merely states that Johnson “was watching” as the ship moved away from New Zealand. If the reader reaches any conclusion about the significance of Johnson’s departure, it is based on the reader’s own interpretation, not on any explicitly announced judgements.

Yet Paul Day asserts that it is a “dubious” approach to view *Man Alone* as merely a “Hemingwayesque adventure story”. Day emphasizes, instead, that the “observant detachment, the absolutely faultless unsentimentality and scrupulous disinterest” of the novel, characteristics which are usually attributed to Hemingway, result from Mulgan’s wish to avoid distracting the reader from the novel’s true subject, an accurate depiction of New Zealand.90

That Mulgan borrowed the modern use of the objective correlative from Ernest Hemingway, however, seems likely given the number of other similarities between *Man Alone* and Hemingway’s early fiction. In Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, for example, rainfall is the objective correlative for the tragedy of Catherine’s death. In *Man Alone* sunshine is the objective correlative for Johnson’s feelings of contentment in the present and hope for the future. Thus when Johnson and Scotty approach Thompson’s farm, “It was a clear day with a heat haze on the hills and southward, a hundred miles away, the hot sun shimmered on the snow peaks of Ruapehu.”91 In *The Sun Also Rises*, as Jake Barnes walks to a good fishing spot with Bill in Spain, the scenery is an objective correlative for their sense of happiness and relaxation:

> It was a beech wood and the trees were very old. Their roots bulked above the ground and the branches were twisted. We walked on

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the road between the thick trunks of the old beeches and the sunlight came through the leaves in light patches on the grass. The trees were big, and the foliage was thick but it was not gloomy. There was no undergrowth, only the smooth grass, very green and fresh, and the big gray trees well spaced as though it were a park. 92

Likewise, when Johnson works as a deck hand on Peterson’s boat the scenery reflects his mood. According to the narrator,

Those were good times for him. They covered all the small bays of the north, going up the winding rivers to drop stores at deserted wharves ... There were days adrift and in no hurry, going up the coast, waiting for the sea-breeze to come in, the great boom creaking across, and a hot sun beating down on them. 93

Hemingway’s and Mulgan’s use of the environment as objective correlative is not necessarily inconsistent with their frequent undermining of the convention that Men Alone find strength or solace in the wilderness. Instead it ironically emphasizes the idea that nature will grant only a temporary respite. Thus the aimless wandering of protagonists in Hemingway’s early fiction debunks the heroic (and according to modern standards, unrealistic) wanderings of a protagonist like James Fenimore Cooper’s Natty Bumppo. Likewise in Man Alone, Johnson’s near-fatal trek through the Kaimanawas challenges the restorative value of the journeys made by Raleigh, Clifford and Cedric. In a sense, Johnson’s anti-heroic flight into the New Zealand wilderness after his liaison with Rua and killing of Stenning corresponds to the “separate peace” from combat that the wounded Nick claims in one of the sketches in The Nick Adams Stories which begins “Nick sat against the wall”. 94 It is also similar to the journey made by Lieutenant Henry in A Farewell to Arms when he deserts the army and flees to Switzerland in an attempt to find a separate peace with Catherine Barkley.

While the above-mentioned similarities do not prove Hemingway’s direct influence on Mulgan, at the very least they suggest that both authors had reacted to the writing style that had preceded them and that some of the seeming evidence of Hemingway’s influence on Man Alone can be attributed to the mood of the times. In Man Alone, for instance, although Johnson resembles what Wyndham Lewis called a Hemingway “dumb ox”, one of “those to whom things happen”, it is not necessarily

93 Mulgan, Man Alone, pp. 34-35.
because Mulgan was influenced by Hemingway’s novel. The resemblance may simply indicate that both Mulgan and Hemingway wrote about the feelings of uprootedness, isolation and alienation that were evident after World War One.\(^{95}\) Thus, Mulgan’s description in *Man Alone* of the plight of an English immigrant to New Zealand after World War I whose faith in New Zealand’s Myth of Progress is gradually disappointed is roughly analogous to Hemingway’s description of the meaningless wanderings of Lady Brett and Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*. After the upheaval of World War One and as members of the “lost generation”, Johnson, Lady Brett and Barnes have faith in nothing.

There are some similarities between *Man Alone* and Hemingway’s early work, however, that can only be explained by direct influence, or, at the very least, by Hemingway’s widespread influence on writers of Mulgan’s generation. For example, the “Stein stutter” or the repetition of key words and phrases in descriptions and the emphasis of important ideas in circular dialogues is a feature of Hemingway’s style which he and many of his imitators acquired from Gertrude Stein. In the excerpt below from the description of Johnson’s work as a milker in the Waikato, “buying a farm” acts as a refrain to emphasize the idea that the way to prosperity is through the acquisition of property:

> They used to talk at times, Johnson and Scott, about *buying a farm*. Everybody wanted *to buy a farm* sooner or later in New Zealand. You didn’t *buy a farm* and build a house and grow pine-trees round it to stay there, but to sell it to somebody else and live on the profit ....

> Scott had the ideas about *buying a farm*, getting in on a small deposit, on a soldier settlement, working sharemilking to make the money first (italics mine).\(^{96}\)

A little later the narrator reports that Johnson goes to dances with Mabel who, at twenty-three, wants a husband: “Mabel’s father had ideas about *buying a farm*”, and Mabel “had ideas about farms”, too (italics mine).\(^{97}\) In contrast to the other characters’ wish to buy a farm is Mulgan’s repeated description of his protagonist: “Johnson listened


\(^{97}\) Mulgan, *Man Alone*, pp. 21, 22.
desultorily, having no ambition.” After Johnson left cow milking in the Waikato, he worked on a scow along the coast of Northland. That his time on the scow was pleasant and restful is demonstrated by the accumulation of comfortable images and by the variations on the verb “to sit”:

He was sitting on the end of a wharf one day watching the tide come up the river and three Maori children fishing with tea-tree rods from the end of the wharf, and waiting for one of them to fall in. He was sitting there because it was dry and pleasant sitting in the sun before it got too hot with the heat of the day .... While he sat there, the scow came round the bend in the river with its grey sails slack in the wind and its auxiliary engine chugging softly (italics mine).

As Johnson escapes from New Zealand on board the Stamboulos, the steward begins a circular dialogue in which he and Johnson repeat again and again the idea that women are unreliable. Although none of the details of their disappointing relationships matches, their conversation recapitulates Johnson’s troubles with Rua:

‘It’s tough,’ [Johnson] said.
‘She shouldn’t have taken the presents and all, and done that,’ the captain’s steward said.
‘No, she shouldn’t have done that. You don’t want to worry about it,’ Johnson added. ‘You want to forget it.’
‘I’ll forget it all right, but she shouldn’t have acted that way,’
‘It wasn’t any way for her to treat you,’ Johnson said. The captain’s steward spat over the side.
‘Well, that’s that,’ he said. ‘If I’m lucky I won’t be here again.’
‘It’s not a bad country,’ Johnson said. ‘It’s not too bad.’
‘They can keep it,’ the captain’s steward said.
‘It’s going to be a while before I see it again,’ Johnson said, ‘but it’s not too bad a country. I’ve had some good times here.’

In his last contribution to the conversation above, Johnson shows that he has learned to accept and endure. Mulgan may have borrowed this characteristic from the attitude to experience shown by several of Hemingway’s protagonists. When a smuggler of illegal immigrants in To Have and Have Not shoots the protagonist, for example,

[Morgan] lay on his back and tried to breathe steadily. The launch rolled in the Gulf Stream swell and Harry Morgan lay on his back.

98 Mulgan, Man Alone, pp. 21, 22.
99 Mulgan, Man Alone, p. 33.
100 Mulgan, Man Alone, p. 187.
in the cockpit. At first he tried to brace himself against the roll with his good hand. Then he lay quietly and took it.\textsuperscript{101}

That Mulgan’s protagonist is also stoical is evident in the epilogue when the narrator repeats what some anonymous soldiers had said about Johnson “He didn’t want to rise in the army or give orders ... but he was a good man. He took what was coming”.\textsuperscript{102}

In conclusion, a comparison of Johnson with Raleigh and Morgan, particularly at the end of their respective narratives, indicates why \textit{Man Alone} signals a transition between the pre-existentialism of some of New Zealand’s early narratives and the existentialism of some of the later fiction. It also demonstrates why Johnson is not, finally, an existentialist Man Alone. One of Raleigh’s main motivations in \textit{Philosopher Dick} and its sequel, \textit{A South-Sea Siren}, is to avoid accepting the responsibility that society would impose on him. Yet because he is a Victorian, Raleigh will survive rejoin society and the narrative about him will conclude with the distinct implication that he will live happily ever after. Although Johnson’s fate at the end of \textit{Man Alone} is less certain, in a sense his narrative has a limited kind of happy ending: he escapes society’s retribution for the killing of Stenning, he learns to endure many kinds of hardship and he learns to find meaning in fellowship with other men. Yet Johnson never really accepts responsibility for his destiny, tending instead to drift from one negative stimulus to the next and to blame his misfortunes on the social or economical environment. Morgan, by contrast, spends his final hours in agony. In \textit{Man Alone} the narrator’s conclusion, “There are some men ... you can’t kill”, is almost cheerful by comparison.

iii.

As I explain in the previous section, commentators debate the amount and nature of Hemingway’s influence in \textit{Man Alone}. Given that a number of commentators also discuss Hemingway’s influence on the existentialist writer Albert Camus, it is not surprising that \textit{Man Alone} resembles Camus’ \textit{The Outsider}. Yet it is impossible that Camus’ novel influenced \textit{Man Alone} in any way: \textit{The Outsider} was originally published in France in 1942; Mulgan wrote \textit{Man Alone} between 1937 and 1938 and published it in 1939.\textsuperscript{103} It is unlikely that Mulgan’s economical style and inarticulate protagonist in \textit{Man Alone} influenced the creation of a similar style and character in \textit{The Outsider}: although Mulgan’s novel originally appeared in London, much of the first edition was

\textsuperscript{101} Hemingway, \textit{To Have and Have Not}, p. 138.
\textsuperscript{102} Mulgan, \textit{Man Alone}, p. 207.
\textsuperscript{103} Day, “Mulgan’s \textit{Man Alone}”, p. 15.
destroyed during a bombing raid; Paul’s Book Arcade of Hamilton did not publish a second edition until 1949.¹⁰⁴

In this section I will briefly consider the most obvious evidence that Hemingway’s, Mulgan’s and Camus’ novels all emerged from the pervading atmosphere of doubt that engendered literary existentialism in the twentieth century. Then I will review Jean-Paul Sartre’s analysis of the influence that Hemingway had on Camus’ style in The Outsider and apply aspects of that analysis to Man Alone. Next I will compare two of Hemingway's narratives with Man Alone and The Outsider, first with regard to the protagonists’ attitudes towards women and then according to Mulgan’s and Camus’ Hemingwayesque depictions of violence. Finally I will arrive at the conclusion foreshadowed by the quotations at the beginning of this chapter, that in Man Alone Mulgan’s perception of the human condition is transitional between the Myth of Progress which Jess Olive celebrates in William Satchell’s The Land of the Lost and Camus’ outlook in “The Myth of Sisyphus”. In other words, Mulgan did not discard New Zealand’s Victorian literary tradition: he modernized it.

One obvious similarity between Man Alone and The Outsider is the theme which their titles make explicit: both novels recount the experiences of protagonists who are isolated and alienated. Although the titles of Hemingway’s novels and short story collections are generally less definitive, In Our Time, The Sun Also Rises, Men Without Women, A Farewell to Arms, Death in the Afternoon, Green Hills of Africa, To Have and Have Not and For Whom the Bell Tolls are similar to Man Alone and The Outsider in that all of these narratives describe the experiences of Men Alone who struggle for meaning in a meaningless, unpredictable world.

According to Richard Lehan in A Dangerous Crossing: French Literary Existentialism and the Modern American Novel, Hemingway profoundly influenced the themes explored by the French existentialists and the style they employed to interpret these themes in literature. Lehan supports his assessment with a list of some of the Hemingway novels that have been translated into French, two of which were available in France around a decade before the appearance of The Outsider. In 1932 Maurice Coindreau translated and Gallimard published A Farewell to Arms (L’Adieu aux armes). The following year Coindreau and Gallimard produced The Sun Also Rises (Le Soleil se lève aussi). In 1945 Marcel Duhamel translated and Gallimard published To Have and Have Not (En avoir ou pas). In 1944 Denise V. Ayme translated For Whom the Bell Tolls (Pour qui sonne le glas) which was reissued by the Paris branch of Heinemann and

¹⁰⁴ Anderson, “The Rise and Fall of the ‘Man Alone’?”, p. 84.
Zsolnay in 1948 and by Le Club Français du Livre in 1950. Jean Dutourd translated *The Old Man and the Sea* (Le Vieil homme et la mer) for Gallimard in 1952.\(^{105}\)

Donald Lazere further supports Lehan’s assessment of the Hemingway influence in France when, in *The Unique Creation of Albert Camus*, he discusses the effect that Hemingway’s “impassive heroes and style” had on *The Outsider*.\(^{106}\) So, too, does Jean-Paul Sartre in “An Explication of *The Stranger*” (originally titled “Camus’s *The Outsider*”, translated by Annette Michelson, New York, Criterion Books, 1955) when he finds in Camus’ novel evidence of the Hemingway style and the outlook it expresses:

> The relationship between the two styles is obvious. Both men write in the same short sentences. Each sentence refuses to exploit the momentum accumulated by the preceding ones. Each is a new beginning. Each is like a snapshot of a gesture or object. For each new gesture and word there is a new and corresponding sentence.\(^{107}\)

In his explication of *The Outsider* Sartre summarizes Hemingway’s influence or, more generally, the influence of “an ‘American’ narrative technique” as “the discontinuity between the clipped phrases that imitate the discontinuity of time”\(^{108}\). In the following passage from *The Sun Also Rises*, for example, Hemingway presents “snapshots” of Jake Barnes at the fiesta in Pamplona:

> At the counter the girl filled the two wine-skins for me. One held two litres. The other held five litres. Filling them both cost three pesetas sixty centimos. Some one at the counter, that I had never seen before, tried to pay for the wine, but I finally paid for it myself. The man who had wanted to pay then bought me a drink. He would not let me buy one in return, but said he would take a rinse of the mouth from the new wine-bag. He tipped the big five-litre bag up and squeezed it so the wine hissed against the back of his throat.\(^{109}\)

The following passage from *The Outsider* is Hemingwayesque in its “snapshot” depictions of Meursault at work and then on his way to lunch after the burial of his mother:

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\(^{105}\) Lehan, *A Dangerous Crossing*, p. 46.


\(^{109}\) Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, p. 157.
There was a whole stack of bills of lading piling up on my desk and I had to go through them all. Before leaving the office to go for lunch, I washed my hands. I like doing this at lunchtime. I don't enjoy it so much in the evening because the roller towel which people use is all wet: it’s been there all day. I mentioned this to my boss. He replied that he found it regrettable, but that it was none the less a detail which didn’t matter. I left a bit late, at half past twelve, with Emmanuel, who works in dispatch. The office overlooks the sea and we spent a few minutes just watching the boats in the harbour with the burning sunshine. At that point a lorry came rushing along with its chains rattling and its engine backfiring. Emmanuel said, ‘Let’s go,’ and I started running. The lorry overtook us and we chased after it. I was swamped by the noise and the dust. I couldn’t see a thing and all I was conscious of was the speed of this chaotic dash, in and out of cranes and winches, with masts dancing on the horizon and ships’ hulks rushing by along side. I caught hold first and took a flying leap. Then I helped Emmanuel up. We were both out of breath and the lorry was jumping about in the sun and the dust on the rough cobbles of the quayside. Emmanuel was laughing so much he could hardly breathe.107

I have quoted such a long passage from the beginning of Meursault’s report of his lunch break because it is significant that no detail of the description suggests that he is grieving over memories of his recently-deceased mother. Meursault’s account reveals, instead, that he lives existentially in the present. Just as he does not dwell his mother’s death, he he does not dwell on the implications of anything he perceives.

In his critique of The Outsider Sartre explains Meursault’s inability to interpret the significance of what he sees with an analogy. Like a man who is speaking into a telephone and gesturing behind glass, Meursault is visible but his conversation is incomprehensible; his mind “is so constructed as to be transparent to things and opaque to meaning”. As an example of this barrier between appearance and meaning Sartre quotes the following passage about the burial of Meursault’s mother. As in the description of Meursault’s lunch break above, there is no sense that he should mourn her death:

From then on, everything went very quickly. The men went up to the coffin with a sheet. The priest, his followers, the director and I, all went outside. In front of the door was a lady I didn’t know. “Monsieur Meursault,” said the director. I didn’t hear the lady’s name, and I gathered only that she was a nurse who’d been ordered to be present.

Without smiling, she nodded her long bony face. Then we stood aside to make room for the body to pass.  

*Man Alone* is full of similar passages describing a protagonist who observes and acts yet does not understand the significance of either. In the excerpt below, for example, while Johnson records details about the Queen Street riot he does not interpret them:

Johnson fighting for a place in this press saw a mounted policeman on a great white horse trying to hold his ground at the head of the street. Not far from him, in the centre of the crowd where the street lamps were shining, he could see a man addressing the unemployed marchers, held up on their shoulders, his cap pulled up and waving in the air, the light shining on his sweating face. Johnson could see him, his mouth moving and his face working but could not hear what he said. The crowd moved round and round him like a broken tide-rip. Sometimes Johnson was carried with it and at others thrown back again. There was no longer for him any moving where he wanted to go but only where everyone else was going, and there was still the feeling that it would be somewhere and that everyone would go.  

Sartre further explains that in *The Outsider* sentences are “simply juxtaposed ... in particular, all causal links are avoided lest they introduce the germ of an explanation and an order other than that of pure succession”. He provides the following passage as an example of Camus’ avoidance of causal links:

She asked me, a moment later, if I loved her. *I answered that it didn’t mean anything, but that I probably didn’t love her. She seemed sad.* But while preparing lunch, for no reason at all she suddenly laughed in such a way that I kissed her. Just then, the noise of an argument broke out at Raymond’s place.  

The narrator of *Man Alone* tends to maintain a more explanatory account of Johnson’s experiences and often traces the causal relationship between events. Sometimes, however, there is a sense in Mulgan’s novel of events simply occurring. In the following description of Johnson’s winter shelter in the Kaimanawas, for example, Mulgan’s protagonist has no control over the environment and must adapt to an unpredictable series of events:

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112 Mulgan, *Man Alone*, pp. 54-55.
He made his home in a small rock shelter which was barely a cave, by the river at the foot of the valley. The sides of the cave dripped with damp, but after a time he plastered them over with mud and lined the floor with wood and dry stones and leaves on top. The cave was a suitable place to camp because, above it, the river curved and made a bar of drift wood which was good fuel and more likely to burn than anything he could find in the bush. He tried cutting into standing white pine for the resined timber that would be inside it, but the task was hopeless with his small axe. Once after two days of torrential rain, the river flooded and washed into his cave, driving him out with all his possessions and his rifle, to sit wretchedly on the bank above through the night. But he would not give up on his cave and, instead, cleared timber and boulders away from the pool above so that the river could not flood again so easily. When the leaves on the floor of his cave had dried again it remained moderately comfortable.\textsuperscript{114}

Aside from similarities between their protagonists' "snapshot" perceptions of unrelated objects or events, there are other indications of Hemingway's influence on Mulgan and Camus. The attitudes Johnson and Meursault share towards women are comparable to those expressed by Krebs in Hemingway's "Soldier's Home". In a passage loaded with the repetition that Hemingway learned from Gertrude Stein, Hemingway records Krebs' thoughts:

Vaguely he wanted a girl but he did not want to have to work to get her. He would have liked to have a girl but he did not want to have to spend a long time getting her. He did not want to get into the intrigue and the politics. He did not want to have to do any courting. He did not want to tell any more lies. It wasn't worth it. He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences ever again. He wanted to live along without consequences. Besides he did not really need a girl.\textsuperscript{115}

Many times in \textit{Man Alone} Mulgan emulates the close relationship that Hemingway maintains in his fiction between his themes and the style he employs to evoke them. In the following passage, for example, Johnson's repeated expressions of the indifference he feels for Rua recall both Krebs' wish to avoid "consequences" and Hemingway's use of the "Stein stutter":

It was not as good with Rua as it had been on the first day; it was not as good to him again. Rua was happy and more contented than he had ever

\textsuperscript{114} Mulgan, \textit{Man Alone}, p. 140.
seen her, but he felt himself sick with her and with what they were doing. It was, he knew, not ever going to be as good again as it had first been, and he did not want it to continue. He did not want trouble. He was not afraid of it, but he did not want it. In the life that he had there now, with Stenning and the farm, he did not want to be disturbed by Rua, who did not matter to him at all.116

Similarly, in The Outsider while Meursault enjoys Marie physically he cannot imagine a future with her:

That evening, Marie came round for me and asked me if I wanted to marry her. I said I didn’t mind and we could do if she wanted to. She then wanted to know if I loved her. I replied as I had done once already, that it didn’t mean anything but that I probably didn’t.117

The killings Johnson and Meursault commit are equally Hemingwaysque when they recall the slow-motion accuracy of Hemingway’s descriptions of violent death. In his introduction to Tough Guy Writers of the 1930s David Madden defines the close relationship Hemingway maintains between theme and style when he states that the tough guy “does not analyze, he acts” because he does not have time “for psychological analysis or lingering descriptions”.118 Madden further explains that the emphasis on action rather than analysis results in a type of fiction where, “‘this I felt, this I saw, this I did at that moment’ is the brutal formula of [tough guy] language — style as action”.119 In the following excerpt from To Have and Have Not, for example, Hemingway’s style seems to approximate the action described when Morgan reports his killing of Sing:

I took him by the throat with both hands, and brother, that Mr. Sing would flop just like a fish, true, his loose arm flailing. But I got him forward onto his knees and had both thumbs well in behind his talk-box, and I bent the whole thing back until she cracked.120

In the following two excerpts it is clear that, although Mulgan and Camus have different writing styles (Mulgan tends to rely on literal imagery, whereas Camus often uses more figurative language to evoke Meursault’s experience), they both employ Hemingway’s “brutal formula”. Thus even though Mulgan uses a more formal third person narrator to

117 Camus, The Outsider, p. 44.
119 Madden, Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties, p. xix.
120 Hemingway, To Have and Have Not, p. 48.
recount Stenning’s death, there is in *Man Alone* the same emphasis on violent sensation that is evident in *To Have and Have Not* and throughout Hemingway’s fiction:

The first barrel went off, firing between them with a sound that was deafening in the small hut, and that dazed Johnson, so that he fell back, one hand still clinging to the gun. The second barrel went off, as if it had been with the shock of the first shot. It blew its way through Stenning’s left shoulder and the side of his head, so that he dropped without a sound and, falling, lay half in and half out the doorway with his head on the floor, his legs hanging outside, and his arms in front of him.121

In this next excerpt, although Meursault evokes the shooting of the Arab with Biblical imagery rather than Morgan’s tough vernacular or the matter-of-fact formality characteristic of the narrator of Johnson’s experiences, Camus offers the same careful delineation of what happens:

Without sitting up, the Arab drew his knife and held it out towards me in the sun. The light leapt up off the steel and it was like a long flashing sword lunging at my forehead. At the same time all the sweat that had gathered in my eyebrows suddenly ran down over my eyelids, covering them with a dense layer of warm moisture. My eyes were blinded by this veil of salty tears. All I could feel were the cymbals the sun was clashing against my forehead and, instinctively, the dazzling spear still leaping up off the knife in front of me. It was like a red-hot blade gnawing at my eyelashes and gouging out my stinging eyes. That was when everything shook. The sea swept ashore a great breath of fire. The sky seemed to be splitting from end to end and raining down sheets of flame. My whole being went tense and I tightened my grip on the gun. The trigger gave.122

Occasionally when Mulgan’s style in *Man Alone* recalls the assumption inherent in New Zealand’s Victorian narratives that events follow a predictable pattern of cause and effect, it highlights the difference between his vision of the human condition and the existentialist outlook which Sartre identifies in *The Outsider* and some of Hemingway’s fiction. Given the mixture of Victorian and Hemingwayesque qualities in *Man Alone* and keeping in mind that Mulgan’s view of the human condition could be described as either emerging from New Zealand’s Victorian tradition or revealing his response to Marxist views which were in the air in the 1930s123 it is hard to determine for sure

122 Camus, *The Outsider*, p. 60.
123 Since both Victorian and Leftist principles tended to produce didactic literature which looked beyond an unsatisfactory present towards a better future and since both encouraged fellowship, it is possible that Mulgan’s novel merges Victorian moralism
whether Mulgan’s attitude towards the human condition is closer to the pre-existentialist attitudes expressed in New Zealand’s early narratives or to the modern existentialist attitudes expressed by Camus, whose writing Hemingway also influenced. In a sense Paul Day complicates the question when he claims that while “[Mulgan] borrows Hemingway’s attitude to experience, his cool detachment and his spare style of narration”, he also has his own style with “its own inner structures and rhythms, which are wholly unlike Hemingway’s”. For every passage I have quoted that has Hemingwaysque qualities, there are others that hardly invoke Hemingway’s manner. In the first paragraph of Man Alone, for example, the narrator describes Johnson as a twentieth-century immigrant who sails to New Zealand after World War One for much the same reasons as the pioneers and settlers did in the nineteenth century. As in earlier New Zealand narratives, Mulgan’s sentences are interpretive:

Johnson went to New Zealand after the war because men he had met in France talked of it as a pleasant and well-to-do country. He had been billeted with some New Zealanders in a rest-camp and the way they talked about it made it seem like the only country in the world. In that period, just at the end of the war, the distance and strangeness that such a journey involved and going there to a new country with no money, was slight beside everything else that had happened to him in the last four years of his life. He was demobilized early and sailed in March 1919 with an ‘assisted emigrant’s’ ticket. The ship that he sailed on carried convalescent soldiers and emigrating Englishmen with their children and families.

Each of the sentences in the excerpt above prepares for the explicitly stated theme of Chapter One, that there was “a stale tiredness hung over everyone”, and, a few pages later, that “there was a quietness and sickness over everything”.

Despite the difficulties presented by the mixtures of styles in Man Alone, a comparison of Morgan (the Tough guy), Meursault (the absurd hero) and Johnson will confirm Mulgan’s relative position between the pre-existentialism and the conscious existentialism of New Zealand’s writers. The differences between these characters will confirm just how widely Hemingway’s, Camus’ and Mulgan’s views diverge.

Instead of leading a conventionally moral existence, Morgan demonstrates the “celebrated Hemingway code” which Sheldon Norman Grebstein suggests influenced

with contemporary political and atheistic assumptions.

125 Mulgan, Man Alone, p. 7.
126 Mulgan, Man Alone, pp. 7, 9.
Raymond Chandler’s depiction of Marlowe, the “tough guy” detective in *The Big Sleep*. Like Marlowe, Morgan “simultaneously rejects social convention, cleanly respectability, and the rule of law, and affirms love, courage, dignity, comradeship, and professional integrity”\(^{127}\). In “Hemingway” Robert Penn Warren describes how important to Hemingway’s world the code and the discipline it entails are:

> They can give meaning to life which otherwise seems to have no meaning or justification. In other words, in a world without supernatural sanctions, in the God-abandoned world of modernity, man can realize an ideal meaning only in so far as he can define and maintain the code.\(^{128}\)

A game fisherman who lives according to the Hemingway code, Morgan is mostly law-abiding: he rents his boat and his fishing expertise to tourists. After a tourist loses some of Morgan’s equipment and leaves without paying either the equipment or his time, however, Hemingway’s protagonist has no moral qualms about smuggling contraband: he needs the money to maintain his boat and support his family. Likewise, even though the Chinese criminal Sing has paid him to smuggle a boat load of Chinese into the United States he does not scruple to abandon them on the coast of Cuba. Nor does Morgan regret killing Sing: he would rather kill Sing than allow him to murder the entire boat-load of illegal immigrants.

In following the code both Marlowe and Morgan exhibit qualities that Camus would later describe in “The Myth of Sisyphus”. In a world where life is as often jeopardised by unforeseen violence as it is by planned criminal behaviour, Marlowe nonetheless tries to maintain his own ethic as he works to protect his clients. Morgan is similarly independent-minded. As the prototypical tough guy, he gambles skilfully with his life. Unlike Marlowe, however, he loses. When Morgan attempts to protect himself by killing the revolutionaries who chartered his boat to escape from the authorities, one of the revolutionaries unexpectedly shoots him.

Morgan’s life and death could be described as Sisyphean: like Sisyphus, Morgan has attempted to live according to his own ethic in a situation that will inevitably destroy him; like Sisyphus, he struggles stoically until he dies. Yet the Marxist moral which


Edmund Wilson claims Leftist critics attached to Morgan’s death (“Harry Morgan is made to realize as he dies that to fight in this bad world alone is hopeless”), dilutes the absurdity of that death by investing it with meaning.\(^{129}\) Furthermore, as my summary of Camus’ definitions of the absurd hero and the absurdity of the human condition will demonstrate, Morgan is not an absurd hero.

The following passages from “The Myth of Sisyphus”, which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Eight, are part of Camus’ definition of the absurd hero:

> If I see a man armed with only a sword attack a group of machine-guns, I shall consider his act to be absurd. But it is so solely by virtue of the disproportion between his intention and the reality he will encounter, of the contradiction I notice between his true strength and the aim he has in view. Likewise we shall deem a verdict absurd when we contrast it with the verdict the facts apparently dictated .... The feeling of absurdity ... bursts from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality, between an action and the world that transcends it.\(^{130}\)

After he retells the story of Sisyphus’ destiny, Camus describes Sisyphus as the quintessential absurd hero:

> The Gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labour.\(^{131}\)

It is when Camus goes on to assert, however, that “[Sisyphus] is stronger than his rock” because he continued to strive, that “the lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory”, that “the struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart”, and that “one must imagine Sisyphus happy”, that his definition clearly excludes Morgan.\(^{132}\) Although Morgan’s battle with the revolutionaries could be described as absurd he does not consciously acknowledge, as Sisyphus does, the ultimate meaninglessness of his struggles; nor is he at all happy about the inevitability of his fate.

Camus’ definition of absurdity also excludes Raleigh. In New Zealand’s early narratives happiness results from virtuous behaviour within the boundaries of society. The difference between Raleigh and Meursault is implicit in the first quotation from

\(^{130}\) Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 33.
\(^{132}\) Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, pp. 109, 111.
“The Myth of Sisyphus” above where Camus states, “we shall deem a verdict absurd when we contrast it with the verdict the facts apparently dictated”. When Raleigh exiles himself from conventional society, although some of its members disapprove of his standoffishness they do not seek to punish him. It is Meursault’s indifference to his mother’s death and to the severe beating Raymond’s girlfriend receives for her suspected infidelity which then leads to the shooting in Part I that results in Meursault’s imprisonment and trial for murder in Part II. Society condemns Meursault to death, not because he commits manslaughter when he accidentally shoots and kills an Arab, but because he fails to mourn his mother’s death in a manner acceptable to society. Meursault is an absurd hero because, after an absurd conviction for a murder he did not commit, his conscious celebration of the indifference of the universe echoes Sisyphus’ glad identification with his inevitable fate:

I looked up at the mass of signs and stars in the night sky and laid myself open for the first time to the benign indifference of the world. And finding it so much like myself, in fact so fraternal, I realized that I’d been happy, and that I was still happy.133

When Raleigh considers killing himself he, too, has a vision of the beauty of the world. Yet Raleigh’s vision is different because it comes from God and is meant to remind him that his life was not his own.

Since Camus’ definition excludes an early Man Alone like Raleigh, it must exclude Johnson too. Johnson is not an absurd hero because Mulgan uses his behaviour to illustrate a central theme of Man Alone, that economic disparity engenders hardship and crime as people victimize each other in their efforts to survive. Thus in Part I Johnson’s stealing of a cap and scarf from the sleeping hobo who “seemed ... to be well provided and well enough inured to small adversities” is framed by the hobo’s oracular comment: “‘Brother, you and I are brothers. That is all we know now, brother.’”134 When Part II ends after Johnson’s steadfast endurance of an evacuation with fellow soldiers demonstrates that he, too, has acknowledged the importance of brotherhood, Mulgan’s promoting of the fellowship convention seems obvious. Furthermore, even though there is an absurd aspect to Johnson’s escape through the Kaimanawas, he never realizes, as Sisyphus does, that his mortality will doom all of his efforts to failure. Nor does Johnson resolve, as Sisyphus does, to live meaningfully anyway. Finally, although Johnson’s stoic waiting for evacuation at the end of Man Alone also has a Sisyphean

133 Camus, The Outsider, p. 117.
134 Mulgan, Man Alone, pp. 69, 67.
quality, his decision to fight in the Spanish Civil War does not exemplify what Camus defines as an acceptance of the absurdity of the human condition. Johnson does not choose to fight with the Republicans even though he knows that their efforts are doomed; he joins the Spanish conflict because he values fellowship with men.

It is the killings in *Man Alone*, *To Have and Have Not* and *The Outsider* and how Johnson, Morgan and Meursault react to them that finally separate the three protagonists and prove that Mulgan’s attitude towards the human condition is transitional between the pre-existentialist perspective expressed in New Zealand’s early narratives and the modern existentialist outlook which Camus professed. Johnson believes that his killing of Stenning was accidental. In a passage where the repetition of ideas once again recalls Hemingway and his borrowing from Gertrude Stein, Johnson explains his lack of responsibility to Peterson:

‘I didn’t shoot him,’ Johnson said sombrely. ‘He shot himself. I didn’t want to shoot him. I liked him all right. There was a reason it went like that just the same. I’ve been thinking about that. It came with working away there on that farm, just the three of us, and no pay. None of us had any pay. You couldn’t get away. You couldn’t do anything but go on working. I’ve been thinking about that and the way things were there. It wasn’t any life.’

Whether Johnson, his environment, the economy or sheer bad luck cause Stenning’s death is a judgement beyond the scope of this thesis. More relevant is Johnson’s attitude: he blames the isolation of the farm, the unrelenting work, and the lack of financial reward, the fact that such a life “wasn’t any life” at all for Stenning’s loss of life. Morgan feels no sense of guilt about his killing of Sing or the revolutionaries, and, unlike Johnson, explicitly acknowledges that he did kill them, first in order to save the lives of the illegal immigrants he was transporting and second, to save his own. He blames himself when his attempt to help the revolutionaries escape the authorities ends in his being shot: “I guess I bit off too much more than I could chew. I shouldn’t have tried it”, Morgan thinks as he is dying in his boat. Even if his final words (“No matter how a man alone ain’t got no bloody chance”) do point to a Marxist moral, Morgan is unlike Johnson in that he does not specifically shift the blame for his predicament onto his environment. That Meursault’s response is utterly different to Johnson’s is apparent.

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136 Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, p. 137.
137 Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, p. 178.
when, in his account of the Arab’s death, Meursault accepts responsibility both for the accidental shooting and for its consequences:

The trigger gave, I felt the underside of the polished butt and it was there, in that sharp but deafening noise, that it all started .... I realized that I’d destroyed the balance of the day and the perfect silence of this beach where I’d been happy. And I fired four more times at a lifeless body and the bullets sank in without leaving a trace. And it was like giving four sharp knocks at the door of unhappiness.138

Meursault’s first shot may have been accidental but the next four shots were not, and they ensure his conviction in Part II. When Meursault continues to fire bullets into the Arab’s body, it is a sign of his acceptance of the consequences of his actions.

Finally, as a transitional writer, Mulgan did not discard those aspects of New Zealand’s Victorian literary tradition that pertain to the importance of fellowship and social responsibility. Although Camus maintained a rather different world-view from the Victorians he also considered the importance of fellowship and social responsibility, especially in his later writings. Thus there is some resemblance between Mulgan’s modernized version of New Zealand’s fellowship tradition and the movement towards social responsibility that Serge Doubrovsky reports Camus as tracing in The Rebel:

“Within the limits of the ‘absurd’ experience, suffering is individual. Starting with the movement of revolt, we are aware of suffering as a collective experience, as everyman’s adventure. I revolt, therefore we are.”139

According to Doubrovsky The Plague also demonstrates Camus’ belief in social responsibility when, with “solitude exploding in the movement of the heart towards his fellow-man”, one of the characters, Rieux, remarks that there was no shame in preferring happiness. “‘But there may be shame in being happy all alone,’” Rambert replies.140

138 Camus, The Outsider, p. 60.
140 Doubrovsky, “The Ethics of Albert Camus”, p. 83.
Chapter Three

Penguin New Writing, Frank Sargeson and the Existentialist Mood

He kept telling himself that the cliff had never fallen in hundreds of years, he produced for himself proof of this in the sea-washed smoothness of each boulder on the beach — their sharpness had long been washed away. His brain pointed out to him that there were no sharp stones ....

‘But,’ came the answer instantly, ‘This might yet be the one moment, the one moment in a thousand years!’

I asked myself who I was to be interfering with anyone’s pleasure in a world like this?

“The Cliff” and “That Summer” are symptomatic of the belief, explicitly or implicitly expressed, that the world is unpredictable. Similar to the mood Jean-Paul Sartre evokes in Nausea (1938), the first excerpt is saturated with a panicky sense of “what if?” — a mood that has permeated much existentialist literature. Although the speaker of the second excerpt only vaguely refers to “a world like this”, suggesting that for him “what if?” is not a concern, James K. Baxter describes the story about him as “writing that verges on existentialism”. During the war years New Zealand began to develop a kind of literary existentialism which would reveal a range of attitudes towards experience, including those exhibited in the excerpts above.

John Lehmann published “The Cliff” and “That Summer” in his wartime literary periodical, Penguin New Writing. In section i I will explain that although there was a wartime shortage of new books in New Zealand and existentialism has hardly ever been taught in this country as a formal philosophy (or even as a French literary movement before the late-1950s), existentialist ideas became increasingly fashionable after World War Two — especially among the younger generation. In a survey of contemporary autobiographical accounts, fiction and magazines, I will describe some of the evidence of this popularity. Because of its relatively wide circulation, I will suggest that during the war years more New Zealanders were exposed to the literary manifestations of

existentialism in the short stories, poems, essays and reviews which Lehmann published in *Penguin New Writing* than by any other publication. Some of the pieces Lehmann published were written by or about well-known existentialists or investigate explicitly identified concepts of existentialism. In section ii I will focus on "The Wall" by Jean-Paul Sartre, considering it and other of the existentialist-flavoured stories by writers not connected with New Zealand as models against which I will compare selected examples of New Zealand's Man Alone literature. In section iii I will discuss the stories contributed to *Penguin New Writing* by Frank Sargeson, Dan Davin, Erik de Mauny, Greville Texidor and Anna Kavan. All of these stories, whether by a New Zealander living in New Zealand (Sargeson), by expatriate New Zealanders (Davin and de Mauny) or by visiting authors (Texidor and Kavan) who lived in New Zealand for only a short time, evoke New Zealand's existentialist mood. While some of the New Zealand stories clearly evolved from the pre-existentialism of New Zealand's early Man Alone fiction and others could be described as approximating a contemporary existentialist outlook even though they were probably not based on European models, still others definitely suggest that their authors were influenced by contemporary existentialist thought while they were studying or working abroad, or were involved with the military in World War Two during the 1940s and 50s. Thus, the New Zealand stories which Lehmann published in *Penguin New Writing* serve as a good introduction to the diversity of this country's existentialist literature. Finally I will discuss a Kavan story published in *New Zealand New Writing*, the Wellington-based imitation of Lehmann's periodical. When the protagonist of that story ends with the conclusion that "there were far too many decisions to make about everything and no permanent set of values by which to decide", not only does she summarize a central theme of contemporary existentialist literature but she also marks the direction in which New Zealand's existentialist novels and short stories would develop.

i.

Even just after World War Two when French existentialism was at its most popular in Europe and North America, New Zealanders in New Zealand had relatively little opportunity to learn about existentialism or to read contemporary existentialist literature. Nancy M. Taylor's *The New Zealand People at War: The Home Front* suggests an explanation for this lack of access when it describes the many restrictions that the war in Europe imposed on New Zealanders. When Japan joined the war, Taylor

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explains, “the list of lacks large and small lengthened sharply”. When supplies of new books were increasingly curtailed at their source because of the scarcity of printing paper and conflict over the shipping lanes, they also became part of the general shortages.

In 1941 an article from London entitled “The Book Trade” which appeared in Dunedin’s *Otago Daily Times* confirms the book shortage:

Thirty-seven thousand catalogued books available for purchase two years ago are now unobtainable owing to production difficulties, says the Bookseller magazine. Fifteen per cent of the titles of technical, medical and educational books are no longer available, 46 per cent of children’s books, 36 percent of fiction, and 27 per cent of other books.

The book trade compiled these figures when the government demanded evidence of its contention that the supply of books was diminishing to a seriously low level. The figures do not include titles which normally would have disappeared.

In 1943 another article in the *Otago Daily Times* expresses the shrinking volume of books in local terms: “In Dunedin an increasing demand has been brought about for second-hand books. War conditions have accentuated this .... The scarcity of good new literature has been very noticeable locally.”

The New Zealand government’s stringent censorship of any literature that it felt might be injurious to the war effort also contributed to the shortage of imported books. According to Taylor, booksellers were frustrated and their businesses suffered because they could not be sure why their ordered books did not arrive. Was it administrative error, shipping delays, loss at sea or because they were being held by the censor’s office? Taylor adds that because the Progressive bookshops in Auckland and Christchurch and Modern Books in Wellington “represented book demands which were in varying degrees leftist or intellectual” (that is, because their orders often included books the government deemed dangerous), they were hard hit by import restrictions.

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7 From a clipping file held in the McNab Collection at the Dunedin Town Library, Dunedin, *Otago Daily Times*, 6 December 1941.
8 From a clipping file held in the McNab Collection at the Dunedin Town Library, Dunedin, *Otago Daily Times*, 14 April 1943.
1940 a letter sent by Roy Parsons of Modern Books to several Labour Ministers of Parliament detailing the irregularities of current censorship regulations attests to the difficulties they caused.\textsuperscript{11} Taylor further reports that a customs warning against the importation of subversive literature caused \textit{The Official Bulletin of the New Zealand Library Association} to recommend that the nation’s libraries practise self-censorship. The outcome of the uncertainties caused by censorship was that booksellers and librarians tended to order only “safe” books rather than risk money or their import licences on shipments that might be withheld.\textsuperscript{12}

It is not surprising, therefore, that in \textit{The Official Bulletin of the New Zealand Library Association} the lists of new acquisitions for New Zealand libraries are very short or non-existent during most of the 1940s. A survey of the \textit{Bulletin} between 1939 and 1955 reveals that even a decade after the war libraries acquired few works by acknowledged existentialist writers or about the existentialist philosophy. It is not until March of 1950 that the \textit{Bulletin} records the acquisition of a translation of Jean-Paul Sartre’s \textit{Intimacy and Other Stories} for free issue. A translation of Sartre’s \textit{Iron in the Soul} is listed in the November \textit{Bulletin}, with \textit{The Chips are Down} listed the following November. Of the American existentialist writers, Richard Wright’s \textit{The Outsider} is listed in the fiction list for June of 1954.\textsuperscript{13}

According to Max Charlesworth in \textit{The Existentialists and Jean-Paul Sartre}, even at the height of its popularity in the 1940s and 50s continental existentialism was poorly regarded by the British philosophical community.\textsuperscript{14} A survey of New Zealand university calendars between 1935 and 1965 indicates that although all of the constituent colleges (later to become universities in their own right) have offered courses in Western Philosophy, existentialism was not studied as a formal philosophy in New Zealand.\textsuperscript{15} Even now it is rarely studied in Philosophy departments, an indication perhaps that existentialism has been as poorly regarded among professional philosophers in New Zealand as it has been in England.

In fact, more New Zealanders have been exposed to existentialism as literature than as a formal philosophy. The following survey of some of the fictional and non-fictional reading available to New Zealanders suggests that from the 1940s until the late

\textsuperscript{11} Taylor, \textit{The New Zealand People at War}, vol. 2, p. 1002.
\textsuperscript{12} Taylor, \textit{The New Zealand People at War}, vol. 2, p. 1013.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Official Bulletin of the New Zealand Library Association}, held at the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
\textsuperscript{14} Max Charlesworth, \textit{The Existentialists and Jean-Paul Sartre} (London: Prior, 1976), p. 28.
\textsuperscript{15} Held at the Central and Hocken libraries at the University of Otago, Dunedin.
60s writers, readers and audiences were evidently interested in existentialism. Several pieces of writing by or about Frank Sargeson will identify him as one of the most influential provokers of that interest. In *Black Beech and Honeydew: An Autobiography*, Ngaio Marsh recalls that in the early 1940s the Drama Society at Canterbury College of New Zealand staged Sartre's *The Flies*. Significantly the production was in English, which would make it accessible to a wider audience. Judging by a passage in Maurice Gee's *Sole Survivor* Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* was well-known, at least among university students and young professionals during the early 1950s. As Ray Sole says over coffee:

"You see, ... the way I look at it is that we've got a longing in us for happiness but the world is silent, or else it gives us back this idiot chatter. We've got a deep desire, a deep nostalgia really, for unity and the world disappoints us. Now in the face of all this, all we can do is struggle. The only weapons we have are strength and pride. The only truth we have is in defiance. Meaning is defiance. If there's any meaning. Ha! Another cup of coffee? Well anyway, that's how I see it."

Glenda Goodlad, one of Sole's audience, does not hesitate to identify the source of his ideas: "'That's how Albert Camus sees it too .... Everyone I know is reading *The Myth of Sisyphus*. I wish they'd find another book.'" Another book which many read was Colin Wilson's *The Outsider*. First published in 1956 when the author was just twenty-five, it was translated into fourteen different languages within eighteen months. While the title recalls Camus' *L'Étranger*, through the course of his book Wilson discusses a wide selection of writers whose ideas have been associated with the existentialist philosophy: Henri Barbusse, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ernest Hemingway, Feodor Dostoyevski, Friedrich Nietzsche, to name just a handful. Wilson's summary of how Barbusse sees the Outsider does very well as a general description of some of the Men and Women Alone who populate New Zealand's fiction of the 1940s, 50s and 60s. Wilson would describe the protagonist of Marilyn Duckworth's *A Gap in the Spectrum*, for instance, as an Outsider. As I will illustrate in Chapter Seven, Diana's extraordinary view of England in the late 1950s emerges from the same atmosphere which produced Wilson's book:

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The Outsider is a man who cannot live in the comfortable, insulated world of the bourgeois, accepting what he touches and sees as reality. ‘He sees too deep and too much’, and what he sees is essentially chaos. For the bourgeois, the world is fundamentally an orderly place, with a disturbing element of the irrational, the terrifying, which his preoccupation with the present usually permits him to ignore. For the Outsider, the world is not rational, not orderly. 19

Although in The Hangover Sargeson does not explicitly identify any existentialist texts, he does examine New Zealand’s provincial puritanism against a background of existentialist ideas. Throughout the novella Sargeson contrasts the puritanical values of his protagonist, Alan, with the vaguely-held notions of a group of young beatniks and the rather more cynical world-view professed by Lennie Dick. Against Alan’s naive “of course” (“He would be an engineer — like his father”20), Sargeson’s narrative suggests that the future is not as predictable as Alan believes. After the unencumbered lifestyle of the beatniks disturbs the established verities of Alan’s engineering studies, Lennie Dick’s blandishments bring his existential uncertainties to a crisis: “as though all he had taken for granted in his life was dislocated”21. The older man’s description in his journal of the cause and effect of this dislocation clearly reveals Sargeson’s interest in existentialist ideas. In the passage below, for example, Dick’s comparison of individuals to multi-layered onions recalls Sartre’s warnings about living in mauvais foi or bad faith, when one does not remain true one’s convictions:

When the ego is so protectively wrapped up that it self-defeats all its endeavours to establish human relations, then it will try to find its own compensation by diffusing itself through the wrappings. But a stiff price will have to be paid — in the thinning out of the egoistic core. Immediate aims may be achieved in the sense that nerve endings succeed in reaching to the surface, thus appearing to establish some kind of contact with the outside world. But this will be largely a delusion. The contact will be strictly nervous, hence consistently very painful. Urgent need for another protective layer will soon become manifest. 22

According to Dick, the onion “is a series of wrappings wrapping nothing”. His description of this central nothingness foreshadows Alan’s behaviour as he peels off

19 Wilson, The Outsider, p. 13.
21 Sargeson, Two Short Novels, p. 131.
three of the four plastic raincoats he had donned to murder those whose empty beliefs and actions had drained his own sense of validity:

All these people must at every moment be afflicted by the terrifying thought that somebody is going to demand something from them .... something of their actual selves. And a very terrible demand to be expected to meet indeed, because how can anyone give anything of himself when he is only too aware there is literally nothing of himself to give?23

Although there were no courses offered in Existentialism in Philosophy departments, Canterbury University College did offer in 1951 and 1952 French 237 for Masters and Honours-level study of an approved subject from twentieth-century French literature or of an approved twentieth-century French author. It was not until the late 1950s and early 60s, however, that works by Camus and Sartre became required reading.

When Lauris Edmond began extramural study through the Massey University College of Manawatu in 1963 she recalls in the second volume of her autobiography, *Bonfires in the Rain*, that "French had changed":

You had to speak the wretched language, not just recite verbs .... Plays were performed ... like Sartre’s ‘Huis Clos’. I was fascinated and appalled at the idea of hell being a cycle of constant small cruelties inflicted by one person on another and repeated through all eternity. This was part of another revolution in my mind and outlook, prompted not by reflection on my own experience (or not that alone), but by my first encounter with one of the great intellectual and philosophical movements of the century — existentialism."24

Edmond’s reading of Sartre and Camus fed her incipient feminism and confirmed that she had given up for good “supposing that God (whatever I meant by that) awaited me in the Anglican service”.25 She absorbed

a great deal about how [Sartre and Camus] arrived at their by then famous idea. ‘L’absurde’, I discovered, was a name for the anguish of modern man who wants to live for ever but can no longer believe he will go to heaven when he dies. From there I followed them to ‘moi, c’est mon projet’: my life is my own, it is all I have; mine — since God will

no longer take it for me — is the responsibility to find its meaning, to become (as they put it) 'authentic'.

Later Edmond would join women’s groups: “I gave talks about self-determination, harnessed my knowledge of existentialism, the philosophy of personal responsibility, I held forth.” In 1968 she went to Wellington to attend the “Peace Power and Politics Conference”, wanting especially to see Sartre (who did not manage to attend). She did, however, listen to other “men of action” whose ideas far surpassed “the utopian dreams” she had shared with her father. Later she would read “On Genocide”, the paper Sartre was to have given.

Others of that time encountered literary existentialism less formally, outside the university. Rhondda Bosworth, in her contribution to the Quote, Unquote article “Remembering Frank Sargeson”, confirms Sargeson’s interest in existentialist literature. Recalling that “with Frank’s encouragement I read Camus, Sartre”, she declares that “existentialism was intoxicating: Frank inscribed for me his copy of Madame Bovary, knowing I would identify with its anti-heroine”.

Edmond’s and Bosworth’s encounters with the ideas of Camus and Sartre occurred in the early 60s. Yet novels and short stories by John Mulgan, Frank Sargeson, R. M. Burdon, Dan Davin, Erik de Mauny, Guthrie Wilson, Greville Texidor and Marilyn Duckworth (among others) that exhibited existentialist qualities had been appearing, if not frequently then with some regularity since the late thirties, especially after the war. Contemporary reviews of this so-called “existentialist” fiction further suggest an awareness of existentialist ideas.

In a 1949 Listener review of de Mauny’s The Huntsman in His Career, for example, Sargeson compares de Mauny’s novel to Cliffs of Fall by Dan Davin and remarks that both authors unsuccesssfully explore modern feelings of guilt and anxiety. Although Sargeson does not specifiically use the word “existentialism” in his review, when he criticizes de Mauny for not sufficiently digesting a number of borrowed ideas he is probably referring to ideas borrowed from Sartre. (In 1948 de Mauny had published his translation of Sartre’s Portrait of the Anti-Semite.) Sargeson’s

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26 Edmond, Bonfires in the Rain, pp. 182-183.
27 Edmond, Bonfires in the Rain, p. 206.
28 Edmond, Bonfires in the Rain, p. 208.
description of the hunting of Milsom also suggests Sartre, particularly the idea Sartre explores in *Les Mains Sales*, “that in politics it is necessary to get one’s hands dirty”31:

In the human world which he belongs to, such things happen, he cannot escape from participating in them. But since he chooses not to consent, he is a man tormented by feelings of responsibility and guilt, anxiety and doubt.32

In his *Landfall* review of *The Huntsman in His Career* D. H. Munro does not use the word “existentialism” in his review either, even though when he summarizes the novel’s main idea, “that, since we are caught up in the network, we cannot help suffering and making others suffer: the important thing is to maintain one’s own integrity”,33 he also is probably referring to de Mauny’s Sartrean view of the human predicament. There are a few more reviews that refer either implicitly or explicitly to the existentialist qualities of various New Zealand narratives, but I will discuss these reviews later when I consider in detail the narratives they concern.

As well as reviews, several magazines available in New Zealand published pieces which treat the topic of existentialism either implicitly or explicitly, in articles or in fiction. Although the following is by no means an exhaustive list, it will give an indication of some of the kinds of writing about existentialism to be found in the 1940s and 50s.

In 1945 and 1946 H. A. Mason contributed two articles to *Scrutiny* magazine: the first, “Existentialism and Literature: A Letter from Switzerland” criticizes Sartre’s *La Nausée* and *Les Mouches*; the second, “M. Camus and the Tragic Hero”, criticizes both the original and the English translation of Camus’ *L’Étranger*.34 In 1945 A. J. Ayer published two critical studies of Jean-Paul Sartre’s philosophy in a series of articles about novelist-philosophers in *Horizon*.35 In 1950 his “Jean-Paul Sartre’s Doctrine of

Commitment” appeared in the British Listener. In 1946 a writer for the New Zealand Listener questions, in “This Word ‘Existentialism’: New Attack on the Ivory Towers”, how long the new “-ism” would last. The explanation the writer provides is significant because it summarizes the attitude toward existentialism apparent in several of the Man Alone narratives I will consider, in the terms by which it would have been understood:

Existentialism ... involves the theory that man must create his own essence by throwing himself into world affairs, suffering and battling for what he believes .... Above all, it is the theory that one cannot stand apart from life, but one must consciously take sides.

In 1946 a New Zealand Listener article reprinted from the New Yorker, “Two Frenchmen of the Moment: Jean-Paul Sartre; Jean Bruller” describes Sartre as “the prophet of a new philosophy known as Existentialism, which has already divided France into two camps and is also beginning to cause intellectuals in other countries to trip over the party lines”.

Unpublished letters from Charles Brasch (the then editor of Landfall) to John Reece Cole in January of 1948 indicate that Cole submitted an article about existentialism to Landfall. Brasch rejected the article with the criticism that “there’s some interesting material in it, but it seems to me that it offers a decidedly sketchy philosophical background and does not show either much acquaintance with the literature or a close grasp of the problems”. Brasch’s comments in his next letter about Cole’s submission indicate that a range of better articles was already available to readers in New Zealand:

I do feel that something more gründlich is needed; after all a good many articles on the subject come to our libraries in journals which are read widely. And on a matter of this kind I think Landfall ought to be more than simply expository.

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In 1949 *Landfall* published “In Defence of the Individual”, H. H. Rex’s inaugural lecture delivered at the Theological Hall, Knox College, Dunedin. In his lecture Rex distinguishes between collectivism and individuality, Hegel and Kierkegaard, describing the latter as “an ‘existential’ thinker”. Also in 1949 *Hilltop*, a literary journal produced by the Victoria University College Literary Society, published “The Fall” by Lorna Clendon. “The Fall” depicts a girl’s fear that she is dying and her subsequent realization that she is not, and ends with the girl’s asking a question posed by many of the characters in existentialist fiction who have realized their mortality: “Now that she was living what would she do?” Hilltop’s successor, *Arachne*, published Erik Schwimmer’s translation of “The Actor” from *The Myth of Sisyphus* in 1950. The same issue of *Arachne* includes another Rex article, “Concerning Sartre”. As in his earlier article for *Landfall*, Rex gives a wider account of existentialism than the generally more populist version provided by the New Zealand *Listener*:

The other day a young New Zealander touring at present the Continent, wrote to me, ‘For good or for ill the existentialist approach seems to have made its way into almost every branch of life and thought on the Continent. Such a philosophy of despair, crystallizing as it does, thoughts of futility which must be in the minds of many people in our age, seems to me an extremely negative and dangerous contribution!’ He was thinking of Sartre in particular. This is important to note, for existentialism covers a wide range of frequently contradictory views, ranging from militant atheism to orthodox Christianity and varying from an emphatic denial of the possibility of personal communion to an equally emphatic assertion of the reality of the ‘we’.

Rex’s “young New Zealander” summarizes the disapproving response of some of the New Zealand writers and reviewers which I will discuss in the following chapters. Rex’s comment on that response summarizes a range of existentialist thought which has hardly even been addressed in New Zealand fiction. In 1951 *Landfall* published a second article by Rex, “Existentialist Freedom”, which deals with Sartre’s “uncompromising assertion

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40 A detailed list of Rex’s existentialist reading and lectures on Sartre and Dostoyevsky is provided by Albert C. Moore and Maurice E. Andrew in *A Book of Helmut Rex: A Selection of His Writings with Memoirs of His Life and Work* (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1980), 77n.
42 Lorna Clendon, “The Fall”, *Hilltop* 3, no. 3 (September 1949): pp. 4-5.
that man is free";\textsuperscript{45} describing that assertion as his strongest contribution to European thought. The article also defines Sartre’s politics as his “weakest contribution” because his call for political action is inconsistent when placed next to the plays and novels which deny that men and women can share anything.\textsuperscript{46}

*Parsons Packet*, posted from Wellington by Roy Parsons between 1947 and 1955, provides an indication of the relative scarcity of existentialist books in New Zealand during the 1940s and 50s. Notes on the inside of the front cover of the 1984 commemorative selection of pieces from *Parsons Packet* explain that Parsons’ small periodical “was a means of bringing attention to books, bookish issues, and of course to the bookshop. There was, in New Zealand at that time, little other publishing of this kind”.\textsuperscript{47} As well as editorials by Roy Parsons lamenting the practice of import licensing (“There is no denying, even in this rather crazy world of ours, it is still extraordinary that in a British country the import of British books should be restricted”)\textsuperscript{48} and his fears that he has nearly exhausted his import licence for British books, there are reviews and articles which Parsons commissioned from all over New Zealand.

Some of these reviews and articles specifically refer to publications which they describe as existentialist. In his February 1948 review of Louis Ferdinand Céline’s *Journey to the End of Night* John Reece Cole comments that “something about recent reading, the Existentialist hysteria and gloom, the disconsolate subjectivism of Davin’s recent war book [*For the Rest of Our Lives*] prompted me to turn back to Céline, surely one of the most sardonic and enigmatic figures who interpreted World War I and the aftermath”.\textsuperscript{49} The “Books to Come” section of the October/November issue of 1948 foreshadows the publication by Hamish Hamilton of Stuart Gilbert’s translation of *The Plague* by Albert Camus and provides a short review of *The Victim* by Saul Bellow. In the February/March issue of 1949 there is a brief description of Camus in the “People” section and an unfavourable review by David Hall of *The Plague*. In the June/July issue of 1949 there is a reprint of a satirical article by Delamore Schwartz from the *Partisan Review* entitled “Does Existentialism Exist?”. In the same issue there is a brief description of Gabriel Marcel’s *The Philosophy of Existence*. The March/April issue of

\textsuperscript{47} *Parsons Packet* April 1947-October/December 1955: A Selection Compiled for Roy Parsons on the Occasion of His Seventy-fifth Birthday 1984 by the Parsons Family and Bridget Williams (Wellington: Parsons’s Bookshop, 1984).
1950 describes Marcel's *Research into the Essence of Spiritual Reality* in "Books to Come", characterizing the author as the leader of the French school of Christian Existentialism. Also briefly described under "Books to Come" is Gerard Hopkins' translation of *Iron in the Soul*, the third instalment of Sartre's *Road to Liberty*. In the July/August issue of 1950 Parsons praises in "My Own Trumpet" an excellent Wellington production of Sartre's *Crime Passionnel*, even as he scorns newspaper reviews of the play. The May issue of 1953 describes Camus' *The Rebel* in the "Books to Come" section, which book is reviewed in the January/February issue of 1954. In the July/September issue of 1955 David Hall reviews the French edition of *Les Mandarins* by Simone de Beauvoir. In the last issue of *Parsons Packet*, October/December 1955, a brief description of Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus* is listed under "New and Forthcoming Books".

John Lehmann's *Penguin New Writing* had an international circulation that was, of course, much larger than that of *Parsons Packet*. According to Michael King, *Penguin New Writing* "was enormously successful and outstripped its predecessors .... Its largest printings were of 100,000 copies (when Penguin could secure sufficient paper), which meant a readership of at least 250,000".50

In an essay charting the history of publishing, patronage and literary magazines in New Zealand, Dennis McEldowney attests to *Penguin New Writing*'s success when he explains that "wartime emotion in Britain, both patriotic and vaguely socialist, turned it for a time into a best seller" and that the periodical printed on "flimsy grey paper" published the work of a handful of New Zealand writers who "achieved a very large audience indeed".51

Anthony Stones corroborates the wide circulation of Lehmann's periodical in his prefatory note to *Celebration*, the anthology he edited of the pieces contributed to *Penguin New Writing* by authors connected with New Zealand:

> In the well-thumbed pages of *Penguin New Writings* aboard troop ships, on remote airfields or in jungle clearings, a wide and specially attentive audience read work which, in the words of its great editor, John


Lehmann, hadn't been written by 'stranded Britishers', but by 'new poets and novelists who thought of themselves as New Zealanders'.

I would add to Lehmann's and Stones' suggestion that not only does Penguin New Writing reveal the moving away from "too insistent a backward-looking towards the English Channel" and towards the development of a self-consciously New Zealand literature, but that it also reflects the development in New Zealand of a modern existentialist mood.

ii.

In his foreward to the fourth issue of Penguin New Writing, published in March of 1941, John Lehmann claims that "Everywhere ... a new consciousness is stirring, both among those who have joined the armed forces and those who are still left in so-called civilian life ... [that] the old ways of life and the old slogans will have to be scrapped". In his foreword to the seventh issue Lehmann adds that many of the pieces he published would chart this new consciousness, not by offering what he labels "pep-talks" designed "to stimulate the will to work and fight" but by dramatizing both the prosaic bravery of ordinary Europeans during the war and their anti-heroic behaviour. Rather than depressing or weakening the readers of Penguin New Writing, the range of pieces he published would strengthen morale: they would broaden readers' understanding by enabling them to "see the dark side as well as the light". Thus Lehmann identifies in "The Wall" by Jean-Paul Sartre "feelings and details of behaviour that most people try to ignore the existence of in wartime".

While "The Wall" is by no means typical of Penguin New Writing it usefully introduces the existentialist mood and demonstrates why, according to Sartre, some of the slogans about wartime heroism "have to be scrapped". In Sartre's story death is the wall against which everyone must eventually stand. Since death is inevitable, in a Godless world innocence, guilt and self-sacrifice are meaningless. "The Wall" begins with Pablo Ibbieta in prison. Charged with aiding Ramon Gris, a Republican leader in the Spanish Civil War, after a mock trial Ibbieta has been told that he will be shot. Fellow prisoners have also been sentenced to death: Juan, a terrified boy whose brother is a Republican soldier, is shot even though he is "innocent"; Tom, who is probably a

sympathizer of the Republican cause, is also shot but his crime is never specified. Initially Tom seems to face the thought of his death more stoically than Juan. But when Sartre describes Tom’s last night alive with the focus on the sensations of a man in extremis characteristic of existentialist literature, it soon becomes apparent that he is terrified: Tom stands in a cold dungeon drenched with sweat, in a puddle of his own urine. Although Sartre does not explicitly indicate that God does not exist in “The Wall”, the absence of God and hope for an afterlife become apparent as Tom gropes towards an understanding of his death: “Something is going to happen to us” says Tom, “that I can’t understand.” 55 By telling Ibbieta that he can imagine and brave the nightmare of his execution but cannot comprehend the nothingness of death, Tom identifies a paradox at the centre of the individual’s existence: he can feel now the horror of not being able to feel when he is dead. When Ibbieta observes the symptoms of Tom’s fear of dying, he wonders if he appears to Tom in the same way and reaches the conclusion that “I knew we had nothing in common, but now we were as alike as twin brothers, simply because we were going to die together.” 56 Only Ibbieta, who is indeed “guilty” of helping the Republican leader, comes to appreciate the absurdity of his condition in a world where, without God, guilt and innocence are meaningless values. After Ibbieta has accepted the inevitability of his death and recognized that his life is worthless, “finished — closed like a bag, yet everything that was inside was left unfinished”, his execution is postponed. 57 Ibbieta’s captors had offered him his life in return for information about the whereabouts of the Republican leader, and he had told them what he thought was the wrong location of Gris’ hide-out, fully aware that discovery of the lie would result in his own execution. Already doubting the relative meanings of guilt and innocence because of the arbitrary executions of Juan and Tom, he is unsure why he is trying to protect Gris. Yet Ibbieta’s effort to save the Republican leader ironically leads to his capture: Gris had unwittingly moved to the place Ibbieta identified. When Ibbieta realizes the ultimate absurdity of attempting to protect a rebel leader in a world that is indifferent to their values but arbitrarily allows him to live for a limited time longer than other prisoners, he ends the story collapsed in laughter.

There should be very little similarity between New Zealand’s early literature, with its borrowed Victorian tradition, and Sartre’s modern short story. Yet even when an early writer such as Chamier reaches a conclusion utterly opposed to a conclusion

reached by Sartre, the former resolving Raleigh’s dilemma with Heavenly intervention and a return to conventional society and the latter not resolving anything except that Ibbieta will die, both authors ponder the effects of the non-existence of God. In *Man Alone* Mulgan’s attitude towards God is closer to Sartre’s because it is mostly implicit: Johnson does not think much about any kind of belief as he struggles to survive in an indifferent, Godless environment. Like Sartre’s detailed description of arbitrary death in a Spanish prison, the details Johnson relates about the death of a farmer who had gashed his leg with an axe negate the myth that God exists and will reward those who demonstrate their virtue through hard work. Bill’s amorality and survival in Sargeson’s “That Summer” (which narrative I will discuss at length presently) also assume the absence of God. In fact, with the exception of the conventional characters such as Alice in *Philosopher Dick*, Esther in *The Land of the Lost* and Helenora in *The Greenstone Door*, all of the Men and Women Alone I consider in this thesis are agnostic or atheist and must somehow learn to survive in a world made unpredictable by the absence of God and God-engendered values.

While some of New Zealand’s Man Alone literature from the 1930s onwards is stylistically closer to “The Wall” and assumes a similarly indifferent universe, there are significant differences. For example, the profusion of sensational detail surrounding Raleigh’s and Cedric’s mental and physical hardships in *Philosopher Dick* and *The Greenstone Door* which bears some resemblance to the extreme situation Ibbieta faces in “The Wall” does not reflect Sartre’s belief that individuals must manage by themselves in an indifferent world but rather the convention common in New Zealand’s early Man Alone narratives that Nature will test the protagonist, whose survival will lead to a happy resolution. Because Johnson’s flight through the Kaimanawas lacks the melodrama and supernatural mystery which characterize the above mentioned early novels, Mulgan’s portrayal of a man in extremis is much closer in style to Sartre’s. Yet once Johnson has survived his wilderness ordeal, he too experiences a kind of happy resolution. In “The Wall”, by contrast, the extreme situation the prisoners endure is not a test. Their reaction to it does not indicate anything except that death is their only possible resolution.

The attitude towards fellowship that Sartre portrays in his story opposes the attitude maintained in nearly all of New Zealand’s Man Alone narratives, an opposition which helps explain the development of New Zealand’s existentialist literature. Since *The Greenstone Door*, when Purcell’s humanistic values cause him to join the Maori in their fight against British domination, New Zealand literature has tended to share Camus’ vision of the human condition rather than Sartre’s. Thus in the 1970s explicit
and implicit references to Camus' brand of literary existentialism did not simply fade from New Zealand literature. They were absorbed: the appreciation and maintenance of fellowship has always been one of the most important motifs in New Zealand literature. In "The Wall", by contrast, Sartre suggests that fellowship is all but impossible. Unlike the early writers and Mulgan, who clearly treated fellowship as meaningful, Sartre in his story allows only the fellowship of death. Ibbieta's acknowledgement of his resemblance to Tom, because he knows they are both going to die, seems very close to the realization that the protagonist of Guthrie Wilson's *Strip Jack Naked* will reach just before he jumps to his death from the wharf:

> He had reached a position where he saw clearly, and without possibility of rejection, that it was death and only death which caused men to have fellow-feeling at all. It was, he understood, the knowledge that the span of all men was terminable and not within their power to prolong that gave men community, allied in fear against its unstayable march. 58

On closer inspection, however, Ibbieta and Jack have reached utterly different conclusions. Although both believe that there is nothing beyond death, Jack has finally understood the human need for community. Ibbieta's realization that he will die pulls him away from fellowship.

While several of the stories Lehmann published in *Penguin New Writing* do not specifically refer to existentialism, like "The Wall" they do maintain an easily identifiable existentialist mood. For example, in the Russian short story "Love" by Yuri Olyesha the narrator's summary of the symptoms of Shuvalov's surreal experience and subsequent conclusion that "gravitation no longer had any existence for him" 59 recalls Roquentin's malaise in Sartre's existentialist classic, *La Nausée*. They also evoke the distorted view of reality of Dostoyevsky's Underground Man who challenges the reader of his memoirs to question rationally accepted beliefs. Like both of these protagonists, Shuvalov has become aware of irrationality in a world that worships logical processes. As Shuvalov puts it, "sometimes my eyes see suddenly illegal, unscientific deformations in things". 60

Correspondences to ideas developed by existentialist writers are seldom as easy to deduce from the stories published in *Penguin New Writing*. As in Sartre's "The Wall" and Olyesha's "Love", however, the assumptions behind William Chappell's "The Sky

60 Olyesha, "Love", p. 103.
Makes Me Hate It" evoke an existentialist mood even though the story itself does not contain the word existentialism. As I explain earlier, both pre- and conscious existentialism emerge from similar feelings of isolation, alienation and rootlessness which could be caused by emigration to an unpredictable new environment or by participation in a war which dislocates millions of people and in which survival or non-survival are a matter of chance. The main difference between pre- and conscious existentialism is the individual's response to these feelings. Pre-existentialists perceive their feelings of anxiety as an expression of their personal inadequacy in a God- or scientifically-grounded world in which success is possible. Conscious existentialists, by contrast, see in their own mortality the inevitable failure of everything. Thus when the articulate and sensitive protagonist of Chappell's story considers how the Army has changed him, his internal monologue recalls the pre-existentialism of Raleigh who is horrified by evidence of the utter insignificance of human beings and their plans. It also anticipates the feelings of anxiety which the protagonist of Dan Davin's *For the Rest of Our Lives* (to be discussed in Chapter Four) exhibits when he acknowledges that the war has invalidated all of his pre-war certainties. Again, the difference is that Raleigh will recover from his dread and rejoin conventional society; the modern kind of anxiety inherent to the lives of Davin's and Chappell's protagonists will remain.

Chappell's title is significant: before the war when the protagonist looked at the sky, he understood what he saw; now he does not, and the sky hurts his eyes. He used to see it as "a stage backcloth with pretty lighting effects", as part of the setting of a play. As such, it was subject to control. But now,

> It dominated the landscape completely, and seemed higher and vaster than I had ever known it. I realised it as an element, aloof, distant, limpid and unsocial; and so far removed from this small dirty world, whirling like a pebble though space, with the small and dirty people balanced on it, wrangling and gesticulating with infinitesimal gestures.\(^61\)

Sargeson coincidentally uses a similar image of the earth's insignificance in "An Attempt a an Explanation" (1937) to illustrate a small boy's realization of "how different sorts of things are all connected up together":

> If I'd been older I would have made a picture for myself of the earth as just a speck of dirt drifting in space, with human creatures crawling over it and

crouching down and holding on tight just as the lice had done on the back of my hand.62

Such a pitiful view of the human condition causes the boy in Sargeson’s story to cry. When the protagonist in Chappell’s story complains that “the sky makes me hate it”, “it” could signify the war which appears grubby and insignificant next to the sky. Or he could be referring to the general loss of innocence and security that the sky had once represented. As he became more aware of scientific advances and world events, the sky reminded him that he had not gained any sure knowledge in exchange for that loss of innocence.

When the soldier muses that “this life, that is not an individual’s life, is making me more of an individual, driving my thoughts into deeper, rarer places than they have visited before”,63 he speaks generally for most of New Zealand’s Men and Women Alone. But his analysis of how war isolates individuals most clearly anticipates novels and short stories about the war by Davin, Guthrie Wilson and Erik de Mauny (to be discussed in Chapters Four, Five and Six respectively), which describe in very similar terms the isolation felt by some of the New Zealand combatants:

No one can be genuinely happy at this time. War, as it welds the people of a nation together, makes every life an isolated life. Everyone is lonely .... We have all become strangers; and when the war is over we shall have to start learning once more to know each other.64

The protagonist of “Words from a Stranger”, another of Chappell’s stories, defines the existentialist mood which seeped into much of the literature associated with World War Two when he remarks:

I think that the majority of people in the Services have this feeling of unreality to a greater or lesser degree, although they do not realise it as a definite malaise, and are, perhaps, only dimly aware of a certain spiritual discomfort that they cannot understand.65

He realizes as he watches the night sky that it is useless to wish for meaning:

No wishes now, when there is everything to wish for. As well
tear out the silly, yearning heart, fling it skywards and make one’s
incantations on the fiery trailing of its blood. As foolish, as useless to call
on the stars.

Deeper I gazed, and deeper still. Around me lay the world, with
all its untouchable, unchangeable shapes of earth and mountain, valleys,
rivers, oceans, and, above all, the fine skies filled with empty arcades of
cloud.

I knew them, and myself, and I was soothed by my knowledge. I
might have been disturbed had I realised that this was almost the last
time I was to find that silence within me which is necessary for full
comprehension.⁶⁶

Even though “Words of a Stranger” is not by an author connected with New
Zealand, I have quoted it extensively because Chappell’s story traces, very generally,
how ideas explored in New Zealand’s pre-existentialist literature could have converged
with the existentialist assumptions contained in a novel like Camus’ The Outsider and
then developed into the nihilism which informs stories by Greville Texidor and Anna
Kavan. In the second paragraph of the excerpt above, the protagonist of Chappell’s story
describes the night sky in words that would not look out of place in a Hardy novel or in
William Satchell’s The Land of the Lost, which I have already described as Hardy-esque.
In the first paragraph the self-conscious protagonist resembles Meursault who
acknowledges, and is soothed by, his place in an indifferent cosmos. The last paragraph
is significant because it anticipates the terrifying violence and irrationality of the
indifferent universe which Anna Kavan will chart in “The Red Dogs”. As I will
presently explain in more detail, while Kavan’s story recalls the isolation and alienation
of New Zealand’s early pioneers, it also records how the optimistic response to the
environment shown by Kavan’s characters changes into the despair of people who have
no earthly idea about how to manage hostile aliens from outer space.

In Chappell’s story, however, the protagonist must learn to manage the
consequences of human warfare. Waiting to be assigned to his next post on the desolate
coast of North Africa, he realizes the futility of trying to chart his destiny: “It might be
you next, me next. Here to-day, and where to-morrow? It doesn’t really matter, does it?”
A little later he answers his own question as he recognizes his lack of identity in the
army:

Not one of us, as we dawdled around the camp, bore anything
more than a superficial resemblance to human beings. We had become a
series of pieces of unidentified luggage left in the cloakroom of a remote

⁶⁶ Chappell, “Words from a Stranger”, p. 34.
railway station. There we were, waiting to be picked up, moved, and dumped in yet another place on the line. 67

Later, a group of Arab children would see his convoy on its way to a new posting as nothing but a symbol of “John-nee! Biskurt!”

The contrast between the protagonist’s earlier appreciation of Nature’s indifference and the following excerpt emphasizes the difference between Satchell’s *Land of the Lost* and Davin’s war stories, which I will consider in the next chapter:

’S so that is all you are now,’ I thought. ‘A symbol! — a stranger .... Not only you, but you, and you, and you. All of us, trundling across the African country. Cut to one shape. Made to what end? You don’t know where you are or where you are going. You belong to no one, and the world is no longer yours ....’

The world seemed suddenly too big, too wide, fertile and indifferent. 68

When the convoy arrives at the protagonist’s new waiting place, he is slightly comforted that he has learned his identity as far as the Arab children are concerned: “Now you know who you are — you can, perhaps, understand yourself.” But the protagonist’s comfort is short-lived: “My heart sank as I realised that it meant very little, very little indeed, to understand nothing.” 69

The self-conscious young protagonist of “The Cliff” by William Sansom whose worries begin this chapter resembles the soldier in “Words from a Stranger” in that both will learn of the utter unpredictability of their destiny. The plot of Sansom’s story is simple: after breaking up with his girlfriend, Podevin is at the seaside. Walking along, deep in thought, he observes a woman sunbathing. When Podevin makes up his mind to meet her and passes under a cliff as he moves in her direction, he imagines that the cliff may fall on him:

He kept telling himself that the cliff had never fallen in hundreds of years, he produced for himself proof of this in the sea-washed smoothness of each boulder on the beach — their sharpness had long been washed away. His brain pointed out to him that there were no sharp stones ....

'But,' came the answer instantly, 'This might yet be the one moment, the one moment in a thousand years!'  

Frightened by this possibility Podevin dashes into the cove where the woman is lying naked, imagines that she is dead and runs off in a panic. When pain from a cut ankle brings him to his senses, Podevin returns to the cove to confirm her condition and finds that the body has disappeared. The woman has moved behind a rock to dress. The story ends when “a silk vest was thrown momentarily into the air”; then, “this too disappeared.”

René LaFarge describes Sartre’s world-view in similar terms:

I am walking along a precipice. The path is narrow, without a guardrail. There is unquestionably the risk that I might slip on a stone or that the earth give way and I would inevitably fall into the abyss. I pay attention to where I set my foot, to rolling stones, to the slippery ground, I keep away from the edge of the path. And then suddenly, when I think I am able to overcome the obstacle, everything is put in question anew, in a much more dangerous fashion. It is no longer the stones, the ground, the drop that I dread, but myself. Might I not throw myself over into this precipice which both horrifies and attracts me? So far I have progressed with caution, taking care not to fall. But I can no longer do it. I realise it all depends on me, and I cannot depend upon myself. The danger is no longer exterior, it is within me.

Although Sansom’s later story, “How Claeys Died”, differs considerably in plot, setting and characterization from “The Wall” it, too, reflects aspects of Sartre’s world vision. In “The Wall” Ibbieta’s accidental betrayal of Gris postpones his own execution and suggests that death is inevitable, unpredictable and indifferent to human values such as guilt or innocence. Sansom’s story confirms these characteristics when Claeys, a teacher engaged in voluntary relief in Germany just after World War Two, is beaten to death by a recently freed group of prisoners of war who mistake him for one of their captors. But just as the story of Podevin is more of a vehicle for Sansom’s philosophizing about a young man’s dread of unpredictability than it is a recounting of fictional events, the story of Claeys’ death is almost incidental to Sansom’s deliberations on the futility of human endeavour. In a Godless world, war is a fact of nature which

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nature unconsciously recycles as it creates, destroys and compensates to maintain a rough, unpredictable balance:

In Germany, two months after the capitulation, tall green grass and corn had grown up round every remnant of battle, so that the war seemed to have happened many years ago. A tank nosing up from the corn like a pale grey toad would already be rusted, ancient: the underside of an overturned carrier exposed intricacies red-brown and clogged like an agricultural machine abandoned for years. Such objects were no longer contemporary traffic, they were exceptional carcasses; one expected their armour to melt like the armour of crushed beetles, to enter the earth and help fertilise further the green growth in which they were already drowned.73

“Murder”, another of Sansom’s stories, also explores the consequences of not being able to know anything. Reading “headlines of violence” in an old newspaper, the protagonist resembles Podevin as he works himself into an hysterical state thinking about the chimney sweep who may murder his wife:

All these had happened two weeks ago, all were forgotten: now this very fact seemed to prove their greater reality. This in turn suggested instantly that such things being true, they could happen again, in the future, or now, and anywhere, and at any time .... Neal was suddenly seized between his legs with a terror ... wildly seized with the idea of possibility, of what might happen at any time to anyone .... What risks, what terrible risks are taken at each moment of existence!74

While several of the pieces Lehmann published in Penguin New Writing explore the kind of dread experienced by individuals who are unsure of everything, only a few refer explicitly to either the existentialist philosophy or to existentialist literature. One such is “The Search for the Myth”, the text of a lecture Lehmann gave in Athens in 1946. In the lecture Lehmann describes the search for the myth as an intense preoccupation of contemporary literature and art and identifies Sartre and Camus as engaged in the new myth-making:

Both — however much they may differ in their interpretations of the fashionable existentialist philosophy — both are endeavouring to exalt certain types of men, certain kinds of conduct to express their views of the world, and have turned to old legends and periods of history

imprecise enough to be remoulded according to their own ideas, to serve as their vehicles.75

Another is Rayner Heppenstall’s “Albert Camus and the Romantic Protest” which examines the works of Camus’ “middle period”.76

Like Penguin New Writing, New Zealand literature contains relatively few explicit references to existentialism or existentialist literature. Yet several of the contributions to Penguin New Writing by authors connected with New Zealand could also be described as existentialist, either because they have developed from New Zealand’s pre-existentialist pioneer experience or because they respond to the existentialist mood characteristic of the war years.

iii.

Anthony Stones collected all the New Zealand contributions to Penguin New Writing in his 1984 anthology, Celebration. In his prefatory note he explains that the title identifies the anthology’s two purposes: the first, that Celebration was to help commemorate the fiftieth birthday of Penguin’s publishing in Britain; the second, that Celebration would confirm New Zealand’s stylistic independence from Britain.77

When Stones uses a stanza from a poem by Charles Brasch that appeared in Penguin New Writing to characterize this “stylistic independence” he is also defining, albeit unconsciously, the origins of New Zealand’s existentialist literature:

Always, in these islands, meeting and parting
Shake us, making tremulous the salt-rimmed air;
Divided and perplexed the sea is waiting,
Birds and fishes visit us and disappear.78

I have already shown that the pioneers and settlers of New Zealand produced pre-existentialist narratives to reflect their uncertainty about their place in the present and the future. In his prefatory note Stones extends that uncertainty to Frank Sargeson, whose

78 Charles Brasch, “In These Islands”, p. 31.
stories touch on the “themes of migration, uprootedness, ‘meetings and partings’”, and to other of the writers connected with New Zealand who were published in *Penguin New Writing*:

It is fascinating to note that at the time of publication, to be a New Zealander for [Charles Brasch] meant to be living in England, waiting to be called up; for Erik de Mauny and Dan Davin to be on active service in the New Zealand Army .... For ... Frank Sargeson it meant maintaining the difficult balance between living and writing in largely philistine New Zealand. For Greville Texidor and Anna Kavan, blown thither by what James Baxter called ‘the winds of a terrible century’, exile from England, permanent for the former and temporary for the latter.

War had only accentuated the migrant character of New Zealand life.79

Although Stones does not claim that *Celebration* outlines the development of an existentialist literature in New Zealand, he does emphasize that the authors represented in its pages were affected by the unpredictability of the war. In his introduction to the anthology Lehmann does not describe it as existentialist either, but he does explain that the Sargeson stories “seemed exactly to fit the mood and hit the note that I wanted to be characteristic of my new periodical”.80 In an early edition of *Penguin New Writing*, he had already claimed that mood as being exemplified by “The Wall”.81

While Stones’ and Lehmann’s comments only suggest that the settling of New Zealand and the war could have caused the New Zealand contributions to *Penguin New Writing* to exhibit characteristics associated with existentialist writing, in 1954 James K. Baxter explicitly links one of Sargeson’s stories with France’s literary existentialism:

In *That Summer* the myth of the lost man who has no place in society and scarcely desires it, is fully developed. One is struck immediately by the similarity of the world-view implied in this story and that which French existentialists have given a philosophical context and some French novelists a voice. (It is surely no accident that Sargeson’s book was lately translated into French.)82

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Baxter’s reference is to *Cet été-là*, Jeanne Fournier-Pargoire’s translation of “That Summer” which was published in Paris by Editions du Bateau-Ivre in 1946.\(^8^3\)

Sargeson contributed three short stories, one long short story and one novella to *Penguin New Writing*: “A Great Day”, “An Affair of the Heart”, “The Making of a New Zealander”, “That Summer” and *When the Wind Blows*. Although the first three of these narratives were initially published before Mulgan’s transitional *Man Alone*, their transparent style and absolute refusal to allow for any kind of transcendent meaning places them a step further from the pre-existentialism of the Victorian conventions Mulgan subverted in his novel and a step closer to the literary existentialism exemplified by narratives like Sartre’s “The Wall” or Camus’ *The Outsider*.

The events in “A Great Day” for example, their causes and their effects, do not obviously proceed from the conclusion that Men Alone are victims of New Zealand’s economy. Although the reader gathers that it is the stress of unemployment plus the jealousy of a small man who has lost his girl to a man who is stronger and more prosperous that provokes Fred into murdering Ken, Sargeson does not explain this. Nor does Sargeson explain the theme of the morbid questions Fred asks Ken as they row towards the reef where Ken will be abandoned:

‘What good’s a man’s strength anyway? ...’
‘Fancy you getting old and losing your strength. Wouldn’t it be a shame? ...’
‘You’ll die someday, and where’ll that big frame of yours be then?’\(^8^4\)

Sargeson’s characters are not aware of the existentialist philosophy or of what Baxter describes as the “the ‘dark wind’ of Camus” blowing towards them.\(^8^5\) Hints about the inevitability of death and consequent meaninglessness of human endeavour are there of course, but only casually, or they are implicit in the setting. At the beginning of the fishing trip, for instance, the ocean is indifferent to Fred’s murderous plans for Ken:

The sun was getting hot, but there still wasn’t any wind, and as the tide had just about stopped running out down the Gulf the dinghy hardly knew which way to pull on the anchor rope. They’d pulled out less than two miles from the shore, but with the sea as it was it might have been anything from none at all up to an infinite number. You couldn’t hear a

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\(^8^3\) Michael King notes the French translation with his list of Sargeson’s published volumes in *Frank Sargeson: A Life*, p. 432.


\(^8^5\) Baxter, “Back to the Desert”, p. 177.
sound or see anything moving. It was another world. The houses on the shore didn’t belong. Nor the people either. 86

Later, when the tide turns and the waves get choppy and Fred prepares to abandon Ken on a submerged reef, there is no sense that the ocean is colluding with the murderer:

And by that time the tide had begun to run in up the Gulf, and there was a light wind blowing up against the tide, so that the sea, almost without your noticing it, was showing signs of coming up a bit rough. And the queer thing was that with the movement the effect of another world was destroyed. You seemed a part of the real world of houses and people once more. Yet with the sea beginning to get choppy the land looked a long way off. 87

Fellowship is an important theme in the Sargeson stories in Penguin New Writing, as it is in all of the New Zealand narratives discussed so far. Love and friendship in novels like Philosopher Dick, The Land of the Lost and The Greenstone Door draws Men Alone back to society where they will lead happy, prosperous lives. In Man Alone although Mulgan uses Johnson and Rua to subvert the Victorian convention of romantic love, he still maintains the importance of fellowship when he leaves Johnson sitting among fellow soldiers. Yet Sargeson’s treatment of fellowship is somewhat different from the early writers and Mulgan. In “Back to the Desert” Baxter remarks that “on an existential level [Sargeson’s] view is sourly compassionate” and uses “An Affair of the Heart” as an example: “That superb and tender love story ... leaves no room for anger or judgement. Mrs. Crawley’s love for her son, though it eventually destroys her sanity, carries its own terrible justification. Truly it is an affair of the heart”. 88 In other words, “An Affair of the Heart” does not make assumptions about the nature of love. An early New Zealand writer would have explained her love as ennobling or degrading. The same dichotomy is implicit in Man Alone. Yet Mrs Crawley’s love for Joe is what it is and readers have to supply their own interpretation. Here is mine: in an impermanent world without transcendent values, Mrs. Crawley is able to transcend her poverty because she loves a son who has long since ceased to visit her. At the end of the story the narrator underscores (but does not explain) this paradox when he observes “how anything in the world that was such a terrible thing could at the same time be so beautiful”. 89

"The Making of a New Zealander", the second of Sargeson's stories to appear in *Penguin New Writing*, was first published in 1939. So was Mulgan's *Man Alone*. Another similarity is that both Johnson and the unnamed narrator of Sargeson's story drift from job to job because neither can settle in conventional society. Mulgan debunks the Myth of Progress. So, too, does Sargeson when the narrator recounts why two Dalmatian immigrants, Nick and his friend, cannot possibly work hard enough to make their orchard prosper:

> Out here everybody wanted the money quick, so they put on the manure. It was money, money, all the time. But he and his mate never had any. Everything they got they had to pay out, and if the blackspot got among the apples they had to pay out more than they got. Then one of them had to go out and try for a job.  

Yet despite the above-mentioned similarities, *Man Alone* and "The Making of a New Zealander" support two fundamentally different views of the human condition. Unlike Johnson, who eventually learns to value fellowship and realizes a kind of happiness among fellow combatants, Nick's situation is irremediable. When he compares the wine he makes from New Zealand grapes unfavourably to Dalmatian wine, the narrator reminds him that he is no longer in Dalmatia. Nick's immediate reply, that "now I am a New Zealander", defines his predicament: he is not a New Zealander, nor will he ever be one. The narrator's rejoinder that Nick's children will be New Zealanders underscores the Dalmatian's predicament. Hints that Nick is homosexual make it unlikely that he will marry and have children and so put down roots in New Zealand society. While Nick and the narrator do not understand that their failure is part of the human condition, their experience implicitly exemplifies Camus' existentialist world-view in a way that Johnson does not.

Baxter's comment that "the insistence on detail in all of Sargeson's stories is characteristic of writing that verges on existentialism" and his description of that detail as "a vast web stretched over an appalling inner void; at times it wears thin and one can see the blackness underneath" recalls the *nada* at the centre of Hemingway's fictional world. The passage from "That Summer" which Baxter provides as example is especially telling:

> I couldn't decide what to do to fill in the time, and I couldn't keep my mind off thinking about a job. I tried reading my True Story but

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90 Frank Sargeson, "The Making of a New Zealander", p. 43.
it was no good. I’d just lie on my bed but that was no good either, and I’d have to keep getting up to walk up and down. I’d stop in the middle of the floor to roll a cigarette and listen to them downstairs. I’d think, my God I’ve got to have someone to talk to, but even after I’d turned out the light and had my hand on the door knob I’d go back and just flop on the bed. But the last time I flopped I must have dozed off, because I woke up lying in my clothes, and I wondered where the hell I was. I’d been dreaming, and I still seemed to be in the dream, because there wasn’t one sound I could hear no matter how hard I listened.92

When I earlier considered some of the remarkable similarities between *Man Alone* and *The Outsider*, I traced them to Hemingway’s influence on Mulgan and Camus. If I add Sargeson’s “That Summer” to the comparison, even with the qualification that Sargeson claimed Sherwood Anderson as an influence rather than Hemingway, it becomes still more extraordinary: prior to the publication of Camus’ novel in French, both Mulgan and Sargeson independently wrote narratives that resemble *The Outsider*.

As Men Alone Johnson, Bill and Meursault live on the fringes of societies which disapprove of them. Although they do not understand this disapproval, they are mostly unaffected by it as they drift without ambition. While religious ideals purportedly affect the behaviour of those around them, they do not believe in God (it would be more accurate to say that they do not think about God), and their behaviour is generally amoral.

Lydia Wevers’ description of Bill’s limited language characterizes a similar lack in how Johnson and Meursault represent their perceptions of the world:

Bill expresses himself only in recounting the sequence of events as he experiences it; his speech contains almost no modifiers, few intensifiers, scarcely any adjectives or adverbs, no similes or metaphors; in other words Bill has no language to speak anything other than ‘factual’ reporting, and what he narrates demonstrates his limited ability to articulate his understanding of what he reports.93

In Wevers’ opinion Sargeson caused Bill to speak in such a way because the inadequacy of his verbal response to experience induces “an insistent reading-in” so that the reader must assign meaning to Bill’s narrative.94 The same could be said about the effect of how little Johnson or Meursault interpret their experience.


Evidently Mulgan, Sargeson and Camus all wished to implicate the reader in their narratives for a similar reason: the language employed by their Men Alone denies that the conventional values of their societies have meaning. Yet there is a difference in scope. Mulgan was concerned to make New Zealanders aware of the gap between their country as “God’s own country”, as it was portrayed by his father and others, and New Zealand as it really was during the Depression. Sargeson also revealed the inadequacy of the Myth of Progress, but equally implicit in his narratives is “the ‘dark wind’ of Camus” which blows his protagonists towards failure. As a philosophical novelist, playwright and essayist whose literary efforts to explore the heart of the problems afflicting modern society won him the Nobel prize for literature in 1957, Camus uses Meursault’s impoverished language in *The Outsider* to suggest the essential meaninglessness of *everything* in a world without transcendent values.

I have already described Johnson as too closely bound to New Zealand’s Victorian tradition to be a conscious existentialist. Bill, however, is different because his experience hardly conforms to New Zealand’s Victorian tradition. He does not embark on a purifying journey. He is not changed by his drifting from country to city and back again. He does not have a conventional romance. Unlike the affair that develops between Johnson and Rua, Bill’s love for Terry is too understated and Sargeson portrays it too sympathetically for it to be a subversion of the convention that governs romance. Although both Bill and Johnson are portrayed as victims of a depressed economy, Bill does not think of himself in that way. And although Bill is like Johnson in that he has always had “itchy feet” (as Bill says of one of the farmers he has worked for, “I liked him all right and the tucker was good, but him and his missus were always rowing, and there was just the three of us stuck away with hardly any company to speak of”95), Johnson will come to understand the causes and effects of his drifting. Bill will not. For example, when Johnson admits to Jack that he had never considered political issues because he has “just knocked around” Jack censures his lack of thought:

‘You’ve been knocked around, that’s what you’ve done.’
‘I had some good years.’
‘Yeah, and you had some bad years, that’s what does it, the fellows like you not ever stopping to think, just bumming around, when things are good not a care in the world and when they’re bad it’s nobody’s fault.’96

95 Sargeson, “That Summer”, p. 53.
Although at the time Johnson minimizes Jack’s interpretation of his behaviour, the conclusion of *Man Alone* will demonstrate that he has taken Jack’s words to heart. In the following passage from “That Summer”, by contrast, Bill agrees and moves on when an unemployed person in the park insists that “a man wants a mate that won’t let him down”:

‘Yes,’ I said. But I wasn’t paying much attention because Terry had woke up.
‘I’ve got to go,’ I said.
‘Wait a minute, mate,’ he said.
‘No,’ I said, ‘I’ve got to go.’
‘Listen mate,’ he said.
‘No sorry,’ I said, and I went back to Terry. 97

The conversation Bill abandons to take care of his mate ironically emphasizes the significance of his feelings for Terry. Yet Bill does not conclude that in an indifferent universe mateship has an enduring value. The closest he comes to any kind of conclusion is implicit in the question he asks himself when the dying Terry drinks too much beer: “I asked myself who I was to be interfering with anyone’s pleasure in a world like this?” 98 Bill never does learn the answer because he is incapable of understanding or verbalizing the value of fellowship. Terry dies while his friend is searching for a priest. When Bill sadly drifts away the implied author refrains from reaching a conclusion, leaving it to the reader to judge the events of that summer.

The agendas Mulgan and Camus enact in their novels are rather more obvious. If the central problem of *Man Alone* is one man’s social and economic alienation, then Mulgan could be described as putting a Marxist spin on the conventional idea that rejoining society will resolve such alienation. *The Outsider* also has a definite programme, but it is philosophical as it demonstrates the consequences of one man’s questioning of conventional meanings.

When Baxter begins “Back to the Desert” with Popeye’s famous self-assessment, “I am what I am and I am what I am”, 99 he is characterizing Bill as an existential figure who is as he is. Yet Bill cannot be described as a conscious existentialist because, although he thinks enough to be puzzled by his constant failures, he is not unduly troubled by them: he would be unable to formulate such an abstraction. Unlike Johnson, Bill does not learn why he is a victim; even though he places a lot of

importance on his relationship with Terry, he does not realize the importance of fellowship. Unlike Meursault, Bill does not come to acknowledge his existential freedom.

*When the Wind Blows* is the last of Sargeson’s narratives to appear in *Penguin New Writing*. Like all of “That Summer” and the section of *Man Alone* where Johnson treks through the wilderness, *When the Wind Blows* presents an existential view of the world. This time, however, Sargeson causes this view to mature as the unexamined and repetitive thoughts of Henry as a child gradually give way to the thoughts of Henry as a young man who has questioned the arbitrary rules of his upbringing and is preparing to declare his independence from it. In the excerpt below Henry describes the secure environment of his young childhood:

> It had always been so, and it would never be any different — because it had always been so as long as you could remember, a long, long time, and it would never be any different because you had never noticed any change. ¹⁰⁰

Beginning when he first leaves the security of home and must learn to cope with school, Henry is depicted as suffering from a nervous condition which reflects his longing for the innocence of childhood even as he questions the narrowness of his background. At the end of the story, however, it is evident that he has grown beyond his parent’s puritanical ethos. Lying naked on the grass, Henry remembers that

> Father and Mother always got in a temper if they saw him without his shirt on. Father always said nobody should be allowed to go in swimming without a bathing suit that covered them from neck to knee. And Mother said of course they shouldn’t. And why people couldn’t be decent she didn’t know. ¹⁰¹

Yet Henry has seen his father spying on his aunt as she dressed and has realized that he, too, is prone to sexual sin. Finally thinking “Poor Father” and “Poor Mother” because their lives have been so circumscribed by their puritanical ethos, Henry savours the existential world of the riverbank which is as unconscious of their rules as it is of his human destiny. Naked as a baby and without any pre-conceived notions he is ready to grow, to begin defining his own ethic as he learns to take responsibility for himself. Plainly there are existentialist overtones, but Sargeson cannot be labelled a consciously existentialist writer. In no way does he suggest that Henry’s declaration of independence

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¹⁰⁰ Frank Sargeson, *When the Wind Blows*, p. 163.
from his parents is related to his development of an existentialist world-view. According to Sargeson, the point of the story is that “once the boy understands that his father is involved in all the human frailties, the way is open for the healing of his traumatic condition”. Even so, Henry’s realization that his life is as random as the wind, that he does not know anything, puts him a step closer to the self-consciously existentialist protagonists of New Zealand’s wartime and post-war writers.

Dan Davin’s “Under the Bridge” and Erik de Mauny’s “In Transit” and “A Night in the Country” also appeared in Penguin New Writing. While the protagonists of these stories have also reached the conclusion that they do not know anything they surpass Henry’s realization, and draw even closer to the consciously existentialist protagonists of New Zealand’s wartime and post-war literature, when they come to understand that they cannot know anything. The three protagonists also dramatize two of the assumptions I have already identified in Satchell’s Hardyesque The Land of the Lost, that individuals live their lives before an indifferent natural backdrop and that their problems and successes are meaningless, merely part of the scenery. The main difference, however, between The Land of the Lost and these wartime narratives is that neither Davin nor de Mauny employs a figure like Jess Olive to act as spokesman for the Myth of Progress.

The first-person narrator of Davin’s “Under the Bridge” is a New Zealand soldier in Crete. Like the soldiers in the Penguin New Writing stories discussed above, he attempts to live under what he has come to regard as an empty sky. His narration expresses Nature’s indifference to the war and his own despair in the face of death which he has realized is both arbitrary and inevitable. The difference between Raleigh’s despair and his own marks the difference between the optimism inherent in New Zealand’s pre-existentialist literature (Raleigh is, after all, called back from the brink of suicide by a heavenly voice) and a wartime bleakness that prefers not to admit hope:

Our hill overlooked the village on its left, on the right front the sea. The sea, smooth and untroubled, its calm a promise of permanence when this tumult should be silent, road home to the lands of rain. Crouched under the lee of rock, nostalgia gripped me like a cramp, nostalgia for the past or for the future. Anything to be out of this moment where we were held by the slow, maddening pace of time. But not for long this mutiny of the heart. Madness to venture hopes on such a sea, to

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commit oneself to anything but a prudent despair. Try to save your life certainly, but within the bounds of decency and dignity. And not expect to save it. Fighting was easier, dourer in despair. 103

The narrator goes on to describe the “silence of negation and death” enveloping the villagers who had taken shelter under a bridge during a bombing raid:

Still, I thought at first; but after a while I seemed to discern movement. It was not a movement of whole bodies, a stirring of limbs rather, of extremities, faint and painful like the movements of a crushed insect whose antennae still grope out pitifully with a hopeless, gallant wavering to life. 104

Throughout a long writing career (to be considered in the next chapter), Davin would compare people to insects to exemplify the fragility of human beings, the brevity of their lives and the determined nature of human actions. While that kind of metaphor can definitely be described as having emerged from the naturalism characteristic of nineteenth-century literature, take away the expectation that human behaviour is as determined as that of instinctive animal behaviour and it also suggests the existentialist mood. Davin’s protagonist understands that he is caught alive in a war. He makes no appeal to God because he realizes that in an unconscious universe he has no special privileges. If he has any kind of “ideal” it is based on the humanistic notion that to be brave is to maintain “the bounds of decency and dignity” in war.

De Mauny’s “In Transit”, which begins with a description of the army camp where Bennett is looking for a place to spend the night as he makes his way back to his unit after leave in Syria, also employs naturalistic detail to invoke an atmosphere of cosmic indifference:

As he stumbled over the deeply rutted field, Bennett was slightly oppressed by the deserted air of the place. It had the lost air of an abandoned picnic-ground. Dim rows of lorries stood behind the tents. He did not see a soul. Pausing for a moment, he faced in the direction of the city he had just quitted. From the deep canyons of Jerusalem, far away, came a hum of activity. He sighed, belched joylessly, and turned about. In the other direction, Bethlehem was already nightbound under sentinel stars. 105

105 Erik de Mauny, “In Transit”, p. 127.
Eventually Bennett shares a tent with an Arab soldier whose brother had been killed by bandits even though he had truthfully claimed to be Islamic. Even though he was a devout Christian, the Arab had also claimed to be Islamic. He was imprisoned. At this point “In Transit” faintly resembles “The Wall” because both stories dramatize the notion that, in a meaningless world, death is arbitrary. Yet the two stories reach fundamentally different conclusions. Once Ibbieta accepts that his death is inevitable, he life becomes meaningless and he finds no comfort in fellowship with the other condemned. The Arab, by contrast, praises the Lord even though his imprisonment in Baghdad has wrecked his health. Although the Arab’s faith in God and his fatalistic response to suffering cause the protagonist to feel considerable impatience, Bennett treats him kindly by telling him where to go for blankets and by sharing a candle and cigarettes with him. When Bennett sets off for his unit thinking “the episode might avail him nothing, but it suddenly seemed like an oasis in a lonely, barren plain”, 106 he is affirming a convention that is well-established in New Zealand’s literature: fellowship with the Arab has added significance to an otherwise featureless desert.

Like “In Transit”, “A Night in the Country” recalls The Land of the Lost when it concludes with the protagonist’s realization that the backdrop to his elaborate and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to fraternize with an Italian woman “was a night of huge, inscrutable presences, which seemed to brood timelessly over the scarred earth”. 107 Yet the plot of The Land of the Lost suggests that Satchell’s “inscrutable presences” are essentially beneficent. De Mauny’s story is more like Chappell’s “The Sky Makes Me Hate It” because the protagonists of both are truly alone in a universe which is truly indifferent.

The two short stories by Greville Texidor which appeared in Penguin New Writing also bear evidence of the existentialist mood. The first, “Epilogue”, resembles “The Wall” when its protagonist realizes that values are meaningless because war kills pacifists and combatants alike. Jim, an aid worker, was killed while trying to deliver a machine gun to a group of Spanish Republicans. When the protagonist later suggests to Jim’s parents that Jim had died heroically aiding combatants, they are horrified because they are Quakers and committed to non-violence. The protagonist renders the idea of heroism even less meaningful when he reproaches himself for telling the wrong lie:

Why couldn’t he have remembered? How easy it would have been to say that their son was killed bringing in a wounded comrade. He might have

106 De Mauny, “In Transit”, p. 130.
been killed any day bringing children away from Madrid. The idiocy of implying that Jim was a fighter. Even his death of a hero had been an accident. Other people had been over there to the machine-gun post and nothing had happened, till in the end it seemed pretty safe to go.\textsuperscript{108}

“Santa Cristina” also suggests that values have no transcendent meaning. Although its epigraph

\begin{quote}
Each day sheds its skin like a snake,  
But not the days of Fiesta\textsuperscript{109}
\end{quote}

affirms that the world grows and wears out while the fiesta of Santa Cristina remains unchanged, events in the story suggest that everything is subject to entropy. Years after the town’s accidental adoption of Santa Cristina, the religious celebration of her fiesta is only perfunctory. When the story opens, the festival is secular and is signalled by the coming of tourists each season.

Each year an old tramp named Cristina, whom Texidor identifies with the saint, settles in the town for the fiesta and earns a few pennies by telling fortunes. The saint also “earns” money from the faithful who leave meagre offerings at her shrine in exchange for her intercession. To the foreign blonde who visits the shrine in order to pray for her lover the mechanic, Cristina seems an embodiment of the Saint. Yet the two are more alike than the woman realizes. Cristina and the Saint both watch over the town, with as little effect: the townspeople are more indulgent than believing of either of them; Cristina would be destitute but for the food and pesetas given to her; Santa Cristina has grown shabby because there are fewer of the faithful to maintain her shrine. Cristina has a “desolate monkey grin”, similar to the grin on the skull of Santa Cristina as it is walked through the town during the festival procession. “Auntie Cristina”, as she is described by a group of tolerantly mocking fishermen, is old and approaching death:

\begin{quote}
The thick curtain of night hung too close round the lighted circle of sand.  
There was nothing but the night and the taste of death in each suck of a hollow tooth.\textsuperscript{110}
\end{quote}

Santa Cristina has also aged and is “dying” because of the people’s lack of faith.

The idea of nothingness advancing on the light, of death as inevitable as the wearing away of a tooth, is ironically emphasized by the Marxist mechanic who boasts

\textsuperscript{108} Greville Texidor, “Epilogue”, p. 123.  
\textsuperscript{109} Greville Texidor, “Santa Cristina”, p. 133.  
\textsuperscript{110} Texidor, “Santa Cristina”, p. 133.
of the future during the Festival procession:

‘What a charade! Education is needed in this country. We shall soon see what the Popular Front can do. And if the politicians won’t act — then we shall see —’

Texidor negates both the mechanic’s boast and the epigraph which begins the story: the mechanic is mortally wounded during a skirmish, his love for the blonde ends, and she withdraws from town life; the town’s summer tourist trade ends when tourists do not visit because of the fighting; the priest’s authority as the Church’s and Santa Cristina’s earthly representative ends when he flees the town after he has robbed Cristina of her clothes for a disguise. Neither Santa Cristina, nor her festival nor the living Cristina can last much longer.

The last few paragraphs of “Santa Cristina” are significant because, as in the Sargeson stories already discussed, the detail seems stretched over an existential void:

Like a ladder the white road stood on end in the heat. The Virgin’s villa quivered in the sky. Cicadas screamed. The wind came suddenly up and tapped the shutter of the sick girl’s room. The fig tree stretched in its shadow and advanced with all its branches. A wave crashed on the shore.

Cristina slept. She was so tired of keeping an eye on things.

Anna Kavan’s “The Red Dogs” is the last of the stories contributed to Penguin New Writing by a writer connected with New Zealand. In the sense that it also offers the most compelling evocation of the twentieth-century anxiety associated with the loss of God, the failure of science to ameliorate the human condition and the exhaustion caused by global warfare, it could also be described as the most “existentialist” of any of the stories contributed by a New Zealand writer to Lehmann’s series. With the appearance of alien monsters who conquer an unidentified country as they devour its inhabitants, entropy and the shedding of significance are horribly accelerated. Because Kavan’s story implies that anything is possible, the insecurity it describes ranges far beyond the anxiety reflected in Sargeson’s, Davin’s, de Mauny’s or Texidor’s fiction. While for the protagonist death is still inevitable, nothing else behaves according to familiar rules.

Kavan’s narratives have been described in terms that evoke the atmosphere of existentialist fiction. In a review of Kavan’s novel, Scarcity of Love, Marilyn Duckworth

notes that Kavan was a heroin addict who died of an overdose in 1968. Duckworth’s comment that *Scarcity of Love* is “full of images of chill and doom and projects a kind of icy, polished glitter”\textsuperscript{113} summarizes the sense of isolation and alienation that either caused or was symptomatic of her addiction. Rhys Davies also alludes to Kavan’s addiction in his introduction to a posthumous collection of her short fiction, *Julia and the Bazooka and Other Stories*. Describing the stories as “a moving chronicle of terrifying isolation and defeat”, Davies adds that the “bomb explosions in the pages are not so much a wartime phenomenon as echoes of personal assaults and the destruction of personal repose which is the real meaning of war in its inescapable aftermaths”.\textsuperscript{114}

While Davies sees Kavan’s fiction as a personal response to personal experience rather than as an imaginative recasting of World War Two, “The Red Dogs” must have seemed particularly relevant in *Penguin New Writing* in 1949. When the arrival of the red dogs completely alters everyone’s way of life, Kavan could be relating some of the history of the war and its aftermath. When the protagonist wonders, “were our officials blind, negligent, incapable, misinformed? Or were they corrupt, and guilty of a positive breach of trust?”,\textsuperscript{115} the red dogs’ rapid takeover could be interpreted as a metaphor for conquest by fascist or communist forces. Possibly there is a parallel with Camus’ *The Plague*, which has been interpreted as a metaphor for the Nazi occupations. The officials’ response once they could no longer ignore rumours that the red dogs devoured human flesh recalls the political manoeuvring and naïveté that preceded World War Two. In a bid to control what they label a deadly new variety of distemper, they order the inoculation of all dogs. The attempt fails. There follows a period of accommodation during which the aliens are provided with human corpses to scavenge. The protagonist’s description of how quickly the populace acquiesced to the changes caused by the alien red dogs recalls Sartre’s disdain for the French bourgeoisie, whom he blamed for the occupation of France:

A year doesn’t seem long to remember such a momentous happening: yet no one so much as acknowledges the anniversary. Of course I don’t suppose everyone has really forgotten the significance of the date; most likely they’ve decided to keep it quiet. And that sort of supineness makes one inclined to despair. What a rare thing human integrity is — how few


\textsuperscript{115} Kavan, “The Red Dogs”, p. 228.
and far between are the individuals who possess it! Humans on the whole aren't much more stable than weathercocks, changing with every fresh wind.\(^{116}\)

Whether “The Red Dogs” should be read as science fiction, as a metaphor of World War Two or as a metaphor of Kavan’s own insecurity, its world-view obviously differs from the more optimistic perspective characteristic of New Zealand’s early literature. Yet the contrast is just as marked when I compare the article Kavan wrote for Horizon, “New Zealand: Answer to an Inquiry”, to New Zealand, the book Ngaio Marsh and R. M. Burdon collaborated on for the series The British Commonwealth in Pictures. Both were published in 1943. Although New Zealand does not minimize the struggles of the pioneers and settlers, its writers clearly believed that New Zealand’s European residents flourished:

It is true that the pioneers and their successors were exposed to many hardships, to the menace of great rivers and vast mountains, and to the inconveniences of primitive living conditions. They were threatened by a native race already enraged by marauding whalers and poor whites. They struggled. In a word, they were pioneers. Since their days we have suffered earthquakes and epidemics, wars and depressions. Yet, in comparison with other peoples in the Commonwealth, are we not a fortunate race? The climate of these islands is temperate, the forests free of menace. The first settlers found no snakes in New Zealand and no dangerous animals. They found fish and birds in profusion, good water wherever they settled, tall timber and rich earth. In a country that lies mid-way between equator and pole, they were spared the ravages of tropical disease and the rigours of extreme cold. They prospered. What sort of race have they bred?\(^{117}\)

Kavan’s article suggests an answer to the question asked above when it focuses on the problematic relationship she believed New Zealanders have always maintained with their unpredictable environment. It goes even further than John Mulgan’s Man Alone in its efforts to dispel complacency about the position of the European in New Zealand:

You get (I mean, of course, I get) a feeling of the country being in opposition to man; to the white man, particularly. In spite of the farms and the fruit trees and the fat sheep, there seems to be a grim passive resistance somewhere in the background exerting a subconscious influence all the time. The fertility seems superficial, and every now and


then there’s a sudden hint of the real oppositional background, bleak fissures of soil erosion, or boiling mud pools quietly chuckling to themselves, and in no wholesale glee either. It seems, fundamentally, to be a place of formidable alien power and of animal- and human-life negation.\textsuperscript{118}

When Kavan speculates about why New Zealanders feel so insecure, she describes the New Zealand bush as far more threatening than Alan Mulgan’s beneficent forests. It is even more threatening than the indifferent wilderness John Mulgan depicts in \textit{Man Alone}. In one long sentence in the passage below, Kavan piles image upon image of nature bearing down on the inhabitants of New Zealand. In Kavan’s view New Zealanders are subconsciously aware of their utter insignificance and therefore fear the entire universe which they imagine to be malevolent:

\begin{quote}
They’ve got to defend themselves somehow against all that loneliness of water and the South Pole and the bush, all the hoary, enormous, spectral trees standing massed against them, and getting them down, because, though they keep on burning and felling the trees, there’s still a huge mass of nature, indestructible, desolate, indifferent, dangerous nature, the oceans and the ice cap and the antique forests and the earthquakes, massing upon them, bearing down on them, separating them from Bodmin and Nottingham; and who are they, anyhow?\textsuperscript{119}
\end{quote}

The insecurity afflicting New Zealanders sounds very much like the feelings of isolation and alienation suffered by characters in contemporary existentialist fiction:

\begin{quote}
They are caused to tremble, being only a few transplanted ordinary people, not specially tough or talented, walking in gumboots or sandshoes among the appalling impersonal perils and strangeness of the universe, living in temporary shacks, uneasily, as reluctant campers too far from home.\textsuperscript{120}
\end{quote}

The result of all this strangeness is the opposite from what Alan Mulgan portrays in his travelogue, \textit{A Pilgrim’s Way in New Zealand}:

\begin{quote}
Hence the depleted vitality, the weariness of the secret eternal struggle, the heart unreconciled, but at home in another place, the mind
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{118} Anna Kavan, “New Zealand: Answer to an Inquiry”, \textit{Horizon} 8 (September 1943): p. 155.

\textsuperscript{119} Kavan, “New Zealand: Answer to an Inquiry”, p. 161.

\textsuperscript{120} Kavan, “New Zealand: Answer to an Inquiry”, p. 161.
preoccupied and closed against strangers, being closed against the menacing strangeness of an alien atmosphere.121

And yet Kavan's science fiction short story resembles New Zealand's early literature in at least two ways: both describe unpredictable environments, and both explore the feelings of insecurity experienced by those who must learn to survive in those environments. Even though the early pioneers and settlers of New Zealand had no alien red dogs to contend with, parts of the new territory could have seemed as menacing to the migrant. Accordingly, when Kavan's protagonist describes the appalling mood of uncertainty caused by the red dogs he approximates the state of mind suffered by Raleigh in *Philosopher Dick* when he attempts to live life on his own terms, away from the society that would shield him from unreasoning Nature.

Unlike New Zealand's early Men Alone, however, the protagonist of Kavan's story has no Myth of Progress to sustain his hope for a better future. Because he does not have the promise of an afterlife to reconcile him to death, his uncertainty about the present is all the more horrible. The sense of personal failure implicit in the isolation and alienation felt by the first European inhabitants of New Zealand is mild in comparison to the protagonist's expression of complete and inevitable human failure:

Try to imagine how much more ghastly than the loss of life in the accepted sense would be transmutation to a type of existence absolutely unknown. Such a change is almost too appalling to contemplate, involving the loss of contact, communication, memory, hope, trust, dreams; everything, in fact, which supports the individual in the enormous void — all that mitigates the frightful solitude which is being.122

The protagonist's description of the "frightful solitude" which afflicts the individual recalls other *Penguin New Writing* stories already discussed, such as Chappell's "The Sky Makes Me Hate It" or Sansom's "Words from a Stranger":

It was as if the universe itself had suddenly lost its reason. As if the glass dome overhead opened on boundless nothing, where dead stones without end hurled and howled in ceaseless, senseless flight. Of this idiot nothingness, divorced from my known self, I must become a part; or else

121 Kavan, "New Zealand: Answer to an Inquiry", p. 162.
set out, isolated and lost, upon a search of which I could not see the end.\textsuperscript{123}

It also signals the beginning of his quest for fellowship, another similarity to New Zealand's early Man Alone narratives. While New Zealand Men Alone often find solace in the fellowship of other men, the outcome is less certain for Kavan's protagonist: alienated from the human "weathercocks" whose bearings are determined by the red dogs, he records his story in a diary which he hopes someone will read and understand as he goes in search of "a part of the earth that still exists, uncontaminated by the red dogs, where I and my brother strangers will find a home."\textsuperscript{124} The narrative ends, however, without a hint that the red dogs can be overcome.

Aspects of the diary Kavan's protagonist keeps in "The Red Dogs" clearly recall the earlier diary which constitutes La Nausée by Jean-Paul Sartre. Appearing in France in 1934, an English translation of the novel entitled The Diary of Antoine Roquentin was published in 1949 by John Lehmann's publishing house — the same year that saw the appearance of Kavan's story in Penguin New Writing. The protagonists of both narratives lead solitary lives in situations where traditional interpretations of events quickly become invalid. "The Red Dogs" begins with an explanation of the methodology the protagonist uses in his journal and its objective:

All I can do with my observer's training is to note down some of my own impressions, quite simply and briefly, as I've been accustomed to do in keeping the records and as I'm doing now. Perhaps an enquiring mind, unshaped as yet, may be stimulated by curiosity to read what I've written.\textsuperscript{125}

Roquentin begins his journal with a similar injunction:

The best thing would be to write down events from day to day. Keep a diary to see clearly — let none of the nuances or small happenings escape even though they might seem to mean nothing. And above all, classify them. I must tell how I see this table, this street, the people, my packet of tobacco, since those are the things which have changed. I must determine the exact extent and nature of this change.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{124} Kavan, "The Red Dogs", p. 240.
\textsuperscript{125} Kavan, "The Red Dogs", p. 227.
Both protagonists are accustomed to taking notes: the protagonist of "The Red Dogs" works at meteorological records; Roquentin is an historian. Kavan's protagonist describes the arrival of the red dogs:

I can't recollect exactly how or when I first got to hear that there were any such creatures. Others have told me that they too feel a similar vagueness about the preliminary stages of the invasion. Knowledge of the red dogs seemed to steal into our minds in the same stealthy way that the beasts themselves penetrated and possessed the territories of the globe.

When I think of the beginning I think of voices. There was a day I woke to an atmosphere of whispering — that's one point which I do recall.127

Roquentin also records and classifies his increasingly nightmarish experiences. Like the authorities in Kavan's story, Roquentin ignores the strange goings on for as long as he can. Like the officials' attempts to treat distemper, Roquentin's early attempts at classification are based on past experience and are completely useless in an unpredictable present:

Something has happened to me, I can't doubt it any more. It came as an illness does, not like an ordinary certainty, not like anything evident. It came cunningly, little by little; I felt a little strange, a little put out, that's all. Once established it never moved, it stayed quiet, and I was able to persuade myself that nothing was the matter with me, that it was a false alarm. And now, it's blossoming.128

The protagonist of Kavan's story attempts to explain the red dogs but cannot. He nonetheless hangs on to the assumption that there is a reason behind their arrival:

It certainly looks as if an anarchic tendency, no matter what its source may have been, was working towards a general disorganization: disturbing the unity which gave shapes their meaning, so that warped patterns ceased to adhere to their centres, and fell apart. Such widespread derangement can't occur without reason.129

Roquentin also records his attempts to quantify, classify and define the changes to his perception. Unlike Kavan's protagonist, however, he realizes while staring at a tree root in the park that existence is not amenable to human reason:

128 Sartre, The Diary of Antoine Roquentin, p. 11.
It had lost the harmless look of an abstract category: it was the very paste of things, this root was kneaded into existence. Or rather the root, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass, all that had vanished: the diversity of things, their individuality, were only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, all in disorder — naked, in a frightful, obscene nakedness.130

Despite many similarities, however, the two diaries reflect different attitudes towards fellowship. Although Kavan’s scientific protagonist is keen to “determine the exact extent and nature” of the changes caused by the red dogs, his primary concern is to establish contact with other human beings who are as horrified as he is by the aliens’ depredations. Roquentin, by contrast, keeps his journal for himself. The diarists’ final entries confirm this difference. The protagonist of “The Red Dogs” ends his narrative with the statement that he will not give up:

How could I go on searching if I believed that our way of life was to give way ultimately to the savagery of the red dogs? How could I go on living if I lost faith in my goal? Even if the mass of humanity falls so low as to become identified with the red dog regime, some individuals there must be somewhere who look upon such a fate with as much horror as I do ....

... I’m sure that in the end we shall live again, as we once lived, in freedom, in peace, in our own right; without shame or subterfuge or alarm. That is my faith, by which I intend to stand. If a cynical voice were to whisper in my ear the words ‘wishful thinking’, I should refuse to listen. One must believe in something to keep oneself going.131

When Roquentin accepts that society’s values are meaningless, he resolves not to rely on them. Instead, he intends to create imperishable art which he will use as a means of relating to others who will think of his life “as something precious and almost legendary”.132

Another of Kavan’s stories, “Ice-Storm”, was published in the first issue of New Zealand New Writing. Edited by Ian A. Gordon, New Zealand New Writing was modelled on Penguin New Writing and directed at the same type of reading public. It is not surprising, therefore, that Kavan (along with Sargeson and Texidor) should also

130 Sartre, The Diary of Antoine Roquentin, pp. 171-172.
have appeared in two of its four issues. Nor is it surprising that, just as "The Red Dogs" is the most "existentialist" of all the existentialist-flavoured narratives contributed to Penguin New Writing by writers connected with New Zealand, "Ice-Storm" is the one story in New Zealand New Writing that utterly captures the existential despair of wartime. The well-travelled protagonist of Kavan's story is isolated and exhausted by her lifestyle in New York city and faced with a difficult choice: "I had to decide whether to continue the struggle with life in America or whether to throw my hand in and start struggling all over again on some other continent." Kavan emphasizes the inherent ineffectiveness of whatever the protagonist will decide with newspaper headlines about a severe and unforecast ice-storm in Connecticut which has changed the landscape to match the protagonist's nihilistic mood. Having concluded that "God, life is hell when you've lost your security, your background", the protagonist walks in the "awful desolation" caused by the ice-storm:

The sky was still grey and bitter, a heavy mist blocked the end of every perspective like a grey curtain. Absolute stillness. Negation of everything.
It was not easy to walk on the frozen road.
This loneliness, I thought is my loneliness. I was the only person out in the glacial world.

Joy in "An Annual Affair" (which story I will consider more fully in Chapter Six) suffers the relatively minor embarrassments and annoyances associated with a family picnic, played out against the background of an indifferent universe. Although the returned soldier in the earlier discussed "Home Front" is more conscious of the loss of values caused by war, he certainly does not sense the "negation of everything" when he thoughtlessly tells the Quaker parents of an aid worker that their son had died trying to deliver a machine gun. In Kavan's story, however, the bizarre effects of the unexpected storm on the scenery and the people of Connecticut lead the protagonist to make no decision at all, to "leave everything to chance". "Ice-Storm" is unlike any of the stories published in New Zealand New Writing, because it plainly summarizes a central theme of existentialist literature when it ends with the protagonist's conclusion that "there were

133 "Episode" (a section of "That Summer") by Frank Sargeson, "Ice-Storm" by Anna Kavan, and "Home Front" by Greville Texidor appeared in New Zealand New Writing, no. 1 (1942). "Growing Up" (a section of When the Wind Blows) by Sargeson and "An Annual Affair" by Texidor appeared in issue no. 3 (June 1944).
136 Kavan, "Ice-Storm", p. 28.
far too many decisions to make about everything and no permanent set of values by which to decide”.

In conclusion, the main similarity between much of New Zealand’s pre-existentialist literature, the various existentialist and existentialist-flavoured stories Lehmann and Gordon published in *Penguin New Writing* and *New Zealand New Writing* and an existentialist classic such as *The Diary of Antoine Roquentin* is that all of these narratives depict the isolation and insecurity of individuals who try to survive in unpredictable situations. As New Zealand writers began to imitate existentialist models consciously, their protagonists’ realization that they must survive in a Godless world broadened into an acceptance that the failure of purpose, meaning and everything was inevitable. The main difference lies in the behaviour which this realization entails and suggests why New Zealand’s literature tends to invoke comparisons with writings by Camus rather than by Sartre. Like Sargeson and Mulgan, Camus believed that fellowship imparts meaning to an otherwise incomprehensible universe.

Thus we return to the quotations at the end of Chapter One, where Purcell articulates in *The Greenstone Door* his realization that to fight alongside his Maori family cannot save them from British oppression. In anticipation of Camus, Purcell will resolve to fight anyway for those values which make life worth living.

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Chapter Four
Dan Davin and the Development of an Existentialist Sensibility

That’s the sort of thing that happens ... once the gloves are off ... we only kid ourselves we can tell the good things from the bad things when they’re so mixed up that half the time we’re thinking one thing, feeling another, and doing something else altogether.¹

In his contribution to the series New Zealand Writers and their Work James Bertram describes Dan Davin’s first novel, Cliffs of Fall (1945), as “a genuine existential novel well before existentialism arrived as a philosophical fashion in post-war France”.² And so it is — in the sense that the novel’s protagonist, Mark Burke, self-consciously suffers from feelings of rootlessness, isolation and alienation characteristic of Men Alone in modern existentialist fiction. It could also be described as “existential” because Davin explores a notion adopted from Dostoyevsky’s Crime and Punishment which has been popularly associated with modern existentialism, that in a world without God anything is permitted. Yet Burke has too much in common with Raleigh to be considered an existentialist character. Nor can the author of Cliffs of Fall be considered an existentialist writer: particularly in his treatment of Burke’s self-destruction, Davin directs the plot of his first novel towards the kind of managed resolution that an existentialist writer would try to invalidate.

Because Davin’s For the Rest of Our Lives (1947), The Gorse Blooms Pale (1947) and Roads from Home (1949) also tend to offer managed resolutions, they are not truly “existential” either. Like much atheistic existentialist fiction, they assume the absence of God. Unlike such fiction, however, Davin’s narratives of the late 1940s do not propose that human beings should reclaim control of their destiny. Instead, Davin depicts his protagonists as victims of their social or natural environment and often ameliorates the consequences of his deterministic world-view by directing his plots into tidy and sometimes comfortable resolutions. Even in the narratives about World War Two which do not end comfortably, although Davin explores the existential meaninglessness of lives during wartime, his emphasis is not on the characters’ freedom to act and take responsibility for their actions but on the brevity and determined nature of human existence.

Davin does not really approach an existentialist perspective in his fiction until well after World War Two. In *The Sullen Bell* (1956), *No Remittance* (1959), *Not Here, Not Now* (1970), *Brides of Price* (1972) and *Breathing Spaces* (1975) his movement away from portraying individuals as victims and towards the idea that human beings should take responsibility for their destiny is inconsistent but perceptible. Thus although Hugh Egan spends a lot of time in *The Sullen Bell* reflecting on the plight of the conscious Man Alone in a universe that ignores his wishes, the novel ends with the anticipation of several marriages and births, suggesting that Davin still tends to ameliorate his bleak view of the human condition by maintaining the protective role of society. Although *No Remittance* refrains from ending happily and its protagonist, Richard Kane, admits his partial responsibility for his failures, when Richard sadly identifies himself with the rural community he used to scorn, it too maintains society’s protective role. *Not Here, Not Now* also assumes the absence of God and lacks a conventional happy ending. And, unlike the victimized Richard, the protagonist of *Not Here, Not Now* is resourceful and successful. Yet as self-aware and self-directed as Martin Cody is, Davin does not completely abandon him to the consequences of his ruthless attempt to win a Rhodes Scholarship. Instead, he allows Martin to leave New Zealand with a symbol of his childhood faith and the strong suggestion that his fiance will follow him. Adam Mahon, the protagonist of *Brides of Price*, is more aware than Martin of the ambiguities encountered during a longer life. Even so, Davin still neatly arranges his destiny.

It is not until the second collection of short stories in *Breathing Spaces*, published in 1975, that Davin consistently maintains the shift from his deterministic point of view or from his attempts to mitigate the effects of such a view. Thus in the excerpt from “The Quiet One” which begins this chapter, in which the protagonist concludes that he cannot know anything for sure, there is an indication as early as 1949 of Davin’s move towards a point of view which resembles the existentialist concern with self-responsibility. “Wall of Doors”, an account of the shattering of an old man’s last illusion, sustains this shift when its protagonist acknowledges that he can have no hope for the future. One of Davin’s later war stories published in the *Listener* explores a situation often portrayed in existentialist literature in which truth and lies are ultimately meaningless because everything ends with death.

Davin’s works can be arranged so as to highlight the author’s movement from the rather simplistic determinism of some of his early narratives towards the existential hopelessness behind his “Wall of Doors”, yet it would be difficult to maintain that he is an existentialist writer. For all that his later narratives unquestionably reflect his mature
perception of the inherent complexity and ambiguity of human existence in a world without God, the style and attitude of the bulk of Davin's fiction has far more in common with the Victorian tradition preserved in New Zealand's pre-existentialist literature.

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While the obvious similarities between Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *Cliffs of Fall* help explain why Bertram would describe Davin's novel as "existential", even so Bertram's claim is hard to justify: the assumptions which inform atheistic existentialist fiction would invalidate the resolutions reached in either novel. Based on their similarity to the patterns underlying *Philosopher Dick* and other nineteenth-century novels, I suggest that it would be more accurate to describe both *Crime and Punishment* and *Cliffs of Fall* as pre-existentialist because both explore some of the concerns of modern existentialist fiction without anticipating either its style or assumptions. Belief in a moral order outside of the individual and the possibility of redemption is clearly implicit in the plots of *Philosopher Dick* and *A South-Sea Siren*. After Raleigh has repented of his temptation to kill himself in the first novel, Alice helps him to rejoin conventional society in the sequel. Their eventual marriage will signify that Raleigh has become a fully-accepted member of settler society. While *Crime and Punishment* depicts the life of a self-aware and angst-filled protagonist in a world which he feels is Godless, it also attests to Dostoyevsky's wish to believe in religious redemption. As Sonia helps Raskolnikov to confess to the murder he committed and to accept society's penalty, her descriptions of God and divine retribution reflect this wish to believe. So does the novel's resolution: Raskolnikov's repentance and his love for Sonia will lead to their marriage and to their building of a new life together after his imprisonment. Thus when *Crime and Punishment* and the two novels about Raleigh affirm the strength of religious sanctions which are maintained individually by the conscience and collectively by society, they cannot be described as existentialist. *Cliffs of Fall* implies a much darker world-view but, as I will presently establish, Davin's novel also partakes of Dostoyevsky's and Chamier's ethos of redemption.

The "dark" sonnet by Gerard Manley Hopkins which Davin employed as the epigraph for his first novel evokes the anguish of a Jesuit priest who doubts the possibility of salvation:

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No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
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My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief-
Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing—
Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked "No lingering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief."

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomèd. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

In the context of *Cliffs of Fall*, the octave of Hopkins' sonnet evokes Burke's "world-sorrow". Unable to accept the Catholic beliefs of his family, he cannot take comfort in either the Holy Spirit or Mary. The sestet (which supplied Davin with the title of his novel), summarizes the futility of Burke's existence: "all/Life death does end". Because in much of his early fiction Davin substitutes an impersonal determinism for divine forgiveness, Burke has no hope for the redemption available to Raskolnikov, Raleigh or even to Hopkins' anguished persona. Although nearly crushed by doubt, the persona in Hopkins' sonnet still calls on the protectors of his faith. As I will demonstrate, however, Burke's ambiguous death suggests the residual influence of some of the very assumptions which saved Raleigh.

Despite their cultural differences and the fact that Dostoyevsky and Chamier wrote in the nineteenth century while Davin wrote in the twentieth, the three authors created remarkably similar protagonists. Although Raskolnikov is neither a settler nor a recent descendant of settlers and although he does not have to cope with the vagaries of a new geography, he is alienated from society by his poverty and by the ideas he has developed about the rights of "extraordinary" as opposed to "ordinary" people. As an intellectual young gentleman Raleigh is alienated, too. Not only does he hold himself apart from the unsophisticated society of the station where he works, but he will not accept what he considers to be their illogical beliefs. Burke's parents are segregated from mainstream New Zealand by their religion: they are Catholics who left Ireland to settle in a country inhabited mostly by Protestants. As part of the rural Irish fringe in Southland, they earn a meagre living on a small farm and are economically segregated from the suburban middle class of Invercargill. Their son is doubly alienated. Born into

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a Catholic community but lacking in religious faith, his ambition is to leave his rural background for the more prosperous professional class.

Raskolnikov, Raleigh and Burke have similar personalities: all three are intelligent, self-centred, moody and obsessive. But Raleigh differs sharply from Raskolnikov and Burke because, although the despair caused by his belief in the survival of the fittest nearly drives him to suicide, he neither kills himself nor plans to kill anyone else. Raskolnikov’s proposed victim is a degraded, avaricious old money lender; he wants her money to save his mother from poverty and his sister from a loveless marriage. Burke’s victim is his pregnant girlfriend who has already had one abortion and cannot bear the thought of another; he will kill her to save her from further guilt. Both protagonists also admit to selfish motivations. By killing the old woman and taking her money, Raskolnikov will be able to resume his studies. If Burke’s girlfriend gives birth to his child, the scandal will wreck his political ambitions.

Beyond the material considerations leading to the murders is the question that fascinates both Raskolnikov and Burke: are they “extraordinary” men? After Raskolnikov confesses to Sonia that he had intended to murder the pawn-broker, he explains why:

“I had to find out ... whether I was a louse like the rest or a man. Whether I can step over or not .... Whether I am some trembling vermin or whether I have the right —”

In a passage that seems to further explicate Raskolnikov’s reasoning, the narrator of Cliffs of Fall describes Burke’s “superhuman elation” after he has strangled Marta:

He had seized his stature, cast out weakness and by a voyage into evil become the master of its bounds. He had climbed out of the grim struggle to a peak where the valleys of good and evil lay down on either side and he did not breathe their air.

In both novels the murders are foreshadowed and recapitulated in dreams or projections which horrify the protagonists and finally prove that they are not supermen. Raskolnikov kills after a dream about the wanton slaughter of a cart horse and prior to delusions which nearly drive him mad. Like Lady Macbeth, he imagines that everything is covered in blood. He also dreams that the police inspector is beating his landlady and

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6 Davin, Cliffs of Fall, p. 150.
“he could hear a crowd gathering on the landings and on the stairs .... It surely meant that they would come for him too”. Yet even though Raskolnikov effectively avoids arrest for the murder, the dreams compel him to betray himself. Similarly in Cliffs of Fall, after recalling how he had shot his loyal sheepdog, Burke strangles Marta. Although he leads the search for Marta’s body so convincingly that he could have escaped legal punishment, in a sense he too gives himself up to justice.

In all three novels the murderer (or suicide) is subject to his conscience and, by extension, to the forces that helped shape it. Yet unlike the heavenly Voice that reminds Raleigh of God’s gifts and exhorts him not to invoke the sanction against murder, or the gentle human voice of Raskolnikov’s long-suffering Sonia, Burke’s voice is bitterly sarcastic. Possibly a projection of his nearly-thwarted ambition or possibly a demon, in either case, Burke’s doppelgänger implicitly sustains the sanction against murder which the Voice in Philosopher Dick so specifically declares. Using Burke’s own “logical” reasoning, it explains that if Burke lacked the courage to either leave Marta or force her to have an abortion he should have known that he would suffer remorse after killing her:

“What business have you got with ambition when you crack up at the first obstacle?”

“You disgusting, hypocritical weakling, whining after your Marta ....
“Look at yourself ... sitting there as feeble and abject as a drowned rat. Do you think if I had done it I would give in like this?”

By goading Burke into leaping at the vision of himself over the edge of a cliff, the voice causes him to kill himself.

Burke’s death also recalls the convention already discussed in connection with Philosopher Dick, The Land of the Lost, The Greenstone Door and Sons o’ Men, that Nature is personified. In the following passage about Raleigh’s near-suicide, for example, the protagonist is nearly destroyed by the natural order which does not privilege his existence:

A cold mist rose up, and crept upon him, and enveloped him as with a shroud; he felt chilled to the heart, and a deadly torpor seized his limbs. Then from out the cavernous profundity he heard a voice calling to him — calling him to come.

7 Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, p. 134.
8 Davin, Cliffs of Fall, pp. 185-186.
9 Chamier, Philosopher Dick, p. 240.
Although Davin dispensed with the voices of despair and Heaven, he employs the luridly heightened vocabulary characteristic of a nineteenth-century potboiler to describe Burke’s self-destruction:

Carried out beyond the cliff-edge by the force of his fury, [Burke] fell spread-eagled and down like a stone to where the rocks crouched out of the waters at the base and witches’ hair of kelp squirmed a malignant invitation.10

Like Raskolnikov, Burke must face the penalty that accompanies murder. In a world without God, however, his killing of Marta starts an inevitable chain of events which leads to his own death. Although Davin’s personification of Nature is less definite than G. B. Lancaster’s (in Sons o’ Men Nature is the stem purifier of mankind), when Burke tries to pull himself out of the water Davin’s narrative seems to suggests that, in the absence of God, the ocean redresses the moral balance when it purposefully washes him from the rocks:

With increasing momentum his body sank back into the water. His fingers slipped from the cleft and dragged slowly down the coarse wet surface of the rock. An incoming wave rushed up to meet them, covered his body, climbed up his wrist and surged into the cleft. Then its effort too exhausted it sank back in defeat, carrying its plunder to the sea.11

Bertram’s description of Davin’s first novel as “stagy in its construction [and] melodramatic in its conclusion”12 tacitly relates it to much of the nineteenth-century New Zealand fiction already discussed. Burke’s leap to his death, for example, is just as stage-managed as the ending of Philosopher Dick which anticipates Raleigh’s rejoining of society. Yet when Davin questions the conventional order in his first novel and then appears to affirm that very order, he establishes an inconsistency of approach which would affect many of his later narratives.

ii.

Davin’s second novel, For the Rest of Our Lives, dramatizes two years of the Western Desert campaign during World War Two. Like the melodramatic Cliffs of Fall, however, its characterization, style and themes suggest the influence of New Zealand’s nineteenth-century literary tradition.

10 Davin, Cliffs of Fall, p. 187.
11 Davin, Cliffs of Fall, p. 188.
12 Bertram, Dan Davin, p. 8.
In his 1947 review of *For the Rest of Our Live* Lawrence Baigent notes Davin’s tendency to employ stock figures. The writers of New Zealand’s early fiction also tended to use stock figures, such as the persecuted hero with a mysterious past, the virtuous heroine, the remittance man and the new chum. While Baigent does not identify in Davin’s novel any evidence of nineteenth-century characterization, he does find that the three New Zealand protagonists, Frank, Tom and Tony, speak, think and act like the narrator rather than as independent characters. And he does assign three women, Paula, Lucile and Nina, to the category of ordinary female love-interest, distinguishing them from the “exotics” Sophia and Gina. According to Baigent, common soldiers like Curly, Shorty and Bill are also “types not individuals”.

Davin’s continuing penchant for explication and his atmospheric use of metaphor also recall New Zealand’s nineteenth-century literature. As in *Philosopher Dick*, the narrator and the protagonist explain the significance of almost every aspect of the protagonist’s existence. Early in Chapter One, for example, the narrator’s description of Frank sitting in the bar of his hotel defines Frank’s mood:

> He ate the last of the nuts. It was withered. He had eaten the good ones first. Life is very much a matter of eating the good ones first, he reflected sourly.  

As noted in the previous chapter, John Reece Cole’s 1948 review of Céline’s *Journey to the End of Night* recognizes “the Existentialist hysteria and gloom, the disconsolate subjectivism of Davin’s recent war book”, alluding to *For the Rest of Our Lives*. Yet the images of meaninglessness Davin uses to evoke his protagonist’s despairing response to the war also recall *Philosopher Dick*. When, for example, Frank walks down the corridor of his hotel in Cairo on his way to bed, he muses on an idea which had also troubled Raleigh: “Behind these doors, nothing. No miracles.” Like Raleigh, Frank’s feelings of futility have seeped into every aspect of his life. Even the wallpaper in Frank’s room exemplifies his lack of hope:

> It was a room without mercy. The grudging window opening of the liftwell shared its unchanging box of air with the windows of sixteen lavatories. The light was weak, but its miserly weakness seemed to see everything though it showed nothing. The wallpaper’s hideous fecundity

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15 Cole, review of *Journey to the End of Night*, p. 6.
was whorish and aggressive, a monstrous proliferation of tomato-red and purple cabbage-roses which grinned like thwarted foetuses. Only time and the lonely feet of many had trodden down the carpet’s worn vulgarity and its insistence that ugly arrogance would never die. Now threadbare it whimpered and admitted that this too must. Dust was already returning to dust.\textsuperscript{16}

In another passage too long to quote in its entirety about how logic leads to martyrdom, “the father of all absurdity”, Frank asks himself “Why should a man get killed in a war other people’s blunders had made and prolonged, had done their best to lose?”. His answer links him to earlier Men Alone, even as it summarizes the difference between himself, Raleigh and Johnson. \textit{Philosopher Dick, Man Alone} and \textit{For the Rest of Our Lives} all present their protagonists as alienated individuals. Unlike Raleigh and Johnson, however, Frank is weighed down by his awareness of his existential freedom to choose; unlike the two earlier Men Alone, Frank knows that any choice will inevitably lead to death:

\begin{quote}
All this to decide alone, even if decision itself were a process of accretion and resolution, a coral rock built slowly by the slow minuteness of a thousand refusals and assents. Alone, a decision for a man alone.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Davin’s novel most resembles \textit{Philosopher Dick} and \textit{Man Alone} when it promotes fellowship as a bulwark against the world’s indifference. Frank, Tom and Tony resemble Raleigh and Johnson in that they are Men Alone \textit{in extremis}, and they must learn painful lessons about the necessity of fellowship before they can lead meaningful lives. In the passage below, for example, Tony summarizes for himself how fellowship helps soldiers to survive:

\begin{quote}
They were all alone, each one alone. Nonsense. One thing that carried them all through was just that, that they were not alone. Everyone had confidence in everyone else. So even if a man had no confidence in himself he was carried on by the confidence others had in him.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Of the three protagonists only Tony dies by the end of the novel. In a sense he destroys himself but not, as Burke does, in expiation for having stepped over the boundary of

\textsuperscript{16} Davin, \textit{For the Rest of Our Lives}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{17} Davin, \textit{For the Rest of Our Lives}, pp. 133-134.
\textsuperscript{18} Davin, \textit{For the Rest of Our Lives}, p. 368.
moral behaviour. Tony has learned the lesson of fellowship so well that when he steps on a personnel mine, he sacrifices himself to protect nearby soldiers:

That noise, that noise. A hissing, and a grating under his foot. An 'S' mine. Too late to bolt. 'S' mine. Scatter,' he shouted and fell flat where he stood, guessing where it was, trying to cover it.\textsuperscript{19}

Yet despite the previously noted affinities, it is the complexity and ambiguity of the choices facing the main characters of Davin's second novel that most conclusively separate \textit{For the Rest of Our Lives} from New Zealand's early Man Alone fiction and \textit{Man Alone}. There is no hint in Davin's second novel of a conventional happy ending, as there is in Chamier's novel. Nor is there is any mythologizing about the transcendence of a stoic Man Alone, as there is in Mulgan's. Frank is last seen chatting to the pragmatic prostitute, Nina. When she asks Frank how long the war would last his rueful reply, "for the rest of our lives", is the closest these two survivors will come to a conclusion.

Published just a few months after \textit{For the Rest of Our Lives}, the loose collection of stories that make up \textit{The Gorse Blooms Pale} provide a subtly-shaded description of the making of a New Zealand Man Alone. Davin summarizes the process in his epigraph poem, "Perspective":

\begin{verbatim}
God blazed in every gorsebush
When I was a child.
Forbidden fruits were orchards,
And flowers grew wild.

God is a shadow now.
The gorse blooms pale.
Branches in the orchard bow
With fruits grown stale.

My father was a hero once.
Now he is a man.
The world shrinks from infinity
To my fingers' span.

Why has the mystery gone?
Where is the spell?
I live sadly now.
Once I lived well.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{19} Davin, \textit{For the Rest of Our Lives}, p. 370.
The first three stories in the collection concern Mick Connolly as a child and describe the predictable and harsh realities of farm life for a Catholic boy in rural Southland. Like the very young Stephen Dedalus in Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and his association of white with God, Mick in “The Apostate” explains why he thinks God is green. His elaborate mythology about spiders also recalls Huck Finn’s superstitions about spiders and bad luck. By juxtaposing this evidence of Mick’s naivete with his realization that either God does not exist and therefore could not hear his prayer asking to find his lost pencil or that his prayer was heard and God deliberately replaced his new pencil with a pencil stub, Davin initiates Mick into the adult knowledge that “the gorse blooms pale”. In other words, that reality is always somehow diminished. In “The Vigil” Mick realizes that because Rosy the milk cow always gave birth to bulls, “they were always killed”; on his parent’s farm raising bulls was not economically viable. “Growing Up” describes what happens when Mick and his father take Rosy’s latest male calf to be slaughtered: Rosy bellows, and “the cows in the next paddock began to bellow in sympathy, recognising their common fate”. In these first three stories, therefore, Mick’s religious superstitions give way to the lessons he learns about the inexorable processes that govern farm animals. A network of causes and effects takes the place of God.

The remaining stories concern an older protagonist who may be Mick. The protagonist of “That Golden Time” is a first-year university student. Walking along a street “as empty as that other space towering vacantly overhead towards the stars” the student feels he has lost his religious superstitions. He has also just had his first sexual experience:

The emptiness, the way his heels rang on the asphalt, was satisfying, emphasized his aloneness. A man alone, alone late at night with no one to say he should be home in bed. A man making his way home from the arms of his mistress. And the clear, frosty night a splendid setting for his solitude.

Mistress, it wasn’t quite the word really. It didn’t go somehow with a girl you’d met at the Town Hall dance only a week before. She was too far from names like Roxanna and Pompadour, the canopied beds, the whisper behind a fan, loud feet on the stairs, the sudden hush of the nightingales and a quick escape into the moonlit garden.

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Although the student is pleased with his experience, he has learned that sex is not as exciting or romantic as he thought it should be. “Boarding House Episode”, about a hung-over university graduate who wakes to the inexorably rising sun, combines the lessons the young Mick had learned about religious superstition and the fate of Rosy’s bull-calves with the knowledge that sexual desire is just as inevitable:

   The mind ... hid too late from its fumbling foresight of the day’s compulsion, its limitations, its ironic erosion of dreams to their realisation, of passion to satiety, of hope to a hang-over, of love to a habit and of flesh to the calcine which underlies the clay.  

The “episode” of the title is a brief affair between the student and his chambermaid which the narrator evokes with further images of inevitability:

   She thought she was free to come back or stay away. And he was no better, lying there and feeling superior, but caught as much as she. Dog doesn’t eat dog but both are devoured. Desire pulls them together like a zip-fastener.  

The final eleven stories of The Gorse Blooms Pale describe how New Zealand soldiers become Men Alone like Frank as they learn to manage their responses to unpredictable situations with a mixture of compassion, stoicism, fellowship and irony. The protagonist of “Under the Bridge”, for example, learns that logic will not explain the horror he feels at the sight of the victims of a bombing raid. To save his sanity the protagonist runs away, yet he will continue to carry the scene in his memory. In “Danger’s Flower” a girl’s gift of a flower to a wounded soldier suggests that fellowship and kindness are possible even in the midst of war. When the soldier withdraws from the battle zone with other of the walking wounded, he considers abandoning a boy who has been wounded with shrapnel and moves too slowly to keep up. Although the soldier perseveres and eventually finds a route to safety, the reader is not allowed to forget that the soldier’s survival is purely a matter of luck. The last sentence of “Danger’s Flower” emphasizes that human kindness and nobility are enacted in front of an indifferent, Hardyesque backdrop: “Night deepened above them to its profound perfection, the immense Cretan night.” The final story of the collection, “Not Substantial Things”, shows how soldiers use irony to cope with the emptiness of the Allied victory in Italy.

After "liberating" a village a group of New Zealand soldiers wake hung-over in their jeep, ashamed of how they had tricked the villagers into giving them victory honours. The soldiers' response to their embarrassment and the cold is as casual and ironic as the ending of For the Rest of Our Lives: "She's been a bonny war", says the protagonist as he takes "another swig at the bottle".  

In his introduction to the 1976 reprint edition of Davin's third novel, Roads from Home, Lawrence Jones explains that Davin observes members of Southland's Catholic community from a perspective that "sees man as a victim of the indifferent natural forces of time, sex, and death, doomed to be conscious and to have wishes in a universe that makes no allowance for them." This perspective is particularly evident in Ned and John Hogan's implicit comparison of human beings to insects controlled by an indifferent life-force. Yet because of the train "accident" which recalls the authorial contrivance characteristic of Davin's first novel as it resolves the main characters' dilemmas, Roads from Home fails to satisfy the bleak requirements of its author's deterministic world-view.

Ned, who feels trapped by his mother's wish that he become a priest, exemplifies Davin's world-view with a description of the life-cycle of insects in a puddle:

There was a small dent in the asphalt, still wet in spite of the spring sun. Swarms of little black insects wriggled in it. When the sun got hotter would they shrivel and die? Or would an altogether new life come driving into them like a magic power and send them up on wings? In the end, the same. They would be as well to stay and die.

Ned's brother John is trapped in marriage with a woman who does not love him. Suspecting that another man had fathered Michael, the baby he had thought was his, John also ponders the life-cycle of insects:

Remote and unintelligible as the stars, as immune, they appeared at their season and in their station, to do what they existed to do, to conduct through themselves the current of life, purposeless outside itself, meaningless because an ultimate; inscrutable because the essential condition of all scrutiny; and when the stream had passed through them they remained behind, shards, shells, empty cases; the egg hatched, the parent died, having done in its short cycle all that it lived to do, having

28 Davin, Roads from Home, p. 23.
ensured that yet another segment of time had pulsed with its full load of life. Yes, and they did this without our by-products of joy and pain, irrelevant parasites, parerga to our task.\textsuperscript{29}

Although Ned and John are conscious of joy and pain and their frequent musings about philosophy, religion and art suggest that human beings are very much more complicated than insects, Davin causes a train wreck to resolve their two dilemmas as inevitably as death determines the lives of insects. That a car and a train would converge is not so unlikely given the hazardous nature of the crossing and the recklessness of the man driving the car. That such a wreck would fortuitously provide satisfying resolutions for both Ned and John, however, is very unlikely. More a symptom of Davin’s desire for a tidy ending than an indication of his deterministic world-view, the wreck may even indicate Davin’s hope that in an indifferent universe some happiness is possible. Thus, John’s marriage ends with the death of his wife who confesses, just before she dies, that Michael is indeed his son. Because Mrs. Hogan will raise John’s now-motherless son, he will take Ned’s place as her offering to God. Ned will be released from his mother’s wish that he become a priest.

In \textit{Roads from Home} Davin’s frequent descriptions of inevitable behaviour, such as his implicit comparison of humankind to insects because both are as powerless to determine their fate, recalls Greek tragedy. Yet when the train in the third novel doubles as \textit{deus ex machina}, it also recalls Bertram’s earlier comment that \textit{Cliffs of Fall} is “stagy in its construction [and] melodramatic in its conclusion”.\textsuperscript{30} Then, the novel’s ending does not suggest the inevitability of Greek tragedy so much as the conventional optimism characteristic of nineteenth-century popular fiction.

iii.

Although there are no melodramatic resolutions in \textit{The Sullen Bell} like those in \textit{Cliffs of Fall} or \textit{Roads from Home} (no murderer leaps from a cliff, and there is no train wreck to free the protagonists from their dilemmas), Davin’s fourth novel still tends to endorse traditional ideas about who deserves to live happily ever after. Thus when Davin relates how a group of New Zealanders make their way in London just after World War Two, his story recalls aspects of the education of Men Alone in \textit{Philosopher Dick}, \textit{The Land of the Lost} and \textit{The Greenstone Door}. As in Chamier’s and Satchell’s novels, \textit{The Sullen Bell} sets up and resolves various complications. Thus with the elimination of a blackmailing drug addict and abortionist, the orchestration of two

\textsuperscript{29} Davin, \textit{Roads from Home}, pp. 158-159.

\textsuperscript{30} Bertram, \textit{Dan Davin}, p. 8.
marriages, the saving of a third marriage and the anticipation of two babies, Davin’s novel sustains traditional values even as it achieves a generally happy conclusion.

Yet aspects of *The Sullen Bell* suggest that Davin has changed his emphasis. *Roads from Home* is set in rural Southland during the early thirties and represents Ned’s view of the human condition in terms of the life-cycle of insects. *The Sullen Bell*, by contrast, is set after the second rather than the first of the world wars and shares the same general setting, mood and structure as T. S. Eliot’s “The Wasteland”. Like Eliot, Davin describes the meaninglessness of modern urban existence and portrays its effects on protagonists who are haunted by memories. In the first paragraph of the novel Hugh Egan, the protagonist, characterizes passengers disembarking from a train as “ghosts ... in some modern-dress Inferno, the overhead lights hollowing their cheeks and the anxieties of the city already darkening their eyes”.

There are even verbal echoes. As Hugh crosses the Thames by taxi he muses on the suicides of his friend Dick, before the war, and his wife Alison, after the war. Both died in rivers, and Hugh counsels himself to “fear death by water”.

As in *Cliffs of Fall*, Davin has drawn the title of his novel from the sonnet he uses as epigraph:

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell.

Unlike Hopkins’ evocation of a persona utterly beaten down by doubt, however, the first two lines of Shakespeare’s sonnet urge the reader to put away grief.

The plot of *The Sullen Bell* is built around the efforts of several of its characters to do just that, to stop mourning the dead, to engage with the living and to take charge of their personal destinies. In previous narratives set before World War Two Davin presented his characters as victims of natural and societal forces. In his first novel to be set after the war Davin depicts his characters’ actions and reactions against the backdrop of a more complicated and ambiguous world. Particularly for those characters who were directly involved in the war, their living or dying is no longer such an arbitrary event. As expatriate New Zealanders they take stock of their lives, and they have choices.

As in *Roads from Home*, however, Davin sets up and tidily settles the problems his characters face. In his *Landfall* review of *The Sullen Bell* R. A. Copland reveals how Davin does this, explaining that “the stream of consciousness by which the characters in

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turn reveal their past is here an orderly stream indeed, turning the millwheels of information with scarcely a drop wasted". Thus the reader learns that Hugh, an academic writing a history about the course of World War Two in Crete, was a battalion commander during the war. Hugh survived the war but has yet to recover from the suicide of his wife. Dave, one of Hugh’s company commanders, must learn to let go of the war as he struggles to understand his reaction to his mother’s death. Sally, a teacher who also served in the Armed Forces, grieves for Bill who died before they could admit that they loved each other. Sally must let go of his memory before she can live fully in the present. Her friend Janet, a physiologist, also grieves for Bill as she chooses to settle into an unromantic marriage with Angus, a physicist. Another New Zealand couple, Clare and Maurice, have an unsatisfactory marriage because Clare does not share her lawyer-husband’s politics and they do not have a baby. She must decide what to do about the liaison with Dave which has resulted in her pregnancy. Bob Ritchie, the New Zealander who works in advertising in London, must make up his mind about how he is to “get on”.

Davin allows the major characters to resolve their problems in a way that will probably ensure their future happiness. Hugh and Sally fall in love and help each other to forget their ghosts. Dave’s difficulties are more dramatic, yet their solution will help resolve the problems faced by Clare and Maurice. Thus Dave, still a warrior at heart, accidentally kills the drug-dealing abortionist who intended to blackmail Clare. After Clare has decided to keep Dave’s baby and she and Maurice have decided to patch up their marriage, Maurice will defend Dave against the charge that he murdered the abortionist. If Dave is vindicated, he will return to the Army. Janet and Angus are expecting their first child. Its birth will make their scientifically-run marriage rather less predictable and, the narrative implies, happier. Bob will marry his boss’ daughter to ensure his path to success.

Despite the somewhat contrived nature of all the resolutions listed above, in the following excerpt when Hugh compares “the days before the war” to the situation of the world just after the war he acknowledges that it had become unpredictable. In Davin’s later narratives his older protagonists will often reach a similar awareness, which, although not explicitly existentialist, does incorporate the existentialist notion of self-responsibility:

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Then everyone had known who the enemy was. Now it was all a hopeless jumble .... And so as far as he was concerned the upshot was stalemate. Before the war you had felt that an individual could accomplish something. Now you felt that you might just as well get on with your own concerns. Perhaps that was simply due to the fact that he was getting older, had less time left.33

While Hugh’s desire to focus on what is in front of him has an existentialist flavour, his thoughts about the fate of most of the “imperial provincials” in London who subsequently return to the provinces express a kind of social determinism as compelling as the natural forces which govern the lives of insects and human beings in Roads from Home. Yet even Hugh’s awareness of the expatriates’ situation suggests an existentialist perspective, especially when it indicates an appreciation of his own destiny:

And every year some went back, to teach art in secondary schools, to brass plates proclaiming a London licentiate on a comfortable suburban door, to a university job, to journalism .... In short, to what was in terms of the outward voyage and ambition failure, in terms of statistical probability the almost inevitable, and in terms of the compromises made with middle age, with love, with family, with life, the reward of reconciled and accepted mediocrity.34

When Davin’s novel closes with the consummation of Hugh’s love for Sally and the certainty that they will leave London to settle into a position at the university in Dunedin, the reader is left with an uneasy mixture of conclusions. As he does in Roads from Home, Davin ameliorates the effects of his determinism. Yet Hugh’s recognition of and evident resignation to the fact that age will limit his choices suggests that Davin’s tendency to meliorism is fading. At the same time, Hugh’s focus on his responsibility to manage his own destiny in an unpredictable post-war world develops the existentialist perspective foreshadowed in “The Quiet One”.

Like The Sullen Bell, No Remittance recalls aspects of New Zealand’s early literature even as it indicates Davin’s interest in the existentialist notion of self-responsibility. When its protagonist Richard Kane (also known as “Gentleman Dick” and “the remittance man without a remittance”) fails to thrive in his new environment and descends into failure and alcoholism, he resembles the remittance man portrayed in Satchell’s The Land of the Lost. Richard differs from the stock character, however, in that not only has he never had the support of a wealthy family back home but that Davin presents his failures as inevitable. Yet while the title suggests that the causes and effects

34 Davin, The Sullen Bell, pp. 221-222.
of Richard's folly are unremitting and that he is a victim of his environment, Richard's recollections about his past sometimes reflect Davin's developing belief that individuals should take responsibility for themselves. Then, Richard's partly objective and partly self-indulgent explanations of how his unrealistic dreams and bad luck led to his failure as an architect in England and New Zealand and to his subsequent failures as a farmer, husband and father signal his awareness that he must bear some of the responsibility for his condition.

In so far as Richard begins his narrative with an assertion about self-knowledge, he seems to take up a roughly existentialist position:

> A man doesn't reach my age, the allotted span, as they say, without knowing about his faults, if he's honest with himself.\(^{35}\)

Yet rather than demonstrate a true understanding of his situation, Richard's reminiscences are full of the unwitting irony of a fallible narrator. Just as the naive and subjective narratives related by the young David Copperfield or Huckleberry Finn provide the reader with far more information about their situations than they are able to understand themselves, Richard's reminiscences give the reader a rather more accurate view of his situation than the one he perceives himself. Bertram implicitly suggests, in his monograph about Davin, the ironic difference between Richard's experiences and his perceptions of them when he compares Davin with Joyce Cary, whom Davin knew well in Oxford.\(^{36}\) David Hall adds detail to the comparison when he compares Davin to Cary in his *Listener* review of *No Remittance*, characterizing Richard as the kind of "imperfect, artful, self-pitying character Joyce Cary loved to create."\(^{37}\) When, for example, Richard recounts that he used to wear leather leggings, breeches and a tweed jacket to walk around his Southland farm because "they were just the sort of thing any substantial farmer would wear in the Old Country"\(^{38}\) (by which he meant England), it does not occur to him that his wife and neighbours would scorn such a display because they were not English but Irish and because they were not landlords but small farmers. Richard also fails to understand why his architectural advice went unappreciated when he made the effort to sit near where his brother-in-law was working. Nor does he

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36 Bertram, *Dan Davin*, p. 37.
38 Davin, *No Remittance*, p. 95.
understand why his nailing of tongue and groove woodwork in the wrong place was ridiculed.

Aside from the inaccuracy of his self-knowledge, Richard can hardly be considered an existentialist character because throughout his life he has avoided taking responsibility for his behaviour. Often Richard ascribes the negative effects of his actions to bad luck, as when the pig he bought on a hunch that it was a Berkshire failed to put on weight and turned out to be a wild "Captain Cooker". It was bad luck also that the purebred bull he purchased to raise the quality of his herd escaped and drowned in the swamp. Other failures Richard describes as inevitable. About his marriage to Norah, for example, he claims that he and his wife were all right as individuals, "the way gas and matches are perfectly all right and it’s only when you put them together you get a blow-up". He vaguely believes that his mother was partly responsible for his embezzling from his first employers because she had encouraged him to dream. Long after her death he continues to suggest that she prompted the laziness and pretention which had alienated his wife’s family and neighbours.

Sometimes, however, Richard’s self-awareness and self-responsibility approach the existentialist point of view Davin implies with his demonstration of his protagonist’s fallibility. Richard comes to recognize, for instance, the gap between his conception of the "Old Country" (his name for the countryside he hardly ever saw because he was a Londoner), with its "lush meadows running down to a river with pollarded willows, and fat cattle standing knee-deep in the water" and the reality, which would include flies. He also learns to recognize the difference between the "London of the Strand Magazine" and the real London he knew with its "endless suburban streets ... and the scurrying impersonal crowds, and the dirt and the dreary sky". Most importantly, Richard realizes why there is a gap between what he imagines and the reality of a situation. His idealized vision of England made much of New Zealand unreal and so easier to put up with, the way the idea of Heaven for those who can believe in it makes the life they’re living now more endurable, just a dreary task they’ve got to get through with before they get home to a nice cup of tea. Of course, it’s easy to say, and it’s probably true that it’d be a damned sight better for some of us if we forgot all about England or Heaven or whatever else on the horizon.

we’ve fixed our minds on and got busy cleaning up whatever’s under our feet.\textsuperscript{41}

In a sense Richard’s conclusion is similar to the one Hugh formulates in \textit{For the Rest of Our Lives}, that he “might just as well get on with [his] own concerns”. Yet the two protagonists are very different because Hugh manages to arrange his affairs satisfactorily, and Richard does not. Had Richard been consciously dishonest or lazy, he might be described as a kind of existential free agent. As he is, however, Richard leans from failure to failure claiming “I’m damned if I see why I was always blamed so much by everyone .... It seems to me that it wasn’t entirely my fault”.\textsuperscript{42} Although Richard considers it, he never does clean under his feet. Even when, towards the end of the novel, Richard accepts part of the blame for what had happened to him, he still tends to think of himself as a victim:

In fact even I could see that there was nobody to blame for it but myself or the bad luck that had planted me in a life I wasn’t fitted for, in a place where my best qualities were bound to go rotten and spoil everything.\textsuperscript{43}

There is no sense of an imposed resolution at the end of \textit{No Remittance} as there is in \textit{Cliffs of Fall, Roads from Home} and \textit{The Sullen Bell}. After Norah’s death Dick decides not to marry Ellen, the woman who had been his mistress, because he realizes that all they have in common is their deception of Norah. If he did marry Ellen, her role would become that of the conventional romantic heroine who waited decades for her true love to be free of an unhappy marriage. Even though Davin refrains from that particular solution to his protagonist’s loneliness, there is a hint at the end of \textit{No Remittance} that the author is still relying on convention to support the role of society. Older, sadder and with fewer of the illusions of his youth, Richard ends his narrative at the farm he no longer wants to leave. Although he lacks the conventional accoutrements of wife and family which Raleigh gained with his return to society, when Richard waits at his gate to hear from those who pass by “all the news of what’s happening up and down our road”,\textsuperscript{44} he shows that he has finally learned to value fellowship with the community he used to scorn.

In \textit{Not Here, Not Now}, although Davin revisits some of the ideas he had mapped in the so-called “existential” first novel around a quarter of a century earlier, his

\textsuperscript{41} Davin, \textit{No Remittance}, p. 123.  
\textsuperscript{42} Davin, \textit{No Remittance}, p. 5.  
\textsuperscript{43} Davin, \textit{No Remittance}, p. 203.  
\textsuperscript{44} Davin, \textit{No Remittance}, p. 224.
perspective is clearly different. In *Cliffs of Fall* Burke perished below his cliff. Not only does Martin Cody not perish (more accurately, the sixth novel does not specify his end) but, like Raleigh, he survives various crises on his way towards success.

Although Martin sometimes resembles Chamier’s protagonist, he learns different lessons. For example, Raleigh told his journal in more or less the same words Martin would use in a conversation with his girlfriend, Delia, that “Illusion is only another word for ignorance. It vanishes when everything is known. I don’t want illusions”. Unlike Raleigh, however, who realized at the top of his cliff that he could not live without the idea of a benevolent God and returned to the protection offered by conventional society, Martin acknowledges the gap between illusion and reality and learns to compromise between them as he leaves his fiancée, family and friends to study in England as a Rhodes scholar.

*Not Here, Not Now* opens with Martin’s undergraduate career at the University of Otago during the Depression. His ambition is apparent from the first when, in this excerpt from the first page of the novel, he weighs up spending a Saturday evening alone with his books or going to the Catholic Club:

You had to go out and meet people ....

But once you started to waste your time, you soon got into the habit of it. Next thing he’d be falling behind with his work programme. In the end, it was results that counted. People’d run after you soon enough after you were a success.

It was a lonely business, all the same.

Martin decides to attend the meeting after all and encounters Delia Egan, the third-year student who initiates him into sex and begins to organize his campaign for a Rhodes Scholarship. When, early in their relationship, they visit the beach below Cargill’s Castle (the vicinity of Burke’s fall), Davin moderates his earlier response to Burke’s existential murder of Marta. He causes Martin to reenact aspects of Burke’s unwitting self-destruction and replaces them with a series of deliberate actions which foreshadow his success. Because Martin does not kill Delia to safeguard his ambition, he will not subsequently throw himself off a cliff. Martin’s existential act, his “stepping over”, is to toss his hat into the ocean. Delia is not passive like Marta but shows her acceptance of Martin’s ambition when she tosses her hat into the ocean as well. In *Cliffs of Fall* the sea claimed Burke’s body. In *Not Here, Not Now*, by contrast, Martin leaves his hand print in the sand. As he explains to Delia, it would be “something for the sea to

Davin adds to the events recalled from *Cliffs of Fall* a nettle which neither Delia nor Martin have ever seen before and which Delia thinks the tide must have deposited on the beach. When the nettle symbolically stings Delia and a curious Martin purposefully touches the foreign weed to learn what it feels like, Davin is suggesting that a man such as Martin will make it overseas.

In Part Three Davin visits the vicinity of Burke’s death yet again when Muriel Strang, another of Martin’s girlfriends, threatens to jump from the cliff at Cargill’s Castle just above the little beach where “three years of tides had washed over the hand print he left there with Delia”. As in *Cliffs of Fall* Davin personifies the ocean below where Martin and Muriel stand as malignant: Martin “could hear the sea waiting for her”. Yet again, Davin modifies the events of the earlier novel and their import. Martin’s prevention of Muriel’s suicide is as calculated as Burke’s self destruction was unthinking. Calmly walking away, Martin professes himself to be glad when Muriel follows him. According to Muriel he was glad only because he would have been embarrassed by her suicide: “It would have been difficult to explain to your Rhodes Selection Committee, wouldn’t it?” While Martin’s reply does not suggest that he could live with Burke’s ruthless doppelgänger more comfortably than Burke did, it does confirm his pragmatism: “Yes, it would have been. But I assumed you’d hardly throw yourself over for the sake of embarrassing me. And you’re not quite fed up enough with yourself, either. Yet.”

Although Martin’s single-minded pursuit of the Rhodes Scholarship does eventually win it for him, he is not really a free agent. There is a limit to what he will do to achieve his goal. He will not kill for it, for instance. Nor can he escape from his background. Just as the protagonist of *No Remittance* finally identifies with the community which had scorned him for most of his married life, so Martin carries parts of his background away with him. At the end of *Not Here, Not Now* when Delia promises that she will join Martin if he wants her, he replies “You can count on that, Delia darling”. Martin will also carry a set of rosary beads and a bottle of whisky from his friend, Phil. Although Martin declares that the bottle of whisky would be used first, he accepts Phil’s suggestion that “they might come in handy some time”. Thus even though Martin is the most self-directed of Davin’s protagonists, even when he thinks

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46 Davin, *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 36.
47 Davin, *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 149.
48 Davin, *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 150.
that he is leaving his "friendships, loves and loyalties"\footnote{Davin, \textit{Not Here, Not Now}, p. 350.} behind in New Zealand and seems on the verge of an uncertain future, his creator does not quite cast him adrift.

Adam Mahon, the protagonist of \textit{Brides of Price} could be a middle-aged Martin. Both left New Zealand to study at Oxford University; both put their academic ambitions ahead of relationships with women. But \textit{Not Here, Not Now} ends when Martin leaves Delia, his family and his friends to take up his Rhodes Scholarship. \textit{Brides of Price} continues the story (albeit with a different protagonist), as it traces Mahon's career as an academic. By the end of his first stint at Oxford University Mahon has argued with and parted from Mary, his first and only romantic love and the only woman to seriously question his ideas. As he moves toward making a name for himself in Social Anthropology he leaves Daphne in Auckland to pursue "his way alone" back in England, where, as he tells himself, "in Oxford or Cambridge you were in an intellectual power-house .... In innumerable disciplines there were innumerable people who all knew something special".\footnote{Dan Davin, \textit{Brides of Price} (London: Hale, 1972), p. 44.}

Yet Mahon's first-person recollections of his past and account of his present combine to present a more mature perspective than that which emerges from the third person narration of \textit{Not Here, Not Now}. Obviously, Mahon is older and knows more about himself. Davin emphasizes this difference when, through his protagonist, he implicitly refers to the earlier novel:

\begin{quote}
I was full of expectation then, not just vague guilt-ridden apprehensions. If heaven wasn't here and now, it might well turn out to be next week. Gradually it became now and then. And now it was then and there, so long as you were careful not to remember too accurately. Certainly not here and not now.\footnote{Davin, \textit{Brides of Price}, pp. 8-9.}
\end{quote}

By the end of the novel not only has Mahon learned to live in the present, but also that "there was always a bride-price". In other words, the protagonist has realized that his attempts to achieve his ambition must be accompanied by some kind of dowry payment. Although Martin describes the bride-price necessary for the realization of his ambition as the breaking of "friendships, loves and loyalties", the difference between them is that Mahon has stepped a few paces outside Martin's egocentric view. What Mahon will pay in bride-price is "not at all the same as the price the woman always pays".\footnote{Davin, \textit{Brides of Price}, p. 191.} Like Martin,
Mahon is atheistic and self-responsible. More than Martin, however, Mahon is aware of the limits of what he can accomplish.

Lawrence Jones describes this awareness of limits in terms of the American “accommodation” novels of the 1950s. Referring to Marcus Klein’s *Beyond Alienation*[^53], he finds in many post-war New Zealand novels the same emphasis on characters learning “to adapt to a given social environment rather than to be victimized by it or to transcend it”. Jones adds that in *Brides of Price* Davin presents the process of accommodation from a more existential point of view:

> The aptly named Adam Mahon achieves a happy accommodation because he believes in nothing ‘except how complex everything was’,[^54] recognizes limits, and does not expect too much.[^55]

> While pondering the definitive book he hopes to publish on the rites of passage of the peoples of the Pacific, Mahon describes his struggle to make a comprehensive pattern which was never able to satisfy all the evidence, the implacable evidence, that stubborn army of refractory facts of which you always had some left, just as you were about to gloat over the machine you had taken to pieces and reassembled.
> In the end I had to accept failure.[^56]

Although the protagonist’s acceptance of failure suggests the process of accommodation, once Mahon has managed to get his book published Davin undermines his realization about the impossibility of devising a system by facilitating the happy resolution of his main problems. Not only does Oxford offer Mahon a chair on the basis of the critical acclaim his book earns, but he passes other rites of passage. Along with three other characters in the novel, Mahon plans to marry. He will officially assume the role of father to the son Daphne bore after he left her in Auckland, a role he has already begun to fill as he helps the young man to negotiate his own rites of passage at Oxford.

Even though Mahon’s intention to marry Daphne recalls the conventional endings of Chamier’s or Satchell’s novels, in the passage below his observation of the

[^54]: Davin, *Brides of Price*, p. 35.
charms of attractive girls suggests the possibility that he may not follow his daughter’s advice that he grow up:

I left her at the corner. The evening was warm and mellow. Pretty girls in miniskirts walked trimly past and I admired their legs and thighs. Part of me still wanted to have everybody. Everything still depended on whether I could grow up or not. To grow old without doing so would be grotesque.

Then, as full of good resolutions and my immediate intention as I had ever been, I went home to Daphne.57

The paradoxical combination of self-knowledge and uncertainty about the future in the conclusion of Brides of Price anticipates Davin’s perspective in Breathing Spaces, his second collection of short stories. Even though two of the stories had already appeared as magazine pieces within a couple of years of the 1947 publication of The Gorse Blooms Pale (“A Return” first appeared in 1948, followed by “The Quiet One” in 1949), Davin’s second collection of short stories unequivocally manifests the change in his world-view which several of his post-war narratives foreshadow. Rather than ending like most of the stories in The Gorse Blooms Pale with a lesson learned, a question posed or a conflict survived, the pieces collected in Breathing Spaces indicate that over the years Davin’s vision of the human condition tended to become more complicated, and, like Mahon’s, allowed more room for those equivocal “facts” which would not consistently fit into any system. And, just as Mahon remarks on the difference between himself and Martin, some of the stories in Breathing Spaces reevaluate situations depicted by stories in The Gorse Blooms Pale. Even the title of the second collection underscores its evaluative purpose. While the jacket notes suggest that the stories in Breathing Spaces emerged from the gaps snatched in the interstices of “a busy life of action lived and reflected upon in many countries”, the title could also imply the mature reflections of an author who has meditated upon the significance of his earlier work.

In the first collection, for example, the young Mick Connolly learns that the slaughter of Rosie’s bull calves is inevitable. In “The Quiet One” Ned realizes that Dulcie’s life is more complicated than a farm animal’s: the inexplicable causes and unpredictable consequences of Dulcie’s choices lead to her death from a botched back-street abortion. Ned’s conclusion summarizes the main theme of the second collection:

That’s the sort of thing that happens .... once the gloves are off .... we only kid ourselves we can tell the good things from the bad things when

57 Davin, Brides of Price, p. 254.
really they’re so mixed up that half the time we’re thinking one thing, feeling another, and doing something else altogether.⁵⁸

Lawrence Jones summarizes the difference between the war stories in *Breathing Spaces* and *The Gorse Blooms Pale* when he comments that the stories of the second collection “are less concerned with initiation into the cruelty and complexity of war, more with the testing of mature character, the criterion of success being the ability to live up to the code of the initiated”.⁵⁹ Thus “Under the Bridge” (from the first collection), details a New Zealand soldier’s response to the horror of seeing the victims of a bomb raid as crushed insects and ends with his running back to the comparative safety of the position occupied by his mates, “a soldier again”.⁶⁰ Yet in “The Persian’s Grave” (from the second collection), Davin adds to the traditional New Zealand demonstration of the importance of fellowship his own version of the Hemingway code. A New Zealand soldier, Boxer, takes responsibility for the terrible consequences of an act of drunken carelessness which had resulted in the betrayal of the Greek family who had hidden him from the Germans for five months. After Boxer confesses the whole incident to Ted, a fellow soldier, Ted recommends that they both move on:

I reckon I know how you feel. But it’s done now. We both got shickered, and it was as much my fault as yours. All right, the bigger bloody fools us. Now we’ve got to start thinking how the hell we get out of here so we can do a few of the bastards. Right.⁶¹

The little girl in “Growing” has to learn a more complicated lesson about the inevitability of death than Mick had to learn in the earlier “Growing Up”. Her father will not allow her male kitten to be neutered to stop it from fighting because, as he says, “He’s got to grow up just as you have to. Life is dangerous but anything that’s not dangerous isn’t life”. Yet Davin does not wholly accept the tough-mindedness of the father’s attitude. Patently, the kitten will not grow up as she does: it has no parents to nurture and protect it. Davin further complicates the lesson when he causes the mother, after she had earlier seemed to support her husband’s reluctance to have the kitten neutered, to subtly challenge his attempt to assure the little girl that her kitten “looks to be a fine fighter”. Thus when the little girl wishes that her kitten would grow up to be “like Julius Caesar and conquer the whole world”, her mother implicitly suggests that

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even a fine fighter would die when she says that “it would be a shame” if the kitten succumbed to Caesar’s fate.  

In “Saloon Bar” Davin suggests that, despite the fragmented nature of human existence, the lives of the lonely protagonist and people he observes are interconnected. Thus the protagonist chats to the barman who anxiously awaits news of his wife’s overdue labour, eavesdrops on the conversation between a married woman and her lover as they discuss the necessity of her having an abortion and observes the behaviour of an American sailor and his underage companion. Without finally deciding what to do about the unwanted pregnancy the couple leave and Nell, the visiting barmaid, acts as a kind of ironic Greek chorus when she points out how they and the serviceman and his girl are linked: “It’s only nature after all. That’s what causes all the trouble.”  

Only the barman’s worries are temporarily resolved. Upon repeating the telephoned news that “It’s a girl. Both well”, he celebrates by giving everyone drinks on the house. Nell is the chorus once again when she exclaims to the serviceman, “Isn’t nature wonderful?”. Moments later, however, she subverts this romantic cliché with a final comment on the unrealistic expectations fostered by Leftist political slogans: “Come the revolution”, Nell says, “we’ll all drink gins all the time”. George Orwell comes to a similarly ironic conclusion in 1984 when the thoroughly constrained Winston ends the novel drunk on Victory Gin.

“Wall of Doors”, the last story of the collection, revisits Ned’s conclusion at the end of “The Quiet One” that “we only kid ourselves” and emphasizes that, although individuals make choices, the making of choices implies the acceptance of a limited range of outcomes which inevitably end in death. Its narrator is an old man who has maintained the illusion since his wife’s disappearance in 1942 that Dinah had somehow survived the bomb blast which had destroyed a nearby pub and restaurant. Because she might return one day, he resists the attempts of developers to move him from his flat in order to complete the demolition of his street.

As a postman during the war the narrator had known many of the people who had once lived behind the doors which construction engineers had taken to nailing together as a wall to screen their demolition site. Even pried apart, the doors would open only onto rubble:

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62 Davin, Breathing Spaces, p. 156.
63 Davin, Breathing Spaces, p. 166.
64 Davin, Breathing Spaces, p. 167.
Now all the homes had gone. There were no hopes left behind these doors, only a great hole which might have been dug as a grave to swallow for ever all that life that was gone. What the bombs, the V1’s and V2’s, couldn’t do, the developers had done. 65

Thus for the old man who has survived the war, the disappearance of his wife, the death of his friend Ralph during the Western Desert campaign, the loss of his book shop and the changes wrought by the war, the wall of doors is a symbol of the inevitable dissolution of everything.

Even so, the narrator still clings to the hope that his wife will return. But a chance meeting at the local pub with an old man who had served in his friend’s unit causes him to reread Ralph’s letters from the front and to flick through the book returned to him after Ralph had been killed. When the protagonist finds the note from Dinah which Ralph had evidently used as a bookmark, he also discovers the solution to the mystery of her disappearance. Dinah had arranged to meet Ralph for a drink at the pub and a meal at the restaurant next door. But Ralph’s unit had embarked early and he had missed the assignation, the site of which was destroyed by a bomb. Even if Dinah had survived the blast, her marriage to the narrator could not have continued. When the narrator realizes this, he finally accepts that she would never return. In effect he nails the door to his memories of Dinah shut, nearly completing the wall that screens the demolition of all of his other opportunities and illusions.

The young Ned in “The Quiet One” realizes “when the gloves are off” that he could not know why Dulcie died. Yet it is implicit in the story’s end that he will continue to grow up and learn other lessons. The narrator of “Wall of Doors”, by contrast, is near the end of his life. He has learned, once the gloves are off, that his wife had been more attracted to the political cynicism (and masculinity) of his friend Ralph than to the leftist idealism (and attendant lack of virility) exemplified by his copy of John Strachy’s The Coming Struggle for Power. 66 Yet in one of his last letters Ralph admits that he has finally come to understand his friend’s point of view which, ironically, the narrator no longer holds. Thus “Wall of Doors” summarizes the central theme of Breathing Spaces: no matter what they had thought, felt or done, both Ralph and Dinah were dead. Realizing that he might as well go to live with his daughter in Cambridge because he, too, would soon be dead, the old man ends his narrative with his

65 Davin, Breathing Spaces, p. 200.
66 Jones, Barbed Wire and Mirrors, p. 32.
acceptance that “hers was the only door now, the last door in the world of doors, before the last door of all”.

Davin recapitulates the theme that death renders everything relative in “Finders and Losers”, a rambling war story first published in the Listener in 1981. When the New Zealand soldier who tells the story repeatedly inverts the sense of his statements, he implicitly confirms the relativity of finders and losers or truth and lies. Thus “we all make excuses for the truth sometimes; just the way we use the truth for an excuse”. His telling of the story of the life and death of his mate Herbie is similarly paradoxical. Herbie’s attempt to mislead his wife into believing that he served the war effort from a safe position behind the front lines comes to nothing when he is killed in battle and she (not knowing of his death) writes to tell him that she “can’t go on pretending any longer” that she loves him. The narrator proves that he has learned Ned’s lesson, and then some, when he concludes that he was

old enough to know that there were no answers, only questions better not asked of anyone, least of all yourself. Or plenty of answers, so that you might as well forget both the questions and the answers.

Even though it is hard to justify Bertram’s labelling of Cliffs of Fall as “existential”, in fact Davin’s writing career could be described as anticipating the rather uneven development of existentialist themes in New Zealand literature. Moving on from the mixture of nineteenth-century morality and pre-existentialism implicit in his first novel, Davin settled into writing about the inevitability of death in a Godless, indifferent universe. Although many of his novels and short stories end by unrealistically mitigating his deterministic view of the human condition, some of his narratives could be described as “existentialist” when the characters attempt to manage their destiny in an imperfect world.

Like Davin, several New Zealand authors would write narratives that could be described as exploring existentialist themes without ever identifying them as such. While some of these authors would manifestly disapprove of what they perceived to be the anti-social effects of the existentialist philosophy, others would portray the development of self-consciousness and self-responsibility (qualities that Sartre and Camus had described as components of existentialist freedom), as important to the education of their protagonists.

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67 Davin, Breathing Spaces, p. 221.
Lately he had developed a new and wonderful faculty — the power of keeping the immediate past a blank. The events of the last few days would, he knew, return at his call when required but just now it was more comfortable to keep them walled up in oblivion. The future was not to be thought of either for fear of bringing it closer .... As yet he was unable to see himself as a criminal. He did not feel like one .... Both the past and the future must be controlled and held at bay while he endeavoured to exist in the cramped present.¹

Novels by R. M. Burdon, Erik de Mauny, Guthrie Wilson, Gordon Slatter and M. K. Joseph about protagonists who are Men Alone tested by the wilderness or World War Two undoubtedly emerged from New Zealand’s Victorian literary tradition. Yet these novels also suggest that the growing popularity of existentialist ideas affected how New Zealand authors portrayed their Men Alone protagonists. In Outlaw’s Progress: A Novel of New Zealand (1943) Burdon fictionalized the story of Stanley Graham who, paranoid and overburdened with debt, killed seven people and escaped into the bush. Like the writers of earlier Man Alone narratives, Burdon represents his Graham-figure as a victim who flees civilization to reach a pre-existentialist awareness of his environment. Burdon’s debt to the tradition is even more apparent when his protagonist oversteps the boundary governing behaviour acceptable to society by committing a murder: the New Zealand Army will subsequently end his much-publicized rampage in a shootout. In Erik de Mauny’s The Huntsman in His Career (1949), however, the fate of the Graham-figure indicates a more contemporary existentialist influence. After describing his freedom to act in terms borrowed from Jean-Paul Sartre, de Mauny’s protagonist forsakes family and friends as he departs New Zealand to fight in World War Two. When Guthrie Wilson portrays the characters of four of his novels as living on the edge in a Godless, unpredictable and indifferent world he could be described as depicting an existentialist view of the human condition. Yet Wilson’s perspective is actually rather closer to Burdon’s nineteenth-century outlook in Outlaw’s Progress. Both Brave Company (1951) and Julien Ware (1952) focus on the importance of fellowship and depict their Men Alone protagonists as being tested and purified by war. Wilson’s links to New Zealand’s Victorian literary tradition are equally apparent in The Feared and the Fearless (1954) and Strip Jack Naked (1957). As Chamier, Davin and

Burdon maintain in *Philosopher Dick, Cliffs of Fall* and *Outlaw’s Progress* respectively, Wilson reaches the conclusion in *The Feared and the Fearless* and *Strip Jack Naked* that murder is wrong and will lead to the murderer’s own death. *Sweet White Wine* differs from Wilson’s other novels because it does not situate its characters in an extreme situation in the bush or warfare but places them against a conventional urban background. Yet it could be described as reflecting an even more existentialist point of view. Similar to Adam Mahon in Davin’s *Brides of Price*, the narrator of *Sweet White Wine* (1956) develops the self-consciousness and self-responsibility characteristic of protagonists of existentialist fiction. Ron Sefton, the protagonist of Gordon Slatter’s *A Gun in My Hand* (1959), resembles Jack in *Strip Jack Naked* when he is portrayed as a victimized Man Alone whose background will inevitably lead to his downfall. And like Jack, Sefton makes no direct reference to the existentialist philosophy. Yet the narrative in *A Gun in My Hand* implicitly evokes the atmosphere of negativity and despair often associated with existentialist literature. In a post-war New Zealand stripped of values Sefton gains a measure self-awareness even if, by the end of the novel, he remains incapable of taking responsibility for his actions. Finally in *I’ll Soldier No More* (1958) M. K. Joseph celebrates fellowship, treats war as a tester of men, traces the process through which two of its protagonists rejoin conventional society, and, more than any of the other narratives about Men Alone at war, presents God as the controlling force of the universe. Clearly *I’ll Soldier No More* emerged from the same Man Alone tradition that produced *Philosopher Dick*. Yet it also demonstrates Joseph’s response to contemporary existentialist notions which question the validity of traditional values. Of the three central characters in *I’ll Soldier No More*, one will commit suicide because he has nothing to believe in. The second, although believing himself self-sufficient, will nearly destroy his career when he chooses to engage in black-marketing. Joseph uses the third, a Roman Catholic who survives the war and returns to his family with his integrity intact, to suggest the continuing relevance of the traditional values which emerge from faith in God.

With a title that sounds more appropriate to a nineteenth-century novel and an omniscient third-person narrator who describes and explicates the setting, the characters and their actions, the densely adjectival *Outlaw’s Progress* definitely recalls early Man Alone narratives. The narrator’s description, for example, of “the road that led south to Donovan’s Settlement”, which “slunk away over the downs like a bad character on a
questionable errand"; evokes the mood of the lawless gumfields in Satchell’s *The Land of the Lost*. That most of the characters in *Outlaw’s Progress* are stock figures from popular nineteenth-century fiction, either “good” or “bad”, also recalls early New Zealand narratives. Thus Bodgers, the largest shop owner in town and a humane creditor, represents the “good” as he helps Marley to buy a new coat for his wife. Amos Hawthorne, a self-righteous creditor who informs on debtors like Marley when he sees them spending money he considers to be his own, is “bad”. Like Chamier or Satchell, Burdon uses an omniscient narrator to explicitly comment on the forces that precipitate Marley’s behaviour, showing how Hawthorne and economic conditions in general exacerbate Marley’s paranoia by necessitating that he work obsessively without reward.

Yet despite its tendency to recall New Zealand’s Victorian tradition, *Outlaw’s Progress* also resembles Mulgan’s *Man Alone*. Burdon demonstrates, rather than merely explains, the effects of alienation and isolation on a returned serviceman who is a victim of economic forces beyond his control. Early in the novel Marley proves himself a marksman and shows fellow pig hunters a favourite spot where he would seek shelter if he “ever had to get right away”. When Mrs. Marley’s illness prevents her from defusing her husband’s rage, he shoots and kills a policeman before he seeks asylum in the bush. Like Mulgan’s description of Johnson hiding in the Kaimanawas and living from moment to moment, Burdon’s description of Marley’s thoughts has a distinctly existential flavour:

Lately [Marley] had developed a new and wonderful faculty — the power of keeping the immediate past a blank. The events of the last few days would, he knew, return at his call when required but just now it was more comfortable to keep them walled up in oblivion. The future was not to be thought of either for fear of bringing it closer .... As yet he was unable to see himself as a criminal. He did not feel like one .... Both the past and the future must be controlled and held at bay while he endeavoured to exist in the cramped present.

Burdon, however, cannot be described as an existentialist writer any more than Mulgan can. Instead of portraying Marley as one who becomes aware of his existential freedom and responsibility to manage his own destiny, Burdon uses Reuben Luxmore to define Marley as a victim of the New Zealand economy and to summarize why the manhunt which ended with Marley’s death was “a terrible mistake”:

Owen had been driven to it by people who wanted to strip him of everything he had got. To own few possessions and to ask little of life should be a protection against the greed of those power is based on usury, on lawyer's deeds, on financier's schemes. Why then not leave men like Owen alone?  

Like Philosopher Dick, Erik de Mauny's *The Huntsman in His Career* traces the education of a Man Alone as he comes to terms with Nature and Society. And like *Man Alone*, it debunks the myth that in New Zealand hard work and virtue will yield prosperity. Yet when de Mauny adapts from *Nausea, Portrait of the Anti-Semite, The Flies* and *Dirty Hands* some of Sartre's ideas about self-awareness, freedom and responsibility, his novel introduces a consciously existentialist world-view never before present in a New Zealand narrative.

Beginning *The Huntsman in His Career* halfway through Peter Villiers' education as a Man Alone, de Mauny introduces his protagonist in "The Hunt" as searching for his destiny. Villiers is also part of the army machine set on catching Gerald Milsom (de Mauny's version of Stanley Graham), who has killed Bernard Cleaves, abandoned his indebted farm and seriously ill wife and fled into the bush. Because Villiers ponders his role in the New Zealand army, the crime Milsom committed and how he should react to it, and because de Mauny encourages the reader to interpret his protagonist's perceptions, Villiers is unquestionably an interpretive Man Alone from the tradition which produced both Raleigh and Johnson. It soon becomes apparent, however, that de Mauny is portraying the human condition in existentialist rather than Victorian terms. For example when journalist Andy Redfern tells Villiers that there was no motive behind Cleaves' death, he is introducing ideas which Villiers will explore throughout *The Huntsman in His Career*, that New Zealanders are alienated from what they think of as their landscape and that their other values are as meaningless:

"It's just one of those spasmodic, meaningless gestures of violence which you find sometimes in a place like this... People think we're civilized... but we're not, really. The wildness weighs against us, the aeons of geological time. Listen to the wind in the telegraph wires!"  

Later, Villiers would link Cleaves' death to a concept popularly associated with Sartre's brand of existentialism:

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5 Burdon, *Outlaw's Progress*, p. 71.  
In a world which has lost all moral sense — he rehearsed sententiously the old proposition — only the act of violence has dimensions and significance, l'acte gratuit; and then, only apparently senseless, since it must obey laws as yet unrecognized.7

A little later, the narrator's description of the bush track the soldiers follow as they hunt Milsom evokes Roquentin's discomfort in Nausea when he becomes aware that he is de trop, or superfluous:8

Entering the gully, they at once plunged into a strange world of filtered green light, a world dark and swirling with ferns and filled with an extraordinary silence: not the restful hush of summer fields at midday, but a nervous, ritualistic silence, vaguely disquieting. A world of the ocean bed, in that green light.9

Although some of the soldiers sing as they walk on the track, when they split into groups and "the stillness closed in around them" they stop singing as if they unconsciously realize that their passage through the bush is meaningless:

Each man now felt himself isolated from his companions, dwarfed by the prodigious height of the trees .... They moved with the dream coherence of divers on the sea bed, for at almost every step, supplejack festooned the path. It was amazingly tough and resilient, and, forced apart to leave a passage, sprang back a moment later into its old position.10

In "The Bay" the author's retrospective view of Villiers as a young boy who has immigrated from England to New Zealand with his family and then grown into a rebellious young man recalls aspects of both Philosopher Dick and Man Alone, even as it prepares for Villiers' eventual acceptance of his existential freedom. Villiers resembles Raleigh and other heroic rebels of Romantic literature, when, during "the bright desert of adolescence", he assures himself "I am not like the others. Let no one look into me. Let no one know me!"11 Villiers' words also recall Nietzsche, whose advocation of a similar kind of aloneness in Beyond Good and Evil Greville Texidor would borrow for her characterization of Otto in These Dark Glasses, to be discussed in

7 De Mauny, The Huntsman in His Career, p. 33.
9 De Mauny, The Huntsman in His Career, p. 34.
10 De Mauny, The Huntsman in His Career, p. 35.
11 De Mauny, The Huntsman in His Career, p. 66.
the following chapter. The difference, of course, is that Raleigh will repent of his wilful self-exile and rejoin society. Villiers is closer to the protagonist of *Man Alone*, who slowly comes to realize that New Zealand society does not conform to the image it has of itself. When a young Villiers meets Cleaves for the first time he is unconscious of the economic forces that have relegated Cleaves to a Depression work gang. Later, like Raleigh who has learned to question his somewhat romantic view of the consequences of atheism, Villiers will become a journalist. When the beginning of World War Two becomes inevitable, he will learn to challenge his attraction to pacifism. His education also includes his first sexual experience with a chambermaid, his realization that she is a victim and his later and freer sexual relations with Laure which are followed by his loss of her to a friend. The subsequent development of Villiers’ sceptical attitude about his ability to effect change culminates in another chance meeting with Cleaves. The salesman’s dubious theories about the acquisition of power suggest to Villiers that neither has much control over his own destiny and causes Villiers to join the army.

Sartre’s existentialist perspective is especially evident in “The Back Street” when de Mauny implicitly contrasts Cleaves with Villiers to show why the former will die as a result of his unauthentic behaviour. Beginning with a description of Cleaves’ underprivileged upbringing and his petty thievery, de Mauny goes on to portray his failure at school, his loutish adolescence and his time on Relief when, carting bricks, he meets Villiers. Later at a sawmill Cleaves associates with other Men Alone who have drifted there “casually ... from the workless towns”. Like Mulgan before him, de Mauny evokes the uneasy fellowship maintained among economic refugees of the Depression:

They were mostly about his own age, between the twenties and thirties. An easy, casual comradeship held them together, arising from common experience of the same misfortune. They were a small group of exiles, who had chosen for a time to live outside ordinary society .... There was a sneaking fear among them that they might remain cut off too long.12

Unlike Mulgan, however, de Mauny explores Sartre’s concept of *mauvais foi*. He was clearly familiar with Sartre’s ideas on that subject: in 1948 Secker and Warburg published de Mauny’s translation of Sartre’s treatise, “Portraits of the Anti-Semite”, a description of the causes and effects of Nazi anti-semitism.13 When Cleaves discovers *A Key to the Arcana* at the sawmill and sets about learning how a “supreme concentration

12 De Mauny, *The Huntsman and His Career*, p. 163.
of Will can accomplish anything, he rehearses the kind of unauthentic behaviour that will end in his death. As a weak and uncharismatic man who lacks self-awareness, Cleaves is not so much interested in learning self-control as in developing the ability to control others. After a variety of farm jobs he decides to become a commercial traveller, which occupation allows him more scope to practise the mind control techniques he has adapted from *A Key to the Arcana*. But when Cleaves attempts to manipulate Milsom, a farmer who suffers from the effects of his own and society’s unauthentic approach to the land, Milsom will mistake him for a badgering land agent and kill him.

In “The Hospital” when Laure asks Villiers to explain the connection between Milsom’s death and “the unloved hills”, de Mauny emphasizes once again the mixture of indigenous and Sartrean existentialism that Redfern and Villiers had earlier suggested was the “cause” of the seemingly motiveless killing of Cleaves:

> “Millions of years of geological time .... They weigh down on us .... A little shelf of material civilization, flung together with scraps of notions from a continent on the other side of the world. Our possession of the place is too tenuous, too uneasy. Somewhere deep down, at some brief point in their lives, even the cow-cockies feel it. So, to fill the void, there’s a sort of spontaneous combustion, an act of violence for its own sake. It’s as instinctive as shouting to reassure yourself in an empty house.”

Feeling compelled to find out everything he can about Milsom and the killing of Cleaves, Villiers visits Mrs. Milsom in the hospital where she is near death from peritonitis left too long untreated. When he comes to believe that he had met her on the ship which had brought his family to New Zealand years earlier, the knowledge that he was somehow bound to the Milsoms and to Cleaves as “a participant in something he did not understand”; his shock over Mrs. Milsom’s condition and the caesarian birth he inadvertently witnesses while at the hospital nearly cause him to faint. Later, after making love with Laure has grounded him in the present, Villiers begins to formulate his own response to the killing which he had earlier described as “only apparently senseless, since it must obey laws as yet unrecognized”. In the excerpt below his education as a traditional Man Alone like Raleigh and Johnson incorporates the existential fortitude born of having no expectations which, as I will demonstrate presently, Sartre explores in his plays:

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14 De Mauny, *The Huntsman in His Career*, p. 164.
15 De Mauny, *The Huntsman in His Career*, p. 188.
16 De Mauny, *The Huntsman in His Career*, p. 199.
To-morrow, something else would happen, and tomorrow or the next day, something else would also come to an end. Although he could not as yet even dimly foresee what that might be, he was no longer afraid. It would be different, it would be life: that was all. An end and a beginning.\textsuperscript{17}

When in the "The Hunted" the narrative advances from Milsom's point of view, \textit{The Huntsman in His Career} novel closely resembles \textit{Man Alone}. Like Stenning, who lived his life according to a groundless puritan work-ethic, "there was something unnatural, almost obsessed, in [Milsom's] way of never easing up on the work".\textsuperscript{18} Both Johnson and Milsom are affected by "a sort of spontaneous combustion" of violence. Both refuse to take responsibility for killings that cause them to flee from the authorities. Both seek refuge in the bush. In the following excerpt Milsom ponders his newfound sense of aloneness:

Being alone. It was amazing, the difference being alone made. Everything he did now, every gesture, was filled with a new significance. Nothing was unimportant any longer, not even the way he lit a cigarette. In two days, the smallest details of the hut had become immensely familiar to him .... The most insignificant things ... were full of meaning.\textsuperscript{19}

That both Mulgan and de Mauny should focus on Johnson's and Milsom's existential reactions suggests the proximity of New Zealand's indigenous existentialism to Sartre's brand of existentialism.

When in "The Private War" Villiers kills Milsom and subsequently leaves New Zealand, de Mauny's treatment of him is, once again, similar to Mulgan's portrayal of Johnson. Villiers' last view of New Zealand from the troop ship recalls Johnson's departure for England:

The first chill wind from the open sea blew in his face. The great, darkened ship was nosing her way out through the heads. At the furthest seaward point of the long black arm of hills on the left, a light flicked on and off in the darkness. It was like a message in an unknown or forgotten tongue from the silent black mass of land behind, waiting to be deciphered. But he was no longer impatient.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17} De Mauny, \textit{The Huntsman in His Career}, p. 202.
\textsuperscript{18} De Mauny, \textit{The Huntsman in His Career}, p. 230.
\textsuperscript{19} De Mauny, \textit{The Huntsman in His Career}, p. 237.
\textsuperscript{20} De Mauny, \textit{The Huntsman in His Career}, p. 264.
When Johnson and Villiers leave New Zealand as maturing Men Alone, they set the standard for the existentialist Men and Women Alone who would follow: confirmed in their self-awareness and sense of responsibility, neither is impatient or fearful of the future.

Despite the similarities between *Man Alone* and *The Huntsman in His Career*, however, the two novels promote altogether different views of the human condition. In *Man Alone* Mulgan recalls New Zealand’s Victorian literary tradition at the same time as he seeks to debunk the Victorian Myth of Progress. While de Mauny also recalls the tradition and its debunking and even though, like Davin, he does not specifically identify his own or his characters’ attitudes as existentialist, his frequent references to existentialist ideas suggest a world-view that is consciously existentialist. At the beginning of the summer holidays, for example, the young Villiers senses his environment in the present-tense experiential terms characteristic of existentialist-flavoured writing:

I have forgotten everything I learned, he thought, and was delighted with the discovery. He was aware in a new way of the smallest detail in his room. Everything came into sharper focus .... He had found the delight of living purely in the moment, and moved his legs lazily between the sheets to confirm the rich, vagrant pleasure. In forgetting everything you begin to live.21

As a young man, Villiers’ perception of his surroundings after he has joined the army is similar:

He found he had time now to live for each moment, to look around him and observe immediate surroundings with an astonishing freshness, as if he were seeing the most ordinary objects for the first time.22

In “The Back Street”, the chapter about Cleaves’ upbringing, de Mauny portrays Cleaves’ experience of his surroundings with the kind of existential detail that Mulgan provides about Johnson’s response to his flight through the Kaimanawas. For instance, while breakfasting with the virtual stranger who is his father, the young Cleaves “began to enjoy the changed atmosphere which he could sense around him. He seemed to sense it directly, like an animal; it sank in through the pores of his skin”.23 Yet de Mauny’s

21 De Mauny, *The Huntsman in His Career*, p. 66.
23 De Mauny, *The Huntsman in His Career*, p. 140.
emphasis is different to Mulgan's: Johnson experienced his environment directly and survived because he learned how to interpret his experience and take responsibility for it; Cleaves, despite his unmediated awareness of the environment and despite the flash of insight about his responsibility for his actions experienced just before his dies, will be killed by Milsom. Although both Mulgan and de Mauny trace the education of their protagonists, Mulgan is more concerned to show how a self-aware and self-responsible Man Alone learns to survive. De Mauny's focus is on the negative effects of inauthenticity.

Unlike *Man Alone* which manifests the general influence of Hemingway's world-view but has no specifically existentialist bent, there is considerable internal evidence to suggest that *The Huntsman in His Career* reflects not only Sartre's *Nausea* and *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* but also two of his existentialist plays. Thus when Villiers explains to Laure that the scene of Cleaves' death manifests "a sense of something irrevocable, absolute" there is a suggestion in his reference to the empty sky in the excerpt below that de Mauny's novel may have been based on "The Flies", Sartre's existentialist interpretation of the *Oresteia*, by Aeschylus:

"I felt it once, seeing a Greek tragedy on the stage: the white exterior of a temple, in front of which all the passions raged — and all the time, behind the absolute tragedy, the absolute emptiness. The absolute emptiness of the sky behind the temple."24

As I have already explained, an empty sky is characteristic of several of the existentialist stories and essays published in *Penguin New Writing*, including de Mauny's own stories "In Transit" and "A Night in the Country". Like the *Oresteia*, Sartre's play opens in the Greek city of Argos where swarms of flies have been drawn by the murder of Agamemnon, its rightful king. Although the people of Argos did not murder Agamemnon themselves, they did nothing to stop it. On the contrary, there are suggestions throughout the play that they found the killing of the king sexually gratifying. Filled with remorse which they teach to their children, even to those born after Agamemnon's murder, the citizens of Argos believe that they should endure the curse of the flies. In the first act the young and untried Orestes, who has been hidden away in Corinth for safety, arrives in the city searching for his destiny and uncertain about whether or not he should avenge his father's death. Yet Zeus describes the regicide, and the revenge which will follow it, as inevitable. De Mauny likewise portrays the killings in his novel as inevitable: Villiers becomes increasingly aware of

24 De Mauny, *The Huntsman in His Career*, p. 185.
the compelling nature of Cleaves' death and of his own part in the hunting and killing of Milsom. At the beginning of "The Flies" Orestes disguises himself as Philebus, a well-bred young man travelling with his tutor. Once he has decided to avenge Agammenon's death, however, his "kind, girlish" demeanour changes into the bearing of a warrior. The transformation de Mauny's protagonist undergoes is equally remarkable: Villiers had regarded himself as a pacifist until, after meeting Cleaves, he joined the Army. In both the play and the novel those killed by Orestes and Villiers lead unauthentic lives. Aegistheus and Clytemnestra cling to their pretence of remorse over the death of Agammenon, yet they commit other sins with little compunction. Milsom's adherence to the Puritan work ethic with its emphasis on endless hard work contribute to his mistreatment of his family and neighbours. In both narratives, once the protagonists have accepted their doom to commit what Orestes' sister Electra calls "an act beyond all remedy", they kill without remorse. In the excerpt below, for example, Aegistheus is weary of feeling guilty about his killing of Agamemnon and invites Orestes to dispatch him:

AEGISTHEUS
I shall not resist. I wish you to kill me.
ORESTES
Good. Little I care how it is to be done.... So I am to be a murderer.
ORESTES strikes him with his sword.
AEGISTHEUS
[Tottering.] Ah! You struck well Orestes. [He clings to ORESTES.] Let me look at you. It is true you feel no remorse?
ORESTES
Remorse? Why should I feel remorse? I am only doing what is right.26

Unlike Aegistheus, however, Milsom does not invite his hunters to kill him. Villiers' shooting of the hunted man can be traced instead to another of Sartre's plays, Les Mains Sales, or Dirty Hands. Set mostly just before the end of World War Two and finishing two years later, Dirty Hands concerns the life and death of Hugo Barine, a member of the Illyrian Proletarian Party. Hugo had been ordered to prove his commitment to the revolutionary party by assassinating Hoederer, one of its leaders, whose advocacy of compromise had caused alarm. After the war Hoederer's pragmatic recommendations were followed anyway and Hugo, just out of prison for his murder, faces assassination himself because he has become an embarrassment to the party. The play opens as Hugo

26 Sartre, The Flies and In Camera, p. 75.
arrives at Olga's, his contact before he went to prison, to appeal for protection from the three men the Party have sent to kill him. Olga manages to negotiate three hours during which time Hugo must explain if his motives for the killing of Hoederer were political or if he murdered Hoederer out of jealousy of his wife's relationship with the charismatic leader. If Hugo can settle on a motive he may be able to forget the murder, go along with the Party's attempt to hush it up and be more useful alive than dead. However, if he cannot accept the Party's version of the murder, if he is "non-récupérable" or unsalvageable, the only alternative is death at the hands of assassins. De Mauny clearly borrowed from Sartre aspects of Hugo's concern about the inauthenticity of political expediency and his own motivations. Thus like Hugo, who edited the Party's newspaper before his desire for first-hand action led to his killing of Hoederer, Villiers worked for a newspaper until he entered the army and joined the hunt for Milsom. Hugo's codename in the Party was "Raskolnikov" and, like Dostoevsky's protagonist, neither Hugo nor Villiers can settle on a stable meaning for their actions. Both the play and novel focus attention on the role the past plays on present motivations: Hugo is unsure about why he killed Hoederer; Villiers is also unsure, first about his pacifism and then about why he should execute Milsom. Both narratives end with the protagonists' specific realization that they must take responsibility for their actions.

Yet the resolution reached in de Mauny's novel is not quite as rigorous as the resolutions Sartre reaches in his plays. Hugo decides that only by facing his assassins (in other words, by committing suicide) will his killing of Hoederer achieve an irrevocable meaning. Villiers, by contrast, does not need to commit suicide in order to confirm the significance of his killing of Milsom but thinks to himself:

So this is the world we inherit ... a world of cruelty and stupidity. A world in which, because of the mere fact of our existence, we are committed to certain decisions and actions forced upon us from outside.\(^7\)

In fact, Villiers is rather more like Hoederer than Hugo when, upon leaving New Zealand, he plans to pursue pragmatic compromise as he faces his responsibilities on the wider stage of World War Two:

If I do not do this, someone else will have to do it. It is an act from which there is no escape. I will kill this man because pity and understanding are not enough, because it is only the act which has reality. But it is my act, by accepting it, I make it my own. If it should be the act of another, I

\(^7\) De Mauny, *The Huntsman in His Career*, p. 253.
should have to consent to it, because I should have no power over it. But by making it my own, I make the responsibility mine: *and I do not consent.* By making the act my own, I affirm my non-consent: and since my non-consent is part of a real world, the world will one day have to learn of its existence.  

Recalling the “bright desert” of Villiers’ adolescent years and his somewhat romantic wish to go his own way, the narrator’s description of how the killing of Milsom has affected Villiers’ significance also evokes how Orestes has changed:

After that, everything had changed. His position in the company had become subtly different, he had become a separate individual in their eyes, there was something that would be said of him from now on, usually with some envy, with some admiration: the beginning of a myth.... In a very short time, the details of the Milsom affair would become blurred in their minds, and then it would be only the act, his act, which would be identified with him .... Behind the myth, he would have to remain anonymous, concealed by its protective colouring, keeping the truth of the act to himself and working things out his own way....

After assuming responsibility for the killing of Aegistheus and Clytemnestra, Orestes claims his throne before leaving Argos and his kingdom behind:

“You see me, men of Argos, you understand that my crime is wholly mine; I claim it as my own, for all to know, it is my glory, my life’s work, and you can neither punish me nor pity me .... .... Farewell, my people. Try to reshape your lives. All here is new, all must begin anew. And for me, too, a new life is beginning. A strange life ... Listen now to this tale.”

Frank Sargeson and D. H. Monro both reviewed de Mauny’s novel soon after it was released. When Sargeson notes that de Mauny’s novel attempts “to grapple with modern problems” and yet does not adequately assimilate some borrowed ideas, he may be referring to the differences between how Sartre and de Mauny deal with the consequences of claiming responsibility for action. Monro also suggests that the novel’s tragedy is “typical of our time” but goes on to note that the main impression left by the

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28 De Mauny, *The Huntsman in His Career*, p. 259.
29 De Mauny, *The Huntsman in His Career*, p. 262.
book is "of isolation, helplessness and puzzlement". 32 It is significant that although both vaguely describe some of the symptoms of the existential dilemma, neither specifically identifies de Mauny's attitude as existentialist.

ii.

Like The Huntsman in His Career, Guthrie Wilson's novels also emerged from New Zealand's Man Alone tradition. In his essay "Fiction and the Social Pattern: Some Implications of Recent N. Z. Writing" Robert Chapman suggests that in Wilson's Brave Company the war replaces pioneering as the proving ground for Men Alone because it allows them the opportunity to confirm the values of courage and manly fellowship. 33 Wilson himself supports this in the brief synopsis which begins Brave Company when he explains "if I had a particular purpose in writing this novel, it was that it should be a tribute to the infantrymen of all nationalities". 34 In celebrating the infantryman, Wilson also suggests his image of the heroic Man Alone.

Like de Mauny, Wilson explored existentialist themes without identifying them. For example, Brave Company shares with atheistic existentialist fiction the assumption that God does not exist, or, as Corporal Hadfield sarcastically observes, "Soul? Arseholes!". 35 As in "The Wall" or The Outsider, Wilson's soldiers are Men Alone who have become alienated from civilian life. Again, according to Corporal Hadfield:

"The legion of the lost — that's us. Here we long for the war to end, and when it is over we won't know how to fit into a world at peace. Think of all the bloody civilians at home. Will you want to be one of them again? ... What are we? Just a disinherited handful, a drop of red blood in a pail of water, civilian water." 36

That Lawyer, the thoughtful and articulate protagonist of Brave Company, is aware of the meaninglessness of warfare is apparent when he contemplates

The gossip of Spandau and Bren, muffled yet unmistakable, was incessant. I wondered whether we or the Huns were attacking.

35 Wilson, Brave Company, p. 34.
36 Wilson, Brave Company, p. 36.
And, of a sudden, it came to me that it did not matter.\textsuperscript{37}

If, as Lawyer suggests, the meaning of present experience is relative, then he can place no reliance on the uncertain future either. As Lawyer explains it: “I have the infantryman’s fatalism and his refusal to look ahead five minutes. It is necessary, this absorption with the present.”\textsuperscript{38} Lieutenant Brent evidently feels the same way as he considers the probability of his own death during an ill-considered mission to secure a ridge: “I’m not objecting. Tonight or next week — what’s the difference?”\textsuperscript{39} Lawyer’s description of Corporal Hadfield on the same mission suggests that Hadfield also refuses to entertain hope: “The worst lies ahead, but he is without apprehension, or, more truly expressed, apprehensions recoil from the invulnerable armour of his fatalism, a dry, mocking acceptance of things.”\textsuperscript{40}

Yet even though Lawyer, Brent and Hadfield suggest an existentialist approach to life with their refusal to hope, \textit{Brave Company} could be more accurately described as a pre-existentialist novel. Like Raleigh, its narrator is an interpretive Man Alone as he portrays the soldiers of the “Brave Company” and their fellowship. In the following passage, for example, when Lawyer identifies himself with his platoon and commemorates the mateship that alleviates the horrors of World War Two in Italy he is following the path established by earlier Men Alone:

These men, my good comrades, they sit there at their ease; contented, sluggishly satiated by sufficient sleep and their full bellies. I wonder whether they, like me, have had visions of the unreality of this existence. Brent, for example. Hadfield too; and Corry. Burton. I do not doubt but that they have thought as I am thinking.\textsuperscript{41}

Towards the end of the novel, just after he has been transferred to Company Headquarters, Lawyer adds that:

They are there, my friends ... my companions of the slit trench and frying pan. It would be strange, discourteous, and inhuman if remorse at parting from them did not move me to a sense of loss. Each clears his individual path and that path is littered with discarded comradeships, half forgotten as our eyes peer into the future. Will I forget these men, this companionship, so easily? My steps become

\textsuperscript{37} Wilson, \textit{Brave Company}, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{38} Wilson, \textit{Brave Company}, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{39} Wilson, \textit{Brave Company}, p. 239.
\textsuperscript{40} Wilson, \textit{Brave Company}, p. 265.
\textsuperscript{41} Wilson, \textit{Brave Company}, p. 47.
slower. No; I shall not forget. Never that. Never completely. But time
and new associations will dim all things and this no less. 42

What separates these passages from accounts of early Men Alone is the lack of a
happy resolution: all but one of the “Brave Company” are killed in the advance led by
Lieutenant Brent. The novel closes with the company commander’s comforting of the
lone survivor, reminding him (and the reader) that there is life beyond the war:

“It’s all right, my lad. In six months’ time you will be back at
your job. You will be able to tell your grandchildren all about your war
.... And they will be able to tell you all about theirs.” 43

When the commander and Lawyer drink to their fallen comrades, the commander toasts
the “Old School Tie” and Lawyer replies “Happy days”. Although both are being ironic,
behind the irony there is still an appreciation for the social formalities which death has
rendered meaningless.

Although Wilson’s Julien Ware also honours the infantry, it is set mostly in
New Zealand and recalls New Zealand’s early writing more obviously than Brave
Company. Like Philosopher Dick it traces the education of a young protagonist who is
alienated from his community. And, like Chamier’s novel, Julien Ware confirms that its
protagonist has the qualities of a Man Alone who has been tested and purified by his
environment. Thus Wilson depicts Ware’s early life on the rabbit-infested land his father
managed for the Cecil family and describes how the land had crept into his father’s
blood. According to the narrator, “the struggle to extirpate the rabbit had assumed for
him an epic quality that satisfied the desire inherent in all men to pit themselves against
the unyielding.” 44

Yet Julien Ware emerges from different assumptions about the human condition.
Raleigh’s happiness coincides with his rejoining of society. Although by dying as a war
hero Ware will also earn society’s approbation, his heroism hardly constitutes a happy
ending. Implicit in Ware’s death is the general existentialist notion that his ambition and
his wartime heroism both come to the same end, whatever he has learned is
meaningless.

Like Chamier and Davin, Wilson dramatizes formative events in his
protagonist’s life to show what he needs to learn in order to become an acceptable
member of society. Thus Wilson portrays Ware’s four years at boarding school, where

42 Wilson, Brave Company, p. 212.
44 Guthrie Wilson, Julien Ware (London: Hale, 1952), p. 17.
he is visibly different in dress and manner from fellow students who come from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Although Ware eventually learns to resemble them, his name is significant. Like Julius Caesar he would be “more purposeful, more alert, less yielding, less swayed by impulses and charity and generosity. Like them but without their weaknesses.” In other words, he would adopt the “strong virtues” advocated by Nietzsche.

That Wilson allows Ware to achieve a kind of redemption suggests that the author does not approve of these “strong virtues”, especially when the narrator asserts that “infantry war, life’s supreme teacher” was “purging [Ware] of what remained of the malevolence he had carried through his youth”. As a result of fighting in the war, “he knew exhaustion and indecision, but they were passing things against a broad ground of fulfilment”. Ware moves beyond the determined existence of his boyhood and beyond choosing to pursue selfish ends. He will postpone his ambitions to own land in order to join the war effort and will ultimately become a Man Alone like Johnson, one who chooses fellowship over alienation.

Ware’s reflections on the human condition near the end of the novel reveal that experience has modified his earlier resolve to practise the “strong virtues”:

Conclusions? Yes. That man was neither master of his fate nor wholly subservient to it. That man and the world he lives in work one upon the other to bring forth in the end something a little different from what either intended. That somewhere between predestination and man’s fierce resolution to mould and bend lies the answer to it all.

A more explicit connection to existentialist thought becomes apparent when Ware, like Camus’ Sisyphus, affirms that his own experience has taught him “that in the striving and only in the striving lay the reward”.

On the surface The Feared and the Fearless is a thriller and wartime love story about the dangers faced and overcome by New Zealander Maria Cresswell and American Max Stuart. Yet when the novel’s central character, Captain Markham Faulkner (a.k.a. Il Brutto), continually steps over the bounds of socially sanctioned behaviour as he expresses ideas vaguely associated with Nietzsche, Sartre and the existentialist philosophy, there is a suggestion that Wilson has used his novel to

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45 Wilson, Julien Ware, p. 54.
46 Wilson, Julien Ware, p. 275.
47 Wilson, Julien Ware, p. 272.
48 Wilson, Julien Ware, p. 275.
49 Wilson, Julien Ware, p. 277.
demonstrate his disapproval of these ideas. In the excerpt below Faulkner questions the role of conscience and the traditional rules of conduct which underpin it:

“I alone have the power to exist in the present with such integrity that all that has been and all that is to be have no pertinence. Other men, crushed into the cages of the past, secreted behind the bars of their future, bear the features of their birth and their extermination. But I am what I am as the second ticks, unrelated to what has gone, freed from connection with what may be.”

Wilson’s novel will demonstrate that the sanction against murder which regulates Raleigh’s behaviour in *Philosopher Dick* and punishes Burke in *Cliffs of Fall* will seal Faulkner’s fate. Thus although Faulkner is the Man Alone leader of an Italian resistance headquarters code-named Point 12, he is not heroic like the characters in *Brave Company*, who live and die according to the values they accord to duty and fellowship, or like the protagonist of *Julien Ware*, who learns to sacrifice himself for others. Instead, and in accordance with the sanction against murder characteristic of New Zealand’s Victorian literary tradition, the police will kill him to put a stop to his anti-social rampage.

Yet Wilson’s attitude towards his protagonist seems ambivalent, especially when he suggests that Il Brutto is not so much an existential superman who kills others to survive as a victim who has no control over his behaviour. Early in the novel, for example, Wilson looks back to Faulkner recovering in a field hospital in Cairo from a near-fatal head wound. The shreds of memories left to him suggest that he has always had the murderous tendencies unleashed by his injury. Sullivan’s shocked first impression of Il Brutto also suggests Faulkner’s lack of choice: “Jeeze ... it’s like Frankenstein — half human, half mechanical.” In other words Il Brutto was created, not by Dr. Frankenstein but by injuries sustained during the war.

In fact, Wilson goes to some trouble to show that Faulkner is not responsible for his actions. In the excerpt below, for example, Il Brutto demonstrates his madness when he brutally kills the woman who has betrayed the location of his Resistance group to the Fascisti, first whispering and then screaming at God:

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51 Wilson, *The Feared and the Fearless*, p. 34.
“God who made me and marred me — this will teach You. This will teach You. This will teach You, Lord God, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost.”

When some time later he calmly talks to God as his friend, it is apparent that Il Brutto believes himself to be God’s representative on earth:

Man to man, but not quite, one in the know to one worth instructing, he held God by the lapels and put Him right. “She was an informer, God. She did what I’d warned her not to do. I’ve rewarded her. She’ll be in Heaven with You. She was a poor blind woman born into misery and vice, Lord, and she didn’t know that it’s a crime to be treacherous, a crime against me, against Brutto. You know what its like down here for these people. They don’t get a chance and they’ve got to lie and cheat to live at all. But they’re good people at heart, Lord. She’s got her head smashed in too. That counts in her favour. But she was a bloodstained informer all the same and she got what she deserved.”

Yet the Brutto who converses with God as an equal could also act as if he were sane, as when he plans to ambush the Fascisti who would advance on the reinforced Point 12. Just before the ambush, “the excitement of what lay ahead flowed through his veins, but coolly as he wished it. He felt relaxed and conscious of his limitless vitality, his superhuman powers.”

As the time of the ambush draws nearer, however, it occurs to Faulkner that the information given to him about the planned attack is false, and he suffers a violent delusion:

His rage came throbbing into his brain. His whole body writhed in the fury surging through him.

He clawed at the ground and the soil he tore was the throat of the informer. His hands clutching deeply, he ground out the life of the wet earth that oozed between his fingers. In that moment it was blood and not dirt that streaked his wrists.

Then his brain cleared. His bursting muscles went limp. His hands were dirt-stained and that was all. Carefully his wiped them on his jacket. He looked at the torn earth and could not remember what it had been like a minute before, but accepted that it was like it now.

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52 Wilson, The Feared and the Fearless, p. 69.
53 Wilson, The Feared and the Fearless, p. 69.
54 Wilson, The Feared and the Fearless, p. 87.
Wilson does not make his opinion of existentialism explicit in any of his novels, yet because he assigns notions to the insane Faulkner which were popularly associated with the existentialist philosophy, it seems probable that he considered it dangerously anti-social. In an Italian mental asylum just after the war, Il Brutto’s paraphrase of Sartre to the New Zealand officer who has located him denies the moral assumptions which would label his behaviour wrong:

“The past has no meaning. What I have done, I don’t wish to remember. It is over, finished with. At this moment I sit here and accomplish nothing. Because I accomplish nothing, I am nothing.”

Yet Wilson makes it clear that the war was at least partly responsible for Faulkner’s murderous actions. The narrator’s tone is distinctly ironic when reporting the media’s change from describing Faulkner as “perhaps New Zealand’s most distinguished soldier of the last war” to “this monster.” Even though the ending implies that peacetime society must be protected from the menace Faulkner has become, Wilson allows him to die happily. When the police finally manage to shoot their quarry, the narrator records the welcoming words Il Brutto imagines God to be saying:

“It’s your time, Brutto. I’m pleased it’s your time. We need you here. There’s work for you that only you can do.”

Although Wilson’s next novel, *Sweet White Wine*, does not focus on the life of a Man Alone in an extreme situation it, too, has an existentialist flavour. The plot is built around the recollections of Simon Gregg, who looks back on his friendship with Paul Mundy, who has had an affair with Jean, his wife. Based upon an awareness of his own foibles, when Gregg accepts responsibility for his actions he resembles the protagonists in Davin’s later fiction:

And now that I have written all this down I find that I have indeed lifted a burden from my shoulder. My part doesn’t seem quite as black as I had thought it to be. I was at fault — very gravely at fault — in allowing the affair between Paul and Jean to continue under the rose bush for so long before I acted. That was despicable. And when I did act I didn’t do well. I feel a little sick when I think of the spying and prying

57 Wilson, *The Feared and the Fearless*, p. 211.
in which I indulged before we had our settlement .... In the end, however, things turned out well for all of us.59

Yet just as the protagonists of The Sullen Bell and Brides of Price cannot be described as existentialist characters, neither can Gregg: Wilson ensures that the narrative about him will end tidily and happily. Mundy has been honoured by the Queen for his public services. Jean has settled happily into her life as Lady Mundy. And Gregg feels satisfaction that he has come to terms with the loss of his wife. The novel ends with his explanation of its title and a summary of why his life has unfolded as it has:

This is the story of three people and it has a word for each of them. Paul Mundy is the wine, Jean is the sweetness. And I — why, I am white. They tell me white is not a colour. It's not often that a writer is lucky enough to hit upon a title that says so much.

In his next novel, Strip Jack Naked, Wilson again concludes that murder is wrong. Yet while he broadly sustains New Zealand’s fellowship convention in his novel about a Man Alone whose background prevents him from joining respectable society, he depicts Jack Stevens’ inevitable death as “happy”. Wilson had already used the soldiers in Brave Company to suggest that there is no God. That Jack and Meursault experience similar feelings and express similar ideas in the face of death suggests that Wilson had moved far enough away from New Zealand’s Victorian tradition to approach Camus’ position in The Outsider and The Myth of Sisyphus. In Strip Jack Naked Wilson shows how a Man Alone, stripped of his illusions, comes to accept his place in an indifferent yet beautiful universe.

The influence of existentialist ideas is evident from the beginning of Wilson’s novel when the first appearance of Jack suggests an atmosphere in which anything can happen: a terrified drunk sees the protagonist stepping “casual-like” from the ocean onto the wharf. Yet when the narrator carefully explains the reason for Jack’s sudden appearance (he had sneaked away from the ship where he worked to escape the brutality and squalid conditions of his life there), it becomes apparent that Wilson is working from the tendency to explanation and analysis characteristic of New Zealand’s early literature.

Jack’s learning to value fellowship is another connection to the early literature. An early lesson about the importance of fellowship takes place in a drinking establishment on the wharf as Jack listens to a drunk paraphrasing the humanistic ideas expressed in John Donne’s meditation, “No man is an Ilande, intire of it self”:

“Because we’ve all got to die, we’re able to feel a neighbour’s horror at any misfortune which brings him nearer to death. The sickness of other men is our sickness. The death of another is suffered vicariously.”  

Events in the novel will prove the drunk’s lesson to the initially sceptical Jack. In a fight at the brewery where he works, Jack “wins” because of the brass knuckles left over from his life as a petty criminal in Britain. Yet the unfair advantage that Jack’s workmates associate with their use means that what he really gains is their contempt. In reporting the protagonist’s inability to accept responsibility for losing the fight, the narrator highlights Jack’s lack of empathy for others:

If only his leg hadn’t welshed on him! If only the sodden swine who’d had the job of setting it had made a job of it! If only — They’d have been eating out of his hand right now.  

Still smarting from the contempt of his workmates Jack picks up a brass vase, goes into town and bashes an innocent bystander on the head. Again, Wilson’s ties to the New Zealand tradition are apparent as this seeming acte gratuit leads to further lessons about the importance of maintaining fellowship. Deciding that it is ridiculous that he should “be held culpable at all for a moment of blind rage directed without malice upon a stranger”, Jack thinks of giving himself up and imagines what a policeman would say: “Cheer up, mate; accidents will happen. We know you didn’t mean to do it, son. You’ve been the victim of circumstances.”  

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A little later, though, when Jack reads in the newspaper about the man he has killed, he recalls the drunk’s pronouncements about the mortality human beings share:

There seemed an intangible conjunction between the two of them, as though Parkinson had been throughout his life his dearest comrade. It was as though at last, but too late, he had met his soul mate. He felt towards him, dead, an affection he had experienced before for no man, no woman.

And,

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61 Wilson, *Strip Jack Naked*, p. 70.
He had reached a position where he saw clearly, and without possibility of rejection, that it was death and only death which caused men to have fellow-feeling at all. It was, he understood, the knowledge that the span of all men was terminable and not within their power to prolong that gave men community, allied in fear against its unstayable march.63

Yet as Jack realizes his connection to others, his lesson is different to the one grasped by New Zealand’s earlier and more successful Men Alone. Unlike Raleigh, whose rejoining of conventional society would be followed by marriage and material prosperity, Jack’s experience recalls Meursault’s on the eve of his execution in The Outsider. In the following excerpt Meursault has just realized that he is part of a beautiful and indifferent cosmos:

I woke with the stars shining on my face. Sounds of the countryside were wafting in. The night air was cooling my temples with the smell of earth and salt. The wondrous peace of this sleeping summer flooded into me.64

During the final hours of his life, Jack also demonstrates a lyrical appreciation of the view outside his dingy flat:

The street lights went on, which was quite a thing to see, because one moment it was daylight smeared by approaching dusk, a sort of swimming grey, and the next you knew that night had come and a hundred lights arranged in chains, shining their effulgence over the half-dozen streets he could name, were there to prove it.65

As a manifestation of Wilson’s world-view, however, Jack is not, finally, a Meursault. His perception of why he killed Parkinson (“I’m made that way ... because I’ve always had to fight ... I’m sorry now, but that’s my way”), implies value judgments which would be foreign to the amoral Meursault. A further inconsistency becomes evident when, a little later, the narrator reports Jack as seeing himself as “built like a tower, unyielding, unforgetting, unforgiving, one man against a world of men and holding his own”66 because here he sounds more like Il Brutto than himself, a victim who used to blame anything but himself for his misfortunes. But the greatest difference between Jack and Meursault emerges from the curious ending of Wilson’s novel, which seems to mix aspects of the endings of The Outsider and The Myth of Sisyphus with

63 Wilson, Strip Jack Naked, p. 122.
64 Camus, The Outsider, p. 116.
65 Wilson, Strip Jack Naked, p. 124.
66 Wilson, Strip Jack Naked, pp. 129-130.
New Zealand’s Victorian sanction against murder. After Jack has learned to appreciate
the beauty of his surroundings, the police chase him to the wharf where he first
appeared. When he jumps from the wharf, grinning, his attitude just before his death
recalls Meursault’s, who, after accepting that he is part of an indifferent world, realizes
that he has been happy and is happy still. Jack also recalls Sisyphus, whom Camus
describes as “happy” because he continues to roll his boulder uphill even though he
knows what will happen when he reaches the top. Finally, Jack recalls the earlier Burke
and Il Brutto who died as a result of their crimes against society:

There was one cry like the scream of a seagull.
And then only the moan of the wind, the cold sloshing of the sea,
and a long drawn-out rumbling as the Hanover Castle brushed the
fenders and whatever had come between her and the wharf, which was
happy Jack Stevens. 67

But Jack’s “happy” suicide may not suggest his existential freedom so much as
ironically testify to Wilson’s belief that a Man Alone who kills has no freedom except,
perhaps, to choose the time, place and manner of his death.

Like Jack, the protagonist of Gordon Slatter’s A Gun in My Hand is a Man
Alone anti-hero who interprets aspects of post-war New Zealand. Yet even though the
first line of the novel appears to indicate that Ron Sefton has the existential lifestyle and
limited point of view characteristic of a Hemingway Tough Guy (“the gun is in my hand
when I hear someone in the passage”), compared to Jack or to Hogan in Jack
McClenaghan’s Travelling Man (to be discussed in Chapter Eight), Slatter’s protagonist
is a rather poor specimen. He sets the tone of his narrative near the beginning of the
novel: “We are [the post-war generation], who were in it, who never came right after it.
We are the lost generation.” 68 At the end of the novel he admits,

I can’t make up my mind what to do. I can’t get up to face another day.
Life is too much for me. I need someone, or something, to help me as I
sit here with the gun in my hand. 69

Unlike Jack, who dies just after he realizes his existential freedom, a man so incapable
of directing his own destiny can hardly be described as an existentialist. Yet there is an
existentialist tinge to Sefton’s hopelessness, especially when his on-the-edge recounting
of his twenty-four hours in Christchurch reaches a climax the morning after a drunken

67 Wilson, Strip Jack Naked, p. 157.
69 Slatter, A Gun in My Hand, p. 240.
party. After years when he had "never told the real story," Sefton finally acknowledges to himself how his foolish attempt to steal a luger from a dead German paratrooper near the end of World War Two in Italy had caused the death of his "cobber" Mick: "This bloody gun did it. The gun and I were responsible." While Sefton does gain a measure of self-awareness there is, however, no sense that he will become a self-responsible Man Alone like Villiers.

iii.

Entirely opposed to the vaguely existentialist mood of Slatter's examination of a self-pitying casualty of World War Two, M. K. Joseph's I'll Soldier No More affirms traditional New Zealand values. Not only is Joseph's belief in God implicit in his treatment of Bombardier Peter Bonham, a Roman Catholic whose thoughts open and close the novel, but the author uses the suicide of Bombardier John Clarke to suggest that a lack of values can result in despair. Yet like Davin's Cliffs of Fall or Wilson's Strip Jack Naked (except that there is no hint that the suicide is punishment for the stepping over of moral boundaries), I'll Soldier No More clearly responds to some of the ideas popularly associated with atheistic existentialism.

At the end of the prologue the narrator alludes to Hopkins’ dark sonnet about the fallen state of mankind, which Davin incidentally used as epigraph for Cliffs of Fall:

> For every day renews the perpetual Crucifixion, until the end of time.
> And every day the world comes to an end.  

Unlike the sonnet, however, Joseph's novel anticipates redemption. In the central chapter entitled "Peter Bonham Salisbury Plain, Autumn-Winter 1943" the narrator describes how nightfall precedes the dawn as the sun rises around the world and the "familiar miracle" of Christmas approaches when "tomorrow was beginning all over again, and becoming today, the day". Towards the end of the novel Bonham describes his destiny in similar terms of inevitability:

> But in His will is our peace. I shall be here as long as I need to be, and no more; and "all manner of thing shall be well" .... Jane and the

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70 Slatter, A Gun in My Hand, p. 238.
71 Slatter, A Gun in My Hand, p. 239.
73 Joseph, I'll Soldier No More, p. 145.
boys are asleep in Sheffield. Between us, England is stirring in its dreams, and all kinds of destinies, like mine, go on their way. 74

Not only does the omniscient narrator often evoke Bonham’s situation and thoughts in biblical terms, but the narrative confirms him as a man sustained by Christian values. When Bonham explains to Clarke why Connolly would not trade food for sex, for example, and why he, himself, had not stolen the book he had wanted from the German home where they were billeted, he opposes a moral standard against the uncertainties of war:

“There’s so many things in a war that you aren’t accountable for — not yourself, personally. But there’s a few things where you make up your own mind. Connolly isn’t a scrupulous man, but he won’t take advantage of hungry people. It turns him up. And if I pinched that book I’d somehow be agreeing to — all this.” 75

Bonham’s belief in values also informs his earlier conversation with Sergeant Harry Gillies, the novel’s third protagonist. When Bonham maintains that Clarke killed himself because he “‘was the kind of man bad things happen to, because he’s nothing to defend himself with’”, Gillies disagrees. Described on the dust jacket as a “young, practical, impulsive New Zealander, determined to make a career, make love, make money, make something of it all”, the sergeant does not believe in God. Rather, Gillies believes that “‘bad things can happen to anyone …. If you get out of them, you’re just lucky.’” Yet while Bonham recognizes that some individuals are self-sufficient, he maintains that Clarke had none of the traditional supports offered by society:

“I think it’s more than luck. A man has to have something, a faith or a family, or just a kind of strength in himself…. Johnny hadn’t any of those things.” 76

Although Gillies demonstrates his self-sufficiency throughout most of the novel, the narrative suggests that Bonham’s world-view is superior. When the sergeant chooses to engage in black-marketing he is nearly caught. When Bonham subsequently helps him to avoid arrest, Gillies decides to turn his back on his criminal behaviour: like New Zealand’s earlier Men Alone, he will marry and settle into farming.

74 Joseph, I’ll Soldier No More, p. 152.
75 Joseph, I’ll Soldier No More, p. 224.
76 Joseph, I’ll Soldier No More, p. 22.
As it began, the novel closes with Bonham’s thoughts. Riding the train home to visit his family, Bonham contemplates the losses from his unit and all those who had been lost in the war, “the drowned sailors, the dead in the cities, Belsen”. Recalling the words of the priest at the retreat house, he summarizes one of the novel’s recurring themes:

“Our Lord gave his life to overcome sin and death. That doesn’t mean they don’t matter any more. We all know they do. They’ve got to be beaten all the time. The man God loves is the trier, who gets up out of the muck and keeps plodding.”

By the end of the novel, the significance of Joseph’s title is clear: Clarke will soldier no more because he has killed himself. Although Gillies has not accepted Bonham’s beliefs, he will quit soldiering to join the conventional society which is grounded on that religious belief. Bonham will soldier no more because, with the eventual end of his responsibilities to the Army, he will return to his family.

Clearly different from de Mauny, who approved of the existentialist ideas he adapted into his novel, Joseph is more like Davin or Wilson, who recognized the danger in the breaking down of traditional values. But like all of the Man Alone writers considered so far, no matter what their attitude to traditional or existentialist ideas, Joseph’s writing illustrates an awareness of the essential aloneness of his characters. Thus when Bonham closes the novel with his perceptions of the men waiting at the train station not only does he note their unity, but he also remarks upon their singularity. In Bonham’s view, they are mysterious symbols:

In one comprehensive understanding, he seemed to see all these men as everlasting entities. One sipped his tea apart. A group about the tea urn were black against the light. Strollers passed through bars of light and shadow. Three laughed over a joke, heads thrown back, eyes shut, mouths wide, like masks. One man lit a cigarette for another, and seemed to offer him a handful of fire.

There they were, the rude soldiery. Chiselled by the hard light, how noble, how simple they seemed, men walking like gods.

In summary, while all of the New Zealand novels I have considered in this chapter demonstrate that their authors were aware of contemporary existentialist notions, only de Mauny’s *The Huntsman in His Career* reflects an approval of aspects of the

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existentialist philosophy. Writing from an explicitly Catholic point-of-view, Joseph maintains the most assured response to the challenge existentialism posed to his traditional values. Like Burdon, Wilson and Slatter, however, Joseph tends to imply the dangers of an existentialist freedom. In the following chapter I will examine the fiction of Greville Texidor (already considered in connection with *Penguin New Writing*), whose narratives take the kind of despair which most New Zealand writers had deplored entirely for granted.
Chapter Six
Greville Texidor: “From point to point you are travelling in a void.”

Greville Texidor was a widely-travelled English-woman who resided in New Zealand from 1940 to 1948. Although she was not a citizen of this country, based on Vincent O’Sullivan’s definition of the New Zealand short story as “one by a born New Zealander, by someone who has chosen to live here, or by a writer who has written specifically from or on New Zealand experience,” Texidor definitely counts as a New Zealand writer: the majority of her fiction was written and published in New Zealand, and all of the stories set in this country reflect her cosmopolitan dissatisfaction with the provincial way of life she had to endure in Northland and Auckland.

Like the previously discussed debunking writers, Texidor’s fiction recalls ideas popularly associated with the existentialist movement: her characters are alienated and her plots explore what she perceived to be the gap between people’s illusions and how they actually lived. Yet Texidor introduced into New Zealand literature a far more desolate vision of the human condition than was imagined by her contemporaries, who tended to maintain aspects of the Victorian tradition. Unlike Burdon in An Outlaw’s Progress, Davin in Cliffs of Fall or Wilson in The Feared and the Fearless and Strip Jack Naked, Texidor does not imply that individuals should find justification and salvation within the group. Her perception of the human condition is closer to Sargeson’s in That Summer or Mulgan’s in Man Alone. Yet while both of these writers had already moved away from the notion that individuals must belong to society in order to be happy and prosperous, they still caused their protagonists to realise the saving grace of mateship in a diminished world. Texidor’s world-view is even closer to de Mauny’s in The Huntsman and His Career. Published in 1949 (the same year as Texidor’s These Dark Glasses), de Mauny’s novel disregards the fellowship convention and thoroughly debunks the Myth of Progress. Yet even in a novel that owes much to de Mauny’s reading of Sartre, there is evidence of the Victorian tradition: the protagonist survives a more-or-less conventional learning journey through the New Zealand wilderness as he moves toward self-determination.

Texidor differs from the aforementioned writers in that she viewed all human structures as fraudulent, not just those left over from Britain. She believed that all

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human aspirations fail, no matter how valuable they are to society. Furthermore, her
damaged characters are beyond learning or teaching. They can only struggle to survive
"without appeal" as Albert Camus described in his collection of essays, *The Myth of
Sisyphus.* Unlike Camus, however, Texidor could find no joy in meaningless struggle.
Nor could contemporary reviewers of her work appreciate her bleak evocations of the
human condition.

I will discuss Texidor’s stories in the order Kendrick Smithyman established in
the only collection of her fiction to be published so far. In his introduction to *In Fifteen
Minutes You Can Say a Lot: Selected Fiction,* Smithyman only speculates about the
composition dates of either the previously published stories or the typescripts of
unpublished stories. They are obviously not organized by publication date: "These
Dark Glasses", the first work listed in the table of contents, was published by Caxton in 1949;
towards the end is "Home Front", which first appeared in *New Zealand New Writing* in
1942 and was republished as "Epilogue" in *Penguin New Writing* in 1943. But whatever
their dates of composition, Smithyman has arranged the narratives geographically: of the
fourteen pieces of fiction listed in the table of contents, the first eight concern characters
in Europe whose lives have been upended by the Spanish Civil War and World War
Two; the remaining six are set in New Zealand. They are also arranged thematically, in
an order that demonstrates the development of a kind of existentialist sensibility. By this
I mean that taken together Texidor’s stories show how the loss of certainty, from the
failure of the Marxist myth in Spain, to the failure of democracy during World War
Two, to the failure of New Zealand’s Myth of Progress, cause her protagonists to lose
faith in everything. Read in conjunction with biographical details from Smithyman’s
introduction, *These Dark Glasses*, "Time of Departure" and "In Fifteen Minutes You
Can Say a Lot" suggest why Texidor left Europe and went to New Zealand. "You Have
to Stand Up to Them", "An Annual Affair", "Anyone Home?", "Home Front", "Elegy"
and "Goodbye Forever" suggest what she thought about this country once she had
arrived and why she eventually moved on.

i.

Symbols in *These Dark Glasses* and "Time of Departure" of rolling downhill
and of hopeless struggle to climb insurmountable barriers seem to be a pessimistic
restatement of ideas from *The Myth of Sisyphus* which she may have come across while
she lived in pre-war Europe or later, during the war, as part of the New Zealand literary
scene. I call them pessimistic because, unlike Camus, Texidor could find no cause for

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happiness in what she perceived to be a meaningless world. Not one of her stories celebrates the paradox of human dignity in the face of certain defeat as does Satchell in *The Greenstone Door*, Mulgan in *Man Alone* or Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus, The Outsider* or *The Plague*.

In his essay Camus describes modern despair in terms of an ancient Greek myth:

> The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labour.\(^4\)

A committed agnostic, Camus had no faith in the existence of “the gods”, Greek or otherwise, but he used the myth of Sisyphus to interpret what he felt was the human condition in a world without supernatural help: hopeless struggle until death. In Camus’ characterization of the myth, however, hopeless struggle is not the precursor to nihilistic despair and suicide. Instead, it is the prerequisite to a happiness that is not based on illusion. Camus’ Sisyphus understands his situation and overcomes it with scorn: he continues to roll his boulder uphill even though he knows what must happen once he reaches the top. According to Camus, human freedom is embodied in such rebellion against acceptance of the inevitable. Because he has no illusions, Sisyphus is free to attempt anything — until he dies.

While three of the reviews published soon after Caxton released *These Dark Glasses*\(^5\) in 1949 emphasize the nihilism of Texidor’s story, only one of the reviewers sees any correspondences to existentialist ideas. This is significant because it reinforces my earlier suggestion that knowledge of existentialism was not widespread in Britain or New Zealand when *These Dark Glasses* was first published. Writers like Davin or Wilson would sometimes use the plots of their narratives to demonstrate their disapproval of nihilistic behaviour, without ever mentioning the word existentialism. Judging from the tone they adopt, Texidor’s story seems to have evoked a similar response from its early commentators.

Helen Shaw’s review in *Here and Now*, for example, identifies Texidor’s narrative with the futility of the Lost Generation of the 1920s: “Impression rather than novel, this is rootless cosmopolitan material sucked from prewar Europe’s wasteland,


and deliberately not a grain of philosophic worth appears.”

Similarly, a review for the *Listener* rather obviously expresses Phillip Wilson’s attitude towards *These Dark Glasses* with the title, “Despair in the Sun”:

*These Dark Glasses* is a tale of disillusionment set in the French Riviera, and from its pathological overtones it reads like the product of a sick mind. Yet it is written with such skill, and is so artfully contrived, that its literary merit cannot be ignored.

Again, there is no mention of existentialism. Wilson relies instead on psychological terms to explain the protagonist’s despair: “The general tone of the book is one of acute pessimism. Ruth Brown, the narrator, has reached the ultimate stage of despair, an icy hysteria in which she doesn’t care what happens to her or what she does.” Wilson further describes Brown as living in a dream world “in the midst of a nightmare of Freudian symbols”. Her mental state is amplified by the people she meets in Calanques: “Maladjusted, frustrated, many of them are avant garde intellectuals and eccentrics for whom free love and sexual abnormality have become almost a way of life.”

In a third contemporary book review, J. C. Reid identifies *These Dark Glasses* with prewar Europe when he discerns the influence of Cyril Connolly’s short novel *The Rock Pool* on Texidor’s story. In the preface to his fictional investigation of British expatriates in the south of France in the early ‘30s Connolly himself acknowledges his debt to the 1920s, “a period when art was concerned with futility”, and claims to have created in his protagonist “a young man as futile as any”. While in his review Reid accepts that Connolly’s novel “is perfectly of its time, with atmosphere, period and character deftly blended”, he objects to Texidor’s story because it evokes a slightly later period, the Spanish Civil War, and lacks the utter appropriateness of *The Rock Pool*. Unlike the reviewers quoted above who do not identify *These Dark Glasses* with the existentialist movement, Reid characterizes the atmosphere of Texidor’s novella as “that of a Sartrean existentialist”. By describing that mood as “somewhat anachronistic, and more appropriate to a later period, in which disillusionment can be rationalized in a form of retrospective cancellation”, Reid suggests that Texidor has imposed on Ruth Brown,

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disappointed as she is about the death of her friend Victor and the failing Leftist cause of
the revolutionaries in Spain, the cosmic sort of disillusionment that was fashionable in
Parisian cafés around the time of World War Two. As a committed Catholic Reid would
have objected to the novella’s lack of redeeming moral value. In my opinion, however,
he failed completely to understand Texidor’s purpose. Like Ernest Hemingway, who
had portrayed the First World War as contaminating every aspect of his characters’
lives, Texidor used the exhaustion and despair caused by armed conflict as a metaphor
for the unhappy human condition.

Reid does not give any examples of the story’s so-called Sartrean existentialist
mood. (Nor does Smithyman when he repeats Reid’s insight in his introduction to
Texidor’s collected fiction.) What Reid does offer, however, is evidence of Camus’
influence when he discerns correspondences to The Stranger in “the sea-shore setting,
the weight of frustration and the strange vein of poetry investing the shabby milieu” of
These Dark Glasses. But even as he recognizes these similarities Reid questions the
absence in Texidor’s novella of what he considers to be an indication of a truly
existentialist atmosphere. In The Stranger the alienation of the protagonist leads
inexorably to a murder. Reid finds that the protagonist’s motivation in These Dark
Glasses is less convincing. On holiday in Calanques, a small resort town in the south of
France, Brown becomes more and more depressed. She keeps a journal in which she
seems to be moving towards the location she had proposed as the site of her suicide. The
narrative ends, though, before she kills herself.

Beyond this summary of Brown’s dismal holiday journal These Dark Glasses
embodies Texidor’s existentialist vision of the human condition, and it is here that the
earlier quoted reviewers have failed to appreciate either Texidor’s intent or the ironic
method she used to accomplish it. That the story is more than superficially depressing is
demonstrated by Victor’s specific death, which signals the insufficiency of Brown’s
general political beliefs, which in turn anticipates the failure of all her beliefs. Texidor
implies this inevitable global failure with a pun when Victor’s death confirms for Brown
that the Leftist cause in Spain is by no means victorious. Then the protagonist is not so
much physically deracinated like Raleigh, Purcell or Johnson, as psychically uprooted:
Victor’s death has yanked Brown and the ideas that used to anchor her out of her
familiar plot of political dissent. That the civil war was distant from England is also
ironic: judging from her journal Brown was not cynical about politics (and everything)
until Victor’s death brought the Spanish Civil War home to her, so to speak.

10 Reid, review of These Dark Glasses, p. 377.
Furthermore Brown is a young Communist, by definition a rebel against the conventional order in Britain. And yet Brown is a common name; it summarizes both the protagonist and the conventional nature of her wartime loss. Finally Texidor treats some of the ideas associated with Camus and Nietzsche with considerable irony, so that they no longer offer even the bleakest sort of encouragement.

When Brown reaches her holiday destination alone there is no one at the train station to meet her. No one has anticipated her arrival, even though Jane had invited her. For the tired and dispirited protagonist, everything is oppressive. During her first day in Calanques, for instance, she goes to a salon to have her hair fashionably coloured:

In there the buzz of dryers and curtained conversation and the smell of burnt perfume sum up the heat of the day. A young assistant, Emile, attends to my hair. While he smears on henna he asks, Do I like Calanques? He is sweating and pale with the violence of the heat and hurry .... His attentions develop into a contest with my hair which he finally dominates, holding up the mirror.11

Brown feels guilty when she remembers with a start that the worker attending to her is being exploited. Her journal entry for the next day summarizes her paradoxical effort to join conventional society: in the mirror outside the hairdressing salon she had seen "a female figure in gaunt blue overalls. The henna has blessed the final banality and now I am very nearly invisible".12 Despite her reddened hair, the young revolutionary is fading.

Brown first verbalizes her thoughts of suicide on Wednesday when she tells her hairdresser that she is "going on a journey". The next day she casually tells Jane that since there were no gas ovens in Calanques she would "climb to the top of the rock that has Vive le Parti Communiste written around it" and jump into the ocean.13 Her subsequent recollection of the suicide she had witnessed as a child in North Wales introduces to These Dark Glasses the recurring motif of rolling downhill that is the central theme of The Myth of Sisyphus. But Camus emphasizes the nobility of the man who would continue to push his boulder uphill until he died, even though he knew that it would inevitably roll back down. Brown's recollection is nowhere near as bracing: the girl did not slide down the slope while struggling to regain the top; despite the arrival of the coastguard with ropes the girl slid faster, "then she went over the edge". When Jane offers a hollow consolation, that "those political things you do are extremely good. I

11 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 28.
12 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 33.
13 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 43.
mean the one I read — they aren’t written for people like us, are they? But they must do a tremendous amount of good”, Brown refers again to the suicide she had witnessed: “It always seems too late to do any good. It’s like slipping down a hill. Everything goes so fast.”

Not only does *These Dark Glasses* offer a decidedly unhopeful view of the efficacy of Camus’ exhortation to try anyway, it could also be said to question Nietzsche’s celebration, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, of the prerogatives of the powerful individual:

To live with tremendous and proud composure; always beyond —. To have and not to have one’s effects, one’s pro and con, at will; to condescend to them, for a few hours; to seat oneself on them as on a horse, often as on an ass — for we must know how to make use of their stupidity as much as of their fire. To reserve one’s three hundred foregrounds; also the dark glasses; for there are cases when nobody may look into our eyes, less still into our “grounds”.

While Texidor evidently found the title of *These Dark Glasses* in Nietzsche, she uses the motif of dark glasses ironically to illustrate just how inaccurate an individual’s perceptions can be. Thus although dark glasses can shield one person’s purposes from another’s gaze, they can also obscure that person’s outward view. Kate, for example, who has arrived in Calanques “brown and business-like in dark glasses”, has two young men in tow. Brown views her facade of political awareness somewhat indulgently, thinking that although Kate had been rather unfaithful to the Party ... honest Kate is not a climber, she spreads. She is always benefitting unlikely people. It’s true she occasionally acquires a brilliant bargain in refugee professors for her parties, but most of her finds are obscure but interesting and political younger men.

One of Kate’s younger men is Otto, a Leftist acquisition from Paris. Otto is the embodiment of Nietzsche’s ideal man, one who lived “with tremendous and proud composure; always beyond —”. But as Brown filters his dialogue, she mocks his Nietzschean pretensions:

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14 Texidor, *Selected Fiction*, p. 44.
Yes, it is thrilling. A life riddled with danger. But picture this brilliant creature alone now, coming back from the night club in the cold light, bringing in the milk bottles off the step, with a cheery word to the concierge who watches from his hole in the passage.

The little cell is neatness and perfection. One isn’t very often alone there. Just at this hour it would be good to have someone, but not many men or women would care to share this kind of solitude. It is different in daytime and when there are many.

He takes the folded copy of the new Incendie out of his pocket. With the latest news in his hand he looks out from his concrete eyrie at the cold light rising over Paris and Europe. He looks out over Europe and laughs. When the knock comes no wreaths from the Party. Only a wry smile for minority martyrs.¹⁷

When Otto deliberately insults Kate, she is not offended. Brown’s subsequent internal comment echoes the title of the novella: “It’s funny, one can’t hear well in these dark glasses.”¹⁸ Evidently, Otto’s dark glasses block his consideration of Kate’s feelings; Kate’s dark glasses muffle words which contradict her assumptions about herself.

Unlike Kate, Brown is conscious of her own dark glasses, and she is able to hide behind them to a certain extent. But her perceptions have been obscured to the point that she can hear only the generalities behind Otto’s explanation of the dangers involved in being politically active for the Left:

He’s immensely well-informed. Everything is so clever in French. But you don’t hear very well in these dark glasses. You hear bien entendu, but it’s like the French headlines, the French proletariat, the sun on the waves of the stones. It’s like the masses ... the great heart of the masses ... ²⁹

In Nausea Roquentin comes to the conclusion that his reality is solidified by the words he uses to describe it. When Roquentin stopped believing in the abstract meaning of words, he suffered from a sickening kind of vertigo as objects began to overflow the restrictive categories he had formerly used to confine them. Although Brown suffers from depression rather than nausea, the cause is similar. Not only has Victor’s death caused her to question the validity of words she used to trust, but she has begun to question the meaning of her own existence:

The world must know the truth about Spain. But already the truth is disappearing around the corner.

¹⁷ Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 63.
¹⁸ Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 62.
¹⁹ Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 64.
The words are to hand, Solidarity, Revolution. Cannibal words that eat their own meaning. There must have been new words in Spain to catch the new hope that was real there .... Experts were over there to catch the real words and the sound of thoughts, but they did not succeed. Victor did not succeed ....

I write a few words then look at myself in the mirror. 

Phillip Wilson suggests in his previously mentioned Listener review that the title of Texidor’s novella summarizes its central theme: “The significance of These Dark Glasses lies in the author’s intuitive awareness ... of the futility of what seems to her to be the blind leading the blind.” He may be referring to the protagonist’s internal comments after Jane had asserted that “the Left Movement isn’t going to be démodé”. Brown responds:

A year or two ago it seemed all right. Things looked bright in a rather wintry light. But wasn’t it naive to trust intellectuals. Toujours plus haut, toujours plus avant sur les cimes. It was only a clearing that they led us across. Now they are disappearing into the fog.

When Jane further suggests that Brown should use her writing to help manage her depression, the protagonist responds “I would still be thinking it might be some use for something”. Later, Brown would try to write a story about Calanques:

The words sit on the fence, or like swallows fly in flocks to Spain, mocking from white walls. Behind them the Revolution, flattened and grey on a receding horizon.

At last I wrote: Rien n’est vivant ici, rien n’est triste ou joyeux, and crossed it out.

As in her attempt to write “the truth about Spain” her “cannibal words” have eaten their own meaning.

The last entry in Brown’s journal seems to imply that she intends to cross herself out as well but, as Reid asserts in his article, it is uncertain if she actually commits suicide. Since there are no more journal entries, it is possible that Brown has indeed killed herself. On the other hand, according to her last journal entry, even “suicide seems superfluous. There is nothing to leave, there is nowhere to go really”.

Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 29.
Wilson, “Despair in the Sun”, p. 16.
Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 44.
Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 67. “Nothing lives here, is either sad or happy.”
Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 82.
companions go on a boat trip to the furthest calanque without her it is with the images
and cadence of a child’s bedtime prayer, “Now I lay me down to sleep”, that Brown
explains why she will kill herself: “Lay down your lives while the vehicle’s still in
motion. Si le ciel est désert nous n’offensons personne. And I lay me down with the
willies.”25 The final paragraph of the novella may not confirm Brown’s suicide as her
view of the boat fades, but it does suggest the finality of death:

The boat shrinks and stands stationary in space, with its cargo of
seated dolls that shine like chocolate papers. Soon it is only the rim of a
white nest enclosing coloured bonbons.

Now there is no boat but a dark dot, seaweed, seabird, or a trick
of the light ....26

Whether or not Brown commits suicide, the plot of These Dark Glasses clearly
proceeds from her recognition of the futility of participating in the Communist Party or
the Spanish Civil War or, indeed, in anything. Keeping in mind that The Myth of
Sisyphus is a treatise against suicide, Texidor’s ironic use of its central motif indicates
that she could not share Camus’ belief in the nobility of trying anyway.

The previously unpublished “Time of Departure” resembles These Dark Glasses
in that it, too, evokes the image of Sisyphus pushing his boulder uphill only to watch it
roll down again. Forced by a mental breakdown to recover in a sanatorium, its
protagonist is trapped in neutral Switzerland just as Western Europe is succumbing to
Nazism. Throughout the story Texidor compares the ideal the protagonist wishes for
with her real situation, beginning with her return from a travel bureau where she has
seen a poster of overseas travel on a ship. With its invitation “to the prize that is life
itself”, the poster’s view of overseas travel and the change and freedom it represents is
in stark contrast to the protagonist’s room at the sanatorium, which she describes as “the
room that does not change with my travels”.27 Feeling as if her “limbs moved lightly,
without resistance, moved carefully, strung on a silk thread”, the protagonist suggests
that she is walking on a frail web of sanity or that she may be a puppet held together by
flimsy strings. Details of why she is at the sanatorium are sketchy. There seems to have
been a breakdown and a suicide attempt: she was rescued from “a filthy pool”, and there
are bandages around her wrists. The invention of a story to ensure that the maid prepares
and cooks the protagonist’s food provides a hint about the nature of her mental

25 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 83. “If heaven is empty, we do not offend anyone.”
26 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 83.
27 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 118.
difficulty: she claims that it was “not the persecution of the police but poison was the cause of my illness”. When the strain of trying to communicate how to protect her becomes too much, the delicate thread of her self control “snapped ... a voice broke ... it began to groan and gabble ...”28

The next section of “Time of Departure” begins with repetition of the description of the protagonist’s room and adds another reference to Camus’ reading of the Sisyphean myth:

I return to the room that is always the same, that does not belong to any climate or country, whose wallpaper is neutral and whose window gives on to a court. The bug left in the dry cracked basin to starve, is full of life still. He crawls to a certain point on the shiny side helping himself by the crack. He slips down to the bottom and starts again.29

When the protagonist subsequently identifies her plight and the plight of Europe with the bug’s hopeless effort, she recalls one of the main themes of These Dark Glasses:

Hours of slowly crawling towards the guichet only to be thrown back by a blind look and a hard smile. Not yet. Submission is not enough. It is not enough to deny three times. Their attitude suggests there is nothing to deny. Let us agree. No targets for martyrdom are visible through the smoke of burning Europe. The boundaries of the just cause waver. Comrades and oppressors are swallowed in the smoke.30

Like Brown, the protagonist of “Time of Departure” used to have faith in the Leftist cause. Her final questions to herself, “What did we once believe? What was betrayed?”, indicate that experience has done more than simply challenge her ideals; it has obliterated them.

As I have demonstrated in earlier chapters, it is a convention of New Zealand’s Man Alone narratives that the protagonist comes to understand the nature of his dilemma. That understanding leads either to a traditional “happy ending” or, in the later fiction, to a limited resolution. While Camus’ characters in The Outsider and The Myth of Sisyphus also realize their condition, they differ from New Zealand’s Men Alone in that they have no hope of even a limited resolution. Nor do the protagonists in Texidor’s fiction. Brown attempts to escape from the futility of her existence through suicide but concludes that “there is nowhere to go really”. The protagonist of “Time of Departure”

28 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 120.
29 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 120.
30 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 121.
tries to escape through mental illness. Yet the psychologist at the sanatorium blocks even that route by attempting to diffuse her paranoid delusions about the border officials. Because of her fears the protagonist would have difficulties with crossing frontiers and emigrating to America. She must “give up this last shred” of herself (that is, her fear of them) and admit that she is guilty of delusions. “Unless with my help you can come to certain conclusions”, says the psychologist, “you may never pass the Statue of Liberty”. Camus’ definition of the absurd is implicit in her dilemma: in order to gain her freedom from the sanatorium, she must give up her freedom to fear the people she believes are persecuting her. What most separates her from New Zealand’s earlier Men Alone is her realization that she can have no hope:

But now I have no delusions. I learnt not to wish or ask for an explanation. This is my last wish — not to wish.\footnote{Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 129.}

As the last of Texidor’s stories to be set in Europe, “In Fifteen Minutes You Can Say a Lot” is central to Smithyman’s biographical ordering of her fiction. Parts of the title story are probably a conflation of Texidor’s experiences in Britain and New Zealand: both she and her German husband were interned as enemy aliens in England before they managed to emigrate to New Zealand. Once in New Zealand Texidor was friends with expatriate British writer Anna Kavan whose husband, Ian Hamilton, was held in Mt. Eden prison during World War Two as a conscientious objector. The story is also significant because it encapsulates one of the main concerns of the collection. As the protagonists of These Dark Glasses, “Time of Departure” and several of the subsequent New Zealand stories conclude, their words and actions are meaningless.

Kirk, one of the two main characters in the title story, is a conscientious objector. His wife, from whose point of view the story is told, fumbles to explain why she does not have much news for “such a long visit” to the jail where he is being held:

I mean the time element. It makes each word so important. You feel you must weigh each word like a telegram. Nothing seems important enough to say.\footnote{Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 148.}

Texidor treats Kirk’s rejoinder, “You can say a lot in fifteen minutes”, with irony. The grim surroundings, the prison guard and Kirk’s inability to see beyond the narrow confines of his self-imposed resistance to authority means that very little can, in
fact, be said. And that little is almost meaningless because neither Kirk nor his wife can communicate though their changed perceptions.

The story begins with a description of where Kirk is being held:

Seen from the respectable heights of the town the castellated prison resembled the forts supplied with sets of toy soldiers. Under a sky the colour of ashes, the mock mediaeval aspect of the place still suggested a huge plaything, a joke, a fake, the 'folly' of some cracked and tasteless eccentric. It was neither functional nor fearful. Its facade of unnatural black, on which the absurdly large stones might have been painted, the tin toy sentry with his gun walking the ramparts, did not inspire the appropriate feeling of awe; only the uneasy horror of hoax.34

Then Texidor adds details of how Kirk has come to reflect the prison's atmosphere. He had taken part in a hunger strike and sent his wife on a wild goose chase for an enema which she had difficulty procuring because of war shortages. After she had finally been able to purchase the enema, she was turned away from the prison:

Standing outside the gate with the ridiculous parcel. The clumsy can breaking through wet brown paper. A lot they'd worry. The futility of it. And all the time Kirk knew they wouldn't let him have it. It was just another trial. His will against theirs. They would refuse and the case would draw public attention to the hunger strikers.35

Kirk's wife suspects that he lives only for resistance, that he has lost his ability to judge the consequences of his words and actions. When Kirk remarks, for example, "'We might be going on another fast soon. Makes you feel wonderful'", his wife wonders if he has become so self-centred that he has forgotten that "other people can be hurt".36 She used to disagree when the pacifists described policemen as Gestapo: "Gestapo is fantastic. The job makes them get to look like that. They have families at home — like us." In the presence of the prison warder, however, her mind mutters "Gestapo. Fake Gestapo agent. Hollywood." In the faux-medieval prison guarded by the Hollywood Gestapo agent whom she describes as "a Rider Haggard god ... that begins to take notice when you least expect it",37 Kirk's behaviour seems as unauthentic as the surroundings.

"In Fifteen Minutes You Can Say a Lot" marks the end of Texidor's focus on Europe with a summary of the atmosphere of futility surrounding her characters:

34 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 143.
35 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 146.
36 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 146.
37 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 147.
The fake facade spilled discreet gloom into the cold blank day. She waited, still looking along the empty road that did not appear to lead anywhere.

When a young sentry gives Kirk’s wife directions as she leaves the prison, she is grateful: “It’s so very kind of you. Thanks so much —” But the sentry has turned and walked away.

ii.

The remaining stories in Smithyman’s collection concern New Zealand and, evidently, Texidor did not like New Zealand. According to a very diplomatic Frank Sargeson, Texidor was “unable to establish with this country relations which in any way resembled a love-affair”. He goes on to describe the nature of her dislike:

If the aim [in “An Annual Affair”] ... is to present her Northland environment as a kind of petty hell inhabited by faintly damned souls, then it succeeds admirably. From this point of view it is remarkably comprehensive, everything one can readily think of is crammed in — sectarianism, trivialities, gadgets, undercover fun, boredom.39

In The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature Patrick Evans further explains Texidor’s dislike as he notes the main characteristics of her New Zealand fiction:

For someone used to the intensity and excitement of wartime Europe, the country must have seemed a wasteland. Texidor’s New Zealand is a desert of emptiness peopled with men and women so repressed they can hardly go near one another.40

I believe that Texidor’s New Zealand stories do more than simply reflect a cosmopolitan’s dissatisfaction with provincial society. Not only do they challenge the Myth of Progress but, with their depictions of futile repetition, of things wearing out and their utter lack of moralizing, they present the same world-view as the European stories. Unlike her New Zealand contemporaries Texidor provides no help for her isolated characters, no joy, or fellowship or learning how to improve their situation. By travelling deeper into existentialist territory than even Sargeson does in That Summer,

38 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 147.
she introduces a despair about the human condition not previously evident in New Zealand literature.

In “You Have to Stand Up to Them”, for example, Myrtle “the pretty girl keeping the books” of a rural electrical goods store is distracted from her work by the electrical sounds coming from the workshop, by the “clapping and static that sounded like lost souls. The drone of the flies”. Her recollection of how much more comfortable the store used to be, when “the music that cured poured from the open shop door, like a sunny sweet sauce ... had made her feel that Electrical Supply and Fitting, was really a wonderful business to be in”, changes the Myth of Progress on its head. These days there were few new appliances and the workroom was overflowing with machines that needed to be repaired. One of the owners, Mack, had guaranteed what Myrtle describes as “another wreck on the bench”:

He shouldn’t have done. Nothing ought to be guaranteed any more. Dead valves ... elements burnt out ... having to do with parts that didn’t do .... Getting snowed under.

According to Myrtle, “civilisation was on the skids” too. Although she and a few like-minded associates do what they can by belonging to the Red Book Club, running the Workers’ Enlightenment Group and arranging for a progressive professor to come from Auckland to address them, Myrtle’s synopsis of the professor’s speech contrasts ironically with her earlier description of their business woes: “‘We have our organisers to thank ... this active group ... wonders of science ... freer and fuller lives ...’”

Clearly Texidor’s purpose in “You Have to Stand Up to Them” is to ridicule the leftist pretensions of some of the inhabitants of a small rural community. (Smithyman notes that when Texidor and her husband lived in Northland they became acquainted with Professor Arthur Sewell, whose lecture to the local W. E. A. Myrtle summarizes.) Beyond that purpose, however, is the story’s atmosphere of failure which originates in Texidor’s existential belief that all expectations are bound to be disappointed. As in These Dark Glasses and “Time of Departure”, the failure of the Marxist Myth signals wider failures. Although there is no talk of suicide, Ernest, the shop’s other owner, resembles the protagonists of Texidor’s previously mentioned stories when he ponders the futility of his existence:

41 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 151.
42 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 152.
43 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 152.
As often as not your plans just fizzled out. And even in spite of the Left movement and Progress sometimes you couldn’t see the use of it all. It might be different in Russia.

It was very quiet. Only the little singing from the workshop. Wasting, wasting away, it whined. Ethel was putting on her hat to go home. Another day over, Another day ....

Joy, the young and unhappy protagonist of “An Annual Affair”, is unlike the characters already discussed in that she does not consciously reflect on the human condition. Even so, her naive observations of a family picnic at the beach which few of the participants enjoy contribute to the story’s implicit conclusion that life is neither satisfying nor meaningful:

It almost seemed to be blowing up for rain. Every minute or two the wind came across the paddocks, like a lorry changing gears, and round the lonely store corner. The store looked lonely because it was closed for Boxing Day. The orange drinks and weeties in the window and the country scene with stout letters, KEEP FIT cutting across made you feel sad, as if you had eaten too much. The wallops from the wind made you feel tired.

The scene becomes even more uncomfortable when other picnickers arrive in a lorry, “the kids screeching”. To Joy the approaching vehicle sounds like “a cage of cockatoos on wheels”. Nor are Joy’s parents at ease as they and Miss Jenkins sit on the steps of the lorry:

Miss Jenkins had several rows of rolls on top of her head, and slacks which were tight behind, and dark red finger-nails ....

Dad kept looking hard at Miss Jenkin’s [sic] finger-nails, then looking away.

But Dad’s inappropriate gaze is not the only source of discomfort:

It began to rain a bit and the wind was chilly. Mum said they might as well go for a walk as it wasn’t lunch time yet, and Miss Jenkins could see the view from further up. Everyone always said it was rather nice, only of course the tide was wrong now.

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44 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 154.
45 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 159.
46 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 159.
47 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 160.
48 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 160.
Joy further reports that on his return from the hotel, "Dad had red patches on his cheeks and his eyes were swimmy". The Reverend Allum strolls by. If Joy's name has ironic significance, then Allum's may be representative of his manner: alum is a dry and bitter-tasting ingredient in pickle recipes. The Reverend is as disapproving and critical as Joy's mother, who has just cautioned her to pull her skirt down. Allum further admonishes Joy for reading her Bible verses each night instead of in the morning when they will act as "armour for the day". But while Allum's pronouncements on the first settlers are meant to be instructive, Mum and Miss Jenkins implicitly challenge them:

> I don't know what others' opinions may be ... but personally Miss Jenkins, I like to think of this little affair as a kind of commemoration. The settlers in these parts landed here. Quite near where we are sitting now I believe. There wasn't anything here then, Mum said, her eyes on the hotel.
> The settlers had faith, said the Reverend. Too right, said Miss Jenkins, putting her hand to a yawn.

Clearly Texidor's attitude is satirical, but as in "You Have to Stand Up to Them" I think her irony reflects more than just a cosmopolitan's disdain for the locals or for the habitual discomforts of country life. Not only does she challenge the convention that family and social life are satisfying, but she questions the notion that either will improve. When Joy meets Jim, the young man she adores, their dialogue allows Texidor to question the Marxist Myth that come the Revolution all men would be equal and life would be worth living. Jim freely articulates his adolescent's contempt for the hidebound society and capitalist system the Reverend represents and can hardly wait to escape from New Zealand to wartime Europe, from whence he will progress to the Revolution which will inevitably follow:

> The change that is coming is rising like a tide. It will reach even this little place one day. But I'm going to be on the spot when the big things happen. You have to think of the future.

But as in the European stories there is a gap between the myths that people believe (or pretend to believe) and actuality. In Texidor's depiction of an annual gathering to

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49 Texidor, *Selected Fiction*, p. 162.
51 Texidor, *Selected Fiction*, p. 165.
commemorate the landing of the early settlers, it rains; Dad goes immediately to the hotel and drinks too much, and Mum is left to worry about the children and the mud.

Joy’s faint awareness of this gap becomes evident when her description of the distant scenery implicitly contrasts the natural green of the landscape with the pastures which progressive farming techniques had improved for exploitation: “It looked lonely, but pretty and peaceful, the grass a soft green, not the metal green of the properly fertilized paddocks.” Yet the title of “An Annual Affair” suggests that Joy’s awareness of the difference will have little effect. On the way home Brian is already anticipating next year’s picnic. Joy’s final comment that “he never stopped to think that everything might be different next year” is tinged with unconscious irony. The weight of the story implies that Joy herself will probably marry, lead a life similar to her mother’s and continue to attend the traditional gathering.

In “Anyone Home?” Texidor follows her rural New Zealanders back to the farm, where she continues to view their lives with considerable irony. The story recalls Allen Curnow’s “House and Land” about a “land of settlers/ With never a soul at home”. Yet it exposes far more than the spiritual poverty of colonists who do not feel at home in New Zealand. Roy, the protagonist, compares what he had hoped for before World War Two with what he has come to believe is the actual human condition, a life of exile and futility followed by the nothingness of death. What used to be his fiancée’s home Roy now sees as a farmhouse with “the empty veranda with its closed doors and windows looking blankly”. He views her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Withers, who also appear in “An Annual Affair” and whose name is as symbolic as Joy’s or Allum’s, as a shrivelled and unimaginative couple. Lily, his fiancée, whose conversation hardly extends beyond “Yes, Roy. If you like, Roy”, has become a colourless figure. Instead of enjoying a romantic honeymoon, Roy and Lily will go to Auckland where Lily will have her teeth pulled out: her parents see this as a practical means for dealing with her rotten teeth. There will be other sacrifices to practicality. After the honeymoon, the newlyweds will not be able to build their home among the trees at the Withers’ homestead as Roy had planned. Mr. Withers had cut them down for use as fence posts because, as Lily explains, “he thought you wouldn’t want anything wasted in wartime”. Roy’s reply, “Just thinking of me? Well he won’t have to think any more. Everything’s going to be different from now on. We’re going to please ourselves”, points to yet another ironic

52 Texidor, Selected Fiction, pp. 165-166.
53 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 169.
54 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 171.
55 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 174.
contrast. As Roy carries Lily down to the pool, the site of their one and only sexual encounter, the impossibility of their being able to please themselves becomes obvious. The scene is not romantic and reminds Roy of when he had carried a wounded soldier through the jungle. Before they could reach the base camp, Roy recalls, the soldier was dead.

Even the scenery in “Anyone Home?” reflects Texidor’s emphasis on the futility of existence. According to Evans in The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature,

Texidor’s New Zealand is imagined with an intensity of emptiness that only an alien can see ... the backgrounds of some of the stories seem almost to shimmer with a horrifying insistence upon their own lack of meaning.\(^\text{56}\)

As example Evans refers to the scene at the pond:

He was glad to put her down beside the pool, in the silence of the sombre bowl of the bush. Tall banks gave the trees a tremendous height, thick green edged down to the black water, and a fallen rata lay like a bridge across it. On the marble-hard surface of the pool every leaf of every tree was reflected. Each detail was there without life or sound, and across the colours strangely dark and cold, a bright shuttle was weaving meaningless traceries. A dragonfly was passing and repassing, but in this flat, black world of pictured silence it had no destination.\(^\text{57}\)

Texidor invests the fiancés’ relationship with a similar existential flatness. Roy’s attempt to take Lily’s photograph recalls Sartre’s grim interpretation of relations between the sexes, when one individual tries to entrap another by objectifying them through “the gaze”. I have emphasized with italics those words which suggest that Roy wants to objectify Lily:

He watched her reflection crystallise in the sun. Stretched on golden bird’s legs, in its dress of endless blue, it slanted bright-balanced, its delicate head glistening against the sky in a clearing between dark and monstrous shadows. When it moved it did not disturb the surrounding air. The face, small, light and almost transparent, looked up, yet it was not lying, nor standing, but floating stationary, an angel in dark ice. The blue space behind the skull was staring through eyes like crystals—

‘Got you!’ he called out. ‘Now laugh, for God’s sake.’\(^\text{58}\)

\(^{56}\) Evans, Penguin History of New Zealand Literature, p. 143.

\(^{57}\) Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 173.

\(^{58}\) Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 174.
Like Sartre, Roy does not believe in God or in life after death. Just before the couple leave the pool, Roy takes a last look at the “empty, flat world on the water”. It reminds him of what he had felt when he was trapped in the “rubbery darkness of the anaesthetic” in hospital:

(\textit{The numb dullness that was always there, where bodiless problems spun with no meaning and no direction because it had always been there, and time was only a load of rubber darkness. Where there was no Roy, no me, no life, no dying, no rest. Only the suffering speck not-I. And the pointless joke of grey rain through glass and a clock that pointed to three. The hand pointing to the fraud, the dream that is no dream and lasts for ever. The fraud that would take my name. My name is Roy.})^{59}

Roy’s feeling that everything was spinning pointlessly colours his perceptions of the party the Withers hold to celebrate his homecoming and engagement to Lily. The farm kitchen which should have been warm with the best wishes of family and friends for the young couple is terrifying “in the cold radius of the naked light bulb, surrounded by swallowing darkness of rust-green walls”. Mrs. Pritchets remark about Lily’s quietness and Mrs. Withers explanation that “It’s her teeth .... She can’t have the new ones till they’re all out” heightens the surrealism. Strands of the subsequent conversation entwine grotesquely as the group discuss going on honeymoon, having teeth pulled and suffering no regrets:

Miss Massey turned on Roy with her sculptured smile. ‘I’ve never regretted it,’ she said. ‘So you’ll be having the ceremony in town. I daresay Lily will be glad when it’s over.’

‘I’m sure she will,’ Mrs Pritchets said. ‘But it’s so nice to look back to. Mr. Pritchets always remembers our anniversaries.’

‘We want to go swimming and dancing,’ Roy said. ‘I can still dance.’

‘That’s the idea,’ Mr. Pritchets said, ‘killing the two birds with the one stone. By George, it doesn’t seem like ten years since the wife and I were in Auckland on pleasure bent. Mrs Pritchets is so tied.’

‘Terribly tied,’ Mrs Pritchets said with her brightest smile, ‘but I’ve never regretted it.’^{60}

The scene in the kitchen reflects Roy’s increasing desperation:

\begin{footnotes}
\item[60] Texidor, \textit{Selected Fiction}, p. 177.
\end{footnotes}
‘You’ll always be on the go, Lily,’ Mrs. Pritchét said, with her bright curdled smile. Mr Withers’ laugh ground round. The walls drew closer. The light glared frenziedly, ringed with glazed faces and china-white smiles. A dream that was no dream. Mr Withers, the dentist, the Reverend Rigby, the surgeon with his knife, Mrs Pritchét with her smile, closed the circle.61

It also prepares for the realization Roy and Lily would reach as they stand outside to discuss their future. Lily’s claim that she had “‘never regretted’” their sexual encounter recalls the earlier equation of getting married with getting dentures. But it is Roy’s belief that everything is pointless that spells the end of their relationship:

‘I knew it was coming,’ she said. ‘I knew from the beginning we should have to have it out. You don’t care about me.’

‘Nobody cares about anything,’ he said ....

‘You know I never regretted it,’ she said, ‘but now — oh, I wish I was dead.’

‘You make me laugh,’ he said. ‘You don’t know what you mean. There’s no point in it. No future in it .... You’re perfectly free, though. Just think it over. Don’t speak now. Don’t say anything yet.’

Her voice was soft and bitter and far away, like the voice of an old person. ‘You’re perfectly free ... Don’t say anything yet ...’ Her pale hair that smelt of earth and antiseptics covered his mouth and nose and stifled him.62

Texidor’s vision of the human condition is grimmer than that of her New Zealand contemporaries because there is no hope of happiness for this couple. Lily’s hair reminds Roy of burial dirt and the hospital, Lily herself reminds him of death. Texidor ends her story about their doomed relationship with a series of negations:

The light clicked off. The dead arm collapsed in the night. From the house came the little irrelevant sounds of tidying away and doors closing. Something had amused Mr. Withers. His laugh went on and on like an argument, drawing its own conclusions from the darkness.63

“Homefront” has already been discussed as “Epilogue”, a story that expressed the negations of the Spanish Civil War in New Zealand terms when Lehmann published

it in *Penguin New Writing.* Yet the story does more than exemplify the hollowness of Jim Chapman’s Quaker background and, by extension, the meaninglessness of all other values. If, as Sargeson suggests, Texidor felt alienated in Northland, her discomfort is evident in the way she depicted the environment which produced Jim. The story opens with a series of threatening and negative images:

The small sharp hills over-lapping like green waves converged on the train. The sun flashed out and the dead trees littering the hillside shone like white bones. Then it was raining again.

Jim’s bedroom where the protagonist would be sleeping, which “held the cold of a whole winter”, in which “the lino was shiny as ice”, and in which “a framed printed card, hung near the dressing table, looked like the rules they have in hotel bedrooms”, offers as little welcome. The protagonist’s brush and comb on the dressing table “looked so uncomfortable ... that he began to feel, not homesick for any particular place, but lonely and stranded”. Jim had left the farm (maybe even escaped, the protagonist muses), to pursue “the excitements over committees, his travels, his political works which had led in the end to Spain”. As her story closes, Texidor ironically underlines the accidental nature of that end with details of the settled rural life Jim had left and the sort of boy he had been. While Mr. Chapman instructs about when to get up and cautions about not tracking mud into the house, the protagonist reads through one of Jim’s old school books and reads the curly writing: “Do unto others (I know the rest) this is called the Golden Rule.” Clearly the Chapmans will continue in the habits they have developed over a lifetime, but implicit in Texidor’s story is the idea that their way of life could not save their son.

Texidor’s alienation is equally evident in “Elegy”. With sharply ironic observations of an educated, leftist couple who farm in rural Northland not only does the narrator challenge the Myth of Progress and the Marxist Myth, but she adds an existential focus to that challenge when she implies that the couple will always be alienated from their surroundings.

Texidor’s satirical purpose is evident from the very beginning of “Elegy”. The story opens with a description of a fallen pine beside the couple’s farm house, “its dead

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64 See pp. 101-102.
66 Texidor, *Selected Fiction*, p. 182.
68 Texidor, *Selected Fiction*, p. 188.
branches sticking up from the ground, and the roots, too, bare in the air like dead branches”. But this image of barrenness does not depress Jim, the husband: “It had been in the way there ... It didn’t matter; it wasn’t a native tree.”\(^{69}\) While Jim distinguishes between native and introduced trees he is immune to the irony that he and his family are also an introduced species. The narrator is as satirical about her hosts’ purposeful and instructive lives: “Farming’s a great life, they will tell you, provided you don’t let yourself go to seed. They have not gone to seed.”\(^{70}\) On top of maintaining the farm they go into the settlement for the Workers’ Enlightenment lectures, listen to Russia on their radio, read overseas magazines and belong to a book club; interesting friends visit during the weekends. When Jess, the wife, suggests a walk, “‘I thought you might like to see our cemetery’”, the narrator’s immediate response captures their Leftist pretensions: “‘Less bourgeois than a rockery’”.\(^{71}\) Yet as self-satisfied as the couple appear and evidently coping with the demands of their rural lifestyle, they are still not at home in surroundings which Nature seems inclined to reclaim. When they direct the narrator to admire the view she reports that,

Eyes wandered. There wasn’t any place they wanted to rest .... You could sleep, of course; but there wasn’t any place you wanted to rest.
Jim hollering at the cows round the shed, and Jess, hopeful in her suntop, though they lived right off the land, yet didn’t seem to belong. Even the child and the few flowers around the house didn’t make them belong.\(^{72}\)

Already at the small farm cemetery there is “the silent invisible push against the palings” of the encroaching bush.

“Elegy” ends when the group returns to the farmhouse. The narrator’s description of the scene underscores their isolation from civilization when, after they turn on the radio, “the shell of the house was filled with world echoes”.

*Goodbye Forever* is the last narrative in the Smithyman collection, where both its title and position imply Texidor’s desire to leave New Zealand. Smithyman’s speculation that the previously unpublished typescript was written between 1946 and 1947 supports this suggestion: Texidor left New Zealand for Australia in 1948, moved

\(^{69}\) Texidor, *Selected Fiction*, p. 189.
\(^{70}\) Texidor, *Selected Fiction*, p. 189.
\(^{71}\) Texidor, *Selected Fiction*, p. 190.
\(^{72}\) Texidor, *Selected Fiction*, p. 190.
back to Europe in 1954 and returned to Australia in 1962. According to Smithyman "the art which she commanded effectively died". Texidor committed suicide in 1964.\textsuperscript{73}

In a sense \textit{Goodbye Forever} completes the story, begun in "Time of Departure", about a protagonist who is trapped by mental illness. Lili, a Jewish refugee who left wartime Europe for New Zealand, suffers from manic depression. As in the earlier story, futile repetition recalls the Sisyphean myth: after a series of unsuccessful relationships and unable to believe that her existence holds any meaning, Lili repeatedly tries to kill herself; although institutionalized several times, she fails to get well. Both stories suggest Texidor's inability to conclude with Camus that there is dignity and nobility in continual trying. \textit{Goodbye Forever} ends as Lili, in one of her manic moods, relates how she has come to be naturalized and how she is preparing for the reunification of her family in New Zealand. Yet previous suggestions of her unreliability as a narrator make it impossible to know if she is on the edge of happiness or if her plans reflect only a disordered imagination.

Like "Elegy" and other of the New Zealand stories, \textit{Goodbye Forever} portrays the emptiness and the lack of culture which Texidor found so discomfiting. When Lili first arrived in New Zealand, for example, her perception of the King Country farm where she stayed reflects her sense of isolation:

there was a boy called George who never said anything and outside the windows there was nothing for miles and miles, there was really nothing and Lili thought all New Zealand was like that.\textsuperscript{74}

Even more uncomfortable is the lack of culture in a young country where Lili has to make her own way:

To live, what for? And the rain and nothing nice to see anywhere. Unheated cinemas and draughty dance halls. And hardly enough money to pay the rent. To live just to eat and sleep. And no love.\textsuperscript{75}

Later in Auckland the young writer who takes up Lili's story (Michael King describes him as "a barely disguised portrait of Frank [Sargeson]"	extsuperscript{76}) sets her view of a disappointing culture against the background of an indifferent nature. After the departure of some visitors he describes how

\textsuperscript{73} Texidor, \textit{Selected Fiction}, pp. 18-19.
\textsuperscript{74} Texidor, \textit{Selected Fiction}, p. 194.
\textsuperscript{75} Texidor, \textit{Selected Fiction}, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{76} King, \textit{Frank Sargeson: A Life}, p. 231.
On these nights of hurricane, the little set of friends seemed very small, in the snug little suburb which might blow away into the sea, and no one would ever miss it ....

A little group of people cast by a gale onto an island. Far away from the world? The rest of the world submerged. A group of people having nothing in common. Yes one thing. A leper colony ....

Just then the wind gave a long ear-splitting whistle .... Most of the others I'd long since ceased to hear, but this whistle, on two perfect notes, perfectly inhuman, and still somehow derisive, always caught my attention.77

Like Lili, the young writer may be speaking for Texidor when he characterizes the interactions of those who make up “the little set of friends”:

Everyone talked but nobody listened to anybody else. Perhaps from living a little out of things they were very dogmatic. The ideas they'd brought with them several years ago, perfectly good ideas, looked a little dowdy like the clothes in the shops, whatever idea anyone happened to have they worked tremendously hard to put it across — the reformist spirit of the early settlers’ forebears was extremely strong.78

Yet Lili’s discomfort reflects more than just her alienation from the reformist spirit of the early settlers. Near the end of the story the young writer offers what is perhaps the most succinct summary of Lili’s troubles:

You get in the car to drive from there to the beach. Where are you between here and the beach? Nowhere. What is there for you between my bach and the waves? Nothing. From point to point you are travelling in a void.79

Although not all of Texidor’s protagonists could be described as mentally ill, not one of them is happy; all of them are alienated from others and trapped by the futility of their lives. From Ruth Brown in These Dark Glasses who can live no longer with invalid ideas, to the trapped protagonist of “Time of Departure” who has learned “not to wish”, to the wife in “In Fifteen Minutes You Can Say a Lot” who waits outside a fake prison on “the empty road that did not appear to lead anywhere”, to the repairman in “You Have to Stand Up to Them” who realizes that “as often as not your plans just fizzled out”, to Joy in “An Annual Affair” whose description of a picnic when “of

77 Texidor, Selected Fiction, pp. 208-209.
78 Texidor, Selected Fiction, p. 211.
79 Texidor, Selected Fiction, pp. 240-241.
course the tide was wrong now” is filled with unconscious irony, to Roy in “Anyone Home?” who has returned from fighting in the war to a life of exile and despair which he believes will be followed by the nothingness of death, to the returned soldier in “Home Front” who tells the wrong lie about his friend whose “death of a hero had been an accident”, to the tired narrator of “Elegy” on an uncomfortable Northland farm where “even the child and the few flowers around the house didn’t make them belong” and finally to Lili in “Goodbye Forever” who was “travelling in a void”, the protagonists in Texidor’s stories add to New Zealand literature a bleakly existentialist view of the human condition that is unmitigated by the Myth of Progress or by conventions which assume the saving grace of endeavour or fellowship.
Chapter Seven
Marilyn Duckworth: When Existentialism Was in the Air

Marilyn Duckworth says that she had not read anything by the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre before she published *A Gap in the Spectrum* in 1959. Yet the title and events depicted in her first novel, even her method of telling the story, all seem to indicate an interest in the themes Sartre explored in his novel, *Nausea*.

In the first section of this chapter I will elaborate on Duckworth's own explanation for their similarity, that "existentialism was in the air".¹ Not only does this statement add her to the group of authors who have explored the pre-existentialist territory of New Zealand's early Men Alone, but it connects her even more decisively to the existentialist literary movement which had been gaining popularity in the western world since before World War Two. After briefly comparing *A Gap in the Spectrum* to an early pre-existentialist novel like Chamier's *Philosopher Dick*, I will explain that Duckworth's first novel developed from a sense of insecurity not unlike the feelings experienced by Raleigh as he tried to make his home in New Zealand. Then, to establish why Duckworth should be considered an existentialist rather than a pre-existentialist writer, I will compare *A Gap in the Spectrum* to *Nausea*.

In the second section I will discuss *The Matchbox House* (1960), *A Barbarous Tongue* (1963), *Over the Fence is Out* (1969), *Disorderly Conduct* (1984), *Married Alive* (1985) and a selection of Duckworth's short stories from *Explosions on the Sun* (1989). Sartre's seeming influence is nowhere as evident as in the first novel, but Duckworth's depiction of relationships in these narratives clearly recalls his ideas about the exercise of power and mauvaise foi. In *A Barbarous Tongue* and *Over the Fence is Out* Duckworth appears to explore ideas derived from Albert Camus' interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus. Rather than attempting to prove direct influence, however, I will suggest that the echoes of Sartre and Camus in Duckworth's fiction are evidence of the New Zealand author's development of her own existentialist sensibility. As in the first novel when the protagonist accepts her lack of privilege in a universe that is indifferent to her welfare, characters in the later narratives achieve a measure of self-awareness. Some of them even begin to manage the forces which used to dominate their lives. But most of these characters are distinctly lonely. Yet in *Disorderly Conduct* and *Married Alive*, there is an adjustment of focus as Duckworth depicts what happens when popular

existentialist ideas about the uncertain human condition have been so thoroughly absorbed that they are taken for granted. Then Duckworth emphasizes that beyond awareness, existential freedom and loneliness there is still a need for community.

i.

A Gap in the Spectrum is clearly a post-war extension of New Zealand’s pre-existentialist literary tradition. Like Philosopher Dick, Duckworth’s first novel focuses on the anxieties of a young protagonist who is isolated, alienated and deracinated in an environment that is unpredictable and threatening. Waking in London without the faintest idea of where or what London is or of how she got there, Diana Clouston believes she comes from Micald. Thus begins a more-or-less traditional learning journey, but in reverse: rather than leaving England to begin a new life in the colonies, Diana has gone from New Zealand to England where she must learn to take responsibility for her destiny. The most important difference between Raleigh’s and Diana’s journeys, however, arises from the fundamental shift in the values their respective societies maintain. Alienated from conventional colonial society by his atheism and opinions about Darwinism, an early Man Alone like Raleigh must become a member of society before he can find happiness. A Woman Alone like Diana, by contrast, learns to survive without the backstop of fellowship.

According to Duckworth, Micald is a metaphor for the half-cold, luke-warm blandness of restrictive New Zealand where everything is predictable. Her very title, A Gap in the Spectrum, refers to the lack of the colour red in Diana’s supposed homeland.

The novel ends when, through her work at a psychiatric hospital, the protagonist has learned to fathom extremes in human behaviour which she would never have known in Micald. To declare her independence from her past and her intention to manage her future, Diana dyes her hair red. Although her story does not end happily and conventionally as Raleigh’s does (she does not acquire either a spouse, settled home or children), Diana does achieve a limited resolution when the closing paragraph implies that she is prepared to deal with her possessive lover, Stephen. While Duckworth does not tell the reader what will happen next, Diana’s developing ability to take care of herself suggests that she will not merely drift from one crisis to the next.

Like the early settlers of New Zealand, Duckworth and her sister, Fleur, had to learn how to survive in a strange territory. In a Listener interview the author explains that they developed an imaginary world “called — very unoriginally — Dreamland”

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when, without roots, isolated from familiar surroundings and alienated from the country of their birth, they moved from place to place in wartime England:

"We could go through to this world and have adventures. It was very important to us ....

"All the time I was in England I thought of myself as being different. There was a frieze around the wall of our classroom, with children playing. I identified with one little kid who looked a bit lost. I thought, 'That's because she's a New Zealander like me.' I thought all New Zealanders had the same lost look." \(^3\)

Duckworth's continued sense of insecurity upon her return to New Zealand in 1947 probably approximates the uneasiness Raleigh felt when he first arrived in this country:

"I came back expecting everybody to be like me and there were all these brash kids, all fat, with terrible accents. I hated it all; life itself seemed to be full of nightmares." \(^4\)

One of these "nightmares" could have been the time when, surrounded by welcoming relatives, the young Duckworth had a whitlow on her finger which was very painful:

"And one of the aunts, this strange person, suddenly grabbed my hand, took hold of my sore finger and plunged it into boiling water — to cure it. I had no idea what she was doing. What's more, there was a typhoid epidemic in Drury, where my grandmother lived, and that was very scary." \(^5\)

Another cause for insecurity, and one which added considerably to the sisters' discomfort, was the polio epidemic which had broken out soon after the family arrived in Wellington. Marilyn and Fleur did their correspondence school lessons outside and slept in a tent. It was during this time that they renewed their visits to Dreamland:

"I went through old Free Lance magazines and found photos of people I thought looked like the characters in our Dreamland and I compiled a huge chronicle. We were 11 and 13 then, so it was just fun, just fiction. But that's partly where Micald in A Gap in the Spectrum came from. I

\(^3\) Marion McLeod, "Plots Aplenty", Listener 114, no. 2440 (22 November 1986): p. 36.
\(^4\) McLeod, "Plots Aplenty", p. 35.
\(^5\) McLeod, "Plots Aplenty", p. 35.
made someone come from another world into this, rather than going the other way as we had.⁶

The title of *A Gap in the Spectrum* evokes one of Sartre’s most important themes in *Nausea*, that the world is not as predictable as people have been taught to believe. In his first diary entry in *Nausea* Roquentin describes how the world he had always taken for granted and had always been able to control with words and their fixed meanings had lost its boundaries:

> Something has happened to me: I can’t doubt it any more. It came as an illness does, not like an ordinary certainty, not like anything obvious. It installed itself cunningly, little by little; I felt a little strange, a little awkward, and that was all.⁷

When Diana wakes up in London she experiences a similar feeling of dislocation:

> The air is quite a different colour here. I don’t know when I first began to notice it, but gradually it has crept up on me — the different colour of the air — the different taste of the water. It has a certain saltiness. But no one else has noticed it.⁸

In their changed worlds, both protagonists panic. In the excerpt below Roquentin races through the streets of Bouville, afraid of what might happen since things seemed to have lost their solidity:

> I kept saying to myself in anguish: “Where shall I go? where shall I go? Anything can happen.” Every now and then, with my heart pounding wildly, I would suddenly swing round: what was happening behind my back? Perhaps it would start behind me, and when I suddenly turned round it would be too late.⁹

Roquentin names the objects he sees (“this is a gas-lamp, this is a drinking fountain”), because he believes that by listing he can fix objects into their expected forms. But he cannot contain his imagination:

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⁶ McLeod, “Plots Aplenty”, p. 35.
What if something were to happen? What if all of a sudden it started palpitating? ... For example, the father of a family may go for a walk, and he will see a red rag coming towards him across the street, as if the wind were blowing it. And when the rag gets close to him, he will see that it is a quarter of rotten meat, covered with dust, crawling and hopping along, a piece of tortured flesh rolling in the gutters and spasmodically shooting out jets of blood. Or else a mother may look at her child’s cheek and ask him: “What’s that — a pimple?” and she will see the flesh puff up slightly, crack and split open, and at the bottom of the split a third eye, a laughing eye, will appear. Or they will feel something gently brushing against their bodies, like the caresses reeds give swimmers in a river. And they will realize that their clothes have become living things.10

As Diana wanders, lost, through London her perceptions and behaviour reflect a comparable feeling of terror:

This was a world of horrible, meaningless things ....

My perceptive powers seemed to have sharpened and all at once I noticed something about the people around me which I had missed before. Some of them were exaggeratedly thin, some terribly fat .... I remembered a frightening dream I had once had, when things had swelled to abnormal proportions, and then diminished sickeningly.

My sense of insecurity grew. This was a world of extremes. Anything could happen, I thought, not for the first time. Anything, anything.11

Diana begins to run, carefully naming the sites she passes. Back at the boarding house she gazes at the familiar landmarks of her room to settle her nerves. Like Roquentin, she suspects that she is going mad.

After depicting Diana’s existential panic with its seeming echo of Roquentin’s “anything can happen”, Duckworth follows her protagonist as she learns to manage her fears about the unknown. Although the plots and resolutions of Nausea and A Gap in the Spectrum are quite different, both novels share a movement away from chaos and towards stability. Roquentin finds a kind of peace in the timeless beauty of a jazz singer’s voice and plans to project his own life into the pages of an adventure story so that will be “above existence ... beautiful and hard as steel.” Like Roquentin who describes himself as “s red-headed fellow who hung about in cafés”,12 the newly red-

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12 Sartre, Nausea, p. 252.
headed Diana has learned not to rely on received, invalid ideas. Like Roquentin, she will try to make her own way in the world.

ii.

While none of Duckworth’s early stories appears to have been as specifically influenced by *Nausea*, in a sense they present a bleaker world-view than either Sartre’s novel or *A Gap in the Spectrum*. Since Roquentin and Diana both learn self-reliance through their struggles, the reader has some hope that they will continue to enjoy moments of triumph after the end of their respective narratives. Most of Duckworth’s stories, by contrast, accentuate moments of realization and end without a hint of optimism.

First published in 1959 (the same year as *A Gap in the Spectrum*), “The Husband” also depicts the fear and sense of alienation experienced by an individual who wakes to an unfamiliar world. When the protagonist, Elizabeth, regains consciousness in hospital she does not recognize her husband. Even so, “she couldn’t understand why his voice was so familiar”. Unlike Diana, who successfully overcomes her amnesia and imagined memories of Micald, Elizabeth does not begin to understand her condition. Instead, Duckworth leaves her and the reader wondering “why she felt afraid”.13

The world in “Klee, the Swallower” is even more ominous when seen through the imaginative eyes of its precocious young protagonist. Her sister’s description of the setting, a gully where a house and a railway line lie between jagged mountains which reminds her of “a prehistoric dog’s mouth and one day the jaws would fall shut”,14 casually foreshadows the story’s climax. One day as the protagonist rides the train away from her house, she realizes that anything can happen:

> There was an enormous creaking, like a great prehistoric yawn, and the jagged mountains behind the house came snapping down towards the rocks in front, just missing the end of the train! Oh, the poor old house! Gosh, I did feel funny.15

As in “The Husband”, there is no sense of resolution.

Duckworth’s second novel, *The Matchbox House*, likewise ends without any of the provisional optimism which characterizes *A Gap in the Spectrum*. Although Jean

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15 Duckworth, “Klee, the Swallower”, p. 43.
Dobie, its irresponsible protagonist, should be happy in the conventional sense (she has a husband, a baby and a home), neither she nor her husband is satisfied with their situation in post-war Britain. Jean, who is unable "to take the pulse of a situation" and who "had to content herself with understanding part, but not all, of what she came across", substitutes daydreams for reality.\(^{16}\) Her husband Johnny, who is thoroughly vexed by her inadequacies — "they affected her cooking, housekeeping, child rearing and love making .... The idea that all he roused in his wife was laziness he couldn't bear" — is having an affair with the widow next door.

Jean's withdrawal into a fantasy world is far more hazardous that Diana's imagined memories of Micald. Unaware of the danger which Duckworth emphasizes in the epigraph to her second novel with a quotation from C. Day Lewis' poem "Moods of Love", Jean's fantasies over the kitchen sink recall Ulysses' voyage past the deadly sirens:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Beware! Such idolising can divorce} \\
\text{Body and mind: the foam-bright fiction drains} \\
\text{Purpose away and sings you from your course.}\quad\text{\textsuperscript{17}}
\end{align*}
\]

Ulysses avoided shipwreck by blocking his ears to the sirens' songs. Jean either cannot or will not forsake her waking dreams.

It is Jean's inability to judge the effects of her actions that eventually leads to the splintering of the matchbox house she shares with Johnny. Their small, dirty cottage becomes even more cramped with the arrival of the three children of an old school friend who is in hospital. Jean's fantasy world soon expands to include Gerald, the children's father, whom she hopes will marry her if their mother dies. Unlike Diana, who manages to adapt herself to her changed environment, Jean does not force herself or the children to do anything. Instead, she encourages David to stay home from school because his presence eases her loneliness. When David's sisters find out, she allows them to stay home, too, because she does not have the moral authority to force them into going. As Jean fantasizes about the children's father, David becomes his embodiment, and she begins to mix motherly and sexual feelings for the boy. Because David has missed so much school, he fails his exams. As Jean drifts closer to the shoals of her fantasy world, David runs away to avoid her caresses. His sister, Glenny, faints at school


and is hospitalized. Finally Johnny hits the oldest sister, Sue. When Gerald arrives to reclaim his children he is angered by the chaotic state of Jean's house and her flustered response to his questions. The novel ends when Jean realizes the dreadfulness of what she has allowed to happen to the children left in her care and vomits into a chamber pot. If Diana could be described as demonstrating that self-knowledge and acceptance of personal responsibility lead to existential freedom, then surely Jean's lack of self-knowledge and failure to accept responsibility for her actions illustrate the opposite. Despite Jean's momentary recognition of her inadequacies, there is no hint, as there is with the feisty Diana, that she will ever modify her condition.

Viewed next to the bleak ending of *The Matchbox House*, the resolution of *A Barbarous Tongue* seems more hopeful than it really is. In fact the third novel develops a theme Duckworth introduced in her first novel, that for modern characters there is no such thing as living happily ever after. Like *A Gap in the Spectrum*, *A Barbarous Tongue* maps the learning journey of a Woman Alone as she travels from innocence to experience. Yet Frieda, the protagonist, covers more distance than Diana. Not only does she realize her ability to manage for herself, but she begins to envision the possibility of companionship with other self-determining individuals.

As in *The Matchbox House*, the epigraph of *A Barbarous Tongue* introduces the conflict. Rather than presenting an omniscient point of view, however, it defines the convictions of Austin, one of the novel's central characters:

> 'But I am old and you are young,
And I speak a barbarous tongue.'

Older than Frieda, the one-armed Austin speaks a barbarous tongue. Experience has taught him that civilization barely softens the harsh edges of existence and that individuals must try to survive as best they can because the world treats their successes and failures with equal indifference.

Frieda begins her journey towards self-reliance by gradually moving away from John, one of the large group of inadequate, insensitive or dastardly males who populate Duckworth's fiction. She learns early that John's co-dependent relationship with his sister who has cancer represents the worst of what she must learn to avoid in her own relationships. She also comes to realize John's limiting effect on her own ability to act:

> Which of us was it said: 'We're pretty fatal for each other'? It's true. The more we love, the less pleasure. The more we need each other,

18 From "To a Child Dancing in the Wind" by W. B. Yeats.
the less help we are for each other, because we’re the same person. And which of us said: ‘We suffer the frustrations of a spinster because there’s only one of us. We’re pulling on the same end of the rope. This is why we feel so temporary. Soon we’ll finish’? Or perhaps one of us will finish first and the other go on for long enough to find a new source of energy and begin to live again? No. Not that.19

Even so, Frieda is unable to resist continuing her relationship with John. If John is typical of Duckworth’s possessive male characters, then Frieda is representative of the female protagonists in that she allows him to possess her. She cannot resist the pregnancy which she hopes will bring them even closer:

All I know is that now there seems even more of him to devour me than ever there was before. I think I feel a nibbling against the wall of my womb. Christ, how I love those little teeth, and how weakly I am falling away.20

Frieda’s continuing passivity about her pregnancy demonstrates how thoroughly she has internalized the belief that there is no God to validate moral behaviour:

I lay and wondered what I could do to have a miscarriage. It wouldn’t take much at this point, would it? It wouldn’t be a crime — that was an old-fashioned thought. Who wants to be born in these times? But my back ached a little and I couldn’t find the energy to act right away.21

That John also lacks the will to act is evident in the hopeless tenor of the question he directs at Frieda and Austin:

‘If I’d had the money to leave this country I’d have done it right away. What are we all doing here? Restricted parking, restricted imports, restricted drinking — everything restricted. What are we all doing here?’22

Austin, one of the few male characters Duckworth treats sympathetically, recalls Camus’ interpretation of the challenge facing Sisyphus to “accommodate himself to what is and to bring in nothing that is not certain”.23 It is Austin’s Sisyphian approach to living that slowly teaches Frieda how to accommodate herself to her own situation. Like

20 Duckworth, A Barbarous Tongue, p. 9.
21 Duckworth, A Barbarous Tongue, pp. 76-77.
22 Duckworth, A Barbarous Tongue, p. 158.
Davin’s Mahon, she must learn how to survive within the limits imposed by an indifferent universe:

‘You’ve no idea of compromise, have you? I wish you had. Don’t you know that’s what life is? It’s a matter of nursing yourself along on small distractions. You make up your mind to live from here to here without getting too involved, and then from here to here, and so on, inch by inch, until you discover you’re in some kind of control — you’re driving this thing all by yourself! And then you’re satisfied — up to a point. Didn’t you know that?’

At the beginning of A Barbarous Tongue Frieda had lamented that John was absorbing her individuality. By the novel’s final paragraph, however, she no longer hides behind the restrictions imposed by her family, friends, lovers and polite society. When she transports her injured baby to the hospital in the truck which she had not believed she could manage, Frieda demonstrates that what Austin had said was true. She was “in some kind of control”:

I could drive this thing after all. One more corner. I was nearly there. I was all right on my own, like he said. All at once I felt exhilarated and proud and confident. I could. Yes. You don’t want to be like John, do you? No, of course not. This is me pulling on the brake. I am a person. People believe that if they touched me they’d feel the firm strangeness of flesh, the muscles of intention. And it’s true. I can be touched. I have intentions — to move, dream, serve, demand, love — and find those other people besides myself. I won’t be lonely. Austin doesn’t believe I’ll pack and go, but I will. Just you wait.

As in A Gap in the Spectrum, Duckworth does not guarantee that the protagonist will live happily ever after, but she definitely suggests that Frieda will continue to manage her own destiny.

The protagonist of Duckworth’s fourth novel, Over the Fence is Out, follows a similar route as she travels towards independence. Janfrey comes to value her “Janfreyness” as she survives her husband Gregory’s mental and physical abuse and establishes her own position within society. But for Gregory and for Clare, who feign friendship while maintaining an adulterous relationship, “over the fence is out”.

The moral judgement implied by the title of her fourth novel appears to add Duckworth to the long list of New Zealand writers who, like Davin, Burdon, Wilson and

24 Duckworth, A Barbarous Tongue, p. 121.
25 Duckworth, A Barbarous Tongue, p. 189.
others yet to be considered, employed the convention that those who step far enough outside the fence of socially acceptable behaviour will be punished. Lawrence Jones underpins this idea when he notes the resemblance between “the awful Gregory” and Mark Burke in Davin’s *Cliffs of Fall*, who also “rejects the constraints of conventional conscience and finally destroys himself”\(^{26}\): both protagonists kill their lovers, and both die after they have melodramatically jumped or driven off cliffs.

Like Davin, Burdon and Wilson, Duckworth explains her characters’ progress towards death in terms of cause and effect. Thus Gregory could be described as a 60s version of the victimized protagonists of *Cliffs of Fall*, *An Outlaw’s Progress*, *The Feared and the Fearless*, and *Strip Jack Naked*. In the excerpt below, for example, Janfrey provides details of Gregory’s upbringing which partially explain his sadistic treatment of her and why he fails to consider anyone’s welfare before his own:

> One couldn’t help feeling that he had grown up in public places rather than in a home and in fact he was a product of boarding school and hostel.\(^ {27}\)

There is further explanation when Gregory tells Clare about his mother’s early death, “She went into hospital for some women’s operation and her heart gave out”, declaring that he did not remember his father. Clare summarizes their shared defect: “I wonder if we’ve missed something by not being part of a close family.”\(^ {28}\)

Yet Duckworth’s resolution to *Over the Fence Is Out* implies more than a simple acceptance of the conventional values of family and society. After Gregory has accidentally shot Clare with a rifle and purposely driven his van over a cliff, Janfrey wonders why her husband killed himself:

> One of them was crazy — both of them maybe. Had she misunderstood him all alone, mistakenly thinking he was evil and she good? Or had she been more right than she knew? Why had he left her there?\(^ {29}\)

Why indeed? Duckworth does not answer this question explicitly, but the resolution to *Over the Fence is Out* clearly recalls the deterministic endings of those New Zealand novels which implicitly disapprove of existentialism. Duckworth uses a coordinating conjunction to join Janfrey’s final statement about Gregory, that “he hated flawed

\(^{28}\) Duckworth, *Over the Fence is Out*, p. 165.
\(^{29}\) Duckworth, *Over the Fence is Out*, p. 192.
things”, to the last sentence in the novel: “And then, below the road, she heard the crash.” Once Gregory had become aware of his flawed nature, his self-destruction was inevitable.

Gregory could be viewed as a kind of negative existentialist who, like Burke or Il Brutto, uses his existential freedom to subordinate others to his will, and, like the two aforementioned characters, he will die violently. Janfrey, by contrast, will survive. As in A Gap in the Spectrum, the resolution of Over the Fence is Out implies that Janfrey will continue to grow into the kind of existentialist behaviour which recalls Camus’ ideas about individual responsibility. Yet Duckworth’s implicit judgement of Gregory’s destructive use of his freedom (as opposed to Janfrey’s more positive behaviour) indicates that, like Davin, Burdon and Wilson, she both rejects and accepts aspects of the existentialist ideas which were inherent to the time.

Despite the deterministic ending of Over the Fence is Out, and despite its lack of specific references to popular existentialist ideas, Duckworth’s fourth novel is nonetheless informed with the same existential zeitgeist as the first three. Clare’s constant role-playing, for example, recalls the habit of mind that Sartre deplored as mauvaise foi, when individuals evade taking responsibility for their decisions and actions. Thus even though Clare knows how badly Gregory hurts his wife, she claims that her initial visit to Janfrey and subsequent performances as a housewife and mother resulted from spur-of-the-moment decisions, for which she should not be held accountable. Despite twinges from a troubled conscience, she will purposefully continue her liaison with Gregory. Clare’s bad faith becomes even more apparent when, after admitting to Gregory “‘I think I’m just a series of acts’”, she pretends to an ironic understanding of his unfavourable opinion of women:

“Being a woman. You can’t be unhappy or frustrated without being revolting and gruesome. Or at best a nagging bitch. But an unhappy man is misunderstood and interesting and arouses compassion.”

“That’s right.”

“And a woman growing old is obscene and ridiculous, whereas a man growing old can only be pathetic.”

“You’re remarkably observant.”

“I think I shall die young,” she said quickly. “Light me a cigarette — my hands are too cold.”

Unless Gregory is so self-absorbed that he is unaware of Clare’s ironic tone, his replies signal his acknowledgement of his own bad faith. Certainly Clare’s words are prophetic:

30 Duckworth, Over the Fence is Out, pp. 164, 169.
she will die young. Her hands are shaking badly as she tries to light the cigarette smoked by those about to be executed.

As noted earlier, in *A Barbarous Tongue* Frieda assented to John's power over her. In *Over the Fence is Out* there are several references to the protagonist's gradual submission of her individuality to Gregory. Both novels recall Sartre's idea that romantic love is impossible because one member of a couple will always try to control the other. For example, when Janfrey reacts sharply to her husband's casual verbal abuse, Gregory responds: "'Ah you begin to exist, all right. Yes.'" Thereafter he will seek to dominate her, despising her ever more as she grows weaker. Later, David Miller will offer cherries and companionship to Janfrey because he does not approve of how Gregory treats her. David's candid support, "'I just want you to know. I'm on your side'", prompts Janfrey to ask "'Is there a war then?'" David's reply recalls Sartre's belief that the only relationship possible between two free individuals is one of conflict: "'There's always a war. Cheerio.'"

When David encourages Janfrey to do the best she can with what she knows to be true, there is an echo of Austin's advice to Frieda and of Camus' challenge to Sisyphus: in an indifferent world individuals should strive to adapt to their situation.

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31 See *The Flies* and *In Camera* for dramatizations of the conflict inherent in relationships.


I. First Attitude Toward Others: Love, Language, Masochism

While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me .... Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others.

If we start with the revelation of the Other as a look, we must recognize that we experience our inapprehensible being-for-others in the form of a possession. I am possessed by the Other; the Other's look fashions my body in its nakedness, causes it to be born, sculptures it, produces it as it is, sees it as I shall never see it. The Other holds a secret — the secret of what I am.

II. Second Attitude Toward Others: Indifference, Desire, Hate, Sadism

We shall never place ourselves completely on a plane of equality; that is, on the plane where the recognition of the Other's freedom would involve the Other's recognition of our freedom.

The Other is on principle inapprehensible; he flees me when I seek him and possesses me when I flee him.

32 Duckworth, *Over the Fence is Out*, p. 35.
33 Duckworth, *Over the Fence is Out*, p. 93.
When Janfrey learns the truth about Gregory’s liaison with Clare and drinks too much rum, David’s instructive “Here, have a crust. The crust’s very powerful. Have you sober in no time” also recalls the world-view which Austin and Camus espouse.

Like Diana, Frieda and Janfrey, the protagonists in three of Duckworth’s short stories also reach deeper levels of self-awareness. Not all of them achieve independence, however. The future is bleak for the protagonist of “Among Strangers” who, after a relationship with a married man, settles into marriage but never establishes her own identity. Years later at her daughter’s wedding the woman is overcome by the knowledge that she has been living for her family, not for herself. Murmuring “What have I been doing — living my life among strangers? However did I get so involved with strangers?” the protagonist realizes that she, too, is one of those strangers. But the daughter’s response minimizes the significance of her mother’s realization: “It’s nothing really. Mothers always cry at weddings. It’s nothing.” “Among Strangers” ends with the woman’s unspoken concurrence, that “perhaps it was.” Thus Duckworth quietly underlines the assumption which informs her narratives from the previous decade, that life is inherently meaningless.

Nearly twenty later in two stories written in Menton, France, Duckworth’s female protagonists still grapple with a concern which their creator had introduced in A Gap in the Spectrum: how they are to manage in an unpredictable world. As in earlier narratives, Duckworth continues to suggest how contingent the future really is. Gillian begins “Explosions on the Sun” (1987), the title story of the 1989 collection of Duckworth’s short stories, with the conclusion that Mme Truffaut’s description of sunspots does not presage doom: sunspots are “familiar, abnormal phenomena after all”. Yet when Gillian, “a failed nun on holiday from Scotland”, wonders if she will be crushed by a piece of falling sky Duckworth uses her worry to suggest the inherent uncertainty of a Godless universe. Reflecting that “it was much easier when God could be blamed for natural disasters”, Gillian has resolved, “after much unhappiness, not to believe in God”. But Duckworth will allow mysterious events to challenge the simplicity of her protagonist’s renunciation. One evening during a stroll Gillian meets and accompanies a demonic young man she may have met before, in reality or in a sequence of nightmares. At the cemetery, he attacks her but runs away when an old

34 Duckworth, Over the Fence is Out, p. 86.  
36 Duckworth, Explosions on the Sun, p. 46.  
37 Duckworth, Explosions on the Sun, p. 47.
tramp arrives. Gillian may have given up belief in God, but she finds that the hand the tramp extends “is surprisingly soft, like feathers”. Has an angel rescued her from the demonic young man? Neither Gillian nor Duckworth makes this apparent, yet Gillian’s request that the tramp tell her about God clearly implies the provisional nature of all her perceptions.

In “All Those Daffodils” Duckworth again emphasizes the uncertainty of human knowledge when Anne attempts to come to terms with another explosion on the sun, the death of her sister in a car crash. What caused the crash? There are hints that Anne herself was responsible for Julie’s death because both were in love with Chris, Julie’s husband, and “Chris is not divisible by two”. Like Gillian, Anne has no clear explanation for the explosion on the sun which has changed her life. Like Gillian, she is disturbed by odd dreams and portents. But even though Anne achieves a clearer recognition than Gillian does of the cause of these disturbances, Duckworth shows that, like the ex-nun, she cannot deal with her feelings of sorrow and guilt by living existentially in the present:

I haven’t thought of Chris for days. Or the future — that thing they wave at you like a flag when you’re a child. As if it is somehow better than now. Nothing is better than now. (I run a few steps.) And won’t be. Whoops — keep that future tense out of it.

Chris also retains a stubborn tendency to hope in the future. After Julie’s death he admitted to Anne that he had wanted to die:

“I had plenty of tranquillisers to do it. My friends gave them to me, being kind.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Because of the daffodils. All those daffodils. They came with the tranquillisers. It was blackmail. They blackmailed me into staying alive — with daffodils.”

In hospital after the accident, although Anne was tempted to eat “all those daffodils” (she believed them poisonous enough to kill her), she did not. Evidently Anne, too, hoped for the future.

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38 Duckworth, Explosions on the Sun, p. 57.
40 Duckworth, “All those Daffodils”, p. 77.
41 Duckworth, “All Those Daffodils”, p. 79.
Yet the ending of "All Those Daffodils" implies that Anne's future with Chris may be problematic. Sitting in the sun she has a moment of epiphany when she acknowledges the joyful bond she used to share with her sister. When her mother was worried by their running onto the common, she used to call "'Julie! Anne!' ... running the names together as if they were one. 'Julianne!'") But the memory is so bright that Anne must turn from it:

One evening when she had put us to bed while the sun was still up, we made our protest. We hitched up our nighties, giggling, and sat our bare bottoms out the window. The last rays of the sun touched us.

The salt sweat is getting in my eyes. It stings. How can it hurt so much?

Enough sun for today. When I stand up my head reels with it.42

Unlike the short stories, Disorderly Conduct and Married Alive do not end just as their protagonists reach a moment of insight. Instead they point to a future which, although not inevitably comfortable or happy, seems more optimistic: their protagonists have learned, as Davin's Mahon does, to accommodate themselves to the uncertainties of living in New Zealand in the 1980s.

As a character whose point of view allows the reader to interpret her situation, the protagonist of Disorderly Conduct clearly belongs to New Zealand's Man Alone tradition. Set during the Springbok Tour of New Zealand in 1981, Duckworth's fifth novel reflects in the disorder of Sophie's domestic life the widespread social upheaval of that time. Yet because Sophie fails to achieve even the promise of a conventional happy ending, she is fundamentally different from the protagonists of Philosopher Dick, The Greenstone Door or The Land of the Lost. A solo-mother who ignores the rules by which society would govern her behaviour, Sophie is not respectable. She differs, also, from Mulgan's and Sargeson's disreputable Johnson and Bill. Not only does Sophie act rather than react, but she usually understands the implications of what she does.

At first glance, the protagonist of Disorderly Conduct could be a more sophisticated version of Jean Dobie in The Matchbox House: her household is as chaotic and she is as easily overcome by the importunings of her children. But the resemblance stops there because Sophie is not lazy, nor does she avoid thinking about the unpleasant or frightening concerns facing contemporary New Zealand. On the contrary, Sophie has a rueful understanding of her place in the modern world:

42 Duckworth, "All Those Daffodils", pp. 80-81.
And this is New Zealand. God’s own country. In other countries bellies are distending with malnutrition. Prisons are filling with political victims, alongside other victims of society. While she expects happiness, no less.\(^{43}\)

Another difference between Sophie and Jean is that while Jean has retreated into a fantasy world, Sophie never stops trying to cope in the real world. Although she thinks of her past life in terms of a race she always attempts and always loses, “she would never quite give up that hope of winning — not until the finishing tape strangled her efforts”.\(^{44}\)

Despite the lack of explicit references to any popular existentialist ideas, the protagonist’s experience in *Disorderly Conduct* could be described as a domesticated version of those ideas. Thus Sophie’s continual efforts to win recall Sisyphus’ exertions to roll his boulder uphill. Added to her refusal to stop trying are a series of realizations which confirm that she is learning to accept her existential freedom. By the end of her narrative Sophie has learned that the imaginary disease which she had feared would incapacitate her has afflicted Pat, the conventional wife of her long-time lover James. She realizes that Pat’s illness was not a punishment but simply a coincidence. The omniscient narrator spells out Sophie’s realization that she must take responsibility for the loss of James:

> Pat has been stricken with an unjust illness, but she can expect the old fashioned kind of total caring which Sophie’s parents had for each other. Sophie has not earned that kind of caring — it is awarded like the gold watch, for long service. Too late now for Sophie to earn that. No matter how many years she has to live, it is far too late.\(^{45}\)

The omniscient narrator also makes it clear that Sophie’s struggle to find meaning will end only with her death:

> She is unaware, of course, that her disorder was always more than physical. What she suffers from is the human condition, no less. Nineteen-eighties version — urban colonial. She can expect a succession of bizarre and distressing symptoms. Small disasters, small rejections, dripping like acid onto her nerves and burrowing into her sense of well being. Life is a sexually transmitted terminal disease.

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\(^{44}\) Duckworth, *Disorderly Conduct*, p. 126.

\(^{45}\) Duckworth, *Disorderly Conduct*, p. 159.
At the end of the novel Sophie literally and figuratively draws away from her relationship with James when the train she is on leaves the station. Once again, Duckworth ends her narrative with a touch of optimism: Sophie’s train moves “confidently, shedding the light behind it”.

Like *A Gap in the Spectrum*, *The Matchbox House*, *A Barbarous Tongue*, *Over the Fence is Out* and *Disorderly Conduct*, *Married Alive* (1985) emphasizes the importance of self-responsibility and self-reliance. Unlike Duckworth’s earlier narratives, however, the sixth novel explicitly reaffirms fellowship and social stability as the bulwarks of New Zealand society.

Its protagonist, Francie, reports what happens when twenty percent of the New Zealanders who had been inoculated with a contaminated influenza vaccine go violently insane:

>The frightening effects of this on the country — the lottery of aggressive insanity — has led to all kinds of new measures. Employees in responsible positions must work in pairs — bus drivers, taxi drivers, crane operators — all have their understudies in case they should be suddenly stricken. Children have been removed from their homes and housed in newly set-up boarding establishments. The staffing of these has provided all kinds of employment. The actual caring staff — teachers and home care givers — has been selected from among people who escaped taking the vaccine, for one reason or another. These are the new elite, certified and sought after.

Although these measures have been effective in limiting the chaos, Duckworth uses her protagonist to suggest that life has always been an uncertain affair. Watching herself sneeze in front of a mirror, Francie thinks of the child’s nursery rhyme about the plague which killed a third of the population of Medieval Europe:

> The mirror rocks on its nail. She laughs, reaching out to steady her moving image. How little it takes to put things out of kilter. Even something as frivolous as a sneeze — Atishoo, atishoo. All fall down.

Francie also describes the profound effect on New Zealand society which the measures against insanity have had:

> It has become a habit generally for people to stand back in relationships. Lovers, friends, family, are put in closed-off compartments to be referred

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to only when necessary. The days of communes, encounter groups and extended families are becoming as exotic as passenger liners. The nuclear family itself survives only in fractionated bits .... Family feeling, trust and loyalty — even love perhaps — are all running around in society like chickens with their heads cut off.49

Francie’s attempt to exchange marriage vows with Sydney confirms the breakdown of social values. At her wedding the Justice of the Peace confuses the marriage and death ceremonies. After intoning “By the authority invested in me! ... I pronounce you all — dust to dust”50 he, too, succumbs to insanity.

Yet Francie progresses beyond the lonely independence which she, like Diana, Frieda and Janfrey, has had to develop in order to survive. By the end of Married Alive Duckworth has suggested a resolution which takes modern uncertainty into account, at the same time as it reaffirms the fellowship conventions which sustain the plots of early New Zealand novels like Philosopher Dick, A South-Sea Siren, The Greenstone Door and The Land of the Lost.

Francie begins her journey back to fellowship when she falls in love with Adam, who believes that the number of people succumbing to insanity could be falling. Speculating that half of the cases could be “hysterically induced by the media — and the way we live”, Adam realizes the need to plan what to do next:

“Eventually it must burn itself out .... When all the crazy people are behind bars — and I mean bars — what else could you call it? What happens then? The country’s organised for solo-living and double-working conditions. There’ll be chaos. Unemployment, soaring birth rate. Housing difficulties. We have to prepare.”51

Francie’s education continues as she manages to escape from Sydney, whose increasingly erratic behaviour indicates that he has succumbed to insanity also. She bumps fortuitously into Adam, who is clearly intended to represent the first man of a reconditioned earth and whose plans for the future of New Zealand recall aspects of the early fellowship conventions: “People need to fall in love and have families. They’ve been doing it for thousands of years, how can they stop now?”

At first Francie is sceptical: “But maybe the world’s meant to end here? There could be a nuclear war tomorrow. Or a virus run wild.” But Adam will not give up: “It

49 Duckworth, Married Alive, pp. 13-14.
50 Duckworth, Married Alive, p. 96.
51 Duckworth, Married Alive, p. 136.
looks dreadful, I admit. But I believe in hope.'  

Later he adds, "We're going to get to know each other. And fall in love. And be happy."

Francie's continued doubt prompts Adam to assert his vision of the future even more strongly: "Don't do that. Give it a chance. You know you want to."

Adam's vision implies that managing in a changed world requires more than the resolution to become self-sufficient. Thus not only does Francie want to "give it a chance", but she decides to help Adam start a new society. After Adam has summarized the operating principle of this new society, "We could both go mad. But I'll risk you if you'll risk me", Duckworth ends Married Alive with her protagonist's renewed sense of excitement: "The wind is blowing in Francie's mouth, taking her breath away."

In conclusion, Duckworth reflects aspects of New Zealand's pre-existentialist Man Alone tradition when her fiction returns to one of its early certainties: beyond the individual's existential freedom, there is still a need for community. But in her later novels she depicts what happens when ideas about alienation, meaninglessness and the need for self-responsibility have been absorbed into the mainstream view of the human condition. Then she joins Camus and Davin (to name just two of the many post-war writers who suggest the fundamental need for accommodation), in describing how her characters learn to acknowledge the limits imposed on them by an indifferent universe in which human beings have no special status.

52 Duckworth, Married Alive, pp. 136-137.
53 Duckworth, Married Alive, p. 165.
54 Duckworth, Married Alive, p. 166.
Chapter Eight
The Happy Man Alone

He asked himself what joy he had in life, and for what purpose did he exist. Poor solitary waif, adrift on dark and troublous waters, ever contending in an aimless and useless struggle.¹

'Once you have destroyed the idea of God you are on your own. There is nobody any longer who existed before man, who created man, and who laid down rules for man. There is only man by himself. Without a rudder.'²

He had nothing to regret; nothing to look forward to. All was well. He was alive; at a new beginning. He was free of his dead.³

The three excerpts which begin this chapter about New Zealand's literary existentialism during the 1960s and 70s illustrate how the Man Alone has changed over the years. Despite the stylistic differences between the first two excerpts, both suggest the difficulty of living in a world without God: “adrift on dark and troublous waters”, man is “without a rudder”. The third excerpt implies that the Man Alone has learned how to manage without a rudder. As in the earlier analysis of Davin's fiction, the following examination of the pre-existentialist and existentialist ideas contained in Redmond Wallis' *Point of Origin* (1962), John O'Shea's 1964 feature film *The Runaway*, Jean Watson's *Stand in the Rain* (1964), Graham Billing's *Forbush and the Penguins* (1965), Jack McMenaghian's *Moving Target* (1966) and *Travelling Man* (1976), and Albert Wendt's *Sons for the Return Home* (1973) will underscore how unevenly the writers of New Zealand's Man and Woman Alone fiction have moved from their traditional assumptions about the human condition. For example only two of the narratives listed above, *Point of Origin* and *Sons for the Return Home*, explicitly refer to popularized aspects of the existentialist philosophy. The remainder, like Marilyn Duckworth's *A Gap in the Spectrum*, emerged from the post-war era in New Zealand when existentialism was “in the air”. That is, in varying proportions these novels reflect elements both of New Zealand’s pre-existentialist Man Alone tradition and the existential *zeitgeist* of mid-twentieth century Western literature: they explore assumptions about alienation, the meaninglessness of human endeavour, the need for self-responsibility and how their protagonists learn to accommodate themselves to the limits imposed by an indifferent universe. As in previous chapters, the success (or

¹ Chamier, *Philosopher Dick*, p. 239.
otherwise) of the lives traced in several of these novels depends on whether or not the protagonists have been purified of the flaws which prevented their integration into society. Yet even in a novel like *Sons for the Return Home* which avoids assuming a moral stance, which proposes that neither nature nor fellowship can relieve the emptiness of the human condition, and which explicitly approves of aspects of Camus’ existentialist world-view, the young Man Alone still has to undergo a learning journey; his observations and interpretations are still intended to influence the reader’s own view of the world. Based on the experiences of most of the characters I have traced so far, I conclude that the writers of New Zealand’s Man and Woman Alone fiction have seldom completely abandoned the conventions which underpin this country’s early literature.

Redmond Wallis’ first novel, *Point of Origin*, is set predominantly in class-conscious Christchurch and charts the progress of an urban Man Alone as he overcomes the disadvantages he thinks are imposed by his status as the son of a station manager. Its protagonist, Peter Henessey, questions the significance of values based on the existence of God and the validity of scientific discovery, and this leads him to question the purpose of his own existence. As in a well-made novel like Davin’s *Roads from Home*, there are clear narrative lines running from cause to effect to define the protagonist’s crisis and its resolution. As in *Philosopher Dick*, Peter declares his independence from his victimizing background and resolves to take responsibility for his own destiny, with the promise that he will settle down with the heroine to join the very society he had rebelled against. This is not so unusual in a New Zealand novel, rooted as the country’s literature is in the Victorian tradition. What is unusual is that the protagonist refers to the existentialist philosophy when he challenges the *status quo*.

Beginning with an epigraph from *A Dictionary of Science* by E. B. Uvarov and D. R. Chapman, Wallis defines the cause of his protagonist’s behaviour:

**Hysteresis**

A physical phenomenon chiefly met in the elastic and magnetic behaviour of materials. When a body is stressed, the strain produced is the function of the stress. On releasing the stress, the strain lags behind .... On removing the stress completely, a residual strain remains. This lagging of effect behind cause is called *hysteresis* ...\(^4\)

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Throughout the novel he records the protagonist’s “sense of impending strain” and details its effects. Similar to Marley in Outlaw’s Progress and Milsom in The Huntsman in His Career, both of whom were tested by adverse conditions and lost their land to an economic system which is portrayed as inherently unfair, Peter’s father was victimized by a land owner during the Depression when their “gentlemen’s agreement” was dishonoured. Thereafter the protagonist is super-sensitive to any slight upon his background as he, too, is tested. He is also ambitious and prone to putting his own welfare first, as is demonstrated when he appraises Marks, Faber and Wrightley, the Canterbury farm machinery company which employs him:

Well, they could be milked for knowledge and whatever money he could drag from them, and then left to wallow in their old-world methods while he, attuned to the century, built for himself. But as he looked at the building he felt a feather of concern brush him. How much knowledge of the sort he desired would be obtainable there? He thrust the concern from him as something on which it was valueless to dwell at the moment. That block of stone with its interior hive-like chain of command was a means to an end, a necessary evil to be endured for a space until the elements of schism were in his hands.5

In the final paragraph of first chapter, Wallis diagrams Peter’s motivation and indicates a possible conclusion for his narrative:

I know what this damned city reminds me of. A graph. A great piece of graph paper stuck on a sheet of green cardboard. The Square is origin. Colombo Street and Worcester Street are the axes. And me? Oh, I am a point on the graph. Yes, of course, a point. Something which has position but no magnitude. Position: the newest, shiniest, lowliest member of the merchandise department of the Christchurch branch of Marks, Faber and Wrightley. Magnitude: nil. Perfect. And the locus of the point? If I have anything to do with it, up and out at forty-five degrees. We’ll see.6

As in earlier Man Alone fiction, Peter must learn how to be happy in society. Gillian Sedgely, the niece of the farmer who had cheated his father, is one of his teachers. Contrary to Peter’s vague idea that events may be pre-determined accidentally, “that there is no overall purpose, no master plan”, Gillian believes that people are “not zombies to be goaded through the streets like drugged cattle”.7 Instead,

6 Wallis, Point of Origin, p. 15.
7 Wallis, Point of Origin, p. 31.
they have tendencies which can be modified by their free will. In Wallis’ careful delineation of the qualities that separate healthy, positive behaviour from the unhealthy, events in the novel show that Gillian is on the positive side and that Peter will learn to join her there. Although in the following excerpt Gillian seems to subscribe to one of the central themes of Sartre’s *Nausea*, that existence cannot be defined or controlled by measurements, it soon becomes apparent that she, too, must learn how not to rely on the rules:

‘You are talking about life, and life won’t admit of either scientific or reasonable explanations. I am tired of attempts to force life into a scientific mould. I am tired of picking up magazines and books and being confronted with articles on how, scientifically, to win myself a man, or keep my husband faithful, or my baby from becoming neurotic. I am sick of people who try to find scientific frameworks for things which can’t be circumscribed, let alone circumscribed scientifically. Science is concerned with measurement, and you cannot measure humans.’

Further lessons develop as Peter and Gillian interact with Shona and Ron, who dramatize what can happen when atheistic existentialism is taken to its logical conclusion. Peter, especially, will learn to value the positive creativity represented by the “roguer” he invented to sort peas. First, however, he must learn about the kind of negative imagination which leads to nowhere.

At the races Shona shocks Peter with her wish to experience death:

‘This is the final experience. And if you were to undergo it voluntarily, if you were to pull the trigger yourself, it would so sharp, so immediate. Most people never know death because it comes so quickly and so unexpectedly. But if you were to go looking for it ...’

Resolved to do what ever she likes, Shona goes on to explain to Peter the logical consequence of his pleasing himself:

‘You have too much respect for other people. Life, my sweet, is like a stock car race. If you do what you like you’ll probably put someone else into the fence.’

A little later when Shona challenges Peter’s unexamined belief in an ethical framework with “if God did not exist, everything would be permitted. Dostoevsky”, she is one

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8 Wallis, *Point of Origin*, p. 32.
of the few New Zealand characters to explicitly refer to an idea central to atheistic existentialism.

Ron is a violent atheist who attempts to disprove the existence of God “with a vast and extremely personal hatred”. A labourer on the Christchurch cathedral, Ron could have been a draughtsman except that he preferred “swinging a shovel” as part of a labouring gang: both forms of employment brought in around the same wage. Besides, adds Ron, “there’s more jobs than blokes to fill ‘em and you can tell ‘em to stuff it anytime you like without losing so much as a day’s pay. It’ll do me.” Not only does Ron lack the work ethic, he lacks ethics of any kind. When Ron shows Peter the obscenely blasphemous and yet technically perfect plaque which he has carved and plans to hang in the church, Peter asks “What the hell for?” Ron’s reply encapsulates his lack of creative purpose, another of the perils Peter must learn to avoid:

‘No reason. Just for the hell of it. It amuses me to think of this up there and all those sanctimonious bastards down below, praying away.’

Although Point of Origin could not be said to advocate Christian morality, it firmly assumes the value of ethical behaviour and privileges the balance which Peter and Gillian will tentatively achieve over the anarchy which surrounds Ron and Shona. Peter helps Ron and Shona affix the plaque to the cathedral tower but is subsequently overcome with disgust at their actions. Like Raleigh on the edge of a cliff in Philosopher Dick and despairing that he has lost all he knows to be worthwhile, Peter contemplates suicide:

It was so very simple. All he had to do was remove his elbows from the balustrade and let his body curve forward as a gymnast lets his body curve and flip around parallel bars .... The distance was more than sufficient. He would burst when he hit the pavement.

Although the scene of Peter’s intended suicide resembles Raleigh’s (both young men will end their sorrows about the inadequacy of their beliefs by jumping from a great height), Wallis’ assumptions about the nature of existence do not really resemble Chamier’s. In post-war New Zealand there is no “still, small voice” from Heaven to wake Peter from his suicidal reverie; there is only his own opinion of Ron’s bad faith.

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11 Wallis, Point of Origin, p. 115.
12 Wallis, Point of Origin, p. 126.
13 Wallis, Point of Origin, pp. 121, 122.
14 Wallis, Point of Origin, p. 127.
15 Wallis, Point of Origin, p. 134.
Peter feels that the obscenity of the plaque is unimportant besides the misuse of Ron’s talent that it represents:

There was imagination in the conception and talent in the execution and yet though the totality might thus be held to be creative, its effect was destructive. Gillian would know about that. He would have to ask—\(^{16}\)

Yet the way in which Peter and Raleigh’s desperation is resolved is remarkably similar. Thinking about the woman he loves causes Peter to snap out of his suicidal reverie, much as Raleigh regains his senses after a lick from his faithful sheepdog, Tiny. Like Raleigh, Peter begins to take responsibility for his destiny as he seeks to balance his freedom to act in a world without God with his human need for ethical guidelines:

I may follow the same seas but I must have, before I set out, certain principles of progress. I must follow certain rules which I believe will get me to a certain destination .... The conditional really means a man is on his own and must draw his own chart, but it does not exclude him at the same time from devising rules for charting.\(^{17}\)

After taking the plaque down, Peter calls Gillian and they negotiate the continuance of their relationship as they articulate their beliefs. Peter echoes Shona’s quotation from Dostoyevsky: “Yes, but don’t you see that if you reject God anything, everything is permitted?” Gillian’s response reinforces his resolve to work according to an ethical plan: “I see that you have perfect freedom to do what you want. I don’t see how that prevents you from choosing to do what is right.”\(^{18}\) While Peter cannot accept this wholly, his reply shows how much he has realized the need for ethical behaviour:

“Well ... there are some things I don’t understand and which seem to me to be irrational. Things which are part of me. So all I can say is that I have to temper the logic of that proposition with these irrationalis. Everything is permitted provided it takes them into account; which means everything is not permitted. Love. And the thing that produced the roguer. The reverse of the thing that produced that plaque.”\(^{19}\)

In the final section of Wallis’ novel the emphasis changes from a dramatization of the implications of “all is permitted” to a conventional working out of the

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\(^{17}\) Wallis, *Point of Origin*, p. 135.
\(^{18}\) Wallis, *Point of Origin*, p. 158.
\(^{19}\) Wallis, *Point of Origin*, p. 158.
reconnected couple's aspirations to share a loving and creative future. Peter will help Gillian to move beyond the conventional morality that governs her prudish sexual behaviour. Because he has too much integrity to be taken in by Dent's lies, Gillian's father utterly shames the man who had long ago cheated Peter's father. The restoration of Peter's lost status will be followed by his wedding to Gillian.

In conclusion, by the time *Point of Origin* ends near the place where it began, Peter has learned several lessons and been changed by them. His interpretation of all that he has learned becomes almost prescriptive as he makes it clear that he believes he has a reasonable chance at happiness. Peter's early description of Marks, Faber and Wrightley as "a means to an end, a necessary evil to be endured for a space" until he could force his ideas on them has changed to an appreciation of the luck that has allowed him to create the roguer. He has learned not to condemn others' sincere efforts: "No man could be condemned for the axioms he held. This was the area of belief, of faith." His rejection of the plaque has taught him to avoid the trap of living in bad faith: "A man might only be condemned for being untrue to what he knew inside himself to be true, or for erecting, upon what he knew to be true, a structure he knew to be illogical."[20] He has become aware that individual freedom within society is a paradox, a "strain in equilibrium, making of self-knowledge a springboard from which all decisions might be taken".[21] Changing his resolve to ascend up and out of the environment which he thought had victimized him into a more moderate curve within the parameters of New Zealand society, Peter demonstrates that he, too, has learned to accommodate himself to the limits of his existential freedom. Or, as he asserts at the end of the novel, "The city is a graph, the Square origin, and I a point. This time and this place is my point of origin. I begin to plot my curve."[22] Finally although Wallis' novel explicitly explores some of the implications of atheistic existentialism, it ends by fitting into a contemporary and humanistic version of New Zealand's Man Alone tradition. A survey of the protagonists in Davin's later fiction and Duckworth's Diana, Frieda, Janfrey and Francie has already shown how some Men and Women Alone have realized their existential freedom and managed to partake of society. Presently I will explain how in *Sons for the Return Home* Albert Wendt explicitly relates this kind of humanistic accommodation to the ideas Camus fostered in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

ii.

Runaway, first released as a motion picture in 1963, contains none of the explicit references to existentialism found in Wallis' novel. Yet when its protagonist, David Manning, kicks a skull and asks Diana, "Is this all I am?", the film clearly indicates that it will trace the experience of a young Man Alone who is searching for a sense of purpose in a world without God.

A comparison of the actions and fates of two similarly troubled young men will demonstrate some of the ways New Zealand's early Man Alone tradition has influenced post-war fiction. For example in Philosopher Dick and A South-Sea Siren Raleigh exiles himself from conventional society, passes the wilderness test, falls in love and rejoins society. The narratives about him end with the expectation that he will prosper. In Point of Origin Peter finds redemption through positive creation and, sure of Gillian's love, rejoins society as he, too, aims for prosperity. Thus both protagonists could be said to uphold the convention that learning to get on with others is good and isolation from society is bad. Runaway also demonstrates that fellowship is healthier than alienation, albeit negatively, when Manning tells Diana that he longs to become

"nothing against the wall of mountains. A thin streak of dust, then nothing. I'd like to do that... disappear to nothing. Lose myself. Become nothing. Vanish in the dead, deserted world of Westland."

Unlike Raleigh in the wilderness and Peter in urban Christchurch, however, Manning never does overcome his sense of alienation. On the contrary his wish to become "nothing" is fulfilled when, escaping from those who would capture (and help) him, he succumbs to the wilderness outside of society.

The reviewer who appraised O'Shea's film for the Listener claims that Runaway has declined to sit in judgement on the way of life of its characters — as though saying that no-one has a monopoly of truth and right, and that no-one is wholly wrong.

In particular, it remains to the end sympathetic to its young New Zealander.

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Since there is no omniscient narrator to comment on the action, the film could be described as more objective than *Philosopher Dick*. Yet I disagree that *Runaway* does not judge its characters, or that it treats its protagonist with sympathy. Describing O’Shea’s film in such a way that it conforms to the definition framed in Chapter One of New Zealand’s pre-existentialist *Man Alone* literature, P. J. Downey’s review of the film in *Comment* implicitly suggests that Manning’s life and death are as cautionary as Raleigh’s experiences in *Philosopher Dick*:

*[Runaway]* is a conscious attempt to put on the screen certain New Zealand characteristics, to portray certain New Zealand types, to illustrate certain New Zealand social situations, and even to move New Zealanders to adopt certain social and political attitudes. *Runaway* is clearly intended to show New Zealand, and to entertain and instruct New Zealanders.\(^{25}\)

Manning’s angst clearly recalls Raleigh’s pre-existential experience because, in a world that holds no meaning for them, the two Men Alone can only drift. Yet *Runaway* moves as predictably towards its tragic conclusion as *Point of Origin*, *Philosopher Dick* and *A South-Sea Siren* reach their happy endings. Rather than present a truly existential record of meaningless events, all three narratives implicitly sustain the convention that running away from responsibility and fellowship will lead to despair and death.

A synopsis of *Runaway* suggests that its sensational plot and stock characters recall the unambiguous conventions of a nineteenth-century melodrama. In the opening scene Manning socializes with an expensive clique whose lifestyle he cannot afford. Because his respectable employer and parents will not condone his dishonest acquisition of a sports car, he runs away north to a small town on the Hokianga harbour in search of a place where he can be free to decide what kind of man he really is. At first Manning thinks he could be happy as a fisherman. Yet when his new friend Joe introduces him at the marae, he admits his reservations about the uncomplicated faith in God and the church that Joe’s whanau maintain. “It’s all right”, Manning says to Joe, “as long you don’t want anything else”. When Joe’s cousin from the city performs at the local dance hall the lyrics of his song, “Runaway ... drift away ... like a bird ... wing away”, recall the film’s title and foreshadow Manning’s behaviour. The protagonist has already started an affair with Laura Kossavich, the stereotypical “loose woman” whose

promiscuity contrasts sharply with the chaste behaviour of Isobel, the young Maori woman Manning has carelessly charmed away from her boyfriend at the dance. Chagrined by Manning’s interest in Isobel, Kossavich later taunts him until he dumps her ignominiously in the mud. In revenge she tells the local policeman, a stock character as two-dimensional as she is herself, that the protagonist has molested her. Manning runs away yet again, this time hitching a ride with a self-made businessman whose character failings are utterly appropriate to the type: a racist, the businessman refuses to pick up a Maori hitchhiker; with the obvious implication that nothing had better get in his way, he swerves his expensive car to run over a hedgehog. When the businessman has a heart attack, Manning bolts from the scene to avoid being blamed for his death. Stealing the businessman’s car and ferry ticket and heading south to the West Coast, he meets Diana on the ferry, and she, by yet another melodramatic coincidence, is probably the businessman’s daughter. Diana, who lacks her father’s meanness of spirit and clearly recalls the faithful, supportive women of early New Zealand fiction, might be able to turn Manning from his path toward self-destruction. When they reach the West Coast and take refuge in a hut for two weeks she counsels Manning (as Gillian counselled Peter in \textit{Point of Origin}), pointing out that although much of what happens is determined by chance, “You can change .... You can be free”.

The film treats Clarrie, whom Manning and Diana meet at the hut, with considerably more irony. Played by Barry Crump and probably related to the narrator of Crump’s first novel, \textit{A Good Keen Man}, Clarrie (“a bit o’ deer’ll do me” is the most articulate line he mumbles) represents a popular contemporary version of the traditional New Zealand Man Alone. Although as a hunter Clarrie leads the sort of purposeful existence close to nature that the young runaway can only dream about, he is so uncouth that he intimidates Diana and shocks Manning into temporarily abandoning his often repeated desire to become one with the wilderness. In spite of Clarrie’s unappealing qualities, however, he does at least adhere to an approximation of the traditional sanction against murder. Manning is an alleged murderer, and in Clarrie’s view he has stepped over the boundary which separates acceptable from unacceptable behaviour. Thus although Clarrie would not ordinarily help the police, it is he who informs them of Manning’s whereabouts. Clarrie, who is not driven to suicide by his worries about the meaninglessness of existence, also helps to confirm the runaway’s status as an unworthy Man Alone whose life and death point to a cautionary lesson.

After Clarrie has informed on Manning, the protagonist runs away yet again. In this last escape, however, he figures as a rather more sympathetic character who is being hounded by a callous society. Up until this point Manning has drifted away from the
consequences of his actions. “You’ve got to let the winds carry you along”, is the explanation he gives Diana. Yet when Diana persists in her role as the kindly voice of reason and recommends that he go back to “face it all” Manning’s reply, “I’ve chosen to face whatever I have to face — here”, is notable because it signals that for the first time the runaway has consciously chosen to accept responsibility for his actions. When Diana twists her ankle and begs his pursuers to “Let him go! Let him go!” the policeman stops the pursuit: “There’s no sense chasing him — he’s had it.” When the mountain guide adds “Young fool. It’s no more than he deserves”, the viewer could sympathize with Manning’s desire to escape the judgemental society his pursuers represent.

Like Mark Burke in *Cliffs of Fall* who hurls himself over the edge of a cliff and dies when the ocean washes him from the rocks below, Manning is judged and punished not by God but by inexorable natural forces. On the mountain pass Nature seems to agree with Clarrie, the policeman and the mountain guide: the Runaway deserves to die. Manning’s fate also recalls the deaths of Marley in *Outlaw’s Progress*, Milsom in *The Huntsman in His Career*, Il Brutto in *The Feared and the Fearless* and Jack in *Strip Jack Naked*. It anticipates the suicide of Jim Dougherty in *Moving Target*, which I will discuss presently. Losing the confrontation between themselves and a society whose rules they have broken, all of these Men Alone have been executed or have committed suicide.

It could be argued that Manning should not be compared to a killer because he does not kill anyone. He is merely the unlucky passenger in a car driven by a man who has a heart attack. Yet even though Manning does not kill the businessman, he does hide his body and steal his car. Because Diana reminds him of the dead businessman, he even considers allowing her to drown when she falls out of the fishing boat. Manning had already hidden one body and, alive, Diana could hamper his flight.

Why Manning dies may be explained by comparing him to Johnson in *Man Alone*. As I show in Chapter Two, Johnson is involved in an accidental death, fears arrest and escapes from the authorities by trekking across the Kaimanawa Ranges. Yet Johnson is not caught and punished for the killing, and *Man Alone* ends almost happily. Like his pioneer forebears, Johnson is tested by extreme adversity and gains an appreciation of fellowship with others. As a kind of mythical war hero, he seems to transcend death. Even if Manning’s attempt to cross the mountain pass is taken as evidence of a similar kind of transcendence, because he would rather destroy himself than submit to society’s dictates (an interpretation which his departure through the towering mountains accompanied by dramatic organ music seems to suggest), the conventions which have so conspicuously moulded the film’s plot and characterizations
prescribe that the runaway who does not learn to appreciate fellowship cannot be redeemed.

In summary, just as *Philosopher Dick* and *Point of Origin* cannot be considered as truly existentialist novels because their plots and characters are too conventional, so *Runaway* is too reliant on New Zealand's Victorian tradition to be considered an existentialist film. Perhaps Manning could best be described as a Victorian Man Alone whose experiences and character have been coloured by a mixture of Victorian conventions and the post-war existentialist mood. Thus while Manning does not specifically discuss existentialist concepts as Peter does in *Point of Origin*, the existentialist mood is distinctly evident in his lack of values, his alienation from society and his desire to merge into the impassive West Coast landscape.

iii.

In his autobiography Barry Crump mentions that Jean Watson, his second wife, “wrote a book about our adventures called *Stand in the Rain*”. A comparison between *A Good Keen Man* (already noted as the probable source of Clarrie) and Watson’s *Stand in the Rain* will demonstrate that although the two narratives are related (both are semi-autobiographical first novels and both have obviously emerged from New Zealand’s Man Alone tradition), they reflect profoundly different views of the human condition.

Like the writers of New Zealand’s pre-existentialist narratives, Crump characterizes the wilderness as a tester of men and portrays mateship and the beauty of nature as the Man Alone’s prime sources of comfort. Even though the title of Crump’s novel is ironic because most of the “good keen men” he describes are just the opposite, Crump’s persona celebrates the warm and tolerant mateship which he sometimes enjoyed:

> The odd mate or two came and went again, all good keen men. A few were good, some were hopeless, and most were bloody awful. A week on the block usually separated the men from the boys. Sometimes when I had a good mate we’d sit over the embers of the evening fire swapping views on the best dogs, rifles and methods of hunting.

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Obviously Crump’s protagonist is not as educated and articulate as Raleigh and Crump’s writing style is less formal than Chamier’s, yet his description of nature’s grandeur recalls the earlier writer’s celebration of the wilderness in *Philosopher Dick*:

In the valley it was a clear, warm evening and I stopped for a smoke at a bend of the river. Flynn came and lay at my feet as the last of the sun raked the ridge-tops. Away towards the head of the valley ridge piled on ridge, blue with distance, to the sharp skyline of rocky peaks. A pair of ducks called in the river, an early possum ran out on a branch, and a hawk hung in the still air. It all belonged to me. It was my block.

I ambled slowly down the last river-flats in the blue dusk thinking how a man was better off here than in town, paying through the nose for his dog-tucker and with everybody going like hell to do things that didn’t really need doing. You got a bit browned off with things in crook weather, but most of the time it was O.K. A bloke could appreciate a warm, dry hut and a good feed when he’d been a bit wet and hungry for a while.28

Watson, by contrast, describes the experiences of an individual who is uncertain about everything in a universe that sheds all attempts to make it meaningful. While her novel makes no explicit references to existentialist ideas, it could definitely be described as advancing an existentialist world-view when it implicitly questions the assumptions about fellowship, nature and purpose which Chamier and Crump sustain in their narratives.

The brief dust jacket description of the 1965 Pegasus Press edition of Watson’s novel describes Sarah as providing a woman’s point of view of the Man Alone tradition:

Here is the woman’s side to a New Zealand legend. Here is the girl behind the good keen, deer-killing, possum-trapping, pig-hunting, rabbit-shooting, scrub-cutting, hard-case, dinkum-type Kiwi. *Stand in the Rain* is a haunting, amoral tale of young love, told with brilliant simplicity.29

A passage from the novel itself provides Watson’s title, celebrates the self-sufficiency of the traditional Man Alone and seems to extend that quality to Sarah herself:

Often I have cooked meals over a campfire while it’s raining and we have stood close together in our damp swannees holding enamel

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Yet Sarah is not just "the girl behind" Abungus. As an individual who interprets her experiences, she is analogous to Raleigh and a Woman Alone in her own right.

In another sense, however, although she acquires some proficiency in bush-survival (in the excerpt above Sarah learns how to make tea and cook in the rain), in the world of the traditional Man Alone she cannot manage alone and is dependent on Abungus for most of the novel. While, like Diana, Frieda, Janfrey, and Francie, Sarah undertakes a learning journey, unlike Duckworth's protagonists she will receive no satisfaction from the changes which experience and increased self-knowledge have wrought in her. Unlike those of Duckworth's women whose unsatisfactory relationships propel them into managing their own destiny, Sarah is not empowered by her declaration of independence. Several of Duckworth's women have the help of sympathetic male characters as they try to find their feet. There is no one to aid Sarah: Abungus will not teach her how to drive the Land Rover, and she does not seem able to arrange driving lessons with anyone else.

Even so, Watson's protagonist does learn some lessons. When Sarah acknowledges the profound effect that the break-up of Abungus' marriage had on her own relationship with him ("In those days I was very unobservant about people and their relationships with one another, especially marriage relationships. I didn't know or think much"31), she shows that along with self-knowledge she has developed a non-judgemental attitude towards those who believe and behave differently than she does. Later this development would extend to an acceptance of her parents' disapproval of her unconventional lifestyle:

I don't blame them for not understanding now, I know now. I don't blame anyone for anything now that I know people are what they are and in most cases what they are not and can only do the things they are capable of doing, and life is just 'things that happen'.32

In his Listener review of Stand in the Rain David Hall pinpoints the existential world-view which Sarah implies with her assertion that "life is just "things that happen". Characterizing the main characters' penchant for movement as a "series of

30 Watson, Stand in the Rain, p. 148.
31 Watson, Stand in the Rain, pp. 13-14.
32 Watson, Stand in the Rain, p. 56.
beat-generation incidents"; he invokes the existential adventures which motivate the plot of *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac's definitive novel of the Beat Generation. (The "pop existentialism" of the Beats is undoubtedly one of the conduits through which the existentialist philosophy reached a wider audience.) From university student to casual worker, to jobless, to employee again, Sarah migrates from flats in the city to a series of rural dwellings before she returns to the city again as she continues her search for meaning. Abungus leaves his wife and returns to her, starts and abandons various jobs, and seems to settle in several locations before he and Sarah finally part. In Kerouac's novel *Sal Paradise* tells of the discomfort of a long car journey turned into a celebration because the discomfort was shared with companions:

> It was a tough trip and none of us noticed it; the heater was not working and consequently the windshield developed fog and ice; Dean kept reaching out while driving seventy to wipe it with a rag and make a hole to see the road. "Ah holy hole!" In the spacious Hudson we had plenty of room for all four of us to sit up front. A blanket covered our laps.

Sarah's description of her first journey with Abungus is remarkably similar:

> A cold dark night and the stub axle broken, puffs of air from the motor warmed our feet and we had a blanket, we didn't belong anywhere, we weren't real people, not like those living behind curtains in the lighted windows we were passing. But we were going somewhere so that was all right, it didn't matter.

The difference between these two passages emerges from Sarah's ambivalence about her journey with Abungus, apparent in her emphasis on the traveller's dreamlike freedom from responsibility when she views conventional life from a distance and through curtained windows at night. In the excerpt below as well, her description of the makeshift home she shared with Abungus implies that she was aware of her tendency to avoid reality as she depicts her mother's life in a less complicated time:

> The electric stove was never used. Half past five I'd get up in the morning and light the wood stove — just like the earliest memories I have of what my mother used to do. A wire rack to keep plates hot and to dry clothes on on wet days.

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Silver and black ... paint it with Silvo and black the top with Zebo once a week ... see the flames glow through the blackened grate and the glowing reflections of flames on the silver. Polish the black top as it dries ... pull out the damper and hear the draught sing in the chimney ... rake soot out of dark hidden places ... Shacklock ... Orion ... an early memory ... a wood stove burning, with the smell of manuka and a kettle always singing there.36

A happy memory, yet it is of the past rather than of Sarah’s present with Abungus.

As Abungus allowed Sarah to play at being a home-maker, he may have represented freedom from conventional restrictions. By the end of her narrative, however, Sarah has learned to question the ideal of freedom she pursued with Abungus:

I have at times wanted to belong with a cape, or trees and mountains for a landmark, and then found — although I knew it before — that it’s too hot, with mosquitoes, or too cold, with nothing to do, and then wanted a tar-seal road and ‘going somewhere’ again.

There are people who will never get used to marriage is ‘why is the stew burnt and where are my clean socks and must you do that when I ...?’

There are people who will always look in lighted windows and want to be there behind the safety of drawn blinds, and when they are there they’ll suddenly not want it or something will bugger it for them and they will feel the road beneath their feet again, and when they’re too old for that they will from time to time watch it through the window of a bus or train — someday it will get them.

And when we sleep will the road unwind dreamlike before us?37

Thus Watson’s novel lacks the closure so apparent in A Good Keen Man, when Crump’s protagonist reminisces about his mates and expresses a sense of contentment. Since neither Watson nor Sarah hint that there is an answer to the question the protagonist poses at the end of her narrative, Stand in the Rain ends without resolution. But whatever the author’s intention, Sarah’s final query encapsulates the existentialist attitude at the heart of a post-war novel about a Woman Alone: the only conclusion that Sarah is able to reach is that she cannot reach a conclusion.

36 Watson, Stand in the Rain, p. 146.
37 Watson, Stand in the Rain, pp. 149-150.
iv.

Like *Point of Origin*, *Runaway* and *Stand in the Rain*, Graham Billing’s first novel *Forbush and the Penguins* reflects aspects of New Zealand’s pre-existentialist Man Alone tradition, even as it adapts to that tradition some of the existentialist ideas in the air after World War Two. Thus like all of the Men Alone I have considered so far Forbush will seek to interpret, or Billing’s narrative will allow the reader to interpret, his predicament. Tested and purified by the extremes of the Antarctic environment while he studies the Adelie penguins on Ross Island, at first Forbush is isolated in unfamiliar surroundings. Like Peter, who must find his ‘point of origin’, Forbush orientates himself:

Where is north, south, east and west, Forbush thought and carefully turned in a full circle as if he was a compass needle set spinning and, being too close to it, unable to find its pole.  

Like several of the Men Alone already discussed Forbush learns to accept and even to celebrate his loneliness:

He began in these days to find a certain peace in the silence and no longer talked aloud to himself. He felt clear-eyed and unstrained, accepting, and no longer anxious for the penguins. In fact, he hardly believed they would come at all and was content to live simply, day by day.

Yet Forbush’s understanding of the human condition is far from complete this early in the novel and he must learn further lessons as the Antarctic tests his new serenity. For example when the penguins finally arrive at the rookery, Forbush identifies so strongly with their struggle that he kills some of the skuas which predate on their eggs and hatchlings. He must learn that to place the survival of one kind of bird over another is futile and that individual lives have no importance in the natural order. This lesson is emphasized by Forbush’s quarrel with an American public relations visitor to the rookery who is rather obviously and satirically named Joe Sloberman. When the visitor tries to photograph a promotional picture of a penguin in a bathing suit, he accidentally destroys two penguin eggs. Although in his review of Billing’s novel Lawrence Jones describes the incident as only “peripherally relevant” and “not

sufficiently interesting in itself to merit inclusion”, 40 in my opinion the arbitrary destruction of the eggs serves to dramatize Forbush’s equation of his destiny to that of the penguins.

A comparison between Forbush and the Penguin and two of Davin’s early narratives like “Under the Bridge” and Roads from Home will show that both authors are concerned to demonstrate their protagonists’ utter lack of importance in a world governed by evolutionary processes. Davin compares his protagonists to insects. Billing emphasizes the inconsequence of his protagonist when, early in the novel, Forbush considers the weather “and found his voice thin and pointless among the echoless frozen rocks.” 41 Later Forbush worries that his attraction to Barbara, a librarian he had met in Christchurch, suggests that his existence is governed by an instinctive urge to reproduce:

Was there any real difference between the way in which the sun imposed a rhythm on the lives of the penguins and the way the moon caused the huge swell and ebb of tidal oceans? All round the Antarctic continent millions of animals were now moving south as if drawn by some immeasurable tidal force so that, in their millions, their kind would continue year by year — an individual was a meaningless entity, an insignificant portion of the animal tide. Forbush was appalled and felt suddenly as if he, himself, was trapped in the tide of moving south, of moving north, of being born, living, growing and inconsequentially dying. 42

Yet the answer to Forbush’s question separates Forbush and the Penguins from Roads from Home and defines Billing’s and, in his later works, Davin’s development of the Man Alone tradition. Although the protagonists in Roads from Home are mostly self-aware, Davin portrays them as victims of a deterministic nature until he arranges their fates with a convenient train accident. Billing, by contrast, arranges Forbush’s experience in such a way that his protagonist will expressly realize his freedom to make choices and his responsibility for these choices.

A further lesson emerges from Barbara’s realization of the danger of Forbush’s fixation on his personal inconsequence when she sends him the translation of part of a poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky, which the poet had written just before his suicide:

41 Billing, Forbush and the Penguins, p. 10.
42 Billing, Forbush and the Penguins, p. 32.
“She loves me? She loves me not ... ? I’ll cut my hand off, fling aside my severed fingers. They’ll scatter on the wind like petals from the wayside flowers, the camomiles that lovers pick to tell their fortunes ....

“I swear that I shall never speak with the shameful tongue of common sense.

“Past one o’ clock — you must by sleeping. Or perhaps you too ....

“The tide is ebbing into sleep. So let us say: ‘The fun is over. Now you and I are quits. Why should we chart our wrongs and hurts and grievances? Love’s boat has piled on the reef called Commonplace and now breaks up.’

“Past one o’ clock — you must be sleeping. The Milky Way spreads like a river through the night upon her huge and silver course.

“Look. How quiet it is. All the earth is silent. Night has embraced the sky with a gift of stars. Now can a man stand, speak, his words echoing through the ages, history and all Creation.”

Like the persona in Mayakovsky’s poem, Forbush could eschew commonsense and remove himself from a world that takes no notice of him. When Barbara comments, “Don’t ever let it be like this for you, Forbush. It’s too beautiful, tragic, hopeless. Never be like this,” she functions as Forbush’s “still, small voice”, similar to the one that prevents Raleigh’s suicide in Philosopher Dick. Yet because the two messages emerge from different generations with different assumptions about the nature of existence, they make different demands on those who receive them: Raleigh’s admonishes him that suicide is a sin and exhorts him to celebrate the gifts God has given him; Forbush’s, by way of the mortal Barbara and with no mention of supernatural interdictions or endowments, entreats him not to give up on the world.

Forbush does not understand why Barbara is not troubled by his worries about meaninglessness. As he explains to Starshot, a scientific colleague who visits the rookery over Christmas:

“She doesn’t believe in anything. God or anything like that. But she seems to understand something, she’s all calm inside as if she knows. It’s probably an illusion. I’ve just probably got to believe in her believing in something or knowing something because I feel as if I don’t know anything myself.”

Paradoxically, it is Forbush’s faith in Barbara’s mysterious knowledge that shields him from utter despair. So, too, do contemporary remnants of Christian custom: when Starshot goes to the rookery to share Christmas with the injured and overwrought Forbush, it is his fellowship which helps the protagonist to recover from the effects of the blizzard. If Barbara is similar to Raleigh’s “still, small voice”, then Starshot is like Dr. Valentine who supports Raleigh through the crisis of his alienation from station society. He also resembles the hermit Crawley who sustains Johnson after his trek through the Kaimanawas. Like Barbara, Starshot seems to understand something that Forbush does not; and, although the phlegmatic Starshot has disturbing dreams he is reluctant to discuss, he is attractively self-sufficient. Starshot is satisfied with the terms of his existence: in balance with the Antarctic environment, he is certain of his status and duties as the leader of his sled dogs. His parting dialogue with Forbush summarizes another of the lessons Forbush must learn, how to accommodate himself to the limits imposed by an indifferent environment: “‘Well take it easy feller. You know. Things’ll come right. Don’t take the birds too seriously. See you.’”

The final lesson takes place in a scene reminiscent of Raleigh’s near-suicide in *Philosopher Dick*. In the earlier novel *Dick* Raleigh becomes overwrought by his isolation as a shepherd and is appalled by the logical consequences of his substitution of God with Darwin’s theory of evolution: if there is no God, then human beings are animals with no control over their fate. *Dick* Forbush is nearly driven to suicide too when he realizes that the lives of the penguins are completely determined. In his despair Forbush resembles Peter on the cathedral spire looking down at a world where, because there is no God, everything is permitted. Or, as Peter later explains to Gillian, “‘There is only man by himself. Without a rudder’”. When Forbush grasps a skua chick which he can either kill or set free, he echoes Barbara’s lament on the plight of Mayakovsky’s persona:

> “It’s too tragic ... hopeless.”
> What is? What’s the answer? There’s no answer. But if I do nothing I’m being used. I’m a victim. There’s no answer. If I kill this chick there is no answer. If I let it go there is no answer. If the chick is dead nothing will be changed. If the chick lives nothing will be changed. If I kill this chick I will take nothing away from the world. If I let it go I will contribute nothing to the world.

....

> If all the penguins died and were eaten by all the sea leopards, nothing would change. If no skua gull ever nested on the Cape again,

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45 Billing, *Forbush and the Penguins*, p. 163.
nothing would change. Life is not an individual thing but a total thing, a volume like the sea. Therefore I am a victim. But if I know I am a victim I am a victim no longer. I am free.

He shouted. The voice broke forth from his heart.

“I am free. I’m free. I am. I am free. I do not understand but I am free.”

When Forbush comes to the conclusion that he is “free” because he realizes that he is a victim of the natural law that every living thing must die, he resembles Sisyphus in Camus’ reading of the Myth of Sisyphus. Like Sisyphus, Forbush resolves to continue living despite his knowledge that the boulder of his existence, which he had been pushing uphill, will inevitably roll downhill again. Unlike animals which have no consciousness of their fate, Sisyphus and Forbush can choose to end their existence before they have to die.

In conclusion, although Forbush resembles Raleigh when he prepares to face a promising future with the help of Barbara, the woman he loves, his explicit realization of his freedom and responsibility to act in an uncertain world does not recall the worldview of a pre-existentialist Man Alone. Instead it reflects an awareness of the existentialist challenge which was in the air in post-war New Zealand: as a self-responsible Man Alone Forbush must somehow balance his own freedom against his need to live with others.

V.

Jim Dougherty, the protagonist of Jack McClenaghan’s Moving Target, spends most of the novel trying to survive in the wilderness alone before he dies, alone. Despite these cues, however, David Hall fails to detect in his short Listener review any evidence of the Man Alone tradition beneath the novel’s deterministic surface. Nor does he describe the protagonist’s decision to commit suicide as a reflection of the existentialist mood:

Unencumbered with the symbolism of Man Alone or The Huntsman in His Career, the adventures of Dougherty, the West Coast prospector-deer culler who deserts from the army in wartime, are simply a film scripted for a popular audience .... Originally pacific, at a crisis

46 Billing, Forbush and the Penguins, p. 188.
[Dougherty] can be ruthless. The ending loses tragedy in its inevitability. 48

While Moving Target clearly owes nothing to Sartre, McClenaghan’s narrative about Dougherty sustains several of the conventions common to Man Alone fiction. Like Mulgan in Man Alone, McClenaghan uses his protagonist as an unthinking outsider whose observations of his surroundings debunk the New Zealand Myth of Progress. Dougherty’s experience recalls three of the assumptions which bolster the fellowship convention: first, that leaving society to wander alone will purify the Man Alone; second, that individuals eventually need fellowship in order to survive; and third that those who rebel against society will be punished, particularly if they kill. As one of those protagonists who kills and then dies himself, Dougherty belongs to quite a large group of Men Alone who, although they are purified as they grow more and more isolated, cannot achieve a conventional happy ending because they do not rejoin society. Thus the authorities execute Marley in Outlaw’s Progress, Milsom in The Huntsman in His Career and Il Brutto in The Feared and the Fearless; Burke in Cliffs of Fall, Jack in Strip Jack Naked, Gregory in Over the Fence is Out, Manning in Runaway and Dougherty in Moving Target all kill themselves.

Much as the title of Cliffs of Fall portends what will happen to Burke, the title of McClenaghan’s novel foreshadows Dougherty’s doom: Dougherty is a moving target; people shoot at targets; eventually, Dougherty will be shot. The epigraph helps establish the novel’s inevitability:

And so farewell,
For soon we’ll be leaving.
The hour is late,
And we must wend our way.
We’ll say goodnight,
There is no need for grieving.
We hope that we’ll
All meet some other day. 49

As in the discussion of Runaway, a synopsis of the events of Moving Target will demonstrate just how inevitable the protagonist’s death is. As a deer culler, gold prospector and crack shot, McClenaghan’s protagonist is conscripted into the New Zealand Army to fight in World War Two. But he soon escapes from the training camp

49 Jack McClenaghan, Moving Target (Wellington: Reed, 1966).
because he cannot conform to the military's rules: even saluting superior officers represents an impossible infringement of his freedom. At first the Army hunt Dougherty as a deserter and intend to imprison him. When he continues to elude them, however, they decide to kill him as a deterrent to others who might desert. As Dougherty persists in escaping his hunters he resembles Owen Marley and Gerald Milsom, whose exploits are based on the historical pursuit of Stanley Graham. Like Marley and Milsom, Dougherty revels in his sense of freedom away from the luxuries and restrictions of conventional society.\textsuperscript{50} In time, he becomes as bushwise as Arawata Bill, the legendary hermit he had met earlier:

[Dougherty] wished the old fellow was still alive so that he could demonstrate to him how much he had learned. He was especially proud of the way his senses had sharpened in the months since he had neither smoked nor drunk beer.\textsuperscript{51}

Towards the end of Moving Target Dougherty celebrates the way that surviving in the wilderness has cut through the veneer of conventional morality:

It was only when he slowed down close to the house that Dougherty felt the zest that comes when a man is committed to relying solely on himself for survival. It was exhilarating, a clean, impersonal energy that purged him of the runaway feeling which had sometimes made him feel ashamed over the last few months.\textsuperscript{52}

Dougherty has learned how to travel quickly and far, and in the same way that Mulgan focuses on Johnson's actions in Man Alone as he struggles to survive in the bush, McClenaghan emphasizes the unthinking quality of Dougherty's trek through the wilderness to escape capture: "It was no time for reasoning of any kind; all his body could do was respond to his great will to escape and survive, and so he kept going."\textsuperscript{53} Yet even though Dougherty has survived an avalanche and killed two man-eating dogs and a soldier, he has not developed into a kind of existential superman. He has simply

\textsuperscript{50} Jones, "Stanley Graham and the Several Faces of Man Alone", in Barbed Wire and Mirrors, pp. 296-312. Since publishing his essay about Stanley Graham, Jones has discovered that Dougherty's experiences are not another fictional account of the Graham manhunt. Moving Target is based on the manhunt of an actual army deserter. Yet this does not invalidate my comparison between Dougherty and Graham. Both clearly belong to the Man Alone tradition.

\textsuperscript{51} McClenaghan, Moving Target, p. 72.

\textsuperscript{52} McClenaghan, Moving Target, p. 151.

\textsuperscript{53} McClenaghan, Moving Target, p. 64.
put into practice one of the lessons Arawata Bill taught him: "'The bush is neutral; it's neither for you nor against you, you just learn to make the best use of it, that's all.'"\textsuperscript{54}

When Dougherty explains the nature of the wilderness to another friend, Charlie Southey, it becomes evident that the protagonist has attained the stoicism characteristic of Johnson at the end of \textit{Man Alone}:

"You could dump me down blindfolded in any part of the Yeelas and I'd know where I was on the first look around. It comes natural. Just give me a little start and no one could catch me. I wouldn't travel at night once, but I got used to it when I had to. You just get used to things. If a bloke has to do a bit of running around when soldiers come marching all over the place, then he has to. It doesn't hurt you much. If your body's fit you can do anything."\textsuperscript{55}

When Charlie asks Dougherty, "'But how will it end?'" the protagonist defines the existentialist mood with a declaration similar to Sarah's in \textit{Stand in the Rain}: "'Think I'm a bloody fortune teller? How do I know? How is anything going to end? You can't tell. It's just one of those things.'"\textsuperscript{56} Dougherty may not know the answer to Charlie's question, but the reader is hardly surprised by his suicide in the final paragraphs. When Dougherty is finally wounded in the arm, he kills the sergeant who shot him. The arm becomes gangrenous and Dougherty kills himself because, even if the pursuing soldiers do not shoot him on sight, when they imprison him he will lose the arm and his freedom.

According to convention then, like Manning who cannot return from isolation to society, Dougherty has to die. Along with the conventions that govern the survival of Men Alone in both \textit{Runaway} and \textit{Moving Target}, however, there is evidence of the post-war existentialist mood. Like Sarah, Dougherty is aware that life is unpredictable. Yet Dougherty's suicide implies that even though he has developed his senses until they are as sharp as an animal's, he has retained his human freedom to hasten his death. Thus Dougherty resembles the protagonist of \textit{Forbush and the Penguins}: against the background of an indifferent nature, both consciously choose whether to live or die.

\textsuperscript{54} McClenaghan, \textit{Moving Target}, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{55} McClenaghan, \textit{Moving Target}, p. 163.
\textsuperscript{56} McClenaghan, \textit{Moving Target}, p. 163.
According to Lawrence Jones, writers adjusted the experience of the Man Alone to emphasize different concerns during different periods. If Paddy Hogan, the protagonist of McClenaghan’s *Travelling Man*, were a traditional Man Alone like Raleigh, after he had observed conditions and interpreted them, he would rejoin society, strengthened; or, he would succumb to the wilderness. The experiences of Johnson and Bill emphasize a different concern: their endurance of hardship during the Depression implicitly debunks the Myth of Progress, which Raleigh’s nineteen-century experience had sustained. As a farm and road labourer, transporter of bootleg whisky and swagman, Hogan travels the length of New Zealand during the Depression. Yet *Travelling Man* was published a generation after *Man Alone* and *That Summer* and has a different emphasis: its protagonist emerged from the post-war era when the debunking of the Myth of Progress had widened to a disregard for many more of the moral verities left over from the previous century.

That McClenaghan’s novel has a different emphasis is immediately apparent: on its dust jacket, below the boldly stencilled title of *Travelling Man*, the subtitle (*A New Zealand novel*) and evocative illustration (a trail of footsteps across the necks and torsos of women), locate and define the action of a Tough Guy narrative about the most misogynistic of the Men Alone to be considered so far. Published some ten years after *Moving Target*, *Travelling Man* seems to invalidate the convention, which McClenaghan had maintained in the earlier novel, that fellowship is necessary for survival. In its place he appears to admit the amoral behaviour of Paddy Hogan, who moves on when circumstances do not suit him, does not learn to appreciate fellowship and is not punished by society.

I suggest that *Travelling Man* seems to disregard the fellowship convention and appears to accept Hogan’s amorality because McClenaghan’s attitude towards his protagonist is hard to pick. Like Hemingway, McClenaghan intentionally distances himself from his protagonist: he never uses the authorial voice to assert his point of view, and he never allows the third person narrator to reflect on Hogan’s behaviour. The only source of information about Hogan is Hogan himself. According to Frank Sargeson, however, “it is impossible for any serious novelist to finish his story without

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letting you know (at any rate, implicitly), that he has judged his characters".59 Hemingway, for example, judged the characters he created according to a code based on his perception that, given the nada at the centre of existence, moral behaviour is meaningless. A Hemingway hero who lives by the code is tough and does not deceive himself. Yet McClenaghan's judgement of his protagonist is unclear. While Hogan resembles some of Hemingway's Tough Guy characters in that he survives as a kind of existential free agent, the author implicitly measures his behaviour against that of New Zealand's traditional Men Alone who learn to value fellowship.

The seeming lack of a moral standard in Travelling Man could be explained by its resemblance to the tough guy novels of the 1930s. According to Sheldon Grebstein, the American Tough Guy is the literary descendant of James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Burmppo, Herman Melville's Ahab and Jack London's Wolf Larsen. All of these characters

are physically hard and emotionally tough. All are supremely adept at their crafts. All espouse objectives which frequently do not square with conventional moral norms but which are admirable nonetheless. All are pragmatists who employ questionable means towards desirable ends. In the Darwinian terminology, they are superbly equipped in the struggle for existence; in the Nietzschean, they practise a Master rather than a Slave morality.60

Except that Hogan does not unequivocally espouse any socially admirable objectives, in his travels throughout New Zealand he resembles the larger-than-life literary figures described above, the supermen, more closely than he does the moderate Johnson and Bill. Although McClenaghan's protagonist shares with these two earlier observers of the Depression some of the characteristics of the traditional Man Alone, unlike Johnson and Bill who often ignored society's rules but still believed in fellowship and kindness, Hogan is violent, vengeful and has scant regard for the law. While Johnson and Bill drift from job to job, careful to avoid trouble, Hogan is generally opportunistic. While Johnson does not want to fight with Stenning about Rua or to punish her for her involvement in Stenning's accidental death, and Bill is philosophical about the money which his seeming friends steal from him at the beach, Hogan is eager to retaliate

60 Grebstein, "The Tough Hemingway and His Hard-Boiled Children", in Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties, p. 18.
A little later Ned, a bootleg whisky distributor who is prosperous even though his activities are distinctly criminal, describes the same area optimistically. When Turncott, one of Hogan’s work and travel companions, ironically remarks on the unreality of Ned’s hopes, the myth’s groundlessness becomes even more apparent:

‘The good thing about this place is the people .... They have to be real battlers, otherwise they wouldn’t take this country on. They’ll never do much more than scratch a living out of it, but one day it will come right.’

‘We’ll all be under the sod by then,’ said Turncott sourly.62

Yet despite their similar purpose, the debunking of the Myth of Progress, Johnson and Hogan do not reach similar conclusions about the society they interpret. In Mulgan’s version of the rioting on Queen Street, for example, Johnson is caught up in the rioting by accident when he attends a street rally about unemployment. He does not take part in the looting but fights for his friend Scotty who is being beaten by a police officer:

Johnson was angry now. He was angered by the brutal blow he had seen, in all that evening’s brutality, and angered, too, to think that of the few who would be picked out and punished for all that night’s work, one of them must be Scotty, the small, the stupid, at heart the inoffensive.63

Eventually Johnson comes to the conclusion that an economic system which forces men to work uselessly for little money will cause them to revolt. During the Spanish Civil War he becomes a kind of hero as he stoically endures hardship in the company of fellow soldiers, the ideal Man Alone “you can’t kill”. Although Hogan is a survivor, too, his behaviour is hardly that of a hero. Early in the novel Hogan burns the scrub which he and Turncott had been employed to cut because he wants to punish the farmer who had pushed them to work harder and harder in uncomfortable conditions before terminating their employment when they would not work hard enough. Pleased by the thought of the farmer scrambling uphill to escape the fire, Hogan shows no concern for his survival. When their next job, the delivery of illegal whisky, leads to the death of a pursuing policeman the protagonist and Turncott go their separate ways. Although they have travelled and worked together for some time, they part without regret because individual survival is more important to them than fellowship. Hogan’s lack of concern about others becomes even more apparent in Invercargill when he plans to start a romance

62 McClenaghan, Travelling Man, p. 23.
63 Mulgan, Man Alone, p. 58.
with a young woman even as he maintains sexual relations with the widow who helped him find work on the Hollyford Road. When the widow discovers Hogan’s intended infidelity and remonstrates, he hits her and leaves. In McClenaghan’s version of the rioting on Queen Street, it is Hogan himself who accidentally initiates the protest. Unlike Johnson, he does not view it as a sign of men “going forward together”. Nor does he believe that the looting is a consequence of economic hardship. On the contrary, in Hogan’s opinion the rioting demonstrates that violence and greed are commonplace and, unlike Johnson, he takes part in the looting. As Hogan later remarks to Marie, his companion at the riot, “‘everyone out there tonight enjoyed smashing all those windows and pinching what they could’”. His instinct for self-preservation is apparent when, even though unwilling to aid the Specials in their efforts to control the rioters, he joins them nonetheless to avoid trouble with the police. When Marie seriously injures Hogan during the second night of rioting because he has not remained faithful to the cause of the unemployed, in revenge he will inform the police that she has looted a fur coat.

Unlike Raleigh who begins Philosopher Dick as alienated from conventional society but ends by marrying into it, or Johnson and Bill who survive on the margins of society with the help of a few good mates, or Manning and Dougherty whose lonely deaths sustain the assumption that community is better than isolation, Hogan survives even as he continues to hurt others. Yet the absence of moral evaluation of Hogan’s behaviour in most of the novel does not mean that McClenaghan has adopted, without question, the Tough Guy ethos about which Orwell complains in No Orchids for Miss Blandish. In the excerpt below, for example, Hogan’s attempt to interpret all that has happened to him approximates the journey from ignorance to awareness that Johnson travels in Man Alone:

A funny thing, all those adventures he’d had; no one could possibly have predicted them, the scrub cutting, the dropping, the work on the Hollyford road, on the swag in Central Otago, looting one night and fighting the looters the next.

One adventure after the next, but without a pattern. It had been a sort of jellyfish existence in which he’d been content to be carried along by events and had never tried very hard to swim against them.

All those experiences, however, did something to a man. They were changing him. Did that happen to every man? Did they all have their life and their very being shaped even against their will? Did no one really have the power to say what sort of man he would be?

64 McClenaghan, Travelling Man, p. 166.
65 McClenaghan, Travelling Man, p. 181.
The passage may signal that since Hogan has realized how his experiences have changed him, he could now begin to take responsibility for his destiny. On the other hand, it might also challenge the notion that experience could somehow change a Man Alone. While the narrator does not explicitly comment on the discrepancy between the protagonist’s meditations and his behaviour, the ironic juxtaposition of Hogan’s contradictory thoughts and actions does provide a compelling (if silent) commentary. Hogan’s explanation to Turncott about why he has refused an offer of employment with a prosperous businessman (“I learned not to get too involved. As far as I can see ... there is no sense in beating your heart out or your guts out, for anything”66) provides a further example of his inconsistency, especially when the protagonist announces that he would rather support unionized labour than the owners who think they can hire and dismiss workers without taking the workers’ needs into account. Yet when Hogan says about the unions “I might get mixed up with them”, it is not wholly because he wants to improve conditions for the ordinary worker: in the new order anticipated by Savage, unions will hold more power than the owners. The protagonist’s vengeful thoughts about Marie are as ironical: after Hogan decides to support the trade union movement, he ponders the punishment he will impose on a woman who believes passionately in workers’ rights.

Yet it is only near the end of the novel that McClenaghan suggests that Hogan’s unthinking Tough Guy ethos, far from enhancing his lifestyle as a free agent, will probably continue to restrict his options. Perhaps McClenaghan’s attitude towards his protagonist might best be explained as a shadow of the outlook he maintains in Moving Target. In his earlier more traditional novel Dougherty accidentally kills a soldier in self defence and then commits suicide because he knows that, inevitably, the Army will either imprison or kill him. McClenaghan’s ambivalence about Hogan’s existential freedom to do as he wants may evidence the continued influence of the fellowship convention on New Zealand’s Man Alone tradition.

Thus, although Hogan’s fate in Travelling Man is far less obvious than Dougherty’s, it is not unreasonable to suspect that, eventually, he will be punished for his misdeeds — sometime after the end of the novel.

As in nearly all of the Man or Woman Alone narratives already considered, the learning journey at the heart of Albert Wendt’s Sons for the Return Home definitely

66 McClenaghan, Travelling Man, p. 185.
recalls New Zealand's Man Alone tradition. In a novel set in New Zealand, Wendt employs a young and alienated Samoan immigrant to reveal the inaccuracy of the memories he and his family have of Samoa. Through his protagonist's experiences Wendt also exposes the disappointing reality of New Zealand's Myth of Progress. As I suggest in the previous section, McClenaghan may or may not accept approve of Hogan's curiously innocent behaviour. But in Sons for the Return Home Wendt records, with a distinct lack of irony, his protagonist's development into an explicitly existentialist Man Alone. This lack of ironic distance may indicate the autobiographical tendency of a first novel: Wendt (also Samoa's first novelist) begins his narrative with the dedication, "in memory of my brother Lloyd, who could not make the return". It could also signal the passionate attempt of a young author to communicate non-traditional ideas about the human condition. Like Erik de Mauny, who adapted Sartre's brand of existentialism to New Zealand in The Huntsman in His Career, Wendt adjusts elements of Camus' variety of existentialist thought in Sons for the Return Home. Yet when Wendt merges Camus' interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus with the Maori myth of Maui to represent the protagonist's loss of illusions, his acknowledgement that he must take responsibility for his destiny and his realization that he is free and "happy", Sons for the Return Home promotes what is perhaps the most explicitly existentialist treatment of the development of a Man or Woman Alone in New Zealand literature.

Like Raleigh, Wendt's protagonist will survive his testing in the wilderness. In Wendt's version of the learning journey, however, the wilderness is urban New Zealand and parts of Samoa rather than the sparsely settled regions explored by earlier Men Alone. Like Raleigh, Wendt's protagonist will have a romance. Yet rather than signalling his return to conventional society, the romance will end bitterly. Even so, both narratives end once the protagonist has realized what he must do to be "happy".

I have accentuated "happy" with inverted commas because New Zealand's early writers, as well as those who later retained some of the conventions of the Man Alone tradition, had a different understanding of the word's meaning than Wendt reveals in his novel. Jess Olive in Satchell's 1902 novel Land of the Lost associated the settlers' inevitable progress in New Zealand with happiness and peace in a benevolent, God-controlled universe. Although Jack Stevens in Wilson's Strip Jack Naked ends the novel as "happy Jack Stevens" and, with his death, seems to achieve the happiness Camus attributes to Sisyphus, his fate after he has killed a complete stranger reinforces the traditional assumption that only the virtuous can live happily ever after in a stable society. Unlike Satchell or Wilson, Wendt specifically identifies his protagonist's experience with the myth about Sisyphus. The "collection of essays by Camus" which
the protagonist recalls giving to his girlfriend early in the novel probably contained Camus’ interpretation of this myth. Unlike Jess, Wendt’s protagonist comes to the conclusion that happiness will follow his accommodation to the circumstances of his life, summarized by the quotation from Pindar’s *Pythian iii* on the title page of *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

> O my soul, do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible.  

The epigraph introduces Camus’ conception of the happiness born of the responsibility that human beings incur once they acknowledge that they have no special status in an indifferent universe. It also introduces his conviction that, even in a world without God, “suicide is not legitimate .... even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism.” As in his already quoted example about the absurdity of “a man armed only with a sword” who attacks a group of machine-guns, Camus exemplifies the dilemma of the absurd man:

what he demands of himself is to live solely with what he knows, to accommodate himself to what is and to bring in nothing that is not certain. He is told that nothing is. But this at least is a certainty. And it is with this that he is concerned: he wants to find out if it is possible to live without appeal.

According to Camus, the absurd self-conscious man can live without appeal:

> If I were a tree among trees, a cat among animals, this life would have a meaning or rather this problem would not arise, for I should belong to this world. I should be this world to which I am now opposed by my whole consciousness and my whole insistence upon familiarity .... And what constitutes the basis of that conflict, of that break between the world and my mind, but the awareness of it? If, therefore, I want to preserve it, I can, through a constant awareness, ever revived, ever alert .... At this moment the absurd, so obvious and yet so hard to win, returns to a man’s life and finds its home there .... The hell of the present is his Kingdom at last. All problems recover their sharp edge. Abstract evidence retreats before the poetry of forms and colours. Spiritual conflicts become embodied and return to the abject and magnificent

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68 Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 3.


shelter of man’s heart. None of them is settled. But all are transfigured. Is one going to die, escape by the leap, rebuild a mansion of ideas and forms to one’s own scale? Is one on the contrary going to take up the heart rending and marvellous wager of the absurd? ... The body, affection, creation, action, human nobility will then resume their places in this mad world. At last man will again find there the wine of the absurd and the bread of indifference on which he feeds his greatness.

Let us insist again on the method: it is a matter of persisting.71

At the beginning of the chapter entitled “The Myth of Sisyphus” Camus summarizes the myth and specifically identifies Sisyphus as the absurd man, “ceaselessly rolling a rock”.72

When the protagonist of Sons for the Return Home explains to his girlfriend that “the absurdity in life was at the core of all Polynesian myths”,73 Wendt is relating Camus’ ideas regarding absurdity to Maori myths about the half-god half-man Maui. Thus, like Camus’ absurd man who attacks a group of machine-guns with only a sword, Maui decides to challenge Hine-nui-te-po, the goddess of death. In his attempt to humiliate the goddess Maui penetrates her, intending to exit through her mouth. But the fantails with him wake the goddess when they giggle:

‘And Hine-nui-te-Po she woke up and found him in there. And she crossed her legs and thus ended man’s quest for immortality.’74

By debunking Samoan illusions about progress and permanence, so as “to live solely with what he knows, to accommodate himself to what is and to bring in nothing that is not certain”, Wendt’s protagonist embarks on his own “marvellous wager of the absurd”. He comes to realize that the “home” his mother had evoked for her children was as unreal as the settlers’ and their descendants’ memories of their “home” in England. After years of listening to her describe the island of her birth

a new mythology, woven out of her romantic memories, her legends, her illusions, and her prejudices, was born in her sons: a new, fabulous Samoa to be attained by her sons when they returned home after surviving the winters of a pagan country.75

74 Wendt, Sons for the Return Home, p. 102.
75 Wendt, Sons for the Return Home, p. 76.
Yet the inaccuracy of these beliefs becomes apparent to the protagonist when he registers with his New Zealand-trained perceptions the dirt, flies and violence of Samoa. Ever the outsider, he criticizes what he sees as the Samoans’ schizophrenic respect for papalangi ways, which they believe to be inferior to their own.

As he continues to investigate the disjunction between hope and reality, Wendt’s protagonist directs an even more critical scrutiny at the New Zealand Myth of Progress. His girlfriend’s narrative about the source of her family’s prosperity indicates that it did not inevitably result from their worthiness but from their dishonest acquisition of land from the indigenous Maori. Sargeson and Mulgan had depicted their characters as learning to deal with the consequences of a failed Myth of Progress. Thirty years later, Wendt’s two young characters take the myth’s failure for granted. Beginning with a description of her tradesman grandfather who acquired land in return for leading an armed expedition to push the remnants of a Maori tribe from confiscated territory, the girlfriend details his insensitivity to the beliefs of the conquered Maori as well as his convictions about the destiny of the British Empire:

‘Being British (and a certified plumber) grandfather didn’t believe in leaving the land as it was, or in tapu, ghosts, and eating rats. He believed fervently in Progress under the British Flag and God’s Protection and in converting the bush into meadows populated by gambolling snow-white lambs and the English landed gentry riding stallions.’

Alan Mulgan had attributed these hopeful beliefs to many of the colonials he wrote about in his descriptions of New Zealand. While John Mulgan’s protagonist is puzzled for most of Man Alone by his inability to enjoy the fruits of New Zealand’s prosperity, even so, Johnson is never cynical. Nor is Bill in Sargeson’s That Summer. Unlike these earlier protagonists, the girlfriend is fully aware of the irony of her description of how her grandfather’s hard work was rewarded by profit, even as it degraded the land and led to the destruction of Maori culture:

‘He used fire, and for lengthy periods the plain choked with flame and smoke. Fire brought him quicker prosperity, which enabled him to hire farm workers and buy machinery, which in turn speeded up the clearing of the bush. Bare of its cover, the land on the hills eroded, and periodic floods threatened to destroy all he’d built — a comfortable home, flocks of sheep, and a dairy herd. He levelled all the pas and used the rocks

76 Wendt, Sons for the Return Home, p. 88.
from them to dam the main stream and direct it on a new course well away from the house.\textsuperscript{77}

After much hard work, the grandfather’s farm was prosperous and his reputation respected. Yet his effort was ultimately futile: neither of his sons would take up farming. On his deathbed, the grandfather uttered a refrain common in New Zealand’s debunking literature when he “mumbled something about the bloody bush and the land having beaten him”.\textsuperscript{78}

The protagonist’s relationship with the old man’s granddaughter also reveals the futility of human endeavour, but from a Samoan rather than a British settler’s point of view. As a result of their move to New Zealand and many years of hard work, the protagonist’s family has become relatively prosperous and returned to Samoa. The protagonist, however, is unable to enjoy their prosperity with them: when he discovers that his mother advised his girlfriend to have an abortion, his mother’s unwillingness to accept a foreigner into the family destroys his relationship with both of them.

Yet \textit{Sons for the Return Home} ends “happily”: the protagonist resembles his grandfather who, according to his father, “believed that the circle of life has no beginning and no end. And that each living thing, even the gods, is part of that circle, part of its centre”.\textsuperscript{79} The very title of Wendt’s novel encapsulates his protagonist’s conclusion that the circularity inherent in Polynesian myth is an accurate metaphor for the human condition. The youngest son of each generation of the protagonist’s family in Samoa had traditionally become a healer. His grandfather was a healer, yet he betrayed that vocation and his love for his wife when he terminated his wife’s fifth pregnancy because he did not believe he was the father. Even though he realized that she had always been faithful, it was too late: the abortion killed her. The protagonist’s father, a youngest son, also broke with the tradition. To improve his family’s economic situation, he had become a factory worker in New Zealand instead of a healer. Betrayal echoed through his experience, too, when he deserted his first friend in New Zealand because the friend’s wife was promiscuous. The protagonist, another youngest son, also chooses not to become a doctor. He leaves his girlfriend after learning of the abortion of their child.

The concluding pages of Wendt’s novel suggest that the return foreshadowed in the title is possible only if the individual is without illusions. The shedding of misconceptions began when the protagonist’s grandfather confessed to the protagonist’s

\textsuperscript{77} Wendt, \textit{Sons for the Return Home}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{78} Wendt, \textit{Sons for the Return Home}, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{79} Wendt, \textit{Sons for the Return Home}, p. 207.
father how his mother had died. After planting a circle of palms the grandfather died and was buried within it, thereby regaining his place in the cycle of life in Samoa. Some forty years later at the grave site, the protagonist’s father admits to his son that he and his wife had attempted to live through their sons:

‘I always regretted the fact that your grandfather died before I could acquire the secrets of his cures, the gift of what he was as a man. I don’t regret that any more. I’m at least satisfied with what I am. I’m happy in Samoa now .... You were always a crutch for me and your mother. We used you to prop up our pride, our hopes, with your accomplishments and grace and beauty and courage .... I know that now, and feel free by admitting it to myself.’

With this admission the protagonist’s father also returns to his home in Samoa.

The protagonist, however, is so like his grandfather that he sees “‘too clearly’” and “‘will never be happy with things as they are’”. He “‘will always be in permanent exile’” and “‘will never belong anywhere’”. Thus he will return to New Zealand but knows it will not be to stay. At the airport for the flight to Auckland, Wendt’s protagonist lacks the illusions which bolster the many around him who are migrating to New Zealand:

Silently they sat, trying to overcome their fears of the present — of the plane exploding into flames and hurtling down into the unforgiving solidity of earth or into the sea, into a horrible oblivion. And more distressing fears of what lay ahead — of the wilderness of cold unknown cities in a country which, they had heard, God had forsaken.

But, as the plane continued to defeat fate, to maintain a haughty equilibrium above the chasm below struggling to suck it down, the promise of the future and their dreams of lucrative jobs, money, houses, cars, a good education for their children, calmed their fears, gave meaning to their journey into what they all believed would be only a temporary exile from which they would return unharmed, unchanged, rich.

Knowing that the migrants’ hopes are unrealistic, Wendt’s protagonist searches through his papers for the poems he had written about his girlfriend and demonstrates that he has lost any illusions he had about her: “As he read them she came alive again. Then he tore up each poem carefully.” Unlike the immigrants on the plane.

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80 Wendt, *Sons for the Return Home*, p. 204.
81 Wendt, *Sons for the Return Home*, p. 204.
He had nothing to regret; nothing to look forward to. All was well. He was alive; at a new beginning. He was free of his dead.83

*Sons for the Return Home* closes as the protagonist writes the conclusion of the story of the absurd encounter between Maui and Hine-nui-te-po on the cover of the equally absurd “slick Technicolor tourist brochure ... that the smiling hostess had given him”. His resemblance to Sisyphus is obvious when he specifically relates Maui’s story to Camus’ interpretation of the myth about Sisyphus by adding that “He imagined Maui to have been happy in his death”. At the end of his essay, Camus leaves Sisyphus with similar words:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one’s burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He, too, concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.84

And this is where I will leave my survey of New Zealand’s Men and Women Alone. Wendt’s protagonist is even more rootless than his immigrant ancestors, who at least had hope to sustain them. Yet in a Godless universe such as they could not have imagined, Wendt’s protagonist has learned to limit his expectations of life and to develop his own set of values.

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Conclusion

Two related trends have become apparent throughout this study. The first is that New Zealand's literary existentialism has developed unevenly. Some of the country's nineteenth-century narratives, even though profoundly influenced by the Victorian literary tradition which the pioneers and settlers had brought with them, reflect a pre-existentialist response to the difficulties of surviving in a new and unpredictable environment. Later narratives about the Depression are also infused with an existentialist mood, contemporaneous with and separate from the first modern statements of existentialist thought in Europe. Despite this evidence of an indigenous literary existentialism, only a handful of writers connected with New Zealand definitely approved of the modern existentialism which was becoming increasingly popular around World War Two; most reacted unfavourably or took it for granted. Even those writers whose fiction implies the dangers to society of pursuing existential freedom, or whose narratives suggest that existentialism was "in the air", tended to share certain of the existentialists' assumptions. Proceeding from a realistic or naturalistic stance, they imply that human beings have no special status in an indifferent universe and that individuals should take responsibility for their own destiny. Eventually, however, both the pre-existentialism of the early Men Alone and the more conscious existentialism of later Men and Women Alone have been absorbed into New Zealand's literary tradition: uncertainty is part of the modern human condition. Even so, a convention retained from early manifestations of the literary tradition has profoundly influenced and, I believe, continues to influence the second of the trends this study has revealed. With few exceptions in either New Zealand's pre-existentialist or existentialist literature, the individual's learning to appreciate fellowship and to accommodate him or herself to society has unquestionably influenced the outcome of his or her narrative.

So far this study of literary existentialism has traced only a few of the paths New Zealand's Men and Women Alone have taken in their narratives; there is a lot more mapping to be done. The following is only a selection of the many approaches and questions that my reading has indicated. For instance Samuel Holland Hux's dissertation, American Myth and Existential Vision: The Indigenous Existentialism of
Mailer, Styron and Ellison, suggests that there are similarities between the fiction that emerged from America’s and New Zealand's pioneering backgrounds. Does the fact that America has produced several well-known existentialist writers, and New Zealand has not, mean that New Zealand has the stronger Victorian tradition? Another route into New Zealand’s literary existentialism might pass through Sargeson’s collection of books at his bach in Takapuna, which reportedly contains a number of existentialist texts. An in-depth study of Sargeson’s reading could explain the existentialist atmosphere that Baxter perceived in his narratives. Existentialism was definitely “in the air” in New Zealand, yet a consideration of biographical details of the overseas studies and wartime experiences of writers like Burdon, Mulgan, Davin, de Mauny, Wilson, Texidor and Kavan might reveal more of the specific origins of their existentialist-flavoured narratives. My feeling that Camus has had more influence on New Zealand literature than Sartre could suggest that many New Zealand authors, descended from a literary tradition built on a Christian and then humanistic regard for fellowship, have been naturally drawn to the humanism inherent in Camus’ writings. Yet it could also reflect a personal bias towards Camus’ ideas or even the arbitrary nature of my samples. Perhaps my tentative conclusion about the relative importance of Camus’ influence will be confirmed when all of New Zealand’s literature and literary criticism is available for computer search. Whose name occurs the most often? More difficult to ascertain (but even more interesting), is whose ideas are more frequently adapted to New Zealand conditions? And what about narratives by Mansfield and Janet Frame, or, more recently, Maurice Gee and Owen Marshall, which also have an existentialist flavour? Although I have progressed only a little way along some of the paths mentioned above, I suspect that none of them is a dead end.

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Abbreviations: ATL = Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington; BR = Beaglehole Room at Victoria University, Wellington

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