

or Frank Sargeson, or the rhetorical inverted-romanticism of Dan Davin. The nearest thing I know to it in New Zealand writing is the ordinary manner of Sir Howard Kippenberger, or Archibald Baxter's *We Will Not Cease*.

But the strongest unifying factor of all, of course, is the writer's own point of view. *Man Alone* is a political novel, a monument to the generation that came of age in the 'thirties—the generation, in New Zealand, of *To-morrow* and the Left Book Club; the generation, internationally, of violent and generous partisanship in China and Abyssinia and Spain. John Mulgan, it is true, had often something of an ironical detachment from the political enthusiasms of his contemporaries, and his belief in fraternal revolutionary activity was later to be modified by war experiences in Greece. But he was enough a man of his time to conceive his story of Johnson in political terms, and enough of an artist to avoid obvious propaganda.

SO *Man Alone* became both a social documentary and a manifesto. The choice of hero (a common working man, not one of those sensitive intellectuals whose painful childhoods and adolescences have proved so irresistible to so many New Zealand writers before and since) followed naturally from such a conception. Johnson in the novel is never so important at any given time for what he is (his one positive instinct is self-preservation; for the rest he is as selfish and amoral as the average Hemingway hero) as for what he becomes—the tested, reliable revolutionary fighter in Spain. The framework of the Spanish civil war in which the New Zealand story is, a little clumsily, enclosed, may be regarded as the macrocosm which gives point and significance to the microcosm—the clash of social forces in this country, and the uncomprehending part that Johnson plays in it.

Johnson, who never seems very remarkable to us as we read about him, yet impresses everyone he meets with a sense of his potential human value. The moral of the book (clearly indicated in the title borrowed from Hemingway) is that this potential can only be fully realised in collective and purposeful revolutionary activity—in Spain, Greece or wherever men come together to fight for the future against the past. It is characteristic of Mulgan's honesty and clear-sightedness that he never over-simplifies the issues, draws no fairy-tale pattern of the Left being always right. Johnson finally gets to Spain through a muddled process of pressure, drift and decision: he is no political ideologue, but he knows which side he is on. And the last glimpse we have of him, sitting in a tunnel by the Spanish frontier under air attack after the cause he fought for has gone down to defeat, is the firmest and most purposeful stroke in the whole book.

MAN ALONE is not a good novel, but it is a novel with elements of greatness; and it is social history of enduring value. For it has perspective. This, the reader who comes to it fresh may know instinctively, is what New Zealand really was like between the wars. This is North Island farming as the ex-servicemen so often knew it; this is what the Auckland riots of 1932 really were, not what they may be heightened into by the historian with an axe to grind. And the power of the book, over

and above any accurate reporting or observation, is due to its affirmation of faith in men working together, if not in man alone.

Two things about this bare antipodean tale would have pleased Matthew Arnold: it is a criticism of life, and it animates. The criticism of some of our most cherished beliefs (notably, of our belief in our own abiding national tradition of kindness and tolerance) is as valid to-day as when it was written. But the rarer quality of the book, I believe, is its call to action. Not necessarily the sort of action that took Griff MacLaurin to Madrid: nor even necessarily the sort of action that John Mulgan

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