

**The Man Alone, the Black Sheep and the Bad Apple: Squeaky Wheels of
New Zealand Cinema**

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In two recent New Zealand films, *Black Sheep* (Jonathan King, 2006) and *Eagle vs Shark* (Taika Waititi, 2007), the now passé trope of the Man Alone is framed as a squeaky wheel in love with its own malfunction. In King's horror-comedy, a reluctant hero, Henry, who is pathologically afraid of sheep, fights his older brother Angus, a mutant were-sheep, with the assistance of his eco-activist love interest, Experience. By the end of the adventure Henry, a de facto city boy, reconciles with the land of his settler forebears. Waititi's romantic comedy presents a self-absorbed and unromantic hero, Jarrod, who struggles to shine in the shadow of his deceased brother, Gordon. Jarrod and his dysfunctional father, Jonah, find themselves and each other through the supportive example and family values of love interest Lily. In both films the heroes begin as dysfunctional "men alone" and female characters, together with renewed contact with the land of their family homes, prove crucial to their catharsis, an outcome that is often missing in more traditional treatments of the trope.

The strategy for recuperating these men alone involves Antipodean Camp, a style of humour identified by Nick Perry in 1998 and characterised by excess, reversal and parody. Perhaps because they come almost a decade later, *Eagle vs Shark* and *Black Sheep* do not encode the "genuflections to European taste" Perry notes in his examples, and, unlike those films, *Black Sheep* and *Eagle vs Shark* are self-aware enough to play on double meanings that point to "any idea of culture, including a national culture, as artifice" (Perry 14). While Antipodean Camp can be read as saying, "We, down under, give you, our superiors, the finger" (Bielharz 229), Waititi and King's "self-conscious foregrounding and reframing of local identity" (Cameron 56) multiplies possible readings of the films' subtexts. Local audiences, if they choose, may enjoy jokes against themselves while perceiving colonialism

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and the European centre from which it came as the real butt of their alternative readings of the jokes. The message then becomes: We, down under, give you the finger, knowing that you will not notice. We are no longer under your spell.¹

It can be no accident that the first literary Man Alone in New Zealand was English. He appears in the novel *Erewhon* by Samuel Butler, published in 1872 during the long depression (1865–1890) a mere three decades after the drawing up of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Although not necessarily recognised in Britain, Butler’s setting matches the South Island landscape where he spent the early 1860s farming sheep. The novel’s title, however, is the reverse spelling of “nowhere” and the name of an uncharted land Butler’s protagonist discovers on his adventure of exploration. As he penetrates the rugged interior, he is troubled by the realisation that the sublime beauty and grandeur of the landscape clashes with his own vulnerability within that isolated environment. His need to prioritise survival threatens to reveal as construct not only familiar Victorian customs of decorum and respectability but also English morality, law and order. When he arrives at his destination, however, his Englishness reasserts itself and he makes a fanciful return journey in a hot-air balloon, a possible nod to the unlikely nature of his adventure and the easy and total resolution of his identity crisis.

In the first half of the twentieth century the Man Alone’s angst is a serious matter of cultural displacement, arising from belonging in one place while having close ancestral and artistic ties to another. His inability to settle is linked to New Zealand’s cultural cringe, sustained throughout the period and arising from the belief that all admirable writing, art and history is in, or comes from, Europe. On the one hand the Man Alone suffers cultural loss, and on the other he does not gain the freedom he expected in New Zealand because the taboos and imperatives of the old world thrive in the new (Fox, *Ship of Dreams* 15). This Man Alone, widely acknowledged as epitomised by Johnson, the protagonist in John

¹ Beilharz follows J. G. A. Pocock, a cosmopolitan New Zealander who regards himself as “an Antipodean and a neo-Briton” (Pocock, 264). Both scholars refer to settler cultures of British origin in that way. I prefer the term Pākehā, a New Zealand term, because I do not identify as a Briton, neo or otherwise.

Mulgan's 1939 novel, *Man Alone*,² is a "paradoxical figure of both existential alienation and self-sufficiency" (Wilson, "From Colonial Outsider to Postcolonial Insider" n.pag.). Johnson, an Englishman damaged by experiences in World War I, is secure in his sense of entitlement to New Zealand, but he lacks a sense of belonging. While he finds temporary refuge in the bush, isolation and contact with the land does not prove cathartic.

By the 1950s the trope had been "demythologized with successive rehandlings," resulting in increased "complexity" but also a loss of "sympathy" so that by the 1970s the trope (in literature) was ripe for parody (Wilson, "From Colonial Outsider to Postcolonial Insider" n.pag.). At the same time, it was revived in the new wave of New Zealand cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, again as a symbol of cultural displacement (*Cinema of Unease*) and again complex, but without parody.

Throughout, the trope is characterised by brooding unease that seems to emanate from the land to trouble the men who are lost or mired in a psychological minefield that causes them to withdraw into their shell. In general they display "emotional retardedness, and non-conformity" (Wilson, "From Colonial Outsider to Postcolonial Insider" n. pag.); they are morose, discontent, often violent and/or outside the law. Alone and lonely they make a futile bid for catharsis by sharing their pain only with the land or the bush. Unlike their contemporary counterparts, these men regard women and family as irrelevant or marginal, or as a temptation and/or a catalyst set to entrap them into responsibilities and social obligations that the rebel, having come to see them as burdens, has rejected. In the end, most find a place in the world but remain outsiders who do not heal or attain a deep self-awareness, regardless of where they travel.

Sam Neill explains the cultural cringe and its links to the *Man Alone* in the 1995 groundbreaking documentary on New Zealand film, *Cinema of Unease: A Personal Journey by Sam Neill*. He also argues convincingly that the darkness, unease, menace and uncanniness captured by New Zealand film arise variously from the land and from the

² Janet Wilson calls Butler's novel the "ur-text" of the trope (n.pag.).

settler psyche. In the documentary Neill fails to pinpoint the slippage between the two, citing numerous films where a maladjusted man is linked to unease in the landscape. At the pinnacle he places Al Shaw, the protagonist in Roger Donaldson's 1981 film *Smash Palace*.

Smash Palace opens with Al having returned from a more sophisticated lifestyle in Europe to occupy the derelict property he has inherited from his recently deceased father. That the land supports a demolition yard (the Smash Palace of the film's title) indicates the local/European dichotomy that troubles Al and, perhaps, his father before him. Al's failure to sustain a career as a Formula One driver in Europe haunts him, and, as his marriage deteriorates, the part of Europe he has brought back with him, his French wife, leaves him. As a Man Alone Al is wronged, but as a postcolonial he is the wrongdoer because he seeks to obliterate his wife's difference by taking her into isolation with him as he withdraws from society. When she refuses, he breaks down the door to her home and assaults her new partner. Then he kidnaps their daughter and heads for the bush. In the end fatherly love prevails and he gives himself up to police. Thus a sense of paternal and familial responsibility signals possible rehabilitation of Al, but it does not deal with the slippage between land and psyche or suggest a way forward. The cultural cringe is supposed to explain, although not excuse, Al's bad behaviour.

J. G. A. Pocock notes that "those who cannot cease attacking the 'cultural cringe' or the 'colonial cringe' are not free from it and may be perpetuating it" (14). Neill's film has come in for that kind of criticism (see McDonald 1985) and, although a useful and entertaining text, it seems dated now that the focus of Pākehā anxiety is more firmly on issues of (particularly the duality of) biculturalism. While I do not intend to engage with the wider implications of biculturalism as a political system of inclusion and exclusion, it is pertinent for my argument to note the following points: firstly, many Pākehā are either ambivalent about biculturalism or at a loss as to how they might contribute to it; secondly, even for some of the many who embrace the term "Pākehā," its official use does not

remove its associations with colonisation; and thirdly, New Zealanders of mixed Māori-Pākehā heritage must come to terms with both sides of their heritage.

Waititi and King's playful treatment of the Man Alone addresses these issues of biculturalism. In both narratives we encounter absent mothers, dysfunctional families, rural family homes, and withdrawn protagonists who demonstrate psychological unease and seek contact with the land. King's Henry lacks machismo altogether and Waititi's Jarrod makes unsuccessful attempts to acquire it through inept acts of overtly masculine (bad) behaviour. Issues of settler and mixed Māori-Pākehā identity are evoked by the humour, setting and back story, and by intertextual references to the Man Alone trope. For instance, when we meet the adult Henry, he cowers in a taxi waiting for a mob of sheep to pass, terrified and inarticulate. Some of the high-angle interior shots are reminiscent of earlier New Zealand films, including *Cinema of Unease*, where Sam Neill drives around showing New Zealand scenery and giving commentary. For local audiences this allusion signals that the film will have fun with contemporary issues of masculinity and the idea that New Zealand landscapes are "dark and menacing." Those in the know may also recall Lawrence McDonald's observation that in the documentary, "[a]part from Neill himself, the only other things that move ... are, tellingly, large quantities of sheep" (22).

Both films use their men alone to speak (albeit sometimes in code) to New Zealanders about the cultural cringe, cutting it down to size by hinting that it lives on more strongly in the minds of those for whom it constitutes an elevation. This is one of the subversive in-jokes that enrich specifically local readings of the films' references to a range of New Zealand identity positions. Waititi's Jarrod has a Pākehā father and a Māori mother. Colonial discourse is evoked in the way a photograph records his mother's ethnicity and covers for her absence. Her ethnicity, not remarked on in the film, intensifies her silence or, depending on the reading, implies that Māori ethnicity is a simple fact of New Zealand life. Her difference contributes to Jarrod's identity crisis only because she has left to become a lesbian in Australia – a humorous but double desertion, given New Zealand's friendly rivalry with Australia. Her ethnicity, and Jarrod's, is confirmed by family video of Jarrod's

brother, Gordon (played by Waititi), who is more obviously Māori in appearance than Jarrod.

Unlike Jarrod, Gordon was a high achiever, an accomplished artist, successful at sport and the apple of his father's eye. Jonah, who is well named, clings to his grief at losing Gordon. He seems not to notice he still has a living son and he is even more troubled than Jarrod. Family videos reveal that he has been in the habit of living through Gordon's sporting achievements. With Gordon gone, he does not "have a life." His emotional disability is represented by his insistence on using a wheelchair to move around, even though he is not physically disabled. Jarrod's lame attempts to gain his father's attention escalate in inappropriateness until at last Jarrod shocks not only Jonah but also himself. Jonah rises from his wheelchair moments before Jarrod realises that he has gone too far and, for the first time that we know of, experiences the self-awareness of shame. On reflection, and prompted by Lily, Jarrod gains acceptance of himself, and Jonah realises that he must put self-pity aside and help Jarrod. Local audiences can choose to read Gordon as the high-achieving indigene, an example of potential for the future that can only occur given the right conditions, and Jarrod can be read as the troubled young man, the fact of the twenty-first century. It follows that Jonah's blindness which rendered Jarrod all but invisible can be read as metaphor for Pākehā society's continuing blindness to the potential of those young Māori who are underprivileged or visible for the wrong reasons.

King's Henry is descended from a settler family who have farmed long enough to trace their time on the land back to the days of colonial acquisition. The film opens with Henry's father, Mr Oldfield, with the young Henry and his equally young friend Tucker (obviously of Māori heritage) riding farm bikes and working the sheep dogs with skill and assurance. Moving effortlessly, communicating well in the golden sunshine and spacious outdoors of the farm, they make a vision of pre-lapsarian innocence. That this innocence will not last is signalled by the shadows on the hills in the background and by Henry's older brother, Angus, a calliper on his leg, unable to take part in the round up. Local audiences will note the irony of the name: there is a breed of sheep called the Angus, and their most

obvious difference is that they are black. The name links Angus to the darkness of the landscape, highlighting his jealousy and foreshadowing his fate at the film's ending.

Later that day Angus commits the foul deed that incapacitates his brother: he murders Henry's pet sheep, Cedric.³ The audience sees Angus pick up the axe and lead Cedric into the barn. When Henry arrives to feed Cedric, portentous and clichéd music references the horror genre, implying that one brother might kill the other in an archetypical tale of sibling rivalry. Tension rises as Henry enters the barn and action is momentarily withheld. Then Angus, dressed in Cedric's bloody carcass and shouting loudly, jumps out at Henry from the shadows of the barn. Most of the audience also jump. Before the affect can dissipate, the boys are told of their father's death from a fall while rescuing a sheep that has gone over a high cliff (we suppose this to have been an accident). Thus not only is Henry's fear of sheep closely associated with his brother; local audiences also recognise a reference to the 1984 New Zealand film *Vigil* (dir. Vincent Ward).

Like the farmer in *Vigil*, Mr Oldfield's sacrifice for the good of his flock deprives the offspring of a parent in a time of need. This last is highlighted when Henry's heroism links to his father's own through Mr Oldfield's Golden Shears Trophy. This trophy, a prestigious national award familiar even to many urban New Zealanders, symbolises Mr Oldfield's dedication to the skill and hard work of traditional farming methods, closely associated with good health and mainstream ideas of masculinity. Although the local audience expects that the shears are a talisman that will protect Henry, their power is no match for the evil Angus. Angus, his humanity compromised from a bite by one of his own progeny, has grown to god-like stature by conjuring new lives in the laboratory and is unaffected by Henry's attempt to subdue him. Even that symbol of modernity and capitalism representing Angus's own enterprise, the aeroplane, fails to arrest his mutating monstrosity. By this

³ The name Cedric alludes to Peter Jackson, New Zealand's famous son and founder of splatstick. In *Meet the Feebles* (dir. Peter Jackson 1989) Cedric (a warthog) is a gang member. His sidekick is a dog and his boss, Mr Big, is a whale. Although this film is a sluppet film, not splatstick (most of the characters are puppets), the humour is dark and the puppets demonstrate Jackson's interest in special effects. The cast also includes a weta, a porn star (a possible reference to the blood and gore special effects by Weta workshop), and Jackson himself, who makes a brief appearance dressed as a character from his splatstick film *Bad Taste* (1987).

time, Henry has developed characteristics, including courage and the ability to innovate with what is to hand (referencing Kiwi DIY), that mark him as a “Kiwi bloke” who “in a UK context would be marginalised because of his class identity” (Bannister n. pag.). Henry owns a farm but it is located on the margins, remote from the more sophisticated Europe. The Golden Shears and the plane, both dual in their symbolism of good farming and Britain’s “expropriation” of the Tangata Whenua (Pocock 215), are emptied of any remnants of colonial power and irrelevant to Henry’s mission.

Earlier in the film, Angus nurtures a relationship with business investors from all over the world, bringing them to his farm to present the supersheep he and an unprincipled scientist have developed using illegal genetic engineering experiments combining sheep DNA with Angus’s own. Angus’ plan is to export the sheep in large numbers. Because they are superior to all other breeds and because they are not naturally bred (Angus supplies part of the DNA), the supply will remain in his control. In effect, he plans to head a wealthy corporation that will expropriate control of northern-hemisphere sheep farming from down under. Such high stakes ensure that Angus and the scientist he employs collude to hide the side-effect: were-sheep that bite, causing humans and sheep alike to mutate into were-sheep.

The first perfect sheep is, of course, not only large with a superior and abundant coat of wool but also whiter than white. When Angus showcases her to potential international clients, she stands out against the sky in a shot that recalls the young Angus watching and turning away from the pre-lapsarian sheep-herding scene. The comparison is continued as, like Angus, she runs amok, calling the rest of the flock and joining them in biting and tearing the would-be buyers to pieces in excessive carnage that is the specialty of Weta Workshop. The violent behaviours of the genetically altered animals, should they escape, indicates a dystopian future, or no future at all, for the human race.

Although the film is a comedy with many gags and jokes, modern farming methods and intensive animal-breeding programmes are linked to ecological and ethical degradation

through farming as capitalist enterprise. Local audiences may recall that for more than a century New Zealand's function as Britain's "protein bridge" cemented New Zealand into its current economic position, limiting the development of manufacturing and stifling efforts to add local value to goods prior to export. This situation lasted into the 1970s and continued to loom large in the collective consciousness into the 1980s (Belich 433). The reference signals acknowledgement of that part of their duality that Pākehā need to address if they are to promote biculturalism. Experience makes this point when she begins to remind Tucker of his ongoing "disenfranchisement," but her message is dismissed by the men who are only conscious of the need to fight a common enemy on their home ground.

Angus's plans to make New Zealand a centre of agricultural and economic power through sheep whose lineage is genetically engineered alludes to the scientific experiments in the United Kingdom, where Dolly, the "cloned" sheep, was conceived in the laboratory. Technically, Dolly is not a clone but a "nuclear transfer" (Franklin 29), and there is no familial term to describe her or her relationship with the DNA donor. She lacks both separation from the original donor sheep and a distinct identity of her own (Franklin 26). Thus no unequivocal answer to questions about how the break in the natural progression of lineage affects the identity of Dolly and her progeny can be found. Dolly is literally the outcome of a "virgin birth" (Franklin 15–32), as, one supposes, are the progeny of Angus and his favourite sheep.

The sheep's disconnection from ancestry provides a parallel for Pākehā, especially apt since Britain is no longer thought of as the "mother country." That connection, only gradually fading in importance, was severed in the 1970s after, as Neill puts it in *Cinema of Unease*, Britain's "abandonment" of the southern "pantry" that the Empire had fashioned and taught New Zealand to rely on. Neill also points out that this rupture occurred at the same time as the new wave of New Zealand film, which includes several examples dominated by men alone and themes of darkness. Inversions of the trope in the 2000s, then, are historically as well as metaphorically connected to versions of Pākehā identity.

Avril Bell offers relevant data in her article, “Dilemmas of Settler Belonging: Roots, Routes and Redemption in New Zealand National Identity Claims,” where she analyses discussions with, as she puts it, young people of the “majority culture” (145–62), who analyse their own identity positions. Her sample is small; nevertheless, it is significant that all subjects express some confusion concerning both their national and ethnic identity. Most trace their inability to explain their past to their ignorance of, or vagueness about, their ancestral links to Britain. In contrast, participants are clear about the present: all except one found their sense of belonging to be troubled less by distance and more by ancestral colonial actions and/or continuing inequities between Pākehā and Māori. One subject, Sally, said that in order to “come to terms with our own cultural identity” Pākehā must not only “acknowledge the trauma of the colonial experience” but also “take the risk” involved in making “a space for tino rangatiratanga” (Māori political self-identity). But she did not know just what that risk might be or how to go about making space (Bell 156).

Corrine David-Ives stresses the progress that has been made through the work of the Waitangi Tribunal, set up in 1975 to assess and find ways to address claims under the Treaty of Waitangi. The Tribunal, she says, has accomplished real work of social importance, although it is constructed in western, not Māori, style. For instance:

In the Tribunal Māori can proudly stand as the “tangata whenua” (the people of the land), and New Zealanders of European descent no longer define themselves as Anglo-settlers in reference to the former mother-country, but as “Pakeha” in reference to the native people.

This in turn gives them new legitimacy in the land. (David-Ives 17)

David-Ives identifies in the work of the Tribunal “a phenomenon of ‘indigenisation’,” where “[t]he negative polarisation between the colonised and coloniser has been redeployed as a juxtaposition of the two cultures and frames of reference” (David-Ives 17).

Part of this work has been accomplished through the Tribunal’s remit that commits them to resist discourses of “victims and villains,” so that tales of “native heroes” stand alongside tales of “the Crown’s bad faith” (David-Ives 17). Thus colonial heroes such as “Good Governor Grey” (Pember Reeves, 1899, quoted in David-Ives 17) are now “deemed

responsible for starting the war in Taranaki in the 1860s” (David-Ives 16). This is in line with postcolonial views that render even Sir Edmund Hilary’s triumph of mountaineering in Nepal politically double-edged. Whether doubleness is analysed as the “juxtaposition of the two cultures and frames of reference” or as issues of colonialism yet to be resolved, it makes obvious that for Pākehā narratives the heroic quest is problematic because Pākehā nobility and heroism must be redefined.

To work openly through contemporary issues using up-to-date and locally recognisable tropes relating to colonialism, post-colonialism and current initiatives of biculturalism is to risk alienating international audiences and the income they bring. Like any local cinema, New Zealand initiatives are beset by tensions between the need to encode content in ways that will attract both New Zealand on Air *and* foreign funding, as well as national *and* international distribution. To internationalise a narrative, however, is to miss out on funding and tax relief available for local film making and to miss the opportunity to represent the local and interrogate local issues on the big screen. One way to localise a film is to base it on an established work of New Zealand fiction, but this, too, is problematic. Ruth Harley, former CEO of the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC), narrowly avoids placing film outside of New Zealand culture when she says that “It’s no accident that many of our strongest films are based on our literature. ... Our culture is the well from which film makers draw their inspiration to create unique cinematic images that are also internationally accessible” (Harley D4). But *Black Sheep* and *Eagle vs Shark* are not adaptations and it is unlikely that they will be remembered as among New Zealand’s strongest films, or even as the strongest films of their directors: both are in the early stages of their career, and Waititi’s more recent film, *Boy*, already exceeds the reputation of *Eagle vs Shark*. What the films do well that many adaptations do not, however, is to play on local cultural values, including some, but not all, of those that render local literature capable of carrying the cost of making a feature film. By stepping away from “our literature,” King and Waititi consciously “take the risk” of failure and loss to “create a space” for discussion of strictly local, contemporary issues (Bell 156).

Eagle vs Shark and *Black Sheep* play out the notion of “legitimacy in the land” but not in any straightforward way: the films also acknowledge broader local issues that complicate the scene. To these local issues must be added notions of marginality at the global level. New Zealand remains in the southern hemisphere, as far from Europe and the relics of ancestral Pākehā culture as ever. New Zealanders know that in the eyes of the northern hemisphere they and their land remain exotic, down under, opposite, the object of several more powerful gazes. In his work *Zone of the Marvellous: In Search of the Antipodes*, Martin Edmond notes the length of time during which a southern antipodes was the north’s fabled elsewhere. Early tales of its existence were fabricated, characterising the place as a version of either paradise or Hades, but never as ordinary, never as “civilisation.” Edmond points out that the actual discovery of the southern lands was a disappointment that has not eradicated the myths (Chapters 1–5) and that old power relationships live on. Not only does the north look “down under,” but New Zealand has adopted the idea that they are the antipodean other in a one-way arrangement that does not posit Britain (or America) as New Zealand’s antipodes. New Zealand does not imagine itself at the centre of its own world view nor does it privilege the notion that the antipodean is a “relationship” that need not be one of “subordination” *per se* (Pocock 194).

These complex issues lie at the heart of recent attempts to use the familiar Man Alone in new ways to speak to local audiences while also hailing international audiences. For instance, *Eagle vs Shark* places a brooding protagonist who refuses to lighten up at the centre of a romantic comedy and resists darkness through genre, understatement, and the female protagonist’s firm values regarding family and commitment. *Black Sheep* sends up contemporary panic about genetic engineering, an issue of global as well as local concern, but resists darkness through open references to the now popular Bad Film that arose from cult appreciation of the Hollywood B movie and the midnight horror films. Badness includes technical reversals that also reverse the paradoxical nature of Bad Film because, as a deliberate flouting of standards of good, narrative filmmaking, they expose the formulaic nature of Hollywood storytelling and oppose its cultural dominance by inviting laughter. Examples in *Black Sheep* include the dysfunctional hero and colourless love interest, the

appearance of low production values and of sloppy or inexperienced directorship. For instance, when the young Henry finds Cedric missing, unmotivated high-angle shots and clichéd horror music are introduced too soon and sustained to excess.

This internationally recognisable Badness also signals Antipodean Camp, which undercuts the seriousness usually associated with the Man Alone. Firstly, both protagonists go back to the place of their birth reluctantly to settle, but not to settle down. King's Henry intends to settle the sale of the farm to his brother and Waititi's Jarrod intends to settle old scores. Secondly, they rely on others to get them there. Henry relies on money. It is ironic that the taxi driver, well aware of the expense, points us to Henry's privileged position as co-owner of a large farm. Henry's closest human relationship with his psychiatrist is also facilitated by money. In contrast, Jarrod has a low-paying job and is close to no one. Lily, who has lost her job, is his girlfriend because she wants to be. Her only living relative, her brother Damon, drives Lily and Jarrod to the rural town that is Jarrod's family home. It is ironic that Jarrod, a member of a more numerous, extended family, is carried by a rarefied, nuclear family of which he is not a member, a passenger on his own journey to reconciliation. Thirdly, for each protagonist, going home is less an escape or withdrawal from society and more a conscious attempt to gain closure. The dysfunction of each is evident in that the actions they have chosen will only indirectly lead to catharsis through renewed contact with family and the family home.

Eagle vs Shark and *Black Sheep* encode local content through techniques such as understatement, excess, camp, kitsch, reversal and the visual pun. Not only do the films show a canny awareness of their embeddedness in the cinema of a small nation, but by invoking a "magical discourse" reminiscent of the language that, as David-Ives points out, proves useful for the Waitangi Tribunal to combine the "Māori spiritual frame of reference" with "western legal considerations" (16), they engage in a wry support for biculturalism. The films' critique of the notion of the Man Alone and New Zealand's marginal "down under" position is not just, or primarily, about what Pākehā did "to themselves in the

process” of colonisation (Pocock 215), nor is it mainly about Pākehā relationships with a distant, ancestral homeland.

Like Jarrod, Waititi faces both sides of the Māori-Pākehā divide, and in his film he uses a magical discourse that references spiritual elements of both sides of his heritage. The discussion is encoded through a series of animated scenes, beginning with the opening credits and recurring when the characters are under extreme stress. In these insets the characters are apples and ants. At the film’s opening, two apples fall onto the grass, tapping into notions of grass-roots belonging and of the apple falling close to the tree. This verbal idiom in visual form provides comment on family relationships: Jarrod, the bad apple, is very like his father (withdrawn, discontent, refusing to acknowledge pleasure in life); Lily and Damon, both good apples, are close, taking pleasure in small things. Later, the bad apple sets out from the beach on a jandal (the New Zealand equivalent of the Australian thong or the American flip flop). Although dominant meanings differ, beach and jandal have iconic status for both Māori and Pākehā. Furthermore, New Zealand is surrounded by sea: although separated by centuries, both groups arrived by sea, landing on the beaches. However, Māori claims to ownership/custodianship of the foreshore, seabed and fishing resources, which are not yet settled, have occupied the Waitangi Tribunal, the press and the minds of New Zealanders generally on and off for decades. Most Māori and some Pākehā audiences may perceive references to current tensions and to processes of, or impediments to, bicultural reconciliation in Waititi’s recurring references to sea and beach.⁴

Taking the Man Alone away from the land and ensuring that he is not alone is also a reversal of the trope. While the journey can be read as a withdrawal from society, the man has not gone bush, but is all at sea. In respect of New Zealand narratives, the water provides an alternative to the land and bush which have failed earlier “men alone.” Not only is the sea a symbol of cleansing; it is also associated with Lily in her gaming guise as the shark of the film’s title. In an earlier scene Lily and Damon are seen eating a meal in wide low-angle

⁴ As I write, on the eve of the 2011 elections, on television I see again the Māori Flag and a large banner protesting the Foreshore and Seabed Act of 2004 displayed prominently at the Māori Party’s base.

shots that juxtapose the native New Zealand shark (a documentary on Lily's television) with her naturalised dish of fish and chips. The fish she is eating is unlikely to be shark, but that it might be is part of the joke. The main point of these shots, however, resides in the bright red container of tomato sauce in the foreground to Lily's right. It is tomato sauce that most obviously differentiates the local dish from its British ancestor: in Britain vinegar is the traditional additive. Later, in her shark costume, Lily represents herself as a creature of the sea, while the dark and withdrawn Jarrod wears an eagle costume, a possible reference to American popular culture. In New Zealand, the eagle is either foreign or extinct, the native eagle (*Harpagornis moorei*) having died out prior to, or soon after, the beginnings of colonisation. This large bird is thought to have arrived with Māori during their migration to New Zealand (Cooper et al. 433). Thus, Jarrod's costume, like his Māori heritage, quietly acknowledges what has been lost.

Both films also imply a magical discourse in their inverted and ironic versions of the Hollywood trope of the chase. In *Eagle vs Shark*, the chase, like the humour, is understated, but the cinematography renders the scene visually magical and the journey is one of the spirit. It takes place after Jarrod commits his most embarrassing faux pas: attacking Eric the Samoan, even though Eric is now a paraplegic. Overcome with shame and embarrassment, but also with self-pity, Jarrod withdraws to his sleeping bag on the point near his family's home close to the spot where his brother fell (or leapt) to his death, the one place Jarrod's father refuses to visit. Jarrod's family ignores him, but Lily is worried. She takes her sleeping bag and keeps him company. As he tries to avoid her by moving, she follows him; their chase around and around the point, rendered in bullet time, provides a visual pun on Jarrod's internal and highly self-absorbed reflections, which are made more laughable by Lily's non-threatening persona and helpful, nurturing intentions. Like the subject in Bell's study, Jarrod must accept that he must do "whatever it takes" to bring about reconciliation.

At the very last minute, as Lily walks to the bus stop, Jarrod expresses his love with a gift of purloined lilies, the flower that is her namesake. Like the unsophisticated Lily, for whom fashion and makeup are recent and idiosyncratic experiences, the flowers are white,

home-grown, and have a tendency to grow wild. During this scene we see Jarrod's family around him, his sister smiling and father no longer in the wheelchair, and in the background a frieze on the wall of the local school shows Māori and Pākehā socialising together. That scene was depicted earlier in the film as the background to one of the "Fight Man" rounds at Jarrod's party where the eagle and the shark competed for the video games championship. The earlier, virtual image reappears in full colour on solid concrete, suggesting not only that balanced, happy, bicultural relationships are possible, but also that for some people such relationships have already been achieved. Jarrod and Lily's warmth and humanity supplement the image behind them and the demeanour of Jarrod's father and sister reveal their reconciliation with Jarrod and with each other. The painting also references the family photograph and Jarrod's mother's absence, which, while it references colonial overwriting, is directly due to her sexual orientation and her lifestyle choice.

In *Black Sheep*, King represents a similar chase as slow and laborious. Henry and Experience, stranded in an offal pit, crawl away from vicious were-sheep through an underground tunnel. Placing these two characters underground at the high point of the film when tension is at its greatest surely indicates a reversal of Hollywood form and echoes the power relationships encoded in the notion of New Zealand as antipodean and its cinema as Other. Not only does the tunnel signify Henry's returning memory of his past, a reversal of his forgetting and trauma, but it also sanctions his connection to the land that nurtured four generations of his family before him. The associations with recent ancestry and belonging are underpinned by Henry's simultaneous recollection of the existence of the tunnel and the return of his long-lost ability to initiate action at his lowest moment: in imminent danger and beneath ground level. Suddenly he takes control of Experience's flame and aromatherapy candle and uses them as part of a quick-thinking plan for escape. Furthermore, it is not just his own escape he thinks of, but Experience's as well. Henry turns the flame that Experience used to "realign her hormones" after their fall into the offal pit on the were-sheep, who are destroyed by the power of the explosion fuelled by their own methane emissions. Henry and Experience emerge from the tunnel in a spectacular rebirth literally from, and covered by, the land of their fathers and mothers. That the couple

arrive safely at the woolshed reverses Henry's relationship with land that once belonged to Māori by indicating that the land now knows and recognises him.

King's chase also alludes to local debates on ways to reduce methane production by farm animals. At the time of the film's production, the reference was less to world ecology and more directly to a controversy that culminated in a demonstration outside parliament in September 2003, supported by the National party, which was in opposition at the time (Taylor). The debate concerned a proposal to measure the methane output of farm animals by analysing their breath. The data was intended to provide a base for a tax on the farming industry in order to finance research into methods of methane reduction. New Zealand has, for several years, had a summer hole in the ozone layer overhead, making the issue one of immediacy, and it was in this context that the New Zealand government floated the plan, which was quickly dubbed a "fart tax." The inaccuracy of the term did nothing to prevent its popular use or the rash of scatological humour that followed in both public and private communications. In fact, the proposal provided so much humour that it quickly became impossible to express its purpose in any serious way. Therefore, while King's rendition of the chase works as an inversion of conventional Hollywood form, and while the offal pit and the woolshed relate to sheep farming generally, the use of a small candle to light a big explosion of methane has special resonance for local audiences. These resonances refer, among other things, to the agriculture brought to New Zealand by Pākehā, "legitimacy in the land," and the work yet to be done in order to clear the air.

As Henry gains confidence, Angus begins to lose his. As he attempts to salvage first his evil plan and then his mutant protégé, his desperation and the foulness of his means escalate. In the end Tucker, the Māori friend of Henry's boyhood, brings the antidote and the sheepdog, that steadfast friend to farming, holds Angus' eye long enough for the sheep drench to be administered. As Angus resumes human form, his deviant behaviour intensifies: he allows himself to be bitten again, aligning himself with the were-sheep. This establishes that he is irredeemable. His greed, deviance and overly scientific methods of

farming are deliberate, wilful and ongoing. If he is not stopped, he will harm humans, animals and the land.

Eagle vs Shark and *Black Sheep* do not resolve issues of ecology, and in both films capable, resourceful women are represented as quirky and beyond the pale. Lily and Experience are grounded, able to articulate to the protagonists what needs to be done. Each takes the initiative that sets the protagonists on their journey and each has her own goal. Yet they are presented as inept followers. Early in the film Lily is unappreciated because she is not trendy, and she loses her job; at the end of the film Experience, it is implied, will trade in her ecological principles merely to stay with Henry because, he says, organic sheep farming is unpractical. Clearly these women are not incidental or threatening, as in earlier *Man Alone* narratives, but they must abandon their own activities in order to become helpers to the male protagonists because it is the working through of male identity that remains central.

Nevertheless, the noise of *Eagle vs Shark* and *Black Sheep* “blow[ing] raspberries at the old world, at Europe, and then even at America” (Beilharz 229) echoes not the perception of inferiority so closely associated with the Antipodean Other, but the knowledge that the periphery understands itself better than the centre understands the periphery. Thus they give the lie to the belief that there is no way between the international and the local outside of very general terms, such as the mission to encode national identity in films via representations of “our culture” as background for “universal stories” that will enable film makers “to play on an international stage” (Harley D24). By negotiating a complex double coding using humour, mixed genre and the reversal of older, well known tropes that have come to be read differently by local audiences, both films simultaneously address local and international audiences.

Furthermore, the films’ local address implies that hope for the future lies in facing squarely up to fear. Henry and Jarrod remain dysfunctional, immature, haunted by ghosts of others they recall as dangerous until at last they confront those fears. Henry stops treating

sheep as the evil other, and Jarrod accepts his family and himself. Both endings, while they reinstate conservative values of agriculture and imply conventional heterosexual couplings, also imply that overcoming fear has brought gains and that nothing that has been lost was actually worthwhile. The humour of the heroes' respective journeys arises from the fact that they should not have been necessary. Angus gains nothing for his trouble, and Henry, Jarrod and Jonah learn only what Experience, Tucker, Lily and Damon knew all along: that personal relationships are the key to learning to live with the many moral dilemmas that cannot be fully reconciled.

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Man Alone feels he belongs in New Zealand, but as New Zealand moves towards biculturalism he is less secure in his sense of entitlement. Thus, rather than imposing on him isolation, dislocation, unease and the need for unity, these films foreground New Zealand as the place and the soil from which the protagonists spring: Pākehā are shown not as kumara, not of the land in the sense of the Māori concept of Tangata Whenua (people of the land), but certainly as home-grown as pumpkin, onion or potato, staples with "legitimacy in the land" that are in the land legitimately and which augment the kumara in providing a balanced local diet.

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