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Whispering Continuities
Mythopoetic Writing and Textual Mobility in the work of
Alan Warner

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Scottish Literature

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Abstract

Alan Warner is at the forefront of contemporary Scottish literature, and a writer whose literary presence is too often lost on critics. Many misconceptions surround the author in terms of his style and literary substance, with critiques often noting the explicitly disparate nature of his fiction which, in a seemingly haphazard fashion, fluctuates between realist writing and fantasy-driven prose. Viewing the corpus as an unruly tapestry which lacks continuity detracts meaning from Warner's work, reducing substance from the novels which can only be accurately traced when understood in their complete context. This thesis shall aim to uncover the subtle nuances which bind Warner's corpus, exposing the novels as an organic whole as opposed to isolated, detached entities. By perceiving Warner's work as a unified body readers can detect the author's reworked images and recurrent symbols which weave through each text, adding weight and profundity to Warner's vision of the modern nation.

In order to uncover the subtle threads which bind Warner's corpus, two main themes shall be analysed: Warner's mythopoetic style and textual mobility. Mythopoetics and the recurring motif of the journey are used by Warner to weave through his oeuvre, implicitly uniting each of the novels. Moving through the texts in chronological order, the concept of mythopoetics and the significance of the trope of the journey shall be utilised to gently close the gap between Warner's perceived realistic and fantasy forms of writing, until eventually the binary between each genre is dissolved.

This research seeks to prove that there is continuity within Warner's corpus, with a consistent style and recurrent symbols woven through each of his novels. It shall unearth ideas regarding Warner's fiction which set him apart in the literary world, significantly elevating the poignancy of his writing. His mythopoetic style and recurring motif of the journey shall be examined and defined in detail against selected novels, as well as comparing Warner's work to various other authors and their literary sensibilities. Such a diverse range of literary parallels highlights Warner's status as an author who is conscious and appreciative of what it means to write, and of the aesthetic pleasure, spiritual power and potential literature has to offer in the twenty-first century.

Introduction

'Calgary Bay is a noble location to spread your ashes. I can recommend it. Facing the infinite west, a cup of sparkling sand with jaws of rock protecting it – normally the sea glows chlorinated blue in at the rock edges, magnifying arm-thick ropes of kelp ten feet under the surface. It looks like a better place down there.'

(Warner, 'Sullivan's Ashes')

In 2010, Alan Warner was commissioned by the Edinburgh International Book Festival to write a short piece on the theme of 'Elsewhere'. Warner's prose, 'Sullivan's Ashes' (2010) was submitted, a short-story which follows the scattering of the title figure's ashes in accordance with his last wishes, specifically to be deposited by 'a semi-naked and beautiful woman, galloping on the white sands', across 'Calgary Bay, Island of Mull.'¹ The short text, set off the coast of Warner's home land, notes the deceased man's life-long adoration for the Scottish island:

I once asked Sullivan why he loved it up on the island so much and he swung open all the bay windows. 'Listen,' he yelled. 'Just silence, isn't it? It's the elsewhere. When you're an Englishman you have England and you have... elsewhere. And you have to pay to get elsewhere, sonny boy.'²

Sullivan describes his beloved Mull not in intricate, geographical detail, but purely as 'elsewhere', a profound place which is a separate entity from the mainland in both a physical and spiritual context. The remote Scottish island is a place unlike the larger nation, and its location, landscape and human sentiment is envisioned as something else in the temporal world; an entity which is quite magical and transcends literary definition. As the late Sullivan's ashes are finely scattered, the elusive term is implemented once again: 'old Sullivan spread himself across our beautiful beach, each scatter like

¹ Alan Warner, 'Sullivan's Ashes', published by the Edinburgh International Book Festival, in association with *The Guardian*, (2010), <https://www.edbookfest.co.uk/new-writing/sullivan-s-ashes>

² Warner, 'Sullivan's Ashes'.

struggling, final heartbeats as he passed off quite gloriously into some new kind of elsewhere.’³

Finality does not resonate in the figurative close of the text, but instead a mythical sense of eternity reigns, transporting readers to an unknown realm which surpasses realistic conception. It is this precise vision of place which this thesis shall focus on, with Warner’s depiction of Mull drawing on universal and spiritual ideals which circulate in the contemporary world. Such a profound concept, looking beyond temporal reality and considering ‘elsewhere’, is a notion which runs through the extent of Warner’s work, with complex mythological nuances spanning the entirety of his corpus.

This precise reading of Warner’s short text removes him from the usual critical perceptions he receives, with ‘Sullivan’s Ashes’ an example of work which blends both realistic and symbolically imaginative concepts of existence. Consistently classified as a strictly ‘realistic’ writer who has had a couple of experimental blips interrupt his ‘conventional’ succession of novels, Warner is an author who defies such simplistic labeling, and challenges readers and critics to explore the implicit, silent depths of his fiction. Linked with the ‘Chemical Generation’ pioneered by Irvine Welsh, renowned as a writer who depicts ‘bafflingly credible’⁴ portraits of women, and is often noted for his accuracy in portraying modern societal traits and traditions with realistic conviction, Warner surpasses all of these surface readings. Critics are thrown by the more mysterious, ‘fantasy-driven’ elements which consistently surface in Warner’s prose, dismissing novels which are ruined by ‘the sheer cornucopia of surreal detail’⁵ as experimental mistakes. But Warner’s work fails to be separated so cleanly into two distinct categories, and rather exists as a unique literary blend of genres and styles. The prose comes to life not as dominantly realistic fiction, or surrealist fantasy prose, but rather an eclectic blend of each: something *else*.

To understand the precise nature of Warner’s unique style, this thesis will research the whispering continuities which delicately bind the entire corpus, perceiving his novels not as haphazard, isolated entities, but rather an organic whole, with fine threads of universal meaning and symbolism woven through each text. Regarding the novels as a single body, made of up of both

³ Warner, ‘Sullivan’s Ashes’.

⁴ Berthold Schoene, ‘Alan Warner, Post-feminism and the Emasculated Nation’, *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.255.

⁵ Nick Rennison, *Contemporary British Novelists* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2005), p.144.

realistic and fantasy elements, this thesis shows how the individual novels become part of a larger vision, where meaning resonates more profoundly. Warner is a writer who is doing something quite extraordinary in the contemporary field of Scottish literature and the linear significance of his prose emphasise this fact. Each of Warner's novels are innovatively integrated, like mythology, with recurring places, figures and symbols adding complex meaning to each text.

Subtle continuities finely exist throughout each of Warner's novels, with his unique configuration of place, and a journey across such a landscape, conceptually threading each of the novels together.

Warner's work is infused with a mythopoetic edge, a literary style which is defined as the 'making of myths' or any literature which 'draws upon older myths, or resembles myths in subject matter or imaginative scope.'⁶ Warner certainly imparts the timeless and universal essence of mythology into his work, implicitly transferring symbolic mythological meaning onto his distinctly modern settings.

His visionary depictions of landscapes are not wholly realistic nor are they dominantly fantasy-driven, and rather expose elements of the past and present, old and new, real and imagined, in one single geographic location. Warner also implements the recurring theme of textual mobility, a trope which unveils the complex and dynamic layers of meaning encased in both the physical and spiritual journey. By awarding each of his novels the central motif of the journey, each text travels across Warner's eclectic landscape, with the journey across the land becoming both a physical and internal journey through time. The journey across each provocative setting is intensified gradually by Warner throughout his corpus, with textual mobility, and the mythopoetic essence of the earth taking readers 'elsewhere', to a place where the past and present exist as one single entity, in an 'Other', timeless realm.

This thesis shall explore a selection of Warner's work in chronological order, tracing the growth and development of Warner's literary journey which manoeuvres through these Other worlds. As a self-confessed 'reader who happens to write',⁷ Warner's own literary evolution is seen in the pages of his

⁶ Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.144.

⁷ Stuart Jeffries, 'A Life in Writing: Alan Warner', *The Guardian* (May 2012) <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/25/life-in-writing-alan-warner>

work, with a magnitude of influences woven through each novel. This research shall reflect this facet of Warner's personal ethos and will reference an eclectic range of literary influences and comparisons, including Charles Olson, Samuel Beckett and W.B Yeats among others.

Beginning with *Morvern Callar* (1995), Chapter One will focus on the initial mythopoetic elements of Warner's debut, seeing his unique configuration of both the landscape and the journey set in motion. The foundations of Warner's literary tendency and recurring motifs are subtly infused into the debut novel, with the text beginning to hint at the co-mingling of reality and imaginative worlds. Warner's mythopoetic style is implemented in his preliminary configuration of the Port, portrayed as a geographical co-ordinate point which comes to life as a place which is simultaneously real and quite surreal.

Chapter Two shall extend and heighten Warner's mythopoetic world, moving out of his homeland to places further afield which uphold his mythopoetic vision. Entering the world of Gatwick airport, a place where the journey manifests, the complexity and profundity of the establishment is evoked in *The Stars in the Bright Sky* (2001). The most modern of Warner's literary settings, the airport continues to be infused with mythopoetic significance, noting the mysterious and profound qualities of contemporary civilisation.

The final chapter shall introduce a new way to regard Warner's corpus, reading *The Deadman's Pedal* (2012) in conjunction with the literary sensibilities of the Celtic Twilight. Regarding the novel in light of the literary phenomenon's artistic principles and symbolic sensibilities, Warner's text comes to life as his most accomplished mythopoetic creation, with the landscape and the journey tightly bound to convey the spiritual weight of the novel.

By perceiving Warner's novels in a linear fashion the prose comes to life as an organic body, with each text welcoming readers to explore an Other world. The motif of the journey, together with the provocative construction of setting, sees Warner's mythopoetic style flourish, with each novel existing not only as a timeless entity in its own right, but as a profound and everlasting body of work. This research shall uncover the depths and dynamic consistency of Warner's style, as he

circumnavigates his readers around his fictitious universe; not moving through a wholly realistic, rationally astute, modern world, but 'elsewhere'.

Chapter One

The Journey Begins

'I kept walking on down the long straight forcing myself not to look backwards'

(Warner, *Morvern Callar*)

‘Since remote antiquity, for all kinds of reasons, people have left home and hit the road’.⁸ This idea of departing from a home is a significant preoccupation of Alan Warner, and not only the exit, but the return to home, is an essential notion which infiltrates the majority of his fiction. *Morvern Callar* (1995) shot Warner to literary fame, and the debut immediately implements this motif of the journey. The debut can be regarded as a foundational text, integral to the understanding of the fiction to follow, and sets in motion Warner’s mythopoetic style and recurring use of textual mobility which thread together the entire corpus. This chapter will introduce and examine Warner’s mythopoetic stylistics, focusing on the intricate construction of setting which begins to hint at the mingling of the real world and the fantasy realm, making his world one which is timeless and profound. By focusing attention on the first publication, Warner’s thematic focus and fluctuating modes of writing come to the fore, presenting *Morvern Callar* as not only Warner’s successful debut novel in its own right, but in retrospect, is his creative manifesto and key to the conceptual deep structure of the entirety of his work.⁹ Firstly acknowledging the critical reception of the novel, then moving towards the innovative construction of its fictionalised setting, the central journey in *Morvern Callar* is brought to life, and provides an innovative platform to begin to acknowledge Warner’s mythopoetic style.

⁸ Elizabeth A. Bohls, Ian Duncan, *Travel Writing 1700-1830: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.xiii.

⁹ Schoene, ‘Alan Warner, Post-feminism and the Emasculated Nation’, p256.

In The Beginning: Morvern Callar

Warner's first literary endeavour was hailed a triumph, its warm reception extended amongst readers and critics with almost unanimous success; an extraordinary achievement for any new writer.

Morvern Callar is a text which is continually grouped with Warner's cluster of 'conventional novels', along with *The Sopranos* and *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, with critics relishing in the realistic familiarity of the prose which banish any trace of Warner's experimental fantasy. The debut text depicts places, features, and societal structures which are wholly recognisable in modern Britain, accompanied by an authentic soundtrack comprised of Miles Davis and Ronald Shannon Jackson records. Dialogue in the debut novel also conforms to its 'realistic' facet, with typical Scottish slang including 'rampant', 'oxters' and 'boak' littered throughout the text, adding to Warner's acute awareness and regard for modern Scottish culture. However, on a closer reading it is clear that the debut may not wholly comply with 'conventional' conformity, and fails, like the rest of Warner's novels, to be crudely pigeonholed into a 'realistic' genre category. Warner's heroine is a key means in which depth and substance is injected into the novel, and his mythopoetic style is expertly evoked through the eponymous heroine. The title figure not only permeates a sense of enchantment and timelessness into the text, but her compelling persona, while exuding moments of realistic clarity, simultaneously nods towards elusive sensuality which transcends the temporal world: lifting the novel from the imprisonment of its 'realism' literary labelling, and presents it as a compelling, innovative hybrid of each genre.

The opening scene of the novel immediately signals a break from convention and exposes Warner's innovative style, with *Morvern Callar* beginning with the grisly tableaux of a boyfriend dead on a kitchen floor.¹⁰ The traditional *femme fatale*, played out in works such as Muriel Spark's *The Driver's Seat* (1970) is directly reversed, and instead the self destructive victim is male, and a male author no less. Warner's unique style is seen on the opening page of the novel, beginning in staccato sentences as the figurative male author is instantly killed off. The repulsive reality of the corpse, morbidly saturated in its own blood, is the brightened focal point which the reader and title figure Morvern are

¹⁰ <http://vulpeslibris.wordpress.com/2008/04/20/movern-callar-by-alan-warner/>

faced with, and even more shocking than the initial sight is her immediate reaction: ‘He couldn’t object so I lit a Silk Cut.’¹¹ Instantly, Warner subverts expectations of morality and reality, with the unnerving first person narration as much a shock to the reader as the scene itself.¹² This captivating persona is exactly what drives the novel, with readers gripped not by the plot line of the dead body’s gruesome fate, but to Morvern’s reaction to the scene. Her cold sense of detachment shapes the entire narration, with the opening sequence in particular laying out Morvern’s robot-like response in the face of horror. Her stubbornly reserved nature is apparent throughout the course of the novel, and initially Morvern’s controversial reaction depicts her as a deeply unethical female, with many critics describing her as an ‘amoral’ character, as she does not comply with ‘conventional morals either to sex or in response to her boyfriend’s suicide’¹³. A contrast to this feminine reaction can be seen in Janice Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), where protagonist Joy has a far more compassionate, ‘human’ response to death, mentally and emotionally scarred by the traumatic ordeal. Joy attends her illicit lover’s funeral, and her predictable, emotional turmoil is captured by Galloway: ‘Michael’s was my first burial. I kept my eye on the coffin the whole time just in case.’¹⁴

However, Morvern’s ‘amoral’ labelling may be misconstrued, with critics reacting to the unfamiliar territory which Warner pulls readers into. Morvern’s character, nor her story, complies with convention, as Warner explains: ‘She subverts what the novel is supposed to be about, the interior life of a character. Everything is a screen’.¹⁵ Morvern’s reluctance to express or indulge readers in her emotional turmoil is what is most captivating about her character, and Warner describes his heroine as ‘inarticulate, a narrator who doesn’t tell you how she feels, she maybe skirts the idea.’¹⁶ Warner is persistent in creating not only this distance between reader and character, but leaving great silences and unanswered questions throughout the text, compared to more traditional, canonical modes of narration:

¹¹ <http://vulpeslibris.wordpress.com/2008/04/20/movern-callar-by-alan-warner/>

¹² Carole Jones, ‘Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999’ in *Scottish Cultural Review of Language and Literature*, Volume 12 (Amsterdam- New York: Rodopi, 2009), p.169.

¹³ Jones, ‘Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999’, p.169.

¹⁴ Janice Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (London: Vintage, 1999), p.82.

¹⁵ Alan Warner, quoted by Jones, ‘Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999’, p.169.

¹⁶ Alan Warner, quoted by Sophy Dale, *Alan Warner’s Morvern Callar: A Reader’s Guide* (New York, London: Continuum, 2002), p.35.

The whole confident ideology of the British nineteenth century novel [...] the grand, rationalist narrative voice would lead you by the hand through all these inevitabilities to a beautifully rounded and often very moving ending; but in our time this has all been destroyed, thankfully. [...] I wanted to leave huge silences in *Morvern Callar*- the way any sort of faith will leave us with just silence.¹⁷

Morvern herself plays into this silent nature of Warner's prose, stating, 'I'm a right queer-case for not talking. I'm taciturn.'¹⁸ Her reticent nature is also the linguistic meaning behind her surname, and she learns that the locally Spanish word means 'silence, to say nothing',¹⁹ adding again to her protective refusal to explicitly divulge personal feeling. Warner's play on silence is not only true to of Morvern's nature, but his writing as a whole and the mythopoetic significance which is inherent to it; with mythology too an ideology dependant on the unspoken universal truths and beliefs of humanity. Just as 'any sort of faith will leave us with silence', so too does Warner's infusion of mythopoetic elements, with the 'unspoken' exuding far more meaning than any definitive answer and adding a timeless dimension to his work.

Warner's use of silence and its mythopoetic significance lends itself closely to the stylistics of the Celtic Twilight; a literary sensibility which will be discussed at length in Chapter Three. Silence is employed by Warner to enhance the timeless essence which is inherent to his mythopoetic style, with the Celtic Twilight an area of literature which too utilises silence to add this spiritual, eternal meaning. Just as W.B Yeats, the pioneer of the Celtic Twilight, employed symbols but kept their literary meaning 'hinted at and withheld',²⁰ so too does Warner utilise silence to leave his symbolic nuances lucid and vague, forcing readers to look beyond his *own* literary screen in search of answers. The work of James Joyce will also be noted in the final chapter of this research, with the silences which filter in to *Dubliners* (1914) once more resonating with Warner's mythopoetic prose. Moments of silence are used throughout *Dubliners* and particularly at the close of 'The Dead', with Gabriel's silence mirroring his state of reflection and paralysis. The frozen land and motionless protagonist in

¹⁷ Sophy Dale, *Alan Warner's Morvern Callar: A Readers Guide* (New York, London: Continuum, 2002), p.35.

¹⁸ Alan Warner, *Morvern Callar* (London: Vintage, 1996), p.36.

¹⁹ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.125.

²⁰ Stan Smith, *W.B Yeats: A Critical Introduction* (England: MacMillan Education Ltd, 1990), p.29.

Joyce's text once more reflects Warner's own use of silence, as a technique which is employed to give his prose an enduring quality which has to be meditated over. Morvern's silence elevates her character and the novel to profound heights, and gives Warner's debut novel a timeless edge which plays on the eternal spirit of both Morvern and the northern land where she lives.

Warner's first- person female narrative is another reason for the book's initial impact on the literary scene. Yet Morvern's defensive reluctance to disclose emotional information cannot be construed as Warner's failure to accurately capture the female psyche, and his construction of Morvern, down to the most intimate details of her beauty regime, attire and cigarette choice, is extraordinarily accurate, as Melissa Denes notes:

When did he get so good at writing girls? His familiarity with female behaviour and private ritual is frankly spooky. He seems to have been places boys aren't invited- locked toilet cubicles, single-sex classrooms, teenage bedrooms.²¹

Yet reservations have been expressed in regard to the male author writing from a female perspective, and many critics view the novel as merely indulging in the fantasies of the voyeuristic male. Zoe Strachan notes that in *Morvern Callar* 'the strong homoerotic subtext between Morvern and her best friend Lanna is played out in a series of rather exploitative scenes', where in some cases 'a male character is present to assume the role of voyeur, at other times it is left up to the reader to do so.'²² However, Warner does not revel in the same female fantasies as for example Vladimir Nabokov, depicting erotic infatuation and obsessions with young girls in *Lolita* (1955), and Warner's feminine protagonists are not mere spectacles for the male gaze to fixate on, but rather free agents of their own making who are laced with mythopoetic depth. Strachan's example of the relationship between Morvern and Lanna in fact lends itself closely to Warner's mythopoetic style, with Lanna's name also awarded an implicit but significant meaning. In English the name translates to 'little rock', but Lanna

²¹ Melissa Denes, 'Girls' secrets, men's myths', in *The Guardian* (25th May, 2002), <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/may/25/fiction.features>

²² Zoe Strachan, 'Irvine Welsh: Alan Warner: Queerspotting: Homosexuality in Contemporary Scottish Fiction', (May, 1999) <http://www.spikemagazine.com/0599queerspotting.php>

is known as '*leanbh*' in Gaelic, meaning 'child'.²³ The Celtic origin of Lanna's name corresponds to Morvern's symbolic stature as a maternal figure at the close of the novel, with the relationship between the girls' one of nurturing care and tenderness rather than sexualised homoeroticism. Such a bond is seen as the women bathe together: 'We sat in the steam then Lanna shampooed my hair and I did hers at the same time, our arms reaching and stretching to lather our heads.'²⁴ The bathing ritual becomes one of mutual care and tenderness, with the bond between the girls' one of unspoken maternal care and devotion, as opposed to overtly sexualised, erotic pleasure.

Rather than constructing the female as a means to project sexuality or eroticism, Warner's heroine is more often than not used to embody profound and complex ideas, and as a female character she prompts the reader to explore both mythical dimensions and the universal values of humanity. A brave and bold feat for any male author to undertake, Morvern is one of the most enigmatic protagonists of recent fiction,²⁵ and a refreshing change from the typical male-based literature of his contemporaries. Writing in the period after the depressed environment of the 1980s, Warner's debut novel does not focus on the failures of men, like the destructive men in Irvine's Welsh's novels, or the male figures in James Kelman's fiction who remain moribund in existential crisis, and he instead turns his attention to women for affirmative inspiration.²⁶ Using Morvern as a key example, Warner's heroine is a universal symbol of hope and salvation, a figure which exudes these values of humanity with far more potential than any male counterpart. Warner coyly confesses that due to his lack of interest in football as a boy, he would spend time conversing with the young girls in his village at the weekends, and finds the female character far more poignant and complex than any masculine equivalent:

²³ http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=9nd05X_awIgc&pg=PT49&dq=Gaelic+phrase+a+leanbh&hl=en&sa=X&ei=1A4YVPGkNe7o7AaLhIDwDw&ved=0CCgQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=Gaelic%20phrase%20a%20leanbh&f=false

²⁴ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.33.

²⁵ Larry Weissman, 'A Drink or Two with Alan Warner', *Random House* <https://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0497/warner/interview.html>

²⁶ Jones, 'Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999', p.162.

I like writing about young female characters because for me they embody a kind of energy and a kind of honesty. It's probably a romantic view [...] but there's something about their energy that I really like, a certain lack of cynicism.²⁷

Warner appears to view the specifically 'young' female figure as having far more substance and potential in the literary world, and utilises Morvern to provoke such profound themes. The vulnerability and innocence of youth captivates Warner, with almost all of his novels since the debut focused on adolescent life of both males and females. Warner articulates this point in an interview regarding his latest novel, *Their Lips Talk of Mischief* (2014), stating: 'I'm fascinated by that period between fifteen and twenty-two where lives are formed and destinies are marked out.'²⁸ Even today Warner still maintains the profundity and complex human meaning to be found in the transitional period of adolescent life, with Morvern's youth a key means in which such depth is channelled into the prose.

Having been brought up without a mother figure, added to the gruesome suicide of her partner, Morvern does not shy away from escape, and instead utilises her new found freedom to flee from a life she knows. On finding the suicide note from her long term boyfriend, a letter which primarily urges for the publication of his completed novel, reading, 'I only ask you to get it published. I'll settle for posthumous fame as long as I'm not lost in silence',²⁹ Morvern transfers her own habitual silence onto the deceased and steals authorial ownership of the text. By doing so, Morvern is able to transform her life and leave the claustrophobic domesticity she has been so used to. The female is used as a gateway to explore such themes of liberation and escape, ironically taking ownership of what was initially supposed to be a male's journey. By hi-jacking the life of her deceased partner Morvern's feminine journey is significantly heightened, and she becomes an empowered female who is now in full control of her destiny. Morvern is presented as a character who has the potential, substance and determination to explore and pursue such lofty ideas with conviction.

²⁷ Alan Warner, quoted in Jones, 'Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999', p.162.

²⁸ Alan Warner, quoted by Laura Barton, 'Alan Warner: booze, books and why he's backing Scottish Independence', *The Guardian* (19th August, 2014) <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/aug/19/alan-warner-booze-books-why-voting-scottish-independence>

²⁹ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.82.

While Warner's construction of the first person female narrative adds profundity and possibility to his text, Morvern's 'party girl' status drew many critics to focus on that single element of her tale. The timing of its publication saw the novel's enchantment and complexity lost on many readers, and hitting bookshelves in 1995, it immediately gave Warner acclaim as part of a revitalisation of Scottish fiction which included the publication of Welsh's *Trainspotting* in 1993.³⁰ Warner was grouped with such contemporaries which in turn led him to be located within the confines of the 'Chemical Generation': a group associated with the rave scene of the late 1980s and 90s, who often put the experience of drugs and the rave at the centre of their narratives.³¹ Indeed, euphoric sensation and chemical addiction is at the heart of Welsh's hugely successful corpus, a catalogue of work which Warner deeply admires, but he himself does not feel attached, stating: 'Irvine is my pal, but I don't think our writing is connected at all... he's done a different thing to me, more funny, direct and perhaps deliberately disposable.'³²

Disposable is the operative word, and while Welsh's novels continually depict the disintegrating society of his contemporary homeland in an immediately powerful way, Warner's novels and characters adopt a timeless quality, living on and beyond the pages of each closed book. Rather than indulging in the chemical rave culture which surrounded Welsh's prose, Warner characterised his own work as 'a clear mocking of the ephemerality of it', and rather aspired to give his story 'the dignity of a myth'³³. This feeling of permanence is clearly seen in Warner's reluctance to leave Morvern behind, not only continuing her journey in *These Demented Lands* (1997), but mentioning the heroine in *The Sopranos* (1998) as 'yon Morvern from the Superstore, used to live up the Scheme'³⁴, and once more in *The Man Who Walks* (2002), where her named spirit haunts the prose even once her own journey has come to an end:

³⁰ Jones, 'Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999', p.162.

³¹ Jones, 'Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999', p.162.

³² Alan Warner, interviewed by Thomson, Graham, 'An Interview with Alan Warner', cited in *The Barcelona Review* (1997), <http://www.barcelonareview.com/arc/r2/eng/warnerint.htm>

³³ Jones, 'Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999', p.167.

³⁴ Alan Warner, *The Sopranos* (London: Vintage, 1999), p.270.

Morbidly curious, the Nephew's only society was splitting a can Special Brew with the disgraced train driver, him never the same after his runaway foster-daughter drowned crossing the Sound on the little illegal ferry.³⁵

Not only characters, but the landscape of Welsh's prose plays a prominent role in the disposable nature of his fiction, with the sterile, modern setting of Edinburgh's 'New Town' continually depicted as corrupt and rapidly decaying: 'It's pissin doon up the Grange, n ah stand under a big elm tree, one ay the cunts that survived the plague ay Dutch Elm disease that hit here a few years ago. That's fuckin Edinburgh fir ye, even the fuckin tree've goat thir ain epidemic.'³⁶ Welsh's vision of the Capital, where even nature rots away, is of stark contrast to Warner's idyllic, stagnant Highland country side, a place which is seen 'moving without any haste to no bidding at all'.³⁷ In an interview with Sophy Dale, Warner explains this timeless, archaic dimension of his work:

There's a fashionable word in seventies criticism - 'mythopoetic' - I always liked that word, and in *Morvern Callar* I wanted to tell a working class person's story as if it wasn't just realism, so that it had something of the quality of myth³⁸

This aspect of mythography, the writing of myths, is a component which Warner delicately infuses not only into *Morvern Callar* but his entire corpus, in all elements of the novel from characterisation to landscape and setting. Warner's mythopoetic style is used to provide a degree of substance to *Morvern Callar*, an otherwise humdrum story of a woman who travels abroad and then returns home. It also adds significance to the universal symbolic nature of the central protagonist and the world she inhabits. By constructing a first person female heroine, who dwells in silence rather than speech, Warner's novel adopts unspoken truths like those of belief systems and myths: a manifestation of his own sense of the mythic which is channelled through Morvern, a female who has the potential to tunnel back to the earliest origins and roots of human experience. Undoubtedly the reason behind the great success of *Morvern Callar*, there is much more than meets the eye with Warner's text, most

³⁵ Alan Warner, *The Man Who Walks* (London: Vintage, 2003), pp.41-2.

³⁶ Irvine Welsh, *Glue* (London: Vintage, 2002), p239.

³⁷ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.90.

³⁸ Alan Warner, quoted by Sophy, Dale 'An Interview with Alan Warner', *Edinburgh Review* (vol. 103, 2000), p.129.

tenderly found within the major silences, and in the way the female persona is utilised as a gateway to explore such lofty themes and questions in a contemporary, conventionally superficial, society.

The Port: A Nexus of Exchange

Warner's intricate construction of Morvern is not the only means in which he utilises his mythopoetic style, with setting an integral feature which manifests his literary tendency. Like Morvern, Warner anchors the dynamic relation between realism and fantasy in his construction of the Port: a fictionalised northern town which provides the backdrop not only to the debut, but many novels which follow. A thinly disguised replica of Oban,³⁹ the town where Warner grew up, the Port provides readers with a familiar geographical co-ordinate point, while it simultaneously fabricates and fictionalises the setting with an infusion of mythology. The geographic location is familiar, yet still detached from reality. The Port is a Scottish town which readers can clearly visualise and accurately understand the social structures and technologies within the community, yet the mythopoetic dimension pushes readers to delve further than the superficial, realistic façade. First brought to life in *Morvern Callar*, the Port is occupied by a host of inhabitants and a landscape which depicts both the mundane and the sublime, and the social realities and mythical enchantment of the remote coastal village are put on the map in a new way.

Warner's literary flair is evident in his depiction of everyday life in the community which he grew up in, and he writes as a knowledgeable insider. Although a fictionalised reworking of Oban, Warner's depiction of the Port is vividly accurate as he describes the setting often in intricate detail. It is a place which is still clearly etched in the author's memory:

There's massive floodlights on the south pier where the island ferries tie up by the railway station. Below the folly you see the north pier, the darkened bay, the first island, then a strip of darker sea to the snowy mountains of my foster mother's island where she's buried. Behind The Complex,

³⁹ Schoene, 'Alan Warner, Post-feminism and the Emasculated Nation', p.258.

mountains go east to the Back Settlement, then west through the pass to the village beyond the power station.⁴⁰

The peripheries of the town are mapped out in intensely precise detail and create a realistically clear picture in the mind of the reader of the main co-ordinate points of the town, capturing Warner's adolescent place of origin and the landscape and landmarks which engulf it. Although at times the Port is mapped out in such intimate detail to create a 'real' sense of place, and one which is very much within the bounds of verisimilitude, Warner also subtly infuses his prose with his mythopoetic style; bringing his location and its geographical essence to life. As with his construction of Morvern, Warner's landscape transcends reductive realism, and contains a mythic edge which hints at the complexity and substance beneath its humble exterior.

Yet this precise setting was provoked not only due to Warner's familiarity and personal devotion to his home, but a determination to prove a point in the literary world:

When I started to write I was fired up to prove - to myself at least - that a novel or novels could be forged out of the community I knew. It really was very important to me to try to force the social reality I knew into the novel form.⁴¹

Warner whole heartedly believes that literary and human profundity can be found in working-class as well as middle-class experience,⁴² and uses his small-town community to exemplify this confidence. Warner's characters from the Port, from shelf stackers to railway labourers, are each complex and compelling in their own right, and are all awarded their own unique voice. He generates a sense of substance and significance in the everyday lives of the working class who he feels, still to this day, deserve to be heard:

There's always the feeling that the daily is looked down on in some way in literary culture [...] a certain school of literary thought doesn't believe that profundity can happen in a working person's

⁴⁰ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.13.

⁴¹ Alan Warner, quoted by John Neil Munro, *Lust For Life!: Irvine Welsh and the Trainspotting Phenomenon* (Great Britain: Polygon, 2013), p.118.

⁴² Munro, *Lust For Life!: Irvine Welsh and the Trainspotting Phenomenon*, p.118.

daily life. But profundity does happen: we all think about philosophy as we're washing dishes and as we shovel the shit around us and as we ring up the till in a shop.⁴³

Each of Warner's novels strives to uncover the profundity and enchantment which can be found in everyday life. This is not a new sensibility in Scottish literature, and dates back at least to the medieval period, where the ethos of Robert Henryson seems familiar and relevant. The makar was also striving to blend the mundane and fantastic nature of everyday life, as J.A Tasioulas notes:

The lofty and the homely, the learned and the colloquial, the humorous and the ponderous are all found within his work, often blended together in a way that brings the great within the comprehension and judgement of ordinary men, and takes ordinary Scottish lives and reveals the heroism inherent in them.⁴⁴

Just like the fifteenth century poet, Warner too depicts 'the greatness and the day-to-day bustle'⁴⁵ of the town where he grew up, using his mythopoetic style to bind his fluctuating corpus and add a greater degree of substance to the disintegrating profundity of human experience in modern life. As he explains, 'in everything I've done, I wanted to give the impermanent the quality of myth',⁴⁶ and this notion is wholly instilled into the Port, where the small coastal town is awarded an air of timeless mystique in the face of temporal modernity. Warner puts the humdrum sea-port and its tight-knit community on the literary map as a place brimming with charm, substance, and enchanting possibilities.

While present in most of Warner's work, Oban is a geographical point which rarely features in literature. Rather than focusing on small mainland towns, contemporary Scottish writers tend to concentrate primarily on the Highlands and Islands of the country, or the populated inner cities, most notably Edinburgh and Glasgow. Described as the 'Gateway to the Isles',⁴⁷ Oban is primarily thought

⁴³ Warner, quoted by Laura Barton, 'Alan Warner: booze, books and why he's backing Scottish Independence'.

⁴⁴ J.A. Tasioulas, *The Makars: The Poems of Henryson, Dunbar and Douglas* (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1999), p.3.

⁴⁵ Tasioulas, *The Makars: The Poems of Henryson, Dunbar and Douglas*, p.3.

⁴⁶ Alan Warner, quoted by Sophy Dale, *Alan Warner's Morvern Callar*, p.66.

⁴⁷ <http://www.explore-oban.com/>

of as a tourist point, a quaint ‘west-coast holiday town’,⁴⁸ which offers access to the Outer and Inner Hebrides, while also providing a functional commute to the nation’s cities. The town is situated in a grey area, not quite mainland Scotland, and not an island, and rather hovers between this geographical binary, making it an optimum setting for Warner to explore and mould.

As noted in *Morvern Callar*, the lights from the south pier of the Port illuminate the ‘first island’, directing the gaze out towards Oban’s neighbouring island of Mull, while just behind lies ‘The Complex’, a rather less enchanting, man-made area of the village which houses estates and the ‘power station’.⁴⁹ This precise geographical description of Warner’s home town provides the ideal backdrop for him to cultivate prose, weaving together both reality and fantasy modes; capturing the social realities of the encroaching modern world, while also recognising the mythical and magical qualities of being situated on the coast of Scotland, directly facing the ancient islands. The coastal co-ordinate marker is a key means in which Warner’s mythopoetic style is cultivated, with the sea shore adding a magical dimension which is a far from the claustrophobic centre of the Port. Traditional Scottish elements of storytelling and folklore are integral to life in the Port, and woven together in Couris Jean’s tale where she divulges a dream-like narrative to Morvern:

...then out of the water in front of me in that bluey light, up rose the great white horse moving its head from side to side as it came over the sand towards me and more horses came bursting out the water, rearing up onto the beach, a dozen horses, two dozen horses running in front of me and splashing drops of salty water on my face while two score more horses came out the sea, running in front of me and running behind me.⁵⁰

The beautiful creatures, rapidly rising from the depths of the Scottish sea-shore, paint the most magical picture in the mind of the reader. Although it is swiftly revealed that a cargo ship carrying horses had capsized, and the animals had simply swam to safety, Couris Jean’s lucid, fantasy driven tale fully encapsulates the magical quality which is instilled in the Port: a location which manipulates reality with its mystical geographic essence. The mapping of Oban allows for such transcendent

⁴⁸ <http://www.explore-oban.com/>

⁴⁹ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.13.

⁵⁰ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, pp.39-40.

qualities to continually circulate in the text, and Warner exposes a place which is simultaneously mundane and quite extraordinary.

When depicting modern Scotland, an urban setting is most commonly used, with writers including Alasdair Gray, James Kelman and Irvine Welsh setting novels in Glasgow and Edinburgh to expose the economic, social and political issues facing the nation. Locating novels within the gritty confines of the city, projecting the bustling cosmopolitan lifestyle inhabited by all walks of life, provides such writers an outlet to describe often hellish realities, using the urban lifestyle as an anchor of authenticity and bare faced reality. The most powerful display of reality arguably comes in Welsh's debut, bringing to the fore the 'real' Edinburgh; not a place brimming with art and culture, but rather a city of heroin addicts trapped in a chronic HIV epidemic. Welsh's *Trainspotting* does not focus on tourist Edinburgh and avoids Princess Street and the Royal Mile, which Welsh deemed the 'shortbread Disneyland'⁵¹ of the Capital, but instead focuses on the geographical side-lines of the city, exposing the depressed and deprived Leith.⁵² The city is deglamourised and stripped back to expose its rawest and most harrowing aspects. Welsh unveils the harsh realities of the nation, often masked by tourism and romanticised visions of Scottish culture. As pointed out by Warner himself, Welsh's 'disposable' stylistic is borne out of his figurative landscape, cultivated through energetic prose and immediate ethical and moral distress, and exposes the corruption at the heart of the nation's capital city.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the Highland and Island writers who have contributed to Scottish literature have a more sensual outlook of life in Scotland, often projecting a romantically engaged picture of the mountainous or coastal landscape. They depict a figurative vision of the nation to be meditated over and artistically appreciated, rather than immediately condemned. The prose and poetry of George Mackay Brown fully encompasses this lyrical outlook on his beloved islands of Orkney. Rather than depicting with accuracy the historical facts and modern realities of the islands in

⁵¹ Dr James Procter, 'Irvine Welsh: Critical Perspective', *British Council Literature* (2009), <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/irvine-welsh>

⁵² Procter, 'Irvine Welsh: Critical Perspective'.

An Orkney Tapestry (1973), MacKay Brown weaves together factual and fictional elements, bringing his lyrical and imaginative writing close to his fellow poets, as he explains:

Most writers on Orkney have been practical in their approach. Excellent studies have been published [...] A few poets- Walter Traill Dennison, Edwin Muir, Robert Rendall- have been more interested in essences; they have described the vision by which the people live, what Edwin Muir called their Fable. This book takes its stand with the poets. I am interested in facts only as they tend and gesture, like birds and grass and waves, in 'the gale of life'.⁵³

Mackay Brown not only weaves together literary elements of prose and poetry, but depicts the Edenic landscape of his beloved islands and unearths their historic culture, with constant focus on the roots and sources of the community from which the islands draw their continuing life.⁵⁴ As Rowena and Brian Murray explain, *An Orkney Tapestry* depicts 'both the real place and the Orkney of Brown's imagination',⁵⁵ a direct contrast to the harsh and accurate realities of Welsh's urban literature. Rather than an exact recreation of his beloved island, Mackay Brown blends together the 'eternal, timeless virtues of respect for humanity'⁵⁶ which are cultivated from historic, Christian and pagan aspects of culture, projecting a place which is idyllic and archaic in both its landscape and national heritage. Much like Warner, Mackay Brown's tapestry threads together both modern realities and the islands of the past in a distinctly mythic fashion, giving his text a rich timeless feel which reflects the enchanting setting.

While the countryside and the city are used by these writers, each tending more towards either 'realistic' or 'fantasy' writing, Oban and its surrounding area delivers a setting which balances delicately between them. Warner blends both the social realities and new technologies found in Welsh's Edinburgh with the imaginative, poetic tendencies of Mackay Brown, exposing the mythopoetic essence of the Port. Warner's Port is at instances a hub of monotonous living, much like Welsh's gritty location, written in such placid prose to mirror the plain reality of life, as Morvern

⁵³ George Mackay Brown, *An Orkney Tapestry* (London: Quartet Books, 1973), pp.1-2.

⁵⁴ Rowena Murray, Brian Murray, *Interrogation of Silence: The Writings of George Mackay Brown* (London and Edinburgh: Steve Savage, 2008), p.118.

⁵⁵ Murray, *Interrogation of Silence: The Writings of George Mackay Brown*, p.119.

⁵⁶ Murray, *Interrogation of Silence: The Writings of George Mackay Brown*, p.121.

explains her tedious job at the Superstore: ‘I covered the tatties with sacks to slow down shooting and I swept the section. I washed the shelves, tipping the buckets down the drain in the meat cutting room’.⁵⁷ Yet this same setting is a place of lyrical beauty, with Warner’s often poetic descriptions of the land overshadowing the ‘real’ sense of place, elevating the setting to something enchanting: ‘Flickers were coming off the loch and the massive sky seemed filled with a sparkling dust above those hot summer hills’.⁵⁸ The latter, more engaged with the lyrical style of Mackay Brown, circulates in Warner’s novel to expose the opposing attributes of the Port; unveiling the enchantment which is to be found amongst banal modernity. The hybrid location of Oban, with opposing island and mainland conventions, allows Warner to explore and expose both the wavering social realities and romantic, often magical promise of the town. The Port is neither wholly realistic nor completely dominated by fantasy -driven prose, and Warner blends each genre to truly depict the spirit of his home town.

However, while Warner is the only writer to extensively use Oban in his fiction, he is not the first writer to implement the town as a geographical muse. Iain Crichton Smith also features Oban in his work. Spending twenty years of his adult life in Oban as a teacher at the local high school, Crichton Smith has collections which directly mention the town. Having grown up like Mackay Brown on a Scottish island, Crichton Smith does not depict his Island of Lewis in the same romantic light as Mackay Brown’s Orkney, and maintains a stubbornly realistic manner when describing the setting; obstinately avoiding lyrical fictitious engagement with the island or its people, most notably in his critical essay, ‘Real People in a Real Place’ (1982). While he avoided indulging in the ‘misty, rather beautiful world’⁵⁹ that Mackay Brown painted of Orkney, Crichton Smith did believe that ‘to grow up on an island is to grow up in a special world’, and as Matthew McGuire notes, it is this ‘mystical otherworldliness’, prompted by island life, that his poetry continually attempts to unravel. Crichton

⁵⁷ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.11.

⁵⁸ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.90.

⁵⁹ Iain Crichton Smith, ‘Real People in a Real Place’ from *Towards the Human* (Edinburgh: MacDonald, 1986), p.14.

Smith's work is 'highly alert to the sacred, otherworldly quality of everyday experience'⁶⁰, presenting the poet as a fitting point of reference to understand Warner's mythopoetic stylistics. A blend of realistic and fantasy driven elements are explicitly seen in Crichton Smith's work, and flourish in his poetry set in Oban. The poems located in Oban delicately weave the modes of writing together, remarkably suggestive of Warner's fiction which followed.

Just as Warner's debut flits between realistic depictions of Oban and fantasy driven aspects of the town, so too does Crichton Smith's poetry. It appears that the geographical location projects the same hybrid sensibility towards each writer, with Warner and Crichton Smith deeply aware of the enchanting substance and imaginative potential which the town possesses. 'Oban'⁶¹ begins: 'The rain is penetrating Oban and the circus has gone home. The lions / and wildcats have gone home through the papers and advertisements'. This exaggerated, caricatured opening exposes the fantastic, magical nature of the town; a fantasy -driven tendency which can also be read in his poem 'Shane', based on the Western film. This imaginative sensibility is continued in 'Oban 1955-1982'⁶² and this time inherits a far more lyrical and figurative outlook, forcing the gaze often away from the mainland and to the islands of Mull and Iona opposite; places which counterpoint his mainland inhabitancy. The island is a place which is 'Gaelic, mysterious: and this radiance is / the extravagant presence of the sea's abyss', exposing the otherworldly, magical presence of the distant islands which can be felt when situated in Oban. Just as Couris Jean envisions horses rising from the depths of the sea, so too does Morvern have a lucid, aquatic dream, describing: 'Bare, sitting on a beach with bluey sea so lovely like in brochures, the horses heads came out the water but fixed to men bodies'.⁶³ The presence of the sea for both Warner and Crichton Smith holds this similar compelling, mythopoetic quality. Each writer utilises the geographical coastal positioning of Oban to express an imaginative, 'unknowable' sensibility, while also incorporating the timelessness of great mythology into their visions of modern Scotland.

⁶⁰ Matthew McGuire, *Iain Crichton Smith: New Collected Poems* (Great Britain: Carcanet, 2011), p.xxi.

⁶¹ Iain Crichton Smith, 'Oban', *Iain Crichton Smith: New Collected Poems*, ed. Matthew McGuire (Great Britain, Carcanet, 2011), pp.214-15.

⁶² Smith, 'Oban 1955-1982', *Iain Crichton Smith: New Collected Poems*, pp.302-11.

⁶³ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.42.

Yet Crichton Smith's poem is not entirely dominated by figurative poetics, and simultaneously unveils the harsh realities which circulate on the mainland. As Douglas Dunn notes, 'material life and the objects with which people ornament or assuage a possibly misplaced hunger for happiness have always filled Crichton Smith with a disdainful horror close to repugnance'⁶⁴, and this contemporary reality is exposed in 'Oban 1955-1982'. The poet acknowledges the distractions which the young are faced with in the modern world, which neither literature nor education can shift.⁶⁵ This prefigures the insular nature of Warner's Port which also manifests such social constrictions, causing women to conform to social expectations with little opportunity for self-expression or alternative options.⁶⁶ The societal dreams of the young are exposed by Crichton Smith, mentioning, 'The girls yearn / for glamorous hairdressing', with the deflated poetic voice viewing them, 'in supermarkets at the till / I see them tapping', abandoning their talents and dreams to merely stay afloat in the sterile, empty modern world. This is close to Warner's depiction of Morvern, working as a shelf stacker in her monotonous job at the Superstore, and also musically gifted Kylah of *The Sopranos*, whose passion is not to become an esteemed musical sensation, but to acquire 'the best job in town... behind the record counter in Woolies [where] ya can play what you want.'⁶⁷

However the positioning of Oban does allow Crichton Smith's island nostalgia to filter in, blending the realities of urban modern life with the cultural history and rural substance of the nation. Writing from his scholarly and academic background, he states:

To be centred in a place where the pure tide
renews its treasures: and each misty hill
is real yet poetic.

The co-ordinate point of the coastal town, grounded firmly on the mainland while still in sight of the neighbouring islands, establishes Oban as a mythical place not wholly polluted with modern realities from central Scotland, but simultaneously 'real' and 'poetic'. The landscape especially is archaic and

⁶⁴ Douglas Dunn, 'The Wireless Behind the Curtain', in *Iain Crichton Smith: Critical Essays*, ed. Colin Nicholson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), p.68.

⁶⁵ Dunn, 'The Wireless Behind the Curtain', pp.68-69.

⁶⁶ Christie L. March, *Rewriting Scotland: Welsh, McLean, Warner, Banks, Galloway and Kennedy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) p.75.

⁶⁷ Warner, *The Sopranos*, p.68.

eternal, describing its water front, ‘The sea is sheaves / of endless blue on blue and lucid crowns / of jellyfish drift lazily’, which explicitly brings the ideal and the mundane together. Oban is a place of two halves, and manifests both reality and fantasy. From ‘the central glitter of the boundless sea’ which stretches all the way to ‘Iona and its graves’, to the superficial values of young girls who only ‘dream of dances and of wavy perms’, Crichton Smith’s geographical location of Oban seamlessly blends together the encroaching, deflating realities of the modern world, while still preserving some kind of poetic, mythical presence, brought to life through its evocative landscape.

Just like Crichton Smith’s gentle interweaving of reality and lyrical fantasy, Warner’s construction of the Port also stands as a hybrid town made up of infringing modern culture and the rustic landscape of the highlands. Specifically regarding the sequel to *Morvern Callar*, *These Demented Lands* (1997), which still traces Morvern’s life beginning in the Port, Christie L. March notes that the landscapes through which Morvern travels ‘echo the literary tradition that glorifies and rusticates the Highlands as a receptacle for traditional Scottish culture’, while also presenting to the reader ‘a “weirding” of landscape as socio-cultural and technological changes infiltrate the environment’.⁶⁸ This is also true of Warner’s debut novel, where he first lays the foundations for this infiltration of urban culture, which will continue to shape the tight community of the Port throughout the rest of his corpus. The Port provides the optimum setting to observe the reach of urban values and their impact on areas of the nation long considered ‘reliquaries of traditional Scottish culture’.⁶⁹ The vast mountainous landscape of Warner’s fictional town upholds the mythical and historical significance of the setting, yet the Port is simultaneously a place which now welcomes Walkmans, nightclubs and chipped nail varnish.

Landscape is a primary means by which a mythopoetic dimension is brought into the work of both Crichton Smith and Warner, with Oban subtly evoking a blend of realism and fantasy. The Port successfully portrays the timeless aspect of Warner’s mythopoetic style, established through the recurring motif of the burial; a notion which further hints at the intermingling of reality and fantasy. Burial links the sense of the eternal to the contemporary, and brings the spirits of those deceased to

⁶⁸ March, *Rewriting Scotland: Welsh, McLean, Warner, Banks, Galloway and Kennedy*, p.72.

⁶⁹ March, *Rewriting Scotland: Welsh, McLean, Warner, Banks, Galloway and Kennedy*, p.73.

encounter the modern land. Just as Crichton Smith's 'Oban 1955-1982' draws on the past and mentions those buried who have an impact on our sense of the land and sea, 'The million dead / illuminate the million tides', so too does Warner make this integral connection between those long gone and the present earthly elements. Morvern looks out to her 'fostermother's island where she lay buried'⁷⁰, awarding the current ownership of the land to her deceased relative who haunts it, and secretly disposes of her boyfriend's corpse across the highland plain, explaining,

I looked out at the landscape moving without any haste to no bidding at all. I yawned a big yawn. Two arms and a leg were buried on the cliff above the sycamore tree and higher up the torso and leg would be helping the sheets of bluebells below the dripping rocks. All across the land bits of Him were buried.⁷¹

Not only does the corpse aid in keeping the land fertile and renewed in the modern landscape, but it adds an eternal presence which will remain forever instilled across the mountainous setting. This vision of Warner's Scotland lends itself closely to the critical work of Cairns Craig, with the scholar noting that, in Scottish literature, 'to cross the Highland boundary is effectively to step into the past'⁷²: a notion which resonates not only with *Morvern Callar*, but all of Warner's mythopoetic prose set in his homeland. History, myth and the imagination go hand-in-hand in Warner's mythopoetic construction of the Scottish highlands, and Craig continues this idea in *The Modern Scottish Novel* (1999):

Scotland's history has constructed no 'splendid edifices'; it has aspired to a narrative leading towards a different future only to lapse back into the cyclical world of nature; in the ruins there is no history because it has been transformed into the stasis of 'artwork'.⁷³

Craig notes that Scotland is a geographical location which fails to 'operate inside the boundaries of progressive history',⁷⁴ and rather than following a linear, structured history instead celebrates its

⁷⁰ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.29.

⁷¹ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.91.

⁷² Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), p.70.

⁷³ Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.123.

imaginative, haphazard past which is infused with mythopoetic nuances. Craig notes that Scottish literature does not conform to ‘history’s forward trajectory’ but instead returns to the ‘cyclical world of myth, to a world of eternal truths untouchable by history’s passage’,⁷⁵ with this recurring mythopoetic quality true in Warner’s writing which defies reductive realism. Warner’s construction of the Port lends itself closely to Craig’s analysis and continually delves backwards into Scotland’s mythological past, coating his fictional, modern world with a timeless, ethereal layer. The burial motif in *Morvern Callar* is one means in which continuity between the temporal world and the ‘otherworld’ is strengthened; with the land possessing a compelling mythopoetic dimension which runs through the entirety of Warner’s work.

In order to explore Warner’s construction of the land further, and Scotland as a geographic location which has a tendency to return to ‘the cyclical world of myth’,⁷⁶ John Berger is another critic worth noting. In his critical essay ‘A Story for Aesop’ (1991), Berger examines this idea of seeing beyond the mere temporal landscape, urging that ‘we have to see the geographic as a representation of an invisible origin’,⁷⁷ an origin which Warner engages through the burial motif. Berger explains that many different things can ‘foreground’ the landscape with meaning, from personal memories to the survival of ecosystems, and states ‘all these, however, occur against a common constant background which I call the landscape’s *address*, consisting of the way a landscape’s “character” determines the imagination of those born there.’⁷⁸ Berger sees the landscape as not simply holding geographic or ecological significance, but, like Craig, something more complex and meaningful, with each landscape around the world adorning its own unique ‘character’. Berger describes Scotland’s ‘character’ against contrasting, foreign lands, suggesting the mythical dimension which Warner seems to draw on:

The address of many jungles is fertile, polytheistic, mortal. The address of deserts is unilinear and severe. The address of western Ireland or Scotland is tidal, recurring, ghost-filled. (This is why it

⁷⁴ Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture*, p.72.

⁷⁵ Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination*, p.166.

⁷⁶ Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National*, p.166.

⁷⁷ John Berger, *Keeping a Rendezvous* (New York: Vintage International, 1992), p.68.

⁷⁸ Berger, *Keeping a Rendezvous*, p.68.

makes sense to talk of a Celtic landscape.) The address of the Spanish interior is timeless, indifferent and galactic.⁷⁹

The distinct characteristics of Scotland, ‘tidal, recurring and ghost-filled’ are inherent in Warner’s work and also nod towards Craig’s idea that the Scottish novel continually moves across a boundary of the ‘modern social world’ and ‘a relentlessly returning alternative world’.⁸⁰ Warner’s burial motif encapsulates both Berger and Craig’s critical views, with the invisible presence of Morvern’s loved ones drawing the strange, otherworldly history of the Highland terrain which is an everlasting presence in the modern world. This spiritual ‘alternative world’ becomes more apparent as Warner’s work progresses, and will be analysed in depth in the chapters to follow. Morvern’s deceased foster mother and lover, two hugely significant people in her adolescent life, are physically part of the land in Warner’s debut novel, and their invisible, ghostly, presence subtly hint towards an Other world which co-exists with the Port.

The Journey: Pushing to the Limits of what’s Known

The Port is a focal point of residence in Warner’s work, but it is also the hub for travel and journeying, a motif which is continued throughout the entirety of Warner’s corpus. The setting of the Port cultivates continuity between the past and present, exposing the mythical, eternal nature of the landscape which transcends reductive realism. How characters physically move across such a captivating landscape is another preoccupation which haunts Warner’s prose. The Port is where a ferry terminal connects people to the neighbouring islands and a railway station provides a direct route to the nation’s inner cities and airports, therefore continually seeing characters embark on travels in, around, from, and back to, the town. While his novels are not focused on great quests or epic journeys, never featuring mammoth obstacles or dangerous crossings, Warner is preoccupied with the idea of moving in, out and around the place which loosely represents his own home. In an interview with the *Scottish Review of Books*, he explains this fascination:

⁷⁹ Berger, *Keeping a Rendezvous*, p.69.

⁸⁰ Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture*, p.72.

Perhaps it's something to do with the small town origins? [...] in Oban when I grew up you were always traversing the countryside in a very real way. As children, gangs of us would walk many miles through uninhabited country, playing at soldiers and commandos. [...]. Fifteen or twenty mile walks home as a teenager were not questioned. I think that moving through landscapes – the physicality of it – became for me, perhaps sadly (laughs) a concept of drama itself! Those journeys to a small village guy like me really did seem like huge adventures and doubtless this has sunk in my provincial psyche.⁸¹

Not only does Warner's childhood home provide the 'very real' physical exploration of journeying through the unique Scottish landscape, but sparks a childish sense of fantasy and adventure, where he and his friends would walk 'the most outlandishness and fabulous distances'⁸² through the highlands as a means of excitement and play. This sense of personal nostalgic fantasy and wonderment is carefully woven into his prose set in the Port, where the journeys which his characters embark on, from flights to foreign lands to one-way rail journeys into Glasgow, are all laced with a deeper, internal meaning which surpasses mere physical travel across a geographical setting. Just as Berger addresses the "character" of the landscape, this personified feature is integral to the personal journeys which Warner's own characters embark on, with the landscape often constructed to reflect and symbolise the personal journey, which is both physical and spiritual.

Warner's mythopoetic style sees elements of his realistic and fantasy writing blended seamlessly throughout his prose, with the tendency strengthening the often mundane journey to a personal pilgrimage of complexity and greatness. Mythopoeitics and the journey elaborate on the everyday movements of the characters within the confines of their social realities. *Morvern Callar* traces the cyclical journey of the adolescent heroine across the water to an unnamed Mediterranean town, before she returns four years later, full circle, back to her homeland. *Morvern Callar* lays the foundations of the journey which will be taken up in every one of Warner's novels to follow, tracing the lives of characters who are leaving or returning to the Port, and even foreshadows *The Worms*

⁸¹ Alan Warner, 'The SRB Interview- Alan Warner- Extended Version', interview with the *Scottish Review of Books*, Volume Seven, Issue Three (10th August 2011), <http://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org/index.php/back-issues/volume-seven-2011/volume-seven-issue-three/419-the-srb-interview-alan-warner-extended-version>

⁸² Warner, 'The SRB Interview- Alan Warner- Extended Version'.

Carry Me to Heaven (2006), a text which ventures once again to the Mediterranean. The central protagonist Manolo does not physically move from his home town, but embarks on an internal journey of recovery and redemption, after being falsely told that he has contracted a terminal illness. Amidst the central nostalgic journey which traces his past, the novel explicitly expresses Manolo's hatred of physical travel, especially those journeys which bring people back to where they started, as he explains:

If these damn teenagers like Teresa were so committed to travel, why not step on our African ferry and disembark, keep walking forever? [...] I detest travel. You know the overwhelming emotion I feel when I travel? Humiliation. [...] It is one of the many big fake romances of modern life. The idea that a new landscape will change my life I simply find ridiculous. New landscapes will change nothing within me.⁸³

Very much against modern expectations of foreign travel, Manolo concludes, 'Travel! You would have more true adventures by walking around our city here'.⁸⁴ This notion is apparent after Warner's biggest geographical distance is covered in *Morvern Callar*, and then swiftly reined in for the novels to follow. No other novel or its characters after the debut are granted such freedom to escape the nation and fly to far-off foreign lands, and, like Manolo's small-town sensibility, Warner's prose limits the peripheries which are traversed. *The Stars in the Bright Sky* (2010) fully encompasses Manolo's small-town ethos, where rather than crossing thousands of miles to new foreign lands, almost the entire journey is ironically set within the confines of an airport, where the notion of travel is turned inward, and conveyed through spiritual rather than physical excursion. In Warner's mythopoetic context, the young girls wait to be lifted to divine heights but instead are left stranded on earth. *The Stars in the Bright Sky* does not allow the girls to venture freely and willingly into the landscape like Morvern, who immerses herself in the natural world, but pulls the journey inward.

The theme of the journey has mythological significance, manifested by the geographical landscape and the characters' spiritual travel, noting Warner's dynamic configuration of textual mobility which

⁸³ Alan Warner, *The Worms Carry Me to Heaven* (London: Vintage, 2007), p.59.

⁸⁴ Warner, *The Worms Carry Me to Heaven*, p.59.

deals with both physical and internal journeying. To understand exactly how Warner combines the journey and mythology, the critical work and poetics of Charles Olson are hugely helpful reference points. Throughout the whole of Olson's writing a concern with the poetic potential of myth is consistent, and as Mark Shackleton explains, 'To Olson, myth expressed the possibilities of humankind, possibilities that the modern age has lost'.⁸⁵ This is precisely true too of Warner's use of myth, permeated in the face of the disintegrating contemporary world. Olson can help here as a literary guide to expand and explore this use of mythological thought. Both writers blend mythology with geographical and historical elements to comment on humanity as a whole. Fascinated by the work of Herman Melville, Olson's preoccupation with mythology was provoked by the great writer, with Olson hailing Melville 'a man of myth'.⁸⁶ Warner too, as a self-confessed 'reader who happens to write'⁸⁷, has expressed such admiration for and the influence of Melville, paying homage to *Benito Cerino* (1855), exclaiming 'what a masterpiece- so mysterious'.⁸⁸ Having clearly read and valued Melville's work, a connection with Olson and Warner confirms their affinity in their appreciation of myth in the novel form, and Olson's own poetics and critical work add subtle links to help us engage anew with Warner's prose.

In Olson's mythology history and geography overlap, as Donald Davie states:

In classical antiquity the earliest historians made little attempt to separate the description of lands from the narration of events the scene of which was in the areas described. For a long time physical geography and history appear attractively intermingled.⁸⁹

The coinciding geographical and mythological elements are especially seen in Olson's *Maximus* poems, where the poems connected to Gloucester, Massachusetts, are geographically precise relating directly to place, but also involve Olson's own personal history growing up there, and the cultural

⁸⁵ Mark Shackleton, *Moving Outward: The Development of Charles Olson's use of Myth* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1994), p.1.

⁸⁶ Charles Olson, *Call me Ishmael* (California: City Light Books, 1947) p.70.

⁸⁷ Stuart Jeffries, 'A Life in Writing: Alan Warner', *The Guardian* (May 2012)
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/25/life-in-writing-alan-warner>

⁸⁸ Dale, 'An Interview with Alan Warner', p. 123

⁸⁹ Donald Davie, 'Landscape as Poetic Focus', *Southern Review* 4 (July, 1968), p.687.

history which is inherent to the location.⁹⁰ Not only does Olson weave in his own personal history of Gloucester, marking the landscape where he played as a young boy, but he also includes references to the historic John Smith and the exotic Turkish princess Tragabigzanda⁹¹, exemplifying both the mythic and personal connections of the geographic location. The landscapes depicted in Warner's fiction bring together similar dimensions. The Port is presented as an accurate physical landscape, but also a deeply personal site for Warner. As will be further examined below, the 'character' of the landscape promotes the location as much more than a subtle backdrop to the text, and it is presented as a complex focal point which actively infringes on the characters' personal journeys.

Olson's poetry focuses on 'human and communal relations in physical space',⁹² as does *Morvern Callar*, and Warner pushes the ethos even further by constructing the landscape to actively engage and reflect human feeling. He sees the personal and geographic connected as one. The idea is stretched to the greatest extreme in *The Man Who Walks* with the title figure's personal appearance blending in with the land so much he looks as if he is physically part of it, seen when readers are eventually confronted by 'The Man Who Walks':

Face of The Man Who Walks! Baseball cap gone. The hair! Leaves and dead crabs in its grey spiked heights. Constant appearance of shock, dirt in the wrinkles, the haunted, prowling expression, already dark skin, weathered by the endlessness of being forced abroad in all weathers into the wider expanses of territory.⁹³

As Berthold Schoene explains, Warner's protagonist 'emerges as a human being whose indefatigable, compulsive peregrination and total immersion within nature have made him an integral part of the land, which has rubbed on him and marked him indelibly'.⁹⁴ There is a mutual bond between humanity and the land. This concept is also championed by Syed Manzurul Islam, with the critic noting that the land has the 'natural propensity to entwine individual bodies inhabiting it, shaping

⁹⁰ Shackleton, *Moving Outward: The Development of Charles Olson's use of Myth*, p.71.

⁹¹ Shackleton, *Moving Outward: The Development of Charles Olson's use of Myth*, p.71.

⁹² Davie, 'Landscape as Poetic Focus', p.690.

⁹³ Alan Warner, *The Man Who Walks* (London: Vintage, 2003), p.273.

⁹⁴ Schoene, 'Alan Warner, Post-feminism and the Emasculated Nation', p.257.

them in its very image', with humanity becoming 'sons and daughters of the soil.'⁹⁵ In the sequel to *Morvern Callar*, *These Demented Lands*, this physical connection is also apparent in the opening chapter, where Morvern is seen to rise from the depths of the Northern waters to reach the shore, as if born from the swell of the sea like the Greek goddess Aphrodite. Although not in images as extreme as those in *The Man Who Walks*, Morvern is seen to rise from the 'lunar seabed's and 'geysers' of 'the Sound',⁹⁶ mimicking the mythical ascendance of Aphrodite on to land. This notion of being born, or reborn in Morvern's case, from the sea also features heavily in Olson's *Call me Ishmael* (1947), where he exposes Melville's mythological ethos: 'The beginning of man was salt sea'.⁹⁷ This notion resonates with Warner's depiction of Morvern. In both *These Demented Lands* and *The Man Who Walks* the characters and their habitual surroundings are intertwined and unified as one single entity, with man resonating more firmly with the land, and woman with sea; a notion which shall be analysed further in Chapter Two.

While Warner is concerned with human relations in physical space, the interaction between the two elements is the central means in which the mythopoetic journey is unveiled. Many characters travel physically throughout Warner's corpus, and are at one with the mythopoetic landscape. In *Morvern Callar*, this merging of persona and land is plainly seen when the heroine is swimming in the Mediterranean Sea, after being a spectator of a religious procession in which a female statue is burned and set out to sea afloat. The 'pale model of the virgin saint girl', ordained in her 'heavy lace dress with tinkling bells',⁹⁸ suggests images of the Virgin Mary, although this is not explicitly stated, and Morvern swims out in search of the statue's remnants with other local girls, 'trying to see her burned face looking up at us from the seabed below.'⁹⁹ Linked to the Virgin Mary in the mythical context of symbolic renewal, fertility and rebirth, Morvern represents them too, now in the modern age. She searches for *herself* in the deep crystal waters, an image reminiscent of the 'the seas abyss' envisioned in Crichton Smith's poem. The natural surroundings and the personal psyche are closely intertwined

⁹⁵ Syed Manzurul Islam, *The Ethics of Travel: From Marco Polo to Kafka* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.5.

⁹⁶ Warner, *These Demented Lands*, pp.5-6.

⁹⁷ Olson, *Call me Ishmael*, p.13.

⁹⁸ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.154.

⁹⁹ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.156.

in Morvern's journey, seeking not only salvation, but her sense of self, from the depths of the sea. The notion of the journey is tightly bound within Warner's mythopoetic context, transferring biblical and spiritual significance onto contemporary society through the female protagonist, enhanced by the natural, geographic setting.

The central theme of the journey, and the dynamic, complex meaning encased in Warner's use of textual mobility, is usefully linked to Olson's understanding of *Moby Dick* (1851). *Call me Ishmael* comments on the greatest myths of human kind, with *Moby Dick*, in Olson's mind, completing the third and final journey of Western thought following Homer and Dante. As Robert Tally Jr. explains, 'with *Call Me Ishmael*, Olson considered how Melville not only responded to the world of 1851, but projected a kind of cosmological vision in which art and experience blended together in a project of mapping a world, as well as exploring other possible worlds'.¹⁰⁰ For Olson, Melville's novel projects an immense mythological and figurative vision, whereas Warner tightly reins his journey in to the central focus of the Port. While not on the same grand scale as Olson's innovative exploration of Melville's text, which spans hundreds of years in an organic, linear ordering of antiquity and epic myth, the idea behind Homer's *Odyssey* as applied to *Moby Dick* can be transferred to Warner's debut novel. Olson understands Homer's great epic in terms of the individual journey, stating:

Homer's world was locked tight in River Ocean which circled it, in Anaximander's map, like a serpent with tail in mouth. But in the *Odyssey* Ulysses is already pushing against the limits, seeking a way out. Homer gave his hero the central quality of the men to come: *search, the individual responsible to himself*.¹⁰¹

This characteristic of Homer's *Odyssey*, transferred onto a much smaller scale, resonates in the personal journeys which Warner's characters embark on; and it is particularly his feminine protagonists who hold this same 'central quality' as depicted by Olson. Morvern's potential and substance lies in her realistic urge to find liberation, and break free of the society she is so familiar with, 'pushing against the limits, seeking a way out'. Just as Ulysses pushes against his restricted,

¹⁰⁰Robert T. Tally Jr., *Some Men Ride on Such Space: Olson's Call Me Ishmael, The Melville Revival and the American Baroque* (Texas: Texas State University, 2013), p.5.

¹⁰¹Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, p.118.

geographic boundaries, so too does Morvern, abandoning her job and life at home, only to find herself in an alien land unlike anything she has encountered within the confines of the Port:

Where you would expect a jumble of hills and a circular folly above a port: none. Where you would expect piers with a seawall between and an esplanade of hotels beyond: none. Where you would expect stone houses hunched round a horseshoe of the bay with The Complex tucked away round a back: none. The resort I was looking at was really another place.¹⁰²

Morvern pushes against her contemporary known world to ‘another place’, depicted in the drastically contrasting landscapes of the Port and the Mediterranean resort. All familiar assets and expectations provoked by the Port have vanished, and instead she is in a land liberated and free of such claustrophobic, small-town norms. Morvern has not travelled to the Mediterranean in search of new geographical or natural wonders, but rather as an escape from her restricted, monotonous life at home, and as means to find herself. As Olson states of Melville’s novel in correspondence to fellow writer Robert Creeley, ‘My assumption is any POST-MODERN is born with the ancient confidence that, he *does* belong. So, there is nothing to be *found*. There is only [...] search [sic]’,¹⁰³ and this notion of searching ‘the individual responsible to himself’, is encapsulated in Morvern’s solo quest.

Morvern’s journey is not motivated by a search of unknown, earthly discovery, as is Homer, Dante and Melville’s journeys across the newly discovered Mediterranean, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, but rather a journey to reach the end of her own experienced world. She is searching for her sense of self, which has been lost in her sterile, modern domain, and finds such spiritual and individual enlightenment in the landscape of the Mediterranean:

Across the orchard there was something else. You could see part of a giant blue eye in the pale light. [...] The massive pale lips of a girl seemed to turn up to the night sky ready for kissing and you could see the light from the screen flicker on the leaves. I turned facing the sea... I closed my

¹⁰² Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.151.

¹⁰³ Tally Jr., *Some Men Ride on Such Space: Olson’s Call Me Ishmael, The Melville Revival and the American Baroque*, p.6.

eyes there in the quietness just breathing in and breathing in. I hadn't slept for three days so I could know every minute of that happiness that I never dared dream I had the right.¹⁰⁴

Morvern sees herself in the figurative contours of the land, finally coming to life, 'just breathing in and breathing in'. The new landscape aids in shining a light on her true persona, emphasising Morvern's journey as not one of physical or geographical accomplishment, but rather spiritual salvation.

The landscape continues to reflect Morvern's newly discovered sense of self, especially in her homecoming at the end of the novel. Far from the coastal shores of the Mediterranean, where 'the seabed of sand under water that was the colour blue, like in brochures'¹⁰⁵, Morvern returns home to the 'real', earthy land of her origin, traveling across the deserted, mountainous highlands in a snow storm. The landscape has changed from the opening sequence in the Port, previously centred on the bustling, superficial nature of The Mantrap and the tedious Superstore, although Morvern is very much returning to the same place, stating, 'In a queerly familiar way the looming things ahead were starting to take shape through the blizzard.'¹⁰⁶ The landscape has taken on a new meaning now, with far more profundity and significance, nurturing Morvern's feminine vulnerability in an abandoned place in which there 'was silentness. Total silentness'.¹⁰⁷ Her return is to a sublime, snow covered setting. Even her 'goldish lighter' to light her Silkcuts has taken on a new significance, showing the transformation of Morvern and her new outlook on the familiar setting. Taking shelter from the snow in the Tree Church, Morvern does not light a cigarette, a symbol of her materialistic life before leaving the Port, but instead lights a candle in the spiritual shelter to guide her through the contours of her lonely refuge point:

¹⁰⁴ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.210.

¹⁰⁵ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.150.

¹⁰⁶ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.227.

¹⁰⁷ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.221.

Heavy snow was layered on the evergreen roof, insulating the place. I lit the last lighter and held it up so shadows shook on the thatch of twigs above, then I moved deeper into the darkneses. A few steps down the aisle I put out the lighter then did a genuflection.¹⁰⁸

The flame, initially used to fuel Morvern's smoking habit, nurtured by the youth culture which previously suffocated her, is now a guiding light of radiance and hope, illuminating her familiar yet completely transformed setting. The Port is no longer a hollow, materialistic village but a place of redemption and salvation.

The wintery scene depicted at the beginning of the novel closely resembles the harsh, icy reality of Morvern's claustrophobic life in the Port, as she states, 'I walked out with my teeth chattering, trying to plonk my feet down on the snow crust instead of forcing my ankles forwards breaking it up.'¹⁰⁹ The once frozen landscape, causing distress and discomfort is now, after her journey away from home, a far more comforting and nurturing land, with Morvern seeing 'the first snowflake twirling down', with 'tickly snow'¹¹⁰ settling on her closed eyelids. Warner's final scene resonates heavily with James Joyce's acclaimed short story 'The Dead' (1914), a literally parallel which will be considered in more depth in Chapter Three. Morvern appears as a feminine equivalent to Gabriel Conroy, with the winter scene at the close of each novel signalling a 'moment of transcendence'¹¹¹ and individual clarity for each protagonist. Gabriel's moment of epiphany not only illuminates the dead souls of Ireland who co-exist with the present world, emphasised as the snow settles across the nation, but Gabriel sees himself as a member of the living-dead on earth, 'constrained by Dublin's social and political milieu'.¹¹² In contrast, Morvern represents a far more positive and forward looking vision at the close of Warner's novel, with the delicate transformation of the land setting the scene for the heroine's final lines:

¹⁰⁸ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.228.

¹⁰⁹ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.28.

¹¹⁰ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.228.

¹¹¹ Daniel R. Schwarz, 'A Critical History of "The Dead"', *James Joyce: The Dead- Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism* (Boston- New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1994), p.67.

¹¹² Schwartz, 'A Critical History of "The Dead"', p.67.

I placed both hands on my tummy at the life there, the life growing right in there. The child of the raves. I put my head down and closed my mouth. I started the walking forwards into that night.¹¹³

While Gabriel envisions the bleak, lifeless state of his nation, Morvern feels new life growing inside of her. Now the land, while woven together with Morvern's own personal journey, takes on further mythological significance: welcoming the redeemed female back to her native land with an implicit nativity homecoming. Depicted as a 'Mother Scotland', the land, like Morvern, is now a symbol of hope and inspiration, facilitating a setting which will nurture and care for the nation's unborn messiah. Mythology circulates this final section of the novel, but not in an explicitly biblical means, and rather focuses attention on the great, unknown questions of humanity and spirituality. Not only is Morvern unified with her geographical surroundings, with the nation's snow covered land adding to the 'whiteness' of her feminine purity and fertility, but her unborn baby is now intrinsically linked to the land too. By pushing against the limits of her familiar, experienced world, Morvern has returned solo with a child, once more adopting symbolic connotations of rebirth from her mythological equivalent, the Virgin Mary. Through the central notion of the journey, Morvern maps out a route of redemption, echoed by the particular attributes of the landscape which mould to reflect her inner psyche; a place and person which are still silent, but now essentially sublime.

The motif of the journey is initially configured in Warner's debut novel, intertwining both the physicality and spiritual essence of such mobility. Structured around his mythopoetic context, Morvern's journey is implicit and often silent in meaning, engaging with the 'unknowable' myth. The precise geographical setting of the Port, a place which Warner will continually return to in his fiction, provides the backdrop to observe such journeying, and manifests the mythological attributes of the nation. A recognition of the 'unknowable' laces the ending of Morvern's initial journey, as she determinedly walks with her head down and closed mouth, 'forwards into that night'.¹¹⁴ Morvern explains, 'I kept walking down the long straight forcing myself not to look backwards',¹¹⁵ firmly

¹¹³ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.229.

¹¹⁴ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.229.

¹¹⁵ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.226.

driving onward into the territory of her unknown future, ready to embrace the next stage of her journey: a prevailing movement in anticipation of the novels to follow.

Chapter Two

Extending Warner's Mythopoetic World

'Everything in these airport lands was seen through tinted or affected glass, which seemed to magnify, distance, or distort the whole world.'

(Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*)

Ambiguity resonates at the close of Warner's debut novel, and this feeling of the 'unknown' continues in each of his novels to follow, particularly through the subtle manipulation of what is real and what is fantasy. Confiding in Ava about the ethereal visions she often has of her stepfather, Chell states: 'Sometimes I really don't know if I'm making it all up. If it's imagination or a real thing.'¹¹⁶ The words, while never deemed significant in any critical reviews of *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, become the crux of Warner's mythopoetic style in each of his novels, a recurring sensibility which has been initially plat-formed in *Morvern Callar*. Continuing from the debut novel, this chapter shall examine Warner's extension of themes and symbols laid out in his first publication, leaving behind the

¹¹⁶ Alan Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky* (London: Vintage, 2011), p.214.

mythopoetic world of the Port and entering a different, but no less profound entity; Gatwick airport. The timelessness of the journey along with the clouding of the real world and the imaginary surface once more in Warner's sixth novel, noting the universal depth and mystery of the modern world. Just as the Port is projected as a liminal space, so too is the airport, and once more the configuration of landscape and the journey become mutually interchangeable, opening up the conceptual gateway to understand Warner's subtle infusion of myth.

Creating New Places: Extensions of the Port

Warner's debut *Morvern Callar* presents the initial configuration of the Port, an integral literary location in the corpus which many of the novels will return to. The Port is a complex place which is rooted in reality, with the geographic location of the town wholly accurate, but simultaneously has an air of fantasy running through it. The precise location fully embraces Warner's mythopoetic style, with a sense of magic and fantasy injected into the modern societal constructions of the coastal town. The contemporary, local sphere becomes profound and timeless, marking the essence of Warner's mythopoetic approach which unveils the enchantment of the everyday. However, the Port is not the only geographic configuration which sees a subtle blend of reality and fantasy, with each of Warner's fictionalised settings embracing the same mythopoetic technique. Warner's entire corpus is united not only by the literary trope of the journey which threads through each novel, but also the mythopoetic style which encases each individual text. Warner's novels journey through a variety of different realms and settings, seeing his landscapes injected with the same mythopoetic sentiment.

As noted in Chapter One, Oban, Warner's geographical muse, is renowned for its liminal nature and is commonly known as the 'Gateway to the Isles'. It is a place which aids in travel and exploration, and this quality is directly transferred on to Warner's fictional construction of the Port. As a nexus of exchange, the Port continually sees characters in *Morvern Callar* depart and return

home, and the setting maintains this position as a 'portal' in the novels to follow. The Port becomes a symbol of transition and mobility, opening up numerous other realms for Warner's fiction to venture into. Each unique setting manifests Warner's mythopoetic style, with the new surroundings evoking the profundity and mystique which graces the everyday, contemporary world. This section of Chapter Two will note the complexity of the Port and the various dimensions which make up the single setting, while also acknowledging Warner's move to lands further afield, primarily using *These Demented Lands* and *The Man Who Walks* as textual examples which extend ideas laid out in the debut. The diverse range of geographical configurations does not jeopardise the mythopoetic integrity of Warner's prose, but, on the contrary, heightens the effect of this innovative style.

Many of the novels which come after the debut break free of the Port, and even Scotland, pulling readers into new, unexplored worlds. Since *Morvern Callar*, Warner's evocation of the Highlands has adopted a new persona, transporting readers into a new-found realm which is both recognisable and quite bizarre. As *The Man Who Walks* progresses, it becomes clear that, although still set in and around the Port, the atmospheric qualities of the land have drastically changed. Throughout *The Man Who Walks* readers often find themselves in a distorted, archaic territory which is remote and secluded from local civilisation. Having left the close-knit, internal positioning of the Port and ventured into the surrounding area, readers are transported to a completely new realm, very much leaving the recognisable village of *Morvern Callar* behind. The opening of *The Man Who Walks* makes it clear that Warner's novel is still rooted in the modern world, exposing a land of decay and rubbish tips, with plastic shopping bags floating through the sky. Drawing attention to these mundane and insignificant objects so accustomed to contemporary life, Warner titles them 'ghost bags', injecting an air of eerie mystery into his distinctly modern sphere. Warner exposes the supernatural mystique behind such objects, writing:

Rarely seen in the distances, though your eye is alert to all those types of strange horizon movements - some ancient instinct for far and dangerous fringe movement. So you generally never see the ghost bag arrivals. They stir and move on through these territories under cover of

night or only when mankind is absent- unless: find the ghost bags at first light where they ended their nocturnal wanderers! ¹¹⁷

The figurative prose, beautifully depicting a seemingly insignificant object, exposes the enchantment which delicately circulates in the modern world. Readers are not left with a vivid image of a synthetic carrier bag, but rather an elusive floating object which haunts the desolate contemporary land.

Warner's modern setting now adopts a new meaning, immediately forcing readers to acknowledge the magical and mysterious qualities which are encompassed within the landscape of *The Man Who Walks*. Readers are transported to a new realm as the novel continues, seen when Nephew, in his hallucinogenic state, recalls brawling with school mate Robert Sinclair at the age of fourteen, his vivid memory projecting a vision of the land which captures its remote, detached position:

A green basin surrounded by mountains curving away up to the turned-back summits and a full sky above of black mounts [...] Hills seemed all round cause when me and Sinclair walked towards each other, the whole world shut out, huge mountains just flew away back with the bang of the first punch. It enclosed us, cause there was no way you could escape that conflict, so I *felt* the mountains round us. ¹¹⁸

Nephew's memory of the land is one in which 'the whole world shut out', mirroring the present trail of the narrative which traverses the most outlandish distances, isolated and removed from local life in the Port. Nephew relentlessly pursues his Uncle's footsteps out of the Port, battling natural obstacles and mountainous plains, yet, as readers, we are constantly reminded that the title figure has 'never gone north of Ballachulish before'¹¹⁹; a place situated a mere thirty miles from the accurate positioning of the Port. Although the journey is not one of immense geographical distance, and progresses around the tight circumference of the Port, Warner securely situates his novel in an 'Otherworld', where the setting is overtly excessive and inexplicable. The novel is set in a place which is geographically familiar, but simultaneously quite bizarre, where birds continually fly

¹¹⁷ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.1.

¹¹⁸ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.66.

¹¹⁹ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.170

overhead integrated with a landscape which appears ‘spectral, brilliant and quite unreal’.¹²⁰ At moments the setting transcends the reality of the secular domain, as Berthold Schoene explains, ‘there are glimpses of clarity but ultimately the contours of the land remain blurred and its identity vague’.¹²¹ Schoene’s criticism of Warner’s ‘blurred’ and ‘vague’ landscape prompts the image of a misty Celtic setting, a notion resonating with the literary sensibilities of the Celtic Twilight. The Celtic Twilight phenomenon sees the boundaries between the real world and the supernatural spheres completely dissolve: a literary sensibility which will be explored in the final chapter of this thesis. *The Man Who Walks* is a novel which successfully hints at this clouding of boundaries (a notion which explicitly comes to the fore in *The Deadman’s Pedal*) and begins to suggest that there are elements of an ‘Otherworld’ which subtly co-exist with Warner’s secular realm.

While *The Man Who Walks* hints towards the enchantment which can be found in everyday contemporary society, the same idea which manifests in *Morvern Callar*, each novel exposes the same geographic location in a drastically different manner. Warner’s fourth novel unfolds just outside the familiar village, but sees a distinct contrast from the Port conveyed in the debut. As noted in the previous chapter, the Scottish land in the final stage of *Morvern Callar* is described as nurturing and idyllic as the heroine willingly crosses the mountainous plain on foot, with the blanket of snow covering the Highlands providing a place of comfort and security, as Morvern explains: ‘The snow was thawing and drops of melty water were falling through the thatched roof making me better’.¹²² Implicitly biblical, silently providing connotations of a modern-day nativity within Warner’s contemporary context, the winter scene at the close of *Morvern Callar* is deeply mythopoetic in its construction, manifesting notions of renewal and purity in its final lines. This nurturing, tender image of the nation’s landscape, observed through the eyes of the female, is also recognised in *The Sopranos*, with the girls viewing the highland landscape as the local bus transports them out of the Port and towards Edinburgh:

¹²⁰ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.155.

¹²¹ Berthold Schoene, *The Walking Cure: Heimat, Masculinity and Mobile Narration in Alan Warner’s The Man Who Walks*, p.97 http://www.academia.edu/1319311/The_Walking_Cure

¹²² Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.228.

Summer, like a furious rash, was upon the land. Fresh bracken, upright and astute, the stalks growth waverings, visible close to the road as they creamed up the brae runs. The emerald of the land made the mountain gushings of froth all the more white.¹²³

Once more, feminine connotations of fertility and growth are encapsulated in the rich green hues of the land, with a scattering of white mirroring the purity of Morvern's winter scene. Images of the 'upright and astute' stalks, summer's 'furious rash', and 'gushings of froth', continue to stress the fertility and fruitfulness of the land, presenting it as a place of amorous human desire. Like the debut, the female gaze in *The Sopranos* projects a vision which is drastically transformed in *The Man Who Walks*. Now, in his first male-centred prose, Warner exposes far more sinister, unrelenting aspects of the natural world, which have no mercy on its innocent travellers or native inhabitants:

Enough to make you dizzy , those lochs under knobs of pointless land, layered with humus and smeared bluntly westward; sick sweet knottles of whin bush and daisies... And that's just when it's raining, woe betide the circumstances a few hours of shuttered sunshine produce as crawling things spill forth: wasps, slugs, bluebottles, moving as if magnetised, clegs, eerie-wigs, slow worms, shell-less snails.¹²⁴

Far from Morvern's Edenic surroundings, with the dusting of white snow projecting a romanticised image of the idyllic nation, the Highlands are now a place of grotesque infestation and terror, a 'pointless land' where the 'heartless mountains'¹²⁵ fail to provide shelter or care for the vulnerable traveller. Warner evolves and moulds the essence and potential of the landscape in this latter novel, drastically manipulating the highland atmosphere from the previous text to a place which is now decidedly more bleak and threatening.

The Man Who Walks can be read as a deeply emasculated vision of the land, and such a mythopoetic gender divide is relevant. Compared to Morvern, a woman tightly bound to the sea, consistently immersed in water throughout the debut novel, man is distinctly connected to the land in *The Man Who Walks*. The male centred prose is almost completely set on dry land, with each male

¹²³ Warner, *The Sopranos*, p.52.

¹²⁴ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.17.

¹²⁵ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.17.

protagonist united with the earth, both physically and mentally. Not only is Uncle seen covered in living, earthly matter, with ‘alive crabs and winkles buried right down in his hair’,¹²⁶ but the land is also described as ‘an eidetic country, made out of memory alone’¹²⁷, stressing the mental perception of the nation which is etched into the mind of each man. Such an internal, spiritual connection with the land is emphasised further, as Macushla explains:

Then when I’d triumphed, I recalled it as this, arcadia... that’s sort of paradise like. What I’m saying is, it’s where our head is at that prints our impression of the landscape! I realised early on, growing up in grandeur like this that you and me are surrounded by each day, I sussed that cause I was lonely I preferred landscapes to people, then I was reading Bertie Camus, as you do, and I read in his Carnets: “In our youth we attach ourselves more readily to a landscape than a man. It is because landscapes allow themselves to be interpreted.”¹²⁸

Macushla’s preference of ‘landscapes to people’ draws on the profound connection between man and the earth. Rather than presented as a ‘Mother Scotland’, as noted in *Morvern Callar*, with the debut novel’s setting projecting a vision of an ‘uncontaminated space, a realm of innocence and immediacy’,¹²⁹ Warner subverts the images of this mother earth in *The Man Who Walks*, and instead draws on the immediate masculine correlation with the northern land. The Scottish highlands are described as ‘bloodied ground’¹³⁰, eternally stained by the remnants of war, violence and masculine sacrifice, heightening once more the integral connection between the male travellers and the earth which they journey across.

While man is connected to the land in *The Man Who Walks*, *These Demented Lands* continues to envision the mythopoetic significance of women and sea. Employing the same vague and remote qualities which make up the setting of *The Man Who Walks*, the novel is set only a few miles off the coast of the Port on a neighbouring island, but transports readers to a distinctly peculiar and

¹²⁶ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.23.

¹²⁷ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.28.

¹²⁸ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.67.

¹²⁹ Schoene, *The Walking Cure: Heimat, Masculinity and Mobile Narration in Alan Warner’s The Man Who Walks*, p.97.

¹³⁰ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.164.

outlandish place. The sequel to *Morvern Callar* continues to project images of the sea, a stark contrast the rugged contours of the highlands traversed in *The Man Who Walks*. Propelled from her sunken ferry, Morvern swims ashore to an unnamed island and a place which is far removed from reality. The land is described through Morvern's eyes as a dark, empty void where, 'light was jumping up behind the looming mountains... and into more mysteriousness of mist banks, darkness'.¹³¹ A sublime and mysterious landscape fills this unique world, one which, again, is far removed from the realistic, internal workings of the Port on the mainland. But presumably the heroine has simply ended up on the Isle of Mull, her foster mother's island, directly opposite Oban. Although the real geographical point rests securely in the mind of the reader, the land itself is portrayed as a fantasy dystopia, separated from any realistic co-ordinate markers. Morvern gives an account of her new surroundings while she tries to swim to shore, pulled under by the current:

I opened my eyes in the static and rumble. A landscape of colours was glissanding on the lunar seabeds way below [...] In the furthest distances of this universe the rising planets and blue stars from the seabed geysers, a huge surface of tiny bubbles, wobbled under us lit by deepest flarings below: a coral reef gone insane in the colours of these killing seas.¹³²

These Demented Lands, as the title suggests, pushes the landscape to its very limits, catapulting readers into a bizarre realm in which all clarity disintegrates and the temporal world slips away. Morvern depicts an under-water-world, a vivid land rising from 'seabed geysers', a notion which has previously been hinted at in the debut. In the Mediterranean village of *Morvern Callar*, the heroine describes the interior of a church she stands in, before she watches the statue of the 'virgin saint girl' burned at sea:

When you looked up to the ceiling there was a strip of bluish glass round the top of the walls and the moonlight was lighting up the glass so's the colour showed on faces [...] With the light

¹³¹ Warner, *These Demented Lands*, p.44.

¹³² Warner, *These Demented Lands*, pp.5-6.

filtering in you were already drowned and on the bottom of the deep sea with the living people above.¹³³

The artistic lighting which filters through the stained glass windows provokes Morvern's enchanting vision, with the heroine, even when on land, spiritually connected with the sea. Parallels can be drawn between the debut and its sequel in regard to these aquatic configurations of place, with *Morvern Callar* initially implying that an 'Otherworld' exists beyond the earthly terrain; a vision which is firmly brought to life as she drowns in *These Demented Lands*. Morvern's mythopoetic connection with the sea resonates firmly in each of the novels, presented like Aphrodite, as a mythological Goddess who was conceived from the swell of the sea, rising from 'the foaming brine'.¹³⁴ Connecting the female with water anchors Warner's universal, mythopoetic construction of Morvern in each of the novels, and such a unification of the feminine body and sea is noted by Lotten Peterson in her description of Aphrodite as the 'Eternal Woman':

Water is the natural element bearing in life. The foetus is embedded in amniotic fluid, carrying the child on its wet waves at birth. Islands emerge from the sea, forming dry land, providing creation myths for cultures all over the world. Universally, primeval water is perceived as female.

Omnipresent, she produces life.¹³⁵

The unification of the female and water is inherent to Warner's mythopoetic heroine, with the sea transformed into a timeless 'mythological underworld'¹³⁶. Morvern, like Aphrodite, exists in Warner's prose as 'a spirit of place and not simply a 'woman'',¹³⁷ bringing to the fore the eternal mythopoetic depth of Morvern and the timeless world she inhabits. While man is connected with land in *The Man Who Walks*, the emasculated nation envisioned through the male footsteps which continually traverse

¹³³ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.155.

¹³⁴ Lotten Peterson, 'Aphrodite as Eternal Woman: Her Development from Mesopotamian Goddess to the Virgin Mary', *Aphrodite: The Making of a Goddess*, ed. Gota Johansson (Lund: Palmkrons, 2005), p.13.

¹³⁵ Peterson, 'Aphrodite as Eternal Woman: Her Development from Mesopotamian Goddess to the Virgin Mary', p.13.

¹³⁶ Susanna Roxman, 'The Making of a Goddess: Aphrodite in Lawrence Durrell's Prose and Poetry', *Aphrodite: The Making of a Goddess*, ed. Gota Johansson (Lund: Palmkrons, 2005), p.98.

¹³⁷ Roxman, 'The Making of a Goddess: Aphrodite in Lawrence Durrell's Prose and Poetry', p.87.

the earth, Warner unites women and the sea, with each natural element adding mythopoetic depth to his prose.

Warner stretches the unique contours of the Port throughout the course of his fiction, with *These Demented Lands* in particular noting the most outlandish distances as Morvern crosses the ‘Hinterlands’, the ‘Mist Anvils’, crossing by the ‘Woodland Edges’ and ‘The Far Places’¹³⁸. The scale of Warner’s mythopoetic world is consistently pushed to its very edges, with each textual journey unveiling new liminal spaces which exude universal, timeless and spiritual meaning. Although referring to Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, Robert Tally Jr. explains the excessive nature of Melville’s world in light of baroque art, an aesthetic description which is also relevant to Warner’s construction of Morvern’s new surroundings:

Unlike the renaissance’s careful and beautiful ordering of space, the baroque work of art appears as a grotesque, ornate and above all excessive art, one that transgresses the limits of the frame and ventures into the space beyond.¹³⁹

This description of baroque art is a fitting reflection of Warner’s fictionalised setting in *These Demented Lands* and *The Man Who Walks*, which too reject systematic organisation or graceful structure, and venture ‘into the space beyond’, provoking a world which is brash and excessive. Another journey, The Grand Tour, flourished in the seventeenth century, with the artists, writers and thinkers all venturing to alien, foreign lands in search of aesthetic inspiration, mirroring Warner’s literary journeys which also travel into the unknown. Warner’s work is similar to baroque art’s visual inventions which ‘can nudge us out of our usual experiences, out of our normal ways of thinking [...] the gateways to this dream world of Baroque art, this place where we meet with - or merge with - a divine or beautiful presence.’¹⁴⁰ Each of Warner’s novels stimulates the same artistic sensibility, with his mythopoetic depiction of the land one which subtly pulls readers into an infinite ‘other’ world.

¹³⁸ Warner, *These Demented Lands*, p.26.

¹³⁹ Tally Jr., *Some Men Ride on Such Space: Olson’s Call Me Ishmael, The Melville Revival and the American Baroque*, p.4.

¹⁴⁰ Vernon Hyde Minor, *Baroque & Rococo: Art and Culture* (London: Laurence King, 1999), p.20.

The Airport: A Time-less Realm

Moving into an area which is quite alien to Warner's style, *The Stars in the Bright Sky* leaves behind the archaic highland terrain of the aforementioned novels and is instead set within the inter zone of Gatwick airport, the most modern of institutions in contemporary society. While the airport may initially appear as a sterile environment which fails to exude the same profundity and enchantment that can be found in the natural landscape, Warner's mythopoetic style comes to the fore once more in the novel, noting the timeless and mythological profundity of his female protagonists. Like the Port, the airport is exposed as another liminal space which is complex and rich in meaning, coming to life as an institute which is detached from the 'real' world and instead occupies its own unique domain. As a writer who has a talent for capturing natural landscapes, with the Scottish highlands, Islands, and Mediterranean coastline depicted in vivid detail, Warner's venture into the airport provides a fascinating point of study that expands our view of how the writer uses liminal spaces to infuse timeless, universal and mythical qualities into modern life. Rather than immersed in the rustic outside world, *The Stars in the Bright Sky* is a decidedly inward- looking and- thinking text, and a novel which once more see's Warner's mythopoetic style flourish.

As the previous chapter noted, Warner's mythopoetic style comes to the fore through his depiction of the Scottish highlands in *Morvern Callar*, with the coastal geographical co-ordinate of the Port a place which manifests both materialistic reality as well as moments of lyrical fantasy. Warner's construction of the Highland countryside rests with Raymond Williams's critique of the country and city, with the Scottish land fitting with Williams view of the country as a place which evokes 'a natural way of life: of peace, innocence and simple virtue'.¹⁴¹ The natural world of the Scottish countryside is continually employed by Warner to enhance the mythopoetic dimension of his work, with the sublime landscape and rugged contours of the nation used to inject a sense of timelessness into the prose; a landscape which is far removed from the industrial, urbane features of the contrasting city.¹⁴² The burial motif which runs through *Morvern Callar*, and novels to follow, subtly evokes this

¹⁴¹ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Hogarth Press, 1993), p1.

¹⁴² Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.144.

eternal presence of the afterlife, with the remnants and spirits of those long gone still actively engaging with the local, natural landscape. The heroine remembers her deceased lover as she looks out across the highland plain, stating, ‘All across the land bits of Him were buried’.¹⁴³ Morvern’s contemporary world is actively shaped by the eternal presence of Him; her unnamed partner’s identity, punctuated with a capital letter, presents Him as an earthly God who has the same spiritual power and invisible co-presence as the Heavenly Father.

Such an example of utilising the earth in this everlasting way can be found most prominently in *The Man Who Walks*, where the Scottish landscape is inherent to Warner’s mythopoetic style which seeks to blur the boundaries between the real world and the imagined. As the title suggests, *The Man Who Walks* is a journey solely on foot, and employs physical textual mobility across the Scottish highlands as a means to unveil the supernatural elements which lay beneath the present earth. The rudimentary function of walking is used as a gateway to explore this enchanting ‘other’ realm, uniting aspects of the past and the present. The basic movement not only explores Warner’s rugged landscape outwardly, capturing a vivid, panoramic view of the highlands, but also journeys back to uncover Scotland’s past. The chapter titles of the novel evoke this literary remembrance, with ‘Highland Clearance’, ‘Bonnie Prince Charlie’s Flight in the Heather’ and ‘By the Bonnie, Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond’, not only linked to the landscape, but also indicate the nation’s historic and cultural past. *The Man Who Walks* scratches beneath the surface of the landscape and uncovers Scotland’s history, utilising walking as an integral means to trace both the routes and roots of the nation, an ethos which Robert Macfarlane also maintains:

To track these tracks, to leave your own prints beside them, is to sense nothing so simple as time travel, a sudden whisking back to the Mesolithic. No, the uncanniness of the experience involves a feeling of co-presence: the prehistoric and the present matching up such that it is unclear who walks in whose tracks.¹⁴⁴

Macfarlane understands the imaginative power which walking enables, and views the journey on foot as a key means to connect with the past. He continues to explain that the tracks which humanity walk

¹⁴³ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.91.

¹⁴⁴ Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (London: Penguin, 2012), p.362.

today are ‘amongst the earliest of texts, from a period of history devoid of recorded narrative’, and that by following physical trails ‘we are reading one of the earliest stories, told not in print but in footprint’.¹⁴⁵ This crucial link between walking and storytelling is also championed by Michel de Certeau, and in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) he notes that walking in urban spaces also evokes the same narrative practice:

They walk - an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it.¹⁴⁶

For Certeau, the ridged cosmopolitan city is a space which is transformed by the rudimentary operation of ‘walking, wandering, or “window shopping”’,¹⁴⁷ and like Macfarlane, notes that our ‘story begins on ground level, with footsteps.’¹⁴⁸ Elements of the landscape, journeying and writing are all bound in Macfarlane’s critical understanding, making it a fitting evaluation in regard to Warner’s own work. Macfarlane eloquently exposes the eternal histories which are permanently etched onto the land, and that by physically journeying across the earth, humankind can resurrect the ‘earliest stories’ of those who walked before.

This ‘feeling of co-presence’ comes to the fore particularly in *The Man Who Walks*, with elements of Scotland’s past very much living entities in the present world which Uncle and Nephew walk. Existing in a ‘semi-spirit world’,¹⁴⁹ Nephew is captivated by Scotland’s ghostly past, with walking a movement which successfully connects the present world with the historical. Young Macushla prides himself on being able to ‘sniff out the bloodied ground’¹⁵⁰ of the highland terrain, directing a Hollywood movie producer to the most authentic areas of land for his historical remake:

That makes a battlesite like a field of dreams, a shitty one. Has so much praying ever been done in one place as a battlefield? More than in any medieval cathedral. Have so many souls ever been

¹⁴⁵ Macfarlane, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot*, pp.362-3.

¹⁴⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (California: University of California Press, 1984), p.93.

¹⁴⁷ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.97.

¹⁴⁸ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.97.

¹⁴⁹ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.67.

¹⁵⁰ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.164.

taken? It's a supernatural spot, imagine the mad exodus of spirits. Think of Waterloo, or Culloden in your case, the Macdonald's bursting apart under Belford's grapeshot, all those spirits rattling upwards so quickly they would need air-traffic control to organise them.¹⁵¹

The supernatural world comes to the fore in Nephew's description, a being alert and conscious of the Otherworld which shapes the present day, noting the merging of the modern world and the past which creates a 'specific degree of haziness on the horizon'.¹⁵² The boundary which separates the 'real' world and the supernatural world subtly begins to dissolve in *The Man Who Walks*, with the entire text striving to expose the infinite co-presence of the past and present which is exposed through the physical journey.

This timelessness of the land found in both *Morvern Callar* and *The Man Who Walks* is inherent to Warner's mythopoetic style, with the journey in and around the Port uniting the worlds of the past and present. Such an eternal, mythic essence is lost in the landscape of *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, and instead readers enter a world in which time is drastically fleeting, rather than preserved. This 'timeless' notion is initially evoked by the vivid airport topography of Gatwick, a place which is of stark contrast to the previous configurations of the Port. The airport is the most modern and technologically advanced setting in Warner's corpus, and a far cry from the 'wild provincial fabulism'¹⁵³ he usually depicts in the Scottish highlands. Replacing the rustic contours of Scottish soil for the minimalist banality of the departures hall, *The Stars in the Bright Sky* invites Warner's readers into a distinctly different world, but one which still maintains the essence of his mythopoetic style.

Reminiscent of J.G Ballard's construction of the shopping mall in *Kingdom Come* (2007), along with Ewan Morrison's *Tales from the Mall* (2012), *The Stars in the Bright Sky* depicts another modern-day building which is universally recognisable in contemporary society. Each text channels emphasis on the true meanings and sensibilities which manifest within each institution, seeing a distinct light shone on the realms of realism and fantasy. Just as Ballard describes the Metro-Centre as a consumerist haven which 'smothered unease, defused its own threat and offered balm to the

¹⁵¹ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.163-4.

¹⁵² Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.164.

¹⁵³ Scott Hames, 'Don't Scum Me Out', *London Review of Books*, Vol.33, No.9 (April, 2011), <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n09/scott-hames/dont-scum-me-out>

weary’,¹⁵⁴ Warner too depicts the familiar, tedious setting of the airport in a new light. In Ballard’s novel the Metro-Centre is continually portrayed as ‘an imaginary world’, where ‘everything is invented, all the emotions, all the reasons for living’,¹⁵⁵ and so is Warner’s account of the airport detached from the ‘real’ world. The modern establishment is presented as a unique domain, and a place which bears ‘its own atmosphere’¹⁵⁶:

Immediately, they had entered the new world of the terminal; disembodied voices on the public address, which would never cease, began to speak. Even in toilets there would now be no escape.¹⁵⁷

The omniscient, contemporary God of the airport echoes throughout the building, evoking a place which is deeply detached from the secular sphere. Hames notes the dramatic change in tone in *The Stars in the Bright Sky* compared to previous novels, commenting that Warner ‘cranks up the alienation’¹⁵⁸ when describing the atmospheric and internal structure of the airport. This observation is accurate and the airport is described using dis-embodied prose often with a hint of futuristic rhetoric, noted in the girls’ journey on the monorail towards the terminal building:

The Gatwick Transit moved, suspended sixty feet above the earth, then the capsule took a long curve, so the occupants leaned over and, quickly, original vistas became visible [...] Everything in these airport lands was seen through tinted or affected glass, which seemed to magnify, distance or distort the whole world.¹⁵⁹

Suspended above the earth in a ‘capsule’ and looking down on ‘airport lands’ rather than the ‘real’ world, it becomes clear that Warner is transporting his female figures into a distinctly alien realm. Warner truly evokes the ‘otherness’ of the airport which becomes a ‘distorted’ entity, honing in on the separation between the real world and this strange, fantasy land. Like an aeroplane in flight, Warner seems to look down from above and depict the earth anew, separating the establishment from the

¹⁵⁴ J.G Ballard, *Kingdom Come* (Great Britain: Harper Perennial, 2007), p37.

¹⁵⁵ Ballard, *Kingdom Come*, pp.66.

¹⁵⁶ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.59.

¹⁵⁷ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.58.

¹⁵⁸ Hames, ‘Don’t Scum Me Out’.

¹⁵⁹ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.105.

natural world and, as Hames notes, annihilates the intimacy of his previous prose.¹⁶⁰ This separation of worlds is further emphasised when the girls initially reach the terminal building and check-in to the airport hotel for the evening:

There was something strange about this corridor. Something alien to it that these country girls immediately felt uneasy about. There was no natural light. There were no windows. All through the years it could be any time of day or night in this long airport hotel corridor, where sun never reached.¹⁶¹

The 'real' world is physically banished from the internal realm, where time is now quantified by 'the subtle shake, the subconscious intake of breath at an aircraft taking off, every three or four minutes'.¹⁶² Warner's depiction of the airport is one of drastic disengagement, portraying the familiar establishment, rooted in the everyday lives of his readers, as an obscure, fantasy entity which is completely disconnected from the natural world. Rather than exposing a place which is timelessness, the architecture of the airport evokes precisely the opposite:

This grand hall was made from components rather than structures, everything was readied to be renewed or changed in an instant- the sensibility of impermanence and lack of faith was in every plastic wall and bulkhead. Once, architecture spoke of permanence and a future; here it was always ready to do a runner, like those huge moulded warehouses which now lay across this part of the kingdom- parcel hubs, super-hypermarkets, furniture vast-houses, or sinister human detainment areas.¹⁶³

Warner stresses that the 'airport hinterlands'¹⁶⁴ lack any sense of profundity or depth, comparing the building to supermarkets and 'sinister human detainment areas', which are void of any human sentiment. Noting a 'lack of faith' and absence of 'permanence' presents the airport as a drastically different territory from the Port, a place where Morvern is conscious of the timeless permanence, and her own human connection, with the land: 'From the model I remembered the route across the

¹⁶⁰ Hames, 'Don't Scum Me Out'.

¹⁶¹ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.15.

¹⁶² Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.7.

¹⁶³ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.59.

¹⁶⁴ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.56.

graveyards but there'd been changes. Through the snow I felt the rise and fall of new graves under my feet.'¹⁶⁵ The snow covered highlands and symbolic burial motif, a recurring image in the novels located in the Port, are now replaced by a synthetic, man-made institution; a building which is not 'saturated in place'¹⁶⁶ in the same way Hames feels Warner's previous novels are. The natural earth provides a time capsule where history co-exists with the present world, while the airport crudely extinguishes any ties with the past. Nothing in the airport is preserved or treasured, like the frozen, eternal world at the close of *Morvern Callar*, or the history seeped earth of *The Man Who Walks*, and instead it is evoked as transitory institution which is significantly 'time-less'.

While the airport landscape fails to add timelessness to *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, a sense of eternal preservation does subtly exist in the novel. The eternal nature of Warner's mythopoetic world, as seen in the previous chapter, is also closely linked to the journey. Moving across Warner's highland landscape the worlds of the past and present are intertwined, with the journey adding to the mythic significance of the prose. *The Stars in the Bright Sky* eliminates such physical journeying found in the novels prior, with the girls firmly stationed within the terminal building for the duration of the novel. However, the static, spiritual journey does resonate firmly within Warner's mythopoetic context, with this internal dimension of textual mobility adding symbolic depth to the novel.

The act of waiting suffocates the text, with the girls stuck in a world which is constantly moving while they remain completely static. Alain de Botton regards the terminal as a 'chaotic living entity'¹⁶⁷ in his text *A Week at the Airport: A Heathrow Diary* (2009), and this description is an appropriate way to also perceive Warner's construction. The former Soprano's continually note the transitional nature of the airport as they remain completely still. Located 'exactly as usual',¹⁶⁸ they observe, 'Everyone is just passing through. In transit.'¹⁶⁹ The girls respond to the repetitive rituals of the airport, with their wait making it seem 'they had been there forever',¹⁷⁰ longing for a flight which, in the end, never comes. Warner's use of waiting resonates heavily with Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for*

¹⁶⁵ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.227.

¹⁶⁶ Hames, 'Don't Scum Me Out'.

¹⁶⁷ Alain de Botton, *A Week at the Airport: A Heathrow Diary* (Great Britain: Profile Books Ltd, 2009), p.45.

¹⁶⁸ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.276.

¹⁶⁹ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.93.

¹⁷⁰ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.361.

Godot (1954), especially the ambiguous, final line of *The Stars in the Bright Sky*: ‘They all waited to see what would happen next’.¹⁷¹ Hailing Beckett as one of his ‘masters’ among ‘Camus, William Faulkner and Juan Carlos Onetti’,¹⁷² it is not a surprise that an element of the Irish writers influence would feature in Warner’s work, and comes to life most prominently in *The Stars in the Bright Sky*. Waiting is the central dramatic feature in Beckett’s production, and a human act which has received numerous and varied points literary of analysis, as Maria Minich Brewer notes:

Godot continues to be a void that interpreters (readers and performers alike) attempt to fill. God, Death, Humanity, Crisis of Consciousness, Waiting, Object of Desire - the list of overlapping definitions for Godot is as interminable as Beckett’s characters wait.¹⁷³

Beckett’s play is infused with vague meaning, described by the writer himself as ‘a play striving to avoid definition’,¹⁷⁴ just like the extent of Warner’s mythopoetic prose which deliberately ‘leaves us with silence’.¹⁷⁵ While Estragon and Vladimir wait for Godot, an invisible presence who ‘occupies the absent space outside the performance space’,¹⁷⁶ Warner’s female characters wait for an aircraft; another invisible but powerful presence which can be heard and felt, but is never physically encountered:

As the sky above them had turned into a milk without feature, the madness of journeys, necessary or unnecessary, continued in the air avenues above, as if the sky itself was a featureless infinity pool and the aircraft noise was only the constant trickle at its edges.¹⁷⁷

The aircraft is never seen, but its immense physical power always heard from above, as the narrator states: ‘with a sound of such profundity it was inconceivable that the machine wasn’t visible.’¹⁷⁸ Like Godot, the aircraft is an invisible spirit that the girls wait for, with their lives inside the airport

¹⁷¹ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.394.

¹⁷² Alan Warner, quoted by Graham Thomson, ‘Interview with Alan Warner’, *The Barcelona Review* (1997), <http://www.barcelonareview.com/arc/r2/eng/warnerint.html>

¹⁷³ Maria Minich Brewer, ‘A Semiosis of Waiting’, *Beckett: Waiting for Godot*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: Macmillan, 1987), p.151.

¹⁷⁴ Samuel Beckett, quoted by Brewer, ‘A Semiosis of Waiting’, p.150

¹⁷⁵ Dale, *Alan Warner’s Morvern Callar: A Readers Guide*, p.35.

¹⁷⁶ Brewer, ‘A Semiosis of Waiting’, p.151.

¹⁷⁷ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.359.

¹⁷⁸ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.5.

completely dependent and dictated by the unseen entity. They wait to be lifted to divine heights, with the aircraft a means which they can physically transcend the secular domain, and escape the monotony of their own lives on earth: ‘Oh, bonnie lassies, these are the times of our lives and they’re only beginning. Only just beginning.’¹⁷⁹ Just like *Waiting for Godot*, Warner’s former Soprano’s wait for life to happen to them inside the airport, a world in which their present lives merely slip away. The ghostly presence of the aircraft and the prospect of the journey pose as receptacles of opportunity and infinite possibility, but the physical vessel never appears. Warner accurately captures the tedious wait of the six women, which is reflected in the length of his novel, and provides a text which, on the surface, fails to capture the timelessness and profundity of the modern world. Just as *Waiting for Godot* is famously renounced as ‘a play in which nothing happens, twice’,¹⁸⁰ *The Stars in the Bright Sky* also follows this duplicate pattern of waiting, with Manda’s missing passport delaying the first flight, and the events of September 11th cancelling the next. On an immediate reading *The Stars in the Bright Sky* appears to eradicate any mythopoetic profundity from the prose.

However, ironically it is this absence of the physical journey which turns the text inward and allows readers to perceive the women in a spiritual and mythopoetic light. The notion of transcending the earthly realm comes to the fore as the girls spend another night together at the airport. Located in their ‘Gatwick Hilton Family Room’ on the Sunday evening, the former Soprano’s reminisce about their childhood in the Port: ‘Life seemed so. Exciting then. Eh girls? Everything was still to happen to us, so’s it felt tons better.’¹⁸¹ Waiting in the hotel for life to kick-start again, musically gifted Kylah serenades the group with a delicate rendition of the biblical hymn ‘Away in a Manger’, with Chell transferring the significant lyrics of the song on to their own lives:

Chell’s smaller voice said, ‘But girls. The stars is still there even in the daytimes. Just you can’t see them. And it’s the night that shows the stars. Like Kylah. She’s a star now and we all know it,

¹⁷⁹ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.388.

¹⁸⁰ Vivian Mercier, quoted by Anthony Cronin, ‘A Play in which Nothing Happens, Twice’, *Independent.Ie*, <http://www.independent.ie/opinion/analysis/a-play-in-which-nothing-happens-twice-26227975.html>

¹⁸¹ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.257.

but one day she'll show up brilliantly. And all of us. I just know it. The stars are still up, shining just for us all girls.' Chell's voice had dropped into a whisper.¹⁸²

The girls are presented in parallel to the stars, a pivotal scene in the novel as the title suggests. On a surface level, the image of the stars radiates the potential of each female, with all of them having the power to shine and excel in their everyday lives. But delving beneath this initial idea, Chell notes that the stars 'is still there even in the daytimes' as well shining at night, emphasising their astronomical presence which is an eternal entity in the sky above. The girls are suddenly illuminated as timeless, heavenly bodies who exist in the modern realm. Just as Morvern is spiritually connected to the sea, and man's unification with the land is evoked in *The Man Who Walks*, the girls of *The Stars in the Bright Sky* are tightly associated with the astronomical matter, becoming celestial bodies who walk the contemporary earth. By envisioning them as stars, Warner transfers, like Morvern, a timeless dimension onto his feminine protagonists, and bridges the gap between heaven and earth in the mythopoetic realm of the airport. Such a mingling of the temporal and the divine will be analysed in more detail in Chapter Three in parallel to the Celtic Twilight, regarded as a specific time of the day which sees each realm unite. While *The Deadman's Pedal* will be used as the primary text to convey similarities to the Celtic Twilight literary approach, the precise timing of 'twilight' is initially alluded to in *The Stars in the Bright Sky*:

'Stars in the bright sky sounds better. Like a poem.' 'But if the sky's bright, what are the stars doing out?' Kay tried to solve it. 'It could be twilight. When you see the stars first, at that beautiful time?'¹⁸³

It is ironically while the girls patiently wait to fly that they transcend the secular earth and become cosmological beings, preserved for eternity in their excessively modern domain. Existing in a significantly 'bright sky', Warner draws on the hope and promise of the six girls, a feeling of optimism which the airport, representing the hollow, modern world, attempts to extinguish. Such an idea resonates once more with Olson's ethos, who believed 'myth expressed the possibilities of

¹⁸² Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.258.

¹⁸³ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.257.

human kind, possibilities the modern age has lost.¹⁸⁴ Perceiving women as living, heavenly bodies is a recurring theme which weaves through Warner's corpus, adding mythopoetic depth and timelessness to his prose, and a fascinating symbolic trope which will be analysed further in the chapter to follow.

Among the fleeting and chaotic world of the airport, mimicking the transient nature of sterile contemporary life, the girls of Warner's novel become timeless. The female figures come forward as six tiny speckles in the vast, sterile world of the airport, but symbolise their grander mythopoetic potential which transcends the modern sphere. It is crucial to note that it is specifically the internal journey which eludes to such perception. While the girls wait to embark on the 'rest of their lives', Warner utilises the inward, static journey to unveil the profundity of the young women in their present existence. Not only does *The Stars in the Bright Sky* draw readers attention to the sterile, monotony which fosters in the airport, but also the timeless, mythopoetic presence of the women which still manages to exist in the modern domain.

Entering the Unknown: A Transmission of Reality

The eternal presence of the girls in *The Stars in the Bright Sky* flourishes within the confines of the airport, a place which ironically dissolves time. While spiritual timelessness does flourish, and the girls of the novel are depicted in a distinctly mythopoetic light, the airport also manifests the blurring of boundaries between the real world and the imagined; a notion initially hinted at in *Morvern Callar*. This dimension of Warner's mythopoetic style comes to the fore within the modern institution, with the separation between the real world and the imaginary world continually distorted throughout the text. Warner's setting begins to blur the boundaries between each distinct entity, presenting the airport, like the Port, as a modern location which is infused with a sense of mysterious fantasy. While Warner exaggerates the inter-zone of the airport, presenting this familiar modern-day institution as a hub of sterile monotony which, on the surface, lacks substance or depth, the novel begins to cloud the

¹⁸⁴ Shackleton, *Moving Outward: The Development of Charles Olson's use of Myth*, p.1.

separation between what is real and what is imagined, with the airport a place which is in fact three dimensional and complex. Just as the Port is infused with a sense of magic, where reality gradually slips away, the airport too pulls readers into a realm of the ‘unknown’.

In order to accurately understand this facet of Warner’s mythopoetic style, Beckett continues to be a significant point of reference. In her critical text *Beckett and Myth: An Archetypal Approach* (1988), Mary A. Doll defines Beckett’s own mythopoetic style:

Firstly, a mythopoetics must step back from so-called normal perception in order to establish an other way. Beckett defines such an act of regression by negatives: it cannot be seen clearly, it is not reached through ordinary sense perception, it is not understood by means of logic, it cannot be named. A poetics of myth thus contains anomalies, contradictions, and variations – endless variations - that shift the foundation beneath the perceiver, such that no single position or mind set can serve as a guide post.¹⁸⁵

Realism breaks down in Beckett’s work and instead point towards an ‘Other’, precisely the angle which Warner takes in *The Stars in the Bright Sky*. The novel, along with the rest of Warner’s prose, is not wholly realistic nor dominated solely by a fantasy driven style, but instead, like each of Beckett’s works, enters ‘a new realm and sense new, unfamiliar depths of beginning’¹⁸⁶. Warner provides readers with another perspective which defies ‘normal perception’. Doll continues to define Beckett’s mythopoetic style, with a breakdown in the relationship between ‘viewer and object’. She states:

The beholder of the art object – character, reader, artist – is placed in an initiatory position, seeking to only understand It, how It is. Its other reality makes itself felt intensely, while being understood only dimly – veiled from ego’s logic.

This description of Beckett’s mythopoetic sensibility resonates firmly with the close of *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, with Warner distorting both the perception and understanding of what is ‘real’.

Although the girls can clearly visualise the atrocities of 9/11 at the end of the novel, and watch a clear

¹⁸⁵ Mary A. Doll, *Beckett and Myth: An Archetypal Approach* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988), p.9.

¹⁸⁶ Doll, *Beckett and Myth: An Archetypal Approach*, p.10.

image of an aircraft fly into the side of a building, their comprehension of 'It' is 'veiled' from their rationality and 'logic'. Beckett's mythopoetic style is an accurate way to understand Warner's tendency in the novel, with *The Stars in the Bright Sky* pulling readers into a world which is simultaneously familiar and bizarre. While the Port echoes this mythopoetic style, exposing the magic which graces everyday reality, the airport heightens and extends the notion; drawing attention to the sinister, eerie atrocities of the modern world which appear imaginary, but are entirely real.

The motion of flying is a means which, like walking in *The Man Who Walks*, stitches together various worlds. Although the physical flight is never achieved in *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, Warner utilises this facet of air travel to bridge the gap between what is real and what is imagined. De Botton articulates the dichotomy between realistic monotony and the enchantment of air travel, as he watches an aircraft come into landing: 'Seen from the car park beside 09L/27R, as the north runway is known to pilots, the 747 appears at first as a small brilliant white light, a star dropping towards earth.'¹⁸⁷ The aircraft comes into focus not as a functional technological machine, but rather an enchanting droplet of the higher realm, far from the 'huge, vengeful ennui'¹⁸⁸ which Warner's aircraft penetrates. De Botton continues:

In the light rain, clouds of water form a veil behind the plane on its matronly progress towards the airfield. Beneath it are the suburbs of Slough. It is three in the afternoon. In detached villas, kettles are being filled. A television is on in a living room with the sound switched off. Green and red shadows move silently across walls. The everyday. And above Slough is a plane that a few hours ago was flying over the Caspian Sea. Caspian Sea – Slough: the plane a symbol of worldliness, carrying within itself a trace of all the lands it has crossed; its eternal mobility offering an imaginative counterweight to feelings of stagnation and confinement.¹⁸⁹

De Botton accurately grasps the profundity which air travel encapsulates, perceiving flying as an integral facet of the modern world which makes the everyday appear quite extraordinary. The aircraft becomes an Other-worldly, magnificent presence in daily life. This notion is embedded into the

¹⁸⁷ Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p.36.

¹⁸⁸ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.199.

¹⁸⁹ De Botton, *The Art of Travel*, p.37.

entirety of Warner's prose, but instead the aircraft reveals its haunting presence in everyday existence, and is portrayed as a mode of transport which evokes sinister mystery instead of wonderment.

While Warner's separation between the real world and the imagined world is not blurred by the physical movement of the aeroplane, the clouding of boundaries is achieved by another symbol in his novel: the television screen. The plasma screens which litter the terminal building do bridge the gap between each realm, distorting the perceptions of what is real and what is illusion. An integral feature in the airport, the most prominent screens are those which provide passengers with travel information, with endless destinations lined above check-in desks and throughout the departure lounge. De Botton notes, 'Nowhere was the airport's charm more concentrated than on the screens placed at intervals across the terminal [...] These screens implied a feeling of infinite and immediate possibility.'¹⁹⁰ De Botton once again draws attention to the liberating quality which the airport manifests, with the screens projecting 'promises of alternative lives, to which we might appeal at moments of claustrophobia and stagnation.'¹⁹¹ The airport and air travel itself provide an escape from the 'real' world, with the 'eternal mobility' of the aircraft offering an 'imaginative counterweight' to such feelings of 'stagnation and confinement', with De Botton's analysis delicately distorting the binary between the real world and the imagined.

However, Warner's novel is not concerned with information screens, and instead *The Stars in the Bright Sky* continually references the numerous plasma television screens which hang in the 'Village Inn' of the airport. Even their precise location begins to eliminate the boundary between what is real and imagined, with the screens hanging in 'a themed English pub'.¹⁹² The internal realm of the airport is a constructed version of the outside world, with the bar replica seeking to give the illusion of an authentic English pub, once more distorting reality. The television screens, like the rest of the fixtures in the airport, are depicted with precise, intricate detail:

Hanging like chimps from trees, in the crannies and against the cosmetic roof beams, were a gang of flat-screen televisions. Soundless, every television was tuned to Sky News, its scroll narrative

¹⁹⁰ De Botton, *A Week at the Airport: A Heathrow Diary*, p.29.

¹⁹¹ De Botton, *A Week at the Airport: A Heathrow Diary*, p.29.

¹⁹² Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.69.

ticker-tapering out along the bottom of the screen with a steady inflow of updates on the latest child molestations and inner-city assaults, supported by lingering and repeated mugshots of the accused. A non-verbal form of justice was being meted out already up there, dramatised by the constant, incongruous accompaniment of the upbeat CD jukebox. Then sport came on and males shifted their position.¹⁹³

Horrific news updates from the outside world silently appear on the screens, the impact of the images diluted by the upbeat musical notes from the jukebox. The screens only visually show the 'real' world rather than intrinsically connect anyone with the atrocities which are happening beyond the terminal, and the images projected fail to emotionally engage with any onlookers. The images which appear feature in the background of airport life, and begin to distort the perception of what is real and what is merely surface illusion. By showing the images through a screen, accompanied by crass musical tones, the news report is morphed in to a cinematic experience which, in the mind of the viewer, is nothing more than televised fantasy. The airport becomes a strange 'Otherworld', like the Port in *Morvern Callar*, which begins to dissolve the boundary between realism and fantasy. While the profound enchantment of the everyday is exposed in the Port, Warner effectively depicts the 'dark side' of such mystery which circulates modern civilisation in his mythopoetic world of the airport.

This distortion between reality and fantasy is pushed further in Warner's text, coming to the fore at the close of the novel. After eventually deciding on Las Vegas as their optimum destination, a place which too manipulates peoples' perceptions of the real world, the girls' first connecting flight to New York is dramatically intercepted:

It was up at the multi-screens in the Village Inn that everyone watched. Finn came closer in, looking at the screens, and heard Manda's voice. Manda turned to the person next to her. 'What is that? A big fire?' The woman looked at Manda. 'Plane crash; but strange.'¹⁹⁴

The terrorist attack of September 11th is depicted through the plasma screens, the horrific events witnessed by the awaiting passengers. Readers are aware of the shocking reality behind the actions of

¹⁹³ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.70.

¹⁹⁴ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.392.

9/11 which shook the world in 2001, but the incident comes to life as an obscure, fantasy apocalypse when projected from the television, with passengers failing to comprehend the reality of the situation: “That’s a replay thing. Is it?’ ‘No. This is live, this is live; that’s just happened.”¹⁹⁵ Warner’s silent mythopoetic essence, which leaves readers with unanswered questions, is transferred onto his female figures, as they stand in silence, ‘looking upwards at the screen [...] as if expecting some final, stunning answer to come over the screen. But no answers came’.¹⁹⁶ The screens evoke the (mis)understanding that the plane crash is merely an illusion, dissolving the boundaries between what is real and imagined within the confines of the airport. By presenting the events through a technological monitor the news becomes detached and unfathomable, as if merely a projection of events. The television screen transmits the pixelated image, but stands in the way of any psychological intimacy or rational comprehension. The fantasy-driven nature of the devastation continues:

Soon actual calls and shouts came from the Village Inn as if something was happening right in there-as if a hunched demon with eyes and claws was moving at leisure over the crammed carpets, slaughtering, and with those shouts, people walked quickly along the promenade talking into mobile phones, attempting to reach some next world.¹⁹⁷

The fantasy facet of Warner’s prose is heightened through the symbolic ‘hunched demon’ which claws its way through the replica English pub, presented as a monster which has just crawled from a cinematic horror movie. The image is deeply reminiscent of W.B Yeats’s ‘The Second Coming’ (1919), a poem which comments on the disintegration of modern civilization, and ‘culminates in a terrible prophecy of the world’s end’.¹⁹⁸ Michael O’Neill notes that the title of Yeats’s poem is ‘a phrase violently wrenched from its usual meaning of Christ’s return to establish a heaven on earth, and made, rather to describe the onset of a civilisation, or ‘anti-civilisation’, founded on terrifying

¹⁹⁵ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.392.

¹⁹⁶ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.393.

¹⁹⁷ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.394.

¹⁹⁸ Sarah Shute, ‘The Second Coming’, *KnowledgeNotes: Student Guides* (Cambridge: Proquest Information and Learning, 2002), accessed via University of Glasgow Library Catalogue, http://literature.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/searchFulltext.do?id=EALKN188&divLevel=0&area=ref&DurUrl=Yes&forward=critref_ft

violence.¹⁹⁹ *The Stars in the Bright Sky* too depicts a world surrounded by ‘terrifying violence’, and the title of Warner’s novel also mirrors Yeats’s biblical significance. Just as O’Neill notes the meaning of ‘Christ’s return’ which the phrase ‘The Second Coming’ implies, the title of Warner’s text is taken from a universally known hymn which symbolises the birth of Christ. *The Stars in the Bright Sky* now turns the birth of the Messiah, who sought to ‘establish a heaven on earth’, into the apocalyptic demise of modern civilisation, subverting the mythical connotations of the biblical song. The close of Yeats’s poem bears strikingly similar connotations to the ‘hunched demon’ envisioned in Warner’s airport:

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?²⁰⁰

Warner’s novel mirrors the ideas laid in Yeats’s poem, with each text portraying an ‘imaginative vision of the breakdown of civilisation.’²⁰¹ The menacing image at the close of ‘The Second Coming’ resonates firmly with Warner’s depiction of the terrorist attack, the fantasy image of the creature crawling through the airport signalling the apocalyptic demise of the modern world as the girls know it.

The Stars in the Bright Sky is a novel which rarely features in critical works concerning Warner’s prose, but is an integral text to consider in relation to his mythopoetic style. Not only does the novel present the female in a mythopoetic light, this time transferring celestial significance onto the modern world, but *The Stars in the Bright Sky* continues to bridge the gap between reality and fantasy, promoting the airport as an Other mythopoetic realm. The nature of air travel and the environment of the airport are presented as mystical, provocative entities which exist in the real world, once more injecting a sense of mystery and ‘unknown’ into the everyday. By venturing beyond the peripheries of the Port, Warner’s corpus begins to take shape as a unified body of work, with each novel encased in

¹⁹⁹ Michael O’Neill, *The Poems of W.B Yeats: A Sourcebook* (Oxon: Routledge, 2004), p.135.

²⁰⁰ W.B Yeats, ‘The Second Coming’, *W.B Yeats: Selected Poems*, ed. Richard Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.26.

²⁰¹ O’Neill, *The Poems of W.B Yeats: A Sourcebook*, p.135.

its own unique mythopoetic sphere, with the divide between what is real and what is imagined becoming incessantly opaque.

Chapter Three

Entering the Twilight Realm

'Now and for always, Simon will be moving through the night, up on those locomotives... crossing these lone territories between stations in a blackness as complete as outer space.'

(Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*)

Having already noted textual mobility in its separate capacities of the physical and spiritual journey, this final chapter will seek to combine each dimension and evoke the mythopoetic complexity of Warner's novel, *The Deadman's Pedal* (2012). A novel which is made up of an eclectic blend of styles, motives and images, the Celtic Twilight is a literary phenomenon which, when regarded closely alongside the text, provides readers with a better grasp of the dynamic layers of meaning which feature in *The Deadman's Pedal*. While Chapter One notes the heroine of *Morvern Callar* pushing against the limits of her known world, and the girls of *The Stars in the Bright Sky* witnessing the apocalyptic end of the temporal earth as they know it, *The Deadman's Pedal* utilises the journey as a means to blend and combine the real world with the silent 'Other', bringing to life the mythopoetic, fantasy realm which has bubbled beneath the surface of the previous fiction. Through Celtic Twilight stylistics and ideas, including folklore and the supernatural, and illumination and

darkness, Warner innovatively blurs the boundaries between the real world and the imagined realm, uniting heaven and earth in his most recent complex and timeless vision of the Port

Introducing Warner and the Celtic Twilight: Celebrating Folklore and Legend

While the novels discussed in previous chapters have noted the complex configuration of setting which evokes Warner's mythopoetic sensibility, along with the motif of the journey which threads together the texts, Warner's innovative style comes into sharp focus in *The Deadman's Pedal* (2012). His mythopoetic style, analysed in his other novels, seems significantly heightened and refined in the text, with an unmistakable resemblance to the literary tendencies behind the Celtic Twilight; a literary phenomenon which, to my knowledge, has yet to be juxtaposed with Warner's work. Recognising Warner's novel in such a light opens more outlets of research and analysis which concerns not only *The Deadman's Pedal* but the entire corpus. The prosperity of meaning and complexity behind the Celtic literary sensibility cannot be encapsulated into this single thesis, and rather this chapter will aim to provide relevant points of contact which may provoke further study.

While originally used as the title of W.B Yeats's book, *The Celtic Twilight: Men and Women, Dhouls and Faeries* (1893) the Celtic Twilight is a literary phenomenon which is not exclusively confined to literature of Ireland, nor are its themes and motives segregated to this single labelling. The Celtic Twilight champions a rich accumulation of literary techniques, symbols and ideas which can be detected in a number of different genres, with elements of the Celtic Twilight crossing into Gothic and Romantic literature. While *The Deadman's Pedal* can be read as a novel which embraces many Gothic qualities, the Celtic Twilight presents itself as a more fitting choice to understand Warner's work. A native born Scot now settled in Ireland, Warner's adoration and connection with the Celtic landscape, history and culture is clearly detectable, once more picking up on Berger's 'character' of the Scottish and Irish land which is, 'tidal, recurring, ghost-filled.'²⁰² Warner consistently portrays Scotland in this Celtic light throughout the entirety of his fiction, viewing his homeland as 'spectral,

²⁰² Berger, *Keeping a Rendezvous*, p.69.

brilliant and quite unreal'.²⁰³ More so, the Celtic Twilight is an area of literature which is diverse and broad, allowing this research to explore Warner's work within a rich context which celebrates a range of stylistics and techniques, opening up countless paths of analysis. Yeats's aim was to inspire a sense of 'awe' in his writing, dwelling on what was 'magical and fabulous'.²⁰⁴ Such an ethos promotes the Celtic Twilight as an appropriate outlet to understand Warner's own mythopoetic writing, which continually exposes the magical and inexplicable qualities which manifest in the mundane, modern world.

Stan Smith describes Yeats's early writings of the Celtic Twilight, understanding the various 'phantasmagorias'²⁰⁵ which are woven into his stories. Smith's regard for the numerous images and dream-like visions which make up Yeats's work provides a clear connection to Warner's prose, with mysticism and the supernatural playing an integral role in each oeuvre. However, Smith continues to note the diverse range of subjects which Yeats's literature includes, with notions of supernatural enchantment only one facet of his writing:

...figures of the Irish Heroic Age, their delight in magic and the supernatural, or in the head-on confrontations with the banal realities of Dublin life of [Yeats's] maturity [...] Yeats's pervasive vision of catastrophe may seem to derive from those supernatural doctrines set out most systematically in his book *A Vision*. But it is not difficult to see in this vision of apocalypse, of the end of an age of darkness and decay, sombre echoes of the deepening crisis of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as gloomy reflection on the decline of the Protestant Ascendancy and the emergence of a new and unwelcome Catholic, middle-class Ireland.²⁰⁶

Smith's description grasps the diverse and complex themes which cultivate Yeats's work. While notes of 'magic and the supernatural' are extensively used throughout Yeats's writing, such images do not wholly dominate his texts, and are carefully blended with political and national tensions to convey serious concerns. Such an array of ideas can also be found in Warner's work, where his mythopoetic

²⁰³ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.155.

²⁰⁴ Edward Hirsch, 'Coming Out in to the Light: W.B Yeats 'The Celtic Twilight' (1893-1902) p.10.

²⁰⁵ Stan Smith, *W.B Yeats: A Critical Introduction* (England: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1990), p.12.

²⁰⁶ Smith, *W.B Yeats: A Critical Introduction*, p.12.

style not only adds enchantment and mystique to the modern world, but, as his corpus continues, simultaneously engages with grander issues which effect contemporary society. Smith notes Yeats's regard for 'nationalistic mystic and writer' George Russell, who encouraged Yeats to 'link his interest in the occult to a political as well as an artistic vision',²⁰⁷ with this blend of art and cultural realities also noted in Warner's work, particularly *The Deadman's Pedal*. Warner is not afraid to tackle large ideologies, with independence, class, and the relevance of religion in a secular context all touched on throughout his corpus. An example of such can be found in the definite class and national divides seen in *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, as the former Sopranos test Ava's English, 'tense, middle-class patience'.²⁰⁸ Political and national tensions in particular reach a climax in *The Deadman's Pedal*, as this chapter will note.

While these dynamic subjects continually circulate in the novels they do not jeopardise the integrity and beauty of Warner's mythopoetic style. Warner's grand ideologies are delicately crafted and concealed in symbolic images or figures, adding depth and significance to the modern world, and such symbolism is a further way in which Warner's work reflects the style and sensibility of the Celtic Twilight. Yeats's early poems are made up of an abundance of symbolic images and ethereal, wavering lyrical prose, with Smith noting the works which are always filled with meaning, yet such implication is consistently 'hinted at and withheld'.²⁰⁹ Smith continues to articulate the implicit beauty behind Yeats's work which makes it so compelling, explaining:

To try and explain the symbols is to destroy their fragile power, by reducing the vague and nebulously symbolic to a spuriously precise, mechanical and systematic allegory- the very opposite of all Yeats was aiming for.²¹⁰

The Celtic Twilight embraces and welcomes silent and ambiguous meaning which cannot be systematically configured, a feature which is very much encased within Warner's own mythopoetic system. Warner explains a similar train of thought in relation to *Morvern Callar*, and although this has been mentioned in Chapter One it is worth reiterating Warner's own words which now seem

²⁰⁷ Smith, *W.B Yeats: A Critical Introduction*, p.27.

²⁰⁸ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.117.

²⁰⁹ Smith, *W.B Yeats: A Critical Introduction*, p.29.

²¹⁰ Smith, *W.B Yeats: A Critical Introduction*, pp.29-30.

significantly relevant when paralleled to the motivations of Yeats and the Celtic Twilight. Not only true of the debut, this vague quality is transferred onto all of his texts, and speaking of the British nineteenth century novel, Warner states:

...everything could be rationally explained, you would go through the novel and characters would be explicated, you would go through the novel and the characters would be explicated and their behaviour would be in accordance with their character [...] I hate novels that explain everything. I wanted to leave great silences in *Morvern Callar*- the way any sort of faith will leave us with just silence.²¹¹

Rejecting methodical conclusions or conforming to conventional literary tendencies, Warner's work celebrates the same artistic notions as Yeats, with the narrative power and potential of their works contained in fragile images and symbols which expose a wealth of interchangeable meaning.

Warner's mythopoetic system which frames his corpus manifests such an ideal, with each separate realm injected with an otherworldly essence which often transcends the secular world and rational explanation.

Being such a broad literary sensibility, the Celtic Twilight opens many outlets of exploration in regard to Warner's work, but this thesis shall aim to focus primarily on the mythopoetic nuances and stylistic attributes which can be found in each. However, while this chapter will filter concentration towards artistic and imaginative tendencies of Warner's work which the Celtic Twilight also manifests, there are further connections between the Scottish writer's prose and the methodology. Although this study cannot commit to exploring these ideas in great depth, it is worth mentioning further parallels which may provoke additional research and discovery. Having already established the close blend of art and ideology which the Celtic Twilight champions, questions centred on national identity and political fate are key aspects of the visionary style, and ideas which can also be found in Warner's work.

The Celtic Twilight preoccupation with politics and national identity comes to light in *The Deadman's Pedal*, this time presented in a Scottish context. As a writer who has written across the span of contemporary Scottish politics, with novels published pre- and post-devolution, it would be

²¹¹ Dale, *Alan Warner's Morvern Callar: A Readers Guide*, p.35

wrong not to acknowledge the subtle nuances of political thought which finely filter into Warner's work. Very reminiscent of the way in which Joyce puts forth his ideas in *Dubliners* (1914), Warner's novel acknowledges and questions greater concerns of his homeland, while also adhering to the stylistics and ideas behind the Celtic Twilight.

As a text, *Dubliners* is far removed from the poetics and lyrical stylistics championed by Yeats and the Celtic Twilight, however Joyce's text does expose the national sentiment and political tensions of Ireland. *Dubliners*, in contrast to Yeats's fabulist style, is highly realistic in its depiction of life in Ireland, as Terence Brown notes:

This text, like all of Joyce's work, contains autobiographical matter and is rooted in an intensely accurate apprehension of the detail of the Dublin life Joyce had observed all about him as he grew to adulthood.²¹²

In contrast to Yeats's symbolism, which offered the poet a means to 'draw back the trembling veil of the invisible to reveal transcendent realities beyond the corporeal world'²¹³, Joyce adamantly chose to 're-embodiment the details of a Dublin life he knew intimately'.²¹⁴ Joyce's instinct was to recount the 'truth of life' in his prose, and, as Brown notes, he narrated life in Ireland with an 'intrigued, calculating imperviousness of an artist for whom nothing is real beyond purview'.²¹⁵ Antipathetic towards Yeats's abundance of symbolism and persistent nod towards the 'Other' world, Joyce provides readers with a scrupulously realistic vision of Dublin and its people; often like Warner's accurate description of the Port which is, at times, divulged in intricate, realistic detail. However, stylistic elements of the Celtic Twilight do subtly filter into Joyce's prose, as this chapter will continue to note, and *Dubliners* is more than merely a series of realistic tales of the city, as Brown explains:

It is, as numbers of critics have shown, a work which achieves a complex pattern of repetitions, parallels and restatements of theme in which detail, incident and image combine to establish a

²¹² Terence Brown, 'Introduction', *Dubliners* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p.xiii.

²¹³ Brown, 'Introduction', p.xxxiii.

²¹⁴ Brown, 'Introduction', p.xxxvi.

²¹⁵ Brown, 'Introduction', p.xiv.

vision of life in the capital which serves as a kind of metaphor for the spiritual condition of the Irish nation as a whole.²¹⁶

Joyce seamlessly blends reductive realism with moments of aesthetic imagery and symbolism, bringing the *essence* of Ireland to life; a technique which is fitting with Warner's own stylistics which manoeuvre between realism and fantasy modes of writing in order to portray the unique spirit of the Port. The short stories in *Dubliners* do not stand alone as isolated entities, and much like Warner's entire corpus, are woven together by subtle continuities and recurring features to provide an organic, unified vision of the Irish city. Implicit imagery is used to intensify the true sensibility of the nation, and stylistic elements of the Celtic Twilight can be delicately traced in *Dubliners*, particularly in the final text 'The Dead'.

Before noting stylistic elements of the Celtic Twilight which filter into Joyce's text, the political significance of the novel corresponds closely with Warner's work. Published after the death of Irish political leader Charles Stewart Parnell, the advocate for Home Rule who reinvigorated the nation's politics, Joyce wrote *Dubliners* in a period when Ireland's future was vague and uncertain. Such ideologies are woven into the closing text of *Dubliners* 'The Dead', with Gabriel fervently condemned as a 'West Briton' by members of his family, as he fails to embrace his national identity or native language of Celtic Ireland: 'And haven't you your own language to keep in touch with-Irish? asked Miss Ivors. – Well, said Gabriel, if it comes to that, you know, Irish is not my language.'²¹⁷ The separation between unionist and nationalist ideals are clear in 'The Dead', an opposition which can also be detected in *The Deadman's Pedal*, with similar questions echoed in the text: 'Are you Scottish Nat? You for Home Rule?'²¹⁸

Political timing and its significance is not lost on readers of Warner's novel. The subjects of nationhood and political destiny are apparent throughout the text, but exist within Warner's mythopoetic style without making the prose dense or polluted with aggressive political thought. The novel unveils contrasting attitudes and proposes numerous questions in regard to national identity and

²¹⁶ Brown, 'Introduction', p.xxxvi.

²¹⁷ James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p.189.

²¹⁸ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.208.

the fate of Scotland, but Warner explores such themes with restraint and sophistication, maintaining his status as a literary artist rather than an overtly political writer. Depicting the fictional life of Simon Crimmons in the early 1970s, a time when devolved legislature for Scotland was beginning to be established, the novel was published in 2012 and divulges ideas and political sensibilities which subtly comment on the run-up to the Scottish Referendum for Independence. However, critic Berthold Schoene has regarded Warner as a political writer prior to *The Deadman's Pedal* and notes the clear political implications of his corpus, particularly cited in *The Man Who Walks*. Schoene perceives the latter novel as a depiction of Scotland as a politically 'emasculated nation' to explore the 'state of devolutionary and post-devolutionary Scotland'²¹⁹. He writes of Warner's novel:

The Man Who Walks, Warner's first post-devolution novel, is far more pessimistic, signalling a clear shift from innocence to experience and from unruly mischief-making to cruel victimisation. Warner departs from a celebration of young female characters [*The Sopranos*] and focuses on two middle-aged males instead: Uncle and Nephew, homeless wanderers in what assumes shape as a shambolic epic of national abjection. The novel opens with a devastatingly bleak description of supermarket 'ghost-bags' wind driven across the Highland landscape, poignantly introducing contemporary Scotland as a 'Waste Land', defaced by post-industrial debris, its former splendour left to be constructed from abandoned shreds of history, folklore and starkly denoted myth.²²⁰

Schoene notes a significant change in tone in *The Man Who Walks* from Warner's previous fiction. Now potentially on the road to independence, political and national binaries litter Warner's latest text, with oppositions including Scotland versus England, Labour versus Conservative, and public versus private sector businesses, all shaping the social structures of Warner's internal realm. The most nationalistic views are explicitly expressed by one of the oldest labourers on the railway line, John Penalty: 'A free Scotland with a parliament. A fucking socialist Scotland. A republic with nae fucking royal family [...] It's nothing to do with the English. It's to do with ourselves and our own country, that was took away by fucking rich boys and Tories.'²²¹ However, while there are moments in

²¹⁹ Schoene, 'Alan Warner, Post-feminism and the Emasculated Nation', p.255

²²⁰ Schoene, 'Alan Warner, Post-feminism and the Emasculated Nation', pp.259-60.

²²¹ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.208.

Warner's text which overtly discuss Scotland's fate, most of the political nuances are implicitly concealed by artistic symbolism. Joyce too uses symbolism to cushion his political thoughts, noted in 'The Dead' during the convivial feast scene, with Britain and Ireland shrunk down into representative battalions of glass bottles:

three squads of bottles of stout and ale and minerals, drawn up according to the colours of their uniforms, the first two black, with brown and red labels, the third and smallest squad white, with transverse green sashes.²²²

The fragile relationship of neighbouring countries is noted in the glass bottles which line the dining table, with the scene vividly sketched in colourful, symbolic imagery, once more blending politics with artistic vision. Warner too employs such a technique in his prose, with the motif of pregnancy and the unborn child used as a means to channel national concerns. Looking at the novels in light of Schoene's political perspective, the ending of *Morvern Callar*, a pre-devolution novel in the critic's eyes, employs the motif of the pregnant female to add national meaning to the text. Warner presents the heroine's pregnancy in a hopeful, optimistic light, most poignantly noted as Morvern determinedly walks forward 'into that night'²²³ ready for whatever future she and her unborn child may face. The Port, as depicted in *Morvern Callar*, is one of idyllic beauty and rejuvenation, mirroring the symbolic representation of Morvern as a mother; a place which is far removed from the pessimistic 'Waste Land' of *The Man Who Walks*. Pregnancy is repeatedly employed throughout Warner's corpus, and a motif used once more at the close of *The Deadman's Pedal*. The image can again be read as a literary symbol of the nation within Schoene's political context:

Simon sat down on the big rock. The silent railway underneath troubled him. He felt something was due and it wasn't any train. Something huge and final [...] A spoiling was coming to this place [...] And a child. He could barely cope with Jeff. He shook his head at it all, looking out

²²² Joyce, *Dubliners*, p.197.

²²³ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.229.

through the splayed leaves across the Port- and to the inner summer lands, going eastward,
backboned by roads, veined with single tracks and passing places, the railway and all he knew.²²⁴

Just as Morvern states, 'I placed both hands on my tummy at the life there, the life growing right in there',²²⁵ Simon too *feels* a sensation come over him, although this time it is not one of a physical nature. Pregnancy has now moved from the maternal to the male, reflecting a shift in political sensibility which it symbolises. As noted in Chapter One, Warner draws on the potential of his female figures, compelled by the 'certain lack of cynicism'²²⁶ which he feels women radiate. Warner employs women to represent universal ideals and add substance to his novels, more so than his male equivalents. In regard to the image of the pregnant female, Schoene notes:

Unwanted motherhood haunts post-feminist girlhood like a fateful, anachronistic spectre of biologist determination, reminding all girls, irrespective of their class backgrounds, that their lives will never be as carefree as the boys', because even in the twenty-first century the simple fact of being female can still cement a girl's destiny.²²⁷

Pregnancy is implemented as a means to observe how women then tackle their own 'destiny', which is now completely altered and dictated by the biological tie. While Warner's previous novels have dealt with motherhood and abortion, *The Deadman's Pedal* is the first text where readers are faced with the father's perspective. Morvern's final chapter is one of reckless determination, setting in motion her next solo quest and courageous pilgrimage to her foster mother's island which unfolds in *These Demented Lands*. In contrast, Simon remains completely static; merely observing the land around him, 'looking out' across the Port, as opposed to immersing himself in it. The previous image of 'Mother Scotland' is extinguished at the close of *The Deadman's Pedal* and readers are left with a vision of ambiguity, where the child, an invisible representative of change, is not a wholly hopeful being. Simon does not have the same courage as Morvern to take hold of his own destiny. From Simon's male perspective, the novel ends not in the same nourishing, hopeful light as the debut, but

²²⁴ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.376.

²²⁵ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.229.

²²⁶ Warner, quoted by Carole Jones, 'Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999', p.162.

²²⁷ Schoene, 'Alan Warner, Post-feminism and the Emasculated Nation', p.257.

rather a vision of bleak uncertainty and fear of change and instability, an interesting way to understand the novel in its underlying political context and the pending fate of the union. The presence of the unborn child emphasises such political undertones, leaning towards a fate which is still invisible, but the anticipation of which is unrelenting and powerful.

While the political aspects of Warner's work are delicately woven into the prose, providing an innovative platform of research with regard to the Celtic Twilight, this chapter will focus primarily on the artistry and stylistic aspects behind the school of thought which are notable features in Warner's novel. The most commonly associated feature of the Celtic Twilight is its tendency to depict supernatural tales, not just confined to Ireland's history but any Celtic nation's past, as Frank Kinahan explains: 'there are stories of ghosts, stories of the *si* and their mortal friends and foes... and the stories of the visions, the séances, and the dark invocations of others'.²²⁸ Initially a strong feature of Yeats's fiction, legend and folklore is also a subtle element which laces the entirety of Warner's work. Dream-like states and ghostly visions circulate not only in *The Deadman's Pedal* but, on reflection, are present in the entirety of Warner's corpus, adding poignant moments of transcendence to each of the novels. This 'folklorist' dimension of Warner's literary sensibility sees his mythopoetic style transferring the essence of mythology onto his own unique visions of the modern world, heightening a sense of 'otherness' and imagination in the everyday.

Regarding the aforementioned features of folklore, legend and the supernatural which flourish in Celtic Twilight prose, strange visions and prophecies have finely penetrated Warner's work prior to *The Deadman's Pedal*, and can be traced back to his debut. Couris Jean's strange dream of the horses in *Morvern Callar* is suffused with a supernatural spirit which transcends secular reality, and is a moment in the novel which is similar to Crichton Smith's acute awareness of the 'sacred, otherworldly quality of everyday experience'.²²⁹ A similar ethereal essence can also be drawn in *The Stars in the Bright Sky* as Chell confides in Ava about the invisible presence of her deceased stepfather:

²²⁸ Frank Kinahan, 'The Unity of Yeats's 'The Celtic Twilight' (1893-1902), *Irish University Review*, Vol.13, No.2, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), p.190, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25477500>

²²⁹ McGuire, *Iain Crichton Smith: New Collected Poems*, p.xxi.

‘I’ve seen ghosts - I think – and read the tarot and that but I’ve never screwed with the Ouija board. You don’t mess with that. It’s just. My stepdad was drowned of a fishing boat and they never found his body. [...] I always think I’ll see the shape. The black shape of Daddy coming on a wave. If I look at the water long enough, I can make myself see something, but it’s unusual like, the sun, sliding along the top of the water. But I do see him there. They say death walks behind you but it floats too.’²³⁰

Chell is a figure aware of such spiritual presences which haunt the temporal, modern world, once more appearing from the depths of the water just as the horses emerged from ‘The Sound’ in Couris Jeans vision. Warner’s characters are often ‘tantalized by glimpses of an evanescent world’²³¹, a key feature of the Celtic Twilight which Sutcliffe identifies with both the work of Yeats and Joyce. But such glimpses in Warner’s work are not confined to dreamlike states, and often occur in the everyday realities of his figures. By depicting such eerie, unexplainable visions Warner draws the reader’s gaze to the complexities of his mythopoetic universe, where beneath the surface, or sea in the case of Couris Jean and Chell, there is an Other spiritual presence always lurking in the contemporary sphere. By including this Other realm in his fiction, Warner forces his readers to regard the profundity of everyday reality. Warner’s novels, while aware of the societal structures and established trends of the twenty-first century, do not accept the modern world on a surface level. Instead Warner delves deep beneath the superficial exterior of the modern world, elevating the poignancy and substance of his contemporary fiction. Each textual example from *Morvern Callar* and *The Stars in the Bright Sky* begin to set in motion the clouding of boundaries between the real world and the imagined one, a notion which is explicitly brought to the fore in *The Deadman’s Pedal*.

Along with these strange visions and prophecies, folklore and legend are also integral features of *The Deadman’s Pedal*, and once more bridge the gap between the secular realm and the supernatural. Just like the modern, living-legend of ‘The Man Who Walks’ who haunts the present world, mythology and folklore are also very much living features of Warner’s novel to follow, emphasising the mythic qualities of everyday experience. The modern and the magical go hand-in-

²³⁰ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.212.

²³¹ Joseph Andrew Sutcliffe, *James Joyce’s ‘Dubliners’ and Celtic Twilight Spirituality* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2006), p.i.

hand, with an air of folklore and legend fully encapsulated in the English aristocratic family who reside in the Port of *The Deadman's Pedal*: the Bultitude's. The 'fabulously outlandish'²³² family are a mysterious asset in the small town, brought to life through the fabricated pub-yarns and oral storytelling of the local residents, similar to the construction of Uncle in *The Man Who Walks*. Just as the 'myth' and 'legend' of 'The Man Who Walks' is a central talking point in the Port, the Bultitude family exude the same compelling quality. The affluent Bultitude's are depicted by Simon and his friends living in 'that huge castle thing' called 'Broken Moan'²³³ far off in the Back Settlement lands. They are a significant talking point in the close-knit nature of the village with their intriguing exotic presence, which, on the surface, seems so disparate from the working-class lives of the young boys and labouring townspeople, providing locals with a deeply fascinating topic of conversation: 'My old man says they've the big house and tons of land and that but nay actual money. They eat boiled eggs for their tea; one of the cleaners told him they like lettuce and stuff... Aye, like salad shite that foreigners eat.'²³⁴ Both the figure of 'The Man Who Walks' and the Bultitude family are renowned and embedded in community conscience, with the mythic essence of each injecting a bewitching and archaic essence into banal, local life.

Many of the stylistic tendencies which are employed by the Celtic Twilight are applied in Warner's depiction of the Bultitude's, exposing the perception that the Scottish townspeople have of their English settlers. Legend and folklore engulfs all understanding of the 'foreign' family, with the young boys relishing in the ghost-like tales of the Bultitude dynasty. Along with a strange flood which once drowned the family mansion, and the glass coffins which encase the bodies of Bultitude remnants in the graveyard beside Broken Moan, the boys are captivated by the eerie death of the ancestry:

But he was queer in the heid as well, like all of them are. Took himself up into the woods one night with a golden chair and he hung himself from a tree. Now the big bedroom in Broken Moan faces the wood, so the Lady- that one's mother- is driven crazy by seeing the woods where her brother went and hung himself [...] Had the wood chopped right down, every single tree of it; then

²³² Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.87.

²³³ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.87.

²³⁴ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, 89.

she had diggers up to turn over the roots, so if you look today you just see open hill, but that all used to be wood there.²³⁵

The family truly encapsulate the Celtic sensibility of Warner's mythopoetic construction of the Port, a place which is mysterious and ghost-filled. Political and national nuances can also be traced in the Bultitude family, providing a fascinating insight into the past and present sensibility of the Scots and English pending union. It is fascinating to note Warner's manipulation of the Celtic Twilight methodology, and he paradoxically transfers the techniques and symbols of the literary sensibility onto a wealthy family of English descent; an audience who originally found the sensibility of the Celts mystical and false, rendering them sensual beings who failed to have rational or factual outlooks on life. Such an idea can be traced back to the critical work of Cairns Craig, as noted in Chapter One, with the critic associating the geography and psychological state of Scotland with an imaginative past, compared to English soil which is rooted in the present and exudes feelings of reason and rationale.²³⁶ This view of Celtic culture is an interesting concept, and one which subtly illuminates Warner's attitude of the British neighbours, although he has never personally vocalised any opinion. But the boarder divide does finely tune his literature, previously noted in the geographical opposition between *The Man Who Walks* and *The Stars in the Bright Sky*. Compared to the vast Highland terrain of *The Man Who Walks*, which is littered with remnants of cultural history and has a distinctly rugged exterior scattered with 'turds and discs of skitters',²³⁷ the setting is a stark contrast to the 'pleasing controlled landscaping'²³⁸ of the English country side in *The Stars in the Bright Sky*. The latter novel presents the English land as a place which is strictly manicured and impeccably maintained, as if there were 'something fake about its domesticated and perfect banks',²³⁹ emphasising the idea that the Celtic nation, in contrast, is enriched by its unruly, uninhibited culture and haphazard history.

While a divide between the Scottish and English landscape is clear in the aforementioned novels, the Celtic nature of *The Deadman's Pedal* is ironically evoked through the only surviving

²³⁵ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, pp.89-90.

²³⁶ Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture*, p.71.

²³⁷ Warner, *The Man Who Walks*, p.142.

²³⁸ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.168.

²³⁹ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.168.

female of the English family, Varie Bultitude. Celtic Twilight, and often Gothic aspects of the supernatural and spiritualism, are channelled through the female protagonist, depicted as a girl who reads tarot cards and wears a crucifix pendant. Varie describes herself as a ‘creature of doom’ who confesses her love of the movie *‘Night of the Demon’* by explaining ‘it’s funny, but dead, dead spooky too. I like all that.’²⁴⁰ Although readers may view Varie as no more than a Gothic pop-icon, much like Morvern is often regarded by critics as an emblem of the ‘Chemical Generation’, there is far more depth to her Gothic exterior. Her close association with Celtic Twilight, and particularly Warner’s literary depictions of the landscape, come into focus when Varie divulges her passion to study Geology in the Capital rather than at a prestigious English university, explaining her adoration for ‘misty old Edinburgh’:

‘I explained to you. It’s like a sand quarry down south; not so much as an anthill for a hundred miles. England’s just a dried-up glass of Andrew’s Liver Salts. The oldest rocks in the world are right under our very feet, on our doorstep, so Edinburgh makes perfect sense. I love the Scottish Highlands even though you hate it here. Why, I’m a Scottish Nationalist now.’²⁴¹

Foreshadowed in *The Man Who Walks*, Warner’s readers are already aware of the mystical nature of the highland terrain, presented as an enriched and legend-infused soil which Varie is deeply drawn to. Her eerie, ghostly persona is enchanted by the Celtic disposition of Scotland, and focuses attention on the supernatural qualities of the land strictly north of the border. The dual qualities of Varie’s name also deliberately strengthen her association with Celtic Scotland. When asked to write her name Simon immediately scribes the Gaelic version, ignoring Varie’s phonetically driven English spelling and pronunciation: ‘That’s no right. Your name’s Gaelic. Mhairi. M, H.’²⁴² The Gaelic significance of her name further presents Varie as a typically Celtic being, and a female who embraces the mystical and enchanting nature of the northern nation.

Not only do particular members of the Bultitude family draw attention to Scotland as a deeply Celtic nation, but together they encapsulate the supernatural and ‘otherworldly’ qualities of everyday life in

²⁴⁰ Warner, *The Deadman’s Pedal*, p.166.

²⁴¹ Warner, *The Deadman’s Pedal*, p.167.

²⁴² Warner, *The Deadman’s Pedal*, p.290.

the Port. This presence of the Otherworld is brought to life through the Bultitude ancestry, explicitly noted in the glass coffins which occupy the family graveyard: “The graves are all made of glass, man. You can look right in on top of them. No coffins. Dead bodies laying right there so you can see them.”²⁴³ Once more the burial motif resurfaces, with Warner consistently applying the symbol to strengthen the spiritual timelessness of the Port. The co-presence of heaven and earth is a feature which continually reappears throughout Warner’s fiction, with the Port a geographical location which promotes such a mingling of worlds. The ‘Otherworld’ or afterlife has always been an invisible feature of Warner’s novels prior to *The Deadman’s Pedal*, with the body of Morvern’s former lover hidden deep beneath the highland earth, and the spiritual presence of Chell’s stepfather confined to her own private visions. But this time those buried are wholly visible in the glass topped graves; the deceased Bultitude’s only slightly concealed by fragments of ‘condensation and moss’,²⁴⁴ strengthening the explicit, and now highly perceptible, unification between the secular and the divine. Visiting the graves, Simon and Varie lie above the glass caskets of the Bultitude ancestry, with Varie stating, “Isn’t it peaceful? I could fall into a nap, I really could.”²⁴⁵ Mirroring the position of the dead bodies which lay beneath her, Varie becomes a living, gothic incarnation of *Sleeping Beauty* (1634). Warner’s novel, while resonating firmly with the techniques and sensibilities of the Celtic Twilight, becomes universally recognisable, with *Sleeping Beauty* a fairy tale, and today a Disney motion picture, which is embedded in global conscience. Not only do the transparent graves of the Bultitude’s unite the past with the present, but sees the renowned fairy tale transferred onto a distinctly modern setting, maintaining its everlasting presence in contemporary culture.

This smudging of the real world and the supernatural is expertly evoked through the Bultitude family, with the eerie ancestry truly dissolving the boundary between local life and legendary abnormality. Although condemned by locals as a ‘cursed family’,²⁴⁶ far removed from the ‘normal’ social structures of the Port, the mythical lineage of the Bultitude’s is in fact wholly inherent to everyday life; the dead bodies of their relatives fully immersed and visible in the landscape, anchoring

²⁴³ Warner, *The Deadman’s Pedal*, p.88.

²⁴⁴ Warner, *The Deadman’s Pedal*, p.286.

²⁴⁵ Warner, *The Deadman’s Pedal*, p.287.

²⁴⁶ Warner, *The Deadman’s Pedal*, p.90.

their deceased legacy for eternity. Their heritage visibly seeps into the land and becomes the local, dissolving the divide not only between the social groups, but the temporal earth and the afterlife. Such a blurring of boundaries is also encouraged by Yeats, noted in his text 'A Teller of Tales': 'Everything exists, everything is true, and the earth is only a little dust under our feet'²⁴⁷. This analysis of the contemporary, secular realm is significant too in Warner's fiction. The 'real' world is merely a temporal and rather weak foundation in Warner's mythopoetic universe, which is a place that embraces *all* elements of the world; the mythological, supernatural and beyond.

Seeing the Port in a New Light: Illumination and Darkness in *The Deadman's Pedal*

As well as encapsulating legend and folklore in *The Deadman's Pedal*, Warner also employs many of the artistic sensibilities of the Celtic Twilight. As stated, Hirsch notes that Yeats's objective was to 'inspire a sense of mystery and awe' in his writing, in which 'twilight dwelt on what was magical and fabulous' and 'wonder was to be the reigning emotion'²⁴⁸, a sentiment which bears close ties with Warner's fiction. Yeats and many other writers who were motivated by the same methodology achieved such works by embracing literature as an aesthetic art form, not only writing in a beautifully lyrical style, but also resurrected the tales from the past to expose people to the eternal richness of the present day. In this artistic sense, *The Deadman's Pedal* becomes inextricably linked to the stylistics of the Celtic Twilight, strengthening the mythopoetic essence of the prose.

It is also essential to acknowledge the specific labelling of the literary phenomenon, with the precise wording of 'twilight' encased with a wealth of meaning. 'Twilight' not only promotes the stylistic imagery of darkness and light, which was rife in prose which embraced the Celtic Twilight style, but is also a transitional period of the day where the material and immaterial worlds combine. The blurring of boundaries is once again heightened when understanding Warner's novel in regard to 'twilight', with the term noting the co-existence of heaven and earth. Twilight sees the oppositions of day and night, illumination and shadow, the secular and the divine, all dissolving into one another,

²⁴⁷ W.B Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight* (New York: Cosimo, 2004), p.7.

²⁴⁸ Hirsch, 'Coming Out in to the Light: W.B Yeats 'The Celtic Twilight'', p.10.

leaving readers with Warner's most accomplished mythopoetic world. For Yeats, the precise timing of twilight, and the amalgamation of the secular and the divine, signalled a supernatural encounter, a feature which again is very much apparent in Warner's work. Focusing on these two artistic elements of the Celtic Twilight, illumination and the supernatural, *The Deadman's Pedal* comes to life as a distinctly Celtic text where light and shade bring the mythopoetic dimensions of the Port and its inhabitants into focus.

A stylistic technique which is fascinating and notable in *The Deadman's Pedal* is the consistent imagery of darkness and light. The word 'twilight' lends itself to such a prominent stylistic, as a period of time which sees partial illumination as the sun dips below the horizon, defined as the transition of daylight to darkness, as the dictionary definition states: 'The light diffused by the reflection of the sun's rays from the atmosphere before sunrise, and after sunset; the period during which this prevails between daylight and darkness.'²⁴⁹ This period of transition is not only voiced in *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, as noted in Chapter Two, but is apparent throughout the course of *The Deadman's Pedal*. Natural illumination of sunlight, moonlight and stars can be detected in Warner's corpus, with the delicate binary between darkness and light a key means in which the atmospheric configuration of the Port comes to life:

Some stars still showed in uncertain bleats of light. It was dark at the Pass mouth and the limited sky to the east only began to indicate an uneven top of the ridge above. They had watched the car headlamps sliding up the driveway, pushing vast, ghostly blocks of dusty light through the glossed metal fence; then showing through the thickest, snaking rhododendron boughs.²⁵⁰

Here, both natural and artificial illuminations work in harmony to blend the earthy and technological aspects of Warner's realm. The modern features of the car headlamps come into focus as man-made starlit speckles which mirror those which scatter the night sky, once more emphasising the beauty and enchantment of the modern world. Warner's mythopoetic universe is continually made up of an eclectic blend of both forms of lighting and darkness, with artificial radiance seen throughout the Port,

²⁴⁹ http://www.oed.com/search?searchType=dictionary&q=twilight&_searchBtn=Search

²⁵⁰ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.4.

with ‘angled whiteness’²⁵¹ projected from the Phoenix cinema screen, ‘street light’²⁵² from the lamps in the Brae Estate, and the reflective glimmer of the ‘silver rail tops’²⁵³ of the railway line all contributing to the construction of his world. Such a blend of darkness and light, rather than harsh black and white imagery, once more promotes Warner’s blurring of worlds. Twilight sees illumination delicately dissolve into partial darkness, perceiving the material and immaterial worlds blending into one.

This precise stylistic of the Celtic Twilight is used to provoke a variety of thoughts, feelings and images for writers who utilise light and darkness, and Warner is no exception. For Yeats it provided aesthetic accomplishment and enriched meaning, and for Joyce, illumination signalled epiphany; a moment of clarity which haunts every story of *Dubliners*. Poet, essayist and critic Lionel Johnson is another key figure to bear in mind when closely examining Warner’s use of light and darkness, as a contemporary of Yeats and literary writer of the Celtic Twilight period who likewise injected a real sense of mysticism into his work. Gary H. Paterson notes that examining Johnson’s use of imagery gives readers an ‘appreciation of his ability to at times express, and at times, reconcile aesthetically his personal tensions’, and while darkness and light distils Johnson’s own ‘personal emotional overflow’,²⁵⁴ Warner’s use of such symbolic imagery does not evoke personal truths so much as illuminates wider mythopoetic ideals and universal sensibilities. Paterson continues to articulate the key means in which such imagery flourishes in Johnson’s work:

Light imagery functions in two ways in Lionel Johnson’s poetry: it suggests the world of everyday reality, of action and transience, a world subject to pitfalls of sin and fears of eternal damnation; light also suggests the triumph of Divine Immortality and, presumably, the frozen moment of mystical ecstasy.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ Warner, *The Deadman’s Pedal*, p.109.

²⁵² Warner, *The Deadman’s Pedal*, p.112.

²⁵³ Warner, *The Deadman’s Pedal*, p.375

²⁵⁴ Gary H. Paterson, *At the Heart of the 1980s: Essays on Lionel Johnson* (New York: AMS Press, 2008), p.80.

²⁵⁵ Paterson, *At the Heart of the 1890s: Essays on Lionel Johnson*, p.81.

Oppositions and binaries come to fore in Paterson's evaluation of Johnson's poetry, with the contrast of darkness and light evoking the strict separation between the everyday and the divine. Johnson's poetry utilises darkness and light to evoke a range of personal sentiments, as Paterson continues:

With Johnson, the fascination with the spiritual world held much more immediate personal commitment, and in order to express his emotions objectively, his use of images of light, darkness, sound, and silence allowed him to convey symbolically a variety of moods and themes: delight in the natural world, the search for security in the past, for mystical fulfilment and the expression of his fear of death.²⁵⁶

Johnson's use of illumination and darkness encompasses a range of symbolic meanings, which like Warner, often transcend the secular world and point towards something deeper. While Johnson's poetry presents such symbolic ideas and themes which circulate the world, Warner's prose utilises illumination to combine each realm. There is not a divide between the 'delight in the natural world' and the 'search for security in the past', and Warner's world is a unified whole which brings together 'the world of everyday reality' and 'Divine Immortality' expertly through lighting and shade.

Such an idea can be found in the debut, with *Morvern Callar* innovatively blending Johnson's perception of the divine with every day, materialistic reality: 'I painted each toenail Emerald Sky with a squiggly line of Sliver Starlite through it.'²⁵⁷ The profundity and aesthetic beauty of the cosmos is reduced to fit the heroine's beauty regime, explicitly transferring natural illumination and mystical qualities of the supernatural on to everyday life. 'Emerald Sky' and 'Silver Starlite' direct the gaze upwards towards the heavens, with Warner signalling 'Divine Immortality' through the astronomical imagery. Warner plays on the exaggerated cosmetic branding found in the modern world, giving fanciful names to the otherwise meaningless nail polish. This cosmetic hollowness can also be traced in Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, with Joy's beauty ritual depicted in precise detail:

²⁵⁶ Paterson, *At the Heart of the 1890s: Essays on Lionel Johnson*, p.87.

²⁵⁷ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.72.

I used to have beautiful hands: white with soft skin...Every second night I brought out a basket of cosmetic preparations can gave them the once over, rubbing in cream and filing my nails before the big finish with fresh coats of varnish.²⁵⁸

Galloway does not award the cosmetic lotions and polishes lavish titles, but keeps them nameless to emphasise their futile existence in Joy's life. *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* draws the reader's attention to the superficial nature of the modern world which manifests such materialistic monotony, as Joy's manicure is pointless as soon as she the finished its application: 'Now they chip, sliding on decay in the kitchen.'²⁵⁹ *Morvern Callar* on the other hand draws on the shallow nature of the modern world in a different way, and Warner awards his cosmetics extravagant titles to evoke the profundity which exists in such a domain. Morvern's nail polishes, while small and insignificant, now point to the sanctity which can be found in the trivial, contemporary world. This idea can also be seen when Morvern applies mud to Lanna's face as a means to improve her complexion:

Using my fingers I smeared more fresh mud out the little hole across Lanna's cheekbones. Her eyes looked mentally white with the blackishness of the muck round. I caked more onto her forehead then up into the hairline. I knew this would be a good facepack when I saw it.²⁶⁰

Once more commenting on cosmetic culture, Morvern's application of the natural facemask now becomes an earthly ritual between the two girls, one which does not reflect the hollow regime of Joy. Warner implements beauty products in his prose not only to capture the accurate details of feminine life, but to draw attention to the moments of profundity which can be found in such a superficial world. The titles of Warner's polishes, 'Emerald Sky' and 'Silver Starlite', hint that profundity *does* exist in Morvern's trivial regime and flourishes in the modern world which seeks to suppress it.

Illumination and darkness features most prominently throughout *The Deadman's Pedal*, once more uniting the real world and the Otherworld. While duality runs through the text, with political ideologies and social classes often pitted against each other, the atmospheric construction of Warner's mythopoetic world is one which marries all oppositions. Light and darkness subtly blend throughout

²⁵⁸ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, pp.91-2.

²⁵⁹ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, p.92.

²⁶⁰ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.99.

the novel, evoking glimmers of illumination, speckles of starlight and lucid shadows, rather than strict disparities of white and black imagery. The Port evolves into a place which, through elusive shading, dissolves the barrier between the secular and supernatural, with the Celtic Twilight stylistic innovatively utilised to blur the lines between what is real and imaginary in Warner's mythopoetic construction.

While darkness and light is used throughout Warner's work to enhance his mythopoetic style, the precise timing of 'twilight', seeing the daylight dissolve into night time, is also a significant feature of *The Deadman's Pedal*. As noted, twilight signals a transitional time of day, but for Yeats also promoted a wealth of mystical significance. Hirsch comments on the precise timing and nature of Yeats's tales in *The Celtic Twilight: Men and Women, Dhouls and Faeries*, explaining, 'virtually every story speaks of a supernatural encounter... most of the supernatural encounters take place at twilight, the witching hour of the fairies when a spell falls on the world and nothing is as it seems'.²⁶¹ Hirsch continues to articulate the mythological definition behind twilight, stating that this exact time occurs in 'the space between light and dark when there is a commingling of heaven and earth, the material and immaterial worlds'.²⁶² Once again resonating firmly with Warner's blurring of boundaries in *The Deadman's Pedal*, this idea can also be seen elegantly filtering into Joyce's text 'The Dead', with the 'commingling of heaven and earth' particularly evident at the close of the text. When Gabriel becomes aware of his wife's previous lover, the deceased Michael Furey, illumination and shading are used to signal Gabriel's moment of epiphany:

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. I had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight [...] I was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely church yard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the

²⁶¹ Hirsch, 'Coming Out in to the Light: W.B Yeats 'The Celtic Twilight' (1893-1902)', p.12.

²⁶² Hirsch, 'Coming Out in to the Light: W.B Yeats 'The Celtic Twilight' (1893-1902)', p.12.

barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.²⁶³

Gabriel's vision utilises light and dark symbolic imagery as a reminder that the spirits of those dead will never cease to haunt the present earth, and that he must learn to accept his wife's eternal love for Furey. Not only does the snow cover the cemetery where Furey rests, but coats the entire nation, adding to Joyce's realistic portrayal of national feeling and the bleak, uncertain future of the country. The narrator notes that 'snow was general all over Ireland',²⁶⁴ a rare occurrence given 'Ireland's generally temperate climate',²⁶⁵ emphasising that all of humanity, not just Gabriel, are eternally touched and reminded of the spirits of the past. This idea is prominent in the recurring burial motif which adorns Warner's fiction, drawing readers' attention to the co-mingling of present, everyday modernity and the afterlife which never ceases to exist. 'The Dead' can be read in accordance with Celtic Twilight imagery, with the white snow delicately falling across the darkened Irish land, and Joyce draws attention to the supernatural presence of those long gone, who will incessantly co-exist with the present, material world. A striking resemblance to Joyce's prose can be found in *Morvern Callar*, as the heroine manoeuvres the body of her deceased lover to the attic of their shared home. Securely in place, the corpse hovers over a replica model of the Port:

I opened both skylights with the hook. Two rectangles of moonlight were on His bare body. [...] It'd started snowing again and flakes spun in through the skylights to the music. His lips were dusted with a layer falling right onto them. I untied the ankle knot then re-rigged the main pulley. As I wound the handle, the model on its baseboard rose smoothly up, taking the weight of His body nearer the skylights, then it stopped under the rafter, snowflakes twirling down on the summer land, coating the sides of the pass, layering the village roofs and the giant man, layering the flowered roof of the Tree Church above Him. Some moonlight came through the skylights with the soft fall and it shone on the snow.²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Joyce, *Dubliners*, p.225.

²⁶⁴ Joyce, *Dubliners*, p.225

²⁶⁵ Terence Brown, 'Notes', *Dubliners* (London: Penguin, 2000), p.317.

²⁶⁶ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, pp.53-4.

Just as snow falls on the tomb stone of Furey and the entire nation in Joyce's text, the same universal symbolism is detected in *Morvern Callar*, with the wintery powder coating not only Him, but the miniature construction of the Port. By freezing the land present time stands still and becomes eternal, with both Joyce and Warner's universal settings fused with the eternal afterlife. Each writer breaks the cannons of classical realism,²⁶⁷ and Joyce and Warner include moments of imagery and symbolism to exude the true *spirit* of their home nations; giving not only a vivid image of place, but the essence of its land and its people. This unification of the secular and divine realm is an interesting and significant observation in regard to each writer, and a notion which once more heightens Warner's mythopoetic style in which contemporary life is exposed as inherently timeless.

The Deadman's Pedal is overtly preoccupied with this precise timing of twilight, with much of the narrative taking place when Simon on the night shifts. The young protagonist is often seen working evening hours, relishing in 'the late-night shifts and the touch of macho attached to those witching hours'.²⁶⁸ The novel is full of mythological nuances which occur during the transitional period of twilight, and Warner expertly utilises the timing, like Yeats, to expose the union of heaven and earth. This idea is noted when Simon and experienced driver Penalty are caught in a natural landslide while manoeuvring the train through the Port. Once more on the 'midnight freight shift',²⁶⁹ the narrative traces the route which Simon takes:

The Pass proper had closed about them; out in blackness around were invisible walls of high crags, embedded rocks the size of houses and waterfalls right above – on either side of the loch's profundity.²⁷⁰

Darkness encases the sublime, local landscape, with the precise railway route of the Pass, much like the Port(al), signalling Simon and Penalty's journey into the Otherworld. Having burst its banks, a stream floods through the Port causing a landslide, with Simon caught up in the whirlpool which fills the village: 'Unspeakable elements touched him down there until his mouth came free. He was stood

²⁶⁷ Brown, 'Introduction', p.xliv.

²⁶⁸ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.277.

²⁶⁹ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.311.

²⁷⁰ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.323.

in water now up to his chest and he lunged forward in panic.²⁷¹ The universe has sent both the man-made and earthly elements of the Port into turmoil, and Simon's vision becomes blurred through such a bizarre sequence of events. He is confronted by a barrage of coffins as they float down the hill from the Bultitude graveyard, as well as being faced with the 'satyr-like head of a drowned sheep'²⁷² which is helplessly trapped in the violent whirlpool. The narrative descends into an inexplicable, chaotic macabre account where the remnants of the dead and living physically collide; an image which very much reflects the unification of the 'material and immaterial worlds' of the Celtic Twilight.

This idea is strengthened even further when the train crashes into what Simon initially thinks is a living 'tall white woman with her hands up at her face',²⁷³ but is in fact the marble statue of the Virgin Mary, a totemic emblem which resides in the cemetery. The contrast between light and darkness infiltrates the prose as Simon views the amputated marble statue float with the current, observing 'the severed head of the Virgin Mary, all white, her cheeks smeared in watery grime'.²⁷⁴ The secular and divine realms are at once explicitly united in the Port, with the statue of the Virgin Mary envisioned, in Simon's moment of distortion, as a real human being who walks the very earth he lives. This is not the first time that readers are confronted with the mythological female in Warner's prose, and an encounter with a statue of the Virgin Mary also appears in *Morvern Callar*. Although the figure that Morvern searches for in the depths of sea is not explicitly referred to as the Virgin Mary, but vaguely as a 'pale model of the virgin saint girl' who is dressed in 'heavy lace' with 'twinkling bells',²⁷⁵ the visual attributes of the figure do lend themselves to such an idea. The Virgin Mary is once more seen at the time of twilight, as Morvern swims out 'at dawn'²⁷⁶ in search of the drowned figure, anticipating the connection with the mythological female who symbolises her imminent motherhood. Fertility, rebirth and rejuvenation surround *Morvern Callar*, with the white, angelic figure of the Virgin Mary treated as a motif to radiate such connotations.

Traditionally viewed as an emblem of motherhood, the mythological figure again provides

²⁷¹ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.332.

²⁷² Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.332.

²⁷³ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.325.

²⁷⁴ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.332.

²⁷⁵ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.154.

²⁷⁶ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.156.

such feminine foreshadowing in *The Deadman's Pedal*, this time in light of Simon and Varie's expected child. Before making love to Simon, Varie describes her unique vision of conception:

'The mirror is reflecting the starlight onto me,' she claimed, as she curled back down to him. 'If I wasn't on the pill, you could give me a star child [...] The starlight penetrates my belly and you have an astral child together; though bad spirits could come into our child because we broke the circle.'²⁷⁷

Just as Morvern will give birth to a euphoric 'child of the raves',²⁷⁸ Varie believes her unborn baby will be penetrated by the powers of the cosmos. The biology of pregnancy is removed in each instance and instead evoked as an Otherworldly experience, much like the miracle, Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. Although she does not possess the conventional attributes of the biblical saint, Varie does in fact embrace many qualities of the mythological figure. The young female can be read in terms of a 'darker' Virgin Mary who walks the earth, alluded to in the Scottish version of her name, 'Mhari', which directly translates to Mary. This idea resonates firmly Mary A. Doll's assessment of myth in relation to female characters in Beckett's work, as she notes, 'Women are in touch with a more mysterious, dark side of myth because they are more in touch with suffering.'²⁷⁹ Doll's notion of 'suffering' relates to Mathew Fox's view that feminine pain is a 'gift of the *via negativa* because suffering allows for birth',²⁸⁰ mirroring Varie's own looming motherhood. Varie now becomes an advocate of the 'dark side of myth', a being who encapsulates this mysterious facet of mythology:

Myth wants to be told and then destroyed. It wants to be heard and not listened to. The most dangerous, dark side of myth is that it is often a story heard and then not forgotten.²⁸¹

Warner's timeless essence of mythology is successfully instilled in Varie, a female figure who upholds this 'dark' and haunting side of myth which is everlasting and 'not forgotten'. She is not a direct reincarnation of the virtuous and pure Virgin Mary, connotations of the figure that resonate

²⁷⁷ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.295.

²⁷⁸ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.229.

²⁷⁹ Doll, *Beckett and Myth: An Archetypal Approach*, p.53.

²⁸⁰ Mathew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality* (New Mexico.: Bear and Company, 1986), pp.146-47, quoted by Doll, *Beckett and Myth: An Archetypal Approach*, p.53.

²⁸¹ Tom Moore, *Rituals of the Imagination* (Texas: The Pegasus Foundation, 1983), p.21, quoted by Doll, *Beckett and Myth: An Archetypal Approach*, p.54.

more closely with Morvern, and Varie is instead a haunting, ethereal being. Varie's connection to the biblical saint maintains the eternal profundity of her persona, and she is very much resembles the marble statue in *The Deadman's Pedal* whose pristine, white marble exterior is stained and dishevelled.

Illumination and darkness continue to play a key role in the construction of the Virgin Mary, signalling Simon's encounter with the supernatural. The mythological figure is continually perceived through such literary shading, seen in *Morvern Callar* as the heroine watches the symbolic emblem burned at sea: 'It burned very quick. The flames came flickering out of the darkness smearing a long line of light across the water towards everybody'.²⁸² The same artistic technique is transferred onto not only the depiction of the white statue of the Virgin Mary in *The Deadman's Pedal*, but is used in the construction of *all* women. Each central heroine is made up of darkness and light, another sensibility of the Celtic Twilight which Warner continues to utilise to evoke the 'comingling of heaven and earth'. The depiction of the female is expertly portrayed through the distribution of light and darkness in the novel, presenting each woman as a larger-than-life, often ethereal being who exists in local life.

The construction of the female through Celtic Twilight stylistics can be readily seen once more in Joyce's *Dubliners*, particularly in Gabriel's perception of his wife in 'The Dead'. From the 'dark part of the hall gazing up the staircase' Gabriel notes a female figure 'which the shadow made appear black and white'.²⁸³ On the realisation that the shadowy figure is his wife, Gabriel continues to describe her presence:

There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something [...] If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones.²⁸⁴

Joyce builds up Gabriel's perception of his wife through the artistic vision of the Celtic Twilight, with the central male protagonist reducing his observation of the female to no more than a static,

²⁸² Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.155.

²⁸³ Joyce, *Dubliners*, pp.210-11.

²⁸⁴ Joyce, *Dubliners*, p.211.

aesthetically pleasing image. Illumination and darkness is employed to reduce the female to a painterly object confined to the male gaze, a notion which Warner exiles in *The Deadman's Pedal*. Instead, lighting and shading bring the female to life in Warner's novel, living beyond the aesthetic image as profound and timeless beings who are laden with mythopoetic significance and depth. For example, both Nikki and Varie are made up of the natural contrasts of warm and cool toned lighting, with Nikki continually described as a 'ray of golden sunshine'²⁸⁵ compared to Varie's dark and icy supernatural demure, with Simon noting her 'white reflection'²⁸⁶ and 'violent paleness'²⁸⁷. The artistic technique does not flatten the feminine persona but rather intensifies it, exposing the provocative, evanescent quality of the female.

Taking Nikki Caine as an example, she exists in the novel as a fragile and delicate vision of radiant 'golden sunshine', but also the opposite side of twilight, as Simon notes 'the two ghostly eggs and black crescent in her moonish rump', after making love to her 'under the high moon'.²⁸⁸ Nikki is both sun and moon, day and night, earth and heaven, with Warner presenting the female as a complex cosmological being who exists in local life; much like the celestial spirits of *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, and Morvern's mythological ties with the sea in both *Morvern Callar* and *These Demented Lands*. Warner's female constructions are not implemented in his novels for aesthetic pleasure or as sexual objects to satisfy the gaze of the male voyeur, but rather complex personas who are embedded with symbolic meaning. *The Deadman's Pedal* in particular sees all of Warner's characters, although most notably his female protagonists, infused with a mythological stature which heightens their earthly existence. The women in the novel do not simply exist as 'normal' or 'conventional' beings, but have added depth which, like the landscape of Warner's novels, hints at the richness of everyday life. The precise artistry of the Celtic Twilight is employed to evoke their feminine provocative nature and heighten the distortion between what is real and imaginary: another analytical thought which could be pursued fully in a further study.

²⁸⁵ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.107.

²⁸⁶ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.169.

²⁸⁷ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.162.

²⁸⁸ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, pp.125-7.

The complex and fascinating construction of the female which runs through Warner's fiction is explicitly heightened in *The Deadman's Pedal*. Sexuality is a feature which Yeats regards in conjunction with twilight, with eroticism and the supernatural going hand-in-hand. Such an idea can be seen throughout Warner's novel, particularly in the amorous encounter between Simon and Varie which explicitly see's the earth and the heavens align. Elements of Gothic literature delicately filter into Warner's text, especially around Varie and the Bultitude ancestry, and David J. Jones notes that in Gothic literature 'Eroticism is a movement towards the Other'²⁸⁹; a notion which is very much alluded to in Warner's text. Yeats further articulates the connection between twilight and sexuality with pushes towards the Other in *The Secret Rose* (1897):

There is a moment at twilight in which all men look handsome, all women beautiful; and day by day as he wandered slowly and aimlessly he passed deeper and deeper into that Celtic twilight in which heaven and earth so mingle that each seems to have taken upon itself some shadow of the other's beauty. It filled his soul with a desire for he knew not what. It possessed his body with a thirst for unimagined experience.²⁹⁰

Simon's 'thirst for unimagined experience' is exposed in his sexual endeavours throughout the course of the novel, with his vulnerability and loss of boyhood innocence wrapped in scenes of eroticism and lust. The most explicit moment in regard to Yeats's definition of 'a supernatural encounter' is his night of passion with Varie. As noted, Varie encapsulates the eerie qualities of the supernatural world, depicted as a being who is renounced as a 'scary witch' and 'papist whore',²⁹¹ and whose ethereal presence is not lost on Simon. Having performed her pagan ritual of confining their naked bodies within a salt circumference, purifying their night of passion and blessing the consecrated space after a 'mutational invocation of the gods of the east',²⁹² hailstones begin to violently fill the sky above them, hammering the roof 'with excited vibration'.²⁹³ Like the unpredictable landslide, the weather signals a rare power and presence which transcends the secular realm. The cosmos align in light of Simon and

²⁸⁹ David J. Jones, *Sexuality and the Gothic Magic Lantern: Desire, Eroticism and Literary Visibilities from Byron to Bram Stoker* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.2.

²⁹⁰ W.B Yeats, *The Secret Rose* (London: Bullen, 1897), pp.142-45.

²⁹¹ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, pp.165-6.

²⁹² Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.292.

²⁹³ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.293.

Varie's earthly love-making, shaking Warner's entire mythopoetic universe. After the hailstones cease the amorous pair hear bird song outside, the natural tune of the creature described as follows:

Between the bouts of ecstasy, outside birds began to sing to them [...] Cruel light was behind the curtains and the volume of birds calling out was quite extreme by the time they both dressed; Simon's shirt stuck onto the blood of his scratched shoulder blade which stung hysterically through his tiredness.²⁹⁴

Now dawn, a period which Yeats also considered 'a site of transition and change',²⁹⁵ sees the heavens align once more. Birds, traditionally regarded as the closest creature to the divine realm and earthly messengers between God and Man, produce a harmonious song which represents the co-existence of heaven and earth. Warner's implementation of bird song and hailstones sees the entire universe powerfully reacting to the single moment of human sexual desire. Erotic interaction with the female brings about such a breakdown of boundaries in Warner's novel, with the precise timing of twilight bringing the remarkable, timeless essence of his mythopoetic world to the fore.

By understanding *The Deadman's Pedal* in conjunction with the artistic sensibilities of the Celtic Twilight the text divulges rich meaning and complexity. The imagery of light and darkness, as well as Simon's encounters with the opposite sex throughout the novel which occur at twilight, are made sense of when regarded in accordance with the Celtic Twilight sensibilities. Warner's mythopoetic female figures are used as a gateway to cloud the separation between the temporal and heavenly realms, presenting Warner's mythopoetic centre, the Port, as a place where all boundaries are broken and the secular and the supernatural palpably co-exist.

The Locomotive Journey: Dissolving the Boundaries

As the previous section noted, the definition of 'twilight' is primarily concerned with a transitional period of the day as light diffuses and darkness descends upon the land, with such a 'transitional

²⁹⁴ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.295.

²⁹⁵ Smith, *W.B Yeats: A Critical Introduction*, p.29.

period' integral to the understanding of Warner's fiction. In regard to Yeats and the Celtic Twilight, the precise timing signalled a supernatural encounter which saw the unification of the secular and divine realms, a notion which can clearly be seen in *The Deadman's Pedal*. However, a figurative meaning can also be derived from the word twilight, defined as, 'an intermediate condition or period; a condition before or after full development', especially in relation to 'imperfect mental illumination or perception',²⁹⁶ which Warner turns into visionary *spiritual* perception throughout his novel as Simon progresses towards adulthood. Such an understanding, still viewing twilight as a distinctly transitional period which blurs the boundaries between temporal reality and the Otherworld, can be transferred onto the notion of the journey in *The Deadman's Pedal*, depicting Simon's own personal and spiritual evolution from adolescence to manhood. By viewing the novel with regards to Celtic Twilight techniques and stylistics, and understanding the particular feature of twilight as a spiritually transitional period, once more promotes *The Deadman's Pedal*, and the entirety of Warner's corpus, as a body of work which can be understood in this innovative manner. While the entire novel is centred on the physical transit of the stream train, Simon's own spiritual growth runs parallel to its tracks, with his loss of innocence and swift evolution to adulthood expertly constructed within Warner's mythopoetic system. Boundaries are dissolved and clouded throughout the course of the novel, with the entire text resting in limbo. *The Deadman's Pedal* is a novel of continuous transition and depicts numerous 'hinge' periods; not only in light of Simon's own life, but in regard to the larger concerns which also hang in the balance, including the future of the railway line in the Port and the political position of the nation.

The steam train is central to the text and the unrelenting pulse behind *The Deadman's Pedal*, with the title of the novel referring to the pedal which acts as a safety device, bringing the vehicle to a standstill if it is not securely held down by the driver : 'Deadman's pedal puts the brakes on if a driver falls asleep'.²⁹⁷ The rhythm of the railway line steadily pushes the narrative along in a simple, rhythmical fashion. As noted in Chapter Two, Warner's novels have been geographically reined in since the debut, and rather than travelling overseas to foreign lands the texts remain firmly grounded

²⁹⁶ <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/208059?rskey=1qo4J9&result=1#eid>

²⁹⁷ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.204.

in and around the Port. This idea is most significantly heightened in *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, a novel which depicts a journey of complete physical stagnation. *The Deadman's Pedal*, although centred on a working railway line, does not travel a great geographical distance and Stuart Kelly notes this perfectly formed motif: 'The central metaphor of the train, involving miles of travel but no change in place, is never overworked'.²⁹⁸ While the novel is always in motion, with the train continuously exiting and returning to the Port, the text does not stray far from Warner's literary geographic centre. While a seemingly simple method of transportation to focus a text on, with the metaphor of the train a literary mechanism which maintains the narrative pace of the novel, the significance of textual mobility concealed within the locomotive exudes complex meaning, once more bringing Warner's mythopoetic style to the fore.

The railway line is another recurring motif used throughout Warner's body of work, and a feature significantly embraced in *The Deadman's Pedal*. Although its presence is apparent in the works prior to this novel, with the train a subtle and functional presence of the previous prose, the railway becomes a central thematic symbol in the latest text. While *Morvern Callar* notes the presence of the train line, the tracks are constantly abandoned, with the heroine only watching out for 'a special train other than the usual evening-only'²⁹⁹ as she walks along the deserted line. The 'special train' emphasises its rare presence in the Port, with Morvern noting that 'not a soul was there'³⁰⁰ as she makes her way towards the railway bar, a stark contrast to *The Deadman's Pedal* where the station is always bursting with commuters: 'The railway station was busy... There were gathered echoes accumulating like mixed radio transmissions beneath the glass canopy roof - quite a lot of tourists were about with luggage.'³⁰¹ *The Deadman's Pedal* fully focuses on the mobile vehicle, with the train line a vital, living presence in the Port. The train initially appears as a modest method of transportation, regarded in contemporary society as merely a convenient and functional vehicle for commuters. Yet Alain de Botton notes the philosophical potential embedded in the train, regarding the

²⁹⁸ Stuart Kelly, 'The Deadman's Pedal by Alan Warner- review', *The Guardian* (1st June, 2012) <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jun/01/deadmans-edal-alan-warner-review>

²⁹⁹ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.217.

³⁰⁰ Warner, *Morvern Callar*, p.219.

³⁰¹ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.132.

precise method of transportation as more than a practical device. To comprehend the complexity of the locomotive, De Botton notes the thought process behind the work of artist Edward Hopper:

Hopper also took an interest in trains. He was drawn to the atmosphere inside half-empty carriages making their way across a landscape: the silence that reigns inside while the wheels beat in rhythm against the rails outside, the dreaminess fostered by noise and the view from the windows, a dreaminess in which we seem to stand outside our normal selves and have access to thoughts and memories that may not arise in more settled circumstances.³⁰²

The visionary ideals of the Celtic Twilight are implied in De Botton's reference, with the critic too moved by the artistic richness and beauty from the humble train carriage. This 'dream like' quality provoked when travelling by train further signals a Celtic Twilight sensibility, with literature of the movement also concerned with all that was 'predominantly shadowy and dreamy',³⁰³ embracing the visions and imaginative thoughts of the individual. The unique way in which the train seamlessly moves across the land manifests such dreaminess, causing the mind to be feverishly distracted from 'reality' due to the ever-changing landscape which passes by. As De Botton explains, such dreams and imaginative thoughts arise on the train because 'the views have none of the potential monotony of those on a ship or a plane, they move fast enough for us not to get exasperated but slowly enough for us to identify objects.'³⁰⁴ Such dream-like stimulation is lost in the world of the airport which harbours repetition and monotony, with the girls of *The Stars in the Bright Sky* failing to seek imaginative respite:

Familiarity had now grown into fondness for the young women. When they entered the terminal they repeated the repetitive security messages spoken from the ceilings to themselves, as if following the prayers of their church.³⁰⁵

Warner emphasises the repetitive nature of the airport, with the same tedious sights and sounds etched into the subconscious minds of the young women. The airport dilutes imaginative stimulation, in

³⁰² De Botton, *The Art of Travel*, pp.56-7.

³⁰³ Francis Shaw, 'The Celtic Twilight', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol.23, No.90, (Ireland: Irish Province of the Society of Jesus, 1934), p.260. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30095144>

³⁰⁴ De Botton, *The Art of Travel*, p.57.

³⁰⁵ Warner, *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, p.360.

contrast to the train which champions mental distraction. *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, in hindsight, successfully foregrounds the profound and evocative qualities of the train journey which manifest in *The Deadman's Pedal*. The latter novel brings the journey back down to earth, moving across a highland terrain which, like *The Man Who Walks*, is an enriched and ancient land, rather than a fleeting, temporal world like that of the airport. The locomotive moves gracefully through areas of the land which are unreachable by any other mode of transport, allowing passengers to see and contemplate the land on every journey, viewing the world in a gentle and meditative state which distracts the mind, dissolves time and provokes 'train-dreaming'.

Such imaginative thoughts and internal reflection is readily seen in *The Deadman's Pedal*, with the opening passage of the novel describing the driver's carriage: 'The windscreens of those driving cabs are endarkened – as if the cell within is dedicated to the most profound contemplation'³⁰⁶ The solitary drivers cab becomes an image laden with religious overtones, with the carriage envisioned like a chapel or hermit's cell. Warner's writing mirrors De Botton's analysis of the locomotive journey, the latter noting that 'of all modes of transport, the train is perhaps the best aid to thought'.³⁰⁷ Thoughts, imaginings and dreams are manifested within the isolated carriage of the train, a notion which reflects Warner's seamless transition between real and imaginary worlds. As the train moves through the 'real world' the mind is free to wander through impossible realms, dissolving the binary.

How exactly the train moves through the land is integral to the cultivation of imaginative journeying. The fluidity of the train, in both a physical and spiritual sense, becomes almost part of the landscape in *The Deadman's Pedal*, with Warner continually depicting the organic movement of the vehicle which aids in the 'train-dreaming' process. The train is immersed in the earthly terrain, compared to the disembodied aeroplane in *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, and moves across the archaic land in a graceful motion which is not detached or intermittent. While Warner embraces the seamless movement of the train to aid in the unification of the real and immaterial worlds, Leah Garrett believes that the precise mobility does not manifest such thought:

³⁰⁶ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.1.

³⁰⁷ De Botton, *The Art of Travel*, p.57.

The train is like a heterogeneous city, with myriad class divisions and the concomitant class hatreds [...] the train moves in city time which is frantic, compartmentalised and disconnected from the natural world. The train is thus a symbol of the breakdown of the unified natural world into fractured parts of the industrial machine.³⁰⁸

Garrett continues to state that the train is ‘anonymous and inhuman’, two descriptions which are drastically disparate from Warner’s construction of the locomotive which is embedded in local conscience and presented as an embodied vessel. The train journey criticised by Garrett is one which reflects the urban, sprinter-type machinery of the modern world, rooted in the temporal, ‘frantic’ environments of inner cities, as opposed to Warner’s Highland journey. *The Deadman’s Pedal* does not breakdown the ‘unified natural world’ but rather strengthens it, presenting the locomotive and the world it travels through as a place of spiritual transgression and profound contemplation. The narrative states that the ‘train feels on ahead’,³⁰⁹ the personified vehicle organically connected to the earth, often immersing its drivers in the land which it moves through:

In the few heatwaves the cab doors of their diesel locomotives are lashed open onto the bulkhead pipes, the noisy air around the drivers festured with clouds of bankside foxglove seeds swirling before their faces and sticking in their grey hair.³¹⁰

Warner’s configuration of the steam train breaks down the conventional barrier between the interior realm of the carriage and the natural world outside, with technology and earth closely mingling as the locomotive races through the Port. Such a binary between the closed carriage and the outdoors is noted by Marian Aguiar:

The spatialization of the railway highlights certain kinds of relationships; this nexus pivots around the paradigm of inside and outside, one of the primary binaries constructing railway space. The

³⁰⁸ Leah Garrett, ‘Trains and Train Travel in Modern Yiddish Literature’, *Jewish Social Studies* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001), p.72.

³⁰⁹ Warner, *The Deadman’s Pedal*, p.3.

³¹⁰ Warner, *The Deadman’s Pedal*, p.2.

split between inside and outside produces what Michel de Certeau calls 'a closed and autonomous insularity.'³¹¹

Aguiar firmly maintains that a strict separation between inside and outside does exist, with the train carriage an isolated space independent of the outside world. This notion is extinguished in Warner's prose and he rather presents the train as a vessel which unites numerous oppositions, most notably inside and outdoors, the real world and the imagined, man and the journey. This breakdown of the interior and exterior barrier is not only noted through the symbolic locomotive, but also in a scene between Simon and Karen Caine, Nikki's elder sister. Like all of the feminine protagonists in the novel, Karen is once more depicted through illumination and shade, bringing the female to life as an ethereal being. Once she and Simon reach their destination, Karen enters her family home and undresses; the only physical barrier between the two is the bedroom window:

She kicked off her shoes and peeled the tights down from her waist- they were like a skin of shadow, some contributory fabric to the darkness itself, another layer to sootiness, so her pale legs came suddenly more visible as she bent and drew the black nylon clear of each foot.³¹²

Once more darkness and light enhance the sensuality of the scene, promoting Karen, like Nikki and Varie, as a ghostly spirit. Separated by the pane of glass the pair begin to kiss:

Simon dropped his helmet on the grass, leaned in and gently touched his own lips against the cold and slightly gritty glass, exactly where her mouth was. Her right palm came up companionably against the inside glass and he mirrored this by placing his own there- hand against hand but no sense of human heart.³¹³

The window acts as a barrier between Karen's interior world, a supernatural realm where she appears almost as a ghost who has the power to vanish into the 'deeper and unlit recess of the room',³¹⁴ and the 'real' world beyond the window, where Simon stands. However, the boundaries between reality

³¹¹ Marian Aguilar, 'Making Modernity: Inside the Technological Space of the Railway', *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 68, Winter 2008, p.78. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/cultural_critique/v068/68.1aguilar.html

³¹² Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.256.

³¹³ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.257.

³¹⁴ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.257.

and the imagined are once again broken down, with the significance of the window, a translucent pane of glass, visibly reflecting and welcoming each world to coincide. The transparent material does not act as a divide but rather provides a gateway to each realm, very much like the locomotive which unites the natural world outside and the dreams of its interior carriage. Thus the train is not a 'closed and autonomous insularity',³¹⁵ but rather a transportation device which encourages the collision and crossing of boundaries.

With regard to these analytical thoughts, ideas behind the theory of 'hyperreality' seem appropriate alongside De Botton's analysis of the journey by train, with the critic noting the blurring boundaries between what is real and what is dreamt from inside the carriage. De Botton notes that 'we seem to stand outside our normal selves' when travelling on the railway line, with this out-of-body experience truly thawing the barriers between reality and the imagination. Just as the train navigates around local geographical locations the mind simultaneously travels into fantasy realms, with the locomotive a vessel which manifests both physical and spiritual travel. Peter Barry defines what is meant by the term hyperreality in light of Jean Baudrillard's theoretical work:

Baudrillard is associated with what is usually known as 'the loss of the real', which is the view that in contemporary life the pervasive influence of images from film, TV and advertising has led to a loss of the distinction between real and imagined, reality and illusion, surface and depth. The result is a culture of 'hyperreality', in which distinctions between these are eroded.³¹⁶

Baudrillard defines hyperreality as '*everything* is a model or an image, all is surface without depth [sic]',³¹⁷ with De Botton's understanding of the locomotive journey one which seems to coincide with such an understanding. For De Botton, travelling by train creates the illusion of blurring boundaries between what is real and what is imaginary, with the mind venturing in to new worlds as the train physically moves across the land. As Simon manoeuvres the train through the Port he has this out-of-body experience, trading in the accurate contours of the land for his own, imaginative vision:

³¹⁵ Aguiar, 'Making Modernity: Inside the Technological Space of the Railway', p.78

³¹⁶ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp.83-4.

³¹⁷ Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, p.86.

On the locomotives now, Simon had the night roads all up in his mind. He too could close his eyes and divine exactly where he was throughout these blinded lands [...] When Simon closed his eyes, he could now have held out each arm like a night bird, flying over the lands to and from the outlying station.³¹⁸

Simon has his own unique perception of the land which transcends the visible accuracy of the geographical location, living in a projected reality made up of imaginative thoughts and the sensory motions of the train. The narrative continues to divulge Simon's detachment from reality when in the drivers cab, stating: 'While he rode the midnight trains, Simon screwed his eyes tight shut, imagined every girl from his old school now fast asleep far across all these places, fair heads on pillows in some massive feminine dreamland.'³¹⁹ The train acts as a catalyst in Simon's own spiritual transition from boy to man, with the 'perpetual forward motion', of the train functioning as 'an emblem of progress',³²⁰ in regard to his personal journey. His adolescent mind freely wanders while driving the vehicle through darkness, with the land too descending into a world made up of both secular and supernatural attributes: 'The speckled frost of trackside hawthorn blossoms blushed out like a conference of ghosts in the black sweep ahead.'³²¹ The train physically moves through a landscape of 'reality and illusion', as well as provoking spiritual travel, exposing the land in *The Deadman's Pedal* as a 'hyperreal' geographic location where there is a remarkable 'loss of distinction' between 'reality and illusion'.

For De Botton the train is a vehicle which transcends functional practicalities and instead acts as a retrospective vessel, where 'at the end of hours of train-dreaming, we may feel we have been returned to ourselves- that is, brought back into contact with emotions and ideas of importance to us.'³²² This analysis resonates powerfully with Warner's mythopoetic style, with De Botton's idea one which anchors the dream-like movement of the train to everyday reality. The Celtic Twilight is viewed as a literary phenomenon which provides a link between the real world and the supernatural realm, with Warner's locomotive a symbol which also provides this connecting quality. The train

³¹⁸ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.321.

³¹⁹ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.321.

³²⁰ Aguiar, 'Making Modernity: Inside the Technological Space of the Railway', p.75.

³²¹ Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal*, p.321.

³²² De Botton, *The Art of Travel*, p.59.

journey perfectly manifests Warner's mythopoetic style, with its unique, seamless movement across the land dissolving the boundaries between all worlds; not only transporting passengers physically, but assisting in a mental and spiritual voyage which transcends everyday reality. The train truly aids in exposing *The Deadman's Pedal* as Warner's most accomplished mythopoetic configuration, with the novel expertly evoking the profundity of everyday life and the 'dignity of myth'³²³ which flourishes in the modern world.

The stylistics and techniques employed by the Celtic Twilight are unmistakable in *The Deadman's Pedal*, and extend and heighten Warner's mythopoetic style. Resonating closely with not only the traditional folklore and supernatural facets of the literary sensibility, but also the symbolic relevance of twilight and the artistic depiction of illumination and darkness, Warner's novel comes to life a deeply Celtic text which exposes the richness and profundity of the modern world. The novel is not preoccupied with Gothic imagery and inexplicable events for solely narrative pleasure, but to evoke a dynamic modern world which is laden with mysterious enchantment. The genre separation of reality and fantasy is decidedly extinguished in Celtic Twilight literature, as it is most effectively in *The Deadman's Pedal*, with the blurring of the real world and the imagined an integral means in which Warner's 'Other' realm becomes everlasting and spiritually profound.

³²³ Jones, 'Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999', p.167.

Conclusion

‘...we both reached for some other world.’

(Warner, *Their Lips Talk of Mischief*)

Speaking to *The Skinny* about his latest publication, *Their Lips Talk of Mischief* (2014), Warner once more emphasises his regard for James Kelman; a writer who Warner confesses ‘jolted’ him in ‘some definite way’.³²⁴ Warner notes the particular controversy which surrounded Kelman’s *How Late it was* (1994) winning the Booker Prize in the same year, reminiscing about the hugely misguided critiques which surrounded the novel. Kelman’s text was condemned a ‘disgrace’, ‘crap, frankly’,³²⁵ and the Scottish writer was hailed an ‘illiterate savage’³²⁶ by Simon Jenkins in *The Times*. But it was a comment made by literary critic Mark Lawson which, to this day, has stuck firmly in Warner’s mind:

He [Lawson] thought it was written in the first person. That’s primary school stuff. It wasn’t Mark’s fault. He just couldn’t work out the dialect. It’s another world.³²⁷

The energetic, Scots rhetoric of Kelman’s stream-of-consciousness prose is to blame for Lawson’s misjudgement. Like many critics, Lawson was unable to comprehend the verbal power and strange narrative structure of the Glasgow based novel, which broke from established literary traditions. But it is Warner’s final words which resonate, and truly capture not only the essence of Kelman’s work but his own literary endeavours. Warner’s perception of the novel reflects his own authorial sentiment:

³²⁴ Alan Warner, *Writers Talk: Conversations with Contemporary British Novelists*, ed. Philip Tew, Fiona Tolun and Leigh Wilson (London-New York: Continuum, 2008), p.162.

³²⁵ Rabbi Julia Neuberger, quoted by Theo Tait, ‘In his own words’, *The Guardian* (12/04/08), <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/apr/12/featuresreviews.guardianreview22>

³²⁶ Simon Jenkins, ‘An Expletive of a Writer’, *The Times*, 15th October 2004, quoted by Mitch, Miller, Johnny, Rodger, *The Writer as Tactician: James Kelman’s Everyday Practice*, http://www.academia.edu/3653125/The_Writer_as_Tactician_James_Kelmans_Everyday_Practice

³²⁷ Alan Warner, ‘Alan Warner: Imagining Scotland’, an interview conducted by Angus Sutherland, *The Skinny: Independent Cultural Journalism* (Radge Media Limited, 2014), http://www.theskinny.co.uk/books/features/308924-alan_warner_imagining_scotland

readers enter the writer's own 'Other' world. For Warner, it is not only Kelman's work, but the art of reading itself which promotes such 'another world', and he remembers the sacred experience of reading while growing up, a sentiment which has stayed with him: 'The worlds that opened up with each book were so intriguing and addictive compared to what I knew.'³²⁸ It is this precise 'world' of reading that Warner has been compelled by, and continually permeates his own prose. His novels invite readers into places which are elusive and enchanting, manipulating the perception of what is real and what is imagined, allowing readers to be swept up in 'another world', an inexplicable 'elsewhere'.³²⁹

It is Warner's own 'Other' worlds which make his literature so fascinating. While often associated with the 'Scottish Beats' of the mid-nineties, and seen as a social commentator of the Scottish youth generation, Warner's work transcends such literary implication. The prose fails to project a vision of the nation in the same immediate way as his close contemporary Irvine Welsh, whose writing directly reflects the political ideologies and societal tensions of Scotland in an immediately powerful manner. Instead, Warner focuses attention on the artistic nuances and profound moments of beauty which circulate in such a volatile and fleeting modern world. Such an example of spiritual beauty and promise is found in the young women of *The Stars in the Bright Sky*, with the sixth female protagonists depicted as celestial stars in a destructive world which is rapidly deteriorating around them. Writing in a contemporary sphere suffocated by political corruption, established class divides and global terrorist threat, Warner's young protagonists bring respite and salvation to such a world, with each novel finding meaning and poignancy in the land and the people who inhabit it. Through his mythopoetic style, and the recurring motif of the journey, Warner's prose is elevated to new heights, inviting readers to circumnavigate around unique worlds which are laden with meaning, symbolism and moments of human promise.

³²⁸ Alan Warner, 'Their Lips Talk of Mischief by Alan Warner, Book Review: Sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll – all in an Acton Flat', an interview conducted by James Kidd, *The Independent* (31/08/2014), <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/their-lips-talk-of-mischief-by-alan-warner-book-review-sex-drugs-and-rocknroll--all-in-an-acton-flat-9700429.html>

³²⁹ Warner, 'Sullivan's Ashes'.

Since the publication of *Morvern Callar*, Warner's prose has sought to uncover the enchantment and mystery which occupies the contemporary sphere, with his mythopoetic style successfully expressing complex meaning. While Warner's novels occupy modern settings, with his configurations of the Port and Gatwick airport wholly recognisable in the mind of the reader, they are places which surpass reductive realism and hint at a mysterious, transcendental world which subtly co-exists with present reality. The liminal spaces noted in *Morvern Callar*, *The Stars in the Bright Sky* and *The Deadman's Pedal* exist in every one of Warner's novels, and invite readers to circumnavigate around 'Other' worlds which cross the threshold between the realms of reality and fantasy. Warner's mythopoetic style, along with the recurring motif of the journey, sees each of the novels flourish in their unique domain. By moving through dynamic landscapes which cultivate both past and present, fantasy and reality, heaven and earth, a journey across such dynamic landscapes becomes a journey through time. The journey sees Warner's land and characters become everlasting, with textual mobility employed throughout the corpus to dissolve the boundaries between what is real and what is imagined.

This timeless quality is integral to Warner's work, not only found in the enriched landscapes of his novels, which are scattered with symbolic remnants of a collective and personal past, but also in the people who inhabit them. Warner utilises his female characters in particular to exude such timelessness, with the women of each of the aforementioned novels embodying mythological symbolism. This area of study has proved particularly interesting, with a gender divide in the mythopoetic potential of men and women quite unmistakable in Warner's prose. As noted, Warner looks to women for 'affirmative inspiration',³³⁰ in contrast to the male-centred works of his contemporaries, Kelman and Welsh. While on the surface Warner's young women comply with the typical trends and adhere to the superficial culture of their respective generations, each protagonist is laced with deeper meaning and substance. All of Warner's female figures, from Couris Jean to Nikki Caine, stress that profundity *can* be found in the temporal and increasingly hollow modern world. Connected to the sea, the stars and the spiritual afterlife, often portrayed through light and dark symbolic imagery, Warner's female protagonists are complex and dynamic, transcending the secular world, and existing as 'Other' eternal beings.

³³⁰ Jones, 'Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999', p.162.

This thesis has sought to uncover the whispering continuities which subtly bind the entirety of Warner's work. The delicate threads which unite each novel unveil the profound and everlasting sentiment which lies at the heart of his fiction. Warner's corpus resonates with great mythology, becoming a timeless literature which evokes the sanctity of life in the twenty-first century. By transferring the essence of mythology onto his modern settings, each of Warner's novels unearths the sacred promise which is present in the mundane, temporal world. Moving from *Morvern Callar* to *The Deadman's Pedal*, recurring themes and motifs adorn each of the selected texts, with numerous symbols and images resonating firmly from one novel to the next. While the works of other contemporary Scottish writers, including Irvine Welsh, Iain Banks and Janice Galloway, exist as isolated, stand-alone novels with no coherence to the overall body of work, Warner's entire corpus is a dynamic literary tapestry, with every novel delicately intertwined. Warner's novels fail to be strictly separated into distinct genre categories, and, like the mythopoetic worlds which they depict, the texts dissolve the boundary between what is realistic and fantasy-driven, becoming a single, organic entity. By understanding Warner's work as a linear whole, the subtle nuances which bind each text come to the fore, exposing the richness and profundity of the seemingly humble, disjointed works.

Warner is an extraordinary and unique writer in the field of contemporary Scottish literature. His novels come to life as a unified body, with each text enriched with meaning and symbolism from numerous literary sources. Unanswered questions, great silences and inexplicable visions haunt the entirety of his fiction, allowing readers to relish in the sacred 'Otherness' of his novels. In his latest publication, *Their Lips Talk of Mischief*, Warner's novel follows the lives of two aspiring male authors, with Llewellyn and Douglas attempting to fathom the chief attributes which make 'pieces of writing [sic]',³³¹ more than mere publications:

'It's almost to do with conception, style meeting subject, so each sentence has its own inevitability.

Then you move on to another, until you have a chain of inevitabilities.' I said, 'Yes. But life isn't

³³¹ Alan Warner, *Their Lips Talk of Mischief* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014), p.210.

like that. Life is awkward, full of eddies and baggy bits, and irrelevancies.’ Lou said, ‘How do you get that into a novel? Half of the art is trying to crowbar in the vagueness of this life.’³³²

Warner’s flair is seen in his depiction of the ‘vagueness of this life’ which he heightens and intensifies in his prose, allowing readers to meditate in a literary vision which transcends the certainty of daily life. It is the ‘eddies and baggy bits’ of the twenty-first century which captivate Warner, and rather than exiling these unexplainable, rough edges, he allows them to thrive. His novels project an Otherworld, a hybrid of realistic accuracy and moments of mysterious, enchanting fantasy, pointing the reader’s gaze towards the richness of modern life; a place in which the daily becomes eternal, profound and laced with endless possibility.

³³² Warner, *Their Lips Talk of Mischief*, p.210.

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