

THE MAJOR FICTION OF NEIL MUNRO
A REVALUATION

by

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**being a thesis submitted for the degree of
Master of Philosophy in the Department
of Scottish Literature in the University of
Glasgow**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank most sincerely Mrs. Lesley Bratton, granddaughter of Neil Munro, for having made available to me many documents relating to Neil Munro and his work, especially her invaluable and as yet unpublished biography of her grandfather. Discussions with her have been extremely helpful and illuminating. I would also like to thank Professor Douglas Gifford for accepting me as his student and for his unfailing helpfulness, patience and kindness while I struggled to complete this work.

I would also like to thank all of the following who have so generously given me help and direction with their knowledge, expertise, enthusiasm and encouragement: the late Pat Maitland, Iain MacDonald, Brian Osborne, Dr. Elaine Petrie, Dr. Beth Dickson, Rae MacGregor, Dr. Rennie McOwan, Charles Munro and Isobel Boyle.

Finally, my most grateful thanks go to my wife Margaret. Not only did she generously and uncomplainingly endure many inconveniences while I “stole” precious family time to work on this project, but she also gave enormous assistance with the typing and preparation of the text.

Tha mi fada 'nur comain uile!

THE MAJOR FICTION OF NEIL MUNRO: A REVALUATION

Summary

Neil Munro was one of the foremost literary figures in the Scotland of his generation and yet today he is mainly remembered for his humorous sketches about the puffer captain, Para Handy, and his crew rather than his novels and short stories - a situation which he himself would have found ironic. This thesis seeks to revalue the range and merits of Munro's major fiction.

Chapter I

This chapter examines the criticism of Hugh MacDiarmid, Fionn MacColla and Angus MacDonald that Munro's writing was escapist and did not tackle the issues of his day. It then examines Wittig's more positive and complimentary view of his work and finally seeks to place Munro in Hart and Gifford's theories of Scottish fiction.

Chapter 2

Here Munro's life and work is reviewed. Of special importance to his fiction is the effect of his upbringing in Inveraray, Argyll, where he was born in 1863. This was to feed his imagination for the rest of his life. His career as a journalist is described and then the publication of his works of historical fiction "in the Highland manner". Fearing that he might be heading down a literary *cul de sac* he turned to the contemporary scene with the novels The Daft Days (1907) and Fancy Farm (1910) but reverted to Highland history with The New Road (1914). After this his literary output is

small. Part of the reason for this is thought to have been grief at the death of his son in the War, but by this time he was also the editor of a busy newspaper and probably had little time for writing fiction. He died in 1930, just over two years after retirement.

Chapter 3

Munro was aware of the weaknesses of Celtic Twilight and Kailyard writing in the Scottish literature of his day and sought to counteract them with his first short story collection, The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories (1896). This was a breakthrough in the authentic presentation of the Highlander in non-Gaelic Scottish literature.

Chapter 4

Munro's first novel "in the Highland manner", John Splendid, was published in 1898. This gives an accurate picture of the Montrose wars in Argyll, probes the weakness of the Highland character and also examines the need for progress and "civilisation" in the Highland way of life.

Chapter 5

In this chapter three novels connected loosely with the aftermath of the '45 Jacobite Rising are examined. Doom Castle (1901) is a clever parody of the Gothic novel, but at the same time the ruinous castle, seat of the loyal Jacobite Lamont, becomes a symbol of the decay of the Jacobite cause itself. The Shoes of Fortune (1901), at one level a fantastic tale about a pair of red shoes, at a deeper level is also an analysis of death throes of the Jacobite cause. Children of Tempest (1903), on the other hand, deals with the quest for the Loch Arkaig treasure, French gold intended to support the Jacobite cause. It has the qualities of a parable, with evil figures in the tradition of Hogg

and the darker side of Stevenson set against good people supported by the Christian traditions of the Southern Hebrides.

Chapter 6

This chapter deals with Munro's modern novels. Although Gilian the Dreamer (1899) was written at roughly the same time as John Splendid it has been grouped with Munro's contemporary novels because it concerns the generation before his own. It deals with the problem of a creative artist trying to operate in a culture where the tradition has been broken, in this case by the Highland Clearances. The contemporary novel, The Daft Days (1907), continues this type of discussion by examining the position of the gifted female creative artist in a society whose educational and religious *mores* inhibit the expression of her talent, whilst Fancy Farm (1910), a novel of ideas, explores theories about "natural man" in connection with landlordism and female independence.

Chapter 7

Here Munro's most accomplished novel The New Road (1914) is examined. It is a novel of mythic regeneration in the tradition of Scott's Waverley. The hero sets out on a romantic journey to the North and is steadily disillusioned by the behaviour of the Highland chiefs he meets, culminating in the barbarity of Lovat. This confirms his support for the House of Hanover, MacCailein Mòr and their enlightened "improvements" which include the new road to Inverness which will bring prosperity and peace - but at the sore cost of the old Gaelic way of life, the erosion of which continues to the present.

Chapter 8

In this section Munro's two other short story collections are examined. Ayrshire Idylls (1912) show that Munro, mainly considered a Highland writer, is quite at home in Ayrshire. His stories deal, among other things, with the Covenanters and with incidents in the life of Burns. Most interesting, however, are the glimpses we are given of Munro's own literary theory. Jaunty Jock and Other Stories (1918) is the most wide-ranging of Munro's collections. The stories are set throughout Scotland and abroad. Most interesting are "Return to Nature", a comic analogue of The New Road, "The Brooch", a supernatural tale in the Hogg tradition, and "Young Pennymore", a beautifully constructed tragedy.

Chapter 9

Here it is argued that MacDiarmid, MacColla and MacDonald have been unfair to Munro, perhaps because they were too close in time to him to appreciate his many real achievements. Apart from being a highly accomplished writer, Munro was, in fact, breaking the ground for the MacDiarmid's Renaissance movement.

NOTE

When this thesis was begun in 1994 only The New Road was in print. I have, therefore, included in my text summaries of some of the short stories and novels. Detailed summaries of John Splendid, The Shoes of Fortune, Children of Tempest and Fancy Farm have been put into italics for easy identification. The summary of John Splendid is very detailed because I considered it to be a key text.

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THE MAJOR FICTION OF NEIL MUNRO (1863-1930): A REVALUATION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For the greater part of his life Neil Munro was regarded as one of the most distinguished literary figures of his generation and, when Hugh MacDiarmid launched the first volume of Northern Numbers, an anthology of contemporary Scottish verse, in 1920, he dedicated it “with affection and pride” to Neil Munro; yet on 3rd July, 1925 in an article in The Scottish Educational Journal and later in a further article in his journal The Northern Scot in 1931, shortly after Munro’s death, we find him condemning Munro’s work in strong terms. Part of his hostility may have stemmed from the fact that Munro declined to contribute to the second volume of Northern Numbers, thereby refusing to become one of MacDiarmid’s “Scottish Renaissance” group of writers. Indeed, he condemned him strongly for not supporting his vigorous young movement who had set themselves the goal of addressing vital contemporary issues which the older generation had failed to face up to (even although by this time Munro was 57 years old):

“A few years ago a group of young Scots resolutely confronted the facts and sought to proclaim them. In order to do so they had to break through a veritable conspiracy of silence and to contend with vicious prejudice and vested interests. The damnable truth of their diagnosis is now generally admitted, but it has been a desperate struggle and those who have conducted it have had no help from Neil Munro or practically any other elder Scot of established position. On the contrary these have been their worst opponents.”¹

The greater part of his hostility, however, seems to stem from the fact that Munro's work was simply not ambitious enough and was negligible on a European and world canvas - although he concedes that he was probably the "finest literary artist **who remained resident in Scotland**"(my emphasis)² and that

"He will be remembered as having been in some ways the greatest of his contemporaries amongst our countrymen....for the true Scotsman, savouring his heritage, he is indispensable, and for the Scottish literary student at all events he will remain so."³

But for all that he was "a minor artist" with "limited, yet indubitable gifts" who was too concerned with respectability and not prepared to endure and sacrifice enough for the development of his art. He was a bundle of inhibitions and suffered "the inability to let himself go". Above all, (like all his contemporaries, with the notable exception of some Gaelic poets like Mary MacPherson (Màiri Mhòr) and John Smith (Iain Mac a'Ghobhainn)), in his literary work he was not prepared to face up to the great national and Highland issues of the day of which, as a journalist, he was only too aware:

"So I think unworthy hesitations - whatever their nature, economic, moral, psychological - have made Neil Munro 'unequal to himself'. All men have spoken well of him. **He has preferred the little wars of Lorn to the conflict of real life in which he ought to have been engaged.** (my emphasis) His literature is the literature of escape - and in so far as it has succeeded in escaping, in being a sort of antithesis of self-expression, a substitute for it, it is without life - for life cannot escape from its destiny!"⁴

This view was strongly supported by 'Fionn MacColla' (Thomas Douglas MacDonald), MacDiarmid's protégé, in his 1971 preface to his Highland novel The Albannach

(1932) where, whilst giving unreserved praise to Munro's evocation of Gaelic life, he condemns him for not engaging with contemporary issues:

"That life had of course been previously written about in an *authentic* manner. The works of Neil Munro for instance are irradiated and suffused with the unique flavour of Gaelic life in a way which is totally authentic and beyond praise. But they are otherwise marred by a treatment exempt from circumstances, by the pushing back of the events to former and distant ages, in other words by romanticism - a course forced upon Munro by his refusal to come to grips with the realities of the situation of the Gael in his day."⁵

MacDiarmid's view was also supported by Angus MacDonald, Lecturer in English in the University of Edinburgh, when he wrote:

"Munro was not a great novelist; he had gifts undoubtedly, but in considering his place in modern Scottish fiction, I am forced to agree with that able destructive critic, Mr C. M. Grieve, that his was a literature of escape."⁶

And then he goes on to say:

"Is there no one bold enough to strip the veil of Romance from Gaeldom, or to perform that necessary operation for cataract and allow her to see herself as she really is?"⁷

Munro, then, stood accused of producing work that was, although competent, shallow and romantic and did not confront the major issues of his day, and this reputation has remained, rather unfairly, to the present, so much so that he is far better known today for his humorous Para Handy and Erichie sketches, than for his more serious novels and short stories. And yet, although he confronted only very marginally the serious contemporary issues of the Highland Clearances and landlordism in the novels Gilian the Dreamer (1898) and Fancy Farm

(1910), a deeper study shows that he has indeed, “been bold enough to strip the Romance from Gaeldom” and that his critique of Highland life and character is far more penetrating and far-reaching than MacDiarmid and his fellow critics perceived.

MacDiarmid’s opinion conditioned critical attitudes to Munro’s work until 1958 when there was a short but significant statement made in his favour. Kurt Wittig, the German critic, observed that the Scottish literary tradition (with the exception of the work of Hugh Miller and William Alexander) had descended to an all time stereotypical low in the two generations after the death of Scott. In Chapter 9, aptly headed “Heaving Again”, of his perceptive study The Scottish Tradition in Literature he sees a vigorous revival in Scottish letters under the stimulating leadership of Stevenson, and in that revival, along with Douglas Brown and MacDougall Hay, he gives a special place to Munro.⁸ Significantly he commends Munro’s intimate and accurate perception of landscape in the tradition of the great Gaelic bards and his distinctive style of language, and at the same time succinctly analyses his perception of Highland history and the “blight and rot” in the Gaelic character and way of life - a far cry from the criticism of MacDiarmid, MacColla and MacDonald! On the other hand, ignoring Munro’s The Daft Days (1908) and Fancy Farm (1910), Wittig again laments Munro’s failure to deal with the fate of the modern Gael. But here it must again be emphasised that no other Lowland Scottish writer contemporary with Munro was prepared to tackle topics of this sort head on: it took the young men returning from the First World War to bring about this sea-change⁹ and by the end of the War Munro had already written his last novel The New Road (1914). This thesis, in revaluing the major prose of Neil Munro, will expand and go considerably beyond Wittig’s appreciation.

Munro's first significant literary publication, the collection of short stories The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories (1896), shows him as a major innovator. In this collection he develops a literary language which, like the Irishman J.M. Synge's later The Playboy of the Western World (1911), strives to imitate the language of the Gael more authentically than the previous efforts of writers like Scott, Hogg and his older contemporary, William Black. In this volume he also sounds the first real blast of the trumpet against sentimental Kailyard and Celtic writing in his construction of some extraordinarily grim and bitter plots which anticipate The House with the Green Shutters (1901) and Gillespie (1914).

After this first volume the plots of the novels which follow are much more balanced and in evaluating Munro it is useful to notice that his work in fact embraces and deals with what Francis Russell Hart considers to be the principal characteristics of the Scottish novel : **history, community and character** ¹⁰ and it is interesting to note his treatment of these.

(1)History.

Almost all of Munro's novels examine Highland and Scottish history in ways that are much more penetrating than those characteristic of mere romance. In particular they examine the effect of change in the Highland community and the nature of the Highland character, occasionally prefiguring Gunn and Mitchison with a reaching back to a Golden Age. They also examine the politics of romance and realism. The "modern" novels also deal with the negative effects of Calvinism on Art.

(2) Community.

Munro's community can be the Highland community with its deep division between Hanoverian Argyll and the Jacobite North, or the small community of Inveraray with its strengths and petty animosities. The father-son relationship which characterises so many Scottish novels from Stevenson to MacDougall Hay and Gibbon is reflected much less starkly in the quasi father/son relationships of John Splendid and Ninian Campbell with Young

Elrigmore and Aeneas MacMaster, whilst the hyper-sensitive hero of Gilian the Dreamer (1899) has no father and his upbringing is left to old soldiers who in their old age have become dreamers themselves.

(3) Character.

As in so many Scottish novels so too in Munro's novels the depiction of strongly individualised characters is an outstanding feature. Gordon, the minister in John Splendid (1898), is a powerful authority figure as is the Marquis of Argile (at least in the first part of the book), whilst Ninian Campbell in The New Road (1914) is strong and shrewd. John Splendid is an archetypal figure, illiterate, boastful and charming. Mungo Boyd in Doom Castle (1901), on the other hand, is the old and unintentionally humorous, roguish loyal retainer, deriving from Scott's Caleb Balderstone in The Bride of Lammermoor (1819) and Stevenson's McKellar in The Master of Ballantrae (1888). As strongly depicted but in different traditions are figures like the romantic baron of Doom and the mystical Father Ludovic of Children of Tempest (1903).

In terms, however, of what Hart calls "scope and intentionality",¹¹ Munro does not try to make the particular mean too much - a weakness which Hart finds in many Scottish novels. Frequent use of deep symbolism is not a characteristic of Munro's work.

In order to achieve a fuller understanding and appreciation of Munro's achievement in terms of the Scottish novel from Scott to the First World War it is necessary to narrow the focus from Hart's broad view to the more finely tuned approach of Douglas Gifford in his extended essay "Myth, Parody and Dissociation: Scottish Fiction 1814-1918".¹² Here Gifford convincingly demonstrates that the bulk of 19th century fiction can be shown to be concerned with three major ideas: **mythic regeneration, parody and the dissociation of self, family**

and society. In revaluing Munro's work it can be seen that that these ideas were also major pre-occupations for him.

(1) Mythic Regeneration.

Gifford points out the regenerative qualities of Scott's fiction in such novels as Waverley (1814), Old Mortality (1816), The Heart of Midlothian (1818) and Rob Roy (1818), showing how they point the way to a future Scotland that will be healthier and wholer. At the end of the 19th Century Munro re-affirms this approach in both his historical and "modern novels". Indeed, the very construction of the historical John Splendid (1898) with the "improving" Marquis of Argile importing Lowland commerce into the Highlands and The New Road (1914) with its Bailie Nicol Jarvie equivalent (Alan Iain Alain Og) asserting that the unwelcome new road will bring prosperity **and** peace show an understanding of Scott's method that was only clarified in critical terms in David Daiches' famous essay "Scott's Achievement as a Novelist" in 1951.¹³ The "modern" The Daft Days (1907) deals with regeneration in terms of Scotland's Calvinist attitude to the arts and the place of women. In both of these genres the stasis of kailyard fiction is transcended.

Children of Tempest (1903) shows regeneration in a quite different manner where the forces of good, personified by the mystical Catholic priest, Fr. Ludovic, and his saintly sister who is clearly related to St Bride and a pre-Christian Golden Age, triumph over the evil men.

(2) Parody.

In his analysis of the nineteenth century novel Gifford asserts:

"But there comes a point where the fiction of the nineteenth century becomes aware of its own posturing; matures, as it were, into a parodic and ironic sense of the *degeneration* of national archetype, and produces a new rhetoric, new narrative strategies and perspectives, to express its detached evaluation."¹⁴

Munro's work too illustrates this parodic quality. Gilian, the hero of Gilian the Dreamer, is both an unsuccessful lad o' pairts and a parody of the insipid hero - or anti-hero - figure of Waverley himself. Furthermore, the far-fetched elopement scene in this novel is sheer parody of the romantic love novel.¹⁵ The Daft Days parodies and subverts the attitudes of the Kailyard novel, while Doom Castle parodies the Gothic genre with devastating irony.

(3) Dissociation.

Munro's fiction too is bound up with the matter of dissociation. His concerns are frequently with division of community, with Scotland the divided nation of Highland and Lowland and the divisions in the Highland society itself in John Splendid and The New Road. As in Scott there are many dualisms with characters like the swashbuckling but ultimately evil Barrisdale and Lovat being counterpointed with the practical Ninian Campbell and the enterprising merchant Alan Iain Alain Og. Dissociation in terms of individual and family is most interestingly dealt with in the cases of John Splendid himself who is unable to be true to himself because of his desire not to offend his chief, and Gilian, the oversensitive youth in the tradition of Archie Weir and young John Gourlay, who, with no father to keep him right and with the breakdown of the old Highland tradition, can only squander his poetic talent in self-indulgent dreaming.

All of this points to a writer who in addition to his many other skills had in fact gone a long way to stripping "the veil of Romance from Gaeldom" and, indeed, Scotland, and was helping her "to see herself as she really is".

In terms of influence on and development of the Scottish literary tradition it is entirely likely that Munro has had a much greater impact than he has previously been credited with. On a number of occasions (which will be detailed later) he refers back to that essential ideal of the modern Renaissance movement, the ideal of a Golden Age. Although he did not

deal with this in a highly systematic way, he was clearly sowing the seeds for the development of a concept that was to become an integral part of the mythopoeic novels of the Renaissance writers. Furthermore his authentic treatment of Highland life and character, his analysis of Highland history, and his completely innovative linguistic approach to Highland English did much to stimulate interest in Highland culture and paved the way for the Highland novels of Gunn and MacColla. In spite of MacDiarmid's strictures they undoubtedly also paved the way for his formulation of the "Celtic Idea" which was to be the basis for his epic poem "To Circumjack Cencrastus" (1930) and which in one form or another he and his supporters Fionn MacColla, Compton Mackenzie, Ruairidh Erskine of Mar, Lewis Spence and Neil Gunn felt had to be the bedrock of the Scottish Renaissance movement.¹⁶

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- ¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, The Modern Scot, Vol.1, 4th January, 1931
 - ² Ibid. p20
 - ³ Hugh MacDiarmid, The Scottish Educational Journal, 3rd July, 1925: p6
 - ⁴ Ibid.p6
 - ⁵ Fionn MacColla, Foreword to The Albannach, Edinburgh, 1971: p1
 - ⁶ Angus MacDonald, Edinburgh Essays in Scots Literature , Ed.H.J.C.Grierson, Edinburgh, 1933 :p161
 - ⁷ Ibid. p171
 - ⁸ Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature, Edinburgh, 1958: pp 257-274
 - ⁹ Duncan Glen, Hugh MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve) and the Scottish Renaissance, Edinburgh, 1964: p52
 - ¹⁰ Francis Russell Hart The Scottish Novel, London, 1978: pp 400-405
 - ¹¹ Ibid. pp 405-406
 - ¹² Douglas Gifford "Myth, Parody and Dissociation: Scottish Fiction 1814-1918", The History of Scottish Literature, Vol. 3, Ed. Douglas Gifford, Aberdeen, 1988: pp 217-258
 - ¹³ David Daiches, "Scott's Achievement as a Novelist", Literary Essays, Edinburgh, 1951: pp88-121
 - ¹⁴ Gifford op. cit. p240
 - ¹⁵ Neil Munro, Gilian the Dreamer, Edinburgh, 1923: Ch 29, pp325-339
 - ¹⁶ Susanne Hagemann "Bidin Naitural: Identity Questions in Scottish Twentieth-Century Renaissance Literature", Scottish Literary Journal, Vol. 21, No 1. May, 1994: pp 45-49

CHAPTER 2

LIFE AND WORK - AN OVERVIEW¹

Neil Munro was born in the little town of Inveraray near the head of Loch Fyne in Argyll, an area of exceptional beauty which was to influence him all his life. He was born in the building known as Crombie's Land on the 3rd June 1863, not 1864 as is claimed by all reference works with the exceptions of Osborne and Armstrong's editions of Munro's Para Handy (1992)² and Erichie and Jimmy Swan (1993).³ The earlier date is confirmed by his birth record in General Register House, Edinburgh, which shows him to be the illegitimate son of Ann Munro, an Inveraray kitchen maid. There has long been speculation that his father was of the House of Argyll but there is no concrete evidence for this. Neil and his mother seem only to have spent a short time in Crombie's Land; it appears that his mother had to return to her work, perhaps at Inveraray Castle, and Neil was fostered for a short time by Jane McKellar. Indeed, Jane's son Archie who was a few months older than Neil remained a good friend and accompanied Neil and shared lodgings with him when he was to leave for Glasgow in later years.

Neil's Grandmother, Ann McArthur Munro, had a one roomed house in McVicar's Land (now known as Arkland 2) and Neil and his mother appear soon to have moved in with her. Most of Neil's Inveraray days were spent in that house. His grandmother hailed from Bailemeanoch on Loch Awe side and she brought up Neil's mother in Glen Aray in the landward part of Inveraray parish between Loch Fyne and Loch Awe on a farm called Ladyfield. They themselves appear to have been educated at the little school in Glen Aray near Stronmagachan. They were native Gaelic speakers and it is from them that Neil received his knowledge of the old language and culture. Neil was deeply interested in Glen Aray; many of the stories in his first book The Lost Pibroch and other Sheiling Stories (1896) are set there. He believed that his branch of the Munro clan came from

Carnus, a derelict farm even in his day near Ladyfield, and he was also deeply interested in his grandmother's people the McArthurs (*na h-Artaraich*) whose country was on Loch Awe side at the other end of the Glen from Inveraray. His grandmother herself is the model for the old woman from Ladyfield, the news of whose death the young boy has to bring to the town in the novel Gilian the Dreamer (1899).⁴

Most of his schooling (which lasted until he was 14 years old) was obtained at the Parish School in Inveraray under the tutelage of Henry Dunn Smith, a good teacher who was also the author of An English Grammar Simplified, although he did also spend some time (it is uncertain when) at the tiny school in Glen Aray where his teacher, John McArthur, taught the children the Gaelic Bible. McArthur himself appears to be the model for the character Copenhagen in the short story of the same name that Munro was to publish in 1918.⁵

It seems likely that the novel Gilian the Dreamer is partly biographical and there is no question that Neil, like the hero of that book, was a keen reader. From various sources in the town, especially the library which the Misses McLeod ran as part of their shop, he was able to obtain a considerable number of books and we are able to put together a very sizeable list of works which he had clearly read in his school days. This included "Penny Bloods" (young persons' thrillers), R.M. Ballantyne's novels, Dickens's Pickwick Papers, Bunyan's Holy War, Smollett's Roderick Random and Ferdinand Count Fathom, J. R. Wyss's The Swiss Family Robinson, Jane Porter's The Scottish Chiefs, Michael Scott's Tom Cringle's Log, Mrs Radcliffe's Udolpho and The Italian, Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, James Grant's The Romance of War, Le Sage's Gil Blas, Godwin's Caleb Williams, Shelley's St Irvyne, or the Rosicrucian, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Lewis's The Monk as well as novels by Trollope, W.H.G. Kingston, J.F. Cooper, Ascot R. Hope and Jules Verne. He especially enjoyed the Boy's Own paper. Many of these would, of course, be considered by many to be too "old fashioned" or adult for a youngster under

14 but such was his appetite for books that he would read everything he could get his hands on!

(Interestingly none of Scott's novels seem to have been available to him at that time although they were to be a major influence on his own fiction.)

In 1875, three weeks after Neil's 12th birthday, his mother married Malcolm Thomson, the retired governor of Inveraray Jail in Glasgow. He was about 70 and would be more like a grandfather than a father to Neil. It is possible that Anne Munro had actually worked for Thomson when he was prison governor before his first wife died and had residential accommodation in the building. At all events Neil certainly knew the jail from the inside :

My earliest impressions of a prison were got, innocently enough, from the inside. A bedroom window looked out on the exercise yard, behind the sea-wall bastions.⁶

This familiarity with the prison he turned to good effect in his description of the prison life in Paris of the heroes of The Shoes of Fortune (1901).

Next to the prison was the Court House (in which the county's courts were held until 1898) and the arrival of the Law Lords in their robes was a great event in the town when the school children were given a holiday. Neil was to capitalise on this in his novel Doom Castle (1901) when reconstructing the atmosphere for the trial of James of the Glen which was held in Inveraray in 1752.

The atmosphere of the Law did not end there for Neil, however, for in 1877, when he left school, he began work as a clerk in the office of William Douglas, a local lawyer and model for the character of Dan Dyce in the novel The Daft Days (1907). He found the work there rather boring and often relieved the monotony by writing articles and at least one poem "Dunchuach" which he eventually sent to the Oban Times. It was there also that he learned what Latin he knew from Trayner's Maxims, a reference book for lawyers, and he also taught himself shorthand from The

Reporter's Companion and later sent for a copy of Pitman's shorthand course. Even at this stage he was preparing himself for a career in journalism.

During the years he worked with Douglas Inveraray Castle was seriously damaged by fire (1877) - an event which he was to use in the short story "The Sea Fairy of French Foreland" (1896) - and 1879 was the year of a massive freeze which he capitalised on in the subsequent novels John Splendid (1898) and Fancy Farm (1910). 1878 saw his peripheral involvement in the General Election of that year in support of the Liberal candidate, Lord Colin Campbell, the son of the Duke of Argyll and, more important from a literary point of view, this event brought him into contact with the Liberals' "star supporter", John Francis Campbell of Islay, Iain Og Ile, the great collector of folk tales to which Munro was to refer frequently in his work.

On 1st June 1881, however, two days before his 18th birthday like so many young Highlanders of that time he found it necessary to emigrate to Glasgow in search of better prospects, but these early years in the beautiful and dramatic countryside of Inveraray and Argyll between Loch Fyne and Loch Awe were of vital importance for they fed his imagination for the rest of his life. And, indeed, he appreciated this very much himself for in 1909 he declared the following :

...I really got the freedom of Inveraray five and forty years ago, and have never ceased to exercise it...I know they were very substantial privileges I got... in right of being a native of this place. I got the key of the street and the freedom of the seashore and the forest, and though I'm beat to remember a single thrilling adventure that ever happened in either - except on one occasion when I saw a ghost at night in Esachosain- I was able to gather in them a stock of emotions and reminiscences on which I have lived more or less ever since.⁷

After arriving in Glasgow on 3rd June, 1883, he found work first with Greenlees Brothers, potato merchants, in Hanover Street and soon after as a cashier in the ironmonger's shop of McHaffie and Colquhoun in the Trongate. His career in journalism also began to take off, for he also became an unpaid Glasgow correspondent with the Oban Times reporting on news affecting Highland people living in Glasgow - although he also used this opportunity to offer an early art review.

The promise of these early days soon bore fruit and in 1884 he became a reporter on The Greenock Advertiser and shortly after this he moved on to The Glasgow News. He found digs in North Woodside Road and fell in love with his landlady's daughter, Jessie Adam, whom he married on 23rd July 1885. In this same year he and Jessie moved to Falkirk to permit Neil to take up a position as reporter with the Falkirk Herald and it was while they were there that their first child Annie was born. This post was short-lived, however, and he was glad to move back to The Glasgow News and then, when it closed, to the re-cast Glasgow Evening News where he was made chief reporter under the editor James Murray Smith at the age of only 23. Appropriately enough, his first leader article in his new job was on Gaelic in Glasgow. With the Glasgow Evening News he found a happy working relationship and it was with it he was destined to stay for the rest of his journalistic life. Domestic life, however, was touched with tragedy at this point, for the Munro's baby daughter Annie died in 1889, but there was consolation in 1890 in the birth of a second daughter Euphemia Fortune Munro, named after Jessie's mother whose maiden name was Fortune. (This explains the humorous name "Miss Fortune" of the wife-to-be of the hero of the novel The Shoes of Fortune (1901)).

At this time Neil's essays in non-journalistic literature included a script for Babes in the Wood and, more interestingly, a thriller The Afton Moor Mystery.⁸ He also sent humorous sketches to the London paper, The Globe, but he was to make his first real mark on the literary

scene in 1896 with the publication of his completely innovative collection The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories. These were soon followed after its serialisation in Blackwood's Magazine by the publication in book form of his first novel John Splendid (1898) - which could be argued to be the first truly authentic Highland novel. Like most of Munro's novels it is set in a period of major social change. It deals with the sack of Inveraray by Montrose and his subsequent victory at the battle of Inverlochy. It also explores the Highland character under stress, particularly in the persons of Gillesbeg Gruamach, the Marquis of Argyll, who is anxious to move on from clan warfare to the more peaceful ways of commerce and the rule of law, and his clansman Iain Alann, John Splendid himself, a swaggering *miles gloriosus* figure whose loyalty permits him to humour his chief and yield to his whims until, finally convinced of his cowardice, he rebels.

After John Splendid had been accepted for serialisation in 1897 Munro reduced his journalism to a part-time commitment of two weekly columns to the Glasgow Evening News, entitled "The Looker On" (on Mondays) and "Views and Reviews"⁹ (on Thursdays). This was to allow him to concentrate on his literary work and in 1899 the novel Gilian the Dreamer was published. Again set in Inveraray at a time of social change - the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars - the story tells of a young boy Gilian who has creative gifts which in an earlier Highland society might have been nurtured to enable him to become a *bard* but the old Gaelic tradition has been broken and Gilian's gifts merely manifest themselves in excessive sensibility and self-indulgent dreaming. He has affinities with Tommy Sandys in J.M Barrie's Sentimental Tommy (1896) and his failure to grow up properly also makes him a kind of Highland Peter Pan.

The next three novels were all to be loosely connected with the aftermath of the Jacobite Rising of 1745. Doom Castle (1901) takes its inspiration from Dunderave Castle on the shores of Loch Fyne. On one level it is an ironic Gothic tale of intrigue and romance but at a deeper level it shows the hopelessness of the Jacobite cause in the face of the new Hanoverian order - a

hopelessness symbolised by the decaying castle of the Baron of Doom compared with the fine Enlightenment castle of the Duke of Argyll in Inveraray. The Shoes of Fortune (1901), unusually for Munro, has its setting in Lowland Scotland and in France. It deals with the death throes of the Jacobite movement as it makes a final bid to join the French in an invasion of Britain. The hero Paul Greig, having seen the antics of the dissolute and broken Prince Charles Edward, renounces his Jacobitism and warns Pitt, thus preventing the invasion. The final novel of this period, Children of Tempest (1903), is only tenuously connected with the '45 Rising. It is set on South Uist and deals with the Loch Arkaig treasure, French money which had been intended to support the Rising but has mysteriously been moved to a cave on the island of Mingulay. This becomes the object of greed and leads to the kidnapping of the heroine and the death of the villain and his *incubus* in a dramatic scene on the cliffs of Mingulay.

At this point in his writing career Neil Munro clearly felt that he had carried the theme of historical romance far enough, indeed that he was going down a literary cul-de-sac, and the next novels mark a change of direction. Before these are dealt with, however, it should be observed that one character from Children of Tempest obviously provided a special source of enjoyment for him. He was Captain Dan MacNeil, the skipper of the "Happy Return", and the prototype for that other master mariner who was to make Munro a household name for generations to come - Para Handy. The first of the hilarious Para Handy Stories was published in 1905 in the "Looker On" column of the Glasgow Evening News and Munro continued writing these for most of his working life. He published them in three book collections under the Blackwood imprint: The Vital Spark, (1906), In Highland Harbours (1911) and Hurricane Jack of the Vital Spark (1923). The "Looker On" had earlier also been the original place of publication for the humorous sketches about Erchie MacPherson, the beadle and waiter who had comments on everything from prohibition to the Glasgow Girls school of art and which were published in book form under the title Erchie my

Droll Friend, again by Blackwood, in 1904. This column was also to host the sketches of the big-hearted commercial traveller Jimmy Swan, the first of which appeared in 1911. These were produced in book form in 1917 under the title Jimmy Swan the Joy Traveller. In their book editions all of these humorous tales appeared under the pen-name of Hugh Foulis, the author keeping his own name for what he quite definitely considered to be his more important literary creations, although, ironically, it is for the humorous sketches that he is currently best remembered. He did not, however, use all of these stories for the book editions published in his lifetime and it is only with the very recent editions of Para Handy and Earchie and Jimmy Swan, excellently researched and edited by Brian Osborne and Ronald Armstrong, that we have come to appreciate fully just how many of these he wrote for “The Looker On” column.¹⁰ This is especially true of the Erchie stories, most of which were not written until after Munro’s own 1904 edition.

In 1907 The Clyde, River and Firth, a beautiful travelogue with painted illustrations by Mary Y. and J. Young Hunter, appeared as did his next novel The Daft Days. As noted above Munro had decided to move away from historical romance and so this latest novel deals with the contemporary scene. It has all the superficial appearance of a Kailyard novel and yet is a subversion of that genre. It is the story of a little American girl who has lost her parents and comes to stay in a small Scottish town (clearly Inveraray). She progresses, thanks to her enlightened but only semi-liberated Aunt Ailie, to become a Shakespearean actress in London’s West End - in spite of the negativity of the Scottish education system and the background of social and religious attitudes which regarded the theatre as unsuitable and rather sinful. It is especially interesting because it confronts the problem of the female creative artist in a society whose *mores* inhibit the expression of her talents.

By now Munro’s literary reputation was quite secure and in 1908 he was honoured with an LLD from the University of Glasgow. This was followed the next year with the award of the

Freedom of Inveraray - although these honours must have been difficult to cope with, he was a man of such modesty:

His dearest friends, the friends of his boyhood - two of them helped to carry him to the grave in Kilmalieu - were a shopkeeper, an innkeeper and a plumber, and he was absolutely without any sense that his vocation might be regarded by the world as finer or more dignified than theirs.¹¹

In 1910 he published Fancy Farm, at once his least successful novel and yet in some ways his most ambitious, and one on which he is known to have exercised much time and care. It is very much a novel of ideas and is a satire on the political philosophy of the hero, the Laird of Schawfield, who appears to be at one with nature and attempts to run his estate on egalitarian lines - only to find that a young lady of whom he thinks he is enamoured can run it better. The plot, however, is confusing at times. Much more successful was the short story collection Ayrshire Idylls (1912). These sketches were published by A. & C. Black and illustrated by the watercolours and drawings of his friend George Houston. They show Munro very much at home in a Lowland Ayrshire setting and among other interesting items contain four stories which reconstruct incidents from the life of Burns and two very effectively depicted Covenanted tales.

Neil Munro's most accomplished novel, however, and also his last was The New Road (1914) where, not surprisingly after the disappointment of Fancy Farm, we find him returning to the historical genre. This is the story of the young Aeneas MacMaster's quest for knowledge about the mysterious death of his Jacobite father, Paul. But it is much more than this. Like Walter Scott's Waverley this novel deals with the gradual disillusionment of the hero with the romantic glamour of the Highlands. Like his merchant uncle he comes to believe that only by trade and commerce will the Highlands ultimately be civilised and the means of achieving this will be the New Road which Wade is building between Stirling and Inverness.

With the outbreak of the First World War Neil Munro returned to full time journalism.

He also visited the Front on four occasions as a War correspondent but the most traumatic event of the war for him was the tragic loss of his son Hugh at Albert (between Arras and Amiens) in 1915. This loss coupled with the pressure of work on the paper seemed to inhibit any more large scale literary production:

After many years of comparatively leisured, or at least deliberate scribbling, I'm again in the thick of lightning journalism, and slaving as I have never done in my experience before - from 6am. till midnight and after. Tonight I shall not get to bed at all or if I do I must be early for I have to be "on the wire" at 1.30am. and into the next forenoon.¹²

Furthermore, he became editor of the Glasgow Evening News in 1918 before the Armistice on the retiral of James Murray Smith. He did, however, publish the urbane and witty short story collection Jaunty Jock and Other Stories in 1917, although many of these were written before the War. The typescript of the first ten chapters of a novel with the working title The Search also survives.¹³ It is a sequel to The New Road and is set just after Culloden. It is a stirring opening and it would be interesting to know why the story was never completed.

Journalist,¹⁴ critic and novelist, he was also a poet. In 1931, after his death John Buchan edited a collection of his poetry for Blackwood.¹⁵ These poems had appeared throughout his life in magazines, newspapers and as parts of his novels. There are some fine pieces among them, notably the poignant "In Prison" which was adapted from the French of Paul Verlaine¹⁶ and, although written in 1925, was obviously inspired by memories of the prisoners in Inveraray jail and "The Only Son"¹⁷ which is a moving and thinly disguised lament for his son Hugh. His poetry, however, does not have the quality of his prose. Indeed, Buchan comments that "his prose seems to me more strictly poetic than his verse."¹⁸

In 1927 Neil Munro's health was failing. He retired from the Glasgow Evening News reluctantly for he enjoyed his work and the camaraderie of his colleagues. Indeed, he was without doubt the most affable and kindest of men. But even in retirement he continued to work. His last book was a History of the Royal Bank of Scotland (1928) and he continued to write articles which he called "Random Reminiscences" under the soubriquet Mr Incognito for the Daily Record and Mail. In October 1930 he was honoured with a second LLD, this time by the University of Edinburgh, but sadly at the ceremony he was in obvious ill health. He died a few months later on 22nd December at his home "Cromalt" in Craigendoran, Helensburgh. He was survived by his wife Jessie, one son and four daughters.

In 1935 An Comunn Gaidhealach erected a monument to him at the head of Glen Aray. The decoration at the top of the simple column is in the shape of a Celtic book shrine and on it is the inscription *Sar Litreachas* - "Excellent Literature". Among those present at the ceremony were many friends and admirers, including Sheriff John MacMaster Campbell and Sir Harry Lauder. In his address the writer R.B.Cunninghame Graham praised Neil Munro as the "apostolic successor of Sir Walter Scott". The inscription on the monument gives the date of his birth as 1863.

- ¹ I am very grateful to Mrs Lesley Bratton for permitting me access to her as yet unpublished biography of her grandfather Neil Munro. Her study has been the backbone of this chapter; individual references are too numerous to mention.
- ² Brian Osborne & Ronald Armstrong, Para Handy, Edinburgh, 1992: p.xxi
- ³ Brian D. Osborne & Ronald Armstrong, Erichie & Jimmy Swan, Edinburgh, 1993: p15
- ⁴ Neil Munro, Gilian the Dreamer, Edinburgh, 1923, Ch1, pp9-17
- ⁵ Neil Munro, Jaunty Jock and Other Stories, Edinburgh, 1918: pp 205-222.
- ⁶ Neil Munro, The Brave Days, Ed. George Blake, Edinburgh, 1931: p30
- ⁷ Neil Munro, text of the speech he delivered when he was made a Freeman of Inveraray in 1909.
- ⁸ Diary of Neil Munro, National Library of Scotland MS 26925. Entry for 4th November, 1893 indicates that he had submitted the first instalment to Quips, a Newcastle magazine. The text is no longer extant.
- ⁹ Blake op.cit. p10. Blake claims that Munro's "Views and Reviews" column "was probably the most enlightened thing of its kind outside of the serious reviews."
- ¹⁰ Neil Munro, Para Handy, Eds. Brian Osborne and Ronald Armstrong, Edinburgh, 1992; Neil Munro, Erichie and Jimmy Swan, Eds. Brian D. Osborne and Ronald Armstrong, Edinburgh, 1993
- ¹¹ Blake op.cit. p16
- ¹² Letter from Neil Munro to the Rev. Donald Davidson, 5th September, 1914. Property of Mrs. Lesley Bratton.
- ¹³ Neil Munro, The Search, National Library of Scotland MS 26903
- ¹⁴ Two volumes of extracts of Munro's journalism were published posthumously, edited by George Blake: The Brave Days, Edinburgh, 1933 (a selection of articles published in the Daily Record and Mail); The Looker On, Edinburgh, 1933 (a selection of articles most of which had been published in the Glasgow Evening News).
- ¹⁵ John Buchan (Ed.), The Poetry of Neil Munro, Edinburgh, 1931
- ¹⁶ Paul Verlaine, Sagesse, Bk 3 No VI (*Le ciel est par dessus le toit*); Selected Poems, Ed. C.F. McIntyre, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1948: p162
- ¹⁷ Buchan op.cit. p61
- ¹⁸ Buchan op. cit. p8

CHAPTER 3

THE EMERGENCE OF A WRITER

The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories (1896)

Although Munro began his career proper in journalism with his appointment as reporter to “The Greenock Advertiser” in 1884, signs of his developing interest in sustained prose fiction did not become evident until we hear of the publication of a thriller serialised in a Newcastle magazine called “Quips”. The story was called The Afton Moor Mystery (1893) the text of which is unfortunately unobtainable. He also submitted “turnovers” to the Globe newspaper at this time. Thereafter, the picture is much clearer and we discover that he had a short story, “The Secret of the Heather Ale,” (a re-working of Stevenson’s poem of the same name) published in Henley’s magazine, The Speaker, in November 1892, and in 1893 a further short story “The Red Hand” was also published by Henley in his The National Observer. By 1893 he had completed two further short stories which were accepted for publication by Blackwood - “Shudderman Soldier” and “The Lost Pibroch”.

These four Highland stories show the road that Munro was to take in the earlier part of his writing career. These with others he hoped to have published in book form by Blackwood and in a letter of 26th February 1894 concerning such a project to Blackwood we gain considerable insight into his ideas about current literary practice and the future direction of his writing:

...I shall be only too glad to lay before you at some early date, for your consideration, such a number of the West Highland stories as might make a volume. I am not the most impartial judge, perhaps, but I have a strong belief, amounting almost to a certainty, that my

sketches have something of the stuff of popularity in them. They strike upon a field absolutely untouched for one thing, being purely Celtic in their treatment of the Highland Celt and Highland scenery whereas all the men who have dealt with the romance of the Highlands hitherto have been Lowlanders, writing from the outside. The Barrie-Crockett-McLaren "boom" has confined itself to the Lowlands; the stuff they deal with is becoming attenuated, and run to seed. Here - or I am a Dutchman! - is a new vein, rich and untried. It should appeal to English readers even more than the Lowland Scots stories for it dispenses almost entirely with dialect. At all events a glossary is unnecessary. We are having a Scots revival in literature and now or never is, I recognise, the chance for anyone who would expound the genuine Highland character and direct attention to the illimitable stories of romance and poetry still lying in the old glens. I wish I could, if it never brought me a penny!¹

From this it is clear that Munro was well aware of the Kailyard School dominated by Barrie, Crockett and McLaren even although at the date of the writing of this letter (1894) much of the major Kailyard fiction of these writers had only recently been published: Barrie's Auld Licht Idylls (1888), Crockett's The Stickit Mininster (1893), The Lilac Sunbonnet (1894), and McLaren's Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush (1894) (although this was serialised in "The Bookman" before publication in book form). The letter, then, makes it clear that Munro sees the limitations of Kailyard writing and wishes to try a new angle.

Further proof of his desire not to be identified with Kailyard writing can be seen in his retrospective look over his life from his retirement when he tells us in “Random Reminiscences” for the Daily Record and Mail how at the very beginning of his career he used to submit “turnovers” to the Globe, a London paper, in 1890:

The traditional first step in literature. Every established novelist had done it, and “my turnovers” put Scotland on the map for this London paper’s readers.²

In these he wrote (as he thought) humorous sketches which involved naive portrayals of naive Scotsmen in kilts complete with whisky and haggis - but to his horror the humour went undetected:

Finding myself in danger of being regarded as an earnest member of the Kailyard School, I switched off.³

Clearly, then, Munro was wary of Lowland Kailyard and was keen to write authentic Highland stories. He was a fluent Gaelic speaker and was aware of the Gaelic tradition in literature. A survey, however, of the Gaelic short story at this time would not have provided him with a better model since the only major example of this genre had been practised by The Rev. Norman MacLeod, *Caraid nan Gaidheal* (Friend of the Gaels) (1783-1862), a collection of whose work was published in 1867.⁴ MacLeod’s stories, although written for the genuine spiritual edification of his readers, were themselves full of Kailyard piety and sentiment.

There was, however, as in Ireland, another cultural movement afoot. In 1888 “The Glasgow Boys” Hornel and Henry had painted a Celtic picture, “The Druids”, of which Munro commented acerbically :

Its aim was not information of any kind but sumptuous decoration...Fiona McLeodish in its Celticism.⁵

This beginning of a Celtic revival took a much more structured shape in Edinburgh largely under the inspiration of Professor Patrick Geddes with his periodical the Evergreen. It sought to revive Celtic styles of art and literature (and did, indeed, have a major influence on the architect, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife Margaret), but Munro was highly sceptical of a Celtic movement which had no knowledge of Gaelic:

This so-called Celtic Revival in Edinburgh is rather a curious thing. It is engineered very largely by people of no Celtic pedigree, and perhaps the only Celtic scholar in it is Mr. Alexander Carmichael, whose knowledge of Gaelic, of Hebridean folklore and hymnology, is greater than that of any living man.⁶

As far as the literary output of the Edinburgh movement was concerned, its sole writer was “Fiona Macleod”, the soubriquet of William Sharp, who had no Gaelic and, indeed, used a very standard form of English but did incorporate into his novels copious quotation from the collection of rhymes and hymns which were to become known as the Carmina Gadelica⁷ (gathered by the great folklorist Alexander Carmichael). Munro clearly thinks very little of his interpretation of the Highland people :

To paint the Scottish Gael as if he were eternally listening to the wail of Ossianic ghosts, looking out for corp-lights, and strumming his Clarsach to plaintive numbers is to misrepresent a very varied and interesting people. Besides his musings on the hill, he had and has his noisy nights in the change-house, and his laugh and song at the ceilidh fire; when he was harrying the adjacent glens there was about him a fine loveable zest for adventure; his songs are often of love and roaming, but rarely of death and ghosts. The Gael Miss McLeod knows, in short, is the Gael who has been made by the Free Kirk.⁸

MacLeod, from Paisley, is typical of one of the Lowlanders whom Munro refers to in the above-quoted letter of 1894 as describing the Highlands “writing from the outside”.

Although four of Munro’s stories had been written before Fiona MacLeod’s first novel had been published the ambience of the Edinburgh Celtic Revival along with the Lowland Kailyard are facets of Scottish cultural scene which he is reacting against as he explores “the new vein, rich and untried” of Scottish literature in his first collection of short stories The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories,⁹ published by Blackwood in 1896, and in much of his work thereafter.

A major feature of his innovation was to be his special use of language to capture the Gaelic *modus vivendi*. In this he differed from both Fiona MacLeod’s straightforward standard English punctuated by extracts from Carmina Gadelica and the older parodic and semi-mocking Highland English used by Scott and Hogg e.g.

Na, na, Hughie Morrison is no the man fo pargains - ye maun come to some
Highland body like Robin Oig hersell for the like of these - put I maun pe
wishing you goot night...¹⁰

or even more exaggeratedly,

I wat pe te mhotter with te prave shentleman` in te oter rhoom? Hu! she pe cot
into creat pig tarnnation twarvel with her own self. She pe eiter trunk or horn
mat.¹¹

Instead, Munro moved towards a much more authentic Gaelic-English, influenced by the translations of Popular Tales of the West Highlands by the polymath and scholar, John Francis Campbell of Islay, Iain Og Ile¹²:

Campbell collected and translated his folklore and heroic tales into an English
which is steeped in Gaelic sentiment, and is in truth a distinctive variety of
English worth the study of the philologist and the artist in words.¹³

Among other things Campbell frequently retained the Gaelic syntax and idiom in his English translation e.g.

“*agus mar so fhein rinn mi*” is translated as “and just so I did”

This was the model on which Munro based the language of his stories - except of course that they were not translations but fresh creations. Obviously it would be impossible to write whole sentences or paragraphs in this way but he does it sufficiently often to give a strong flavour of Gaelic syntax e.g.

“...it’s lame he’ll be all his days anyway, and little use to any man.”¹⁴

In addition he frequently incorporates specific Gaelic idioms e.g. “the mouth of the night” literally translates *beul na h-oidhche* and means “twilight”; “squint mouth” translates *cam beul* from which the name Campbell is derived; and throughout the text there is a gentle spattering of actual Gaelic words e.g. *caman* (shinty stick), *iolair* (eagle), etc. He also incorporates an abundance of Gaelic place names and accurate local references. Other not strictly linguistic features such as the use of often genuine proverbs or *seanfhaclan* (literally: “old words”), the names of well known pipe tunes and vivid descriptions of nature in the tradition of the great Gaelic eighteenth century nature poets Alasdair MacDonald and Duncan Ban MacIntyre also enhance the Gaelic atmosphere. Furthermore - and a point not often noted - Munro includes a wide range of Scots words which would have infiltrated the Highland speech of Inveraray and its environs long before standard English.

The effect of all this is to create the illusion for the reader that s/he is initiated into the language and culture of the characters in much the same way that Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s “Speak of the Mearns” takes us into his East Coast region. Munro’s task, however, is more difficult since he has a completely separate language to represent as opposed to a dialect of Scots. It has to be said, however, that he is not always successful and an early review complained of the need to keep

consulting the appended glossary of Gaelic words¹⁵ and there are times when the attempt at transposition of idiom can be too awkward and clumsy e.g.

“There’s dignity in yon craft, or less than red-shirts was the wearing of
the scamps who row her.”(pp265-266)

Nonetheless, as his work proceeded he became more adept at handling this technique and by the time of The New Road (1914) he has it to a fine art.

The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories consists of twelve stories: one allegory, two fantasies, one exploration of the attractions of an alternative life style, one humorous piece and seven rather bitter, sad pieces, some of which are truly tragic. When looking for a genre in which to implement his new ideas it was almost inevitable that Munro decide upon a folk tale format since, as mentioned above, the short story was totally undeveloped in Gaelic literature except in the rather Kailyard fashion of Caraid nan Gaidheal, but there was considerable vogue for publishing the products of the oral tradition i.e. songs, proverbs (e.g. Alexander Nicolson’s A Collection of Gaelic Proverbs and Familiar Phrases (1881)) and folk tales, especially, of course, Iain Og Ile’s Popular Tales of the West Highlands in four volumes (1860-62) which became extremely well-known and many of which had been gathered around Inveraray by Campbell’s assistants. On closer inspection, however, it can be seen that in terms of general technique (apart, of course, for the language issue already dealt with) The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories owe mainly only their one dimensional characters to the influence of Iain Og and the traditional tale. In terms of structure, although, like their Lowland counterparts Scott’s “Wandering Willie’s Tale” and Stevenson’s “Thrawn Janet”, they have the superficial appearance of folk tales, closer examination reveals a much tauter structure than that found in a genuine oral piece and almost all are shot through and held together by bitter irony.

It is also very clear that Munro, like Stevenson, is very much a writer of place, but at this stage in his career very narrowly so (not a practice in the great traditional oral tales) and almost every one of these stories is set in the area of adjacent to Inveraray, especially Glen Aray.

“The Lost Pibroch” itself is a mysterious story told in highly poetic language. It is set in Half Town in the Inveraray environs. (Half-Town or *Leth Bhaile* is quite a common name for a settlement in Gaelic and has echoes of the song “*Rosan an Leth-Bhaile*” (“Rose of the Half-Town”) by Eoghan McColl, Bard Loch Fine (1808-1898), the bard from Kenmore just outside Inveraray.) A piping competition takes place between two travelling pipers who arrive in the village and Paruig Dall (Blind Peter). Eventually Paruig Dall plays the tune “The Lost Pibroch” and this has a tremendously unsettling effect at first on the other two pipers and then the men of the village and eventually Paruig himself. All grow restless and depart, even the animals, and the women and children are left behind to fend for themselves in a derelict economy.

Although the story has a vague historical setting of about 1750 (i.e. just after Culloden) it is possible to see the whole piece as an allegory of the history of the Highlands, depicting the dereliction of the Highland way of life (although ironically the story is set in the anti-Jacobite Campbell area) after Culloden, the Clearances and the years of emigration to the cities (Munro’s own fate), to Canada and elsewhere.

The story is rich in allusion to authentic pipe tunes and the speaking animals owe something to oral tradition. It is ironic, however, that beautiful music which, for example, in Shakespeare’s last plays is a symbol of healing and reconciliation should here be the means of destruction and dislocation. Munro appears to be hinting that the break up of the old Highland way of life with its language and culture is inevitable - a theme which persists throughout almost all of his Highland romances.

It is interesting to note that, when the Gaelic short story did come to be developed a few years later, one of its first practitioners, Iain MacCormaic (1870-1947), who was, indeed, also the first Gaelic novelist, wrote a sentimental short story called '*S Leam Fein an Gleann*,' ("The Glen is Mine") (1908) after a pipe tune of the same name. In it the exact opposite happens when the sound of the pipes signifies the return of a young man who has made his fortune and who rescues the people from poverty and hardship. History has proved Munro's insight sounder!

The two fantasy tales are "The Sea Fairy of French Foreland" and "Castle Dark". "The Sea Fairy" deals with the wooing of a young Argyllshire lass Marseli by a handsome man whom she takes to be a fairy king. Ironically, he turns out to be one of the French wine traffickers after whom French Foreland takes its name. She, however, never realises that he was merely human and that he had to leave simply because of a dispute between her brothers and the French merchants. The gentle irony is emphasised by the fact that the story opens with sightings by the narrator and others of a fairy King, a fairy bull and the *Sithean Shluaidhe* (the little people). The reader is prepared to expect a fantasy which, in the end, the story turns out not to be after all!

(This story opens with reference to a fire in Inveraray Castle the idea for which would have come from that actual fire there which Munro witnessed as a boy in 1877.)

"Castle Dark" is a much eerier piece. It is told by the blind piper Paruig Dall, of "The Lost Pibroch" story. A traveller, Adventurer, visits Castle Dark by taking his place on the mysterious *birlinn ghorm*, the Blue Barge, which is rowed by twelve men in red shirts "swinging merry at the oars and chanting the Skye *iorram* (boat song)" (p265). On his first visit he sees the owner of the mysterious castle fall out with his wife as he abandons her to go to fight for the "old cause", probably one of the Jacobite Risings. On his second visit Adventurer sees the lady of the castle surrounded by drunken revellers. Unlike the parallel scene in Homer's "Odyssey" she is enjoying

their company, particularly that of George Mor. Her husband returns, challenges George to a duel, kills him and leaves the castle and his wife to their fate of imminent attack by his enemies. We are left with the thought that, if the woman's behaviour was disloyal, the husband's loyalty to his cause was no less unfair to her.

There is a strong Gothic atmosphere in this story which reflects the extensive reading in this genre which Munro had undertaken in his youth and it looks forward to the atmosphere of his later satirical romantic novel Doom Castle (1901).

"Boboon's Children" deals with the life of one of the travelling folk and the attempt by a well-meaning philanthropist to "domesticate" him and make him live in a house in the town. Munro based the story on a Boboon MacDonald he actually knew. He was

head of the MacDonald tribe of West Highland tinkers...more than one attempt was made to 'extirpate' him and his clan and drive him into a house, but he was an animal of wood and field till the last...he smelt a little high, but when it came to gentlemanly address and delicate finesse he was the perfect courtier.¹⁶

Furthermore, the real Boboon was the informant of the story "The Brown Bear of the Green Glen" to Iain Og Ile to which reference is made at the beginning of the story and the character is clearly based on an amalgam of the ideas contained in Campbell's notes on his contributor:

John himself is a character; he is about fifty years of age; his father an old soldier is alive and about eighty...[The father and son] both recite; they do not simply tell the story, but act it with changing voice and gesture...The father...never "saw a school." He served in the 42nd in his youth. One son makes horn spoons, and does not know a single story; the other is a sporting character, a famous

fisherman, who knows all the lochs and rivers in the Highlands, makes flies,
and earns money in summer by teaching Southerners to fish.¹⁷

The story illustrates the “old word” or proverb (Gaelic: *seanfhacl*) “There are few lapdogs in a fox’s litter”. Boboon is persuaded by his friend and benefactor the captain to live in a house in McVicar’s Land (actually Munro’s old home) in Inveraray. The call of the wild, however, is too strong and after three attempts to persuade him to stay it is agreed that he should rejoin his tribe. Before Boboon leaves the captain asks for the hand of his daughter and this is granted but she dies soon after in childbirth. The Captain is left to bring up their son who resists formal education and seeks the country ways. Eventually he and his father quarrel so badly that he is shown the door. He wanders the country and then, as if by instinct, he is drawn to the tinkers and is united with his grandfather, thus, ironically in spite of his father’s efforts, fulfilling the “old word” although it had skipped a generation.

The only humorous story in the collection is a tale of mistaken identity, “Ius Primae Noctis”.¹⁸ This story did not appear in the original edition of The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories of 1896, being rejected by Blackwood because it was too risqué. (It was subsequently published in Henley’s New Review in 1897). It also shows signs of less careful preparation in its use of Gaelic words e.g. “*kebur*” for “*cabar*”(p121) It was, however, included in the posthumous Inveraray edition of 1935. Its rejection from the first edition was in some way fortuitous since its tone does not accord with the rest of the collection and furthermore its narrator is an educated soldier rather than a “folk voice”.

It tells the story of a Gentleman who takes a fancy to a young Lady called Ealasaid one day when he sees her doing the washing. Later he makes advances towards her which she rejects. Angered at this he threatens to use his position as the local feudal superior to exact his *ius primae*

noctis from her. He then persuades his foxhunter, Seamas, to marry her in order that he may gain his right. Seamas, however, marries the wrong Ealasaid, an ugly woman who actually wants the Gentleman to exact his right! In the end, when she is brought to him, repulsed by her ugliness he only kisses her hand as his right! Then her husband reveals his presence and informs the gentleman that, if he had taken advantage of his wife or rejected her, he would have regarded either as an insult and slain him. By choosing a middle course he had saved his skin, albeit that it was repulsion and luck that dictated his course of action rather than any finer feelings.

As with many of these stories, it is difficult to put a date on the supposed time of the action but this one appears to suggest a pre-Reformation date with its reference to Mass (p119). This is interesting because it is the first of many direct references to Catholicism which occur throughout Munro's work.

The remaining seven stories are the antithesis of the sentimentality of the *Kailyard* and *Celtic Twilight* against which Munro has been reacting. They are bitter and sad and shot through with cruel irony. Six of these are concerned with pride of race and family and of these two are tragic in almost the full Aristotelian sense of the word.

The earliest of these, "The Secret of the Heather Ale", is an Argyllshire version of Stevenson's poem of the same name. It is set in the seventeenth century in Glen Shira. In order to prevent his sons revealing the recipe of the Heather Ale to a band of marauding Campbells Calum McKellar arranges for their deaths. Then he throws himself over the cliff of the Scaurnoch, taking a Campbell henchman with him. This heroic act causes Neil Mor, the Campbell leader, to utter in the style of Shakespeare's Antony at the death of Brutus:

"Yon," said he, "had the heart of a man!" (p66)

The story, then, is about family pride in retaining ownership of the recipe but it is spoiled by the triviality of the cause. One human life is not worth such a recipe - let alone four!

“Red Hand” again deals with fierce uncompromising family pride. Again a vague 17th century setting. A woman becomes furious that her stepson, trained at Boreraig by the McCrimmons, should challenge his father at piping:

“...if it was I, a claw was off the cub before the mouth of day.” (p44)

She is the boy’s stepmother and is presumably jealous of him, so in the night she steals into his presence and cuts off his hand to ensure that her husband will still be the better piper. Ironically, the boy’s father had naturally been delighted at his son’s piping achievements.

“Shudderman Soldier” is again a powerful if somewhat melodramatic story which gains its effect from cruel irony. Mairi is betrothed to Ellar but is actually in love with Duncan of Drimfern and, as a token of her love, she has given him an inscribed sampler. He, however, is indifferent to Mairi and fails to recognise the significance of the sampler and thrusts it carelessly into his pocket. Ellar has fallen on the Beannan during a snow storm and has been brought down dead by the men of the area. Duncan, one of the rescue party who had gone to seek him, has been lost and is now also feared dead. Mairi is terrified that her sampler will be found on his body and that she will be disgraced by the discovery of her faithlessness to the dead Ellar. She is, therefore, happy that the deformed, nasty little Shudderman, who is clearly fond of her, go up to the Beannan to find the body of Duncan and to bring back the sampler. The upshot, however, is that Duncan did not die and had actually used the sampler to staunch a wound in Ellar’s side. The discovery of the sampler means that Mairi’s reputation and pride are left intact. Shudderman, however, died in vain on the snow-bound hill searching for Duncan. Ironically, the sampler had been at the house before he left and he need never have gone.

The powerful setting of this story is in a winter of snow and wind but it loses some credibility by the author's overuse of pathetic fallacy:

"Still the nor' wind, and the snow, and the dark frost said '*Suas e!*' running down the glen like the strong dogs on the peching deer." (p180)

and this is continued on pps187 & 196.

"A Fine Pair of Shoes" is set in Carnus ("now a *larach* of low lintels, and the nettle over all" p247) in Glen Aray in the eighteenth century in the time of Duke John. This is a highly dramatic short piece in which the old shoemaker Baldi Crom defends his roguish son Tormaid's reputation at *camanachd* (shinty - a very old game) and *piobaireachd* (piping) but never lets on to his visitors that the shoes he is painstakingly making are for his son so that his pride will be maintained even on the gallows. Ironically, in spite of his exhausting efforts to complete the task in time he collapses and dies before he can have the shoes delivered. In the town Tormaid goes to the gallows barefoot:

"They might have given him a pair of old bauchels, if no better, to die in,"
said the drover in the old woman's ear.

"Ochanoch! and they might!" she said. "The darling! He lost his shoes in swimming Douglas Water to get clear, and they say he sent yesterday to his father for a pair, but they're not come. Queer, indeed, is that, for 'twas the brag of the folks he came of that they aye died with a good pair of shoon on their feet!" (p257)

The two stories "Black Murdo" and "War" come very near to true tragedy in that the pride of the two protagonists brings about the *peripeteia* of each story.

In "Black Murdo", like "Boboon's Children", the springboard for the story is an "old word" (proverb): "a stolen bitch will never throw clean pups". The hero, Murdo, a Macarthur, sets

out from his home in Stronbuie across Glen Aray to Inneraora (Inveraray) in order to get a midwife for his wife Silis who is in a sense a foreigner in that she is a Campbell from the other side of Glen Aray. He has had a *taibhs* (vision) suggesting that she will die in childbirth. On the way he is challenged by Campbells, the bitter enemies of the MacArthurs, and gives them his dirk and shield as payment for safe passage. He collects the midwife and begins the return journey. He is again challenged and this time his assailant demands his sword for safe passage. Murdo's pride cannot stand it no longer and agrees to fight. In the heat of the struggle he has a further *taibhs* which tells him the baby has been born and his wife needs the midwife. He redoubles his efforts and wounds his assailant so severely that he will have a severe limp for the rest of his days. He then proceeds on his way but this delay to defend his pride causes his wife's death for, by the time they reach Stronbuie, it is twenty minutes too late for the midwife to be of assistance.

The cruel irony does not cease there, however, for Murdo naturally assumes that Silis's red haired baby, who survived the ordeal, is his own son and he brings him up to hate, as the murderer of his mother, the man who challenged him for his sword in Glen Aray on that fateful day. When Rory, the boy, is old enough Murdo takes him to Inneraora to challenge his lame enemy. He is loathe to hurt the boy but is eventually wounded by his slashing blows. The boy then, urged on by his father, stabs his victim to death. Just after this the midwife appears to reveal that the lame man is, in fact, the boy's father. The boy then had killed his own father and both "fathers" had killed Silis by their delay caused by their duel. Furthermore, the proverb is also fulfilled in that Silis was "the stolen bitch"- the Campbell girl who had left her own clan and had been unfaithful to her MacArthur husband and given birth to a Campbell child.

Whilst "Black Murdo" deals with the almost elemental emotions of tribal pride which one associates with Scott's Robin Oig or Fergus McIvor, "War" is a grim story which deals with the

fierce *hubris* or pride of a woman, Jean, who will not show a sympathetic world her poverty, and this pride causes the death of her child.

Jean's husband, an irresponsible, thoughtless fellow called Rob Donn, an early version of John Splendid, in order to earn twenty pounds has gone with the Campbells to fight the forces of Bonnie Prince Charlie. He leaves none of the money to his needy wife who is too proud to ask him for any and yet, while he is on the march, he gives some to another needy woman. After this he gambles away the rest of his cash.

At the news of Culloden the townspeople rejoice and prosperity returns, but all the time Jean's poverty is growing more acute, yet her pride will not permit her to ask for help. Indeed, she gives away what little she has to protect her reputation. All the time her child grows more and more weak, but her mother pins her and the child's hopes on Rob returning with money and animals as he had boasted he would. Finally the child dies at the very moment the soldiers return. But, to add to that irony, even if Rob had been a little earlier it is doubtful if he could have helped since he had no money. All he had was a captured white cockade for the child!

Finally, there is "The Fell Sergeant", the tale of Aoirig, an old Mull woman, who is dying in Glen Aray. She tells how long ago she was courted in Mull by a man from Glen Aray called Macnicol who brought her blue flowers, "cuckoo brogues", all the way from Argyll. As her end draws near the wright (who performed the duties of undertaker) is sent for - none other than Macnicol himself, although no longer young and handsome. Aoirig dies and the wright enters the room with the stretching board. Suddenly Aoirig sits up for a moment, clearly recognising him, "and then she fell back on the bed with her face stiffening." (p109) This irony is compounded by Macnicol's innocent remark:

"I once knew a woman who was terribly like yon, and she came from Mull." (p109)

The tragic atmosphere saves the ending from falling into bathos and leaves us to savour the grim humour of the situation. Cohesion and pathos are added to the story by the references to the blue flowers which Aoirig could see from her bed and which Macnicol had given her in youth.

The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories was enthusiastically received when it was issued in 1896 and there is no doubt that these stories in which the emphasis is most frequently on action show a high level of craftsmanship and skill. All are beautifully structured and they are often marvellously ironic. Furthermore, they are a breakthrough in the depiction of the Gael and Gaeldom in non-Gaelic Scottish Literature. Nonetheless, they are Munro's early work and do show certain teething troubles. Munro was reacting against the Kailyard and he wanted to paint a more authentic picture of the Highlands than had been done hitherto by the Lowland writers of Celtic Twilight. In his enthusiasm to redress the sentimentality of Kailyard he anticipates George Douglas Brown's criticism of his own The House with the Green Shutters, that "There is too much black for the white in it."¹⁹ Certainly the grimness and savageness of "Red Hand", "Black Murdo", and even "The Secret of the Heather Ale" is too black to be "natural".

In addition, his construction of a new Gaelic-English language to create a clearer picture of the Gael, although very novel and frequently successful, is at times overdone and can occasionally caricature itself and end in bathos or obscurity.

These stories, although a great advance on previous treatments of the Gael and Gaeldom, are still not quite out of the Celtic Twilight. In their setting in the one small area they have a rural parochialness parallel to Lowland Drumtochty. More seriously, however, they are all set in the past but in most cases a past that has no clear historical context. This has the effect of sometimes producing vague, elemental, semi-Ossianic characters whose world lacks historical credibility. Munro's next book John Splendid, however, whilst incorporating many of the innovations of The

Lost Pibroch collection, is much better judged. It continues the theme of Highland decline dealt with in “The Lost Pibroch” story itself within a very precise historical period which in turn calls for the depiction of characters appropriate to that seventeenth century world.

- ¹ Letter from Neil Munro to William Blackwood, 26th February, 1894, National Library of Scotland MS 4621.
- ² Neil Munro The Brave Days, Ed. George Blake, Edinburgh, 1931: p145
- ³ Blake op. cit. p145
- ⁴ Rev. Norman MacLeod, Caraid nan Gaidheal, Glasgow, 1867 (a selection of his prose writings)
- ⁵ Blake op.cit. p268
- ⁶ Neil Munro, "Views and Reviews", Glasgow Evening News, 5th March, 1896
- ⁷ Alexander Carmichael, Carmina Gadelica Vols 1&2, Edinburgh, 1900
- ⁸ Neil Munro, "Views and Reviews", Glasgow Evening News, 5th March, 1895
- ⁹ Neil Munro, The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories, Edinburgh, 1923. This edition is used throughout except where otherwise indicated.
- ¹⁰ Sir Walter Scott "The Two Drovers", Scottish Short Stories 1800-1900, Ed. Douglas Gifford, London, 1971: p31
- ¹¹ James Hogg "The Strange Letter of a Lunatic", The Short Stories of James Hogg, Ed. Douglas Mack, Edinburgh, 1982: p167
- ¹² John Francis Campbell, Popular Tales of the West Highlands, Edinburgh, 1994
- ¹³ Neil Munro, "Views and Reviews", Glasgow Evening News, 29th August, 1895
- ¹⁴ Neil Munro, "Black Murdo", The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories, Edinburgh, 1923: p128
- ¹⁵ Review of The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories, The Bookman, London, May, 1896
- ¹⁶ Neil Munro, "News and Reviews", Glasgow Evening News, 13th February, 1896
- ¹⁷ Campbell op.cit. Vol.1 pp232-233
- ¹⁸ Neil Munro, The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories, Jaunty Jock and Other Stories, Ayrshire Idylls, Edinburgh, 1935: pps 113-126
- ¹⁹ George Douglas Brown, letter to Ernest Barker, 24th October, 1901. Quoted in Ian Campbell, Kailyard, Edinburgh, 1981: p7

CHAPTER 4

JOHN SPLENDID (1898)¹

The Tale of a Poor Gentleman, and the Little Wars of Lorn

John Splendid, a story primarily about the wars between Montrose and the Marquis of Argyll in 1644-45, can claim to be the first truly Highland novel in Scottish literature written from the “inside”, as it were, by a Gael and has its roots both in the traditions of Neil Munro’s local culture and in his wider literary heritage. It is important to explain the sources from which he draws to indicate not only his deep knowledge of Highland tradition but also to show how he uses and transforms his debt to his literary predecessors Scott and Stevenson who clearly influenced this novel.

In terms of the local cultural heritage and traditions of Mid-Argyll there was much to interest and inspire Munro on the subject of the sack of the Marquis of Argyll’s Inveraray by the army of Montrose in 1645. In October 1877, while he was a boy in Inveraray, there was a huge fire in Inveraray castle:

...nothing of irreplaceable value was lost, except the only authentic portrait of the “Great Marquis” of Argyll, which had hung in the hall. It had only recently been brought there from another room, to match the picture of the Marquis of Montrose, just acquired by my Uncle Lorne.

There was an old woman in Inveraray town who had shaken her head and predicted calamity when she heard that Montrose’s picture had been brought to the Castle. Two hundred years had not obliterated the memory of the winter

when he and his wild Irish carried fire and sword into the heart of Real Argyll. But her warnings were unheeded by the Victorian generation. For a few days, or weeks, the portraits of the two Marquises hung side by side. The lightning from Heaven put an end to the unnatural companionship of these two mortal enemies.²

With his exceptional interest in local history this incident would have made a big impression on the young Munro and no doubt inspired him to learn more about the subjects of the portraits and traditional lore of the sack of Inveraray as a result of their mutual hostility.

In addition, John Francis Campbell, whom Munro admired and from whom he had learned so much of his folklore, had gathered a considerable number of oral accounts about Montrose's general, Alasdair MacDonald, son of Colkitto (referred to as Colkitto in the novel), and his invasions of Argyll and, although these are housed in the Advocates' Library and have never been published in full, their informants would have lived in Argyll and no doubt Munro would have been familiar with some of the stories. Interestingly enough, one of the accounts in this archive deals with an incident referred to in the novel (p239), the death of Sir Duncan Campbell of Auchinbreac, commander of Argyll's forces and the person who had advised Argyll to leave the field at Inverloch³ and another deals with the poet Iain Lom MacDonald, who also figures prominently in the novel, claiming that he was born in Argyll but was taken to Keppoch by his mother after her husband had avenged an assault on his wife. As a result of this the young Iain Lom was vitriolic against the Campbells.⁴

The literary ancestors of the swaggering soldier of fortune from whom the novel John Splendid takes its name go back to Plautus's *miles gloriosus*, Pyrgopolynices, to Spenser's Braggadochio and in more recent Scottish literature to Smollett's Captain Lismahagow in

Humphrey Clinker (1771), and Scott's Dugald Dalgetty in A Legend of Montrose (1819). In this last work we meet in Captain Dalgetty a selfish, garrulous and rather pedantic mercenary who has fought like John MacIver of Barbreck, or John Splendid as he is nicknamed, in The Thirty Years War in Germany for Gustavus Adolphus as part of the Scottish Brigade. Unlike John Splendid, however, back in Scotland he is still prepared to sell his arms to the highest bidder. The similarity with the Legend of Montrose does not, however, end there and Scott seems to be an important source for Munro, for the narrator of the book, young Elrigmore, is also a Scottish mercenary, both novels have a large part of their setting in Inveraray and both deal very specifically with the Battle of Inverlochy (1645) in which the Royalist forces of Montrose and his general, Alasdair MacDonald (Colkitto), defeat Archibald Campbell, Gillesbeg Gruamach, Marquis of Argyll, the leader of the Covenanting forces (who was, like Montrose, later to meet his fate at the Grassmarket in 1661 and have his head impaled on the same spike on Edinburgh's Tolbooth). Furthermore, references to Sir James Turner's Pallas Armata, a manual of arms, to "The Children of the Mist" (although Munro makes these MacAulays rather than MacGregors), to bloodhounds in pursuit of a hero and to supernatural predictions are all borrowings from Scott. The novels are, however, told from opposing points of view, Munro's from the Campbell perspective and Scott's from that of Montrose's supporters, and, more significantly, unlike its literary ancestor, John Splendid only once touches upon the full national significance of the war, that is when Auchinbreac, Argyll's adviser, persuades him not to lead his men at Inverlochy because

"you are the mainstay of a great national movement, depending for its success on your life, freedom and continued exertion." (p239)

It is above all a Highland novel which emphasises the age old feud between Campbells and MacDonalds as clans rather than as participants in the wider national picture.

Although Munro clearly used Scott as a source there is one significant tradition in which he differs. Scott follows the tradition that MacIlduy (Cameron) transmitted the news of the whereabouts of Argyll's army to Montrose. Munro follows the tradition that it was Iain Lom MacDonald, the great 17th Century Gaelic bard, who brought this news and, although Munro does not make accurate reference to the canon of Iain Lom in Chapter XVIII (p166), he was certainly familiar with his greatest song, *Là Inbhir Lochaidh* ("The Day of Inverlochy"), and, indeed, Munro puts the following into Iain Lom's mouth in Chapter XX:

"There are plenty to fight; there's but one to make the song of the fight
[i.e. *Là Inbhir Lochaidh*], and that's John MacDonald with your
honours' leave."(p182)

The idea that John Splendid and Elrigmore watched the battle from a hill in Brae Lochaber probably owes its origin to Iain Lom's declaration in the poem that he watched the battle from a hill above Inverlochy:

Dhirich mi moch madainn Domnaich
Gu braigh caisteal Inbhir Lochaidh;
Chunnaic mi 'n t-arm dol an ordugh,
'S bha buaidh a' bhlair le Clann Domhnaill.⁵

Early on Sunday morning I climbed the brae above the Castle of Inverlochy. I
saw the army arraying for battle, and victory on the field was with Clan Donald.

This poem also refers to the death of Auchinbreac:

'S iomadh fear aid agus pice
Agus cuilbheire chaoil dhirich
Bha 'n Inbhir Lochaidh 'na shineadh,

'S bha luaidh nam ban a Cinn-tir' ann.⁶

Many a warrior with helmet and bow and slender straight musket lay
stretched at Inverlochy, and the darling of the women of Kintyre
(Auchinbreac) was among them.

Interestingly enough it is also likely that the hero of the novel gets his name from one of one of the prisoners taken by the MacDonalds mentioned in this poem - Sir Donald Campbell of Barbreck:

Iain Muideartaich nan seol soilleir,

Sheoladh an cuan ri la doilleir,

Ort cha d'fhuaradh bristeadh coinne:

'S ait leam Barra-breac fo d'chomas.⁷

John of Moidart of the bright sails, who would sail the seas on a dark day,
you were not found guilty of breaking your tryst; it pleases me that you
have Barbreck in your power.

Barbreck was the name given to the hero of the novel - John MacIver of Barbreck, John Splendid.

John Splendid clearly also owes much to R.L. Stevenson whom Munro obviously admired and to whom he dedicated the poem "The Story Teller"⁸ on his death in 1894, four years before the novel was published. The novel which appears to have the most obvious influence on Munro at this stage is Kidnapped (although there is some evidence of the darker vision of Jekyll and Hyde in his portrayal of Gillesbeg Gruamach). Like Kidnapped John Splendid is very much a novel of place with vivid descriptions of the Scottish countryside. It also involves a journey and the pairing of the

two main characters Alan Breck and David Balfour is replicated in John Splendid and Colin, Young Elrimore. There are, however, significant differences in this latter aspect in that, instead of the two heroes coming from either side of the Highland /Lowland divide, both are Highland but followers of Clan Campbell and, therefore, anti-Royalist/Stuart, and Elrimore, instead of being a callow youth like David Balfour, in his late twenties, is already a veteran of European wars.

John Splendid is set during the Civil War in Britain which was to culminate in the execution of Charles 1. Although at this period Scotland and England were not united by the Treaty of Union (1707), both countries were riven by internal division between pro-royalist and anti-royalist camps. In an endeavour to secure victory for a full-blooded Presbyterian church in Scotland free of any of the latitudinarian modifications required by the King, the Covenanting party drew up and signed, first, the National Covenant in 1638 and later the Solemn League and Covenant in 1643 by which they agreed to assist the English Parliament against Charles on condition that England would, in effect, adopt a Presbyterian Church. The Covenanters were headed by the Marquis of Argyll, Gillesbeg Gruamach, Archibald the Grim, chief of Clan Campbell and probably the most powerful man in the Scotland of his day. The Royalist party was headed by his great rival, James Graham, Marquis of Montrose (although he had previously belonged to the Covenanting party and had, indeed, been the first to sign the National Covenant in Greyfriars' Church in Edinburgh). The novel is set during Montrose's *annus mirabilis* of 1644-45 when he was carrying all before him and seemed unstoppable before his defeat at Philiphaugh. It deals in particular with the sack of Inveraray, the headquarters of the Marquis of Argyll, and the Battle of Inverlochy.

Although this is the background to the wider political picture the novel is intensely Highland in its outlook. Montrose's forces relied very heavily on the MacDonalds and their allies - indeed, his commander-in-chief was Alasdair MacDonald, son of Colkitto and often known by the same nickname as his father - and the MacDonalds were the traditional and bitter enemies of Clan Campbell and it is this aspect of clan warfare that becomes all-consuming for almost all the protagonists. Munro called his novel a "winter tale" and at one level it is fair to describe the book as a romance since, as will be seen, a rather insipid love plot runs through the story but this combines with the political plot which deals with bitter warfare and probes the weaknesses in Highland society and gives the story a much harder edge.

Like almost all of Munro's fiction John Splendid, as already mentioned, is very much a novel of place. It is set principally in Inveraray and its environs (although anachronistically he describes the modern town built in the 18th century rather than the 17th century village) and follows the journey of John Splendid and Elrigmore, through Glen Noe, Loch Leven, north as far as Kilcumin (Fort Augustus), and south again via Corryarick, Glen Nevis, Glencoe and Glen Orchy. The accuracy and care devoted to landscape is such that individual scenes are so vivid and recognisable that landscape itself becomes a major character in the book, especially those set in Glen Roy and Glen Nevis (Chapter XIX) and Glencoe (Chapter XXIV).

The novel falls into five parts.

The first section (Chapters I-XV) deals with the homecoming of the narrator of the story, Colin, Young Elrigmore of Glen Shira. His arrival at night in the sleeping Inveraray is brilliantly realised. He has been away fighting for seven years as a soldier of fortune in the Thirty Years War in Germany in the army of Gustavus Adolphus, only to find that he has returned to find himself in the middle of a civil war at home. We are then introduced to the character of Argile (sic), Gillesbeg Gruamach, portrayed at this stage as a fierce, unyielding judge (he was also Scotland's chief law officer) somewhat in the vein of Stevenson's Weir of Hermiston. He is giving judgment on a matter of local politics - the trial of two Catholic MacLachlans, traditional enemies of Clan Campbell from the other side of Loch Finne and who provide an introduction to the romantic love theme. John MacIver of Barbreck, another ex-soldier of fortune is now introduced and Argile, preparing to assemble an army to prevent young Colkitto from joining Montrose, offers Elrigmore a captaincy as he had already done to John Splendid. Unlike Splendid, however, Elrigmore feels he has too many commitments at home at this stage. Betty Brown, the Provost's daughter, a childhood sweetheart of Elrigmore is now introduced but his conversation with her is interrupted by Splendid when he asks her to warn her cousin, the young son of the chief of the MacLachlans who is intending to stay at her father's house that night, that he will be in danger of attack from the MacNicolls who are seeking revenge for the murder of one of their clan by a MacLachlan. They seek their revenge and there is fine brawl in the main street of the town but in the end young MacLachlan escapes - back to Betty's house - leaving the seeds of jealousy in Elrigmore's mind that they are lovers.

The story goes on to demonstrate the power of the Kirk and at the same time to show how both Argile and the Kirk have worked to make Inveraray and "real Argile", in spite of the odd local quarrel, a very prosperous, modern, and pleasant place to live. This is contrasted by an

account of the departure of Argile with his army, news of the location of all the armies on both sides, and news of Montrose's victories. It now seems very likely that Betty is being courted by young MacLachlan and Elrignore is unsure where he stands with her. In Chapter VII we hear of the shooting of a MacAulay woman who had surprised Elrignore and his people when they were gathered in the cattle fold. Dying, she foretells disaster for the Campbells and MacCailein Mor:

"I see the heather above the gall and MacCailein's head on a post." (P64)

(Heather is the badge of the MacDonalds, and gall or bog myrtle the badge of the Campbells. The post is an allusion to the spike on the Tolbooth in Edinburgh on which Argile's head was to be impaled in 1661)

On hearing that Argile's troops are due home, we are given a tantalising hint that Betty has a more than friendly interest in John Splendid himself. The section ends with return of the army and the superficial prospect of peace for the winter overcast by the MacAulay prophecy.

In this first section, then, we are introduced to the two main plots of the book: the romantic plot involving Betty, young MacLachlan and the narrator, Elrignore, and the major plot of the war with Montrose. The supernatural element which will help to provide cohesion for the whole novel is also introduced.

The second part (Chapters VIII - XV) deals with the invasion and sack of Inveraray by Montrose and young Colkitto. The section opens with the freezing winter of 1644 when Loch Finne was frozen and the deer and cattle could cross it. The major plot is introduced at once when at a party in Inveraray Castle John Splendid sights the lighted beacon on Dunchuach warning of invasion. Elrignore now honours his word and prepares to join Argile as a soldier. Argile himself at the sight of his little son looks for an excuse to take him and his mother out of harm's way and with the encouragement of John Splendid decides to go to Edinburgh to direct reinforcements to

Inveraray. He leaves and the result is that the Campbells, in the absence of their chief, in spite of Splendid's assurance to the contrary, do not muster to repel the invaders. John Splendid organises the evacuation of the old and the women and children across Loch Finne and all are despatched - with the exception of Betty Brown and a child, the oe (grandchild) of Peggy Mhor, she was trying to save. The enemy attack and John Splendid, Elrignore and Sir Donald are obliged to retreat to the glen of Eas-a-Chosain behind the town. Elrignore has been wounded, so they stay in a cave there until their presence is spotted. They then make their way to the fort on the top of Dunchuach in the dark, having been joined by young MacLachlan who is seeking Betty Brown and the child.

Once in the fort there is a stirring battle while they are attacked by Clanranald first on one side and then on the other. They were warned of the second attack by the heroic action of the Protestant minister, Gordon, who joins them at this point. Further proof of his sterling character is given when he insists on leaving the fort to go out and obtain water for his fellow soldiers. On his way back he stops to give a drink to a dying enemy, a Glencoe MacDonald, but is attacked and knocked unconscious by other enemy clansmen. When he comes to, however, he informs the others that MacDonald had told him:

"There's a woman and a child in the wood of Strongara." (p110)

John Splendid and Elrignore set out to look for the Provost's daughter but they cannot find them in the dark.

Next day they find the girl and the child. In the course of conversation she hints to Elrignore that John Splendid is the child's father. Elrignore tries to be gallant towards her but she gives him no encouragement. On hearing that Montrose's men are on the move from the town they seek to move to a safer position but have to take refuge in a barn near the road. The soldiers

pass and then, as Montrose himself passes on his own, the baby cries. Montrose clearly hears but moves on, doing nothing to harm them.

After the departure of Montrose Argile returns to his ruined town. He is ashamed of himself for having deserted his people. He blames John Splendid for being “the devil’s counsellor” (p142) and giving him false advice.

This section, then, contrasts the cowardice and weakness of the Marquis and his plausible yet well-intentioned Highland adviser, John Splendid, with the nobility of action of the Lowland minister Gordon and the Lowland General Montrose.

Section 3 (Chapters XVI-XX) opens with John Splendid telling Elrignore that he did not deny paternity of the child in Betty’s care, partly out of good manners and partly because, by comparison with himself, Elrignore will shine in the lady’s eyes. The army sets off and Dame Dubh, a crazed old woman, appears for the first time at the head of Glen Aray and follows them. Then they go across a frozen Loch Awe to the first night’s camp in Glen Noe at which John Splendid recites the ballad “Sergeant of Pikes”. Argile fraternises with his soldiers and there is no sign of hesitancy or cowardice in his behaviour.

As they move north the Campbell looting of enemy Stewart territory is fierce in reprisal for their previous suffering, in spite of Argile’s injunctions to the contrary. As they leave to cross Loch Leven they hear of Dame Dubh’s prophecy which has the same import as the MacAulay woman’s. Argile sets up camp at Inverlochy and then sends out John Splendid and Elrignore to ascertain the whereabouts of Montrose. After taking rest in a cottage at the foot of Loch Oich they meet the bard Iain Lom MacDonald. A dispute breaks out between them when Iain Lom taunts them with MacCailein’s cowardly departure from Inveraray. Suddenly all three are taken prisoner by some MacGregors and are brought to Montrose. Iain Lom is identified as the Bard of Keppoch

and he reports the location of Argile's force. Montrose puts John Splendid and Elrigmore on parole. Montrose then decides to surprise the Argile's army with a countermarch to the south via Glen Tarf, Corryarick and Glen Nevis amid brilliantly described appalling winter conditions. The scouts have, of course, failed in their mission. As prisoners of war they are not allowed to join in the battle but they see it from a hill in Brae Lochaber. The Campbells are soundly defeated (although details are not revealed until later) and the scouts see six fugitives heading in their direction pursued by Ogilvy's cavalry. One of these is Gordon, the minister.

Section 3 is the climax of the novel, the countermarch of Montrose's MacDonalds and Athole Stewarts, building up to their triumph at Inverlochy. From now on the action of the book deals with the retreat to Inveraray of John Splendid, Elrigmore and Argile himself.

Section four (Chapters XXI-XXVIII) deals with the flight of the seven refugees (one has been killed) as they head south. Gordon arraigns John Splendid for not having given Argile sound advice and eventually discloses that Argile left in a galley before the commencement of battle. Dame Dubh reappears and reviles the retreating Campbells. They reach Glencoe and receive hospitality in a blind woman's cottage. It becomes apparent that her husband had recently died of plague - a situation which terrifies John Splendid and the other Highlanders. Gordon, however, copes very well, kissing the woman's hand on departure.

They then make for Glen Etive. When they reach the house in Dalness they find the fires lit and food on the table. They are too hungry and fatigued to resist and they settle down for the night. Elrigmore and Gordon have a conversation about Argile in which Gordon explains that the reason for the Marquis's weak behaviour is that he has been flattered into not knowing his duty by people like John Splendid and Auchinbreac and the consequence was his "shabby flight" from Inverlochy. John Splendid overhears this and assaults Gordon. Then Dame Dubh arrives

battering at the door with news that the apparently hospitable house is a trap and that the Glencoe MacDonalds will soon be upon them. They leave and seal off all the exits except the front door with the idea of locking the enemy inside once they have entered. However, this plan fails and they have to separate and make their own ways south to the Bridge of Urchy. Elrigmore ends up in the inn at Tynree where a bogus spae wife informs him that MacLachlan is making progress in his wooing of Betty. He then gets lost on Rannoch Moor but finally meets up with John Splendid just before the mist rises. They then proceed to the Bridge of Urchy, but the others have already gone, so they proceed homewards.

In section 4 in addition to the vivid descriptions of the flight of the fugitives through dreadful weather in Glencoe we learn of the essential weakness in the John Splendid's character which Gordon clearly identifies - that he is unable to make tough decisions when advising or dealing with friends like Argyll or the blind widow in Glencoe although he can be hard on his enemies easily enough:

“Did I not say to you you knew your duty in hate better than in affection.”(p123)

Furthermore, the appearance of Dame Dubh at Dalness assists the cohesion of the story, although her apparent recovery from her previous crazed state is less satisfactorily explained.

Section 5(Chapters XXIX-XXXV) opens with the two soldiers' return to Inveraray where the houses are being rebuilt “for MacCailein's first thought on his return from Edinburgh had been the comfort of the common people”(p273). They go to the castle to report to their chief. When they meet him he confesses his shame for his behaviour at Inverlochy but blames his flattering advisers for their part, saying that the only person whose advice he could trust was the blunt Lowland minister, Gordon. Eventually he pushes John Splendid for his true opinion on his behaviour at Inverlochy. John can dissemble no longer, and, in spite of clan loyalties, he finally

speaks his mind, saying that his chief has gone soft, putting books before valour. He then throws down his dagger in a challenge. When they leave, Argile weeps. To counterbalance this impression, the narrator then moves us forward to intimate that, when Argile was executed in 1661 after the Restoration, his death was in fact noble.

(The main plot ends at this point and the remaining chapters (XXXI-XXXV) deal with the resolution of the romantic plot.)

Elrigmore meets Betty who is walking with John Splendid. She tackles him again on the paternity of the baby grandchild of Peggy Mhor. By not denying it he appears to plead guilty (although we know he is not), probably to enhance Elrigmore in the lady's esteem. On hearing that MacLachlan has been bragging openly in the town of a love affair Elrigmore becomes incensed for the lady's honour and he and John Splendid contrive that he should challenge MacLachlan to a duel. This takes place at Tarra Dubh and MacLachlan is wounded. A skilly woman is sent for who turns out to be none other than Dame Dubh. She is able to reveal that MacLachlan is the father of Peggy Mhor's grandchild and that he appeared to be courting Betty only to have access to the baby. He is not in love with her. MacLachlan marries Nannie Ruadh and Elrigmore and Betty develop a loving relationship and will eventually marry. After his dispute with Argile John Splendid has resolved to take up his old trade as soldier of fortune and sets off for foreign climes. Only in the very last lines does it become clear to Betty that he was not the father of the child, and, as he departs, she stares after him wistfully, obviously a bit in love with him.

In the 5th section the political plot is resolved with MacCailein's admission of guilt and his accusation of his false advisers. He was, however, a man "tossed between philosophies" (p281) and the conflict of his allegiance to traditional Highland values with his vision of a more modern "civilised" future points towards the Highland resistance to change which will have to be faced up

to. The love plot is conveniently resolved by the revelations of Dame Dubh. Unfortunately, although she is a useful linking device in the story, the complete alteration in her character from crazed sybil to nurse and her unlikely appearances at convenient times do constitute a weakness in structure. (There is, however, historical evidence for the existence of a crazed sybil who followed the Campbell army.)⁹

John Splendid moves on the whole at a brisk pace and contains a great deal of action. Indeed, each of the five sections is dominated by powerful fight sequences: the brawl in Inveraray, the battle at the fort on Dunchuach, the battle of Inverlochy, the confrontation at Dalness and the duel at Tarra Dubh.

Neil Munro has been accused of not dealing with the problems of the Gael in his own time and "John Splendid" is obviously a historical novel which deals principally with the age old Campbell-Macdonald conflict, but at a deeper level it is exploring deeper themes which are of more modern concern. It probes the weakness of aspects of the Highland character and also explores the need for, and process of, change in the Highlands - a theme which he will return to in "The New Road" (1914). These themes become apparent in a study of the four main characters.

John Splendid himself is a veteran of the Thirty Years War. He is in his forties, is vain in his dress and is moderately good-looking. He is extremely boastful, in the mould of Alan Breck, although not nearly as strongly drawn as his Stevensonian counterpart. He comes nearest to him in the episode when he and Elrigmore are lost in the Moor of Rannoch and they kill two hounds which their pursuers have set on them:

"Oh, I'm the most wonderful fellow ever stepped heather, and I could be making a song on myself there and then if occasion allowed."(p262)

(cp Alan Breck's boastfulness in Kidnapped after the fight in the roundhouse with "This is the song of the sword of Alan".¹⁰) Yet in spite of the braggart in himself he is very popular with all around, male and female.

Above all he is a good, brave (sometimes superstitious) soldier in whom Argyll has the utmost confidence and there is no doubt that he is well practised and practical in the skills of war. Furthermore, although he may have been a mercenary selling his services to the highest bidder abroad, at home his loyalty to his clan and chief are without question. And herein lies his weakness: such is his desire not to offend he will not give blunt advice and speak his mind forcefully to his friends and to his chief for fear of hurting them and in some way diminishing their self-esteem. Consequently, when he sees that Argile is intent upon deserting his people and going to Edinburgh to direct reinforcements to Inveraray when Montrose is about to attack he flatters him by telling him he must go because:

"There's not a man there but would botch the whole business if you sent him...it must be his lordship or nobody."(p77)

and later he says:

"He'll know himself his going looks bad without my telling him, and I would at least leave him the notion that we were blind to his weakness."(p79)

At the end of the book after Argyll has allowed himself to be seriously misdirected by Auchinbreac to forsake the field at Inverlochy he pushes John Splendid very hard to know his opinion of his action. Only then reluctantly in anger and disdain does he finally give his true opinion to his chief - an opinion that will forbid any chance of future reconciliation:

"Purgatory's your portion, Argile, for Sunday's work that makes our name a mock to-day across the world...but here's my dagger...it's the

last tool I'll handle in the service of a scholar. Tomorrow the big old wars [abroad] for me." (p280)

It is the weakness of over-politeness, the desire not to offend when his duty is otherwise that Munro singles out here as the crucial weakness in the Highland character. As Argile says of John Splendid:

"You and you kind are the weak strong men of our Highland race. The soft tongue and the dour heart; the good man at most things but at your word." (p142)

John Splendid also illustrates the other problem of the Highlands which Munro seems to be hinting at - the reluctance to accept change. He accuses Argile of being too much of a scholar, of living in a world of books and documents:

"Paper and ink will be the Gael's undoing; my mother taught me, and my mother knew. So long as we lived by our hands we were the world's invincibles." (p280)

He cannot see that the Gael must move with the times and prefers to believe, like his namesake Fergus MacIvor in Waverley, in the old heroic values.

Gillesbeg Gruamach illustrates these problems from the other side, as it were. He is the most complex character in the book and is portrayed as a something of a Jekyll and Hyde figure, the tyrannical and bigoted judge of chapter II supporting clan faction and at the same time the sensitive scholarly man who wishes peace and prosperity for his people:

The place was swamped by incomers...all brought up here by Gillesbeg Gruamach Marquis of Argile, to teach his clans the arts of peace and merchandise.(p11)

He has “come - or wellnigh - come to the conclusion that this life was never designed by the Creator to be spent in the turmoil of faction and field” (p139). He is caught between the values of the clan system and the values and ideas of the more modern world into which he is trying to bring his clan. Endeavouring to rationalise his position he is indecisive and because he is not strongly and honestly advised by John Splendid and Auchinbreac he fails in his duty to his people with terrible consequences at the two most crucial junctures of the book: the sack of Inveraray and Inverlochy. Not surprisingly does he berate John Splendid for his flattery and his easy words:

“One word of honest duty from you at that time had kept me in Inneraora though Abijah’s array and Jereboam’s horse and foot were coming down the glens.”(pp141-142)

Nonetheless, Argyll has the vision and the will to introduce a more modern and peaceful way of life to his people and his reputation is saved by the forecast of his honourable death.

These Highlanders with their faults of dishonest kindness and indecisiveness are set against the blunt Presbyterian minister, Gordon, and the man of action, Montrose.

Gordon shows fearless courage all through the novel from his arrival in the fort of Dunchuach where he tends to a dying enemy at peril of his own life to his flight through Glencoe where he kisses the hand of the blind woman who may well have had the plague. He is the loyal and uncompromisingly truthful chaplain of Argyll and he identifies the cause of his faults as the advisers who keep “from him every rumour that might vex his ear” and colour “every event in such a manner as will please him”(p236) to the extent that they were responsible for his dereliction of duty at Inverlochy and his “shabby flight”(p239). He is unyielding in his criticism of John Splendid as one who “knew your duty in hate better than in affection.”(p215)

Montrose, likewise, is contrasted with the two Highlanders as a man who is decisive and the soul of honour. Examples of this are in his quite deliberate connivance at the presence of the fugitives in Glen Aray when he hears the child cry and his extremely honourable treatment of the prisoners of war on the countermarch and at the field of Inverlochy. Indeed, he shows real magnanimity to them in a much wider sense:

“as Cavaliers who, clansmen or no clansmen of the Campbell chief, have done well for old Scotland’s name abroad, I think you deserve a little more consideration at our hands at this juncture than common prisoners of war can lay claim to.” (p182)

As regards the character of Elrimore, the Highland narrator, he is more straightforward and sees the faults of both John Splendid and Argyll but he can do little to correct either. The main interest that he has for us is as the instrument of Munro’s narrative technique. He narrates the story from the comfort of his old age and we find the narrative broken frequently with melancholy retrospects which give the impression that Elrimore is viewing the world from a happier and more civilised time and that the world has in fact moved on from the bloodletting of 1645.

As regards language Munro continues to use the Gaelic-English he had pioneered in The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories but in John Splendid it is without doubt handled with more confidence and control and less extravagance. Indeed, the author enjoys a sly joke now and again with such phrases as:

“What is it that you want?” he asked, burring out his Gaelic r’s. (p40)

There are, of course, no “r’s” in the above quotation, so we must assume that the character spoke the Gaelic words “*De tha sibh ag iarraidh?*” “What do you want?”

Authenticity of atmosphere is also gained through such devices as using genuine Gaelic proverbs

e.g. “*Ruigidh an ro-ghiullach[d] air an ro-ghalar.*” “Good nursing will overcome the worst disease.” (p87)¹¹

and

“The man who waits long at the ferry will get over some day.” (p208) “*Am fear a bhios fad aig an aiseig, gheibh e thairis uaireigin.*”¹²

The author is also aware of the Gaelic fascination with genealogy or *sloinneadh* when he describes two of the fugitives arguing about this subject:

“So the two would be off again into the entanglements of Highland pedigree.” (p233)

And a nice Gaelic touch is obtained when he has John Splendid refer to his gun as *Mairi Og* (p102) just as the famous bard Duncan Ban MacIntyre referred to his gun as *NicCoiseim*.¹³

The many fine and detailed descriptions of nature, however, give the book its greatest Gaelic authenticity. Nature is described minutely down to different plants, grasses and animals in a specific location to give sensuous delight in the manner of the great nature bards Duncan MacIntyre and Alasdair MacDonald. The following passage, selected by John Buchan¹⁴ for its poetic quality will serve to illustrate:

“I know corries in Argile that whisper silken to the winds with juicy grasses, corries where the deer love to prance deep in the cool dew, and the beasts of far-off woods come in bands at their seasons and together rejoice. I have seen the hunter in them and the shepherd too, coarse men in life and occupation, come sudden among the blowing rush and whispering reed, among the bog-flower and the cannoch, unheeding the moor-hen and the cailzie-cock rising, or the stag of ten at pause, while they stood, passionate adventurers in a rapture of the mind, held as it

were by the spirit of such places as they lay in a sloeberry bloom of haze, the spirit of old good songs, the baffling surmise of the piper and the bard. To those corries of my native place will be coming in the yellow moon of brock and founmart - the beasts that dote on the autumn eves - the People of Quietness; have not I seen their lanthorns and heard their laughter in the night? - so that they must be blessed corries, so endowed since the days when the gods dwelt in them without tartan and spear in the years of the peace that had no beginning.”(pp219-220)

In addition it is possible to see towards the end of this passage strong hints of the Golden Age which was to become such an important symbol in the works of writers of the Scottish Renaissance such Neil Gunn and Lewis Grassie Gibbon.

John Splendid is not only Neil Munro's first extant novel but also the first novel about the Highlands of Scotland written by a Highlander "from the inside". There was no tradition of novel writing in Gaelic for him to draw on - the first Gaelic novel Dun-Aluinn by Iain MacCormaic was not written until 1912¹⁵ and, when it did come, was not to be compared with Munro's own efforts - so he was very much a pioneer and on the whole a very successful one. If we omit the rather strained and inconsistent device of Dame Dubh as a supernatural means of linking the story, the convolutions of the romantic plot towards the end and a rather weakly drawn heroine, we have a very powerfully executed story about a major event in Highland history. Hugh MacDiarmid's criticism that Munro was parochial and that he preferred "the little wars of Lorn to the conflict of real life" is unfair.¹⁶ Munro was seeking to write a specifically Highland novel and, though the wars of Lorn may have seemed little enough to MacDiarmid on a British or world canvas, to the Highlander they were all too real. Furthermore, Munro, in his analysis of Highland character and

the process of change in the Highlands is opening up an investigation already hinted at in “The Lost Pibroch” and which would continue to interest him throughout the rest of his literary career. It would also interest such contemporaries of MacDiarmid’s as Gunn, Mitchison, MacColla and MacKenzie in the Scottish Renaissance.

Finally, it is also worth noting that in this novel a tolerance and sympathy towards Catholicism is evident, especially through the character of John Splendid who describes himself as like the parson of Kilmalieu who scooped a hole in the bottom of the Pre-Reformation baptismal font so that he could baptise Protestants and Catholics alike (p25) and in Chapter 5 where there is clear sympathy for the young girl and her father who are forced to leave the town for the simple reason that she had visited Catholic relatives in the Islands (pp48-49). This is developed further in the “Post ’45 Novels” Doom Castle, The Shoes of Fortune and Children of Tempest.

- ¹ The text of John Splendid used throughout is the Inveraray Edition, Edinburgh, 1935
- ² Blanche Dugdale (daughter of Marquis of Lorne's sister), Family Homespun, London, 1940: pp6-7
- ³ Advocates' Library MS, West Highland Tales Vol.II p175. Published in J.A.MacDonald (Ed.), Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Glasgow Vol 5, 1958: p35
- ⁴ Ibid. Advocates' Library pp100-101 and MacDonald, pp85-87
- ⁵ Annie MacKenzie (Ed.), Orain Iain Luim, lines190-194, Edinburgh, 1964: p20
- ⁶ Ibid.lines 210-214, p22
- ⁷ Ibid.lines 242-245, p24
- ⁸ John Buchan (Ed.), The Poetry of Neil Munro, Edinburgh, 1931: p77
- ⁹ Ronald Williams, The Heather and the Gale, Colonsay, 1997: p125
- ¹⁰ R.L.Stevenson, Kidnapped and Catriona, Ed. Emma Letley, Oxford, 1986: Ch10, p62
- ¹¹ Alexander Nicolson, A Collection of Gaelic Proverbs and Familiar Phrases, Edinburgh, 1881: p341
- ¹² Ibid. p11
- ¹³ Angus MacLeod(Ed.), "Oran do'n Ghunna dh'an ainm NicCoiseim"(No.27), The Songs of Duncan Ban MacIntyre, Edinburgh, 1952: pp226-229
- ¹⁴ Buchan, op.cit. p9
- ¹⁵ Iain MacCormaic, Dun-Aluinn, Glasgow, 1912
- ¹⁶ Hugh MacDiarmid, The Scottish Educational Journal, 3rd July, 1925: p6

CHAPTER 5

THE POST '45 NOVELS

Doom Castle

The Shoes of Fortune

Children of Tempest

Following in the tradition of John Splendid Neil Munro went on to publish three further historical romantic novels between 1901 and 1903. These were Doom Castle, Shoes of Fortune, and Children of Tempest. They have the common factor of being set in the period immediately after the Jacobite Rising of 1745 although none of them are deeply involved in a detailed way with the actual historical events of that time.

CHAPTER 5(a)

Doom Castle (1901)¹

Doom Castle owes its principal inspiration to Dunderave Castle, a beautifully appointed fortified tower house on the shores of Loch Fyne, about five miles north of Inveraray. This building was restored by Sir Robert Lorimer in 1911 - a restoration to which Munro was later to object vigorously.² The book, however, was written when the building was still in a ruinous state and it is its decaying condition which Munro was to make an important symbol throughout the novel.

In terms of its literary roots this novel catches the time and atmosphere of Stevenson's Catriona. It is set in 1752 with the trial of James of the Glen (*sic* Munro) taking place during the action.³ During the trial the town is full of lawyers, dominated by the powerful figures of Argyll himself, the Justice General, and Lords Kilkerran and Elchies. The French Count Victor, hero of the

story, finds it unwise as a foreigner to go into Inveraray immediately after the trial because “there was associated with the name of the condemned man as art and part in the murder that of a Highland officer in the service of the French.”(p105) - a reference to Stevenson’s Alan Breck whom we are told in Kidnapped wore the French army uniform.

Another strong influence on Doom Castle is Scott’s The Bride of Lammermoor. The character of the proud domestic, Mungo Boyd, who devises all kinds of strategies to give the impression that his impoverished master is, in fact, quite wealthy has close affinities with Caleb Balderstone⁴ (although Mungo has a very definite personality of his own), and the crumbling castle of Wolf’s Crag with its decaying splendour and the general atmosphere of The Bride of Lammermoor clearly provide a Gothic prototype for Munro’s novel. Add to this Munro’s boyhood familiarity with Radcliffe’s Udolpho and The Italian and Walpole’s Otranto and it is easy to see that he was well equipped to exploit the Gothic genre.

Doom Castle is a Highland Gothic novel and at the same time it satirises the genre. The castle itself is a place of eerie staircases and echoing rooms set on an shadowy off-shore island where winds moan through the mainland trees. There are mysterious midnight visits and violent skirmishes and the haunting sound of a flageolet is heard often at night. One of the old domestics is a seer and has the Evil Eye of which all the inhabitants are afraid. And in this castle an apparently wicked father keeps his beautiful daughter locked away - for the simple reason that he knows (quite rightly) that the man who is courting her is and out and out rogue! The story is shot through with satire and irony at the expense of the genre e.g. Count Victor says to himself of his miraculous escape down a secret tunnel:

But figure a so-convenient tunnel in connection with a prison cell! It was too good to be true.(p247)

and with the more obvious humour provided by the shrewd, well-meaning but officious Mungo Boyd.

The plot deals with the arrival at the castle of a very romantic and honourable French Count and Jacobite sympathiser, Victor de Montaiglon. He has come on a mission to seek vengeance on a Highland double agent called Drimdarroch who had drawn his pay from the British Government whilst also taking sides with the Jacobites and, as a result of these intrigues, was responsible for the death of Cecile Favart, Victor's lover. The Count takes up residence in Doom and is intrigued by the playing of a flageolet by the urbane and handsome Sim MacTaggart, the Duke of Argyll's Chamberlain, for the benefit of his lover, the Baron of Doom's daughter Olivia (in spite of the fact that he had trifled with the affections of her mother twenty years before! (p198)). It turns out that this romantic lover is also an unscrupulous rogue who has defrauded the Baron of his property of Drimdarroch. He makes several attempts on Victor's life to protect himself from eventual detection - for he, in fact, is the double agent who had been using the name Drimdarroch when abroad in France - and because he is jealous of the favour which Victor has found with Olivia. In the end he is slain by the Baron when, demented, he comes to seek his final revenge on Victor. At bottom the gallant lover was merely a sordid self-seeker.

Like John Splendid the plot has action in plenty - although on a less grand scale - with the opening attack on Victor by a band of hired thugs masquerading as MacFarlanes, the two night raids on Doom, the beautifully described duel at dawn between Victor and MacTaggart, and the latter's death at the hands of the Baron. There is, however, a weakness in that the story becomes somewhat convoluted towards the end and is difficult to follow. Indeed, Munro himself appears to have been a little confused in that Doom's late wife appears to be called Christina at one part of the novel (p206) and Mary at the end (p322). Furthermore, the reader identifies the villain just beyond

the half-way mark and waiting for confirmation of his identity by the main characters becomes a little wearing.

The main theme, then, is the triumph of good over evil and this is supported, on the one hand, by the scrupulously honourable French count who surrenders himself after severely wounding the Chamberlain and in the end will marry the thinly written maiden of Doom, Olivia (“Miss Milk and Water” as she is called by her rival Mrs Petullo (p294)), and, on the other, by the smooth-talking unscrupulous MacTaggart who has all the panache of Stevenson’s James Durie in The Master of Ballantrae. Although the undoubted villain, he creates much interest in that he is a Jekyll and Hyde figure. His good side shows him to be, like Gilian the Dreamer, a man of great sensibility, a 19th Century Man of Feeling who insists that his drinking companions savour the beauty of a moonlit scene:

In the midst of their half circle the Chamberlain lay back and drank the
vision in by gloating eyes (p166)

who enjoys playing the flageolet and who is moved to tears by a piper’s tune (p212). He is a man who wants to be good but the Hyde in him is too strong. When trying to distance himself from Mrs Petullo he says:

“There’s my punishment: by something sham ... I must go through life beguiled
from right and content. Here’s what was to be the close of my folly, and Sim
MacTaggart eager to be a good man if he got anything like a chance, but never
the chance for poor Sim MacTaggart!” (p87)

But as with John Splendid there is a deeper underlying theme which questions the direction of Highland society. The novel has two locations, Doom Castle and Inveraray Castle, and these locations are powerful symbols. Doom Castle, as its name suggests, signals gloom and

despair. Crippled by poverty it is falling into steady decay. It is the seat of Lamond, Baron of Doom, a supporter of the ill-fated House of Stuart who are destined never to return. Inveraray Castle with its new town, on the other hand, signals prosperity and order. It is the new castle of the Enlightenment, the seat of Archibald Campbell, 3rd Duke of Argyll, supporter of the Hanoverian Government and the Lord Justice General, who commissioned Roger Morris, architect, and William Adam, clerk of works, to undertake its construction. It is the home of many books, the venue for learned disquisition by fine minds like Lords Elchies and Kilkerran and the scene of sophisticated musical gatherings.

The owners of these castles reinforce their symbolism.

The melancholy figure of the Jacobite Lamond, the Baron of Doom, broods over the whole book. He supports James of the Glen whose execution is intimated in the novel and of which he says:

“Murder was done this day in the guise of justice” (p98)

The only act of loyalty to his cause and defiance of the new regime which he can now perform is the charade of dressing up in Highland regalia in the old chapel of his keep:

He drew them out hurriedly upon the floor but yet with an affectionate tenderness, as if they were the relics of a sacristy, and with eagerness substituted the gay tartan for his dull mulberry Saxon habiliments.

(p147)

(And, as if continuing the simile, he treats them with the reverence of a priest vesting for Mass.) Although he strikes the final blow for justice in the novel, he must still go into exile in France where the majority of the Jacobites are men of less than honourable character and

“James [Stuart, the “Old Pretender”] and Jacquette were often...

indifferent enough...about the cause our friends were exiled there for.”

(p142)

and

“Charles ... was not...an inspiring object of veneration.” (p142)

The Duke of Argyll, on the other hand, is a scholar and a lawyer. He is usually good natured and cheerful but firm on matters of grave importance of law and order, even with his wife who can normally manipulate him. Of Victor after the duel he says:

“ No more of that, Jean; the man must thole his trial, for I have gone too far to draw back even if I had the will to humour you.”

There was one tone of her husband's his wife knew too decisive for her contending with, and now she heard it. (p242)

Despite the rights and wrongs of the James of the Glen trial and Argyll's part in it (and here there is an implied resemblance to Stevenson's Lord Prestongrange in Catriona) there is no doubt that he represents the new Scotland of the Enlightenment and a more civilised Highlands. Referring to imprisoning Victor so that he can stand trial for his part in the duel against his Chamberlain he says:

“My father would have been somewhat more summary in circumstances like these” (p230)

- civilisation has moved on in Argyll. And Victor himself has reasonable expectations of fair play:

Count Victor's breakfast [in his cell]...was generous enough to confirm his belief that in Argyll's hands he was at least assured of the forms of justice. (p232)

In addition to his use of symbolism in Doom Castle Neil Munro's technique shows considerable progress in another important area - his portrayal of female characters. Maurice Lindsay accuses him of depicting women who are mere "verbal wraiths".⁵ Whilst this is just comment on Betty Brown in John Splendid and Olivia in this novel it would be less than fair to the portrayals of Kate Petullo and the Duchess of Argyll.

Kate Petullo, a "small town Argyllshire Emma Bovary" as Francis Russell Hart calls her⁶, is no cardboard cut-out. She is powerfully drawn and closely observed. She has a sharp, cruel beauty:

Opposite the unhappy lawyer sat a lady of extraordinary beauty - a haughty, cold supercilious sort of beauty, remarkable mainly from the consciousness of its display. Her profile might have been cut from marble by a Greek; her neck and bust were perfect, but her shoulders, more angular than was common in that time of bottle-shape, were carried too grandly for a gentle nature. (p80)

She delights in her gauche husband's discomfiture when he spills a compote over himself at dinner in Inveraray Castle while she flirts strongly with Sim MacTaggart. He had been her lover until lately but now he wishes to relinquish her for Olivia. In an endeavour to retain his love she uses all the seductive powers at her disposal:

(she) lifted up her mouth and dropped a swooning lash over her passionate orbs.(p114)

Indeed, such is her passion for him and her contempt for her husband that she openly courts MacTaggart in front of her husband in her own home. To please him she admits to having got her lawyer husband to ruin Doom by defrauding him of the Drimdarroch estate and she threatens further vengeance on that family:

"You made me pauperise her father, Sim; I'm sorry it was not worse. I'll see that Petullo has them roused at the door."(p181)

Then realising that she is making no progress she embarrasses him by announcing his forthcoming marriage to Olivia when such a happening was far from certain.

Later, ironically, she causes a distraction for Sim in the duel with Victor which results in his serious injury and, while tending his wounds, she is driven to distraction when in a fever he reaffirms his love for Olivia. She has her revenge when a letter she wrote to Sim revealing his identity as the double agent who had used the name Drimdarroch was intercepted by Doom, Olivia and Victor.

The Duchess of Argyll, likewise, is no two dimensional character although her part in the action is much smaller than Mrs Petullo's. She is a warm person who in her sixties is still very much in love with her husband. She is not a Gael and has brought some of the sophistication of the outside world to the Ducal court. She has an unerring female intuition when dealing with men and is quick to identify Victor as the victim and MacTaggart the villain long before the evidence has been discovered. Indeed, whilst cunningly appearing to maintain a politically correct stance, she gives sound advice to Victor for his safety:

"If I were to meet this person we speak of [i.e. Victor himself], I should - but for the terror I know I should feel in his society - tell him that so long as he did not venture within a couple of miles of this castle he was perfectly safe from interference."(p256)

Furthermore, although she knows that she has very real influence over her husband, she is shrewd enough to know when it is no longer judicious to interfere (p242).

As regards language there is, perhaps injudiciously in view of its setting, a considerable lessening of Gaelic-inflected English in this book ; indeed the only heavily marked use of it is in a speech of Olivia's in Ch XVI:

“Isn’t that a father, Count Victor!” cried Olivia...“But he is the strange father too, that will be pretending that he has forgotten the old times and the old customs of our dear people...” (p140)

although there are individual Gaelic words deployed throughout and again Nicolson’s Gaelic Proverbs is in evidence:

“*Ni droch dhuine dan da fein.*” “A bad man makes his own destiny.” (p316) ⁷.

The major linguistic innovation in the volume, however, is the wide deployment of French and Scots.

Much of the book is seen through the eyes of the honourable and chivalric Count Victor and the copious use of simple French phrases and French-inflected English in his speech helps to reinforce **his** perception of all that is going on. Indeed, a lasting impression that we have is of the sophistication of France compared with the decay of Doom. This language also strengthens our awareness of the life of the Jacobite community in France who are referred to throughout and whom Doom and Olivia are soon to join.

The *tour de force* of the novel, however, is the racy Scots of Mungo Boyd, the small shrewd and cunning East Coaster from Dysart who is an alien in the Gaelic speaking lands of Argyll. Indeed, the language and the character are inseparable. Mungo is dedicated to his master and, in order to save the reputation of the house, he resorts to all sorts of ploys the execution of which provide some hilarious incidents e.g. he promises juggled hare for Victor’s dinner on the night of his arrival only to be able to provide rabbit. When confronted with this fact he replies:

“A rabbit!...Weel if it was a rabbit it was a gey big ane, that’s a’ I can say.” (p37)

In a desperate bid to save the menage from penury he actively encourages the relationship between Olivia and MacTaggart:

“I aye keepit my he’rt up wi’ the notion that him doon-by the coat
 belongs to wad hae made a match o’t and saved us frae beggary.”(p282)

His summing up of the situation when hope is past and exile inevitable is a moving epitaph for the house of Doom and the now decadent cause to which it gave support:

“And noo’ it’s a’ by wi’t; it’s the end o’ the auld ballant...I’ve kent auld
 Doom in times o’ rowth and splendour, and noo I’m spared to see’t
 roused, the laird a dyvour and a hameless wanderer ower the face o’ the
 earth. He’s gaun abroad, he tells me, and ettles to sit doon aboot
 Dunkerque in France. It’s but fair, maybe, that whaur his forbears
 squandered he should gang wi’ the little that’s to the fore. I mind o’ his
 faither gaun awa’ at the last hove up, a fair Jeshurun, his een like to
 loup oot o’ his heid wi fat, and comin’ back a pooked craw frae the
 dicing and the drink nae doot among the scattered-brained white
 cockades.” (p281)

Doom Castle, then, is an experiment in the Gothic tradition which not merely satirises the genre but also goes much further in that, continuing the tradition begun in John Splendid, it makes a statement about Highland society. Like Scott’s Redgauntlet but in a much less serious tone it rings the death knell on the Stuart cause and implies that the new way of the Enlightened House of Argyll is the way forward. In addition Munro enhances his novel by the deployment of French nuances and widespread use of protracted passages of fluent demotic Scots in the mouth of Mungo Boyd. Both of these strands he develops further in his next novel The Shoes of Fortune.

- ¹ The text used throughout is Neil Munro, Doom Castle, Edinburgh, 1901
- ² Neil Munro, The Looker On, Edinburgh, 1933: pp44-49
- ³ The action of the book is clearly intended to be set in 1752 although Munro is sometimes imprecise about chronology and has Argyll tell MacTaggart to “wake up! this is ’55.” (p109)
- ⁴ “...after creating a character with much skill and pains, his familiar look suggested that he must be stolen from somewhere. I had to read the most of Scott over to learn that my deucedly clever Mungo Boyd was only Caleb Balderstone with an alias. And he had to go, poor man.” Letter from Neil Munro to Kate Turner, 5th December, 1899. (Property of Mrs. Lesley Bratton) Clearly Munro changed his mind and decided not to remove Mungo Boyd.
- ⁵ Maurice Lindsay, History of Scottish Literature, London 1977: p346
- ⁶ Francis Russell Hart, The Scottish Novel, London, 1978: p166
- ⁷ Alexander Nicolson, A Collection of Gaelic Proverbs and Familiar Phrases, Edinburgh, 1881: p333

CHAPTER 5 (b)

The Shoes of Fortune (1901)¹

The Shoes of Fortune differs, quite refreshingly, from Munro's previous historical romances in that it is not set in the Argyllshire Highlands and, indeed, most of it is set outside Scotland itself. The Scottish parts of the book are set mainly in the area around the old village of Newton Mearns, near Munro's home at Waterfoot where he lived before moving to Gourrock. The other parts are mainly set in Dunkerque and Helvoetsluys (probably influenced by Stevenson's Catriona) and a large section is located in Paris and Versailles.

The story is divided into seven movements and, like Stevenson's Kidnapped, the opening and close of the novel deal with the most romantic episodes where the hero leaves home in unfortunate circumstances and in the end returns to take up his rightful place, in David Balfour's case as the true heir to the House of Shaws and in Paul Greig's, the hero of The Shoes of Fortune, as the innocent and honourable son of Quentin Greig of Hazel Den and future husband of Isobel Fortune of neighbouring Kirkillstane. The intervening sections, however, grow more interesting because the heroes of both books become involved in major political events connected with the Jacobite cause and the significance of the respective plots is transformed from local to national and beyond.

The Shoes of Fortune opens with a lively scene in Glasgow where Paul Greig is rusticated from the university for throwing snowballs at a Baillie to the shame of his family. He returns to Hazel Den near Newton Mearns where he helps his father work the family croft. He meets and falls in love with his neighbour Isobel Fortune but is too naive to see that his love is being reciprocated and thinks her affections are meant for David Borland of whom he quickly becomes inordinately jealous. In the meantime his Uncle Andrew, a wild and depraved Jacobite, comes

home in a poor state of health and soon dies. He leaves his few belongings which include a pair of red shoes of Eastern origin - "The Shoes of Sorrow" or "The Shoes of Fortune" - to Paul. These give Paul the desire to travel and explore and are a symbol of reckless restlessness and wanderlust which Quentin Greig regards as his family's curse. Wearing them one evening Paul goes to Isobel's home merely to see the light in her room but encounters Borland coming away from the house. Insults are exchanged and a duel arranged for the next morning at which Paul thinks he has killed his opponent.

After a hurried leave-taking of his parents he rides frantically for the port of Borroustouness where he encounters a Captain Dan Risk, a figure not unlike Stevenson's Hoseason, who seems to know the nature of his crime and offers him terms for a passage to Nova Scotia. Once the ship is underway Paul discovers from a friendly and honourable seaman called Horn that Risk and the crew are rogues who intend to scuttle the ship and claim insurance for the cargo which they have secretly landed at Blackness. The ship founders and Risk and his crew take to the boat, leaving Horn and Greig to their fate. They are saved, however, by the timely appearance of the "Roi Rouge", captained by Antoine Thurot, a gentleman corsair; and, as at the similar point in *Kidnapped*, the book enters the political arena.

The ship reaches Dunkerque where Paul enjoys the hospitality of Thurot and his friend and lukewarm Jacobite supporter, the Irish Lord Clancarty. He meets a fat Jesuit priest, a Fleming who goes by the name of Father Hamilton, and a young Scottish woman, Clementina Walkinshaw. Paul is immediately attracted to Clementina and in a short time she arranges to get Paul a job as Fr. Hamilton's secretary on a European tour which he has to undertake although she clearly dislikes Hamilton intensely. Knowing their mutual antagonism Thurot finds it incredible that Clementina should have arranged a position for Paul with the priest and at the same time hints are dropped of a connection between her and Prince Charles Edward. Meanwhile

Paul goes to thank Clementina who regrets that he may be being corrupted by the “sophisticated” society of Dunkerque. Paul at once assumes that her reason for sending him away with Fr. Hamilton is to protect him from this and she herself leaps at such an explanation:

“Am I no the careful mother of you to put you in the hands o’ the clergy?”(p116)

By now it is obvious that Paul has fallen in love with Clementina and, observing her loneliness, he offers to cancel the position with Hamilton to stay near her. At this she grows angry and accuses him of making fun of her. Then she tells him to write to her each day so that she will know exactly where he is, but the priest is not to be told of this correspondence or its means of delivery (as yet unknown). Finally, banking on his obvious infatuation, she tells him to wear his red shoes for her. Obviously Paul is being exploited as a means of spying on the priest’s whereabouts and activities.

The setting of the novel now moves to Paris. The priest wakes Paul at 5 a.m. three days earlier than arranged to set off on their tour, obviously a ploy to give the slip to unwanted observers of his whereabouts. Walkinshaw’s servant, Bernard, however, has secured employment with the priest after being “sacked” by his mistress and tells Paul that he will see to the delivery of correspondence between Paul and the lady. On arrival in Versailles they visit the Place d’Armes where Paul recognises Prince Charles Edward whom he had seen once in Glasgow as a boy. A few days later Hamilton gives Paul a letter in Miss Walkinshaw’s handwriting to deliver to the prince. This is in fact a trick to get the prince to meet Hamilton who had intended to shoot him. The plan, however, is forestalled and Buhot, a police inspector, substitutes for the prince and the bullets are removed from the gun. Paul and the priest are arrested. Buhot tells Paul that there have been a number of attempts on the Prince’s life by the Jesuits and the real object of their attention is one of the Order’s superiors, Fr.Fleuriau. He asks Paul to try to get further information from Hamilton while in prison. Paul refuses to stoop to this method and accepts the possibility of long term imprisonment in Bicetre and Galbanon. Whilst in Bicetre a sous-officer

gives him a letter from Bernard informing him that the correspondence with Miss Walkinshaw can be continued - and it does. When he meets Hamilton he finds him to be extremely happy that his attempt on the Prince had failed because it meant that he could live with his conscience. Then Paul is threatened with the Galbanon, the most severe of French prisons. At this news Hamilton decides that they should attempt to escape and they set out across the prison roofs at night, finding windows and trapdoors etc. conveniently open to assist their escape. They then go into hiding in Paris. Hamilton finds out that Paul is sending letters to Clementina through Bernard and that Bernard took the bullets out of his pistol. Hamilton then admits that the letter to the Prince in Clementina's handwriting was a forgery. So we have plot and counterplot: the Jesuits seeking to kill Prince Charles Edward and Clementina, the Prince, Buhot and Bernard spying on the Jesuits through Paul's letters to Clementina. At this point, an Alan Breck character, MacKellar of Kilbride, the brother of Paul's room mate at Glasgow University, happens to meet Paul in a tavern and warns him off Hamilton.

Hamilton disappears and Paul decides to go back to Dunkerque where Thurot tells him he and the priest were pawns in a game, that neither are now in danger and that Hamilton had been permitted to escape by Buhot in the hope that he would lead them to the Jesuit superior Fleuriau who had by now been captured. Then Paul goes to see Clementina but is too naive and still too infatuated with her to see her part in all of this and believes that she sent Bernard to spy on them to protect him! She tells him she has arranged a commission for him in the Auvergne Regiment, but he does not want to go since he will be separated from her. He then declares his love for her. She tells him she is merely a proxy for Isobel Fortune and besides she has a preference elsewhere. Meanwhile Paul has seen a debauched Charles Edward on the streets of Dunkerque calling himself M. Albany and soon after he is challenged to a duel by an apparent drunk called Bonnat who later admits to having been instructed to get Paul out of the way by the Prince. Paul then

visits Clementina to seek an explanation of the Prince's behaviour and to his surprise finds the Prince staying at her house. The Prince admits to having spoken to Bonnat after dinner when he was drunk but had no recollection of the order he gave. At this point Paul declares his complete opposition to the Jacobite cause.

Paul then goes to fight with his regiment in Prussia and is wounded in battle. By chance he is tended by MacKellar of Kilbride who assists him to desert. They make for Helvoetsluys where MacKellar knows Hamilton to be. Kilbride explains to Paul exactly how he has been used and that his letters were the means of informing the French Cabinet of Hamilton's movements. Bernard had passed on all his letters to Buhot. Clementina had organised all this on behalf of her lover, the Prince, to get to the source of the Jesuit plot and now the Order had been suppressed in France. The Prince had set Bonnat on Paul because he was envious of his friendship with Clementina. In the meantime Hamilton is being threatened by his own order because they blame him for betraying Fleuriau. They return to Dunkerque. On a visit to Thurot's house Paul overhears a plan being discussed by the Prince and Thurot for the French invasion of Britain on behalf of Charles Edward. He is captured because of his red shoes but eventually escapes with MacKellar and Hamilton across the Channel in a small boat.

When they reach London Paul seeks an interview with Pitt who is more inclined to believe Paul's information of the invasion than that of another Scot because Paul is not seeking to bargain with it. Then Paul makes a clean breast of his crime against David Borland and tells Pitt he is going to hand himself over to the Lord Advocate in Edinburgh. When he reaches Edinburgh by chance he hears that Captain Risk is in a sorry plight in prison and goes to visit him. Struck by the appalling prospect of what he saw there he decides not to give himself up but to go to America. This necessitates him travelling west and so he takes this opportunity to have a last look at his old home at Hazel Den without informing his parents. His horse goes lame, however, and he

has no choice but to stay the night at the inn at Newton, is recognised by his red shoes and is reconciled to his parents. Furthermore, as it happens, David Borland is not dead (Paul's shot had merely grazed his temple) and he had married, not Isobel, but Jean Fortune, so the way is clear for Paul to marry Isobel who had been waiting faithfully for his return.

The Shoes of Fortune, then, has two distinct aspects to it. On the one hand, it is a romance which depends for much of its action on the device of the red shoes by which the hero will be recognised as a Greig all over Britain and France and as a result his fortunes will be affected for good or ill. Closely connected with this are other frequent and unlikely coincidences which occur throughout the story and keep the action moving. On the other hand, at a deeper level, Munro tackles matters of historical interest: he interprets albeit fairly superficially but nonetheless pioneeringly in Scottish fiction the position of the Jesuits in France in the 18th Century before the suppression of the Order in 1762 and, like Scott in Redgauntlet, comments on the wisdom of further support for Jacobitism after the failure of the '45.

As regards the former, there is no doubt that Munro knew what he was doing for in the opening words of the story the narrator warns us of the way our lives are influenced by chance and coincidence:

It is an odd thing, chance - the one element to baffle the logician and make the scheming of the wisest look as foolish in the long run as the sandy citadel a child builds upon the shore without any thought of the incoming tide. A strange thing, chance; and but for chance I might this day be the sheriff of a shire...if it had not been for so trifling a circumstance as the burning of an elderly woman's batch of scones.(p1)

and again

I began these chronicles with a homily upon the pregnancy of chance that gives the simplest of our acts oftentimes far-reaching and appalling consequences. It is clear that I had never become the Spoiled Horn and vexed my parents' lives had not a widow woman burned her batch of scones, and though perhaps the pair of shoes in the chest bequeathed to me by my Uncle Andrew were without the magic influence he and I gave credit for, it is probable that I had made a different flight from Scotland had they not led me the way of Daniel Risk. (p272)

Munro, then, is quite deliberately exploring the use of coincidence and chance in his story and the red Shoes of Fortune become the device which unifies the plot. He was clearly enjoying the entire idea and not only does he end with the amusing pun on Paul's wife's maiden name:

My Shoes of Fortune, she will sometimes say, laughing, brought me first and last Miss Fortune. [i.e. herself] (p324)

but it was also a family joke for Munro's wife's mother's maiden name was, in fact, Fortune and his second daughter's name was Euphemia Fortune Munro (born 1890). Other "in" jokes which Munro clearly enjoyed are the naming of the tenement in Glasgow where he stayed as a student as Crombie's Land (in reality the house where he was born in Inveraray) and calling his room mate in that house MacKellar after Archie MacKellar, his foster brother, whom he roomed with when he first came to Glasgow. Indeed, it is worthwhile remembering what Munro said of his novels when looking back on them in 1921; it is particularly true of The Shoes of Fortune:

I fancy I shall never write the story of my own childhood, though there were tragic and pathetic elements in it which would make a dozen novels of the grimy sort now in vogue. I sought escape from them in the

imagination for so long, and so ardently, that I couldn't help becoming a romancer in the end.²

When the setting moves to France we are introduced to the first part of the “political” plot of the novel which deals with the Jesuit plot on the life of Prince Charles Edward. The idea of Jesuits being a subject for major, if rather superficial and conventional, treatment in Scottish literature is certainly new although Munro does refer to both Catholicism and Jesuits frequently throughout his work. It is interesting to note, however, that Munro's friend R.B. Cunningham Graham produced his study of the Jesuits in Paraguay A Vanished Arcadia (on which the film The Mission was based) also in 1901. The source for this episode appears to be Pickle the Spy (1896), a study of the government spy in the Jacobite ranks, young Glengarry, written again by a person whom Munro very much admired, Andrew Lang. The key passage would seem to be:

He admits that he acted as a *mouton*, or prison spy, and gives a dreadful account of the horrors of Galbanon, where men lay in the dark and dirt for half a lifetime. MacAllester next prosed endlessly on the alleged Jesuit connection with Damien's attack on Louis XV, and insists that the Jesuits, nobody knows why, meant to assassinate Prince Charles. He was in very little danger from Jesuits.³

Munro takes up this challenge and constructs a completely fictitious conspiracy in which the Jesuits use Hamilton, an apparently disreputable member of their Order, to attempt the assassination of Prince Charles. Galbanon is pointed out to Paul as his fate if he fails to co-operate in traducing the priest, and the escape from Bicetre, the smaller prison (clearly based on Inveraray jail, even to the parrot in the cage) near Galbanon, is for sheer tension one of the best recounted episodes of the book - the more so because the coincidences of open windows and trapdoors which have been

deliberately arranged to permit Hamilton and Paul's escape provide a satirical humour and counterpoint beautifully the "conventional" coincidences in the rest of the novel. The counter-conspiracy masterminded by Walkinshaw is masterly, using Paul and his red shoes and letters as a way of providing the Jacobites with news of the Jesuit plotting against the Prince and it is these letters in the end which lead to the capture of the Jesuit superior Fleuriau and the suppression of the Order in France. In Ch.35 Kilbride tells Paul:

"...the Marshal Duke de Bellisle, and Monsieur Florentin, and Monsieur Berrier, and all the others of the Cabinet, had Fleuriau's name and direction from yourself, and found the plot had some connection with the affair of Damiens."(p260)

and

"She [Walkinshaw] made you and this Bernard the means of putting an end to the Jesuit plot upon his Royal Highness by discovering the source of it, and now the Jesuits, as I'm told, are to be driven furth the country and putten to the horn."(p261)

The Jesuit debacle is followed by news of the planned invasion of Britain by pro-Jacobite France. This, of course, has a basis in historical fact. Paul overhears the plan for this being discussed by Prince Charles and Thurot and it is clear to him that he must prevent it at all costs. His family had been Jacobite in sympathy but the more he saw of Prince Charles the more he had become disillusioned with his dissoluteness until the last time he was in his company he spoke of him in these terms in his hearing:

"Neither prince nor king of mine, Miss Walkinshaw...No, if a hundred thousand swords were at his back. I had once a notion of a prince that

rode along the Gallowgate, but then I was a boy, and now I am a man.” (p247)

Now he is in no doubt that he must take decisive action and, as soon as they reach England, he seeks an interview with Pitt to inform him of the invasion plans. Significantly, as in Scott’s The Heart of Midlothian, such an important audience is gained through the intervention of the House of Argyll:

It was more by good luck than good guidance, and had there been no Scots House of Argyll perhaps I had never got rid of my weighty secret after all. (p295)

For all Paul’s naiveté and irritating slowness to see the *realpolitik* of what has been going on around him and how in his boyish infatuation he has been used by Walkinshaw and that she is Charles Edward’s mistress, this major decision which saves Britain makes him a more successful man of action than the David Balfour of Catriona, who for all his strong intentions to prove the innocence of James of the Glens finds his hands tied at every turn even although as a character he is much more strongly drawn:

For upon a retrospect, it appeared I had not done so grandly, after all; but with the greatest possible amount of big speech and preparations, had accomplished nothing.⁴

During the interview with Pitt Munro’s tongue in cheek humour surfaces again when the statesman tells Paul that another Scotsman had also come to him with news of the invasion but he was prepared to give Paul’s information more credibility because Paul was not seeking to bargain with his knowledge. This is almost certainly meant to be a reference to the historical Pickle’s submission.

The character of MacKellar of Kilbride is also interesting in this context. Like Alan Breck he is a Highlander and had been out in the '45 but now he is disillusioned and is only too anxious to throw in his lot with the Hanoverian government:

“The breed of them [the Stuarts] has never been loyal to me, and if I could wipe out of my life six months of the cursedest folly in Forty-five I would go back to Scotland with the first chance and throw my bonnet for Geordie ever after like the greasiest burgess ever sold a wab of cloth or a cargo of Virginia in Glasgow.” (p290)

Although MacKellar only comes in towards the end of the book he has the charisma and attractiveness of an embryonic Alan Breck figure. By making such a character pro-Hanoverian and a potential follower of the life-style of Bailie Nicol Jarvie Munro is shifting the emotional conviction of the book profoundly away from the Jacobite cause, a device which will become even more marked in the similar placing of the much more fully developed character of Ninian Campbell in The New Road (1914).

Although the portrayal of the dissipated Charles Edward is slight in the novel it nonetheless justifies both Paul and MacKellar's scepticism about the House of Stuart. Clancarty calls him, not unfairly, “a madman, a sotted madman tied to the petticoat tails of a trollope” (p281) and, when Paul goes to confront him about the duel in which he had him involved with Bonnat and which was nothing less than an assassination attempt, it appears he has no recollection of giving the command since he gave it after dinner when he was habitually drunk:

“I do not wonder that M. Albany has lost so many of his friends if he settles their destinies after dinner.” (p246)

Our last picture of the Prince is of him discussing the invasion of Britain with Thurot and insisting, against Thurot's obviously superior advice, that the attack should begin, like the ill-fated '45, in the West Highlands.

Clementina Walkinshaw, the daughter of a Glasgow merchant, is a complex and interesting creation. She is clearly dedicated to Charles Edward yet out of a sense of patriotism is ambivalent about the invasion of Britain and Scotland in particular and does not believe it will help the Jacobite cause:

"The cause will suffer from this madness more than ever it did, but in any case it is the most miserable of lost causes...Where is your heart, Mr Greig, that it does not feel alarm at the prospect of these *crapauds* making a single night's sleep uneasy for the folk you know?" (p118).

To protect Charles she masterminds the whole plot against Hamilton and the Jesuits but at the same time she cruelly exploits young Paul Greig's infatuation for her in making him the unwitting spy in the Jesuit camp. She obviously does, however, feel a maternal attraction towards him, sufficient to rouse Charles Edward's jealousy, and at the same time he reminds her of her lost innocence. She says of him,

"The honest and unsuspecting come rarely my way nowadays and now that I'm to lose them I feel like to greet."(p242)

He also, of course, reminds her of Scotland. Significantly she uses Scots for intimacy and affection as when imagining herself back home:

"Look! look! ye Mearns man, look! look! at the bairn playin pal-al [hopscotch] in the close. 'Tis my little sister Jeannie that's married on the great Doctor Doig - him wi' the mant I' the Tron kirk- and bairns o'

her ain, I'm tell't, and they'll never hear their Aunt Clemmie named
but in a whisper.”(p94)

Perhaps, however, Munro's most interesting and adventurous creation in The Shoes of Fortune is Fr. Hamilton, the Jesuit priest. Hamilton is enormously fat, self-indulgent and good-natured:

He was corpulent beyond belief, with a dewlap like an ox; great limbs, a Gargantuan appetite, and a laugh like thunder that at its loudest created such convulsions of his being as compelled him to unbutton the neck of his *soutane*, else he had died of a seizure. (p86)

As a somewhat disreputable priest he is considered expendable by his Order and is used as an instrument to kill Charles Edward. He undertakes the mission because he feels that there is little chance of him ever finding him and he is terrified when he is eventually informed that Charles is at Versailles. When the attempt is forestalled and fails he is delighted because he can now live with his conscience:

“Now my part is done, 'twas by God's grace a failure, and I could sing for content like one of the little birds we heard the other day in Somme.”(p162)

He is happy to go to prison and only decides to attempt an escape to prevent Paul being sent to Galbanon. The description of his attempt to drag his girth across the precipitous prison roof is all the more heroic in that it is entirely altruistic. In hiding in Paris he is a St Francis figure who attracts the affection of birds and children and in the end, having escaped to London, having been pursued across Europe by his fellow Jesuits for, as they believe, betraying their superior, he dies protecting the life of a child who is being mercilessly beaten by her father. He dies a picture of essential goodness, saying to Paul:

“Be good, be simple, be kind! 'Tis all I know.” (p305)

Such generosity to Catholicism and to a catholic priest is unusual in post-Reformation Scottish literature and for the time in which Munro was writing. Interestingly, his next book Children of Tempest has another priest as a main character, although of a very different type.

The Shoes of Fortune is, then, a romance heavily dependent on coincidences and the device of the red shoes but at the same time it has important things to say about Jacobitism and the nature of goodness as personified by the priest. It is also a good spy novel of the Jacobite period, an idea which was touched on in the behaviour of Sim MacTaggart as double agent in Doom Castle and which was to be taken up again by Violet Jacob in Flemington (1911) and later by Munro himself in the New Road (1914). Munro was fully aware of the fact that he was exploiting the devices of coincidence and the red shoes and, had he been writing only at the level of fantasy or fairy tale, the result might well have been more successful. This approach, however, sits uneasily with the more important historical judgements at the end of the book and make them less credible. Having said that, there is no doubt that the book is heavily influenced by Stevenson's Kidnapped and Catriona and, although considerably inferior to them artistically, it, nonetheless, makes a sharp political statement where Kidnapped does not, and, although Paul is much less sharply drawn than the David Balfour of Catriona, his decisiveness in going to Pitt and averting invasion is a major advance on Balfour's inaction. Furthermore, the alliance of the Alan Breck character, Mackellar, with the Hanoverian side is a significant change on the Stevenson model. Finally, although there is a similarity with the ending of Scott's Redgauntlet in that both books end with the failure of Charles Edward's cause, in Scott there is a tone that is elegiac for the end of the auld sang; in Munro there is no doubt left in the reader's mind that right has been done.

¹ The text used throughout is Neil Munro, The Shoes of Fortune, Inveraray Edition, Edinburgh, 1935

² Letter from Neil Munro to Lynn Doyle, 10th March, 1921. (Property of Mrs. Lesley Bratton)

³ Andrew Lang, Pickle the Spy, London, 1897: p299

⁴ Robert Louis Stevenson, Kidnapped and Catriona, Ed. Emma Letley, Oxford, 1986: Ch 20 p383

CHAPTER 5(c)

Children of Tempest (1903)¹

Children of Tempest can claim to be the first novel to deal with the Outer Hebrides. It is set for the most part on the island of South Uist, but also on Benbecula, Mingulay and, briefly, North Uist. The inspiration for the novel would appear to be Munro's own visits to Barra, to the Uists and Benbecula in 1901 where he was fascinated by the fords which connect the islands at low tide² and especially to the island of Eriskay where he met Father Allan MacDonald, Maighstir Ailean (1859-1905) as he is still known in Gaelic throughout the Southern Outer Hebrides. Fr. Allan was parish priest first of Dalibrog (1884-1893) and later of Eriskay (1893-1905). Munro visited him in Eriskay and corresponded with him intermittently thereafter³. He was a heroic pastor who in putting his people before all else seriously overworked and damaged his health. He was clearly very charismatic and much loved by his people for whose welfare he campaigned relentlessly. In addition he was a fine Gaelic scholar: he edited Cornhchruinneachadh de Laoidhean Spioradail (1893),⁴ a collection of hymns for use in Catholic Churches and, indeed, wrote many of them himself, and he collected many note books of folk tales, traditions and vocabulary of the Outer Hebrides which are invaluable to scholars today. He also corresponded with and assisted the folk collector Alasdair Carmichael in his researches for the Carmina Gadelica, the great collection of Hebridean Catholic hymns, prayers and invocations, some dating back to pre-Reformation times.⁵ Not surprisingly, then, Munro found in Maighstir Ailean a model for Father Ludovick, his priest hero in Children of Tempest, and much of the novel is set in Boisdale in the South of South Uist, the area roughly corresponding to Mghr Ailean's first parish of Dalibrog. The church, however, which plays a

central part in the novel takes its name, *Stella Maris*, from the church in Barra which Munro admired ⁶ and the building itself on its rocky eminence is modelled on St Michael's in Eriskay, which Mghr Ailean built himself and was particularly dear to him.

Children of Tempest is set in the Scotland of 1795-96 and deals with the supposed fate of the famous Loch Arkaig treasure or *ulaidh* of 40,000 louis d'ors (£20,000) which was actually sent from France to support the Jacobite cause but arrived too late and was buried at Loch Arkaig and then disappeared. Unlike Doom Castle and The Shoes of Fortune this novel deals only very loosely with the aftermath of the Rising of 1745 and makes no overt political statement.

It is a romantic love story in which the heroine Anna, the sister of Father Ludovick, priest of Boisdale, is sought after by two brothers from Corodale. One of them, Duncan, a "stuck" priest, is an honourable young man who goes to Anna's aid when she is cut off from the rest of the party as they cross the North Ford on their return from her Uncle Dermosary's funeral in North Uist. He finds her and stays with her and comforts her on the islet of Trialabreck until the tide subsides (p55). (This incident may well have its origin in Chapters 7 & 8 of Scott's The Antiquary where the hero, Lovel, rescues the heroine, Isabella Wardour, and her father and Edie Ochiltree, who have been cut off by the tide. This is confirmed by a nearby reference to the "blue gown" of the beggar on p66 - the garb which Edie Ochiltree, the noble beggar of Scott's novel, wears.) The other suitor is named Col. He is a mean, selfish and acquisitive individual - something of a ruthless entrepreneur - who, aided by an old man, Dark John, seeks Anna's hand because she is the heir to the Loch Arkaig ulaidh which has been left her by her Uncle Dermosary and which she will be eligible to receive in about a year's time (since, according to the rubrics of the story, the appropriate heir of the MacNeil family should receive the money fifty years after its delivery to Loch Arkaig provided there is no other Jacobite Rising). In order to achieve his aim Col

persuades Dan MacNeil (nicknamed Flying Jib-boom) the Captain of his sloop, the "Happy Return", to sing a song with an interpolated defamatory verse about Duncan (a device which Munro was to modify and use again in The New Road) to a crowd of Boisdale fishermen whom he has got drunk. The verse is :

"Duncan, Duncan, what is you wishing?

A crock of gold and an easy life.

Come over from Corodale, then, and welcome,

To make the crock of gold your wife." (p159)

This spreads like wildfire among the people and, when Duncan himself hears it and its suggestion that he is only after Anna for the ulaidh and realises that he has nothing to offer her in the way of prospects, he feels honour-bound to leave Uist at once without taking leave of Anna. This, of course, leaves the way open for Col to try his suit but Dark John finds out that the people have discovered his deception and plan to have Duncan home by the Autumn.

In the meantime another unscrupulous and acquisitive rogue, the Sergeant, who keeps the inn at Creggans in Benbecula becomes involved. He extracts from Dark John the information that Col's romance with Anna is doomed to failure and suggests that he and Dark John (unknown to Col) kidnap Anna in order to extract from her the location of the ulaidh. She is captured aboard the "Happy Return" and taken to the inn at Creggans where after subjection to rough treatment by the Sergeant she is rescued by Jib-boom who takes them all back to Boisdale on the sloop. He suggests she do a deal with the Sergeant telling him, in exchange for the letters of Duncan which he has been withholding from her, the location of the lulaidh. She agrees and tells him that:

*"It's in the Long Gallery in Mingulay, then, on the ledge below the blood
of the Merry Dancers." (p250)*

When they reach Boisdale Dark John is forced to disembark with Anna and she is restored to Ludovick. In the meantime Jib-boom punishes the Sergeant by sailing, not for Mingulay, but for the Clyde where he discharges him. Dark John, however, meets Col and persuades him to sail for Mingulay only to find that the treasure is no longer there below the fuil nan sluagh or the blood of the Merry Dancers (a piece of red lichen high up on the side of a cliff lit by the reflection of Aurora Borealis in a creek in Mingulay). Upset when Dark John climbs up the cliff and touches him unexpectedly from behind, Col wards him off and sends him hurtling to his death. A few days later he himself drowns as he tries to reach the boat when it floats back into the creek.

The ulaidh had, ironically, been discovered and squandered twelve years before by Col's father. Only two people knew this - Jib-boom who had been Old Corodale's co-plunderer and Father Ludovick who was bound by the seal of the confessional.

Duncan returns to Uist and he and Anna marry and go to live in Corodale.

Although the bald narration of the plot of this novel suggests that it is somewhat melodramatic with stage villains opposed to saintly characters, a closer examination shows that Munro's treatment of good and evil produces a novel with the qualities of a parable.

Like the stories "Boboon's Children" and "Black Murdo" in The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories, Children of Tempest has as its mainspring a proverb (probably of Munro's invention, and not taken on this occasion from Nicolson). In Chapter 2 Bell Vore says,

"It is not lucky to save a man from drowning: take its spoil from the sea
and the spoil itself will punish you." (p15)

This refers to the heroic act of rescue which Col performs at the opening of the novel when he sees Dark John's little boat in trouble in the open sea and rushes out to save him from drowning. It immediately becomes the key idea in the novel. Throughout the story frequent references are made

to this proverb as a piece of folk wisdom and we realise that Col, although intending a kind act, has in fact been guilty of *hubris* in interfering where he had no right. The situation is similar and may, in fact, owe something to that in Stevenson's The Merry Men where Gordon Darnaway and others are punished for looting sunken ships, the sea's spoil. Indeed, Col himself becomes aware of its reality early on when he considers that bad luck in his commercial/smuggling activities may be punishment for his *hubris*:

he... looked from the little window into the garden and over the fields
and out as far as he might upon the sea, that he had robbed of its spoil,
and now - it might be in the first of its revenge - had robbed him of his
sloop.(p35)

The old man, Dark John is, of course, the spoil and, immediately in the *ceilidh* house after his rescue he declares to Col:

"I drink...to the gentleman of Corodale. I am his man from this on. Is it
the fire? - there is the hand! The knife for him? - here is the
bosom!"(p18)

He dedicates himself entirely to Col and is his complete servant. The grotesque imagery which is used to describe the old man, however, makes us realise that there is something very unpleasant about him and he is to be treated with grave suspicion:

He might have been a monster of the deep, some uncanny soulless thing,
in the form of man briefly borrowed for villainous devices, slobbering
the stuff that feeds itself on ooze and slime.(p205)

and

She looked down and saw Dark John like a toad, his eyes shut up to slits, his jaws industrious, gave him a look more of repugnance than of blame and stood upon the deck. (p224)

It gradually becomes clear that Dark John (like Hogg's Gilmartin in The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner) appears to be there spurring Col on whenever his greed for the *ulaidh* appears to wain :

A thought came to him with a sense of revelation that this old wretch haunted him, a ghost in moments critical, led him first astray, and always spurred his interest in the fifty years' fortune at any time the same might seem to flag. (p260)

Even after he lashes the old man's face with a switch the old man still will not forsake his allegiance to him. There is, therefore, a strong suggestion that Dark John is a demonic being, who drives Col on to his inevitable doom in a magnificent climax in Mingulay. In the yawl which they had commandeered John directs Col to the foot of the cliff below the blood of the Merry Dancers and, spurred on by his greed, he climbs up. He finds no treasure and then finally stops to take stock:

No ease of his mind had been for him since he dragged its prey from the sea, to be the spur to schemes that somehow seemed to end in foolishness and mockery. It was *trom-lighe* (nightmare) - it was Incubus he had lifted from the Barra Sound; there was something after all in the ancient proverb. (p273)

Finally, after he has lashed out at Old John who has climbed up behind him and sent him to certain death Col descends to the water's edge to find that the boat has disappeared. After a day or two it drifts back in an atmosphere that has all the eeriness of Part III of Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner" with the body of the Old Man before the mast:

'Twas Death come back for him. (p281)

Col leaps into the water to reach the yawl but his weight capsizes her:

The yawl heeled over with his weight; the body fell on his shoulders; the tide was sucking his feet, and he sank with his burden, with *trom-lighe* - incubus - spoil of the sea he had robbed at Michaelmas - to the dark, expectant, patient depths. (p281)

“Incubus” is, of course, the term Stevenson used to describe James Durie, the Master of Ballantrae⁷ whom he had earlier described as “all I know of the devil”.⁸ It is also conceivable that there is a verbal echo of the name The Merry Men, the name given to the breakers which seduce Gordon Darnaway to his destruction, in the Blood of the Merry Dancers, the red lichen on the Mingulay cliff which fascinates Col and leads him on to his ultimate doom.

Although Col does have a few redeeming features (at one point he does seem to have genuine love for Anna for herself (p105) and not for her money and he does show regret for having duped Duncan with the song (p172)), he is almost completely selfish and unscrupulous. One of the interesting things about him, however, is the fact that he is a cunning and unscrupulous entrepreneur in a **Hebridean** setting :

“...but nowadays too many of the curing-barrels belong to Corodale Col, and the bounty and price he pays for the cran are hardly worth a God-fearing man wetting his boots or putting his breath in a net-bow for.”
(p109)

Along with the Sergeant, his equally grasping but much less subtle business partner, they make a formidable pair. The Sergeant is brutal in his treatment of Anna when he kidnaps her and considerably moreso in his treatment of his pathetic and slatternly wife:

...when he turned to shut the door behind him, and saw her, he put his foot out and thrust her down the stair. She fell to the bottom with a cry of pain that he paid no heed to. (p231)

His ultimate punishment of exile for all his greed, however, is much less severe than Col's, presumably because he did not steal the sea's spoil.

It is certainly possible to see in these two men approximations to the small town entrepreneurs Gibson and Gourlay in George Douglas Brown's The House with the Green Shutters (1901). Indeed, the similarity between the Sergeant and his wife and Gourlay and his wife is particularly marked and when the Sergeant taunts the terrified Anna with the phrase

"I wonder what I'll do next" (p230)

one is reminded of John Gourlay's taunt to his terrified son,

"What am I to do wi' ye now?"⁹

and when Jib-boom fells the Sergeant with a blow so that

He fell with a crash among the ashes of the hearth (p245)

we are reminded of the death of Gourlay after he had been struck with a poker by his son:

Gourlay thudded on the fender, his brow crashing on the rim.¹⁰

Although Munro's business characters are pale reflections of the starkness of Douglas Brown's they will almost certainly have been influenced by The House with the Green Shutters since Munro was familiar with that book and a friend of its author,¹¹ and they, in turn, may have contributed to the character of Gillespie Strang since John MacDougall Hay's Gillespie (1914) was dedicated to Neil Munro.

The character of Dan MacNeil, nicknamed Flying Jib-boom, captain of the sloop "Happy Return" is a "bridge" character between the good and evil groups in the book. Although he has been the unwitting promulgator of the scandalous verse in the song and has been manipulated to

kidnap Anna and was one of the two original plunderers of the *ulaidh*, he is, when left to be his own man, a decent person who is in the end responsible for Anna's safe return and for the punishment of the Sergeant. He has a sense of fun and lives to enjoy life and is clearly the literary predecessor of Para Handy. When he brings Duncan back to Boisdale he says:

"Two or three splendid dances have I lost this week in Arisaig, that I might be the one to take him back. I'm not complaining a bit, though I'm the boy for the dancing." (p284)

In opposition to Col, in *Dark John and the Sergeant* we have the characters who represent unalloyed goodness: Father Ludovick, Duncan and Anna - all strongly religious characters although on the whole rather blandly portrayed.

Ludovick, clearly based on Maighstir Ailean, is a much loved and popular but rather lonely priest whose presence seems to permeate the narrative although his participation in the physical action is comparatively small:

To its south they saw Ludovick rising on the brae, his tall figure bent against the furrows of a little field beyond his dwelling. When he reached the summit he stood dark against the sky. He stopped a moment there, and turned and looked across the islands and over the sea, the genius of the place, a lonely figure. (p120)

He is a mystic who is at one with nature and who very quickly sees into the heart of things. He sees through Col:

A shallowness in his spoken sentiments made the priest distrust him, and come at last to the sad conclusion that here was a vulgar mercenary, so they went their own ways searching. (p254)

At the same time his reputation for justice terrifies Dark John and the Sergeant when they realise their folly in kidnapping Anna:

Father Ludovick's wrath, they felt, would follow them to the remotest of
the Outer Isles. (p250)

Above all, however, it is the strength of his priestly calling and his attention to his priestly duties which impress us. All along he was in possession of the agonising knowledge that the *ulaidh* had been stolen by Old Corodale but he could not stop the mad speculation and problems connected with it because he could not break the seal of the confessional. But most impressive of all is his belief in the power of prayer: when Anna is discovered missing, perhaps drowned, he goes into *Stella Maris* and prayed all night. He emerges from the church at the same hour as her release is secure. When he meets her he says:

“I knew you were coming ...Since the break of day I never had a doubt
of it.”(p258)

Duncan, too, is a religious figure. He is described as a “stuck priest” i.e. a student for the priesthood who leaves seminary before ordination. He is a highly honourable young man who, unlike his brother Col, is completely unselfish. Although the older son, he cedes his rights to Corodale to his brother since he feels that enough of the family money has been spent on his priestly training which he never completed. Above all his sense of duty and fairness to Anna forces him to leave her to seek his fortune on the mainland when he realises that people are saying that he is after her merely for the *ulaidh* and that he has no means or prospects to offer her for support in married life. His return to Uist and to Anna in the end is, of course, right and fitting.

Anna herself, Ludovick's sister and housekeeper, is again a person with strong religious connections. Although she is not portrayed with great depth, she has a sparkling personality and is extremely popular on the island, particularly with the women and the children. Where Ludovick is

aloof and remote, she complements this. She is not naive in that she suspects Col's integrity; she "was always dubious of her visitor" (p192) but she never fully sees through him. She is courageous and plucky during most of the time of her kidnapping. Above all, however, she is a strong loving personality (as can be seen in the way she goes back to kiss the Sergeant's feckless and much abused wife when they are leaving Creggans) and a supporter of the religious traditions of the Uists, especially that of St. Bride with whom she herself is ultimately compared. When she is finally united with Duncan she can be heard singing by the people:

Her voice came over the water from Orosay's lee, a sound enchanting -
 Bride's voice that hushes the children and wrings the hearts of men.
 (p286)

In addition, of course, to his use of Highland English which is, appropriately, sustained throughout this novel, one of the most interesting aspects of Children of Tempest is the tremendous mass of traditional material which Munro has researched and introduced to give the story Hebridean authenticity. This material falls into two categories: secular and religious.

The secular lore involves among other things the mention of a race meeting or *oda* which took place on the sands (p10). These ceased in Uist in 1820. Interesting also is the account of the people moving to the summer shielings on Hecla and Benmore. In addition to allowing us to hear the folk voice of the island in the conversation of the ordinary people, this section also enables us to understand clearly the purpose of the tradition of taking the cattle to the higher ground for the summer months:

It came to the time of the summer shealings, when the cattle grazed on
 the uplands till the corn of the levels should ripen for the hook. (p193)

More important is the traditional religious material which Munro has included because, in addition to invoking a true Hebridean atmosphere, it adds to the artistic strength of the book in reinforcing the role of the “good” characters. The most obvious religious material is the frequent reference to Carmichael’s Carmina Gadelica - hymns, invocations and prayers which fill every part of the Hebridean day to which Munro is clearly referring in the following passage:

The fisher of the Uists begins no enterprise but in the spirit of prayer, nor
rises at morn nor sleeps at night, nor kindles cruisie light nor smothers an
evening fire without some invocation of the saints (p108)

Munro refers to four specific examples from the Carmina on pps 25, 91, 140, 176. The example on p91 he gives to Anna as her morning prayer and is his own accurate translation except that he omits the 4th line of the original, presumably for rhyming purposes:

Iosda Criosda, thanks to Thee
That brought me from the deeps of night
Into the solace of the light,
Through blood atoning shed for me.(p91)

Taing dhut Iosda Criosda,
Thug mis a nios o ’n oidche ’n raoir
Chon solas soillse an la ’n diugh,
Chon sonas siorruidh a chosnadh dha m ’anam,
*An cion na fal a dhoirt thu dhomh.*¹²

In addition to the traditional Uist hymns he also includes extensive reference to the Latin Mass and, very interestingly, to the Gaelic translation of the *Veni Creator Spiritus* (*O Thig a nuas, a Spioraid Naoimh*) the ancient hymn to the Holy Spirit. Ludovick and the others sing this for comfort as they are crossing the dangerous North Ford:

Ur naimhdean fuadaich fad bhuainn,

'Us builich oirnn do shith gu buan. (p51)

Far from us drive your foes

And award us everlasting peace.

Munro would have got these lines from the Comh-Chruinneachadh de Laoidhean Spioradail (Collection of Spiritual Hymns) which had been edited by Maighstir Ailean and the hymn itself translated by his relative D.C MacPherson.¹³

Another item of traditional Uist lore is the name the fishermen give to the sea, "The Treasury of Mary" (p20). In Gaelic this is "cuile Mhoire" and appears in Maighstir Ailean's poem, *Ceathramhnan a Rinneadh do dh'Eirisgeidh* (Verses to Eriskay).¹⁴

The baking of Michaelmas cakes was also traditional in Uist for the feast of St Michael on the 29th September and these were distributed to the less fortunate on the island:

Some... were running with bee-skep baskets round the poorer huts of the nearer town land, giving, as custom compelled, and their good hearts in any case had prompted, something of their bounty in St Michael's morning food to the less fortunate of their fellows. (p9)

It is also worth noting that there are many references to St Bride who is particularly revered in Uist. She has taken on the attributes of a previous pagan goddess of Spring and her feast

coincides with Candlemas in the Catholic Church. In the novel Anna is rocking Brideag in a cradle when Duncan first comes to see her. Brideag, in reality, was “a sheaf of corn, ornamented with flowers and ribbons” (p112) and the practice of doing this was the vestige of a fertility rite performed as a prayer for good crops in the coming year. It is referred to in Fraser’s The Golden Bough.¹⁵ As was noted above Anna herself is compared to Bride, presumably for her good qualities and for the spirit of optimism she engenders among the people.

Looking at the novel as a whole, then, it would seem that the inclusion of such a vast amount of Christian/Catholic tradition suggests the strength of Christian faith in the whole way of life of the island which is there to support Ludovick and the other good characters and will ensure their ultimate triumph against the brutality of the Sergeant, the scheming of Col and the demonic incubus, Dark John.

Finally, although there is no major political statement in this novel as there is in Doom Castle and The Shoes of Fortune, Ludovick does enjoy visiting the township of Kilbride where there are still the “ashes of revolt” after the ’45. But the reason he likes this place is not for its active part in the campaign but because it has retained the old way of life that was disturbed by the ’45 and all that came after it. He loved this place because there he feels himself “separate by some freak of the imagination from that new world of fretting influences that came with books and letters to the Bay of Boisdale”(p252). In Kilbride “people were content and never had a doubt of God”(p252).

In this section (like the famous “I know corries in Argyll” passage in John Splendid (p221)) Munro seems to be harking back to a Golden Age in the way that is to become one of the basic tenets of the Scottish Renaissance of the 1920’s and 30’s. It is interesting that here he is doing it through the eyes of a Catholic priest. Indeed, it is remarkable that he, an orthodox Presbyterian,

should have invested so much effort into research on the Catholic Church in this novel and in The Shoes of Fortune. It may be that like Fionn MacColla, Compton MacKenzie and George Mackay Brown he was using the older faith of the Catholic Church as a means of getting back to a Golden Age of a wholer, more harmonious Scotland without going so far as they did in becoming converts to Catholicism.

- ¹ The text used throughout is Neil Munro, Children of Tempest, Inveraray Edition, 1935
- ² Neil Munro, The Looker On, Ed. George Blake, Edinburgh, 1933: pp79-81
- ³ Neil Munro, The Brave Days, Ed. George Blake, Edinburgh, 1933: pp302-308
- ⁴ Fr. Allan McDonald, Comhchruinneachadh de Laoidhean Spioradail, Oban, 1893
- ⁵ Alexander Carmichael, Carmina Gadelica, Vols. I&II, Edinburgh, 1928
- ⁶ Neil Munro, The Looker On, Edinburgh, 1933: p80
- ⁷ Letter from Robert Louis Stevenson to Henry James, March, 1888, The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson, Ed. Sidney Colvin, London, 1901: p87
- ⁸ Letter from Robert Louis Stevenson to Sidney Colvin, 24th December, 1887, The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson, Ed. Sidney Colvin, London, 1901: pp88-89
- ⁹ George Douglas Brown, The House with the Green Shutters, Ed. Dorothy Porter, Harmondsworth, 1985: Ch.25, p219
- ¹⁰ Ibid. Ch 25, p226
- ¹¹ Neil Munro, The Looker On, Ed. George Blake, Edinburgh, 1933: pp277-282
- ¹² Alexander Carmichael, Carmina Gadelica, Vol. I, No. 41, Edinburgh, 1928: p96
- ¹³ McDonald op.cit. No.20: p44. Also J.L. Campbell, "The Sources of the Gaelic Hymnal, 1893", Innes Review, Vol. VII, Number II, 1956: pp101-111
- ¹⁴ Fr. Allan McDonald, "Ceathramhnan a rinneadh do dh'Eirisgeidh" ("Verses to Eriskay"), line 79, Bardachd Mghr. Ailein, Ed. J.L. Campbell, Dun-Eideann, 1965: p83
- ¹⁵ Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough, London, 1963: p177

CHAPTER 6

THE “MODERN” NOVELS

Gilian the Dreamer

The Daft Days

Fancy Farm

Munro’s novels are broadly speaking of two types - historical romances set in important periods of change in Scottish, and usually, more particularly, Highland history: John Splendid (1898), Doom Castle (1901), The Shoes of Fortune (1901), The New Road (1914) and, more loosely, Children of Tempest (1903); and his “modern” novels Gilian the Dreamer (1899), The Daft Days (1907) and Fancy Farm (1910), the latter two set in his own day.

CHAPTER 6(a)

Gilian the Dreamer (1899)¹

Gilian the Dreamer is an unusual novel. It is “modern” in that it has its setting in the 1820’s, Munro himself being born in 1863. It is possible to date the time of the action fairly accurately since the characters of the three veteran soldiers of the Napoleonic wars, General Dugald, Cornal (*sic*) Colin and Captain John Campbell with whom Gilian lives, are based on and named after real Inveraray people. In actual fact the oldest of these men, Dugald, died in 1824 and it is reasonable to assume that his fictional counterpart is supposed to have died at about the same time (Ch19). The action extends a further three years or so after his death, and so the whole the book belongs to the 1820’s. But, although it is a modern novel, Gilian the Dreamer is a bridge between Munro’s two types of novels because, like the historical romances it is also set at an important juncture in

Highland history, a combination of the Highland Clearances (although Munro does not spell this out in the explicit detail that he gives to the political and social background in John Splendid or The New Road) and the peaceful aftermath of the Napoleonic wars. Indeed, he may not even have been as consciously aware himself of the full effects of the political and social background on the action of this novel as he clearly was in the case of the others mentioned, since it was so much closer to his own time. It is into this world that Munro projects his hero, Gilian, a very sensitive but dilatory young man of an artistic temperament, a dreamer, who in spite of his obvious poetic gifts lacks the ability and the direction to turn them into creative art until the very end when it is too late. He falls in love with the beautiful and vivacious Nan Turner from Glen Shira but is ultimately rejected in favour of Young Islay, a man of action, just as a generation before his guardians, the three old war veterans, had been rejected by her mother Nan in favour of the younger and more dashing General Turner.

Gilian belongs to that tradition of sentimental and hypersensitive young men which runs through Scottish literature from Henry MacKenzie's The Man of Feeling (1771) through Scott's young Edward Waverley, who was a dreamer until the grim realities of the folly of the romantic '45 forced him to wake up and return to the Hanoverian side, through Stevenson's young Archie Weir, to the sensitive Kailyard lads o' pairts. Gilian the Dreamer, indeed, has all the superficial appearance of a Kailyard novel with its small town setting (clearly Inveraray), its caring schoolmaster and general douceness of atmosphere, and Gilian himself has the superficial appearance of a lad o' pairts. But closer inspection shows that it is in fact a subversion of the Kailyard and it has much more in common with the contemporary anti-Kailyard and pre-Renaissance novels: Brown's The House with the Green Shutters (1901), Hay's Gillespie (1914) and Barrie's Sentimental Tommy (1896). Unlike the conventional lad o' pairts of Ian Maclaren's stories in Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush (1894) and Crockett's The Stickit Minister (1893) Gilian does not progress to academic

success or even honourable failure. Rather, like the other somewhat unhealthily sensitive young men of the anti-Kailyard novels mentioned, because of his undirected sensitivity he fails to succeed, although unlike young John Gourlay and young Eoghan Strang his sensations are not morbid, and unlike Tommy Sandys, who is like him a creative artist striving for a role, he seems, especially in his teenage years, incapable of taking any initiative at all. And, unlike all three, in spite of his devastation at the end of the novel at least he survives and, indeed, produces poetry!

Munro intended that his novel should be unusual and different:

My plan is to treat of the Highlands of Scotland in a totally different manner from that in which it has been depicted already by some of our writers. The central motif of the novel is an attempt to realise the character of a boy hill-bred, sensitive, imaginative to a marvel, poetical to a miracle, wistful, **and, I think, quite new in literature so far as I can tell from my own reading.**(my emphasis)²

The hero, then, is a young sensitive and gifted boy projected into the changing world of the 1820's. Munro has often been accused e.g. by MacDiarmid³ and MacColla⁴ of not facing up to the Scotland of his day and setting all his novels safely in earlier eras. In this novel he seems to be touching on an issue of very considerable contemporary relevance - The Highland Clearances - although he never mentions them explicitly. When Gilian and Nan go to visit Ealasaid at the Lochs of Kames near Cruach an Lochain they stay in a shieling hut and we are told that :

he knew it for a relic of the old days, when the moor in its levels here would be spotted with happy summer homes, when the people of Lochow came from the shores below and gave their cattle the juicy

grazing of these untamed pastures, themselves living the ancient life,

with singing and spinning in the open... (p345)

The fact that the shielings are no longer used for cattle and the only jobs open to Gilian himself are either soldiering or shepherding suggests very much the world of the cleared Highlands.⁵ Munro's interest in them, however, for the purpose of this novel is not the political and social treatment they were later to receive by Iain MacCormaic who refers to their injustices in the first Gaelic novel Dun-Aluinn in 1912 or later still by Neil Gunn in Butcher's Broom (1934) and Fionn Mac Colla in And the Cock Crew (1945). Instead Munro sees them as a great watershed in Highland history in terms of the role of the creative artist in modern Highland society. The Clearances complete the dislocation of Highland tradition. Gilian is a very gifted and sensitive young man, but there is now no role for him in Highland society. In John Splendid (1898) Iain Lom as *bard* had a very definite public role, *inter alia* to write the song of the Battle of Inverlochy.⁶ In an earlier day Gilian likewise would have had a similar role as *bard* or *seanachaidh* (shenachie), but times have changed and society now no longer knows how to deal with someone with Gilian's gifts.

Throughout the novel Gilian's affinity with the old, rich and stable tradition of the Highlands is very obvious. He identifies very clearly with the story's two bearers of *beul-aithris* (oral tradition), Gillesbeg Aotrom and Black Duncan. Gillesbeg Aotrom was "the wanderer who came about the glens and was called daft by the people who did not know, as Gilian did, that he was wiser than themselves" (p28) - an equivalent of Shakespeare's fool.⁷ In Ch13 Gilian recites beautifully Gillesbeg's story of the King of Knapdale's daughter to Nan. It tells of how the girl went in search of the Earl's daughter who was to be her husband. She searched for him on the bed of a river. There she met two brothers, one Sir Sleep and his Older Brother. Sleep tells her he would be faithful "almost half the time" (p139), so she goes with the Older Brother. He tells the story again in Ch 26 (p300). This time an older and wiser Nan realises that the Older Brother is Death.

Again he identifies very strongly with the story called "The Desperate Battle" which Black Duncan, significantly a Catholic (p246),⁸ tells in Ch 16. Here Duncan tells of a time when he was coming down a glen at night and in the dark he was attacked by what seems to have been a wild beast. He stabs it and waits till morning to see what he has killed, only to find that there is nothing there. Again this is a powerfully imaginative tale which perturbs Gilian greatly.

Both of these tales in their own way show Gilian's involvement with and response to the old Highland story-telling tradition. Gilian's problem is how to progress beyond this to use his own creative gifts in the present day. Significantly both of these stories end in Death - which appears to be Munro's ironic comment on how Gilian's and Highland creative tradition will end up if a sense of direction for people like Gilian cannot be found. These stories are an ironic comment on the effect of the disintegration of tradition.

A further element of the change in Highland history referred to above is the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. Many of the inhabitants of Inveraray are veteran soldiers, particularly the three old men with whom Gilian lives. They are what has become of the old clan warriors. Instead of clan feuds of yesteryear and the important battles of the Napoleonic wars all that they have left to fight about are petty feuds such as the Paymaster and General Turner conduct over young Nan and Gilian.

Indeed, this little Highland town has passed through a transition from a traditional Highland community to something much more like a Lowland burgh. Furthermore, the Duke of Argyll, Duke George,⁹ unlike Gillesbeg Gruamach in John Splendid, scarcely knows his people and spends a great deal of time away from them in London, thus marginalising them still more. The town has become

A stopped and stagnant world, full of old men and old complaints, the dead
of the yard behind, the solemn and sleepy town before. (p34)

and the English inn-keeper, outsider and looker-on,

He was seeing - lucky man to have the chance! - the last of the old
Highland burgh life and the raw beginnings of the new; he was seeing
the real *daoine-uasail*, gentry of ancient family, colloquing with the
common merchants whose day was coming in.(p50)

Much of the action is taken up with the habits of the three old veterans with whom Gilian now lives. They are the Highland warrior in decay. Two of them have been great war heroes in their day but now their military operations are reduced to petty plotting against General Turner who, it emerges, married the girl (Nan's mother) all three had been in love with. They wish Gilian to be a soldier to be a means of getting their own back on Turner. Indeed, the Paymaster says:

“I'll train him - I'll train him to hate your very name!” (p59)

Ironically, of course, they themselves are dreamers, constantly reliving the wars in which they fought. Colin, the Cornal, is forever recounting his campaigns to Gilian and, even more ironically, John, the Paymaster, is forever taunting Gilian for his lack of soldierly qualities when he himself had never actually fought on active service. He was, in fact, satirised by the local bard Evan MacColl¹⁰ in these lines:

“Captain Mars, Captain Mars,
Who never saw wars.” (p20)

Although they give the superficial appearance of toughness and discipline, they are too old and rigid to be a healthy and attractive role-model for Gilian and their reminiscing can only endorse the capacity for dreaming which already has a grip on him before he meets them.

This, then, is the world into which Gilian is projected. When we meet him he is twelve years old. He is a highly intelligent young man of a bookish disposition. Like young John Gourlay and young Eoghan Strang he is highly sensitive, especially to nature, but perhaps because he did not have a domineering father he is not morbid and brutalised. Like Tommy Sandys he has suffered from severe cultural dislocation. Tommy's stay in London with his mother talking constantly about Thrums caused him to fantasise repeatedly. Gilian's cultural dislocation may well be the reason for his fantasies.

From childhood he has fantasised constantly, and in Ch.1 we find him rehearsing **how** he should present the news of his grandmother's death to the Clerks and the Paymaster rather than being concerned about the news itself. He fantasises about being a soldier but no sooner does he meet Nan at the Boshang Gate than this idea leaves him. He sees no point in being a soldier when he can fantasise the role:

“Perhaps...it is better to be at home and soldiering in your mind instead of marching and fighting.” (p149)

Shortly after this he takes Nan to see a heron's nest and again imagines he knows the content of the nest. He later admits that he has not actually seen the bird or its eggs and chicks:

“Lots of boys would be for climbing and finding that out, and think how vexatious it would be after all that trouble! I just made the eggs and the young ones out of my own mind and that is far better.” (p155)

The most significant example of his ability to fantasise comes at the crucial scene, for him the turning point of the book, where the ship “Jean” is shipwrecked and he, instead of attempting to rescue those on board by bringing up the small boat, imagines the suffering of the victims and then imagines that he himself is their rescuer. In short, fantasy becomes a substitute for action and an impediment to Gilian's maturity and leaves him looking effeminate and cowardly in the eyes of both

Nan and Islay. Even at the very end of the story he is still very immature and naive, although at one point our expectations were raised when he did come close to self-knowledge. When reflecting on his part in the shipwreck three years before he says to Islay:

“I wish my comprehension of the act to be done was as ready as my imagination.”(p259)

However, once he got involved in the “elopement” escapade with Nan this embryonic insight disappeared.

His disposition to dream, however, is reinforced by Miss Mary who cossets him and will not make him face reality, even at the very end when he naively believes that Nan still loves him although she has just married Islay. Mary herself was a dreamer and still harboured love for General Turner, Nan’s mother’s husband. Gilian was damaged too by the Pensioners, dreamers also, who were still living in the past both in their martial exploits and in using Gilian as a weapon against General Turner. Significantly, when history repeats itself and Gilian like them is rejected by the daughter of the object of their desires, their folly is emphasised.

Unlike the school teacher in Brown’s *Barbie*, Gilian’s teacher Brooks is a much more sympathetic and constructive dominie. He recognises Gilian’s intelligence but also recognises that he does not know how to handle someone of Gilian’s gifts:

“There’s the making of a fine man in him if we give him but a shove in the right direction...Sometimes I feel I have in him fine stuff and pliable, and I’ll be trying to fathom how best to work it, but my experience has always been with more common metal, and I’m feared, I’m feared, we may be botching him. ...I’m wae to see him brought up on no special plan.” (pp227-228)

Here Brooks is admitting to Scottish education's inability to deal, in modern jargon, with the divergent thinker, and the same criticism is made again in The Daft Days. Gilian, however, would not have been debilitated by his undoubted gifts in an earlier generation of Pre-Clearance Highland society and people would have known how to nurture his talents in the role of *bard* or *seanachaidh* and he would have had the respect of the community. There is no special plan for him in modern Inveraray. No one has any special advice for him - until Nan suggests that he might be a poet:

"Do you know I begin to think you must be a poet. Have you ever written anything?"

He found himself extremely warm. Her question for the first time suggested his own possibilities. No, he had never made poetry, he confessed, though he had often felt it... (p303)

But she fears that he will only imagine his progress in this area:

"It'll be like other things... You must be dreaming it when you might be making it." (p303)

In the end, however, he transcends his ability merely to dream and develops the skill and craftsmanship to write his first poem, "The Maid of the Moor" and later a whole volume of poems. The *kudos* which he would have gained from this, however, was too late to give him any chance with Nan. The old Gaelic literary tradition had been broken and Gilian has, as it were, to find a new one.

Furthermore, for all Gilian's fascination with nature he is in no way sustained by it in the Wordsworthian sense. He represents Munro's own *fin de siecle* uncertainty with tradition and it is only with the arrival of Neil Gunn's Hugh in Morning Tide and Kenn in Highland River that we find young heroes who have normal well-adjusted upbringings and who use nature, not as an escape or a source of fantasy, but as a source of genuine sustenance and refreshment.

The characters of Nan and Islay contrast markedly with Gilian. Nan is a very bright and vivacious girl but much less sensitive than Gilian. She understands Gilian's feeling for the *seannos*, the old traditions, in her songs:

“I have felt a little of it in a song” (p297)

but she also prefers stories which are true, as opposed to old folk tales, and more modern army songs (187). In short she is able to bridge the traditions from the old Gaelic world to the present. Islay stands in even sharper contrast. He is the modern soldier, the modern successor of the old clan warrior, the man of action, boorish and insensitive on a number of occasions, but by and large normal and friendly. Not surprisingly Nan prefers him to Gilian, the over-sensitive victim of his broken culture - “John Hielan'man” as she calls him.

Gilian the Dreamer, then, is a novel which illustrates many of the problems of cultural dislocation and dissociation in late 19th century Scottish Literature. Gilian, the intelligent, imaginative youth who is particularly sensitive to nature cannot transform his thoughts into concrete expression; he is the *vates* without the discipline of the craftsman *makar/poeta*. He illustrates the problem of the creative artist in a broken tradition. Furthermore, the novel is parodic. Gilian's “elopement” (Ch 29) with Nan is a parody of the sentimental romantic novel and it highlights all Gilian's lack of gallantry and general ineptness. In addition, it has all the superficial appearance of a Kailyard novel. But Munro, early on in his career had declared war on that genre.¹¹ Although Inveraray seems a douce static Kailyard village, it is actually undergoing a period of considerable social change. Like Barbie it is seeing the rise of a new merchant class and the decline of military influence. Deeper than this but, less obviously, there is the changeover from the traditional Highland way of life to the more douce *mores* of a Lowland burgh. But most

interestingly of all there is the parody of the lad o' pairts. Gilian with his intelligence and his schoolmaster's sympathy and interest ought to be the ideal lad o' pairts - but, because of the social changes he is part of, he is not. The final irony is in his name. In Highland tradition Gilian was the eponymous founder of Clan MacLean, a powerful heroic figure, his nickname Gilian of the Axe.¹²

The Gilian of this novel is the very opposite.

- ¹ The text used throughout is Neil Munro, Gilian the Dreamer, Edinburgh, 1923
- ² Neil Munro, The Bookman, London, October, 1898: p103
- ³ Hugh MacDiarmid, The Scottish Educational Journal, Edinburgh, 3rd July, 1925: p6
- ⁴ Fionn MacColla, Foreword to The Albannach, Edinburgh, 1971: p1.
- ⁵ Beth Dickson, Development in Wholeness: The Scottish Novel 1897-1947, PhD. Thesis, University of Strathclyde, 1989: Vol.I p37. I am grateful for the insights provided both in this thesis and in subsequent-conversation with its author. They have guided the whole direction of this section.
- ⁶ “There are plenty to fight; there’s but one to make the song of the fight; and that’s John MacDonald with your honours’ leave.” Neil Munro, John Splendid: p182.
- ⁷ Gillesbeg Aotrom (“Daft Archie”), the wise fool, was a common figure in Gaelic literature, especially in the stories of the Skye bard Neil MacLeod, Clarsach an Doire, Edinburgh, 1883
- ⁸ It is commonly accepted that the Catholic areas of the Highlands have maintained a closer link with traditional culture because the continuity was not disrupted by the strictures of the Reformation.
- ⁹ George William, 6th Duke of Argyll, spent almost all of his life away from Scotland, mostly in London. Neil Grant, The Campbells of Argyll, London, 1975: pp78-79
- ¹⁰ This is a tongue-in-cheek reference to the local poet Evan MacColl, Bard Loch Fine (1808-1898). He belonged to Kenmore, a small village a few miles south of Inveraray.
- ¹¹ Letter from Neil Munro to William Blackwood, 26th February, 1894, National Library of Scotland MS 4621 (See pp23-24 above)
- ¹² The contrast is deliberate. Munro refers to Gilian of the Axe on a number of occasions throughout his work e.g. John Splendid: p190

CHAPTER 6(b)

The Daft Days (1907)¹

After the Jacobite romances Doom Castle (1901), The Shoes of Fortune (1901) and Children of Tempest (1903) Munro appears to have taken a revulsion to historical romance and quite uncharacteristically seems to have become very angry with those who had praised his Highland romances, thereby leading him into, as he then saw it, a literary dead-end. In an article in "The Scotsman" in 1963 marking the centenary of Munro's birth Norman Bruce cites a "brief entry" in Munro's diary which was

an anathema against those (unspecified) who had encouraged him to pursue the vein he had adopted in his fiction. One can only suppose that he had in mind those friends, critics and possibly publishers who had seized on his writing "in the Highland manner" and by their acclamation led him into an artistic cul de sac.²

Bruce locates this entry as appearing after the publication of Children of Tempest (1903) and notes that after this "the Highland historical novels cease" until appearance of The New Road in 1914. The character of Para Handy does seem to derive from Dan Macneil, Captain of the "Happy Return" in Children of Tempest, but apart from that historical Highland romance was abandoned. Instead Munro was to try his hand at contemporary novels - The Daft Days (1907) and Fancy Farm (1910).

The Daft Days deals with the arrival of a ten year old American orphan girl called Lennox Dyce (or "Bud", as she is nicknamed) in a small Scottish town. Her father has just died and her guardians, her uncle Jim Molyneux and his wife, feel that, since they are actors and constantly on

the move, it is better for her to go and stay with her father's family in Scotland. She is welcomed by her uncle, Dan Dyce, and her aunts, Bell and Ailie. She is a very outgoing and gifted child and is an accomplished mimic. She develops, like her father before her, a desire to be an actress and, in spite of some opposition from her Aunt Bell, she trains for the theatre and the story closes with her playing Desdemona in a London West End theatre to a rapturous audience.

The small town setting is quite clearly Inveraray. Many of the buildings are easily identifiable and, indeed, the Dyces' house with the brass door knocker shaped like a human hand ("the brass man's hand") was the house owned by William Douglas, the lawyer for whom Munro himself worked as a clerk before he left for Glasgow in June 1881. After Munro went into semi-retirement from the Glasgow Evening News in 1897 in order to devote more time to his "serious" writing he rented this house during his children's school summer holidays and did a great deal of his work there. In the story the character of Dan Dyce, a cheerful and compassionate lawyer, is obviously based on William Douglas - although one suspects that more than a little of Munro's own kindly nature and personality is also, perhaps inadvertently, transferred to him. The characters of Aunt Ailie and Aunt Bell are also based on Munro's relatives and many of the other characters are based on local people.

Although The Daft Days cannot be argued to be set at a time of major political or social change like many of Munro's other novels, nonetheless, the values and traditions of the modern small country town are being challenged by the arrival of the influence of the New World in the persons of the adopted prodigy, Bud, and her direct and outspoken uncle, the actor Jim Molyneux. And in this way that The Daft Days is the logical successor to Gilian the Dreamer, for both novels deal in different ways with the problems of the creative artist in relation to prevailing cultural traditions. In Gilian's case the Gaelic tradition has been broken by the Clearances and cannot support a poetic person who in an earlier age would have been a *bard*; in Bud's case the tradition

of Presbyterian distrust of the theatre and the acting profession extending from the Reformation to the time of the novel's action in the early 20th century is the major inhibiting factor.

This tradition of Presbyterian opposition is sardonically articulated by the narrator when Jim Molyneux arrives in the little town to see Bud and suggest that she go to school in Edinburgh:

But to be an actor too! earning easy bread by mimicry, and in enormous theatres, before light-headed folk that have made money - God knows how - and prospered. Sinful a little, we allow, for there are doubts if the play-actor, having to paint his face and work late hours in gas-light finally shall obtain salvation...(pp209-210)

but it is also personified throughout the novel in the character of Aunt Bell. She is a homely and kindly woman who is concerned only with the practicalities of life, playing Martha to her sister Ailie's Mary. She looks after Bud's physical needs and teaches her housekeeping and other mundane but necessary tasks. She is intensely proud of her Scottish heritage and from that she derives strong Presbyterian convictions.

When Bud feels she has been punished by pneumonia for telling "fibs" to Kate, the housemaid, (itself a Presbyterian conviction, no doubt acquired during her stay on Scotland) by writing a fake letter to her from an imaginary lover, going out to post it on a wet evening and then acting out a little play while waiting for her clothes to dry, Aunt Bell describes her as "my poor sinful bairn" (p126) and is glad that the ten year old has "a conviction of the sin of it herself" (p128).

As Bud grows older and starts to find life in the little town dull and constricting Bell opposes any ideas she has of moving away and any tendencies she has to follow in her mother's footsteps on the stage. She feels it is wrong to use the human body in such a public way and begs Ailie to stop the child from "thinking of worldly glories" and to

“Teach her to number her days, that she may apply her heart unto wisdom.” (p143).

She is shocked when she discovers that Molyneux does not carry a Bible in his luggage and, when Bud reveals to Dr Brash at the party where she plays the part of The Macintosh (of which Bell, of course, had already disapproved) that she wants to be an actress, she is in no doubt about her aunt's views of the stage:

“She considers acting is almost as bad as lying, and talks about the theatre as Satan's abode... I wish I didn't love her so - almost - for I feel I've got to vex her pretty bad.” (p258)

In spite of this, however, Bell does go to London to see Bud playing in Othello. She is appalled at the inordinate glamour and decadent show of wealth in the West End theatre but eventually she becomes engrossed in the action; she forgets that “it was nothing but a **sinful play**” (my emphasis) and begins to feel some pity for Othello.

A second influence on Bud's formation is her uncle Daniel Dyce. His views on life come somewhere between those of his two sisters. He is constantly cheerful, compassionate and tolerant but is perfectly happy to remain at home. He sees no need, however, for the hustle of the cities and the attraction of the bright lights which now seem to be attracting Bud. He is clearly a committed Presbyterian like his sister Bell but all his emphasis is on the joyful side of religion rather than a deep Calvinist sense of sin as is very clear when he tries to help Bud with her Shorter Catechism:

“But no, - God's good! Sleep comes and the clean morning, and the morning is Christ, and every moment of time is a new opportunity to amend. It is not sin that is eternal, it is righteousness and peace!” (p59)

Dan gives Bud the life-affirming aspects of religion. He communicates joy. He sings her hymns and psalms and, perhaps significantly, teaches her the Our Father (Pater Noster) in Latin - the Catholic practice at that time.

Along with this more positive influence from Dan comes the major impact of Bud's middle-aged, good-looking Aunt Ailie. She is entrusted with Bud's educational and intellectual development and instils in her curiosity and ambition. She herself is very bright, artistic, liberal and independent. She likes the independent spirit of Bud's American people:

"I love Americans...because they beat that stupid old King George, and have been brave in the forest and wise on the prairie, and feared no face of king, and laughed at dynasties. I love them because they gave me Emerson, and Whitman, and Thoreau, and because one of them married my brother William and was the mother of his child." (p23)

and she reflects on her own sense of independence when she is talking to the two ultra prim and conventional Misses Duff who run the primary school which Bud is going to attend:

And oddly there rose in her, too, a sense of gladness that she was of a newer kind of women than those gentle slaves, prisoned in their primness, manacled by stupid old conceits. She was glad she was free, that her happy hours were not so wasted in futilities, that she saw farther, that she knew no social fears, that custom had not crushed her soul, and yet she somehow liked and pitied them. (p75).

Yet, for all that, she has been trapped by the conventions and *mores* of her society. She would like to have been a teacher but ironically her genial brother Dan, perhaps for reasons of social convention, stood in her way. She is a frustrated actress. When she watches Bud entertaining Kate

by acting extracts from Macbeth by candlelight she feels envy and shame and the narrator tell us that later Ailie told him

of her conviction then that for her the years of opportunity were gone,
the golden years that had slipped past in the little burgh town without a
chance for her to grasp their offerings. (p100)

She appears to have renounced all her plans for an artistic future one day when she sat reading the Gospel of John to her mother on her deathbed and

found open some new vista in her mind that made her there and then
renounce her dearest visions, and thirl herself for ever to the home and
him [Dan] and Bell. (p226)

She is, however, determined that the same circumstances which she did not have sufficient courage to challenge will not inhibit Bud's chances of an artistic career and sees in Bud a reincarnation of herself:

“I thought a girl called Alison I used to know long ago was long since
dead and done with, and here she's to the fore yet, daft as ever, and her
name is Lennox Dyce.”(p129)

She constantly encourages her and, when Molyneux asks for her permission to let Bud take a small part in Shakespeare's King John which is to be the start of her career, she gives it, delighted that Bud would have the “freedom and the space that herself had years ago surrendered.” (p274)

Ailie, then, is the modern counterpart of Gilian - the artist circumscribed by a society that cannot deal with her gifts. She does, however, succeed in employing them vicariously through Bud. At the same time she illustrates the problem of the Scottish woman of independent and ambitious spirit, suppressed by her society. She can articulate her desires but is unable to put them into practice. She, herself, is only half way to Joanna Bannerman in Catherine Carswell's Open the Door

(1920) but she has been the important catalyst in assisting Bud break through the barriers to enable her achieve an impressive career as a serious actress.

And so to Bud the central character of the story. She is a perceptive, precocious and gifted child who from the very outset clearly has creative talent. She makes up verses of her own and even at the age of ten she can tell the difference between real poetry and rhyming doggerel:

“It looks like poetry sure enough, for it’s got the jaggy edges, but it doesn’t make any zip inside me same as poetry does. It wants biff.”(p82)

When she writes poetry herself she does so under the name of Winnifred Wallace, finding that when she adopts that persona she seems to get extra inspiration. Her pen name is perhaps intended to be an amusing echo of the name of the famous American poet Walt Whitman who is referred to in the course of the book.³ (At the same time it echoes Munro’s own practice of adopting the pen name “Hugh Foulis” for some of his work and anticipates the practice of the Renaissance writers who used pseudonyms e.g. Mitchell/Gibbon, Grieve/MacDiarmid, McDonald/MacColla.) She has a fertile imagination and in Ch.6 fantasises about being shipwrecked. Unlike Gilian, however, she has self control and is able to put this to humorous effect and not believe that it had actually happened to her.

Her creative talent gets another outlet when she takes to writing fanciful letters to the housemaid Kate’s beau, Charles Maclean. Above all, however, she is a born actor and mimic and this is especially demonstrated when she acts a bit of Macbeth to cheer up an ailing Kate and when she imitates The Macintosh, her teacher of dance and deportment at the polite Edinburgh school which she later attends to complete her education.

Eventually when she comes home after a term in Edinburgh she realises that she must move on for, even although she loves the town and the Dyces, “I feel if I lived here always I’d not grow

any more” (p243). And she proceeds in a very natural and healthy way to a glittering career as a Shakespearean actress. Significantly, however, she had ten years of American upbringing before she came to Scotland which did much to nurture her independent spirit; she was welcomed into a happy, supportive household who did all they could to develop her talents and make her feel secure, unlike the orphan Gilian who was taken into a house where he spent a great deal of his time being resented by his old soldier guardians; and, being educated at home, she avoided the spiritually repressive nature of Scottish primary education which Munro gently satirises. Above all she had the encouragement, education and inspiration of her enlightened Aunt Ailie who ensured that the opportunities which had been denied her would not be denied her niece.

Most interesting of all, however, is the ending of the story in the Imperial theatre in London. Aunt Bell, who represents traditional Calvinist suspicion of the theatre, gets so caught up in the action that she forgets that it was “nothing but a sinful play” and begins to feel sorry for Othello. After the rapturous applause they go round to Bud’s dressing room and it is into Bell’s arms Bud throws herself. This is almost a symbolic act of reconciliation between the Presbyterian Scotland and the theatre and the arts. Modern Scotland has moved on!

The Daft Days, as indicated above, satirises the Scottish education system of its day. Just as in Gilian the Dreamer the schoolmaster claims that he does not know how to deal with a gifted boy like Gilian, so here we find an education system which is not only unsuitable for Bud but is unlikely to foster the creative talents of any child. The Misses Duff, the teachers of the Dame School, are horrified to hear from Ailie that Bud has an independent mind. They regard this as an affliction to be cured and one of them says:

“But no doubt by carefulness and training it can be eradicated.”(p76)

They expect the children to remain quietly in their seats and to ask no questions. Bud becomes thoroughly frustrated and absents herself early - and does not return.

In Ch 23 Munro again returns to this subject of education, this time to the subject of corporal punishment. Jim Molyneux has come to the town on the same coach as the Misses Duff. They have been purchasing a tawse because the behaviour of children, they say, is getting worse. Molyneux challenges the value of corporal punishment:

“As moral suasion, belting don’t cut ice...It’s generally only a safety-valve for a wrothy grown-up person with a temper and a child that can’t hit back.”(p207)

He goes on to say,

“Over here I think you folks think children come into the world just to please grown-ups and do what they’re told without any thinking. In America it’s looked at the other way about: the children are considerably more important than their elders, and the notion don’t do any harm to either as far as I can see. As for your rebels, ma’am, cherish ’em; rebellion’s like a rash, it’s better out than in.” (p208)

It is interesting to note how Munro’s criticisms have anticipated much educational reform, especially of primary school teaching methodology.

If like Gilian the Dreamer The Daft Days criticises Scottish education it also parodies the Kailyard. That Munro knew exactly what he was parodying there can be no doubt as the following extract from the collection Erbie, My Droll Friend (1904) illustrates. Erbie is talking sarcastically to his wife Jinnet about a somewhat unreliable divinity student who is lodging with them:

“I declare, Jinnet,” he said, “I think he’s yin o’ the kind o’ students ye read aboot but very seldom see. His faither’ll be a wee fairmer up aboot Clachnacudden, hainin’ a’ the money he can, and no giein’ his wife her richt meat, that he may see his son through the college and waggin’ his heid in a pu’pit. Him and his faither’s the stuff they mak’ the six shillin’ Scotch novells oot o’ - the kind ye greet at frae the very start - for ye ken the puir lad, that was aye that smert in the school, and won a’ the bursaries, is gaun to dee in the last chapter wi’ a decline.”

“Puir things,” said Jinnet.

“Ye divna see ony signs o’ decline aboot Mr Tod, do ye?” asked Erchie anxiously.

“I didna notice,” replied Jinnet, “but he tak’s his meat weel enough.”

“The meat’s the main thing! But watch you if he hasna a hoast and thon hectic flush that aye breaks oot in chapter nine jist aboot the time he wins the gold medal.”⁴ (pp71-72)

This is, of course, a brilliant parody of the typical Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush story. The parody in The Daft Days is, however, subtler. It deals with the plight of not a lad o’ pairts, but two lasses o’ pairts. The native Scots one, Ailie, is unable to fulfil her gifts because of Scottish convention and Bud prospers because she avoids the traditional Scottish education mediated by the Misses Duff (the counterparts of Maclaren’s Domsie), because of ten years of independent American upbringing and because she is advised and encouraged by the older woman who had herself been trapped by the system. The novel, indeed, brings up the whole feminist issue.

In other ways, too, this novel subtly subverts the Kailyard with gentle resemblances to Brown’s The House with the Green Shutters (1901). A Kailyard village or town tends to be very

static. Just, however, as the railway stimulates major change in Barbie, so Bud and Molyneux stimulate change in Inveraray, the most interesting being the new business dynamic which Bud creates in Miss Wright's Italian warehouse which she transforms from near bankruptcy to a profitmaking enterprise in the space of a day:

“When they were gone I had a good heart-to-heart talk with her, and said phil- philanthropic principles were a great mistake in a small Italian warehouse, and that she ought to give the customers a chance of doing unto others as they would be done by.”(p158)

The Daft Days also faintly resembles The House with the Green Shutters in its closing pages where the pride for Bud's achievement in Othello is clearly grudging from some quarters - although, of course, nowhere is it remotely shot through with the viciousness of Barbie's "bodies".

In terms of ultimate weaknesses and strengths it has to be said that, although Munro believed

“This parish, though you may not think it, is a miniature of the world”⁵

The Daft Days is flawed by a couthy sentimentality which did not trouble him in his earlier historical romances. Furthermore, the list of achievements of the main character Bud, although she has tremendous wit and verve and a marvellous turn of American phrase, do become tiresome and somewhat ridiculous, especially the absurd letter-writing courtship she organises for Kate and the production of a business plan for the Italian warehouse.

In terms of strengths, however, The Daft Days provides clearly etched pictures of the town in which it is set at all seasons of the year, it uses the symbolism of the migrating wild geese to signify the need for change in Bud's life (a symbol taken up by MacDougall Hay in Gillespie (1914) to depict the inevitability of fate), it portrays strong female characters and most of all it develops the

theme of Gilian the Dreamer by confronting a new problem - the problem of the female creative artist in a society whose educational system and social and religious *mores* inhibit the expression of her talent.

¹ The text used throughout is Neil Munro, The Daft Days, Inveraray Edition, 1935

² Quotation from article by Anne Smith, The Scotsman, 11th December, 1982

³ Although Munro may be making humorous reference to Whitman, the character of Bud was based on **Winifred** Hodge, daughter of his friend and colleague, David Hodge. Her mother Lizzie was the daughter of William **Wallace**, editor of the Glasgow Herald. (I am grateful to Mrs. Lesley Bratton for this information.)

⁴ Neil Munro, Erichie and Jimmy Swan, Eds. Brian D. Osborne and Ronald Armstrong, Edinburgh, 1993: pp71-72.

⁵ Neil Munro, text of the speech he delivered when he was made a Freeman of Inveraray in 1909.

CHAPTER 6(c)

Fancy Farm (1910)¹

Fancy Farm is, as George Blake says, “by far the least successful of all [Munro’s] novels”, and yet at the same time it is his most ambitious for it is above all a novel of ideas. It is also a work on which we know he expended a great deal of care and effort.²

The story acquired its name from a farm building (still extant) actually called “Fancy Farm” in Greenock very near Munro’s home “Carnus”, in Tower Drive, Gourrock. Other places from this area incorporated in the story are Whiteforeland Point which becomes Whitfarland and Divert Road which gives its name to the teacher, Mr. Divvert. The rural setting, however, is clearly Argyll, mostly in the Crinan area, since Cairnbaan and Duntryne (Duntroon) are mentioned and there is a clear reference to the pre-historic linear cemetery in Kilmartin Glen (p41). It is quite likely that Munro had in mind the estate of the Malcolms of Poltalloch. The town scenes are, as usual, based on Inveraray. Although the setting is West Highland the locus is treated as Lowland and the characters speak either Standard English or, when it is an all male gathering, a “thin” Scots. It seems likely that the hero of the story Sir Andrew Schaw of Schawfield gets his name from the Shawfield Campbells of Islay, in particular Walter Frederick Campbell (1816-48) (the father of John Francis Campbell, Iain Og Ile) who was a very enlightened landlord and built *inter alia* the towns of Port Ellen and Port Charlotte in order to prevent people being cleared off the land.³

Fancy Farm is a modern novel set in Munro’s own day which deals with the quixotic, eccentric and egalitarian Sir Andrew Schaw’s “great experiment in training the Ideal Wife”(p2).

His first wife, Lady Jean, whom he married by accident, has died. The next lady whom he considers marrying, Penelope Colquhoun, he encounters when he is posing as the local coach driver. He had lost a curling match to the official driver, Tam Dunn, and as a result agreed to swap positions with him for a day. Significantly, Dunn is referred to as Christopher Sly, the tinker from The Taming of the Shrew, who also finds himself socially elevated, and the whole novel, indeed, is a parody of the Shakespeare play (although the ending turns out to be much more like Willie Russell's Educating Rita (1985)).

Penelope is coming to Schawfield as a companion to a Miss Skene whom Sir Andrew's ward and cousin, Norah Grant, had invited as a possible match for him. Pen, however, soon steals the limelight because she saved Norah's life when they were out skating and Sir Andrew makes her the object of his attentions. She would appear to be an ideal match for someone of his egalitarian ideals: she is bright, honest, straightforward, unpretentious and, as her father is a church minister, not at all wealthy. But Sir Andrew is not as egalitarian and tolerant as he thinks he is and decides that some aspects of Pen need improving e.g. her voice control, her poise, her knowledge of poetry, and so without her knowledge he, Norah and Reggy Maurice (a poet friend of Norah) embark on an "educating Pen" programme. What Andrew cannot see, however, is that he is simply trying to make Pen more like his cousin Norah (who, of course, is in love with him all along).

One day Pen tells Sir Andrew that

"I'm afraid if I were rich I would be hard and cruel." (p176)

Immediately he decides to put this to the test, and developing the reversal of roles prank initiated with Tam Dunn at the beginning of the book, he appoints Pen in his place as mistress of his run-down estate for a month. She handles the job very well and brings in many reforms and improvements (mainly suggested by Nora) which expose many of Sir Andrew's shortcomings as a

landlord, but she does not like the unpopularity the job entails and gives up before her period of office expires. However, when one of Sir Andrew's tenants, Watty the fiddler, is ill she goes into the nearby small town (part of the Schawfield domain) to nurse him and while there discovers that she is the subject of the Laird's "great experiment" - and everybody knows about it! She is deeply hurt and resentful and copes with the humiliation by throwing herself into looking after the sick and needy in the town, thereby demonstrating strong character and independence and at the same timing exposing further the appalling living conditions of many of Sir Andrew's people.

After this Pen at first refuses to return to Schawfield. Norah tries to rectify the situation by sending for Reggy Maurice (whom it has wrongly been assumed by all and sundry that Norah herself was in love with) to come and speak to Pen. Pen soon realises she is love with Reggy and, although Andrew would have married Pen to spare her embarrassment since he had raised public expectations concerning their relationship, he finally realises that he is in love with Norah and only wanted to change Pen to make her more like her. The novel ends with the anticipated marriages of Pen and Reggy and Norah and Andrew, but also, and most importantly, with the knowledge that Andrew has been reformed and seen the errors of his stewardship at Schawfield and with the sensible Norah to guide him all will be well.

Although much of the plot is a superficial romantic love story, Fancy Farm has more depth than this brief summary appears to indicate. The book hinges on the impulsive character of Sir Andrew Schaw. Indeed, he is regularly described as quixotic and, lest the point be missed, Pen is described as Dulcinea, the woman Don Quixote nominated as mistress of his heart - an honour of which she too was entirely unaware!(p150)

Sir Andrew believes himself to be at one with nature, and indeed, the atmosphere and description of the curling match in Ch.7 shows the clear influence of Wordsworth:

He [Sir Andrew] shouted at this wizard portal of the spirit, like a boy again, half fearful of its loneliness and mystery, and the echoes of his voice went clanging like to shaken brass against the precipices. (p.66)

Compare this with this extract from the skating scene in “The Prelude”:

So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
And not a voice was idle; with the din
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron.⁴

He identifies with the animal life and with the plants. When some of his trees are blown down in a storm he becomes inordinately distressed for the trees themselves. Carrying Romantic theory further he believes that man is naturally good, he rejects Original Sin, he believes “the heart is an infinitely better guide for man or poet than the head” (p163). He is forever doing impulsive acts of kindness. He has is not bothered about money or any other practicalities, even when choosing his wife. Indeed, he regards money on the bride’s side as an impediment. He is completely egalitarian, to the point of cutting himself off from his own class and spending time with poachers and tinkers and he treats his tenants as equals. He is totally committed, he thinks, to the brotherhood of man.

What he cannot see in all this, however, is that it is open to abuse. Tenants do not always look after their portions of the estate if not held accountable; in his concern for poachers and tinkers many who really need his help are denied it; and in his desire to respect the privacy of his tenants he will not go into their homes and thus not see the sometimes dreadful conditions in which they are living:

In truth, his hatred of intrusion had too long concealed from him the internal state of things among his humbler tenantry. (p256)

Above all, for all his would-be egalitarianism, he cannot see the hypocrisy in his own position - that he should consider Pen to be in some respects common and require to be educated in the social graces to meet his requirements.

Pen, on the other hand, is the genuine article. She is truly natural in that she is down to earth, unpretentious and extremely practical. She has no time for sham, is independent and is courageous in her convictions. Much of this is due to her background - her father was a United Presbyterian minister whom Pen refers to as "a Christian Socialist"(p116). The "education" in the "frills" which she received from Sir Andrew was unnecessary. When she takes over the running of the estate things immediately become more efficient and she exposes many of the defects in Sir Andrew's handling of things. She insists that the farmers mend their dykes and hedges, that poachers get jobs and that shares are sold to finance tree planting and, although many of these ideas were Norah's, it was Pen who had the conviction to see them through:

"She gave me the ideas, and all I had was the effrontery to express them.

She was too polite..."

"It's the effrontery, as you call it, that gave the idea any value; a too pale monitor is as useless as a mute inglorious Milton," answered Maurice.

(p274)

In addition she highlights the problems of the poor and sick and sets about working in the town to improve their lot.

The upshot of all this is that she wakens Andrew up to his true responsibilities and, therefore, to the ultimate betterment of the whole community.

And not only Andrew. She sees through the "saccharine sham emotions"(p259) of would-be poet Reggy Maurice's collection Harebell and Honey and convinces him that there is more

poetry to be found in his family business of shipbuilding than the kind of poetry he writes.

Again she is right:

He had burned his note books and gone back to the shipyard, nursing strange emotions, and found the place, as it were, an epic - new meanings in the giant cranes, the oozy piles, rhythms unsuspected in the beat of mallets, inspiring cadences in the throb of riveting machines.

(p260)

Not surprisingly she later marries him.

In addition to satirising “natural man” theory and the dangers of egalitarianism in the person of Sir Andrew, Fancy Farm also contains a number of discussions on the nature of beauty and what constitutes a good poem, painting or piece of music. Apart from the fact that these become tiresome and impede the flow of the narrative, the verdict of them all is that the subjective satisfaction of the reader, viewer or listener is all that matters. The architectonics and craftsmanship of the art forms mentioned are considered of no importance. What is strange to this reader is that these conclusions are put into the mouth, not of the romantic Sir Andrew, but of Pen, whom logically one would expect to hold a less dangerously subjective view.

Although Fancy Farm is not one of Munro’s best novels, it is, nonetheless, very interesting from the point of view of his own development as a novelist. Although it is a modern novel in terms of his own dates and although it ventures into a discussion of abstract ideas, there are strong connections with his past and, as it turns out, future historical fiction. The character of Sir Andrew who cannot bear to offend another by saying “no” is a descendant of that master of the easy word, John Splendid. Even more is he a descendant of Gilian; he too is a dreamer, more interested in Romantic theories of Rousseau and Wordsworth than harsh reality. He also prefigures that other

dreamer Aeneas, the hero of The New Road, in his romantic phase, and, just as Pen brings Andrew down to earth, so too does Aeneas's hard-headed merchant uncle, Alan Iain Alain Og, set sensible and realistic targets for him in the future.

Fancy Farm also continues the discussion of the theme of women's independence explored in The Daft Days in the character of Pen as she takes initiatives and shows firm leadership in tackling head on the problems of the poor and downtrodden in the town. It is interesting to note that, like Joanna Bannerman in Open the Door (1920), her father too was a Free Church minister. At the other extreme, it also continues to make reference to the idea of a Golden World already touched on in John Splendid and Children of Tempest when discussing Sir Andrew's intellectual background:

Inland, the estate spread from the hill-slopes over an enormous plain that had harboured the earlier Unknown Race, whose standing-stones and cromlechs sanctified the fields. Cells of the Culdees, old Cistercian chapels, churches of the Living God, had flourished there since these lichened menhirs were uplifted in a faith whose meanings baffle us, but the menhirs still were standing, and the chapels were in dust. These stones, so old, mysterious, and speechless, entered someway into what Sir Andrew, as a youth had cherished as a faith. (p41)

Finally and most interesting, Munro has been criticised for not dealing with the contemporary problems Highland and national,⁵ and it is true that nowhere does he (or any other Scottish novelist or poet writing in English or Scots) deal overtly with the Highland Clearances or the Land Agitation which followed them, although the effects of the Clearances are strongly implied in Gilian the Dreamer. Fancy Farm, does, however, begin to broach these subjects by

dealing with the problem of landlordism. Although it tackles it in a somewhat abstract way, it does make the point that egalitarian landlordism that merely seeks to curry favour with the tenant is irresponsible. If the landlord does not take mature responsibility for his tenants he is no good to himself or his people.

- ¹ The text used throughout is Neil Munro, Fancy Farm , Edinburgh, 1923
- ² Neil Munro, The Brave Days, Ed. George Blake, Edinburgh, 1933: p14
- ³ Norman S. Newton, Islay , Newton Abbot, 1988: pp137-139
- ⁴ William Wordsworth, "The Prelude", Book I, lines 438-442, The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth , Oxford, 1950: p500
- ⁵ Fionn MacColla, Foreword to The Albannach, Edinburgh, 1971: p1

CHAPTER 7

The New Road (1914)¹ and The Search

The New Road was published in 1914. In it Munro returns to the literary vein which had been so successful for him in the early 1900's, the world of historical romance, after trying his hand at two contemporary novels The Daft Days (1907) and, less successfully, Fancy Farm (1910). Indeed, it may have been dissatisfaction with this last work which made him turn again to a genre in which he was so much more sure-footed.

The New Road is a very accomplished and wonderfully entertaining Jacobite romance set around 1733. (Conflicting internal evidence makes the dates 1732 and 1734 also possibilities.)² The setting is Inveraray, Inverness and all the countryside between as the two protagonists, Ninian Macgregor Campbell and Aeneas Macmaster, travel from Argyll to the country of Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat, to investigate lawless behaviour and the potential for trade in the Highlands. As they go they gradually probe the mystery of the death Paul Macmaster, Aeneas's father, a Jacobite, who was alleged to have been killed at the Battle of Glenshiel in 1719. As the plot unravels, however, it turns out that he is not the casualty of a romantic cause but, in fact, the victim of a sordid murder by an unscrupulous and greedy "friend", Alexander Duncanson, who by guile and treachery has been able to acquire Paul's estate, Drimdorran. Suspense as to the whereabouts and method of the killing is maintained to the very last page when, after the sudden death of the murderer, Ninian discovers the evidence of Paul's burial and the dirk which was used to strike the fatal blow in the walled up fireplace of the dovecot, the place where the mystery started.

The New Road, however, is not merely a thrilling tale. It is much more than this. It builds on real historical characters such as Wade, Burt, Barisdale, Lovat and Forbes of Culloden. It does not espouse the traditional sympathies of Jacobite romance but is told from the point of view of the

pro-Hanoverian, anti-Jacobite House of Argyll, in this anticipating Violet Jacob's Flemington (1914) and Naomi Mitchison's The Bull Calves (1947). Although not historically accurate in all its details it examines and places before us some of the forces that shape the history of modern Highland Scotland and, although there are regrets for the end of an auld sang, the total thrust of the book shows a very positive direction for the future of Scotland, a Scotland in which the divide between Highland and Lowland can be healed, so that this work can be called, in Douglas Gifford's terminology, a novel of mythic regeneration in the Scott tradition.³

The structure of all of Munro's Jacobite novels follows Scott in a much more profound way than the mere depicting of the beauty of Highland scenery (although he does this very well!). He shows an understanding of Scott's method of juxtaposing the claims of heart and head with a sureness that is only now beginning to be recognised. Indeed, his approach to the writing of these novels anticipates David Daiches' famous essay of 1951 where this thesis is fully explained for the first time.⁴

Like Scott's great novels Waverley and Rob Roy, The New Road is set a time of major change - the period after the Battles of Sheriffmuir and Glenshiel and the construction of Wade's famous roads which were built in response to these with the intention of subjugating the Highlands. Into this situation is introduced Aeneas Macmaster, a young man of twenty two years old who like Edward Waverley is hypersensitive, a literary descendant of Harley, the hero of Mackenzie's The Man of Feeling (1771):

his heart was all in pictures and in poetry - very pretty things no doubt,

but scarcely with a living in them. (p44)

Like Waverley he too is in love with his own distorted romantic view of the Highlands. When he is sacked by Duncanson, ostensibly for neglecting his duties as tutor to Duncanson's daughter and ward, but in reality because he was coming dangerously close to stumbling on the circumstances of

his father's murder, his Uncle Alan-Iain-Alain Og suggests that he accompany Ninian Campbell who as Messenger at Arms to the Duke of Argyll was about to make a journey to Inverness to investigate reports of gun running, cattle thieving and vandalism of the New Road. He suggests that Aeneas take this opportunity to assess the business potential of the North now that the New Road is nearing completion. At first the prospect of a commercial expedition seems dull and boring but when his uncle describes it as "Adventure" (p47) his whole attitude changes:

Now to his uncle's great astonishment, he leapt on Blaeu [a map], and with his chest upon the parts he knew, he peered, transported, on that legendary region of the boisterous clans, still in the state of ancient Gaul, and with Gaul's customs. The very names of castles, passes, straths, misspelled, entranced him; everything was strange and beckoning. Moreover, it had been the country of his father's wanderings, somewhere there his father had been slain, somewhere there was buried.

(p48)

They set off on what for Aeneas, like Waverley, will be a journey of disillusionment. First, they meet the petty chieftain and Master of a Watch, Col of Barisdale, who clearly intends mischief against them. He is a bombastic bully with laughable pretensions to urbane culture and scholarship. For Aeneas he is the first indication that his romantic notion of the Highlands might be false:

All at once it came upon him that his glamoured notion of the North was just a kind of poetry in himself; it vexed him to reflect that, after all, the heroes of the *ceilidh* tales - the chiefs and the caterans - were, like enough, but men of wind as this one seemed. (p82)

Furthermore, once Aeneas has seen the unscrupulous way Col, who is supposed as Captain of a Watch to protect farmers against cattle reiving or the *creach*, takes a herd of Glen Lyon cattle for himself he is further disappointed because another romantic notion has been destroyed:

Till now, the customs of the North, as he had heard of them, high-coloured with imagination, had appeared to have a kind of gallantry, and now the **foray** - most inspiring of them all, as having in it something of adventure and the risk of war - was shown as commonplace and mean.(p93)

This is a far cry from the highly romantic picture of the doings of the Highland warrior Duncan in Scott's "Coronach":

Red hand in the **foray**
Sage counsel in cumber
Fleet foot in the correi
How sound is thy slumber.⁵

Aeneas's disgust increases when Ninian praises him by laying lightly the tip of his sword blade on his head in accordance with Highland custom after he has been blooded by shooting a Macdonald at Druimbeg. At this he is physically sick and exclaims:

"Everything's destroyed for me!... The stories have been lies, and we have aye been beasts, and cloak it up in poetry." (p111)

When he reaches Inverness, acting as his uncle's agent he meets a number of petty chiefs and is utterly disillusioned by them, seeing them to be more grasping and acquisitive than the meanest merchant:

From these proud petty chiefs he got his last illumination of the North as glamoured mainly to the eye of fancy, and a gleam went off the hills for him as slips the sunset off the heather...he found that just as Barisdale below his leather coat was but a bellows, so these men of family, for all their show of native ancient pomp and ritual, were more the merchantmen than Alan-Iain-Alain Og. They haggled like to fishwives on the price of salt and salmon crops, and pickled beef, and timber.(pp 163-164)

His greatest and most powerful disillusion comes, however, in his meeting with the most powerful chieftain in the North - MacShimi, Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat. In Castle Dounie he hears this chieftain, in his specious paternalism to his people, treat them with utter contempt with these words:

“Here is healthy and contented people bruicking and enjoying every comfort fitted for their state, secure of the invasion of those desperate and levelling ideas that in other places have played havoc with the loyalty of commons and reduced authority of chiefs.” (pp176-177)

He even refuses them schools. As long as the Highland aristocracy's children are educated according to their needs he sees no need to educate the common people:

“My people always have what fits them best in their condition - schooling of the winter and the blast, rough fare, the hills to strive wi' and the soil to break. They need no more, except their swords and skill to use them.” (p177)

Not surprisingly Aeneas is outraged at the sheer barbarism of this and describes it as “blasphemy”.

Like Waverley the veil has been lifted from his eyes and he now sees the Highlands for what they really are. The only aspect of them which has remained true to his earlier notion of them is the image of his father. Paul Macmaster was not the corrupt, double agent Duncanson made him out to be. Argyll himself, although Paul's political enemy, tells Ninian that Paul would never have betrayed his friends.

Over and above Aeneas's personal disillusionment the overwhelming impression is given of corruption and barbarity among the rulers of Highland society. By any objective standard Barisdale is a thug. Ninian uncovers Lovat's cunning ploy of importing obsolete guns from Holland so that the clansmen can sell them to the Government under the Disarming Act while the good weapons are kept in the thatch of the houses, thus enabling him to remain the most powerful man in the Highlands and, if need be, ready to take part in another rising. As Ninian says,

“He wants to keep the real stuff in the thatch; he doesna want the North
disarmed no more than he wants roads and schools. So long's the North
has gun and claymore ready, Simon is king beyond the Spey.”(p291)

Duncanson is a nefarious double dealer, outwardly professing allegiance to Argyll, while, mainly for money, clandestinely in league with Lovat. His family is from Gunna, a small, barren and rocky islet between Col and Tiree. Col was a rebellious place whilst Tiree belonged to civilised Argyll. Duncanson, or Maclean as he was then known, chose to live in whichever of those places suited his needs. The meanness of Gunna symbolises Duncanson's own character whilst his lack of loyalty to either Col or Tiree is symptomatic of the greed which was to characterise his whole life. Significantly, like Scott's Vich Ian Vohr, both Lovat and Duncanson are described as spiders in a web who cunningly control the dark deeds of the Highlands. Paul Macmaster, on the other hand, is an honourable Jacobite but we are given the impression that he was rather feckless and seduced by a romantic dream rather than a realistic conviction.

The arbitrary power of the chiefs is again endorsed in their ability to dictate their clansmen's religion as Ninian tells Aeneas when they are in Druimbeg:

“Ye'll mind we're in among a lot of heathens, no' right sure yet whether they are Protestant or Papist till the chief of them comes round to tell them wi' a yellow stick.” (p107)

whilst Alan-Iain-Alain Og suggests that it is the chieftain class who are the cause of the troubles in the Highlands:

“It's no the common people, mind! - the poor and faithful clansmen - but their lairds and chiefs I'm after, them your father marched wi' in his folly, blind to their self-interest, thinking they were only out for James.” (p49)

This insight into the behaviour of the chiefs anticipates Gunn's similar identification of them as the major weakness in the 18th century Highland society. He targets their changed relationship with their people (albeit after Culloden) as a primary cause of the Clearances in Butcher's Broom,⁶ whilst the sympathy for the common people, although only just touched on in Munro, anticipates Gunn's Butcher's Broom (1934), MacColla's And the Cock Crew (1945) and Crichton Smith's Consider the Lilies (1968).

Against the disillusionment of the sensitive young hero figure and the more generalised criticism of Highland society must be set the regenerative aspects of the novel. As mentioned before, The New Road flouts the usual convention in novels dealing with the Jacobite period by presenting the case, not from the Stuart side, but from the Hanoverian perspective through MacCailein Mòr, the Duke of Argyll,⁷ and his brother Islay. These two figures are never actually encountered in the novel although we hear of them as men who are Enlightenment “improvers”,

men who are carrying on the tradition of peaceful commerce in Argyll introduced by Gillesbeg Gruamach in John Splendid. They stand for civilised values and are presented as acting in Scotland's best interests. Likewise the Lord Advocate, Duncan Forbes of Culloden, is presented as a reasonable person torn between his instinctive loyalties to the past and the need for civilisation in the modern world. Most interesting of all, however, in this regard is the highly charismatic character of Ninian Macgregor Campbell, *beachdair* and Messenger-at-Arms to MacCailein Mòr. It has frequently been remarked that The New Road resembles Stevenson's Kidnapped in that Ninian and Aeneas are counterparts to Alan Breck and David Balfour. And at a superficial level this is true. But where Munro rings a skilful change is in placing his highly attractive, charismatic, perceptive and competent Alan Breck character, not on the side of the Stuarts, but on the side of Argyll. The mere act of doing this transforms the credibility and attractiveness of the Hanoverian side in the reader's eyes. Like Forbes, Ninian has great sympathy with the plight of the suffering Highlander because of his own persecuted Macgregor lineage but, nonetheless, his loyalty to MacCailein and his civilising values is beyond all question and in this he takes the reader with him.

The regenerative impulse is intensified in the character of Alan Iain Alain Og. He is a successful merchant who can now control his business throughout the country without leaving Inveraray. He is a bailie and has gradually adopted all the external hallmarks of a Lowland burghess. Indeed, he has grown quite stout:

Mercantile prosperity would seem to have an ill effect upon the trunk, in which the energy and elegance of men and women mainly centre, as they say, and he was grown a little heavy and deliberate in his movements.

(p17)

He sees the North as an opportunity for trade and commerce and the New Road as the ideal means of accessing these new markets. Indeed, he has given Aeneas special instructions to evaluate its

usefulness for his enterprise (p47). Like that other famous Bailie, Scott's Nicol Jarvie, he sees trade as the logical and sensible way forward for a modern nation rather than an obsession with a romantic affection for the feuding of the past. He sees the operation of the modern man of business as an adventure just as the clan wars were adventures in the past:

"It's just a bit of an adventure," said the Bailie. "That's the thing wi' me in business, otherwise it wasna worth a docken leaf!" (p47)

He believes with MacCailein, furthermore, that trade is the way to pacify and civilise the North:

"That's right!" the Duke would say to him, with a jaunty step into the store among the coopers packing powdered sugar, tea and hops, silk cloths, tobacco-rolls and looking glasses, - "that's right, Bailie, keep tickling them with luxuries, and I'll guarantee you'll help to subdue my savage Hielandmen far quicker than we'll do it with their Watches and dragoons." (p16)

But it is here he goes further than Nicol Jarvie and the old unregenerate Highland temperament also shows itself. In addition to making money, trade with the Highland chiefs is his way of seeking vengeance for his brother Paul whom he considers they seduced into the Jacobite cause. By civilising them through trade and commerce he says,

"...*I'm smashing them*, the very men that led my brother Paul astray. MacCailein and me! MacCailein and me! And now there's Marshal Wade and his bonny Road that's going to make the North a land for decent folk to live in!...Once the New Road is finished, and the troopers and the guns and my carts on it, it's an end to the dominion o' the chiefs." (pp48-49)

And this brings us to the New Road itself. It will penetrate a land previously impenetrable to all but the brave or foolhardy:

Since roads had been in Scotland they had reached to Stirling, but at Stirling they had stopped, and on the castle rock the sentinel at nightfall saw the mists go down upon a distant land of bens and glens on which a cannon or a carriage wheel had never yet intruded. Only the bridle-paths to kirk and market, the drove-track on the shoulders of the hills!(p45)

Now all this is about to change. Wade's road will open up the country from Stirling to the Moray Firth and this will radically improve trade and transport and bring prosperity. But it is not just trade and transport that will change; it is a whole way of life that will alter and this for any native Gael will be a matter for regret. As Ninian says the whole Gaelic way of life will change irretrievably:

"I'm tellin' you that Road is goin' to be a rut that, once it's hammered deep enough, will be the poor Gael's grave." (p33)

and, of course, as Forbes inadvertently prophesies, it will take the cannons that will suppress the Rising of '45 (p115). Indeed, the process of change initiated by Wade's road goes on to-day as the North is relentlessly stripped of its Gaelic character.

The road then becomes a symbol of the union of Highlands and Lowlands, a symbol of prosperity, and a symbol of the new civilised values which MacCailein and Forbes are trying to introduce against the barbarity of Lovat and his supporters who have steadfastly organised the vandalism of the road to ensure their primitive hegemony. But even the humane Forbes, a Highlander himself with all the *dualchas* (heritage) of the true Gael, cannot see this change implemented without regret. His statement to Ninian sums up the situation:

"The hearts of all of us are sometimes in the wilds. It's not so very long since we left them. But the end of all that sort of thing's at hand. The

man who's going to put an end to it - to you and Lovat and to me -
 yes, yes, to me! or the like of me, half fond of plot and strife and
 savagery, is Wade...Ye saw the Road? That Road's the end of us! The
 Romans didna manage it; Edward didna manage it; but there it is at last,
 through to our vitals, and it's up wi' the ell-wand, down the sword!...It
 may seem a queer thing for a law officer of the Crown to say, Mr
 Campbell, but I never was greatly taken wi' the ell-wand, and man, I
 liked the sword! At least it had some glitter." (p200)

The New Road, then, affirms a myth of regeneration. In Waverley Edward Waverley becomes disillusioned by the romantic but false glamour of the Highlands but in the end good sense prevails and he opts to return to the Hanoverian fold; likewise Aeneas has his eyes opened to the falseness of Highland chieftains and their glamourie. In Rob Roy the Jacobite cause is a romantic dream but the true way forward in the modern world is through the sensible trade and commerce of Bailie Nicol Jarvie; likewise Alan-Iain-Alain Og and his nephew Aeneas Macmaster choose to pursue this route vigorously. And the key to this civilised prosperity is the New Road. Costs will have to be paid and there will be regrets, but the ell wand is preferable to the sword for all its glitter and the head determines that the New Road is the route to take whatever the impulses of romance or nostalgia.

The above is the main thrust of the novel but other interesting considerations also arise. Just as the identification of the unhealthy relationship between chief and people mentioned in Munro as a source of criticism is developed in Gunn in Butcher's Broom, so too does there seem to be some

further evidence of ideas about a past Golden Age and myth and ritual in The New Road which anticipates the Renaissance writers. When Janet and Aeneas are standing looking at the Old Road and the New Road running down the valley into Badenoch Aeneas says:

“I could weep myself to think our past is there. Where men have walked are always left the shades of them - their spirits lingering. To your eyes and to mine nothing is on the old drove-road but grass and boulder, but if there’s aught of the immortal in men’s souls, there’s the immortal likewise in their earthly acts. Our folk are on the old-drove road - the ghosts of them, the hunters and the tribes long-perished to the eye, the *duineuasail* (sic) and broken men. It’s history!”(p269)

This passage is very reminiscent of the picture of pre-Clearance contentedness in Sorley Maclean’s poem “Hallaig”⁸ and it does seem to suggest a time of idyllic happiness in the Highlands (although this is at odds with the main view of the book that the Highlander, even the urbane Duncan Forbes, is only a hair’s-breadth from “the wilds”).

Again Munro seems to be attracted by myth and ritual and it is interesting to note that Ninian insists in carrying a Virgin Nut with him for good luck wherever he goes.(Anna in Children of Tempest also carries one.) This was a Molucca Bean known in Uist and Barra as *Airne Mhoire* “the kidney of Mary”. The mark of a cross is faintly discernible on it and it was used as a charm against sickness and evil in the Islands.

A further example of this type of behaviour occurs when Ninian is searching for the kidnapped Aeneas. At Bunchrew Burn he stretches his hands to the east, then washes his face and declaims an *Ora Ceartais* (Invocation for Justice) (p196). This lustration ritual and the invocation declaimed (slightly adapted) are again taken from Carmichael’s Carmina Gadelica.⁹

In these two examples of symbols for good Munro seems to be recalling Scotland's earlier Catholic past, as he does in John Splendid, Gilian the Dreamer, Doom Castle and Children of Tempest, and taken in conjunction with the Golden Age idea we seem have further confirmation that he is looking back to a time when Scotland was wholer and more harmonious, thus anticipating in a less systematised way the approach of MacColla and MacKay Brown and one of the main tenets of the mythopoeic Renaissance novel.

Since The New Road is so frequently compared to Kidnapped in any revaluation it is worth comparing the characters of Duncanson and Ebenezer Balfour. Duncanson's location in the plot is much more central. He is effectively controlling the country in Islay's absence and we are constantly aware of his influence even when he is not present. The description of his fear of the dark and the doocot and his disintegration are very well told and we are left with the final irony that this unscrupulous, greedy rogue tries to convince Paul that his father was a double agent when, in fact, he himself was the arch double-dealer of the novel. Ebenezer is small beer compared to this.

It is also worth pointing out that, despite Maurice Lindsay's criticism that Munro's female characters are "verbal wraiths",¹⁰ all five of the female characters in this novel are well depicted: the courageous and intuitive Janet Campbell, the flirtatious Annabel Macmaster, the outspoken but affectionate Mary Forbes, the pert and confident Margaret Duncanson and the morose Prim Campbell, the downtrodden wife of Lovat.

Finally, although it is commonly acknowledged that Munro's descriptions of Highland rural scenery are extremely well executed in The New Road, it should also be noted that his descriptions of the Highland capital Inverness, though brief in treatment, have all the verve of Stevenson's Edinburgh.

The Search

The common assumption has been up until now that Munro did not write any more novels after The New Road (1914) (The short stories in the Jaunty Jock collection were probably all written during the pre-war period.) Tradition has it that after the death of his son Hugh at Albert in 1915 he lost the will to undertake major creative work. However, the typescript of eleven chapters of another novel, The Search, exists in the National Library of Scotland.¹¹ It is undated and at the moment no evidence exists on which to base a conjecture of the time of writing except to say that it must have been after The New Road in 1914 because one of the main characters is Ninian Campbell, somewhat older but still *beachdair* and Messenger-at-Arms to the Duke of Argyll. The story appears to break off in mid-chapter.

The story tells of the arrival of a young horseman in Inveraray called Derry. He is an urbane and sophisticated young man, rather like the hero of Violet Jacob's Flemington (1911), and like him he too is a government spy. The time is about six months after Culloden and his task is to track down a young Jacobite whom it seems reasonable to deduce from internal evidence to be called Patrick Drummond and who goes by the alias "Morag".¹²

Derry calls on Sheriff Campbell (clearly modelled on Munro's friend Sheriff John MacMaster Campbell) for further instructions and is introduced to Ninian who is to accompany him in his search for "Morag".

The Jacobite is believed to be in the area of Arisaig, but before heading North Derry is determined to visit the home of the assistant keeper of the prison in Dumbarton. While there we are introduced to Colina, an attractive young woman who seems to be the sister of "Morag" although the other characters have no means of knowing this at this point. While they are there a

prominent Jacobite, Craigharnet, escapes from the prison. After this they head for Stirling Castle for further instructions. Receiving none they head North to Doune and Balquhiddar. In the meantime Colina dons male clothes and makes for Arisaig to warn “Morag”. And there the story stops.

The fragment is extremely well written and the descriptions of Inveraray, Dumbarton and the “top of the town” in Stirling are very evocative. Particularly interesting is the description of Inveraray at the time of the building of the new Adam Castle and the New Town, the products of the Enlightenment thinking of the 3rd Duke, Duke Archibald (1743-1761). Again the idea of the need for a more civilised way of life in the Highlands is being dealt with. On the other hand, Ninian with his outlaw Macgregor background, although a man committed to peace, is deeply upset at the thought of the suffering of his fellow Gaels when he sees a herd of a thousand cattle being driven through Doune from Lochaber, the government’s compensation to itself for the Jacobite clans’ part in the ’45, and at the sight of Hanoverian soldiers working the smithy where the Maclaurens had formerly created their famous Doune pistols. The same classic tensions of The New Road!

In addition we have the character of Sheriff Campbell who, like Mitchison’s Forbes of Culloden in The Bull Calves, hints that it might be wiser to turn a blind eye and let the Jacobite fugitive go free in contrast to the zealous Derry who would not countenance such an idea.

It is a tantalising fragment dealing again with the Highlands at a crucial period in their history. One can only speculate as to why Munro did not complete it.

- ¹ The text used throughout is Neil Munro, The New Road (with introduction by Brian D. Osborne), Edinburgh, 1994
- ² Osborne op.cit. p.ix
- ³ Douglas Gifford, "Myth, Parody and Dissociation: Scottish Fiction, 1814-1918", The History of Scottish Literature Vol.3, Ed. Douglas Gifford, Aberdeen, 1988: pp217-223
- ⁴ David Daiches, "Scott's Achievement as a Novelist", Literary Essays, Edinburgh, 1951: pp88-121
- ⁵ Sir Walter Scott, The Lady of the Lake, Canto 3, lines 386-389, Ed. Thomas Crawford, Oxford, 1972: p195.
- ⁶ Neil Gumm, Butcher's Broom, London, 1977: pp72 & 96
- ⁷ John, the 2nd Duke of Argyll (1703-1743), nicknamed "Red John of the Battles". He commanded the government forces against the Jacobites in 1715 and dominated Scottish politics in his later life.
- ⁸ Sorley Maclean, "Hallaig", From Wood to Ridge, Manchester, 1989: pp226-227
- ⁹ Alexander Carmichael, Carmina Gadelica, Vol.1, No.20, Edinburgh, 1928: p53
- ¹⁰ Maurice Lindsay, History of Scottish Literature, London, 1977: p346
- ¹¹ Neil Munro, The Search, National Library of Scotland MS 26903
- ¹² Morag was a code name in Gaeldom which the Jacobites used for their cause, for individual Jacobites and on occasions for Charles Edward himself.

CHAPTER 8(a)

Ayrshire Idylls (1912)¹

In 1912 Munro produced his second short story collection, Ayrshire Idylls. These were published by A.& C. Black and were illustrated with the drawings and watercolour landscape paintings of George Houston, one of the leading artists of his day and peripherally part of the Scottish Colourist movement in which S.J. Peploe, J.D.Ferguson and F.C.B. Cadell played a major part. The stories themselves are interesting in that they show very clearly Munro's familiarity with Lowland Scotland and the Lowland tradition and exhibit again that fluency in the Scots language which he had already shown in such an accomplished manner in the character of Mungo Boyd in Doom Castle (1901).

There are ten stories in the collection: two deal with Covenanting figures; one with an incident in Johnson and Boswell's tour; four, appropriately for a collection set in Ayrshire, with the life of Burns; "The Three Brothers" is in the nature of a parable; "Magic Casements" contains a portrait of the novelist John Galt and "Miss Jean" is the sad story of an old lady who is shielded from reality by her neighbours while she dreams an impossible dream.

Of the two Covenanting stories the first, "The Lion of the Covenant", deals with death of Richard Cameron, the vigorous field preacher who gave his name to the extreme Covenanting group, the Cameronians, at the battle of Airds Moss in 1680. It is written from the Covenanting viewpoint in the tradition of Hogg's The Brownie of Bodsbeck (1818) and Galt's Ringan Gilhaize (1823) (as opposed to the viewpoint of Scott's Old Mortality (1816)). (No doubt Munro was also reminded of the tradition by John Buchan's John Burnet of Barns which was published in 1898.) It

portrays Cameron as saint and martyr, knowing that his hour has come, happy to embrace death and speaking in the biblical language of the preachers of the Covenant:

The horses rode him down and trampled over him, but he arose like one unharmed, and still the claymore knotted to his wrist, to find himself before the levelled barrels of a file of Strachan's horse. For a moment he stood smiling as if ravished by some vision of delight, his look not of this yird but of a land delectable, no more a creature but a spirit sanctified; then, spreading out his arms, walked calmly to the guns.

"Neither by an Army nor Strength, but by My spirit, said the Lord of Hosts!" he cried and fell face-downward as the horsemen fired. (pp41-42)

In addition to the portrait of Cameron this sketch is enriched by a wonderful picture of a misty morning in July which creates a ghostly atmosphere and at the same time initially protects the Cameronians from being spotted by the dragoons. There is also a vivid picture of the ensuing storm which unnerves the Covenanters' horses and causes them to break from the knoll on which they are gathered on Airds Moss, thus precipitating their defeat.

"The Cloak of Darkness" is a less sympathetic tale of a leading Covenanter. It is a critical portrait of the field preacher and "prophet" Alexander Peden who skulked around the countryside egging on his co-religionists to rebel against the Establishment, disguised in a dark cloak and velvet mask. His "miraculous prevision"(p54) foretold the merciless attack of Claverhouse on John Brown, a small hill farmer, but instead of grieving at the appalling slaughter he is more preoccupied with cursing Claverhouse in highly charged biblical language and gloating that his prophecy had been correct:

“A bloody end and terrible, O Lord, to that messan whalp, John Graham of Claverhouse! Let him die without the witness of the spirit, and his bones be turned to whistles. Ay! ay! thou son of Belial, death’s door is only on the hasp for thee...” (p59)

John Brown’s wife, another of Munro’s strong female characters, however, perceives his gloating:

... it touched her to the quick to find him vain that his prognostications were fulfilled, rejoicing in the very horror of the crime as confirmation of the very worst that he had thought of Claverhouse; the sappier in his unction that he himself was not the victim (p61)

and she reduces him to his true stature of coward, accusing him of egging on the other Covenanters to their deaths in the Grassmarket, at the same time being unwilling to fight himself; indeed, having used his gift of prophecy on this occasion to save his own skin he abandons her husband to die.

Punning on the vexed matter of Indulgences she berates him as follows:

“Ye have denounced the Indulgences and who, forsooth, so much **indulged** (my emphasis) as Alexander Peden in every cot house in Carrick, Kyle, or Cunningham, or skulking in Glendyne of Sanquhar, or the hills of Wanlockhead, or in the thickets of Loch Trool.”

Then in proverbial Scots she reviles him thus:

“Wha winna march... should never blaw the trumpet! There’s my man deid!”(p64)

We are left with a pathetic Peden. The proud character at the beginning of the story has been chastised and deflated and we are reminded that human nature does not change - even in the most godly.

“Ursa Major” is an amusing reconstruction of Dr Johnson’s visit to Boswell’s home at Auchinleck and his meeting with his father, Lord Auchinleck, the High Court judge. It is based on the entries for 1st-8th November, 1773, of Boswell’s A Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides. Munro tells first of the travellers’ visit to the home of the aged Countess of Eglinton and wittily “interpolates” her “true” feelings for Johnson when he is out of earshot and about to leave:

“There are two things sadly lacking in your lion...– a sense of humour, and a family. It took me all my time to keep my countenance when he was lecturing me upon how to bring up children. An amazing man, Mr Boswell, but I never slept a wink last night for a headache!”(p6)

The next day they meet Lord Auchinleck where inevitably he and Johnson have a dispute over religion. Munro cleverly polarises this into a direct conflict between Anglicanism and Presbyterianism/Puritanism, with Auchinleck, after making pious reference to the Covenanters Peden and Cameron, carrying the day with the following Parthian shot:

“What good did Cromwell ever do?” Dr Johnson asked.

“T’ll tell ye that, man,” answered Auchinleck. “He gart kings ken they had a lith [joint] in their necks.”(p13)²

After Johnson has left Lord Auchinleck refers to him as “yon big bear” - Ursa Major in a pejorative sense!

In this story Munro proves himself capable of fake Johnsonese, parodying the great master very wittily as in the following:

“I shall certainly not be disquisitionary on topics disagreeable to a gentleman in whose house I shelter; especially I shall not be so to your father...Fortunately there are innumerable other themes on which I hope I may consider myself qualified with edification to dilate.” (p10)

Finally, Munro's Auchinleck uses witty reductive Scots to describe Johnson as cursed with the schoolteacher's affliction of not being able to stop lecturing people:

"I wonder if he has his tawse with him?" said Lord Auchinleck. "I think sometimes, Jamie, ye're gane gyte! First it was yon land-loupin' Corsican Paoli ye were traikin' after, and now it's ower the hills ayont Dunblane wi' this auld dominie that keepit a schule and ca'd it an academy. Your frien', I can see already, is just a hectorin', conceited schulemaister, still drum-majorin' bairns." (p10) ³

Ayrshire Idylls also contains four graphic sketches which reconstruct incidents in the life of Burns. The first shows Burns in search of the sublime, the second as philanderer, the third as makar in action and the fourth as ambivalent "democrat". In "Mossgiel Rab" Burns, frustrated by the grim, boring routine of farm life, leaves Mossgiel for Poosie Nancy's pub in Mauchline. He has his half yearly pay on him - a sum of £3 10/-. He spends the night drinking with the locals. In the small hours the wife of one of his fellow revellers comes seeking her husband - or, more specifically, his wages which he had by this time drunk. With typical generosity Burns gives her what is left of his half-year pay - 30 shillings.

In his description of Burns's journey to Mauchline on that cold winter's night Munro attempts to give us glimpses of the poetic "uplift to his soul" (p19) and "that glance into the heart of things, that second's ecstasy" (p21) that Burns gained from the beauty of the natural scene and for which he was continually striving:

Old trees overhung the dwelling, the tall haw-bushes made a hedge to shelter it; among them went the wind, that seemed to sweep the shire of Ayr of all its chilly elements and pile them, drift-white, in the wide

quadrangle of the steading. Some sparks from the fire that Blane was banking for the night came up through the low chimney, and lived a moment - red, aspiring little stars, that gave to the poet a fancy of his own and all men's sad futility; his heart played thud in his breast and he gasped with an emotion such as poet's feel from things that may seem trivial to the world, but to the gifted have the import of a cataclysm.

(p19)

In "Burns and Clarinda" we are given an imagined account of the first meeting of Burns with Nancy McLehose at Miss Nimmo's house and the beginning of the Sylvander - Clarinda correspondence. (It is based particularly on Burns's letters to her of Saturday, 8th December, 1787 and Friday, 28th December, 1787, the latter being actually quoted on pp51 and 52.)⁴ He is unable to keep his next appointment with her because of an injured knee and writes to her. The story probes Burns's motives for the use of highly emotive Augustan English prose in the letter quoted. We are led to believe that he recognised full well its exaggerated, "over-the-top" style but decided to post it anyway,

The story also contains a slight but skilful portrait of Miss Nimmo who pawkily chastens Burns for his disloyalty to his wife, Jean Armour, and at the same time reveals the faults and wiles of her friend Mrs McLehose:

"Her husband is in the Indies, and she hopes he'll bide there. Meantime it is plain she wants to keep herself in practice at the gallivanting. I'm touched at her raptures over your book; she must have raced through it unco fast, for she borrowed my copy at nine o'clock last night when she heard there was a chance she might see you here." (p49)

In "The Making of Tam O'Shanter" Munro reconstructs the circumstances of the creation at Ellisland Farm, Dumfries, of Burns's finest poem which according to Lockhart's Life of Burns (1828) was the work of one day and which Burns himself declared to be his "own favourite".⁵

After a week's hard travelling on excise work Burns returns to Ellisland on a grim Friday afternoon in winter. The next day he seeks inspiration for his great mock epic, not from the nearby River Nith but rather from the Doon in Ayrshire. Exiled now from Ayrshire, the land of his youth, it has now become "the vivifying spirit [from which] his music always came" (p75). More important, however, than the physical circumstances of the creation of "Tam o'Shanter" is Munro's depiction of the ecstasy Burns feels on having fulfilled his poetic task. Not only had he created a story full of wonderful characters

But more he joyed that he had, in their making, maintained the deeper,
greater, more abiding thing - the Symbol, the essential soul that makes
all that is great in the art of man a microcosm, a miniature of the world...
(p79)

The way for Burns's reaction to his creation of "Tam o'Shanter" had been prepared at the beginning of the story by the suggestion that Burns had acquired the inspiration for the song "Ae Fond Kiss" from a girl who smiled at him as he travelled towards Ellisland the day before. This is, of course, an anachronism since "Ae Fond Kiss" was written in 1791, the year after the composition of "Tam", and, in any case, it was inspired by Nancy McLehose, but much more important is the fact that Munro attempts to give an insight into Burns's feeling of ecstasy as the recipient of poetic inspiration:

There and then he was invincible, for to him without research had come
the true divine elation, that exaltation of the soul he sometimes sought

for in the bottom of a glass with old companions, only to find a coarser substitute. 'Twas then he knew he would not die, he could not die; that he was older than the hills, and would outlast them; that he had been admitted to the Secret; that he partook in God's delight in the ancient hour when He was happy, and one evening filled the empty space with shining stars! (p69)

This seems to owe something to Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode" as well as reflecting the *Exegi monumentum aere perennius* tradition of Horace,⁶ Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?") and looking forward to Sorley MacLean's Dain Do Eimhir 19 (*Ma thug mise dhut biothbhuantachd*, "If I gave you eternity").⁷ The view of poetic inspiration may, of course, in the end may be more Munro's than Burns's!

"The Democrat" shows the paradox and ambivalence of Burns's political vision.

In the story Burns has been involved as part of his excise work in removing arms from a smuggler's brig. The contents of the haul are being auctioned in Dumfries and Burns bids successfully for four cannons at the price of £3 (which he can ill afford!). Not knowing what to do with them once he has purchased them he decides to send them to the French revolutionaries. Indeed, he declares himself a Jacobin. But there is a more romantic side to this gesture:

Arms were to him not cruel things for slaughtering but the tools of
valour, instruments of liberty, accoutrements of romance. (p99)

And it was the romantic impulse which determined his action on this occasion.

Immediately, however, public opinion turns against him. Eventually he is almost completely isolated until one young man, James Grierson, tells him that there is a threatened French invasion and that he has just joined the Volunteers. Immediately Burns joins up and goes and tells his wife:

“Great news!” he cried elated. “The French are goin’ to fight us, and I’ve joined the Volunteers. I wish to the Lord I had back my cannons!...I’ll be better wi’ a gun than at the gaugin’. But the idiots up the toun imagine...that I’m no patriot!”

“If that’s the case,” said his wife as she cut the scones upon the griddle, “they canna hae read a great deal o’ your poetry.”(p109)

“The Three Brothers” is a sad little story, and something of a parable, of a woman called Lily Armstrong, “a town-lady; well-bred, refined, and elegant” of considerable artistic skill and good taste who married John, one of the three brothers of Clashlet, a rough sheep farm. Far from enjoying married life there, she became the brothers’ slave and was worn down and reduced to an early grave as they wrestled relentlessly and insensitively to make their living from the sheep.

The brothers are rough and unsophisticated, rather like Stevenson’s Black Brothers of the Cauldstaneslap. Munro uses interesting imagery to describe them. Dugald, the oldest, is compared to a rock. He is harsh and unrelenting and is of the mould of the old Covenanters:

He wrestled without ceasing, not only against principalities and powers,
but against all things tender, delicate, or beautiful. (p113)

Paul is compared to a larch tree “that had rooted in a crevice of that cliff, his elder brother” (p113) - although he had a free spirit, at the end of the day he could not escape the dominance of his elder brother. Finally, John, Lily’s husband, is also subservient to Dugald. He is compared to running water; he is feckless and irresolute, “fluid as Clashlet Burn”. He could see what was happening to his wife and, while still loving her, was “likewise capable of standing timorous and acquiescent while the gentle creature perished in the clayey furrows of Clashlet Farm”. (p115).

Interestingly, in this rural story Munro emphasises disapprovingly the brothers' obsession with Capitalism and materialism:

Her brutal unbefitting labours were no less essential to men whose God was the family Capital. (p120)

She died a sacrifice to the family Capital - to three thousand black-faced sheep. (p120)

By implication he connects this obsession with the Protestant work ethic, particularly in the person of Calvinist Dugald, while Lily stands for delicacy and beauty, art and sensibility, which are repressed by the prevailing *zeitgeist* and which Dugald, in turn associates with Roman Catholicism:

“What was yon bowed head on the book-board for? We’re not accustomed here to such Papistical play acting.” (p117)

Again as in Gilian the Dreamer and The Daft Days we see Munro’s concern with the fostering of the creative spirit in the context of the Scottish cultural background and the factors which inhibit it.

“Magic Casements” purports to be a story about the meeting of the narrator, an anonymous old man, with the ageing John Galt, the author of Annals of the Parish, who is seeking further material for his fiction. It is, in fact, more profound than this and seeks to explore the nature of fantasy and “pure poetry”.

The narrator takes Galt to the Black Whale Inn in Irvine in the hope of meeting some local “characters”. It is an appalling night and no one has come until suddenly an Ancient Mariner figure enters and delivers the portentous line:

“The night is cold and it is far from Talavera”(p87)

and other similar utterances. He then takes out a book of poems and reads the stanza from Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” which contains the lines:

The same that oft-times hath

Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam

Of perilous seas, in fairy lands forlorn. (p89)

These “noble lines” entrance the old mariner and the narrator because he realises he is too old to witness such fantasies. The mariner, however, tells the narrator that he has seen the “magic casements...in fairy lands forlorn” and that he has heard the harp of Isabella (presumably suggested by Keats’s poem “Isabella”) coming from them. When asked how he got there he replies:

“I thought of it, and better thought of it.” (p92)

All, then, is a product of his imagination!

After this an official comes in and takes the old mariner away and Galt puts away his pen, saying that there is no material for fiction in the ravings of a madman. The point, however, is clearly being made that there is more to art than Galt’s Enlightenment rationalism and the narrator also suggests that Galt has been away from Scotland far too long to remember its affinity with the supernatural. Munro, as has been suggested above, has been using the device of the old mariner, like Coleridge, to begin to explore the fantastic and “pure poetry”:

It was the first but not the only time I got a peep at what lies out beyond this
tolbooth of the flesh, these iron bars of reason that encage us with our
businesses, our dubious certainties, our poor cramped, timorous senses
nothing better than the brutes, and I got that glorious vision through a daft
man’s eyes. (pp80-81).

The final story “Miss Jean” is set in Girvan in the late 1800’s. It is a pathetic little tale of an old lady Miss Jean whose sister Olivia to whom she was absolutely devoted ran off with a soldier and never returned. Jean could not accept the fact that she was dead and secluded herself in her parlour for the next forty years, losing all grip of time and deluding herself into expecting a visit

from Olivia and her husband (now mysteriously promoted to Major) and family on Handsel Monday.

The story is skilfully told through the eyes of a small boy who visits Miss Jean and he explains how the local people conspire “to save this over-grieved lady fresh trials” and talk to her as if the old were still young and “the long dead quick and busy”. The narrator himself had seen a tombstone in the kirkyard dedicated to the memory of

“Olivia Kennedy...who died in Edinburgh, 3rd June 18-- Aged 19 Years” (p138)

and naively tells Miss Jean of this. She dismisses the information angrily saying that Olivia will be visiting on Handsel Monday. He reports this to his mother when he gets home. She is angry with him

And but for a promise that I should never name Leevie or Olivia again,

would never have got back to the parlour in Whitton’s Land. (p139)

He too is made part of the conspiracy!

Ayrshire Idylls, then, is remarkable in showing a completely different side to Neil Munro’s writing in terms of his major fiction. Up until the publication of this collection in 1812 (if we ignore the humorous works published under the pseudonym Hugh Foulis and the novel The Shoes of Fortune) he could be said to be mainly a Highland writer who dealt Highland topics. Here he shows himself very comfortable writing about Lowland Scotland, about Ayrshire in particular and often in good Scots. Even more interesting, perhaps, are the glimpses we get into his own literary theory in his attempts to reconstruct Burns’s feelings about poetic inspiration and satisfaction on completion of a major work. Interesting too is the concern which he shows about the relationship between religion and art in “The Three Brothers” and his tentative exploration of the nature of fantasy and “pure poetry” in “Magic Casements”.

- ¹ The text used throughout is Neil Munro, Ayrshire Idylls, Illustrated by George Houston, London, 1912
- ² Auchinleck's comment does not appear in Boswell's A Tour to the Hebrides. It first appears in a note in John Wilson Croker's edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson and a Tour to the Hebrides (1831). Here we are told that Croker was given this comment by Sir Walter Scott. G.B. Hill and L.F. Powell (Eds.), Boswell's Life of Johnson, Oxford, 1934-1950: Vol.5, p382.
- ³ This passage is also based on traditional information given by Sir Walter Scott to Croker. Hill and Powell, op.cit. Vol.5, p382
- ⁴ Letters of Robert Burns to Agnes McLehose, Alan Bold (Ed.), Rhymer Rab: An Anthology of Poems and Prose by Robert Burns. London, 1993: pp291-293
- ⁵ Letter from Robert Burns to A.F.Tytler, February 1791, James A. Mackay (Ed.), Letter 578, The Complete Letters of Robert Burns, Ayr, 1987
- ⁶ C.E.Bennett, "Odes" III, 30, Horace: Odes and Epodes, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960:p278.
- ⁷ Somhairle MacGhill Eathain, Dan 19, Dain do Eimhir agus Dain Eile, Glasgow, 1943

CHAPTER 8(b)

Jaunty Jock and Other Stories (1918)¹

In 1918 Munro published a further collection of short stories, Jaunty Jock and Other Stories. These stories appear to have been written over a long period and gathered for publication towards the end of the War. They differ markedly from The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories (1896) in range and content. They are not all narrowly located in Inveraray and Glen Aray; rather they are spread more widely throughout Scotland - one, indeed, is set in Paris and another in Spain. Furthermore, unusually for Munro, five of them have contemporary settings. There is much less bitterness and blackness in them and many of them are, in fact, quite humorous, although one of them, "Young Pennymore", is a beautifully constructed tragedy and may well be Munro's most skilful piece of writing. Overall, the style of this collection is much more sophisticated than his previous efforts in the short story field.

Of the four comedies in this collection two, "Copenhagen" and "The Tudor Cup", are fairly slight. "Copenhagen" is a gently humorous portrait of the whimsical schoolmaster of the little primary school in Glen Aray and is probably based on John MacArthur, its teacher in Munro's day. This story describes a number of his eccentricities and then, touchingly, at the end we learn that he wishes to help the war effort in the Crimea by sacrificing his own military pension and he writes a letter to the Admiralty to that effect. His handwriting, however, is so illegible that neither the narrator nor Copenhagen himself can read it - but the old man insists that they post it as it is since the superior intelligences of the Admiralty will be able to penetrate its illegibility:

"But no matter, John, we'll just let her go as she stands; they're better scholars in London than what we are."(p221)

Needless to say the British Admiralty never “availed itself of an offer so unusual and kind” (p221).

“The Tudor Cup” deals with the attempt of two crooked London dealers, Harris and Hirsch, to obtain a silver Tudor cup from the House of Quair (clearly modelled on Traquair House near Peebles). A similar one had been sold recently at Sotheby’s for £7,000. Amusingly after Kirsch has persuaded the old guide (who turns out to be none other than the owner, the impoverished Sir Gilbert Quair himself) to lend him the Tudor cup for £1000 so that he can have a copy made of it, it emerges that the Quair cup is itself a copy. Sir Gilbert had sold the original in order to raise funds to pay for the upkeep of his estate. The story concludes on a humorously nationalist note appropriate to its Borders associations, with Sir Gilbert defending his actions in this way:

“The greed of English thieves brought them here marauding for good six hundred years, and it seems ye’re no done yet! My forefolk fought you with the sword, but Gilbert Meldrum Quair must fight you with his wits!” (p204)

When, however, they tell the Laird that they are, in fact, Jews, not English, he carries the joke still further (although he would be faulted for political correctness today) by explaining to them that the Scots are still in conflict with the Jews for what they did to Christ:

“That is worse,” replied Sir Gilbert, making for his door. “We Scots are still at feud wi’ the Jews for what they did out yonder in Jerusalem.” (p204)

Munro’s comic muse gains considerably more scope in the two longer stories “Jaunty Jock” and “A Return to Nature”. “Jaunty Jock” is set in Edinburgh in Jacobite times and deals with two Highlanders, Barrisdale (*sic*) (who is nicknamed Jaunty Jock and appears also in the New Road ² although his treatment in this story is much more lighthearted) and his cousin Dan. They are

on a visit to an Edinburgh ball at which the ladies are masked and the atmosphere is somewhat similar to the soirée described by Violet Jacob in Flemington.³ Barrisdale is a blusterer in the John Splendid mould, renowned for his swashbuckling roguery. He has arranged for his cousin Dan to be introduced to a Miss Duthie as himself. She accuses him of his reputed crimes and Dan goes good-humouredly along with this ploy, the incident thus giving a humorous but nevertheless significant treatment of the Highland/Lowland divide explored in Scott's Waverley and "The Two Drovers":

"When I come to think of it," said she, "the very virtues that you claim are what in the rough bounds of the Hielans may well manifest themselves in fashions that hereabouts in lalland towns we clap men into jyle for." (p14)

Dan, like Cyrano de Bergerac, has a long nose and, when he sees Miss Duthie staring at it, he assumes it is in a spirit of mockery. She denies this strenuously but he clearly does not believe her.

The second part of the story has a brilliant description of a fire in one of the high storied lands in Edinburgh's Old Town. Miss Duthie's family (her father is a Law lord) lives in one of the higher apartments. Barrisdale and Dan by good fortune have taken lodgings in the same land. When the fire is discovered Dan fights his way up the stair amid the panic of the descending bodies and awakens the sleeping Miss Duthie, giving his name as Barrisdale. The real swashbuckling Barrisdale ironically, however, has bolted for the exit. When Dan realises that danger from the fire is not imminent he descends to the front entrance, and, remembering that Barrisdale had been enamoured of Miss Duthie, encourages him to go up and escort her down, saying that in her gratitude he is sure she will excuse him for the prank of the exchanged names. When Barrisdale reaches the ground floor with the lady, however, his expression is gloomy and there is clearly to be no match.

Dan thinks it was because of the lady's anger at the deception. In fact it was because Barrisdale was shocked at Miss Duthie's appearance:

"After this, I'll always see the mask off first; she had a worse nose than yourself."(p31)

The braggart is brought down to earth.

"A Return to Nature" is a comic analogue of The New Road. In it the hero, a rather douce and uninspiring lawyer Alexander Macaulay, factor of the island of Kilree, hears the owner of the estate, the Captain of Kilree, give instructions that the old Macaulay keep of Kincreggan on a remote part of the island is to be demolished. All of a sudden he is consumed by a tremendous rage and he lashes out at Kilree with his penknife, wounding him. He then takes off to Kincreggan which he proceeds to fortify and defend in the manner of the ancient clans. He defies Kilree for a number of months and survives by organising raids on his cattle. Eventually Kilree gets the better of him by flooding him out. He returns home where his wife manages to get him to put on his slippers. Immediately he returns to normal and is only too anxious to get back to his legal work.

The story is full of romantic ideas: Macaulay takes his owner's cattle in a *creach* (cattle raid) and he dons *cuarain* (moccasins) in place of his carpet slippers. He is so successful and attractive that people come from far and near to see Kincreggan and eventually:

They got a new light upon society and its rights and wrongs, though they
might not have the philosophy to explain it clearly: they seemed to see
that might was right at any time.(p77)

The slippers, however, bring Macaulay to his senses. They are presented as the *buidseachas* (magic) which transform Macaulay from his old ways and in this way correspond to the magic charm of the Virgin Nut in The New Road. At the same time they also correspond to the New Road itself. Like the road the slippers are a symbol of civilisation and "improvement". When the

Captain asks Macaulay what broke the spell and learns that the slippers brought him down to earth he says:

“I wish I had not asked you. I expected a miracle, and you
gave me only an epitome of civilisation.”(p96)

This story, then, satirises the Romantic theory of the Noble Savage. The behaviour of MacShimi and Vich Ian Vohr is no substitute for civilised behaviour. The line, however, between civilisation and romantic savagery is very thin. Macaulay, the factor, of course, parallels that other famous lawyer in The New Road Duncan Forbes who for all that he wished peace and harmony could never forget his Highland heritage:

“...and it’s up wi’ the ell-wand, down the sword!... It may seem a queer
thing for a law officer of the Crown to say, Mr Campbell, but I was
never greatly taken wi’ the ell-wand, and man, I liked the sword! At
least it had some glitter!”⁴

Four of the stories in this collection are moral fables, the first three of which can also be described as fantasy writing.

“The Brooch”⁵ is a story in the Hogg tradition set in the Border country in the 17th Century and the Covenanting times. It is an excellent narrative, spoiled a little, however, by an overcrowded plot which is not easily followed at the first reading. It deals with the working out of the punishment of the hero, Wanlock of Manor, by his sister for speculating with and losing the money intended for her dowry. She sent him a cursed brooch which she prophesied would bring him:

“Seven shocks of dire disaster and the last the worst.” (p100)

Once he has the brooch in his possession his fortunes rapidly begin to decline. First of all he loses an expensive lawsuit which reduces him to abject poverty. He then tries to get rid of the brooch but it keeps returning bringing with it six further reversals of fortune, including the death of his son Stephen at the hands of a fierce brownie figure and, finally, his own death when he drinks a goblet of wine in which the brooch itself has been concealed. Too late the maid tries to warn him :

“The brooch! the brooch!” she screamed; a gleam of comprehension passed for a moment over Wanlock’s purpling visage; he raised his arms, and stumbling, fell across the body of his son!(p135)

The story gains much of its robust atmosphere from its 17th century Covenanting background with appropriate Biblical reference and its use of lowland folk tradition. Wanlock himself is a Covenanter:

he cried it [the Holy Name] as they cried it on the moors - his people, when the troopers rode upon them. (p124)

but he is not one of the elect:

Had he not repented? nay, penitence had been denied him from his very birth, and without repentance well he knew there was no sin’s remission. Thus are the unelect at last condemned for a natural inability - terror they have and chagrin at results, but no regret for the eternal wrong. (p125)

It is this doctrine of predestination wedded to the simple folk idea of the fulfilment of the curse of Wanlock’s sister that makes the story so powerful. It emphasises that there can be no escape for the hero.

In addition the eerie sound like the bittern’s cry which haunts the story adds to the evil atmosphere whilst the brownie-like creature which appears at Wanlock’s window and assaults and

kills Stephen is drawn from folk tradition. Munro compares him to the Blednock brownie (Aiken-drum in folklore) (p129) who was believed to be particularly ugly and, like Wanlock's persecutor, was impervious to the influence of the Bible (p124).⁶ He also bears great similarity to the leech-like Merodach in Hogg's "The Brownie of the Black Hags". But in Munro's story the brownie is worse than either of these: he is the Accuser of the Brethren himself.

"Isle of Illusion" is a fantasy and a fable which endorses the Greek proverb *meden agan* ("nothing too much"). The hero Morar and his newly-wed wife are spending an idyllic honeymoon cruising round the Outer Isles seeking "for the last pang of pleasure"(p156). After some time, however, the bride sees an island on which they have not yet landed and wishes that she and her husband be put ashore there. The Captain is unwilling and warns them against it:

"Myself I would not risk it so long as this world has so many pleasant things to be going on with. All I can tell you of Island Faoinneas is that, paradise or purgatory, it depends on what you eat."(p167)

But the girl's will prevails and they spend the night there. In the morning the girl brings Morar berries and immediately after they have eaten them they start to quarrel fiercely. She has a shelister (wild iris) blade in her hand which becomes mysteriously transformed into a poignard and with this in her raging despair she stabs herself. She calls for water and he carries some to her from a stream which had been blessed by a priest from Eriskay.⁷ Immediately both are restored to health and love, the couple having learned their lesson.

The story anticipates Barrie's play Mary Rose (1924) where local superstition warns Simon not to tempt fate by taking Mary Rose back to the magic island where she disappeared for a time as a child. But "Isle of Illusion" goes further in that it is a modern analogue of the temptation of Adam. When the girl offers Morar the berries he says laughingly:

"The woman tempted me, and I did eat"(p170)

and immediately, as in Genesis, the Golden World is shattered and fierce quarrelling breaks out.

Redemption comes from the water blessed by a priest, a servant of Christ. In addition, just as he had Wanlock suffer seven disasters in "The Brooch", so in "Isle of Illusion" Munro avails himself of folk tradition to increase the atmosphere of wonder in the story by using the magic number seven to quantify the virtues of the heroine and the number of times the priest blessed the stream.

Finally, the Gaelic name of the island, *Ealan Faoineas*, means more than Munro's translation of it as "Isle of Illusion" would suggest. *Faoineas* has a much stronger meaning than mere "illusion"; it means "vanity" or "folly", from which the young people have to be rescued.

"The Scottish Pompadour" is another moral fable, this time set in the Paris of the early 19th century. It illustrates the dangers of an indulgent and lavish lifestyle.

Lord Balgowie, the Scottish Pompadour, wishes to see what his own lifestyle looks like from the outside, as it were, and changes places with his secretary who dons his clothes and uses his wealth (but will not indulge in his master's expensive taste in food and prefers a homely diet). His secretary is sought after by leading socialites, including a lady called Mathilde with whom he falls in love. In his idealism he asks her if she would still love him, even if he were poor. Her witty reply shatters him:

"*Farceur!*" said she, "now you are romantic, and to talk romance in seriousness is ridiculous."

Of a sudden he saw her for what she really was - vain, cruel, calculating, parched in soul, despite her saintly face.(p282)

Just as the truth about the selfishness of human nature is dawning on his innocence his mother, from whom he had learned his straightforward decency, arrives to save him from any blunder he might make. She had jaloused from his letters that the girl he was in love with was calculating rather than sincere.

Ironically, Lord Balgowie, the libertine who was watching his own lifestyle enacted before him by his secretary has become a morality figure, feared by the socialites:

“...he looks - more like a conscience than a human secretary!...Get rid of him - get rid of him!”(pp279-280)

Furthermore, this story is another parody of the lad o’ pairts tradition. The highly educated young man of humble background does not go on to great things in French society and presumably returns to his roots but his kailyard values - “a homely taste in viands, and his honest heart”(pp284) - triumph and teach his master the folly of his ways.

“The First Foot” is a humorous moral tale. It is Hogmanay. A dissolute young man, Black Andy, has drunk away all his money, including the price of his father’s horse, and is now reluctantly returning home to face the music. It is a fiercely stormy night on Flanders Moss and Andy finally comes to a remote little inn where he seeks shelter for the night. The landlady is decidedly unhappy about taking in a guest on such a night and is bad tempered and most unwelcoming. Her husband is much more genial and warm, especially when he hears the nature of the young man’s security:

“But what’s your security?” demanded madam, and the goodman sighed...

“God,” said he.

“Sir?” she queried.

“I said God was my security,” remarked the stranger.

“Ye couldna hae better!” cried the innkeeper, and drawing a chopin of ale for the pious gentleman, beat down by the very gust of his geniality the rising opposition of the woman’s manner. (p142)

When Andy is shown to his room he spots a chest underneath the bed which he discovers contains in a secret compartment a bag of cash belonging to the wife which he rightly deduces the husband knows nothing of - “a leather pouch with three-and-twenty guineas - madam’s private hoard!”

(p143). He steals this and flees out into the wild night and the landlord gives chase but the young man soon realises that he has made a real fool's bargain since he had left his plaid and bonnet in the inn which will be easily identified in the locality. But there is nothing for it but to try to get home and face his father. However, he gets lost on Flanders Moss in the wild black night and unintentionally returns to the self same inn. There he "pays the lawin' " to the wife with the stolen guineas.

Divine Providence, then, ensures that Andy puts his wrong to right, that the wife is punished for her bad-tempered lack of hospitality and for deceiving her husband about the existence of her fortune by being temporarily separated from it and that the genial, apparently ingenuous innkeeper's faith in God is justified. He was in no doubt that Andy would be a "good risk" because

"I kent ye had Grand Security." (p152)

The three remaining stories are of quite disparate types. "The Silver Drum" is a romantic story of war, love and mistaken identity. It involves a sure use of flashback technique as it moves from a contemporary discussion in an Edinburgh studio between the narrator, a writer like Munro himself, and George Urquhart, a sculptor,⁸ back to the sack of Ciudad Rodrigo during the Napoleonic/Peninsular War.⁹ Urquhart tells the narrator of how as a young son of the manse he did not want to go on to study Divinity at Edinburgh and ran off to join the army. There he became a distinguished drummer with the 71st Division and was given the privilege of playing one of the pair of Kildalton's drums which had been presented to the regiment by Mr. Fraser of Kildalton.

The 71st were active at the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo and were to be first through the walls, the sound of Kildalton's drum leading them through. In the aftermath there is vile plundering and pillaging and in a graphically described scene General Fraser, brother of the donator of the drums, orders Urquhart to accompany a picket up a war-torn lane and beat assembly to call the pillagers

off the local people. The picket is soon under siege but the situation is made worse by one of the picket getting in Urquhart's road as he looks for a cowardly way out. The drum is damaged in the cross-fire, the picket go to the aid of some local women, Urquhart drops the drum and picks up a rifle and the coward runs for safety, picking up the damaged drum and using it as an excuse for his retreat. General Fraser catches hold of the deserter, attempts to return him to his duty but is himself rendered unconscious, shot in the arm as he holds his brother's drum. By good fortune Urquhart appears on the scene and saves the General from certain death as he scares off a looter who was approaching the fallen General with a knife.

After being injured at Badajos Urquhart is sent home to Argyll for convalescence and is then used as part of a recruitment campaign. He beats his drum in a parade outside the home of late Mr Fraser of Kildalton where his playing is heard and admired by his daughter Margory. They fall in love. General Fraser, her uncle, however, returns from war and, hearing of Urquhart from his niece, is convinced he is the coward he encountered in Ciudad Rodrigo. He sends for him and berates him as follows:

“You came out of that infernal lane whimpering like a child, after basely deserting your comrades of the picket, and made the mutilated condition of your drum the excuse for refusing my order to go back again, and I, like a fool, lost a limb in showing you how to do your duty.” (p253)

Because of the social gulf between them Urquhart believes that the General will never listen to him and that it will be impossible to convince him of the mistaken identity. Urquhart is then sent to Salamanca.

Later his circumstances change and, when he leaves the army, he sets up his sculpture studio in Edinburgh. One day the General comes in to have a bust made of himself when he spots a drum lying there. Urquhart had used its music for inspiration when he was depressed by the routine

of work. Urquhart then tells the General that he used to play Kildalton's drum and the misunderstanding caused by mistaken identity is cleared up. The General arranged for him to meet Margory again and they marry to live happily ever after. The story closes with the sound of the singing of young Margory, Urquhart's daughter.

The story is at its best in the creation of the war-torn atmosphere of Ciudad Rodrigo. It depends, however, rather too much on coincidence in the two encounters with the uncle/general. But Munro knew exactly what he was doing here and was deliberately parodying the inevitable happy conclusion of the popular love story. After Urquhart has told how he was sent to Salamanca, unable to clear his name, the following dialogue between the narrator and Urquhart takes place:

“But the story, my dear Mr Urquhart. You positively must give me its conclusion!” I demanded.

“Why in the world should that not be its conclusion?” said he, drawing a wet sheet over the bust. “Would you insist on **the hackneyed happy ending?**” (my emphasis)(p254)

“The Tale of a Boon Companion” returns to the style of the early The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories collection of 1896. It purports to be a folktale and is set at the same time as the novel John Splendid, the period of the sack of Inveraray by Alasdair MacColla immediately before the Battle of Inverlochy in 1645:

This particular and ancient history that I am telling is a story that is to be heard on winter nights in the fir-wood bothies of Upper Loch Finne. It is the story of an affair that happened in the wild year before the beginning of the Little Wars of Lorn.(p288)

The setting, like The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories, again is very precisely the Inveraray area and in particular Glen Shira. The farms of Maam and Stuckgoy are mentioned as well as Ben Shean and Ben Bhuidhe. Also like many of the early stories this story's springboard is a proverb:

"Every man his boon companion, every man his maid."

The main character of the tale, Red John, is a man in the mould of John Splendid and Jaunty Jock. He is a man of the easy word, a flatterer, a great teller of tales and singer of songs, but rootless and unreliable - yet for all that great company and well-intentioned:

"I'm foe to none, woman," he cried, "except perhaps to a man they call Red John, and the worst enemy ever I had was welcome to share the last penny in my sporran. I have my weakness, I'll allow, but my worst is that my promise is better than my performance, and my most ill-judged acts are well intended."(p297)

He becomes very friendly with Ealasaid's boyfriend Alan and she grows very resentful of the increasing amount of time they spend together to her neglect until she eventually accuses him of wrecking people's lives:

"You're like the weak man in the *ceilidh* story," pressed the girl.

"How?" quo' he.

"Because you botch life," said she. "Let a girl tell it you. And the pity of it is you'll do it in the end."(p297)

The second part of the story deals with Red John's reparation for his selfishness. There is an attack on Ealasaid's home in Glen Shira by Colkitto's men. Red John and Alan rescue her and make for a cave on the sheer side of Ben Shean. It is accessible only by a rope tied round a haw

tree which the Glen Shira people keep in readiness. When the party arrive at the tree the enemy are hot on their heels. Before he lets Ealasaid down to safety Red John apologises to the girl for the times he had robbed her of Alan's company. When the couple reach the cave he cuts the rope and turns bravely to face the enemy. But the story ends in tragic irony for the rope falls to the ground far below, imprisoning the lovers and sentencing them to a cruel death. John has "botched life" to the end.

Finally, "Young Pennymore" is a taut and grimly ironic story of mistaken identity. It deals with the trial and execution of a young Jacobite, John Clerk of Pennymore, for being art and part in the murder of Campbell of Clonary. It is set very precisely on the 5th September, 1752, which is also the year of the Appin murder. Significantly, there is a parallel with Stevenson's Kidnapped in that both Campbell of Lochgair in this story and Colin Campbell, the Red Fox, in Kidnapped are murdered as a result of being distracted on their journeys and then shot by a hidden assailant.

The story is in three movements. It opens with a short but dramatic trial scene before Lord Elchies (also portrayed by Munro in Doom Castle) in which John Clerk is condemned to die. This is followed by a description of his parents frantically attempting to enlist the help of influential people to plead on his behalf and the mother is eventually successful in obtaining the help of Campbell of Lochgair who goes off to Edinburgh to petition Lord Prestongrange, the Lord Advocate. When Lochgair fails to appear by the day before the trial the parents go in the pitch dark of an early stormy morning to see their son in Inveraray where he is in jail. The mother fondles a gun in her plaid - her pride will not allow her son a public execution. The horse, as if instinctively aware of foul practice, breaks its belly band and the husband has to go into town to search for a rope. In the meantime the wife becomes aware that the cart has stopped before the town gibbet and assumes that the body hanging there is her son. They cut the body down and put it in the cart.

The third movement describes the journey home in which the woman viciously blames Campbell of Lochgair for not intervening. Suddenly they hear his horse galloping towards the town. The woman prepares to shoot him but her husband finally manages to wrest the gun from her. She goads him into firing at Lochgair by telling him that John Clerk was not his son, but Lochgair's. Momentarily enraged he pulls the trigger and Lochgair dies. When, however, they have stripped and disposed of the body and gone through all his papers they discover that Lochgair had indeed brought the reprieve for John and was clearly in haste to deliver it. They then go to the cart and pull back the plaid over the body there to discover that it was not their son!

This story is taut, tense and beautifully constructed. The mother's pride (*hubris*) is the driving force of the action. The woman does not want to be seen in the town lest she become an object of pity and does not want her son to have the indignity of a public execution so they go to the town in the dark of early morning. Her intention is to deliver to him his gun so that he can take his own life. The repeated reference to this gun which she fondles underneath her plaid becomes a motif in itself and increases the atmosphere of menace throughout the tale. Furthermore, because she is disposed to think the worst, the mother imagines that the body on the gibbet must be her son and so her imagining becomes her sadly mistaken reality.

The husband, on the other hand, is a peaceable and holy person who strives to keep his wife's anger in check but, temporarily unhinged by the news that Lochgair was the true father of his son, now becomes the instrument of her vengeance. In his innocence he had actually believed that the changes involved by the implementation of the Gregorian Calendar might have saved his son - but now any hope from that quarter is past.¹⁰

The most appalling irony of all is that at the end of the story John Clerk is still alive, the reprieve is actually in their possession - the boy's own father had brought it! - but now that Lochgair has been murdered, his body drowned and his other possessions destroyed what can be

done to save John? Had the woman left well alone and trusted Lochgair, her former lover and father of her son, all would have been well. After all

Lochgair, more, as it strangely seemed, for the sake of the peevish dame than for her husband's, promised his active interest, and almost guaranteed release, and in the latter days of August went to Edinburgh to wait on the Lord Advocate, who was Prestongrange. (p38)

The final irony is the way that Munro uses nature's apparent unconcern about the events affecting the Clerk family to emphasise the terrible turmoil in their minds:

"My son! my son!" she screamed till the rocks and trees gave back the echo, and yet the distant lights of the burgh town glowed on with unconcern.(p44)

Neil Munro's Jaunty Jock and Other Stories shows considerable development in his handling of the short story genre from his early The Lost Pibroch and Other Sheiling Stories of 1896. There is a greater variety of approach and interesting experimentation with the comic form and the fable as well one very successful attempt in the tragic mode. This would seem to justify McDiarmid's assertion (whatever his reservations about other aspects of Munro's work):

Neil Munro remains, on the whole, one of the six best short story writers Scotland has yet produced, the others being R.L.Stevenson, "Fiona Macleod", John Buchan, R.B. Cunninghame Graham, and (to count them as one) the Findlater sisters.¹¹

- ¹ The text used throughout is Neil Munro, Jaunty Jock and Other Stories, Edinburgh, 1918
- ² Neil Munro, The New Road, Edinburgh, 1994: Chs.8 & 9, pp76-94
- ³ Violet Jacob, Flemington, Aberdeen, 1994: Chs.17&18, pp151-168
- ⁴ Neil Munro, The New Road, Edinburgh, 1994: p200
- ⁵ "'The Brooeh' may be a little too sombre for some tastes, but I am more than satisfied with it technically than with any short story I have written. It is, if anything, perhaps a little too crowded and close in the texture; however." Letter from Neil Munro to George Blackwood 3rd December, 1909. Property of Mrs. Lesley Bratton.
- ⁶ Cp. "But the canny auld wife cam' till her breath,
And she deemed the Bible might ward aff scaith,
Be it benshee, bogle, ghaist or wraith -
But it fear'd na Aiken-drum."
From "The Brownie of Blednoch", Poetical Works of William Nicolson, Castle Douglas, 1878. Quoted in Hannah Aitken, A Forgotten Heritage, Edinburgh, 1973: p33
- ⁷ A reference to Fr. Allan McDonald, parish priest of Eriskay (1893-1905) and model for Fr. Ludovic in Children of Tempest, (1903)
- ⁸ It is probable that Urquhart is partly modelled on Munro's friend, the sculptor and poet Pittendreich MacGillivray (1856-1938).
- ⁹ This war was the setting for one of the novels which most influenced Munro as a boy, James Grant's The Romance of War (1845) and was the theatre for the exploits of the old soldiers in his own Gilian the Dreamer (1899).
- ¹⁰ The Act of Parliament which introduced the Gregorian Calendar stated that 3rd September, 1752, should become 14th September, 1752 - that is, eleven days were to be dropped. John Clerk was to be hanged on the 5th September which technically no longer existed and his father naively believed, therefore, that his son "could not die but on the day appointed". (p46)
- ¹¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, The Scottish Educational Journal, 3rd July, 1925: p6

CHAPTER 9

Conclusions

Neil Munro was without doubt one of the foremost literary figures of his day and yet he is now remembered mainly for his Para Handy stories - a situation which he himself would have found ironic. His reputation declined rapidly after harsh criticism from Hugh MacDiarmid and some of his contemporaries. But MacDiarmid and his colleagues may have been too close to Munro to see what he had actually achieved.

Munro was well aware of the blight which Celtic Twilight and Kailyard writing had cast on Scottish literature.

Celtic Twilight he combats, first, by inventing a Gaelic-English language for his Highland characters which incorporated Gaelic syntax, idiom and vocabulary. With this language he presents them much more authentically than the older, parodic, semi-mocking Highland English used to represent Highlanders in literature had done. Munro uses his new language in most of his historical novels and, although occasionally a little overdone when it first appears, by the time he comes to write The New Road he has it to a fine art. His second weapon against the mystical and sentimental excesses of Celtic Twilight writing was simply the accurate knowledge of Highland history, tradition and culture which he displayed in his writing. The purveyors of Celtic Twilight had only the slightest grasp of these.

Again, he was well aware of the emotional morass of the Kailyard movement and, far from contributing to it, took the opportunity to parody and subvert it on a number of occasions. Gilian the Dreamer, The Daft Days and the short story "The Scottish Pompadour" are all in different ways parodies of the lad o' pairts tradition.

The accusation of MacDiarmid and Angus MacDonald, his ally from Edinburgh University, that Munro's literature was mere escapism is less than fair. There is undoubtedly a strong romantic element in his novels but beneath this a shrewd analytical method is employed. His historical novels do explore the condition of Gaeldom and go a long way to "perform the operation for cataract and allow her to see herself as she really is".¹ John Splendid is told from the less romantic Campbell viewpoint and points to weaknesses in the Highland character; Doom Castle points up the decadence and decay in the Jacobite cause; in The Shoes of Fortune the hero rejects the discredited Stuarts and warns Pitt of the threatened Jacobite invasion. In The New Road, a novel of mythic regeneration in the Scott tradition, the hero becomes disillusioned with the superficial romantic glamour of the unregenerate Highland chiefs. This confirms his support for the Hanoverian order and their New Road which will bring prosperity to the North, but at the cost of the old Gaelic way of life - a cost that is still being paid today as the Highlands are relentlessly stripped of what remains of their Gaelic character. The same point is made in a humorous way in the modern short story "A Return to Nature".

Allied to this charge is the criticism of MacDiarmid and Fionn MacColla that Munro would not face up to the "conflict of real life"² and "refused to come to grips with the realities of the situation of the Gael in his day".³ And it is true that Munro did not deal overtly or aggressively with major issues like the Highland Clearances or the subsequent Land Agitation. But neither did any other writer contemporary Scottish writer writing in English or Scots. The Highland Clearances, however, are clearly the background to Gilian the Dreamer, although what is being explored is not their social and political effects, but their effects on traditional art and culture, and Fancy Farm does broach the vexed problem of landlordism although in a somewhat theoretical fashion. The

contemporary novel The Daft Days, on the other hand, makes valid criticism of Scottish Primary Education methodology and vigorously confronts the problem of the female creative artist in a society whose educational system and social and religious mores inhibit the expression of her talent.

In addition to the above points it should be noted that Munro anticipated one of the main tenets of the Scottish literary Renaissance of the 20's and 30's with his frequent reference to a past Golden Age along with other references to myth and ritual. A Golden Age is referred to or strongly implied in the short stories "Boboon's Children", "Isle of illusion", and the novels John Splendid, Children of Tempest, Fancy Farm and The New Road; the use of myth and ritual is clear in the ceremony performed by Anna in honour of St. Bride, the vestige of an ancient fertility rite, in Children of Tempest whilst a lustration ritual accompanied by recitation of one of the ancient Carmina Gadelica takes place in the The New Road. Although the function of these references is by no means as developed and precise as in the mythopoeic novels of the Renaissance there is no doubt that Munro is using them intentionally to direct us back to an earlier more harmonious, happier Scotland.

Along with this one must note Munro's frequent reference and generosity to Catholicism throughout his work. Although he was an orthodox Presbyterian, two of the main characters in his novels are sympathetically portrayed Catholic priests. There is sympathy for the unfairly ostracised Catholic family at the beginning of John Splendid, the Carmina Gadelica which are recited in several of the novels come from the Catholic tradition, the life-affirming Presbyterian Dan Dyce in The Daft Days teaches Bud the Lord's Prayer in Latin - current Catholic practice, art and beauty are associated with Catholicism in the short story "The Three Bothers" and, very significantly, Black Duncan, the traditional storyteller in Gilian the Dreamer, is a Catholic. It is dangerous to push

theory too far but it does seem likely that Munro is using the older faith as a way of getting back to a wholer, unfragmented, more creative Scotland, complementing the references to a Golden Age already noted.

Neil Munro is a highly accomplished writer whose achievements are many and whose major fiction has been unfairly neglected since MacDiarmid's adverse criticism of him in 1925 and 1931. Contrary to MacDiarmid's belief Munro was actually pushing towards the Renaissance which MacDiarmid himself facilitated. He broke the ground linguistically and thematically for the analytic Highland novels of Neil Gunn and Fionn MacColla. Indeed, his work broke the ground for MacDiarmid himself who claimed that the "Celtic idea" had to be at the heart of his Scottish Renaissance movement.

But above all Neil Munro should be read for himself.

- ¹ Angus MacDonald, Edinburgh Essays in Scots Literature, Ed. H.J.C.Grierson, Edinburgh, 1933: p161
- ² Hugh MacDiarmid, The Scottish Educational Journal, Edinburgh, 3rd July, 1925: p6
- ³ Fionn MacColla, Foreword to The Albannach, Edinburgh, 1971: p1

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