‘The Gael Will Come Again’:

Reconstruction of a Gaelic world in the work of Neil M. Gunn and Hugh MacDiarmid

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Abstract

Neil Gunn and Hugh MacDiarmid are popularly linked with regards to the Scottish Literary Renaissance, the nation's contribution to international modernism, in which they were integral figures. Beyond that, they are broadly considered to have followed different creative paths, Gunn deemed the 'Highland novelist' and MacDiarmid the extremist political poet. This thesis presents the argument that whilst their methods and priorities often differed dramatically, the reconstruction of a Gaelic world - the 'Gaelic Idea' - was a focus in which the writers shared a similar degree of commitment and similar priorities.

Both writers tackled the question of Scottish identity on a local and national level. An integral feature of this task was the issue of reclaiming Gaelic identity in a manner which was suitable for modernity and yet respectfully preserved its ancient and classical values. The term 'Gaelic', applied to the collective identity of the Highlands and Islands, is defined not only by the historic and continued use of the Gaelic language but by the region's distinct social and economic structures, relationship with nature, and cultural heritage. This is summed up in the word 'dùthchas', a concept coined by Gaelic scholars and one to which this thesis will return. Gunn and MacDiarmid's focus on Gaeldom in the 1920s and 30s followed the romanticisation of the Gael in the Celtic Twilight and precedes the Gaelic Renaissance of the 1960s and 70s, their work therefore acting as an integral stepping stone in the revitalization of Scotland's Gaelic culture and its representation in literature in the twentieth century.

Taking into consideration the themes considered most important by Gunn and MacDiarmid to the Gaelic experience, the thesis conducts a thorough overview of their treatment of the Gaelic world. Chapter One's focus is on 'people' – the construction of individual, community and regional identity – Chapter Two on 'land' – its symbolism in the texts, the materialist economics it stands for, and the specific place of the archipelago within the Gaelic world – and Chapter Three on 'culture' – including reclamation of traditional or 'lost' cultures in the form of language, literature and music. Although the focus is primarily on close analysis of their creative work in the 1930s, relevant non-fiction has been included in the investigation so as to provide biographical evidence of the expansion of their consciousness of and involvement in this world, the reality which compliments their constructions.

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Abbreviations

(in order of appearance)

LP = *Lucky Poet*

CP (1/2) = *Complete Poems, Vol. 1/2*

HR = *Highland River*

BB = *Butcher's Broom*

SD = *The Silver Darlings*

AFS = *Annals of the Five Senses*

TLG = *The Lost Glen*

SC = *Sun Circle*

RT (1/2/3) = *The Raucle Tongue, Vol. 1/2/3*

IS = *The Islands of Scotland*

AD = *The Atom of Delight*

OB = *Off in a Boat*

WH = *The White Hour*

SP = *Selected Prose*

HP = *Highland Pack*

Introduction

'Out of the Celtic Twilight and into the Gaelic sun!' Hugh MacDiarmid penned these words in 1945, in a poem dedicated to Neil M. Gunn.[1] The text in question, 'Good-Bye Twilight', identifies two alternate methods of representing the Gaelic world. Shunning the fatalist romanticism of the Celtic Twilight, it champions instead the revitalization of Scotland's Gaelic culture within the modernization of national literature. This intention, similarly exemplified in the title of this thesis, which was the title of an article written by Gunn in 1931, is what brought Gunn and MacDiarmid together.[2] Although their personal relationship deteriorated throughout the course of their careers, their commitment to a vision which prioritized the Gaelic world continued to unite their literary efforts.

Poet Hugh MacDiarmid– pseudonym of Christopher M. Grieve – and novelist Neil Gunn began their careers together, first as acquaintances, and then as friends, brought together by the modernist regenerative campaign that was the 1920s Scottish Literary Renaissance.[3] Grieve had made a name for himself as the editor of *The Scottish Chapbook* and makar of Scots lyrics, as well as a political man with proclivity for controversy. Meanwhile, Gunn had his contemporary to thank for his first publication, was credited by him in 1926 as 'the only Scottish prose-writer of promise', and dedicated his novels to the domestic rural life of his native Highlands.[4] Although their writing appeared in very different forms, they agreed that 'The whole Scottish situation require[d] review', and it was this 'overriding harmony' which strengthened their relationship in the 1920s and 30s.[5] Not only were they comparable in their artistic vision, but they were political allies, involved in both Scotland's socialist movement and the founding of the National Party.

However, it is not this period of 'harmony' which I focus on, rather the years that followed, in which MacDiarmid grew increasingly discontent with Gunn's mysticism and commercial popularity. He came to favor other writers over his former friend, causing controversy when he praised Fionn MacColla's *The Albannach* as 'the most radical product

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[1] *CP2*, p.1125.
[2] Written for *Scots Magazine,* under the pseudonym of 'Dane McNeil'.
[3] MacDiarmid will be the name referred to from this point onwards, besides when a text is penned by Grieve, or he is cited as such by another source.
[4] Grieve published Gunn's poem 'O, Sun!' in *The Scottish Chapbook*, Jul 1923; C. M. Grieve, 'Neil M. Gunn' in *Scottish Education Journal* (Apr 1926), cited in Margery Palmer McCulloch (ed.) *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939* (Glasgow: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), p.62.
[5] Neil M. Gunn, in letter to Grieve (Nov 1933) J. B. Pick (ed.) *Neil Gunn: Selected Letters* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987), p.35; Alastair McCleery (ed.) *Landscape and Light: essays by Neil M. Gunn* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), p.98.

yet of the whole Scottish Renaissance movement' in 1932.[6] As their correspondence dwindled, MacDiarmid admitted, in 1937, to wishing that things had played out differently: 'I regret that the divergence took place and admit that I had coveted other things for you and that I wish both for your sake and my own that we might have kept in closer contact intellectually.'[7] Yet they kept their distance for the rest of their lives. The 1930s were the years of disagreement which fueled their separation, however each man's literary development in this time was less different than they liked to convey. In their respective commitments to the Gaelic world – a continuation for Gunn, an expansion of awareness for MacDiarmid – the writers engaged with similar themes in the representation of the Highlands and Islands.

Gunn and MacDiarmid's reconstructive efforts were spurred on by a shared antagonism to the 'Celtic Revival' (aka 'Celtic Twilight'), a popular Victorian movement. Initiated by Ernest Renan's studies of the Celt as 'a shy, sensitive, and imaginative race, pushed back to the outermost fringes of Western Europe', it was developed by Matthew Arnold's discussion of feminine, mythical Gaelic values as a constituent of English identity.[8] The movement first took hold in Ireland, where writers including W. B. Yeats, 'A.E.' Russell and J.M. Synge championed a distinct Celtic identity and language. In Scotland, William Sharp proved popular, writing under the pseudonym of Fiona MacLeod. He characterized the Gaelic experience as 'gloom, the gloom of unavailing regret, of mournful longing, a lament for what cannot be again.'[9] It was a fatalist breed of romanticism, grown out of a history of Scottish depiction which had begun with Scott and Burns, where the Lowland narrative dominated and the Highlands were perceived and commented upon by those who were not native to their customs. Simultaneously, Scottish literature at the turn of the twentieth century was rife with the Kailyardism of J. M. Barrie and Ian Maclaren, English-language fiction which sentimentalized the nation's rural past. Combined with the Celtic Twilight, this context created the perfect storm of twee, uneducated stereotypes which Gunn and MacDiarmid were averse to. As Alan Riach writes of MacDiarmid, 'He was unpersuaded, resolutely unseduced. […] Nostalgia was anathema.'[10] Sorley MacLean, the

[6] Quoted in the Foreword to Fionn MacColla [1932] *The Albannach* (London: Souvenir Press, 1971).
[7] Hugh MacDiarmid, quoted in a letter to Neil M. Gunn (1.12.37), pp.260-263 in Alan Bold (ed.), *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), p.261.
[8] Rachel Bromwich, *Matthew Arnold and Celtic Literature: A Retrospect, 1865-1965* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965), p.6.
[9] William Sharp, 'Introduction', pp.xix-li in *Lyra Celtica* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1932), p.xxix.
[10] Alan Riach, 'W. B. Yeats and Hugh MacDiarmid: Kingly Cousins', pp.87-100 in *Scottish & International*

Gaelic poet, similarly considered these literary movements 'at best a haze over the realities of the Clearances […] the late Thirties was no time for quietism of any kind'.[11]

It was these 'realities' which Gunn and MacDiarmid sought to [de]-'haze', this 'quietism' they resisted. Their literary constructions demonstrate a willingness to better understand and deal with the difficult history of the Highlands and Islands, tackling the delicacies and human impact of the past with a respect for the old Gaelic order which 'did not simply die: it was deliberately strangled'.[12] Gunn handled the sensitivity of his subject with particular care, providing a sympathetic illustration of the Highlands' complexity and nuances. MacDiarmid dealt less with the human element, yet in his readiness to educate himself he opened himself up to a region of Scotland which was not his own, along with the difficult conversations which it provoked. Neither are without their faults, however their efforts to reintegrate the Gaelic narrative into national literature were vital for popularizing what that world had to offer, and for paving the way for its own voices to be heard.

MacDiarmid's fascination with Scotland as 'a Gaelic country' did not become a priority until the 1930s, however it had been incorporated into his vision from the very beginning.[13] His very pseudonym was chosen on the basis of its Gaelic connotations, adopted because 'Hugh has a traditional association and essential rightness in conjunction with MacDiarmid'. [14] Besides in the article which this thesis is named after, Gunn did not adopt a façade of greater 'Gaelic'-ness. Likely he did not feel the need to, hailing from the Highlands which he focused his fiction on, its heritage therefore his own by birth. Despite this though the men shared 'outsider status' in regard to Gaeldom, neither man having spent his most formative years in the Highland environment or having any more than a rudimentary knowledge of Gaelic. Despite Gunn's birthplace in the Caithness fishing village of Dunbeath, he, like MacDiarmid, was schooled in the Lowlands, and pursued a career which took him to urban centres. Although MacDiarmid had spent childhood holidays in Easter Ross, with an uncle whose second wife spoke Gaelic, he kept very little

Modernisms: Relationships & Configurations (ed.) Emma Dymock & Margery Palmer McCulloch (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2011), p.93.

[11] Sorley MacLean, 'Introduction' (1982) in *Ris a' Bhruthaich* (ed.) William Gillies (Stornoway: Acair Ltd., 1985), p.3.

[12] Michael Newton, *A Handbook of the Scottish Gaelic World* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), p.28.

[13] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Introduction', pp.vii-xxxvii in *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (ed.) Hugh MacDiarmid (London: MacMillan, 1948), p.viii.

[14] *LP*, p.6.

contact with the Highlands and Islands as an adult. It was only when he returned to the North in the 1930s, to Shetland, that his eyes were opened to the archipelagic nature of Scotland's geography and identity.[15] Thus the respective degrees of authority which Gunn and MacDiarmid had to comment upon the Gaelic situation were not as unlike as one might assume, hence why their constructions are worth comparing and contrasting.

Hugh MacDiarmid defined the role of the Gaelic world within his vision most succinctly in 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea' (1931/2), published in *The Modern Scot.*[16] Referring to Professor G. Gregory Smith's theory of the 'Caledonian Antisyzygy', MacDiarmid argues that in Scotland, it is the nationally characteristic zig-zagging between contradictions and extremes which drives progress. It will be a modernist return to the classical Gaelic culture, therefore, which propels Scottish literature to reach the ideal envisioned for it and to reach the goal of an East-West synthesis. He claims that 'Only in Gaeldom can there be the necessary counter-idea to the Russian idea', elaborating further that 'It does not matter a rap whether the whole conception of this Gaelic idea is as far-fetched as Dostoevsky's Russian Idea'.[17] Realism is not a priority, rather it is a 'dynamic myth' which he hopes to construct; 'an intellectual conception.'[18] In this instance his vision is quite different to Neil Gunn's. In its comparison of their efforts, this thesis has a tendency to dwell on the idea of 'authenticity', and what that may mean with regards to how the Gaelic world is conveyed by these contemporaries. However, MacDiarmid's statement here is not forgotten. Whilst the 'Idea', in its wholest sense, was 'an intellectual conception', not intended to be fully practicable, this does not mean that every stage in its development was rooted in the unattainable – particularly as MacDiarmid's biography brought him in closer contact with the realities of the Gaelic experience.

In light of their disputable authority, both writers have been subject to scrutiny with regards to their right to construct an identity for a world they did not fully relate to. This scrutiny has evolved with time. By contemporary publishers Gunn was initially seen as

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[15] James Hunter, *On the Other Side of Sorrow: Nature and People in the Scottish Highlands* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1995), p.128.
[16] Where 'the Gaelic Idea' is mentioned, it is in reference to this pivotal essay. Gunn does not speak of an equivalent theoretical concept, thus the term shall be confined to the discussion of MacDiarmid alone.
[17] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea', pp. 56-74 in Duncan Glen (ed.) *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), p.67.
[18] Glen 1970, p.67; Glen 1970, p.68.

'too Gaelic, too 'poetic', to write a strong novel.'[19] Much later, his work was praised for exactly these qualities, considered as a 'socially-conscious writer' who 'served with the utmost fidelity the needs of the Highland communities'.[20] More recently, however, he has been considered not Gaelic enough, his service to said communities dismissed in an essay by Christopher Whyte, who argued that he merely 'filled the void labelled 'Gaelic' in the minds of his readers with a construction of his own making, one that had precise ideological and philosophical implications.'[21] MacDiarmid, on the other hand, had less personal link to the Gaelic world and is considered more of an outsider. That said, Iain Crichton Smith – a native Gaelic poet and author – appraised his controversial vision as 'almost an evolutionary attempt to move the species forward', claiming elsewhere that 'The only authority poetry ultimately has is the imagination', somewhat leaving the argument of authority and appropriation obsolete.[22]

The simplistic dismissal of Gunn or MacDiarmid's work as appropriation or sentimentalisation disregards the research and dedication which went into the conscious inclusion of the Highlands and Islands within their wider visions. This thesis encourages the reader to look beyond such readings into the nuances of their constructions and their shared emphasis on Gunn's argument that 'The language, tradition, and nurture of the Gael sufficed in those days, and would have sufficed in these, if they had not been interfered with from outside.'[23] Born of a generation whose national literary identity was founded on Scott's romanticism and the nostalgic stereotypes of the Celtic Twilight, Gunn and MacDiarmid understood the power of literature to entirely alter the rhetoric of any chosen world or identity. Their aim was to recorrect what had gone so wrong, and they did this by interweaving their imagined constructions with knowledge that had been picked up through books or through personal experience. It is a constructive effort like MacDiarmid's 'dynamic myth' that Timothy Baker alludes to in his suggestion that 'In order to understand the place of Scots and Scottishness within history, it is necessary to create a

[19] Pick 1987, p.7: Expressed by Jonathon Cape in a letter to Gunn, with regards to justifying rejection of the publication of *The Lost Glen.*
[20] Francis Thomson, 'Neil M. Gunn, Recorder and Interpreter', in David Morrison (ed.), *Essays on Neil M. Gunn* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1971), p.39.
[21] Christopher Whyte, 'Fishy Masculinities: Neil Gunn's *The Silver Darlings',* pp.49-68 in Christopher Whyte (ed.) *Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) p.52.
[22] Iain Crichton Smith, 'The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid' (1978), pp.192-3 in Smith, *Towards the Human*, p.193; Iain Crichton Smith, 'The Golden Lyric: The Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid' (1967), pp.176-191 in Iain Crichton Smith, *Towards the Human: Selected Essays* (Edinburgh: MacDonald, 1986), p.190.
[23] Neil. M. Gunn, writing as 'Dane McNeil', The Gael Will Come Again', *Scots Magazine* (Feb 1931), pp.277-280 in McCulloch 2004, p.279.

new myth of history, one that provides a foundation for all that follows.'[24] Gunn's fictionalization of historical events, on the other hand, evokes Crichton Smith's suggestion that 'poets and writers are better historians, often, than the professionals', because 'what I like to think about is a kind of history lived on the bone rather than an intellectual creation.' [25] The difficulty with Gunn and, to an even greater degree, MacDiarmid is that neither commits himself to a coherent construction of history across the board, instead combining elements of 'a new myth' and experience 'lived on the bone' to an often indistinguishable degree. Whilst this creates nuance and a believable blend of reliability, it also creates liabilities with regards to representivity and the problematic politics and perspectives which undermine their literary constructions.

Their efforts are characteristic of International Modernism and the complexities which it traversed. Consider, for example, T. S Eliot's argument in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919). The text, which would have been highly influential when Gunn and MacDiarmid were just starting out, discusses the handling of history in modern literature:

> Tradition […] cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense […] involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.[26]

If tradition cannot be inherited, then it raises the question of who in society ought to take responsibility for it and ensure its documentation. Moreover, might Gunn and MacDiarmid's literary efforts not be considered a demonstration of 'great labour'? Neither took the task set for them as writers lightly – 'All the destinies of my land are set before me'- recognizing the importance of literature in the development of society and literature in the future.[27] Tension is created by the co-existence of alternative approaches to historical authenticity and imaginative freedom within the worlds which Gunn and

[24] Glen 1970, p.67; Baker 2009, p.9.
[25] Iain Crichton Smith, quoted in Colin Nicholson, 'To Have Found One's Country', pp.114-132 in Colin Nicholson, *Poem Purpose and Place: Shaping Identity in Contemporary Scottish Verse* 1992, p.121.
[26] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), pp.21-30 in John Hayward (ed.) *T. S. Eliot: Selected Prose* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1953), p.23.
[27] *CP2,* p.1167.

MacDiarmid constructed, as they tackled the political and emotional sensitivity of their role. Various pressures and influences were at play at various points in their careers, and this is evident in the often contradictory depictions of the Gaelic world which they present.

Highland historian James Hunter claims that 'there are many, many Highlands. Some of them overlap. Others are in conflict'. [28] In his commitment to the explication of such conflicts Neil Gunn devoted some twenty novels, in addition to short stories, journalism and biographical writing. A specific selection has been chosen for the purpose of this thesis' analysis however, so as to award each text the close analysis it deserves. Believed to be most relevant to the primary themes of community, land and culture which Gunn explores, this composes of *The Lost Glen* (1932), *Sun Circle* (1933), *Butcher's Broom* (1934), *Highland River* (1937) and *The Silver Darlings* (1941). Although they span a mere ten years in publication dates, these novels encompass thousands of years' worth of human experience, therefore providing a broad spectrum of the Gaelic world's development over time. Gunn exploits the freedoms of the conventional English form of the novel, 'that most bourgeois and urban of literary forms' to depict a world traditionally dominated by folk narrative and poetry, popularizing and revitalizing the rhetoric of an oppressed culture and identity in the language of its oppressor. [29] His autobiography *Off in a Boat* (1938) also acts as an indispensable point of reference, providing much of the contextual framework which elucidates the fiction.

The publication of these texts also corresponds to the introduction of the 'Gaelic Idea' in MacDiarmid's work, inviting a closer analysis of their contrasts and agreements. The 1930s brought not only the poet's move to Shetland but also the beginnings of his correspondence with Sorley MacLean, travels around the Hebrides, and the adoption of English over his formerly preferred Scots. This thesis focusses on texts which were penned during this time and which pay special attention to the Gaelic world as subject, namely 'Lament for the Great Music', 'Direadh I-III', 'In Talk with Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir' and 'Island Funeral'. MacDiarmid's own island book, part non-fiction, part biography, *The Islands of Scotland* (1939), will also be taken into account. This period marks a pivotal point of development in MacDiarmid's career and as such deserves far greater critical attention than

[28] James Hunter, 'The Scottish Highlands: A Contested Country', pp.2-59 in Hugh Cheape (ed.) *Fonn's Duthchas: Land and Legacy* (Edinburgh: NMS Enterprises Limited, 2006) p.58.
[29] Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.156.

it has been awarded thus far.

Whilst much material already exists on Neil Gunn and Hugh MacDiarmid, surprisingly little takes into consideration a comparison of their creative work on the Gaelic world. Perhaps that is because on the outside they appear so different – one writes novels and the other poetry, for a start. MacDiarmid's treatment of Scots and English is generally favoured over his interaction with Scotland's third national language, his work pertaining to the 'Gaelic Idea' subsumed under his wider vision. Gunn, on the other hand, is remembered as a Highland writer, yet he has been left out of much academic discussion in recent years. Thus, while much has been learnt from already existing criticism, much of what this thesis explores also expands into under-researched territory and looks to highlight Gunn and MacDiarmid's continued significance to the development of Scottish literature and history in the twentieth century.

Biographical works by Alan Bold, J. B. Pick and F. R. Hart have been invaluable in their provision of the contextual background. Margery Palmer McCulloch's study of Gunn's novels has also been crucial, as has work by Richard Price, John Murray and Cairns Craig. Scott Lyall's writing on community in Scottish literature and his exploration of MacDiarmid's politics of place have prompted further research questions surrounding the poet's focus on the territories of the Highlands and Islands, highly valuable to the intentions of this thesis. Although primarily a literary enquiry, historical context has also been integral to the research, such as that provided by Gaelic historians Michael Newton, John MacInnes and James Hunter. My research brings together existing literary criticism and this historical framework with an understanding of the history and literature which Gunn and MacDiarmid wrote in response to.

Their reconstructions have been considered under three sub-categories: people, land, and culture. Chapter 1 centres on the concept of *dùthchas,* a Gaelic term taken to signify the hereditary culture and territory synonymous with traditional Highland communities. It considers the 'people' involved in Gunn and MacDiarmid's texts – the writers themselves, the individuals whom they create, the structure of the communities in which those individuals interact, and the idea of the Gaelic 'race'. Chapter 2 focusses on land, and the symbolic and material functions with each writer instils the natural environment with. They combine literary symbolism with traditional labour values and contemporary

Marxist ideology to create a set of tensions between alternative methods of representation. Both traverse these tensions in a way so as to be true to the realism of their approach, whilst retaining respect for the myth and legend which the landscape was traditionally associated with. Finally, Chapter 3 explores the influence of language, culture and popular writing on the Highlands – fiction and non- fiction – on the writers' constructions. The thesis conducts a historical enquiry into the literature which directly influenced them, before analyzing the manner in which their knowledge of language, literature and music was translated into the creative worlds that they imagined and depicted.

Chapter One

Dùthchas: Identity, Community and Belonging in a Gaelic World

Gunn and MacDiarmid's Gaelic worlds feature constructions of individual, community and generational identities, both writers highlighting certain shared characteristics which differentiated the Gael and their experience from any other Scot and theirs. Yet they do so to varying degrees. Gunn's novels intimately explore the relationships, hierarchies and interactions which constituted the social context of the Gaelic world, whilst MacDiarmid's allusions to the Gàidhealtachd refer more to an emblematic aspiration than to a tangible grouping. In place of envisioning individual Gaelic identities and personalities, the poet's voice infiltrates all that he constructs to create a world which feels more subjective and more instrumental than Gunn's, MacDiarmid's presence as its creator within felt at all times.

The concept of *dùthchas* is relevant to their constructions of a social context and identity, the term having been used by Gaelic scholars to denote the sense of attachment and belonging felt by Gaels for their communities and environments. Michael Newton's definition is particularly helpful:

> Gaelic cosmology places a heavy emphasis on hereditary traits, characteristics transmitted through family lines. The terms *dùthchas* and *dualchas* are commonly used to discuss issues of heritage. *Dualchas* means most specifically one's genetic inheritance; *dùthchas* has much wider connotations, such as hereditary territory and customs.[30]

John MacInnes similarly defines *dùthchas* as 'not so much a landscape, not a sense of geography alone nor of history alone, but a formal order of experience in which all these are merged.'[31] It is essentially untranslatable into English, signifying an intrinsically Gaelic phenomenon which Gunn and MacDiarmid were able to tap into, despite their own personal distance from that world and inability to speak or write in the language which the term comes from. This chapter examines how the concept is applicable to Gunn and MacDiarmid's constructions. It does so firstly by taking into account the incorporation of their own voice and opinions; secondly, the depiction of the individual; thirdly the importance of

[30] Michael Newton (ed.) *Dùthchas Nan Gàidheal: Selected Essays of John MacInnes* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd., 2006), p.xxvii.
[31] John MacInnes, 'The Panegyric Code in Gaelic Poetry and its Historical Background', pp.265-319, ibid., p.279.

community; and finally, the idea of the Gael as a 'race' that extended beyond their own comprehension of it.

The Writer

'Absolute objectivity, in the sense of being quite uninfluenced by the circumstances of one's own time and place is [...] as unattainable a goal for the historian as for anyone else.'[32]
- James Hunter

Gunn himself argued that 'A novelist cannot write about people in a vacuum. They must have a background, and the background becomes part of them, conditioning to some extent almost everything they do.'[33] It is an unsurprisingly materialist perspective to have, one which it can be assumed MacDiarmid would have shared. In light of this, both men's biographies have been taken into consideration in regards to the impact they are likely to have had on the development of their literary constructions. It affects their first-hand experience of the Gaelic world, the materials they had access to which they learnt from, and the emotional and political attitudes which they had towards their subjects. The communities and characters of the Gaelic world served a different purpose to each writer and as such they are illustrated in quite different manners. This first section explores how personal experience and perspective informed their tone when depicting the Gael, most interested in how their own identity impacted that which they fictionalized.

Neil Gunn's prose presents him as a man familiar with the social environments of the Gaelic world, the encounters in his novels presumed to have been informed by real life interactions and inhabitation. His repertoire presents a vast spectrum of character development, demonstrative of the various influences which affect Gaelic identity on both an individual and communal scale. Borrowing from a definition offered by Newton, Gunn proved identity to '[depend] as much on context as on inherent characteristics' – hence why *dùthchas,* and the sense of territorial attachment that it implies, is so relevant.[34] By giving an insight into protagonists' narratives whilst simultaneously representing the views of their wider community, Gunn succeeded in creating prose which is intimate and

[32] James Hunter [1976] *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd., 2010), p.289.
[33] Neil M. Gunn, 'Landscape Inside', pp.43-46 in *Saltire Review* 6.19 (Autumn 1959), p.43.
[34] Michael Newton, *The Warriors of the Word: The World of the Scottish Highlanders* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd., 2009), p.45.

yet rich with context. Unlike MacDiarmid, he was considered a 'quiet' writer, what Thompson refers to as 'the silent onlooker on the touchline of life' due to his relatively neutral narrative stance.[35] This neutrality allowed his characters to speak for themselves, the subtleties of their interactions and development indicative of how Gunn intended for the world to be represented and explored in literature.

In comparison with Gunn's prose MacDiarmid's poetry presents an entirely different understanding of priorities. From the man who claimed that 'I have no love for humanity – but only for the higher brain-centres', it should come as no shock that he glosses over character development and the representation of individual experience.[36] Instead, he concerns himself with the bigger picture, primarily the role of the Highlands within Scotland and Scottish literature. This tendency is noted by John MacInnes as being prevalent in native Gaelic poetry: 'Poets are the spokesmen of Gaelic society […] It is not a different awareness so much as a difference in artistic convention that makes the Gaelic poet concern himself with the national dimensions of a given issue.'[37] MacDiarmid's chosen medium of poetry thus works differently to Gunn's prose form, allowing him to explore the 'national dimensions' of regional identity as its spokesman. Rather than dwelling on the nuance of individual experience, he approaches his Gaelic world from above – note the choice of the word 'Direadh' as a title – often appearing as though he approaches his subject armed with an agenda before even encountering it (or them).[38]

Although MacDiarmid's own sense of *dùthchas* is atypical in that he personally does not have tangible ties to this specific region of Scotland, his representation of Gaelic identity is understood to be a crucial part of the holistic national identity which he aspires to create. This 'spokesmen' role was one assumed by a number of writers in the Scottish Renaissance, who understood the power of writing – consider Fionn MacColla's speculation in *The Albannach*: 'It was as if Alba was waiting once again for the birth of a man, and all the mighty bens stood listening for the first cry of the babe that was to be a poet.'[39] Gunn and MacDiarmid used their platform as popular writers to alter the way in

[35] Thompson, in Morrison 1971, p.38.
[36] *LP,* p.78.
[37] Newton 2006, p.3.
[38] From Gaelic the word 'Dìreadh' translates to English as the verb 'to surmount' or 'to climb'; MacDiarmid's trilogy of poems under this title were only published in full in 1974, but were begun being written in the 1930s/40s whilst the poet lived in Shetland.
[39] MacColla 1971, p.2.

which Gaelic values and traditions were perceived, thereby doing their bit to ensure that they would not be committed to history. They illustrated this dedication regardless of their own debatable distance from the identity they constructed.

The poetry in which MacDiarmid references Gaelic language, culture and tradition is quite clearly subjective and suggestive of the poet's unwillingness to shed his own persona. Rather than foray fully into fabrication, he founds his writing on what he knows, an idea summarized by Andrew MacNellie:

> MacDiarmid said he could only write what he lived. He lived, we should say, not only in material poverty but in intellectual turmoil […] MacDiarmid was truly an autodidact. When he said he wrote what he lived, he also meant he wrote what he read, for he lived much in books[40]

Considering he did not live much in the Gaelic world, the concept of identity and community he bears in mind throughout its construction is therefore a combination of minimal personal experience with extensive reading. He knew that no man could ever truly understand another's experience – 'there's nae kennin' what ony man in the mob / May ha'e, in his hert if in nae ither place', and his poetry did not pretend to do so.[41] In acknowledging the individuality of a man's mind and imagination, MacDiarmid offers both justification for his sparse inclusion of characters, and explanation for the strong presence of his own. This was not an approach confined to his poetry, and Scott Lyall suggests – with regards to his extensive use of pseudonyms - it was because: 'if he was to sing alone, he would need to swell the chorus with his own community of voices.'[42] The few characters he constructed, like those many names he wrote under, reinforced his vision of a community in which the individual was not shunned or isolated but celebrated. 'Tam o' the Wilds and the Many Faced Mystery' and 'Old Eric's Hobby' represent two such texts in which the identities that MacDiarmid constructs for characters of Northern, if not Gaelic, origins, are almost interchangeable with elements of his own. His comprehension of Gaelic values grows out of what he knows and in turn feeds into the construction of a national identity intended to unite Scots from the Highlands and Lowlands.

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[40] Andrew McNeillie, 'Theatres in the Round', talk given to CSCS (Centre for Scottish & Celtic Studies) at University of Glasgow, 12.02.2019.
[41] *CP1*, p.379.
[42] Scott Lyall, 'MacDiarmid's Impossible Community', pp.82-102 in Scott Lyall (ed.) *Community in Modern Scottish Literature* (Boston: Brill, 2016), p.83.

Further to this, the interjection of personal anecdote throughout MacDiarmid's poetry ensures that his own voice is consistently made relevant, the 'Gaelic Idea' embedded within his wider universal vision. 'Lament for the Great Music' features such examples, the narrative repeatedly related back to MacDiarmid himself: 'I too who have never become eingebürgert elsewhere / Feel changed in Scotland, grown strange to myself'.[43] *Direadh* similarly utilizes the first person, MacDiarmid's interaction with his subject matter brought to the forefront in the repetition of 'Was it only yesterday I cried', 'Was it only yesterday I was struggling still'.[44] Elevating his own voice above that of the Gaels themselves reinforces the concept of his instrumentalization of the Gaelic identity as part of an individual project. It is a very different approach to Gunn's, whose personal goals and perspectives barely encroach upon his fictional world.

Use of the first person recurs in 'Lament for the Great Music' in its plural form, which sees MacDiarmid assume the voice of a collective of Scots. Speaking of '*our* duty' and what '*we* see', he adopts the authority to speak for others and introduces an element of conversation between those whom he represents and those whom he addresses.[45] When he claims that 'doubtless we are truer Scots, truer men, / Despite mere appearances than you old masters of the *Ceol Mor*', the 'we' is suspected to be the current society of Scotland that MacDiarmid himself is a part of, encompassing Gaels as well as Lowlanders such as himself.[46] His willingness to act as 'spokesman' for all Scots, rather than just that local group which he identifies with, glosses further over the very regional variations which are already made purposely ambiguous through the adoption of his pseudonym. MacDiarmid ensures that as the 'creator' of the Gaelic world he portrays, his own experience and perspective are rendered relevant, regardless of whether or not they would have been considered so by those whom he speaks for. His poetry presents the Gaelic regions as viewed through a national lens, and the identities of each locality surveyed as contributory to the whole, hence why specific experiences are not a priority to him.

Despite falling outwith the traditional definition of *dùthchas,* MacDiarmid captured the Gaelic world within his vision due to a sense of responsibility– 'A Scottish poet maun

[43] *CP1*, p.472; 'eingebürgert' translates from German to 'naturalised' or 'domesticated'.
[44] *CP2*, p.1171.
[45] *CP1*, p.462 (italics have been added).
[46] *CP1*, p.463.

assume / The burden o' his people's doom'. [47] It was an urge which he and Gunn shared, a duty recognized by Fiona Stafford in other Scottish poets before them:

> For the poet, the task was not just one of loving devotion and grateful perception […] Personal experience offered a vital source of truth, but, from the mass of experience drunk in through thirsty senses, the poet had a responsibility to select the things that really mattered.[48]

The 'Gaelic Idea' was evidently perceived to 'really matter', clear in the increasing frequency with which it is referenced throughout the 1930s and 40s. He and Gunn took it upon themselves to ensure the Gaelic world was preserved and revitalized through literature in a manner which they saw fit, enacting what Colin Nicholson refers to as 'a poetic confrontation with the extreme difficulty of recovering collective memory, and from that recovery a reconstruction of collective political responsibility.'[49] Where collective memory could not be recovered, the individual writer stepped in. Having done so and withdrawn from mainstream society in Shetland – 'my duty is here', - MacDiarmid became a 'Communal dweller yet lone hunter', a man with a sense of duty for the world he constructed and, as a consequence, those who inhabited it.[50] Much like the pursuits of those whom he depicts – such as Tam and Eric's learning, or Duncan Ban MacIntyre's stalking – this was a purely solitary endeavour:

> I have had to get rid of all my friends,
> All those to whom I had to accommodate myself.
> If one's capital consists in a calling
> And a mission in life one cannot afford to keep friends.[51]

Inspired by Charles Doughty, another 'man of independent mind' and 'outsider', MacDiarmid sets himself on the lonely path of the artist in exile.[52] To him, the everyday mundanities of a Gaelic life were secondary issues, overshadowed by the bardic responsibility of heralding this personal construction of a 'Gaelic' world and identity. Although not to the same isolating degree Gunn shared this understanding, justifying

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[47] From 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle': Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (ed.) Kenneth Buthlay (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2008), p.239.
[48] Fiona Stafford, *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p.29.
[49] Colin Nicholson, *Poem, Purpose and Place: Shaping Identity in Contemporary Scottish Verse* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), p.xx.
[50] *CP1*, p.480; *CP1*, p.479.
[51] *CP1*, p.476.
[52] Edwin Morgan, 'MacDiarmid at Seventy-Five', pp. 219-20 in Edwin Morgan, *Essays* (Cheadle: Carcanet, 1974), p.219; Mark Ryan Smith, *The Literature of Shetland* (Lerwick: The Shetland Times, 2014), p.119.

Margery Palmer McCulloch's claim that the Scottish Renaissance had 'more in common with Shelley's belief in the poet or artist as 'unacknowledged legislator' than with modernist detachment.'[53] Their construction of the Gaelic world by way of capturing it in literature was Gunn and MacDiarmid's means of intervention, offering an opinion on its legislation in culture just by their very input.

Of the two, Gunn had a stronger biographical connection to the Highlands, and as such there is a personal and, at times, sentimental sense of belonging and commitment which courses throughout his novels. He develops the narratives of the characters whom he depicts and the backgrounds of their social contexts, prioritizing the voices of his subjects over his own. MacDiarmid, comparatively, does not possess this personal pool of experience, tales and characters from which to draw and instead draws upon and amplifies his subjectivity, his own identity feeding into that which he imagines. Whilst Gunn's novels favours the construction of characters' complex interiority, MacDiarmid's poetry is dominated by a first person narrative which emanates from a persona of himself, the poet. Each, however, understood the significance of the individual in Gaelic society, and be that themselves or one that is fabricated, it is this that the following section shall explore. It will analyze the manner in which both writers constructed narratives of individual experience, how this impacted their portrayal of *dùthchas,* and the implications this had for their overall construction of a Gaelic world.

The Individual

'As the Sun put a circle round the earth and all that it contained, so a man by his vision put a circle round himself. At the centre of this circle his spirit sat, and at the centre of his spirit was a serenity for ever watchful.'[54]
- Neil M. Gunn, *Sun Circle*

Individuality is highlighted in both Gunn and MacDiarmid's constructions of the Gaelic world, each writer illustrating the tension that exists between solitude and kinship in traditional Highland society. As discussed, MacDiarmid primarily emphasizes this through the prefacing of his own role and duty, however he also does so through the

[53] McCulloch, *Modernism and Nationalism,* p.xiii.
[54] *SC*, p.366.

characterization of isolated individuals. The balance between independent and communal struggle is a recurring theme in both his and Gunn's writing, the Gaelic identity they construct shown to be wrought with hardship, endurance and belonging to a troubled past. Evocative of MacDiarmid's own struggle of isolation and poverty on Shetland, any characters he identifies are singled out and challenged - like Tam of 'Tam o' the Wilds', who 'never had a stroke o' wardly luck / But a desperate fecht frae beginnin' to end'.[55] Tam is one of two Northern characters who MacDiarmid develops and who I look at in this chapter. He serves as an example of Scottish values which the poet believed worthy of devoting attention to.

Gunn's range of character development is comparatively more balanced than MacDiarmid's, a broader spectrum of personalities depicted so as to illustrate the nuances in identity that existed throughout the Gaelic world. He too singles out specific characters, however, to highlight the tension that exists between individuals and traditional Highland communities. He instils in his protagonists an awareness of their solitary purpose in life, their independence shown to be an integral feature of their identity. Community, as Gunn presents it, is to be considered not as a coherent united whole but as a constantly fluctuating network of relationships and interactions between distinct individuals. This is illustrated in *Butcher's Broom:*

> Each being was distinct - even an extreme - individualist, as diverse in physical and mental characteristic as the Drover and McHamish, or Rob and Davie, yet all combining in a communism or community of interest, not merely complete in its material aspect, but sustained by a singular spiritual force.[56]

In this scene from Rob and Elie's wedding the tension is highlighted between retaining one's individuality and succumbing to the group, reminiscent of the questioning final line of Yeats' poem 'Among School Children': 'How can we know the dancer from the dance?'[57] As the Riasgan are portrayed before the clearances, they are 'distinct' and yet 'sustained', dancers indistinct from the dance, individuals bound together by a shared identity and common experience - united by *dùthchas.* It is this which the clearances of 'Bliadhna an Losgaidh' (1814) destroyed: 'Already, as a community, cohesion had gone. They were

[55] *CP1*, p.369; ibid., p.377.
[56] *BB*, p.288.
[57] W. B. Yeats, 'Among School Children', pp.242-45 in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: MacMillan & Co Ltd., 1965), p.245.

stragglers after a battle rather than a simple people moving to new lands.'[58] Without a territory to belong to, and without faith in the persistence of their traditional values, the individuals became just that: individuals, no longer connected by the same spirit. The intimate lens through which Gunn views and depicts his Gaelic world lends its characters a degree of humanity which MacDiarmid's distance from his subjects obstructs him from quite attaining. As such, the events are portrayed in a relatable manner, even when they are horrific, such as this.

Individuality is a defining characteristic of Gunn's Gaelic experience even prior to the devastation of the clearances, however, as highlighted particularly in the characterization of Elie. Having witnessed the harshness of life elsewhere, Elie welcomes the Riasgan's familiar hospitality back into her life, yet continues to experience isolation, detachment and loneliness. She withdraws from those around her and relies only on herself on in times of struggle. Her escape to the hollow during her anxious search for Davie is an example of this, spurred on by 'A sudden sharp feeling of loneliness'.[59] Similarly, when she mourns for Colin in the forest, she experiences a 'hostility to the forces' which 'withdrew her from them', described as 'something more than the defiant pleasure of the outcast'. [60] She does not feel fully alone for she is aware of the community around her and, more so, the Earth which supports her. It is in knowledge of this that she finds her strength - 'When Elie came down from that mount of her lonely vision, she found need for all her courage.'[61] Her solitude is as integral a part of her 'Gaelic' identity as her relationships are. Through her independence, when she chooses to look inward on herself rather than out to the community, she finds her affinity with the other elements which make up her world, thereby developing a better understanding of who she is.

The Silver Darlings presents a similar struggle in the experience of Finn, his mood attuned to the tempestuous waters he must seek his livelihood from. His independence, like Elie's, is most resounding in times of turmoil, like in the aftermath of the storm when he and the crew described as being 'in the mood not to want humanity, to hold a strange yet comforting perversity to the outcast world they had created about them'.[62] The lifestyle they lead out of necessity, so reliant on natural forces, is one at odds with the

[58] 'The Year of the Burnings'; *BB*, p.378.
[59] *BB*, p.90.
[60] *BB*, p.194.
[61] *BB*, p.195.
[62] *SD*, p.329.

comfort of community that they formerly knew, breeding a kind of loneliness in its unrelatable extremity, not unlike MacDiarmid's isolated stay on Shetland. However, it is also through his lonely travels that he is exposed to other individuals just like him, thus reinforcing the idea of kinship. The islands in particular open his eyes to the Gaelic identity he shares with those who live there – on Lewis he perceives the faces around him 'with an unusual clearness [...] Finn knew them with a profound and loving intimacy [...] Each face, too, had a physical resemblance to faces he knew at home.'[63] This strengthens Gunn's reliance on *dùthchas*, emphasizing the bond that unites a widespread community of distinct individuals. In highlighting the loneliness of struggle and the shared nature of this loneliness due to the shared nature of the experience, he shows that independence is not altogether negative but is in fact what brings people together. His characters experience complicated and fluctuating relationships with their solitude, this struggle depicted as a defining feature of the Gaelic identity and experience as it struggles to maintain its traditional values and yet bring itself into a much changed modern world.

Hannah Arendt defined the modern individual by 'his inability to be at home in society or to live outside it altogether'.[64] This statement is applicable to Elie, Finn, and a number of Gunn's other young protagonists. Ewan in *The Lost Glen* is what Hart calls an 'alienated native', a term which could similarly be applied to Gunn himself.[65] *Sun Circle's* Aniel and Breeta grapple with their identity in a rapidly changing society, often feeling lost at its fringes. Kenn in *Highland River* undertakes a solitary journey of maturation and enlightenment. Gunn portrays his characters as distinct individuals with distinct stories to tell, defined along their paths by an implicitly Gaelic self-awareness, independence and attraction to solitude, as much as by the shared qualities of their kinship.

Detachment was not an unfamiliar concept to MacDiarmid either, both in his own experience and that which he constructed for others, like Tam. Although the poem is not about the Gaelic world - in fact it is about an entirely different 'world', that being the North-East territory of the Doric - its setting in Aberdeenshire indicates MacDiarmid's growing awareness of and interest in regions and identities of Scotland that he himself was not familiar with. [66]

[63] *BB*, p.369.
[64] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p.39.
[65] Hart 1978, p.351.
[66] The poem's setting is deductable through MacDiarmid's reference to 'the boats frae Macduff and Banff, /

Tam himself is 'uncommon', both in personality and in the degree to which MacDiarmid develops his character.[67] Shown to be a hard-working man who 'never had an instant to spare' 'For idle convenin' wi' ither folk', the poem begins as a character sketch.[68] The focus switches, however, to his keen pursuit of knowledge, a hobby which rendered him, much like MacDiarmid himself, an 'outsider':

> For the feck o' folk couldna faddom at a'
> A workin' man wi' a purpose in life
> 'Yont his work and a dram and fitba',
> Or mebbies the Kirk, but what could he want
> Wi' this passion for nature and science?[69]

MacDiarmid highlights his isolation further in the link to William Soutar, both men 'withdrawn frae the common life 'o man'.[70] Soutar, bed-ridden due to ill health, was cut off from the world far more visibly than Tam, however both used their isolation to expand their learning. Thus, although they appear to be limited by their situation, they actually enjoy its freedom, 'livin' in what a wonderfu' world even then / - The pure world o' the spirit'.[71] Unable to relate to an archetypical experience as Gunn might have done in this instance, MacDiarmid, writing what he knows, characterizes Tam less as the 'common man' and more as the symbol of the pedagogue, a role he sees himself as fulfilling in real life.

The character of Eric Laurenceson in the short story 'Old Eric's Hobby' is a similar example. Much like 'Tam o' the Wilds', the text's setting in Shetland signifies MacDiarmid opening up to the exploration of regions and identities farther afield – although this time with the added influence of inhabitation. He presents the islanders as a coherent community, 'completely different [...] in their attitude to the most fundamental things, in the intimate texture of their beings' - only for the character of Eric to then be singled out.[72] Like Tam he is characterized by his passion for knowledge, there being 'no man in the

Whitehills, Portsoy, Findochtie, the Buckies' and mention that 'Far owre the Moray Firth the Caithness mountains / Are clearly picked oot 'gainst the evenin' sky'; *CP1*, p.375.
[67] *CP1*, p.368.
[68] Ibid.
[69] *CP1*, p.369.
[70] *CP1*, p.378.
[71] Ibid.
[72] *AFS*, pp.204-5.

archipelago who knows more about the history of the islands and the psychology of the people'.[73] Eric, like many of Gunn's characters, develops a close affinity to nature through his solitude, 'the sea [...] almost as much in his blood as in theirs', his figure barely distinguishable from the rocky background of the stormy seascape.[74] The image of his body merging with his landscape invokes the image of Tam hiding out in the hills, MacDiarmid sheltering in a cave on West Linga, or Duncan Ban MacIntyre stalking deer. The independence obtained through heightened understanding of one's natural environment is a recurring concept in MacDiarmid's writing, applied to the characters he creates as much as to his own life.

MacDiarmid's construction of the individual in both these instances shares Gunn's understanding of the significance of individuality and yet places less emphasis on the overarching sense of *dùthchas.* Even when situated within a wider community, his characters are constructed as isolated outsiders, excluded from society because of their independent pursuits. Unlike Gunn's adoption of imagined identities and a level of intimacy which MacDiarmid found untoward – 'Intimacy is always something I have instinctively avoided' – the poet instils his constructions with traits of his own, drawing from his own experience and understanding of a Scottish identity defined by learning and independence.[75] Instead of blindly appropriating an identity which is foreign to him, MacDiarmid illustrates his aspiration to merge the known with the unknown in order to construct a Gaelic identity as part of his national vision. It suggests that, despite his claims in 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea' about the 'Gaelic Idea' being 'far-fetched', in practice there was an element of wishing for his representation to be believable and representative.[76]

In writing what he knew, MacDiarmid placed less emphasis on community and relationships in his Gaelic world than Gunn did. John Brannigan clarifies this: 'MacDiarmid figures no sense of lived community, no sense of affinity with either the islanders or the distant masses, and so the imagination of the 'unapprehended possibilities' of a common humanity seem perversely lonely.'[77] The closest the poet came to inhabitation in a Highland society was on Shetland, 'Psychologically unsettled' and poverty-stricken,

[73] *AFS*, p.204.
[74] *AFS*, p.207.
[75] *RT3*, p.529.
[76] Glen 1970, p.67.
[77] John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p.171.

enhanced by brief insights into Hebridean life on visits to friends Sorley MacLean and Compton Mackenzie.[78] Although the society on Shetland which MacDiarmid experienced was not 'Gaelic', it introduced the poet to alternative Scottish identities, and to the archipelagic nature of Scotland's geography, a feature of which the Shetland Isles, and the Hebrides which he visited, were vital focal points. On Whalsay, MacDiarmid's island life was lonely, and it was isolating. How could the writer, who struggled to belong himself, envision an identity in which loneliness was shared, and strength wrought because of it? It is in this that Gunn and MacDiarmid's attitude to the individual within a Gaelic social context differs, Gunn familiar with the traditional idea of *dùthchas,* MacDiarmid foreign to it, yet willing to learn.

The Community

'Is miann le triubhas a bhith a-measg aodaich, ach is miann leam fhéina a bhith a-measg mo dhaoine' ('Trousers like to be amongst clothes, but it is my wish to be amongst my people')'[79]
- Gaelic proverb

Although each writer primarily conveys their depiction of the Gaelic world through an individual perspective, parallel emphasis is placed on the role of the community. Rather than a purely homogenous grouping, Gaelic society is portrayed as a fluctuating combination of relationships and interactions, in which the individuals come together without losing their independence. As John Burns remarks, 'The quality of 'light' comes not from an individual abandoning the community for a life of contemplation, but […] from realizing the extent to which individual freedom and participation in the life of a particular community interact with and complement each other.'[80] By presenting characters in the context of their social settings, the writers explore various hierarchies and dynamics, such that 'through the relationships that constitute community, can the individual be known.'[81] This tension features more prominently in Gunn's construction than MacDiarmid's, the latter more concerned with the solitude and independence that he himself knew. However, if one is to consider the understanding of 'community' that Scott Lyall suggests, as 'more a

[78] Bold 1988, p.318.
[79] Quoted in Michael Newton, *A Handbook of the Scottish Gaelic World* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), p.111.
[80] John Burns, 'Neil Gunn: Towards the Light', pp.33-4 in *Cencrastus: Scottish and International Literature, Arts and Affairs,* 32 (Jan 1989), p.34.
[81] Baker 2009, p.153.

metaphysics of striving for home, rather than the actuality, or even the possibility, of arrival', then MacDiarmid's 'impossible community' becomes equally as valuable to discussion on the 'Gaelic Idea'.[82] Less tangible, MacDiarmid's construction of Gaelic community transcends regional boundaries and challenges traditional ideas of time and kinship. As an intellectual creation, his Gaelic world brings together individuals and characteristics that he has learnt about, more so than being based upon realistic interactions or social dynamics.

It is important to consider how the community functions and identifies in Gunn's novels, by considering their identification both as distinct social classes – i.e. crofters, fishermen - and racial groups - the 'Gael'. Douglas Gifford considers 'Community, with its racial tradition behind it' to be, 'an entity of supreme importance' to Gunn, indeed it forms the focal hub of his narrative.[83] Gunn's novels illustrate how Gaelic communities develop organically due to the shared nature of his characters' experience and their equal standing in society. The manner in which he depicts similarities within communities ranging across such a broad time span, from various locations in the Highlands, alludes to a racial connection which runs deeper than any modern economic classification. In illustrating this connection yet never overtly politicizing it, Gunn is less problematic than MacDiarmid, who uses the Nazi term *Blutsgefühl* (blood feeling) to explain his own understanding of Scottish race-consciousness. He writes that as Scots 'we are a Gaelic people' and 'we ought to be anti-English', likening their racial superiority in a manner not dissimilar to the classification and hierarchy of racial groups by fascist groups.[84] His use of the terminology is extreme and sheds light upon the liabilities which undermine MacDiarmid's perception and utilization of the Gaelic world for his own cause. Gunn does not suggest to have been influenced by such extremist politics, his own consciousness growing out of the experiences and stories which had formulated his life and interactions.

Alongside the identification of Gaelic communities as a racial group - problematic to varying degrees – they are also united, in both Gunn and MacDiarmid's constructions, by social class. To group them as such implies a materialist approach. Whilst this is something we see aplenty in MacDiarmid's theory it is less evident in his poetry, and I would argue that in focusing more closely on domestic rural life and labour, Gunn actually

[82] Scott Lyall, 'Preface', in Lyall, *Community,* p.vii; Lyall, 'MacDiarmid's Impossible Community', ibid., p.87.
[83] Douglas Gifford, *Neil M. Gunn & Lewis Grassic Gibbon* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1983), p.126.
[84] Glen 1970, p.71.

proves to be more committed to a materialist understanding of the Gaelic world than his contemporary. E. P. Thomson, who studied the formation of the English working class, suggests that social class occurs 'when some men, as a result of common experience… feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves and as against other men whose interests are different from, and usually opposed to, theirs'.[85] The Pictish tribes in *Sun Circle,* the Riasgan in *Butcher's Broom*, and the fishing community of *The Silver Darlings* all behave like this, united in the understanding of the work that drives their lives, hostile to outside forces. The degree to which Gunn emphasizes the various labour roles which his characters fulfil within their communities, and the extent to which they are shown to rely upon each other in a complex but interdependent network, alludes to a materialist reading of Gaelic society as an economically driven social group.

Through their existence as both a racial group and social class, illustrated across such a vast time span and as experienced by characters of all ages, Gunn demonstrates Michael Newton's argument that 'A culture propagates itself from one generation to the next, at least in part, by inspiring the youth to follow the precedents offered by role models.'[86] Respect for the past is embedded in the Gaelic identity that he depicts and his young characters grow up with 'the love of exquisite learning [...] somewhere in the marrow', supported by the community from whom they learn.[87] In this sense, the picture of community that Gunn paints is similar to that which Timothy Baker imagines:

> a community has its roots in the past, and is the only way the spiritual knowledge of the dead can be transmitted to the living. Community, not as a vague notion but as a particular, localised reality, is thus necessary for the individual to define him- or herself, to move into the future and to benefit from the knowledge of the past.[88]

Gunn's communities are centred around the family, and his novels place particular emphasis on the lessons and stories which can be passed down from father to son. Ewan and his father in *The Lost Glen* pose one such example, as the son lives in his father's shadow before inevitably falling prey to the same fate. Similarly, the bond is highlighted between Colin and his father in *Butcher's Broom*, when they honour tradition by burying Mairi's body together – in death their union is strengthened and 'the solidarity of the group is reaffirmed', a trope recognized by John MacInnes as characteristic of the Gaelic tradition.[89]

[85] Quoted in Hunter 2010, p.34.
[86] Newton 2009, p.164.
[87] *TLG*, p.45.
[88] Baker 2009, p.95.
[89] Newton 2006, p.284.

Although not father and son, Sandy and Hugh in *Morning Tide,* and Young Art and Old Hector provide similar examples, representative of the intimate bonds between men which propagate the preservation of culture and tradition in their respective communities. Depiction of the relationship between young and old introduces the circle of life, and the fragility which mortality imposes upon small Highland communities. When characters such as Dark Mairi die, the traditional beliefs that they helped to sustain gradually disintegrate with them, a natural symptom of progress and change. Similar characters crop up in other accounts of the clearances, most notably comparable to Crichton Smith's Mrs. Scott figure in *Consider the Lilies,* indicative of the collision of two phases of history and the breakdown of traditional values. Gunn highlights death as a natural and respected process which enables the community to constantly change and adapt– much like MacDiarmid does in 'Island Funeral', his own intimate portrayal of a Gaelic community.

Within the community Gunn also depicts dynamics induced by pride and shame, exploring what Crichton Smith refers to in 'Real People in a Real Place' as *cliù*, defined roughly as '"reputation", which 'implies that a man who has it may be considered useful to the community'.[90] The struggle between pride in one's background, traditions and legacy, and the shame of unfulfilled potential to live up to expectations epitomizes 'the fine, secret Gaelic temper' which afflicts so many of his characters, influencing how they see themselves and interact with each other.[91] In some cases, such pride is shown to manifest as defiance:

> if you don't like the Highlands you can leave them. You think you can come here and order us about like dogs as though we were dirt. But we won't be ordered like dogs by you or anyone like you. And if you don't like it you can be going to the devil. To hell with you![92]

Gunn depicts a profound understanding of the weight which hung over Gael's heads - although communities did not wish to be *defined* by their oppression, it affects their character nonetheless, creating a troubled relationship with the narrative of their own history. Instead of shirking away he, like Donald (quoted above) chooses to fight back proudly and reclaim his identity. Ewan too carries a burden of shame, anxious that he is failing in his duty to fulfil his Gaelic destiny:

[90] Smith 1986, p.19.
[91] *TLG*, p.27.
[92] *TLG*, p.267.

> he saw his spirit as the spirit of his people [...] He saw something so fine and sure that its betrayal would live on through eternity. All who had gone before him would be bowed under it. [...] He was not making himself important: he was making himself one of the condemned.[93]

The Lost Glen might be Gunn's bleakest novel, and the story ends fatefully, portraying in Ewan's death the most extreme example that the pressures induced by Gaelic community can have. Gunn shows the negative impact of *cliù* on all the communities he constructs, even in the pre-modern setting of *Sun Circle*, in which Aniel is ashamed of 'the fatal flaw in his make-up, an eternal weakness of will against the supreme moment.'[94] In this he welcomes uneasy realities into the narrative of his novels, in a move away from the romanticisation of the past.

In doing so, Gunn also explores the idea that society as a whole has deteriorated in its values, stemming from the clearances as the ultimate 'betrayal' of the Gael, shameful 'Because our own people did it.' [95] Drawing from very real emotion in *Butcher's Broom,* he refers to the Duchess of Sutherland 'as surely as she were Judas, she has crucified the Gael.'[96] Gifford notes the likeness of the fictional factor's name, Heller, with the real figure of Patrick Sellars, suggesting the influence of real history on Gunn's fiction.[97] The clearances are shown as a pivotal event, from which the Gaelic world is still recovering:

> There was a shame in it however he looked at it. And this shame got linked up with all their land, with the bitter shame of the clearances, with a recognition of some inner futility and weakness in their character, a fatal central dividing within them, paralysing all power of decisive action. Children of the Gael! Children of the tempest! Children![98]

Expressed by Davie, this epitomizes the struggle between staying loyal to a devastated community and abandoning one's heritage for a fresh start, a choice which afflicted Gunn and MacDiarmid to an extent – to focus purely on its lost past, to fully bring it into the

[93] *TLG*, p.338.
[94] *SC*, p.351.
[95] F.R. Hart, 'At the End of the Day' in Dairmid Gunn & Isobel Murray, *Neil Gunn's Country: essays in celebration of Neil Gunn* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1991), p.39; Gunn, quoted by F. R. Hart, ibid., p.26.
[96] *BB*, p.418.
[97] Douglas Gifford, 'Neil Gunn and the Mythic Regeneration of Scotland: The Two Great Epic Cycles', pp.75-111 in Gunn & Murray 1991, p.92.
[98] Gunn & Murray 1991, p.316.

modern age, or to grapple with a sensitive and respectful yet creatively innovative combination of the two. The Gaelic identity that Gunn constructs is wrought with pride in where one has come from, coupled with the shame of failing to do that heritage justice, feelings which are tied up in the belonging and responsibility of *dùthchas.* Social pressures inflicted upon the community undermine the relationships between Gunn's characters and their confidence both in themselves and as members of the group, as they struggle to maintain traditional values in the face of change.

The Gaelic experience that Gunn presents is shown to be affected by other determining factors also, one being gender. His treatment of the issue is one of the areas in which he has received the most criticism, for instance from Christopher Whyte, who has called Gunn's writing 'a kind of gender kailyard'.[99] Such a claim, however, is implicit with a dismissal which it is too simplistic to award to Gunn's carefully constructed social contexts. The incorporation of both male and female protagonists ensures that Gunn's narrative awards a degree of interiority to both, exploring the ways in which their experiences differ in part due to gender. Where one senses a hesitation in his depiction of women, the thesis would argue that it is a distance kept out of respect rather than disregard, suggesting Gunn's acknowledgement of his own limitations to fully imagine their experience. His understanding of difference is suggested by Davie in *Butcher's Broom*:

> They were in a world apart from him, apart from all men. The difference between them and him was more than the difference between their bodies (which was marvellous enough): they had their secrets, their griefs, their queer hidden ways, from which he was shut out[100]

F. R. Hart considers in the 'exclusively male' narrative of *Highland River* how woman is depicted as being 'shut out of the male world', yet in the quotation above it is the men who are equally shut out of the *women's* world, their domains presented as wholly separate spheres.[101] Gunn's hesitation to overstep his mark is clear, suggestive of the difficulty to authentically describe the experience of his female subjects due to his own gender. Certainly, women are depicted differently to how they are in the work of his contemporaries, for example Lewis Grassic Gibbon, who awards Chris Guthrie a level of interiority that Gunn does not. However, Gibbon also fails to drop his lustful male gaze;

[99] Whyte 1995, p.ix.
[100] *BB*, p.135.
[101] F. R. Hart, 'At The End of the Day', in Gunn & Murray 1991, p.35.

consider the scene in *Sunset Song,* when Gibbon's own gender depicts his protagonist admiring her female body in the mirror – '[she] thought herself sweet and cool and fit for that lover'.[102] This is something which is – positively – not present in Gunn's world. Rather, the intimacy he depicts is of the domestic and the mundane, offering an insight into a Gaelic life lived behind closed doors as well as in the public eye.

Depicted in the role of motherhood, Gunn's women are shown to be strong and multi-faceted, particularly in times such as war when the adult male population was absent, leaving them with heightened responsibility. Kenn develops a better understanding of his mother's strength as he matures, growing to appreciate her understanding of 'the inexorable nature of the needs of daily life', and her 'bear[ing] the burden of all mortal things' as only one who has created and supported life herself can do so.[103] Much like MacCaig's 'Old Highland Woman', whose 'people / are assembled in her bones', she appears to him as though 'All the history of her people is writ on her face', gathering a 'mythological value as the years went on, until now he can see her as the mother that abides from everlasting to everlasting.' [104] The timelessness of a mother's role is engrained in the Gaelic society that Gunn constructs, Finn too envisioning that 'His mother would never alter. She would deepen and grow in her own wisdom.'[105] Even when Gunn's distance from his female characters suggests hesitation, he remains committed to an approach of sympathy and an aspiration for authenticity, based on the realities of the Gaelic experience he himself had witnessed.

Gunn's female characters are not confined to their stereotypical domestic roles. Seonaid, for one, demonstrates admirable defiance when she reprimands the invaders, as are Elie and Mary when they defend themselves against Rob and the Colonel's advances respectively. Their gender does not inhibit them, even when it puts them in a traditionally vulnerable position, and for that reason it would be unfair to consider Gunn as adopting a kind of 'kailyard' attitude to its place in the Gaelic world. Although his characters experiences do vary due to their gender, they are not defined by it. The presentation of communities across different points in time and place reveals the nuances that existed, establishing that there was no single definition of what it meant to be male or female in

[102] Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair* (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1995), p.71.
[103] *HR*, p.135; *HR*, p.91.
[104] Norman MacCaig, 'Old Highland Woman' in *Voice-Over* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988), p.20; *HR*, p.90; *HR* p.88.
[105] F. R. Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London: John Murray, 1978), p.332; *SD,* p.581.

Gaelic society. Through the storytelling of the novel, Gunn had greater freedom to develop a complex, believable representation of the relationships which existed between genders and generations, underpinning the evolution of the traditional community structure.

The aspiration for 'authenticity' which resounds in Gunn's characterization of gender is similar to that which MacDiarmid expresses in reference to his desired depiction of the islanders he encountered on Shetland – a desire to better understand an experience which is not his own. This is conveyed in *Lucky Poet:*

> I have dreamed of poetry that would do them justice; poems so accurate both in their boat-handling and racing strategy that only one who knew all the intricacies of sailing and racing [...] could do them; poems that all who like small-boat sailing will delight in, full of thumb-nail sketches of local characters.[106]

MacDiarmid evidently aspires for the kind of intimacy that Gunn is successful in portraying, yet it was not in his nature. Like Tam, 'First-hand knowledge was what he aye prized / And personal observation was his constant pride'.[107] Thus it was difficult for him to represent anything in poetry that was not, at least partially, founded on what he knew and understood regarding community and identity too. His personal limitations and perceptions cloud his writing and help explain why he places less focus on the fictionalization of topics he was unfamiliar with than Gunn does.

Aside from this very brief insight given in *Lucky Poet*, 'Island Funeral' is MacDiarmid's most notable attempt to construct an image of Gaelic community. The poem is an unusually intimate survey of an island community, most likely on Barra, depicted in a time of grief.[108] His focus on the traditional community ceremony brings to mind MacInnes' argument that it is through death and its formalities that 'the solidarity of the group is reaffirmed', the closeness of the scenario alluding to a stronger sense of *dùthchas* than in any of his other poetry. There is the feeling that what he witnesses here perhaps resonates with a personal attachment to the close-knit rural community which he had grown up with in Langholm, in which 'we all know each other, and as a rule we know all about each other and past generations'.[109] His respect for the closeness of the community and familiarity of their

[106] *LP*, p.52.
[107] *CP1*, p.378.
[108] The location of Barra is suggested by the Catholic funeral ceremony conducted in Latin, and also due to it being one of the islands that MacDiarmid was most familiar with and had more first-hand experience on, thanks to visits to MacKenzie.
[109] Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Out of the World and Into Langholm', *RT3*, p.102.

traditions is palpable in that 'Everyone is immediately concerned / In what is taking place', describing the islanders as 'weather-beaten people with eyes grown clear'.[110] Their traditional ways are in decline, indicated by the fact 'There are few and fewer people / On the island nowadays'.[111] 'Island Funeral' emphasizes MacDiarmid's aspiration to close the distance that existed between himself and his Gaelic subjects, however there remains a considerable degree of detachment – their faces retain 'a strange remoteness'.[112] John Brannigan considers the islanders in the poem 'ghostly figures […] mere shadows which fleet across the surface of a world of objects', however there is more depth to them than this statement suggests.[113] Although they remain nameless, the islanders are attributed appearances – 'The men in the stiff material / Of their homespun clothes' – and emotions – 'All of them laughing now, / With the merriment of clowns', contributing to the depiction of a multifaceted, tangible community.[114] The incorporation of such a group in one of his 'Gaelic' poems introduces a more prominent element of construction, where MacDiarmid lends some of the narrative to the communities that he depicts, rather than speaking entirely for them. Perhaps it was the closest he could get to a 'poetry that would do them justice'. Certainly, it offers an intimate insight into the individuals and communities which constitute the Highlands, through which the reader witnesses the values and bonds which MacDiarmid considered most admirable in the Gaelic world.

Gunn and MacDiarmid's treatment of community in the Gaelic world differs due to the writer's respective priorities in their literary visions. Where intimate dynamics of family, gender and social pressure are of high importance to Gunn, MacDiarmid aspired for representation of the community that transcended the boundaries between generations, favouring grand thinking over specifics of the every day. Beyond the idea of the individual and the community therefore, the concept of the Gaelic 'race' is introduced, along with the values which connected generations from the past with those in the present and the future.

The 'Race'

'You'll say to a fellow: 'It's a fine day for the race.' And he'll say: 'What race?' And you say:

[110] *CP1*, p.578; *CP1*, p.577.
[111] *CP1*, p.578.
[112] *CP1*, p.577.
[113] Brannigan 2015, p.166.
[114] *CP1*, p.576; *CP1*, p.578.

'The human race.' That fairly takes him in'[115]

- Neil M. Gunn, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*

The foreboding of change coupled with respect for the past in Gunn and MacDiarmid's constructions reinforces the idea of the Gael as a 'race' which transcends traditional boundaries. Writing to Grassic Gibbon in 1935, Gunn described how 'In my locality […] there did exist traces of the ancient kindness and interest of the Simple Folk. It goes far beyond the Gaelic'.[116] The Gaelic world he represents therefore spans from the pre-modern paganism of *Sun Circle* right up to the modern day. Silke Stroh encourages a postcolonial reading of the historical novels – which can also be applied to MacDiarmid - to aid understanding of the Gael's development, noting that 'the 'Celtic dimension' helps to extend the historical perspective of postcolonial studies into pre-modern periods'.[117] Encompassing such a vast time period enables Gunn to explore nuances on an intimate scale, as discussed, but also offer comment upon the major changes that occur over many generations throughout history. MacDiarmid also alludes to a grand time frame in his poetry, however the Gaelic 'race' is referred to more as a symbol than a tangible grouping. Analysis of both men's treatment of time and progress are integral to developing an understanding of how *dùthchas* is applied to their Gaelic worlds to denote an attachment which transcends the present moment a text is situated in.

Both writers highlight likenesses between the contemporary Gael and their ancestors, signalling an awareness of the past as a major contributor to Gaelic identity. Gunn illustrates this through Kenn's epiphany, when he realizes that 'I am the Pict!'[118]

> Turning, he saw the shepherd's house […] It was inconceivably lonely, […] it emphasized more than anything could have done the static eternal quality of the scene. At such a moment, eternity was felt not as a dimension in time forward in the way the mind usually feels it, not even as a dimension in time backward, but as the point of meeting where the circle starts and ends.[119]

The concept of time as an ongoing continuum attributes new perspective to the experience

[115] Neil M. Gunn, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (Norwich: Souvenir Press, 1944,) p.175.
[116] Quoted by Gifford in Gunn & Murray 1991, p.84.
[117] Silke Stroh, 'The Gaelic Voice and (Post)colonial Discourse: An Alignment Illustrated by Case Studies of Neil Gunn, William Neill and Tormod Caimbeul', pp.77-91 in Carla Sassi & Theo van Heijnsbergen (eds.) *Within and Without Empire: Scotland Across the (Post)colonial Borderline* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), p.91.
[118] *HR*, p.228.
[119] *HR*, p.229.

of any individual, minute when measured on such a large scale. As such, his story had been lived and told before, and it would be so and do so again, due to the elements in the Gaelic world which would endure, regardless of setting in time: 'How typical he was in himself of countless Highland lads who came back to the scenes of their boyhood!'[120] The transferability of the individual's experience against the backdrop of 'a communal feeling so genuine that the folk themselves never thought about it', bridges the gap between self and the community, highlighting the balance between independence and co-dependence that defines Gaelic society past and present.[121] Gunn establishes awareness and knowledge of the past as an integral precursor to Gaels' understanding of themselves, their past, and their collective purpose.

Prioritization of a holistic vision of race, although present in Gunn, is a MacDiarmidian approach through and through, as captured in 'Direadh II'. Here, the poet addresses the tension between solitude and membership of a community that transcends generations:

> those who have had to dwell
> In solitude, at the furthest remove from their fellow,
> Serve the community too. Their loneliness
> Is only because they belong to a wider community
> Than that of their immediate environment,
> Not to one country or race, but to humanity,
> Not to this age but to all time,
> As your pibrochs reached to Eternity[122]

'Humanity' mapped against 'all time' is favoured over anything more intimate, the 'pibrochs' reminiscent of the 'clear old island sound' in 'Island Funeral' which 'Will sound out every now and again / Through all eternity.'[123] MacDiarmid's understanding of the vastness of eternity and the Gael's place within it alludes to the existence of classical 'pre-Gaelic' qualities which he, like Gunn, admires and wishes to reclaim in modernity. He appears to understand his own role against this too, happy to be part of something greater: 'I have heard it now and am content forever.'[124] MacDiarmid does not shy away from the task of constructing a holistic national literature which incorporates comprehension of

[120] *HR,* p.220.
[121] *HR*, p.17.
[122] *CP1*, p.477.
[123] *CP1*, p.583.
[124] Ibid.

Gaelic culture, nor does he shirk from suggesting himself as the man for the job, regardless of his debatable authority.

Materialist philosophy influences MacDiarmid's prioritization of grand ideas, alluded to in the statement that 'We who are strong think only in terms / Of classes and masses, in terms of mankind.'[125] It evokes Eliot's reference in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' to the writer who is compelled 'to write not merely with his own generation in his bones'.[126] Gunn and MacDiarmid act on this compulsion, as does Gaelic poet Sorley MacLean in 'Hallaig', when he claims 'They are still in Hallaig, […] the dead have been seen alive', implying an awareness of the endurance of the Gaelic 'race'.[127] Norman MacCaig expresses a similar understanding in 'A Man in Assynt':

> I feel
> I am looking through the wrong end
> of the same telescope
> through which I look back through time
> and see
> Christ, Socrates, Dante – all the Big Men
> picked out, on their few acres,
> clear and tiny in
> the misty landscape of history.[128]

Awareness of the vastness of time in 'the misty landscape of history' is prevalent throughout MacDiarmid's construction of the Gaelic world, and the medium of poetry enables him, like MacCaig and MacLean, to explore such infinities with freedom. Mark Smith considers the suitability of epic poetry to such epic musings, explaining that 'because it allows the poet to work on a very large scale, [it] has the flexibility and potential for inclusiveness necessary to unify an infinitely varied world.'[129] MacDiarmid exploits these qualities even in his poems which are not considered 'epic', through acknowledgement of the grandeur of time and space in Gaeldom, as demonstrated in 'Island Funeral'. The text's intimacy and specificity contrasts the qualities of 'epic' poetry, however the impact of history, evolution and tradition upon the islanders indicates the infinite varieties present in the world on a microcosmic scale. MacDiarmid ascribes the

[125] *CP1*, p.468.
[126] Hayward 1953, p.23.
[127] Sorley MacLean, 'Hallaig' in *Hallaig and Other Poems* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2014) p.118.
[128] Norman MacCaig, 'A Man in Assynt', in *Between Mountain and Sea: Poems from Assynt* (ed.) Roderick Watson (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2018), pp.75-6.
[129] Smith 2014, p.135.

community with a spiritual endurance that exceeds their physical existence:

> The minds or souls of these old islanders –
> Have existed during an eternal time in the past
> And will exist for an eternal time in the future.[130]

It is reminiscent of the reference in 'To Circumjack Cencrastus' to

> the islands
> Where the wells are undefiled
> and folk sing as their fathers sang
> Before Christ was a child.[131]

This, too, is similar to his description of the people 'In the Gaelic Islands' who are 'just as they were long before Christ. […] of an indescribable innocence - absolutely unspoiled.'[132] Such allusions to the purity of life before Christ signify the Highlands' pagan past, denoting a point in time before the conventional Christian calendar began, much like in Gunn's *Sun Circle.* An atheist himself, the pre-Christian Gaelic world is as vital to his understanding of Gaelic identity as the contemporary one is, indicating his intentions to construct a holistic representation.

An understanding of *dùthchas* is present in the responsibility that MacDiarmid expresses in regards the dissemination of these stories of the Gaelic world. One get the sense that he even felt a degree of an ownership over their narrative, evident in the line 'Now I see all my land and my people'.[133] The 'my' is ambiguous; not only does it envelop the people and lands of the Highlands, alongside the rest of Scotland, but it indicates an adoption of the power to instrumentalize their communities, heritage and culture, to his own ends. Politically, this is questionable and markedly an example of an outsider silencing the Gaelic voices in order to speak for them, however understood within the context of MacDiarmid's career, it is also possible to see it from the poet's perspective. The 'Gaelic Idea' marks a certain point on the trajectory of MacDiarmid's career which grows from documentation of the local to speculation of the cosmic, developed through continual self-improvement and the attainment of knowledge. In the construction of a Gaelic world, ultimately an individual intellectual project embedded within a broader vision,

[130] *CP1*, pp.582-3.
[131] *CP1*, p.208
[132] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'In the Gaelic Islands', *AFS*, p.232.
[133] *CP2*, p.1179.

specificities or nuances within the narrative do tend to be glossed over. Yet where these are lost, a more holistic understanding of how the Gaelic identity fits into its national and international surroundings is what MacDiarmid succeeds in conveying.

Matters of biography clearly impacted the identities that Gunn and MacDiarmid created for others, as did their willingness or hesitation to construct a narrative for those outwith their own realms of experience, and their choice of poetry or prose. Cairns Craig explores this point:

> if it is in epic poetry and poetic drama that nations summon up the founding origins of their *ethnie,* it is in the day-to-day world of the novel that they show how those founding origins survive, by resistance and adaptation, to allow the national community to continue to know itself and to recognise its own identity despite the transformations of history.[134]

Through Gunn's characterization of individuals, and the relationships and hierarchies that existed within their communities, his writing explores nuances of Gaelic identity on an intimate level. He utilizes the qualities implicit within the novel to demonstrate a constantly evolving construction of identity and, thanks to the vast time span he covers in his oeuvre, how the Gael survives despite 'transformations of history'. His narratives unpack the tensions which existed within the Gaelic world, and he does not necessarily try to resolve these, acknowledging the persistence of such contradictory elements to Highland experience. Thus, whilst his characters are individuals afflicted by loneliness and struggle, they also belong to a wider community where that struggle is shared, kinship an equally integral feature of Gaelic life. Gunn reveals the various dynamics that exist according to age, gender and social pressure, resulting in the construction of a social context which is restless, riddled with tensions, conflict and change.

MacDiarmid's, in comparison, presents infinitely different preoccupations, pointing to the absolutes rather than the nuances, reaching conclusions where others would not have found them. Where Gunn's prose lends greater attention to the relationships and social hierarchies of traditional Highland communities, MacDiarmid's poetry dwells less on individual character variation, and more on the incorporation of the 'Gaelic Idea' within his overarching vision. The impact of his own voice and bias is palpable throughout all that

[134] Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.11.

he constructs as its creator, such that it is qualities which he himself values that emanate most prominently from the Gaelic identity his poetry presents – learning, solitude, acceptance of responsibility and the importance of cultural and historical awareness as a precursor to progress. Whilst this does not deem it fair to disregard them as 'in-authentic' Gaelic values, for they are stressed by Gaelic scholars and writers elsewhere, it does illustrate his complete willingness to pick and choose what to emphasize, as he saw fit, and there is the temptation – or perhaps necessity – to be wary in reading MacDiarmid's construction and to bear in mind its role as a component within a wider intellectual project.

Chapter Two

Land and Livelihood:
Symbolic and Material Functions of the Natural Environment

Dùthchas emphasizes place as well as people. As such, land, sea, and archipelago feature prominently in Gunn and MacDiarmid's constructions of the Gaelic world, lending their visions a sense of physical purpose. Through their representations of Highland ecologies, economies and territories, the texts offer variations on an insight into the intellectual, aesthetic and emotional connotations of the natural environment.

First and foremost it is important to remember that Gunn and MacDiarmid's constructions are products of creative fiction, in which the landscape was assigned symbolic function and significance within the texts. As such, it is not wholly the accuracy of representation that should be analyzed, rather the varying manners in which they utilized and manipulated the natural world to certain ends in their work. Whilst they agreed on a rejection of Celtic Twilight romanticism and shared in its place a vision of the land which was more grounded in reality, this is not to say that they, too, were not guilty of idealism. Actuality is mingled with imagination and it is the tension between sentimentalism and realism which makes their portrayal of the natural environment, and the identity attached to it, so unique. The thesis will analyze Gunn and MacDiarmid's utilization of landscape in the Gaelic world, exploring the influence of personal sentiment, artistic vision and Marxist materialism.

Sentiment & Art

'The ancient Gaels used to say, 'Put your trust in the earth; it has never left thee empty.' 'Toughness, vigour, and fullness' – these are indeed the pre-requisites of a poetry faced with such difficulties as confront the poets of Scotland today. They are, indeed, the traditional requirements of Gaelic poetry.'[135]
- Hugh MacDiarmid

Landscape held both sentimental and artistic significance for Gunn and MacDiarmid, as

[135] *RT3*, p.57.

each associated a specific Gaelic environment with their adolescence, Gunn with Caithness and MacDiarmid Easter Ross. The delight and nostalgia attached to this time infiltrates the lens through which they perceived the area, however both men also revisited as adults. The heightened awareness achieved through such periods of inhabitation impacts their depictions of the Highlands also has an impact upon their representation of the Gaelic world, creating a tension between the various ways in which they perceive its landscape.

The significance of childhood environment for Gunn is suggested in *Highland River*, in which Kenn's maturation is paralleled by an increasing boldness to traverse his river's pools. Gunn treats the river as though It were a part of his physical body, aiding him through formative years:

> From that day the river became the river of life for Kenn. [...] When his years had doubled and he was a soldier in France he could more readily picture the parts of it he knew than the trench systems he floundered amongst. In zero moments it could rise before him with the clearness of a chart showing the main current of his nervous system and its principal tributaries.[136]

Gunn's ambiguous use of terminology which relates to the river and to Kenn's body illustrates the transferability of personality between the two, emphasizing the symbolic function that the river holds in his life. Elsewhere, he is described as being 'grounded in a relationship to his river that is fundamental and that nothing can ever quite destroy [...]', a relationship which 'is carried over [...] to every other environment in his life'.[137] From WWI trenches to Glasgow slums, it is the river pools to which he returns time and time again. Oscillating between the present day and internal memory, Gunn similarly returns his narrative to the river regardless of how far it strays, a point which Richard Price alludes to in his comment that 'Gunn's interest in remembrance, in the relation of single events to much wider issues, and in the expression of philosophical ideas through the medium of constructed memory, is sustained.'[138] Just as Kenn imagines his life in parallel with the river's shape, so the narrative of the novel itself is structured in line with the growth of the knowledge he obtains in travelling from the its mouth to its source, having matured from a naïve boy to a man:

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[136] *HR*, p.33.
[137] *HR*, p.182.
[138] Richard Price, *The Fabulous Matter of Fact: The Poetics of Neil M. Gunn* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991) p.63.

> Going from the mouth to the source may well seem to be reversing the natural order [...] Yet that is the way Kenn learned his river and, when he came to think of it, that is the way he learned life.[139]

Based on this link between the natural environment, history, and understanding where one has come from, Price calls Kenn's landscape 'super-physical and storied', offering 'both sensual pleasure and entrances to the origins of his people'.[140] The method of progress from mouth to source is applicable to Gunn too, and how he learned the Gaelic world, developing from 'where individuality is lost' in the transferrable domesticity of *The Grey Coast* and *Morning Tide* to the exploration of philosophy in which 'individuality is born' in *The Atom of Delight* and *The Other Landscape*.[141] Neither extreme is favoured in the overall construction that he presents, rather his novel shows how they complement each other. The motif of 'the source', repeated by MacDiarmid in 'Lament for the Great Music', with reference to 'the secret source', alludes to the writers' understanding of the past as a superior structure of society, and their frustration at what has been lost - 'It's a far cry to the golden age [...] Our river took a wrong turning somewhere!'[142] *Highland River* is particularly poignant in this sense, considering its contextualization in WWI, the war pinpointed as a destruction of 'Golden Age' hope, much like in Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song.* Nostalgia – not in the sense of sentimentalized kailyardism, but as a lament of history – recurs throughout Gunn's Gaelic world, embodied in unchanging fixtures in the natural landscape, particularly in the characterization of Kenn's river. Both he and MacDiarmid indicate the timelessness of the Gaelic world, discussed with reference to 'race' in Chapter 1, but also epitomized by 'The land, the quiet land, which for ever endures, threaded by women and children, in the bright patterns of their lives.'[143] They present the Gael as existing outside of traditional understanding of time, history and Enlightenment theories of progress, their traditional connection to their landscape a glimmer of hope in the face of modern Capitalism.

Attachment to environments for personal reasons – much like *dùthchas* - is something that MacDiarmid and Gunn share. MacDiarmid's poetry recurrently reflects on the landscapes of his Borders upbringing and how this impacted his view of the environment on a national scale. Although he does not 'inhabit' Highland areas as Gunn

[139] *HR*, p.42.
[140] Price 1991, p.69.
[141] *HR*, p.42.
[142] *CP1*, pp.473-4; *HR*, p.114.
[143] *SD*, p.101.

does, he shows a commitment to learning about them, and visits not just as a tourist. The imagery of nature recurs throughout his poems on Gaelic subjects, for instance in 'Lament for the Great Music':

> Is Scotland not the small unsightly root,
> That leaf darkest and with prickles on it
> That in another country bears a peerless flower
> But not in this soil? Or did it bloom here once
> And can it bloom no more?[144]

In this lamentation for lost Highland culture, MacDiarmid indicates the interwoven nature of music, art, and nature in the Gaelic world. The idea that its beauty can 'bloom no more' suggests a belief, at least to some extent, in the Golden Age, however hope is also expressed in that 'The dead leaves [are] necessary to the coming flowering'.[145] He alludes to a stage of disintegration as being integral to progress, evocative of the Marxist argument for the 'withering away' of the state prior to the achievement of a new order.[146]

Yet regardless of personal connection, MacDiarmid is simultaneously careful to avoid romanticisation, ensuring to emphasize the environment's austerity and unsuitability as a traditional subject of art. As a creator he is conscious of 'the discipline in Nature that none can escape'.[147] It is this sentiment, more so than emotional attachment, which courses throughout his poetry:

> If a vista of plain and mountain appeals solely
> To his artistic sense, a man is obviously incapable
> Of reading any deeper into it, or of resounding
> To any other appeal, and there is nothing more to be said.[148]

MacDiarmid makes clear his disapproval of the use of landscape purely for aesthetic purposes, hence his aspiration to refashion the methods of its representation. Unlike Gunn's foundations upon the domestic comforts of the Highland world, MacDiarmid builds his poetry around the experience of the kinds of harsh extremities he grew accustomed to

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144 *CP1*, pp.471-2.
145 *CP1*, p.472.
146 The concept is discussed in V. I. Lenin, 'The State and Revolution' [1917], pp.381-492 in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974).
147 *IS*, p.xviii.
148 *CP2*, p.1185.

during his inhabitation of the 'burnt-out star' of 'a Shetland vista'.[149] As Crotty notes, 'When the poet arrived in the archipelago in May 1933 [...] he found himself surrounded by evidence of a mode of existence insusceptible even to the biological development.'[150] The Highland archipelago was an ecological surrounding which MacDiarmid had not been exposed to before, a way of living based off of a landscape which was not constructed so as to make such a life easy. It was a far cry from the fertile farmland and rolling green hills of his Lowlands upbringing, and as such his representation of the natural world changes in this period of his career to match that experience.

The settings of the Direadh poems are presented in light of their severity, the narrative remaining 'above the tree-line, where the track / Is the bed of an amethystine burn / In a bare world of shining quartz and purple heather'.[151] 'The North Face of Liathach' provides a similar example, as MacDiarmid depicts the inhospitable sheerness of its cliffs and its 'jagged teeth', 'no place for children / Or for holiday dawdling'.[152] 'Direadh III' also transports its reader to an austere Highland setting, 'near the summit of Sgurr Alasdair' on Skye':

> Here in this simple place of clean rock and crystal water,
> With something of the cold purity of ice in its appearance,
> Inhuman and yet friendly,
> Undecorated by nature or by man
> And yet with a subtle and unchanging beauty
> Which seems the antithesis of every form of art.[153]

The challenge that MacDiarmid faces as a poet in the construction of a Gaelic world is how to grapple with such terrain that is 'antithetical' to 'every form of art' and to manipulate it into just that. His depiction echoes a sentiment expressed by Kenn in *Highland River*: 'It is not a glen of the mountains, craggy, stupendous, physically impressive. There is nothing here to overwhelm the romantic mind.'[154] As opposed to the romantic understanding of landscape used for aesthetic purposes, MacDiarmid and Gunn recognise the significant ways in which the natural environment posed a formidable influence upon the lives of those who inhabited it. Influenced by their early experiences of the Highlands, they utilized

[149] *RT2*, p.510.
[150] Patrick Crotty, ''Like Pushkin, I?: Hugh MacDiarmid and Russia', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Vol.44, Iss.1 (2019), pp.47-89. Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol44/iss1/7> [accessed 08.06.19], p.87.
[151] *CP2*, p.1175.
[152] Liathach is a mountain in the Torridon Hills, in NW Scotland; *CP2*, p.1055.
[153] *CP2,* p.1186.
[154] *HR*, p.121.

the natural environment in their constructions of a Gaelic world in a manner which they both believed to be most intrinsic to the reality of Gaelic experience.

Symbolism: Animism & Acceptance[155]

'For an instant I seemed to see into the bird's mind / And to thrill with its own exhilaration of assured safety.'[156]

- Hugh MacDiarmid

Symbolism pertaining to the landscape was a pertinent feature of traditional Gaelic poetry, and was employed by both Gunn and MacDiarmid to emphasize the relationship between man and his natural environment in the Gaelic world. Michael Newton comments upon animism when 'engaged in poetic dialogue':

> While it sometimes is merely a poetic conceit requesting that some feature of the landscape, being an eyewitness to history, contribute its wisdom, at other times it appears to be a sincere form of address. At other times both sides of the dialogue merely echo human sentiment, though put in the 'mouth' of an animal, mountain, or other non-human entity.[157]

It is a technique employed frequently by Gunn, who personifies the Gaelic landscape in his prose as though it were human. John Murray expands upon Newton's point with specific reference to this, remarking that 'his description of the landscape using scaled up equivalences to parts of the human body, or anthropomorphs, reflects a Gaelic sensibility', highlighting the common incorporation in Gaelic place names of anthropomorphic nouns such as *slios* (side), *druim* (back), and *cìoch* (breast).[158] Animism using 'anthropomorphs' occurs most notably in the characterization of the glen in *The Lost Glen*:

> the glen, neither dreaming nor awake, would not be disturbed. The dark heart of the mountains lay still in its hollow. The open space of the sea was its soundless ear. All its antique knowledge was heedless even of the beams that penetrated from the cottages built of its grey boulders. Heart and ear and beam and earth, heedless in the sad immemorial harmony of night.[159]

[155] John Murray defines 'animism' as 'a belief, which can invest the non-human world, both living and non-living with human feelings, thoughts, actions and even spirits.' This is the definition that the thesis bears in mind when referring to the terminology throughout this section. Murray 2017, p.171.
[156] *CP2*, p.1189.
[157] Newton 2000, p.197.
[158] Murray 2017, p.170.
[159] *TLG*, p.314.

The glen is depicted as an enduring body which will outlast the comparably fleeting lives of those who live in it, reinforced by the repetition of 'heedless'.Gunn's implication is that the stoic land, much like the defiant Gael, will remain, in the long term, unperturbed by the adversity of modern 'improvement' and Capitalism. In attributing an identity to the natural environment in line with that which he attributes to the individuals and communities who inhabit it, Gunn alludes to the respect commanded by the landscape in the Gaelic world. It is upon this which he shows traditional economic interdependence with the land to have been founded.

Elsewhere it is the mountains which Gunn personifies, offering quite a different representation to the austere vision of MacDiarmid's 'Direadh' poems or 'The North Face of Liathach':

> The mountain was retiring within itself. All mountains did this at night. They withdrew. They folded their shoulders and drew their mantles about their feet, like gigantic prophets. But once in the West he had seen them like gigantic beasts, immense squatting brutes, mammoth figures moulded by some cosmic youth already touched by the tragic brooding of mind.[160]

His description is similar to MacDiarmid's reference to the Sutherland hills as 'marching across the landscape of the mind's eye like great prehistoric monsters'. [161] Mountains, 'like Highlandmen themselves' or 'like gigantic beasts', are depicted in terms of their vastness, simultaneously awe-inspiring and fear-invoking, reminiscent of the sublime. [162]

Inferences of the sublime evoke the Romantic representation of nature which Gunn and MacDiarmid generally distanced themselves from, inviting into their representation of the Gaelic world an element of nuance, if not confusion, as to how the natural world could be depicted in a manner which truly illustrated its full impact. Both of their writing at times strays into a more romanticised adaptation of the Gaelic landscape which they struggle to break free from entirely. Gunn's description of the glen, although it precedes an exploration of the economic activity which characterizes the landscape in a modernizing world, is introduced similarly to Scott's own glen which 'seemed to open into

[160] *HR*, p.237.
[161] *IS*, p.118.
[162] Ibid.

the land of romance', in Waverley's first impression of that 'sylvan amphitheatre'.[163] Impossible to shake off such methods of representation entirely – as will be explored further in the look at Gunn's perception of the Hebrides in Chapter 3 – both he and MacDiarmid allude to the 'sublime' or the 'romantic' Highlands alongside the emphasis they place on the economic viability and materialist reading of the land. There is a somewhat uneasy tension created by this, as both writers contradict themselves in the attempt to encompass many alternative perceptions within their constructions.

Whilst mountains are depicted as fixed characters within the natural environment, the symbol of the sea epitomizes the constant changes which afflict the Gaelic world, attributed human emotions much like the land is instilled with human physicality. Gunn remarks in *Butcher's Broom* that 'The sea had been in a good mood that morning [...] A person could always tell what the weather is to be by smelling the sea.'[164] When not in a 'happy mood', however, it is illustrated as 'a living motion which 'choked its own mouth, then moved away'.[165] Its violence is palpable – consider the fates of Ewan and his father, or Tormod. Where life in the Gaelic world is lived by the rules of the elements, it is often left to the land and sea to take life away as much as to give it.

Moreover, Gunn's characterization of the land and sea is executed along gendered lines, much like the community he depicts. Whilst the land's fertility and sensuality links it to femininity, the sea's strength renders it the masculine of the two, connotations which Douglas Gifford explores with regards to *The Silver Darlings* in quite some depth.[166] It is a pattern which is suggested to have stemmed from Gunn's real experience of a gendered Gaelic society, a byproduct of his upbringing:

> As his existence had two parents, so it had the earth and the sea. If his mother was the earth, his father was the sea. In fact he could hardly think of his father without thinking of the sea. Out of the sea came the livelihood of the household.[167]

MacLean offers an insight into the symbolism of the natural environment in traditional Gaelic folklore, remarking that it 'ascribed to the sea the counterpart of everything on

[163] Scott 1986, p.105.
[164] *BB*, p.7.
[165] *SD*, p.17.
[166] See Douglas Gifford, '*The Silver Darlings* and the Song of Life', pp.116-146 in Gifford 1983.
[167] *AD*, p.79.

land', reinforcing Gunn's understanding of its contrastive nature.[168]

Gunn builds the femininization of the land upon the incorporation of anthropomorphic language that emphasizes the earth's life bearing qualities, its fertility intrinsic to labour and to the progress of society:

> A smooth shape of slender flanks and fluent spinal ridges, of swelling breasts and wandering arms, brown-skinned except where the region of its fertility lies softly grey-green with grass. Here men and women are at work, concerned forever, too, with fertility in that place and in themselves; [...] making love in youth and story-telling in old age[169]

Elsewhere, it is sensualized, most notably in the perception of Clare Marlow, an English visitor to the Highlands and therefore representative of romanticisation of the Gael by the outsider. She is evidently aware of romantic Celtic literature - note her reference to Yeats – and this clouds her perception of the Highlands. She remarks upon how 'the wine of the hills had touched her blood, and the heather-scented plumes her unprotected skin […] How deliciously responsive the convalescent body to this great old earth!'[170] To her, the environment carries connotations of sex and femininity:

> The breasts of the hills. The dark hollows of the earth. A profound everlastingness. Nothing fretful or fearful. The wandering dark wind passing over all things like a secret caress, old as the hills and the hollows. Her own body had become nearly the last hollow of all. But not quite.[171]

Gunn is not subtle here in his usage of language. As a visitor, and as a woman, Clare inhabits a distinctive role. The attraction she feels to the hills and glens of Gunn's Gaelic world is similar to the pull she feels towards Ewan, who represents all of her preconceived ideas about the Highlands encapsulated in an individual. It is an appeal of places 'not lonely but withdrawn', of 'more than escape - penetration', and of being drawn 'to some mystical secret source of life, of fertile life'.[172] In his incorporation of a character such as Clare, and the exploration of the feelings that she experiences, Gunn constructs a more complex vision of the land as a gendered body that can not only be fertilized or admired, but also exploited – be that economically, i.e. through clearance or destruction, or culturally,

[168] Sorley MacLean, 'Notes on sea-imagery in seventeenth century Gaelic poetry', pp.83-105 in Gillies 1985, p.99.
[169] *BB*, p.12.
[170] *TLG*, p.80.
[171] *TLG*, p.268.
[172] *TLG*, p.200.

through overly sentimentalized representation.

In contrast to this, the sea provides Gunn with a metaphor for masculinity, featured as a prominent presence within the lives of Gunn's male protagonists such as Ewan, Aniel, Finn and Kenn. It is defined by its brutality and ruthlessness - 'The sea was like iron', 'The sea gave up nothing', 'Strength was the keynote of this coast' – and the sound of its presence is said to 'play on the ear with forebodings of universal doom.'[173] It is in his effort to de-romanticize the Gaelic world that Gunn emphasizes its sinister edge, comparable to MacDiarmid's emphasis on its austerity. However he also illustrates its positive side, showing how as well as provoking fear, it encourages strength and offers opportunity:

> He came to love the sea. It was a great element. He saw now how great and strong it was, with the strength of great men and daring and courage. It was a man's element. […] The mere handling of a boat against it was a thrill that nothing on land, in man or in woman, could equal.[174]

Even as other responsibilities and attachments come and go, it is the sea and the men associated with it which continue to hold the most formative roles in Finn's personal development. In its masculine connotations of bravery, independence and freedom, the sea is presented as a gendered symbol, just as the earth is. Such symbolism, in part through the use of animism, is an important feature of the Gaelic world that Gunn constructs, explaining, to an extent, how the gendered experience discussed in the previous chapter develops organically out of the natural environment, written in the law of the land.

Animism is similarly present in MacDiarmid's poetry. In 'The North Face of Liathach', the narrator highlights both the light and dark within the mountain's human-like 'Face':

> this cliff is not dead.
> It has an immense life of its own
> And will loom, as if it could come rushing
> To beat, to maim, to kill[175]

Like Gunn, MacDiarmid emphasizes the terror of the Highlands' natural environment,

[173] *TLG*, p.68; *TLG*, p.71; *HR*, p.49; *HR,* p.56.
[174] *SD*, p.435.
[175] *CP2*, p.1056.

harking back to his insistence on austerity over beauty. There is something in his words of the brutality of the Gael, as epitomized by Fionn MacColla in *The Albannach,* that Highland novel which MacDiarmid revered so highly. MacColla depicts his central character of Murdo as a troubled young man whose inability to understand and deal with the world around him and his feelings in relation to it results in violent outbursts - 'To beat, to maim, to kill'. Such representation of the Highlander was also present within popular Scottish literature as early as the publication of Scott's *Waverley*, where the Gaelic societies are seen to be backwards and barbaric. Whilst one would expect MacDiarmid to move away from such representation, elements of its influence remain present in his depictions of the harshness of the Highland landscape. Much like Gunn's characterization of the sea, MacDiarmid portrays the mountains as imposing structures with a greatness to them both beautiful and terrifying, emphasizing their ability to impose harm upon those who interact with them.

Contrary to this however, MacDiarmid also likens the landscape's sternness to that of a female, the sheer cliffs in 'The North Face of Liathach' compared to a woman,

> Something not of this world,
> Which makes you tremble with delight and repulsion
> When you see it so close.[176]

His words are evocative of those passages in Gunn's prose where the land is gendered too and instilled with human sensuality. John Murray discusses how 'In Celtic poetry, the bard is sometimes imagined as a bard in flight between this world and the next, able to bring knowledge and insight from the other side to the present'.[177] This is present in his desire to enter the mind of the deer in 'In Talk with Donnchadh Ban Mac an t-Saoir', or his vision of the eagle swooping over the countryside in 'Direadh III', which also symbolize his aspiration for an improved intimacy with nature. Much like Gunn, MacDiarmid's construction of the natural environment implies a level of understanding and respect for the traditions of the world which he appropriated.

Further to this, MacDiarmid highlights an aspiration to break down the barriers which exist between man and his landscape in order to feel not just closer to it, but

[176] *CP2*, p.1057.
[177] Murray 2017, p.209.

accepted by it, yearning for a connection which transcends the material. This is most evident in 'In Talk with Donnchadh B'an Mac an t'Saoir', in which he considers the bard to be representative 'of the time / When man's affinity with nature was more strict / And his fellowship with every living thing more intimate and dear'.[178] He admires Ban MacIntyre not only for his writing but for his deer stalking, an occupation which required him to gain incredibly intimate knowledge about his natural environment in order to move through it.

> Nature needed, and still needs, this beautiful creature
> Standing betwixt man and animal, sympathising with each,
> Comprehending the speech of either race, and interpreting
> The whole of existence of one to the other.[179]

Within MacDiarmid's writing, traditional Gaelic culture symbolizes a time and example of when this closeness with nature was prevalent, where man '[knew] that your life and theirs were part of one plan.'[180] He expresses his wish to 'lie here like the cool and gracious greenery', 'mingled and kneaded / Into one substance with the kindred qualities in human nature', reminiscent of the image of Kenn sleeping naked by the river.[181] It echoes, also, a sentiment expressed by Nan Shepherd in her own book on the Highland landscape which she knew so well, *The Living Mountain* (1977):

> No one knows the mountain completely who has not slept on it. As one slips over into sleep, the mind grows limpid; the body melts; perception alone remains. One neither thinks, nor desires, nor remembers, but dwells in pure intimacy with the tangible world.[182]

The close relationship between man and land is implied as consisting of more than the mere physical aspect, dependent on one allowing their mind – through learning, curiosity and acceptance - to grow closer to the natural environment. Like Shepherd, Kenn and many of Gunn's other protagonists, MacDiarmid uses the knowledge he has acquired to bring himself closer to the landscape and to better comprehend both what it has meant in the past and will continue to mean in the future. In MacDiarmid's awareness, Gaelic poetry represented more than the landscape's material existence, and he admired this not just in Ban MacIntyre, but in MacLean too:

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[178] *CP2*, p.1099.
[179] Ibid.
[180] *CP2*, p.1101.
[181] *CP2*, p.1187; *CP2,* p.1189.
[182] Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008), p.70.

> [he] sees the wild peaks of the Cuillin in terms of the endless struggles of mankind and is not only a magnificent evocation of the Hebridean landscape but of the whole tumult of history and human hope, for the poet sees not only the superficies of the scene, and not only the local history of which these Skye hills have been the theatre, but the entire perspective of human history of which they provide such a tortured and towering symbol.[183]

MacLean employs the Cuillin mountain as a symbol of all the generations who have lived throughout its existence, thereby intertwining the longevity of the landscape, the persistence of the Gaelic 'race', and the vastness of eternity together in a similar manner to what MacDiarmid attempts in 'Lament for the Great Music' or the 'Direadh' poems.

The natural environment provides a wealth of symbols in both Gunn and MacDiarmid's constructions. Gunn's inclusion of animism and gendering in his novels ensues that the landscape is attributed symbolic qualities for the communities that inhabit them, as well as for the reader. Whilst this isn't as explicit in MacDiarmid, it is present in the aspiration for acceptance by nature and the desire to achieve a closer unity with it. Rather than relying on symbols of nature within his poetry, it is more so the 'Gaelic Idea' itself that is symbolic – a 'dynamic myth' - signifying a point through which MacDiarmid, and subsequently all of Scotland, could achieve the enlightenment about its Celtic past he, and it, needed to progress into the modern age.[184] As such, whilst Gunn and MacDiarmid's constructions illustrate similar goals, this is primarily where the writers' natural Gaelic worlds differ. Gunn's presents an amalgamation of symbols written in the land and voiced in the sounds of the sea; MacDiarmid's is a symbol in itself, best understood when contextualized within his national vision.

Materialism: Economy & Territory

'There is no country in Europe that does not possess, in some remote corner, at least one remnant-people, left over from an earlier population, forced back and subjugated by the nation which later became the repository of historical development. These remnants of a nation, mercilessly crushed […] In Scotland, for example, the Gaels'[185]

[183] *SP*, pp.164-5.
[184] Glen 1970, p.67.
[185] Karl Marx, 'The Magyar Struggle', pp.213-226 in David Fernback (ed.) *Karl Marx, The Revolutions of 1848: Political Writings* vol.1 (London: Allen Lane, 1973), pp.221-2.

Land, coastline, sea and river, all significant symbols in Gunn and MacDiarmid's Gaelic worlds, also represent physical spaces which provide a material and economic function in the lives of those who inhabit them. In MacDiarmid this manifests as an extension of wider Marxist world views when applied to the oppressed culture and economy of the Highlands. In Gunn, the economic value of the natural world is implicit in the Highlands that he depicts, the significance of the landscape upon the lives of his characters made evident through the work that they do on it.

Gunn's novels boast the assertion of a life lived off of the natural environment as an engrained feature of the Gaelic world. His scenes in which the landscape features most prominently the land is shown to provide the people with a purpose as much as they do it: 'Along the glens and the straths from mountain to sea, the soil was being prepared for the seed, and here and there in suitable places men could be seen with ponies and a plough.'[186] His emphasis on the communality of Highland life, as discussed in Chapter 1, extends to a history of interdependency not only on one another, but on the land. Characters are brought together through the shared experience of labour and their understanding of it as the dictator of their livelihood, for instance in *Sun Circle*: 'They were a pastoral rather than a fighting people. Field sports and hunting and music were their pastimes'.[187] Agriculture is embedded in their collective identity, and Gunn illustrates how this continues to be so despite major changes, including the clearances, mass emigration, war and the rise of the fishing industry. In setting his novels in different time periods, a number of them centuries apart, Gunn exposes how the land provides a consistent material function throughout the spectrum of experience that he presents.

Gunn's construction of a Gaelic world illustrates the breakdown of the Highlands' ancient land laws. As the narrator of *Butcher's Broom* explains, 'This system of land tenure had an ancient source and seemed natural enough to the people', and 'To the introduction of any great change in the social and economic life of a people there is technically no obstacle other than what may be found in the law of the land.' [188] Depiction of the clearances in the novel, 'one of the first extended realizations of the event ever

[186] *BB*, p.89.
[187] *SC*, p.323.
[188] *BB*, p.35; *BB,* p.266.

published', shows how the betrayal is not just to the communities, but to their ancient traditional respect for their environment.[189] Hugh Cheape highlights how, prior to this tragedy, there had been 'a sense in which the land belongs to everyone', equality implicit within the Gaelic ethos.[190] The clearances, imposed upon violent and inhumane grounds, therefore introduced the debate of ownership, a question raised by Norman MacCaig in 'A Man in Assynt': 'Who possesses this landscape? – /The man who bought it or / I who am possessed by it?'[191] Gunn approaches the topic with similar questions and a similar understanding of the complexity of emotions which the Clearances, as an event which impacted social and economic conditions in the Gaelic world forever, provoked in its communities. Price remarks that by 'Making detailed social conditions and relations the fabric of his history novel, and thus rejecting the romance anaesthetic fabrication of history […] Gunn politicised the very bones of the history novel.'[192] Although he is typically considered the less political of the two men, Gunn reveals his own bias here.

The centrality which Gunn devotes the land within the lives of his communities evokes the kind of materialism more commonly associated with MacDiarmid, human life highlighted as being determined by the physical foundations upon which it sustains itself. This understanding reveals itself in time to characters such as Kenn:

> There was thus about the most ordinary labour some of the excitement of creation. Nor could cold or gloom or hunger or other discomfort completely obscure the sense of family unity in its life struggle; on the contrary as with all creative effort, the discomforts and setbacks particularly in retrospect, add some extra quality of fineness or delight […] Kenn sees this as the essential social tradition.[193]

It is the 'essential social tradition' that Gunn captures so insightfully in his depiction of the Highlands, creating across his career a believable construction of human relationships, not only between people but between them and the natural environment in which they live and work. The socialist undertone in the phrase and in Gunn's emphasis on labour, is expressed more explicitly in *Butcher's Broom*, when the glen is described as 'suffering fire as did the Kremlin, and destruction as did the battlefield'.[194] By drawing such a clear link between the political climates of the Highlands and Soviet Russia, Gunn reinforces the

[189] Price 1991, p.54.
[190] Hugh Cheape, 'Fonn's Duthchas: Land and Legacy', pp.61-120 in Cheape 2006, p.118.
[191] MacCaig 2018, p.70.
[192] Price 1991, p.59.
[193] *HR*, p.70.
[194] *BB*, p.22.

violence and inhumane devastation that were endured by both. The destruction of the old Gaelic economy is recurrently stressed throughout his fiction, notably evident in *The Lost Glen,* where profit-driven modernization has defiled the land:

> The degradation of poverty in a world where money was the supreme power. The old spirit had had its day; was being squeezed to death; the old land existed for the hotels and the shooting lodges, where money gathered; and what sort of money it didn't matter.[195]

Gunn depicts the imperial and Capitalist powers that bring destruction to the Gaelic world bitterly, with an emotional awareness of the mistreatment suffered by generations of Gaels. His own political stance is interwoven in the stories of his characters, revealing the struggle of the Gaelic world against the onslaught of modern change and 'improvement'. However he does not present the situation as entirely without hope, painting the opportunities presented by the fishing industry in a much more positive light. This is most prevalent in *The Silver Darlings*, which Price refers to as a celebration of 'a synthesis of individualism, community values, tradition, and the challenge of the modern.' [196]

Unlike the land, over which ownership was debated, the sea was understood to be free to all, and as a result those crofters made destitute could look forward to a freer, wealthier life at its mercy: 'All along these coasts – the coasts of the Moray Firth – there was a new stirring of sea life. The people would yet live […] for no landlord owned the sea, and what the people caught there would be their own'.[197] Male characters are shown to quickly awaken to the economic possibilities presented by the fishing trade, rushing for the chance to benefit from it – Hendry for example, who describes the sea as 'a gold- mine' from which 'The money will be flowing like the river.'[198] Fishing opens Gaeldom up to the rest of the modern world, giving it a platform to stand on in terms of international trade and reputation, allowing locals for the first time to '[glimpse] regions far beyond the waters of their creek.'[199] Gunn emphasizes the specific nature of a life lived off of the sea, very different to one lived off of the land and yet equally indicative of the Gaelic experience.

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[195] *TLG*, p.180.
[196] Price 1991, p.93.
[197] *SD*, pp.13-14.
[198] *SD*, p.72; *SD*, p.80.
[199] *SD*, p.185.

As much as it offers opportunity, however, the Gael's dependency upon his natural environment is also portrayed as a consistent vulnerability of the Gaelic world. This feeds into contemporary economic anxieties which Gunn discussed in articles for *Scots Magazine,* such as in the following claim in 1937 that 'the decline in every phase of Highland life is becoming alarming. […] The old croft is no longer a self-supporting unit. The sea-fisheries are in desperate straits.'[200] Such worries must have influenced his fiction too, however unlike MacDiarmid, who would have used his present understanding to colour his creative work, Gunn does not so overtly propagandize his historical novels with that kind of retrospective perspective. The variation in setting and context of his novels enables him to explore different historical moments as they would have been experienced at the time, requiring an appreciation of the full sequence in order to develop one's own understanding of how society has deteriorated throughout time. The hostility of the Gaelic world is also portrayed as a potential impediment to progress, thanks to shared memory of conquest, clearance and the rise of sporting estates, introduced by outsiders on violent economic grounds. Change in the past stood for ruin, and as the Master tells Aniel at the end of *Sun Circle,* people worried 'that by going forward they would leave their true riches behind'.[201]

Yet despite the atrocities suffered by the Highlands' environment and economy, Gunn illustrates how there remains hope, as explored in *Off in a Boat*:

> the Highlander is tired of his 'romantic' past, particularly when contrasted with his unromantic present. Tired, too, of talking of the failure of his fishings and his crofts, of deer forests and sportsmen […] these new forests […] were somehow like a symbol of a new order. The trees were full of sap, of young life, green and eager, larches and other pines, pointed in aspiration, and with an air about them not of privilege but of freedom.[202]

Due to its endurance through struggles of the past, Gunn portrays how the landscape offers hope for future perseverance and regeneration. It is this tension between conservativism, change and hope, which helps shape the evolution of Gaelic society across the lengthy time span that Gunn's novels encompass. He presents a comprehension of and appreciation for the narratives of crofting, depopulation and clearance and legitimizes them in his work

[200] Neil. M. Gunn, '"Gentlemen – The Tourist!: The New Highland Tourist', *Scots Magazine* (Mar 1937), cited pp.305-310 in McCulloch, *Modernism and Nationalism,* p.306.
[201] *SC*, p.267.
[202] *OB*, p.335.

through respectful acknowledgement of the lasting effects still felt by the area's landscapes and economies.

In comparison, MacDiarmid's comprehension of the material functions of the natural environment is better understood as having developed out of his wider political ideas and been applied to the Gaelic world, as opposed to a concept which grew organically from within. His poetry expresses a particular preoccupation with land due to its economic viability and fertility, evident in the following example from 'Direadh II':

> This is the cream of the country – probably
> The cream of the earth the famous Dunbar red lands.
> These red loams combine a maximum of fertility
> With friable easy-working qualities of unequalled perfection.[203]

Reference to the 'Dunbar lands' does not apply directly to the Highlands, just as the poem as a whole is more concerned with the Borders. However, it helps to retain a holistic approach to his treatment of Scottish land and its value, knowing that he would have viewed it holistically himself. Attributing focus to the natural environment's physical function distances MacDiarmid from the popular instrumentalization of land in poetry for purely romantic purposes. As such, he creates a new role for himself that exceeds the bounds of the traditional poet, taking upon himself a task of social commentary, reinforced by an understanding of Marxist materialism.

The politics of the matter is explicated more clearly in his journalism than in the poetry. Christopher Grieve, the essayist and journalist (as opposed to Hugh MacDiarmid, the poet) devotes ample focus to the deterioration of the Highland economy and, as a result, the natural environment and the Gaelic culture that propagates there. He argues in 'Neo-Gaelic Economics' (1928) that 'The decline of the Gaelic is a consequence – not the cause – of the existing economic and political system'.[204] Elsewhere, landlordism and Capitalism are more directly blamed:

> Under the old system the land was cultivated to its utmost extent, and it maintained a large and vigorous population equal to any other people in Europe. What has to be kept in mind now is that the condition of the Highlands, as we now see it, is

[203] *CP2*, p.1177.
[204] *RT1*, p.66.

> wholly the arbitrary action of the landowners.[205]

Moreover, he suggests hope for a revival of socialist materialism in the Gaelic world and across Scotland - "It is always darkest just before the dawn,' however, and deplorable and desperate enough as the plight of the Scottish Islands had become, there are signs now of the dawn.'.[206] There is the possibility his optimism was inspired by real events, such as the Highland land reclamation following WWI, when crofters took back land that was rightfully theirs in Skye, Raasay, Tiree and Coll, and threatened to do so in Helmsdale, the area that Gunn's fiction is centred on.[207] As a politically conscious individual, it is not far-fetched to presume that MacDiarmid would be aware of such occurrences. In a similar sense to Gunn, he evidently understood the significant impact left by a history of crofting, land tenure, and clearance upon the Gaelic identity, and as such includes awareness of this struggle within his construction. Both men illustrated a comprehension of the past, and yet they did not dwell on it, instead utilizing their knowledge to include a reclamation of history in their reconstruction of representation of the Gaelic world in literature.

Alongside earlier journalism, *The Islands of Scotland* is similarly integral to developing a comprehensive understanding of MacDiarmid's approach to Gaelic land and economy. The text introduces the archipelago as an amalgamation of spaces in which the lives of individuals and communities are ruled by occupation, inviting materialist discussion. In one instance, he encourages the revival of the Hebridean fishing industry to combat the area's 'background of depopulation and decline'.[208] Islands appealed to MacDiarmid as a distinctive territory within the Gaelic world, which lent unique purpose to those who dwelt there. The idea of 'territory' is another important material function which the land provides in both his and Gunn's constructions where experience was determined, to an extent, by locality. Gunn alludes to this in *The Lost Glen:*

> True environment gives to a man's actions an eternal significance. A native's natural movement is part of land and sea and sky; it has in it the history of his race; it is authentic. What others do or suffer may be touching or beautiful or sad, but finally does not matter.[209]

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[205] *RT1,* p.131.
[206] *RT1*, p.38.
[207] William Kenefick, *Red Scotland: The Rise and Fall of the Radical Left, c.1872 to 1932* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.179.
[208] *IS*, p.115.
[209] *TLG*, p.341.

Once again, it amounts to *dùthchas*. In relation specifically to crofting communities, James Hunter states that 'This intense emotional attachment to territory – an attachment stemming ultimately from the place of land in the kin-based society of the old Highlands […] is still fairly prevalent'.[210] Such a feeling evidently affected Gunn, translating through his writing as loyalty to the Highlands and their documentation. It is significant therefore that however far his narrative travels around the Highlands, it does not stray far from his own territory of the Moray Firth, the story of which 'to Kenn is intricate with the doings of men and women, legendary or known to him.'[211] He draws to an extent from what he knows, not dissimilar to MacDiarmid in this way. The ancient territory of *Sun Circle* is situated in the North East, its location highlighted in the remark that 'Beyond the mainland the blue of the sea was more intense than the blue of the sky, and the Islands of the Orcades lay at anchor like fabled ships'.[212] *The Silver Darlings,* too, is contextualized around the Dunbeath of his birth and Finn's island travels informed by his own, each island attributed a different character, similar to MacDiarmid's documentation in *The Islands of Scotland*. Gunn highlights the value of experiencing new territories like this: 'Sailing along the coast of one's native land was a new way of reading its history, a detached way, so that instead of being embroiled on it, one looked on.'[213] The introduction of distance here, of stepping back from one's environment in order to comprehend it more clearly, occurs repeatedly in Gunn's novels, his narrative frequently breaking from the depiction of the everyday and domestic to allude to this awareness of the bigger picture. The nature of the Gaelic experience is shown to vary depending on the specific location, yet Gunn is limited, every experience is impacted, in part, by his own native background in Caithness.

Although MacDiarmid delves less into the variations of the Gaelic experience, he too signposts specific territories in his poetry on the Highlands so as to contextualize his discussion within a relevant space and place. 'Lament for the Great Music', for example, reference 'the Hebrides' alongside multiple specific locations on Skye, including 'the hollow at Boreraig', Dunvegan Castle and 'the broken graves in Kilmuir Kirkyard'.[214] The 'Direadh' poems reference Wester Ross, Sutherland, Eigg, Canna, Harris and Perthshire, amongst others. Beyond this, Patrick Crotty considers the influence of Easter Ross, the location of MacDiarmid's childhood holidays to which he returned as a caretaker in 1920,

[210] Hunter 2010, p.281.
[211] *HR*, p.102.
[212] *SC*, p.7.
[213] *SC*, p.278.
[214] *CP1*, p.475; *CP1*, p.482.

upon his Gaelic world:

> Many references in both his English and Scots poetry suggest that on his return to Rosshire in 1920 he was haunted by the emptiness of the landscape and by an awareness of the cultural death to which its ruined homesteads and inscrutable place-names bore witness. Kildermorie maintains a persistent, usually unnamed presence throughout his work.[215]

One gets the impression, however, that for MacDiarmid's lists and references are less personal than Gunn's due to his relative unfamiliarity with the environments he includes within his vision. His poetry does not suggest the same degree of physical attachment or inhabitation as Gunn's prose does, for where his contemporary demonstrates through his writing a commitment to his 'true environment', MacDiarmid retains that special relationship with the Borders, the Highlands holding a very different appeal. On the whole, his construction of the Gaelic world presents the natural environment as a material which can be manipulated and instrumentalized to his own artistic ends. That said, his love of the Scottish landscape is undoubtable, forming the basis for much of his poetry, including the earlier lyrics as well as the later scientific work. As such, whilst although much of his construction of the Gaelic world is presumed to be impersonal appropriation, it is founded upon very real feeling, and very sympathetic intentions.

The concept of 'territory' as a material function of the natural environment in Gunn and MacDiarmid's constructions stem from inhabitation, and the physical differences that existed in the different regions of the Highlands and Islands which people inhabited. During their island trips, neither writer was an inhabitant, yet they were given an insight into how life might be if they were. Despite this, they remained on the fringes of the communities, and the hostility of localities to the outsider was something that both touched upon, MacDiarmid in 'Old Eric's Hobby' – 'You have to live a long time on the islands and to shed all the outwards signs of being a stranger until the islanders almost forget that you are and accept you as one of themselves' - and Gunn in *Off in a Boat* - 'the true inwardness here is difficult to penetrate […] For the normal tourist, it is impossible to penetrate, going beyond picturesqueness or the presence of unusual personal attributes, good or bad.'[216] It is worth exploring, then, the kind of insight which each man experienced and depicted in regards to the Gaelic archipelago as a specific 'territory', and how this in

[215] Crotty 2019, p.58.
[216] *AFS*, p.204; *OB*, p.180.

turn influenced their construction of a Gaelic world.

The Archipelago

'Scotland is broken up into islands other than, and to a far greater extent than merely, geographically.'[217]

– Hugh MacDiarmid

MacDiarmid found the Scottish archipelago to be a source of endless intrigue, having lived in Shetland and visited Skye and Barra – homes to MacLean and MacKenzie - as well as Eigg, South Uist, Mull and Iona.[218] This fascination culminates in *The Islands of Scotland* (1939), a Batsford commissioned travel guide which, much like his poetry and unlike the common conception of a travel guide, provides its reader with a constructed artistic manipulation of real environments. This section will compare the text with Neil Gunn's *Off in a Boat* (1938), highlighting the archipelago as a specific space within the Gaelic world that both writers deemed significant enough to devote entire books to. In visiting the islands as research, both men were given a closer insight into the reality of their nature, and what life as an islander constituted, lending greater weight to comment upon their 'territory'.

First and foremost, islands fascinated MacDiarmid on the basis of their distinct ecological make-up, as well as the richness of history and tradition that they had preserved. This two-fold interest is captured in his Author's Note: 'There is nothing there but just a lot of water and rocks. Just a lot of water and rocks – and peace and beauty and the glories of an ancient people.'[219] He continues as thus:

> the traveller who feels that this is semi-desert uncultivated, bare of trees cannot be called beautiful, and who is surprised that anyone should live here of his own free will, does not know that these seemingly barren places hide both strange romances and gloomy secrets.[220]

The point is that islands are infinitely more complex than 'a lot of water and rocks', none

[217] *IS*, p.8.
[218] Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography* (London: Paladin, 1988), p.345.
[219] *IS,* p.xi.
[220] *IS*, p.xvii.

more aware of this than the man who claimed that 'Few men can have visited as many of them as I have done'.[221] It was their great variations in size which appealed to our curious poet the most, leading him to an awareness of the differences which existed not only within nature but amongst humans too:

> They are of all shapes and sizes. No symmetry of effect is obtainable. She seems to have no control over them. Several groups appear to have escaped from and concerted movement of which she is the centre altogether. And while some remain in groups others are isolated stragglers. It is a chaotic spectacle seen from above.[222]

This image of Scotland and her islands is used by MacDiarmid as a visualization of the subdivision of Scottish, and thus Gaelic, identity. Just like people, 'while some remain in groups others are isolated stragglers', human nature shown to be reflective of its natural environment. In alignment with his quest for a holistic representation of the Gaelic world within his national vision, MacDiarmid also understood that 'in order to know any island it is necessary to know many islands', evocative of his suggestions elsewhere that everything must be understood as 'contributory to the whole'. [223] Thus, although the majority of the book is dominated by the bigger islands such as Orkney or Skye, attention is also awarded to the smallest isles, depicted as being unlike any other environment. Barra, for example, is described as 'the island that gives me the most complete sense not only of passing into a spiritual climate of its own to be found nowhere else, but is like being in a different world altogether'.[224] Eigg and Rum are mentioned too, highlighted for their fertile lands and 'kindly climate'.[225]

Most striking in MacDiarmid's perception of the archipelago is the idea that he constructs of the islands as the least spoilt area of the Gaelic world, where traditional values and cultures have been preserved most successfully. This is highlighted in 'Lament for the Great Music' through his comparison of the Hebrides and the Ceol Mòr with the Greek islands and Homer:

> It is necessary to see the islands to know you,
> As one only half-understands Homer till one has seen
> The Greek islands really dancing in chorus
> From the high blue shoulder of a toppling wave,

[221] *IS*, pp.1-2.
[222] *IS*, p.1.
[223] *IS*, p.61; *CP2*, p.1167.
[224] *IS*, p.134.
[225] *IS*, p.126.

> But no longer in the Hebrides is there only
> Water and fire as of yore; the grey rocks
> Are gaining ground and the seas are black with their shadows.[226]

As distinct as MacDiarmid finds the islands' environments, 'like going into another world', so is their culture.[227] Timothy Baker notes the tendency within Scottish literature to portray 'a linked and opposed perspective in which the island stands for a unified culture that is either sustainable or must be left behind.'[228] This is highly relevant to MacDiarmid's construction. *The Islands of Scotland* documents features which are shown to be both remarkable and dying, highlighting the difficulty of preserving the past without romanticisation. The link drawn between the cultural purity of the islands and the act of travelling to them implies the innate connection which exists in the Gaelic world between the natural environment and the art which is created out of it. Once again it demonstrates that the Gaelic world is rooted in *dùthchas*, a territorial attachment to a specific location and its history, so strong that the culture cannot even be understood fully without having witnessed, if not inhabited, the environment which inspired it.

Like Gunn's Finn, MacDiarmid documents the variations in character of the different islands he visits, illustrating the nuances which are created by specificity of environment and geography. Whilst Orcadians are represented as 'quiet, friendly, industrious, well-doing people', their Shetlandic counterparts are viewed as quite the opposite, a difference he attributes primarily to the physical differences in their islands' geographies and the effect this has on the lived experience.[229] This said, despite these differences, he finds a commonality between even the wildest of extremes, uniting them through his holistic perspective of Scotland:

> There are invisible bridges from every one of the Scottish islands, I think, that cross as far as the mind can go and reach across whatever space lies between us and anything that has ever been or ever will be apprehensible by the minds of men.[230]

Representing the archipelagic nature of Scotland and Scottish identity, of which the Gaelic islands and Gaels make up a significant proportion, is to MacDiarmid a crucial step

[226] *CP1*, p.475.
[227] *AFS*, p.232.
[228] Timothy Baker, 'The Lonely Island: Exile and Community in Recent Island Writing', pp.25-42 in Lyall 2016, p.29.
[229] *IS*, p.109; *IS*, p.96.
[230] *IS*, p.136.

towards achieving and propagating an improved understanding of his nation. Where here it is invisible bridges, elsewhere it is the sound of Biederbecke's cornet or the image of Cencrastus, an undefinable, fluctuating essence that unites humanity, the movements of which 'form the pattern of history.'[231]

Gunn's *Off in a Boat* depicts a similar fascination with the timeless character and landscapes of the Scottish archipelago - particularly Western Isles - although it is presented very differently to MacDiarmid's. Introduced as 'This simple record of a holiday in a boat', it results in so much more, providing insight into the kind of anecdotal experience which would go on to guide the writing of *The Silver Darlings*.[232] His fascination with the Hebrides, Price considers, might 'derive from a perceived anthropological link between them and Caithness', linking it back, therefore, to the discussion already established with regards to childhood sentimentality, native environments, and *dùthchas.*[233] Like MacDiarmid's *Islands*, *Off in a Boat* represents a foray into the formerly unknown, resulting in a similar mystification with the apparent preservation of the traditional identity and values found in the islands. Gunn remarks that 'The old values are seen with a profound clarity', considering the witnessing of them to be 'closely akin to the vision of the modern young communist poet, except that he is moved by a sort of intellect whereas we were moved by a sort of memory.'[234] In this he implies the islands to have been unaffected by modernity to the same degree as the mainland Highlands, in part due to their physical separation and isolation. He refers to a specific man from Tiree who epitomizes this for him, painted as the sum of all those qualities he most valued in the Gaelic world:

> he stands in my mind as representative of his race, the race that was outraged and beaten and driven forth by the money-changers of a new age of greed and fear. The civilization of the Celtic folk. […] Decency and character, kindliness to children and to strangers, love of heroic deeds and heroic men, came out in his oral literature and in his music.[235]

Here the individual on an individual island symbolizes to Gunn an entire race and history, representative of the idea of the Gaelic world that he pursues throughout his construction

[231] Quoted from an explanation of 'Cencrastus' in a letter to Helen B. Cruikshank (Feb 1939), pp.127- 130 in Bold 1984, p.128.
[232] *OB*, p.9.
[233] Price 1991, p.11.
[234] *OB*, p.26.
[235] Ibid.

of 'the West of legend'.[236] His emphasis on the islands' timelessness is similar to that introduced by MacDiarmid - 'I lost all sense of time, hardly knowing whether I was myself now or a thousand years ago'.[237] Gunn's description of Iona is like an echo of MacDiarmid's encounter of Barra; 'There was immediately the feeling of landing on a different, almost a strange and foreign, shore, though it was yet more intimate, as a shore of tradition, or dream, or actual past experience is intimate.'[238] This combination of strangeness and intimacy is something which both writers document on the islands, stemming primarily from their roles as visitors, rather than inhabitants, and their aspiration for a closer understanding of their foreign environment and culture.

Careful to avoid over-sentimentalisation, Gunn offers justification for his trip, remarking that 'It is easy, of course, to dismiss the picture by calling it the escapist's dream, and difficult to defend it, without pretentiousness, by an excursion into speculative thought on the conditions of the human affairs in the world to-day.'[239] In seeking a more holistic understanding of 'the conditions of the human affairs' throughout the Gaelic world and to better their own knowledge, it was necessary for both writers to carry out the trips that they did and witness the variations of experience which existed. Both were acutely aware of former tendencies in literature which they hoped to avoid and such research aided their refashioning of Gaeldom's representation.

As such, the economic focus is retained throughout *Off in a Boat* – as in *Islands* – to offset the descriptive passages, and Gunn devotes plentiful attention to issues of clearance, depopulation and the decline of fishing. On Eigg, he emphatically compares the clearances to 'the completeness of the holocaust', remarking that 'They dogged us everywhere we went, and at times the tale sickened us, so that we could have wished for something new, were it only some new variety of economic atrocity.'[240] Beyond the archipelago the language of violence and atrocity is similarly used in reference to 'Glencoe of the massacre', where there broke out 'A riot of loveliness and singing over the graves of the murdered.'[241] His desire to represent the ugly side of Highland history is evident, and his work goes some way as to ensure that such honesty remained a prioritized feature of the rhetoric applied

[236] *OB*, p.22.
[237] *OB*. p.30.
[238] *OB*, p.206.
[239] *OB*, p.59.
[240] *OB*, p.131; *OB*, p.135.
[241] *OB*, p.319.

to the Gaelic landscape. Furthermore, in recognizing the continued decline of the fishing industry, Gunn ensured that the Highlands' economic issues were understood to be an ongoing contemporary problem as well as one of the past:

> We were seeing taking place before us the death of an ancient way of life that had many very fine qualities. […] the universal problem appears to be: how to manage efficiently the economic machine and at the same time retain the maximum amount of individual freedom.[242]

As discussed in Chapter 1, the tension between 'individual freedom' and the function of the wider community is one which defines Gunn's Gaelic world. Perceived here in a more political light, Gunn's worldview is remembered as a byproduct of the very environment he here describes, he himself brought up around such communities and affected by their path of progress. Though the archipelago represents to both writers a very different natural environment, it is the development of a holistic understanding of the human experience in the islands that Gunn focusses on, just as in his novels. He portrays the island identity as a constituent part, alongside that in the rest of the Highlands (and Ireland), of 'the old seanachaidh, the complete Gael'.[243]

The difference between MacDiarmid and Gunn's priorities as writers – MacDiarmid on knowledge, Gunn on the human – infiltrates their documentation of the islands much like it does of the rest of their representation of the natural environment. As elsewhere, Gunn inhabits a position of sympathy seeking to positively represent those involved, whereas MacDiarmid inhabits the role of the surveying outsider seeking to enhance his own understanding. The islands do however introduce a heightened sense of intimacy into MacDiarmid's representation. Their inclusion characterizes Gunn and MacDiarmid's struggle, as illustrated similarly elsewhere, to encompass both the realist and romantic readings that the Gaelic environment provokes. As a result, their constructions acknowledge narratives of both materialism and mysticism, the coexistence of which creates an uneasy tension throughout their work.

The natural environment and landscape serves a plethora of functions in both Gunn and MacDiarmid's writing, and the careful navigation of balancing these was a delicate task which is not necessarily always achieved. Each writer's incorporation of the landscape is

[242] *OB*, p.266.
[243] *OB*, pp.179-80.

dependent on their own attachments to it and visions for its usage in literature. As such, Gunn expresses sentiment towards the Highlands of his youth, MacDiarmid towards the land of his nation as a whole. Both – although more so MacDiarmid – to represent the environment in a modern fashion which moved away from romantic or Celtic Twilight attitudes, thereby adopting a responsibility which transcended that of the 'romantic' poet/author. Symbolism features in Gunn's construction most strikingly in the form of animism, such that the landscape is humanized, gendered, and attributed an identity as much as those who live on it. Whilst MacDiarmid's poetry does this to an extent, he places greater emphasizes a desire for acceptance and the aspiration for a closer relationship between man and nature, achievable through the attainment of knowledge. As in their reconstruction of community and identity, it becomes clear that both Gunn and MacDiarmid believed in a time when man's affinity with nature was closer, and wished to return to many of these traditional values in their modern reconstruction. In their perception of this past, the laws of the land were obeyed and livelihood was wrought through labour with one's natural environment. Life on the land was not profit driven, nor was it lived in the wake of a disaster, such as the Clearances. The Scottish archipelago is highlighted by both as a distinctive Gaelic environment in which these traditions and this identity are better preserved, indication on a microcosmic scale of the kind of purer society which acted as their muse.

The tensions which Gunn and MacDiarmid's visions navigate - sentimentality without over-romanticisation, symbolism without cliché, materialism without physical inhabitation– manifest as a byproduct of the writers' efforts to render a revitalized literary representation of the Gaelic world fit for the modern day. Land, sea and archipelago act as integral features to the identities of those who inhabit them, and provide symbolic and material significance to both Gunn and MacDiarmid in their constructions. In providing the foundations upon which communities develop and feelings of 'territory' are established, land is crucial to the concept of *dùthchas*, providing a physical context for all which defines the Gaelic experience.

Chapter Three

Consciousness and Translation:

Traditional Gaelic Cultures Within a Modern Construction

Neither Gunn or MacDiarmid spent their most formative years being schooled in Gaelic or learning about traditional Gaelic culture, yet both strove to demonstrate an understanding of it as though they had. Alongside the Highlands' distinctive social contexts and natural environments, the production and preservation of art was something which Gunn and MacDiarmid emphasized throughout their reconstructions of the Gaelic world.

Each writer was somewhat of an outsider to the Gaelic tradition himself. This chapter examines how exactly the culture of the Highlands and Islands infiltrated their consciousness therefore, including an insight into the texts which are believed to have influenced their appreciations. Their awareness depended very much on independent research and access to already existing literature, as well as interaction with Gaelic natives, most notably Sorley MacLean, in MacDiarmid's case. I am interested in how this awareness translated into their comparative fictional constructions, taking into account the three most integral areas of language, literature and music in this final chapter.

Awareness & Appreciation

'This can only be done by, on the one hand, a thorough reconsideration of Gaelic history and culture in the light of the present and with a view to the future; and, on the other, by an analysis of all the vital thought and tendencies of the world today from a Gaelic standpoint.'[244]

- Hugh MacDiarmid

To develop an understanding of the role of the Gaelic world and its culture and identity to the Scottish Renaissance, it is crucial to analyze Gunn and MacDiarmid's non-fiction, where the ideology that undermines the revitalization of tradition is explored more explicitly.

[244] *RT2*, p.67.

Silke Stroh considers how 'Attempts to rehabilitate the Gaelic heritage often entailed a relatively uncritical, idealizing stance toward anything which could be labelled "traditional" or "indigenously Gaelic"'.[245] Gunn and MacDiarmid's respective achievements sought to preface *new* ideals, revitalizing Gaelic culture in a manner which was not typically romantic but which sought to remain true to the environment, history and communities from which it arose.

MacDiarmid is known for his referentiality, alluding to and borrowing from a broad range of writers within his own work. A critical survey of this gives an insight into the literature which might have lined his own bookshelves, thus inspiring him to construct his Gaelic world in the way that he did. As proof of such influences, *The Islands of Scotland* is an invaluable source, rich with citations, including John Tonge's *The Arts of Scotland* and W. C. Mackenzie's *History of the Outer Hebrides.* The text gives credit not only to Gunn's own island book published the year prior, but to other contemporary Highland writers; Louis MacNeice, Amy Murray and John Lorne Campbell are included alongside Gunn, and Edwin Muir, J Storer Clouston, Eric Linklater and Marian MacNeill named in a specific ode to Orkney writers.[246] Evidently the poet was keen that *Islands*, the major non-fiction project of the 'Gaelic Idea', be read not as an unresearched project. The Gaelic world that MacDiarmid constructs, at times easier to assume as fabrication in light of his personal distance from the Gaelic identity, is reinforced by his voracious appetite for literature about the world that he sought to depict, to plug the gaps of what he did not understand.

Even more insightful in this respect is MacDiarmid's early journalism. In the late 1920s and early 1930s his understanding of Gaelic culture grew out of an awareness of its 'Celtic' connection to Ireland, particularly after his meeting with Yeats in 1928. In the article 'A New Movement in Scottish Literature' (mid 1920s), he quotes from William Sharp's claim in the Preface to *Lyra Celtica* (1896) that 'All Ireland is aflame with Song… Scotland is again becoming the land of Old Romance.'[247] Sharp (aka Fiona MacLeod) would later become one of the figures whom MacDiarmid and Gunn both disagreed with most strongly on the issue of Gaelic representation, shunning the fatalist attitudes of his 'Old Romance'. Nonetheless, it is important to note that as one of the most popular writers of

[245] Silke Stroh, *Gaelic Scotland in the Colonial Imagination: Anglophone Writing from 1600 to 1900* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2017), p.217.
[246] *IS,* p.100.
[247] *SP*, p.5.

Gaeldom at the time, his influence is unavoidable – as Eliot expressed, 'no man wholly escapes from the kind [...] of culture which he acquired from his early environment.'[248] Regardless of their difference of opinions, MacDiarmid's construction was shaped by Sharp and the Celtic Twilight, in that he was inspired what *not* to do, adamant that Sharp's 'Scottish literary revival proved to be a promise that could not be kept', something he must improve upon. [249]

Following this, 'Scottish Gaelic Policy' (1927) more explicitly champions the campaign for the revitalization and modernization of traditional cultures. MacDiarmid argues that 'Without realizing our relationship, however disguised linguistically, politically, and otherwise, to the Gaelic traditions, we will be unable to rise into major forms.'[250] Borrowing the words of an unnamed writer, he follows this by quoting that 'Scotland today is overwhelmingly Gaelic in blood. [...] Let our children be taught that the ancient Gaels were a race with a culture, skilled in the working of bronze and gold, with a soul for poetry.'[251] It is an idealistic image, and not one that should be considered as MacDiarmid's consistent viewpoint, however the inclusion of such a quote indicates the awareness of classical qualities within Gaelic culture which he admired and would later prioritize within his own poetic reworking. This wish to look to the past for inspiration and 'the possibility of "getting back behind the Renaissance"' is one that he repeats.[252] Gaeldom is presented as a source of creative enlightenment, increasingly relevant in the face of twentieth century 'English Ascendancy' and the need for improved 'synthesis and the establishment of a common front' between Gaelic and Scots.[253]

MacDiarmid's involvement with *The Pictish Review* further highlights the efforts to merge his own Lowland background and culture with Celtic elements. The journal only ran for a year, from 1927-1928, and was edited by Ruaraidh Erskine of Marr, political activist and ally of the poet. In that short time MacDiarmid submitted numerous articles which went on to be published. In one such piece, entitled 'Towards a Scottish Idea' (November 1927), he expresses frustration at Scotland's dismissal of the past, arguing that 'The Scottish spirit has been largely dissipated in mere antiquarianism' and that 'We must

[248] T. S. Eliot, 'Culture and the Family', pp.250-1 in Hayward 1953, p.50.
[249] *SP*, p.6.
[250] *SP*, p.50.
[251] *SP*, p.52.
[252] *SP*, p.71.
[253] *Albyn*, p.63.

repair the fatal breach in our continuity which has cut us off from our own roots.'[254] In another, 'The National Idea and The Company it Keeps' (March 1928), he voices his disagreement with representation of traditional Gaelic cultures in popular literature, specifically referencing D. H. Lawrence:

> This is the register of Celtic decadence; this is the pass to which Scottish culture has been reduced; and the great majority of people in Scotland today have been brought to so admirable a condition from Mr Lawrence's point of view that they regard these inane ubrications and silly miscognate settings as typical products of Gaelic genius.[255]

Whilst MacDiarmid was aware of literature which already existed on the Gaelic world, including that by popular writers such as Lawrence, or Sharp, it is clear that he disagreed with the manner in which they handled the subject. As such, the reclamation of traditional Gaelic culture became one of the main ambitions of his own literary movement, as charted in the growth in Gaeldom's presence within his journalistic writing in the 1920s.

The search for what MacDiarmid called 'a new creative pride in the old traditions' was a pursuit which Gunn shared.[256] Although this manifests predominantly in the inclusion of Gaelic poetry, folklore and music in his fiction, it is also possible to trace the influence of specific sources, as has been done with MacDiarmid. He too makes clear his awareness of romanticised representations of Gaeldom, however his disapproval is not as explicit. In *Off in a Boat*, for example, he argues that 'Those who have never known the West like this may find it easy to jeer at phrases like 'the Celtic Twilight'. But I have the uneasy feeling that does not end the matter'.[257] It is a sentiment echoed by the narrator of 'Half-Light', who claims that 'I used to laugh, too, at Fiona Macleod and the like, but now – I'm damned if I'm not becoming fanciful myself'.[258] He then goes back on himself, to speak of the 'grain of bitterness' he feels in his 'acknowledgement of him, or of Yeats, or of any of the modern Celtic twilighters, an irritable impatience of their pale fancies, their posturing sonorities and follies.'[259] The refutation of the Celtic Twilight movement is not as implicit a conclusion for Gunn as it is for MacDiarmid, swayed as he is by what his nephew Dairmid refers to as a 'profound knowledge of Celtic mythology and tradition' and his 'love of Celtic

[254] *RT2*, p.38; *RT3*, p.40.
[255] *RT3*, p.47.
[256] *Albyn*, p.73.
[257] *OB*, p.22.
[258] Neil M. Gunn, 'Half-Light', *WH*, p.269.
[259] *WH*, p.272.

culture'.[260]

Nor is Gunn's referentiality as explicit or extensive as MacDiarmid's, although he does express awareness of representation of the Gaelic world. The short story 'Wells and Wishes', for instance, provides Gunn's response to Dr Johnson's writing on the Highlands, Johnson considered even more of an outsider than he or MacDiarmid. In *Butcher's Broom* Gunn highlights another popular documentation of the Highlands when the character of Mr Heller refers to Sir John Sinclair, citing him as the source which informed his preconceptions of the Gael. [261] Elsewhere, he credits Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica* (1900) for the provision of original Gaelic poems included in the novel. Carmichael's text, a collection of oral story-telling from the Highlands and Islands, was monumental for its time and has since been credited by Gaelic historian John MacInnes for its 'robust awareness of the everyday life of crofters' and its insightful perceptions, 'certainly not those of an Ivory Tower artist.'[262] In showing awareness of such a critical text for the Gaelic world, moreover one considered 'authentic' to the everyday Highland reality, Gunn suggests that his construction, like MacDiarmid's, was also a researched project, although he indicates differing priorities to the poet, favouring storytelling over non-fiction or fact.

However, his sources have come under fire, it having been noted that 'The Desire of the Ancient Bard', the poem he borrows from Carmichael's text is the only poem included in an 1841 anthology to have appeared in English as well as Gaelic, thereby reminding one of Gunn's limitations.[263] Christopher Whyte expands upon this to repudiate the poem's relevance to the novel entirely, explaining that the 'fabrication' 'could hardly have been more than twenty years old at the time he writes of and is not likely to have been in oral circulation.'[264] This should not be taken as proof of Gunn's failings, however, but as indication of him working within his means and ability to construct a sensitive, sympathetic treatment of his subject. I would encourage a more balanced approach to Gunn's utilization of existing literature, such as that which J. B. Pick proposes:

[260] *OB*, p.2.
[261] Sinclair researched and wrote *The Old Statistical Account of Scotland*, published between 1791 and 1799.
[262] John MacInnes, 'Preface', pp.7-18 in Alexander Carmichael. [1900] *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns and Incantations Collected in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the Last Century* (Edinburgh: Florris Books, 1992), p.10.
[263] Price 1991, p.60.
[264] Whyte 1995, p.60.

> Gunn's references back to the Gaelic culture of *Carmina Gadelica*, and to his sense that his own people had a way of life which enabled community and individual to operate in harmony may be romantic or it may be realistic, but it is fundamental to his work.[265]

Gunn's efforts are consistently sympathetic to the traditions and cultures of the people and environment that he re-imagines and, like MacDiarmid, he recognizes the work of others as indication of his willingness to learn more about the Gaelic world. The inclusion of references to traditional literature indicates that the awareness is there, even if the knowledge needed to understand the materials he has to hand are not fully developed.

Both Gunn and MacDiarmid's constructions of Gaelic culture originated largely within what literature was available to them, including sources on Irish Celtic culture, as well as Scottish. Price highlights the influence of Daniel Corkery's *Hidden Ireland* (1924) as one such material, calling it 'strong medicine for both Grieve and Gunn's politics and art', due to its display of 'a cultural richness, a Gaelic sophistication comparable with but quite distinct from European high art'.[266] John Brannigan, in relation to MacDiarmid, credits works by Aodh de Blacam, Henri Hubert and L Albert Hermann as having provided inspiration in the writing of *The Islands of Scotland*.[267] Evidently it was a plethora of sources, combined like a patchwork to complement their real life interactions and imagination, which informed the writers' awareness of Gaelic traditions and culture. Alongside acknowledgement of their referentiality, this consciousness impacted their creative work in other ways, translated through Gunn and MacDiarmid's acknowledgement of traditional Gaelic language, literature and music.

Gàidhlig: Language & History

'Still, in the Gaelic language and literature are embedded certain beauties of word and phrase, of idea and myth. We Celts who write English should seek out these manifold beauties and popularise and perpetuate them by means of our art and the English tongue'[268]

- Ruaridh Erskine of Marr

[265] Pick, 'The Eternal Landscape', in Gunn & Murray 1991, p.66.
[266] Price 1991, p.55.
[267] Brannigan 2015, p.161.
[268] R. Erskine, 'The National Tongue and the Ascendency', *Free Man* (Mar 1933), pp.294-6 in McCulloch, *Modernism and Nationalism*, p.295.

Linguistic history was as integral to the Gaelic world that Gunn and MacDiarmid constructed as its social and economic history. Both men expressed awareness of the drastic decline of the Gaelic language, blaming this largely on the imposition of English and failings of the Scottish Educational system. Whilst prior to the breakup of the Lordship of the Isles Gaelic had been spoken as far South as Fife and as far West as Galloway, by the twentieth century it was confined to the Highlands and Islands.[269]

Language became a particularly controversial topic in 1930s Scotland following the contention between MacDiarmid's revivalism and Muir's defeatist argument that 'until Scottish literature has an adequate language, it cannot exist', calling the use of English 'the only practicable' option.[270] English had long been favoured in academic and intellectual settings, explaining why, at school or elsewhere, neither Gunn or MacDiarmid were taught the language of their Highland ancestors. In recognition of Scotland and Scottish literature as linguistically contested territory, J. Derick McClure remarks that

> the linguistic history of Scotland presents a similar parallel to those of Ireland and Wales: a protracted conflict between a Celtic language and English, with the latter frustrated of complete victory by a sense of patriotic loyalty towards the indigenous tongue.[271]

The implied superiority of English in British literature was one of the main antagonists against which MacDiarmid founded his Renaissance movement, and despite their apparent ignorance, both he and Gunn were affected by that 'patriotic loyalty towards the indigenous tongue' to a degree, agreeing with Crichton Smith's later argument that 'for the islander to lose his language utterly would be to lose, to a great extent, the meaning of his life, and to become a member of a sordid colony on the edge of an imperialist world.'[272] As such, both men's work advocate for revitalization of the vernacular

Hugh MacDiarmid consistently prioritized language in his poetry and non-fiction alike, expressing what Bold refers to as a 'hypersensitivity to words'.[273] His venture into

[269] T. M. Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War: The social transformation of the Scottish Highlands* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p.1.
[270] Edwin Muir, [1936] *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1982), p.111: MacDiarmid famously fell out with Muir over his dismissal of the Scottish vernacular in this publication, and Gunn also responded with a scathing review in *Scots Magazine* the same year.
[271] J. Derick McClure, *Language, Poetry and Nationhood: Scots as a Poetic Language from 1878 to the Present* (East Lothian: Tuckwell, 2000), p.2.
[272] Smith 1986, p.37.
[273] Bold 1982, p.ix.

representation of the Gaelic world and its language and culture only enhanced, rather than encroached upon, this. Having previously championed the vernaculars of Scots in the Borders, Doric in Aberdeenshire and Norn in Shetland, he turned his attention to the Gaelic tongue with the same vigour as he had awarded these before it, keen to understand more about the 'racy native dialects' of another of Scotland's localities.[274] It is known that MacDiarmid relied on many dictionaries throughout his career, one which he references in 'Direadh III' as being Macfarlane's *English and Gaelic Vocabulary* (1815), alluding to his efforts to become more familiar with the language. Introduced in part to Gaelic by Sorley MacLean, he understood knowledge of it to be a critical precursor to understanding the environment from which it stemmed.[275] The 1930s increasingly saw him include it within his creative work and national vision, however he does not appear to have ever learnt the language or to have written full original poems in it as he did in Scots and English.

Mention of Gaelic is present in MacDiarmid's prose as early as the 1920s. In an essay from this time entitled 'Introducing Hugh M'Diarmid', the poet proposes that 'The literary cultivation of the Vernacular – as of the Gaelic – is merely one aspect of that; a problem within a problem', highlighting that although Gaelic is a part of the plan to rejuvenate 'the essential Scottish diversity-in-unity', it remains on the periphery at this time.[276] In 'A Theory of Scots Letters', Grieve again dwells on the idea of the vernacular, thereby introducing the line of argument he later applies to Gaelic: 'Whatever the potentialities of the Doric may be, however, there cannot be a revival in the real sense of the word […] unless these potentialities are in accord with the newest and truest tendencies of human thought.'[277] The consistent worry he expresses is that the minority languages within Scotland, including Gaelic, have been dismissed as antiquated figments of the past, society having denied the responsibility to revitalize them for use in contemporary literature. The goal to reverse this courses throughout MacDiarmid's work, Scottish literature intended to one day encompass all native dialects rather than being conducted purely in imposed English.

MacDiarmid argues throughout the 1920s and 30s that since the decline of the vernacular, Gaelic in particular, Scottish literature itself has declined, failing to produce

[274] Glen 1970, p.62.
[275] *CP2*, p.1191.
[276] *SP*, p.10.
[277] *SP*, p.19.

material of note: 'A sense of continuity and tradition can only be recovered by 'connecting up' again with our lost Gaelic culture. This is the background to which we must return if we are ever to establish a Scottish classical culture.'[278] This expands into the argument that 'All forms of literary and artistic expression, equally with other phenomena of intellectual and spiritual activity, have reached in our Western civilisation the point beyond which they can go no further', a reminder of his opposition to twentieth century Capitalism.[279] His emphasis on the need to establish a 'classical culture' highlights the link between Gaelic and the ancient cultures that came before the Scots Romantic movement, a belief which Gunn shares, as prefaced in his claim that 'The lack of achievement in Scotland in past has been due not to external but to internal warring elements.'[280]

The co-existence of multiple national languages – Gaelic, Scots, Doric, English - creates what Colin Nicholson calls 'a complex psychological terrain', terrain which MacDiarmid traversed in depth.[281] Despite their differences, he consistently argued for the union of these vernaculars, envisioned in 'English Ascendancy in British Literature':

> [it is necessary to] bridge the gulf between Gaelic and Scots. Both have been tremendously handicapped by circumstances, and yet in their evolution, thus miserable attenuated and driven underground by external factors, they have continued to complement and correct each other in the most remarkable way.[282]

Imagining 'Scotland in 1980' (1929), MacDiarmid envisions a 'new standard Gaelic, approved by the Scottish Academy of Letters' which would one day make up the majority of Scotland's output of literature.[283] Historic imposition of English upon Scotland and the subsequent quashing of native languages fuels MacDiarmid's Anglophobic nationalism, in turn an incentive for the revival of Scots and Gaelic in his own work. Although it is an issue which he primarily treats very seriously, it is also handled with humour, for instance in 'In the Gaelic Islands', when he argues that 'Gaelic's worth learning if only to nonplus the English.'[284] Regardless of tone, MacDiarmid consistently promotes the vernacular not only as an artistically superior medium but also politically superior, it being the language of the (Scots)people, as opposed to the English, which never was.

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[278] *SP*, p.50.
[279] *SP*, p.27.
[280] Neil M. Gunn in a letter to C. M. Grieve (14.11.33), pp.35-36 in Pick 1987, p.35.
[281] Nicholson 1992, p.xix.
[282] *SP*, pp.73-4.
[283] *Albyn*, p.72.
[284] *AFS*, p.233.

Elsewhere, in 'Scottish Arts and Letters: The Present Position and Post-War Prospects' (1942), the poet argues that

> along with that return to an intimate first-hand practical knowledge of every inch of our terrain, there will be a return to the languages (Scots and Gaelic) which are the proper media for the expression and extension of that knowledge – a purpose for which English is worse than useless.[285]

This article is particularly remarkable for its understanding of the transferability of the Russian situation and socialism as inspiration for cultural revolution elsewhere. He continues:

> They [the Scottish workers] can only be dynamically reached – and stirred to the very depths of their beings – through the Scots Vernacular, applied to modern purposes, and expressly directed to their vital needs. This is the dynamic angle – the only way to get right into the hearts of the Scottish people and rouse them. A mighty force will be generated as soon as that is done […] it will burst the existing system in Scotland into smithereens.[286]

Such rhetoric is riddled with resemblance to Leninist dialectic, similarities evident in the emphasis of the instrumentality of language - in this case Gaelic – to the modernization of the state. In 1914 Lenin discussed the Russian national language issue in a similar manner, arguing that whilst the value of the supposedly superior intellectual language should not be denied, it remains

> that the population must be provided with schools where teaching will be carried on in all the local languages, that a fundamental law must be introduced in the constitution declaring invalid all privileges of any one nation and all violations of the rights of national minorities.[287]

Swap Russian for English and 'local languages' for 'Gaelic', and this excerpt could be mistaken as being taken from one of MacDiarmid's more propagandistic articles. The 'Gaelic Idea', at its roots, was an outward-facing intellectual and political conception, designed so as to balance the very Russian idea which Lenin here discusses. The affinities with Russian thought, particularly with Russian socialism, are implicit.

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[285] *SP*, p.159.
[286] *SP*, pp.161-2.
[287] V. I. Lenin, 'Is a Compulsory Official Language Needed?' (1914), pp.71-3 in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works,* Vol. 20 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), p.73.

Thus even prior to consideration of epistolary or autobiographical evidence, it is clear how MacDiarmid's understanding of the importance of Gaelic grew throughout the 1920s and 30s. This was encouraged further by the perspective and knowledge obtained from his younger contemporary and close acquaintance Sorley MacLean.

MacLean and MacDiarmid first met in Edinburgh in 1934, the former an aspiring but unpublished poet fresh out of university, the latter already successful and having recently relocated to Shetland.[288] They shared similar outlooks on politics and culture, MacLean committed to the revival of Gaelic for the twentieth century much like MacDiarmid had been with regards to Scots. MacLean offered MacDiarmid considerable insight into his native tongue, providing understanding and translation which he could not have achieved by himself. As Michel Byrne argued, if MacLean '[had] not existed MacDiarmid would have had to – and probably tried to – invent [him]'.[289] Through their friendship, MacDiarmid was able to bridge the gap between the Gaelic world and his own personal detachment from it.

Their collaboration came to fruition in the form of *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (1940). The compilation process saw MacLean provide MacDiarmid with translations from Gaelic into English, which he would then versify. Writing to MacLean, MacDiarmid expressed his intentions to include a worthy representation of Gaelic poetry, believing it to have been underappreciated in previous similar anthologies: 'I am immensely grateful to you for all your help […] I am particularly anxious that the Gaelic side should be thoroughly well represented'. In the same letter, from 1935, he continues to ask, 'is there anything you know of by a really good living writer? I don't want to give the impression if I can help it that good Gaelic poetry is a thing of the past'.[290] It was crucial to MacDiarmid that the diversity and richness of Scotland's language, history and culture was promoted, not only through his own creative work, but in anything else he attached his name to. This correspondence with MacLean - now accessible thanks to Susan Wilson's book *The Correspondence Between Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley MacLean* (2010) - proved invaluable to the opening of MacDiarmid's eyes to the Gaelic language and culture. It was predominantly during and following their collaboration on *The Golden Treasury* that he

[288] Susan R. Wilson, *The Correspondence Between Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley MacLean* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p.12.
[289] Wilson 2010, p.11.
[290] Wilson 2010, p.119-20.

introduced Gaelic into his own writing. In doing so, he effectively conveys that, in the world he constructs, the very words used to describe it were different.

MacDiarmid's own poetry in the 1930s, particularly 'Direadh I', illustrates this awareness of Gaelic language, despite its being written in English'. As with Scots before it, Gaelic is upheld as being superior to English with regards to its ability to depict the world in which it originated. In recognition of this, MacDiarmid awards its vocabulary and sounds considerable attention, illustrating the qualities which are implicit within the language. Attila Dósa speaks of poetry that 'reaches out to the periphery of language, and extends its power beyond the normal capacity of words'.[291] If anybody's poetry had the ability to do this, even when using a foreign language, it was MacDiarmid

> I covet the mystery of our Gaelic speech
> In which *rugadh* was at once a blush,
> A promontory, a headland, a cape,
> *Leadan*, musical notes, litany, hair of the head,
> And *fonn*, land, earth, delight, and a tune in music[292]

Particularly in relation to the natural environment, MacDiarmid's reverence for the language's ability to describe specificities is made explicit in the poem's first few pages. Its list-like format allows him to convey an array of novel vocabulary, accompanied by English translations. He includes words such as '*ard-ghaoir'*, a 'clear, thrilling sound'; '*móramh*', 'the longest note in music'; and '*cromadh'*, 'swooping down like a hawk', illustrating the untranslatability of Gaelic language, and thus Gaelic experience, into common English understanding.[293] The theme of world languages – emphatically including Gaelic – grows in significance throughout the Direadh poems, the last of which introduces phrasing in Greek and Hebrew alongside French and German. It indicates the contextualisation of MacDiarmid's 'Gaelic Idea' as it was, nestled between his former fixation on the modernization of Scots and the later domination of a holistic vision of world literature, signifying the point at which the local met the global.

In comparison with this, 'Lament for the Great Music' illustrates how the language might be used in speech, incorporating phrases rather than mere words. The reasoning for

[291] Attila Dósa, *Beyond Identity, New Horizons in Modern Scottish Poetry* (New York: Rodopi, 2009), p.11.
[292] *CP2*, p.1191.
[293] *CP2*, p.1164.

the use of Gaelic in the phrases quoted is not made explicit, and one can only assume that MacDiarmid felt them to be of particular relevance to the Gaelic situation as he saw it, or that they stemmed from a translation he was able to get his hands on. One such example is 'we see you no longer and are as body without soul, / *Nidh inmheadhonach idir bheith ann agus gan bheith ann!',* expressed in address to the MacCrimmons.[294] He translates this as 'Somewhat in a state between existence and non-existence', suggesting that in forgetting its ancient traditions and values, Scotland no longer exists in the same form as it once did, as though it lives in body but not in soul. Elsewhere in the same poem, MacDiarmid laments the days when the Ceol Mor was in its prime and when the pibroch was celebrated within the Gaelic world and within Scotland's culture:

> All this
> Only shows how far from the great music I am
> *Gabhlánach an rud an scéaluidheacht*[295]

This translates as 'Romances are involved in affairs'. Elsewhere he states, '*An mhaith do bhí ná bí dhi / An mhaih atá, tar tairse…'*, translated as 'The good that hath been, meddle not with; the good that now is dwell on that'.[296] His words here act as a reminder to overcome the hapless lamentation of the Celtic Twilight and to focus on the possibilities of modernism, whilst retaining respect for the language and culture of the past.

In other instances it is the Gaelic which MacDiarmid translates into English. One instance of this is in his reference to the well-known Gaelic proverb 'The world will come to an end / But love and music will last for ever', one of a number of alternative translations of '*This crìoch air an t-saoghal, ach mairidh gaol is ceòl'.*[297] Perhaps its popularity acts as reason for its quotation in English, indicative of his handpicking of pockets of culture which he wished to include in his reclamation.

These are in no sense the only examples of the presence of Gaelic within MacDiarmid's poetry. Whilst the political intentions behind his promotion of Gaelic are clarified in his journalism, his friendship and collaboration with MacLean clearly had a significant impact on his understanding of the language and his creativity in using it in his

[294] *CP1*, p.462.
[295] *CP1*, p.466.
[296] *CP1*, p.467.
[297] Ibid.

own poetry. In keeping with his efforts to represent and promote minority languages and cultures, the Gaelic language acted as another means through which he could approach this otherwise unfamiliar identity and, as he did with everything, enhance his knowledge of it in order to reclaim it for use in modern literature. The friendship with MacLean allowed him to do so in a more sensitive manner, demonstrating a willingness to build bridges over his own personal detachment from the Gaelic world. Arguably distanced due to his outsider status, he wished not to let this define him, but to instead fulfil the role of the sympathetic intellectual wishing to better understand and represent the complexity of his culture, society and nation.

Gunn conveys a similar understanding of language in his construction. In 1935, he expressed awareness of its importance to society, arguing in an article for *Scots Magazine* that 'as with the Vernacular, so with the adventurous spirit: it is dying. […] Instead of the living word on our lips, we want the dead word in a dictionary.'[298] His stance on the revitalization of Gaelic seems clear. However, Gunn's position in relation to the language, much like MacDiarmid's, is a contestable point. Despite growing up with a Gaelic speaking family, his knowledge of the language was 'sparse', proving 'insufficient' for interacting with locals in the Hebrides.[299] His characters, on the other hand, are predominantly native speakers. Although their stories are conveyed in English, it is Gaelic which shapes their experience, epitomizing Michael Newton's claim that 'Language helps to form a culture's worldview' and 'has an important symbolic role in marking group identity'.[300] Gaelic is highlighted in particular settings in which it can be presumed to have been present in Gunn's own experience –for example in church, amongst elders, or in song. It is brought to the fore in times of conflict, depicted as being more attuned to emotion, struggle and knowledge than the imperially imposed English. As such, it is a crucial feature of the world and identity that he constructs, despite his own limitations. It is difficult not to wonder why Gunn did not learn and write in the language which appears to form the backbone of his characters' identity and experience.

Lack of personal fluency aside, Gunn does establish the importance of language in novels such as *The Lost Glen*, despite its situation at a time when Gaelic usage had already

[298] Neil M. Gunn, 'Preserving the Scottish Tongue: A Legacy and How to Use it', pp.38-9 in *Scots Magazine* (Nov 1935), p.39.
[299] *OB*, p.31.
[300] Newton 2009, p.52.

declined. Use of the native tongue is indicated in conversations where emotions are heightened, such as in Donald and Ewan's outrage at the English-speaking Colonel, or when Alastair 'switched into urgent Gaelic'.[301] Elsewhere, the tension between Highlander and outsider perceptions of Gaelic is conveyed by the Colonel's story about a man whom he knew at college who 'pretended that he couldn't speak Gaelic' due to the ridicule he would suffer if he did. In *Butcher's Broom*, set 100 years prior, the decline of the language is more of a current issue, memories of its strengths more prominent in characters' minds.[302] It is portrayed less as a relic of the past and more as something which continues to form a central, albeit tragically disintegrating, part of the Riasgan's identity. Gunn comments extensively upon 'the old language' associated with individuals like Dark Mairi:

> it is an immensely old tongue, and a thousand years before Mairi it was richer in its knowledge, wider in its range, and was given to metaphysics and affairs of state. The thousand years have slowly pushed it back, have shut it up in the glens,where it has developed its instinct for human value, and may flash out of the mouth of a tempestuous fighter or grow silent in him who with fixed eyes stares through the material world and sees what takes place outside our notions of time and space.[303]

In this Gunn conveys the close affinity he sees as existing between the Gaelic language and experience, the tongue 'given to metaphysics and affairs of state', aligned with the traditional society and its way of functioning and thinking. Off the back of this, he writes that 'It could hardly be within God's irony that a world which had forgotten their very tongue should be concentrating all its forces of destruction upon them.'[304] It is a similar sentiment to that which dominates the writing of later Gaelic poets such as Iain Crichton Smith - 'He who loses his language, loses his world' – Gunn's concern resting predominantly in the human consequences of the language's loss.[305] This correlates with his wider outlook, as opposed to MacDiarmid who was more fascinated in the innate qualities of the language itself. Gunn proves his priority, once more, to be the realities of human experience, whilst MacDiarmid dwells on the ideas, words and politics which constitute such contexts.

Due to such preoccupations, Gunn embedded the Gaelic language within

[301] *TLG*, p.255; *TLG*, p.302.
[302] *TLG*, p.229.
[303] *BB*, p.14.
[304] *BB*, p.21.
[305] Crichton Smith 1986, p.67.

landscapes through the incorporation of Gaelic place names. As well as signposting the geographical locations of his novels, this also highlights a history of Gaelic in line with *dùthchas* and the environment, language an integral feature in characters' sense of belonging to and understanding of their origins. Gunn explores the linguistic debate through the learning of his characters. Kenn recognizes the presence of Gaelic within his environment as a connection to bygone generations:

> It was remarkable how the races that had gone to his making had each left their signature on the river bank [...] On one side of the harbour mouth the place-name was Gaelic, on the other side it was Norse. Where the lower valley broadened out to flat, fertile land the name was Norse, but the braes behind it were Gaelic.[306]

MacDiarmid also grappled with the coexistence of Gaelic and Norse in the Gaelic world, understanding that Gaelic culture constituted more than one language and identity, however this is confined primarily to the poetry which relates specifically to the Shetlands, and as such constitutes another discussion.

Finn in *Silver Darlings* similarly becomes aware of the multiplicity of the vernacular. Through his travels he grows to understand Doric 'pretty well', alongside being exposed to the island dialect of Lewis, where the preacher spoke in 'the finest, most sounding voice Finn had ever heard', his Gaelic 'flawless and inexorable.' [307] In Dunster, further South-East, he is out of his comfort zone of Highland languages, made vulnerable due to 'his real terror', a 'lack of English.'[308] Elie suffers the same experience during her time in the Lowlands, mocked by natives there who 'laughed at that, for they had no Gaelic.'[309] Reference to different territories of Scotland, highlighted in their difference due to language, helps Gunn to explore the nuances in the experience of the Gàidhealtachd both in and outwith the Gaelic world. Whilst on the one hand the Gaelic language encourages bonds within the community and a shared social identity it also isolates Gaels who choose to travel elsewhere. Perhaps it is due to this stigma of vulnerability, or the fear of not being accepted by the outside world, that Gunn does not concern himself with utilizing the language as a medium for his own creativity. The mystery of his choice will never be solved however, so this is mere speculation.

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[306] *HR*, p.52.
[307] *SD*, p.427; *SD*, p.367.
[308] *SD*, p.251.
[309] *BB,* p.146-7.

That said, criticism has analyzed the impact of Gaelic on Gunn's prose style, despite his decision to write in English. John Murray highlights the Gaelic classes Gunn had organized in his Inverness home of Larachan as indication of his effort to learn, and notes instances in which Gaelic speech patterns clearly influenced his English narrative.[310] He remarks in particular upon the use of the Gaelic colour palette, which distinguishes variations between grey/green/blue as part of its vocabulary, reinforcing Kurt Wittig's argument that 'The Gaelic basis of his style is apparent in the rhythms, sentence structure and idioms of the dialogue, but also, though less obviously, of the narrative.'[311] Gunn's evident awareness of linguistic rhythms combined with a respect for Gaelic speakers results in a sympathetic construction of the Gaelic world, comparably more 'authentic' than what preceded it, significant therefore as a creative and political project which Gunn attempted within his means. He may not have been a native speaker, but he wrote with the authority of somebody who was dedicated to the representation of what it was like to be one.

In the aspiration for 'authentic' documentation of a Gaelic world, both Gunn and MacDiarmid are at a disadvantage due to their lack of command with the native language. However, each man's curiosity and sympathetic appetite for the knowledge of their subjects ensures that their resultant literary constructions are remarkably sensitive. There is an interesting parallel to draw between their position and that of contemporary Gaelic poet, Meg Bateman. Born in Edinburgh and educated at Aberdeen University, Bateman began, much like Gunn or MacDiarmid, an outsider to the linguistic tradition of the Highlands. However she had what Ronald Black refers to as 'a yearning for a community that was not class-based, for a way of life that was less technological, and for a mode of expression that came more easily'.[312] It was a yearning which saw her attain a university degree in Gaelic, move to the Isle of Skye, and immerse herself in the culture of that world, such that her work in Gaelic is now read by a Gaelic audience and respected as though it were written by a native. Had Gunn or MacDiarmid immersed themselves as she did - or as Whyte, the biggest critic of Gunn's authority, did – or had they been *able* to, given the magnitude of the task and their lack of a university education, perhaps their

[310] Murray 2017, p.179.
[311] Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1978), p.24.
[312] Ronald Black (ed.) *An Tuil: Anthology of Twentieth-Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Polygon. 1999), p.815.

constructions would not prove so controversial.

Yet the fact they did not serves as testament to the fact that their vision did not end with the Gaelic world, both preoccupied with Scotland as a whole and, beyond that, the role of their small nation in the international literary scene. Thus it is important not to dismiss them due to their lack of Gaelic, that being an overly simplistic conclusion considering the research, effort and evaluation which went into their respective constructions. MacDiarmid's political championing of the vernacular and journalistic commitment to increasing awareness of Scotland's minority languages enlightens his reader as to the increasing frequency of its inclusion in his creations. Gunn's comparative commitment to the depiction of Gaelic speaking communities and recognition of its qualities illustrates that he, too, understood the value of language to the making of identity. Moreover, their interest in language bled into an awareness of traditional literature, the forms of which they incorporated as part of their construction of a Gaelic world.

Literature: Poem, Folklore & Myth

'Scottish literature today is therefore once more claiming separate recognition, as something not only contributing to English literature, but in many respects opposed to English literature and certainly with separate functions and a different destiny of its own. It claims recognition as a national movement, in unbroken descent from our racial beginnings – the inheritors of the traditions of Gaeldom on the one hand and the Old Makars on the other.'[313]
- Hugh MacDiarmid

Considering their awareness of traditional cultures, their campaign for literary revival, and their understanding of the value of the native tongue, it is only natural that Gaelic literature would feature within Gunn and MacDiarmid's constructions in one way or other. In 1936 Edwin Muir had argued that 'In poetry itself, apart from its great period, Scotland has little more than two forms to show: the lyric and the ballad'. [314] It was to this so-called 'great period', combined with appreciation for modern forms, which both men turned to for inspiration. Roderick Watson has considered the influence had on each man by Gaelic bards, giving specific credit to Duncan Ban MacIntyre's 'penchant for lengthy objective description' for MacDiarmid's poetic determination 'to list everything and anything that

[313] *Albyn*, p.60.
[314] Muir 1982, p.74.

had ever caught his magpie attention', as well as drawing the link between Gunn and traditional Gaelic literature due to their share fascination with the 'delight in the actuality of things, and [...] universals beyond them.'[315] This connection between reality as one perceives it, and the 'universals' which one imagined to be beyond it, was something which dogged Gunn and MacDiarmid throughout their careers, and it is present in their constructions of a Gaelic world too. It was an ambitious vision, to encompass such extremes, however both men were surely in agreement with T. S. Eliot's sentiment that 'modern poetry is supposed to be difficult', and it is hoped that in exploring each man's sensitive handling of such difficulties, through interaction with oral narrative, poetry, prose and song, a greater appreciation of their work will arise.[316]

MacDiarmid considered poetry to be the highest conceivable form of art, and during the 1930s and 40s this translated as admiration for Gaelic bards, the most extensive instance being 'In Talk with Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t'Saoir'. It is to the bard's era of literary greatness which MacDiarmid wishes to return, a time when he perceives poetry to have dealt with the issues of the common man, art created spontaneously out of the community rather than from intellectual centres. He discusses this in 'Our Gaelic Background':

> We must return
> To the ancient classical Gaelic poets. For in them
> The inestimable treasure is wholly in contact
> With the immense surface of the unconscious.[317]

MacDiarmid considers the writing of Ban MacIntyre specifically as 'An art learnt not from books but from life'.[318] It relied on

> Not town-folk's speech, flat like the rest of their natures,
> But the power that can speak to the heart of others
> With that faculty of sheer description
> Which not only tells *what* a thing is, but at least
> Incidentally goes far towards telling *why*.[319]

The poem also refers to eighteenth century poets Rob Donn and Alexander MacDonald.

[315] Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland: The Twentieth Century* (2nd ed.) (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.49; ibid., p.85.
[316] T. S. Eliot, ''Difficult' Poetry', pp.92-4 in Hayward 1953, p.92.
[317] *CP1*, p.664.
[318] *CP2*, p.1098.
[319] *CP2*, p.1099.

Neither man was 'educated', nor was Ban MacIntyre, who was illiterate.[320] Despite this, all succeeded in producing texts of note, illustrating the disparity between academic 'intelligence' or 'intellect' and creative 'genius'. This indicates the kind of traditional values which MacDiarmid respected and prioritized in the creation of his own poetry, values which could not be taught but which were natural to the Gaelic world and would prove crucial to the creation of a new progressive national literature.

Other Celtic bards are mentioned elsewhere, for example 'MacCruitin, O'Heffernan, O'Hosey' in 'Direadh I' and the Irish poet Fearghal in 'Lament for the Great Music'.[321] MacDiarmid's journalism from the time reinforces the argument that he looked to poets of the past as inspiration for his own cultural movement, further proved by the fact that he wrote entire articles devoted to individual writers, an honour he rewarded to very few poets. It is evident that MacDiarmid devoted considerable time and attention during the 1930s to bettering his own knowledge of Gaelic literature and to spreading that consciousness through documentation of what he learnt in his own writing. The incorporation of this awareness in his construction of a Gaelic world emphasizes the importance of poetry to the society in which it breeds and flourishes.

Alongside this, MacDiarmid expresses an awareness of legend as an alternative form of traditional Gaelic literature, and which should be remembered and respected as such in modern culture. 'Lament for the Great Music' references the legendary names of Fionn, Grainne and Oisin. MacDiarmid, imagining the MacCrimmons' pibroch and reflecting upon Gaeldom's literary and legendary past, considers how

> To remember the great music and to look
> At Scotland and the world to-day is to hear
> *An Barr Buadh* again where there are none to answer.[322]

'An Barr Buadh' was the horn used by Fionn to summon his battalions. Mere lines later he also mentions '*Oisin d'éis na Féine'*, described in the notes as a 'withered babbling old man, whose love for Ireland made him return there from Tir na n-Òg'.[323] MacDiarmid's recognition of legend and myth, as an example of traditional literature embedded in the

[320] Illiterate and unable to document his poetry himself, Ban MacIntyre's creations were recited from memory throughout his lifetime and transcribed only when he dictated them, shortly before his death.
[321] *CP2*, p.1167; CP1, p.475.
[322] *CP1*, p.463.
[323] Ibid.

Gaelic landscape and community, indicates MacDiarmid's comprehension of the multi-faceted nature of Gaelic culture throughout time. The situation of Gaeldom and Scotland alongside other legendary lands implies his simultaneous perceptions of it as superior to the rest of Britain – an entirely different 'Empire' – and yet lost and irretrievable:

> Sumeria is buried in the desert sands,
> Atlantis in the ocean waves – happier these
> Than Scotland, for all is gone, no travesty
> Of their ancient glories live
> On the lips of degenerate sons as here.[324]

What is presented here is a harsh assessment of the nation which he devoted his life to representing, however it indicates the critical, dismissive attitude which MacDiarmid maintained towards the majority of writers writing before and alongside him about Scotland and about the Gaelic world. Distancing himself from his contemporaries, including Gunn, MacDiarmid looked instead to the era of perceived Gaelic greatness for inspiration in his work as he sought to reclaim that 'relationship between freedom and genius, between freedom and thought'.[325] The 'Gaelic Idea' acted as a bridge from modernity back to such classical values in literature.

Nonetheless, regardless of his contempt for other writers in the field, MacDiarmid did not perceive the revitalization of Gaelic culture to be a lost cause. His writing features frequent, albeit vague, references to 'the Gaelic genius', alluding to the persistence of artistic values and capabilities which were innate to the Highlands and Islands, formed and propagated thanks to traditional literature and an enduring sense of identity. In light of this, he encourages Gaeldom to utilise literature to its advantage in equipping itself for modernity. This is expressed in the 'satiri[cal]' poem 'Good-bye Twilight', dedicated to Neil M. Gunn himself, in which he pleads 'Out from your melancholy moping, your impotence, Gaels […] Back into the real world again'.[326] Literature of the recent past, most notably the 'melancholy moping' of the Celtic Twilight, is of no interest to MacDiarmid, rather it is the ancient and modern which he hopes to fuse in the reconstruction of a new traditional culture, recognizing that the most important artistic values will have endured:

> the treasures of the Gaelic genius

[324] *CP1*, p.467.
[325] Glen 1970, p.66.
[326] *IS*, p.xiv; *CP2*, p.1126.

> So little regarded in Scotland today.
> Yet emerging unscathed from their long submergence,
> Impregnably rooted in the most monstrous torrents[327]

Belief in such 'genius' constitutes a considerable part of MacDiarmid's 'Gaelic Idea', alluding to hope in the cultures which he strives to help preserve:

> For the true spirit is still living here and there, and perhaps
> The day is not far distant when the Scottish people
> Will enter into this heritage, and in so doing
> Enrich the heritage of all mankind again.[328]

MacDiarmid's respect and admiration for native creation dominates his poetry and politics with regards to his vision of future progress, integral to his wider project for national and world literature. It was his argument that the reversal of literary representations of the Gaelic world though revitalization of the 'Gaelic genius' was equally as important as the revival of the Gaelic language.

Gunn shared MacDiarmid's interest in legend and folklore, his characters and environments shrouded in its mystery and rhetoric despite their otherwise realist construction. Such traditional forms of literature contribute to his communities' understanding of their identity throughout history - in *Butcher's Broom* legendary civilizations of the past, learnt about through poetry such as 'Paradise of the Aged Bard', are as important as real ones.[329] They, too, contribute to how the Riasgan perceive their position in the world:

> In this darkness of the world identity is lost and time becomes one with the monstrous beginnings of life, which legend recreates in such beings as centaur or water kelpie; or, receding still further, becomes one with the dark spirits, the Nameless Ones, who were before light or creation was.[330]

As discussed in Chapter 1, there is a symbolic thread – *dùthchas* - which sustains Gunn's Gaelic individuals and communities throughout time, and this is partly thanks to the legendary filter through which they understand history, causing reality and the ineffectual to become confused.

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[327] *CP2*, p.1187.
[328] *CP2*, p.1126.
[329] *BB*, p.55.
[330] *BB*, pp.297-8.

The representation of modern Gaelic literature is less of a priority to Gunn than it is to MacDiarmid, and there is less evidence of his reaching out to Gaelic speakers and creators to bridge the gap of understanding and to learn. Contemporary literature from the Highlands, poetry which was most likely written in English, was mentioned only briefly and unenthusiastically in 'The Gentle Rain from Heaven':

> From my trip to the West, I had brought back some books of modern poetry from a man who finds in poetry a natural enrichment of life. Sometimes I must confess I read this "modern" poetry with the same sort of reluctance with which I approach a crossword puzzle. Once I get going it's not so bad.[331]

Kenn shares Gunn's sceptical attitude towards poetry, particularly that of the present day:

> If poetry is the highest expression of literature, how is it that the modern age has produced no great poetry, no poetry anyway that dominates intelligent minds, holds them with a sense of being an absolute – as it has done in the past?[332]

It is arguable that other literature is not as important in Gunn's construction due to the foundations of his understanding in personal experience and social interaction, as opposed to MacDiarmid's method of reading and research. That said, traditional Gaelic poems are included within his own texts, as mentioned. Similarly, one is reminded of Finn's 'Gaelic poem that described all the different kinds of waves there are' and his disbelief at its existence for surely 'no poem could describe them all.'[333] There is a link to be made here between such a poem, which in its native language is able to depict the environment in which it originated perfectly, and MacDiarmid's own fascination with the abilities of Gaelic speech, demonstrated in 'Direadh I'. However such written literature, acknowledged fleetingly as representative of Gaelic traditional culture, is attributed minimal attention in Gunn's construction.

In comparison, Gunn elevates the role of the oral storyteller, inspired by stories he would have heard himself when living and travelling in the Highlands. This suggests a belief in folklore as a more authentic form of Gaelic literature than the likes of poetry. The ultimate storyteller is *Silver Darling's* Finn, carrying something in his being of the legendary

[331] Neil M. Gunn, 'The Gentle Rain from Heaven' in *HP*, p.163.
[332] *HR*, p.214.
[333] *SD*, p.298.

Fionn McCoull. It thrills him to recount the tales of his adventures at sea, to dramatize the happenings of his own life much like Gunn does in his novels: 'Never before had Finn known the power of the story-teller. The smashing seas, the screaming birds, the black rock-faces, and the terrible thirst that had come upon them.'[334] His enjoyment highlights the freedom of creative license and 'power' that the storyteller is able to exert when constructing his own version of reality, something both Gunn and MacDiarmid were aware of themselves.

Others who share the joy of storytelling are Taran the Bard in *Sun Circle* and Tomas the Drover in *Butcher's Broom.* Taran is specifically granted the responsibility of documenting the community's tales as a bard, illustrating the significance that Gunn believes the storyteller to hold within society. He maintains a special position amongst his peers, respected and understood as the one who bears the emotional turmoil of the community through the memorialization of their experiences: 'it was no part of the province of a bard to fight. His indeed was to suffer the elation of victory or the agonies of defeat.'[335] Through his characterization, as in Finn's, Gunn epitomizes the power and the thrill of artistic creation, reinforcing the importance of storytelling in the Gaelic world and the propagation of culture through the dedication of such individuals :

> Many bards are fiery and given to boasting, but Taran was not one of these. Yet was there the deep note of boasting when he spoke of the heroes and battles of the past; in the quietness it was a booming, stirring note, with a strange and lingering excitement.[336]

Tomas the Drover's tales of war and clearance are similarly devoted pages of retelling in *Butcher's Broom*, illustrating the manner in which stories of real experience were disseminated and remembered within the traditional Gaelic community.[337] Gunn's attitude towards his fictional bards and storytellers is evocative of MacDiarmid's respect for the Gaelic poets of the eighteenth century, prioritizing imagination and memory where the poet prioritizes knowledge.

Both Gunn and MacDiarmid evidently understood the importance of the literary and

[334] *SD*, p.448.
[335] *SC*, p.162.
[336] *SC*, p.87.
[337] See *BB* pp.4-5 for tales of war and pp. 417-19 for tales of clearance as two prominent examples of lengthy storytelling.

oral tradition to the Gaelic experience. Their constructions, although to different degrees, illustrate the roles within Gaelic communities of legend and storytelling, and the importance of literature as means for the propagation of culture. As writers who shared a comparable vision of their own duty and role as documenters of the Gaelic world, it is natural that the literature of others would be included as a focal part of the cultures that they constructed. In order to create a holistic picture of the Gaelic world neither could ignore the literature which had influenced them, not even that which they disagreed with. It was in the nature of an artist to be affected by the art he himself experienced, as much as by that which he himself created and envisioned. Whatever MacDiarmid and Gunn hoped to achieve, their own work would never fully be free of the influence of other forms of literature, and it is significant that both not only accepted this in their constructions of a Gaelic world, but positively celebrated it.

Music: Pibroch & Lament

'the Gaelic culture has produced music under every kind of disruption and oppression, and the picture is made the more incredible when one remembers that half the landmass and half the population of Scotland was still Gaelic-speaking at the end of the sixteenth century.'[338]
- John Purser

Faith, history, art, and whisky all impacted the cultural climate of Gunn and MacDiarmid's Gaelic worlds, however the final area this thesis focusses on is the role of traditional music. It will investigate the writers' incorporation of both its methods of creation and its functions in the community, lending particular attention to the forms of pibroch and lament, thereby encompassing both instrumental and lyrical forms of musical production.

MacDiarmid's interest in pibroch is most evident in the poem dedicated to its memory, 'Lament for the Great Music'. The text explores his anguish over society's loss of the 'Ceol Mor' and its creators, and his loneliness in feeling that he is one of very few left in Scotland who truly understand its value. He 'marvel[s] / At the music that towered into Eternity from them', in awe of the qualities in the pibroch which endure throughout time,

[338] John Purser, *Scotland's Music: A History of the Traditional and Classical Music of Scotland from Earliest Times to the Present Day* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1992), p.125.

similar to 'The cornet solo of our Gaelic islands' at the end of 'Island Funeral' which 'Will sound out every now and again / Through all eternity.'[339] To express an admiration of pipe music in the context of constructing a Gaelic identity and culture is not original, of course, and MacDiarmid is careful to maintain his distance from popularized perceptions and representations of bagpipes. John Purser explores the relationship between bardic culture and pibroch, drawing the link between the two in a manner which MacDiarmid conveys, illustrated side-by-side as being uniquely suited to the documentation of Gaelic feeling.[340]

Just as with literature in Scotland, MacDiarmid recognizes the quality of bagpipe music to have deteriorated. His argument is reminiscent of Yeats' claim in the 'The Second Coming', that 'The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity'; pibroch, having been popularized, had lost sight of the element which made it so special, now only celebrated by 'the worst' in their 'intensity'.[341] Referring to its modern forms he claims that 'It is equally absurd to say that most of those / Keenest on pipe-music only know its degenerate forms', adding satirically that 'We have no use for the great music. / All we need is a few good-going tunes.' [342] The 'We' here represents a generation of Scots that he wishes not to be associated with. In address to the MacCrimmons he apologizes that

> your music
> As I hear it is not as you did and may well be
> Unrecognisable to you.[343]

MacDiarmid's main emphasis throughout the poem is on the loss of traditional forms of culture, fitting therefore that he titles it a 'Lament', as he mourns for the past. Crichton Smith echoes the sentiment somewhat in his essay 'Real People in a Real Place', as he too laments the deterioration of Gaelic music:

> the songs sung at modern ceilidhs have nothing at all to do with those sung at the old ceilidhs. […] The songs have become nostalgic exercises, a method of freezing time, […] The ceilidh as it is now practised is a treacherous weakening of the present, a memorial, a tombstone on what has once been, pipes playing in a graveyard.[344]

[339] *CP1*, p.469; ibid., p.582.
[340] Purser 1992, p.139.
[341] W. B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming', pp.210-11 in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: MacMillan & Co Ltd., 1965), p.211.
[342] *CP1*, p.465; ibid., p.467.
[343] Ibid., p.466.
[344] Iain Crichton Smith, 'Real People in a Real Place', pp.13-70 in Smith 1986, p.23.

Gunn expresses similar dissatisfaction with the modernization of traditional music in an article written on the annual Mod for *Scots Magazine* in 1937: 'no real Gael, in his heart, believes in the Mod. […] here in truth are precious things of the spirit, and he knows that the life that bred them is dying.'[345] The similarities between these comments suggests that the sorrow expressed by Gunn and MacDiarmid is not merely an outsider's ignorant sentimentalisation, but a view in line with Gaelic natives and artists themselves, thus more respectable despite their own debatable positions. Classic pibroch signifies to MacDiarmid what the ceilidh does for Crichton Smith and pre-Mod music for Gunn, a time when art and music arose organically out of the emotion and experience of the Gaelic world, unmatched by modern translations which do not boast the same connection to the reality of human experience.

Classical culture – including that of Gaeldom - was considered by MacDiarmid to be that which sprung out of the community spontaneously rather than from 'habits arising in privileged centres'.[346] He considers how in pibroch this manifests as 'the jubilant sound signifying that the heart conceives / What is unable to express.'[347] It is not only 'jubilance' that the pipes are able to express, but also feelings of lamentation or hope, the extremes of emotion which MacDiarmid most closely associated with the Gaelic experience. 'Good- bye Twilight' transforms the woe of 'Lament for the Great Music' into a frustrated determination, addressing not just the MacCrimmons but the entirety of Gaeldom past and present. He calls 'Back to the great music, Scottish Gaels. Too long / You have wallowed as in the music of Delius', highlighting Delius as the musical equivalent of the Celtic Twilight's sombre fatalism, in comparison with the refreshing energy of Sibelius.[348] He continues, 'Back to the great music, you fools – the classical Gaelic temper!'[349] In calling them 'fools', his disappointment in the Celtic Twilight and its romanticisation of the Gael is implicit, however the poem as a whole leaves the reader with faith in MacDiarmid's belief in his own regenerative efforts. Inspired by the pibroch, his resolution to achieve the aims of his vision is apparent.

[345] Neil M. Gunn, 'The Ferry of the Dead', *Scots Magazine* (Oct 1937), pp.310-314 in McCulloch 2004, p.314.
[346] *CP1*, p.478.
[347] *CP1*, p.474.
[348] *CP2*, p.1124.
[349] *CP2*, p.1125.

The ability of the pibroch to fire men into action in the past is not lost on MacDiarmid either, for he recognizes the critical role that the instrument held in war, and as such in the shaping of culture's place within the Gaelic world throughout history. Reminiscing on the events of Bannockburn, Waterloo and Dargai, he characterizes the pibroch alongside the fearsome energy and fiery exhilaration of battle:

> Others will tell you that men of the Isles charged
> At Bannockburn to the skirl of the pipes,
> That the sound of the pibroch rode loud and shrill
> Where the fire was hottest at Waterloo[350]

This said, he simultaneously recognizes the strength that is carried in the 'great music', and the melancholy of loss to which they relate, equally as relevant in the setting of war. It is epitomized in a later poem, 'Bagpipe Music': 'The bagpipes – they are screaming and they are sorrowful. / There is a wail in their merriment, and cruelty in their triumph.'[351] Purser discusses the innately Gaelic relationship between bagpipes and marching, explaining how 'Since the Highland bagpipes are at their worst when stopping and starting there is a strong incentive to keep going', rendering them the ideally suited instrument for endurance and the rousing of troops in battle.[352] Piper and pibroch are embedded within the well-known narrative of tragedy that surrounds the Gaelic world and their history:

> it was only when the piper came down the nave
> Pouring forth the lament which enshrines the heroes of Flodden
> And all the dead in all the Floddens of History
> Only then did the eyes grow dim with tears,
> The sob rise in the throat[353]

It is this alignment with the rawest forms of human emotion which make them so utterly eternal to MacDiarmid, such that

> yesterday, and to-day, and forever
> The bagpipes commit to the winds of Heaven
> The deepest emotions of the Scotsman's heart
> In joy and sorrow, in war and peace.[354]

[350] *CP1*, p.468.
[351] *CP1*, p.665.
[352] Purser 1992, p.138.
[353] *CP1*, pp.468-9.
[354] *CP1*, p.469.

They were an integral part of battle when people fought for 'authentic' values, something which following his own experience on the frontlines in an imperialist war, he would consider forgotten 'In the din of our modern world'.[355] He believed that

> no army in the world,
> Would do that to-day – nor ever again –
> For they do not know and there is no means of telling them[356]

The classical pibroch represents in MacDiarmid's poetry a time when society was more in touch with their emotions, not just as individuals, but collectively. It is this aspect of shared understanding and creation in culture which make piping and lament so important to MacDiarmid's Gaelic world, just as traditional poetry, legend and language are.

Neil Gunn shares with MacDiarmid this admiration of communal art and culture, as evidenced by his own incorporation of pibroch as an integral presence in the Gaelic world that he constructs. He expresses a similar reverence for the MacCrimmons in particular in *Butcher's Broom*, when Colin calls them 'the two greatest pipers in the world of that time, of the time before it, and of the time after; and there will never be their like again until the end of the world.'[357] As with MacDiarmid, it is their ability to express the inexpressible that resonates with Gunn and he too depicts this through their inclusion in scenes when human emotion is at its rawest and any other art form would not suffice. One example is when Colin hears Old Roy playing Patrick Mòr MacCrimmon's *Lament for the Children*, illustrated in the beautifully poetic prose that is so remarkable about Gunn's writing:

> Sometimes these emotions grew beyond enduring and the body for relief could have stalked on great legs and stretched its arms to the sky, crying, crying, and scattering the stars; but more often – ah, more often – it curled over like a boulder and cried into the earth, while the notes of the music, like the waves of the world, broke over it; while at still other times, the living breath drew the notes in and sent them forth from the breast quivering like an instrument on which the white cold lights of the northern world advanced and withdrew, rayed out and vanished, flickered and died.[358]

Purser highlights the dual ability of the bagpipes to be both 'warlike and raucous' and, in

[355] *CP1*, p.582.
[356] *CP1*, p.470.
[357] *BB,* p.240.
[358] *BB*, p.397.

examples such as *Lament for the Children*, to 'convey both anguish and tenderness, with a power and intensity that few could match.'[359] In Gunn's reference, the character of Old Angus goes on to remark that 'it's not himself that's playing now; it's his sorrow', suggesting a strength in the emotion and the music that transcends the mere physical ability of the body.[360] Much as he applied animism to the landscape, Gunn also applies living qualities to this traditional music form, as though it has a personality itself which is created and exists in harmony with the lives and identities of his characters.

Shared memory is integral to Gunn's construction of the Gaelic community, race, and culture. Music, in particular, is highlighted throughout his novels as a method in which emotions of the past can be preserved and understood by future generations: 'No wonder the ghost of the race walked! The old Gaelic music, the pipe tunes, the long heave of the sea, the green glens, the mountains, the brown moors.'[361] When Gunn includes pipes within his narrative he does so to evoke a reminder of the connection which unites Gaels as a race throughout time:

> Some of the notes hung in the air so long that time gave up and died. But more notes came, and they strung themselves one after the other until they went round the world. In this way the world was enchanted.[362]

Pibroch and lament are intertwined in his Gaelic world just as they are in MacDiarmid's, used to highlight the memories of sorrow and loss which haunt Gaeldom past and present, 'a strange ache, a poignancy akin to pain.'[363]

Elsewhere Gunn explores the uniqueness of traditional Gaelic music further. *The Atom of Delight* features reference to the image of 'a Highland girl sing[ing] one of the traditional Gaelic songs of loss and doom', a very real memory which influences the inclusion of music forms in his fiction.[364] The image of the singing girl, much like the piper piping, recurs throughout his construction of a Gaelic world. She translates as Mary in *The Lost Glen,* whose 'singing voice had touched things in [Ewan] for a thousand years'.[365] Also as Elie in *Butcher's Broom,* who

[359] Purser 1992, p.141.
[360] Ibid.
[361] *TLG*, p.339.
[362] *SC*, p.361.
[363] *HR*, p.166.
[364] *AD*, p.138.
[365] *TLG*, p.341.

> sang in a tongue and a rhythm that were not merely countless centuries old, but had been born out of the earth on which they starved and feasted and against which their feet pressed now, so that all the millions of influences and refinements that had shapes themselves to make the incommunicable understood were from the very first note altogether at her service.[366]

Evocative of MacDiarmid – 'the Inaccessible Pinnacle is not inaccessible'- the emphasis is on the achievement of the formerly unthought of, the making of the 'incommunicable understood', and on the shared nature of community struggle as the foundation of creation.[367] Gunn, much like his narrator in 'Pure Chance', signifies how one need have 'no knowledge of the Gaelic words' in order to 'understand their emotional content so overwhelmingly', classical culture rooted in emotion and experience and thus accessible to man regardless of education.[368] He conveys traditional Gaelic singing, much like the pibroch, as possessing qualities specific to the Gaelic people and environments from which it originated. Gunn and MacDiarmid both expressed a respect and admiration for traditional Gaelic music and the central role which it played within the community, pertinent to the nature of the Gaelic experience and history. Neither however resigns it to the past, instead ensuring that its qualities are conveyed through their writing.

It was the forms of traditional culture 'born out of the earth on which they starved and feasted' which both writers foregrounded in their reconstructions of a modern Gaelic world and culture. Their constructions similarly preface language, literature and music as crucial components of *dùthchas,* as much so as community, economy and landscape, and both writers promote the need in Scotland to reflect upon the creation and representation of these. Language was crucial to cultural and political progress, Gaelic crucial to how individuals and communities communicated and understood their own identities. Literature, too, is highlighted by both writers as an integral feature of how culture propagates from generation to generation, specifically in how the Gaelic world remembers and represents its history and its worth. The Highland phenomena of pibroch and lament also illustrate how Gaelic communities formulated music through the shared experience of struggle, and are included within Gunn and MacDiarmid's constructions in light of this potential. Subsequently it is highlighted how, as a result, these traditional creations carried

366 *BB*, p.293.
367 *CP2*, p.1193.
368 Neil M. Gunn, 'Pure Chance', *WH*, p.195.

in their being the rawest emotions of successive Gaels, emotions which must be understood and acknowledged in order to achieve progress and tap into that which was, and continues to be, integral to the essence of an entire race. In researching and appreciating traditional Gaelic cultures, and incorporating these into their own constructions, Gunn and MacDiarmid contributed to an ongoing push for improved representation of the Gaelic world and the traditional components which constituted Gaelic art and the Gaelic experience.

Conclusion

The investigation into Gunn and MacDiarmid's handling of the 'Gaelic Idea' that this thesis has conducted has shown that these writers deserve not only to be related in terms of their personal relationship during the 'Scottish Renaissance' but also in terms of their enduring visions, their work from the 1930s and 40s proving that they pursued similar goals regarding the revitalisation of Scottish Gaelic culture. Their comparable reconstructions of a Gaelic world followed Gunn's call for 'Not a revival of the old, but the old carried forward, evolved, into the new, and the creative instinct at work once more.'[369] Like John MacInnes, Gaelic scholar and champion of the Gaelic world, they demonstrated an understanding of the fact that 'There are thus certain areas of Gaelic tradition in which elements of great antiquity co-exist with those that reflect the history of more recent times.'[370] Both men's work illustrates the difficulty of the task they tackled, set on preserving the ancient qualities of the Gaelic world and its roots in legend and myth, whilst also attempting to avoid the trap of sentimentalism and to portray an 'authentic' experience which was sensitive to the experience and memory of those involved.

Whilst their supposed lack of authority to document an unfamiliar world has received criticism in the past, it is hoped that the counter-argument to this has been highlighted. Rather than being dismissed as the appropriations of outsiders, their creations deserve to be analyzed as researched and sensitive projects with the wellbeing of a people and a culture as their driving force. Their apparent ignorance to the Gaelic tongue and reluctance to learn it can be explained by the fact that they were not writing for a Gaelic audience. Was it an oversight on their part? Perhaps. Is it difficult to comment upon this considering my own inability to speak for a Gaelic readership? Certainly. However, to immerse themselves fully in that culture and language as others have done would have been to forego their broader vision, their ties to other regions of Scotland, and their understanding of the modern diaspora and diversification of the Gaelic community. Moreover, the 'Gaelic Idea' was consistently aspirational, and both Gunn and MacDiarmid wished to achieve more than one lifetime could permit them to do so. This is clear within the definition which MacDiarmid offers for his own 'Gaelic Idea', and it is clear in Gunn's endeavour to encompass such a vast scope of experience within his construction. I would not

[369] *TLG*, p.340.
[370] John MacInnes, 'Gaelic Poetry and Historical Tradition', pp.3-33 in Newton 2006, p.5.

consider their ambition a downfall.

Alan Bold alludes to MacDiarmid's aspiration to document the Gaelic world fairly: 'Had he been given the opportunity, he said, he would have written his poetry in Gaelic.'[371] Had they both had the opportunities, the time, or the education, perhaps Gunn and MacDiarmid would *both* have written in Gaelic, and we'd be faced with a very different set of works and set of arguments to deal with today. Speculation is unhelpful. The fact is that despite their limitations, Gunn and MacDiarmid's reconstructive efforts helped to reclaim and revitalize representation of the Gaelic world. Writing in English ensured their efforts were accessible to an increased Scottish and international audience, and the literary and political value implicit in Gaelic culture and identity was exposed to countless others who, like them, had not been born into it. Gunn and MacDiarmid did not allow their individual limitations to stop them from being dedicated to the cause of reclaiming the Gaelic narrative in literature.

As such, both writers can be considered to have instrumentalized the Gaelic world to a degree, each having utilized its communities, landscapes and culture in the pursuit of their own particular vision. This ought not to be considered an act of ignorant appropriation nor should it lessen the value of their work. Both constructed a literature which challenged the reader's expectations by introducing political interjection upon their subject, thereby encouraging the reader to reflect upon the issues raised in their work, and even to do their own further research. Gunn and MacDiarmid's ideological backgrounds are evident in their poetry and prose, the rhetoric of nationalism and socialism woven into their writing, alongside an understanding of the literary movements which they had been influenced by and disagreed with. It was from the clutches of these popular movements – namely the Celtic Twilight and Kailyardism – which they endeavoured to reclaim the Gaelic narrative and to 'reconstruct' the literary representation and perception of the Gaelic world as a result. The idea of 'reconstruction' denoted by the title of the thesis is pivotal to understanding Gunn and MacDiarmid's refashioning of a popular rhetoric with particular aims in mind.

While the writers maintained distinct styles and practices, there is inarguably a strong affinity between their projects of reconstruction. Although they employed different

[371] Bold 1988, p.10.

mediums and exercised different priorities – Gunn's being the human and MacDiarmid's knowledge – the ultimate goal which fueled their passion with regards to the Gaelic world remained consistent in the 1930s and 40s. MacDiarmid argued against this fact, maintaining well into subsequent decades that 'we are at opposite poles in all our ideas'.[372] Gunn, however, less partial to conflict than his contemporary, understood the commonality in what they both attempted:

> pick out any paragraph in HR [*Highland* River] and discover for me in it this "vagueness" of Celtic mysticism. I know it cannot be done. Because any paragraph there I can analyse to elements real to the psyche and designed by me for some artistic – or other – purpose – precisely as you design your poems. My final design may be a different one from yours – you may not like it – but that does not affect the reality of the process in each mind.[373]

It is when their work focusses most self-consciously on the 'reality of the process', that Gunn and MacDiarmid's respective constructions are most striking. Each emphasizes an appreciation of the Gaelic world due to its roots in classical culture, traditional community structure, and emphasis of the relationship between man and his natural environment, alluding to the overarching belief in an 'undefiled' society which existed prior to the corruption of modernity, imperialism and Capitalism.[374] Although I have been firm in my advocacy of the need to separate Gunn and MacDiarmid from prior romanticisation and sentimentalisation of the Highlands, it cannot be dismissed that their constructions, too, relied to an extent on the pursuit of an idealized society like that which they believed to have existed in the past, uncorrupted by modernity. The political understanding which MacDiarmid in particular approached his task with however is what separates him from those who came before him, as this idealisation was accompanied by an indication of the practical steps necessary for the practical realization of progress towards that goal. In this case that meant the modernization of Gaelic language such that it could be taught in schools and used in politics and popular culture, and the elevation of traditional Gaelic cultures and values within Scotland's culture and society.

Following the 1930s Gunn continued in his commitment to depiction of the Gaelic experience, however his novels broadened their focus to encompass other regions of Scotland and an increasing interest in Zen philosophy. MacDiarmid primarily used the

[372] Hugh MacDiarmid, in a letter to Neil M. Gunn (10.12.54), pp.270-272 in Bold 1984, p.271.
[373] Neil M. Gunn, in a letter to C. M. Grieve (3.12.37), pp.53-55 in Pick 1987, p.54.
[374] *CP1*, p.208.

'Gaelic Idea' as a leeway into exploration of world language and world literature, however retained the understanding and appreciation of the Gaelic world which he had obtained in these years. The men's literary paths expound more similarities than they were even aware of themselves. Hindsight offers a clearer perspective on their comparable achievements, and it is hoped that the discussion of this thesis has offered some enlightenment on their agreements and disparities, and why it is so important to how Scottish literature has evolved since then. The development of national and international interest in the Gaelic world in the years following Gunn and MacDiarmid's efforts is suggestive of their influence on the literary and political environment in Scotland and beyond.

One just needs to look to the creation of the Gaelic Renaissance in the 1960s and 70s, including writers whom Gunn and MacDiarmid directly influenced such as MacLean and Crichton Smith, as evidence of the value of their work and its impact on Scottish literature. More recently Scotland has seen contemporary poetry by the likes of Meg Bateman, the publication of numerous Gaelic anthologies - many of which provide English translations - and the rise of the Gaelic novel. Additional developments in wider culture include the arrival of Gaelic language television – i.e. BBC Alba, founded in 2008. – and increased efforts in politics and education to preserve the Gaelic heritage. Namely, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig was founded in 1973 as a further education college to propagate the use of Gaelic at academic levels, and the Glasgow Gaelic school was established in 2006 to encourage revitalization of Gaelic outwith the traditional confines of the 'Gaelic world'. Just last year Bòrd na Gaidhlig launched the nation's Gaelic Language Plan, set on increasing the learning and usage of Gaelic across Scotland.

This is by no means to say that Neil Gunn and Hugh MacDiarmid deserve full, or even extensive, credit for these developments. However, it is undeniable that both men deserve a place within the narrative of this evolution of Gaelic representation, an ongoing process into which they were sure to insert what they had to offer and say. Each, in his own way, proved that the Gaelic world, along with its culture and language, were worth holding on to in the modern age, deserving of fairer treatment and acknowledgement than it had been awarded previously. In a time when native Gaelic writers might not have had the confidence to face this task themselves, Gunn and MacDiarmid initiated the conversation and gave them a platform, lending their weight in the international

modernist scene to the heralding of this minority culture and creating space for their own voices to eventually take the stage and multiply.

There is much more that could be said on the topic of the 'Gaelic Idea', much more nuance and investigation into its influence or comment upon its execution which simply exceeds the bounds of this thesis. It is hoped that this project's research will prompt further discussion of and appreciation for Gunn and MacDiarmid's Gaelic worlds. They took Scotland out of the Celtic Twilight and introduced it to the Gaelic sun. For that, their reconstructive efforts proved formative in the evolution of Scottish literature ever since, and they deserve greater critical attention than they have thus far received.

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