

SCOTTISH AND INTERNATIONAL THEMES
IN THE WORK OF
EDWIN MUIR AND NEIL M. GUNN

by

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Volume I

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SUMMARY

This thesis investigates the work of the twentieth century Scottish writers Edwin Muir and Neil M. Gunn, with particular reference to the nature, significance and inter-relationship of Scottish and international themes and influences in their work.

The Introduction briefly discusses the twentieth century literary, philosophical and political ambience in which each found himself and indicates similarities and dissimilarities in the way each responded to the pressures of the Scottish and the international modernist contexts, both in his personal life and in his work.

The first part of the thesis investigation is devoted to the poetry and the literary and social criticism of Edwin Muir. Section one deals with the 'Apprentice Collections': the early poetry from First Poems (1925) to Journeys and Places (1937). It points to the influence of German Romanticism in First Poems and to the influence of Scottish Calvinism throughout the early collections. It shows Muir attempting to distance himself from personal and religious preoccupations by the employment of Greek myth as metaphor, and demonstrates his slow mastery of an initially inadequate poetic technique.

Section two investigates Muir's mature poetry of the war years, from The Narrow Place of 1943 to The Labyrinth of 1949, the latter being the fruit of his bitter experiences in post-war Prague. In this section, international themes - both in the topical sense and in the universal philosophical sense - predominate, while one observes also that pre-occupation with Calvinist doctrine which is consistent in Muir's work

and which is overtly expressed in the early work, being transmuted into the preoccupation with the impersonal vengeance of fascist and totalitarian political systems.

The third section deals with Muir's final collection of poetry, One Foot in Eden (1956) and with the posthumous 'Poems not previously collected'. Again, the universal theme of the human journey - both in its timeless spiritual context and in the topical context of the twentieth century post-war world under threat of nuclear war - dominates the poetry. The life-denying qualities of Scottish Calvinism are contrasted with the humanity of the Catholicism Muir found in Rome, and the theme of Scotland is, as in earlier work also, seen to be one strand in the universal Fall of Man theme. As in section two, the maturity of Muir's poetry in these late collections and his increasing employment of a symbolic allegorical method, is demonstrated.

Muir's criticism is discussed in two sections. The first deals with general international themes and points to the consistent affinity between Muir's attitudes and practice in his poetry and in his criticism. In particular it indicates the essential Muir attitudes and concerns which are observable as early as We Moderns (1918), despite that book's Nietzschean overtones, and demonstrates the closeness in theme and philosophy between the last two collections of criticism - Essays on Literature and Society (1949 and 1965) and the posthumously published The Estate of Poetry (1962) - and the late poetry.

The second criticism section deals with Muir's relationship to Scotland, with his problems of identity and language, his sense of apartness from the Scottish Literary Renaissance Movement. It investigates Muir's attitudes to Scottish literary and political matters as evidenced

in his books and periodical articles about Scottish affairs, and discusses the nature of the Scottish dimension as it appears in his own work.

The second part of the thesis investigation is concerned with the work of Neil M. Gunn. As Gunn's criticism and journalism are of a more occasional nature than are Muir's, such writings are not discussed separately but are considered alongside the discussion of his fiction.

The first section of this second part discusses Gunn's short stories. It suggests that the short story or nouvelle is a form especially suited to Gunn's particular talents as a writer and to his cultural background. It points to the close links between his short stories and novels and to the fact that many of the inadequacies of the post-war novels are present in earlier short stories, some of which provide sources for later novels.

The second section deals with Gunn's earliest novels from The Grey Coast (1926) to Butcher's Broom (1934) as novels of Highland decline, in which Gunn presents and investigates the contemporary impoverished situation of the Highlands and, in Sun Circle and Butcher's Broom, goes back into history in the attempt to find the roots of that decline. Predominant among the motifs of these early books is that of the fatalism of the Celtic Twilight, a philosophical attitude as constricting as the Calvinist predestination which troubled Muir in his early poetry.

Section three demonstrates Gunn's turning away from themes of decline towards the essential Highland experience. The novels in this group all belong to the middle period of Gunn's work from Highland River (1937) to The Drinking Well (1946). Gunn's journalism of the thirties

and early forties is particularly closely related to this group of novels and is discussed alongside the novels. The Green Isle of the Great Deep (1944), which is included here, in addition anticipates the concern with human freedom and totalitarian systems in the modern world which predominates in Gunn's post-war novels, and which thus relates his late work thematically with that of Edwin Muir.

The final section discusses the late novels of disintegration and loss of freedom and suggests that, with the exception of Bloodhunt (1952), they exhibit a severe decline both in perception and in technical achievement. It investigates the nature of this decline and proposes that its source lies to a significant extent in Gunn's departure from the cultural milieu of the Highlands as context for these novels, and in his comparatively unsophisticated novel-writing technique, which is itself conditioned by the inheritance of oral folk-culture in the Highlands and which is unsuited to the complex interplay of character, action and philosophical attitude which his urban themes demand.

Despite Muir's ambivalence in relation to Scotland, and Gunn's failure in his late international-theme novels, the Conclusion recognises Edwin Muir and Neil M. Gunn as writers of both national and international significance.

Abbreviations

Wherever practicable, quotations from the works of Edwin Muir and Neil M. Gunn will be referenced in the text by title abbreviation and page number.

I EDWIN MUIR

A	<u>An Autobiography</u>
Ch	<u>Chorus of the Newly Dead</u>
CP	<u>Collected Poems</u> (2nd edn 1963)
E	<u>Essays on Literature and Society</u> (2nd edn 1965)
EP	<u>The Estate of Poetry</u>
FP	<u>First Poems</u>
L	<u>Latitudes</u>
Sc	<u>Scott and Scotland</u>
SF	<u>The Story and the Fable</u>
SJ	<u>Scottish Journey</u>
T	<u>Transition</u>
WM	<u>We Moderns</u>

II NEIL M. GUNN

AD	<u>The Atom of Delight</u>
B	<u>Bloodhunt</u>
BB	<u>Butcher's Broom</u>
DW	<u>The Drinking Well</u>
GC	<u>The Grey Coast</u> (Porpoise Press edn of 1931)
GI	<u>The Green Isle of the Great Deep</u>
HD	<u>Hidden Doors</u>

HP	<u>Highland Pack</u>
HR	<u>Highland River</u>
KC	<u>The Key of the Chest</u>
LC	<u>The Lost Chart</u>
LG	<u>The Lost Glen</u>
MT	<u>Morning Tide</u>
OB	<u>Off in a Boat</u>
OL	<u>The Other Landscape</u>
S	<u>The Serpent</u>
SB	<u>The Silver Bough</u>
SC	<u>Sun Circle</u>
SD	<u>The Silver Darlings</u>
Sh	<u>The Shadow</u>
SS	<u>Second Sight</u>
W	<u>The Well at the World's End</u>
WG	<u>Wild Geese Overhead</u>
WH	<u>The White Hour</u>
YA	<u>Young Art and Old Hector</u>

GENERAL

NLS	National Library of Scotland
MS	Manuscript
PC	Printed copy
TS	Typescript

INTRODUCTION

The early decades of the twentieth century constituted a period of intellectual, artistic, social and political upheaval in which innovations applauded in the name of progress were counterbalanced by the fear of the destructive potentiality within them. It was a time of explosive vitality in the arts, yet also a time of disillusionment and withdrawal among many artists; a period when science and technology were embraced as the liberators of mankind and simultaneously feared as the destroyers of man as a spiritual being; a period of energetic vitality which yet seemed to contain within it the seeds of its own destruction.

The First World War is sometimes regarded as the cataclysmic event in Europe which broke into the stability of the past, but although the horror of that war does act as a marker for the changes which have taken place in social life and philosophical attitudes between the Victorian and contemporary worlds, the forces for change, which had their roots in the nineteenth century, were already at work before the war, and these forces were of a Janus nature which has made the twentieth century an exceptionally difficult period within which to find philosophical stability. Nineteenth and twentieth century scientific discoveries about the physical nature of the universe and about the evolution of man both freed man from the restrictive taboos of traditional religious teaching while at the same time they undermined his accepted view of himself as being at the centre of God's world. God himself was under threat as Nietzsche's concept of the Superman replaced the transcendent God by the God within man himself.

The psychologists Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung explored a world of the unconscious which frequently exposed man, not as Superman, but in weakness and insecurity. Machine technology offered to free ordinary human beings from a life of drudgery and so give them the opportunity to fulfil creative needs which had previously been open only to the rich and leisured classes. It also threatened man's freedom by the possibility that he could become the slave of the machine he had invented, as the logic of machine-functioning began to be applied to the organisation of human society.

Such international upheavals were reflected to a certain degree in the microcosm of Scottish society. The tide of the movement for political autonomy which had ebbed and flowed since the loss of the Scottish Parliament in 1707 gained new momentum as the men who had fought for the rights of 'little Belgium' returned from the First World War with increased consciousness of the rights of their own small country. The Russian revolution found sympathisers among Scotland's working people under such leaders as John MacLean and among some artists and intellectuals. In the arts, the Scottish Literary Renaissance Movement was founded by the poet Hugh MacDiarmid (C.M. Grieve) who wished to bring Scotland once more into the mainstream of European art and ideas as it had been in the fifteenth century in the time of the makars. The composer F.G. Scott attempted to marry Scottish tradition and European stylistic innovation in his songs, while a painter such as J.D. Ferguson, who lived and worked in France for some years, reflected the new French painting in his own work.

The two writers to be considered in this thesis, the Orkney poet Edwin Muir and the Highland novelist Neil M. Gunn, occupy an ambivalent position in relation to the artists of the modernist period. Although the work of both writers relates in theme to the preoccupations and fears of many artists and intellectuals of the period, neither exhibits the innovatory stylistic techniques which have characterised early twentieth century literature, painting and music as a whole. In neither Muir nor Gunn does one find the exhilarating imaginative confrontation of modernist thought and techniques with the attributes of the Scottish tradition which produced Hugh MacDiarmid's A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle. On the contrary, both employ traditional means of expression in their work.

In the case of both writers, this can perhaps be attributed in part to early environment. In An Autobiography Muir describes the lack of books in his home, his scanty schooling, resulting in an unfamiliarity with literature apart from the orally-transmitted Scottish ballads and the Bible. He described his progress as poet after his delayed beginning when in his late twenties thus:

I had no training; I was too old to submit myself to contemporary influences; and I had acquired in Scotland a deference towards ideas which made my entrance into poetry difficult. Though my imagination had begun to work I had no technique by which I could give expression to it. There were the rhythms of English poetry on the one hand, the images in my mind on the other. All I could do at the start was to force the one, creaking and complaining, into the mould of the other. . . . I began to write poetry simply because what I wanted to say could not have gone properly into prose. I wanted so much to say it that I had no thought left to study the form in which alone it could be said.¹

Yet, as Helen Gardner has described, Muir was in the outward circumstances of his life 'deeply involved in the long crisis of this century' while he was also 'through his own personal distresses, profoundly affected by the revolution in our whole conception of human personality brought about by the genius of Freud and Jung.'² An Autobiography relates the trauma of his emigration in the early years of the century from the communal pre-industrial society of Orkney to post-industrial Glasgow and the impersonality of a modern competitive society in which four members of his family died within the space of a few years, as it also recounts the experience of psychoanalysis which contributed to the freeing of his imagination and his late entry into poetry. The themes which inspired that poetry represent a significant strand of modernist experience. Ezra Pound's lament that 'we appear to have lost the radiant world'³ is applicable to Muir's exploration of the paradox of good and evil and of necessity and freedom through the biblical myth of the Fall and the legends of Greece as it is to Pound's world of literature, to T.S. Eliot's diagnosis of cosmopolitan spiritual and material decay in The Waste Land and to Hugh MacDiarmid's journey through the related waste-land of twentieth century Scotland in A Drunk Man.

Although, as the quotation from An Autobiography about his entry into poetry suggests, the means of expression did not seem to be for Muir, as for T.S. Eliot, for example, a significant ingredient in the contemporary writer's predicament, one way in which Muir does approach modernist techniques is in his use of dream vision and myth as the vehicle for his exploration of the human situation. Yet, as in his work as a whole, Muir's employment of myth stands apart from that of

more characteristic modernist writers, being completely lacking in the ambivalent irony of a Joyce or Eliot and being related to a significant degree, through his use of the Fall myth, to traditional religious seeking. Muir does not preach any specific religious doctrine in his poetry, but his acceptance of the biblical story of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden as a basis for his metaphorical exploration of what Eliot called the 'immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history'⁴ - and which at one time must have seemed to Muir to be his personal history also - inevitably colours the reader's response to his themes. In An Essay on Criticism Graham Hough points to the difficulties such use of Christian myth as symbol can raise. Commenting on the fact that 'in very early mythologies alternative creation myths, alternative genealogies of the gods make their appearance' without any apparent conflict between them, he goes on: 'Those who maintain that the Christian myth is different from all others are right - not because it is "truer" than any other, but because it was believed in a different way. And some critics have thought it unsuitable for literary purposes on that account.'⁵ This comment is very relevant to an assessment of Muir's success in his use of such myth in his poetry.

Neil M. Gunn also came from a non-urban, communal society; in his case from Dunbeath, a fishing and crofting community on the north-east coast of Caithness in the north of Scotland, an area which has many affinities with Muir's Orkney. Like Muir also, his family background was a non-intellectual one and his formal schooling, while fuller than Muir's, was somewhat eccentric in that in its post-primary stages it was conducted by a private tutor with a predisposition

towards nineteenth century romantic poetry. Again like Muir, Gunn was a late entrant into literature, his first short stories being published when he was in his late twenties. On the other hand, Gunn's early work does not exhibit the technical insecurity which characterises Muir's. The short story 'Down to the Sea',⁶ for example, first published in 1923, is one of Gunn's earliest stories and remains one of his finest. Similarly his more conscious employment of poetic devices in his descriptive prose-writing is to be found in his early short stories and novels. As we shall see in the fuller discussion of his work, Gunn's stylistic apartness from the modernist movement in his novel-writing lay in his employment of simple, traditional novel-writing techniques such as one finds in the early development of the English novel, and in his relationship to the folk-culture of the Highlands in which traditional attitudes and social organisation and the demands of orally-transmitted tales and epics were at a far remove from the sophisticated attributes of the modern novel as it had developed in the city cultures of England and Europe.

Nevertheless, Gunn, like Muir, was philosophically involved in the changes of the century. Pound's lament is also applicable to his search for the lost 'atom of delight'⁷ in human lives, to his attempt to find an opposing vision to what Muir called 'this artificial world which we have made out of the world.'⁸

There are thus many similarities in environmental background and in artistic and philosophical relationship to the modernist period between Muir and Gunn. A comparison of their respective autobiographies - Muir's An Autobiography and Gunn's The Atom of Delight - demonstrates additionally how closely related was the life and work in the case of

each writer. With regard to Gunn, the relationship between life and work was a straightforward one. One meets the boy of Dunbeath Strath in the late The Atom of Delight as one had earlier met him in Morning Tide⁹ and Highland River.¹⁰ Many of the boyhood incidents in these books are seen as a consequence of reading The Atom of Delight to have been derived directly from Gunn's own boyhood experiences. In addition, many of the incidents and comments on them recounted in The Atom of Delight amplify themes of the earlier books. This relationship is especially so with regard to Highland River. Moreover, the autobiographical nature of the philosophical elements in The Atom of Delight frequently assists one to determine more clearly Gunn's philosophical position in his late novels which, like the autobiography, are much influenced by his interest in Taoist philosophy and Zen Buddhism.

The relationship between Muir's life and work is a more complex one, as Muir's life itself followed a more tortuous pattern than did Gunn's. His childhood in Orkney and the subsequent cultural dislocation and tragedy of family bereavements which he suffered in Glasgow conspire to make the myth of the Fall appear to be a particularly appropriate vehicle for Muir's work. One must be cautious, however, to avoid a romanticised reading of the opposing Orkney/Glasgow experiences in relating them to Muir's themes as poet. A careful reading of An Autobiography makes clear that the source of the Fall obsession lay in Orkney itself, and in the family's unfortunate farming experiences and in the tensions generated by the enforced moves from the good farm the Bu to a series of poor ones. Muir supports such a view in the autobiographical article 'Yesterday's Mirror: Afterthoughts to an Autobiography' when he refers to 'my earliest conviction of guilt,

after the Fall that drove me out of my seven years' Eden.'¹¹ Muir was seven years old when the family had to leave the Bu and it was about this time also 'when my first world was crumbling and I was frightened and ill that I was sent to school' (A 40).

I believe that An Autobiography demonstrates that another source of the Fall obsession which developed in Orkney was the influence of Scottish Calvinism which forced itself upon the innocence of the growing child: a conclusion arrived at by Willa Muir also as she puzzled over her husband's breakdown and the re-surfacing of his earlier neurotic apprehensions after their post-war experiences in Prague. In Belonging she comments:

Ever since the beginning of our marriage I had been aware of his preoccupation with the Fall and with Original Sin, and had thought that it burdened him unduly. I disliked the doctrine of Original Sin, at least the version of it I had met in Scotland. For Calvinist Scots, only the Elect were forgiven their share in Original Sin; Jesus died to save only the Elect. Everyone else had to face an unforgiving final reckoning on the Day of Judgment. As no one could be certain of Election, Calvinists spent much of their time on earth on rehearsing Judgment, censoring their own and other people's conduct, showing up others as less likely than themselves to be counted among the Saints. . . . So irrational an obsession, I thought, must have taken root in his unconscious at an early, very impressionable age.¹²

It is clear from Muir's autobiography that, despite a personal lack of censoriousness towards family members and friends, Muir's family - and the boy Edwin - took its religion seriously. There are none of the humorous descriptions of over-zealous visiting catechists or competitions by the children to find the shortest verse in the family bible-reading which humanise Neil Gunn's infrequent accounts

of Scottish religious practices. Instead we have the ritual of the Sunday boat excursion to the Church on the neighbouring island of Rousay, the evangelical hysteria of public acknowledgement of 'being saved' by Christ, with its surrounding aura of the conviction of sin and unworthiness in self and others; the fundamentalist debates within the family as to whether Elijah ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire or a whirlwind. Muir tells us that 'there was a great deal of Biblical discussion in our house' and that the Millennium of his later visionary dreams 'had often been discussed by my father and mother at the Bu after a reading of the Reverend Doctor Baxter, while I listened and almost without knowing it fashioned my own delightful pictures, long since forgotten' (A 57). There was also hostility on the part of his parents towards imaginative literature as being sinful, which led the young Muir to divert his schoolboy ambitions to be a writer into the acceptable topic of a Life of Christ. It is surely no coincidence that the child's first nervous crisis took the form it did: the obsession with guilt at having, possibly but without certain remembrance of the deed, touched the sheep-dip which his father had forbidden anyone to touch - an interesting sidelight on the psychological efficacy of the Church's teaching on the human inheritance of sin, which, like its redemption, was not personally earned - and the endless washing of his hands in the attempt, like Pilate in his relationship to Jesus Christ, to cleanse himself of that guilt and its repercussions. (A 34)

Thus the conviction of and inexplicable mystery of Original Sin was early implanted in Muir's mind and reinforced by the arbitrary deaths of his brothers and parents after the family's removal to Glasgow. However much the adult man rejected the uncompromising,

determinist doctrines of the Scottish Church, what Daniel Hoffman calls his 'unexorcised Calvinism'¹³ remained a potent force in his work as poet. It is this 'unexorcised Calvinism' and not the more obvious loss of Orkney-Eden which I believe is the source of the Fall obsession in Muir's work. As we shall see in the fuller discussion of the poetry, it is also a significant factor in his employment of Greek myth as metaphor in his poetry.

The intrusion of Calvinism into the child's innocent world points to one significant difference between Muir's and Gunn's autobiographies. While both books emphasise the childhood experience, it is the adult-oriented quality of the experience which emerges from Muir's depiction of childhood. Gunn's boy of the Strath kept the adult world firmly outside the circle which enclosed his essential child's self. For him, 'the funeral cortège passed, the school was left behind, the church door was shut - "I'm off" - and he was into his own intense world' (AD 32). And within the freedom of this world of the second self 'the boy was protected not only from the good intentions of his elders but also from whatever adult evil was let loose among them. He had the power not to let either the good intention or the evil actually touch him' (AD 88). In this way Gunn's boy resembles Henry James's Maisie who kept her childish innocence intact in the midst of adult deceit.

It is the relationship with the kind of intrusion into childhood of the adult world that D.H. Lawrence explores in his account of the childhood of Ursula in The Rainbow which one notices in Muir's autobiography. There is no suggestion of warring parents in Muir's account as in Lawrence's novel, but one senses that the tensions of the adult

world broke too early into what Muir in Scott and Scotland somewhat ruefully calls the 'sanctioned irresponsibility and endless false hopes'¹⁴ of childhood. This childhood was a lonely one. The youngest of six children, the predominant figures in Muir's world were the adult ones of mother and father whom he tells us he saw as 'fixed allegorical figures in a timeless landscape' (A 24), his cousin Sutherland who in his hearty way brought the adult world of work, sex and death into the farmhouse, and an old maiden aunt. There were apparently no child playmates save a little girl from a neighbouring farm and a young sister. Because of ill health, the boy did not go to school until he was seven years old.

The contrast between Muir's and Gunn's childhoods is maintained in the immediate physical environments of each. In the article 'My Bit of Britain', Gunn describes the delights of Dunbeath Strath, his boyhood playground:

These small straths, like the strath of Dunbeath, have this intimate beauty. In boyhood we get to know every square yard of it. We encompass it physically and our memories hold it. Birches, hazel trees for nutting, pools with trout and an occasional visible salmon, river-flats with the wind on the bracken and disappearing rabbit scuts, a wealth of wild flower and small bird life, the soaring hawk, the unexpected roe, the ancient grave-year, thoughts of the folk who once lived far inland in straths and hollows, the past and the present held in a moment of day-dream.¹⁵

Orkney, too, is a land of beauty and visible links with an ancient past. But the timeless quality of the Orkney landscape, its light reflected from the apparently illimitable horizons of the surrounding seas, the uniform gentleness of its sloping hills and curving bays, lends itself to an adult reflection and metaphysical speculation which contrasts

with the bustling world of boys and nature which Dunbeath Strath contained. Muir tells us that there were few flowers around his home and his encounters with nature were either ritualistic, through the pig-sticking and the bringing of the cows to the farm bull; heraldic in the awe and fear which the farm horses inspired in the small child; or terrifying as he confronted the world of small insects. We do not find in Muir's account the sense of intimacy and companionship with nature felt by the boy of the Strath. Nor does one find to any significant extent in the adult Muir's poetry that ability to evoke the world of nature through sight, smell and touch which is characteristic of Gunn's best work. In contrast, this strangely symbolic childhood environment, its solitary play dominated by the awareness of the adult world which lay alongside it, must early have induced in a sensitive, imaginative child the metaphysical thought-processes which one finds in the adult Muir's work.

On the other hand, it is Muir's autobiography which excels in the quality of its prose style and in the range of its perceptions. Its first version, The Story and the Fable,¹⁶ was published in 1940 and a revised and extended edition appeared in 1954 during Muir's period as Warden of Newbattle Abbey in Edinburgh. The Story and the Fable exhibits in prose the confident, richly allusive and frequently poetic handling of words and themes which is missing in Muir's poetry of the time. Both versions demonstrate Muir's characteristic probing beneath the surface phenomenon of a situation. Muir's autobiography is now considered as one of the classic works of literature in English of this country.

The Atom of Delight, on the contrary, is an unsatisfactory book. It was published in 1956 after Gunn's last novels and it displays many

of the inadequacies of the late books. Like them, it is influenced by Eastern philosophy, and while, as we shall see, the inadequacies of a book such as The Other Landscape¹⁷ derive in part from its first person narrative form, The Atom of Delight idiosyncratically recounts its autobiographical tale in the third person. This has the effect of distancing the author from his narrative - which may have been what Gunn intended to happen - but it also results in a loss of involvement and intensity. In addition, Gunn's narrative register in his autobiography, as in some of the late books also, is casual, the register of a yarn told by the fire to like-minded companions rather than that of a formal autobiography written for an audience many of whom will be strangers. It may be that Gunn, like his professor of Ancient History in The Well at the World's End, is deliberately putting aside any notion of being 'somebody',¹⁸ but as in that book also, the result is a communication of a lack of seriousness and commitment, a dilettante impression which is false to Gunn's essential concerns.

There is no such apparent lack of commitment communicated by Gunn in his work as a whole with regard to his relationship with his country, Scotland, and in this matter one finds Gunn's and Muir's paths once again diverging.

Muir's relationship with Scotland was an equivocal one. In a late article in The Listener in 1958 he described Scotland as 'my second country',¹⁹ and it is clear that as an immigrant at the age of fourteen to the industrialised Lowlands of mainland Scotland from the Norse-influenced Orkney islands, he found himself distanced psychologically and culturally from the Lowlands. Although he overcame his initial horror of industrialised Glasgow, and in the thirties period especially

proclaimed his belief in Scottish nationhood and independence both because 'I believe that men are capable of organizing themselves only in relatively small communities' and also because 'I am a Scotsman' (SF 260), yet his sense of being a 'Displaced Person' (A 280) in the context of mainland Scotland never entirely left him, and his views on the viability of Scottish nationhood and on the revival of writing in Scots initiated by Hugh MacDiarmid were constantly in flux. In the twenties he stood aloof from commitment to the Scottish Literary Renaissance Movement, 'because after all I'm not Scotch, I'm an Orkney man, a good Scandinavian, and my true country is Norway, or Denmark, or Iceland, or some place like that.'²⁰ His stay in St Andrews from 1935 to 1942 found him 'more unhappy . . . than I had been since the time of my obscure fears and the course of psychoanalysis that dispelled them' (A 244), while his final period of residence in Scotland as Warden of Newbattle Abbey Adult Educational College from 1950 to 1955 was latterly clouded by disagreements over policy and factional intrigue. After his vigorous involvement in the thirties in Scotland and the problems associated with her lost nationhood, he returned at the end of his life to a more distanced position: the revised edition of his autobiography does not contain the positive references to the desirability of independent Scottish nationhood or to his acceptance of himself as a Scotsman which appeared in The Story and the Fable. He spent the last few years of his life not in Scotland, but in the village of Swaffham Prior, near Cambridge. As we shall see, this ambivalent relationship with Scotland was both a source of strength and of weakness in his work as poet and critic.

While Muir suffered a sense of dispossession in relation to Scotland, Gunn, as man and writer, was firmly rooted in his native

Highlands where, apart from a short period as a young man, he lived throughout his life. In the thirties and early forties especially he was active in writing on the social and economic problems of the Highlands and of Scotland as a whole. His approach in his journalism was factual and founded in a close working relationship with and understanding of the Highland way of life. Many of the themes investigated in his journalism became also the matter of his fiction. Although, as with Muir, the linguistic medium of his work was English, he was in sympathy with the aims of the Scottish Renaissance Movement, especially in regard to its broader objective of encouraging writing of quality in all three of Scotland's languages: in Scots, Scottish/English and Gaelic. The specific aspect of the revival of writing in Scots does not seem to have been for Gunn, as for Muir, a matter of personal crisis. Hugh MacDiarmid has described his lively discussions with Gunn on the question of 'getting the Gaelic aristocratic idea into Lallans harness.'²¹ Gunn himself found that the unique contribution of a writer such as Lewis Grassie Gibbon to the Movement lay in his achievement in Scottish/English of 'not a new language but an old rhythm.'²² As with Muir's national equivocation, Gunn's rootedness in the Highlands of Scotland has both positive and negative effects on his work.

In the essay 'The Quick Movement of Affection: Neil M. Gunn's Short Stories, Plays and Essays', James Aitchison comments in relation to Gunn's theme of the Highland Clearances that 'it is not too fanciful to suggest that the Clearances were a wretched re-enactment of the archetypal expulsion from Eden.'²³ However, as the thesis discussion of Gunn's work will show, such a view is misleading in that it suggests that Gunn's themes of loss have a religious dimension similar to that

contained in Muir's employment of the Fall myth. But while Gunn and Muir both develop in their work the modernist theme of the waste-land of contemporary society, and Gunn himself relates the dispossession of the Clearances to the dispossession of European refugees in our century,²⁴ and while both writers attempt to offer an alternative positive vision to their themes of loss, their individual attitudes to that loss and to an alternative vision as expressed through their work are clearly differentiated and illustrate a further dichotomy in their respective relationships with Scotland.

For Muir, the use of the Fall metaphor epitomised the traditional religious context of his search and his attempt to explain the paradox of good and evil in human life. As discussed previously, the Fall theme was also closely related to the influence of Calvinism on his mind and feelings, even while he rejected its harsh doctrines. In Gunn's theme of the Clearances, on the other hand, the evil was not in the people themselves as in the expulsion from the Garden, but was perpetrated upon them. They, unlike Muir's fallen men and women with their inherited legacy of Original Sin, were innocent sufferers. The evil lay outside them.

This essential difference between the theme of the Fall and the fact of the Clearances is reflected in the contrasting attitudes of the two writers to religion and to the observed presence of evil in human life. Gunn, unlike Muir, seems to have been little affected by Calvinism, although it was the religious context of the environment in which he grew up. In his work as novelist and in the philosophical arguments of The Atom of Delight there is more a separation of the attributes of good and evil than an acceptance of their interweaving nature; more a belief in the necessity for and the efficacy of a

return to a simpler way of life and values than, as in Muir's mature work, an acceptance of the presence of both negative and positive aspects of this 'difficult land.'²⁵ Such a philosophy on Gunn's part has as significant an influence on his development as novelist as Muir's preoccupation with the paradox of good and evil has on his work as poet.

This thesis will seek to examine the development of Edwin Muir's work as poet and critic and Gunn's work as short story writer and novelist in the light of these environmental and philosophical attributes which they at times share and in respect of which they at other times diverge from each other. In particular it will attempt to discover the relative significance of and the relationship between Scottish themes and more universal international themes in the work of each writer.

Because of Muir's accepted reputation as critic and the extent of his critical writings, these will be considered in a separate section of the thesis in addition to references to them throughout the poetry discussions. Gunn was more of an occasional journalist and critic and the extent of his non-fiction writing is limited. It will therefore be discussed in relation to the themes of his novels.

The first biography of Neil M. Gunn: Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life (London: Murray, 1981) by Francis Russell Hart and J.B. Pick, was published in November 1981 after the research work for this thesis had been completed and the thesis was being prepared for submission. Bibliographical information with regard to Gunn's short stories and novels and to his relationship with The Scots Magazine under the editorship of J.B. Salmond has thus been researched independently of the biography and is in no way indebted to it.

INTRODUCTION

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- 24 See the article 'The Highland Clearances', Radio Times, 24 November 1954, p. 1.
- 25 Edwin Muir, 'The Difficult Land', Edwin Muir: Collected Poems (London: Faber & Faber, 1960), 2nd edn 1963, p. 237.

EDWIN MUIR

I THE POETRY

i The Apprentice Collections:

First Poems Chorus of the Newly DeadVariations on a Time Theme Journeys and Places

Although Edwin Muir made several verse contributions to The New Age between 1913 and 1916,¹ it was not until after his departure in 1921 from Britain to Europe that he began seriously to attempt to write poetry. The departure and its accompanying freedom from daily regular employment had been made possible by the offer of a contract to write one or two monthly articles for the American magazine The Freeman. Before this opportunity arose, Muir, while working as Orage's assistant on The New Age, had been persuaded to undergo psychoanalysis, and this had resulted in an outflowing of visionary dreams, both imaginatively stimulating and frightening in their intensity. It is not possible to know whether the poetry grew out of the opening up of the unconscious world achieved by the psychoanalysis, or whether it proceeded more naturally from the freeing effects of his marriage and foreign travel, and from the return to the child-like irresponsibility from daily labour which the Freeman contract allowed. Whatever the reason, Muir during his stay in Prague and Dresden began writing the poetry which was eventually published under the title of First Poems² in 1925 by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press.

Muir was later dissatisfied with this first collection. Only six of the original twenty-four poems were published in the Collected Poems

of 1952, edited by J.C. Hall, and nine were included in the Collected Poems of 1960, edited by Willa Muir and J.C. Hall.³ While many of the following comments have relevance to First Poems as a whole, I wish in particular to discuss some of the poems which were not reprinted in the collections of 1952 and 1960 and so have received little critical attention.

First Poems is dominated by Muir's personal philosophical insecurity and by an insecurity in poetic technique. It is marked also by the influence of German Romanticism, an aspect of the collection which is not so clearly observable in the edited versions reprinted in the Collected Poems of 1952 and 1960.

Muir's work early displayed affinities with international themes and writers. Nietzsche was the philosopher to whom he turned as a young man in Glasgow in the attempt to understand and order his personal sense of dislocation, and We Moderns⁴ and much of Latitudes⁵ exhibit the not altogether fortunate effects of that influence. Another German influence was that of the poet Heinrich Heine, both through his poetry and through his prose writings. In First Poems, despite some attempt to distance himself emotionally from his preoccupations through the use of myth as metaphor as in 'The Battle of Hector in Hades', it is the influence of Heine and German Romanticism which predominates. Many of the poems in the collection are remarkable for the self-absorption of their narrator and for the romantic Sehnsucht and Angst which he exhibits. Yet, just as Muir's later employment of myth as metaphor differed from the more characteristic modernist use of myth in its lack of irony and ambiguity, and in its relationship to traditional religious seeking, so in First Poems also there is none of the qualifying irony

which one finds in Heine's romantic longing. Muir's philosophical position is perhaps closer to the narcissism and regressive yearning of Shelley: the conclusion of Adonais with its nostalgic remembrance of that creative Light which the 'eclipsing Curse/Of birth can quench not'⁶ is close to Muir's longing for the pre-lapsarian world in his early poetry.

As in Mignon's song from Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, much of the longing in First Poems is directed towards a lost land. The poem which bears this title, 'The Lost Land', was based on one of the dreams which Muir's analysis provoked, and it exhibits the poet's frustrated longing for the lost land of childhood, a remembered time of tranquillity and security. The poem, which was not consciously reshaped from the original dream, has itself the vague, insubstantial quality of a dream: 'The houses waver towards me, melt and run',⁷ and despite the narrator's disappointment in finding that the longed-for land is not in fact the remembered land, there is no rhythmic or verbal intensity in the poetic expression:

I look again. Alas! I do not know
This place, and alien people come and go.
Ah, this is not my haven; oft before
I have stood here and wept for the other shore. (FP 11)

The poet seems content, Narcissus-like, to immerse himself in his hopeless longing. There is no struggle to reach his goal. The 'towering cliffs' and 'serpent-fangéd caves' which lie between him and its achievement seem make-believe, as do the 'moon-charméd valleys' where he gathers the ambiguous 'light and dead' orchids for his head's 'pallid garland' (FP 12).

In discussing this poem in Edwin Muir: Man and Poet, Peter Butter comments that the desire to re-enter childhood is 'natural to man, and is not an escape. Indeed it is the reverse of an escape; for the recovery of an ability to experience freshly like a child makes a man unusually vulnerable, strips away the protective mask worn by most adults. The dream pointed Muir away from nostalgia towards a recognition of the powers within himself in the present. Like the other resurrection dream it represented the revival of the intuitive, imaginative part of himself.'⁸ While this may be the psychological interpretation of the dream, and especially of the latter part of the dream which Muir did not reproduce in the poem, and so relevant to Muir the man, there is no evidence in the poem, or in First Poems as a whole, to show Muir being able to operate without his protective masks.

'Remembrance' and 'Houses' continue the theme of longing for a lost past. In the former poem, Muir seems to be attempting to grapple with the theme of time and the unchosen changes time brings, which he was to explore more fully and successfully in his later work. Here the apparently unbridgeable division between past and present seems less of a metaphysical problem than one of syntax and outworn poetic expression and mood. 'Houses' is more successful in that the poet gives some substance to his dream of childhood through his remembrance of the house within which, as a child, he felt secure. 'There was a line around on every side,/And all within spoke to me and was home' (FP 17) evokes the Celtic practice of putting a circle round the home to ensure its safety from evil powers. But there is an unresolved ambiguity in the mood of the poem, evidenced through its descriptive

terms. Is the 'estranging land' (FP 17) in the first stanza the land of the present which separates him from the safety of the past? One suspects that it is, but this is not clear, especially as in a later stanza one finds that even in the security of the past, beyond the house 'the empty fields spread waste and wide' (FP 17) and that in his dream vision the houses are not truly safe: he sees once more 'through their struggling web of stone and steel/Those distant houses shine with grief and mirth!' (FP 18)

'Reverie' abandons the poet's past for a scene from the present, but the poem is again dominated by the poet's aching sense of isolation and undefined longing, a mood matched by the stanza form of Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard' which Muir adopts here. A soldier and his girl stroll by the side of the railway to the accompaniment of the sound of a concertina played by a boy in a neighbouring watchman's hut - a classic German romantic lied setting - but the poet's sad yearning does not find a meaningful correlative in the lovers' story. There is nothing in the story-line of the poem to tell us of unhappiness or disaster in the young couple's relationship. On the contrary 'they talk/In peace, and gather comfort as they go'; they walk 'in unintelligible rapture' (FP 25). Yet the poet describes their garments as being 'creased with woe'; his 'thin-toned anguish frets my heart/Over the cabin boy . . . And over those two' (FP 25). The unhappiness is that of the poet and the poem ends with his anguished cry for understanding of life's mystery:

Why do we walk with muted footsteps round
In this strong trance called life from which none wake?

.

Why do I wait still with my foolish pain?
 All, all at last must take their sorrow home. (FP 26)

First Poems is very much an apprentice work where one finds Muir essaying various modes in the attempt to find his own voice. 'An Ancient Song' experiments with the sonnet form and abandons German romanticism to concentrate on the passions which affect all men. The passion of bereavement finds expression in what will become characteristic Muir terms:

Bereavement which, by deathless Memory teased,
 Pores o'er the same, forever-altered track,
 Turns, ever on the old lost way turns back. (FP 29)

This poem's imagery has the strong visual quality which one associates with Spenser's Faerie Queene, a poem to which Muir turns more than once in his prose writings. 'Anatomy', too, invokes the conceits of Elizabethan and Jacobean poetry, and continues the experimental movement away from a poetry of romantic longing towards Muir's later exploration of time and human destiny. Both poems seem to me to be worthy of a place in Collected Poems, for themselves and for their contribution to Muir's poetic development.

Although the rest of the First Poems omitted from Collected Poems continue Muir's experimental attempts at a wider canvas, like the poems of romantic longing they do not succeed in poetic terms. 'Logos' is of interest only for the evocation of the Creation in its final sections which, almost uniquely in Muir's work, is brought about through visual imagery suggestive of the Creation myths of Norse legend. 'Salzburg - November', a companion-piece to the Prague and Hellbrunn poems reprinted in Collected Poems, contains a sketch of one of Muir's legendary horses: of the everyday world and yet somehow transcendent.

'Grass', an experiment in blank verse, is an exercise in rhetoric divorced from actual experience. One cannot readily believe that the Muir who felt keenly the blighting of the natural environment in the industrial wastes around Glasgow, could so blandly praise 'grass' as the 'invulnerable vesture of the world' (FP 42). One image is authentic Muir: Grass is a 'perpetual mirage hung beyond Time's reach' (FP 41).

The Scottish ballads had provided Muir with one of his few contacts with imaginative literature in his early years and although there are few explicitly Scottish-theme poems in his work, there is a vital relationship between his themes of freedom and necessity and the stark determinism of fate which, no less than in Scottish Calvinism and Greek myth, is the philosophical context of the Scottish ballads. In the apprentice work of First Poems, the ballads provide one possible model for the poet's experimentation, six of the twenty-four poems being ballad imitations. Three of these imitations were reprinted in the 1960 Collected Poems: 'Ballad of Hector in Hades', 'Ballad of the Soul' (originally titled 'Ballad of Eternal Life') and 'Ballad of the Flood'. Those omitted were 'Ballad of Rebirth', 'Ballad of the Nightingale' and 'Ballad of the Monk'. Only 'Ballad of the Monk' and 'Ballad of the Flood' are in Scots.

All the ballad imitations point to Muir's lack of a good natural musical ear for the subtleties of word-sound and rhythm, a technical drawback which he never entirely overcame in his mature work, and one which is highlighted here by the pattern of the original ballad form which beats insistently behind the weakness of the imitation.

Muir based 'Ballad of Rebirth' and 'Ballad of the Soul' on the visionary dreams which had 'come to him' during the period of his analysis. As in 'The Lost Land', he did not creatively reshape the dream experience in the subsequent poem, but used it directly. As almost always in Muir's unshaped dream poems, these ballads cannot communicate the essence of the visionary experience satisfactorily, the problem being compounded by the outworn romantic diction which provided him with his principal poetic tool. The very attempt to restrain the communication of the vision within the abcb rhyming pattern of the ballad verse form diminishes it. To appreciate its effect on Muir's imagination, one must go to the prose account in An Autobiography. (A 159-62) Yet, once again, the last lines of a poem point forward to the Muir of the later work: 'But my eyes were forged in Paradise,/And have forgotten Time' (FP 50) of 'Ballad of Rebirth' anticipates the metaphor of the search for Eden.

'Ballad of the Nightingale' which had its source, according to Muir's introductory note, in the German Philosophy and Religion of Heine, is close in theme to 'The Transfiguration' of The Labyrinth collection of 1949. In the early poem, however, there is no underlying sense of the strange wonder of the happenings. The mood is romantic, not religious or philosophical. 'Ballad of the Monk' and, to a lesser extent, the reprinted 'Ballad of the Flood' are especially disappointing in relation to their use of Scots dialect. There is in Muir's attempt to employ Scots none of the vital creativity which one associates with Hugh MacDiarmid's Scots language; no attempt to penetrate to the psychological heart of the language and to remould this towards contemporary needs. In the thin dialect of his experimental

poems in Scots, as in the dialogue of his Scots novels, there is no hint of the richness which Scots could afford, a richness which, however much the Orkney Scots differed from the spoken Scots of the Borders in the midst of which MacDiarmid grew up, must equally have surrounded the boy Muir in his formative years. Perhaps the difference between the Norse-influenced Orkney speech and Lowland Scots made Muir feel as much of an outsider in the use of Scots as he claimed in his Freeman article 'A Note on the Scottish Ballads' all Scottish writers were in the use of English: 'No writer can write great English who is not born an English writer and in England.'⁹ In neither Scots nor English does Muir show discernment of the creative allusive potential of actual vocabulary which one finds in MacDiarmid's exploitation of Scots, or, to disprove his strictures on the writing of great English, in the work of the American T.S. Eliot and the Irishman James Joyce. Although Muir increasingly employed symbol and metaphor in his mature work, the active manipulation of the poetic potentialities residing in the unit of the word or group of words never to any significant extent became part of his poetic machinery.

The significant difference between the poems in First Poems omitted from and those included in the 1960 Collected Poems is the higher standard of attainment in rhythmic movement and poetic expression which one finds in the latter. The revisions made by Muir in the re-printed poems point to the rhetorical weaknesses of the early collection. Many of these revisions are towards more definition by the replacing of a weak, vague word by one that is more specific, or by giving a description more actual sense by the changing of a word, as, for example, in the Noah ballad where 'dragons rising from the glaur' - which does not make much sense in terms of a sea journey - becomes

'dragons rising from the deep' (FP 73; CP 35). Many effect a more satisfactory rhythmic movement.

In addition, the themes of the reprinted poems are more clearly defined, are more successfully related to the poetic expression and, significantly, most can be seen as precursors of the themes of Muir's characteristic later work. 'Childhood' is without ambition in poetic technique, but it succeeds in its quiet way in establishing the child's sense of security related to home and natural environment, something which the ambiguous yearning of the omitted poems was unable to achieve. Muir's undefined sadness finds objective justification in the theme of Autumn in the three poems 'When the Trees grow bare on the High Hills'; 'Autumn in Prague' and 'October at Hellbrunn'. The surface achievement of the first two poems is deceptive, however, in that these poems still exhibit the ambiguity of metaphor which characterised the poems of longing. There is confusion between the poet's employment of Autumn as a 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness',¹⁰ and simultaneously as the chill harbinger of sterile winter. There is no sense of the essential unity in the double aspect of the season as Muir uses it, such as one finds in Keats's ode. And as in the account of the soldier and his girl in 'Reverie', the poetic ambiguity is here associated with the poet's own state of mind in which

My heart grows light like the bare branches,
And thoughts which through long months
Have lain like lead upon my breast,
Heavy, slow-ripening thoughts,
Grow light and sere,
And fall at last, so empty and so beautiful.

And I become
Mere memory, mere fume
Of my own strife. (CP 22)

In a passage from The Story and the Fable omitted from the revised An Autobiography, Muir comments on the awakening of his past life when in Dresden in the early 1920s in terms relevant to the state of mind displayed in this poem. He says: 'If one can speak of a turning-point in life, this was my turning-point; since when my past life came alive in me after lying for so long a dead weight' (SF 235).

'October at Hellbrunn' is a more satisfactory poem. The mood is still one of sadness and loss, but it finds an objective correlative in the grey skies and the stillness of the dying year. There are no ambiguous contradictions in the atmosphere which is sombre throughout. The poem is much improved by the omission of two verses from the 1925 version which return to a mood of subjective longing.

Of the ballad imitations reprinted in Collected Poems, 'The Ballad of Hector in Hades' has been much admired. Its principal claim to the reader's attention, however, seems to me to reside in the employment in it, for the first time, of the material of Greek legend to give objective form and universality to the poet's personal experience. When considered for its merit as a poem, the experience described seems very much 'recollected in tranquillity.'¹¹ For emotional and verbal intensity one has to turn to the account of the boy Edwin's terrified race home to escape the clutches of Freddie Sinclair in the vigorous, imaginative prose of Muir's autobiography. (A 42) Nor is 'Ballad of the Flood' of much poetic significance. It is interesting thematically, however, for the way in which Muir marries his obsession with Calvinist doctrine - Noah is obviously one of the Elect - to the fatefulness of the 'green countrie' of the ballads. Professor Butter finds in this poem 'a tenderness and a humour . . . that are not found

elsewhere in First Poems.¹² More true of the poem, in my view, is Daniel Hoffman's description: 'a dour poem' where Noah's 'vindictive condemnation of the sinner is the dominant tone of the ballad.' Hoffman continues: 'But more significantly, I think, "Ballad of the Flood" shows directly the repressive and vengeful Calvinism that repelled Muir in the Scottish character.'¹³ With the exception of its moments of Calvinist spitefulness on the part of Noah, this ballad remains a tale retold, not imaginatively recreated. There is no recreation of the ballad form such as one finds in 'The Ballad of the Crucified Rose' and 'O wha's the bride that cairries the bunch/O' thistles blinterin' white'¹⁴ from A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle.

First Poems is on the whole an indifferent collection. It is valuable, however, for the insight it gives into Muir's later poetry through its themes and in the evidence it provides of Muir's limited natural poetic technique. It is interesting also for the evidence of influences, such as the influence of romantic, and especially, German romantic poetry which are apparently jettisoned in the later work, and the extent of which one might not suspect from the nature of the poems from First Poems which are included in the 1960 Collected Poems. In addition, the collection demonstrates that from its earliest beginnings Muir's poetry, despite its personal Angst, was in theme and expression unparochial and internationally-oriented.

Chorus of the Newly Dead¹⁵ was published by the Hogarth Press in 1926. The poem had been begun during the Muir's stay at A.S. Neil's school in Hellerau and, according to Willa Muir in Belonging, had been

'continued, with excitement and pleasure', when they returned to the school, now on the Sonntagberg, in 1924 after The Freeman ceased publication. Mrs Muir describes their living on the heights of the Sunday Mountain as 'our first gods'-eye view of the earth. I feel that it helped to liberate from Edwin's unconscious a gods'-eye view of humanity.'¹⁶ Unfortunately, this 'gods'-eye view of humanity', together with a continuing predilection for outmoded poetic machinery, effectively prevents the Chorus from coming to life.

In a letter to Sydney Schiff from the Sonntagberg school, Muir himself described the thinking behind the poem, which would seem to have been in part motivated by a desire to escape the romantic subjectivity which characterised First Poems:

I wished to get a certain pathos of distance in contemplating human life and I found this the most unconditional way. In this 'chorus' there will be types like the Saint, the Beggar, the Idiot, the Hero, the Mother, the Rebel, the Poet, the Coward, and they will all give some account of their lives as they see it from eternity, not in Heaven or in Hell, but in a dubious place where the bewilderment of the change has not been lost. There will also be choruses for all the newly dead in which some kind of transcendental judgment will be passed on these recitals as they arise. The atmosphere I am aiming at is one of mystery and wonder at the life of the earth. There will be no dogmatic justification, and as little mere thought as possible; no mention of the name of God, but an assumption of infinite and incalculable powers behind the visible drama. Yet I hope that in the end a feeling of gratification will be given by the poem as a whole.¹⁷

The theme, despite Muir's exclusion of 'dogmatic justification' and 'God', has the ambitious grandeur of Milton's attempt to justify the ways of God to men in Paradise Lost, a relationship which is reinforced by the lofty tone of the opening stanza and of the

commenting Choruses. Neither tone nor ambitious theme finds justification in the ensuing poem.

The poems of yearning in First Poems had demonstrated Muir's need to find a meaningful way of objectifying and defining his subjective experience in his poetry. But the 'types' through which he attempts to examine human life in the Chorus remain abstract entities. They cannot arouse our interest or empathy because they themselves have no individual life; the individual nature of the suffering is undefined in terms of everyday living experience. The attempt to contemplate human life at a distance has resulted in a divorce from human life as we know it. Apart from a few touches in 'The Harlot' of a recognizable everyday world, such as 'the traffic's beat' and the 'weak lamps' of 'the darkening street'; the 'dark and dusty well' of the 'toppling tenement' (Ch. 9-10) - all of which could relate to Muir's experience of city life in Glasgow - the suffering of the victims in the Chorus is played out in an allegorical landscape.

The Chorus is unsatisfactory poetically and metaphysically. It does not succeed in creating an atmosphere of 'mystery and wonder at the life of the earth' as Muir indicated to Schiff; instead, it is Muir's obsession with Calvinist doctrine which dominates the Chorus's 'transcendental judgment';

It was decreed. We cannot tell
 Why harlot, idiot or clown
 Lived, wept and died. We cannot spell
 The hidden word which drove them down. (Ch. 10)

Yet, as in First Poems also, a random phrase or image points the reader forward towards the later work. Both 'that stationary country

where/Achilles drives and Hector runs' and 'that ghostly eternity/
Cut by the bridge where journeys Christ' (Ch. 15) are images characteristic of the exploration of time eternal behind time present, of the search for the fable which gives universality and meaning to the human life story. The Chorus's comment on the Idiot's sense of alienation:

He did not know the place, the alien throng;
The light was strange to him, bound by the awe
Of a once-broken long-forgotten law (Ch. 5)

anticipates the imagery of the exploration of dispossession and loss in the later Fall-theme poetry.

There is a gap of eight years between Chorus of the Newly Dead and Variations on a Time Theme,¹⁸ which was published in 1934 and in which one finds Muir still attempting both to define more precisely his thematic field and to find an individual means of expression appropriate to his themes. The eight intervening years were filled with living and literary experiences which, although on the surface they might seem to have delayed Muir's development as poet, were closely involved with that development. The experiences were related both to the international and Scottish aspects of Muir's life and work.

During this period Muir gained an increasing reputation as a critic and prose-writer. His collection of essays, Transition,¹⁹ was published in 1926, followed by The Structure of the Novel²⁰ in 1928, and, less happily, by John Knox: Portrait of a Calvinist²¹ in 1929. His translation, with his wife, of Kafka's The Castle appeared in 1930 and this was followed by the translation of The Great Wall of China and

Other Pieces in 1933. A commission to translate Feuchtwanger's Jew Süss provided the opportunity to live in France between March 1926 and May 1927 and this successful translation was followed by that of Feuchtwanger's The Ugly Duchess. In the early thirties the Muirs began the translation of Hermann Broch's The Sleepwalkers with its theme of the inevitable break-up of civilization in contemporary Europe: a disturbing work which re-aroused Muir's latent neurotic apprehensions. During this time Muir also wrote three novels: The Marionette²² (1927) set in Salzburg, and two Scottish novels, The Three Brothers²³ (1931), the action of which takes place in Reformation Scotland, and Poor Tom²⁴ (1932) set in contemporary Glasgow. All these activities contributed to the freeing of Muir's imagination and to the loosening of the hold on him of his unhappy past which made possible the mature poetry of the forties.

Variations on a Time Theme was not the first poetry to be written after the Chorus. Five short poems appeared in periodicals between 1927 and 1931 and were subsequently brought together, with the addition of one other, in the collection Six Poems by Edwin Muir,²⁵ printed in a limited edition at the Samson Press in 1932. These poems, 'The Stationary Journey', 'The Field of the Potter', 'The Trance', 'Tristram Crazy', 'Transmutation' and 'The Fall' were incorporated, some with altered titles, into the 1937 collection Journeys and Places²⁶ and can best be discussed in connection with that work.

The Variations is a bleak collection. The poems were not written as a linked series, many of them appearing individually over a period of time in magazines such as The Listener and The Spectator.

They are united, however, by the poet's obsession with the themes of time and mortality, preoccupations also of the autobiographical novels The Three Brothers and Poor Tom. In rhythmic movement and expression the poetry is much in advance of that of First Poems and the Chorus, but Muir has still not achieved an individual voice which fits with what he is attempting to say. Surprisingly, in view of his lack of appreciation of the poetry of T.S. Eliot as evidenced by his critical articles of the twenties, it is Eliot's voice which frequently echoes through the collection and fragments of imagery characteristic of 'Gerontion', The Waste Land and 'Ash Wednesday' which give form to Muir's sensation of futility and loss.²⁷

In many of the poems human time is seen as the 'place of disaffection' of Eliot's later 'Burnt Norton', but in few is there any sense of a 'time after'²⁸ which will bring positive release and recompense. Instead there is the obsession with the Nietzschean concept of eternal recurrence, the 'sad stationary journey' of 'generation after generation' (CP 40), and with the futility of the time present in which each generation is similarly imprisoned: 'we have known/Only this debris not yet overgrown'; the 'dead stones/Among dead stones' (CP 45). At the same time, the poet's desperate need is for some assurance that human lives are not 'the mock of Time' (CP 48), that there is a connection between human time and eternity.

In poem VIII the preoccupation with mortality is more precisely directed towards the fact of death itself and the unchosen end of the human life-span:

Time is a sea. There, if I could but sail
For ever and outface Death's bullying gale
I'd ask no more.

Yet he knows this to be an impossible dream:

It is not I but Time that is the fisher.
 He he will catch and stuff into his net
 With mortal sweepings, harp and banneret. (CP 49)

In his psychological studies of patients whom he had under analysis, C.G. Jung defined a mid-life crisis in which he diagnosed the need to re-orientate one's life towards the acceptance of and preparation for death, a process which, for Jung himself, involved a regression in which problems of childhood once more came to the surface of his mind. Jung's treatment of this mid-life crisis was by a process of individuation, a journey towards integration and wholeness which, for him, had many of the attributes of a religious quest. Jung's diagnosis and prescription has much relevance to the spiritual crisis which is manifested in Muir's early poetry, in which his attempt to connect the story with the fable is not so much related to the belief in the universality of human experience, to the generalising from the particular personal experience out of a belief in man's common fate such as we find in the work of Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth century and also in Muir's own later work; but, rather, to the overriding need to prove that his personal history does have significance, that he, personally, is not to be the 'mock of Time' (CP 48). Muir was already thirty-eight years of age when First Poems was published and forty-seven on publication of Variations. The mid-life crisis demonstrated by the obsession with time and mortality in the early poems was, for him, complicated by the fact that he had not yet come to terms with the family tragedies of his early years, or with Scottish Calvinism, the graceless doctrines of which made these

tragedies seem irredeemable and thus unbearable. Evidence of Jung's theory of regression to the problems of youth in middle age can be found in both The Three Brothers and Poor Tom which demonstrate the hold which the tensions of youth still had over him. Both novels anticipate the later Autobiography in their dramatisation of actual incidents from Muir's childhood and youth and both explore the theme of time. The Three Brothers obsessively argues out the doctrines of Original Sin and the concept of the Elect; Poor Tom re-enacts the death of Muir's brother Johnnie and Muir's early struggles with the fiend 'Indifference', a conflict described also in poem IX of Variations. Muir's novels have been regarded by many critics as mistaken digressions from his essential work as poet, but I believe that there is sufficient evidence in the irresolution of tensions in the early poetry to show that they were a necessary writing-out of the neurosis brought about by the tragic happenings of his youth and his immature and unaided efforts to deal with them. Muir himself seemed to recognise the problem: he told Sydney Schiff that 'art is for me the only way of growing, of becoming myself. . . . I know it is my good, the only real good for me, and the personal feeling, the personal integration seems to me more and more the thing that really matters.'²⁹

In poems III and VI of Variations Muir attempts to clothe his personal feelings of loss and dispossession in the Old Testament metaphor of the exiled Israelites, a further step along the road of myth as metaphor and distancing mechanism which he had first experimented with in 'Ballad of Hector in Hades'. The use of the biblical myth here seems to me to be unsatisfactory, resulting not in the universalising of the personal experience, but in confining it within

another restricted journey. In addition, the search for personal justification through myth is in this poem a one-sided affair: there is the re-telling of Jewish history in the poem, but for the related personal experience which the myth is to shape and order, one must await Muir's Autobiography.

Despite the increased poetic competence of the collection as a whole, there is still a disturbing lack of definition in Variations. Unlike Eliot's The Waste Land, MacDiarmid's A Drunk Man and Kafka's The Castle which Muir had so recently been translating, in Variations the wilderness of poem I is the abstraction of a state of mind rather than the evocation of a concrete place or experience which can span both material and metaphysical world. There are a number of isolated striking images throughout the poems, such as 'the knife of demon Time the vivisector/Incising nightmares' in poem V (CP 44) and the opening passage in poem I with its surrealist description of 'this broken wood' with its

Splintered stumps, flapping bark, ringwormed boles,
Soft milk-white water poisoned in jagged holes
Like gaps where tusks have been. (CP 39)

These remain isolated, however, and are not woven into the logical process of the poems.

The most satisfactory poem in Variations in terms of poetic expression and individual voice is perhaps number nine which first appeared in The Spectator of 22 December 1933 entitled 'The Dilemma'. It incorporates the themes of time and, tentatively, the Fall which were to occupy Muir throughout his life's work as poet, and re-introduces that Indifference which plagued Mansie Manson in Poor Tom

and which recurred as 'The Interceptor' in Muir's later work. Its third stanza re-uses, with minor alterations, the striking and characteristic evocation of the passion of bereavement from 'An Ancient Song' in First Poems. Yet the poem's ending is unsatisfactory. The implication that suffering is justified by the need to keep indifference at bay through pity suggests Muir's continuing inability at this point in time to come to terms with his own past experiences, and exemplifies a lack of philosophical resolution typical of the collection as a whole.

The final collection in this grouping of apprentice poetry is Journeys and Places. Like Variations on a Time Theme it is a product of Muir's experiences in the late 1920s and the 1930s, six of its twenty-four poems, as previously mentioned, having been published in a limited edition by the Samson Press in 1932, and five of these six poems - 'The Trance' (later titled 'The Enchanted Knight'), 'Tristram Crazed' ('Tristram's Journey'), 'The Stationary Journey', 'The Fall' and 'Transmutation' ('The Threefold Place') having been written, according to Willa Muir, about 1928.³⁰

In the early thirties the Muirs lived in Hampstead where they met many of the young politically-oriented poets of the period, while from 1935 until 1942 their home was in St Andrews in Scotland. In An Autobiography Muir comments, wonderingly, that in spite of the outward fortunate circumstances of his family in the early thirties, the poetry which he wrote at that time was 'tinged with apprehension.' Of the late thirties he tells us that 'I was more unhappy in St Andrews than I had been since the time of my obscure fears and the course of psycho-

analysis that dispelled them' (A 231, 244). What is noticeable about both the Variations and Journeys and Places is that whatever apprehension pervades the poems does not spring from the topical pressures of Muir's immediate living situation, but still emanates from the inner conflicts which he had been attempting to resolve in his poetry since First Poems.

Although in prose writings of the thirties such as Scottish Journey³¹ (1935), Social Credit and the Labour Party³² (1935) and Scott and Scotland (1936), Muir effectively pursued questions of immediate national, literary and political relevance, one does not find in his poetry of the period the political and social concerns which characterised the work of English writers such as W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender and Cecil Day Lewis, and which are to be found in much of Hugh MacDiarmid's poetry of the thirties. For Muir the poet it is still 'the eternal problem' (WM 17), especially in its relation to his own search for self-knowledge and spiritual significance, which dominates his work. For the union of the transcendental with the topical, a characteristic quality of MacDiarmid's work as a whole, but one which the English poets of the thirties on the whole did not succeed in achieving, or did not attempt to achieve, one has, in Muir's work, to wait for the poetry which came out of the crisis of war-torn Europe in the 1940s.

Of Muir's poetry to this point in time, Journeys and Places exhibits to the highest degree Muir's use of myth and legend to embody his search for understanding, a search given definition variously through the Fall of Man and the Fall of Troy, through Arthurian legend, through literature and history. Muir's attitude towards the material

of poetry is here still that of his critical attitude in We Moderns and Latitudes. In the latter he complains in 'A Note on Ibsen' that in the work of modern writers art is 'blasted, and from inside, by a necessity to insinuate into it something less triumphant than itself: the "problems" of our time' (L 68). In We Moderns he contrasts unfavourably the artistic criteria of the modern period with those of the ancient Greeks: 'For the Greeks did not aim at the reproduction but the interpretation of life, for which they would accept no symbol less noble than those ideal figures which move in the world of classic tragedy. To the Greeks indeed, the world of art was . . . a symbolizing of the deepest questions and enigmas of life' (WM 15-16). This is very close to the position of Matthew Arnold in the mid-nineteenth century who, like Muir, returned to the experience of the Greeks in his attempt as poet to deal with contemporary uncertainty and who, also like Muir, wrote his best work - in Arnold's case the short poem 'Dover Beach' - when he allowed his personal response to the present to triumph over his didactic return to the past for theme. In the Preface to his Poems (1853), Arnold insisted that the poet should choose as subject those actions 'which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections: to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time.'³³

This is similar to Muir's viewpoint as he contemplated the work of the Auden generation: 'A new generation had appeared from a country which I had never guessed at' which 'appeared to belong in a specific way to the present' (A 232-33). Their 'new poetry had left the immemorial hopes behind it' (A 235). In contrast, Muir felt himself to belong to that lost generation which should have spanned the gulf

between the pre-1914 period and the thirties, but whose survivors could not make contact with the new world: 'The generation to which I belong has survived an age, and the part of our life which is still immobilized there is like a sentence broken off before it could be completed: the future in which it would have written its last word was snatched away and a raw new present abruptly substituted' (A 194). The tragedy of Muir's generation was also the tragedy of the microcosm of Muir's individual life-journey, and Journeys and Places continues his attempt to find a way to relate his own aborted pre-industrial Orkney past with the alien present.

Technically, Journeys and Places is much in advance of the earlier collections. Linguistic remnants of Muir's undigested romanticism still linger in phrases such as 'eld's frosted hair'; 'Charlemagne's death-palsied hand'; 'silver billows/Rippled the azure sky' (CP 57, 87); and in the sentimentalising use of the diminutive in phrases such as 'stooks . . . like little golden graves' (CP 79). The much-praised 'Enchanted Knight' is a romantic amalgam of Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' and Heine's 'The Dead Lover'. In An Autobiography Muir tells of the influence this particular poem of Heine exerted on him during the period of his work at the bone factory in Greenock, when the state of neurotic arrestment and alienation symbolised in the dead lover's inability to respond seemed to match his own emotional condition. (A 144-45) Elizabeth Huberman finds that when Muir demonstrates 'the intolerable pressure of the nightmare weighing on the forsaken knight . . . it is clearly the nightmare of our own age that he points to as well.'³⁴ It seems to me, however, that, as with 'The Enchanted Prince' from First Poems, the ambiguity

of the romantic references in the poem suggests that it also is a record of Muir's unresolved personal conflicts at this time. There is some obscurity of meaning in several of the philosophical 'Place' poems also, but on the whole the themes of the poems in this collection are more clearly defined and the diction and imagery, while not imaginatively adventurous, are more related to the satisfactory exposition of these themes. As in First Poems, the verse form of Journeys and Places is made up largely of quatrains of eight-syllable lines, but the movement is freer and both rhythmic flow and syntax are less distorted by the constrictions of end-rhyme.

As in The Chorus and Variations, predominant themes are the universal ones of time, mortality and immortality, predestination and recurrence, and the apparent futility of our human journey. Poems in the 'Journeys' section of the original edition of the collection ('Journeys' and 'Places' distinctions were removed in the Collected Poems reprinting) describe movements from one mental state to another, as in 'Tristram's Journey' where the movement is both into and out of madness, while the 'Places' poems are evocations of static conditions. The first poem in the collection, 'The Stationary Journey', demonstrates what Willa Muir in Belonging describes as 'an indulgence in one of the occupations dear to Edwin, going back against the flow of Time in defiance of the "astronomic world", to see "the dead world grow green within/Imagination's one long day."' ³⁵ In the autobiographical article 'Yesterday's Mirror' Muir himself describes the search for self-knowledge in similar terms: 'what we require for real self-knowledge is the power to stop the sun and make it revolve in the opposite direction, taking us back stage by stage through manhood to youth and

through youth to childhood, missing nothing, until it conducts us to the mystery from which we started.' While the mature Muir acknowledged that to attain such power was an impossibility, that 'at most we can take only a few chance leaps backward while Time hurries us on; and these fortuitous leaps we afterwards call our life,'³⁶ the kind of exercise indulged in in poems such as 'The Stationary Journey' suggests an attempt to evade the circumstances of past and present actuality. Muir, like Keats in his not dissimilar attempt to evade what he could not yet accept in 'Ode to a Nightingale', has to learn that this indulgence is 'a dream!' (CP 59)

In 'The Mountains', with its Scottish physical and metaphysical context, no such imaginative journeying backwards is possible: 'The days have closed behind my back/Since I came into these hills' (CP 59). 'The Original Place' and 'The Unattained Place' similarly posit man's weakness and his predestined inability to be master of his own fate. Man may seem to be the ruler of these earthly lands, but in reality 'you could not leave these fields.' Man is subject to 'a force unknown/That neither answers nor yields' (CP 86). 'The Threefold Place' (originally 'Transmutation') tentatively suggests that resolution may be found in an eternal time beyond our human time, but as Peter Butter comments,³⁷ this possible resolution can only be grasped by the reader if the poetically unsatisfactory final stanza of the original version of the poem, omitted from Collected Poems, is allowed to remain. Without it, the poem's meaning is obscure.

Thematic uncertainty and obscurity characterise several of the 'Place' poems. In a letter to Stephen Spender in September 1935 Muir elaborated on the thinking behind 'The Solitary Place', which Spender had criticised, and commented that 'the poem is only part of an

argument that I hope to carry on, if I have good luck.'³⁸ The charge of the argument existing outside the poem is applicable equally to 'The Unfamiliar Place', 'The Private Place' and to 'The Place of Light and Darkness' where the logical uncertainty is further confused by imagery of romantic fancy: 'tasselled barges'; 'the lover standing by the trysting-tree'; 'the feathery tomb bursts open/And yellow hair is poured along the ground' (CP 79-80).

As Peter Butter observes in Edwin Muir: Man and Poet, 'most of the best poems in the volume are those in which the problems are dealt with obliquely through the experience of some historical or mythical character.'³⁹ 'Merlin', which Muir said 'more or less wrote itself',⁴⁰ is a fine poem, marred only a little by the intrusion of the fanciful element of 'the sleeping bride shut in her bower' in its closing lines. In it Muir achieves a fine blend of Arthurian legend and biblical myth in which to pursue the paradoxes of human mortality, the journeying backwards through time to negate the evil being here imaginatively justified by the legend of Merlin's magic powers. Like the contemporaneous 'Scotland's Winter' from the prose book Scottish Journey, the poem is surprisingly sophisticated and successful in its symbolism for a poem at this stage of Muir's development. Its theme is perfectly lucid, and is developed poetically:

O Merlin in your crystal cave
 Deep in the diamond of the day,
 Will there ever be a singer
 Whose music will smooth away
 The furrow drawn by Adam's finger
 Across the meadow and the wave?
 Or a runner who'll outrun
 Man's long shadow driving on,
 Break through the gate of memory
 And hang the apple on the tree?
 Will your magic ever show
 The sleeping bride shut in her bower,
 The day wreathed in its mound of snow
 And Time locked in his tower? (CP 73-4)

In 'Troy' and 'A Trojan Slave' (which were originally titled 'Troy I' and 'Troy II'), Muir returns to the area of Greek legend he had first employed in 'Battle of Hector in Hades'. In her analysis of Muir's use of myth in Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry, Lillian Feder finds that 'Troy appears frequently in Muir's poetry as the "universal landscape" of man's inevitable fall from a happy and secure state' and that while in the poem 'The Fall' 'it is Eden that is the interior landscape; in 'Troy' and 'A Trojan Slave', the historical city has become a myth in man's memory.'⁴¹ Miss Feder's interest in Muir's poetry in her book is directed towards his employment of myth and thus towards mythical explication more than towards literary criticism, and it seems to me that at times she overstates the possible mythical interpretations which Muir was consciously deploying in the 'Troy' poem. Of the treasure for which the mad, heroic old man was so casually and futilely killed by the robbers, she says: 'The "treasure" that his attackers demand until he dies is clearly the mythical ideal of splendor which the fallen city symbolizes, buried in its roots, but haunting the imagination of both the mad old man, who dreams of restoring it, and those who hope to snatch it from him.'⁴² This is a possible interpretation of the mythical symbols of the poem, and Muir certainly uses Troy in his work to symbolise fallen and unfallen worlds, but in reading the poem as poem, what seems to me to predominate is Muir's battle with Scottish Calvinism. The poem conveys that sense of the simultaneous heroism and yet apparent futility of man's earthly journey which is characteristic of much of Muir's early poetry, although not so well defined as in the 'Troy' poem, and which one meets again in 'The Combat'. This human journey is undertaken in a philosophical

context of chance happening and indifference and the arbitrary operation of good and evil. The robbers are part of that chance, arbitrary evil, their greed for treasure opposed to the loyal heroism of the mad, old man. And to Muir, the searcher, both greed and heroism inexplicably appear to be equally futile. His unasked, but implicit question in this poem is that with which the collection as a whole closes: in the 'day after the Last Day',

Where is the knife, the butcher,
The victim? Are they all here in their places?
Hid in this harmony? But there was no answer. (CP 88)

Again Muir seems to be tortured by the impossibility of ever coming to terms with the human journey through such inflexible concepts as the Calvinist doctrines of Predestination and the Elect.

In the companion poem, 'A Trojan Slave', the seeds of the destruction of Troy are to be found within Troy itself. As with the Calvinist concept of Original Sin in relation to human life; like, too, the internal dissension at the heart of Scottish life which Muir in his Scottish Journey found to be the greatest obstacle in the way of Scotland's regaining the lost Eden of her nationhood, so in this poem Muir develops the idea that Troy's fall was brought about by the practices of her society, and in particular by the unwillingness of her rulers to trust the loyalty of the slaves and accept them equally as defenders of Troy. And despite Troy's treatment of him and the city's destruction, the exiled slave, like the old man, like the Scots, like fallen humanity itself, cannot divest himself of a longing for his lost home and his idealised past.

What predominates thematically in this grouping of apprentice poetry collections is not only that concern with universal, international

themes which is characteristic of Muir's poetry and criticism as a whole, but also that equally influential, although more implicit, concern with Scottish Calvinism which had taken root in Muir's imagination as a child. As we shall see, the mature poetry of the forties demonstrates his new-found ability to give this personal obsession universality through its translation to the arena of Europe at war.

EDWIN MUIR

The Apprentice Collections

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- 7 Muir, First Poems, p. 11. Subsequent quotations from poems from First Poems not reprinted in Collected Poems (1963) will be referenced in text by title abbreviation and page number. Poems reprinted in Collected Poems will be referenced in text by Collected Poems title abbreviation and page number. Where comparison between two versions is made, page numbers for First Poems and Collected Poems will be given.
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& O'Keefe, 1978), pp. 119-22 and pp. 102-3.
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Press, 1926).
- 16 Willa Muir, Belonging, p. 102.
- 17 Edwin Muir, Selected Letters, p. 37.
- 18 Edwin Muir, Variations on a Time Theme (London: Dent, 1934).
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- 19 Edwin Muir, Transition: Essays on Contemporary Literature
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- 20 Edwin Muir, The Structure of the Novel (London: The Hogarth
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- 21 Edwin Muir, John Knox: Portrait of a Calvinist (London:
Cape, 1929).
- 22 Edwin Muir, The Marionette (London: The Hogarth Press, 1927).
- 23 Edwin Muir, The Three Brothers (London: Heinemann, 1931).
- 24 Edwin Muir, Poor Tom (London: Dent, 1932).
- 25 Edwin Muir, Six Poems by Edwin Muir (Warlingham: The Samson
Press, 1932).
- 26 Edwin Muir, Journeys and Places (London: Dent, 1937).
Quotations will be referenced in the text from Collected Poems.
- 27 For echoes of T.S. Eliot, see, for example, the opening stanza
of I (CP 39): 'After the fever . . . speculation'; also II
'At the dead centre of the boundless plain' (CP 40); 'And so
we do not hope' (CP 41); V 'and spring opening their hearts/
To emptiness, and autumn shutting their hearts/On emptiness,
stirring their hearts, not them' (CP 44); 'these dead stones/
Among dead stones' (CP 45); 'this hard torrid winter without
spring' (CP 47); 'Who curbed the lion long ago' (CP 52).
- 28 T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', Four Quartets, Faber paperback edn
(London: Faber & Faber, 1959), p. 17.
- 29 Muir, Selected Letters, p. 54.

- 30 Willa Muir, Belonging, p. 146.
- 31 Edwin Muir, Scottish Journey (London: Heinemann in association with Gollancz, 1935).
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- 36 Muir, 'Yesterday's Mirror', The Scots Magazine XXXIII, p. 404.
- 37 See Butter, Man and Poet, pp. 129-30.
- 38 Muir, Selected Letters, p. 86.
- 39 Butter, Man and Poet, p. 142.
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EDWIN MUIR

I THE POETRY

ii 'The Single Disunited World': Poetry 1943 - 1949

The Narrow Place The Voyage The Labyrinth

With the publication of The Narrow Place¹ in 1943, Muir's poetry moves into a new order of achievement. Although the title of the collection suggests a continuation of the Journeys and Places exploration, the poems themselves demonstrate a maturity of philosophical insight and poetic expression not found in the earlier work. Most commentators are agreed on this aspect of Muir's progress as poet. There is also considerable consensus as to the reasons for this new maturity, and from this point onwards one increasingly finds Muir's achievement as poet being considered in relation to the deepening of his personal spiritual life. The crucial event in Muir's religious experience which is most often singled out as the harbinger of his poetic advance was his realisation in February 1939, as he found himself reciting the Lord's Prayer one evening in a time of personal distress, that he was a Christian:

I had believed for many years in God and the immortality of the soul; I had clung to the belief even when, in horrifying glimpses, I saw animals peeping through human eyes. My belief receded then, it is true, to an unimaginable distance, but it still stood there, not in any territory of mine, it seemed, but in a place of its own. Now I realized that, quite without knowing it, I was a Christian, now matter how bad a one; and I remembered a few days later that Janet Adam Smith had told me, half-teasingly, while I was staying in Hampstead, that my poetry was Christian poetry: the idea then had been quite strange to me. (A 246-47)

In Man and Poet Peter Butter comments that 'the considerable advance poetically between Journeys and Places (1937) and The Narrow Place (1943) was related to, and in part caused by, this deepening of his spiritual life.'² But although he thus partially subscribes to a spiritual explanation of Muir's poetic maturity, he does not go on to tie the poetry so closely to religious interpretation as does Elizabeth Huberman who sees The Narrow Place as the collection in which Muir finally resolves the dilemma of 'whether to choose the darker or the brighter view' of human existence. For her, 'The Gate', at the mid-point of the volume, is 'the nadir of horror and desolation' after which the way is upwards to 'a rebirth into the light of acceptance and praise.'³

I believe that Elizabeth Huberman is too ready to accept reconciliation as the goal and achievement of Muir's poetry. And while his realisation of his Christianity in 1939 was one of the circumstances of his personal life at that time which influenced the course of the poetry, it does not seem to me to be adequate as an explanation of his new-found artistic maturity. Perhaps the significance of the 1939 experience lies in Muir's discovery of what the words of the Lord's Prayer now meant to him: 'every word . . . made me seem to realise that this petition was always universal, always adequate, and to life as it is, not to a life such as we long for or dream of: and for that reason it seems to sanctify common existence.' In addition: 'I never realised before so clearly the primary importance of "we" and "us" in the prayer: it is collective, for all societies, for all mankind as a great society.'⁴

This realisation of the Prayer's relevance to the here and now

related to other circumstances of his life at that time which were conspiring to bring the topical world, both Scottish and international, into his poetry. Muir's stay in St Andrews found him more unhappy than he had been at any time since the period of his analysis in London. He wrote in his Diary: 'I have often been aware of a faint ache, walking along the streets of this town and looking at the people, and it is due to the feeling that many of us walking there do not fit one another, and if we had the choice would not choose one another or our relation to one another' (SF 244). The books about Scotland which he had written during the thirties had forced him to assess objectively the depressed state of the Scottish nation. Although, in his Diary, he concluded that he believed in Scottish Nationalism and 'should like to see Scotland a self-governing nation' both 'because I am a Scotsman' and because 'I believe that men are capable of organizing themselves only in relatively small communities . . . I am for a kind of society where men have some real practical control of their lives' (SF 260), yet his experience of contemporary Scotland did not suggest to him that his hopes for the realisation of Scottish nationhood were well founded. In a letter to George Scott-Moncrieff he wrote in November 1940: 'when I think of Scotland, and when I come in contact with it, as I do now every day . . . I do not - forgive me - feel very hopeful . . . it seems to me, looking at Scottish life, that discouragement is everywhere in it.'⁵ The bitterness and disappointment which Scotland induced in him is both the strength and the weakness of The Narrow Place poem, 'Scotland 1941'.

At this time also, the war in Europe brought the Muirs financial problems as their income from translating from German now ceased.

Muir's efforts to obtain a teaching post in compensation proved to be a sardonic parody of the Calvinist doctrine of the Elect which had so long obsessed him in his search for meaning in his poetry, his entry to the heaven of teaching being entirely dependent upon the certificate of the Elect which he did not possess. In a letter to Alec Aitken of 12 June 1941 he tells how his 'lack of an academic degree is a most astonishing obstacle: in Scotland nothing but a certificate of some kind seems to be recognised as really meritorious - a curious example of the preference of faith to works, for surely by this time I've done some work that should count.'⁶

The shock of his wife's illness which produced Muir's first love poems was paralleled by his distress over the fate of friends and acquaintances in war-torn Europe, where Hermann Broch's intuition of the breakdown of civilization had now come to pass, and Broch himself came as a refugee to Muir's home in St Andrews. In St Andrews Muir's contact with the war was limited to the reading of newspaper reports, the fire-watching and drilling in the evenings with the Home Guard, and the drudgery of his job stamping ration books in the Dundee Food Office, but when he went to work for the British Council in Edinburgh in 1942 his contact was with refugees and servicemen from Europe as he arranged entertainments for the various foreign 'houses' in the city. This contact with Europe in disaster intensified when he went to Prague for the British Council immediately after the war and witnessed the evil of the Nazi occupation being replaced by the impersonal authoritarianism of a Communist regime.

As a result, it was no longer the personal tragedies and sense of alienation from his own past which now obsessed Muir, but the

problems of this 'single, disunited world' (A 194) of the nightmare present in Europe and its implications for the future of all humanity. Thus his poetry from The Narrow Place onwards increasingly operates in the metaphor of the present, and while he continues to pursue the philosophical themes of the paradox of good and evil and the mystery of human existence, these are now related to the fate of mankind as a whole. He is now no longer preoccupied with time and immortality as these relate to his personal fear of being the mock of time, but he is able to use his subjective experience as the springboard for his leap into the condition of all mankind. He is now truly able to universalise from the particular personal experience, to give voice to the sense of man's common fate which was the legacy of his upbringing in the non-competitive, co-operative community of the Orkney islands.

Muir's long apprenticeship as poet had at last provided him with the tools to dissect his contemporary experience. In 'Yesterday's Mirror' he tells how, having corrected the final proofs of his autobiography, 'I felt that now my autobiography was finished, I could really write my autobiography. I had cleared up a few things in my mind.'⁷ Not only the autobiography, but also the novels The Three Brothers and Poor Tom had cleared up a few things in his mind, and, philosophically, Muir was now ready to make peace with his past. In addition, he had become increasingly skilled in the use of imaginative, pointed, descriptive language in prose writings such as Scottish Journey and the first version of his autobiography, The Story and the Fable, and in the poetry from The Narrow Place onwards one finds this technical maturity entering the poetry also. Thus, even in the

mythical poems, one finds that the imagery is more related to the experience of the contemporary world through its new-found incisiveness. This achievement may have been aided by Muir's own belated realisation of the poetic method he had unconsciously pursued since First Poems: in An Autobiography he confesses to having used the symbols of his childhood in his poetry for ten years without realising it until it was pointed out to him (A 208). Now his past increasingly co-operates in a new way with the imagery of the present in his exploration of earthly life. As he expresses it in 'Yesterday's Mirror': 'Our feeling of life comes from the present, our knowledge of life from the past. Our feeling of life is real only if we project ourselves into life and feel all round us the struggle, suffering and enjoyment of the world; our knowledge of life significant only if we read into the pattern of our own past the universal pattern of human existence. There, in the present, which to us is all space, and in the past, which to us is all time, lies our earthly meaning.'⁸

Three of the poems in The Narrow Place collection have direct associations with the 1939-45 war: 'The Wayside Station'; 'The River' and 'The Refugees', this last-mentioned appearing in the 1960 Collected Poems in a much curtailed form, being the revised final section of the more extensive poem of the original The Narrow Place collection. 'The Wayside Station' grew out of Muir's daily uncomfortable waiting at Leuchars Junction for a train connection to his job at the Dundee Food Office and the mood of despondency which it evokes is that of its poet as he contemplates the return to futility in his own daily life and its parallel in warring Europe. Both Willa Muir and Elizabeth Huberman draw attention to the new departure which this poem (and, for Elizabeth

Huberman, 'The River' and 'The Refugees' also) represents. Mrs Muir describes 'The Wayside Station' as being 'unlike any of his recent poems in being an immediate impression of a recognizable local scene, not removed into an imaginary setting, but fitted into its actual place, related to the present world around it, as we too were finding ourselves related.'⁹ Elizabeth Huberman finds that while the expression of the European nightmare 'through contemporary images' does not obviate a lack of 'imaginative vision' in both 'The River' and 'The Refugees', 'the triumph of "The Wayside Station"' is 'this tremendous impact, this reverberation through time and the solar system which the otherwise carefully modulated poem delivers, almost unexpectedly in its last lines.'¹⁰

'The Wayside Station' is a fine poem, especially in the evocation of the dreary, grey east-coast winter morning which the precise observation in the visual imagery of the first stanza produces:

Here at the wayside station, as many a morning,
 I watch the smoke torn from the fummy engine
 Crawling across the field in serpent sorrow.
 Flat in the east, held down by stolid clouds,
 The struggling day is born and shines already
 On its warm hearth far off. Yet something here
 Glimmers along the ground to show the seagulls
 White on the furrows' black unturning waves. (CP 92)

Similarly evocative are the closing lines, where the imagery is both visually effective and philosophically allusive:

The wood stands waiting
 While the bright snare slips coil by coil around it,
 Dark silver on every branch. The lonely stream
 That rode through darkness leaps the gap of light,
 Its voice grown loud, and starts its winding journey
 Through the day and time and war and history. (CP 93)

The repeated 'and' in the final line slows the already slow-moving verse to a halting pace which corresponds with the weary mood of the poem and with the long, winding historical journey which it evokes. The little word 'war', slipped unobtrusively between 'time' and 'history', brings one with a shock up against the reason for the poem's mood of futility and cheerlessness.

'The River' and 'The Refugees' both invoke the historical context suggested by the final line of 'The Wayside Station'. The opening of the former poem images

The old woman standing at the cottage gate,
 Her hand upon her grandson's shoulder. He,
 A bundle of clouts creased as with tribulations,
 Bristling with spike and spits and bolts of steel,
 Bound in with belts, the rifle's snub-nosed horn
 Peering above his shoulder. (CP 93)

Muir's observation that the young soldier

looks across
 From this new world to hers and tries to find
 Some ordinary words that share her sorrow (CP 93)

moves the poem into that preoccupation with human alienation, impersonality and futile hostility which provides the theme for much of his poetry of this war period: The stream of history

Runs on into the day of time and Europe,
 Past the familiar walls and friendly roads,
 Now thronged with dumb migrations, gods and altars
 That travel towards no destination. Then
 The disciplined soldiers come to conquer nothing,
 March upon emptiness and do not know
 Why all is dead and life has hidden itself. (CP 94)

'The River' ends with the stream of history flowing onwards and the poet asking despondently what peace it can possibly find 'far past the other side of the burning world?' (CP 94)

In 'The Refugees', on the other hand, Muir looks backwards into human history to find the seeds of the nightmare present in the indifference of the past. This poem does not seem to me to deserve Mrs Huberman's charge of a lack of imaginative vision. It is, in terms of descriptive writing, a plain poem, there being in it none of the poetic imagery of the evocation of the drublie days of winter in 'The Wayside Station'. It does, however, employ its domestic metaphor satisfactorily, and the plangent evocation of the

always homeless
Nationless and nameless,
To whose bare roof-trees never come
Peace and the house martin to make a home (CP 95)

is especially effective. Effective too is the way in which it incorporates into the wider theme of war and man's inhumanity to man Muir's personal preoccupation with suffering and indifference and Calvinist doctrine. Muir had himself experienced the unthinking detachment which he now sees as one of the causes of contemporary disaster. Like the family in the opening lines of the poem who 'lived in comfort in our haunted rooms' and uncomprehendingly 'watched gently grow/The tame domesticated danger' (CP 95) from the crack in their hearthstone, Muir and his wife had, in the twenties, lived comfortably and joyfully and self-containedly in the community of A.S. Neill's school at Hellerau, oblivious of the misery of many Germans as a consequence of the reparations demanded by the Allies after World War I, and oblivious also of the anti-semitism which flourished unchecked in Germany and Austria.

Our communal guilt for the devastation of the present through our past history, our embracing of the machine and the replacing of things spiritual by things mechanical was a theme which troubled Muir,

both in his poetry and in his letters and his Diary in the early years of the war. He wrote to Alec Aitken on 28 May 1940: 'I'm depressed: the news about Belgium's surrender has just come in. I still think we are going to win; but what an effort, and what bloodshed it will take, and what terror to our children, and what a world of hatred and general hatefulness. Yet we are all responsible for it - I mean all peoples and probably almost all individuals in Europe - by turning away from the soul and pursuing our private ambitions and greeds and personalities, and behaving as if they alone existed.'¹¹ The events in Europe seemed to provide a contemporary illustration of the ancient biblical doctrine of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children. In his Diary he commented on the news that Hitler had marched into Prague: 'The nineteenth century sowed the whirlwind that we are reaping. Think of all the native tribes and peoples, all the simple indigenous forms of life which Britain trampled upon, corrupted, destroyed, during that time in the name of commercial progress. All these things, once valuable, once human, are now dead and rotten' (SF 257). Later, in Prague after the war, he was shown by a friend a photograph of young Gestapo men, one of whom had been responsible for the killing of her husband. Muir saw them not only as embodying contemporary evil, but also as victims of history: 'They all seemed to be in their late twenties, and it suddenly came into my mind that they had been bred by the first world war. They had been children in 1919 when Germany was so wretched, and young girls and boys sold cocaine in the streets of Berlin and gave their bodies to anyone for a free meal. . . . They stared out from the photographs with the confidence of the worthless who find power left in their hands like a tip hastily dropped by a

frightened world. Though they had done so many things to satisfy their revenge on mankind there was no satisfaction in their faces, and no hope.' Muir continues: 'Perhaps it was fanciful to see these young men as I saw them then. Evil works itself out from generation to generation, but to observe it happening, to be confronted with one particular illustration of the universal law, is like a violation of the ordinary faith which makes us believe that all men can be saved' (A 261-62).

In 'The Refugees' poem also he turns towards the religious mystery of good and evil and original sin, our communal heritage of sin:

This is our punishment. We came
Here without blame, yet with blame,
Dark blame of others, but our blame also. (CP 96)

Like the limited operation of human free will in a wider context of predestination, he sees the evil of the war as being both inevitable, yet perhaps avoidable in its present form:

This stroke was bound to fall,
Though not to fall so.
A few years did not waste
The heaped up world. The central pillar fell
Moved by no living hand. The good fields sickened
By long infection. Oh this is the taste
Of evil done long since and always, quickened
No one knows how
While the red fruit hung ripe upon the bough
And fell at last and rotted where it fell. (CP 96)

Muir began with high hopes for his original 'Refugees' poem, but concluded that while 'it was inspired by quite sincere feeling', it 'never rose to the right height, the pity and indignation never transmitting themselves, except in one or two lines in the last part.'¹²

I believe his early optimism is justified by the one third of the original poem which is reprinted in the 1960 Collected Poems. It is a strangely haunting poem, and remains relevant beyond its immediate occasion into our late twentieth century world of nuclear menace and world-wide social and economic deprivation. We have yet to 'shape here a new philosophy' to deal with the 'rejection bred by rejection/Breeding rejection' (CP 96).

Several other poems in The Narrow Place develop international themes contiguous to the explicit European war theme. In 'The Ring' Muir successfully employs the difficult terza rima interconnecting verse form of Dante's Divine Comedy to uncover the broken ring of the human family chain. His theme here is that of his essay on King Lear and the unnatural reversion to animal nature which 'had never known the vow and the pilgrimage' (CP 113) in the behaviour of Goneril, Regan and Edmund towards the old king and towards each other. As in the essay and in An Autobiography, Muir in 'The Ring' sees human conflict as 'a conflict between the sacred tradition of human society, which is old, and nature, which is always new, for it has no background' (A 53). He peoples his poem with the human animals whose features throughout his life recurred to haunt him in times of acute emotional distress. The poem is not entirely without hope. In its final lines the inheritors of the broken tradition overhear

the long-forgotten word
That rounded again the ring where sleeping lay
Our treasures, still unrusted and unmarred. (CP 113)

'Scotland 1941', which shares an opening line with 'The Ring', returns to Scottish themes and the broken ring of Scotland. This poem

was omitted from the 1952 Collected Poems and has been criticised for the simplistic view of Scottish history which is displayed in it. The title of the poem is unfortunate in that it would be difficult to claim in the context of Scotland 1941, as Muir does here, that the Scots endure 'spiritual defeat wrapped warm in riches' (CP 97). Nor did they ever enjoy such an idyllic pre-Reformation past as that idealised picture of 'busy corn-fields' and the 'green road winding up the ferny brae' (CP 97) in the first stanza suggests. One wishes also that in his opening line Muir had placed 'family' before 'tribe'. This would have been more satisfactory semantically, while the slight blocking of the rhythmic flow of the line in consequence of placing the three-syllabled 'family' first would have added emphasis to Muir's philosophical idea of all-embracing unity in the progression from the small family unit through that of the tribe to that of the nation. Nevertheless, despite these qualifications, there is in the poem much of the vigorous writing which Muir's battles with Calvinism and the Scottish psyche frequently provoked.

As Hugh MacDiarmid in A Drunk Man saw himself and Scotland's soul personified in him as 'a stuffed bird on metal like a brainch/Or a seal on a stump o' rock-like wood,'¹⁴ so in this poem Muir, too, sees Scotland as a museum piece:

Wallace and Bruce guard now a painted field,
And all may read the folio of our fable,
Peruse the sword, the sceptre and the shield. (CP 97)

Scotland had once been 'a tribe, a family, a people', in whose way of life, as in the life of the Orkney of Muir's childhood, the sky fitted the earth:

A simple sky roofed in that rustic day,
 The busy corn-fields and the haunted holms,
 The green road winding up the ferny brae. (CP 97)

In Muir's view, Scotland's ring had been broken by the intolerance of the Reformation, and the sins of the fathers of the Scottish Calvinist Kirk were still being visited upon Scotland's children: 'Out of that desolation we were born' (CP 97). The poet's anger is communicated in vigorous alliterative and allusive language: 'Knox and Melville clapped their preaching palms'; 'mummied housegods in their musty niches'; 'sham bards of a sham nation'; 'no pride but pride of pelf' (CP 97). Burns and Scott are 'sham bards', not because of the quality of their work, but because, as Muir discusses at length in relation to Burns in particular in Scottish Journey, their work is distorted and fêted for the wrong reasons by a nation which has lost its right to be called a nation, and which uses its literary figures cynically as props for its pretence of nationhood.

The destructive power of a faith carried to extremes is the theme also of 'The City', but in this poem there is no defining factor such as the story of Scotland and the resulting obscurity in my view lessens its impact. Peter Butter comments: 'I suppose the idea is that the attempt to make the holy city on earth (Calvin's Geneva; John Knox's Scotland) leads to the use of force, to strife, and anger, that we must be content with an imperfect and human order.'¹⁵ There is, too, a suggestion of the Wars of the Crusades in 'small-towered Jerusalem'; 'the other troops' and 'the streets of the holy city running with blood' (CP 107-8). One is reminded of Neil M. Gunn's The Green Isle of the Great Deep¹⁶ and the contrast between the humanity of human imperfections and the cruelty of the ideal heavenly order which the administrators of

the Green Isle seek to impose. On the whole, however, the poem seems to me to demand recourse to too many outside references in the attempt at explication.

Many of the poems in the collection pursue more generally Muir's recurring universal themes of 'where we came from, where we are going, and . . . how we should live with one another' (A 56). 'The Return of Odysseus' and 'The Good Man in Hell' briefly examine the question of faithfulness amid chaos and against all the odds. 'The Gate' is concerned with the evil of an adult world which threatens the innocence of childhood. I find there is something deeply unsatisfactory about this poem in which the atmosphere of overpowering evil finds no correlative in the happenings of the poem, but seems to depend on external factors about which the reader is not told. The Elizabethan sense of sexual licence in its phraseology - 'the rich food that plumped their lusty bodies'; 'too gross and strong/For our unpractised palates' (CP 110) - brings to mind the not dissimilar atmosphere of sexual evil without sufficient justification in the dramatic action of Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida. Nor is the comparison with Troilus and Cressida altogether fanciful. The matter of Troy is a recurrent metaphor in Muir's poetry and the description in this poem of the children 'warm against the wall', 'that great parapet', 'the huge gate', even the 'hillock/So small and smooth and green' (CP 110) which suggests the Castle of Muir's island Wyre where he played as a child and which he tells us in his autobiography he saw as Troy (A 206), all bring to mind Muir's use of the Troy story and its connection with the theme of fated evil. 'The Gate', however, remains obscure and unsatisfactory as a poem, the key to its atmosphere of unhealthy sensuality remaining in the poet's mind.

Three poems, 'The Human Fold', 'The Narrow Place' and 'The Recurrence' take up again themes from Journeys and Places. 'The Human Fold' patterns 'The Original Place' in its awareness that human beings are 'penned within the human fold' (CP 99), their inability to 'leave these fields' (CP 86) a 'stationary farce' mocked by the mobility of 'the ever-moving stars' (CP 99). The poem is pessimistic in tone. The line 'There's no alternative here but love' (CP 99) for a moment suggests a possibility of resolution such as one finds in Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach',¹⁷ but Muir quickly dispels that comfort by suggesting that genuine love itself cannot flourish 'where there's no genuine liberty' (CP 99), and that

of the legends of our day
This one remains alone:
'They loved and might have loved for ever,
But public trouble and private care
Faith and hope and love can sever
And strip the bed and the altar bare.' (CP 100)

Muir uses images from the dream visions of his analysis period - 'The dragon with his tears of gold,/The bat-browed sphinx' (CP 99; A 160) - to suggest intimations of immortality which human beings can sense from their earthly position, but the dominant note of the poem is one of alienation:

but here our sight is bound
By ten dull faces in a round,
Each with a made-to-measure glance
That is in misery till it's found. (CP 100)

'The Narrow Place' and 'The Recurrence' both attempt to present alternative scenarios. The former looks back to the claustrophobia of 'The Mountains' in its opening metaphor of Scottish geography and climate:

How all the roads creep in.
 This place has grown so narrow,
 You could not swing a javelin,
 And if you shot an arrow,
 It would skim this meagre mountain wall
 And in some other country
 Like a lost meteor fall.
 When first this company
 Took root here no one knows,
 For nothing comes and goes
 But the bleak mountain wind,
 That so our blood has thinned
 And sharpened so our faces - (CP 101)

while the final two stanzas attempt to postulate another, as yet unrealised, dimension in time. The attempt at compensation looks forward to 'The Difficult Land' of One Foot in Eden and its conclusion that 'this is a difficult country, and our home' (CP 238), but in this earlier poem the negative picture built up in the first half of the poem is too strong for its ending which is rhetorical only and evades the problem of human circumscription:

Sleep underneath the tree.
 It is your murdering eyes that make
 The sterile hill, the standing lake,
 And the leaf-breaking wind.
 Then shut your eyes and see,
 Sleep on and do not wake
 Till there is movement in the lake,
 And the club-headed water-serpents break
 In emerald lightnings through the slime,
 Making a mark on Time. (CP 102)

'The Recurrence' suffers from a similar inability to resolve in the poetry the contrary possibilities. Its attempt to defeat the horrific immortality of Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence relies to a significant extent on the reader's willingness to assume the truth of the Christian story of Christ's resurrection. Again Muir conveys the negative case powerfully, while the verse which attempts a positive

refutation is limp and its imagery imprecise. There is a similar reliance on resolution through belief in the Christian story in the unsatisfactory Scottish-theme poem 'Robert the Bruce: To Douglas in Dying'.

For a more sure evocation of the positive compensations of our life in this difficult land one must turn to the personal poems in The Narrow Place which demonstrate also Muir's new-found poetic maturity. Outstanding among these personal poems is 'The Confirmation', a variation on the sonnet form in which he was to excel. Unlike his first sonnet, 'An Ancient Song' from First Poems, this poem has fifteen lines instead of the traditional fourteen. Like its two companion poems, 'The Annunciation' and 'The Commemoration', 'The Confirmation' is a love song to the poet's wife in which he celebrates not the romantic, idealised love of youth, but the qualities which have proved their worth in a long marriage and which are defined in the poem in imagery which epitomises the essential attributes for life as we know it:

But you,
 What shall I call you? A fountain in a waste,
 A well of water in a country dry,
 Or anything that's honest and good, an eye
 That makes the whole world bright. Your open heart,
 Simple with giving, gives the primal deed,
 The first good world, the blossom, the blowing seed,
 The hearth, the steadfast land, the wandering sea,
 Not beautiful or rare in every part,
 But like yourself, as they were meant to be. (CP 118)

Like Shakespeare in his sonnet 'My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun',¹⁸ it is not an unrealistic and unobtainable ideal which the poet celebrates, but, in anticipation of 'One Foot in Eden', the 'strange blessings never in paradise' (CP 227) of his everyday, earthly life.

An interesting feature of these personal poems is their relationship with late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Metaphysical poetry, a relationship which had first tentatively appeared in some of the experimental poems of First Poems. The affinity between Muir's meditative poetry and that of seventeenth century religious poets such as Henry Vaughan has frequently been pointed to; but here we have the relationship extending to themes which are not specifically religious, although, like the Metaphysical poets, Muir here displays a cast of mind which in his poetry can suggest the transcendental world which is the wider context of his secular, topical themes. 'The Annunciation' and 'The Commemoration' both suggest a relationship with John Donne's 'The Extasie', the latter through its 'monologue of two' (CP 119) and 'The Annunciation' through its conceit of the pilgrimage of body and soul. 'The Letter' uses the fact of mortality - and immortality - as a reason for healing a breach of friendship: in it, it is not golden lads and lasses who, like chimney sweepers, must succumb to mortality, but 'the tried friend and the too much tried' (CP 98). 'The Face' grew out of an experience in St Andrews: 'Yesterday I caught a glimpse in the street of a middle-aged woman whose eyes glittered like those of a bird of prey' (SF 257). The resulting poem is unusually visual in its sea imagery and both idea and expression relate to the Elizabethan and Jacobean world which produced Shakespeare's The Tempest and to Muir's own exploration of the animal in the human in his essay, The Politics of King Lear.¹⁹

Another personal poem of note is 'The Swimmer's Death' in which Neil M. Gunn found 'the wonderful clarity and radiance of the light - of the sea - which remained in our minds from early boyhood years in

that northern world.' What stood out for Gunn, besides the evocation of the light on the northern sea, was the word 'homing' which 'gave a warmth to radiance, appeared to add human experience to austere vision.'²⁰

Finally there are the opening and closing poems of The Narrow Place, 'To J.F.H. (1897 - 1934)' and 'The Question' and 'The Day'. 'To J.F.H.', which is Muir's lament for and homage to his friend John Holms, is a fitting choice to open the collection and so to herald Muir's new poetic departure. Its imagery is contemporary and both language and verse movement are vigorous and assured. The poem conveys well the poet's shocked sense of displacement in time caused by the chance sight of a motor-cyclist who reminded him of his dead friend. Particularly effective are the opening metaphors of sport, which convey the speed of the cyclist while symbolising the quick mind of Holms which Muir admired so much, and the stillness of the moment of readjustment when the poet realises his mistake: 'The clock-hand moved, the street slipped into its place,/Two cars went by' (CP 92).

The collection ends with two short meditative poems, one of eight lines and one of seventeen lines, and both consisting of one long sentence: 'The Question' and 'The Day'. 'The Question' pursues a paradox dear to Muir, that of 'the gatherer gathered, the finder found' (CP 122) and suggests through its imagery that the fable may be found in the everyday story. Calvinist predestination is the context of 'The Day', but the poet's prayer in this mellow transformation of his earlier Calvinist themes is not that he should be allowed to escape from the 'in eternity written and hidden way' but that he may be allowed 'the acceptance and revolt, the yea and nay,/The denial and the blessing that are

my own' (CP 122): that he may be helped to live his own life within the predetermined framework. Like 'To J.F.H.' in its opening, both poems are fitting conclusions to a collection which has seen Muir advance more surely into the metaphor of the world about him.

The Voyage,²¹ Muir's next collection, is simultaneously a sustaining of the developments of The Narrow Place and a partial retreat from them. The collection contains most of the work written during Muir's three years in Edinburgh with the British Council, a period during which, he tells us in his Autobiography, he wrote more poetry 'than in all the years in St Andrews' (A 250). Willa Muir describes some of this poetry as Muir's 'Tram Poems': 'Shuttling about in trams from one House to another, Edwin discovered that sitting on the top deck of a tram in rapid motion set his unconscious moving too, so that lines and snatches of poems began to come up. When the tram journey stopped, the poem stopped. In his 1946 volume: The Voyage there are some of these Tram Poems, like "Reading in Wartime."²²

'Reading in Wartime' is a fine poem, but there are a number of short-line poems in the volume in which the rhythmic influence of the shuttling tram has been less benign. Commenting on the predominance of short-line poems in the collection, Peter Butter finds Muir's work more satisfactory 'when he allowed himself more space',²³ and there is certainly in several poems in The Voyage a regression to the weak, predictable rhyming and limp rhythms which characterised much of the work of the early collections and which, as in these early collections also, is caused to a significant extent by the constrictions of a short line and a tight abab or abcb rhyming pattern. On the other hand, many poems

- in particular the personal poems, the poems inspired by the war situation and one or two of the philosophical poems such as 'The Myth' and 'The Voyage' - uphold the poetic advances made in The Narrow Place.

The title poem, 'The Voyage', had its source in a story told to Muir by his fellow Orkney-man, the novelist Eric Linklater, of a sea voyage to Australia which, because of bad weather, was unrelieved by the sighting of any other ship and lasted so long that the sailors began to speculate that the world had perhaps come to an end and that they alone were left alive.²⁴ The resultant poem explores one of Muir's recurring themes: that of catching hold of the timeless moment in time. As its theme unfolds, the poem, with its octosyllabic, alternately rhyming lines, evokes the mysterious world of the ballads and of Coleridge's 'The Ancient Mariner'. As in the Ancient Mariner's case, the isolation and the accompanying mesmerised speculation of the sailors produce their own visions. In 'The Voyage', however, the vision is not of a death ship, given shape by the Mariner's guilt-ridden conscience, but is the evocation of the sights and sounds of home: 'the whispering quays' of a safe harbour; 'a land of harvests and of graves' (CP 137). This latter image-a simpler version of the image 'stooks that lean like little golden graves' from the Journeys and Places poem 'The Place of Light and Darkness' - is at first surprising, but the juxtapositioning of 'harvests' and 'graves' is completely convincing in the metaphysical context of Muir's work and also in a visual context when one remembers the Orkney landscape with the ancient domed burial cairns patterned in the similarly domed haystacks of autumn.

Muir's sailors are not Coleridge's, however, and for them the isolation, brought about not by evil action but mysteriously given to

them, becomes a peace and a blessing; the homeland of their visions becomes 'a legendary land' and their present 'loss . . . our only joy' (CP 138). This experience of a reality beyond human time cannot last: there are no controlling occult forces in Muir's poem as in 'The Ancient Mariner'. The landfall is eventually made and the sailors return, with some sense of loss, to the flawed world of everyday experience, their plight (unintentionally) symbolised in the limp rhythm of the final line of the poem: The land

rose up, a sullen stain
 Flawing the crystal firmament.
 A wound! We felt the familiar pain
 And knew the place to which we were sent. (CP 138)

Other philosophical poems in the volume explore Muir's recurring theme of the paradox of good and evil in human affairs, the good associated, as in 'The Gate' of The Narrow Place with the innocence of childhood, the evil being introduced by the adult world. 'The Three Mirrors' develops in verse Muir's exploration of the good/evil paradox - 'the wise king safe on his throne,/The rebel raising the rout' (CP 141) - in 'Yesterday's Mirror'. In the article he defines 'three ways in which men may look into that mirror which shows life as it is lived':

There is the glance of experience which discerns a world where wrong triumphs and right suffers, where greed succeeds and generosity fails and selfish illusion reigns. This is the world of the realist, who has forgotten his childhood or has dismissed it as unimportant, as if he had been born fully equipped to deal with life at the age of thirty. Then there is the glance of the man who in maturity has kept a memory of his childhood. Perhaps simply by virtue of that memory he sees in the mirror an indefeasible rightness beneath the wrongness of things; a struggle between good and evil, and not merely the victory of evil; and to him the rightness of human life has a deeper reality,

a more fundamental appositeness, than the evil, as being more truly native to man. This, to our credit, is our normal view of life. The third glance into the mirror is given only to the greatest poets and mystics at their greatest moments, and is beyond rational description. The world the mystical poet sees is a world in which both good and evil have their place legitimately; in which the king on his throne and the rebel raising his standard in the market place, the tyrant and the slave, the assassin and the victim, each plays a part in a supertemporal drama which at every moment, in its totality, issues in glory and meaning and fulfilment. This vision is too dangerous for us as human beings struggling in the arena; it would be safe only if we felt no touch of evil; and it is given to men only when they are at the very heart of good, and, in a sense very different from Nietzsche's, beyond good and evil. St Augustine saw it and so did Blake; it is the supreme vision of human life, because it reconciles all opposites; but it transcends our moral struggle, for in life we are ourselves the opposites and must act as best we can.²⁵

These mirror definitions are central to Muir's philosophical search in his poetry: to his belief in the significance of childhood experience and vision and to the 'mystery and wonder at the life of the earth'²⁶ which he tried unsuccessfully to portray in Chorus of the Newly Dead; to his increased capacity in his late poetry to accept and give expression to the unity of human experience. In the poem 'The Three Mirrors', Muir patterns the prose piece in his definition of the three mirror-visions, but he does not claim for himself as poet the insight 'given only to the greatest poets and mystics at their greatest moments.' While first and second stanzas begin in the indicative mood, he qualifies verse three with the opening 'If':

If I looked in the third glass
 I should see evil and good
 Standing side by side
 In the ever standing wood,
 The wise king safe on his throne,
 The rebel raising the rout
 And each so deeply grown
 Into his own place
 He'd be past desire or doubt. (CP 141)

'The Window', 'The House' and 'The Myth' likewise explore contrasting themes of innocent, irresponsible childhood and flawed, circumscribed adulthood. Of these, 'The Myth' is most mature poetically and philosophically. In Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry, Lillian Feder points to the equivocal use of myth by twentieth century writers. She finds that 'the interest in myth in the twentieth century is complicated by the fact that it is considered both truth and falsehood by some of the very poets who employ it. . . . The very poets who consider myth a vehicle for the expression of truth are also aware of the validity of the popular use of the word to mean a falsehood or an avoidance of reality.'²⁷ While Muir's employment of myth inclines on the whole towards its positive nature as a vehicle for man's exploration of self and human existence, the opening of 'The Myth' suggests an awareness of the equivocal attitude discussed by Lillian Feder. This poem can be interpreted in strict relationship to Muir's own life story, but it seems to me that, unlike earlier evocations of his personal life-journey such as Poem III (originally 'Autobiography') of Variations on a Time Theme or 'The Mythical Journey' of Journeys and Places, the strength of 'The Myth' is that it can be read without relationship to Muir's personal autobiography: both the 'childhood . . . Enacted in a distant isle' and the 'tragi-comedy' of youth (CP 144) serving as metaphors for our universal, communal journey. The immobility of the picture of 'Time with his hourglass and his scythe' who 'stood dreaming on the dial' (CP 144) in the first stanza lends support to the view of childhood as 'myth', as a temporary detachment from reality, its irresponsible play guarded by 'the faithful watchers' who stand 'at each corner of the wood' (CP 144). Similarly, in stanza two, the

visions of youth - the 'reveries and names' - are eventually routed and remoulded in the 'practical clay' (CP 144) of the adult world. Nevertheless, for Muir, the positive attitude towards the validity of myth is uppermost in that the final stanza of the poem brings a restoration of the efficacy of the visions of childhood's innocence and of the 'reveries' of youth: 'Unshakeable arise alone/The reverie and the name' (CP 145). Like the mystic's vision of the reconciliation of good and evil in 'Yesterday's Mirror' and 'The Three Mirrors', this poem is an evocation of an order in life 'beyond rational description.' The innocence of the childhood vision is in the end justified by the wisdom of experience.

Several poems in The Voyage continue the international war theme of The Narrow Place. In 'Reading in Wartime', Muir turns to literature in his attempt to cope with the despair and futility engendered by the Second World War. His relief, characteristically, comes from a recognition of our common humanity which writers such as Dr Johnson and Leo Tolstoy are able to communicate:

Boswell's turbulent friend
 And his deafening verbal strife,
 Ivan Ilych's death
 Tell me more about life,
 The meaning and the end
 Of our familiar breath,
 Both being personal,
 Than all the carnage can,
 Retrieve the shape of man,
 Lost and anonymous. (CP 148)

'Reading in Wartime' was one of three poems sent by Muir to Oscar Williams for inclusion in The War Poets: An Anthology of the War Poetry of the Twentieth Century. The others were 'The Escape' and 'The Lullaby', the latter being replaced by the more striking heraldic poem 'The Rider

'Victory' in the published anthology.²⁸ Muir's comment on 'The Escape' makes interesting reading when contrasted with the finished poem. He tells Oscar Williams in the letter accompanying the poems:

'The Escape' was suggested to me by a story called 'Corporal Jack', an account of an English soldier's escape from prison camp, his wanderings through France, and his final arrival at Gibraltar. It occurred to me then that this journey of his was a typical modern journey; tens of thousands must have made it, hundreds of thousands must have made it in imagination in their desire to escape. These journeys remind me of the many wanderings back through Europe after the failure of the Crusades, which must have been typical of that time too. So that the escape I try to describe in the poem is partly realistic and partly symbolical.²⁹

As so often in Muir, the resulting poem leans towards the symbolical rather than towards the realistic. Muir transforms the source story of a dangerous flight across Europe into an interior, spiritual journey of escape. One is reminded of the metaphysical ambience of K's journeyings in Kafka's The Castle, but the Muir poem does not have the convincing picture of the actuality of the minutiae of everyday life which runs parallel to the metaphysical dimension in Kafka's stories. The pictures of the life of the country which the poem evokes - 'The great farmhouses sunk in time'; 'The family group/Still gathered round the dying hearth'; the church where 'in rows the stabled horses stood' (CP 127) are notable for their symbolic meaning, as opposed to their contribution to the building up of a realistic picture of the everyday life of divided Europe across which the escaped soldier is trying to make his way. The poem is best read in this symbolic way, without too much reference to its source in Corporal Jack's escape and wanderings.

Two other poems deal with the wanderings and dispersals of war. In 'Moses' the terrible contrast is between Moses' Old Testament vision of

the promised land towards which he is leading his exiled people, and the twentieth century compulsory wanderings of the Jews:

Nor did we see, beyond, the ghetto rising,
Toledo, Cracow, Vienna, Budapesth,
Nor, had we seen, would we have known our people
In the wild disguises of fantastic time,
Packed in dense cities, wandering countless roads,
And not a road in the world to lead them home. (CP 130)

Muir's lines describing this frustrated wandering and alienation are powerful in themselves, but the poem is additionally coloured by the contemporary reader's knowledge of the horrific extent of the 'final solution' to the Jewish problem which Hitler's Germany attempted. The poem ends ambiguously, suggesting the preordained pattern behind the wanderings:

All this was settled while we stood by Jordan
That first great day, could not be otherwise (CP 130)

and suggesting also that it is Moses' original vision of the paradise of Canaan regained that is the true and lasting one:

Moses saw that day only; we did not see it;
But now it stands becalmed in time for ever:
White robes and sabbath peace, the snow-white emblem. (CP 130)

Yet, as in the alternative scenarios of 'The Narrow Place' and 'The Human Fold', and like, too, the picture of the gods on their mountain top in the later 'The Labyrinth', this attempt at resolution does not seem to me to be successful, depending as it does on the reader's willingness to accept the truth of Christian doctrine. In poetic terms, it is the strength of the evocation of exile and rootlessness which remains with the reader.

In 'The Greeks' Muir returns to Greek myth for a vehicle for his comments on the effects of war on human lives. Like many of the poems in The Voyage, this poem is made up of short lines of six or at most seven syllables and it follows Muir's recurring rhyme-pattern abab, with the addition of two extra lines in each stanza rhyming ba. Nevertheless, in spite of these short alternately rhyming lines, the poem's rhythmic flow is slow and ponderous, patterning the uncertain, weary return of the Greeks from the Trojan war, and of all soldiers from all wars. Muir achieves this slowing-down of what should, in such a verse form, be a fast pace, through the blocking operation of heavy consonants and polysyllabled vocabulary as in the opening two lines: 'The veteran Greeks came home/Sleepwandering from the war' (CP 125).

Willa Muir describes this poem as 'an image of the homeless soldiers who turned up in Edinburgh with their terrible stories',³⁰ and Muir himself tells how 'the terrible memories which the refugees brought with them [to Edinburgh] became more distant and bearable as they fell into the mould of a story, often repeated' (A 250). It is this human aspect which is uppermost in the poem which demonstrates the distorting effect war has on natural, everyday human values and relationships. In a way, the Greeks' long assault on Troy is a terrible parody of the sailors' period of timelessness in 'The Voyage':

Reading the wall of Troy
Ten years without a change
Was such intense employ

.

All the world was strange
After ten years of Troy. (CP 125)

Their experience has been so narrowed and yet so intensified that they are now alienated from normal life which seems diminished, both physically and philosophically:

And when they arrived at last
 They found a childish scene
 Embosomed in the past,
 And the war lying between -
 A child's pre-occupied scene
 When they came home at last. (CP 125)

In the end, the Greeks re-accept their place in the circle of past and present and go to their wives watched by the faithful Penelope who awaits the return of the still-wandering Odysseus.

Other poems of note in this collection are the personal poems with which it ends. These give expression, as do the personal poems of The Narrow Place, to what can be achieved 'in Time's despite'. 'All We' celebrates artistic creation, while 'For Ann Scott-Moncrieff (1914-1943)' and 'Epitaph' demonstrate on the one hand, a potentiality of being fully realised, and on the other hand, one 'who living was a flickering soul so dim/He was never truly loved nor truly a lover' (CP 153). 'Song', like 'The Confirmation' in The Narrow Place, is a love song which sings the proved concord of 'this single song of two' (CP 147); while 'Time Held in Time's Despite' sustains to the end the affinity with Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' which was suggested, then abruptly cancelled, in the earlier 'The Human Fold'. Muir's faith in the efficacy of human love which is given expression in these poems, is restated in a letter to Stephen Spender of 21 March 1944: 'For me too love is the supreme quality and more closely connected with immortality than any other, immortality either as you or I conceive it. And in a way I feel it is more important than immortality. If I could

really love all creatures and all things I should not trouble about immortality.'³¹

The fine short poems 'In Love for Long' and 'A Birthday' give expression to this feeling of love for 'all creatures and all things.' Willa Muir tells that both poems were written on the Pentland Hills near Swanston, the birthplace of Robert Louis Stevenson, and in a BBC 'Chapbook' programme in 1952 Muir described how 'In Love for Long' came out of an experience at Swanston when he felt 'an unmistakable warm feeling for the ground I was sitting on, as if I were in love with the earth itself, and the clouds, and the soft subdued light.'³² 'A Birthday' evokes more specifically and potently the world of nature, an infrequent but welcome attribute of Muir's poetry when it comes:

I never felt so much
 Since I have felt all
 The tingling smell and touch
 Of dogrose and sweet briar,
 Nettles against the wall,
 All sours and sweets that grow
 Together or apart
 In hedge or marsh or ditch.
 I gather to my heart
 Beast, insect, flower, earth, water, fire,
 In absolute desire,
 As fifty years ago. (CP 157)

As in 'The Myth', the second stanza returns to the rightness of childhood's vision:

The first look and the last
 When all between has passed
 Restore ingenuous good (CP 157)

and to Muir's recurring theme that man's true journey through life has been mapped out for him and he made for it:

Before I touched the food
 Sweetness ensnared my tongue;
 Before I saw the wood
 I loved each nook and bend,
 The track going right and wrong;
 Before I took the road
 Direction ravished my soul. (CP 158)

This vision of the essential rightness and direction at the heart of the universe - a vision attempted unsuccessfully in 'Moses' - does not invalidate the apparently contradictory awareness that the track does not always run the right way, an awareness given expression in poems such as 'Dejection', 'Song of Patience' and 'Sorrow'.

The volume ends with 'In Love for Long' and its confirmation of what can be held in time's despite - 'A little paradise/Held in the world's vice' (CP 159) - a vision developed through the Blake-like metaphor of

the happy doe
 That keeps its perfect laws
 Between the tiger's paws
 And vindicates its cause. (CP 160)

It was a vision which Muir found almost impossible to sustain when he entered the labyrinth of post-war Europe in 1945.

At the end of the war Muir was appointed Director of the British Institute in Prague by the British Council, and in August 1945 he set out for the city which had been associated with his new freedom in the twenties. He found a Europe ravaged by war and a Prague which was 'the same and yet not the same, whose streets I or someone very like me had walked many years before' (A 255). This ambivalent response to the city anticipated the lost way theme of many of the poems written during his

period in Czechoslovakia, while his journey through Germany to Prague provided the actuality of the experiences imagined in poems such as 'The Refugees' and 'The River' from the earlier The Narrow Place collection:

When we reached Germany there seemed to be nothing unmarked by the war: the towns in ruins, the roads and fields scarred and deserted. It was like a country where the population had become homeless, and when we met occasional family groups on the roads they seemed to be on a pilgrimage from nowhere to nowhere. In the towns and far out in the countryside we met them pushing their belongings on hand-carts, with a look of dull surprise on their faces. Few trains were running; the great machine was broken; and the men, but for the women and children following them, might have been survivors of one of the mediaeval crusades wandering back across Europe to seek their homes. Now by all appearances there were no homes for them to seek. (A 251)

Although the Muirs were aware of undercurrents in the Prague atmosphere - what Willa Muir in Belonging calls 'the opaqueness, the alien inscrutability we felt in the atmosphere of Prague, despite our friendliness and personal popularity'³³ - they did not understand their source, and showed something of the same political naivety which had characterised their earlier pre-war stay in Prague, Dresden and Vienna. Mrs Muir acknowledges that 'the basic assumption of believing that the political line of division ran between Germany, the enemy, on one side, and all the Allies, including Russia, on the other, was one that Edwin and I made unthinkingly. It never occurred to us at the time that Stalin might already be deepening a cleavage, as with a sword, between America, together with her European Allies, and Russia.' The Russians were, nevertheless, 'making all ready for a subsequent Communist take-over' and 'the Czechs, in consequence were being subjected to unfair

political pressure from the day that the Russians entered Prague, and they were aware of it although we were not.'³⁴

In the days immediately before the Communist putsch, the situation in Prague was like that satirised by Karl Kraus in Die Fackel in the years before Hitler came to power in Germany: 'The stories kept coming in: a high Russian official had arrived in Prague just before the trouble began: Benes had been prevented from speaking to the people over the radio. When people do not believe what is said by the newspapers, they create their news for themselves' (A 266). And as Karl Kraus had acknowledged the defeat of satire when Hitler came to power in 1933 - 'Mir fällt zu Hitler nichts ein'; 'Ich bleibe stumm'; ('I can do nothing with Hitler'; 'I remain silent')³⁵ - so, too, was post-war Prague silenced and emasculated in the face of the Communist take-over:

The old stale fears were back. No one opened his mouth in the trams. No one said 'God damn the government,' knowing he would be arrested if he did. No one dared to tell what he really thought, except in his own house or to a friend he could trust. No one telephoned if he could help it, though in a very short time people knew by the slight diminution in the volume of sound when the line was being tapped. And men at last became suspicious even of their friends. (A 267)

This post-war European experience was the international context of the poems published in The Labyrinth³⁶ collection in 1949, a volume distinguished by the immediacy and intensity of its poetic communication and the maturity of its technique. Muir's achievement in this volume was accompanied by a greater consciousness of his poetic method; a consciousness which may have been heightened by his teaching at the Charles University in Prague. Telling of the difficulties in obtaining

English literature texts in Prague in a letter to William Montgomerie of 6 March 1946, Muir outlined his method as teacher: 'I have to explain the poems to them, of course, build up Blake's Tiger, find some definite meaning in the "deeps" and "skies", and I find this very interesting, useful for the students, and very good for myself as a critic, since it forces me to keep my eye perpetually on the object, and almost on every word.'³⁷ One of the stylistic attributes of The Labyrinth is the more overt use of symbol and extended metaphor, and Muir's letter to Joseph Chiari of 14 September 1947 shows that this was a conscious development. He tells Chiari: 'I have almost a volume, but not quite, by this time; I intend to call the poems Symbols, or something of that kind, for they all deal with symbolical human situations and types; and I hope this will give the volume a sort of unity, and at the same time that it won't cause the contents to be monotonous.'³⁸

In Beyond the Labyrinth: A Study of Edwin Muir's Poetry, Christopher Wiseman draws attention to this heightened use of symbolism on Muir's part, and claims Muir as Symbolist poet from The Labyrinth collection onwards. Dr Wiseman's concentration on the formal aspects of Muir's poetry and his detailed examination of so much of the later work are useful in that they focus attention on the stylistic maturity of the late work, as opposed to the connections between its themes and Muir's personal spiritual development. His detailed analyses do much to redress the balance of his complaint that, for most critics, 'Muir has been regarded, even by those who admire his poetry, as a writer whose language and techniques are somehow impervious to the analytic methods of modern criticism.'³⁹

To attempt to ally Muir with the tradition of Symbolist poetry as it evolved in France is, however, less satisfactory. Muir is no more a Symboliste for employing symbolism in his poems than is D.H. Lawrence an Imagiste for writing some poems which seemed to conform to the principles of Imagism and so were included in Imagist anthologies. The positive involvement with human affairs which is characteristic of Muir's mature poetry has more in common with the attitudes of nineteenth century Romantic poets, whose conflict with society was still an involvement with society, than with the social withdrawal and esoteric concern with poetic form which characterised the Symbolist movement. Paul Valéry's comment that 'it is no bad thing if certain men have the strength of mind to attach more value and significance to determining a remote decimal number, or to the exact placing of a comma, than to the most resounding of news items, the most terrible catastrophe, or even to their own lives'⁴⁰ is at a far remove from Muir's attitude to the writing of poetry. Muir's 'symbolism' is much more of the kind which Edmund Wilson describes in Axel's Castle as being familiar to us from 'the English poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth century',⁴¹ demonstrating an affinity with Elizabethan poetry which was noticeable as early as First Poems in a poem such as 'An Ancient Song'.

Yet however the poetic method of The Labyrinth is regarded, most commentators are agreed on the success of the collection. Peter Butter considers it to contain 'some of his greatest poems, and is, I think, his most consistently excellent volume.'⁴² Muir himself, writing to Joseph Chiari in September 1948, before the publication of the volume, commented: 'I really think it is the best I have done yet.'⁴³ The Labyrinth went through a second impression in 1950 and was the only collection reprinted in full in Muir's final Collected Poems.

On the other hand, while most commentators agree on the poetic achievement of The Labyrinth, there is some reluctance to accept the validity of the labyrinth experience given form in the collection, and an anxious eagerness to hurry Muir on from its 'shadows' and 'lower key' (Elizabeth Huberman)⁴⁴ to what Christopher Wiseman describes as the 'inclusive celebration of One Foot in Eden.'⁴⁵ I believe this over-concern with the achievement of reconciliation as the theme of Muir's poetry results in distortion of the assessment of Muir's poetic achievement. This can be seen especially in relation to the title poem, 'The Labyrinth'. In a sense Muir is the poet of the labyrinth, not of beyond the labyrinth. His own experience of dispossession in relation to his family losses, his emigration from Orkney and his ambivalent relationship with Scotland and her lost nationhood, together with his personal awareness of the need for the spiritual dimension in human life which traditional Christianity seemed no longer able to supply, make him especially effective as the portrayer of the material and spiritual dispossession which has been a recurring phenomenon of twentieth century life. Muir's strength lies in his open mind, in a receptiveness to the individual circumstances of a situation. In relation to his spiritual themes, it is important to notice that, as Daniel Hoffman expresses it, 'Muir though a deeply religious spirit, remained to the end a seeker of the fable, not a receptor of the revelations of others.'⁴⁶ The labyrinth is not a shadow on the road back to Eden, but remains to the end of Muir's work as poet a vital part of human experience. What is so often called the 'reconciliation' of the late poems, is for Muir, if not for all of his critics, less a triumphing over the labyrinth than an acceptance of its validity in human experience.

'Too Much', the opening poem of The Labyrinth collection sets the course for the volume as a whole in its restatement of Hölderlin's 'Patmos' theme 'und geblendet sucht'/Ich eines, dass ich kenne' ('and dazzled/I looked for something I knew').⁴⁷ Muir's interest in the poetry of Hölderlin had been aroused by Ivo von Lucken with whom he had spent much time discussing poetry while staying at A.S. Neill's school in Hellerau in the twenties, and there is some philosophical affinity with Hölderlin in Muir's approach to his themes. In Essays on Literature and Society Muir writes of Hölderlin's 'more than usually concrete grasp of certain truths: that the past exists in the present, that the gods (or what Hölderlin meant by them) mingle with human history, that time and timelessness are inextricably bound up.' As with Muir also, for Hölderlin 'the mystery itself, not any particular manifestation of it, was his theme'; and, as Muir had experienced on occasions, the subject matter of his poetry was 'given to' his imagination 'as the subject-matter of a dream is given in sleep.'⁴⁸ Muir describes the lines from the 'Patmos' poem which he echoes in 'Too Much' as an example of Hölderlin's ability to make an apparently simple statement which is yet charged with mystery. In his Essays translation of Hölderlin's lines - 'And blinded I sought/Something I knew' - Muir keeps close to the form of the German 'geblendet', while in his own poem's allusion to the lines - 'Threading my dazzling way within my night' - he uses, as Michael Hamburger's translation does, the alternative 'dazzled', which conveys more keenly the 'so densely charged with mystery' sense which he found in the original Hölderlin.⁴⁹

This affinity with Hölderlin is noticeable elsewhere in The Labyrinth, although throughout Muir's work his tendency to mingle

Christian and pagan gods and treat them equally in his mythical exploration reminds one of Hölderlin's similar treatment of the gods, as it does also of Milton's method in Paradise Lost. In Hölderlin's 'Hyperion's Schiksaalslied', for example, one finds Muir's labyrinth/gods opposition in the German poet's evocation of the gods walking above in the light ('Ihr wandelt droben im Licht') while weary mortals grope blindly below:

Doch uns is gegeben	(But our lot it is
Auf keiner Stätte zu ruhm,	To rest at no place,
Es schwinden, es fallen	And suffering men
Die leidenden Menschen	Dwindle and fall
Blindlings von einer	Blindly from one
Stunde zur andern,	Hour to the next,
Wie Wasser von Klippe	Hurled like water
Zu Klippe geworfen,	From rock to rock,
Jahr lang ins Ungewisse hinab.	Downwards for years to uncertainty.) ⁵⁰

'The Labyrinth' is the principal statement of the lost way theme in the volume. It opens with a sentence thirty-five lines in length, in which the thread of meaning is continually being obscured by complex syntax and parenthetical comments. That this was deliberate methodology is shown by Muir's comments on the poem in a BBC 'Chapbook' programme. The poem had been begun at the Writers' House at Dobris in Czechoslovakia: 'Thinking there of the old story of the labyrinth of Cnossos and the journey of Theseus through it and out of it, I felt that this was an image of human life with its errors and ignorance and endless intricacy. In the poem I made the labyrinth stand for all this . . . The poem begins with a very long sentence, deliberately labyrinthine, to give the mood.'⁵¹ The poem is therefore not a retelling of the Theseus myth, but, rather, a psychological drama inspired by it. Its referential context is unusually rich and allusive. Dostoyevsky's intuition of the 'double' in

the human psyche is evoked by the Golyadkin-like experience of 'the swift recoils, so many I almost feared/I'd meet myself returning at some smooth corner,/Myself or my ghost' (CP 163). At times the maze alters its centre of gravity and, like the old wheel of fate, 'revolved around me on its hidden axis' (CP 164). K's constantly frustrated efforts to reach the Castle and its ruler in Kafka's The Castle are called to mind in the description of

all the roads
That run through the noisy world, deceiving streets
That meet and part and meet, and rooms that open
Into each other - and never a final room -
Stairways and corridors and antechambers
That vacantly wait for some great audience. (CP 164)

In yet another version of the labyrinth motif, 'the smooth sea-tracks that open and close again' (CP 164) takes us into the world of The Narrow Place poem, 'The Swimmer's Death', and the detachment of Nature in the face of human suffering.

After the halting, syntactically blocked movement of the opening depiction of the labyrinth, the verse movement quickens as the protagonist wildly attempts, as in a nightmare, to escape the maze:

And then I'd stumble
In sudden blindness, hasten, almost run,
As if the maze itself were after me
And soon must catch me up. (CP 164)

But he can no more escape the maze than could the poet of 'The Original Place' 'leave these fields' (CP 86). Muir adds to the sense of claustrophobic hopelessness at this point through the specious counsel of the 'bad spirit', who, like Despair in Spenser's Faerie Queene, attempts to remove any remaining show of resistance:

'No, do not hurry.
 No need to hurry. Haste and delay are equal
 In this one world, for there's no exit, none,
 No place to come to, and you'll end where you are,
 Deep in the centre of the endless maze.' (CP 164)

'The Labyrinth' has attracted much critical attention, especially in relation to the picture of the gods which Muir presents in opposition to the labyrinth experience. In the 'Chapbook' programme referred to above, Muir said also in relation to his depiction of the labyrinth: 'But I wanted also to give an image of the life of the gods, to whom all that is confusion down here is clear and harmonious as seen eternally.'⁵²

Peter Butter, who gives a biographical reading of the poem - 'the poem deals with Muir's state of alienation in his Glasgow years, his escape from it and his later efforts to reconcile two apparently contradictory conceptions of human life'⁵³ - accepts the validity of the portrayal of the gods:

This is the real world, one in which time is contained within eternity rather than being opposed to it. He is not here seeking an escape from time, but only from the illusion of being imprisoned in a maze of roads 'that run and run and never reach an end.' The labyrinth has sometimes been taken as a symbol of the world of time, and Muir himself may seem to lend some countenance to this by saying that it is 'an image of human life with its errors and ignorances and endless intricacy.' But in the poem the maze is not properly speaking an image of human life, but only of a special way of looking at human life, which is specifically said at the end to be a lie, a 'wild-wood waste of falsehood.'⁵⁴

Christopher Wiseman, too, finds a 'redemptive authenticity' in the vision of the gods. He sees this vision as 'an expansion of the lines in the early poem "The Mythical Journey" The gods preside over a place of harmony . . . and the labyrinth, in comparison, becomes small and inconsequential.'⁵⁵ In addition, 'the thread leading out of the maze is

there in this poem, elusively and weightlessly beckoning as it floats in dream and hope. It is a thread which will eventually lead Muir out into the positive landscape of One Foot in Eden (1956), where the labyrinth shrinks under the confidently asserted pressure of symbols of growth and regeneration.⁵⁶

I believe that both these readings underestimate the evidence of the poem as poem. For it is the communication of the labyrinth experience which, in poetic terms, tells most about human experience in this poem. The labyrinth poetry is strong, richly allusive, varied in movement, pulsing with life. In contrast, the vision of the gods is lifeless, a wistful substitution of wish-fulfilment for actuality. Lillian Feder, who interprets Muir's poetry in the context of mythical criticism, and not in traditional literary criticism terms, nevertheless gives support to this negative view of the gods - and of similar passages elsewhere in Muir's work - when she comments that, in contrast to Robert Graves's response to the 'old gods', 'Muir's equanimity in the face of the most painful, bizarre, or violent stages of his fable is reflected in his mythical reconstructions which, even when they depict sorrow and conflict, express a basic serenity.'⁵⁷ This 'basic serenity' I would call in many cases a lack of poetic intensity, stemming from the imposed nature of the reconciliation vision. Elizabeth Huberman, whose general reading of Muir's work is in a context of its progression from darkness to the light of One Foot in Eden, is, nevertheless, also dissatisfied with 'The Labyrinth' gods, finding that 'Muir's view of the reconciling gods derives from outside.'⁵⁸

One might argue also, in thematic terms, that Muir's vision of the gods is philosophically more terrifying than the experience of life's

labyrinth which he so potently evokes. There is something irreconcilably fearful about the idea of the gods placidly overlooking the human miseries of the disunited world which Muir depicts in The Narrow Place and The Labyrinth and which he continues to explore in One Foot in Eden⁵⁹ and his last poems. One remembers MacDiarmid's contrary vision in 'The Snares of Varuna' section of In Memoriam James Joyce which also is an evocation of the nightmare experience of Europe in the thirties:

The world is fast bound in the snares of Varuna
 - 'Cords consisting of serpents' . . .
 . . . The winking of men's eyes
 Are all numbered by him; he wields the universe
 As gamesters handle dice⁶⁰

and which itself contains an echo of Gloucester's cry: 'As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;/They kill us for their sport.'⁶¹ Muir's essential response to the problems of evil and human mortality is, I think, more fairly represented by his letter to Stephen Spender from Edinburgh in March 1944, than by his portrait of the gods in their timeless world. In the letter he says:

The problems are terrifying, as you say. The religions exist, I suppose, to provide an explanation of them. I can't accept any religious explanation that I know of, any more than you. I would rather have the problems themselves, for from an awareness of them and their vastness I get some sort of living experience, some sense even of communion, of being in the whole in some way, whereas from the explanations I should only get comfort and reassurance and a sense of safety which I know is not genuine.⁶²

'The Labyrinth' poem ends, as it began, with the intensity of the labyrinth experience which re-asserts itself poetically over the previous vision of reconciliation. After the serenity of the 'real world' of the gods, the poet returns to

the lie,

The maze, the wild-wood waste of falsehood, roads
 That run and run and never reach an end,
 Embowered in error - (CP 165)

The linguistic and rhythmic vigour of the lines make their own artistic point, as does the symbolic ambiguity of the final lines:

Last night I dreamt I was in the labyrinth,
 And woke far on. I did not know the place. (CP 165)

Although it is in my view in the communication of this labyrinth experience that the validity of 'The Labyrinth' as poem is to be found, there is also within the world of human experience in the poem the possibility of a compensating vision such as is developed more fully in One Foot in Eden. There is no need to invoke the external gods to oppose the labyrinth. As in Neil Gunn's late novels of disintegration in the modern world, nature provides a restorative vision:

ever since I came out

To the world, the still fields swift with flowers, the trees
 All bright with blossom, the little green hills, the sea,
 The sky and all in movement under it,
 Shepherds and flocks and birds and the young and old . . .
 (CP 164)

This moment of refreshment in the poem is not dependent on supernatural factors and its satisfactoriness in poetic terms speaks for its validity. It, like the terror of the labyrinth, is part of the world of living experience.

'The Way', 'The Return' and 'The Journey Back' are also part of this restrictive beginning to The Labyrinth collection. The leitmotiv of 'The Way' is Muir's recurring one of there being no way back: 'The way leads on' (CP 166). It is a short poem of twenty alternating lines of six and four syllables in the form of antiphonal responses such as one might find in religious liturgy. Its claustrophobic atmosphere derives from the way in which the same uncompromising, relentless answer is returned to each question about the way to follow: 'The way leads on.'

'The Return' is a mature variation on another of Muir's recurring poetic themes, that of tracing backwards in memory and imagination the events of his life in the effort to come to terms with them. Here the poet returns 'to the house/Of my own life' (CP 166) as an old man. 'There all the doors stand open/Perpetually, and the rooms ring with sweet voices' because 'not a room but is/My own, beloved and longed for' (CP 166-67). Memory is the meeting-place where his past and present, 'childhood and youth and manhood' (CP 167) can welcome each other. Yet here, too, he finds that 'the way leads on', that one cannot go back. What defeats him is time, which he had in Variations on a Time Theme seen as an enemy to be overcome, but which in the later poetry is increasingly accepted as one of the necessary conditions of human existence. Memory and imagination are still valid in the search for self-knowledge, but as Muir accepted in 'Yesterday's Mirror', these must be recognised as 'a few chance leaps backwards while Time hurries us on.' One cannot 'stop the sun and make it revolve in the opposite direction.'⁶³

'The Return' sustains well its extended metaphor of the journey back 'to the house of my own life', the 'compassionate years' which have in memory softened the 'ancient walls' of pains and sorrows being compared to 'old and heavy and long-leaved trees that watch/This my inheritance in friendly darkness' (CP 167). The speech rhythms, which direct the free verse form, fit well with the poem's explorative, meditative tone.

'The Journey Back', on the other hand, is in my view disappointing in relation to the promise of its early lines which lead one to expect the kind of metaphysical/material exploration of sources which one finds in Neil M. Gunn's Highland River or in the fine, short lyric in the opening section of Hugh MacDiarmid's To Circumjack Cencrastus, 'Shadows that feed on the licht.'⁶⁴ Muir, however, does not sustain the imaginative opening metaphor of 'old founts dried up whose rivers run far on/Through you and me' (CP 168).

Elizabeth Huberman finds a failure to trust the basic metaphor in this poem as in 'The Labyrinth'. She points to a parallel with Rainer Maria Rilke's imagery in the third 'Duino Elegy':

sondern die Väter, die wie Trümmer Gebirgs
uns im Grunde beruhn; sondern das trockene Flussbett
einstiger Mütter -;

(but the fathers, resting like mountain-ruins
within our depths; - but the dry river-bed
of former mothers;) -

and comments that Muir does not follow through his search, does not explore 'the old founts dried up.'⁶⁵

On the other hand, Peter Butter considers this poem 'one of his greatest' poems, a viewpoint supported by Kathleen Raine ('Muir's greatest poem') and Elizabeth Jennings ('Muir's finest poem.')

⁶⁶

The length of the poem certainly suggests that Muir was attempting an ambitious theme, yet I do not find that it contributes any more to Muir's exploration of the universal human predicament through his own life-story than do many smaller, apparently less ambitious poems. In its form of several contrasting movements it is reminiscent of the early Variations on a Time Theme, which itself related to Eliot's method of overcoming the problems posed by the long poem, but the poetic intensity and imaginative variety of Eliot's thematic expression are missing in the Muir poem.

There is also some confusion as to the context of the journey back. Christopher Wiseman interprets the journey as 'a journey in more than one direction', and returning to his view of Muir's work in a context of the symbolism of Eden-Orkney/Fallen Glasgow, takes the reader forward from Muir's childhood in Orkney to the 'description of the poet's physical and mental life in Glasgow, and in the ghastly bone factory at Greenock.'

⁶⁷ This is a reading which makes some sense of the imagery of the latter part of the first section which, like the evil atmosphere of 'The Gate' finds no justification in the poem itself. It is difficult otherwise to make a meaningful transition from, for example, the trustworthiness of 'my father's farmer hands' which are 'my father's gift/ Left here for me at the first friendly station/On the long road' (CP 169) to the tortured obsession with 'those hands'

That shall be always with me, serve my ends,
 Button, unbutton for my body's needs,
 Are intimate with me, the officious tools
 That wash my face, push food into my mouth
 Loathed servants fed from my averted heart. (CP 170)

It is not satisfactory, however, to have to go to the Autobiography for an explanation of a poem. Nor does this close biographical reading fit entirely satisfactorily with Muir's imagining himself lodging 'in other lives' (CP 169), as in the life of a murderer in the lines quoted above; nor is it in keeping with the opening metaphor of 'old founts dried up whose rivers run far on/Through and me' (CP 168) which seems to promise a larger metaphysical arena.

This larger, metaphysical arena is, presumably, what the remaining sections of the poem are intended to present. Section Two of the poem is a brief, conventionally-imaged mystical section, with short lines and a kind of lulling, hypnotic rhythm which corresponds to the idea that the traveller's spirit passes

from place to place
 In a sleep-wandering pace
 To seek my home. (CP 171)

This is followed in Section Three by what seems to be another stage in the journey back, this time through a pre-Christian era:

When the poor child of man, leaving the sun,
 Walks out into the sun and goes his way,
 Not knowing the resurrection and the life,
 Shut in his simple recurring day,
 Familiar happiness and ordinary pain. (CP 172)

The symbolism of the final line of this section: 'The red rose blooms and moulders by the wall' (CP 172), is continued in Section Four, but while in Section Three it was related to the idea of the simple, unquestioning life of primitive man, in the next section the symbolism seems escapist, belonging to the world of romance:

And sometimes through the air descends a dust
 Blown from the scentless desert of dead time
 That whispers: Do not put your trust
 In the fed flesh, or colour, or sense, or shape,
 This that I am you cannot gather in rhyme. (CP 173)

Muir is here perhaps trying to suggest, as Hugh MacDiarmid did in 'North of the Tweed' - and almost immediately powerfully refuted through his evocative nature imagery⁶⁸ - that one cannot catch the moment out of time by temporal means, but imagery such as 'scentless desert of dead time'; 'in the air I toss/Remembrance and rememberer all confused/In a light fume'; 'And child and woman and flower/Invisibly fall through the air on the living ground' (CP 173) is fanciful and poetically outworn. It does not succeed in evoking the transcendental. Nor does it relate to the world of living experience from which art and, in spite of the seeming paradox, the moment out of time also must spring.

In Section Five the traveller in time, like Tiresias, stands 'where many have stood/And seen the calamities of an age' (CP 173), while in Section Six the poet takes the reader to the world of Hölderlin's gods in 'Hyperion's Schiksaalslied' who 'walk high in their mountainland in light' (CP 174). The verse form in this section is the complex terza rima form which Muir previously employed successfully in 'The Ring', but thought and imagery in this poem do not seem to me to match the subtlety of the verse form. And as in 'The Labyrinth', the paradisal vision seems willed:

This is the place of peace, content to be,
 All we have seen it; while we look we are
 There truly, and even now in memory,

Here on this road, following a falling star. (CP 174)

The opening of the final section of the poem is reminiscent of Eliot's objective, discursive tone in some movements of Four Quartets, but this opening quickly modulates into the familiar Muir theme of the way and how it is to be found:

 how could I come
 To where I am but by that deafening road,
 Life-wide, world-wide, by which all come to all,
 The strong with the weak, the swift with the stationary. (CP 175)

The poem comes to life in this closing section, but its conclusion does not evolve out of the kind of journey back which the opening metaphor so richly promises and the poem as a whole does not convincingly portray.

Several poems in The Labyrinth collection relate more topically to the labyrinth of human affairs as it manifested itself in the events in Europe in the thirties and forties, and especially, in the experiences which awaited Muir in Prague when he went to work for the British Council there immediately after the war, while at the same time they give a new form to Muir's earlier Calvinist themes. Foremost among these poems are 'The Good Town', 'The Usurpers', 'The Helmet', 'The Interrogation' and, although more metaphysical and more symbolically organised than the others, 'The Combat' which Willa Muir in Belonging tells was inspired by the Czech friend Jirina who, although she 'was being threatened with the loss of her small widow's pension if she did not join the Party, said one must never lose faith, never give up hope.'⁶⁹

In 'The Good Town' which was read by Muir at the last meeting of his Writers' Circle before he and his wife finally left Prague,⁷⁰ the poet returns to the double theme of 'The Refugees' of The Narrow Place collection: our communal responsibility for evil in society and the mystery surrounding the presence of evil in the universe. The poem has been attacked for its over-simplified opposition of good town to bad.

Edwin Morgan complains:

One simply doesn't accept the 'universalizing' black-and-white opposition between the Danny Kaye 'streets of friendly neighbours' where lock and key were 'quaint antiquities fit for museums' while ivy trailed 'across the prison door' and their later metamorphosis into a place where

if you see a man
Who smiles good-day or waves a lordly greeting
Be sure he's a policeman or a spy.⁷¹

Muir himself describes its origins in an earlier idea for two poems about towns:

A little after writing 'The Labyrinth' . . . I had an idea for two poems about towns, one to be called 'The Good Town', and the other 'The Bad Town'; and I intended the towns to stand as symbols of two ways of life. But as things were then shaping in Prague, I saw that the only way to treat the theme was to describe a good town turning into a bad one. Yet the poem is not really about Prague or any other place, but about something that was happening in Europe.⁷²

There is certainly justification in criticism such as that put forward by Edwin Morgan, especially in relation to the unconvincing, idealised picture of the good town in the poem's opening section. But I believe that, as it progresses, the poem overcomes this initial disability and that its final overriding communication is not one of a good town opposed

to a bad one, but what Muir calls 'something that was happening in Europe.' As in 'The Refugees' poem, as in America after the assassinations of Dr Martin Luther King and John and Robert Kennedy, the poem forces the reader to review the values of his society and ask the question: how did it happen?:

How did it come?
 From outside, so it seemed, an endless source,
 Disorder inexhaustible, strange to us,
 Incomprehensible. Yet sometimes now
 We ask ourselves, we the old citizens:
 'Could it have come from us? Was our peace peace?
 Our goodness goodness?' (CP 185-86)

In this poem it is not Muir's old enemy, time, which is to blame for the present calamity. Time is our common natural enemy and we all must make our peace with him. The enemy here is more sinister and insidious:

It was not time that brought these things upon us,
 But these two wars that trampled on us twice,
 Advancing and withdrawing, like a herd
 Of clumsy-footed beasts on a stupid errand
 Unknown to them or us. Pure chance, pure malice,
 Or so it seemed. (CP 185)

In 'The Refugees' Muir had suggested the doctrine of Original Sin as a possible explanation of the mystery of evil in our lives:

Oh this is the taste
 Of evil done long since and always, quickened
 No one knows how (CP 96)

in addition to its more obvious source in the way we conduct our human relationships:

For deaf and blind
 Is rejection bred by rejection
 Breeding rejection. (CP 96)

In 'The Good Town' neither philosophical nor social explanation is so unambiguous, and both are frightening in their apparent insusceptibility to causal analysis or predictable behavioural patterns:

What is the answer? Perhaps no more than this,
That once the good men swayed our lives, and those
Who copied them took a while the hue of goodness,
A passing loan; while now the bad are up,
And we, poor ordinary neutral stuff,
Not good nor bad, must ape them as we can
In sullen rage or vile obsequiousness. (CP 186)

Frightening as this mechanistic balance of good and evil and neutral stuff in human nature is, more frightening is its lack of a mathematical corollary. If good and evil are so finely balanced, then surely 'only that jot is wanting/That grain of virtue' to put things right again?

But no:

 when evil comes
All things turn adverse, and we must begin
At the beginning, heave the groaning world
Back in its place again, and clamp it there.
Then all is hard and hazardous. (CP 186)

The power of evil is supreme also in our individual efforts to work for good:

 We have seen
Good men made evil wrangling with the evil,
Straight minds grown crooked fighting crooked minds.

.

These thoughts we have, walking among our ruins. (CP 186)

'The Usurpers' also relates to themes explored in The Narrow Place.

The protagonists of this poem could be the young Gestapo men whom Muir described in An Autobiography who had tortured and killed his friend's

husband in Nazi times; or they could be the communist rulers of Czechoslovakia whose new philosophy 'freed' them from the restrictions of the past. As in many poems in this collection, Muir here uses a ten-syllable line without rhyme, which gives him the space and measured pace he needs to recount and comment. Both the telling and the implicit, inadvertent comment on the narrative are in the mouths of the Usurpers themselves.

There is much in this poem that relates to Muir's 1946 W.P. Ker Memorial lecture on Shakespeare's King Lear which was reprinted in Essays on Literature and Society in 1949, the same year as the publication of The Labyrinth. Like the sisters and Edmund, the Usurpers exist in the present; they are 'divested of all associations; denuded of memory' (E 43):

And the old garrulous ghosts died easily,
The friendly and unfriendly, and are not missed
That once were such proud masters. In this air
Our thoughts are deeds; we dare do all we think,
Since there's no one to check us, here or elsewhere.

.

We are
Self-guided, self-impelled, and self-sustained. (CP 187)

Muir's attack in the poem is directed most obviously against the machine-like impersonality of a totalitarian regime, whether communist or fascist, where 'categories' (A 269) not people signify, and where the accumulation of inherited experience and tradition is rejected in favour of the new, self-sustained impersonal aim. Yet the unfettered philosophy of the Usurpers, and of Lear's daughters, has implications for social intercourse outside the political sphere also, as we see, for example, in An Autobiography where Muir describes his stay in St Tropez in the

twenties and the 'freedom' of the young people who gathered there:

It was now the middle of the 'twenties, and the cult of untrammelled freedom had now become an established fashion among some of the intellectuals and artists. With the removal of restraint nothing, not even enjoyment, seemed to matter to them any longer, and life, under its assumed carelessness was joyless and without flavour. . . . These decent 'free' people therefore carried about with them a vague sense of loss, perhaps due to the permanent disappointment of discovering that, even though they followed their impulses, on principle or because they wished to, the result was quite different from what they had hoped. . . . There was something ambiguous in that life, for its freedom was not real freedom, but merely the rejection of choice. (A 228-29)

The Usurpers, also, are not entirely at ease in their new freedom. They cannot quite dispel the ancestral ghosts of the world of dreams, that world of the unconscious mind to which Muir always looked for self-knowledge, for evidence of immortality, evidence which 'came to him' from the racial unconscious, that continuous unconscious experience of mankind. And it is not only the world of the unconscious mind which impinges on their freedom. The world of Nature, too, seems troubled:

The day itself sometimes works spells upon us
And then the trees look unfamiliar. Yet
It is a lie that they are witnesses,
That the mountains judge us, brooks tell tales upon us.
We have thought sometimes the rocks looked strangely on us,
Have fancied that the waves were angry with us,
Heard dark runes murmuring in the autumn wind,
Muttering and murmuring like old toothless women
That prophesied against us in ancient tongues. (CP 188)

One is reminded of D.H. Lawrence's comment on freedom and slavery in 'A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover':

The modern slave is he who does not receive his powers from the unseen, and give reverence, but who thinks he is his own little boss. Only a slave would take the trouble to shout: 'I am free!' That is to say, to shout it in the face of the open heavens. In the face of men, and their institutions and prisons. Yes - Yes! But in the face of the open heavens I would be ashamed to talk about freedom. I have no life, no real power, unless it will come to me.⁷³

This too, is the message of Muir's poem.

The horrifying image with which 'The Helmet' opens has the hard, clear concentration demanded by Ezra Pound's Imagist credo. In it the face of Usurper or Gestapo man has fused with its covering helmet to form a dehumanized mask, impersonal and impregnable as a death mask:

The helmet on his head
Has melted flesh and bone
And forged a mask instead
That always is alone. (CP 177)

The fear engendered by the final stanza is that of irreconcilability and incomprehensibility:

But he can never come home,
Nor I get to the place
Where, tame, the terrors roam
Whose shadows fill his face. (CP 177)

'The Interrogation', which Elizabeth Huberman calls "'The Combat" in twentieth century dress',⁷⁴ is one of Muir's most explicitly contemporary poems and one of the finest short poems in The Labyrinth. In it the struggle between the individual and the impersonal vengefulness of authority is played out on the open street, the plight of the arrested being exacerbated by the apparently chance nature of the encounter with evil: 'We could have crossed the road but hesitated/And then came the patrol' (CP 182); by the surly indifference of the soldiers in the patrol; and

by the self-absorption of the lovers who pass 'hand in hand, wandering another star' (CP 182) across the road and beyond the hedge. The poem's impact comes from the natural, everyday quality of the setting of the action, and from Muir's effective use of a silent beat or pause in the movement of his lines. The occasional, unpatterned rhyme, as in the 'waited' of line five which chimes with the 'hesitated' of line one, adds to the build-up of tension to the point where one imagines one can feel the silence of the waiting.

'The Combat', on the other hand, returns to the world of myth where the conflict is between the kind of mythical beast beloved by the medieval world:

Body of leopard, eagle's head
And whetted beak, and lion's mane,
And frost-grey hedge of feathers spread
Behind . . .

and an animal equivalent of Wordsworth's Simon Lee:

As for his enemy, there came in
A soft round beast as brown as clay;
All rent and patched his wretched skin;
A battered bag he might have been
Some old used thing to throw away. (CP 179)

The poem succeeds in evoking through these unlikely combatants both the inexplicable, recurring forces that threaten man and the corresponding indestructability of man's spirit. Daniel Hoffman finds Muir's theme of Scottish Calvinism returning in the poem and describes its stanza form as 'a five-line two-rhyme unit, in merry octosyllables, jiggling along as unadapted to its grim tale as is the ballad meter to its.' Most commentators are in agreement with Hoffman's estimation that 'there is something

indefinably terrifying in this vision of struggle without end between the unappeasably destructive element and the undefeatable passivity of pure suffering.⁷⁵ Peter Butter quotes from the transcription of a tape-recording made by Muir about the poem when at Harvard in 1955 in which Muir also stresses this aspect of indestructability:

Helpless . . . little animal . . . might be a . . . or stand for something in humanity that can be killed - that, that cannot be killed, actually - that is always attacked, that is in a very vulnerable position. It is very valuable . . . that after it has . . . been . . . beaten or vanquished, it does return again. It's in a way, it's a . . . rather horrible [way?] but it's an expression of hope at the same time, at the end. I take it to be something like that. Or it might be taken as humanity and all the enormous forces, particularly nowadays, ranged against humanity in every way.⁷⁶

Both 'The Interrogation' and 'The Combat' refer back to the mythical 'Troy' poem of Journeys and Places in their themes of the chance, arbitrary nature of evil and the indestructibility of the human spirit.

As in The Narrow Place and The Voyage, The Labyrinth volume contains a number of successful short poems on more specifically personal themes. 'Circle and Square', 'Love's Remorse' and 'Love in Time's Despite' explore the changing context of a loving relationship, while 'The Border' looks forward towards death through the metaphor of a frontier-crossing. 'The Interceptor' reactivates the fiend 'Indifference' of Poem IX of Variations on a Time Theme, its smooth, lilting surface rhythms patterning the normality of natural, sympathetic feeling into which the Interceptor constantly breaks. Willa Muir, reflecting on her husband's nervous breakdown in Cambridge on their return from Prague, ascribes 'The Interceptor' to Muir's combat with Calvinism: 'The Interceptor cutting Edwin off from natural feeling was his own defence against the doctrine

of Original Sin'⁷⁷ and to his attempts to reconcile this harsh doctrine with the arbitrary deaths of his brothers. The European experience of the thirties and forties, and particularly his personal experiences in post-war Prague, demonstrated that impersonal vengeance was not confined to Scotland's Calvinist God.

Three further poems in The Labyrinth, all of some length and universal in their meditative/religious nature, deserve mention. These are 'Soliloquy', 'The Transfiguration' and 'Oedipus'.

'Soliloquy' is a complementary but contrasting portrait to T.S. Eliot's 'Gerontion'. In it Muir adopts the persona of a much-travelled merchant who, now an old man, has returned to his country home in Greece to await death and meditate on what he has gathered on his journey through life. In contrast to the metaphors of spiritual barrenness and futility with which 'Gerontion' opens, Muir's poem begins with the merchant's memory of Christ's crucifixion, an event, the significance of which he did not grasp at the time, and which still troubles him as he reflects on it. Unlike Gerontion's 'thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season',⁷⁸ his meditations are full of the wisdom of a life lived with intensity. They are full also of the wisdom which Muir's mature poetry and his literary and social criticism distil.

In his reminiscences, the merchant takes up the mortality theme which had so troubled Muir in the middle-life crisis of Variations on a Time Theme:

I have learnt a host of little things, and one
Too great for thinking, scarcely to be borne:
That there's a watershed in human life,
A natural mountain which we have to scale;
And once at the top, our journey all lies downward
Down the long slope to age and sleep and the end.

.

Oh the air is different on this side of the hill,
 The sunset side. And when I breathed it first
 I felt dismay so deep and yet so quiet,
 It was a silence rather, a sea of silence.
 This is my trouble, the common trouble. (CP 195)

His progress to the 'sunset side' has, however, brought some compensating understanding:

I have learned another lesson.
 When life's half done you must give quality
 To the other half, else you lose both, lose all.
 Of what's been given you by bold casual time.
 Revise, omit; keep what's significant. (CP 195)

And unlike the final negative, fragmented thoughts of Gerontion, Muir's merchant ends with a positive prayer of acceptance:

Light and praise
 Love and atonement, harmony and peace,
 Touch me, assail me; break and make my heart. (CP 197)

'The Transfiguration' is more specifically Christian in its context, relating as it does to the Gospel story of Christ's Transfiguration. A Miss Maisie Spens, who had herself written about the Transfiguration, drew Muir's attention to the links between his poem and orthodox Christian thought on the subject when she wrote to thank him for the poem. Muir himself had not been aware of specific relationships with Christian literature on the subject when he wrote 'The Transfiguration'. He told Miss Spens:

I know nothing of the literature of the Transfiguration, and in writing the poem probably did not see where it was leading me. On the other hand I have always had a particular feeling for that transmutation of life which is found occasionally in poetry, and in the literature of prophecy, and sometimes in one's own thoughts when they are still.

He adds that as a child the story of the Transfiguration 'filled me with wonder. The idea of Judas going back into innocence has often been with me.'⁷⁹

In a BBC 'Chapbook' programme in September 1952 he again spoke of how he had 'always been deeply struck by the story of the Transfiguration in the Gospels, and I had felt that perhaps at the moment of Christ's Transfiguration everything was transfigured, mankind, and the animals, and the simplest natural objects.' And telling of Miss Spens' letter: 'Perhaps in the imagination of mankind the Transfiguration has become a powerful symbol, standing for many things, and among them those transformations of reality which the imagination itself creates.'⁸⁰

Despite his acknowledgement of his early absorption in the Gospel Transfiguration story, Muir does not commit his poem to a specifically Christian interpretation, linking the Christian myth with 'that transmutation of life which is found occasionally in poetry, and in the literature of prophecy, and sometimes in one's own thoughts when they are still.' As a young man he had himself undergone a kind of transfiguration experience during a Socialist May Day demonstration in Glasgow, an experience he describes both in An Autobiography and in the novel Poor Tom. Poor Tom gives the more immediate account:

But when presently from the front of the procession the strains of the 'Marseillaise' rolled back towards him over the surface of that quietly rising and falling sea, gathering force as it came until at last it broke round him in a stationary storm of sound in which his own voice was released . . . everything was transfigured: the statues in George Square standing in the sky and fraternally watching them, the vacant buildings, the empty warehouses which they passed when presently they turned into Glassford Street, the rising and falling shoulders,

even the pot-bellied, middle-aged man by his side;
 for all distinction had been lost, all substance
 transmuted in this transmutation of everything into
 rhythmical motion and sound. He was not now an
 isolated human being walking with other isolated
 human beings from a definite place to a definite
 place, but part of a perfect rhythm which had arisen,
 he did not know how. ⁸¹

Muir had first attempted the Transfiguration theme in poetry in the
 'Ballad of the Nightingale' in First Poems, where the dreaming priest
 beholds transfigured the 'murderers in red raiment', 'harlots robed for
 bridal' and the beasts who 'lift up their faces/Like statues and adore'
 which had occurred earlier in Muir's own dreams.⁸² In the later more
 mature version of the theme in 'The Transfiguration', Muir adds to the
 transfigured not only the inanimate clothes and house-stones, but 'those
 who hide within the labyrinth/Of their own loneliness and greatness'
 (CP 199), which, as in many of the poems in The Labyrinth collection,
 contributes a psychological dimension to the more traditional concepts
 of the outcast in the pictures of the harlots and murderers. In the
 later poem also, the experience of transfiguration is not as in 'Ballad
 of the Nightingale', a dream, but more that of the catching of a timeless
 moment such as the poet had experienced in the Glasgow May Day procession,
 or in the religious conversions of his boyhood and young adulthood. And
 as in these experiences, so here human time and human reality returns:

But the world
 Rolled back into its place, and we are here,
 And all that radiant kingdom lies forlorn
 As if it had never stirred. (CP 199-200)

Muir ends his poem with the statement that Christ and the moment of
 transfiguration will come again, a statement of faith qualified slightly
 by the added 'it's said': 'But he will come again, it's said.' And the

returned Christ will be

Christ the uncrucified,
Christ the discrucified, his death undone,
His agony unmade, his cross dismantled.

Judas will

take his long journey backward
From darkness into light and be a child
Beside his mother's knee, and the betrayal
Be quite undone and never more be done. (CP 200)

As always in Muir, there is no active redemption in this vision. It is, as Elizabeth Huberman notes, 'a cancellation rather than a reconciliation of sin.'⁸³ Yet, despite this, the poem succeeds in visionary terms in a way that 'The Stationary Journey' with its vision of 'Adam and Eve un-fallen yet' (CP 58) does not. There is a metaphysical quality in the transfiguration experience described which recognises 'underneath/The soot . . . the stone clean at the heart' (CP 199), and which encourages imaginative belief that the evil can be negated, that the hurts of human time will be seen in the end, as expressed in 'One Foot in Eden', as damaged foliage and fruit merely and that the root will remain 'clean as on the starting day' (CP 227).

In 'Oedipus' Muir returns to Greek myth and implicitly to the theme of Scotland to explore the themes of guilt and innocence and the will of the gods. In this poem the relationship with Calvinist theology is clear. As with the inheritors of original sin, Oedipus is one 'who as in innocent play sought out his guilt,/And now through guilt seeks other innocence' (CP 189). In this poem it is not human guilt which is negated by the miracle of transfiguration, but, rather, human innocence which is corrupted by the unknown decrees of the gods:

did we sin
 Then on that bed before the light came on us,
 Desiring good to each other, bringing, we thought,
 Great good to each other? But neither guilt nor death. (CP 189)

As the strict Scottish Kirk with its regulations and doctrine of the Elect encouraged a censoriousness which often soured human relations, so Oedipus finds that the censoriousness of his gods, who had willed his guilt and his innocence of the true nature of his relationship with Jocasta, now destroys even the memory of his love for her before the inadmissibility of their relationship was made known to him.

In his discussion of this poem Christopher Wiseman comments that 'Oedipus accepts his destiny and the action of the gods. . . . He finally realizes that the gods themselves are not exempt from the evil consequences of the Fall. It is "their guilt and mine/For I've but acted out this fable."⁸⁴ This seems to me to be a misreading of the poem. Although Oedipus does 'accept his destiny', it is not the guilt of the gods which he shares, but that of mankind:

I have wrought and thought in darkness,
 And stand here now, an innocent mark of shame,
 That so men's guilt might be made manifest
 In such a walking riddle - their guilt and mine,
 For I've but acted out this fable. (CP 191)

And in behaving thus, Oedipus is acting out the role of the mythical hero as described by Lillian Feder in Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry:

We identify with the hero of myth not only because he acts out our unconscious wishes and fears but also because in so doing he performs a continual rite of service for the rest of mankind: he asks our essential questions and he answers them. The mythical hero's whole career is devoted to action which raises questions about and indicates possible answers to those issues we usually avoid: death, our relation to time, destiny, freedom of will. For these answers he pays a price most men do not have the strength or courage to pay.⁸⁵

This is Oedipus's role in Muir's poem, and although Daniel Hoffman describes Muir's fable as resembling the Christian story without the Redeemer,⁸⁶ there are parallels between the role of the mythical hero in this poem and that of Christ in the Gospel story. Unlike Christ, however, Oedipus, as Muir portrays him, does not pay his price in order to absolve men of their guilt, but 'that so men's guilt might be made manifest' and 'the immortal burden of the gods' (CP 191) eased.

This ending thus reverses the Christian myth in which Christ the God eases the burdens of men by taking upon himself the sins of the world. In its harshness it also opposes the vision of 'The Transfiguration'. At this stage in the development of his poetic vision, Muir had not yet succeeded in bringing together an acceptance of positive and negative forces within the one poem. For such a resolution of the paradox of good and evil one must await what Elizabeth Huberman calls 'the most compassionate, the most reconciling, of all Muir's books, his last volume One Foot in Eden.'⁸⁷

EDWIN MUIR

'The Single Disunited World'

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EDWIN MUIR

I THE POETRY

iii Last Poems

One Foot in Eden

'Poems Not Previously Collected'

From January 1949 until the summer of 1950 Muir was Director of the British Council Institute in Rome. This was an especially fortunate period in his life, restoring health to himself and to his wife, and widening as well as deepening his spiritual life: an experience which Daniel Hoffman characterises as 'the northern child of Calvinism' being 'awakened to a sensuous as well as a spiritual perception of what the Mediterranean world might take for granted.'¹ This was a perception which had escaped Muir in his earlier visit to Italy in the twenties, when 'coming for the first time to the South, I was repelled by the violence of the colours, the sea like a solid lake of blue paint, the purple sky, the bright brown earth: to my unaccustomed eyes the contrasts seemed crude and without mystery' (A 210). Now the Italian people, their landscape and the visible evidence of their history enchanted him. Rome offered 'the vistas at street corners where one looked across from one century to another' (A 277). He found in Italy, as in Orkney, 'the landscape, the soil . . . things shaped by generations with affection and made into a human scene,'² the absence of which was to fill him with unease during his period as Harvard Professor of Poetry in America from 1955 to 1956. Most influential was the religious atmosphere of Rome. He wrote to

Joseph Chiari in December 1949: 'you feel the gods (including the last and greatest of them) have all been here, and are still present in a sense in the places where they once were. It has brought very palpably to my mind the theme of Incarnation. . . . Edinburgh I love, but in Edinburgh you never come upon anything that brings the thought of Incarnation to your mind, and here you do so often, and quite unexpectedly.'³ In An Autobiography Muir elaborates on what the differing experiences of the Roman and Scottish religious atmosphere meant to him. In Scotland the bible-based Word was all:

During the time when as a boy I attended the United Presbyterian Church in Orkney, I was aware of religion chiefly as the sacred Word, and the church itself, severe and decent, with its touching bareness and austerity, seemed to cut off religion from the rest of life and from all the week-day world, as if it were a quite specific thing, shut within itself, almost jealously, by its white-washed walls, furnished with its bare brown varnished benches unlike any others in the whole world, and filled with the odour of ancient Bibles. It did not tell me by any outward sign that the Word had been made flesh . . . that Christ was born in the flesh and had lived on the earth.

In Rome, on the other hand, the evidence of Incarnation 'met one everywhere':

In Rome that image was to be seen everywhere, not only in churches, but on the walls of houses, at cross-roads in the suburbs, in wayside shrines in the parks, and in private rooms. I remember stopping for a long time one day to look at a little plaque on the wall of a house in the Via degli Artisti, representing the Annunciation. An angel and a young girl, their bodies inclined towards each other, their knees bent as if they were overcome by love, 'tutto tremante', gazed upon each other like Dante's pair; and that representation of a human love so intense that it could not reach farther seemed the perfect earthly symbol of the love that passes understanding. A religion that dared to show forth such a mystery for everyone to see would have shocked the congregations of the north, would have seemed a sort of blasphemy, perhaps even an indecency. But here it was publicly shown, as Christ showed himself on the earth. (A 277-78)

This 'open declaration' which seemed to Muir to be 'the very mark of Christianity' (A 278) inspired the poem 'The Annunciation', while the contrast between the Roman and Scottish religious experience was the impulse behind 'The Incarnate One'.

Muir's stay in Italy was short-lived. For reasons of economy the British Council was forced to close its Rome branch, and the summer of 1950 saw Muir returning to Presbyterian Scotland, this time as Warden of Newbattle Abbey Adult Residential College, near Edinburgh. The poems in One Foot in Eden are the progeny of these two polar experiences.

One Foot in Eden is divided into two sections. Part I is almost entirely given over to poems whose universal themes are structured on a framework of biblical or Greek myth, while Part II is both more personal and more topical. While the collection was being prepared for publication, Muir suggested to T.S. Eliot, a Director of Faber, that the title be changed from One Foot in Eden to The Succession, having had 'a sudden feeling that the title might appear a little ridiculous', but on persuasion from Eliot he agreed to retain the earlier 'more striking and memorable one.'⁴ The Eden title, like the poem from which it comes, is certainly more memorable than 'The Succession'. Yet the latter perhaps more closely follows the collection's thematic celebration of 'continuity ruled by repetition.'⁵ The title 'One Foot in Eden' is itself somewhat equivocal. Does it relate to Wordsworth's intuition that 'trailing clouds of glory do we come/ From God, who is our home'⁶; or to the progress of Muir's personal journey from darkness to light? Does it relate to the concept of the duality of man's nature, or, as Willa Muir suggests in Belonging, to

the fact that Muir, in spite of his Eden themes, had 'only one foot in Eden, the other firmly on earth'?⁷ In view of Muir's recent experience of Rome and his return to Scotland, it is even perhaps not too fanciful to see his opposition between 'Eden' and 'the other land' (CP 227) as being coloured by the different religious and human experiences of Catholic Italy and Calvinist Scotland.

The omission from the title of the collection of the significant word 'still' (CP 227) which occurs in the first line of the Eden poem lends credence to a critical view of Muir's poetic journey such as one finds in Elizabeth Huberman, for example, as a progression from the solitary and unattained places of Journeys and Places through the darkness of The Narrow Place and The Labyrinth into the light and reconciliation of One Foot in Eden. Yet as that omitted 'still' makes clear, the journey is not an onward progress, but is circular and repetitive, looking backwards to its source for sustenance. There is much in Muir's philosophy which relates to Wordsworth's 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy!'⁸ As we have seen in a poem such as 'The Myth' from The Voyage, for Muir the innocent intuitions of childhood can be a source of inspiration, the validity of which is verified by the mature wisdom of experience. The poet, and by implication, mankind, does not progress from the lost way experiences of The Labyrinth into the comparative safety of One Foot in Eden, but 'the root' which 'still from Eden springs' (CP 227) illuminates these experiences and points to what can be achieved 'in Time's despite' in this 'difficult land' (CP 155, 237). Progress, as Muir declared in the essay 'The Poetic Imagination', belongs to the world of science. 'Continuity ruled by repetition' is the context of human lives. This continuity

is the theme of many of the religious-myth poems which form the major part of the first part of the One Foot in Eden collection.

In the essay 'Robert Henryson' Muir points to an advantage possessed by the fifteenth century poet which his modern counterpart has lost: that of living in an age in which 'an agreement had been reached regarding the nature and meaning of human life, and the imagination could attain harmony and tranquillity. It was one of those ages when everything, in spite of the practical disorder of life, seems to have its place . . . and the life of man and of the beasts turns naturally into a story because it is part of a greater story about which there is general consent.'⁹ Although One Foot in Eden continues to explore the human journey themes which have animated Muir's poetry from First Poems, it seems to me that in the first part of this collection Muir attempts, to a greater degree than before, to achieve imaginative reconciliation through the framework of that once universal, but now increasingly disregarded story. As R.P. Blackmur comments in 'Between the Tiger's Paws' in linking Muir with Virgil as poets who 'join in kind however distant they may be in degree':

Virgil wrote the will of the Roman Empire when that empire was young. Muir, sturdy in his own way, has written an individual, a personal - an English, a Scotch - footnote to life in the true empire at a time when the notion of a good empire seems no longer plausible or possible but only an image for longing without hope.¹⁰

All the religious-myth poems in the first part of the volume relate in some way to that traditional 'true empire', to the human journey as one finds it depicted in the Bible from the Creation of the world through the Fall and expulsion from Eden, Christ's incarnation and death, to

our lives now.

Muir's attempt to relive the human journey in terms of the traditional biblical myth in a secular age aware of the evolutionary discoveries of science as they relate both to animal and human life and to the physical universe itself, could be viewed as foolhardy. Yet Muir succeeds to a considerable extent, principally because of his symbolic, even allegorical treatment of his theme. 'The allegory', as he observed in 'Robert Henryson', 'is a form which the modern taste finds stilted and unreal, because the great story as Chaucer and Henryson knew it is dead. But while that story lasted the allegory was a perfectly natural convention - the most convenient device for telling it.'¹¹ And as Henryson in his Fables found 'in the lives of the animals a pattern of human life,'¹² so Muir finds in the Old and New Testament stories, as in the myths and legends of Greece, an allegorical action which can illuminate and sustain mankind's continuing journey. For Muir, 'myth is endlessly adaptable,'¹³ and in this collection, as in previous volumes, he frequently reworks his mythical source for his own purposes as, for example, in 'Adam's Dream' and 'Orpheus' Dream'. On the other hand, the essence of the original story is sufficiently invoked to enable it to act as correlative for Muir's transmutation.

The poem which opens the volume, 'Milton', is itself not based on biblical happening, but is closely related to the Fall theme and to the Christian hope of life after death through the references to its protagonist's own account of the Fall in Paradise Lost and to Muir's imaginary telling of Milton's attaining 'the fields of Paradise' (CP 207). The poem, in sonnet form, is beautifully wrought, quietly majestic in

movement, its allusions to Milton's blindness and to his poetry smoothly integrated into the web of Muir's own conception. The imagery is in places strikingly sensuous as in the evocation of the sights and sounds of Hell. The dark tower of Hell, terrifying yet visually exciting in its enveloping brilliant colours:

Set square in the gate, a mass of blackened stone
Crowned with vermillion fiends like streamers blown
From a great funnel filled with roaring flame

Milton in his blindness could not see; but he, like us, could hear and recognise its din:

the steely clamour known too well
On Saturday nights in every street in Hell. (CP 207)

Although the poem ostensibly deals with Milton's death and rebirth into everlasting life, there is in it, as in many of the poems in this volume, the implication that if, as Marlowe's Mephistophilis expressed it, 'this is hell nor am I out of it,'¹⁴ if Hell is all about us in the 'steely clamour known too well', then Heaven too can be found 'a footstep more' (CP 207) in our mundane lives.

'The Animals' and 'The Days' which follow 'Milton' return to the Genesis creation myth in their beginning of the account of the human journey, and follow the biblical pattern of the six days of creation culminating in the creation of man, with the celebration of the glory of the Lord on the seventh day. In 'The Days' Muir does not attempt to give a detailed or scientifically precise description of the various stages in the evolutionary process of the planet, but suggests through the use of a form of metonymy, a symbolic aspect which can stand for a whole development, the nature of the various evolutionary stages. The

eerie desolation of the planet without animal or human life is communicated psychologically to us as we contemplate it through Muir's imagery:

And the first long days
A hard and rocky spring
Inhuman burgeoning,
And nothing there for claw or hand,
Vast loneliness ere loneliness began,
Where the blank seasons in their journeying
Saw water at play with water and sand with sand. (CP 208)

He catches the element of growth and continually changing forms in

Wild lights and shadows on the formless face
Of the flood of chaos, vast
Lengthening and dwindling image of earth and heaven. (CP 209)

The following passage with its repetition of the evocative 'green', also shimmers with changing forms, although here one wishes that Muir had found an alternative for 'meadow' with its associations of pasture-land and domesticated landscape:

The forest's green shadow
Softly over the water driven,
As if the earth's green wonder, endless meadow
Floated and sank within its own green light. (CP 209)

The creation of the animals is represented by their traditional king, the lion, 'raging and burning in its watery cave' (CP 209), and by Muir's personal symbol of awe-inspiring animal life, the horse. Then comes man, and the change which he brings is symbolised as in 'The Animals', by the fact of language, the 'articulate breath' (CP 208):

Then on the waters fell
The shadow of man, and earth and the heavens scrawled
With names, as if each pebble and leaf would tell
The tale untellable. (CP 209)

The unity of all creation is symbolised in the river flowing from its source in the mountains, 'threading, clear cord of water, all to all' (CP 209).

The human journey is plotted from this point on in one long sentence in which the nature of human life on this planet is depicted emblematically. Items in the heraldic emblem of life include 'the wooded hill and the cattle in the meadow' - a more appropriate use of the word this time - and 'the tall wave breaking on the high seawall' (CP 209). Although symbols standing for a fuller action, these items are in no way abstract in nature, but throb with living observation and experience. There is the fine visual symbol of 'the crescent shadow/Of the light-built bridge.' Food-gathering finds 'the fish in the billow's heart, the man with the net'; war, 'the hungry swords crossed in the cross of warning.' Scotland's heroic past is there: 'The lion set/High on the banner, leaping into the sky' (CP 209). The poem ends with the vision of the reconciliation and transfiguration which God's seventh day will ultimately bring:

The women praying
For the passing of this fragmentary day
Into the day where all are gathered together,
Things and their names, in the storm's and the lightning's nest,
The seventh great day and the clear eternal weather. (CP 210)

The context of what W.S. Merwin calls 'the miraculous "The Animals"' ¹⁵ is again that of the Genesis creation myth. Christopher Wiseman finds in this poem a celebration of 'the animal kingdom by contrasting its simplicity with man's dubious sophistication' and a 'strategy of pretended pity for the animals, who are unable to conceptualize their existence.' Man is 'the creature who pities the

non-conceptualizing animals but who is much more to be pitied. . . . Man's knowledge is nothing compared with the original created harmony, and, as we shall see in 'The Horses' the animals - or rather what they represent symbolically in terms of innocence and eternal order - intimate the very thing man has lost and is desperately looking for.'¹⁶

This is a possible interpretation of the poem, which does at times emit a sense of wistfulness towards the animal world of the 'unchanging Here' (CP 208). Such an interpretation does not seem to me to be convincing, however, in the face of the evidence of One Foot in Eden - and indeed of Muir's poetic output - as a whole, and of prose works such as 'Yesterday's Mirror' and the significant essay The Politics of King Lear, all of which point to the significance of 'the memoried day' (CP 208). In the Lear essay, the daughters and Edmund are compared to animals precisely because they choose to live in the 'unchanging Here', in their case with a small 'h', in 'this shallow present.' And 'having no memory, they have no responsibility, and no need, therefore, to treat their father differently from any other troublesome old man. . . . The hiatus in Lear's daughters is specifically a hiatus of memory, a breach in continuity; they seem to come from nowhere and to be on the way to nowhere; they have words and acts only to meet the momentary emergency, the momentary appetite.'¹⁷ And in spite of Muir's recognition of the bond between men and animals, despite his use of horses in particular to symbolise the awe-inspiring mystery of that bond, this restrictive acting to meet the 'momentary appetite', which is a condition of animal life, is one which Muir associates with non-human, undesirable behaviour. This theme is explored in poems such as 'The Ring' and 'The Usurpers'. In the Lear

essay Muir elaborates on what he considers to be Shakespeare's attitude to the 'new generation' and his 'identification of them with nature':

Their life in the moment, their decisions based on what the mere moment presents, their want of continuity, their permanent empty newness, are sufficient in themselves to involve them with nature, for nature is always new and has no background; it is society that is old. . . . Nature is not corrupt in itself, nor is man as Shakespeare normally sees him; but when man is swallowed up in nature a result is produced which seems to corrupt both. Goneril, Regan and Cornwall become mere animals furnished with human faculties which they have stolen, not inherited by right. Words are their teeth and claws, and action the technique of the deadly spring.¹⁸

Muir may be considered as momentarily envying the animals that they 'have never trod/Twice the familiar track' (CP 208) - a painful but necessary road for man. But 'The Animals' is not a celebration of this animal lack, but, rather, a recognition of the significance of the 'articulate breath' which creates and keeps alive the 'memoried day' (CP 208), and, by implication, the ideal of the 'innocence and eternal order' which Dr Wiseman sees the animals as symbolically representing.

'Adam's Dream' and 'Outside Eden' move on from the Creation myth to the Fall myth for starting-point. The former begins by putting aside the Eden experience as Adam's 'age-long daydream in the Garden' (CP 210) and looking forward to the life in time which is now before him and his descendants. The opening dream image is a powerful one.

Adam stands

High on the mountainside, bare crag behind,
In front a plain as far as eye could reach,
And on the plain a few small figures running
That were like men and women, yet were so far away
He could not see their faces. On they ran,
And fell, and rose again, and ran, and fell,
And rising were the same yet not the same,
Identical or interchangeable,
Different in indifference. (CP 210)

Muir returns to The Labyrinth experience in his attempt to convey the confusion of this 'way that was not like a way' (CP 211), and Adam's fearful bewilderment as he tries to grasp its meaning. Adam's shouted questioning and the crags' unanswering echoing of his questions recalls the claustrophobic unresponsiveness of 'The Way' with its relentless, uncompromising burden of 'the way leads on' (CP 166).

Muir skilfully alters his focus from the long-range of the opening image of figures on the plain to a gradual drawing nearer until his final placing of Adam among the running figures. This shifting space focus is paralleled in the time dislocation: from Adam dreaming in his present; to a future which is beyond him, but which is our present; to his eventual remembrance and acceptance of his past which has become the context of our spiritual journey. The verse movement of the poem patterns the movement of the poet's thought and the actions he describes. Written basically in slow-moving, unrhymed iambic pentameters, the poem's movement quickens, hesitates, and turns on itself as it patterns the running figures:

On they ran,
And fell, and rose again, and ran, and fell,
And rising were the same yet not the same. (CP 210)

And again, the figures

went their way that was not like a way;
Some back and forward, back and forward, some
In a closed circle, wide or narrow, others
In zigzags on the sand. (CP 211)

The repeated cries and answering echoes of '"What are you doing there?"'
. . . '"Are you doing there?"' which break up the line movement, create in sound Adam's sense of bewilderment and panic as do also his insistent

cries of "'I must see" . . . "Where are the faces? Who/Are you all out there?"' (CP 211)

Adam's eventual recognition of his own face in the faces of what are to be his descendants brings with it a simultaneous remembrance of the Fall and the Promise made to him. The poem ends with his acceptance of life outside Eden: He

Cried out and was at peace, and turned again
In love and grief in Eve's encircling arms. (CP 212)

'Outside Eden' is less resolved than the powerful 'Adam's Dream'. In this poem Muir takes a step further from Adam's acceptance of his new life and we find his descendants living 'by the ruined wall and broken gate' (CP 212) of the Garden, not seeking to re-enter it, but guarding in reverence

Their proud and famous family tree
Sprung from a glorious king who once
Lived in such boundless liberty
As never a one among the great
Has known in all the kingdom since;
For death was barred from his estate. (CP 213)

There is, as Elizabeth Huberman finds, 'acceptance and reconciliation'¹⁹ in this poem also, but there seems to be something ambivalent about this reconciliation. The poem gives the appearance of being a celebration of simplicity, of the biblical injunction to be 'as little children', but one is forced to ask if the poem itself, in its celebration of a desirable attribute, has not become philosophically simplistic. What is it that the people are accepting, and thus by implication rejecting?:

Guilt is next door to innocence.
 So here this people choose to live
 And never think to travel hence,
 Nor learn to be inquisitive,
 Nor browse in sin's great library,
 The single never-ending book
 That fills the shelves of all the earth.
 There the learned enquirers look
 And blind themselves to see their face.
 But these live in the land of birth
 And count all else an idle grace. (CP 213)

This reads strangely like a denial of 'the articulate breath' of human scholarship, of scientific and philosophical enquiry; a refusal to eat from the tree of knowledge in case it might bring sin, and a simplistic interpretation of the biblical exhortation to be 'as little children' as the acceptance of a continuing condition of childishness as opposed to the kind of strengthening childhood innocence which one finds in 'The Myth'. A much more satisfactory post-Eden resolution is to be found in 'One Foot in Eden' and 'The Difficult Land'.

'Abraham' and to a lesser extent 'The Succession' which carry on the tale of post-Eden wanderings into the times of Abraham and Isaac, are unmemorable poetically. Muir does not find his inspiration in the mere retelling of a story, but has to find a way of reshaping a legendary starting-point to fit with his own psychological or religious preoccupations, or with contemporary events, if his poem is to come to life. This we have seen him do most satisfactorily in the context of Greek myth, where the original mythical starting-point does not carry the same weight of belief as is demanded by the Bible's stories. 'The Days' and 'Adam's Dream' show the poet successfully restructuring biblical events, but 'Abraham' and 'The Succession' do not present any transformation or illumination of their sources. 'Abraham' retells the story of 'the rivulet-loving wanderer Abraham' who

died content and full of years, though still
 The Promise had not come, and left his bones,
 Far from his father's house, in alien Canaan. (CP 221)

There is no sense of poetic urgency or necessity behind the poem.

'The Succession' is similarly negative, despite the potentially interesting opening symbol of Abraham and his son Isaac as twin stars. Its final stanza brings the journey up to our own time and to Muir's recurring unknown way theme:

We through the generations came
 Here by a way we do not know
 From the fields of Abraham,
 And still the road is scarce begun. (CP 222)

Of a different poetic order are religious-theme poems such as 'The Annunciation' which gives poetic form to the experience of seeing the plaque of angel and girl described in An Autobiography; 'The Incarnate One' which contrasts the 'Word made flesh' (CP 228) of the Roman religion with Calvin's 'iron pen' (CP 228); and 'One Foot in Eden', Muir's moving avowal of commitment to this 'other land' of 'famished field and blackened tree' (CP 227). Successful also are 'AntiChrist', a psychological study of deception where the Pretender Christ forgives 'for love of sin not of the sinner' (CP 226), and the similarly psychological 'The Killing' which contains the memorable image of Christ 'walking in the park of death' (CP 225). This poem describes Christ's crucifixion from the viewpoint of the detached stranger and his observation of Christ and of the people who have crowded on to the hillside to watch the execution. In all of these Muir's theme is developed poetically through symbol and metaphor and this method allows an imaginative subtlety and complexity which more straightforward narration or statement denies.

'One Foot in Eden' is the positive image of human life 'outside Eden'. The metaphorical context of the poem is that of agriculture and it opens with the striking image of the poet/seer bestriding heaven and earth as he surveys the harvest of 'the other land':

One foot in Eden still, I stand
And look across the other land. (CP 227)

The placing of the verb 'stand' at the end of the first line, and the resultant hiatus between first and second lines which the sound of 'stand' with its blocking final consonants 'nd' brings about, creates the sense of space and distance between Eden and this 'other land' and also the sense of the poet balancing between them. After this opening and the personal 'I' of the observer, the pronoun changes to 'we' as the poet moves from his ambivalent position of seer/observer to that of involvement in the harvest he has been observing. The poem is rich in implied allusions to New Testament metaphors of sowing and reaping which provide additional touchstones for its explorations. Although the poet has now become involved in the harvest, he is still able to examine its nature with detachment. Muir gives poetic form to this detachment by means of the static quality of his heraldic imagery of 'corn and tares' (CP 227). The philosophical inseparability of the crops of good and evil in human life is represented as the interwoven emblematic elements on a shield or heraldic device: 'The armorial weed in stillness bound/About the stalk' (CP 227). And as the plants' roots, whatever the appearance of foliage and fruit, still contain the essence of Eden, so does human life bring forth its own peculiar virtues which the poet is now able to see are equally worthy of acceptance as is the unfallen state he had previously mourned:

But famished field and blackened tree
 Bear flowers in Eden never known.
 Blossoms of grief and charity
 Bloom in these darkened fields alone. (CP 227)

As the mystic described in 'Yesterday's Mirror' could see what is denied to most of us: that 'the king on his throne and the rebel raising his standard in the market place' are reconcilable in 'a world in which both good and evil have their place legitimately',²⁰ so the poet has now reached a point of visionary insight where he understands that whatever time and life have made of what man could have been, yet 'still from Eden springs the root/As clean as on the starting day' (CP 227). Man's essence is still good, despite the ravages of time. This is in a way a reversal of Nietzsche's Superman concept, to which Muir, like many artists and intellectuals of his time, had subscribed in his early days. His insight now is that we do not need to wait for the evolutionary development of the godlike Superman, but need only accept the essential goodness which resides in man now. In the essay 'The Natural Man and the Political Man', Muir contrasts the traditional mythical and religious view of man with the new evolutionary attitude. In contrast to the evolutionary view of man which sees the individual's life 'as a "development"', the traditional conception was of 'a moral struggle in the centre of the individual. . . . This fundamental moral struggle within the individual was for many centuries accepted as the essential character of man. This being suspended between good and evil by a law inherent in his nature is the man of Dante and Shakespeare, and of Balzac and Tolstoy.'²¹ It is just such a conflict which produces the 'strange blessings never in Paradise' (CP 227) of the Eden poem.

'The Annunciation' is also a poem of celebration. In it Muir expresses through the description of the meeting of angel and girl depicted on a wall-plaque in Rome the new understanding of the meaning of Incarnation which his stay in Italy had given him. Once again Muir remoulds a legendary starting-point: the poem concentrates, not on the traditional transcendental aspects of the meeting, but on 'that representation of a human love so intense that it could not reach farther' and which 'seemed the perfect earthly symbol of the love that passes understanding' (A 278). Although no precisely-imaged description of the meeting of angel and girl is given, there is no sense of abstraction in the account, but, rather, an eroticism unusual in Muir's poetry. In the second stanza he borrows the popular Elizabethan and Metaphysical conceit of 'looking babies' through which to suggest their love and their interchange of earthly and heavenly attributes:

Each reflects the other's face
 Till heaven in hers and earth in his
 Shine steady there. (CP 223)

The intensity of their meeting, the 'tutti tremante' of the prose account, is conveyed through the short, repeated 'see' in 'See, they have come together, see' (CP 223); and in the image of the trembling feathers:

Yet the increasing rapture brings
 So great a wonder that it makes
 Each feather tremble on his wings. (CP 224)

As in 'The Interrogation' from The Labyrinth collection, Muir in this poem creates a sense of stillness and intensity through his depiction of a double action: the lovers in the wall-plaque, apart in the

absorption of their meeting; the passers-by intent on the business of their 'ordinary day' (CP 224). The timelessness of the happening is patterned in the long, slow vowels of the final stanza:

But through the endless afternoon
 These neither speak nor movement make,
 But stare into their deepening trance
 As if their gaze would never break. (CP 224)

'The Incarnate One' with its unforgettably Scottish opening:

The windless northern surge, the sea-gull's scream
 And Calvin's kirk crowning the barren brae (CP 228)

continues the theme of Incarnation, and with it the theme of Scotland, in bringing together the opposing religions of Catholic Italy and Calvinist Scotland. Muir contrasts the paintings of the Italian Giotto in which one experiences through the visual images 'the Word made flesh' with the 'iron pen' (CP 228) of Calvinism through which

The Word made flesh here is made word again,

.

And God three angry letters in a book. (CP 228)

Mystery has no place in the latter system; on its 'logical hook . . . the Mystery is impaled and bent/Into an ideological instrument' (CP 228): a negative transfiguration which Muir quietly underlines by his changing from capital to lower-case letters in the line: 'The Word made flesh here is made word again'. As 'The Annunciation' centres on the human-love aspects of Incarnation, so, here, it is the contrary impersonal inhumanity of the Calvinist religion which is under attack. The poem moves outwards from its censure of religious Calvinism into a

confrontation with any system which enshrines 'the fleshless word' (CP 228). As in poems of the forties period such as 'The Usurpers', Muir sees that the self-sufficient impersonality of such systems can only result in 'abstract calamity' (CP 228) for man. The final stanza of 'The Incarnate One' is equivocal. Its opening moment of refreshment - 'A soft breeze stirs and all my thoughts are blown/Far out to sea and lost' (CP 229) - reminds one of Paul Valéry's similar wind and sea image in *Le Cimetière marin*: 'Le vent se lève! . . . il faut tenter de vivre!' ('The wind is rising! . . . One must try to live!');²² and while the earlier foreboding prophecy is retained, the vision is not entirely hopeless:

A soft breeze stirs and all my thoughts are blown
Far out to sea and lost. Yet I know well
The bloodless word will battle for its own
Invisibly in brain and nerve and cell.
The generations tell
Their personal tale: the One has far to go
Past the mirages and the murdering snow. (CP 229)

There are few specifically Scottish-theme poems in Muir's work. Yet Scotland's loss of nationhood and the consequences of this in the lives of the people is one strand in the weaving of the Fall theme which is consistent throughout his poetry. One fine Scottish-theme poem is 'Scotland's Winter' which immediately follows 'The Incarnate One' in the One Foot in Eden collection. As mentioned earlier in the Journeys and Places discussion, this poem first appeared in Scottish Journey (1935), standing as epilogue to the chapter on Edinburgh. As Hugh MacDiarmid does in the lyric 'Lourd on my Hert', from To Circumjack Cencrastus, so Muir here explores Scotland's decline through the traditional Scottish poetic convention of the winter season. The

opening is heraldic in its icy metaphors, and, like 'Merlin' of Journeys and Places, the poem exhibits a surprisingly mature employment of symbolism for this period of Muir's work:

Now the ice lays its smooth claws on the sill,
The sun looks from the hill
Helm'd in his winter casket,
And sweeps his arctic sword across the sky. (CP 229)

Striking also is the image of the Miller's daughter, her heels tapping on the unresponsive frozen ground under which Scotland's heroes lie. These heroes, unlike Arthur's knights, cannot be awakened in Scotland's hour of need. Nor do the 'common heels' of contemporary Scotland know 'whence they come or where they go' but 'are content/With their poor frozen life and shallow banishment' (CP 230). The mood of the poem is one of resigned futility as the poet contemplates the gulf between his country's 'songless' present and the heroic past, a Scottish Fall which takes its place in the broader theme of man's loss of Eden.

In Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry Lillian Feder comments that while, for Muir, 'Christian and pagan myth alike record intense love, loyalty, hate, conflict, fear, and, most important of all, the continuous existence of man, who inherits all the inner experience of the past . . . there is no doubt that in Muir's fable classical myth has a much more significant role than any other. He identifies emotionally far more readily with a fallen Trojan than with the fallen Christ.'²³ Although religious-theme poems are unusually dominant in the first section of One Foot in Eden, Muir returns also to Greek myth and legend for metaphor. There is a difference, however, in his employment of Greek myth in this volume. Muir is not here involved as formerly with the matter of the Fall of Troy which, as with the loss of Scottish

nationhood, is part of the greater theme of the loss of Eden; but with the essence of the human experience which a given myth embodies.

'Orpheus' Dream', like 'The Annunciation', is a celebration of intense love. As most often in his treatment of myth and legend, Muir modifies the original Orpheus and Eurydice story, but the interest lies in the way in which the modified myth is a reversal of the happenings in the original. In the popular version of the story, immortalised in music by Gluck in the aria 'Che farò senza Euridice' from the opera Orfeo ed Euridice, Orpheus loses Eurydice permanently because his great love for her forces him to look back to confirm that she is still following him from the underworld, thus breaking his agreement with Pluto for her ransom from Hades. Peter Butter points also to the version from Plato's Symposium in which "the gods sent Orpheus away from Hades empty-handed and showed him the mere shadow of the woman he had come to seek."²⁴ Muir's poem is a reversal of both these stories, but its ending, as Professor Butter comments, is particularly related to Plato's 'shadow' version. In Muir's poem the love between Orpheus and Eurydice is so strong and of such a nature that even Hades cannot separate them. It is the underworld which must be content with the shadow when opposed by

Forgiveness, truth, atonement, all
Our love at once - till we could dare
At last to turn our heads and see
The poor ghost of Eurydice
Still sitting in her silver chair,
Alone in Hades' empty hall. (CP 217)

Muir's poem is philosophically and textually complex. Christopher Wiseman points to the significance of the title: 'We are told that this is Orpheus' dream - not the reality - and we may suppose it to

be dreamed after his losing Eurydice.'²⁵ Dream is always for Muir a means of coming into contact with significant universal truths, and as in the religious-myth poem 'Adam's Dream', so in this poem dream is the means by which Orpheus is helped to understand the significance of, and be reconciled to, his living situation. Muir, however, leaves imprecise the exact circumstances of this situation, and is helped in this by the confusion generated by the dream context: Who is in the boat with Orpheus? Does he have a vision of Eurydice, or is she suddenly, inexplicably, in the boat with him? And if so, is it the real Eurydice, or his vision of her generated by his love who, with him, constitutes the 'we' who 'dare/At last to turn our heads and see' (CP 217) the insubstantial shadow which the underworld has captured? The relationship with Plato's version of the story is significant, because there is affinity with platonic philosophy in this intimation that the reality of the lovers' relationship lies not in their surface circumstances, but in what lies behind these; in the suggestion that the Eurydice which Pluto captures is truly the platonic 'shadow' of the reality of the love between her and Orpheus.

Some idea of Muir's tussle with the complexities of his theme can be gauged from a study of the heavily emended manuscript versions of the poem in the National Library of Scotland.²⁶ There are four manuscript versions, plus a fifth typewritten copy. The title in most is the published one of 'Orpheus' Dream', only version two giving the alternative title 'The Return of Eurydice'. The platonic motif in stanza two: 'the lost original of the soul', seems to have been troublesome, being variously attempted as 'the true shape of the one' (version one); 'the archetype of the one' and 'the perfect lineament of the one'

(both in version two). In all versions the ghost of Eurydice is left 'alone in Hades' empty hall', but she is variously described as 'phantom' and 'mirage' (version one) and 'twin-ghost' (versions two, three and four). Version three tries 'phantom' and 'ghost' as well as 'twin-ghost', and leaves her 'still dreaming in her silver chair.'

From a technical standpoint the poem is quietly but finely constructed. The immediacy of the opening statement: 'And she was there' (CP 216), catches and holds the experience which is then substantiated in the following development of the poem. The pause after the first word 'Stopped' in line four of the first stanza both patterns the movement of the boat and emphasises the following repetition of the opening statement: 'for Eurydice was there.' There is onomatopoeic patterning in the final two lines of this verse: the balancing of two and three-syllabled words such as 'felicity', 'foundering', 'afloat' with the short 'skiff' and 'keep' (CP 216), and the repeated alliterated 'f' sounds which move forwards and backwards across the lines, suggests the rocking movement of the boat, almost overturned by the emotion of its occupants. There is emphatic placing of significant words at the end of lines throughout the poem. 'Keep' at the end of line five in verse one contributes through its long vowel and forced pause after the blocking effect of its final consonant 'p' to the rocking movement of the boat. 'Won' in line two and 'whole' in line four of verse two emphasise the positive nature of the lovers' experience. 'Dare' (CP 217) at the end of line two of the final stanza proclaims a challenge to the negative forces of the underworld. The overall rhythmic movement is serene and flowing, in keeping with the nature of the experience being celebrated.

While 'Orpheus' Dream' celebrates the essential power of a loving relationship, 'The Charm' and 'The Other Oedipus' depict the evasion of or loss of meaningful experience. 'The Charm' takes up a previously unexplored aspect of the Troy story in its theme of Helen and her enchantment. In a relationship with Helen vital human experience is evaded through drugs: 'Dropped in the wine-cup it could take/ All memory and all grief away' (CP 218). The drinker, although conscious, is overcome by Muir's old enemy indifference. Bereft of memory, life to him becomes 'all storyless, all strange' (CP 218). The poem, like 'One Foot in Eden' demonstrates the necessity of accepting, not avoiding, the pain of human experience:

But far within him something cried
 For the great tragedy to start,
 The pang in lingering mercy fall,
 And sorrow break upon his heart. (CP 219)

'The Other Oedipus' exhibits a parallel with Shakespeare's King Lear. In this poem Oedipus is portrayed as a broken, mad old man, who, like Lear with his Fool, travels the roads with serving boy and concubine. As Lear's madness was a temporary escape from a reality too overwhelming to be borne, so in this poem Oedipus, in contrast to the questioning and acceptance of his earlier portrayal in The Labyrinth Oedipus poem, evades his guilt and its human and supernatural implications through madness. Madness has brought apparent happiness and freedom from care:

They were so gay and innocent, you'd have thought
 A god had won a glorious prize for them
 In some celestial field. (CP 217)

But the price, in Muir's terms, is high:

They were quite storyless and had clean forgotten
That memory burning in another world. (CP 217)

Like the unmemoried animals, such carefreeness is to be pitied:

The surly Spartan farmers
Were kind to them, pitying their happiness. (CP 218)

The theme of 'Telemachos Remembers' combines a child's misunderstanding of the heart of an experience with a mature realisation of its significance. In this poem Muir retells yet again the story of faithful Penelope and the weaving and unweaving of her web. This time the waiting and weaving are seen through the eyes of her son Telemachos who, as an adult man, remembers his childhood reaction to the 'forlorn scraps' of his mother's 'treasure trove':

I wet them with my childish tears
Not knowing she wove into her fears
Pride and fidelity and love. (CP 220)

This poem is Muir's finest depiction of the Penelope theme. It consists of seven stanzas, each of five lines following a basic iambic tetrameter line pattern and rhyming abaab. It is unusually rich in sound effects. The poem's rhyme pattern evokes the regular, hypnotic whirr of the treadle, its movement interrupted by the consecutive rhymes in lines three and four of each verse which suggest a pause in the weaving, or a backward movement, partially undoing what has been done. Within the basic iambic line itself there is variety. Stanzas one and two open with the reverse trochaic foot pattern, the heavy initial stresses giving form to the length of the waiting and the monotony and reluctant doing of the task, as does also the repetition of 'slowly' in stanza two:

— — — — —
 Twenty|years,|every|day,
 The figures in the web she wove
 Came and stood and went away.
 Her fingers in their pitiless play
 Beat downward as the shuttle drove.

— — — — —
 Slowly,|slowly|did they|come,
 With horse and chariot, spear and bow,
 Half-finished heroes sad and mum,
 Came slowly to the shuttle's hum.
 Time itself was not so slow. (CP 219)

There is a similar heavy stress pattern in stanza four which tells of Odysseus' labyrinthine wandering:

— — — — —
 Far|away|Odysseus|trod|
 The treadmill of|the turning|road. (CP 219)

Verse five isolates the length of the task and the mournful sound of the continually turning loom in its long 'ee' and 'oo' vowel sounds and its humming 'm' and 'n' consonants:

The weary loom, the weary loom,
 The task grown sick from morn to night,
 From year to year. The treadle's boom
 Made a low thunder in the room.
 The woven phantoms mazed her sight. (CP 220)

Thematically, the poem gains much from being narrated by Telemachos who from his dual standpoint as child and adult is able to convey both the apparent chaos and futility of his mother's task and its underlying significance. The significance of Penelope and her web can be interpreted variously. On one level she is the guardian of human virtues such as love, the capacity to grieve, faithfulness, hope: the personal attributes which the new men of 'The Usurpers' and 'Song for a Hypothetical Age' (which occurs in the second part of this volume and which again returns to the Penelope story as touchstone) have put aside.

She is also an image of faithful mankind, subject to the vagaries of a fate which it cannot influence or, like the young Telemachos, understand, yet trusting that the predestined road will in the end lead to a recovery of what has been lost.

Douglas Young objected in a letter to Muir to the image of 'the treadmill of the turning road' in the fourth stanza of the poem on the grounds that The Odyssey is a 'nautical affair.' Muir's reply shows that the road image was no oversight, but that it was chosen with care. It also gives an insight into the extent of his preoccupation with the Troy story:

I was not trying to give a correct account of what Odysseus was doing, but conveying the anxiety and bewilderment of Telemachos and his mother, and I think the picture of someone wandering about in a circle gives a better impression of persistence and frustration over a long stretch of years than any nautical image could possibly give. At least that is how I see it: I think I have read the Odyssey about twenty times, so that I was not floundering about at random.²⁷

Muir discussed the Penelope theme also in a BBC radio programme 'Scottish Life and Letters' in May 1954. In it he interpreted the myth on the level of the conflicting claims of life and art, an interpretation which is significant in relation to the use of the theme in 'Song for a Hypothetical Age'. Had Penelope finished her weaving, she 'would have achieved the supreme work of art, but in doing so would have renounced her humanity.' Muir sees his retelling of the myth as 'a fanciful statement of the claims of life and art' which 'describes the desolation which would follow if they were quite divorced from each other, as fortunately for us they cannot be.'²⁸

'Prometheus' and 'The Grave of Prometheus' complete the Greek myth poems in the first part of One Foot in Eden. Both explore the same theme: the ending of Prometheus, betrayer of the gods and fire-giver to men. 'Prometheus' was sent to T.S. Eliot in response to a request for a poem for the Ariel series of poems, and correspondence between Muir and Eliot shows the difficulty Muir had in achieving a satisfactory poetic resolution of the theme. The poem opens with Prometheus, cast out from Olympus by the gods and condemned to everlasting torment, praying for the end of the world which will release him into 'blessed nothingness' (CP 214) and speculating on what he would say to the gods were he suddenly to be recalled by them. The poem contains a Hölderlin-like mingling of Christian and pagan myth, a recurring attribute of Muir's work, but one which troubled Eliot who wondered 'whether a line or so . . . could prepare the reader for this continuity of the agony of Prometheus up to date.'²⁹ In response Muir added the paragraph beginning 'The shrines are emptying and the peoples changing' (CP 215) which, as Peter Butter comments 'contains some fine writing' and 'enriches the poem and makes it in some ways easier to understand. But there was also, perhaps, some loss in separating the questions asked in the paragraph before it from the answer suggested in the final lines of the poem.'³⁰ The loss is that of the surprise and impact of the confrontation between pagan and Christian religion, between the 'heedless gods' (CP 215) who condemned Prometheus to his endless pain and Christ, who like Prometheus himself 'came down, they say from another heaven/ Not in rebellion but in pity and love' (CP 215), and who, if Prometheus could find him, 'would hear and answer' (CP 216). The explanatory paragraph destroys this confrontation with its implicit acknowledgement

of the significance of Incarnation. It turns the reader's attention away from the dilemma of Prometheus, the supposed subject of the poem, towards the theme of impersonality and 'abstract calamity' in the world of men. In these circumstances the final paragraph seems almost superfluous: the poem has changed course as a result of the added material and the answers which the final paragraph suggests, although not irrelevant, are no longer essential.

'The Grave of Prometheus' has no such confusion. Here the myth is reshaped geologically as Prometheus finds release through being absorbed ever more deeply into the earth. There is no attempt at a Christian resolution as in 'Prometheus', no contrast between the vindictiveness of the old gods and the pity of Christ. Gods and men have departed; the fire is out and Prometheus has become his barrow. Yet his release has not meant the end of everything, as he prayed in the previous poem; it has not even meant the obliteration of his role in the affairs of the earth. His memorial is in the continuing world of nature:

Yet there you still may see a tongue of stone,
 Shaped like a calloused hand where no hand should be,
 Extended from the sward as if for alms,
 Its palm all licked and blackened as with fire.
 A mineral change made cool his fiery bed,
 And made his burning body a quiet mound,
 And his great face a vacant ring of daisies. (CP 216)

That splendid final line, reminiscent in its economy and visual and imaginative forcefulness of Donne's 'a bracelet of bright haire about the bone,'³¹ is typical of the effective unity of the geological metaphor of the poem as a whole.

The second section of the One Foot in Eden collection is, on the whole, and in spite of the presence of several striking poems, less successful than the first part. Paradoxically, in view of the achievement of The Labyrinth which showed Muir relying more and more on the subject matter of contemporary experience in his work, the subdued quality of Part Two seems to arise from the more personal and topical nature of the poems and the virtual abandonment of the mythical structure of the poems in Part One. There are only four poems in this section, for example, which relate to Greek myth, and in three of these the relationship is tangential. In addition, while man's journey in this difficult land continues to be a theme, this is now explored out-with the explicit framework of the Eden myth.

As the opening sonnet 'Milton' introduced the Eden theme of the first section, so does the sonnet to Franz Kafka, 'sad champion of the drab/And half' (CP 233), anticipate the themes of frustration and negation which are characteristic of Part Two. 'The Difficult Land', which could be described as 'One Foot in Eden' without the Eden symbolism, is one of the most significant of these frustration poems. In it the context of man's life is once again seen, as in the Journeys and Places poems, as one of restrictive determinism: 'Here things miscarry/Whether we care, or do not care enough' (CP 237). As in 'One Foot in Eden', the metaphor is agricultural, but in this poem the enemy is not the weeds which inseparably mingle with the crops, but nature itself:

Sun, rain, and frost alike conspire against us:
 You'd think there was malice in the very air.
 And the spring floods and summer droughts: our fields
 Mile after mile of soft and useless dust. (CP 237)

Muir calls on the experience described in 'The Cloud' of seeing a young man harrowing in a cloud of dust to give force to his depiction of barren nature:

We yoke the oxen, go out harrowing,
Walk in the middle of an ochre cloud,
Dust rising before us and falling again behind us,
Slowly and gently settling where it lay.
These days the earth itself looks sad and senseless. (CP 237)

As in 'Prometheus' the people's suffering leads to a wish to put an end to life, and as in 'The Grave of Prometheus' Muir gives this death-wish form through the powerful metaphor of absorption into the earth:

And we would gladly rid us of these burdens,
Enter our darkness through the doors of wheat
And the light veil of grass

.

And gather into the secrecy of the earth
Furrowed by broken ploughs lost deep in time. (CP 237-38)

Opposing this mood of evasion is the poet's and his characters' awareness of the positives of life and the duties and responsibilities life places upon them. First among these positives is the awareness of the continuity of human experience:

We are a people; race and speech support us,
Ancestral rite and custom, roof and tree,
Our songs that tell of our triumphs and disasters
(Fleeting alike), continuance of fold and hearth,
Our names and callings, work and rest and sleep,
And something that, defeated, still endures -
These things sustain us. (CP 237)

And having accepted this continuity, unlike the daughters in King Lear, this continuity imposes its own demands upon them: they have a duty

both to the living attributes of 'honesty, kindness, courage, fidelity/The love that lasts a lifetime' (CP 238) which sustain them, but also to the dead 'who lodge in us so strangely, unremembered/ Yet in their place' (CP 238). As in 'One Foot in Eden' the final position is one of acceptance: 'This is a difficult country, and our home' (CP 238).

'The Cloud', another powerful poem, does not succeed in escaping from its labyrinth of frustrated longing. In its setting the poem returns to Muir's post-war stay in Prague and his visits to the Writers' House at Dobris, where one evening

we lost our way
In a maze of little winding roads that led
To nothing but themselves,
Weaving a rustic web for thoughtless travellers. (CP 245)

The poem is strangely reminiscent of Wordsworth's 'The Solitary Reaper', but where Wordsworth's coming upon the Highland girl 'reaping and singing by herself' was for him in the nature of an epiphany, a moment of intense insight and joy which remained with him to sustain him:

The music in my heart I bore
Long after it was heard no more³²

Muir's meeting with the solitary young man harrowing 'hidden in dust' (CP 245) is a symbol of despair, a barren, cheerless sign which itself presaged the political 'change' which was to come in Czechoslovakia.

The young man seemed

A prisoner walking in a moving cloud
Made by himself for his own purposes;
And there he grew and was as if exalted
To more than man, yet not, not glorified:
A pillar of dust moving in dust; no more. (CP 245)

There is an implicit contrast with Moses' experience on the mountain, with Christ's Transfiguration; a remembrance on the part of the reader of Eliot's 'fear in a handful of dust'³³ in The Waste Land.

The young man's barren isolation is reinforced by the 'preacher from Urania' who, in contrast to traditional religious employment of the dust metaphor, 'praised the good dust . . . And cried that God was dead' (CP 245). There is no reconciliation in the poem which ends with the poet's longing for reassurance that impersonality has not triumphed, that the continuity of human experience from Adam's Fall, through Christ's Incarnation, to the present is still valid and unbroken:

And thinking of the man
Hid in his cloud we longed for light to break
And show that his face was the face once broken in Eden
Beloved, world-without-end lamented face;
And not a blindfold mask on a pillar of dust. (CP 246)

'Song for a Hypothetical Age' is also concerned with the possible domination of impersonality when 'history takes its final turn' (CP 242), and it returns to the myth of Penelope in the attempt to posit an alternative philosophy of living. As in the Lear essay, as in 'The Difficult Land', the poem stresses the necessity of personal, human attributes, the duties and responsibilities which the conception of life as an integrated whole imposes upon us. The poem gives expression also to Muir's views on life and art expressed in the 'Scottish Life and Letters' broadcast referred to in the discussion of 'Telemachos Remembers'. Just as Penelope in the former poem would have 'worked a matchless wrong' (CP 220) had she completed her weaving, so in this poem she must undo what 'might have been a masterpiece':

else all is lost
 And great Odysseus tempest-tossed
 Will perish, shipwrecked on my art. (CP 243)

In spite of its resorting to the powerful Penelope symbol to counter the fear of future 'abstract calamity' (CP 228), this poem too ends with stony images. In the 'new impersonal age'

the hot heart petrifies
 And the round earth to rock is grown
 In the winter of our eyes;
 Heart and earth a single stone. (CP 243)

What is lacking is known, but there is no indication of possible restoration:

Until the stony barrier break
 Grief and Joy no more shall wake. (CP 243)

Other poems with themes of personal dislocation and broken continuity are 'My Own', 'Into Thirty Centuries Born', 'Song' and 'The Young Princes', but the more abstract, philosophising tone and expression which characterises most of these inhibits an imaginative impact such as is made through the symbolic correlatives of 'The Difficult Land', 'The Cloud' and 'Song for a Hypothetical Age'. A more positive resolution of the impersonality theme is attempted in 'Day and Night', 'Nothing There but Faith', and, especially, in 'The Island'. This last-mentioned, written in Sicily during Muir's fruitful stay in Italy between 1949 and 1950, contradicts the pessimism of a poem such as 'The Cloud' with its tangible and visual evidence of continuity as found in 'the golden hills of corn/Which all the heroic clans have borne' (CP 248) and the 'ancestral faces' (CP 249) of the Sicilians.

'Effigies', a group of five related poems, would, with the exception of poem five which took its impulse from an 'old memory', appear to have grown out of Muir's embattled committee experiences while he was Warden of Newbattle Abbey. Like 'The Face' which symbolised a similar unhappy, frustrated period in St Andrews, the poems in 'Effigies', especially numbers one and three, are bitter and psychologically merciless in their portrayals, containing 'a little infusion of poison', as Muir himself described them to Kathleen Raine.³⁴

Three further poems deserve detailed attention in this second section of One Foot in Eden. These are 'The Late Wasp', 'The Late Swallow' and 'The Horses'. 'The Late Wasp' and 'The Late Swallow' which, with 'Song' ('This that I give and take'), bring the collection to a close, are companion-pieces which call to mind Henryson's Fables, each on the surface observing and commenting on in a companionable way the creatures which have shared the poet's summer. Underneath this surface metaphor of everyday life, however, one is aware of the poet's preoccupation with the coming end of a more universal summer of life, and, perhaps, with his own end. Although personal, even occasional poems, they are simultaneously cosmic in their significance.

The poems posit opposing views of life and its ending through their allegories of wasp and bird. In the first the wasp is reluctant to admit the end of summer and its sweetness, continuing to feed on the marmalade

So deeply, all your strength was scarcely able
To prise you from the sweet pit you had made. (CP 253)

Yet summer's end for wasp and man is inevitable, and Muir gives this awareness form in imagery which succeeds in keeping the wasp's world in the forefront of the poem while continuing to suggest also the human dilemma which lies behind it, a human dilemma which is highlighted by the allusion to Yeats's 'The Second Coming' in 'the good air will not hold' (CP 253). For the wasp, as for a philosophy of life which finds no place for immortality, the end of summer is the end of all: 'And down you dive through nothing and through despair' (CP 253). Muir's tone in this poem is pitying, yet accepting, acknowledging the conditions of the wasp's existence.

In 'The Late Swallow', on the other hand, the tone is exhortatory. Like Henryson's swallow who tried to warn her fellow-birds about the fowler's cunning, the poet here urges the late swallow to change direction. The underlying human and religious significance of the poem is gently pointed to through such words and phrases as 'southern paradise'; 'Across the great earth's downward sloping side' (a phrase which recalls Muir's earlier description of the late years of life in 'Soliloquy'); 'pinions'; 'heavens of ice'; 'radiant tree' (CP 253). Yet as with the metaphor of the late wasp, the metaphor of bird migration in this poem is sustained to the end, although its allegorical implications are more overtly sign-posted than in the former poem.

Finally there is 'The Horses' which is placed just beyond the midpoint of this second section of One Foot in Eden, but whose theme leads on to Muir's increasing preoccupation with the potentially catastrophic situation of the post-war world which dominates his very last poems, brought together in Collected Poems under the title 'Poems Not Previously Collected'.⁴¹

'The Horses' has been the subject of much critical commentary and is considered by many to be one of Muir's finest poems. Its context, like that of 'After a Hypothetical War' from 'Poems Not Previously Collected', is that of the aftermath of a nuclear war. Unlike the later poem, however, this poem tells of a community which has been spared the devastation which communities closer to the holocaust would have suffered, and which, although experiencing a certain degree of deprivation, is able to rebuild its life. The poem consists of two sections, the first telling of the war and the abandonment by the community of their old way of life; the second of the promise of a new beginning, material and spiritual, which the 'strange horses' with their offer of 'free servitude' (CP 247) bring. Although the happenings in the poem take place in a hypothetical future beyond our present lives, they are told to us in the past tense and in the first person plural 'we', by, presumably, one of the survivors who acts as spokesman for the group: a group whose new-found co-operation and community of interest is evidenced in the consistent use of the first person plural pronouns 'we', 'us', 'our'.

The poem opens with a reference to the Genesis Creation story which has been inverted in 'the seven days war that put the world to sleep' (CP 246). The significance that the 'strange horses' will have is pointed to by their introduction in the first few lines in the context of these world-creating and world-destroying events, and by the dislocation of normal syntax which places them with their verb 'came' at the very end of the long, allusive opening sentence:

Barely a twelvemonth after
 The seven days war that put the world to sleep,
 Late in the evening the strange horses came. (CP 246)

Allusion to the Bible story continues throughout the poem. In addition to 'The seven days war that put the world to sleep' quoted above, overt Old Testament references are to be found in phrases such as 'on the second day'; 'on the third day'; 'on the sixth day' (CP 246); 'Eden' (CP 247). More implicit are the allusions to the New Testament story in 'covenant' (CP 246); 'borne our load'; 'free servitude'; 'their coming our beginning' (CP 247).

As the poem is divided into two sections, before and after the arrival of the hope-bearing horses, so is there a formal difference in approach between the sections. In the first part of the poem, after the announcement of the fact of the war and the arrival of the horses, Muir isolates a number of specific aspects of the post-war situation which mark its separation from the 'old bad world' (CP 246). In the first few days of the war

it was so still
 We listened to our breathing and were afraid.
 On the second day
 The radios failed; we turned the knobs; no answer.
 On the third day a warship passed us, heading north,
 Dead bodies piled on the deck. On the sixth day
 A plane plunged over us into the sea. Thereafter
 Nothing. The radios dumb;
 And still they stand in corners of our kitchens,

.

The tractors lie about our fields;

.

We make our oxen drag our rusty ploughs,
 Long laid aside. We have gone back
 Far past our fathers' land.

(CP 246-47)

In contrast to this detailed description of isolated aspects of the everyday life of the community, the second part of the poem is visionary, evoking the symbolic significance of the horses and their

'free servitude' in metaphors of sound - the 'distant tapping'; 'deepening drumming'; and 'hollow thunder' - of heraldry - 'fabulous steeds set on an ancient shield' (CP 247) - and through the allusion to the Eden myth and through implicit references to Christ's offer of rebirth through faith in Him.

Muir's fable of rebirth through the coming of the horses is very moving and, in the context of his consistent material/transcendental attitude to horses throughout his poetry and prose writing, is, I believe, entirely convincing. Less convincing, in my view, is the scene set by the first section of the poem in which the everyday situation of the post-war community and their attitude to their new situation is described.

The very selectivity of Muir's descriptive details raises questions about the situation of the people and about their relationship to the areas of devastation. We know that the community is situated by the sea, because a warship is seen heading north on the third day, but where exactly can it be situated to have escaped contact with survivors and fleeing refugees from other areas? One suspects that the place is Orkney, and if it is, then this would explain the lack of signs of deprivation and starvation, Orkney because of its island nature being traditionally more self-supporting than mainland communities. But if Orkney, then why the surprise at the coming of the horses? If they are real, 'good plough-horses',³⁵ as Muir insists that they are, then they must have continued to live on the island farms and must have been fed by the farmers, even after their displacement by tractors. Orkney consisting of islands, and the nature of the Pentland Firth being what it is, they could have come from

nowhere else. Where did the oxen come from to pull the rusty ploughs? Would the farmers have kept oxen on the farms after they had been displaced for ploughing first of all by horses and then by tractors? Why not use the horses, since they must still have been on the islands?

I find a similar lack of conviction in the details of the radios and the silence. If this community was considerably isolated from the centre of devastation, as the still-standing kitchens, rooms, radios and tractors suggest, then while there might well have been a fearful, hushed quality in their intercourse while they waited initially for some news of what was happening, there would surely also at other times be agitated chattering and coming and going as people gathered together to find out what they could. And I do not think that they would ignore their radios if 'on the stroke of noon a voice should speak' (CP 246), but, rather, would react with joy and excitement at the evidence that there was still life continuing elsewhere. The dilemma for the reader centres on the extent to which Muir placed this first part of his poem in the realm of fable.

C.B.Cox, whose essay, 'The Horses', is one of the most detailed analyses of the poem, places the whole poem firmly in the world of fable despite the realistic details of everyday life in the first section:

We are never told what country this is, and all we know of the real landscape is that it is by the sea. . . . We have left normal reality for the world of fable.³⁶

For Mr Cox, this fable is that of the Old and New Testament stories of the journey from Eden. Pointing to the biblical phraseology in the poem, he finds that the people have been reborn into a new Eden: they are 'going back, far back, to the sources of life.' In this interpretation,

the realistic details of section one are symbolic of 'the unique quality of the new Eden. The description of a silence "so still we listened to our breathing and were afraid" takes us from the real world, with its multitude of noises, into a stilled landscape like some formal medieval painting, or "illustration in a book of knights." The landscape and the events are symbolic, depicting a rebirth into innocence.' Of the silent radios he comments that this 'suggests that a whole way of communication has been cut off, that the voices of the old, bad society no longer speak to these people.' And the tractors are 'become like fabulous sea-monsters, part of an evil world no longer to be tolerated. So the people are prepared for the coming of the divine horses.'³⁷

All these elements are certainly implicit in Muir's poem, but I am not sure that Muir would have subscribed to such an overtly Christian interpretation as that given by Mr Cox, nor to such an emphasis on the fabulous context of the poem. In his prose-writing and poetry Muir, as we have seen, was frequently preoccupied with the theme of the impersonality which a machine-oriented, technological society encourages, an impersonality which could result in such a disregard for individual human life and for natural life that the ultimate act of destruction could be contemplated. In this sense the tractors and radios can be interpreted, as Mr Cox suggests, as being symbolic of the machine-culture which has replaced the old personal relationships between individual human beings and between humans and animals. But Muir's comments to a student, Derek Hawes, who had sent him an essay on the poem, suggest that Muir himself did not regard the poem principally in a symbolic way. He acknowledges that 'the poem is to some extent

"engagé" and that 'the horses are good plough-horses and still have a memory of the world before the war. I try to suggest they are looking for their old human companionship.' And as for the sound of the horses which Mr Cox interprets symbolically: 'But God speaks in the thunder, and the wave is part of the sea of life'; Muir gives an everyday explanation of this also:

As for the 'tapping': have you ever listened, on a still evening, to horses trotting in the distance? the sound is really a pretty tapping. The drumming sound indicated that they were drawing nearer: the hollow thunder when they turned the corner meant that they saw the village or farmstead and found their home. I think I am right in the choice of verbs here. ³⁸

These comments do not suggest that the fabulous element should not be read into the poem, but that, as Peter Butter notes, Muir 'does not so much leave normal reality for the world of the fable as perceive the fable beneath the surface of normal reality.'³⁹ It is Muir's depiction of this 'surface of normal reality' which seems to me to prevent the poem achieving complete poetic resolution. For not only do the details of the post-war situation which he chooses to present raise unanswered questions about the situation and nature of the community of survivors and about the supposed devastation in the world beyond them, but his simplistic rejection of 'that old bad world' of radios and tractors ignores the very real benefits which such modern inventions - and symbolised through them, many other technological developments - have brought into the lives of ordinary people. Muir himself recognised the benefits which Orkney reaped from the Industrial Revolution: the island in the twentieth century was able to use its inventions without having itself to suffer the squalor and devastation which industrialisation brought about in many places on the mainland. It seems to me

that in 'The Horses' there is the same simplistic interpretation of man's historical situation which is present also in relation to the history of Scotland in poems such as 'Scotland 1941' and 'Complaint of the Dying Peasantry' from 'Poems Not Previously Collected': an irreconcilable dichotomy in the poetic representation of a situation between its symbolic interpretation and the supposed documentary evidence which it presents. In this context, Edwin Morgan comments in an essay on Muir that in 'The Horses', 'Muir's primitivism, returning all post-atomic mankind to an Orkney farm, not without a certain austere satisfaction, seems to me to be more insulting than comforting to man's restless spirit and aspiring brain. Let your survivors tame the horses of the moon, the dragons of Mars: I would call that hope. But Muir was in search of a simplicity which the future was unlikely to reveal unless by a return to the past, and even the simplicity of the past is more myth than reality.'⁴⁰

While agreeing with Edwin Morgan about the mythical simplicity of the past, and while finding, as discussed above, that Muir is often guilty of just such a mythical presentation of the past, I do not think the alternative solution of setting the survivors to tame the horses of the moon is any more satisfactory - realistically or symbolically. While one may quarrel with the details of Muir's representation in 'The Horses' as in the Scottish poems, the poem does make a powerful impression because, in spite of everything, Muir has succeeded in penetrating to an essential truth about the human condition and its relationship with all created life. Edwin Morgan's solution, on the other hand, seems to evidence the very hubris which has led man to his present potentially suicidal situation. Muir demonstrated his

preoccupation with the ominous aspects of that situation in many of the poems which he wrote after the One Foot in Eden collection.

Muir's last 'collection' of poems, 'Poems Not Previously Collected', was brought together by Mrs Muir and J.C. Hall after Edwin Muir's death in January 1959 and included as a final section in the Collected Poems (1960) which was at that time being prepared for publication. There are three groupings of poems about which the editors made the following comment:

Thus, the first twenty-two poems are known to have been published (although sometimes in slightly different versions) during Edwin Muir's lifetime, or to have been given by him to his publishers in typescript. These can be regarded as carrying the author's imprimatur. The next six poems were discovered among Edwin Muir's papers in typescript, but had not previously been published as far as is known. . . . Finally, there is a group of poems or parts of poems which were found only in manuscript and needed deciphering.

For the 1963 second edition of the book, there is the additional editorial comment:

For the second edition we have made a few amendments in two poems in the final section, 'Dialogue' ('I have heard you cry') and 'I have been taught', and some minor typographical changes elsewhere. A hitherto uncollected poem, 'The Two Sisters', first published in 1956, has been added to the final section.⁴²

Because of the unusual nature of this final collection, I have marked poems to be discussed 'I', 'II' or 'III' in accordance with the groupings mentioned in the editorial note.

Before his death Muir himself had commented on his post-Eden poetry on a number of occasions. In April 1958 he wrote to Norman

MacCaig that he had 'almost enough poems, now, to make up another volume, and one half of them I intend to put under the heading of "ballads".'⁴³ This volume would, presumably, have consisted mainly of the poems belonging to the first group mentioned by the editors of Collected Poems. Although few of these last poems could be termed 'ballads', their increased preoccupation with the international themes of survival of man and with individual human relationships relates to Muir's interest in the universality of the ballads and in writing a book about them, for which he was given a Bollingen Foundation grant, but which he did not live to undertake. In a letter to T.S. Eliot of 13 March 1956 about the Bollingen application he spoke of his long interest 'in the world of the ballads and the world out of which they came; the fact that they solved the problem of the audience for poetry, which is so impossibly difficult today . . . I want to study the question of the audience . . . This all has a bearing on society, and the difference between the society in which this could happen, and our own.'⁴⁴ Later, in a letter to Kathleen Raine about the project, he wrote that it would 'take me back again into the roots of poetry, where we should all be, and away from fashion.'⁴⁵ In this same letter, written in America during his period as Harvard Professor of Poetry, he commented: 'I have been writing some very queer poetry since I came, with a good deal of new horror in it.' And in November of the same year he told Tom Scott in a letter: 'I am trying, at long last, to bring my own poetry up to the present and the future (the future not seen, I may say, in any Utopian light.)'⁴⁶ These comments by Muir on his work in progress are very relevant to the kind of poetry one finds in 'Poems Not Previously Collected'. In its prevailing mood of

apprehension for the future of mankind this is one of the most contemporary and international of Muir's collections of poetry. In its more direct poetic method, almost entirely unstructured by Greek or biblical myth, this poetry is closely related to the poems in Part II of the One Foot in Eden collection.

The most memorable thematic grouping of these final poems - one which spans all three of the editors' groups - is that which follows 'The Horses' in its anticipation of man's future. Unlike 'The Horses', however, these late poems do not envisage a hopeful outcome for man, but are Cassandra-like in their prophecies of doom.

'After a Hypothetical War' (I) presents an alternative scenario to 'The Horses', and, although narrower in scope, is, in terms of the actuality of the horror which nuclear attack would bring to those caught up in its path, more convincing than the earlier poem. There is no safe island haven for the survivors here. Instead of a symbolic return to 'that long-lost archaic companionship' (CP 247) of an earlier, simpler world, and through it to a promise of a new beginning for man, the sparseness to which life is reduced in 'After a Hypothetical War' is productive only of sterility and jealousy.

No rule nor ruler: only water and clay,
And the purblind peasant squatting, elbows out
To nudge his neighbour from his inch of ground
Clutched fast through flood and drought but never loved.
Avarice without meaning. (CP 265)

Even more terrible is the evocation of perversions and deformities, natural and human, which radiation damage brings about: 'soil on its perpetual death-bed'; this

Chaotic breed of misbegotten things,
 Embryos of what could never wish to be.
 Soil and air breed crookedly here, and men
 Are dumb and twisted as the envious scrub
 That spreads in silent malice on the fields. (CP 265)

There is no comfort in this poem, no consoling fable. But it brings before the reader, as 'The Horses' because of its different philosophical orientation does not do, the awareness of the horrifying implications of nuclear war, something which we try to evade with our contemporary talk of 'nuclear theatres'; 'fall-out shelters' and 'survival tactics.' It is too easy to believe that the disaster will happen elsewhere; that we will be spared, our hardest trial being, perhaps, to learn to relive a simpler life without the aid of modern technology, an attitude that 'The Horses' in one sense encourages. In 'After a Hypothetical War' Muir forces us to look disaster in the face, to acknowledge that this kind of survival - our 'very cradle an image of the grave' (CP 265) - would very probably be the only kind of survival, if there were survival at all, for most of us who live in the political centre of any future conflict.

'The Last War' (I) continues the theme of possible nuclear warfare and combines the direct impact of 'After a Hypothetical War' with the wider referential context of 'The Horses'. It is written in five sections of varying lengths, in lines of varying length and with no regular rhyme pattern, rhyming lines occurring only occasionally and where emphasis is placed on a given thought or word. The basic foot pattern of the poem is iambic, but the whole movement is determined by the stresses of the speaking, questioning voice, and by turns in the poet's thought.

The title is suggestive, calling up associations of 1914 and 'the war to end all wars', a relationship with previous warfare which the first stanza immediately takes up and develops. This last war will be different. There will be no place in it for the instances of individual human heroism, skill and sacrifice which, as history demonstrates, the enveloping evil of warfare paradoxically draws out from man: no 'strange blessings' will come out of this human disaster:

No place at all for bravery in that war
 Nor mark where one might make a stand,
 Nor use for eye or hand
 To discover and reach the enemy
 Hidden in boundless air.
 No way to attempt, to save
 By our own death the young that they might die
 Sometime a different death. (CP 282)

Sections II and III move from a general to a more specific consideration of such a war, as the poet tries to imagine how we should face the coming end. What would be our final thoughts? Would we 'stare in hatred at the turncoat sun' (CP 282) or would we realise the enormity of the destruction which we had brought about?:

Or shall we picture bird and tree
 Silently falling, and think of all the words
 By which we forged earth, night and day
 And ruled with such strange ease our work and play?
 Now only the lexicon of a dream.
 And we see our bodies buried in falling birds. (CP 283)

As in the evocation of the creation of the world in 'The Days', Muir here suggests the elements which will be destroyed through specific representative symbols with which we can identify: nature through 'bird and tree'; the hard-won 'articulate breath' through the choice of 'lexicon', the dictionary for dead languages. In the last line the

full horror of the destruction of man and nature is caught in the imagined sight of 'our bodies buried in falling birds.'

Section III continues speculation on the actual form of the coming death: 'Shall we all die together?' or 'Perhaps nothing at all will be but pain,/A choking and floundering' (CP 283). The poet thinks of harrowing instances of partings and farewells in the life we have known, the plight of refugees to which most of us, in our comfortable lives, have given too little thought. These wretched people can now be regarded as 'our harbingers' (CP 283). In his evocation of the situation of the refugees Muir uses a striking image which he employs again in another reference to refugees in the poem 'The refugees born for a land unknown' (III). The refugees, having said their terrified good-byes, are subsequently shipwrecked:

Spilling salt angry tears in the salt waves,
Their lives waste-water sucked through a gaping hole,
Yet all the world around them; hope and fear. (CP 283)

In this image he catches the futile waste of human lives, man's helplessness in face of natural disasters as of man-made troubles, and the unbearable tragic frustration of a situation where the refugees could see 'the world around them' as disaster struck, their situation simultaneously productive of 'hope and fear.' Now the poet imagines the would-be refugees from the universal disaster of nuclear war potentially in a similar situation. Now we 'might founder on common earth and choke in air,/Without one witness' (CP 283). Section III ends with a return to speculation about the specific circumstances of the end, and as with all deaths, about how we will face it:

Will great visions come,
And life lie clear at last as it says, Good-bye,

.

Or shall we remember shameful things concealed,
Mean coldnesses and wounds too eagerly given? (CP 283)

Section IV begins with a personal reminiscence by the poet which leads him into a more general comment on human life. The experience described is given a precise, imagiste form:

A tree thin sick and pale by a north wall,
A smile splintering a face -
I saw them today, suddenly made aware
That ordinary sights appal. (CP 283)

This experience suggests to him that we are all part of the one life-cycle, disintegration in nature or human life eats into us all. Part of the remedy, the 'great counterpoise/To blind nonentity' lies

in all that is full-grown
In nature, and all that is with hands well-made,
Carved in verse or stone
Or a harvest yield. There is the harmony
By which we know our own and the world's health. (CP 284)

Yet, even as he puts forward this remedy, he recognises that it is 'not enough' (CP 284). As with the problem of the refugees, a true remedy must lie in communal responsibility: a consistent theme in Muir's work. The possibility of universal destruction has come about because we did not recognise our duty and responsibility to others:

Because we could not wait
To untwist the twisted smile and make it straight
Or render restitution to the tree.
We who were wrapped so warm in foolish joys
Did not have time to call on pity
For all that is sick, and heal and remake our city. (CP 284)

After the focus on our everyday human responsibility which that last slow-moving emphatic line leaves with us, section V moves into the realm of visionary experience. This is perhaps the only ending possible for such a poem, which has ranged far in human experience, and which could not have had either an optimistic or a pessimistic ending imposed on it without destroying its philosophical and poetic achievement. As Peter Butter suggests in his discussion of this poem, the vision of the 'spirits of earth and heaven' which lie 'about the well of life' (CP 285) in this final section most probably relates to Muir's references to his 'Well of Life' dream and to the dream of 'watchers in a dark place' in his notebook of 'Dreams and Diary Items 1957-58'.⁴⁷ The visionary ending allows the human experience given form in the first four sections to stand unmitigated, while placing it in a philosophical context of the mystery which surrounds the existence of life.

Some poems in this group of poems dealing with man's future concentrate, not on a possible war, but, as in sections III and IV of 'The Last War', on aspects of social and political life which contribute to disintegration. 'The Tower' (I), which itself disintegrates poetically after the first section, returns to the totalitarian images of Muir's European poems of the forties and to the restricted fate theme of the Journeys and Places collection. Here, however, man is circumscribed not by an incomprehensible fate, but by his own actions: 'We are the architects of that power' (CP 278). His empty sign, the 'Babel Tower' manned by 'mannikin sentries' aims a gun at the sky in which 'the archaic clouds pass slowly by' (CP 278), witnesses to the continuity of life he has destroyed. 'Ballad of Everyman' (II) and

'Nightmare of Peace' (II) continue the totalitarian theme. The poems, which are experimental versions of one poem, explore the death of 'stout Everyman' (CP 290) at the hands of totalitarian forces which operate under the guise of peace, 'and murder peace to bring their peace' (CP 291).

'Impersonal Calamity' (I) is relevant to an age which increasingly witnesses the world's disasters vicariously through newspaper, radio and television screen, but which cannot experience the significance of these or participate in the grief which they bring. Like the drug which Helen administers to her victims in 'The Choice', these

impersonal calamities estrange us
From our own selves, send us abroad
In desolate thoughtlessness,
While far behind our hearts know what they know,
Yet cannot feel, nor ever express. (CP 281)

Man's inherited need is for the personal contact:

For our inherited features cannot show
More than traditional grief and happiness
That rise from old and worn and simple springs. (CP 280)

'How can an eye or brow/Disclose the gutted towns and the millions dead?' Yet,

A single grief from man or God
Freely will let
Change in and bring a stern relief. (CP 280-81)

'The refugees born for a land unknown' (III) tells of a refugee who has succeeded in escaping to begin a new life. Like the imagined refugees in 'The Last War', this refugee also was shipwrecked, saw

'My life waste water drawn down through a hole,
Yet lived.' (CP 298)

Yet, although this refugee lived, the new life is only a half-life.

Muir's depiction of the refugee's sense of dispossession and alienation through the sensuous evocation of an English country garden is especially poignant in view of his own chosen exile in Cambridgeshire during the last few years of his life:

'And now with alien eyes I see
The flowering trees on the unreal hills,
And in an English garden all afternoon
I watch the bees among the lavender.
Bees are at home, and think they have their place,
And I outside.' (CP 298)

The ending of this moving poem is somewhat obscure. As the refugee sits in a room 'where no doors open', he/she remembers a room in the old life where the door did open:

'Footsteps on the stair, two heavy, two light,
The door opens. Since then I remember nothing,
But this room in a place where no doors open.
I think the world died many years ago.' (CP 298)

There is something ominous about this memory which the poem does not sufficiently clarify. Whose feet? The heavy and light footsteps of husband/wife and child who will subsequently be lost? Or the Secret Police of a totalitarian regime with a torture which will destroy memory and capacity for a full life? This poem comes from the group of manuscript poems found among Muir's papers, and it may be that he would have given the closing lines more definition in revision, as he may also have altered the imagery which repeated that of 'The Last War'. As it is, the ambiguity in the ending of this otherwise fine

poem seems to me to prevent it achieving complete resolution.

Another poem of the future from the group of manuscript poems is 'The Day before the Last Day' (III) with its striking similarity in imagery to David Blackadder's Judgement Day vision in Muir's novel The Three Brothers: an affinity which draws the matter of Scotland into Muir's preoccupation with international turmoil. Joseph Summers, Professor of English at the University of Connecticut, had sent Muir an essay on his work which had incorporated a passage from Muir's 1931 novel. In thanking Professor Summers for his essay, Muir said:

I had forgotten that passage from The Three Brothers, and I was surprised to find that I wrote anything so good so long ago, in that very unequal story. I have not read the book for more than twenty years, and do not even have a copy of it now; my last remaining copy was lent to someone long ago. But the quotation does bring the past back very vividly, and not sadly.

In an editorial note to the Summers letter in Selected Letters of Edwin Muir, Peter Butter comments that the passage referred to is 'David's nightmare vision of the worm in his hand and his subsequent meditation. . . . It may have been this reminder of The Three Brothers that started Muir writing his poem 'The Day before the Last Day' which is largely based on another passage in the novel.'⁴⁸

The penultimate chapter of The Three Brothers is written in diary form, perhaps under the influence of James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. In this diary David puts down his thoughts about God and Time and the suffering of human beings. Included among these thoughts is the account of his vision of the Last Judgement, which came to him much as Muir's own waking visions had come to him

during the period of his psychoanalysis in London:

Then how it happened and whence it came I know not, but within my mind or before my eyes, as I lay with closed lids on the bed, appeared a vision of the Last Judgment. I was not asleep, nor was I in a trance, and it seemed to me that my mind sought those very images which came to it; yet where it could seek them, and whence it could take them I could not tell.⁴⁹

The poem begins, as in 'The Horses', 'The Last War' and 'After a Hypothetical War' by imagining a future nuclear war. As in 'The Last War', Muir emphasises the enormity of the fact of such destruction by isolating specific examples of life as we know it and can identify with:

In such a nuclear war

we murder all
That ever has been, all species and forms,
Man and woman and child, beast and bird,
Tree, flower and herb, and that by which they were known,
Sight and hearing and touch, feeling and thought,
And memory of our friends among the dead. (CP 300)

This time there will be no survivors, no theatres of warfare to contain the scope of the devastation. Muir imagines that the devastation is entire, and stresses this entirety by his vain wish that 'if there were only a single ear that listening heard/A footstep coming nearer', then that would give hope of 'the world's resurrection' (CP 300). The fact that contemporary jargon now talks of 'theatres of warfare' does not invalidate Muir's late 1950s fear of universal annihilation. In a way, the mind that could plan and launch total devastation, the murder of 'all species and forms', even on a contained, limited area, is guilty in kind, if not in degree, of the total devastation imagined by Muir in the poem. Muir takes this prospect of annihilation and places it for reference in the context of the biblical Judgement Day concept:

Mechanical parody of the Judgment Day
That does not judge but only deals damnation. (CP 300)

He then, as in parts of 'The Last War', imagines the thoughts and attitudes of the people as they wait for the blow to fall. And it is in this context that he calls upon the Judgement Day vision of David Blackadder for happening and imagery.

Powerful as the opening section of this poem is, I do not think that the subsequent marriage of the old and the new Muir is successful. In particular, the nuclear war imagined does not present the 'mechanical parody' of the Judgement Day that it did of the Creation in 'The Horses'. The concept of Judgement Day itself, especially as it is portrayed in the Scottish Calvinist religion to which David Blackadder subscribed, is not sufficiently less full of horror than is the annihilation imagined, to present an opposing vision as touchstone. One might expect, in view of Muir's writings on Calvinism and his equating of that system with the Bolshevism he encountered in Europe, that his idea in the poem might be to treat the waiting for the attack to begin as a parallel with the waiting for God's judgement, both of which, except for the Elect in the latter case, will result in the end of everything. But that 'Mechanical parody of the Judgment Day' (CP 300) in the linking section between the opening evocation of disaster and the vision, the parallel with the parody of the Creation in 'The Horses' and changes in the wording in places between poem and its source vision, suggest that Muir did indeed intend the Last Judgement to be an opposing correlative. In both visions the waiting forget their humanity and their responsibilities to each other as they become absorbed in the thought of their own fate. But while the Judgement Day people are absorbed in the thought of the Judgement Day,

those waiting for the attack to begin 'curse the faithless earth' (CP 301). In both visions those waiting see the sun rise above the sea, and realise that 'we shall not watch its setting' (CP 301). But while, in David's vision, this is a sign for the people to hear a voice within them announcing: 'There shall be no more time, nor death, nor change, nor fear, nor hope, nor desire, nor secrecy, nor shame, nor need, nor endeavour, nor expectation',⁵⁰ the people of the future hear no such voice,

But all are silent, thinking:
 'Choose! Choose again, you who have chosen this!
 Too late! Too late!
 And then: 'Where and by whom shall we be remembered?' (CP 301)

David, too, hears a voice commanding him to choose, as he stands, his soul 'filled with joy at the sight of the eternal day breaking, and with despair at the great sun standing in the sky, and I could not choose.'⁵¹ Although he does not choose and although his relationship to the Elect is not made clear in this vision, he is comforted by his vision which restores to him the ability to pray which he had for a long time lost. There is no such comfort for the people in the poem, only the knowledge that human memory which keeps alive the continuity of human life and thus defeats time and mortality, will perish with them: 'Where and by whom shall we be remembered?': a forlorn echo of Muir's late Diary entry: 'But remember, remember; we begin to die when we stop remembering.'⁵²

Other poems in this posthumous collection explore aspects of the human journey outwith the ominous future course of mankind. 'Complaint of the Dying Peasantry' (I), in ballad form, uses the matter of Scotland to comment on what Muir sees as the impoverishment of contemporary life

and the inevitable depersonalisation and destruction of the old ways of life which technology brings:

Our old songs are lost,
Our sons are newspapermen
At the singers' cost. (CP 262)

Unfortunately, as in 'Scotland 1941', Muir diminishes an otherwise fine poem by his simplistic over-statement of the Scottish historical situation:

There were no papers when

Sir Patrick Spens put out to sea
In all the country cottages
With music and ceremony
For five centuries.

Till Scott and Hogg, the robbers, came
And nailed the singing tragedies down
In dumb letters under a name
And led the bothy to the town. (CP 262)

It is an exaggeration of the importance of Scott and Hogg, as well as unfair criticism, to blame their writing down of the ballads for the loss of the old peasant way of life. One could with more chance of accuracy claim that, but for that writing down, many of the old songs and the knowledge of the way of life which they represented would have been lost to us for ever as industrialisation and political and economic factors irrevocably changed the way of life of the people.

Yet the image which Muir leaves with the reader of that lost way of life and of the impersonality of our modern substitute for it is an emotionally powerful one. As in 'The Horses' and 'Scotland 1941' the fable almost succeeds in overcoming our doubts about the details of its presentation:

Sir Patrick Spens shut in a book,
 Burd Helen stretched across a page:
 A few readers look
 There at the effigy of our age.

The singing and the harping fled
 Into the silent library;
 But we are with Helen dead
 And with Sir Patrick lost at sea. (CP 262)

'Penelope in Doubt' (I) returns to another old theme. In 'Dreams and Diary Items' (8.11.57), Muir tells of how, when taking his usual evening walk along the Station Road, he

remembered the meeting between Penelope and Odysseus, and thought the only thing which identified him for her (after 20 years), was a brooch described from memory, a brooch of beaten gold showing a dog and a fawn, the dog fastened to the fawn's throat, the fawn striking at him with its slender hoofs, the brooch lost now and the combat still going on, unchanged. She remembered it when he spoke of it. Then he spoke of the time when he was hunting on Parnassus and a wild boar gashed him on the thigh, far up. The scar was still there. The brooch and the scar, these were all that brought him back to her. For his hair was grey, his shoulders had shrunk, though his back was still straight, and his eyes were cold and pale, as if they had looked at things she would never know, or had been bleached in the snows of time. Were these enough to make her know in her heart he was Odysseus? A poem somewhere out of this.⁵³

This preoccupation with the lost years in the life of Penelope and Odysseus is the theme also of the blank verse play 'The Return' which is among Muir's papers in the National Library of Scotland. The play is undated and its burden relates equally to the hiatus in the lives of the returning Greeks and their wives in 'The Return of the Greeks' from The Voyage collection as it does to Penelope's doubts in the later poem. In the play Penelope tells Telemachos:

When the first men came home
 After the war, their wives stood looking at them,
 Men on the one side, women on the other.
 Then they crossed over. There was no rejoicing,
 Only a meeting, a joining of empty hands,
 Time's measured dole. I am a fool to think
 A pair can rush into each other's arms
 Straight across twenty years.
 Why, one week's absence in the early days
 Made us feel strange. We could not find our tongues
 For half a day.

And even if she does physically recognise Odysseus when he eventually
 returns to her, Penelope knows that it will not be the same Odysseus;
 something in the relationship will have been lost:

Absence can grow so thick
 That there is no getting through it or across it.
 Now all I know is that I shall not know
 The man Odysseus, not my own Odysseus,
 Who one day shall come here to find Penelope,
 Not his Penelope. We shall miss each other
 For ever, joining hands. He is lost already,
 Whether he comes or stays. I am afraid
 Of his coming now as of his never coming.
 But you, my son, who do not know his face,
 Will have all that there is of him. Take comfort.⁵⁴

The 'Penelope in Doubt' poem may at first reading seem not to
 add much to Muir's musing on the theme in his Diary item. Yet, read
 carefully, and with the more expansive treatment of the loss theme of
 'The Return' in mind, one realises that it does in its quiet way add
 yet another dimension to the story of faithful Penelope and wandering
 Odysseus which had preoccupied Muir for so long:

A stranger, who had seen too much,
 Been where she could not follow, sealed
 In blank and smooth estranging snow
 From head to foot. How could she know
 What a brown scar said or concealed?
 Yet now she trembled at his touch. (CP 277)

In contrast, 'The Two Sisters', which was published during Muir's lifetime in 1956 and was added by the editors to 'Poems Not Previously Collected' in the 1963 reprint of Collected Poems, seems to me to be untypical of Muir in its somewhat ironical, witty and essentially trivial treatment of its theme of death by suicide. In this poem, one sister commits suicide because she cannot bear the thought that her great beauty will one day be lost:

At last to set it free
 From enmity of change
 And time's incontinence
 To drink from beauty's bone,
 Snatching her last defence,
 She locked it in the sea. (CP 281)

The second sister has an equally slight reason for her suicide:

The other, not content
 That fault of hers should bring
 Grief and mismanagement
 To make an end of grace
 And snap the slender ring,
 Pulled death down on her head. (CP 281-82)

No attempt is made to place the self-absorbed actions of 'these ladies' who 'put to sea' (CP 282) in the wider context of the human journey as one might have expected from a poet such as Muir. One wonders if he himself would have felt this slight poem worthy of inclusion in Collected Poems.

Other more successful, but in some ways also untypical Muir poems are 'The Church', 'Salem, Massachusetts' (both group I and both arising from his stay in America) and 'Petrol Shortage' (II). They are all what might be termed 'occasional' poems, are topical, somewhat detached and ironical in tone as they contemplate the situation from which they take impulse.

In 'The Church' the poet watches the cross which has been newly set up on the unfinished church and speculates on the justification for 'that splendour of blue and gold/For One so great and poor He was past all need' (CP 263), while remembering also the past dubious history of the institution of the Church:

I look at the church again, and yet again,
And think of those who house together in Hell,
Cooped by ingenious theological men
Expert to track the sour and musty smell
Of sins they know too well;
Until grown proud, they crib in rusty bars
The Love that moves the sun and the other stars. (CP 263-64)

The mood of the poem is one of acceptance. The poet wishes the new church well, not doubting that, in spite of the deficiencies in the institution of the earthly Church, 'He is there' (CP 264).

'Salem, Massachusetts' also has a religious starting-point: the activities of the Puritan immigrants from England who were uncompromisingly certain that their religion and their way of life was the true one:

They walked black Bible streets and piously tilled
The burning fields of the new Apocalypse.
With texts and guns they drove the Indians out,
Ruled young and old with stiff Hebraic rod,
The Puritan English country gentlemen;
And burned young witches. (CP 264)

Muir's irony is contained in the contrast between the apparent piety of the first two lines and the sadistic, un-Christlike behaviour of 'and burned young witches', the climax of the opening verse paragraph. The Puritans' similar attitude to the native Indians is demonstrated in the juxtapositioning of 'texts and guns' in line three. The ironic contrast develops with the poem: the uncompromising first settlers are

later replaced by 'their sons' grandsons' who have substituted economic dominance for religious conquest: They

Throve on Leviathan and the China trade
And built and lived in beautiful wooden houses,
Their Jordan past. (CP 264)

And instead of the Elders avidly watching over the burning of the young witches,

in the evenings businessmen from Boston
Sit in the beautiful houses, mobbed by cars. (CP 264)

Outwith the unfamiliar prevailing ironic tone is the momentary, poignant glimpse of the young witches' last sight on earth: a more characteristic Muir touch: As the refugees drowned in 'The Last War' with 'all the world around them', so the witches were led

to a little knoll
That looks across a tideless inland bay
In the clear New England weather. This they saw,
The women, till the fire and smoke consumed
Sight, breath and body. (CP 264)

In 'Petrol Shortage', the poet uses the unaccustomed silence of a 'mild late-winter afternoon', brought about by a petrol shortage, to speculate that the noisy contemporary world of motor-car and aeroplane will one day give way to a return to a simpler life, and 'earth will repair its broken day' (CP 289). He knows, however, that this is just a daydream with no hope of fulfilment within any estimable space of time:

A week refutes a prophecy
That only ages can make true.
The deafening distractions wait,
Industrious fiends, for me and you. (CP 289)

This poem, with its casual, almost self-mocking tone, is again unusual in Muir's work.

Another grouping among these late poems explores in a more symbolist manner some of Muir's recurring themes, but these poems do not seem to me to have the impact of earlier work. Among them are 'Images' (I), which is in some ways reminiscent of 'Effigies' and of the early Variations on a Time Theme; 'The Three Tales' (I); 'Dialogue' (I) and 'The Desolations' (I). More successful is 'The Strange Return' (I) which imagines a return, like that of Lazarus, from death to life. Although the poem's landscape has the indefiniteness of a dreamscape, Muir's theme is not in doubt. The return from Hell is symbolic, a return into time and into a full living experience with all the pain this can imply. As the sight of 'a tree thin sick and pale by a north wall' (CP 283) made the poet in 'The Last War' aware of our common humanity and the inter-relationship of man and nature, so in this poem it is the life-giving sight of a budding tree which gives the poem's protagonist the courage to go on with his attempt to re-enter fully into life:

Three feet away a little tree
Put out in pain a single bud
That did not fear the ultimate fire.
And in a flash he knew it all,
The long-forgotten and new desire,
And looked and saw the tree was good. (CP 270)

Reasonably successful too are 'The Song' (I) and 'Sick Caliban' (I), both of which symbolise the human condition through the metaphor of a suffering beast.

A few final poems are more directly personal in nature than has been customary in Muir's work. The notebook 'Dreams and Diary Items

1957-8' shows Muir at the end of his life turning more and more to memories and dreams of family and friends in Scotland: of his brothers Willie and Johnnie, his parents, his old friend, F.G. Scott, the composer.

'There's nothing here', an incomplete fragment from Group III, seems to be based on Muir's cousin Sutherland, who had lived with the family in Orkney, retelling as it does several of Sutherland's exploits which feature in An Autobiography. The poem follows the tradition of 'Kynd Kittock' in its rejection of the favours of Paradise for those of earthly life. Sutherland's soliloquy, with its occasional Scots words and humour, its colloquial register, gives the poem a more earthy presence than is usual in Muir's work. His memories of what gave him pleasure in his earthly life make out a powerful case for 'the other land'.

'The Brothers' (I) retells a dream Muir had of his brothers as young men playing together. He wrote to Kathleen Raine on 24 January 1957 that he

watched them playing in a field, racing about in some game, and it was not a game which either of them was trying to win (there was no winning in it), and because of that they were infinitely happy in making each other happy, and all that was left in their hearts and their bodies was grace. It is very difficult to convey this in a poem. I had not thought of them for a long time. And when I did know them (I was little more than a boy then) there was affection, but also little grouses and jealousies, assertions of the will, a cloud of petty disagreements and passions which hid their true shape from me and from themselves. In the dream it seemed to me the cloud was dispelled and I saw them as they were. I'm sure Blake could have told me everything about it.⁵⁵

The poem is philosophical in nature and muses on the spiritual beauty of the brothers which is so obvious in the vision but which had escaped

the poet when he knew them in life:

For still they raced about the green
And were like two revolving suns;
A brightness poured from head to head,
So strong I could not see their eyes
Or look into their paradise. (CP 272)

As the poem progresses, the poet's recognition of the gulf between himself and the brothers - not only the time gap between past and present, but also the earthly/heavenly divide - is emphasised by the phrase 'twenty thousand days ago' instead of, as in the first few lines, 'half a century' (CP 272). The last stanza suggests that the laws of heaven are not those of earth, that 'the indifferent justice done/By everyone on everyone' (CP 273) here on earth does not represent the essence of human lives as seen in the poet's vision of his brothers.

'Sunset' (III), 'The Poet' (II) and 'I have been taught' (III) all centre around Muir himself. 'Sunset', like 'Penelope in Doubt', takes its impulse from an evening walk along the road to the railway station, recorded in Muir's late Diary. The symbolism implicit in the prose description of the Diary item becomes heightened in the poem. In the Diary Muir describes the evening as

extraordinarily still, bright clouds in the west, soft and suffused with all the colours of light flowing through them horizontally, yet lingering, reluctant to go. The trees along the road seemed conscious of this image of peace, and three horses in a field were subdued by it. Nothing which appeared to be unaware of it. Strange perfection of a common mood, sky and light and cloud, and tree and the horses. I felt it too.⁵⁶

The poem emphasises the paradox of the peace of the evening and the fiery light of the setting sun:

Conflagration of peace,
Wide hearth of the evening world. (CP 299)

Muir then takes up the image of that 'tender fire' (CP 299) and relates it to the biblical bush which burned and yet was not consumed, and was a sign of God's presence to Moses. So does this evening fire rein together 'man, beast and tree' as in a 'heavenly field' (CP 299):

Yet now each bush and tree
Stands still within the fire,
And the bird sits on the tree.
Three horses in a field
That yesterday ran wild
Are bridled and reined by light
As in a heavenly field.
Man, beast and tree in fire,
The bright cloud showering peace. (CP 299)

'The Poet' is a verse statement of Muir's beliefs about the nature of poetry; an acknowledgement of the strange fact that the finished work of art often contains deeper significance than the artist had conceived of when he began the work:

What I shall never know
I must make known.
Where traveller never went
Is my domain. (CP 286)

This is the poem for which Muir wished a satisfactory 'objective correlative' to embody its meaning more vividly. He thought he had found one in 'the poet Hölderlin in his half-mad prophetic phase', but did not in fact rewrite his poem to accommodate the Hölderlin metaphor.⁵⁷ As it is, his awareness of 'the mystery' behind the artist's work is simply and potently conveyed in the poem as first conceived.

'I have been taught' is the final poem in this posthumous collection and thus in Collected Poems as a whole. It is a fitting conclusion to

Muir's work in spite of the fact that it is obviously unfinished.

In an editorial note in Selected Letters, Peter Butter refers to Mrs Muir's comment that 'there were so many unwritten poems in him - notably one about his father and mother, which was haunting him', and suggests that his wish to pay tribute to his parents, evidenced also by his Diary notes, was partly realised in this last incomplete poem 'I have been taught'. Selected Letters also reproduces the manuscript version of this poem which shows in what way the published version is conjectural.⁵⁸

The poem is an acknowledgement by Muir of the forces which have shaped his life as man and poet:

I have been taught by dreams and fantasies
 Learned from the friendly and the darker phantoms
 And got great knowledge and courtesy from the dead
 Kinsmen and kinswomen, ancestors and friends
 But from two mainly
 Who gave me birth. (CP 302)

Muir recorded in his Diary for 15 May 1958 his sudden thoughts about his parents, 'their goodness, their gentleness' and his own remorse at forgetting about them 'for decades of time, as if they had never been.'⁵⁹ Apart from the somewhat stilted portrait of the archetypal mother and father figures in 'The Sufficient Place', 'I have been taught' is Muir's only reference to his parents in his poetry. It is also his justification of his mythical approach to the writing of poetry. As Lillian Feder comments: In 'I have been taught' Muir

accepts the 'phantoms' of the unconscious mind for the wisdom they offer him, but he distinguishes between 'that unspending good' of traditional lore and the 'sultry labyrinth' which even at the end threatens terror and destruction. . . . The sense that his own inner life is part of the mythical experience of thirty centuries is for Muir a conquest of time and mortality.⁶⁰

With 'The Poet', 'I have been taught' constitutes a relevant final comment by Muir himself on his life as poet.

EDWIN MUIR

Last Poems

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EDWIN MUIR

II LITERARY AND SOCIAL CRITICISM

i International Themes

As in his poetry, Edwin Muir as critic stands outside the mainstream of literary criticism in the twentieth century, having more in common with American neo-humanists such as Irving Babbitt than with the formalist approach initiated in English literary criticism by writers such as T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards. Yet despite this apartness, his mature criticism, like his mature poetry, is peculiarly relevant to the problems of the modern world. As critic Muir follows the tradition of the Renaissance humanists and of Johnson and Arnold in his concern with the moral aspects of art in its relationship to human existence, but unlike the criticism of Eliot, who can also be regarded as a critic in the humanist tradition, Muir's work shows no evidence of the predominantly formalist approach of twentieth century criticism. This apartness is both a strength and a weakness in his work: while his moral approach enables him to probe meaningfully beneath the surface of contemporary art to the deeper problem of the relationship between art and life, his lack of interest in formal analysis leads him at times to misunderstand and undervalue writers whose work does not conform to the humanist context which he considers the life-blood of the work of art, while at the same time it results in an overestimation of others whose work has more obvious links with past tradition and whose conception of 'timelessness' approaches his own.

From its beginnings, Muir's criticism was involved with international themes and writers. Although it is not concerned with the innovatory stylistic elements which characterised European art in the early twentieth century, Muir was not insular in the geographical range of his critical writing, but wrote as readily of European writers who interested and influenced him as of the more well-known English literary figures. Nietzsche and Heine were the earliest European influences on his mind and work in his years as a clerk in Glasgow. His first residence in Europe between 1921 and 1924 introduced him to Hölderlin's poetry through his contact with Ivo von Lucken, and this discovery of the German poet proved to be an abiding interest both in his poetry and in his critical writing. An early essay on Hölderlin appeared in The Scottish Nation of 11 September 1923 and this was followed in later years by the better-known essays collected in Essays on Literature and Society and by numerous references and allusions to Hölderlin's poetry in his own poetry and critical writing. As we have seen in the discussion of the last poems, as late as September 1956 Muir was still finding in Hölderlin a relevant correlative for the themes of his own work.¹ In relation to European writers, Muir's name, with that of his wife, is perhaps most associated with that of Kafka, whose novels the Muirs introduced to the English-language public through their successful translations. Muir's own innate affinity with Kafka can be seen in an essay such as 'Franz Kafka' in Essays on Literature and Society and in their mutual use of the metaphor of 'the way', a metaphor which had appeared tentatively in Muir's poetry before he became familiar with Kafka's work in the late twenties, but which became noticeably more predominant in the poetry from the Journeys and Places collection of the thirties onwards.

Muir's first collection of critical writings was We Moderns (1918), a miscellany of aphorisms which had appeared in The New Age from October 1916. The content as well as the form of these aphorisms was heavily influenced by Nietzsche, and Muir in later years was at pains to reject We Moderns.

The present-day student of Muir is less likely to be so hard on the book as Muir himself was. Like much writing by Muir's contemporaries it certainly shows the powerful influence of Nietzsche, but one finds in it also the Muir of the late poetry and criticism, sometimes figuring clearly, sometimes struggling to disentangle himself from the interwoven coils of two contradictory and irreconcilable philosophies. One recognises in sections such as 'Creative Love' and 'The Tragic View', the need which Nietzsche supplied for Muir: a philosophy which appeared to offer a way in which his family tragedies could be made bearable. Rejecting the 'unholy' sympathetic love of humanitarianism for Nietzsche's creative love, Muir proclaims the former a 'barren' love which 'springs from disbelief in existence.' Creative love, on the other hand, 'does not bring enjoyment, but rapture and pain. It is the will to suffer gladly; it finds relief from the pains of existence, not in alleviation, but in creation' (WM 178). In addition Nietzsche taught Muir that the living moment 'is what it is' by virtue of one's past experiences:

Justify it and you justify them. The physical agony which left its mark upon you; the anguish of bereavement and disillusionment; the cynicism with which you consoled yourself; the years when you lived altogether bereft of hope; your most profound and most petty thoughts and actions; your meanest, bitterest and noblest experiences: all these are unconsciously affirmed in your affirmation of this moment. Let them be affirmed consciously! (WM 229)

Muir's personal history can be traced also in the book's pre-occupation with Original Sin and interpretations of the Fall myth, themes which, as we have seen, he continued to explore throughout his work as poet. As in many of the Fall-theme poems, so here Muir is preoccupied with the attempt to negate the Fall, to put the apple back on the tree. In 'The Fall of Man', he finds that it was to explain 'the tragicality of existence' in early times that the 'whole fable of Adam and Eve and the Fall was invented. The doctrine of Original Sin was simply an interpretation which was afterwards read into the story, an interpretation, perhaps, as arbitrary as the orthodox interpretation of the Song of Songs' (WM 63-4). In 'Interpretations', he asks if 'not Original Sin, but Original Innocence is the true reading of the fable? Its raison d'être is the Garden of Eden, not the Fall?' (WM 68): a Nietzschean view which suggests that the 'fall from innocence . . . was the fall from the Superman into Man' and that redemption will come 'by the return of the Superman!' (WM 68).

Philosophical positions characteristic of the later Muir make their appearance early in the book. The Preface, somewhat ingenuously in view of the strength of Nietzschean influence, declares that 'the reader will look in vain in this book for a system' (WM 7), an open-ended philosophical declaration which relates to the freedom from theological dogmatism within which he pursued his religious themes in his poetry, and to his deathbed insistence that 'there are no absolutes.'²

Characteristic, too, is the opening statement in 'The Advanced' that 'the advanced have made up their minds about all the problems of existence but not about the problem of existence' (WM 13), a

condemnation which he pursued more specifically in the later Transition analysis of Aldous Huxley's portrayal of the 'symptoms' of modern living. For Muir himself, throughout his work, the important thing was to get beneath the surface symptoms to the underlying cause, something which he did most painstakingly in his late critical writings.

This condemnation of 'the advanced' relates to Muir's general condemnation of modern realism in life and literature, of the rejection of 'the eternal problem' (WM 17) of the ancient Greeks and the substitution of a preoccupation with the minutiae of modern living. In 'The Intellectual Coquettes' he attacks the kind of spurious freedom which he was to condemn later in his King Lear lecture, in a poem such as 'The Usurpers' and in his accounts in An Autobiography of the aimless St Tropez habitués: 'to abstain from a choice is not freedom but irresponsibility. To be free, is, on the contrary, itself a choice, a decision involving, in its acceptance, responsibility' (WM 14). In 'Emancipation' he finds that the moderns have interpreted freedom as 'negation, the freedom from some one thing or another' (WM 121), while in 'Genealogy of the Moderns' they 'live unthinkingly in the present' (WM 123). In 'Domination of the Present', as in the King Lear essay and as in many of the late poems in the One Foot in Eden collection, Muir puts forward the view that 'to be enslaved to the present . . . is the most dangerous form of superficiality: it is to be ignorant of the very thing that makes Man significant . . . the sense of continuity is necessary for human dignity' (WM 124-25). This awareness of continuity, of the ancestral pattern, is constant throughout Muir's work and is a significant theme of his last book of criticism The Estate of Poetry.

In purely literary terms, the preoccupation with the present is, for Muir, what produces the realism in modern literature which he considers a 'symptom of poverty' (WM 18). He sees the 'realistic novel' as being 'in form . . . more loose, in content and execution more unequal, and in imaginative power less rich and inventive than poetic drama, or any of the higher forms of literature' (WM 19). He contrasts the 'reproduction' of life of the modern realists - the modern average man's desire for plays about '"the marriage question", or bad-housing, or the Labour Party' (WM 16, 15) - with the 'interpretation of life' found in the ancient Greek writers. While 'the aim of art was once to enrich existence by the creation of gods and demi-gods; it is now to duplicate existence by the portrayal of men' (WM 159). If one subtracts the declamatory tone, then this is a view which Muir held consistently throughout his work as critic and poet, even in his late poetry where it co-existed with an increase in the matter of everyday life as theme.

Uncharacteristic is his declaration in 'An Evil' that 'art is at the present day far too easy of comprehension, far too obvious. Our immediate task should be to make it difficult and the concern of a dedicated few' (WM 156): a viewpoint which stands at the opposite pole from his generous theory of imagination, his belief in the centrality of poetry in relation to life and his appreciation of the relevance of the popular nature of the ballad tradition. The epigram in the Appendix on W.H. Davies suggests that his target here may have been Edward Marsh's Georgian poetry anthologies, chosen for busy modern people who did not have time to choose for themselves³ - for Muir, perhaps, another symptom of the superficiality of modern life. It

would seem to take little account of the 'difficult' literary innovations of writers such as Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, nor of the stylistic upheavals taking place in all the arts in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. In We Moderns, as in his later work, Muir does not concern himself with critical analysis or with the details of literary style. Preoccupied with 'realism', Muir gives no evidence of awareness of the innovatory techniques which were being developed in literature, painting and music at the time. His essential critical stance is that of 'Literature and Literature' where he insists that 'literature that is judged by literary standards merely is not of the highest rank' (WM 167): a position which, most interestingly, is similar to that of Eliot's 1936 essay 'Religion and Literature' in which he affirms that 'the "greatness" of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards', although Eliot immediately complicates the issue by adding that 'we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards.'⁴ Muir's commitment to the moral tradition is more pure.

Latitudes (1924), Muir's next collection of essays, is less homogeneous and is in many ways a less satisfactory book than We Moderns. Consisting of articles written principally for the American publication The Freeman between 1921 and 1923, Latitudes demonstrates all too clearly his apprentice-status as critic and the lingering influence of Nietzsche's manner and thought. Muir's somewhat deprecatory Preface to the book demonstrates his own contemporary uneasiness with it. His reaction on re-reading it in 1958 with a view to adding to a revised edition of Essays on Literature and Society was unequivocal: he wrote to Norman MacCaig:

I hadn't read the book I should say for thirty years, and it was a humbling experience. So much mere nonsense combined with overweening confidence, arrows clumsily notched and shot mainly into nothingness. And yet there were things here and there, choice forlorn fragments, that seemed to be worth doing something with again (I had quite forgotten these particular strays). So that I shall have something to add to the book the Hogarth Press want, but not very much.⁵

One of the few satisfactory essays is 'A Note on the Scottish Ballads' which can take its place without too much diffidence among more mature work. In keeping with his characteristic anti-formalist critical stance, Muir in this early essay seems to me to underestimate the art of the ballads in their use of symbolism and pattern. He does comment, however, on their use of colour, finding in the ballad 'Jamie Douglas' that colours are 'seen as they are only seen in childhood, for the first time, and with something solid in the vision of them; something which we have perhaps for ever lost' (L 24). In this we recognise the authentic Muir voice, intimating the theme of the lost land of childhood which was to feature so prominently in First Poems and which was to develop into the Fall theme of later poetry. In anticipation of later writing on the ballads in Scottish Journey and in Scott and Scotland (which will be discussed more fully in the 'Muir and Scotland' section of the thesis), he isolates the peculiar attributes of the Scottish as opposed to the English ballads: 'this sense of immediate love, terror, drama; this ecstatic living in passion at the moment of its expression and not on reflection'; the lack of 'moral compensation, or of moral blunting, or of resignation, or of alleviation' (L 21). He finds a relationship between this uncompromising passion and the national temperament which was later to accept Knox's

uncompromising theology: 'Certainly only a people who saw life so intensely as a matter of sin and pleasure, of sin in pleasure and pleasure in sin, could have accepted with such passion a theology which saw life as a thing of transgression and damnation. There is something unswerving and, however we may dislike and deplore it, heroic, in the theology as well as the poetry of Scotland. A burning contemplation of things which take men beyond time made her equally the destined victim of Calvinism and the chosen land of the ballads' (L 28).

Essays on the European writers Dostoyevsky, Ibsen and Nietzsche took impulse from a series of books on these writers by Janko Lavrin. The essay on Nietzsche does not seem to me to add much more to one's conception of Muir's appreciation of the German philosopher than can be gleaned from We Moderns, but the essays on Ibsen and Dostoyevsky are perceptive pieces which demonstrate the kind of skill and intuition which Muir later showed as a reviewer when his own perceptions of a given writer seemed to combine creatively in his review with the reviewed author's account of the work.

Of the more general essays, 'A Plea for Psychology in Literary Criticism', first published in The Athenaeum in January 1921, sets out Muir's conception of the critic's calling, while confirming his own anti-formalist, moral approach: 'the function of criticism is to treat, in their expression in literature, the mind and the soul'; 'and what the critic must be concerned with, for he has only it as subject-matter, is the mind and the soul, the attitude to reality, the relation to God' (L 95, 98). He follows Eliot's theory of impersonality in art put forward in the essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919) in his rejection of biographical criticism which lays emphasis on the

relationship between artist and work: 'for this task of illumination, the works of a writer are all that is required; anything outside them, indeed, is irrelevant; for criticism is concerned with the mind and not with the man' (L 100). As we have seen in the discussion of the early poetry, the need for artistic detachment was a pressing personal preoccupation with Muir at this time. He was not consistent, however, in his holding to the theory of impersonality in his criticism, and his own unanalytical approach to the work of art made it for him, unlike Eliot, an unfruitful method of criticism.

Related to the themes of his poetry is the three-part essay 'North and South' in which he explores the difference in character and philosophical attitude between the northerner and the southerner. His references to Goethe's 'Kennst du das Land' and Heine's 'Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam' relate to the preoccupation of the contemporary First Poems with themes of longing for a lost land, while his analysis of the opposing characteristics of necessity and freedom, adaptation and struggle, limitation and inexhaustibility presages the similar conflict with determinism and free will which was to be a consistent element throughout his poetry.

On the whole, however, there is too little in Latitudes of lasting quality, too much clever putting-together of current intellectual jargon - 'we are all born last century's ghosts' (L 222). Instead of the search beneath the surface phenomenon, which one finds even in We Moderns, there is substituted too frequently a satisfaction with the clever quip: 'Plato was only a Dostoyevsky whose problems had never become personal problems' (L 242). It is not until Transition (1926) that one finds a consistently mature critical collection.

Transition is unusual among Muir's collections of essays in that it deals only with English literary figures, chief among whom are James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot. Its principal concerns, however, are the universal ones which animate all Muir's work. The Author's Preface suggests an assured and mature approach to literary criticism and supports the position of Muir the reviewer in its assertion that 'the things with which it is most essential that the critic should deal are the things of the present' and in its author's intention 'to treat my subjects with as much consideration as if they were dead.'

Muir opens the collection with an introductory essay on the spirit of the age, 'The Zeit Geist'. The essay is disappointing in its range, however, being confined to the English literary scene and taking no account of contemporary European movements which influenced it. One interesting aspect is Muir's attitude to what he calls 'literature of escape', a category in which he includes not only the contemporary D.H. Lawrence, but also Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats. For Muir, literary 'escape', while not as successful a way of dealing with one's time as 'struggling with it', is a valid way 'in which the writer may avoid being assimilated by the age' (T 7); a viewpoint which has relevance to his approach to the themes of his own early poetry.

Perhaps the best essay in Transition is that on James Joyce which appeared in several periodicals in the twenties and was reproduced with minor omissions in James Joyce: The Critical Heritage, edited by Robert Deming, in 1970.⁶ In contrast to his lasting difficulties with the work of D.H. Lawrence, and to his initial antipathy to the poetry of Eliot, Muir was early convinced of Joyce's genius, and, in particular, of the significance of Ulysses. In this essay he rejects the theory of

impersonality expounded in Latitudes and adopts a more characteristic attitude to the relationship between artist and work of art: 'There is thus a necessary and an organic relation between him and his work, to create being, as Ibsen said, an act of emancipation' (T 23).

Muir does not deal to any extent with the symbolic structure of Ulysses or with specific stylistic attributes. What interests him is that it seems to come out of a 'folk rather than a literary inspiration.' He says of the Nighttown episode:

Mr Joyce's prostitutes in the brothel scene exist neither in the world of literature, as that world has been conceived almost since its beginning, nor in the world of fact. They are rather figures in a folk-lore which mankind continually creates, or rather carries with it. . . . This folk-lore, which is the aesthetic utterance of the illiterate classes and of the illiterate parts of our nature, which co-exists with literature, but in a separate world - is not inarticulate; but it expresses itself anonymously, and is such a constant attribute of human life that it rarely feels the need of the more permanent, the more specialized, expression of art. . . . Yet from it literature arose, for like literature, it is aesthetic, and has the freedom of perception which can only come when men are delivered from their utilitarian prejudices. And to it accordingly literature must periodically come back, as much to test as to renew itself. (T 33)

This mythical quality is what interested Muir in his use of Greek myth as metaphor in his own poetry and inspired his lasting involvement with the world of the ballads, a world in which was to be found 'the roots of poetry, where we should all be.'⁷ For Muir, Joyce, too, in Ulysses, 'went back . . . to the fundamentals of art' (T 37).

In contrast to his enthusiasm for Joyce's work, Muir's response to that of D.H. Lawrence was at best equivocal, at worst derogatory and dismissive. Both We Moderns and Latitudes attacked Lawrence and the kind of literature he represented for Muir, seeing such work as

'nihilistic' and its popularity as pointing 'to a disintegration of personality which must be general' (L 174). Latitudes linked Lawrence's writings also with psychoanalysis, and in particular his writings on sex with Freudian analysis, and found both 'filthy' (L 178-79): an interesting contemporary sidelight on Muir's own recent experiences of psychoanalysis, which he appeared to look back upon with gratitude in An Autobiography. In the article 'The Assault on Humanism' published in The Scottish Nation in September 1923 Muir had also found Lawrence the chief instigator behind a philosophy which he considered was attacking the traditional foundations of humanist morality.⁸

The Transition essay attempts to give a more balanced picture of Lawrence and his work. It begins by drawing attention to his 'most obviously striking quality' which, for Muir, is 'a kind of splendour, not of the spirit, nor of the mind, but of the senses and the instincts' (T 49). Muir finds that 'we smell and touch the objects he describes, and he makes us feel such things as heat and cold, growth and decay, more vividly than any other writer' (T 51). This is unexceptionable criticism, but Muir simultaneously claims that Lawrence's imagination 'recoils solely before most of the things in which the imagination has till now found its inspiration: the conscious life of mankind, ordinary relations and problems, the tragedy and comedy of life as we know it' (T 50). He attacks Lawrence's employment of dialogue in his novels which to him appears 'a graph of the movements of the instincts: it does not depict character, nor define situation' (T 55). For Muir, Lawrence has 'never drawn a complete character' (T 57).

It is certainly true, especially of Lawrence's later work, that as Muir concludes, 'Mr Lawrence's theories are encroaching on his art' (T 61), but such criticism as the above forces one to ask just how extensive Muir's knowledge of Lawrence's novels and short stories was,

and what were the literary criteria by which he judged them. Lawrence may have rejected the 'old stable ego'⁹ of the character, but his characterisation in a novel such as The Rainbow, for example, is fully realised. Ursula changes in every stage of her life from childhood to young womanhood, 'yet she was always Ursula Brangwen.'¹⁰ A minor character such as Tom Brangwen's old nurse Tilly makes few appearances, but her character is thoroughly communicated to the reader. Character and situation are finely defined through the words and silences of Tom and the child Ursula in the scene where they feed the cattle in the byre while the child's mother gives birth to Tom's child. There are countless similar examples of characterisation, dialogue, 'ordinary relations and problems' and 'the tragedy and comedy of life as we know it' in many of Lawrence's novels and in short stories such as 'Daughters of the Vicar' and 'Odour of Chrysanthemums'.

Muir's difficulty with Lawrence lay not only in his antipathy to what he considered to be Lawrence's rejection of mind and traditional humanist values, but also in Muir's own lack of interest in formal criticism, which blinded him to the innovations in novel-writing technique which Lawrence was attempting. This critical limitation distorted his view of much modern literature. He dismissed Henry James, for example, as a minor writer and gave his work no serious critical consideration, while he held an exaggerated view of the significance of another American in Europe, Djuna Barnes. In the twenties he seemed to give equal weighting to the significance of T.S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell, if anything preferring the work of the latter.

Muir's Transition account of Lawrence's work is immediately followed by an essay on the novelist Virginia Woolf, with whom he found himself much more in tune. His comments on her novels demonstrate

the traditional and moral criteria by which he judged the modern novel, and in many cases such as that of Lawrence found it wanting. For him Mrs Woolf 'stands in the same relation to her characters as almost all the chief English novelists have stood to theirs' (T 68-9).

Other novelists considered in the Transition collection are Stephen Hudson, where what attracted Muir seemed to be the element of causality in his work: 'this truth of necessity, psychological law, destiny, call it what we may' (T 86); Aldous Huxley and Lytton Strachey. Huxley he found to be completely of his period: 'there could not be a more perfect example of the writer of transition', and thus his art was 'not one of comprehension; it is one of exposure' (T 108, 104).

As mentioned above, Muir found difficulty initially in appreciating the poetry of T.S. Eliot. Eliot the critic won his admiration, but for Muir at this Transition period, Eliot's poetry, like Huxley's novels, 'expresses an attitude to life, not a principle of life.' And 'as a poet Mr Eliot lacks seriousness' (T 140-41). Once again Muir's anti-formalist approach inhibits his coming to terms with an innovatory writer. His conclusion is that 'although his symbolism makes Mr Eliot's poetry arresting, piquant, unique, it makes him fatal to imitators and till now a poet of inferior range. The instrument of expression he has forged would not serve for a great poet, and could not be used by an unskilful one' (T 144).

Transition concludes with two general essays, one on contemporary poetry and one on contemporary fiction, in which Muir assesses his chosen writers in relation to the context in which they operate. In keeping with his traditional critical approach, one notices that he is perceptive about the philosophical and scientific changes of the period

and their potential effect on the work of art. He anticipates the later essay 'Robert Henryson' in his discussion of an age without a philosophical framework, which has 'a host of theories but among them no ruling theory' (T 192-93). He contrasts the 'great order' of a previous age with ages of transition such as the present age, which 'cannot give this significance to the accidents of their existence' (T 193). Like Wordsworth at an earlier stage of scientific progress, he isolates the problem for the poet of attempting to use science as the material of his art in terms which are highly relevant to his fellow countryman Hugh MacDiarmid's attempt to use the material of science in his later poetry: 'The reason why the poet has not these discoveries as the objects of his art can only be because they are not really familiar to him, because while he accepts them intellectually, his unconscious has not accepted them' (T 197).

From a purely literary standpoint, his summing up is less sure. In regard to the novel he finds that the hallmark of the writers whom he has singled out as representative contemporary novelists is 'the note of originality. . . . The writers mentioned above have sought to bring new provinces of experience into fiction, and in general have experimented with language and forms' (T 205). Yet this experimentation with language and forms is a province which his detailed essays on contemporary novelists did not to any significant extent explore. In contrast to his enthusiastic appreciation of Joyce in the earlier essay, he now finds Joyce's characters to be 'isolated figures. . . . The disintegration of all thought, sentiment, faith, is here carried to its conclusion. The individual exists in a void' (T 214). Lawrence he sees 'driven . . . into the same isolation' although under 'quite a

different influence. . . . Mrs Woolf alone, perhaps, has kept intact her sense of the reality of communication' (T 215). It is Mrs Woolf's work also which makes possible the surprisingly optimistic conclusion: 'Mrs Woolf has retained the tradition of humanism, and by permeating it with the new spirit has revived it' (T 216).

Muir's next two books of English literary criticism were The Structure of the Novel¹¹ (1928) and, after an interval of eleven years, The Present Age¹² (1939), which was part of the Introductions to English Literature series, edited by Bonamy Dobrée.

The Structure of the Novel demonstrates Muir's strengths as a traditional critic in the humanist tradition. It gives an excellent general introductory account of the English novel tradition, distinguishing clearly between such categories as the novel of character, the novel of action, the dramatic novel, the chronicle and the period novel. Muir's examples are generous and there are many interesting comments on individual writers, although his omission of the nineteenth century novelist George Eliot is surprising and the modern period is scantily dealt with, being limited to a consideration of Joyce's Ulysses and Proust's À la recherche du temps perdu as 'the two outstanding works of prose fiction of the present age,'¹³ and mentioning several other works and authors in passing.

The Present Age is a most unsatisfactory book which exposes Muir's weakness when faced with the contradictory stylistic and philosophical attitudes of the Janus-faced modernist period. He was himself unhappy with it and wrote to Bonamy Dobrée asking that it should not be re-printed with the rest of the series.¹⁴

Muir's final two collections of criticism exhibit most fully his critical concern with international themes and the relationship between

his mature poetry and criticism. Essays on Literature and Society was published in 1949, the year of The Labyrinth, and a revised edition containing six additional essays was brought out in 1965 after Muir's death. The collected essays in the book span many years, one, 'Laurence Sterne', having been published in the New York Bookman as early as 1931. They deal with literature and society not as separate entities, but in characteristic Muir fashion, with the closely-woven inter-relationship between literature and life. One notices also the increasingly close relationship between the thought in many of these essays and the 'disunited world' themes of Muir's poetry in the forties and fifties.

The first essay, 'Robert Henryson', sets the course for the book as a whole, with its dominant theme of the search for wholeness in the modern age. For Muir, Henryson was fortunate in that 'he lived near the end of a great age of settlement, religious, intellectual and social' where 'an agreement had been reached regarding the nature and meaning of human life, and the imagination could attain harmony and tranquillity. It was one of those ages when everything, in spite of the practical disorder of life, seems to have its place' and 'the life of man and of the beasts turns naturally into a story because it is part of a greater story about which there is general consent' (E 10). It is this philosophical wholeness which Muir sees as being missing in contemporary life, a lack which makes it difficult for artists and individual human beings to be at ease and find a meaningful role in the new society.

The Politics of King Lear continues the theme in its discussion of an earlier age of transition, the Elizabethan Renaissance period in

England in which, as today, traditional values were being overthrown in favour of a new aggressive individualism. Muir finds that Shakespeare in writing King Lear 'without his being aware . . . wrote in it the mythical drama of the transmutation of civilisation' (E 35). In Muir's reading of the play, Goneril, Regan and Edmund belong to the new world. Unlike Macbeth who still belongs to the old order and feels guilt, 'Regan, Goneril and Cornwall never feel that they have done wrong, and this is because they represent a new idea; and new ideas, like everything new, bring with them their own kind of innocence' (E 35). As we have seen, this theme of a new order is one to which Muir constantly returns in his late poetry from 'The Ring' of The Narrow Place to the unfinished 'Ballad of Everyman' in 'Poems Not Previously Collected'. For Muir, the conflict in Shakespeare's King Lear is not a clear-cut battle between the forces of good and evil. It involves more deeply a breakdown of understanding and, perhaps, a new conception of society. Lear, 'the representative of the old, is confronted with something brand new; he cannot understand it, and it does not even care to understand him' (E 36). And while 'the new generation may be regarded . . . as the embodiment of wickedness . . . can it also be said that they represent a new conception of society?' Muir continues: 'If we had not lived through the last twenty years, had not seen the rise of Fascism in Italy and Germany and Communism in Russia, and did not know the theory and practice by which they were upheld, we might be disposed to deny this. As it is we cannot' (E 42). He relates the Machiavellian context of Shakespeare's play to the Reapolitik of the twentieth century. To indulge in such 'political action which ignores all moral considerations' is to see life as 'a

continuous present divested of all associations, denuded of memory and the depth which memory gives to life' (E 42-3). In such a system human beings, like Lear's daughters 'become mere animals furnished with human faculties which they have stolen, not inherited by right. Words are their teeth and claws, and action the technique of the deadly spring' (E 45).

Muir returns to this animal theme in the essay on Oswald Spengler, whose philosophy of history he finds expressed through 'verbal brutality' (E 125). Like German Expressionist poets before the outbreak of the 1914-18 war, Spengler exalts the Raubtier image: 'When I call a man a beast of prey whom do I insult, man - or the beast? For the great beasts of prey are consummately noble creatures, and without the hypocrisy of a human mortality based on weakness.'¹⁵ Muir comments that while the image itself is not new, what is new is Spengler's use of it in that he finds it a 'noble or edifying fact.' Man is exhorted to become like the beasts. In addition, Spengler 'makes of history, or rather of the historical process, the sole significant embodiment of human life, and consistently implies that the individual human existence is not of the slightest consequence' (E 126, 127). Muir contrasts this creed which 'makes no allowance for the moral impulses of mankind' and 'grants no value to individual existence' (E 129) with the view of life 'which used to be universal and is still held, I think, by the great majority of people', a view which 'started from the individual but reached the universal. . . . Mankind's secular destiny was certainly worked out in history, and history was therefore a process of the utmost significance. But man was also an immortal soul, whose essence could never be seized and contained by history. He had longings which history could not satisfy, and sorrows of which history took no account' (E 129-30).

Other essays explore the effect of modern philosophies on literature and the individual artist. The essay on Spengler is immediately followed by 'The Political View of Literature' in which Muir attacks what he sees as the political view of literature put forward by David Daiches in the book The Novel and the Modern World. Muir's criticism of Daiches' viewpoint is similar to that of his criticism of the historical view of man in the Spengler essay. Discussing essays on James Joyce, Muir finds that 'Mr Daiches puts into practice his counsel to work from the wider context inward . . . the wider context being society. But the working inward determines to a great extent what he finds in the work itself; it blinds him, for instance, to the strong Catholic element in Joyce's work. . . . But the Catholic impulse in Joyce does not count for Mr Daiches, because the wider context from which he works inward does not include Catholicism except as something to be interpreted in political terms' (E 134-35). In this method Muir sees the individual quality threatened by an insistence on the artist's or work's relationship to its social/political context. Similarly he takes issue with Daiches' insistence on the importance of the historical context of a work, and here he finds himself unusually allied with the formal critic who, Daiches charges, 'always tends to think that he knows what the work in question is simply because it is in print before him.' For Daiches, on the contrary, 'what the real work is and what gives the principle of organization to the whole can be certainly determined only by investigating the relation of the printed words to the civilization that produced them.'¹⁶ For Muir, on the other hand, the 'real work' is 'our first actual experience of it' and 'it loses its own reality and

takes on a different reality in which all that was individual in it is generalised' when one tries to explain it, as Daiches does of the twentieth century novel, in terms of a 'writer's adjustment to a state of transition' (E 140-41). Muir is probably right in his charge of inadequacy against a purely historical or political interpretation of literature, but his own view is also partial.

In 'The Decline of the Novel' Muir puts forward a cause and effect theory of what he sees as the decline of the novel: a theory which in approach is not dissimilar to the social and historical criticism which he had so vigorously attacked in relation to Daiches' book. In Muir's view, 'to the novelist fifty or a hundred years ago life obediently fell into the mould of a story; to the novelist to-day it refuses to do so.' Our 'order of thought and imagination' is no longer, as it once was, 'a classical order.' And thus 'the novel describing the life we live is a symptom of the order in which we live; its incompleteness is a reflection of the incompleteness of a whole region of thought and belief.' And for Muir, 'a story without an ending describes a mode of existence which has not been thought out and stops short of meaning.' While 'a comprehensive and widely accepted conception of human life produces good imaginative art; a tentative and partially accepted conception of life' produces 'unsatisfactory imaginative art' (E 143-44; 146-47).

Such a view seems to me to be equally open to reproach as the historical or political theory he objected to in David Daiches' work. It is certainly not easy for the artist to find either a meaningful role or a meaningful form of expression in the twentieth century context, but one cannot move from this position, as Muir does, to a rejection

of all art in this transitional age as 'unsatisfactory imaginative art' in contrast to the 'good imaginative art' of an apparently more settled age. This is equal to suggesting that sincerity on the part of the artist, or in Matthew Arnold's terms, the choice of a 'sublime' subject, is a guarantee of satisfactory art. With such a theory, Muir himself denies the individuality of the artist in his dealings with his subject and his age.

There is too, as we have seen also in Muir's poetry, something of the mythical in Muir's regard for the past. The novels of Jane Austen, one of the writers of the past to whom he refers, may appear to have come out of a settled philosophical background and they certainly exhibit the completeness - the story with an ending - which Muir considers necessary to good art. But Jane Austen was only able to give this impression because she deliberately narrowed the field of her novels to what she herself had experienced. The unsettled nature of her period is only hinted at in the various background details of army and navy occupations, of distant family deprivation, of social climbing and the nouveaux riches in the countryside. What is sometimes wistfully looked upon as the stable philosophical and social context of the past was in many ways only relevant to those who for one reason or another were able to ignore threatening or surrounding instability. Perhaps one of the most significant features of the modern period is that improved communications of all kinds - of transportation and of information and ideas through the mass media - have made each of us more vulnerable to the instability inherent in man's world.

John Lehmann called 'The Natural Man and the Political Man' 'one of the most remarkable articles I ever published - in fact one of the most important published anywhere during the war,'¹⁷ and in

this essay Muir again takes up the theme of spiritual/eternal values as opposed to the temporal in life and literature. In the past the 'man of myth and religion . . . was not regarded as human in the complete sense until he put on the spiritual man' and the 'moral struggle in the centre of the individual' was 'for many centuries accepted as the essential character of man' (E 151). In contrast, the modern world sees the individual's life as a 'development' and in such an evolutionary environment 'the moral struggle . . . recedes into irrelevance' (E 152, 154). As in 'The Decline of the Novel' Muir relates this changed view of man to the literature which has been produced in the modern period:

The history of the modern novel describes the disappearance of man as religion and humanism conceived him. Instead, there has emerged a new species of the natural man dovetailed into a biological sequence and a social structure. This natural man is capable of betterment but, unlike the natural man of religion, has no need for regeneration. He is simply a human model capable of indefinite improvement on the natural plane; the improvement depending ultimately on the progress of society, and of things in general. (E 150)

Inevitably D.H. Lawrence, linked here with Henri de Montherlant and Ernest Hemingway, finds his place in Muir's attack on the idea of the natural man and its effect on contemporary literature. For Muir, this effect is 'a simplification of the idea of man' which 'only those writers who are deeply rooted in tradition, and possessed with the idea of time, have been able to make headway against; . . . such writers as Proust, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, to confine ourselves to the novelists.' In contrast, 'Lawrence, Hemingway and Montherlant are completely in the modern convention' (E 161).

Stephen Spender replied to Muir's essay in his own article 'Literature and Public Events' in Penguin New Writing, October-December, 1942. While agreeing that Muir has quite accurately stated the problem facing modern literature, Spender disagrees with his conclusions, questioning his assessment of the writers praised or censured in relation to modern literature, and employing the kind of literary criteria noticeably absent in Muir's analysis. Of Muir's praise of Joyce, Proust and Virginia Woolf as writers 'possessed with the idea of time' (E 161), Spender comments: 'Unfortunately, he does not go on to study the impasse reached by the writers whom he so admires; had he done so, he might have felt that his own criticism suffered from over-simplification.'¹⁸ He questions Muir's view of tradition which seems to lead to an inability to see that a writer may feel he has to reject aspects of past tradition and practice to be true to his own imagination. Spender comments:

Although Mr Muir is aware of the political events which have made novelists invent political man, he seems to assume that the traditional attitude and 'an assession [sic] with time' are attitudes which can produce great contemporary art. Yet the romantics of the early nineteenth century did not wilfully and perversely betray a great tradition . . . What happened was that they found the traditional attitude quite incapable of enclosing the situation in which they found themselves. It had become an inhibiting and repressive force, instead of a vivifying and critical one, able to recreate life as they saw it lived. Putting this in purely literary terms, the technique of the traditional writers could not convey experiences of which the romantics were aware.¹⁹

Of the more specific literary essays in the collection, those on Hölderlin, Kafka and Hardy seem to me to be of most interest. There are two essays on Hölderlin, a general one and one on his Patmos poem.

In both, as in the essay on Kafka, one is aware of the affinity with the philosophical context of Muir's own poetry. The discussion of the gods is particularly relevant. Muir finds in Hölderlin's gods 'the recurring effect of passing at one step from the world of time and change to that of timelessness, and back again' (E 88). Although this mingling of time and timelessness might be taken as an effect of Hölderlin's mental disturbance, to Muir 'it has another aspect in which that confusion seems to come from a more than usually concrete grasp of certain truths: that the past exists in the present, that the gods (or what Hölderlin meant by them) mingle with human history, that time and timelessness are inextricably bound up' (E 89-90). He finds that 'the imagination in Hölderlin's poetry is obviously related to dreams . . . it regards the contemporary world as the Old Testament prophets regarded it: that is, in general terms, as falling short of its vision' (E 91). In the discussion of Patmos Muir finds that while the poem is 'one of the first modern poems, in the sense that it envisages human life in historical terms', it avoids the limitations of a purely historical vision: 'But while preserving his image of life as a cycle of alternating light and darkness, he saved himself from the blank relativity to which this would have committed him by the vision of the sign of God standing still in the thundering sky' (E 102). And like Muir himself, Hölderlin 'approached the mystery of time and eternity through the imagination . . . the mystery itself, not any particular manifestation of it, was his theme; and what he made out of it was a mythology' (E 103).

Muir's opening description of the fatalism in Hardy's novels in 'The Novels of Thomas Hardy' relates to the Calvinist concept of destiny

which pursued Muir himself throughout much of his poetry and which he objectified in his use of Greek myth and legend. In Hardy's novels, 'misfortune is not brought about by men and women, but is arranged by this power which is indifferent to all arrangements and therefore to misfortune itself. Misfortune is a principle of the universe and falls upon the weak and the strong indiscriminately, neither averted by wisdom nor brought on by folly, striking inevitably and yet as if by chance. For it is the result of a mistake which man cannot correct, since he did not make it. It was made by the Maker of the universe' (E 111). It is thus 'in describing endurance' that Muir finds 'Hardy is best', for, as he himself dramatised in a poem such as 'The Combat', 'by enduring man seems to rise above the malice of fate by a pure act of magnanimity comprehensible only to himself' (E 119).

The essay on Kafka is particularly relevant to the themes of Muir's own work: 'The image of a road comes into our minds when we think of his stories; for in spite of all the confusions and contradictions in which he was involved he held that life was a way, not a chaos, that the right way exists and can be found by a supreme and exhausting effort' (E 121). As in Muir's spiritual searches also, the problem for the hero of The Castle and The Trial is that his goal 'is enveloped in a mystery different from the ordinary mystery of human life, and he does not know the law of that mystery. The roads leading towards it are therefore deceitful; the right turn may easily chance to be the wrong, and the wrong the right' (E 121). The communality of experience - our common destiny - which was so important for Muir is significant in Kafka's work also: 'The hero of the two great stories is anybody, and his story is the story of anybody' (E 124).

Among the essays added to the revised edition of Essays on Literature and Society two continue the theme of the relationship between art and society. In 'The Poetic Imagination' Muir's theme is the difference between the poetic and the scientific imagination. Science, and particularly the world of applied science, has conditioned us to believe in 'consistent, mechanical progress.' In this world 'machines give birth to ever new generations of machines, and the new machines are always better and more efficient than the old, and begin where the old left off' (E 226). On the other hand, 'in the world of human beings all is different; there we find no mechanical progress, no starting where a previous generation left off; instead there is a continuity ruled by repetition.' The human being 'will pass through the same ancestral pattern and have the same feelings, the same difficulties as generations long before he was born.' This is why 'the great figures in imaginative literature are perpetually contemporary' (E 226, 217).

In 'A View of Poetry' Muir returns to the crisis facing poetry in the first decades of the century and now accepts, as Spender argued in 'Literature and Public Events' that 'for the good of its future, if it was to have one, poetry had to submit to a phase of almost surgical experiment . . . for the style of poetry now and then tends to harden until poets can no longer say what they want to say, and new styles have to be found to enable them to speak freely' (E 228). Yet Muir is still unenthusiastic about analytical criticism and what he considers to be the convention of obscurity which has grown up around contemporary poetry. While he now accepts that Eliot's poetry was genuinely difficult because of its revolutionary nature, he finds that from that poetry

'criticism went on to conclude that all poetry is difficult, a thing to be enquired into, as if it were a scientific problem.' He continues:

The New Criticism has many virtues; it is painstaking and conscientious, and it tries to be exact; yet I cannot read it myself without a slight onset of claustrophobia and a feeling that I am being shut in with the critic and the poem, which is generally quite a short one, knowing that I shall not get away until all three of us are exhausted. (E 231-32)

For Muir, 'the animating spirit of poetry is imagination, and the work of the imagination is to seize life as it lives and moves in its individuality' (E 232-33). While the analytic or scientific imagination has dominated thought in the modern world, Muir believes that it is only through imagination that we can see this modern world 'rooted in a past whose extent we cannot measure, and perhaps never will be able to measure. Imagination unites us with humanity in time and space . . . and our lives would not have any meaning if they were quite without it' (E 234).

Imagination and the continuity of human experience are significant themes also in Muir's final collection of criticism The Estate of Poetry. Given originally as a series of papers during Muir's period as Harvard Professor of Poetry between 1955 and 1956, The Estate of Poetry was published posthumously in 1962 with a forward by Archibald MacLeish.

In these papers Muir takes up once again the themes of the relationship between art and life which pervade all his criticism from We Moderns onwards, but which are increasingly explicit in his late work. He begins by considering the question of the traditional audience for poetry which he sees as having been replaced in modern times by 'an alarming, vast, shapeless something, deaf and blind to a once recognized

and accepted part of life, and a human inheritance.' This new audience is 'the public' (EP 2). As Edward Marsh in 1912 saw himself as choosing a selection of poems for the modern man or woman who no longer had the leisure to choose for himself or herself, Muir, too, although in an attitude of protest, sees that the speeding-up of our everyday lives 'has forced on us a new kind of sensibility, imposed new habits and with that new ways of thought' which 'are bound to affect our response to literature. Indeed they may help to explain why we neglect it; we live at such a speed that we are carried straight past it' (EP 4).

In addition to the speed at which we live our contemporary lives, there is also the question of increasing mechanisation and the resultant separation of man from the primary sources of life. Muir's quotation from Wordsworth's Preface to the Lyrical Ballads as to the deadening effects on the imagination of modern trends in social organisation fits without incongruity into his own definition of modern man's predicament, but he is without the earlier poet's faith that 'the time is approaching when the evil will be systematically opposed.'²⁰ For Muir, the effect of technological developments on the imagination has been such that poetry is now 'a thing which is written for the few, while the mass of the people now read the news and go to the cinema, or sit before a television set. The public has become one of the subjects of poetry, but is no longer its audience' (EP 7).

Muir is at pains to make it clear that he is 'not advocating a return to a past that has gone for ever, or romanticizing the coarseness of peasant life, or its poverty and hardship' (EP 8). But whatever the material gains which industrialisation and mechanisation have brought

man, he believes that these have been accompanied by a loss of the quality of first-hand experience of living which produced the ballads and their audience: 'This artificial world which we have made out of the world, the monotony of the work which produces it, the abundance of the distractions which vainly try to make up for that monotony - all these things, it seems to me, help to explain the depressed state of poetry, and the present neglect of it' (EP 9). In contrast, the ballads 'were once a general possession . . . And that great poetry can, or once could, be a general possession is a fact which we should not forget: those of us who write poetry, and those of us who criticize it' (EP 22).

As in earlier writings such as 'A Plea for Psychology in Literary Criticism' and the Transition essays, Muir here takes a responsible view of the critic's function which is close to that of Matthew Arnold. Agreeing with Arnold's estimation of the critic's importance as a disseminator of 'fresh and true ideas adapted to his age,'²¹ and adding his own belief that the critic should also act as 'helpful intermediary between literature and the reader' (EP 61), Muir finds that in the twentieth century, in keeping with the prominence of science and technology, 'the best criticism has been more and more confined to a different task, that of analysis and interpretation, and the work of intermediation has been left to critics of less contemporary repute.' And in consequence: 'I cannot help feeling that the gap between poetry and its potential audience is due partly to this cause' (EP 61-2). Muir's belief is that the analytical new criticism 'is addressed mainly to those who have to study poetry in any case, to university students and secondary school boys' (EP 63). Its main purpose 'is to establish

what the poem really means, linguistically' (EP 64). For Muir himself, poetry, like imagination, should be able to be possessed by all. It is a central part of man's life. Thus, 'there is another way of coming to know a poem, a way which does not hold up its movement (and that is of great importance) even at passages which are not immediately understood, but runs as it reads, keeping pace with the rhythmical pulse' (EP 64). Rejecting the criticism which 'resembles a scientific test' (EP 69) he states his belief that the critic's best tools are 'a long experience of all kinds of writing, by which he has learned to distinguish their qualities and assess them, just as in the course of living we imperfectly learn to distinguish and assess the qualities of people we meet' (EP 74). Thus he affirms his commitment to the traditional humanist moral approach to the criticism of literature which has characterised his work from its beginnings.

And as he rejects the kind of criticism which subjects poetry to scientific analysis, so Muir returns to the theme of 'The Poetic Imagination' and the difference he sees between the workings of science and of imagination. Compared with the precision of science, imagination's 'scope is vague and incommensurable, since it embraces all possibilities of experience. Consequently, it is for human living that imagination is indispensable' (EP 81). As the ballad tradition evoked an imaginative response from the people as a whole, so Muir's definition of imagination itself is a popular one. For him imagination is 'a faculty which belongs to us all, in however fragmentary a degree. If we did not possess imagination in this sense, we would not be able to understand our neighbors and our friends even as imperfectly as we do, and life would be a blank for us: we would have no image of it.' Even gossip can be accommodated within his definition for 'it involves invention and with

that some rudimentary conception of life; at its common level it is a perpetual reminder that common men are subject to the same pleasures and griefs and the same absurd chances as the great' (EP 80).

Muir points to the imbalance between science and imagination in the contemporary world and the fears which this imbalance arouses: 'What we are troubled by is the sense that science has run on far ahead of us, and that we are without the wisdom to use for our own good the enormous power which it drops in passing into our hands' (EP 85). He re-uses the words of the essay 'The Poetic Imagination' to contrast the continuity and repetition of human life with the progress in the world of applied science: 'Applied science shows us a world of consistent, mechanical progress', while 'in the world of imagination and of human beings . . . you find no consistent progress, no starting where the previous generation left off; instead there is continuity' (EP 87). This is very much the philosophical context of Muir's late poems which insist on the importance of memory and an awareness of the past which lives within us: 'We are bound to the past generations by the same bond as to our neighbors, and if only for the sake of preserving the identity of mankind we must cherish memory. This means that how we regard the past is very important' for 'the past is a living past, and past and present coexist: that also the imagination tells us' (EP 89, 91).

In relating this sense of the past to the poet's task of giving form to the present, Muir demonstrates once again his rejection of the kind of topical, naturalistic literature which is rooted shallowly only in the present. For him, the sense of timelessness is supreme: 'Poetry in any age is bound to be contemporary. What I have tried to urge is that poetry will not truly be contemporary, or truly poetry, if it deals

merely with the immediately perceived contemporary world as if that existed by itself and were isolated from all that preceded it' (EP 92). Yet although it is timelessness which ultimately concerns him, he recognises that the contemporary world has given the imagination the possibility of access to the timeless world in a new way through the discoveries of psychology. While 'the categories of psychology will probably be of little use' to the poet, 'the dream life of the unconscious with its own image of life is certain some time to enter into and deepen the archetypal images of the imagination' (EP 92).

Muir concludes The Estate of Poetry with a return to what he considers to be the central problem for the poet in the modern world: his relationship with his audience, the public. For the public is an impersonal force and the poet 'cannot speak its language, which is the language of the third party and the onlooker.' His, on the other hand, is the language of a response to life 'in its immediacy and its individuality' (EP 102), and his tragedy is that he no longer can identify the individual audience with whom he wishes to make contact. Muir sees his dilemma as being how to escape a retreat into an Axel's Castle in the face of an undifferentiated, indifferent mass public, a retreat made only too easy by the emphasis on the formal, stylistic attributes of poetry in the modernist period. Yet in Muir's view, poetry is still, as in the time of the ballads, a central need in human life. Its object is 'the creation of a true image of life', an image which, through imagination, 'we all help to create.' And 'the supreme expression of imagination is in poetry' (EP 107, 108).

As he himself practised in his own poetry, Muir suggests a possible way forward for the contemporary poet by pointing him towards the

diversity yet communality of human experience for his audience:

To imagine an audience, one must hold up before himself the variety of human life, for from that diversity the audience will be drawn. The poet need not think of the public. . . . He has to see past it, or through it, to the men and women, with their individual lives, who in some strange way and without their choice are part of it, and yet are hidden by it. (EP 110)

Thus, in his late criticism, as in his late poetry, one finds Muir concerning himself ever more closely with the contemporary problems facing individual human being and artist. Throughout his work as critic he held consistently to his commitment to the traditional moral approach to literature, to his belief in the inseparability of art and life. And while his lack of interest in analytical criticism was at times a limitation in his dealings with work in the modernist tradition, his approach appears increasingly relevant in the late twentieth century when the creative arts are increasingly being judged by the criteria of entertainment, and the gap between 'serious' art and its commercial counterpart grows ever wider. The Estate of Poetry, like the late poetry, is a brave attempt to recall the poet from the periphery of human activity and return him to his ancient central role in human affairs.

EDWIN MUIR

LITERARY AND SOCIAL CRITICISM

i International Themes

References

- 1 See letter to Janet Adam Smith, Selected Letters, p. 187.
- 2 Muir, quoted by Willa Muir, Belonging, p. 315.
- 3 See Edward Marsh, Prefatory Note to Georgian Poetry 1911-12 (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1912): 'Few readers have the leisure or the zeal to investigate each volume as it appears.' Muir, 'To W.H. Davies', We Moderns, p. 245.
- 4 T.S. Eliot, 'Religion and Literature', Selected Prose, edited by John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953), p. 31.
- 5 Muir, Selected Letters, p. 203-4.
- 6 This essay appeared as 'James Joyce: The Meaning of Ulysses' in The Calendar of Modern Letters, 1, No. 5, July 1925, pp. 347-55. Also as 'James Joyce' in The Nation, CXXI, No. 3145, 14 October 1925, pp. 421-3. The former version is the Transition essay (pp. 19-36) and this version has added to it 'A Note on Ulysses', revised from the essay in New Republic, XLI, No. 523, 10 December 1924, pp. 4-6, which has become pages 36-45 in Transition. The Transition essay is in turn reproduced in James Joyce: The Critical Heritage, edited by Robert H. Deming (London: Routledge, 1970), Vol. 1, pp. 327-34. Omissions from the original essay, apart from a few minor omissions of phrases etc., are pp. 19-20 ('That book . . . laws') which discuss the early Joyce; and a passage of detailed description of Ulysses pp. 29-30 ('The scene in the pub . . . history.')
- 7 Muir, letter to Kathleen Raine, Selected Letters, p. 185.
- 8 See Edwin Muir, 'The Assault on Humanism', The Scottish Nation, 4 September 1923, pp. 6-7. See also reply by C.M. Grieve 16 October 1923, p. 4; Muir's reply 'The Assault on Humanism Again', 6 November 1923, pp. 4-5; and letters 13 and 20 November 1923.
- 9 D.H. Lawrence, Letter to Edward Garnett, The Letters of D.H. Lawrence, edited with an introduction by Aldous Huxley (London: Heinemann, 1932), p. 198.

- 10 D.H. Lawrence, The Rainbow, Penguin paperback edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1949), p. 437.
- 11 Edwin Muir, The Structure of the Novel (London: The Hogarth Press, 1928).
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- 14 See Butter, Man and Poet, p. 170.
- 15 Oswald Spengler, quoted by Muir, Essays on Literature and Society, p. 125.
- 16 David Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World, quoted by Muir, Essays on Literature and Society, p. 139.
- 17 John Lehmann, I Am My Brother, quoted in Butter, Man and Poet, p. 229.
- 18 Stephen Spender, 'Literature and Public Events', Penguin New Writing No. 15, October-December 1942, p. 129.
- 19 Ibid, p. 130.
- 20 Wordsworth, Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, p. 735. Quoted by Muir, The Estate of Poetry, p. 6.
- 21 Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', Essays in Criticism: First Series (1865; rpt London: Macmillan, 1921), p. 37.

EDWIN MUIR

II LITERARY AND SOCIAL CRITICISM

ii Muir and Scotland

The chief part of Muir's literary and social criticism which relates specifically to Scottish matters is to be found in the reviews which he wrote in the thirties for periodicals such as The Modern Scot (and its successor Outlook), The London Bookman and The Spectator, and in the two significant books which encapsulated the arguments of these scattered articles, Scottish Journey (1935) and Scott and Scotland (1936). Muir's reviewing at this time took place in a context of an upsurge of literary and political activity in Scotland itself and a corresponding new awareness of the Scottish dimension in London circles. In the early thirties, for example, The Spectator announced an editorial policy of regular coverage of Scottish matters because 'the cultivation of Gaelic and the conscious development of a modern Scottish literature are movements demanding not only observation but discussion',¹ and it is frequently in The Spectator that one first finds Muir exploring several of the themes which were to form the arguments of his Scottish books. In addition to articles on Scottish writers of the past such as Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson, for which there was an established interested market, this reviewing also gave Muir the opportunity, even if a regrettably limited one, of introducing and commenting on as critic a new generation of Scottish writers such as Hugh MacDiarmid, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Neil M. Gunn and Fionn MacColla whose work related

in sympathy, if not always in language, to the aims of the Scottish Literary Renaissance movement which had been given its chief impetus by MacDiarmid's successful writing in Scots in the early and mid-twenties. Although Muir continued as a reviewer until almost the end of his life, in later years principally with The Listener and The Observer, his articles on Scottish matters became infrequent after the early forties, and it is thus to the thirties period that one must turn for his principal analyses of the Scottish situation.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, and as illustrated by the poetry itself, Muir's relationship with Scotland was an ambivalent one. This was a source both of strength and weakness in his writing about the country and its problems. As Orkneyman, his sense of detachment enabled him to observe and analyse the contemporary scene without his judgement being clouded by emotional over-involvement or by the tired familiarity of traditional attitudes to Scottish affairs. Yet he was also sufficiently a Scotsman to understand the nuances of the Scottish situation as no total outsider could have understood them. This understanding detachment is one of the strengths of Scottish Journey. On the other hand, his Norse-influenced origins and his consequent sense of linguistic dislocation both from the English language and from the rich spoken Scots of the Borders and Lowlands which formed the kernel of MacDiarmid's personal literary 'synthetic' Scots, led him, I believe, to overestimate the role of language in his analysis of the possibilities inherent in Scotland's literary revival in Scott and Scotland, and to discuss the language situation of Scotland in the thirties in terms frequently more relevant to that of the age of Burns.

Scottish Journey incorporated one series of Muir's explorations of the contemporary and historical situation of Scotland. As in many other ostensible travel books of the period, Muir's journey is an interior journey where the traveller does not merely report the surface physical terrain of his chosen territory or the everyday lives of its people, but through his wanderings explores his and their essential being and that of the times in which both live. Thus description of landscape and incident becomes a metaphor for a deeper psychological and philosophical search, what Hugh MacDiarmid in his similarly-conceived travel book, The Islands of Scotland, called the attempt 'to expose through the physical form the spiritual meaning of Scotland today.'²

The principal theme of Scottish Journey is Scotland's loss of national responsibility and cultural identity, a process which Muir saw as having begun with the Reformation and the Union of the Crowns in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and one which was being accelerated in the twentieth century by the increasing centralisation of economic and political decision-making in London. Although Muir's analysis relates to the Scotland of the depressed thirties, one of the most memorable qualities of the book is its applicability to the Scotland of almost half a century later. His conclusion that economic change from capitalism to socialism must come before nationalism anticipates the apparent political mood of the majority of Scots today, while his description of Scotland's economic breakdown is relevant to our contemporary inability to redirect our industrial base from the heavy industry of the past to the technology of the present and future:

My deepest impression . . . was one of emptiness, and that applied even more to the towns than to the countryside. Scotland is losing its industries, as it lost a hundred years ago a great deal of its agriculture and most of its indigenous literature. The waste glens of Sutherlandshire and the literary depopulation of Edinburgh and Glasgow were not obvious blows at Scotland's existence, and so they were accepted without serious protest, for the general absorption in industrial progress and money blinded everybody to them. Now Scotland's industry, like its intelligence before it, is gravitating to England, but its population is sitting where it did before, in the company of disused coal-pits and silent ship-yards. (SJ 243-44)

Muir's journey took him from Edinburgh where, as he intimated again in Scott and Scotland, he found that 'the half-meaninglessness of Scottish life overwhelms you more strongly than anywhere else' (SJ 30), to the vitality of the towns of the Borders with their ballad heritage and continuing vigorous sense of identity; through Ayrshire to Glasgow and its industrial environs; and, finally, through the Highlands with their empty glens and foreign landlords to Orkney, that 'erratic fruition', which although 'it represented the only desirable form of life' (SJ 241) which he found on his journey, Muir knew could not form the model for a revitalised Scotland.

Muir's argument in Scottish Journey is that the aimlessness and emptiness of Scottish contemporary life has a deeper source than the growing anonymity which threatens all societies in the modern world. He believes that a country such as Scotland is in a particularly vulnerable position in that being no longer a nation, with the tangible political and social institutions related to nationhood, all Scotland has left is 'a distinctly marked style of life; and that is now falling to pieces, for there is no visible and effective power to hold it together' (SJ 25). 'What makes the existence of the mass of people

in Scotland so unsatisfactory, apart from their economic plight . . . is not the feeling that they are being subjected to English influence, but rather the knowledge that there is no Scottish influence left to direct them' (SJ 27-8). Muir contrasts Scottish nationalism with Irish nationalism and finds that

the unfortunate thing for Scotland is that it is not an obviously oppressed nation, as Ireland was, but only a visibly depressed one searching for the source of its depression. Glencoe and Culloden are things of the distant past, useful perhaps for a peroration or the refrain of a song, but with no bearing on the present state of things, since everybody can see the English and the Scots living side by side in peace. In such circumstances Nationalism becomes an argument supported by reason on the one side and met with scepticism on the other. Yet in spite of that Scotland is as urgently in need of independence as Ireland was. More urgently, indeed, for if she does not get it she will lose her national consciousness, as Ireland would never have done. (SJ 29)

In Scott and Scotland the loss of the Scottish language became for Muir the critical aspect of Scotland's struggle to retain what was left of her cultural autonomy, and the point at which his own exploration became fossilised, but in Scottish Journey he is able to accept, as we increasingly do today, that the adoption of the English language need not mean the surrender of one's Scottishness: 'The ability to speak English . . . does not involve any wish or any intention of becoming English or denying the Scottish tradition. And besides, English as it is spoken in Scotland is very different from English, and certainly very full of Scottish character' (SJ 27).

Muir found the Scottish character he was seeking in the small towns and countryside of the Borders. As he was to repeat over twenty years later in the Listener article 'Nooks of Scotland', 'the essential virtues of a nation generally gather at their greatest strength not at its centre

but at the places where it is most powerfully and persistently threatened: its frontiers' (SJ 45). For Muir, the Borders not only exhibited this vigorous frontier quality, but demonstrated that history, in this area of Scotland,

goes back without a break to the time of Bruce and is continued beyond that in legend. The Reformation certainly reached out and absorbed the Borders in due time; but the absorption was never so complete as in the rest of the Lowlands, for the genius of the Border people was already too completely formed to be fundamentally altered. That genius was partly heroic and partly poetical, and its most essential expression is the ballads, which form the greatest body of Catholic poetry in Scottish literature. (SJ 45-6)

As he contemplated the fragmentation of tradition which was contemporary Scotland and a historical development which, as he described it in 'The Problem of Scotland', his Spectator review of George Blake's The Heart of Scotland, 'has consisted in giving away its past piecemeal, until it squandered almost all its old heritage',³ the Ballads of the Borders represented to Muir

a wedge of solid life going back through all the vicissitudes of Scottish history, an unchanging pattern of the Scottish spirit as it was before Protestant theology, and James VI's long visit to London, and the bribery and corruption of 1704, and industrial progress had changed it in such a strange and inevitable way. The normal development of a nation is a development founded solidly on its past. The development of Scotland during the last three centuries has been a development bought at the expense of shedding one bit of its past after another, until almost the only thing that remains now is a sentimental legend. (SJ 46-7)

In much of his writing on Scottish matters, and especially on those related to Scottish literature, Muir unequivocally places the blame for Scottish decline at the door of Calvinism. This is the theme of

The Narrow Place poem 'Scotland 1941' and was one of the aspects of Scott and Scotland which aroused controversy. In Scottish Journey he casts his net wider and, as in the passage quoted above, recognises the unfortunate combination of religious, social, political and economic factors which worked together to bring about Scotland's present decline.

Muir finds evidence of that decline equally in past and present Scotland. Historically he sees it evidenced in the life of Sir Walter Scott - a subject to which he returned again and again in his reviewing and essay-writing - whose crisis of identity manifested itself in the way in which Scott 'could swallow the most crude and worthless lumber if it was only sanctified by history.' Muir's description of Scott's portrait, 'expressing simultaneously consciousness of power and of defeat', is symbolic of the crisis which he finds within Scotland itself: 'The face might be that of a life-long outcast or a life-long prisoner who has never resigned himself to his lot' (SJ 58, 59).

And as with Scott, so with later Scots, who have settled for a sentimental legend to cloak their unsatisfactory reality. As he leaves the Borders and the Ballad tradition behind, Muir contemplates the Burns Cult and Kailyard literature and sees both as a 'sham substitute' (SJ 67) for the vital poetic culture which the fifteenth century Makar tradition and the Ballads had provided. What Muir calls 'the flight to the Kailyard' is, to him, understandable in the light of

the rise of an industrial system so sordid and disfiguring that people were eager to escape from it by any road, however strange. The flight to the Kailyard was a flight to Scotland's past, to a country which had existed before Industrialism; but by the time the flight took place Industrialism

itself had sucked that tradition dry of its old vigour; it was no longer of importance except as a refuge from the hard facts of Scottish town life. The Kailyard school of literature was thus really a by-product of Scotland's economic history. All the songs and stories of Scottish country life after the Industrial Revolution got into its stride were for a long time dreams of comfort or escape. To anyone living in Glasgow or Dundee even the Kailyard must have seemed heaven. (SJ 67-8)

Muir finds no such defence for the Burns Cult, that complex social myth which has at its heart a poet but which, as Muir observes, is not a literary cult at all:

It has very little to do with Burns, and is concerned chiefly with the perpetuation of a myth. In that myth Burns becomes an ordinary man like his devotees, which he was not. He also becomes a successful lover and a free and glorious companion, which everybody would like to be. His myth is thus based on a firm foundation of sanctified illusion and romantic wish fulfilment. (SJ 90)

As Hugh MacDiarmid does also in A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, Muir makes comparison between the fate of Burns and the fate of Christ, although it is Muir's comparison which contains the satiric twist more often associated with MacDiarmid's method in A Drunk Man:

This legendary figure is a Scotsman who took upon him all the sins of the people, not to redeem them, but to commit them as ideally as they should be committed, that is, freely and guiltlessly, in an imaginary world beyond good and evil; a Paradisal Kailyard with a harmless domesticated serpent. . . . He was a scape-goat driven out to sweet pastures, while the people elected to remain in the wilderness; a god who sanctified the meagre indulgences of the many by unlimited loving and drinking. . . . The Burns of popular legend is an imaginative incarnation of a people's desires, unfulfilled in life. It has no fundamental resemblance to Burns himself. (SJ 90-91)

Although Muir condemns this particular form of myth-making linked to Burns the poet as 'hypocrisy' (SJ 91), he understands the need which the Scots have had for myth-making and the powerful capacity they have shown for such an activity throughout their history. But while, 'at the beginning, when Scotland was conscious of its growing power, the theme of legend was successful heroism against odds; later, when it felt its power slipping from it, or quite vanished, its imagination turned to the spectacle of beauty in misfortune and the tragedy of a lost cause' (SJ 92-3).

Among the most obvious contemporary examples of this 'tragedy of a lost cause' which confronted Muir on his journey was that of economic decline, evidenced both in the squalor of Glasgow and its industrial environs and in the unproductive Highlands, once the homeland of a proud people, but now the sporting preserves of absentee foreign landlords. Muir saw the same inadequate capitalist dream as being responsible for both the emptying of the Highland glens and the squalor of the slums of Glasgow, and believed that neither problem could be solved by nationalism alone. Only a fundamental change in the economic philosophy which produced such deprivation could have any lasting effect on it. In his analysis of the problem of the industrialised areas, Muir is at pains to make it clear that he is not against Industrialism per se, but against the way in which this has been developed to the detriment, instead of to the benefit, of ordinary human beings:

By Industrialism I mean the distinctively modern form of capitalist production and exchange which was set going over a century ago by a generally sanctioned greed such as the world had never seen before, called competition, and went on perpetuating itself in security once that greed had achieved the logical infallibility

of a law. In working itself out, this process took no regard of human life, unless when it was compelled to do so; it devastated whole tracts of the country-side, and sucked the life and youth out of the rest; it huddled up as quickly and cheaply as it could great deserts of towns, quite unsuitable for human habitation; and it set its mark on several generations of the men, women and children by whose work it lived, in shrunken bodies and trivial or embittered minds. In return for this it increased vastly the total wealth of the world, and raised considerably the general standard of comfort in those countries where it prevailed. (SJ 103-4)

In his earlier development of the same argument in 'The Problem of Scotland', Muir found that 'Scotland became so radically industrialized because, having destroyed its past, it had no reserves to draw upon.'⁴

In his exploration of the slums of Glasgow through his memories of the past and his observations of the present, Muir shows that willingness to probe beneath the surface of a problem which is characteristic of his literary and social criticism as a whole, as it is also of the themes of his poetry. He sees the slums as a canker affecting the whole society. They not only stunt the bodies and minds of those who have to dwell in them, but 'take their revenge on the respectable and the rich if in nothing else in compelling them to grow a still thicker hide of insensibility and suppression. . . . Thus the existence of the slums and of poverty in general poisons the life of a community in all sorts of hidden ways' (SJ 122-23).

As elsewhere he blames Calvinism for the aborted development of the arts in Scotland, so in Scottish Journey Muir attributes the eager embracing of capitalism by the Scots in the early days of industrialism and the attitudes which respectable people developed towards the undesirable effects of its operation, to the Scottish religion. He contrasts the attitudes of the church-goers with whom he associated

when he first arrived in Glasgow at the beginning of the century, who ignored the existence of the slums in their pursuit of personal social betterment, with those of Socialists and Trades Unionists who acknowledged the fact of the slums and pledged themselves 'neither to take any advantage of their neighbours, nor to rise in the world at their expense' (SJ 147). Muir sees Calvinism, with its emphasis on the separation of the secular and the religious, its doctrine of the Elect and the resultant wish of its members to show that they were among the chosen by demonstrating through economic or social success that God's favour was with them, as a religion which encourages the attitude that one can be a good churchman on Sunday and an exploiter of one's fellows during the week; a religion which also makes it too easy for the wretchedness of the slum-dwellers to be ignored as a mark of God's disfavour towards them, as a hideous warning to others of what could be their fate if they stray from God's path. In contrast, Muir himself sees the 'squalor of the slum-dwellers' lives' and 'their open publication of their degradation' as arising from 'a last-ditch sentiment of justice. To publish one's degradation is a moral protest' (SJ 122).

The problem of the Glasgow slums and that of the contrasting but related empty Highlands were individual factors in a wider context of Scottish cultural decline which Muir tried to fit into some coherent pattern as he reflected on his journey from the tranquillity and beauty of Melvich. In a theme frequently explored in his poetry, he postulates that throughout Scotland's history it is betrayal from within which has brought about Scotland's downfall:

I went over in my mind what Scottish history I could remember, hoping to find some faint sign that Scotland's annals need not have been so calamitous as they were; and need not have led to the end of Scotland as a nation. I thought of the declaration on independence signed at Arbroath Abbey on April 6th, 1320: 'As long as a hundred of us remain alive, we will never submit to the domination of the English: for we fight not for glory, nor riches, nor honour, but for liberty alone, which no good man giveth up save with life itself.' I thought of Barbour's fine lines on freedom. But I reflected that Wallace had been betrayed, that David I had sold his country; I saw the first four Jameses thwarted on every side, Mary Stuart sold to the English, Charles I sold to the English, and Scotland itself sold to the English. I remembered Culloden and the Highland clans delivered helpless to Cumberland because of the intrigues and counter-intrigues of their chieftains and a few Lowland Scots; I thought of the present feud between Glasgow and Edinburgh, the still continuing antipathy between the Highlands and the Lowlands; and it seemed to me that the final betrayal of Scotland which made it no longer a nation was merely the inevitable result, the logical last phase, of the intestine dissensions which had all through its history continued to rend it. (SJ 226-27)

And in a striking image, reminiscent of the dream images from An Autobiography, he compares Scotland's fate to 'a sight that I had seen as I stood on the banks of an Austrian mountain stream on a very hot summer day many years before. The stream was running very fast, and in the middle I made out two bright green snakes struggling in a death battle; I watched them for a few moments; then they were both swept, still fighting, over a cataract. The comparison was too swift and dramatic, I told myself, for the stubborn anger that burns through Scottish history; but nevertheless it would have been as impossible to put a stop to that at any of the disastrous turns of Scottish history' (SJ 227). Muir concluded that 'the real obstacle to the making of a nation out of Scotland lies now in the character of the people, which is a result of their history . . . and that obstacle, being the product of several centuries of life, is a serious one; it

is, in fact, Scotland' (SJ 232).

It was perhaps this disheartening realisation as much as the economic deprivation he had witnessed as he journeyed which led Muir to his final conclusion in Scottish Journey that any regeneration of Scottish life could be achieved only through some form of socialism. The Scottish National Party could not, for Muir, provide any radical solution to Scotland's problems because, in the corollary of the dissension argument, it 'has become safe in its attempt to attract people of every opinion, Liberal, Conservative and Socialist' (SJ 233).

Yet, in spite of a certain degree of logic behind this conclusion, it is not entirely satisfactory. While nationalism without economic viability is no answer to Scotland's problems, the converse is also true. Muir's evocation in Scottish Journey of Scotland's cultural malaise demonstrates that the question of Scottish identity must be resolved if Scottish life is to attain any meaningful vitality. Economic revival will not, of itself, spirit away such a centuries-old cultural dilemma. And, in spite of Scottish Journey's socialist conclusion, there is evidence that Muir himself recognised that this by itself would not be sufficient. Even while advocating a socialist as opposed to a nationalist solution, he comments: 'Looking, then, at Scotland as impartially as I could . . . I seemed to see that it was ripe for two things: to become a nation, and to become a Socialist community; but I could not see it becoming the one without becoming the other' (SJ 234). And in a review of Scotland: That Distressed Area by George Malcolm Thomson in The Criterion of January 1936, Muir, with the evidence of Scotland's economic decline before him in the form of Thomson's statistics, comes down firmly on the side of Home Rule:

In this book Mr Thomson has tried to rouse Scotland to a realization of its state. But his book should also be of interest to England, if she takes the Union seriously or thinks of it at all. . . . Mr Thomson is convinced that Scotland would be better off now without the partnership than with it, and indeed the comparisons he has drawn between Scotland and such small countries as Norway and Denmark justify him in his belief. It is clear that Home Rule should in any case be freely granted by England now, both for her own sake and for the sake of Scotland; otherwise she may find that a still important part of her kingdom will have sunk past hope and past recovery.⁵

Scottish Journey is a fine example of Muir's ability to weave together in his critical writings many strands of living experience apparently effortlessly and without incongruity. He is able, for example, to deepen his analysis of unemployment and his reader's understanding of 'the enforced inactivity, the loss of manual skill, the perpetual scrimping to keep alive, the slow eating away of dignity and independence' (SJ 144) which it brings by the quotation of the insidious advice of Despair from Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queene. This interlacing of elements more usually dealt with separately is typical of the book as a whole. The common experience of time having telescoped or expanded during a journey is transformed by Muir as he finds himself at last within sight of Orkney and the Hill of Hoy, into the imaginative exploration of time and space, material and transcendental reality, which one encounters in his poetry, and which yet takes its place without incongruity among the more everyday details of his journey. In an early passage of the book, having passed from the water-music which one associates with MacDiarmid's evocation of the Borders rivers to the 'beefy names' (SJ 63) of the agricultural country around Moffat and Dumfries, he muses on the similar difference in the

songs of these areas and on the dissimilarity of both to the poetry of the Celtic Highlands. In contrast to the Border Ballads which 'achieve magic through passion' and the Gaelic songs which attain a similar state 'through some inexplicable refinement of sensibility' (SJ 65), he finds that the 'love songs of Dumfriesshire and the Mearns, another region famed for its fertility in Scotland, are mainly Rabelaisian . . . completely of the soil, for fertility is as close a shackle as dearth, fettering the peasant not merely by necessity, but by all his senses, until his mind becomes as dull and rich as the landscape on which it feeds' (SJ 64).

Muir's own poetic prose, evoking the spirit of the solitary stretch of moorland between Newton Stewart and Barrhill, contains that metaphysical quality which is absent from the nature poetry of Burns, but which is to be found in the Ballads and the Gaelic songs, in the nature poetry of MacDiarmid and in much of the descriptive writing of Neil M. Gunn:

The silence of such places is so complete that it sinks into one's mind in waves, making it clearer and clearer, drenching it as with a potion concocted out of some positive life-giving essence, not out of the mere absence of sound. In that silence the moor was a living thing spreading its fleece of purple and brown and green to the sun. As I sat in the heather, breathing in the perfume, it seemed to me that I could feel new potentialities of nature working in this scene, secrets that I had never known or else had quite forgotten. . . . There was not one contour, one variation of colour which did not suggest peace and gladness; and the loneliness and silence surrounding the moor were like a double dream enclosing it and making it safe, one might have thought, for ever. (SJ 81-2)

Muir's poetry is the one disappointment of Scottish Journey. Apart from 'Scotland's Winter', the poetry in Scottish Journey, as in Muir's

poetry collections of the thirties, is tentative and insecure, searching through the voices of others for an individual voice of its own. It gives little indication of the qualities which were to distinguish his mature poetry and is much inferior to the prose-writing of the book, a prose-writing which in its confident vigour, wit and poetic quality ranks with the similarly distinguished prose of An Autobiography.

Muir's next major piece of writing on Scottish affairs was Scott and Scotland, published in 1936 one year after Scottish Journey and one year also after he had returned to Scotland with his family and taken up residence in St Andrews. The book proved to be controversial, exciting, for example, the hostility of Miss M.P. Ramsay in regard to its accusations against Calvinism, and provoking a lasting breach with Hugh MacDiarmid on the question of the viability of the Scots language for literary purposes.

In Belonging, Willa Muir blames herself for persuading Muir to settle in St Andrews where he was unhappy and dissatisfied, and accounts for 'the uncharacteristic acerbity of Edwin's remarks about Scotland' in Scott and Scotland as being 'a measure of the effect living in St Andrews had had on him.'⁶ It is clear, however, from Scottish Journey and from review articles written by Muir before he returned to Scotland, that the bitter diagnosis of Scotland's literary ill-health which took shape in the book was not prompted by St Andrews alone. As early as September 1931 Muir was writing of R.L. Stevenson in The Bookman:

Moreover, he was younger than his years, for he had spent his childhood and youth in a country where everything combined to prevent an imaginative writer from coming to maturity. After three centuries of a culture almost exclusively theological, imaginative literature in Scotland in Stevenson's time was tolerated, where it was tolerated at all, only as an idle toy.⁷

The arguments of Scott and Scotland are anticipated also by Muir's Spectator review of R.L. Mackie's A Book of Scottish Verse (20.4.34) and the article 'Literature in Scotland' (25.5.34). In the former, Muir praises the poetry of the sixteenth century Alexander Scott for 'a union of passion and thought which Scottish poetry has never recovered since',⁸ while in 'Literature in Scotland' he discusses the related problems of 'a renaissance without a centre' and the viability of the Scots language: 'that Scots will ever be used again as an independent language capable of fulfilling all the purposes of poetry and prose is, I should think, very doubtful.'⁹

Muir's brief in Scott and Scotland was to produce a book on Sir Walter Scott to take its place in a series of small books on Scotland to be called The Voice of Scotland. However, as he tells the reader in the introductory chapter, when he began to consider his subject in the context of his country he found that 'my inquiry into what Scotland did for Scott came down finally to what it did not do for Scott. What it did not do, or what it could not do' (Sc 13). He found also that 'I could not consider literature without considering language too, for language is the vehicle of literature; and so I had finally to come back to the Scottish language, which is the most controversial aspect of my subject' (Sc 10). The resultant book is heavily weighted towards an adverse critique of the fragmented development of Scottish literary culture and a doubtful prognosis of its potentiality for survival. Only a small concluding section deals specifically with Scott and his work.

There are two principal lines of argument in the book: firstly, Scotland's loss of nationhood and language, and the effect of this on a national literature; and, secondly, the part Scottish Calvinism has

played in the impoverishment of the national culture, again with particular reference to literature.

As a writer, Muir was himself in an equivocal position with regard to language. The language of his childhood was the Norse-influenced Scots of Orkney, but as we have seen, no trace of this appears in his poetry or prose-writing and he uses a generalised Scots only in a few poems such as some of his ballad-imitations in First Poems and in dialogue passages in the novel The Three Brothers. From his earliest attempts, the usual medium of his published work was English. His comment on the use of English in the Freeman article on the Scottish Ballads, later reprinted in Latitudes, may indicate his own uncertainty about his use of his chosen medium:

No writer can write great English who is not born an English writer and in England; and born moreover in some class in which the tradition of English is pure, and it seems to me, therefore, in some other age than this. . . . And because the current of English is even at this day so much younger, poorer and more artificial in Scotland than it is in England, it is improbable that Scotland will produce any writer of English of the first rank, or at least that she will do so until her tradition of English is as common, as unforced and unschooled as if it were her native tongue. (L 15)

Yet Muir was even more uncertain about the use of Lowland Scots, and the few poems which he wrote in Scots are linguistically unmemorable.

It is significant also that Scott and Scotland was written in the context of increasing awareness of the Scottish Literary Renaissance Movement. Although in 1936 MacDiarmid's first successful poetry in Scots was now over ten years old, and MacDiarmid himself was increasingly turning to English as a poetic medium, the language question was still very much an issue in Scottish literature. Muir, returning to make his

home in Scotland, may have been all too aware of his own uncertainty about Scots and of the commitment he had already made in his poetry to English as a medium. In addition, his own use of that chosen medium in the thirties was still tentative and unsettled, and his poetry had not yet achieved a distinctive, individual voice. Whatever the impetus, language, not Scott, became the central issue in his book.

Scott and Scotland is subtitled The Predicament of the Scottish Writer, and in the introductory chapter Muir defines the predicament of the contemporary Scottish writer as follows:

A Scottish writer who wishes to achieve some approximation to completeness has no choice except to absorb the English tradition, and . . . if he thoroughly does so his work belongs not merely to Scottish literature, but to English literature as well. On the other hand, if he wishes to add to an indigenous Scottish literature, and roots himself deliberately in Scotland, he will find there, no matter how long he may search, neither an organic community to round off his conceptions, nor a major literary tradition to support him, nor even a faith among the people themselves that a Scottish literature is possible or desirable, nor any opportunity, finally, of making a livelihood by his work. (Sc 15)

The latter part of this statement has much truth in it and has been given forceful expression in poetry by Hugh MacDiarmid in poems such as A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, To Circumjack Cencrastus, and with more resignation in Lament for the Great Music. But the predicament described arises principally from the loss of national sovereignty and consciousness of identity, and the subsequent lack of a sizeable, vital capital city which can provide economic patronage and imaginative, intelligent support for its artists. This is a predicament which has relevance for all artists working in Scotland, as the difficulties experienced, for example, by Muir's friend the composer F.G. Scott demonstrate. It is not confined

to those whose medium is language. While artists - or to return to Muir's especial concern with language - writers may adopt the English language and English literary modes in the attempt to find economic patronage and critical acceptability in London markets, this is a different matter from the attempt to absorb the 'English tradition' in order to 'achieve some approximation to completeness' suggested in the opening sentence of the above quotation.

In addition, this suggested adoption of the English language and tradition contradicts not only Muir's earlier views on the impossibility of a foreigner writing 'great English' - an opinion which is itself debatable in view of the achievement of writers such as Joseph Conrad, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and James Joyce - but also runs counter to his more recent comment on national tradition in The Spectator of 18 November 1932. Reviewing Scotland in Quest of her Youth, Muir takes issue with the opinion of Catherine Carswell and Eric Linklater that to be Scottish a Scottish writer need not deal with Scottish scenes. Muir's view here is that 'Russian fiction is about Russia, French fiction about France, English fiction about England, simply because in all of them the living tradition of a people comes to expression.'¹⁰ (my italics)

Most significantly, this opening suggestion that Scottish writers should adopt the English tradition, is irreconcilable with the argument concerning the impoverishment of literature as a result of the writer feeling in one language and thinking in another which develops into one of the major themes of the book as a whole.

Having given his assessment of the contemporary literary situation, Muir then returns to the history of Scottish literature to find the evidence for his diagnosis of Scotland's literary malaise. In the process

he makes many interesting comments on the literature of the past, especially in relation to the contrast between the Makar tradition and the poetry of Burns in the eighteenth century, but his argument suffers from his obsession with language and Calvinism, and from a surprising lack of breadth in relation to the external context within which the peculiarly Scottish predicament must also be considered.

Muir's view was that Scotland's loss of nationhood and, in particular, the retreat of the Scottish language from formal functions and intellectual matters, meant 'that Scotsmen feel in one language and think in another; that their emotions turn to the Scottish tongue with all its associations of local sentiment, and their minds to a standard English which for them is bare of associations other than those of the classroom' (Sc 21).

His analysis of the divided Scottish sensibility is strikingly similar to T.S. Eliot's theory of the dissociation of sensibility in English letters, in the essay 'The Metaphysical Poets', and it may be that Muir, who thought highly of Eliot's criticism, was influenced by Eliot's theories when he came to examine Scottish literary development, which, with the added complication of the language division, offered an extreme example of the dissociated sensibility theory. Eliot described the difference in 'the mind of England between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning' as 'the difference between the intellectual poet and the reflective poet. Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility.'¹¹

In the Scottish context, Muir says of the contrast between the anonymous early lyric 'My heart is heigh' and Burns's 'O my luve's like a red, red rose' that there is something present in the first which is lacking in the second, something which was lost after the sixteenth century:

a quality which might be called wholeness. Burns's poem is pure sentiment, sentiment at its very best, but nothing more. The earlier poem has sentiment too, but it is ennobled and transformed by something which Burns could not know, for the Scotland of his day did not know it: that is a philosophy of life and following from that a philosophy of love which accounted for all the aspects of love, sensual, romantic and spiritual, so that all three could be given their due force in one poem with perfect balance and propriety. One way of saying this is that in addition to its other beauties the earlier poem has an intellectual beauty which transfigures the feeling on all its planes. (Sc 56)

The continuation of Eliot's argument in 'The Metaphysical Poets' is very relevant to Muir's description of Burns's poetry as 'sentimental' and underlines the fact, which is not pointed to by Muir, that the divided sensibility which developed in Scotland as a result of historical and linguistic factors was complicated by what was happening in England and in Europe from the neo-classical movement of the late seventeenth century onwards. Eliot finds that in England the dissociation 'was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden. Each of these men performed certain poetic functions so magnificently well that the magnitude of the effect concealed the absence of others. The language went on and in some respects improved. . . . But, while the language became more refined, the feeling became more crude. The feeling, the sensibility expressed in the Country Churchyard (to say nothing of Tennyson and Browning), is cruder than that in the Coy Mistress.' Eliot continues: 'The second effect of the

influence of Milton and Dryden followed from the first, and was therefore slow in manifestation. The sentimental age began early in the eighteenth century, and continued. The poets revolted against the ratiocinative, the descriptive; they thought and felt by fits, unbalanced; they reflected.¹²

And in Scotland, with its peculiar historical context, the revolt was extreme. As David Daiches, who followed Muir's arguments in his fuller study of the eighteenth century situation in The Paradox of Scottish Culture, describes it: The European sentimentality movement

lodged itself more deeply in Scotland than elsewhere, because of the division between the Scottish head and the Scottish heart that history had already produced. . . . When the rational tone and method [of the Enlightenment] disappeared . . . Scottish literature was left with the kailyard as its only refuge. The road from Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* to Sir James Barrie's *Sentimental Tommy* is continuous if not altogether straight.¹³

It is interesting to note that while Calvinism was, for Muir, one of the principal factors which conspired against the development of a healthy Scottish culture, his analysis of the divided Scottish sensibility, in contrast to Eliot's development of his theory, demonstrates a separation of thought and feeling akin to the Calvinist separation of the secular and the spiritual, even as he strives for reconciliation. Muir claims that 'any emotion which cannot be tested and passed [my italics] by the mind of the man who feels it is sentimental' (Sc 38), a simplification which seems coloured by an intuitive acceptance of the very dichotomy between thought and feeling which he finds unsatisfactory in Scottish poetry.

Muir's charges against Calvinism for its adverse effects on Scottish literature were angrily refuted by Miss M.P. Ramsay, first of all in a correspondence in the Scottish periodical Outlook which had published a chapter of Scott and Scotland in June 1936, and later in her own book Calvin and Art: Considered in relation to Scotland (1938).¹⁴ Muir's view was that Calvinism, by prohibiting the development of poetic drama through its refusal to permit the establishment of theatres, by encouraging dissension through its religious doctrines, by making a complete break with past tradition as the Reformation in England did not do, and by encouraging the destructive consequences of capitalism through its encouragement of the separation between the secular and the spiritual in one's philosophy of living, irretrievably damaged Scottish culture. For Muir, 'the Reformation truly signalized the beginning of Scotland's decline as a civilized nation' (Sc 24), an uncompromisingly hostile viewpoint similar to that which informed his earlier unsatisfactory biography of John Knox, John Knox: Portrait of a Calvinist (1929).

As David Daiches recognises also in The Paradox of Scottish Culture, there is much truth in Muir's allegations against Calvinism, especially in regard to the way the Reformation in Scotland broke completely with the country's religious - and thus traditional cultural - past. There was no compromise between tradition and reform of the kind represented by Queen Elizabeth's religious settlement in England. But Muir weakens his argument by the extravagance of his attack, as, for example, in his ascribing to the dissensions of Calvinism 'the splitting up of the Scottish language into a host of local dialects' (Sc 74). This is obviously an unbalanced viewpoint. Although Calvinism undisputedly made

its contribution to the impoverishment of Scottish culture, there were other factors equally significant in its decline, as Muir recognised in Scottish Journey. And as a consequence of the departure of, first of all, king and then parliament to London, there was no opposing centre of values to that of the Scottish kirk which, as David Daiches comments, 'had to bear some of the responsibilities of a lost nationhood, and it was not adequately equipped to do so.'¹⁵

Muir moves on from a consideration of Scottish poetry to a consideration of Scottish criticism and finds it inadequate for similar reasons. And once again one finds him ignoring factors in a wider literary context which do not fit with his thesis, as in the discussion of the problem facing the contemporary Scottish critic:

A Scottish writer dealing with the poetry of Burns in English¹⁶ is clearly not fulfilling the same function as Coleridge did when he dealt with the poetry of Shakespeare and Wordsworth. For between Burns and this writer, though both are Scotsmen, there is a barrier of speech. The critic cannot use Burns's language; he has no working standard, therefore, for measuring the excellence which Burns attained in it; but, most important of all, he is not in the least involved in the preservation of a living speech. All criticism of Burns is consequently at best what is called academic criticism: it never gets to grips with the subject. (Sc 32)

On the other hand,

Coleridge's criticism of Shakespeare . . . was the result of the most close communion between the critic's mind and the poet's through the medium of a single language in which both were in their different ways incomparably expert. (Sc 34)

In this passage Muir seems to me to be wilfully ignoring aspects of the development of English and Scottish language and literature which should have modified his argument; a deliberate putting aside of what

would not fit with his argument similar to his method in his attack on Calvinism's suppression of poetic drama, when he claimed that before poetic drama in England one finds only 'the simple lyric with all its natural thoughtless grace' (Sc 25): a claim which Miss Ramsay, with Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney and Spenser to support her, refuted with greater ease than she did his more general charges against Calvinism.

In his references to the 'close communion' between the minds of Shakespeare and Coleridge 'through the medium of a single language', Muir conveniently ignores the changes in English language and sensibility between the Elizabethan period and the early nineteenth century. Language in the time of Shakespeare was in a phase of vital experimentation. There was as yet no settled written standard and poets and dramatists were free to use language individually. The English language itself was constantly being modified by new vocabulary being brought back from the New World in company with more tangible treasures, and by the intellectual concepts which derived from Europe and the Renaissance. This vital linguistic freedom was curbed in the seventeenth century when the influence of European neo-classicism set in: one finds the re-writing by Dryden of Shakespeare's Anthony and Cleopatra in the attempt to make it conform to new standards of civilised writing; the attempts to set up an Academy on the French model to monitor the language; in the eighteenth century one finds Dr Johnson recognising Shakespeare's greatness, but misunderstanding the complete nature of that greatness and lamenting his 'faults' while he simultaneously censures the Metaphysical poets for what he considers their violation of the standards of good writing. If one takes all these elements into consideration, then Coleridge's criticism, written in the early nineteenth century, must, in Muir's terms, be considered

'academic' criticism, as indeed must almost all contemporary criticism of anything but the most recent past literature. Yet one of the achievements of Eliot's criticism in essays such as 'The Metaphysical Poets' was that he enabled the twentieth century reader to get behind the distortions which had been imposed on the literature of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by the neo-classical and romantic periods and approach it more authentically.

Muir is on equally unsteady ground in relation to his comments on Burns. Had he used the fifteenth century Makars as example, then his charge of academic criticism would have had more substance. But, like MacDiarmid in the twentieth century, much of Burns's most successful poetry was written in what David Daiches describes as 'an English tipped with Scots.'¹⁷ The twentieth century reader may have to repair to his glossary more frequently than his eighteenth or nineteenth century counterpart, but there is still affinity in speech rhythms and syntax, in the cast of the mind. The modern Scot, would, I believe, experience fewer difficulties in the reading of Burns than the early nineteenth century Englishman would Muir's example of Shakespeare.

One finds a similar ignoring of relevant aspects of a situation when Muir deals with the contemporary literary context. Here his argument is obviously influenced by the fact of the Scottish Renaissance movement and the attempt to restore Scots as the poetic medium. This makes the context of his argument different from that of his discussion of earlier Scottish literature, but although he refers to MacDiarmid's poetry, Muir does not elaborate on this changed context, but on the contrary leaps uninhibitedly across a century and a half in his application of the thinking and feeling split which he had previously discussed in terms of Burns and Scott to the contemporary situation.

In his discussion of this contemporary situation, Muir finds that 'Scottish poetry exists in a vacuum; it neither acts on the rest of literature nor reacts to it; and consequently it has shrunk to the level of anonymous folk-song.' He acknowledges MacDiarmid's attempts 'to revive it by impregnating it with all the contemporary influences of Europe one after another, and thus galvanize it into life by a series of violent shocks', but concludes that in spite of having written 'some remarkable poetry', MacDiarmid 'has left Scottish verse very much where it was before. For the major forms of poetry rise from a collision between emotion and intellect on a plane where both meet on equal terms; and it can never come into existence where the poet feels in one language and thinks in another even though he should subsequently translate his thoughts into the language of his feelings. Scots poetry can only be revived, that is to say, when Scotsmen begin to think naturally in Scots. The curse of Scottish literature is the lack of a whole language which finally means the lack of a whole mind' (Sc 22). (my italics)

There are several unsatisfactory omissions here. There is no acknowledgement, for example, of the changed language context as instanced by the sections underlined above. In a sense, the twentieth century and the eighteenth century are the reverse sides of the language coin. In the age of Burns, Scots was still a significant competitor with English, even if its more formal functions had been usurped by the southern tongue. The language division between everyday Scots and formal English was a reality for most of the population. The situation is very different in the twentieth century, even when considered in the pre-television context of the thirties when Muir was writing. Scottish/English, as Muir himself acknowledged in Scottish Journey, is now the language of the major part

of the population for informal and formal purposes. Most of us naturally express our thoughts and feelings in it. Muir's comment about the impossibility of achieving major forms of poetry 'where the poet feels in one language and thinks in another, even though he should subsequently translate his thought into the language of his feelings' is therefore not a restatement of the eighteenth century language predicament, as it might at first appear, but is directed specifically towards the members of the Scottish Literary Renaissance Movement who, in opposition to the practices of Burns in the eighteenth century, allied themselves with the fifteenth century Makars in their deliberate adoption of Scots for matters of weight in their poetry. Scots was no longer to be equated with folk-song imitation.

In addition, Muir makes no distinction in this connection between those poets who, like MacDiarmid, developed their use of Scots for literary purposes from a natural spoken Scots base, and those whose natural language was Scottish/English, and whose use of Scots could therefore truly be described as 'translation.' Nevertheless, his comment that 'Scots poetry can only be revived . . . when Scotsmen begin to think naturally in Scots' (Sc 22) shows that he recognised the distinction. And throughout the entire language discussion there is no acknowledgement of the linguistic similarity between Scots and English, a similarity which made the adoption of the southern language only too easy when it became socially and economically politic to do so; a similarity which, if acknowledged, would have rendered Muir's extreme view of the language division unviable.

Muir's analysis of the contemporary literary predicament in Scotland thus seems to me to be unsatisfactory chiefly for the way in which he

does not employ arguments and understanding which it is evident from his other writings and from implicit comments in Scott and Scotland itself are in his possession. It seems clear that by the mid-thirties the Scottish language problem could not be discussed in equivalent terms with the eighteenth century problem, and that there should have been discussion of the fact that, for many Scots, the use of a Scottish standard of English, being their language from childhood, was the only way in which they could achieve 'completeness'. Muir's opening polarisation of the choice for a Scottish writer between the absorption of 'the English tradition' (Sc 15) and isolation in Scots distorts the book's argument and prevents an objective and much-needed examination of the whole cultural situation as it had developed in the twentieth century.

Muir seems to have been taken aback by the furore which Scott and Scotland aroused,¹⁸ and it is noticeable that his articles on Scottish affairs in the late thirties and early forties are less provocative in attitude. Both the article 'The Scottish Character'¹⁹ in The Listener of 23 June 1938 and the pamphlet The Scots and Their Country²⁰ (1946) are mellow in tone, distanced in a way that the involved author of Scottish Journey and Scott and Scotland was not, to some extent accepting the Scots and their country as 'characters.'

It seems to me to be a matter for regret that Muir did not have either the opportunity or the continuing inclination to write on Scottish matters, especially on matters of contemporary Scottish literature. In many ways he was ideally placed as an outsider/insider to comment objectively on the developing literary situation, and, in spite of the unsatisfactory nature of Scott and Scotland, the few reviews of contemporary

writing which he published elsewhere show him responsive to the new situation. While in Scott and Scotland he had complained that Hugh MacDiarmid had received no criticism of his work which could be of help to him, this is not quite so. Muir's own reviews of MacDiarmid's early work are perceptive and show that he was well equipped to undertake the task, had he had the opportunity and the will to do so. In an early review of A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle in The Nation and Athenaeum²¹ of 22 January 1927, he was quick to perceive both the literary significance of the poem and its logical though idiosyncratic form, developed through the poet's adoption of the Drunk Man persona. He gave a welcome also to MacDiarmid's second long poem To Circumjack Cencrastus, finding in it, as in Dunbar, a 'kind of poetry' which 'by a natural twist, a "thrawnness", combines the most violently opposed elements out of an intellectual relish in the contrast.'²² The essay 'Contemporary Scottish Poetry' in The Bookman of September 1934 contains a much more balanced account of the historical development of Scottish poetry than the argument of Scott and Scotland. In his comments on the twentieth century situation and the ground out of which MacDiarmid's experiments grew, Muir gives an interim assessment of MacDiarmid's poetry which demonstrates the true patron's willingness to support periods of experimentation for the sake of the achievement of the past and the potential of the future:

MacDiarmid has shown in a succession of volumes that it [the Scots language] is capable of dealing with a great number of feelings and ideas which have been lost to Scottish poetry. His first two volumes, 'Sangschaw' and 'Penny Wheep', were mainly collections of short lyrics, exquisite in rhythm, individual in mood and not in the least in the Burns tradition. They were followed by a long, semi-philosophical poem called 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle', which is probably his finest work, and

I think one of the most remarkable poems of the time. It is a farrago, but one expects a farrago from a drunk man; and the psychological transitions, from drunk to sober, from drunk to more drunk, are managed with great skill. His next poem, 'To Circumjack Cencrastus', was even longer, but not quite so successful, being very careless in execution; it contained however some fine satire and a few lovely lyrics. This was followed by 'Scots Unbound' which, except for one or two poems that are probably better than anything else he has written, lacks the vigour and daring of his earlier work. His latest volume, 'Stony Limits', is partly experimental and partly propagandist, being divided between adventures in new forms of English, which are not very successful, and hymns proclaiming the triumph of Communism and Social Credit, which are vigorous but prosaic. As a transitional work this volume is interesting enough; but it has none of the intrinsic virtue of M'Diarmid's early poetry, in which incongruous elements were united in the most daring and natural way. The incongruities are still here, but they are not united.

This is not the place to estimate Hugh M'Diarmid's poetry, nor the time, for his latest work is obviously transitional. But it would hardly be denied, I think, that he is the most gifted poet in Scots since Burns.²³

One wishes that Muir had found both the time and place to make the fuller study of MacDiarmid's poetry - and of twentieth century developments in Scottish literature as a whole - which, on the evidence of his brief review comments, it seems he was capable of undertaking.

As it is, Muir's relationship with Scotland as critic seemed to be attended by that same ambivalence which marked his relationship as man and poet with his 'second country.' Such national ambivalence is entirely absent from the work and personal attitudes of his fellow Scotsman from the north, and the companion writer to be considered in this thesis, the novelist and short story writer Neil M. Gunn.

EDWIN MUIR

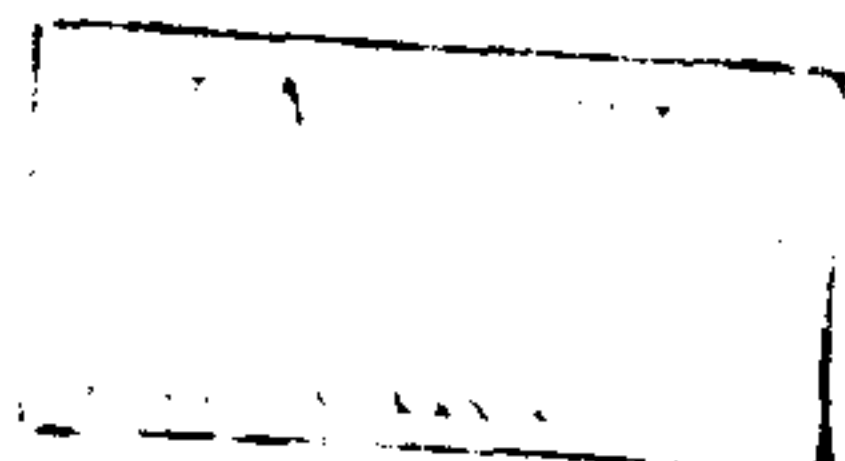
II LITERARY AND SOCIAL CRITICISM

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- 15 Daiches, The Paradox of Scottish Culture, p. 43.

- 16 Muir's expression is ambiguous here. He means to say, I believe, that 'a Scottish writer dealing in English with the poetry of Burns in Scots is clearly not fulfilling . . .'
- 17 Daiches, The Paradox of Scottish Culture, p. 88.
- 18 For some indication of the hostility which Muir's analysis of the Scottish language situation in Scott and Scotland aroused in Hugh MacDiarmid, see the correspondence between F.G. Scott and C.M. Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid) held in the Special Collection section of Edinburgh University Library, especially letters from Scott to Grieve of 1 September 1936, 2 October 1936, 13 March 1937, 6 September 1937, 20 April 1940, together with letter from Grieve to Scott of 13 July 1940. Unfortunately, most of the letters from Grieve to Scott during the period of the controversy do not seem to have been preserved. The dispute is discussed also by George Bruce in the essay '1936 - The Borderer and the Orcadian', The Age of MacDiarmid, ed. by P.H. Scott and A.C. Davis, and by Maurice Lindsay in Francis George Scott and the Scottish Renaissance, who also quotes from the Scott-Grieve correspondence.
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SCOTTISH AND INTERNATIONAL THEMES
IN THE WORK OF
EDWIN MUIR AND NEIL M. GUNN

by

Margery Greenshields McCulloch

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NEIL M. GUNN

I THE SHORT STORIES

Neil M. Gunn had established himself as a short story writer before the publication of his first novel, The Grey Coast,¹ in 1926. An early story such as 'Down to the Sea', published in The Scottish Nation in September 1923, already demonstrates the qualities of descriptive writing, psychological perception and that Wordsworthian sense of human at-one-ness with the natural environment - in this instance with the sea - which are characteristic of Gunn's best short stories and novels.

There is a close relationship between the stories and novels, a relationship which is partly thematic and partly attributable to the structural nature of Gunn's novels. As in the novels of D.H. Lawrence a chapter such as 'Rabbit' from Women in Love can stand as a short story outwith the context of the novel, so in Gunn's work many pieces of writing which began life as short stories later take their place as incidents or episodes in more expansive novels. The best-known of these re-used stories is 'The Sea',² published in 1929 both in The Scots Magazine and in Gunn's first collection of short stories, Hidden Doors. This was later revised and incorporated into the novel Morning Tide as the epic sea-storm episode in which the boy Hugh waits by the shore of the little fishing village while his father defies the storm by bringing his boat safely to harbour.

The re-use of a short story was a pattern which Gunn followed throughout his work as writer from the early example of 'The Sea' to a later one such as 'Ride the Gale',³ a story published in the American periodical The Saturday Evening Post in December 1950 and re-appearing in The Well at the World's End in 1951. 'Ride the Gale' is itself a fuller, revised version of 'The Storm',⁴ published in The Scots Magazine in 1935. As in the progress of 'The Storm', there can be a considerable time-gap before the re-appearance of a story. 'The Dead Seaman',⁵ was first published in The Scots Magazine in July 1931 and was not re-used until 1945 when it became the substance of the principal theme of The Key of the Chest. Similarly, 'The Circle',⁶ published in The Scots Magazine in January 1932, provided the core of The Silver Bough of 1948.

This redeployment of stories is interesting in relation to Gunn's work as novelist. In some ways Gunn's talent is intrinsically more suited to the short story form than to that of the novel. In structure his novels tend towards the episodic construction of traditional, oral folk art, where the story-teller cannot depend upon his audience being able to grasp the intricacies of character interaction and of a complicated, interweaving plot which have become characteristic of the printed novel, but must hold his listeners' attention by means of description, drama, suspense and numerous episodes or actions which can be complete in themselves. Gunn's episodic construction works well in a novel such as The Silver Darlings⁷ which is, in essence, a folk epic; but in other novels such as, for example, the picaresque The Well at the World's End or The Key of the Chest, one feels that the unity and credibility of the action as a whole has been undermined by the episodic nature of its parts. Even a potentially fine novel such as The Drinking Well⁸ demonstrates a

similar crisis in its closing stages, where a previously coherent action degenerates into a series of separate incidents.

On the other hand, Gunn's approach is entirely acceptable in the short story form where the crisis of the action is in fact the story which is being told and the episode in which the action is contained must give the illusion of bringing past and future together into the immediacy of the present. In the economy of the short story form, the folk story-teller's attributes of skill in descriptive narrative and in the creation of dramatic, often suspenseful, actions have a useful function.

A feature of Gunn's writing technique which is successful in the short story form, but less satisfactory in the novels in which it is employed, is his tendency to develop his action through a single centre of consciousness, either in the person of one of the characters or through first person narrative. In the more extended novel form this method frequently results in an inability on the part of the reader to see the action in the round. One cannot find alternative viewpoints through which one can evaluate the happenings. In the short story, on the contrary, this limited centre of consciousness, like unity of mood, is an asset. The restricted space and time dimension of the story form cannot accommodate a more sophisticated interplay of action and attitude.

One interesting aspect of the close relationship between Gunn's stories and novels is the light these stories throw on the novels themselves, and, in particular, on later novels such as The Key of the Chest, The Shadow,⁹ The Well at the World's End and The Other Landscape. It is tempting to account for the failure of many of Gunn's post-war novels as being the consequence of a decline in his writing ability coupled with

his increasing preoccupation with philosophical matters, or of a failure of his sensibility to adjust to the conditions of the post-war world. While all these factors have their part to play in the lack of success in the later work, what a perusal of the less successful short stories makes clear is that the flaws which loom so largely in Gunn's late novels are in fact present in his work from its beginnings, and for much of his writing life appear side by side with the positive qualities which one associates with his best writing. For example, the melodramatic action pertaining to the musician Menzies and his wife Annabel in the last novel The Other Landscape has an early ancestor in the story 'The Uncashed Cheque' from the Hidden Doors collection, which also deals with an unsuccessful artist 'who had never got hold of the keyword - saleability',¹⁰ the accidental death of a pregnant woman during the absence of her husband and an enigmatic piece of writing which affects the course of the action. The uncollected 'Tragedy into Dream' from The Modern Scot of 1931 reads like an equally self-conscious ancestor of the fateful piece of writing.¹¹ The inarticulate, somewhat pretentious philosophising in The Other Landscape on the part of Menzies and the narrator Walter is found also in early stories such as 'Visioning' (1923)¹² and 'Hidden Doors' (1927).¹³ In the latter story, which was originally published in The Cornhill Magazine as 'Musical Doors', music is the key, as it is in the novel, to the other landscape, but the visions which await the philosopher on the other side of the door are banal in the extreme:

It is a delightful experience, that first catch of the breath. The lawns, the terraces, the ivied walls, the ivied trees, the trimness, the antique beauty. Yet every promising prospect can be baffled, so that the stepping to a blind turn is a game of breathless expectancy. What

could you find, anyway? That airy minuet - traced with the delicacy of lace. Lace ruffles, eh? and finger tips? The rhythm - it creates, embodies. Do you see them? . . . A little stone Amor, with a smile by a French artist of the old Courts, désillusionné - a smile at the shadow on the sundial; complete, sprouting wings an' all. . . . A peacock, full-spread . . . pavane, eh? out of Casals' 'cello. . . . The secrecies . . . desire . . . (HD 187) (Gunn's ellipses)

Similar triteness characterises much of Gunn's 'visioning', from the early stories 'Visioning', 'Hidden Doors' and 'Half-Light'¹⁴ to the late whisky-cave episodes of The Well at the World's End and the philosophising of The Other Landscape.

The couthy sentimentality which is the context of The Silver Bough is also anticipated in the earlier stories. 'The Sleeping Bins' (1924)¹⁵ introduces an archaeologist who is obviously related to the later Simon Grant, while 'The Circle' (1932) with its equally amateurish archaeologist is without doubt the source story for The Silver Bough.

Evident also in an early story such as 'Visioning' is the narrative technique which flaws many of the late novels: a technique which tends towards the author telling, without corroborative action, what is going on in a character's mind, instead of developing a plot through character in action. And throughout Gunn's work, in stories and novels alike, one finds an uneasiness whenever he attempts to deal with relations between the sexes outwith the almost archetypal relationships of the Highland cultural pattern. Thus trivial, insensitive stories of sophisticated and not so sophisticated urban couples such as one finds in 'Adventure in Jealousy', 'Footsteps in the Corridor', 'The Poster' and the collected 'Love's Dialectic'¹⁶ co-exist with perceptive studies of childhood and old age and with a love story such as 'The Tree',¹⁷ collected in The White Hour, a moving account of the relationship between an elderly

widower and his newly dead wife. Less easy to explain away by context is the rhetoric of 'The Wild', set in the Highlands and published in The Modern Scot in the summer of 1930:

Here's the dark power again, rounding me up, shepherding me back to my desk. Can it be the premonition that I may presently drift over the borderline of social consciousness, drift back into a state beyond that of the individual hunter, a state of self-loneliness that is at once a touch of Nirvana and the brute? Or is the urge to set down this writing merely the something implicit in the evolutionary impulse which got the caveman engraving reindeer on ivory in the grottoes of La Madeleine?¹⁸

This unsatisfactory first person narrative is roughly contemporaneous with the splendid Morning Tide and the equally perceptive short story 'Paper Boats'.¹⁹ Without the author's name being given, one would not associate 'The Wild' with the latter two works. Yet 'The Wild' is itself typical of a vein of writing which is recurrent throughout Gunn's work.

Thematically, the short stories and novels are also closely related. Although some stories are of an anecdotal nature - 'The Black Woollen Gloves' and its later variant 'The Lady's Handbag'²⁰ depend, like the whimsical 'The Sleeping Bins', on the twist in their endings for their principal interest - and while others such as 'The Clock' and 'Pure Chance'²¹ are tales of suspense and fateful, perhaps supernatural happenings, on the whole most stories explore themes, or aspects of themes, which preoccupy Gunn also in the novels.

Foremost among these themes is the theme of Scotland and, in particular, the life of the Scottish Highlands. This is explored historically in two stories, 'The Ghost's Story', which deals with the fight for freedom which culminated in the Battle of Bannockburn, and 'Montrose Rides by',²² but a more characteristic setting for the theme is that of the

dying east-coast seaboard in the early twentieth century. Within Gunn's all-embracing Scottish theme one finds the exploration of related themes such as rootedness, the continuity between past and present, the relationship between man and his natural environment, and, in particular, between man and the land of his birth. Other less specifically Scottish themes, but themes which are frequently explored by Gunn within a Scottish context, are those of childhood and old age, relationships between men and women and the destructive power of the analytic mind. Many of these are the universal themes which, as we have seen, preoccupied Edwin Muir also in his poetry and criticism.

Gunn's finest short stories are to be found principally in the collection The White Hour. Published in 1950, this book brought together the best of the stories from the earlier 1929 collection Hidden Doors and other stories written since that time. The twenty-six stories in The White Hour represent about one third of Gunn's total output of short stories. In addition to the seven stories which were not reprinted in The White Hour from Hidden Doors, the National Library of Scotland accession file for Gunn holds printed copies or typescripts of forty-three uncollected stories. I have myself come across fourteen others, including those Young Art stories first published in The Scots Magazine and Chambers's Journal in 1941 and 1942 which Gunn brought together as the novel Young Art and Old Hector.²³ In view of Gunn's prolific contribution to periodicals in Scotland, England and in later years America, there may still be other stories which have been overlooked.

In his book on the short story form The Lonely Voice, the Irish writer Frank O'Connor finds 'in the short story at its most characteristic something we do not often find in the novel - an intense awareness of

human loneliness.'²⁴ Gunn's best short stories, like his most successful novels, are in the main rooted in the Highland way of life and this quality of 'human loneliness' is present in both forms: a factor which has perhaps some significance in any consideration of the formal problems of the Highland novel and of Gunn's novels in particular. While in O'Connor's own stories human loneliness is uncovered in the midst of society and within the interplay of human intercourse, in Gunn this loneliness is more an apartness from social contacts: man alone with his natural environment such as one finds in Wordsworth in the story of Michael or in Conrad where the isolation of the sea provides the context for man's moral self-conflict.

One of Gunn's strengths is his descriptive writing: his ability to bring the natural environment immediately before the reader, to place the reader, indeed, within it, whether, like Conrad, in his heroic sea-storm episodes or, as in the work of D.H. Lawrence, in the quieter evocation of the countryside. The poetry and intimacy of Lawrence's 'a cupful of incredibly warm sunshine'²⁵ from The Rainbow can be found in Gunn's more sustained evocation of the visual beauty and sounds and smells of the countryside in a passage such as the following from the story 'Whistle for Bridge'²⁶:

The path at last climbed up a steep wooded bank and Donald found himself by a slow-winding waterway. It was lovely and quiet here. The banks on each side were golden with broom and whin taller and thicker than ever Donald had seen. There was a scent that came up to him and went away in a mysterious fashion. The scent, although elusive, had yet a thickness in it that might have choked him if it had stayed. He pursued it tentatively in a world that had waked out of a drowsy afternoon and become watchful. The water was clear and still. There was not a human being anywhere. The birds sang in notes loud and challenging. The colour of the scent was yellow. And the thousands of golden flowers, all packed together like swarming bees, dazzled the eyes. Donald listened and became watchful, too, and faintly dazed about the forehead.

The reassuring human quality - the 'cupful' - in the intimacy of Lawrence's description is, however, missing in Gunn. In his scene the boy is simultaneously at one with and apart from the natural scene. The scent of the broom 'had yet a thickness in it which might have choked him if it had stayed.' Before the myriad scents, sounds and colours of the natural environment, Donald 'listened and became watchful, too.'

There is a similar involvement in, yet wariness of, nature in the story 'Symbolical'.²⁷ This time the suggestion of menace in the perfection of the beauty of the countryside is more overt in that the setting is an unexpected spring snow-storm:

The snow was bright and lay on everything. It must have drifted strongly at one stage. In the lee of the low stone dike there wasn't much, but on the weather side it curved almost to the top - a beautiful curve, showing particularly at the slap in the dike. Hendry admired it and broke the edge of the curve with his boot. Then he looked at the flaw. In that perfect curve was the flaw-mark of his boot. Queer thing. (WH 61)

And as Hendry approaches the cottage of his neighbours:

No life moved anywhere about it. Its two small windows were tenantless eyes, one each side of the closed door. It looked at him unseeingly, very still. The draped whiteness of the snow had something terrifying about it that he had never noticed in snow before. And suddenly the windows were looking at him with eyes that did not belong to Geordie Acharn and his sister Christina. (WH 62)

Hendry's apprehension of the menace in the white beauty is justified when he finds his neighbour frozen in the midst of the croft land which he had worked so hard to reclaim from the moor:

There he came on Geordie sitting in the yard of furrow he had cleared, frozen stiff, his hands knotted to the spade which was upholding him, his lean hairy shanks incongruously exposed and blue, his eyes wide in a fixed stare at the

inimical expanse as though they could not get over some final knowledge that had been vouchsafed them. Instinctively lifting his eyes to follow the stare, Hendry had the sensation of that deathly moor heaving and billowing down on him like a sea. (WH 64)

This menace of the snow in 'Symbolical' is quite different from Lawrence's symbolic use of snow in the chapter 'Snowed Up' in Women in Love.²⁸ In Lawrence's novel the menace within the perfect beauty of the white snow is a symbol of Gerald Crich's spiritual and emotional frigidity, of the icy nothingness which he feels increasingly gathering at his heart. Snow and man are one. But in Gunn's story, the snow, like the choking scent of the broom in 'Whistle for Bridge', is a symbol of the alien apartness of nature which is present even while man feels himself at one with his land. A man may be bound irrevocably to his land, or to the sea, yet he is also apart from it. He does not possess it, although it may possess him. In Gunn one is always aware of the separate life of nature, even when man is closest to it.

The ability to communicate the living quality of the natural environment which Gunn shares with Lawrence is accompanied by another attribute common to both writers: the psychological understanding of the mind and feelings of a young child, and the ability to recreate this child's world in story. Gunn's most famous portraits of children are probably those of novels such as Morning Tide, Highland River and Young Art and Old Hector, but The White Hour contains three child-oriented stories which are among Gunn's best.

'Whistle for Bridge' with its fine evocations of the countryside referred to above, is, on the surface, a simple enough tale of a young boy's misunderstanding of the words on a notice-board by the canal bank. But in this misunderstanding is the essence of the young child's relation-

ship to the world about him: the matter-of-factness and the belief in the magical which co-exist naturally in his response to experience; the invulnerability which, as in Henry James's What Maisie Knew, springs from innocence of the ways of the adult world, or as Gunn himself describes it in The Atom of Delight, springs from the unbroken circle of the child's 'second self.'²⁹ There is no world-shattering drama in the story, only the discovery by the boy that the mysterious, magical words 'Whistle for Bridge' relate to the opening of the bridge to allow boats to pass through the canal. Yet in this discovery is the essential experience of the process of growing up, of taking a small step into the strange adult world. Gunn also catches the human variations in this adult world with economy and sureness as, at the close of his story, he returns the boy to his father and his opinionated, analytical friend:

They were still talking, or at least Murray was, when he came up with them. As he felt his father look at him, warmth came into his face, he did not know why. But his father said nothing.

Murray's talk was full of intricate and difficult words so that one could shelter behind them, though his little hard laugh occasionally was disturbing. They came to a low bridge over water.

'This,' said his father to him, 'is the Caledonian Canal.'

'Boats go right through it,' explained Murray, 'from Inverness to the West Coast.'

Donald recognised the water. 'But the bridge . . .'

'They whistle for it,' said Murray, 'and the two men turn that handle and the bridge opens.'

Revelation caught Donald in a flash of light and he went hot with secret shame.

'What did you think?' asked Murray, eyeing him.

Donald brought to his face the calm, far-eyed expression of his father, and said, 'I was just wondering.' His father took his hand. (WH 31-2)

'Paper Boats' is the story of a boat-making competition between two boys, one, George, who 'made folds and bends with the precision of a carpenter', and the other Hugh, who 'was never intended for a carpenter' but whose body 'seemed full of an eager fire' (WH 51). In spite of the flaws in Hugh's boat caused by his eager impatience and imperfect skill, it is this boat, not George's perfectly executed model, which adapts to the variable sea conditions it finds:

There was a fitful air of wind from the land, but not enough near the pier to stain the water. Thus the two boats for a time scarcely moved at all. Yet it was noticeable that Hugh's boat kept her head to the sea whereas George's boat on an even keel did not know what to do. She seemed to have no spirit of her own and her dead perfection floated listlessly broadside on.

'Mine's gaining!' cried Hugh. The great rock behind the pier echoed his cry, all the way up to its grassy scalp.

'You wait!' said George.

'She's gaining steadily,' cried Hugh, and laughed shrilly. His eyes were on fire. The bow of his boat, cocked up, swung a little from side to side, as if it had just been troubled by a real breath. The stern by being low in the water at once steadied and helped this action. The little craft was oddly alive as though it delighted in its imperfection. (WH 53-4)

The story is a splendid representation of boyhood experience, of the utter commitment with which young children can enter into the spirit of a game. The word-play between the boys is lively and entirely convincing:

'You haven't enough sand in yours,' said George.

'Haven't I?' challenged Hugh, glancing quickly into his rival's hold. 'You wait!'

'You always need plenty of ballast if a boat's going to hold to the wind.'

'Do you think I didn't know that?' asked Hugh. 'Ho! ho! What wind's in it to-day? Circumstances alter cases.'

George snorted. Hugh felt pleased with himself over his blind hit about the weather and became more excited than ever. (WH 52)

Yet, as in 'Whistle for Bridge', there is more to the story than the boyish adventure related. There is in it something of the conflict which one finds in Turgenev's short stories between the man of action and the dreamer, or the conflict which one finds again in Gunn himself in stories such as 'Symbolical' between the solid, worthy but essentially unimaginative human being who, like Martha in the New Testament story, sees to the necessities of everyday life, and the dreamer whose vision, although apparently careless of these everyday practicalities, is yet equally, if not more, essential to human life. One would not wish to overload a lively story with symbolic meanings, but throughout its telling one is aware of the symbolic contrast between 'dead perfection' (WH 53) and the vitality of human life with all its imperfections. It is a measure of Gunn's success that he can invoke such symbolic allusions without weakening his primary portrait of boyhood experience.

'Dance of the Atoms',³⁰ on the other hand, is a frightening story of boyhood innocence and commitment gone wrong. First published immediately before the outbreak of war in August 1939, this story takes its place with The Green Isle of the Great Deep in its exploration of the evil which can twist men's minds: an evil which Gunn frequently associates with a passion for scientific analysis as opposed to intuitive understanding. The young boy in 'Dance of the Atoms', Charlie, is the precocious, over-indulged only son of a successful business man, who knows only 'where money comes from and how it's made' and who is delighted at the prospect of having a 'pretty hot-stuff scientist' (WH 132, 133) for a son. The story recounts a chilling tale of the deliberate murder of the family dog by the boy in his passion for scientific experiment. That the experiment is conducted within the amoral 'innocence' of

the child's response and with the excited commitment and enthusiasm of the boy Hugh in 'Paper Boats' makes the story all the more terrible and significant in relation to the ways in which evil can insinuate itself into human activities. The tale is completely convincing. We recognise the essential boy in Charlie, even if his boyish qualities are somewhat out of focus, even if, as his mother worries, 'there's something wrong in Charlie - or going wrong' (WH 132).

Gunn's ability to portray the world of childhood is complemented by his equal understanding of the world of old age. Some of his very best short stories deal with the close of life and it is in these that one is most aware of O'Connor's attribute of 'human loneliness.' There is also in Gunn's short stories of old age and death the aspect which Rainer Maria Rilke called 'der eigne Tod'³¹ - dying one's own death. In the pseudonymous piece 'As the Gentle Rain from Heaven' first published in The Scots Magazine under the name of Dane McNeil in August 1941 and later collected in Highland Pack entitled 'The Gentle Rain from Heaven', Gunn tells of his discovery of Rilke's poetry which for him,

fell like rain from heaven upon the arid place [of intellectual modern poetry] beneath. No intellectual strain searching for intellectual values, no vast effort in the head. A close absorbed attention, an utter receptiveness, and down the rain falls, gently over the body and seeping deep into the blood. This is poetry and the magic of poetry, and it has been known of all time, for it is neither modern nor ancient but timeless. Time may give it its form and the spirit of the age its turn of phrase, perhaps, but the communication itself is timeless, and coming out of a last refinement of all experience it is not arrogant but gentle, gentle as the rain that falls on the dry ground.³²

Gunn could not have been influenced in his stories of old age by Rilke's theory of 'der eigne Tod'. The stories in which this element is prominent were written long before his discovery of Rilke's work. But as his

comments in 'As the Gentle Rain' suggest, there is an essential affinity in their mutual attitude to human experience.

In Gunn's stories of old age, each old man or woman comes to death in a way and in a spirit which grows out of the way in which the life has been lived. They die what Rilke called an authentic death which has an individual flavour and which is part of a life which has itself been lived in a way which is true to one's own individuality. In several of Gunn's stories this end is related also to the call of the homeland, or as so often in Gunn, to the call of the sea. To die one's own death, as to live one's own life, means additionally for Gunn to return to where the heart is at peace:

When the blood fondly says, 'This is my land,' it is at that moment profoundly in harmony and at peace. When it cannot say that, something has gone wrong, and it is that something that is the evil thing.³³

'Down to the Sea' tells of the death of the old fisherman Lachie. The story begins and ends with the first person narrator and the precentor Rob returning from Lachie's funeral and speculating as to whether 'it id hev been better for him, mebbe, if they hed pit him to the poorhouse' (WH 214). Lachie's body had been found awash on the little shingle beach near the harbour wall from which he had fallen into the sea, and there is a feeling among the villagers 'that it would have been more respectable, both for himself and the general feeling of the place, if the old man had died decently in his bed, maybe even in a poorhouse bed, God help him' (WH 214). The narrator, however, is sensitive to 'the instinctive humanity in the reservation of that "mebbe"' (WH 214) with regard to Lachie and the poorhouse, a humanity which recognises that this kind of legalised, institutionalised death would have been a

falsification of Lachie's life. The re-enactment of the death which Gunn places structurally between the opening and closing discussions of it makes it clear that Lachie's ending was truly part of his life.

The old man and his way of life are keenly yet quietly observed. He is at peace with life, waiting for its end:

At a certain season there moves in the breasts of all migrant things a strong beating urge. Man is not immune, but his season is uncertain, the call at once more ordinary and more mysterious.

In the two-roomed, squat cottage down at the straggling tail-end of the grey fishing village the shadows were gathering. By the peat fire the old man sat as though awaiting quietly his summons. (WH 214-15)

As Lachie responds to the call of the sea, and leaves the cottage for his customary evening walk to the harbour, not only his own past way of life, but the past life of the whole dying east-coast seaboard is evoked by Gunn through descriptive detail and creation of atmosphere and mood. This is particularly so in the telling description of the wildflowers which grow on the track leading down to the harbour:

Down the grey track to the harbour he plodded on, the evening air about him and the intense glowing of yellow wildflowers. His skin was too insensitive to feel the air's fingers, but his eyes did see one little patch of wild flowers. Lately, indeed, he had been in the habit of pausing in the descent and gazing at that grassy patch, yellow with dandelions and buttercups. Flowers on a grave have a respectable decency, and that women should be interested in them is characteristic and as it should be. But that wild flowers should be growing there, on that little level stretch, was, for a man, a thought full of desolation, more full of desolation than the gaping, roofless curing-shed which sagged stricken beside it. For in the prime of his manhood no grass nor yellow weed had grown there - because of the salt and the herring-brine. (WH 217)

As the old man sits alone on the sea wall he remembers past days and friends:

Hunched and motionless on the quay-wall, with the darkness settling about him. No sound but the sea's and the intermittent, cavernous crying of the gulls. Weird the crying of these birds against the deep, reverberant precipices at night-time. Once the old man, troubled, perhaps, by some memory of the Castlebay and Stornoway days, had thought to himself that they might well be the keening souls of drowned bodies. Some such thought came to him now, but affected him hardly at all. In the ultimate quietism nothing is all-important, not death itself. To the hunched figure on the wall the living reality of things shone and glimmered, rather, in the magical days long dead, the enchanted days where not a face that he could now see but was touched by a light that the carnal eyes had, somehow, missed then. (WH 218-19)

In the above passage, Gunn creates through word-sound and rhythm the solitude of the old fishing creek where the gulls cry and the old man sits and dreams. Now he brings back the excitement of the old days and the race of the boats for the shore:

Ah, the boats! There they were, with their brown sails, magical sails. Hear the Gaelic chant of the 'hired men' as mast left crutch and halyards creaked rhythmically, as mains'l went aloft. A fleet of them, dozens and scores, making out of this same harbour-basin to court the sea, that passionate, fickle mistress of theirs.

Morning and the boats coming back, racing with feather of foam at the forefront for a good berth and an early discharge. Then the gutters in their black oilskins, stiff rustle-rustle, their gaiety, their wit deft as their incredibly deft fingers should a man dare a sally. (WH 219)

And finally, the lure of the sea which had held Lachie in the past catches hold of him again:

The old man begins to sway a little, his eyes round and fixed, his shoulders ever drooping forward. A last flicker of earth-born anxiety, wherein bits of old visions flash uncertainly - a face like a flame, with wistful, smiling eyes, threading its

way mysteriously, like a moon of the soul, through swift, fragmentary passing of brown sails and voices and human gestures and old, old yellow sunlight - and the flicker goes out. Colour dies finally. The hypnotic sea, catching utterly within its rhythm that swaying figure drooping forward, forward. . . . A suddenly shocked gull sets up a cavernous crying, and the dim line of the quay-wall against the grey sea is unbroken once more. (WH 220-21)

(Gunn's ellipsis)

This story seems to me to be an example of the art of the short story at its best. In its economy, its descriptive narrative, its drawing of past and future into the immediacy of the present action, the touch of suspense which is just enough for the story which is being told, its significance reverberates beyond the tale of Lachie's ending to the way of life of a whole people and their land. Although one of Gunn's first stories, it remains one of his finest.

The death of the miser Donald in 'The Chariot'³⁴ is also an appropriate death, but the man in this tale is neither in harmony with his fellow human beings nor with his natural environment. A shopkeeper who had throughout his life 'got the poor people in his debt and fleeced them - not dramatically, but in that hellish little by little, that slow grinding that never let up' (WH 13), Donald does not even have the struggle with the mean land which eventually warped Uncle Jeems of The Grey Coast as excuse for his miserliness. His death manifests the narrow, mean-spirited quality of his life. In contrast to his earlier grudging the money for the doctor's visits, the dying man now hoards these visits as he had earlier hoarded his money: 'The old man was not so much greedy for life as greedy for the doctor's life' (WH 20), and as time passes the doctor too feels the corroding potency of the old man's influence:

And the power of that character he had ample time to think over and to assess, until it assumed, by its terrifying persistence in time, every day, every hour, year after year, a more destroying potency than that of any ogre or invisible devil. It checked here, it checked there, little by little, in this and that, until it baffled and frustrated and subdued. (WH 23-4)

Running parallel to the doctor's fight against the malignant influence of the old man is his attraction to the man's vibrant niece, Johanna, who now runs the shop for her uncle. The drama of the growing attraction between doctor and girl and their mutual fight against the withering power of the old man is played out against the setting of the living countryside: 'another lovely day, when growing things matured or flowered, with a warmth that ran through the air in a delicate fragrance' (WH 15) is opposed by the chill bleakness of the sick-room:

The eyes were on him from the instant the door opened, but the body was still as a log, as a dead body laid out. (WH 15)

As the end nears, the doctor, staring into the sunlight that lies on the ripe fields outside the cottage, dreams of Johanna who 'came walking, as it were, towards him, out of the potato fields and the ripe corn, along the land under the blue sky' (WH 25-6). In contrast, his patient withdraws further from a life which has been lived without warmth into the bleakness of his own death:

The old man's eyes slowly turned on him, coldly, distant. The bone ridges and the flesh had caught the final stillness of stone, the everlasting stillness. From the doctor the eyes asked nothing; in their own need they lifted from the face and stared at the ceiling.

Never had the doctor seen such utter bleakness. He sat on the bed and stared at the face. There was nothing to be said.

Then, just before the end, there was an inward movement, a stirring of the mind, an appalling comprehension of the past by the spirit; the doctor felt it in himself with extraordinary

power. The loneliness, the bleakness, were intensified a thousandfold; were apprehended now as never before, apprehended finally and beyond all possibility of change. As if the stone face had been struck, the mouth opened in a guttering 'Ah -h-h'.

The doctor shuddered, got up off the bed, and closed the eyes. (WH 26)

Although Gunn ends his story with the coming-together of the doctor and Johanna and the dissolving, for them, of the arid influence of the old man, it is the power of his study in bleakness which remains with the reader.

'Henry Drake Goes Home'³⁵ and 'Such Stuff as Dreams'³⁶ both deal with the attempted return of an exile to his homeland to die. Neither exile succeeds physically, but this is in the end irrelevant because each has in spirit returned to the homeland which in spirit neither has ever really left. In 'Such Stuff as Dreams', an early story, the exile is a Highlander on a Canadian homestead, dying, and in his delirium imagining himself at home in the Highlands, taking the old sheep track which leads to the lochan. The tale is in some ways a suspense story. Although one suspects what the reality of the man's situation may be at the beginning of the story, thus entering into the poignancy, yet the necessity of the man's spiritual journey home, one is not entirely certain, and so the tension of the action builds up until the man is found dead by the water-hole in the expanse of the Canadian prairie. The story is alive with the exiled Highlander's longing for and love of his homeland, the unquenchable knowledge of where home is despite his acceptance of an exile which he would not willingly have chosen had circumstances allowed differently. At the end he is alone in spirit with his land.

In contrast to the timelessness of 'Such Stuff as Dreams', the action of 'Henry Drake Goes Home' takes place in the modern world of

pension books and government officials. Here the exile is a Devonshire man who has chosen to settle in the Highlands of Scotland because of matrimonial difficulties and what he considers to be the unfairness of officialdom in England towards him in the settling of these difficulties. Like the sick Highlander, however, awareness of the approaching end of his life calls him home and he sets out to walk, in wartime from the Highlands to Devon. As the government official charts his progress on the long journey by means of his cashed pension orders, he finds that he not only grows into an understanding of Henry Drake, but through him, into an understanding of the bond which exists between all men and the land of their birth:

That solitary forsaken figure plodding along the edge of the great road assumed lines of a mythical simplicity. The ways of a wife, injustice among men, were no more than the accidents of life. Henry Drake was going back to something deep in him as life itself. Indeed, the spirit had already gone back. The body was struggling to follow. (WH 249-50)

In 'The White Hour'³⁷ the old person near to death is a woman and, appropriately, Gunn centres her awareness of the coming end of her life not, like the men, on the relationship with land or sea, but in the continuity of life which she can apprehend in the relationship between her grand-daughter Mary and her young man. Human contact is important to the old woman in her aloneness with the awareness of death. She fears the intuition of death's presence which comes upon her when she is left by herself; but, unlike Donald of 'The Chariot', it is the warmth and generosity of her own past life which she communicates to those from whom she seeks companionship and reassurance, and it is the repetition of her own past happiness with her husband which she sees in the relationship between Mary and the young man which reconciles her to the end of her own life.

This is a gentle, timeless story, its almost mythical quality emanating from Gunn's lack of specific definition in his portraits of the characters. The young man is not named; none of the characters is described physically; Mary, the grand-daughter, says little and is seen principally through her grandmother's words and through actions which are not related to individual character but which would be characteristic of any woman in her situation. Yet the story is in no way abstract or lacking in imagery. The old woman may take into herself the condition of all old women, yet she has also an individual warmth and presence which is communicated through her words and memories and through the young man's response to her. Mary is brought alive by touches such as her Granny's awareness of the soap she uses on special occasions:

She had brought a rustle of air with her and a faint fragrance of violets. The fragrance touched the nostrils of the old woman so that she thought of the little green cake of soap Mary would be using at special times. She felt the nearness of their two young strong bodies and her heart kindled a little at the blaze. (WH 84)

and by Gunn's brief, detailed description of her work in the kitchen:

He found Mary by the water-barrel. She did not look at him, busy as she was drying the dish-basin. Finally she wrung out the dish-clout, opened it out, flapped it. Then she spread it over two nails by the door. (WH 85)

The old woman's death is softened by her contact with other human beings and by her awareness that the continuity of human life as she herself has experienced it will be maintained in the relationship between Mary and the young man:

The old woman did not see the crushing of the pliant body nor the smothering of the wild kissing, but the companionableness of it was with her in a great sweetness, so that the glazed white light from the window softened to a shadowy beauty. (WH 85)

The sureness with which Gunn sketches the archetypal relationship between young man and girl in 'The White Hour' is not typical of his treatment of sexual relationships in his stories or in his novels. In the traditional Highland culture in which Gunn is rooted, man is the hunter, the sea-farer; woman is the giver of life, the eternal earth-mother. Each has his or her appropriate but separate contribution to make to the welfare of the community. There is little of the independent individuality which flourishes in a more sophisticated urban society. Gunn succeeds best in portraying sexual relationships when he is dealing with men and women in their traditional roles. The urban world of educated, emancipated women and sophisticated, independent relationships between the sexes always remained foreign to him, and his attempts to portray it in novel and story are almost without exception unsuccessful. As mentioned earlier, several of the failures among the uncollected short stories are of this type: stories such as 'An Adventure in Jealousy' and 'The Poster'. So also is 'Love's Dialectic', first published in 1941 and later collected in The White Hour. It is difficult to believe that this artificial story with its Lawrentian theme of the struggle for mastery between a man and a girl, could come from the pen of the writer who published, also in 1941, The Silver Darlings. There is in it none of the perceptive psychological understanding which characterises Lawrence's 'The Captain's Doll',³⁸ which also has the struggle for supremacy as its theme; there is no interplay of differing temperaments

and life-styles, no context for the drama such as one finds in Lawrence. Instead, there is the synthetic rhetoric which predominates whenever Gunn is uprooted from his Highland environment and is thus ill-at-ease with his setting:

Light and darkness. Thesis and antithesis. And it did really appear as if you could not apply any dialectical process to them. More light made the darkness deeper. Could you synthesise an object and its shadow? The brighter the sun, the more pronounced the shadow. In matter, in physical fact. Two worlds. Two planes that, however they tilted, kept parallel. She tried to use such engaging ideas in talk, but not very successfully. One had always to be pretty careful of a personal give-away. Eyes would look as much as to say: What's got repressed now? Is this the dodge of staging an argument to cover - something? Eyes looking from that other plane, inquisitive, with an expectancy, a greed, mockingly veiled in good nature. (WH 144-45)

Yet, as a tale such as 'On the Stone',³⁹ published in 1947, demonstrates, Gunn could deal surely with such a theme when it was enacted in a Highland context. In 'On the Stone' the struggle for supremacy is played out in a context of unacknowledged attraction and amid the boisterous exchanges of the young girls and lads in a northern fishing village. The story is amusing, psychologically perceptive and full of drama. When Jeck's tormenting of the girl Ellen leads him into the danger of a cliff fall, it is Ellen whose courage and physical strength saves him. The story ends, not with the mastery of one character over the other as in 'The Captain's Doll', but with the mutual respect and co-operation which is intrinsic in Highland tradition.

'The Listener's Tale',⁴⁰ on the other hand, returns to Gunn's uneasy urban context. In this provincial story a young husband retells coffee-room arguments to his admiring wife and uncomprehending but equally admiring children. There is much sexual innuendo in the retelling and,

as in late novels such as The Shadow, Freud and Freudian psychoanalysis come in for mockery. One would like to believe that this story was intended as a satire on half-educated, anti-intellectual, suburban attitudes, but a conviction of Gunn's sympathetic identification with the couple is difficult to dispel. He ends his story:

'I wish I could understand it,' he said feeling for his pocket book.

'Understand what?' she asked, throwing him a glance. There was the oddest worried expression on his face now.

'What makes me laugh,' he said wrinkling his brows. 'What makes me laugh when I hear them at it.'

Her face softened fondly, while her eyes shone in a private assessing humour.

'I know what makes you laugh,' she said, and she kissed him. 'Come on.' (WH 176)

The story demonstrates once again how badly Gunn can write when he uproots himself from his home environment.

Such an uprooting is the theme of 'The Mirror'.⁴¹ In this story the hero is a Glaswegian who exiles himself in a mood of romantic idealism to a remote crofting area where he believes he will be inspired to write the works which will combat the 'virulent industrialism' (WH 159) of Scotland. But the writer finds that his imagination will not operate in its new environment. In the crofting life he finds what Edwin Muir described in Scottish Journey as the fertility which 'is as close a shackle as dearth, fettering the peasant not merely by necessity, but by all his senses, until his mind becomes as dull and rich as the landscape on which it feeds.'⁴² The crofting area of Glendun may not be as richly fertile as the farmlands of Dumfriesshire to which Muir referred, but it is equally unproductive for the writer who finds in it a similar 'dreadful literalness of the soil' (WH 160). The story ends with his purchase of a single train ticket back to Glasgow.

In its formal aspects 'The Mirror' exhibits the conscious symbolism which is a feature of many of Gunn's short stories. Symbolism is, of course, a feature of the novels also. Titles such as The Lost Glen,⁴³ Butcher's Broom,⁴⁴ The Drinking Well, The Serpent,⁴⁵ The Shadow all suggest a symbolic context for their novels. But while the nature of the novel form, its expansiveness and the social interaction of characters who must operate on the stage of everyday life, provides a counter-balance to the referential symbolism of Gunn's theme, often banishing it to the periphery of the work, in his short stories, as in a poem, symbolism can more overtly be part of the formal machinery. In 'The Mirror', for example, the cracked sideboard mirror through which is reflected the landscape outside the cottage and the Glendun visitors who come to his room, symbolises the writer's alienation from the crofting environment and the flaw in his understanding which has brought him to Glendun.

In 'Symbolical' it is the universal mystery of life which is symbolised in the death of the crofter Geordie and the dreamer Hendry's musing as to why God would send an April snow-storm to harm the old people and the new-born lambs. 'Blaeberries'⁴⁶ is almost a prose poem. It is more the evocation of a mood of longing and expectancy than a story as the young man's love for his girl is unfolded through the metaphor of the changing seasons and the crying of the birds. Its consummation comes in Autumn, the fruitful season, when he finds her picking and eating blaeberries. The girl herself could be Autumn personified:

The turnips swelled to a plump girth, the year waxed mellow and luscious. He came upon her of a sudden on an evening of small rain like a mist. It was the rain that draws out and holds fragrance of flower and fruit and gives to the bloom of a cheek the petal smoothness of a rose. She was eating blaeberries.

Her lips were stained purple, her fingers were stained purple, and there were purple stains here and there on her face besides - a ripe black purple. Tiny raindrops clung to strands of her hair, a wild diffusion of light and colour played on her features, and concentrated light and colour flashed in her eyes. (WH 67)

In addition to its metaphorical context, 'Blaeberries' demonstrates a more consciously poetic use of language which is present to a significant degree in many of Gunn's short stories, and in his early stories in particular. Sometimes this use of poetic language results in over-writing, and it is interesting in this respect to compare the revised versions of stories in The White Hour collection with their originals in Hidden Doors. A major part of the revision consists in the removal of unnecessary poetic adjectives and phrases which detract from a description which is already sufficiently image-ful. One such revision relates to the Autumn description of the girl in 'Blaeberries' quoted earlier. While The White Hour version ends the rich description of the blaeberry-stained girl with the sentence: 'Tiny raindrops clung to strands of her hair, a wild diffusion of light and colour played on her features, and concentrated light and colour flashed in her eyes' (WH 67), Hidden Doors adds: 'Rain, light, colour, fruit - magical cosmetics enough' (HD 80), a comment which somehow translates the description into the world of the magazine advertisement. Even the fine 'Down to the Sea' is spoiled in places in the original version by the over-use of adjectives such as 'ephemeral', 'mesmeric', 'mellifluent', 'beautiful', 'siren' (HD 113, 114), which break into the simplicity of the portrait of the old fisherman which is in need of no extravagant imagery to bring it to life.

Much of this unnecessary rhetoric is edited out in The White Hour, either by the removal of offending words and passages in stories which are reprinted, or by the omission of stories such as 'Visioning' and 'Hidden Doors', in which it is too pervasive for editing. Some, however, survives in stories such as 'Half-Light' and 'The Moor'.⁴⁷

In 'Half-Light' Gunn seems to be deliberately making use of Celtic Twilight associations as symbolic correlative for his own exploration of the problem of the dying fishing coast as he does also to some extent in his portrait of the schoolmaster in The Grey Coast, which was published one year after the story. There is an uneasy relationship between passages of characteristic Gunn description such as the opening evocation of the northern half-light hours:

There is a quality in this half-light that is at once a closing in and an awareness. Colour intensifies, 'runs', so that the ditchside of kingcups at hand becomes a sheet of gold, and the field of 'half-sphered scabious' beyond the bank a veritable ravishment of 'purple mist'. Into the silence creeps a listening stillness. The bleating of a sheep or far barking of a dog dies out in ears that continue to hear the echoing forlorn-ness. Upon the body itself, squatting stiffly steals that subconscious alertness which, if a sudden hand were to descend on a shoulder, would cause a jump with the heart in the mouth. A bathing, a physical brooding. It is the hour of the earth spirit. (WH 257)

and the 'visioning' by the drowned schoolmaster which one finds in his poem 'The Croft' and in his diary entries relating to the lure of the sea. Evaluation of the story as a whole is made difficult by the fact that it is told by a first person narrator within the context of Celtic Twilight attitudes and without any obvious intervention by Gunn the author. One cannot estimate where the author stands in relation to narrator, schoolmaster and Fiona Macleod.

'The Moor' suffers from insensitive over-writing. Gunn's description of the gypsy-like girl and the young artist who is attracted to her seems more suited to a romantic novelette than to serious literature, the girl being painted in the manner of Russell Flint with a degree of titillation which appears to have no necessary function in the working-out of the action:

Her eyes were gypsy dark. Perhaps she was twenty. Sunk in the darkness of her eyes were golden sun motes. His confusion stared speechless. A tingling trepidation beset his skin. A tight-drawn bodice just covered and repressed her breasts. Her beauty held the still, deep mesmerism of places at the back of beyond. She was shy, yet gazed at him.

The dry cup of his flesh filled with wine. (WH 275)

And when she brings the milk he has asked for:

She had covered somewhat the wide V gleam of her breast, had swept back her hair; but the rents, the burst seam under an arm, the whole covering for her rich young body was ragged as ever, ragged and extraordinarily potent. (WH 276)

This is the edited The White Hour version. Hidden Doors describes her additionally as 'Madonna of the adder-haunted moor' (HD 154-55) and finds the ragged covering for her body 'extraordinarily potent, as if it sheathed the red pulse at white beauty's core' (HD 156). Once again one is conscious of a puzzling coarseness in Gunn's writing, a coarseness which can emerge in a passage of description such as the above or in the pretentious philosophising which at times takes over in his work, and which runs parallel to the perceptiveness and sensitivity of stories such as 'Down to the Sea', 'The White Hour', 'The Tree'. This crudity is a quality which one finds also in the work of his fellow Scottish novelist, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, and as in Gunn, it runs parallel to writing of the highest quality and sensitivity.

Although Gunn makes little use of the Scots language in his stories, except in occasional passages of dialogue as in 'The Sea', 'Down to the Sea' and 'Between Headlands', the Highland context of his English language is given form in many of these stories, as in a novel such as Morning Tide, through syntax and rhythm. Gunn described Lewis Grassie Gibbon's use of language in Sunset Song in terms which have relevance to much of his own work:

I should say that what Mitchell achieved was not a new language but an old rhythm. Apart from a handful of Scots words, the medium used in the Scots novels is English, but the effect produced by the rhythm is utterly un-English. 48

Thus, when Lachie sits on the sea-wall in 'Down to the Sea':

Weird the crying of these birds against the deep,
reverberant precipices at night-time. (WH 218)

or in 'Symbolical' where Gunn differentiates between the two brothers:

There were people who could waste time thinking about how a thing like snow could come - with turnips to be cut, fodder to be brought to the byre, potatoes to be taken from the pit; with the whole day to be filled up one way or another - and there, outside, the snow, covering the grass that had been making a start. Like as not he, John, would have to buy oilcake again; and he hadn't the money to buy oilcake again. (WH 59-60)

In 'Such Stuff as Dreams' the rhythm is sinuous as the sheep track which winds round the hill in the man's delirious dream:

And his was surely a case of the long-wandered child.
For this little loch in the hills, whither the sheep-track took him, he had visited only twice in his life, and on both occasions as a grown lad on a fishing ploy. He had caught brown red-spotted trout there; had tucked

up his trousers and waded in, had whipped off all his clothes and bathed. Even that first glimmer of it in the distance, with the forenoon sun at his back turning the rippled surface to a molten richness of dark blue - ah, he had never seen such a blue again, it had glowed, a great jewel. Nearer, the colour had faded into that mysterious darkness of the hill loch. With the afternoon a blessed tiredness had come on his body and he had lain down and felt the place about him and merged in its stillness and secrecy and remoteness, one with it, bemused, drunk with it. (WH 187)

Two further stories deserve mention, 'Snow in March'⁴⁹ and 'The Tree'.

The former, an uncollected story which reappeared in a revised form in the novel The Shadow, tells the story of a middle-aged spinster who takes a year's leave from her teaching post to help her farmer brother after the death of their mother. The brother is himself killed in a farm accident and the woman finds herself alone with the farm for a period before selling-up and returning to the city. The setting of the action around which the story revolves is, as in 'Symbolical', a late spring snow-storm.

There is much fine writing in the story: in the description of the spring flowers in the rock garden which the woman has created out of a rough grassy bank; in the mood and atmosphere created by the bleating of the new-born lambs in the snowy night; in the quiet, authentic dialogue - both of the woman musing to herself and talking with the shepherd who comes to join her as she tries to help the ewes and their lambs. Like many of the stories, this too has a symbolic context. The snow-storm and the crying of the lambs bring before the woman her own childless state and the realisation that her frozen motherhood, unlike the temporary freezing of life by the late snow-storm, is permanent. Her heartache and the crying of the lambs drive her out into the snow in an attempt to comfort them and ease her own pain.

There are echoes of D.H. Lawrence in this story, as there are in several of Gunn's stories, but unlike the novel The Shadow into which the story was incorporated and in which one is more conscious of Lawrence's influence, in 'Snow in March' any resemblance is kept subordinate to Gunn's own vision. In the ending especially there is a divergence from the kind of treatment which the theme might have received from Lawrence. There is a warmth in the relationship of woman and younger shepherd as they drink tea in the farmhouse while attending to a motherless lamb. The woman is attracted to the man and once his awkwardness has been thawed out there is a companionship between them, an intimacy born of their struggle with the ewes. The development of this intimacy which one would have looked for in Lawrence does not take place in Gunn's treatment of the situation. Instead, the serving-girl, awakened, comes to the kitchen. She, it appears, is the shepherd's girl and the older woman's warming towards the man is smothered almost before she has become aware of her feelings. Gunn handles the scene sensitively, as he does also the closing symbolism of the stricken ewe:

'Come in, Jean,' said her mistress quietly. She glanced at Tom. He was looking at his plate.

The emotion between them, whether it had ever been declared or not, was so obvious to their mistress that her hand shook with the knowledge of it as at last she poured out Tom's tea.

'You're up very early,' she said to Jean.

'I heard the lamb and I wondered,' said Jean, her back to them, attending to the fire.

'Put some more water in the kettle, because there's hardly enough tea here for you.'

She began telling Jean about their experiences in the snow, disjointedly, while she drank her tea, so that the whole affair of their being thus together became normal and without strain, if still with an undercurrent of excitement, not in her own mind now, but self-consciously between these two.

'Well, I think I'll have an hour or two in bed. What's the time? Five. No need for you to hurry, Tom.'

She left them and went up to her room.

She was feeling very tired now, but when she had undressed and stretched between the cold sheets she experienced a pleasant sensation of ease, almost as if she had become disembodied. A crush of snow, softer than the lamb's mouth, smothered itself against the window. And all at once she thought of the ewe - that she had quite forgotten - with the head thrown out and back, the neck stretched to an invisible knife. The snow would be drifting about the body, covering it up.

She began to cry soundlessly, effortlessly. The tears ceased and she fell into a deep sleep.⁵⁰

'The Tree' is more of a nouvelle than a short story. In it time is not telescoped into the immediate present as it is in the short story proper, but as in a novel we experience it passing and observe the growth of self-discovery in the principal protagonist. In 'The Tree' this protagonist is an elderly man, Major Morrison, whose wife has unexpectedly died at a relatively early age. He finds himself lost without her and his sense of loss is communicated through his relationship to his garden.

There is a symbolic context for this story also. The man's attempts to come to terms with his wife's death and with the new knowledge of her personality which the fact of her death is gradually forcing upon him, is played out through his conflict with a young birch tree, a tree which his wife had long wanted to cut down in order to open up a view, but which he himself, illogically and conservatively, had wanted to keep just because it was part of his property. As he struggles to understand how his wife could have been prepared to cut down this tree, he finds that part of his struggle is to understand her herself:

Nor could he understand her yet. Though now it was being borne in upon him that there had been far more in her than he had ever quite grasped. For there was nothing clearer

than that in going away she had taken the trees with her. And not only the trees, but the garden and the rockery and even the inside of the house, which now had a few hollow sounds with an extra distance between the walls. (WH 90)

Yet this is not quite accurate; for he knows she would not have taken them away with her:

She would have done everything for him she could, quietly, her head bent over the rockery, turning round a tree-trunk here, over a shrub there, everywhere, her calm, pleasant face with its concentration, its occasional humour, its sheer sense, and her hair with a touch of that pale gold seen in the birch leaves when they first begin to turn. She would have left everything for him, in healthy fitness, not with any expression of emotion or love, not out of duty, but with an unobtrusive, perfect naturalness. He knew that - as he had never known it before. The trees had not been taken; they had gone with her. (WH 90)

He continues to put off cutting down the young birch tree and gradually he begins to find comfort in the very heaviness of the trees:

The trees began to gather about them a new, dark, heavy life. This was something his wife had never known. Or was it life - or death - or what?

He did not speculate. He was covered over. His wife was beyond this, as she had been beyond his near male strength that had always to reach out to take her or to shove her aside. (WH 91)

Inevitably the gardener and his wife are drawn into the Major's conflict, and Gunn communicates well the nuances of the situation: its master/man relationship on the one hand, yet on the other the mutual respect, if at times tinged with exasperation, between Major and independently-minded gardener. The gardener's wife would have liked to encourage her husband to cut down the tree to give the Major relief, yet 'in her bones she felt that the tree brought a living warmth to the Major. It brought his wife to him. The tree was like a warm blanket of argument. If it went all

of a sudden, his wife might go, and he would have nothing left' (WH 87).

The climax comes when the Major returns from an unusually extended regular shooting holiday in the Autumn: 'The desire to see his woods was consuming him':

There came the last rise of the road, the dip down and turn round, and there they were.

And then all in a moment he realised that his wife had come back.

Here and there a hanging spray of birch leaves had turned yellow. An odd bracken frond, too. Everywhere could be caught a glimpse of the colour of her hair, and between the trees and down the paths was an openness frank as her face. It was exactly as if from every place he gazed at her presence had just been removed, leaving behind the light of that presence.

It was at once exhilarating and extraordinarily intimate, and was made almost unbearably exciting by throwing into contrast quite involuntarily in his mind the darkness of the closing-in trees before he had gone away. That darkness had been for death. A man shuts himself in, lets the dark trees grow up and over him like the walls of a mausoleum.

Now she was alive again, all through the woods, letting in colour and light. She was doing it herself, as she always had done things, here and there, with bent head or uplifted face.

For the first time in all his mortal career, there came to the Major some conception of the word Resurrection. (WH 92)

The poignancy of his later discovery that 'she was everywhere - and so he realised she was nowhere' (WH 94) does not alter his homecoming decision to cut down the birch tree. What does alter it is the discovery that the gardener's nephew, whom his wife had befriended, has in his absence attempted to cut it down for him. And so the struggle is resumed, more fiercely than ever. It is played out finally one night during a fierce storm in which it seems that the Major's wife has herself entered into the tree: 'She was taking the shape of the tree, entering into it and bending it over, trying to break it.' He imagines himself entombed and his wife trying to release him, calling to him:

Her features, forming human size, flashed full of an agony of endeavour, every muscle taut. 'Duncan!' Then the upthrusting tree swept her back, and his name fled down the wind. (WH 100)

In the morning, the tree is down and the Major is finally at peace.

'The Tree' is a splendid story, well observed, sensitive to nuances of character and situation; its tree symbolism perfectly woven into the fabric of the action. In spite of the physical absence of the wife, the relationship between her and the Major, uncovered through metaphor of tree and garden, is one of the most moving portraits of a relationship between man and woman in Gunn's work. It is also uniquely successful in that, although it is placed in a country setting, it is not specifically related to the Highland way of life.

That Highland way of life is the subject of the first two groupings of Gunn's novels to be discussed in this thesis.

NEIL M. GUNN

THE SHORT STORIES

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NEIL M. GUNN

II THE NOVELS

i The Novels of Highland Decline

The Grey Coast Morning Tide The Lost Glen

Sun Circle Butcher's Broom

In addition to his short stories, Neil M. Gunn published twenty novels between 1926 and 1954. These novels group themselves into three categories which in the main correspond to the chronology of their publication. First come the novels of Highland decline beginning with The Grey Coast in 1926 and including Morning Tide (1931), The Lost Glen (1932) and the two historical novels Sun Circle¹ (1933) and Butcher's Broom (1934) which explore that decline in a period of historical transition. Secondly there are the positive Highland novels - the novels of essential Highland experience: Highland River (1937), The Silver Darlings (1941), Young Art and Old Hector (1942), The Green Isle of the Great Deep (1944) and The Drinking Well (1946). Finally there are the novels written principally in the post-war period, but including some from an earlier date which are to a significant extent philosophical in nature and which explore themes of disintegration and freedom in the modern world.

The moral and physical milieu of the novels in the first two groupings is that of the Scottish Highlands. In the final grouping the physical and/or philosophical setting is in many cases that of contemporary urban society and in most of these novels the Highland tradition is seen as an opposing restorative vision to what Gunn sees as the nihilism and

destructiveness of urban society. Bloodhunt² is the exception among these late novels in that it returns to homogeneous Highland experience for physical and moral milieu.

Although, unlike Muir, Gunn as novelist is thus seen to be rooted in his native Scotland, many of the themes explored in his books are the universal themes which concerned Muir also and which relate to our common human journey 'through the day and time and war and history' (CP 93).

Gunn's first three novels, like many of the short stories and later books, demonstrate the quality which he found significant in the work of his contemporary Lewis Grassie Gibbon: a commitment 'to human life as it was lived around him.'³ In this Gunn was at one with the aims of the Scottish Literary Renaissance movement and opposed to the tradition of historical romance which had been the predominant literary mode in the treatment of the Highlands since the influential work of Sir Walter Scott. In a review of Edwin Muir's Scott and Scotland Gunn said of Scott and the tradition he founded:

It is not that the history was untrue or was inadequate subject matter for his genius; it was that it no longer enriched or influenced a living national tradition; it had not even the potency of pure legend; it was storytelling or romance set in a void; it was seen backwards as in the round of some time spyglass and had interpretative bearing neither upon a present or a future.⁴

In these early novels of Highland decline Gunn does not shrink from focussing his own spyglass on a present which appears to hold out little promise of a future for the Highland way of life.

The action of The Grey Coast takes place in a small fishing and crofting village similar to Gunn's birthplace of Dunbeath or the neighbouring Lybster, on the north-east coast of Caithness. Despite its 320 pages, the novel, with its restricted space and time compass, is close

in form to that of the nouvelle or long short story. Apart from the shadowy entry of the outside world through the account of Ivor's fishing trip to Skye and through Uncle Jeems's reminiscences of his exotic adventures in the East when a sailor, the action takes place entirely in the tiny, straggling fishing village, with the fishermen's houses clustered around the harbour and the crofts scattered on the hillier land above; and the major part of this action is played out in the even narrower compass of Jeems's croft. Similarly, there is no extended passage of time such as one commonly finds in a novel. Instead the action is concentrated into a brief period in the lives of the principal characters. Ivor, the young fisherman, tells Maggie that he will be away 'seven weeks or eight, maybe'⁵ at the West Coast fishing, but even that period of time seems telescoped as a result of the uneventfulness of the happenings around the croft between his sailing and returning.

Although the principal characters in the novel - Uncle Jeems, his niece Maggie who keeps house for him, Ivor who loves her and Daun Tullach the farmer who lusts after her - are well distinguished and effectively portrayed, there is no self-discovery or growth in their portrayal as one would find in a more complex dramatic novel. In this sense The Grey Coast conforms to Edwin Muir's definition of the novel of character in The Structure of the Novel. Muir said of the characters in such a novel:

Their weaknesses, their vanities, their foibles, they possess from the beginning and never lose to the end; and what actually does change is not these, but our knowledge of them.⁶

This is very much the pattern of The Grey Coast, where even the apparent change of direction in Jeems's behaviour at the end of the novel when he wills his money to Maggie, can be understood finally to be true to his essential unquenched independent spirit, bred by the sea, which had

enabled him to avoid being totally subservient to the prosperous Daun Tullach whose unpaid-for help he has been willing to solicit, and which now leads him to make his final gesture of defiance against the mean land, symbolised in Tullach, which has warped and almost destroyed him.

One distinctive aspect of Gunn's characterisation is that the land and the grey coast are themselves characters in the drama. The lives of the people are shaped as much by the decline of the fishing and the hard struggle with the land; by, paradoxically, the continuing lure of the sea, its freedom and opportunity for heroism and independence, and by the beauty which can yet be found in the barren moorland landscape, as by the intercourse with other human beings. As in the novels of Thomas Hardy, the human characters are to a significant extent passive endurers in a drama of fate. Gunn points to this in the following passage through Maggie's consciousness as she thinks over Ivor's departure for the fishing grounds:

She scraped the hens' dish carefully and returned to the back-place. Her thought was too vague, lacking in passionate urgency, to compel action of its own accord. The fatalism bred of the grey coast, woven into the stones and soil of it, came out in its fruits. Maggie could have her longings and desires, but the law was to endure and to accept. (GC 183-84)

Daun Tullach - Donald Tait of Tullach Farm - appears to be the only man of substance in the community. At Tullach Farm Maggie would be a 'leddy' (GC 60), but the price she would pay as the wife of the coarse-grained, lustful Daun is abhorrent to her, and much of the action of the novel revolves around Jeems's sly, unspoken conspiracy with Tullach to trap her into marriage, and Maggie's equally devious attempts to avoid that marriage, or, indeed, any contact at all with the farmer. The 'back-place' to which she retires when Tullach visits is symbolic of her

dependent, trapped situation. Yet while, as with Miss Louisa in D.H. Lawrence's story 'Daughters of the Vicar', who was similarly trapped by poverty and restrictive circumstances, Maggie in spirit rejects the life-denying marriage solution accepted by Louisa's sister Mary, one does not feel that Maggie can produce the vigorous, positive action which enabled Lawrence's heroine to take charge of her life. Maggie would never, in spirit, accept Daun Tullach, but one is aware that, if fate does not intervene, then there may be no alternative for her but an unwilling partnership with him. Her role is that of an endurer of fate:

That Tullach had set his mind on getting her she could now no longer pretend to ignore. . . . She turned on her back, breathing heavily. She felt spent, and for the moment no longer cared. After all, however she argued it, she saw the ending of it all, the inevitability. Life was a grey on-flowing, and poverty's skeleton fingers throttled all foolish notions. (GC 60)

Yet repulsive as Daun Tullach is, Gunn succeeds in communicating that he too is victim as well as villain. At the roots of his being he is insecure, oppressed, like the other members of the community, by unfulfilment. Part of the attraction which Maggie has for him is based on his instinctive sense that she is different from the other woman; that, despite her poverty, she is in spirit independent, a recognition which arouses the urge to conquer in him. Similarly, in Jeems he sees not only the helpless, toadying old crofter, but also a man who in his earlier life has experienced what will always be alien and closed to him, Daun Tullach, despite his present superior material position.

Gunn's second novel, Morning Tide, published by The Porpoise Press in 1931, was the Book Society choice for January of that year, and this success resulted in the republishing of The Grey Coast by Porpoise Press in April 1931 with a second impression in May. This new edition was

revised by Gunn in much the same way as the early stories from Hidden Doors were revised before inclusion in the later collection The White Hour. As with the stories, many of the revisions in The Grey Coast relate to the removal of unnecessary or weak adjectives and explanatory phrases and sentences; to the simplifying or removal of passages of over-writing. It is unfortunate that the 1965 reprint sponsored by the London and Home Counties Branch of the Library Association and the more recent reprint in 1976 by Souvenir Press should both have reproduced the unrevised text of The Grey Coast.⁷

Despite the instances of over-writing and wordiness in its unrevised version, The Grey Coast, in whichever edition one reads it, is a fine book. Gunn's decision to present the realities of life in the north-east-coast villages, not to paint a romanticised portrait, makes it also a bleak book, but unlike, for example, The House with the Green Shutters,⁸ where the hatred and malevolence of the inhabitants of Barbie appear self-generated and out of proportion to the circumstances of their situation, in The Grey Coast Jeems and Tullach and the 'murning' women are seen to be victims of their poverty and restricted life. There is also a place for a character such as the fisherman's wife Kirsty, who puts the case for the hardness as opposed to the heroism of the fishing way of life, yet is still able to share - as is Maggie also - what little she has with self-forgetting generosity and warmth.

There is a greater use of Scots in the dialogue of this novel than in Gunn's novels as a whole. In addition, its prose style recaptures the quality of an early short story such as 'Down to the Sea' and looks forward to Morning Tide. As Ivor and the men set out for the West Coast fishing:

The pulse of the sea caught them, rocked them. Ivor felt it under his feet, a gliding heave and roll, a sinuous continuous passing underneath of an insecurity that no land knew, a living insecurity taking them to itself, cutting them off with a profound sense of finality.

Dipping and rising, already a different smell in the air he breathed, the sea smell, a broad salt-water tang from all the oceans of the earth. (GC 175)

And as the boat makes for the open sea, Ivor's perception of the straggling Balriach village is transformed into a timeless, archetypal vision of human existence on that dour coast: an ikon of endurance which recalls Edwin Muir's similarly potent opening lines in 'The Incarnate One':

The windless northern surge, the sea-gull's scream,
And Calvin's kirk crowning the barren brae. (CP 228)

Calvin's kirk does not find a dominant place in Gunn's work, as it does in Muir's, but the harsh spirit which informs Calvinism is present in the very landscape which Ivor sees from the fishing boat:

Soon they opened out the cliff-tops and the long straggling village of Balriach. The land was already curiously diminished in bulk, the houses like squatting pigmy houses with sunk claws holding them to the earth in a dour immobility. Securely fixed there, earthed in the one eternal spot. The sea-board now swept for miles on either hand, curving just perceptibly from headland to headland in a marginal line of sheer rock-face. A grey strip, backed by far inward moorland crest sweeping eastward, and to westward by broken-backed mountains culminating in a peak that was the fisherman's load-star, the first far glimpse of approaching homeland. How tiny the croft patches, how insignificant those midden scratchings of the earth! To think that men could live on them, squeeze out of them children and gaiety and rancour and Calvinism and a jealous God! (GC 176)

As in several of the short stories and novels, the characters are at times seen symbolically. Ivor on the cliffhead appears 'bent double, not unlike a boulder being weathered by the inexorable forces ever shaping to a pattern' (GC 64). Daum Tullach, his lusting after Maggie, and the repulsion which she and Ivor feel for him, are captured metaphorically in the description of the Tullach farmhouse and steading:

Eastward from Balriach and set some little distance back from the cliffs lie crouching together the farmhouse and steading of Tullach. The wind plays round it, leaving no nook or cranny unsearched, and picks up on its clean wings a pungent reek of deeply rotted manure from the heaps disturbed these last few weeks in the process of feeding the soil.

Round the house whirls the reek, and as though something of its animal pungency touches the heavy sleep of Tullach himself, he snorts and pechs and stretches out a grabbing arm as the elusive forms in his slumbers lure or mock; then, still again, breathes heavily in defeat or conquest, or with the cunning instinct that, even in sleep, can bide its time.
(GC 65)

Gunn succeeds in creating in the reader's mind and senses the tightly confined spatial reality of the action, bounded by the sea-coast and harbour and by the hillside crofts; as he does also the claustrophobic tension of the action within its narrow compass. The life of the village and the activity around Jeems's croft are presented through a number of consciousnesses. Maggie's predominates, but the happenings and possible interpretations of them are seen also through the eyes and mind of Jeems, of Tullach, of Ivor, even of the workers at the peat-digging. Kirsty provides an important centre of consciousness for the activity of the fishing area of the village.

Gunn's use of dialogue is especially effective. Hostility or understanding between characters can be conveyed as much through silence and hesitation as through direct speech. This is especially so in the devious exchanges between Jeems and Tullach, but one finds this subtle communication of atmosphere also in a passage such as the description of the meeting between Ivor and the schoolmaster, which conveys the teacher's unalterable apartness from the Highland community despite his involvement in and interest in the life of the village. In the following passage, the schoolmaster has invited Ivor in for a chat before the young man leaves for the

West Coast fishing. His bafflement at Ivor's lack of response to his questions about the fishing and the lure of the sea, about the old way of life - 'There was a slow richness in it - and poetry. You know, all these old Gaelic tunes - milking-croons, and sea-croons, and death-croons . . . You'll have heard them out in the West?' (GC 43) (Gunn's ellipsis) - leads him to read the young man Yeats's poem 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree':

When he had read all three verses, he looked up. Ivor met his glance, face properly smiling.

'Sounds nice,' he said.

Bafflement again gripped Moffat, and in spite of him his face stilled to rather more than an enquiring calm.

'Yes, but - isn't there something there, something that is real, like truth; something near - ' the word would come - 'near the heart?'

A small hollow of silence, wherein Ivor's smile got fixed a trifle.

'Oh well! . . .' he said.

'You think it's just nice?'

Moffat's eyes were direct now, and the least bit appraising. Ivor's smile remained, but the eyes hardened.

'Ay, it's nice.'

'But actually far enough from the truth?' probed Moffat.

'I don't know,' said Ivor evenly. (GC 44)

By his questioning of Ivor, the schoolmaster is trying to come to some understanding of the continuing significance and relevance of the Highland culture and experience, a theme which preoccupied Gunn throughout his work as novelist. The teacher's quotation of Yeats's poem is related to his interest in late nineteenth century Celticism, and he is especially anxious to discover the relevance of the attitudes and writings of Fiona Macleod⁹ to the Highland life which he is now experiencing at first hand. He is haunted by Fiona Macleod's lines: 'It is destiny, then, that is the Protagonist in the Celtic Drama' (GC 42) and Ivor seems to him to epitomise

the Celtic hero: 'one of those figures of strength and gloom moving with destiny on them in the shadow land of myth' (GC 40).

In his account of Gunn's work in The Scottish Novel, Francis Hart comments that while 'Gunn's short stories contain half-serious jokes hinting at a loyalty to Fiona Macleod . . . there is a basic difference between them.' For Professor Hart this difference lies in Gunn's depiction of the realities of Highland experience and in the fact that 'Gunn's is finally a genius for humor.'¹⁰

'Half-Light' is the short story in which Gunn most overtly refers to the Celticism of Fiona Macleod. In this story, as in The Grey Coast, the explorer is a schoolmaster, but the young man of the story is a native of the grey coast who first of all rejects, then is absorbed into the drama of destiny which is at the heart of the life of the coast. I am not sure, however, that Gunn's references to Fiona Macleod should be taken as jokes, even if 'half-serious' ones. Gunn is unlike the writers of the Celtic Twilight in that, as Professor Hart observes, he is dealing with the realities of contemporary Highland life, not with the shadowy figures of a mythical past. But these contemporary realities are in an almost fatal way bound up with the past. A country which is not self-governing cannot control or affect its destiny any more than Maggie of The Grey Coast can affect hers. The Highlands, like all Scotland, suffer from the lack of responsibility for their own affairs, but they also suffer because of their cultural apartness from the Lowlands of Scotland. Their people are among the last survivors of a Celtic culture which once stretched across Europe but which has left little material evidence of its former significance. While evidence of the achievement in art can be determined from examples of Celtic stone and metal work which has survived, Celtic literature was orally transmitted, its music not written down. Most significant

in terms of the Scottish Highlands is the decline of the Gaelic language over the centuries as a consequence of decisions made in the south.

In A History of Scotland Rosalind Mitchison points out that hostility towards the Gaelic language and the Highland way of life was not confined to the notorious subjugation of the Highlands after the risings in support of the Stewart kings in the eighteenth century:

The reign of James VI did not bring stability or peace to the inner Highland areas. . . . James was never able to look on the Highlands as anything but a problem of law and order, as a society distorted by bloodshed and feud. This view seems to be shared by most historians of the Highlands. . . . For those like James who were ignorant of Gaelic and hostile to Roman Catholicism, who disliked bloodshed and stories about bloodshed, there was no way of appreciating the more positive side of seventeenth-century Highland culture. Though the old inheritance of Celtic art was by now moribund there was real life in the poetry and music of the day. This can be recognised in the Carmina Gadelica, the collection of religious poetry with its elaborate use of traditional imagery. It was in the seventeenth century that the Pibroch, the 'great music' of the pipes, based on the formal structure of air and variations, was built up. The Scottish government never came to appreciate this side of Highland life, and indeed by encouraging law and order in the Lowlands, did much to cut off the two parts of Scottish civilization from each other.¹¹

With such a history of decline, it is difficult to escape the lure of fatalism. And however one tries to explain it, history shows that the Celts have been singularly unwilling to fight for survival, retreating westwards before usurping forces. In Scottish history one has the example of the passivity of the people in the face of the Clearances, a passivity which seems almost in-bred in the ancient, mystical relationship between chief and clansman which the obvious defaulting on this relationship by the chiefs themselves did nothing to alter as far as the people were concerned. This relationship with the chief, their belief in the supernatural and fated happenings, the remnants of ancient cults of the dead and ancestor worship seemed to make them easy prey for the Protestant

ministers who preached a religion of wrath and accounted for the evictions as evidence of God's anger with his sinning people. Their heritage and experience did not encourage them to question authority and, having questioned and disagreed, fight for what they believed to be right.

Gunn, like the Irish Celticists at the end of the nineteenth century, differs from Fiona Macleod in his political attitude to the realities of Highland decline. Fiona Macleod's aim was 'the preservation of the old language, with racial characteristic feelings, and their expression in literature.'¹² In her biography of her husband, Elizabeth Sharp points out that he was in no way political in his aims: 'William Sharp's great desire was that the Celtic spirit should be kept alive, and be a moulding influence towards the expression of the racial approach to and yearning after spiritual beauty whether expressed in Gaelic or in the English tongue.'¹³ Sharp/Fiona himself declared that while the Celts were 'a doomed and passing race' the Celtic spirit 'rises in the heart and the brain of the Anglo-Celtic peoples, with whom are the destinies of the generation to come.'¹⁴

Fiona Macleod's Celticism is essentially that of the late nineteenth century aesthete. Yet while Gunn's is more surely based in his recognition in his novels and journalism of the need for political change and for the introduction of new industries into the Highlands in addition to the needs of existing industries such as fishing and crofting being more carefully considered, it seems to me that in a story such as 'Half-Light' and in early novels such as The Grey Coast and, especially, The Lost Glen, Gunn is himself trying to come to terms with his knowledge of Highland history and his awareness of the contemporary plight of the Highlands and their people. Is it possible to give new life to this area to which he is

himself as man and novelist committed? How can the people themselves be brought to play a part in any regeneration? Or is it that Fiona Macleod was right? Has the ancient culture of the Highlands now only a legendary role to play? Can the spirit of the Celtic peoples now live only through the dominant Anglo-Saxon race and culture? This is the question which perplexes the schoolmaster in The Grey Coast, a minor figure in the principal action, but one who is spokesman here for Gunn's own fears, and who leaves a thread to be caught up again in the novels which follow. The poetry and tales of the Gaelic West, like Yeats's 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', must have some living relation to the life of the present if they are not, like Scott's history, to be only the stuff of romance. As the schoolmaster watches the fishing boats set sail, he talks to the old fisherman, Peter, who, like Lachie in the story 'Down to the Sea', mourns the lost glory of the sea-coast's past:

'Look at the cooperage yonder, wi' its roof falling in an' its windows broken an' boarded up. I'll sometimes be thinking the boarded windows are dead eyes. The thought came on me one night in the darkening an' them gaping there.' (GC 172)

And there seems little that can be done. Destiny has passed the fishing people by. Sailing boats have been superceded by steam, the small fishing villages by the big centres like Wick and Aberdeen. The 'Fishery Board won't do anything . . . Nor the proprietor nor the County Council nor any council o't!' The small fishing creek, like the Celtic culture has 'had its day and is dying' (GC 173). As he listens to old Peter's tales of the old days, the schoolmaster's mind poses to itself Gunn's dilemma:

The schoolmaster listened to Peter's story, told in circumstantial detail, careful of the racy touches, lingering over realities that could still warm the old flesh, but he listened to it with an ear that caught at

echoes of legend rather than at a recital of events scarcely a generation old.

Out of that old swarming of life, emotions and gaiety and work, a communal life self-contained, self-supporting, self-centred, could have been woven any web of vision, with a coloured thread of any motif twisting its thematic arabesques. But out of it as an echo of legend - the Fiona Macleods! Was that it? . . . (GC 173)

Echo of legend or active reality: the answer will be significant for Gunn's development as a novelist of the Highlands.

In Morning Tide the problem of the survival of the Highland communities is removed from the centre of the action. The novel is still one of Highland decline - the fishing is not good; the young men emigrate; Old Hector is the only piper of quality left in the village - but the presentation of that decline is more oblique. Of especial significance is the fact that the predominant centre of consciousness for the action of the novel is the boy, Hugh. Hugh is aware that the community has not the vitality of the old days. He knows 'in his heart that he wasn't going to sea' (MT 22). Yet this awareness is remote from the immediate preoccupations of boyhood. Hugh's view of his community enables the reader to achieve a new perspective on the grey coast: an appreciation of its interdependent relationships, of the sustenance it can give to the growing child.

Yet however much Hugh gains from his upbringing in the small Highland fishing village, in Morning Tide we see also the first of Gunn's solitary protagonists: the hero who is of his community, yet apart from it; a situation which in later books such as The Lost Glen, The Serpent and The Key of the Chest developed into the theme of the Highland community as prison-house. As with the theme of decline, the theme of apartness is muted in Morning Tide because of its boy hero, but it is still recognisable:

Hugh does not live in Seabrae, the cluster of fishermen's cottages around the harbour, but on the higher ground above. He is 'a bee from another hive, a gull from another rock' (MT 24). He is personally prepared to diverge from the interests of the other boys when necessary: 'a solitary doing something different from themselves' (MT 24). Behind him is his mother who, like Catrine in The Silver Darlings, does not want her sons to go to sea. Unlike Catrine, however, Hugh's mother is helped to achieve her aim by the decline of the fishing.

The opening chapter of Morning Tide is one of the finest passages in Gunn's work and, indeed, in Scottish fiction. The language is English, but the rhythm is that of the Highland speaking voice, and the quality of the whole is that of prose poetry. One notices again the descriptive symbolism of short stories such as 'Symbolical' and 'Whistle for Bridge', where an essential ingredient in animate nature is its quality of menace:

The boy's eyes opened in wonder at the quantity of sea-tangle, at the breadth of the swath which curved with the curving beach on either hand. The tide was at low ebb and the sea quiet except for a restless seeking among the dark boulders. But though it was the sea after a storm it was still sullen and inclined to smooth and lick itself, like a black dog bent over its paws; as many black dogs as there were boulders; black sea-animals, their heads bent and hidden, licking their paws in the dying evening light down by the secret water's edge. When he stepped on the ware, it slithered under him like a living hide. He was fascinated by the brown tangled bed, the eel-like forms, the gauzy webs. There had been no sun to congeal what was still glistening and fresh. (MT 9)

The metaphor of the sea smoothing and licking itself 'like a black dog bent over its paws' has the quality of surprise, yet the simultaneous visual and sensuous recognition of aptness on the part of the reader which characterises T.S. Eliot's evocation of the fog in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' through the metaphor of a cat.¹⁵ Gunn's metaphor lacks Eliot's irony, however; its character is less literary and its human

implications are more deeply rooted in the natural environment evoked.

As the description of the boy on the beach continues, it is Wordsworth's leech-gatherer who supersedes Eliot's cat:

The loneliness of the bouldered beach suddenly caught him in an odd way. A small shiver went over his back. The dark undulating water rose from him to a horizon so far away that it was vague and lost. What a size it was! It could heave up and drown the whole world. Its waters would go rushing and drowning. He glimpsed the rushing waters as a turbulent whiteness released out of thunderous sluices. 'But you can't,' he half-smiled; a little fearfully, glancing about him. A short distance away, right on the sea's edge, he saw one of the boulders move. His heart came into his throat. Yet half his mind knew that it could only be some other lonely human in the ebb. And presently he saw the back bob up for a moment again.

Yes, it was a man. Seeking among the boulders there like some queer animal! He looked about him carefully. There was no one else. There were just the two of them in the ebb. Here they were on this dark beach, with nobody else. A strange air of remoteness touched him. It was as though they shared this gloomy shore, beyond the world's rim, between them. (MT 14-15)

There is considerable affinity in the attitudes of Gunn and Wordsworth towards the relationship between man and nature and the importance for man's physical and spiritual well-being of the natural as opposed to the industrialised urban environment. Nevertheless, this evocation of Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence' poem in the description of the boy on the beach points to Gunn's cultural and philosophical distinctiveness. Wordsworth's leech-gatherer acts as a mediator between the poet and his natural environment. Physically, as in Gunn's description, he appears at first to be one of the natural objects on the lonely moor, who in their turn are seen to be endowed with animate attributes:

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couched on the bald top of an eminence;

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So that it seems a thing endued with sense:
Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself;

Such seemed this Man.¹⁶

Morally, the leech-gatherer's rock-like steadfastness and patience bring home to the disquieted poet the qualities of character and mind which contact with the natural environment encourages. Gunn's animism is quite different in visionary character. The sea-creatures which seem to have crawled forth on to his ebb-tide beach do not repose on shelves of sand or rock as in Wordsworth's metaphor, but emit menace with every movement. In addition to the sea which 'was still sullen and inclined to lick itself, like a black dog bent over its paws', the boulders too were like 'black sea-animals, their heads bent and hidden, licking their paws in the dying evening light down by the secret water's edge.' When the boy stepped on the sea-weed, 'it slithered under him like a living hide' (MT 9). When he meets the old man Sandy Sutherland, who is also gathering bait, it is human comfort which Hugh finds, not, like Wordsworth, a moral comfort derived from the contact with nature. Sandy and Hugh are two humans, part of, and yet apart from, the natural world of which one has to be ever wary, however much satisfaction one may derive from it:

The light was now more than half gone, and the figures of the man and the boy, bent a little under their burdens, gathered as it seemed all the eyes of that place upon them as they walked away. Heads stooping forward, backs slightly arched, dark stumbling figures, moving up from the sea. Sparks of fire suddenly came from the old man's head. Each spark shone distinct and round, sprightly and mocking, gleaming wayward moments of an intenser life. The defeated water choked among the boulders. Through a rocky fissure a lean tongue thrust a hissing tip - that curled back on itself in cold froth.

They won clear of the weeded boulders. They approached the foreshore. Their fists gripped across their breasts upon the ends of their sacks. The twist of canvas bit into their shoulders, bit the boy's neck, as they stumbled up the slope of grey-blue stones. The stones rumbled and roared, carrying each foot back to the sea. But foot went before foot, and soon they were on the high-tidal bed of weed. Treacherously it slithered under them, and when the boy stumbled the man cried to him to take care. Soon they were over that, first their legs disappearing beyond the crest of the beach, then their bodies, and finally their heads. An eddy of darkness like a defeated wind swirled in

among the boulders. There was nothing left for the watching eyes to see beyond that crest but the first pale stars in heaven. (MT 18)

Structurally, Morning Tide is divided into three sections, each one ending in an episode of heightened action. Part I ends with the storm episode which originally saw life as the short story 'The Sea'; Part II ends with departures: with Grace's return to her London lady's maid position, and, more significantly for the grey coast, with the emigration to Australia of a group of young men among whom is Hugh's brother, Alan. In Part III it is the illness of Hugh's mother while her husband is away at the summer fishing which provides the climax of the action.

Part I is the most completely successful of the three sections. It has a unity of mood and style from its beginning in the evocation of the boy on the beach to its ending in the heroic sea-storm episode where the boy's father dares and conquers the menace of the sea. Between opening and ending are details of the boy's everyday activities which fix firmly for the reader the pattern and quality of life in the community. Gunn handles well the introduction of Hugh's family. We first meet Grace, his sister, home on holiday from London, through Hugh's unexpected encounter with her and the young man Charlie as he makes his way home from the fight with the Seabrae boys. Grace's furtive behaviour and her city-bred attempts to persuade Hugh to keep quiet about the meeting suggest her separation from the community and its values. Like her mother, Grace does not want her brothers to go to sea, but while the mother's fear of the sea is elemental, Grace does not wish that her brothers 'should become common' (MT 55). Kirsty, the other sister, whose young man Grace has now attached to herself, is entirely of her community. She is the one who accompanies Hugh to the harbour during the storm to await news of the boats, and it is to her that Hugh feels he can confide his troubles. For Hugh, and for Gunn, she is the keeper of traditions:

At that moment Kirsty had for Hugh the born voice of the story-teller and the story-teller's imagination. Her tone was not mournful: it was sweet as the honey of woe; its intimacy went down through the personal to the legendary where the last strands of being quiver together. (MT 68)

Although Gunn continues to stress Kirsty's legendary role as the story unfolds, one is not always convinced in its later stages that her words and actions sufficiently support this view of her function in the community and in the novel.

The family meal in the first part of the novel which is later counterpointed by the last family supper in Part II, serves to illustrate the significance of the family unity within the larger unity of the community: the kind of wholeness the loss of which Edwin Muir lamented in poems such as 'The Ring' and 'Scotland 1941'. At the centre of the family is the mother from whom atmosphere and pulse flow:

The mother passed the cups of tea. She had the natural air of dispensing life's mercies. Her movements were soothing and sufficient. She was the starting point of a circle that finished in her. Within that circle were their faces and their thoughts and their hands. The paraffin lamp, which was now on the mantelshelf, shone down on them its soft light. (MT 42)

The most dramatic episode in the book is the account of the storm which brings Part I to a close. A comparison of this section with its source in the short story 'The Sea' demonstrates the maturity of the Morning Tide version. The short story opens with the boy Hugh waking from sleep:

His eyes came staring out of sleep . . . his flushed cheeks blanched.

'Mither!'

She stood beside him in her nightdress, a candle in her hand, tall and listening. About her ghost-like presence he heard the moaning of the wind.

'Do you hear it?' Her uplifted solemn voice spoke as to the night itself. Every now and then the moan rose to a shriek. Terror dissolved his breast. (HD 7) (Gunn's ellipsis)

In contrast to this somewhat melodramatic opening, the account in Morning Tide is crisply dramatic:

Hugh's mind leapt awake, and in the roar of the wind about the house tried to catch the high forlorn cry as it died away. He was just too late. Nor could he be quite certain whether its last echo had been heard in sleep or in the instant of waking. Out of his taut body his eyes stared into the dark. The house trembled under a great bout of wind. When the bout passed, the wind cried and whined. But almost immediately the whine began to work itself up into a threshing anger that launched its violence in another bout. The walls shook. Then the torn, baffled wind began to whine again . . . to snarl . . . to work up . . .

The front door smashed open and Hugh heard Kirsty's voice cry aloud. So intently was he listening now that he could hear the door being pushed against the wind, although no sound was made until it finally rattled shut. Then in the lull he was sure of the voices of Kirsty and his mother, though he could not make out what they said. (MT 61-2) (Gunn's ellipses)

There is in addition some sentimentalisation of the situation in the short story. The boy, his heart 'beating up into his throat,' watches his mother, 'his own kind mother, standing there so still, wrapped in her dreadful thought' (HD 8). What is troubling her is that there is no-one to send to the harbour to await news. The boy decides he will go:

'I'll go down, Mither,' he said.

She started; looked at his slim little form, his white boy's body. But something stood in his face, and his eyes no longer looked at her; they were the eyes of one going about a man's business. He lifted his diminutive trousers from the floor.

'Oh, I cannot let you go.'

And as Hugh goes, the mother gives way to her fears:

Her womanhood came over her, her motherhood, and a sound like a stifled whine broke from her; she took a few quick uncertain steps, like an animal turning in a circle, then

stumbled to her knees at the chair by the bedside and prayed, a prayer of no words, a desperate linking of God, O God, to those at sea and to the little figure battling through the heaving plantation down to the steep harbour walls; the little figure hardly severed from her body - become man at a stroke. (HD 9-11)

The book version of the storm episode is greatly assisted by the fact that there are four characters in the house during the storm: Hugh, his mother, Grace and Kirsty who has come home from the house where she is employed to see what she can do to help. The interplay of emotions and actions is therefore more varied and dramatic in quality. Hugh appears to be an older boy in the novel, or at least a more mature boy. He is divorced from the women, a man's man already. When Hugh and Kirsty have struggled down the brae to the harbour, the storm and the waiting are experienced from several centres of consciousness: through Kirsty, Hugh, the 'Viking' and the old woman Morag. The drama of the waiting is both marked and relieved by the comedy of Morag's dressing while Kirsty waits in ever-increasing tension and exasperation:

Morag put on a knitted woollen petticoat with scalloped foot. Its colour was the natural grey, and her fingers fumbled a long time fixing it. Footsteps passed the window, and men's voices shouted loudly through the storm. Morag put on a second petticoat of exactly the same material and shape, except that its colour was a dull red. Now she would be ready in a minute, thought Kirsty. Morag put on a third petticoat, of a more washen red than the second, but this one would not fix without its safety-pin. With a hand gripping it behind, Morag came shuffling and peering towards the mantelshelf.

'Do you see a safety-pin there? Your eyes are better nor mine.'

Kirsty immediately caught up the lamp. 'Where? Here?'

'Yes. Just there on the corner.'

'It's not here.'

'Then it must have fallen down.'

Kirsty, pushing a chair back, searched in and about the fender. She couldn't find the safety-pin anywhere. 'I don't

see it at all,' she cried. Her senses were now beginning to go outside the house. Her impatience increased. As she stood up, Morag took the lamp from her, saying, 'It must be there,' and she stooped slowly to the floor. Kirsty's quick eye caught the gleam of the pin on the seat of the chair. 'Here it is!' She dived for it, nearly upsetting Morag and the lamp. (MT 74-5)

Short story and novel follow the same pattern in the description of the arrival of the boats, but the mishaps with regard to the first two boats are expanded in the novel version. In both versions the climax is the arrival of Hugh's father and his expert seamanship in riding the storm into the harbour: 'trust John MacBeth at the tiller!' (MT 95). But while the short story version ends in understatement: '"Well, Mither, we've got back," and his voice was kind and smiling' (HD 21), in Morning Tide Hugh, more convincingly, can contain no longer his pent-up emotion:

Hugh ran. Tears were streaming down his face. Rid Jock, who was in front, turned and saw, and as he ran sideways his mouth opened to cry something. But looking on that face, drawn instantly white and implacable, he thought better of it, and the mouth weakly dribbled out ambiguous sound.

But he would yet pay for merely having seen. There was nothing more certain than that! Nothing under the red sky! Nothing!

O red ecstasy of the dawn! (MT 101)

After such a climax at the close of Part I, Part II of Morning Tide is inevitably more subdued. Its quieter note is in addition related to its principal theme, the coming departure of Hugh's brother Alan and his friends for a new life in Australia. This second section develops the action of Part I by giving a fuller portrait of the characters and of the life of the community through a sequence of episodes and dramatic encounters. As in The Grey Coast, these scenes are descriptive in their function and do not change the course of the plot or the consciousness of the characters. While this approach was successful in the restricted time and space compass of the earlier novel, it is less so in Morning Tide. The episode of the

English poetry lesson in the schoolroom is sufficiently lengthy and detailed to arouse expectations in the reader of its having some function in the plot. Its educational content is also not without significance in the decline of the Highlands. Yet Gunn does not attempt to relate the material to his overall theme. He seems content to use the episode as another colourful addition to the story.

More satisfactory is the account of the almost ritualistic expeditions which precede Alan's departure for Australia. The boy Hugh is introduced by Alan to the magical River, to salmon poaching, to Hector's piping: to the traditional ways of the community whose continuity will be broken by the emigration of the young men. For Hugh, the promise of an expedition to the River carries with it the mystery and magic of an initiation ceremony:

Each pool had its own name. Strange evocative names, half of them Gaelic. They went back into Hugh's earliest childhood. . . . One day when I am big I will go to these pools. When I have done that, I will be a man and know the boundaries of the world. . . . The only other far places that had an echo in his mind were places in the Bible. Canaan and Bethlehem and the River Jordan. (Gunn's ellipses) (LT 132-33)

Old Hector's talk brings together the opposing elements in the fishing way of life: the mother's elemental fear of the sea, given added force by the death of her first son at sea:

'You see, she would rather lose you to Australia, where you will live, even though she should never see you again - rather than that you should follow your father.' (MT 150)

and the father's dilemma, which is related to the continued life of the community:

'But from your father's side it's different. You see, a man likes someone to come after him. It's a queer thing that. And no man understands it until he has passed his prime. Then it begins to gnaw at him. A man founds himself, and his race. It's not a bad old race. It's all we've known. You see what I

mean? And then in our old age, there's no one left -
no one of our very own. . . .'(MT 151)

Gunn involves the reader in Hugh's response to the old piper's playing,
which demonstrates what a vitality had been in that 'old race':

Hugh knew the theme of the Lament for Katherine, and its first statement, as Hector took the floor, went prickling all over his skin. His throat made little dry swallowing motions. His body grew rigid and a strange lightness came to his half-turned head. Every note was clear and distinct. The grace notes were like tiny golden sparks. The drones sent a waving flame ascending among the rafters; it grew solid, a beaten wave, reverberating, near and far, insistent; against it, the theme, slowly, so slow that every note became freighted unbearably, every phrase a piece of sorrow set in eternity, so that no time could conquer it, so that it must hang there on the nail that man has driven through eternity's heart.

The variations came as a relief. One could listen to the fingering, the clever neat work. The fingering became more intricate. The ear grew more anxious; but as every turn, every difficulty, was flawlessly overcome, the eyes glistened. Delicate work! The Crunluath Doubling was an astonishment and a joy. Hector stood still for the final variation. The eyes of his listeners interchanged shining glances. (MT 152-53)

One final ceremony which concerns immediate family as opposed to community is the last meal which the family take together before the departure of Alan to Australia and the return of Grace to London. The symbolic treatment of this passage has a specific Christian context unusual in Gunn's work and does not entirely escape sentimentalisation:

His mother was in good form this night. Her kindness lapped all round them. Her heart was overflowing with kindness. Her gestures were warmly inviting. She had a great tea for them. Liver and bacon and gravy. Plenty of butter, abernethy biscuits, scones, jam, a crusty loaf. 'Be eating, now. Make a good tea, bairns.'

.

For this was more than a normal tea; more even than the evidence of a mother's kindness. She broke oatcakes for them and cut bread. She filled their cups. She watched each one, and helped him to the elements on the table. She smiled. Her heart was full of love and broke itself amongst them. That which she loved she was about to lose. (MT 139-40)

Then, as the cups are drained, the plates wiped clean, Kirsty's absence regretted:

'Are you sure you'll have nothing more, Alan?'

'No, Mother, thanks.'

'Then - that's all.'

It was the end of their last supper. (MT 141)

In the ending of the supper one finds that Gunn's Christian symbolism has become overweighty for the events of the story. In the silence which follows the mother's regret at Kirsty's absence, there is an uncomfortable awareness on the part of Alan, Hugh and Grace herself that Kirsty's absence may have something to do with the fact that Grace has attracted to herself the man whom Kirsty loves. In doing this, Grace has betrayed Kirsty's trust and has gone against the interdependent way of life of the community. But there is uneasiness in the implicit comparison with the actions of Judas which follows, inevitable as a result of the previous emphasis on the breaking of oatcakes and bread, the filling of cups, the 'elements on the table' and the 'last supper':

It was the end of their last supper.

Grace got up all of a sudden.

'I'll run over to Ina Manson's,' she announced. 'I promised I'd say good-bye.'

She did not look at her mother nor at any one. Her voice was hurriedly cheerful. Because of what she was about to do, guilt was at her heart. (MT 141-42)

Part III of Morning Tide is on the whole superfluous. The climax of the novel has been reached with the departure of Alan and what follows must inevitably be tinged with anti-climax. The final section is unsatisfactory also from a technical standpoint. There are two principal interweaving events: the illness of the mother and the wooing of Kirsty by Charlie Chisholm, who has returned to his first love now that Grace has departed.

There has been no preparation in the earlier sections for the mother's serious heart condition, and the episode of her illness is developed through a suspense technique more suited to Gunn's heroic sea-storm passages. There is also an uncomfortable sentimentality in the death-bed scenes. Kirsty degenerates from the figure of legend which Gunn proposed for her in the early chapters of the novel to the position of a sentimental, 'murning' woman. As in the last supper section, there is a heavy, and it seems to me spurious, religious influence over the action. There is no tragic ending, however. The mother miraculously recovers. The boy runs to the wood for his thanksgiving offering. Life goes on. In human terms it is a good ending, but dramatically it is unsatisfactory. The reader has been so prepared for the mother's death that one feels that it is the reader, not death, who has been ultimately cheated. This avoidance of tragedy by the romantic resolution of themes is a characteristic of Gunn's novel-writing which is especially predominant in his late novels, where it frequently runs counter not only to the course of a particular episode, as here, but also to the development of the plot as a whole.

The wooing of Kirsty also demonstrates a deficiency in Gunn's narrative technique which will increasingly dominate the late novels. Hugh is the principal centre of consciousness for the novel and it is thus through his eyes as he hides in the trees that we watch the love-making of Kirsty and Charlie. The effect is a prurience which is heightened by Gunn's description of the boy's emotional response to what he sees and by the repeated references to Mad Margat and her illegitimate baby. This narrative technique also lacks credibility. Even with the most willing ears and eyes in the strath, one cannot easily believe that Hugh could overhear and see in such detail from his hiding-place among the trees. Like the mother's

illness, this is an unsatisfactory addition to the principal action. One feels that, on the whole, Part III of the book diminishes rather than completes the action of Parts I and II, which by themselves are sufficient to constitute a fine short novel.

The Lost Glen completes the trilogy of contemporary Highland decline. This novel introduces a new element into the drama in that its principal protagonist is a partial outsider in the person of a returned student, disgraced and expelled from his university. He is also a new kind of hero in Gunn's work. The suggestion of apartness from community in the description of Hugh as 'a gull from another rock' (MT 24) in Morning Tide is in The Lost Glen more fully developed. Ewan Macleod is tied emotionally to his land, to its people and its traditions. As he soliloquises towards the end of the novel: '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' (LG 340). Yet, on his return from university in Edinburgh he inevitably brings with him the fresh perspective of an outsider. And because he can no longer accept without question the attitudes of the Highland community and their uncritical view of the world of achievement outside the Highlands, he is in turn rejected by his people. Indeed, the very fact that he has chosen to return after his disgrace in Edinburgh has effectively distanced him from the community. By returning a failure, as the villagers believe, Ewan has challenged an important element in Highland tradition: the success of the 'lad o' pairts', usually in the ministry or similar profession, and thus the redemption through success in the wider world outside the Highlands of the sacrifice made by parents and community to educate him. Ewan's failure is not merely personal. It affects the whole community of which he had been a chosen representative:

For Ewan had betrayed something more than himself. And not to many is the awful power of betrayal given. To less and less in this ancient land. Therefore how jealously must the few guard it! (IG 27)

In its theme of return to the Highlands, The Lost Glen relates to the 1928 short story 'The Man Who Came Back'¹⁷ and to the play 'Back Home' (1932),¹⁸ both of which developed into the 1946 novel The Drinking Well in which Gunn attempted a positive solution to the problem of Highland decline. The Lost Glen, which should be read in conjunction with the later The Drinking Well, is not a successful novel, but it is provocative in its failure, setting out as it does many of the themes which preoccupied Gunn in his exploration of the situation of the Highlands in fiction and journalism. Like Morning Tide it is divided structurally into three parts, of which Part I is the most satisfactory. Its portrayal of the homecoming of Ewan and the exposition of the predicament which confronts him hold the promise of a much more subtle and complex novel than the one which eventually develops.

There is no gentleness in Gunn's portrait of Ewan's Highland community in The Lost Glen. As in The Grey Coast, the struggle with the unrewarding land has left its mark on the crofters, but there is in addition a debilitating weakness in the people themselves. They are ready to condemn the man who is different; willing to pander to the whims of the tourists; unwilling to take action to improve their conditions. Land and people are exhausted:

He looked up and down the hillsides, where the trees swayed, buds sore-swollen upon their wintry twigs, and where elbows of the earth stuck out, boulder-warts here and there upon a dark-brown pelt.

This land was too old. Scarred and silent, it was settling down into decay. The burden of its story had become too great to carry.

.

Ewan's eyes fell on the houses that now seemed to be huddling for warmth, and all at once he saw them mean and wretched, and understood that they were dying, thin-blooded and miserable; they would never more be warm in all time, and the spirit shunned them as it always shunned death. (IG 58-9)

Ewan's father - Ewan's and Gunn's ideal - is significantly a sea figure:

His father was different from the other men in the place, even though one or two of them, like Alan Ross, had when young gone as hired hands to the East Coast herring fishing. But the glen was in spirit a settlement of landmen, the old Celtic stock that is of the land rather than the sea. But his father had in his spirit that something extra of the moving deeps. (IG 61-2)

For Ewan's father, the contact with the sea brings out the steadfastness of character which Wordsworth found in the contact with natural objects on land. His mother, on the other hand, has been warped by her poverty. This harsh portrait of an embittered, defeated woman, unwilling to attempt to understand or even to ascertain the facts of her son's disgrace, is untypical of Gunn's mother figures. She is presented to us in a series of still photographs with no attempt to show character or emotional response in action. We do not see how she reacts to the death of her husband at the end of Part I or know if she ever learns the facts behind her son's return from Edinburgh. She is fixed in her static role of mourning, embittered woman.

In the account of Ewan's return from Edinburgh to the glen where rumours of his disgrace have preceded him, one is made aware of the reverse side of the closely-knit communal pattern of Highland life which in the greater part of his work Gunn points to as a positive way of life:

Several greeted him. Ewan said 'Yes' to them, smiling, his dark eyes flashing here and there, the faintest colour beneath his skin, all in a way that might be mistaken for a natural touch of friendly embarrassment. In fact, it was surprising to them how normal he was about the whole affair. Eyes, when they could, peered at him with inhuman penetration, for he personated so much in the way of monstrous behaviour.

So that later in any one of the little croft houses, a man might say quietly, 'I saw Ewan Macleod coming off the bus tonight.' The woman would glance up quickly, asking, 'What did he look like?' And the man would answer, 'Oh, just as usual.'

The man's words would hang themselves in the silence. Then perhaps the woman would say, 'It's his poor mother I'm thinking of.' Or if she was another kind of woman she might say, 'I don't know how he has the face to come home! Bringing disgrace on his parents. He must be a bad rascal!' And she would get into a heat about it and her virtue would be hurt and could not remain silent, as though it had all happened to herself. And another woman might say, 'Well, she had always great ideas, and her brother had the money which he earned where he did. Little good of it has come to them, seemingly.' And so every house would live under the shadow of Ewan's return. At length the man would go out and lean against a door-jamb or a gable-end, and stare into the darkening silence, and after a time would say to himself, 'Thighearna, if I had been him, I think I would have stayed away altogether.' And there would be in his heart a dark and uneasy condemnation. (IG 9-10)

In his turn, Ewan is unwilling to put the true facts of the situation before his friends and acquaintances. His reticence, too, is born of the traditional values of the community: 'A man may not justify himself to his friend. Not openly, anyhow, or directly' (IG 27).

The flaw in Gunn's presentation of Ewan's situation in Part I of the novel lies in the length of time he takes to inform the reader of the nature of Ewan's offence, and the sense of anti-climax which the triviality of that offence when discovered engenders. Ewan has been surprised by his church-going, publican uncle, who is financing his studies, in an uncharacteristically rowdy celebration of examination results in his lodgings. The uncle is affronted and Ewan dismissed in disgrace. One could hardly have expected such a trivial incident to lurk at the heart of Ewan's - and Gunn's - agonised soul-searching in the early stages of the story.

There is, however, a deeper reason for Ewan's and his author's Angst. For Ewan, the true problem is not that he has offended his uncle and thus had his financial support withdrawn, but that he had found his divinity

studies arid. Whatever the villagers may think of him, Ewan knows that he has not betrayed the spirit of his people. Such a spirit is betrayed by the sterility of the studies he has had to undertake; by the hypocrisy of those such as his uncle, who makes his living selling drink on weekdays and condemns its effects on Sundays; by the unthinking endorsement of the work ethic in city life, which must come before loyalty to family. What Ewan is revolting against is a whole way of urban life and educational pursuits which his own simple community looks up to and accepts as evidence of having advanced in life. Measured against what he finds sustaining in the Highland way of life, he finds the city pattern a sham. Yet he, despite his insight, is unable to find a positive way forward. He is defeated by his disillusionment, and by his own inability, no less than by his community's lack of understanding, to resolve the conflicts aroused by his new perspective on city life and Highland community. He has returned because he felt that to go abroad without first going home would be an evasion of his position. But the solution he adopts - or slides into - that of staying on in the Highlands and working as a summer ghillie, is itself an evasion of his responsibilities to himself and to his people. As the novel progresses, Ewan becomes a Hamlet-like figure, indecisive, tortured by his constant, unresolved mental debates with himself. In a sense he becomes a mythical figure, taking upon himself the weaknesses of his people, like them defeated by fate. One returns to Fiona Macleod's Sin-Eater and the Grey Coast schoolmaster's obsession with the saying: 'Destiny is the protagonist in the Celtic Drama.' But while the schoolmaster, an outsider, could speculate about the significance of the philosophy of Fiona Macleod to the contemporary situation of the Highlands, Ewan, a Highlander, succumbs to its fatalism like the young man Iain in

the story 'Half-Light'. As he makes his way home with his father after his return to the glen, he has a vision of their future fate:

A moment of piercing divination came to Ewan wherein he saw their twin bodies caught up against a fateful eternity, not dark, but faintly silvered, like the far and utter loneliness of the sea. (IG 13)

It is this fate motif which predominates in the characterisation of Ewan. His tortured, indecisive philosophising is permeated by thoughts of destiny. He sees the spirit of his people 'in eclipse and passing' (IG 48). For his mother 'the coarse grain, the life grain, was gloom. Gloom, the despondency of a congested fatalism, irradiated by serenity' (IG 153). For himself 'the dream is for failure, the simple life an escape for the weak spirit, the past a delusion and its brave ways a snare. Behold the marsh lights leading the sensitive spirit through darkness to tragedy' (IG 205). His life seems to him 'like something that a dark blade severed, the future, on its hither side, caught in its own fatality' (IG 206). Only when he has a further vision of his own death, like his father's, through drowning, does he feel released for action: 'The tragic end being known, he was freed!' (IG 206). Yet this 'freedom' is another evasion of responsibility. It is the same fatalism which has all along debilitated Ewan and the community of which he is now the symbolic representative. His inability to redirect his studies into a less arid discipline, to find a way of helping his people through his greater intellectual capacity - he cannot even write a letter to the authorities on behalf of the protesting crofters - is at one with the passivity of his people, with their resigned acceptance that the past is legend and the destiny of the people is to endure. Only at the very end of the novel does Ewan face the fact of his evasion and ruminate on how he might have ordered his life more positively on his return from Edinburgh. But even here he is defeated by the Highland situation: 'What

was wrong was that his spirit could not now find in this place an easy home. As though not his spirit but the place had been betrayed. And in this betrayed place his spirit moved like an uneasy ghost' (LG 339). Ironically, in the novel's ending, Ewan is finally overcome by destiny, the influence of which has debilitated him since his return. Having decided against killing Colonel Hicks, the immigrant Englishman who has become his enemy, Ewan meets him by chance and is attacked by him. In the ensuing fight the Colonel is killed. The novel ends with Ewan setting off in his boat in a storm, with the sound of his friend Colin's piping of 'The Lost Glen' in his ears, to fulfil his earlier vision of his death at sea.

Ewan's problem was in many respects Gunn's also. Emotionally committed to the Highlands, having himself returned to live and work there, active in investigating the problems of fishing and crofting areas, Gunn, if he was to continue as a Highland novelist, had to find some way of giving satisfactory imaginative expression to the life of the Highland people which would also be a true reflection of their contemporary situation. Even without the complication of decline, this was a formidable task. But with the evidence of decline before him every day as he went about his work as an excise officer, Gunn, in these early novels, seems to be struggling with the problem of whether there can be any viable future for the Highlands and their people, quite apart from the related problem of whether he can succeed in his aim of portraying the life of that people in his novels. Is the Celtic Twilight voice the authentic voice? Is it the destiny of the Celtic people of the Highlands to give way before the vigorous Anglo-Saxon culture, their past diminished to romantic legend, their future to make their spiritual contribution, as Fiona Macleod believed, through their absorption into that Anglo-Saxon culture? The weight of this

philosophical conflict is too great for The Lost Glen to bear.

In addition to the problem of its philosophical theme, The Lost Glen is formally unsatisfactory. Part I has a tragic unity of its own, opening with the return of the disgraced Ewan to the glen and ending with the death of his father in a storm when he had gone out to sea against his better judgement in the attempt to ease his son's unhappiness. Parts II and III do not demand knowledge of the happenings in Part I for understanding and their actions could just as satisfactorily begin with the opening of Part II. Here we find Ewan employed by tourists as a summer ghillie on the loch, an ironic contrast, which Gunn does not point to, with the freedom of the sea life which had distinguished his father from the landmen and which, in Part I, had seemed necessary for Ewan also. Opposed to Ewan is Colonel Hicks, an Englishman, stranded, like Ewan, in the Highlands and, again like Ewan, with some hidden, disgraceful episode in his past life. Such a confrontation suggests a potentially significant dramatic conflict in the plot. Gunn's essential quality as a writer, however, does not lie in showing character in action and he is unable to develop dramatically the explosive ingredients in the characters and situations of Ewan and Colonel Hicks. He tells the reader of Ewan's hatred for Colonel Hicks and of Colonel Hicks's disgust for Ewan, as for most of what he considers to be the lazy natives. But there are insufficient encounters between Ewan and the Colonel to give this enmity substance in the action of the plot, and their final confrontation seems therefore contrived and melodramatic. In addition, Ewan is not sufficiently substantiated in the second and third parts of the novel. Colonel Hicks is a pasteboard character: a caricature of an ex-colonial military man. Clare, his niece, like all Gunn's sophisticated city heroines, is unsatisfactorily depicted. Her encounters with Ewan are titillating as opposed to the more explicit, but less prurient, relationships between male and female characters which one finds in D.H. Lawrence's work. Clare

muses much about love and sex, but like Nan in The Shadow, the content of her thought does not escape the confines of women's magazine literature:

Sex after all meant life, came out of life. And this growing towards health and colour was warm and inviting. It made the body feel a lovely thing as if a lily had got flushed with rose. (LG 173)

And after an encounter with Ewan:

Really! she thought, going on a few paces to a cairn of stones on which she sat down, feeling weak, as if an immense virtue had been drained out of her.

Really this was - too amusing. She tried to give her body comfort, her lips wide for air. Her body was so warm. Good heavens! The whole thing was so - coming all at once - humiliating. Really she . . . But a thought was forcing its way in as to what would happen - what might happen . . . she pulled her coat open at the neck . . . the next time. (LG 203)
(Gunn's ellipses)

One remembers J.H. Millar's censure of similar writing by the kailyard writer S.R. Crockett: 'It is with a sense of relief that one passes from such trash to the clean and honest wit of Fielding and of Congreve.'¹⁹

One fine episode in the novel is the satirical concert interlude which brings Part II to a close. The interlude is disproportionately long in relation to the action of the novel as a whole, but it is crucial to Gunn's portrayal of the Highlands in this book. The interlude is treated as if it were a play, as indeed, in view of the role-playing by Highlander and incomer, it philosophically is. Description of scene, individual performers and audience response is given tersely in the manner of stage directions on a script, which allows Gunn to make satiric observations while preserving his objectivity as narrator of the action as a whole. Each item on the programme has a symbolic context which underlines the decline of the Highlands. The Master of Ceremonies is, of course, the new American laird, Mr Denver, and the entertainment follows the pattern of a

city concert, not of the traditional Highland ceilidh. Two young girls sing the duet 'Life's Dream is O'er' while a Mr Duncan Morrison gives a humorous recitation which mimics the Highlander as seen by the Lowland and English tourist: a performance which recalls the Highlanders in William Black's novels. Miss Martha Macrae 'singing her endless Gaelic song with its old sadness' (IG 216) is received with embarrassment by incomer and, especially, native. Her repetitive song is in the old indigenous tradition of story-telling and singing, but her fellow Highlanders can think only of what they see as the poor contrast with the Dixie melodies previously rendered on the piano by the American laird's son. The irony of the whole interlude is epitomised in the address on 'Our Highland Heritage' by an 'ancient lady' who eulogises the tradition of the cultural past and whose pleasure at standing 'on a real Highland platform' to 'speak to real Highland people' (IG 219) is in no way diminished by the contrast between the riches of the past which she extols, and the poverty-stricken present. The episode is more truly a symbol of the community's decline than is the shadowy dream of the lost glen which inspired Colin MacKinnon's piping composition and became the symbolic title of the novel.

Despite its disproportionate length, 'Interlude' succeeds because of its satiric vigour and its symbolic function in the novel. Too many incidents in the novel, on the other hand, have little causal relationship with each other and no obvious functional purpose in the plot. Colonel Hicks's attempted rape of Mary MacKinnon in Part III does have a function in that it provides Gunn with the necessary machinery to bring his action to a climax in Ewan's fight with the Colonel. But the attempted rape is itself completely unbelievable in terms of the previous action of the novel and is handled sensationally. The relationship between Ewan's

sister Jean and her student lover Ronnie, which becomes interwoven with the events relating to Colonel Hicks in the closing stages of the novel, is also unconvincingly developed. Ewan's singular obtuseness in the face of many obvious clues to Jean's pregnancy and Ronnie's guilt appears a contrivance on Gunn's part to enable him to use Jean's situation as an additional excuse for Ewan's decision to kill Colonel Hicks. Jean's farewell to Ronnie is the material of a trivial novelette, and Gunn's unqualified presentation of Ronnie's behaviour towards her as the equivalent of Ewan's earlier disgrace leads one to question the quality of his judgments concerning human values.

The Lost Glen is a poor novel, redeemed to a limited extent by its first section and by the satiric liveliness of the concert interlude, which exhibits a narrative irony badly needed in the novel as a whole. It is, nevertheless, a significant novel for an understanding of Gunn's work and of the problems with which the Highlands presented him as novelist and man. His attempt to find a positive solution to the dilemma which confronted Ewan can be seen in The Drinking Well, which exchanges the gloomy fatalism of the Celtic Twilight for modern farming methods and an enlightened landlord.

'The dream is for failure, the simple life an escape for the weak spirit, the past a delusion and its brave ways a snare' (IG 205). In the two books which follow The Lost Glen, Sun Circle and Butcher's Broom, Gunn goes back in time to investigate Ewan's pessimistic assessment of the Highland situation. The historical periods chosen are themselves periods of defeat for the Celtic peoples. The action of Sun Circle takes place about the eighth century A.D., after the coming of Christianity to Scotland and

at the time of attacks by the Vikings on its north and west coasts.

Butcher's Broom deals with an event, which although still close to the contemporary world in time, has already passed into the mythology of the Highlands: the Clearances, that series of evictions of the people from estates in the Highlands to make way for sheep which began in 1792 and lasted, interspersed with periods of calm, until the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Sun Circle, perhaps understandably because of the lack of source material, is not a successful book. Its opening is rhetorical, its narrator a timeless, Tiresias-like figure who surveys past, present and future of the northland before his gaze 'turns for rest into a sea valley, and in a little glade comes upon a young woman playing with a child. The outline gathers about them, wavers, and disappears' (SC 10).

Gunn is not able to bring the life of the community of which girl and child are part convincingly before the reader. His difficulty is similar to that experienced by Edwin Muir in his novel The Three Brothers, which attempted to depict events in Reformation Scotland. Like Muir's Reformation Scots, Gunn's eighth century Celts speak in recognisably twentieth century accents and with the psychology of the modern world. Nessa, daughter of the chief Drust, asks 'Anything up?' (SC 122) in the manner of a twentieth century teenager. She has difficulties with her mother: 'I must go, or mother will pitch her flints. She doesn't really want me for anything. She's afraid I may have ridden away with the four men!' (SC 128). The familiar Hollywood 'eternal triangle' situation dominates much of the action, which seems at times equally concerned with which girl will capture the heart of the pupil-Druid Aniel, Nessa the chief's fair-haired daughter, or the dark girl of the people, Breeta, as it is with the conflict between the old and the new religion, or between Viking

raiders and Celtic peoples. Hollywood surfaces again in Drust's response to the news of the coming of the Northmen which Aniel brings: 'Say all that again,' ordered Drust grimly, 'and say it slow' (SC 135). The occasional use of a Scots word or expression within the English language predominantly employed does not add local colour but intrudes awkwardly into the speech register as in 'It was great, yon' which is immediately followed by the formal 'Let us go back' (SC 130).

What the book does illustrate is the perennial weakness of the Celtic peoples, their inability to work together in the face of danger, their insouciance and lack of planned action when that danger materialises. In the book The Celtic Realms, Nora Chadwick and Myles Dillon quote Strabo's early account of the Celts of Gaul:

The whole race, which is now called Gallic or Galatic, is madly fond of war, high-spirited and quick to battle, but otherwise straightforward and not of evil character. And so when they are stirred up they assemble in their bands for battle, quite openly and without forethought, so that they are easily handled by those who desire to outwit them; for at any time or place and on whatever pretext you stir them up, you will have them ready to face danger, even if they have nothing on their side but their own strength and courage.²⁰

These early Celts are recognisable in the warriors who assemble under Drust's command to repel the Viking invaders. The Northmen 'had been in too many fights of the kind to let enthusiasm defeat their cunning', but 'it was otherwise with the Ravens, whose enthusiasm would have carried them through fire' (SC 157). In addition, the Ravens were lacking 'in that battle sense which made the eyes of the grizzled faces before them smile in cunning foreknowledge. The great shields of the Northmen, too, deceived and exasperated young men shieldless and urgent for the encounter that is face to face' (SC 158).

Gunn's account of the fight on the beach between Norsemen and Celts is, as one would expect, full of excitement and suspense, but unlike his epic sea-storm episodes, this conflict ends in tragedy. The Celts are defeated, their community broken and scattered.

As in battle, so in religion. The book depicts the defeat of the old Druidic religion by Christianity, and the removal of power from the Druidic-based chiefdoms of the north to the larger Christian-dominated units of more southern areas.

These themes of defeat are not, however, sufficiently dramatised through the action of the novel to enable one to come to any significant understanding of the forces which acted together to bring about the decline of the Celtic peoples of the Highlands. There is too much philosophising, too little interplay of character and action. Gunn's own attitude is uncertain. He follows historical tradition as to the qualities in the Celtic peoples which laid them open to defeat, but is unable to give dramatic expression to any positive qualities which could have compensated for that defeat. His attitude to the displacement of the Druidic religion is equivocal. As in the major part of his work, religion does not play a dominant role here, despite the prominence of the Master and Aniel the Druid as characters. The Master's observations to Aniel concerning Christianity seem to speak for Gunn's own attitude to formal religion in its various forms. Having described how the Druids succumbed to the temptations of earthly power and so were in the end overcome by the spiritual force of Christianity, the Master continues:

As a new faith the Christian will thus become very widespread and strong. It, too, may last thousands of years. It, too, may get caught in the tangle of temporal power and decline, and again a new faith come in its place. What that new faith may be like, and what the faith beyond that, no one may say.

But I know that, beyond what we have arrived at, nothing really new can ever come to the mind of man, unless the mind itself enlarge and gain the knowledge that is beyond life and, when it does that, it will no more be man but god.

(SC 115)

From a political and philosophical viewpoint, the ending of the novel seems to lead once again to the philosophy of defeat of Fiona Macleod. The Master foresees the glen on fire again in a future time. Aniel leaves to bring back a new young Christian chieftain from the south to rule over the remnant of the people. There would appear to be no positive way forward for the Celts as an independent people. Their past will continue to live as legend; their future will be directed by those who, like the conquering Norsemen or the rulers of the south, 'make their own decisions' (SC 357), who have the will to rule. The Master describes the qualities in the Celts of the North which make this future inevitable:

They are a dark intricate people, loving music and fun, and it is a mark of them that an old man will play with a child, and the old man will pretend to be defeated by the child, for their pretences come naturally to them and twist into many games. Out of their pretences they make stories, strange stories that hold the child's wonder and so hold their own. They also make tunes, tunes that possess the mind even more than the stories, and they start with the mother tunes to the children. These tunes and these games are never forgotten, so that in times of the greatest danger, in times of brutality and terror, in times of starvation and death, in the blood times when the wolfish mind is a black demon, even then the old tune will come in, will possess and conquer. How then can they ever lead? They cannot. At a time when a great decision has to be made, a decision to go forward, to conquer for the sake of conquering, to conquer and hold, they feel that by going forward they leave their true riches behind. And if they don't feel that, yet the instinct for that is in them and acts like a nerveless infirmity of the will. They can go forward, but it is for something that no leader could ever understand; they can endure for this strange thing; they will sacrifice themselves and die for it. But what it is they do not know, and when they have conquered and died yet they have not gone forward.

There is thus in them a profound persistence rather than a conquering or leading. And out of this persistence, that often looks no more than an intricate weakness, they see with a curious clearness. They see that the ruler does not persist but is as one passing on. There is no abiding importance in him. This is known finally as the core. (SC 353-54)

Butcher's Broom recounts the fulfilment of the Master's vision of the glen smoking again in some future time. It is one of three significant twentieth century novels on the subject of the Highland Clearances, the others being Fionn MacColla's And the Cock Crew²¹ and Iain Crichton Smith's Consider the Lilies.²² Gunn's novel differs from the other two in its extensive treatment of the subject and in the comparatively minor part religion plays in the happenings. Both And the Cock Crew and Consider the Lilies are, as their titles might suggest, dominated by religious forces. The Clearances provide the occasion for the playing out of the conflict, but are not, of themselves, the essential cause of the conflict. Iain Crichton Smith's short novel is a perceptive psychological study of an old woman, who is forced through the receipt of her eviction notice and the negative response of the minister to whom she turns for help, to reconsider her past life and uncompromising relationship with husband and son which her strict adherence to narrow religious teachings dictated and finally destroyed. Fionn MacColla centres his conflict in the differing attitudes to the indigenous way of life of the people in the glens and to the fact of the evictions on the part of Fearchar, the old poet, and Maighstir Sachairi, the Calvinist minister, who allows his natural human warmth towards the people and his instinctive angry hostility to the evictions to be pushed aside by his belief in the inevitable judgement of a wrathful God towards human beings born in sin.

This kind of intense religious conflict is absent from Gunn's novel. The minister of the Riasgan does not feature prominently in the action,

although Gunn's description of him - 'Outside the pulpit, there was a pleasantness in his manner that was not so much deceitful as evasive. Persons in a high position were often like that' (BB 17) - defines at least one of the qualities which led the majority of the Highland Protestant ministers to see that their interests lay with the gentry, not with the people, in the matter of the evictions. There is some talk in the novel of more extreme evangelical types such as Mr Bannerman and old Gilleasbuig - 'the Men' - whose God is recognisable as the God of MacColla's Maighstir Sachairi; but, in the first part of the novel especially, before the return of Elie with her child, these men are seen as eccentrics or extremists in regard to the attitudes of the community as a whole.

The Clearances occupy a strange position in Scottish history. While they have passed into the mythology of Highland life, in Lowland Scotland the existence of this brutal campaign of evictions has too often been forgotten or deliberately ignored: a situation which has perhaps some relationship to the fact that Lowland sheep farmers were in many cases the beneficiaries of cleared land. Outside of Scotland also the cruelty of the Clearance policy was understated. The evictions on the Sutherland estates were defended as instances of progressive farming methods which would benefit England by providing cheaper and better meat. The American Mrs Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose book, Uncle Tom's Cabin, had a considerable emotional impact in the campaign to end slavery in the Southern States of America, visited Britain and was fêted by the aristocracy, including the Duchess of Sutherland. Her Sunny Memories,²³ which she produced after a short visit to the Highlands, and which was based on information supplied to her by the Sutherland factors, contradicted 'rumours' of the harshness of the Sutherland evictions which were circulating in America and defended the 'enlightened' policy of the Duke and Duchess. It is noticeable that

the Clearances do not feature as a subject for discussion in the programme of Fiona Macleod and his fellow Scottish neo-Celticists. The political dimension was missing from the late nineteenth century Scottish Celtic revival as it was not from the Irish.

With the writings of such as John Prebble²⁴ and the re-issue of Alexander Mackenzie's History of the Highland Clearances,²⁵ first published in 1883, the subject of the Clearances has in recent years become opened up for layman, historian and fiction writer. In 1934, however, Gunn's Butcher's Broom was very much in the nature of a pioneer work. In his review of the book in November 1934, the editor of The Scots Magazine called it 'the most moving tale of the Scottish Highlands that has yet been written,' and drew attention to 'the skill which Mr Gunn uses in his description of the evictions, his courage in admitting that they had a logical business point of view.'²⁶

As a result of the existence of Alexander Mackenzie's book and his reprinting in it of much of the Gloomy Memories²⁷ of Donald Macleod, the Strathmaver stonemason, with its eye-witness accounts of burnings and evictions, and in the stories and memories current among the Highlanders themselves, Gunn had the kind of source material available for his novel which was not obtainable in regard to the eighth century setting of Sun Circle. The result is a work which is partly historical documentary, partly imaginative fiction and partly the kind of fictionalised documentary which has developed in recent years in the field of television.

Butcher's Broom, which is set in Sutherlandshire at the time of the Napoleonic Wars, is divided into four sections, the time-span of which covers life in a remote glen, the Riagan, in the peaceful period some years before the evictions, through the departure of the young men of the glen to fight in the Duke of Sutherland's regiment in the Napoleonic Wars, to the eviction of the people in 1814 and their expulsion to the bleak cliff-tops

where they were expected to make a living from marginal crofting and sea-fishing, an occupation which was entirely foreign to them. The title of the novel is symbolic, Butcher's Broom being the local name for the plant which is the clan emblem of the Sutherland family, whose traditional caring relationship between chief and people had been replaced by a policy as brutal as the burnings and killings instituted by the Duke of Cumberland - 'Butcher Cumberland' - after the 1745 Jacobite rebellion. For most of the novel Gunn's position is that of objective narrator, but from time to time he assumes an omniscient role, as, for example, in the ending of chapter one, where he intervenes to place the peaceful life of the Riasgan in the context of the Napoleonic Wars which were then engulfing Europe, and whose reverberations would presently engulf the Riasgan also. Less successful is his prophetic role in relation to events such as the loving of Elie and Colin, where the recurring hints of coming doom intrude on the flow of the action.

Butcher's Broom opens and ends with Dark Mairi in whose person Gunn symbolises the indigenous way of life of the people. We first meet her ministering to the sick in a neighbouring parish and gathering herbs from the sea-shore to take back to the Riasgan. At the end of the novel, her death as a result of being mauled by the sheep-dogs which now guard the Riasgan, symbolises the final destruction of her disintegrated community and the end of the old way of life.

Gunn depicts life in the glen in the opening chapters of the novel by means of an idealised and metaphorical approach. We are not given a detailed, realistic picture of the everyday occupations of the people, but, rather, accounts of certain happenings which are representative of the qualities inherent in that old way of life. This accords with the timeless quality in the description of Dark Mairi's introductory view of her village

as she returns from her herb-gathering visit:

The round-backed cottages clung to the earth like long animals whose folded heads were always to the mountain. Lying thus to the slopes they were part of the rhythm of the land itself. They grew out of it and merged with it, so that shadow or stillness caught them when it caught the mountain, and the cries of children were no more alien than the sharp cries of moor-birds. . . . There were little herds of these cottages at long intervals, and every now and then an odd cottage by itself like a wandered beast. Even in a flock of sheep on these hills there is the 'piner'. (BB 14-15)

Mairi herself is something of a lone sheep. Her cottage is situated on the high land on the periphery of the community, and although she is part of that community, she is also different from the small crofters. Like many of Gunn's apart protagonists, she is a sea-figure: 'Dark Mairi of the Shore,' the people call her; it is the vegetation of the sea which she carries in her basket to provide the basis of her cures:

They knew, of course, that she had got her healing knowledge largely from her grandmother, who had been carried away from one of the Islands of the West by the famous smuggler called Black MacIver. Not that they could have called Mairi in her mainland home a foreign or strange woman. She was rather like a little woman from the hills, from any of the small inland glens, and her kind was not uncommon even in townships near the sea. Only Mairi seemed to have in her an older knowledge than was common to the rest of her ancient kind in these places. (BB 11)

In appearance and character she has the detached, abiding quality of the surrounding landscape.

The action of the opening stages of the book revolves around Mairi's croft where she lives with her young grandson, Davie, and the girl Elie, who helps her with the animals and the work of the croft, and the house of Old Angus, his son Hector and daughter-in-law Anna, in the lower part of the village, which acts as the heart of the community. One significant gathering in Anna's house in these early chapters is the occasion of the waulking of the cloth, where the women full the cloth while singing their

traditional songs and inventing proverbial sayings and lines of song with which to tease the men, who take no part in the waulking. This traditional gathering, with its interweaving of work and play, its storytelling, its traditional wisdom and humour, its piping and dancing, is in outstanding contrast to the falseness of the concert described in 'Interlude' in The Lost Glen, which traduced the traditions of the Highland people. Old Angus's recitation of the 'Song of the Ancient Bard' captures the Highlander's love of his land and the wisdom of the ancient world:

In all this there was both the reverence and the freedom of love. Behind the Aged Bard was the eternal earth and over it the Sun. In instinct and in heart they delighted and worshipped here. What they knew as God and religion interfered with this spontaneous worship and love. The Aged Bard had no Hell. They had no God of Vengeance to fear in those days. But yes now. Therefore when they slipped back with Angus, their hearts opened like flowers and the muscles of their bodies grew fluent with immortal health. (BB 57)

In these early passages Gunn describes also the organisation of the community, its system of land tenure and the division of labour between men and women. Significant for his uneasy portrayal in other novels of the relationships between men and women in the contemporary world outside the Highlands is his account of the separate activities of men and women:

The women were the more persistent and fruitful workers, and found the males frequently in their way. Many of the tasks about a house they would not let a man perform - even if he had wanted to, which, of course, he did not. In this matter of work there was so strong a custom that if a man did a woman's work, where a woman was fit to do it, the feeling of shamed surprise would be felt stronger by the woman than by the man. The system worked very well, for the man in his sphere and the woman in hers were each equally governing and indispensable. Thus the difference between a man and a woman was emphasised and each carried clear before the other the characteristics and mystery of the male and female sex. Men were not knowing with regard to their women. (BB 65)

Although we are told that 'in life's major dealings, like cattle-droving, marketing, hunting, and war, women would have felt helpless without their men' (BB 65), there is in Gunn's presentation of the life of the community an evasiveness about the role of the men which prevents his portrait of a self-contained, viable community from being entirely convincing. This is especially so in relation to the departure of the young men to serve in the Napoleonic Wars. We do not hear that they are missed in relation to the work-load of the community. And if they are not missed in this way, what possible occupation could there have been for them had they remained at home? This is one historical aspect of the pre-Clearance economy of the Highlands which Gunn does not convincingly examine, although his telling of the promise of land which was used to bribe the young men suggests that the system of land tenure as it stood could no longer support the population satisfactorily.

There is difficulty also in relation to the idealised portrait of the community in the early stages of the novel and in relation to the treatment of characters, who are not presented as individuals, with individual psychological attributes, but as representative of certain roles or qualities in the community of which they are members. Thus Mairi, Elie and Davie are seen symbolically:

In the centre of this gloom was the fire, and sitting round it, their knees drawn together, their heads stooped, were the old woman, like fate, the young woman, like love, and the small boy with the swallow of life in his hand. (BB 31)

Similarly, in Anna's house, Old Angus has himself many of the attributes of the Ancient Bard whose poem he recites, Anna is 'the mother', 'little Kirsteen, who was a whole month younger than Davie, appeared before him like Fand, the Pearl of Beauty . . . and Davie himself was an arrow that

flew hither and thither and had magic power to grant all the wishes of the Aged Bard, whose smile would be reward' (BB 56).

Symbolic representation and convincing actuality come together in the ceillidh-house passages of the novel. Gunn's difficulties begin when he moves from the impersonal, idealised evocation of the community and its qualities to the personalised fictional story of the relationship between the girl Elie and her lover Colin, Anna's son. Here we miss the intimate knowledge we have of a character such as Iain Crichton Smith's Mrs Scott in Consider the Lilies. Colin is undifferentiated from the other young men. His function in the plot is to be the soldier-father of Elie's illegitimate child and a representative of the loss which the community suffers as a result of the departure of the young men. Although Elie is one of the principal characters, we do not know the impulses behind her actions or how she herself regards any particular happening. There is no psychological depth to her characterisation. She, too, although more developed than Colin, is playing out a role in the novel. There is no attempt made to present her son Little Colin as an individual. As the novel progresses he takes over the role initially played by Davie, and although approximately fourteen years must have elapsed since his birth by the time of the evictions, he is still spoken of as if he were a little boy.

It is difficult also to reconcile the departure of the pregnant Elie from the Riasgan with the warmth of the community as Gunn depicted it in the opening passages of the novel. One feels that the community whose traditional qualities were so powerfully evoked during the waulking in Anna's house would have found some way of accepting a bastard child and its mother, especially as the father was one of their own young men who had left for the wars. Elie's departure, like the representative characterisation, is, one feels, symbolic. Her return eight years later with

the child Colin from the famine and hardship of the uncaring, non-Gaelic-speaking south, symbolises the coming destruction of the Riasgan where disintegration has already set in as a result of the hard winters which followed the departures of the young men and Elie herself. Gunn appears to endorse this view through Elie's comment on Rob the Miller's attack upon her after her return: it 'brought all the south into her own homeland' (BB 200).

The cleavage between the depiction of the community before the departure of Elie and after her return is also too strong to be convincing. On her return Elie has to face the fear of interrogation by 'the Men', a situation more appropriate to the religious ambience of MacColla's And the Cock Crew. She has also to bear the lewd attentions of and finally marriage to Rob the Miller, a marriage celebrated with a licentiousness which again seems at odds with Gunn's earlier depiction of the positive qualities inherent in the community's indigenous way of life.

Gunn seems to me to be at his best in Butcher's Broom when historical fact provides the basis of the action, whether fictionalised or documentary. Thus in Part One research into the patterns and traditions of the Highland way of life provided the background for the splendid waulking of the cloth chapter. Part One additionally succeeds in communicating the apartness of the glen, the innocence of the people as to the ways of the world outside the Highlands as they believe the opinion of 'London' rather than the information in the letters of Uisden the soldier; as they have faith also in the promise of land to those who go and fight in the Duke's regiment. There is irony in the comparison of this answer to the call to arms with that of past times:

Many times in the long past of the Riasgan had the mothers watched their sons go, single sons and married sons, out over that crest of the hill at the summons of the fiery cross. On this morning all their history stood tranced.

Yet there was a difference in the spirit of the trance. In past times the women would not have ignored the children about their knees. They would have snatched them to their breasts, for who knew what would come back over the hill-crest, hunting and hunted? No danger threatened like that now. By their men in the past the Riasgan and its homes had been made secure for all time. These were their sons, answering still the call of their chief, not for the forays of the glens, but for campaigns and battles on foreign fields, so that not only their homes but their country might have peace with honour. (BB 123)

In the second and third parts Gunn conveys the gradual awareness of the evictions in the south and the coming danger to themselves through the reports of Tomas the Drover, whose defence of the old way of life and traditions of the people in Butcher's Broom is not dissimilar to that of the poet Fearchar in MacColla's later novel. In Chapter One of Part Three the scene shifts to London and the meeting of Mr Heller, who has many of the attitudes and actions attributed to the historical Patrick Sellar, with the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland. Mr Heller is the prospective new tenant of the Sutherlandshire land which includes the Riasgan, and, like the concert episode in The Lost Glen, his meeting with his future superiors provides an ironic commentary on the attitudes of outsiders to the Highlands. The irony here is more subtle than in The Lost Glen as, for example, in Mr Heller's interest in the painting 'Christ being examined before Caiphas' which hangs in the hallway of the Duke's London home, and in the devious efforts of the Duke, Mr Heller and Mr James, the Commissioner of the Sutherlands' English estates, to placate the delicate fears of the Duchess as to the treatment of her subjects. By removing the action from the Highlands at this point, Gunn succeeds in objectifying the fact of the evictions and in placing them in the context of land improvement schemes, the growth of the industrial proletariat and the need to feed and clothe

the workers, the individualism inherent in the new economic philosophies and, not least, the fear among the upper classes of a rising among the proletariat such as had recently been experienced in the French Revolution.

When the action returns to the Highlands, Gunn follows closely the source material in Alexander Mackenzie's book. He recounts the calling of the people to the meeting at Dunrobin Castle, with a fictionalised account of which And the Cock Crew opens; the warning of the people that the summons is a deception and their march past the castle to the new inn at Golspie. He tells of the inability of the people to understand the sheriff who spoke in Scots/English, the reading of the Riot Act and the final dispersal of the unmilitant, defenceless people while the military was summoned from Fort George: 'a regiment of Irish being marched into the Northern Highlands to even the balance of immortal justice. . . .

The bloody Highlanders!

The bloody Irish!

Each oath in the Gaelic tongue, while the officers rapped out their governing commands in English' (BB 308).

Gunn is able here to make comprehensible the relative passivity of the people in the face of the evictions: a passivity induced by the apartness of the glen, the ignorance of the ways of the world outside the glen and the inability to conceive of any other way of life, the continuing faith of the people in the Duchess, their chief. There are no officials to whom they can turn for help, and if they try to resist, what small community can resist for long the might of the military?

Part Three of the novel ends with the evictions in the Riasgan and once again Gunn follows closely the historical accounts, with especial reference to the writings of Donald Macleod, the Strathnaver stonemason. First comes the illegal burning, on the part of Mr Heller, of the ground

in March before the expiry of the people's tenancy, so that the sheep will be able to take advantage of the new young shoots. This, of course, has a disastrous effect on cattle already weakened by the long winter. Then we see the people planting the grain and potatoes they will need for the coming winter, whether in the Riasgan or on the coast, hoping until the last moment that they will not in fact be forced out. Finally come the evictions and the cruelty towards the crofters who at that time consist mainly of women, children and old men, the able-bodied men having gone to round up the cattle from the surrounding hills. Gunn most effectively works the historical accounts of the Sutherland evictions into his own picture of the community of the Riasgan. Old Morach, the mother of Seumas Og, the seer, becomes the 'old bed-ridden hag' about whom Patrick Sellar is reported as saying, 'Damn her, the old witch, she has lived too long; let her burn!'²⁸ In Gunn's account, the words, altered a little, are put into the mouth of the new tenant, Mr Heller. Seonaid, whose fiery spirit and courage has been established in her verbal battles with Murdoch and her accompanying of the pregnant Elie to the south, becomes herself the pregnant woman who defied the evictors and who gave birth prematurely after falling through the roof of her house. Mairi's meal chest is representative of the many actual meal chests which were hurled down hillsides into the river, while her hens suffer the roasting in the fire which was the fate of many of the domestic animals belonging to the actual Sutherland people. The Clearances are brought to life through Gunn's skill in the writing of dramatic and suspenseful episodes and by the identification of the happenings with the characters and situations already created in the novel.

In Part Four we meet the people in their new homes on the cliff-tops by the sea. Gunn's account of the struggle of the settlement for survival is less severe than the historical accounts of some evicted communities.

There is nothing to compare with the situation of the people at Badbea on the Ord of Caithness who had to tether both animals and children to prevent their falling over the cliff into the sea and who battled heroically for many years before emigrating to New Zealand. What Gunn does emphasise in this final section is the increasing moral disintegration of his fictional community, a disintegration which first appeared after the departure of the young men to the wars and the return of Elie with her illegitimate child. Now the evictions have struck at the heart of the people's way of life. Traditional hospitality - 'The door of Fionn is always open and the name of his hall is the stranger's home' (BB 377) - has had to be refused the evicted because of the threat of further evictions. There is a new uneasy attitude towards Dark Mairi. Previously accepted by the community as a link with the wisdom of the past, she is now regarded almost as a witch. There is excessive drinking and prostitution among some of the people. The active young people like Davie and Kirsteen are emigrating; the old people are dying. Any hope which the community has had of their wrongs being redressed is extinguished by the acquittal of Mr Heller by the courts on the charge of culpable homicide and fire-raising in relation to the evictions.

The novel ends with the death of Mairi who has been mauled by sheep-dogs while wandering the Riasgan to collect herbs, and with the return of Colin from the wars, not to the promised gift of land, but to the devastation of his glen. He meets, unknown to him, his young son Colin who has come in search of Mairi, and together they carry the old woman back to the settlement on the cliffs.

Although in this ending there may be some individual hope for Colin, his son and Elie, whose husband Rob has died, there is little hope for the regeneration of the community. Mairi's death symbolises the final

destruction of the old way of life, yet another instance of the defeat of the Celtic peoples and their communal traditions by an aggressive, individualistic, foreign culture. Gunn's venture into history to attempt to answer the defeatism of Ewan in The Lost Glen has not produced an answer to the predicament of the Highlands and their people.

NEIL M. GUNN

The Novels of Highland Decline

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NEIL M. GUNN

II THE NOVELS

ii The Essential Highland Experience

Highland River The Silver Darlings

Young Art and Old Hector

The Green Isle of the Great Deep

The Drinking Well

Gunn's preoccupation with Highland decline, given voice in the early novels from The Grey Coast to Butcher's Broom, continued throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. This recurrent investigation of decline took place, however, not in his novels of the period, but in journalism, especially in the articles written for The Scots Magazine, and in plays such as Net Results,¹ Choosing a Play² and Old Music.³

In addition, there is a change of mood in his approach to decline from the mid-thirties onwards. The mood of fatalism which permeated The Grey Coast and The Lost Glen in particular is absent. There is no longer a playing with Celtic Twilight philosophy as perhaps the only viable continuation of the spirit of the Highland tradition. Instead, there is anger, an investigation of the facts of the decline and of possible ways towards regeneration.

Gunn resigned from the Civil Service in the mid-thirties to devote himself to writing, and it may be that in consequence he was more free to write openly in a political and factual manner about the conditions prevailing in the Highlands. Whatever the reason, his approach to the fact of Highland decline took a positive change in direction. Gunn was now on the attack.

One aspect of Highland impoverishment which occupied him to a significant extent was the decline of the once prosperous fishing industry, a way of life which had grown out of the tragedy of the Clearances and the success of which he was to celebrate in The Silver Darlings. In the 1937 Scots Magazine article, 'One Fisher Went Sailing',⁴ he describes the deterioration in the West Coast fishing industry, which seems to be following the earlier pattern of decline on the north-east coast given imaginative expression in The Grey Coast and in a short story such as 'Down to the Sea'. The problem would appear to be only partly one of over-fishing and lack of conservation. As 'One Fisher Went Sailing' and other articles such as 'The Family Boat: Its Future in Scottish Fishing'⁵ make clear, it was also the consequence of the way in which the Scottish fishing industry was organised. While the family boat ownership pattern worked towards the communal good of the fishing crew and preserved the democratic traditions of the folk, it did not provide any bulwark against a poor fishing season such as the English system of company-owned boats provided. The play Net Results dramatises the tragedy of debt and loss of self-respect which just such a sequence of poor fishing seasons provokes. While accepting the traditional worth of the Scottish pattern, and on the other hand being wary of the dangers of outside capitalist backing for local enterprises, Gunn in these fishing articles argues strongly for more co-operation on the part of the Scottish fishermen: 'some system of co-operation similar to that which has proved so successful in Scandinavian countries.'⁶ As Muir does also in Scottish Journey, Gunn recognises here that dissension and individualism can only work against successful Scottish enterprise. Unlike Muir, however, Gunn also argues strongly for Scottish control over Scottish affairs if regeneration is to be successful: 'If Scotland had to

deal with her own affairs, her fishing industry would at once be of major importance in her economy, and she would very soon be compelled to give it the attention that the Germans, Danes, Swedes and Norwegians give to theirs.⁷

Tourism has for long been proposed as the most hopeful answer to the problems of the Highlands. Again like Muir in Scottish Journey, but with more specific factual backing, Gunn makes his view plain that tourism is no positive way forward. "Gentlemen - The Tourist!": The New Highland Toast⁸ takes as its starting-point objections to a proposed Hydro-electric scheme for the Highlands because of a philosophy that tourism should be given priority. Gunn draws attention to the Highland problem as it appears in the emigration of young people, in the decline of fishing and crofting, in the loss of language and culture, and asks how the tourist industry can reverse this situation: 'In this whole area [i.e. the north-east Caithness coast] there are two families that benefit, to a certain degree, from the tourist traffic: the family that runs the hotel and the family that runs the garage. No other families benefit. The tourist traffic has not given rise even to one small standing order for fish or for croft produce.'⁹ He dismisses objections that schemes such as the proposed Hydro-electric scheme would 'destroy the tourist traffic'. In the end, however, 'tourism one way or the other wouldn't matter.' The only real solution to the decline of the Highlands is lasting work located in the Highlands:

I should demand a man's work, and I should demand it in my own land. I might hate the forces, national or local, that had so misgoverned and impoverished the Highlands as to compel me away from my fishing or crofting and into a factory. But better a factory than starvation; better a self-respecting worker in my own trade union than a half-sycophant depending on the whims of a passing tourist. For I should know that so long as Highlandmen are employed in the Highlands, so long as

they constitute the mass of the workers there, then there is hope for the Highlands. In virile life, however employed, there is a future, because free men will not bear indefinitely the evils of our present industrial system. But when this free virile life is absent, then not all the deserving old women attending to all the tourists of the world and prattling of the scenic beauty of empty glens can save the ancient heritage from decay and death. ¹⁰

Similar findings are communicated in Off in a Boat,¹¹ the account of the journey down the West Coast of Scotland made by Gunn and his wife to mark the start of the new pattern of living initiated by his resignation from the Civil Service. On that journey they were confronted by the emptiness resulting from the Clearances of an island such as Rum and the decline of the once successful fishing industry which had arisen out of the Clearances. The only hopeful pointers towards the future were the aluminium smelter at Fort William and state-inspired activities such as afforestation and the new community created at Portnalong by the Agricultural Board. The new forests, in particular, seemed to carry in them the possibility of renewal. They were 'State forests; the forests of the folk themselves.'¹²

Gunn's dream for renewal - 'It is easy to launch out, in imagination, on increased afforestation, local industries such as fish-freezing, fish-canning, cloth-weaving, kelp-burning, eggs and honey; to assist crofting, with all the power supplied by small hydro-electric plants - on the basis, say, of one plant to one glen, so that there would be no more jealousies! I myself have been turning over that dream for a generation' - is one 'that might well perpetuate and make creative once more the Highland spirit.'¹³ And it is this Highland spirit which he sees increasingly threatened, yet is so worthy to be fought for. In 'Highland Games'¹⁴ he attacks the new commercial aspect of the Games which is interfering with the traditional local element which sprang from 'the whole conception of communal life' and which 'shows us the real value of tradition, shows us growing and

blossoming from our own roots.'¹⁵ Similarly in 'The Ferry of the Dead',¹⁶ he propounds an attitude to An Comunn Gaidhealach and the Gaelic Mod which is at one with that put forward forcefully in the twenties by Roderick Erskine of Mar, himself a Gael, and by the Lowland Hugh MacDiarmid, who were opposed to An Comunn because of its refusal to become involved in politics and because they wished to see a Scottish literary revival - in Gaelic and Lowland Scots - aiming at the highest achievements of European writers of the time. Thus, in 'The Ferry of the Dead', Gunn concludes that the Mod is on the side of decline because 'it is essentially neither a creative body nor an inspiration towards creation. At the core, it stands for the remembrance of things past, and does not envisage a future in terms of that past.'¹⁷ It is in the category of the spurious Concert episode in The Lost Glen and the folk-music collector in the play Old Music, whose concern for the sentimentalised past surpasses her awareness of the sorrow of the living present. 'Nationalism and Internationalism',¹⁸ again in sympathy with MacDiarmid's philosophy for a Scottish renaissance, makes the point that nationalism and internationalism are not incompatible attitudes: 'it is only when a man is moved by the traditions and music and poetry of his own land that he is in a position to comprehend those of any other land, for already he has the eyes of sympathy and the ears of understanding.'

Thus, at the core of Gunn's aspiration for economic and social renewal in the Highlands is his belief in the importance of the qualities which are to be found in the traditional way of life of the people, what he calls in Highland River 'the essential social tradition' (HR 77), a tradition which in its close relationship with land and sea affords the individual opportunities to experience 'the fine essence of delight' (HR 114). This delight and its source in the life around him was the subject of many of Gunn's articles in the late thirties and early forties when Europe faced

the consecutive tragedies of the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, and the individual became increasingly menaced by totalitarian systems. A number of such articles, originally written for The Scots Magazine under the titles of 'Memories of the Month' and 'A Countryman's Year', and under the pseudonym of 'Dane McNeil', were later brought together and published as Highland Pack in 1949. A similar source of inspiration and renewal for Gunn is the continuity between past and present which is to be found in the Highland culture. In the Highlands 'there has remained over from an old culture much of that elemental sense of piety or reverence for life. The spirit still has an instinctive urge to dodge restrictive mechanisms.'²⁰ In Off in a Boat Gunn finds that these old values 'belong to the mountains and glens, to the curve and flow of the land, to the gleam of the sea, to that which exists static and eternal, yet flowing, before our eyes. The silence is inspired with the far sound of it' (OB 26). And while the Highland communal philosophy of life may be 'closely akin to the vision of the modern young communist poet,' his idealism stems from 'a sort of intellect whereas we were moved by a sort of memory' (OB 26). As Gunn and Eoin return from the purchase of the boat for the Off in a Boat journey, they encounter such 'race memory in the form of

a man on a knoll winnowing grain in a gentle wind. . . .
From the rhythmic motion of the riddle, we watched the good grain fall to the earth and the chaff blow on the wind. The man on the knoll stood against the sky.

In the northland, the generation before mine used to winnow thus in their little barns, the winds blowing in at the small window and out at the door. As they used to do it in the country of the Loire away back in that sixteenth century when Joachim du Bellay wrote, D'un Vanneur de Blé aux Vents. (OB 35)

Like Wordsworth's meeting with the Highland girl reaping, and unlike Muir's encounter with the man harrowing in 'The Cloud', Gunn's seeing of the man winnowing grain is life-giving in its re-inforcement of the continuity of

past and present: 'the virtue of the picture lay in its gathering together in human kinship all men who have winnowed grain across all the fields of time' (OB 35).

It is this belief in the efficacy of Highland social and spiritual values which inspires a second group of novels which follows on from the novels of Highland decline. The new beginning is initiated by Highland River and is continued in The Silver Darlings, Young Art and Old Hector, The Green Isle of the Great Deep and The Drinking Well. Although it would appear that almost all of what one might call these positive Highland novels had their particular impetus in chance remarks by acquaintances - Highland River, for example, was the result of the directors of Faber suggesting a river subject to Gunn in the hope of inspiring another Morning Tide,²¹ and The Green Isle of the Great Deep was apparently Gunn's answer to Naomi Mitchison's criticism of the Young Art and Old Hector stories as escapist²² - Gunn's non-fiction writing of the period demonstrates that the move away from the depiction of Highland decline in the novels was a logical one. The expression of the positive values of Highland tradition is not, of course, limited to the above-mentioned novels. The virtues of the culture which was being lost was an important aspect of several of the novels of decline, and in his later work Gunn consistently employs Highland values as a corrective to what he sees as the nihilism and destructive intellectualism of contemporary urban life. What is philosophically and formally significant about this middle group of novels is that in them, through choice of subject and development of plot and characterisation, these Highland values are allowed to speak for themselves without the intrusion of a didactic narrator. We are not told that these values exist as so often in the later novels. Through character in action Gunn convinces us that they do exist.

Highland River occupies a significant pivotal position in Gunn's work. In addition to its initiation of a positive thematic approach to the Highland way of life, it looks back to Morning Tide through the characterisation of the young Kenn, the boy entity of the composite Kenn character, and forward to the later, more overtly philosophical novels through the adult Kenn's search for the source of his river and of his essential being: a search that was to lead Gunn eventually to The Well at the World's End.

Highland River's success is to a significant degree due to Gunn's maintaining these two elements of boyhood consciousness and adult search in balance throughout the novel. In addition, the boy's innocence and directness, the firmness with which his everyday activities are depicted by his author, allow no adult sentimentality to distort the hunt. The grown-up Kenn's search is rooted in the vivid, direct actuality of the young boy's animistic responses, the delight which, as Gunn defines it in The Atom of Delight, stems from 'thought, skilled movements and the body with its senses and its sex' (AD 155).

The opening of Highland River both evokes the opening of Morning Tide and marks its departure from that book. The boy is the first actor on the stage of each, but while Hugh in Morning Tide gathers his bait in the twilight hour, with the sea hissing and menacing around him, the boy Kenn encounters the salmon, and so begins his search for his individual being, in the first of the morning. Where the opening action of Morning Tide is all silence and endurance, in Highland River it vibrates with the exhilaration of the hunt:

Out of that noiseless world in the grey of the morning, all his ancestors came at him. They tapped his breast until the bird inside it fluttered madly; they drew a hand along his hair until the scalp crinkled; they made the blood within him tingle to a dance that had him leaping from boulder to boulder before he rightly knew to what desperate venture he was committed. (HR 8)

The animism in the description reflects the changed context. Instead of the 'black dog' boulders, 'licking their paws in the dying evening light down by the secret water's edge' (MT 9), there is 'the tin pail that the tinkers had made' which 'watched with bright face from the kneeling-stone' (HR 12).

The symbolism in the opening passages of the novel is subordinate to the actuality of Kenn's 'saga of a fight' (HR 12) with the salmon, but it is sufficiently present to be recalled when necessary as the book progresses. The boy Kenn has met with the salmon as it swims back to the source of its life in the upper reaches of the river, and the encounter starts Kenn on the road which will eventually lead him to a similar search. In Celtic legend, the salmon is the source of wisdom as the hazel nuts are the source of knowledge. In Young Art and Old Hector, Hector tells Art the story of Finn MacCoul and how the hero, when a boy, obtained his great wisdom by eating the salmon. Kenn, too, through his successful hunting of the salmon, feels himself changed. As he arrives home with the fish, water seeping from his clothes, his mother notices 'a flame, an intolerant fighting spirit, that knit him together, and separated him from her in a way that suddenly pulled at her heart' (HR 16). And 'from that day the river became the river of life for Kenn' (HR 40). Through this fight with the salmon and the other 'boyhood approaches' which follow, Kenn 'is grounded in a relationship to his river that is fundamental and that nothing can ever quite destroy. And, from his river, the relationship is carried over, in whatever degree, to every other environment in life' (HR 195).

The portrait of the community and its land and sea environment is one of strength in Highland River. While in Morning Tide one is aware of the sustaining qualities of Highland tradition in the maturing consciousness of the child, Hugh, one is also aware that Hugh's community is a

fishing community in decline. Hugh will not follow his father to sea. His brother and his friends emigrate. Kenn also does not follow his father to sea and his brother Angus emigrates, but these courses are not in Highland River specifically related by Gunn to a dying community. Kenn's intellectual ability, his questioning, precise mind, take him to Glasgow University and a scientific career. We are not told why Angus emigrates. The declining fishing industry may be a factor in the community's way of life, but it is not this that interests Gunn in the book, but the positive qualities of coast and communal living pattern. Through sea-fishing and crofting

in the course of centuries there had developed a communal feeling so genuine that the folk themselves never thought about it. They rejoiced and quarrelled, loved and fought, on a basis of social equality. Even the big farm was absent and so there were no bothies and farm servants, and none of the children that went to school had a father who thought of some-one above him as 'the master'. (HR 23-4)

Gunn's description of the sea-coast could itself be held as the locus classicus of his positive vision of the north-east sea-board and the values which it inspired:

Strength was the keynote of this coast, a passionless remorseless strength, unyielding as the rock, tireless as the water; the unheeding rock that a falling body would smash itself to pulp upon; the transparent water that would suffocate an exhausted body in the slow rhythm of its swirl. There was a purity about it all, stainless as the gull's plumage, wild and cold as its eye. However strange and haunted one's thoughts, they were never really introverted; but, rather, lifted into some new dimensions of the purely objective, where internal heats and involutions pass out upon, without tainting, the wind and the sea. (HR 57)

There is no place here for the softness of the West or for the philosophy of the Celtic Twilight.

Within the outward strength of the community and natural environment is the more intimate strength of the immediate family unit with its emotional reserve yet 'silent invisible affection' (HR 76). At its centre is the mother: 'All the history of her people is writ on her face. The grey seas are stilled in her eyes; danger and fear are asleep in her brows; want's bony fingers grow warm at her breast; quietly against the quiet trees the struggle of the days lies folded in her hands' (HR 99). As he looks back on her in later years, the adult Kenn sees her 'as the mother that abides from everlasting to everlasting' (HR 97). In contrast, his father is a man of the sea, a heroic figure with whom the boy Kenn's relationship is one both of awe and companionship. The characterisation of mother and father in this book is thus simultaneously archetypal and naturalistic through the details of everyday living with which the parents are associated. As can be seen from the above quotation, Gunn's view of the mother is, especially, an archetypal one. She has little personal individuality: Kenn 'does not know what she is thinking' (HR 99). Nevertheless, Gunn succeeds in creating a living portrait of the mother because it is through the child Kenn's consciousness that we principally see her, and to the young child his parents had, as Edwin Muir described it in his Autobiography, something of the quality of 'fixed allegorical figures in a timeless landscape' (A 24).

Gunn's symbolic representation of Kenn's parents and his sense of the eternal strengths of community and coast relate to the boy Kenn's discovery of his archaic heritage in the fight with the salmon. The boy found that the instincts of his hunting ancestors precipitated him into his first fight with a salmon. In later years, he marks his success in the University Bursary Competition by again catching a salmon. As he returns home with it through the dark night, he finds that the salmon has released to him some

more of its special gifts. He not only is no longer afraid of the dark, but 'on this night, too - though he did not realise it until he began to retrace his steps by his Highland river with some care - substance was given to his belief in the folk, of whom he was one. This belief has accompanied him with an elusive assurance of power' (HR 218).

Kenn's awareness of his links with the past of the folk is given expression throughout Highland River, but its most concentrated formulation is to be found in Chapter Five of the novel which in many ways parallels in imaginative prose Edwin Muir's similar search for his roots in an archaic heritage in the poem 'The Journey Back' in The Labyrinth collection. While Muir's poem is, in my view, hampered by its abstract nature and by the obscurity of the subjective nature of its allusions and associations, Gunn's exploration 'into the source of the river and the source of himself', and also 'into the source of his forbears back beyond the dawn of history' (HR 59) is made concrete by its own source in the boyish activities of Kenn and his observation and questioning of the signs of the past which abound on the river banks and in the Strath where he plays:

It was remarkable how the races that had gone to his making had each left its signature on the river bank; often over and over, as children on gates and walls scrawl the names of those amongst them who are 'courting'.

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. A mile up the river where the main stream was joined by its first real tributary, the promontory overlooking the meeting of the waters was crowned by the ruins of a broch that must have been the principal stronghold of the glen when the Picts, or perhaps some earlier people, were in their heyday.

And all these elements of race still existed along the banks of the river, not only visibly in the appearance of the folk themselves, but invisibly in the stones and earth. (HR 59-60)

Despite the arid irrelevance of a schooling which taught him nothing about his ancestors or the ways of his people, 'in some unaccountable way he seemed to be aware of the living essence of this history without having been explicitly taught it.' His mind which 'secretly quickened before a broch, before a little path going up through a birch wood, to presences not looked at over the shoulder, possessed a magic that it seems more than a pity to have lost. For it was never deliberately induced. It was often feared, and sometimes hated. It was intensely real.' Thus, 'the adventures of boyhood were adventures towards the source, towards the ultimate loneliness of moor and mountainside, and his own adventure will finally have to take the same road' (HR 61-2).

In its Proustian time-shifts, the narrative pattern of Highland River is more sophisticated than that of Gunn's work as a whole. The hero Kenn is a composite character, both boy and man, and the action of the novel flows forwards and backwards between these two stages of his life. There are time-shifts also within the boyhood span, determined by the boy Kenn's stream of consciousness. The whole is thus a complex interweaving of adult and boyhood consciousness and experience. For example, Kenn the man, musing on how the 'moment of sheer unconditional delight' (HR 36) can be captured from within himself, remembers Beel and Art and the young Kenn hunting after what they think is the scent of wild honey, and finding it is only the scent of a certain wild flower; and this re-entering into the life of young Kenn leads back to the salmon, to Kenn's earlier fight with the salmon and forward to the schoolroom where Kenn is still lost in the meeting, despite the schoolmaster's wrath and the beating he has given the boy. Time, in Eliot's phrase, is 'eternally present'²³ in this book.

These time-shifts between boyhood and adulthood and the adult Kenn's speculation about the nature of consciousness and experience are, however,

always firmly grounded in the actuality of the boyhood experience. The narrator is in control in this book, as he is frequently not in control in the later philosophical novels. We experience the happenings through the boy's senses, but the narrator is also there, directing and commenting, placing the boy's and man's journey in its relevant context. As in all the novels and short stories where a young boy is the central character, one is struck by Gunn's ability - like that of D.H. Lawrence also - to take the reader inside the child's mind and emotional being. For this reason the thrashing of Kenn by the schoolmaster because of the boy's day-dreaming after his fight with the salmon, is almost unbearable to read. The reader too feels violated, 'all the glory of the morning' which the freshness of the boy's joy in life has evoked for him, 'lost' (HR 30) for him too. Gunn's handling of the schooling experiences in this book is much firmer than the unsatisfactory schoolroom episode in Morning Tide. Here, through the contrast between Kenn's experiences within and without the schoolroom, Gunn makes clear, without didacticism, the irrelevance of such schooling to the way of life of the Highland community. In The Atom of Delight, he describes his own relationship with the Galloway headmaster who taught him Latin and took him fishing, and who initiated him into the knowledge of herbs and wild flowers and their use in the Highlands in the past which became the context of the Dark Mairi character in Butcher's Broom. For Gunn, remembering this relationship, 'the boy was not being taught, he was learning by the way from a grown man who knew the traditions of the tribe. And it was this feeling for a people behind the wild flowers that was somehow most strongly evoked' (AD 182). This also is the way in which Young Art learns from Hector in the later book. But there is no such feeling for a people behind Kenn's schooling, no understanding of how present experience could illuminate the past and build a future based on the

qualities of that past: 'But the master did not tell them of salmon and of pools, of moors and the source of a river, of spawning and the mysterious journeyings of fish in river and sea.' Nor did he tell them of the Celts and Vikings who had left their names along the banks of the river. Instead 'Leicester is famous for boots' (HR 31), a piece of useless information beaten into the boy, the utterance of which marked the adult Kenn's return to consciousness after the trauma of his gassing in the trenches in the First World War.

The descriptive qualities of the narrative are outstanding. This is especially so in the evocations of the sea and river in winter. In these passages Gunn not only makes the reader feel the cold with Kenn, but creates a visual picture from his verbal description. As Kenn listens to the fishermen talk in the late evening by the harbour, 'his teeth would chitter and he would try to rub his skin against the inside of his clothes.' When the body got as cold inside as the point of the nose outside - not the ears which only got cold suddenly, in frost - then nothing could warm it. You were like the miry earth, the damp air, the raw wind coming round the corner with stinging spots of rain out of the dirty weather that lay on the breast of the sea.' And the sea itself: 'how wild and how cold! When the wave smashed against the quay-point, the froth was unearthly white as the gull's feathers, of a coldness more deathly than any snow' (HR 65). In the description of the sodden land at the tail-end of winter, there is a prose-poetry reminiscent of Edwin Muir's evocation in his autobiography of the waste-land of nature in the environs of Glasgow:

There was a sharp spell of snow and frost towards the end of February. The thaw was dark and raw and colder than the frost. Everywhere the ground was swollen and here and there it was spewed up. The effect was as if the earth had been drowned. Long grey grasses lay flattened against the washed peaty banks. In fields, by roadsides, on river flats, were tiny high-water marks of brown leaves, twigs, and bits of

grass - short, nibbled bits as if the deluge had searched out and dispersed even the nests of mice. The moss was sodden and dotted with the droppings of sheep and rabbits in astonishing numbers.

Beads of manure on the drowned land. Bare trees, fallen branches, rotten stumps with spawn of toadstool crushing away from the foot, tumbled stones of pre-historic dwellings grey with lichen, and the bitter rain-spitting wind.

The passing beyond death into disintegration. (HR 115; A 92)

Disintegration in the form of human disintegration is a significant aspect of the philosophical theme of the book. It is given concrete expression through the responses of Kenn's older brother, Angus, both in the course of a poaching expedition in youth and in the trenches in France during the First World War; and it is opposed by Gunn's vision of wholeness which itself has its source in what he later called 'the atom of delight.'

This exploration of disintegration is, in my view, one of the least satisfactory elements in Highland River. Gunn's lack of conviction here does not lie in the depiction of Angus's fear of the gamekeeper when poaching, or of his breakdown in the trenches, for these are portrayed movingly and with convincing actuality. What is to me disturbing are the philosophical conclusions which Gunn draws from these happenings, and these conclusions are themselves part of his somewhat ambivalent philosophy of delight.

It is difficult to grasp just exactly what Gunn means by 'delight', which to us, as we use it today, has become a somewhat semantically neutered word. Gunn himself seems to be aware of an imprecise quality in the word. As the adult Kenn remembers his boyhood past, the narrator tells us that 'delight is here not so much too strong as too uniform a word.' It seems that this delight may be a moment 'troubling in the old panic sense; it may be ecstatic; or it may, by a lure of memory, evasive as a forgotten scent, draw one towards it as towards a source' (HR 36). Later he

describes the wish to recapture 'not merely the old primordial goodness of life but its moments of absolute ecstasy, an ecstasy so different from what is ordinarily associated with the word that its eye, if it had one, would be wild and cold and watchful as the eye of the gull on the cliff-top' (HR 62).

Delight, then, is no simple concept, not merely the idea of a pleasurable response which one most often associates with the word. It would seem to have to do with an absoluteness of response, whether to pain or pleasure, which is undiluted by the consideration of extraneous factors; the kind of response which one perceives in the young child who pursues his moments of happiness or sorrow or mental absorption oblivious of the world around him; the kind of response which, as Gunn himself suggests in The Atom of Delight, can be found properly in the adult being only perhaps in the responses of the creative artist. In relation to the child's experience, he believes, with Wordsworth, that this sensation of delight is most surely to be found where 'the child has had half a chance to run wild among natural surroundings . . . then everything is perceived vividly . . . with all the freshness of the first time, so vividly that the child's perceiving eye has been called by poets "the innocent eye"' (AD 155).

Gunn refers in the above definition of delight to 'the old primordial goodness of life', and in Highland River and in many of his books he seems to be suggesting that the Diffusionists' conception of a primordial 'golden age' is indeed a viable one; that, as Kenn comments in Highland River, 'our river took a wrong turning somewhere' (HR 123); that if we could only return to the primitive sources of communal living, our individual spiritual being would be enriched and reborn. In his account of the boy Kenn's fight with the salmon he describes the two kinds of fear Kenn feels: 'The fear was fear of the fish itself, of its monstrous reality, primal fear; but it was also infinitely complicated by fear of game-keepers, of the horror

and violence of law courts, of our modern social fear' (HR 8). While 'primal fear' would appear to be healthy, and one of the possible sources of Gunn's 'delight', 'our modern social fear' is destructive, breaking into the sanctuary of what Gunn calls 'the second self' (AD 83). It is this second, disintegrating fear which somehow has broken through the innocence of the boy Angus. He has no primal fear of walking through the darkness to bring home the hidden salmon, but the fear of the gamekeeper is too strong for him:

Kenn looked at Angus's face. It had whitened, and playing on it was a weak surface smile.

All the dark proud life was gone.

Doom was in the nervous lips, in the shallow glitter of the eyes. The spirit, netted in the white smile, haunted Kenn through all the rest of his years. (HR 155)

Similarly with Angus's behaviour in the trenches where Kenn meets him again after his return from Canada to fight in the First World War. Again 'the spirit [is] netted in the white smile', and Angus's principal pre-occupation is to keep himself as far from danger as is possible in that exposed situation.

Gunn did not himself serve in World War One and Kenn's war experiences are apparently based on those of his brother John, as are many of the details of Kenn's career.²⁴ His account of Angus's breakdown seems to me to be simplistic, too obviously contrived to illustrate his theory of the wholeness of primordial delight opposed by the destructiveness of social fear, and taking no cognisance of the many tragic accounts in poetry and prose of shell-shocked and destroyed minds which resulted from the horror of the trenches, and which could not all be ascribed to a previous lack of wholeness in the sufferer. Gunn's description of Kenn's contrary confidence in the trenches is similarly simplistic, and smacks not a little of boys' adventure stories. Kenn is, like Biggles, the invincible hero:

'Is that cross-section under observation?' he asked.

'Under observation! You can bloody well shake hands with yourself!' The man's astonishment was tinged with something like disgust. Apparently no-one crossed that trench on his two feet and lived. (HR 161-62)

The account of Kenn's flight from the advancing Germans in chapter three of the book is of a similar romantic, escapist nature.

Throughout Gunn's expounding of his philosophy of delight and wholeness, whether in a philosophical novel such as Highland River, or in the late autobiographical book The Atom of Delight, one is aware of the absence of any consideration of the paradox of good and evil in human existence, a paradox which seems to have little meaning for Gunn. While Edwin Muir in his poetry fought through from an obsession with human confinement and the attempt to negate the unbearable awareness of evil through 'imagination's one long day' (CP 58), to the mature acceptance of the co-existence of good and evil given expression in poems such as 'One Foot in Eden' and 'The Difficult Land', one feels that for Gunn good and evil are two separate entities, both in individual experience and in human life as a whole: the one stemming from a primitive, simple, communal life pattern; the other from the intellectualism, urbanisation and power-seeking philosophies of modern life. For him there is either the way of good or of evil; of delight or of disintegration. And it would appear that he believes that if we could only follow the way of delight, then the evil would necessarily disappear. This, too, I believe, is an over-simple philosophical attitude, taking little account of an evolutionary complexity in social organisation that cannot readily be discarded, and ignoring the preoccupation with the observed fact of the co-existence of good and evil in human life of philosophers and religious teachers from the beginnings of history. One may now find it difficult to accept the story of the expulsion from Eden as other than myth. But it is a myth which has grown out of the need to

explain the otherwise inexplicable paradox of good and evil. One could also maintain that it acknowledges the loss of innocence which is part of mature living experience. The innocence of the Garden was a limited innocence, just as the innocent, instinctive revolt of Art in The Green Isle of the Great Deep is to some extent a limited revolt. The woman Mary's deliberate defiance of the totalitarian authority of the administrators through her eating of the fruit of life and human responsiveness is a more mature revolt based on conscious choice. Gunn's over-simple opposition of good and evil, his insistence on the way of delight and, in his later books, on the happy ending, is to some extent an evasion of the human predicament: the adult, no less than the boy, wants to be 'off and away' (AD 24), to keep his 'second self' to himself.

This philosophical position seriously impairs many of Gunn's late novels. In Highland River it is contained by the book's prevailing emphasis on Kenn's boyhood and by the psychological truth of the boy's undiluted experience of 'delight'. Only occasionally, as in the War passages, or in the adult Kenn's conversations with his colleague Radzyn towards the end of the book does a doubting response on the part of the reader creep in. For Kenn, as he muses on his own search for the source, 'there was something for ever tragic' in Radzyn. 'There was nothing one could do with the tragic conception of life except acknowledge it. Bow to it, giving nothing away, and pass on the moor like sunlight, like shadow, with thoughts hesitant and swift as a herd of hinds. In this way one is undefeatable - until death comes. And as death is inevitable, its victory is no great triumph' (HR 251). Such an attitude could, I believe, be with justice castigated as escapist, its expression rhetorical. It is certainly one which seriously restricts the philosophical and material world of the novelist.

Kenn's 'saga of a fight' with the salmon and the search on which it launched him is followed in The Silver Darlings by the epic story of a people who snatched victory from the jaws of defeat that the Clearances represented. It is, as Alexander Scott describes it in an essay which is essential reading for The Silver Darlings and one of the best introductions to the archetypal element in Gunn's work, 'a folk epic on the major theme of human indomitability, a triumph-song of the Gael.'²⁵

In the article 'Filming The Silver Darlings', Gunn describes the motivation behind the work: 'When I wrote The Silver Darlings I was moved by what happened to our Highland people during and after the Clearances.'²⁶ The book thus provides a sequel and a counterpointing theme to Butcher's Broom. While in the earlier book Gunn went back into history to explore the nature of the Highland experience in a time of defeat and decline, in The Silver Darlings the historical situation explored is one of growth and optimism, and the human qualities which are given expression in it are both the traditional ones of interdependence and communal concern and fellowship, and the newer qualities of independence, strength, and humility in that strength bred by the struggle with the sea. As Highland River had described the 'strength [that] was the keynote of this coast, a passionless remorseless strength, unyielding as the rock, tireless as the water' (HR 57), so The Silver Darlings tells us as does The Atom of Delight, that 'if humility was the sea's unended lesson, it was the humility that stood on its own feet, fighting it out' (AD 102). The new environment is no place for physical or moral reticence. It is the breeding-ground of heroes.

The Silver Darlings is dedicated 'to the memory of my father' (SD 5) and, equally with the Clearances, the author's father and the tradition

of seamanship which he represented provide the inspiration behind the book, as indeed they do in relation to most of Gunn's novels which tell the story of life on the north-east seaboard. The description in The Atom of Delight captures the inspiration behind them all: 'His father's boat, coming at last with her consort of gulls, weighted well down' (AD 107).

Although The Silver Darlings experience is positive in contrast to the forces of destruction which operate in Butcher's Broom, the book is, as Gunn's own comment above suggests, a sequel to the earlier book. The community at Helmsdale from which Tormad and his inexperienced fishing companions are snatched by the press-gang could easily be the community of Dark Mairi which was evicted from the Riasgan to the cliff-tops at the end of Butcher's Broom. Gunn's depiction of their struggle for survival in the opening chapter of The Silver Darlings is told with restraint, yet with an actuality of detail which is more convincing than the account of the transplanted crofters in the earlier work, which seemed to dwell less on the hardships which confronted them and the bravery with which they confronted the hardships, than on the moral disintegration and return to superstitious practices to which they fell victim. While The Silver Darlings tells how the people had been driven from the inland valleys 'where they and their people before them had lived from time immemorial' to the sea-shore 'to live if they could and, if not, to die'; and while 'many had died' and others 'had been carried away in empty lime ships' (SD 12), yet it also tells that 'it was out of that very sea that hope was now coming to them. . . . The people would yet live, the people themselves, for no landlord owned the sea, and what the people caught there would be their own' (SD 13-14). The sea might be a relentless opponent - 'You could never be sure of it as you could be sure of the earth' (AD 101) -

but it provided the people with a freedom and independence which the earth, managed as it was by landlords and factors, could not provide. Gunn stresses the epic quality of the era which is the subject of his book by his use of the adjective 'fabulous' in its opening pages, where he contrasts the end of one European epic which had its roots in a revolt of the people - 'It was the end of the Napoleonic era' - with the burgeoning story of the folk of the Moray Firth: 'For the Moray Firth it was the beginning of the herring fisheries, of a busy, fabulous time among the common people of that weathered northern land' (SD 14).

As in Butcher's Broom Gunn's narrative was at its best when the action was supported by historical fact, so one of the principal strengths of The Silver Darlings is the historical authenticity of the portrait painted. In the article 'Neil M. Gunn: A Brief Memoir', Francis Hart describes the extensive research which went into the book, research which was only possible as a result of the greater leisure afforded by Gunn's retiral from the Civil Service. Like Highland River, the book's genesis lay in a proposal from outside:

As Neil recalls it, many things for the book were simply thrown at him. His good friend Peter Anson of Morayshire proposed it, and on the basis of Anson's Fishing Boats and Fisherfolk on the East Coast of Scotland he began. At Helmsdale he found a ledger for 1815. An old Dunbeath man told him of the first four men from the district to sail through the Pentland Firth to the western fishing, miss the Butt of Lewis and head past the Flannans till a large ship coming in directed them straight about. Visits to Peter and Ena Macleod in Stornoway provided talks with fishermen and local fishcurers. Peter Macleod's father, Malcolm, still fishing off Bernera, one of Neil's father's crew, was persuaded to take Neil on his semi-annual sail to the Flannans to deliver or return his lambs from the grazing there. Neil described it in three instalments for Chambers's; they are incorporated into the closing sections of Highland Pack, and they provide the precipice episode of the novel. Then he came upon a doctor's account of the plague's coming to Caithness, with prescriptions and all. He remembered, too, from earlier visits to Dunbeath, the story of the sailor with the silver clasp in his head, memento of fights with the press gang operating out of Helmsdale. Such in part was the provenance of The Silver Darlings.²⁷

Gunn himself was at pains to make clear that such research is only part of the recipe for success. In the article 'The Novel at Home' he tells how an American critic described The Silver Darlings as a book 'written by one who lived in kinship with the matter of his writing'. For Gunn, such '"kinship" or authenticity does not come from knowing the facts. Facts can be acquired easily enough. It comes rather from the attitude of the author to the facts. And this is the important thing.'²⁸

In some respects The Silver Darlings, like D.H. Lawrence's The Rainbow or Lewis Grassie Gibbon's A Scots Quair, is a chronicle novel. The story of Catrine and her son Finn and the series of new beginnings with which they are associated is also the story of their people and their new beginnings as fishermen after the Clearances. The novel is both an account of the individual life-story of Catrine and Finn, and a social document of the kind which one associates with the work of English novelists such as George Eliot and Arnold Bennett. Yet, just as Lawrence's The Rainbow is both related to the nineteenth century social novel tradition and is also something quite distinct from it, so Neil Gunn's The Silver Darlings has a dimension which is foreign to the English chronicle novel tradition. This is its epic nature, which has its roots not in the conventions of the bourgeois novel, but in the oral traditions of the Celtic peoples. Gunn's remarks in the typescript article 'Is there a living Scottish tradition in writing today' (held by the National Library of Scotland) on the adverse reaction by a London critic to the storm scene at the close of the first section of Morning Tide indicates the different milieu from which his work springs. Gunn comments:

That simple scene of a boy gathering mussels for bait was followed by the boats going to sea with their baited lines. They were caught in a terrific winter storm and had to fight their way back against all the odds. The crews survived.

Now the story was founded on fact. And I can still remember my astonishment - though it's nearly thirty years ago now - when a highbrow London magazine, criticising the book, said it fell short in its storm scene because it avoided tragedy. Yet to us, on the spot, the sheer wonder, the marvel, lay in the seamanship that so ordered the terrible fight in its final moments that death was given the slip with barely an inch to spare. Scenes like it were common enough all round our coasts - including the Islands, of course. That was what happened; that was the tradition in seamanship; and that was what I was paying tribute to.²⁹

This heroic, epic quality dominates The Silver Darlings. The pregnant Catrine's journey over the Ord of Caithness from Helmsdale to the land-safety of Kirsty's croft in Dunster (Dunbeath) after the seizure of her young husband and his fishing companions by the press-gang, is an epic journey, as is later her son Finn's walk from Dunster via Watten to Wick to consult the cholera doctor in an effort to save his mother. Similarly, Roddie's fishing expedition to Stornoway in the chapter 'Storm and Precipice', with Finn for the first time as a member of his crew, and Finn's later return journey, without Roddie, to Stornoway and to the Outer Hebrides, are epic journeys. All are individual heroic exploits in the greater epic which is the historical journey of the Highland people from their traditional rootedness in the land to their new life as fishers on the sea-coasts.

In keeping with the novel's epic nature, the characters are both individuals and archetypes. Finn, Catrine's son, whose growth to manhood co-incides with the achievement of success by the people as fishers, is representative of that new beginning. As Ronnie, the only one of his father's captured companions to return home after serving his time in the navy, tells him: 'You are the new generation' (SD 456). It is clear that Gunn intends the reader to see Finn both as the representative of this new beginning and as a figure of legend. He shares a name with the legendary

Finn MacCoul, and on three separate occasions Gunn expressly links his name and achievements with those of the Celtic hero. When Finn visits his mother's people in Dale after the first epic journey to Stornoway and at the ceillidh-house tells of his adventures, an old drover, at the end of the recital, puts a finger on Finn's breast: 'You gave me a vision - of the youth of Finn MacCoul himself' (SD 449), he says. On the second night of Finn's visit the same drover asks: 'Are the days of Finn MacCoul coming back upon us?' (SD 479). Similarly, during Finn's meaningful stay in remote North Uist, a stay which 'had the influence on his life of a rare memory that would come and go by the opening of a small window far back in his mind' (SD 535), the old man in whose house Finn sleeps initiates him into the traditions and knowledge of the community as if he were passing the mantle of his wisdom to Finn. Significantly the old man too is named Finn, and Gunn stresses that this name 'was likewise Finn MacCoul's, the great hero of the noble Fians, whose marvellous exploits were this storyteller's province in learning and art' (SD 538). Finn is himself not the kind of hero that one finds in a traditional novel, but a hero such as one finds in such epic tales: while his daring, his occasional unreasonable, even ludicrous behaviour, can be read as belonging to the maturing difficulties of the adolescent boy, they are also typical of the way in which folk heroes are presented, their faults as highly-coloured as their heroic exploits.

Other characters also have a two-sided nature, even if this is not so overtly pointed to as the legendary aspects of Finn. Catrine symbolises the people's rootedness in the land and fear of the new sea environment, while she is in addition another of Gunn's symbolic mother-figures. She is much more individualised, however, than the mother either in Morning Tide

or in Highland River. Her journey from inexperienced, fearful young wife to the single parent responsible for her growing son's welfare, to the mature woman who conquers the fears and the tragedy in her past to become the wife of Roddie, the initiator of Dunster's fishing reputation, is movingly portrayed and completely convincing in a way that Gunn's young women characters seldom are. This portrayal is, significantly, rooted in the traditions of Highland life and in a simple, past way of life. It has no reference to our contemporary city-influenced culture. Nor, unlike the depiction of Elie in Butcher's Broom, does one feel that elements in Catrine's situation have been contrived to accord with the symbolic context of the narrative. Catrine's actions, and what happens to her, are convincing in their own right.

Gunn is particularly successful in the way he conveys Catrine's fears for Tormad's safety and her conviction of his death through her dream visions. Whether or not one believes in prevision as explored in Gunn's Second Sight,³⁰ a novel contemporaneous with The Silver Darlings, the portrayal of Catrine's dream visions is psychologically and dramatically convincing, as is her son Finn's sense of communion with the consciousness of his people's past in the House of Peace. As Alexander Scott comments in his essay on the novel, 'Gunn's talent is at its most tactful in the way that he uses the age-old superstitions in which the minds of early nineteenth-century Highlanders were saturated in order to suggest a world behind this world and to imply an immortal immunity to change interpenetrating the continuous changes of history.'³¹

In contrast to the philosophy which he communicates through the adult Kenn in Highland River, Gunn does face up to the possibility of tragedy in the portrayal of Catrine, and this contributes to the strength of her

characterisation. She begins her journey from Dale to Dunster in tragic circumstances, but even more significant is the self-awareness which comes upon her as a consequence of the visit of Tormad's fishing companion, Ronnie. She initially interprets Ronnie's 'I see it is too late' (SD 466), when she refuses his offer of marriage, as pertaining to the wasted years of his own life. Later, in the quietness of her home, she realises that they also apply to her life:

For now the words had a new power, a different meaning. Before, they had made the tragic pattern of life clear; they had set things at a distance. . . . But now the words were not spoken by Ronnie but in the dark recesses of her own mind, and they came upon her with a sense of immediate horror. The clear picture was blotted out like a piece of sentiment. Too late - too late - for you, Catrine. . . . It was her first real intimation of Death. (SD 466)

And Catrine discovers that she does not want to be on the road to death:

She was on Kirsty's road. . . . But she rebelled at the thought, and with that came a greater access of strength. She was young. She felt so young. In her mind and her body she felt like a young girl. She was no older than Shiela, who was in the midst of life, a warm, swarming life. (SD 470-71) (Gunn's ellipsis)

Catrine is, unusually, a Gunn character who changes in the course of the action, whose self-discovery is played out through the action of the novel. And as Catrine's characterisation is strengthened by her facing up to the genuinely tragic possibilities in the course which her life is taking, so in the depiction of the cholera epidemic, Gunn's dramatic narrative is strengthened by his allowing the death of Kirsty as opposed to his more customary practice of snatching a potential victim from the very jaws of death. And although Catrine, who insists on staying with Kirsty, does not catch cholera, her escape is convincing because it is based on the careful procedures of hygiene which she adopts in the nursing of Kirsty and on the

efficacy of the medicines and advice which Finn succeeds in bringing from the doctor in Wick. It is not a miraculous escape.

Kirsty herself has something of the quality of Dark Mairi in her, but again she is a much more human, individualised figure. Roddie is truly a sea-figure and symbolises the new commitment of the people to the sea in opposition to Catrine's clinging to the land. Both have to learn that land and sea have their equal succour and dangers. It is land, in the form of the precipice of Eileen Mor which Finn climbs, that saves the storm-lost sailors during the voyage to Stornoway. The cholera which comes to Dunster demonstrates to Catrine that the land cannot be entirely trusted. In addition, Roddie fulfils the Druid Aniel's vision of the future in Sun Circle as Butcher's Broom had fulfilled the Master's vision of the smoking glen. In Sun Circle Aniel saw the future of the Celtic people in the hands of those who, like the Viking Norsemen, could 'make their own decisions' (SC 357). Significantly, Roddie would appear to be of Viking stock. He is described as 'one of the old Vikings' (SD 281); 'tall and fair, with his blue eyes and his quiet ways.' He is the youngest skipper in Dunster, a leader in the new way of life. Musing on his activities and on the changes coming to Dunster, one of two old men sitting by the Inn 'had the sort of feeling that he had come himself up out of the sea like - like one sent to deliver us' (SD 85). As Alexander Scott points out, 'the characters appear as archetypes because they see one another as such, because each is aware, at particularly revealing moments in the action, of qualities in the others which have value always and everywhere, qualities not limited to any one time and place.'³² And in addition to the principal characters, there are numerous background figures such as the fish curer 'Special', the members of Roddie's crew, his sister Shiela with her warmth and gaiety, the

Stornoway gutters, who are economically yet clearly differentiated, and who create the context of a bustling, thriving community and its outposts. Although these background characters have not the overt symbolic attributes of the principal characters, one is aware throughout the action of the novel of the essential human qualities which are represented in them.

The Silver Darlings is rich in the qualities which characterise the best of Gunn's short stories and novels. Prominent among these is the descriptive writing, both in passages of pure prose description as in the evocation of the 'first greyness of morning' (SD 347-48) in the chapter 'Drink and Religion' which deals with the first Stornoway expedition, and in passages of descriptive narrative such as the young Finn's chasing of the butterfly in the chapter 'Finn and the Butterfly', his visit to the Fair in 'Finn Blows His Trumpet' and the account of his father's ill-fated fishing trial in the opening chapter of the book, 'The Derelict Boat'. In 'Finn and the Butterfly' one finds also a typical example of Gunn's menacing animism: as the young child is led farther and farther from his home by the elusive butterfly, 'now and then the wood was like a thing whose heart had stopped, watching' (SD 93).

Paralleling the richness of the descriptive writing in the book is the evocation of the positive social qualities which Gunn associates with the traditional Highland way of life. As he describes it in The Atom of Delight 'the social structure was so simple that it didn't consciously exist' (AD 117). Within this classless structure people are distinguished by their individual qualities. The generosity of the communal fellowship is illustrated by the welcome Catrine and her unborn son receive from Kirsty and her father, who are themselves not materially well-off, but are willing to share what they have with one who is more unfortunate; and by

the sharing arrangement Roddie makes with his first crew. Catrine's own generosity leads her to the disposal of Tormad's croft and boat, just as Kirsty and her father make a later disposal of their croft to Catrine and Finn. Permeating the whole way of life is 'the education that came from no schooling' (SD 550), the archaic heritage of the people. (Almost the only false note in Gunn's portrayal of the relationship between Catrine and Finn is Catrine's attempt to persuade Finn to engage in further conventional study and go to Aberdeen University to study for the ministry: a clichéd intrusion of the lad o' pairts syndrome which was appropriate to the action of Highland River but is wholly irrelevant to the themes and action of The Silver Darlings.)

In its formal aspects, the episodic nature of Gunn's narrative is in accord with the chronicle nature of the book, and the many suspense episodes fit into the chronicle pattern and into the pattern of traditional, oral, folk-epic. It seems to me, however, that despite the considerable harmony between overall narrative pattern and individual episode in this book, there is some loss of shape in the novel's form after the account of the first expedition to Stornoway. Gunn's problem here is that, for his epic purposes in relation to Finn, Finn must make a second voyage to Stornoway without Roddie to prove his own manhood and capability for leadership and heroism. He must, without outside help, act out the role of the legendary hero. Similarly, his visit to North Uist is necessary for the fulfilment of his legendary role. Through it and his exposure to the traditional stories, songs, dances and wisdom of the people of the West, he is not only enabled to see his mother 'as a woman under the spell of her own destiny' (SD 549) and thus enter into a new, adult relationship with her, but also to enter into his own maturity and into an awareness of his own destiny.

Yet however necessary these late epic journeys are in relation to the mythical aspects of the novel, in relation to the form of the novel as a whole they are in dramatic terms not entirely satisfactory. This is in great measure due to the superb quality of the descriptive and dramatic narrative in the account of Finn's first epic sea expedition with Roddie as skipper, which is to be found in the chapter entitled 'Storm and Precipice', and which is one of the finest episodes in any Gunn novel. The account embodies excitement, suspense, humour in the crew's struggle with the sea and in Finn's daring climb up an apparently unscalable cliff - the latter description all the more remarkable in view of its author's confession in The Atom of Delight that the boy 'had a poor head for great heights - his one and awful secret weakness' (AD 96). In addition, this journey provides a convincing psychological account of the battle for mastery between the young Finn and his surrogate father, Roddie, and of the elder man's conflicting responses to Finn's challenge to his previously undisputed authority. And while the journey, for Finn, elicits the element of self-discovery which one finds in Conrad's sea-stories, it also, perhaps even more strongly, demonstrates the interdependence and communal concern of the fishing crew. Their harmony in working together is illustrated by Finn's assessment of their decision-making process: it was 'as if some silent common intelligence had been at work' (SD 345). Yet, as he discovers later during his stay on North Uist, this interdependence in no way diminishes individuality: 'Never before had Finn so clearly seen how different each one of the crew was from the other' (SD 535).

It is difficult to repeat such a dramatic, varied, absorbing episode such as that described in 'Storm and Precipice' without an element of anti-climax creeping into the narrative. Inevitably, Finn's own journey to the

Western Isles is somewhat diminished by the success of his earlier expedition with Roddie. The frequent jokes about Rob's widow and exclamations of 'cold iron' become clichéd from over-indulgence; the returning victorious with a boat-load of herring after having been given up for dead can become a predictable narrative pattern.

One feels that the novel could have benefited from compression in its later chapters. Once Ronnie has visited Catrine with the confirmation of Tormad's death, there is no need to delay the awaited union of Catrine and Roddie any longer. The reader has for long been awaiting their marriage. Similarly, the coming-together of Finn and Una is too protracted, Una herself is not sufficiently substantiated and the relationship between her and Finn is not sufficiently convincing to stand as representative of the future of the community as Gunn employs it at the end of the novel. In addition, the passages which deal with Finn's endorsement of Catrine and Roddie's marriage through his visit to the new baby, are sentimentalised. Gunn seems to have abandoned his narrative objectivity in these closing sections and to be indulging himself in the warm bath of a happy ending: a human response, but one which the novelist allows himself at his peril.

That a happy ending is not entirely certain for the new and now prosperous communities of the Highlands is implicit in the action of the novel, but it is a theme which Gunn does not choose to develop in his epic narrative. The reader is at times only too conscious of the spendthrift attitude of the communities to their new-found wealth: 'the sea loves the spendthrift hand anyway!' (SD 573). In their prosperity the fishers exhibit the carefree exuberance and lack of forward planning which characterises the historical accounts of the Celts, the reverse side of which is the fatalism which permeated Gunn's depiction of the Grey Coast communities in

their decline. As the sea, in contrast to the land and its landlords, has given the people its wealth without obligation, so the fishermen and the wives spend that wealth fully and freely without care for the future. The wives indulge their passion for hospitality, the men for drink. Only the land-based curers like 'Special' seem able to lay down the basis of a continuing personal prosperity from the wealth which the sea uncovers. One is conscious of the twentieth century sequel to that prosperity and Gunn's own advocacy of proper planning and co-operation in the fishing industry in his many articles on the subject of its decline in the 1930s. The seeds of that decline seem to be present in the celebration of its growth in The Silver Darlings.

Such criticisms are largely overshadowed by the impact of the novel as a whole, which in its universality stands at the summit of Gunn's own narrative achievement and is a unique contribution to the novel in Scotland. For the editor of The Scots Magazine, J.B. Salmond, 'this, "The Silver Darlings", was the book Neil Gunn was meant to write, in fact was made to write.'³³

Although Young Art and Old Hector and The Green Isle of the Great Deep are satisfactory separate entities, their philosophical depths are most fully plumbed when they are read in relation to each other. Young Art and Old Hector provides the basis for Gunn's criticism of the misguided idealism of the Green Isle administrators, and the certainty with which he communicates 'what a true form of communal living might mean'³⁴ in the earlier novel enables the reader to respond, no less immediately or intensely than do Art and Hector, to the beehive nature of the Green Isle's corporate state.

Young Art and Old Hector apparently grew out of a commission to write a number of short stories for Chambers's Journal.³⁵ While the conservative nature of the periodical may have led Gunn to his choice of the theme of the relationship between an old man and young boy in a Highland village, the development of this relationship in the stories explored in imaginative fiction political and philosophical themes which were already occupying the writer in his journalism of the 1930s and early 1940s. Looking back on the genesis of the Young Art books in the article 'The Novel at Home', Gunn comments:

I wrote a novel about an old man and a little boy living quietly in the Highlands of Scotland (where I live myself). Nothing, you would say, could be more removed from the world of war and political theory. No violence, no killings, only simple daily happenings, against a given background and an old Gaelic culture. In a sense it would be difficult to produce anything more 'provincial', and apparently socially dying at that.

But that's not quite the way it struck me. We all follow political movements at home and abroad and argue about Socialism and Communism. But our arguments are necessarily hypothetical; our concept of the brotherhood of man is a theory in the head; realisation must be an affair of the future. Here in the Highlands of Scotland, however, we still have traces of that old Gaelic communal culture I have mentioned. Thinking over it, I began to understand what a true form of communal living might mean. I have thus had intimations of it from actual life.³⁶

Accounts of similar intimations from the actuality of communal living are to be found in articles such as 'Highland Games' which condemns the commercialism creeping into the contemporary Games, contrasting it with the traditional local element which 'gets at the core . . . of the whole conception of communal life':³⁷ a conception given expression in the chapter 'Art Runs a Great Race' in the Young Art and Old Hector novel; and in 'Nationalism and Internationalism' which puts forward the view that 'it is only when a man is moved by the traditions and music and poetry of his

own land that he is in a position to comprehend those of any other land, for already he has the eyes of sympathy and the ears of understanding.'³⁸ 'Memories of the Month: A Balance Sheet'³⁹ explores the relationship of the individual to his society, while 'The Essence of Nationalism'⁴⁰ and 'On Belief' convey a mistrust of idealisms and systems which constrict the spiritual freedom of the individual.

Although, in contrast to the wide span of The Silver Darlings, Gunn has in Young Art and Old Hector narrowed the field of the novel to this relationship between 'an old man and a young boy living quietly in the Highlands of Scotland', there is no loss of intensity in the living experience communicated. As Hector tells Art: 'It's not the size of the knowing that matters', but 'the kind of the knowing' (YA 250): a conclusion reached also by the far-travelled Ronnie in The Silver Darlings (SD 450-51). Sea and river are both beyond the actuality of eight-year-old Art's experience, but what his physical and imaginative reach can encompass is communicated with a richness which takes it beyond the immediate surface situation. Even the myopic Questioner in the Green Isle is forced finally to acknowledge that Art is different because he is 'the complete boy. The country community he came out of was to him a complete and familiar community' (GI 181). Significant, also, for Gunn's positive purposes in this novel, is that his narrowed field of action does not take Art to a position where the limitations as well as the strengths of such a community may become apparent. In commenting on just such limitations in his review of Gunn's later novel The Key of the Chest, the editor of The Scots Magazine (who was always perceptive about the cultural, if not necessarily about the formal aspects of Gunn's novels), contrasted The Key of the Chest with Young Art and Old Hector where 'the shades of the strange "prison-house," the instinct of the community, have not yet begun to close

about the growing boy.⁴¹ In Young Art and Old Hector it is the positive aspects of the Highland communal way of life which concern Gunn and which he communicates so fully through the developing consciousness of the boy Art in its relation to Old Hector and to the few other characters such as his brother Donul and sister Morag who loom large on the periphery of his self-awareness.

Young Art and Old Hector begins in the midst of a typical incident which immediately sets the context for the story in its depiction of Art's aspirations and frustrations and his reliance on the ability of Hector to sort things out for him. Donul, his elder brother, has given him the slip and gone to what is for Art the magical and seemingly unattainable River on a poaching expedition with Hector's grandson Hamish, and it is left to Hector to turn this disaster for Art into the boy's identification of himself with the folk-heroes of his Celtic past such as the fighter Cuchulain and the wise Finn MacCoul. In The Green Isle of the Great Deep Gunn explicitly links Art, who has become 'the immortal boy', a 'legend' (GI 119, 129) to the people of the Isle, with the heroes of the Celtic past. In particular he draws a parallel between him and the legendary King Arthur, a parallel which is re-inforced by his association with Old Hector - Sir Ector being the good man in Malory's re-telling of the Arthurian tales who is recommended by Merlin as fit to be entrusted with the rearing of the child Arthur.⁴² One is aware of this symbolic context in the friendship of old man and boy in Young Art and Old Hector also, just as one is aware of its relationship to C.G. Jung's archetypes of boy and wise old man, a double presence which Jung felt within himself and which in the context of Art and Hector is present not only in the separate identities of boy Art and Old Hector, but also in the ability of Hector to enter again, in old

age, the mind and emotional being of the boy, and in the intimations of wisdom which the boy Art receives through his contact with Hector.

The relationship is additionally a symbol of continuity and cyclical growth. As in Edwin Muir's poem 'The Myth', the association between Art and Hector demonstrates that the intuitive innocence and simplicity of the child's vision is justified and restored by the wisdom of experience:

'Unshakeable arise alone/The reverie and the name' (CP 145). Or, as Hector puts it to himself as he somewhat ruefully remembers his daughter's classifying him as 'in his second childhood' (YA 86), and muses on the difference, yet the even more significant resemblance between childhood and old age:

And when they thought he understood children and was kind to them because he was in his second childhood, that, too, was not the whole truth. . . . Yet the wonderful thing was the resemblance between the two states. When a young boy was alone with you, talking quietly and asking questions, he rarely grew obstreperous, as he so often did before an audience. And then suddenly, all in a bright moment, you would see the open wonder of his mind. It was there before you, as a bird or a rabbit might be. And for a time the companionship would be pleasant and take on little extravagant airs and sensible follies. That early rapt wonder, which had been lost for so many years, opened its own eyes in you once more and beheld the world. But now it was not the same wonder, not quite, for it had grown selfless and was altogether clear vision. It asked for nothing. This vision of the circle completing itself was all the mind desired, so marvellous it was, and supporting the vision came a feeling of such well-being that panic or time could no more intrude. (YA 87)

This perception comes also to the Questioner in the Green Isle as he attempts to analyse where they have gone wrong in their dealings with the old man and the boy: 'Old Hector - and this is what some of us were slow to grasp - was his natural friend. The boy's simplicity was found again in the old man's - and the old man's was the simplicity refined out of experience' (GI 181).

And encircling this cyclical relationship is the relationship to the past of the Celtic peoples. Hector is Art's mentor and he not only guides

him through the process of personal self-discovery and developing consciousness, but initiates him into the past of his people so that it too can continue as part of the living present. Art asks his friend:

'It makes a big difference, doesn't it, when you know the name?'

'It does. There are many places, many many places, with names that no-one knows but myself, and they will pass away with me.'

'Will you tell them to me?' asked Art eagerly.

'I will indeed, and gladly, for I would not like the little places to die.'

'Will they die if they lose their names?'

'Something in them will die. They will be like the clan that lost its name. They will be nameless.'

'"Nameless by day,"' quoted Art from the song, and looked up with a shy, glowing smile.

Old Hector nodded in compliment. 'You have it now.' (YA 251)

And Art promises that he, in his turn, will also pass the names on. And as they go together through the glen towards the river, the presence of this past passes through Hector to the small boy:

Old Hector was now a tall big man, and his whiskers were ancient as a forest. He was withdrawn from Art into a distant grown-up world, and his eyes glimmered as they looked far off. His affection for things past touched Art to an obscure turmoil of silence, as the things past came into the present, into this small wild hollow in the Little Glen, and stood beside Old Hector in greeting and farewell. Then the affection went down his arm and caught Art's hand. (YA 253-54)

Yet while awareness of these symbolic aspects of the novel is always with one in reading Young Art and Old Hector, it does not obtrude on the liveliness of the story told. As Gunn said himself of the similar symbolic nature of The Green Isle of the Great Deep, 'the old man and the young boy were still having adventures.'⁴³

Of supreme importance in the depiction of these adventures, physical, emotional and mental, is the quality of the dialogue in the novel. The

narrator remains in the background in this book, and the story progresses through the actions and the talk of the principal characters. For this reason there is little pure descriptive writing in the book of the kind that one finds in the opening evocation of the sea-shore at dusk in Morning Tide or the description of the richness of nature in Dunbeath Strath in Highland River. Descriptive writing in Young Art and Old Hector is more closely tied to the progress of the narrative, which itself relies heavily on the word-play between the characters.

The dialogue is especially lively and varied. The differences in the relationships between Art and Old Hector; Art and his sister Morag; Art and his fifteen-year-old brother Donul and his adult brother Duncan are all subtly conveyed through words and tone employed. Similarly, the alien nature of the more southerly farm to which Donul goes as apprentice cattleman, is conveyed through the farm-hands' talk: not only by the quality of the language used - 'Gode, she'll roar her guts out' (YA 231) - but by the nature of the jokes they make at Donul's expense, which, although the men mean the boy no harm, have an indifferent, dismissive edge which is missing from the banter of his own village.

The warmth of humour is everywhere in the dialogue: in Hector's evasions of his daughter's suspicions; in Art's vociferous protests at life's unfairness to a boy; in Morag's devious attempts to make her meetings with Tom the shepherd appear accidental. Especially amusing is the confrontation between Hector and the Estate Officers who are seeking the location of the illegal whisky still and have good reasons from the past for suspecting that the old man may have something to tell them. Here the silences and understatement which in The Grey Coast were used to communicate the tense atmosphere in the croft house between Maggie and the scheming Jeems and Tullach, are employed with humorous effect to differentiate between

Hector, his clansman Mr Macdonald who is an employee of the Estate and is as devious on the side of the law as Hector is on the side of the folk, and the chief investigator Mr Ramsbottom, whose foreignness is demonstrated by every response he makes to old Hector's words.

Equally successful is the way in which Gunn works traditional tales, proverbial wisdom, the belief in old superstitions and in the supernatural into the fabric of his novel. Several of the old stories find their way out in the course of Hector's attempts to pacify Art in the face of seemingly endless obstacles which frustrate his aspirations. In such a way we hear the story of the hazel nuts of knowledge and the salmon of wisdom, references to which appear consistently in Gunn's novels of Highland boyhood, and which is part of the legend of Finn MacCoul which featured prominently in The Silver Darlings. The world of the little people is introduced with conviction through Art's difficulties with the new baby Henry James in the chapter 'The New Jersey, the Fluke, and Whispering Reeds'. The account of his contrite, terrified attempt to persuade the hissing fairies of the rushes to take back their 'changeling' - the sick Henry James - and return his new brother, is alive with the child's animistic vision and its struggle for supremacy with his more mundane distress over the condition of his new jersey.

The traditions of the people which Gunn puts forward as evidence of true communal living are given expression throughout the novel, but especially in extended passages of narrative such as the account of the Games in 'Art Runs a Great Race', the managing of the croft by Donul in his father's absence in 'Going and Coming' and in the thanksgiving meal which celebrates the father's safe return in the same chapter. The account of this meal is more surely handled than the descriptions of the two family suppers in

Morning Tide. These meals were to some extent set pieces in the flow of the narrative. Although they were related to other significant happenings - the last supper, for example, being the final family meal together before the departure of Grace and Alan - one had the impression that Gunn had set them apart from the narrative in the attempt to draw attention to their significance and their legendary aspects. In the process they did not entirely escape sentimentalisation.

The meal in Young Art and Old Hector has similar legendary tones. For a moment one might be back in Morning Tide:

The table was laden and the smell of fried bacon sharp in the nostrils. In a circle of peace, the father said the Grace Before Meat, and the mother sat where she could reach for the teapot, her hands in her lap, more calm than the others, as if they were all her children, including her husband. Her face was smooth with beneficence and her provident eyes quiet with peace. Before her husband's hand was down from his brow, she said in pleasant practical tones: 'Now be eating, bairns.' (YA 162)

The account is, however, unsentimental and more closely integrated with the action of the rest of the novel. The mother, who plays a background role in this book, is not so fully idealised as a legendary earth-mother figure. One is more aware of the men: of the father and Duncan, returned from the summer fishing and inspecting the croft; of the usually work-shy Donul, who has been left in charge of the croft, blushing at his father's praise; of Art watching everything, awaiting his turn of attention. The whole scene is bustle and activity and mutual giving. It is firmly related in its closing lines to previous and future happenings through that most tangible and longed-for symbol of Art's knife.

Art's attempt to help Donul with the potato patch during his father's absence is reminiscent of the scene in The Rainbow where the child Ursula similarly attempts to help her father. But while in Lawrence's novel Will's

personal frustration and domineering self-preoccupation cause him to lash out at Ursula's childish incompetence, and so make yet another breach in the circle of her second self, what predominates in Gunn's account is the sense of mutual respect and helpfulness. Art is no less conscious than the child Ursula that his efforts are inadequate, and his attempt to cover up his deficiencies is childishly similar. But what was disaster for Ursula is for him another positive step towards maturity. Having fallen further and further back with his hoeing, he cuts down a potato shoot by mistake, and buries the evidence. Then he awaits Donul's discovery:

Presently Donul came down. 'You're doing fine,' he said. 'You needn't try to keep up with me. Every little helps. Are you feeling dry?'

'I am,' answered Art.

'I'll tell you what,' said Donul, more in the voice Art knew, 'you go and get some oatmeal and sugar and mix it with well-water in the little milk-pail. Then we'll have a good drink. How would you like that?' (YA 157)

And as Art runs off happily to the croft for the drink, 'his eyes lifted to where Donul, all alone, with bent head and moving hoe handle, was doing the work of the croft. Something in this vision of Donul touched him more obscurely and more profoundly than his premonition of his mother's smile.'⁴⁴

The Games episode illustrates that local aspect which Gunn found missing in his criticism of contemporary Highland Games in the article of that name. The heroes of Art's Games are the young men he knows in their everyday lives. They are not people apart. He can aspire to be one of them. And as his brother Duncan shares the first prize for the high jump, so Art himself becomes one of the heroes in his winning of the boys' race, a symbolic achievement which reverberates even to the ears of the supreme ruler of the Green Isle, as he discovers in the later book. The Games are thus born of the reality of the known world and are simultaneously legendary, like Art's impression of the pipers:

A terrible oncoming sea of ever-swelling sound, irresistible and splendid, surging up and up, breaking over human heads like boulders on a flat strand. But the minds of the heads were not drowned, and they left the old heads, and they took the crest of the wave where the spindrift was flying, where the ancient glory was streaming its banners. (YA 138)

Young Art and Old Hector is itself in a similar way both legendary and rooted in the actuality of Highland experience.

J.B. Salmond described Young Art and Old Hector as 'a bright happy book of a bright, happy childhood', but added that 'over it all hangs the strange cloud of an ancient wrong.'⁴⁵ The shadow of the Clearances to which Salmond refers is replaced in the allegorical The Green Isle of the Great Deep by the shadow of the Change, a clearance policy perpetrated on the people of the Green Isle, and an enforced change in their way of life, made in the name of perfection of administration. In the article 'The Novel at Home', referred to previously, Gunn described the genesis of Young Art and Old Hector. In the same article he comments with regard to the philosophy behind its sequel:

The notion of testing, as it were, the ways of life of the old man and the little boy against the conscious ideology of totalitarianism got a grip on my mind that I couldn't shake off. In actual life we know perfectly well what would have happened: the two simple country folk would have been physically liquidated. But my concern here was not for the physical but for the mental, for that state of mind which produces the physical manifestation. The fundamental conflict is between states of mind. In essence my problem was spiritual, not physical.

He continues:

I knew a little about the Continent before the war. I had books published there. Now I tried to get all the information I could about what was happening inside the concentration camps of Europe. With an ever increasing sense of horror I began to perceive that the human mind could be conditioned, that Hitler's boast of a domination of Europe for a thousand years was a conceivable possibility. . . . I studied as far as I could the techniques whereby the adult mind could be

broken down or conditioned and the young mind moulded. And I'm not now referring only to physical tortures, applied in their infinite and horrible variety, but, in the case of the highly civilized individual, to the subtle attacks upon the inner citadel of the mind by the expert psychologist.⁴⁶

This concern with the spiritual dimension of human life under threat from all forms of totalitarianism is a recurring preoccupation in Gunn's periodical articles of the early forties. 'The Essence of Nationalism' communicates a distrust of idealism 'not for what may be genuinely implicit in it, but for the lengths to which history has shown me human nature will go in order, as we say, to implement it';⁴⁷ a distrust especially applicable to the workings of the Green Isle. 'On Belief' takes up the question of how 'a system or ideology of the highest intention may in practice result in the most barbarous cruelty' (God's very condemnation of the Questioner in the Green Isle); how 'knowledge, as knowledge, obtained from a host of best-selling books on science and politics, may lead to an increasingly destructive materialism; unless, behind system and book, there is a concern for the living spirit of man.'⁴⁸ 'Memories of the Month: A Balance Sheet' defends the policy of writing such a series of articles on country matters and ordinary, everyday life in the Highlands in a time of universal danger as an affirmation of individual response and individual inspiration in the face of the propaganda for 'a new kind of consciousness, a corporate consciousness of the herd.' Gunn believed that 'the war is not altogether responsible for this attitude' of mass consciousness, this 'great modern heresy.' Although 'it has emphasised it, brought it actively into consciousness . . . the whole trend of our age was already shaping that way.' And for him, the relationship between man and society must be a mutually beneficial one: while man benefits from the communal support which society provides, society benefits from man's 'inspiration': 'for it

is on this inspiration from the individual that society lives and remains a dynamic force; without that inspiration, society becomes static like the beehive.⁴⁹ It is just such a static beehive nature of society which confronts Art and Hector when they find themselves plummeted through the Hazel Pool into the Green Isle. The Green Isle is, of course, Tir-nan-og, the Gaelic paradise, and it is a masterstroke of irony for Gunn to set his investigation of totalitarian systems in the one place where one could safely expect idealism and perfection of system to operate for the freedom, good and happiness of all. The fact that this does not happen, that 'this paradise is run on totalitarian lines',⁵⁰ sets the complex philosophical problem for the novel.

Gunn is at pains, however, to emphasise that whatever the novelist's philosophical concerns, his problem as novelist 'is not just to manipulate the clash of ideas or ideologies. His real business is to see how his two individuals in this new milieu naturally react. He can never depart far from them';⁵¹ a sound piece of advice which he would have done well to heed in many later novels. For the critic too it is important to remember that, however fascinating the complex philosophical arguments which provide the context of the book, as a novel its life lies in Gunn's ability to create a living picture of his travellers from Clachdrum in the Green Isle, to bring his philosophical arguments alive through their responses and actions. Again Gunn himself emphasises the point: 'Intellectual critics said some nice things about it, possibly because it dealt, after its fashion, with ideas. But the interesting thing for us here is that no critic, so far as I know, said it was a poor story. The old man and the young boy were still having adventures.'⁵²

The story-line of The Green Isle of the Great Deep leads on from the point at which the reader left Art and Hector at the end of Young Art and Old Hector. Art has again been frustrated in his attempt to reach the

magical River, this time by Hector's cow choking on a turnip. The cow is saved by the chance presence of Red Dougal and Art and Hector are brought home from their wanderings to face the wrath of Hector's middle-aged daughter, Agnes. The opening comedy of Agnes's exasperated anger and Hector's evasive contrition is quickly superceded by the solemnity of the atmosphere at the ceillidh-house gathering at Old Hector's, where enquiries about the cow and jokes at Agnes's and Hector's expense modulate into a discussion of a newspaper report about mind-conditioning techniques; an unusual topic for Hector's community, productive of an atmosphere equally unusual in his house: 'Never before at a ceillidh in Old Hector's house had there been such uncertainty, for never before had such conceptions of the unclean come so close to the thresholds of their minds. There was something of horror, with a weird feeling of vomit against it near the throat, a queasy blind feeling that knew it could say nothing without saying too much in wild and violent denunciations' (GI 14).

What brings forth the horror is not the idea of physical torture, frightful although this is, but the idea that the mind itself can be broken and changed: '"I do not know what to make of it," replied Old Hector. "The mind is all we have finally. If they take that from us - if they change that - then we will not be ourselves, and all meaning goes from us, here - and hereafter"' (GI 13). His worry is similar to that which Edwin Muir faced also in his investigation of new ideologies in poems such as 'The Usurpers' and 'Song for a Hypothetical Age' and in his King Lear essay. The mind is the repository of our knowledge of the past, of our traditions. The memories stored there bring the past alive into the present. If we break the mind, then not only our relationship to the present is broken, but the past dies also. As Art and Hector discussed in Young Art and Old Hector, the past will be nameless.

Gunn thus prepares the way for his fable by this opening chapter's anticipation of what Art and Hector will find in the Green Isle from the discussion of mind-conditioning to outbursts such as Agnes's 'God will call them to a terrible judgement for it'; Red Dougal's typically cynical 'The trouble seems to be . . . that, for some reason, He does not always interfere when wrong-doing is going on' and his explosive 'If they could catch him!' (GI 11, 13) when Willie begins to suggest what such torturers of the mind might do to a boy like Art.

Eventually Art and Hector succeed in reaching the River and the Hazel Pool. While attempting to poach a salmon they fall into the pool and the scene is set for Gunn's allegorical investigation of a totalitarian paradise.

Gunn describes his novel as a 'phantasy',⁵³ but the work has the surface actuality of a religious allegory such as John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress or of a modern anti-utopian book such as George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, or, indeed, of one of Hector's own parables. Being set in Paradise, it cannot escape religious symbolism, but this is woven subtly, and often ironically, into the fabric of the story. The central paradox is the prohibition of the fruit of life and its transformation into 'the poison fruit', a mystery which to Hector is 'greater surely than the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden!' (GI 66). Hector and Art do not stay at the wayside Inn on arrival, as instructed, Hector putting forward as his excuse that he thought there might be 'no room at the Inn' (GI 39). The Seat on the Rock to which arriving pilgrims make their way is an ambivalently-named destination. Its name contains the suggestions of rest, refuge and steadfastness which one associates with the biblical phrases 'Rock of Ages' and 'upon this rock will I build my church', but which are noticeably absent from the Green Isle Rock. Its rock-like qualities are

the negative ones of unyielding hardness and aridity, Eliot's 'mountains of rock without water.'⁵⁴ It is a place of ceaseless machine-like activity, of 'human traffic' (GI 44), 'an instrument in the process' (GI 180), of 'the sound of the fine wheels of the brains that never slept' (GI 56).

Although God himself is absent for a large part of the action, the spirit of God permeates the whole, either by reason of its strange absence in the administrators and drones of the Green Isle Paradise, or by virtue of its presence in the innocence of Art and the simplicity of Old Hector with his joy in nature and his loyalty to his fellow human beings; and in the conscious revolt of Mary, who, as a woman, 'always fights not for a theory, not for a system, but for life' (GI 91). Nevertheless, despite these and other explicitly Christian references, the positive religious context of the book is more one of spirituality and reverence for life, human and natural, than the strict adherence to any particular religious system. With regard to religious doctrine, the Green Isle is a remarkably secular Paradise.

As in Young Art and Old Hector, Gunn develops his Green Isle fable by way of dialogue and action, and this is assisted by symbolic, often ironic, connotation in language and happening. There is no need for an omniscient narrator to advise the reader of Art's and Hector's feelings of alienation as they come in contact with the people of the Green Isle. That alienation is firmly communicated as we hear Hector's initial admiration for the beauty and richness of the countryside - 'It must be fertile land, this. Indeed it looks the finest country ever I have seen' (GI 25) - and his customary friendly greeting to the first men they meet, gradually diminish to silence and uneasy puzzlement. The atmosphere of unease is developed through Art's tremulous response to the shallow laughter of the people, a response which innocently alights on their programmed nature: '"P-perhaps," stuttered Art, "they k-know no better"; by the song they hear the children sing as they

pass the school - 'Three Blind Mice' (GI 29); by Hector's quick, anxious denial of Art's suggestion that this Green Isle might be the Green Isle of the Great Deep: 'How could it be? because the Green Isle of the Great Deep is Paradise' (GI 32). Most significantly, the adverse effect of the atmosphere of the Green Isle on the travellers is communicated through Hector's hiding of the nut-shells after they have eaten the nuts which Art had brought with him in his pocket: 'They discussed this act, which neither of them had ever done before, as they continued on their way' (GI 31). The perfect management of the Green Isle has already provoked a furtiveness unknown to the travellers in their human Highland community.

The principal action of the plot is set in motion when Art refuses to comply with the instruction to proceed to the Seat on the Rock by way of sleeping at the Wayside Inn, and instead encourages Hector to sleep with him in the open, sustaining themselves with the fruit from the orchards. Inevitably they are caught, but are fortunate in that their first captors are different from the people of the Isle with whom they have previously come into contact. Mary, the wife of the man who finds them, 'thought below the surface of her face', while those whom they had met previously seemed to Hector 'like clean empty shells on a strange seashore.' As for Robert her husband, as he watches his wife's hospitality towards the travellers, 'his expression now was netted in a certain intolerance, a human expression.' For, as he reminds her, 'you know it is not our business to feed the stranger' (GI 41), a peculiar contravention of the mores of Highland hospitality. As we see later in the novel, Robert's lack of hospitality is born of his fear for his wife, fear that her warmth will lead to the discovery that they are able to eat the forbidden fruit of life as a result of her discovery of how to make an antidote jelly:

'You know about wild herbs,' Old Hector complimented her.

'My grandfather, he was a Bethune of the old medical school of the Gaels,' said Mary. 'But he never made a jelly like this one. He never had the need,' she added. (GI 71)

The use of symbolic and ironic allusion as comment on the action as in Mary's 'He never had the need', is present throughout the novel. Everyday, outworn expressions containing references to God such as Hector's often-used 'God bless me', recover their original intensity in a heaven from which God has absented Himself, and where His blessing and aid are urgently needed. Robert's fear for his wife as she is taken off to the Seat for questioning is expressed in the language of romantic fiction: 'I may lose her altogether, for ever' (GI 122), but it has a new significance when it is considered in the context of eternity gone wrong. Similarly with his anxious, irritated outburst: 'What in the name of God is she up to?' (GI 128). Of all the dwellers in the Green Isle, Mary is acting in God's name, is going about His business in her conscious attempts to defeat the life-denying ordinances of the administrators. Although it is Art's revolt which captures the imagination of the reader and, in the end, of the people of the Isle, and which thus provides much of the drama and suspense of the action of the novel, in philosophical and human terms Mary's revolt is the more significant. Art's flight is instinctive, born of a boyish, animal fear of being caged, of a reaction against the lack of warmth and human fellowship which he feels in the Green Isle people. Mary's revolt is that of the adult woman, 'rebellion, not through ignorance - sheer and designed' (GI 90). And as such it provides the hope that even under such an oppressive regime, the spirit of human love will consciously struggle to find a way out. And when God returns to His heaven and routs the administrators with His wisdom, the adjective 'divine' in Gunn's description: 'It was a divine morning and Art was bubbling over with life' (GI 220), reacquires its original force.

Evocation of the natural world is a significant weapon in Gunn's distinction between freedom and restrictive system. As Hector and Art sit in the orchard in the early stages of their journey, they hear the pilgrims who have obeyed the instructions to stop at the Inn pass on the roadway which they themselves have left. The contrast in the choice of language in the description of their relative situations re-inforces the sinister depiction of the man-made aspects of the Green Isle environment:

About a mile from the approaches to the town, Art left the road and Old Hector did not catch him until, amid the green peace and the flecked shadows, they stopped to listen, and from far behind heard the shuffling of the feet of the swollen body of the pilgrimage. In the dusk the straw piled its pale gold. (GI 38)

When, later, Hector is at the Seat, he awakens one morning to what he at first thinks is the buzzing of flies about the peat banks at home. The intensity of Gunn's evocation of the scene in his mind, its quality of open space and the particularity of its individual elements: 'the rough grazing . . . beyond the crofts'; the 'old wooden gate across the cart track to the peat banks' where 'the sheep used to gather on a sunny day'; the 'urgent buzz of flies' (GI 55) - this intensity contrasts with the deadness of the scene which meets Hector's gaze when he awakens fully:

The face of Axle asleep in his bunk, and other faces down both sides, were quiet as the faces of the dead. Everywhere there was stillness in the grey morning light, and silence - save for the hum that, listening, he fancied was the sound of the fine wheels of the brains that never slept. A far sound under the tower, the whizzing of the invisible wheels of thought; the light in the eyes and the intelligence that never ceased. (GI 55-6)

As we understand from the above passage, Hector eventually complies with the command to report to the Seat on the Rock, but Art goes into hiding, and material and philosophical plot turn on the attempts to capture Art and to find out what it is in the make-up of the old man and boy that has made them unsusceptible to the conditioning of the Green Isle.

It is important to realise that the administrators of the Isle are not intrinsically evil. They are the idealists, whom Gunn mistrusts in 'The Essence of Nationalism' and 'On Belief', the scientists whose obsession with their particular field of research leads them to ignore its wider, human implications. Evil, like the physical torture discussed at the ceillidh at Hector's house, would be easier to recognise and to counter-attack. The conditioning of the mind on the part of the Green Isle administrators is insidious. Like human politicians or religious leaders committed to the realisation of an ideal, they believe implicitly that they are working for the good of all the people. Their belief in their purpose and in the perfection of their system is such that they can regard those who dissent as in some way flawed, in need of conditioning treatment. They cannot understand Hector's greeting: 'It's a fine day that's in it', because 'Every day is fine here' (GI 30). Kindness, which to Hector in his home environment 'seemed natural as the singing to a bird or the taste of fruit to a boy', is no longer necessary: 'Surely you need to be kind only where things are not perfect. Where all is perfect, kindness is no more needed' (GI 74). Having accepted that their ideological system is philosophically perfect, the aim of the administrators is the achievement of 'that perfection of management of which men always dream' (GI 97), and it is to this end that they have proscribed the fruit from the tree of life, life being not always susceptible to such management. Robert tells Hector that the fruit was forbidden 'so that man would be restored to his original innocence, so that he would be without blemish, so that he would be the perfect worker, so that he would do all things he was told to do, so that perpetual order would reign everywhere' (GI 92). In the process they have created drones as in a beehive and they have killed off art as they now attempt to capture and condition Young Art, whose name Gunn explicitly

defines, not altogether satisfactorily, as a symbol of 'the activities of certain individuals in an earthly existence' (GI 131): the troublesome artists. Before the Change, Robert tells Hector, 'we ate and we gave and we laughed and we sang, and sometimes in moments of ecstasy we made verses' (GI 93). One of God's criticisms when He returns to the Seat is that since the Change Robert has made no verses.

Equally frightening in the administrators with their belief in their perfect system, is their capacity for self-delusion and the relentless reasonableness with which they pursue their victims. Robert may describe their activities with violence as in his 'They castrate the mind' (GI 114), but to the administrators themselves these activities are directed towards the benefit of the people as a whole:

The Questioner carefully explained to Old Hector why he asked all these questions, and though Old Hector might be too weary to follow him rationally, yet he was left with the feeling that in some way he was assisting at the salvation of Clachdrum. The more he could explain, the easier it would be for those who came after him. As the burden of this came on him fully, his anxiety became almost unbearable. (GI 54)

In the urgent conference held after Hector, driven past endurance, has asked to see God, they continue to justify their actions to themselves in the name not only of perfection of management, but of creation. War on earth has taught the value of the corporate state. Their aim is now the corporate mind which will not only satisfy management needs, but will also satisfy the wish for continuing creation in an otherwise static, perfect state. Hugh MacDiarmid's Cencrastus joke:

I'm feart lest in the end I'll be
Bored to death in Eternity,
That muckle Hippodrome Hereafter
Whaur a' thing's swallowed up in laughter⁵⁵

voices the fears of the Green Isle administrators:

So here on the Green Isle we have been proceeding to the creation of an interregional mind. And this is creation. It is not - as it was before the Change - a case of individuals plucking fruit off a tree and spending or putting-in eternity in a changeless way. That hopeless stagnation was cast off. We are on the march again. (GI 198-99)

So great is the administrators' immersion in their Universal Plan, that they can ignore warning signs, such as the Questioner's 'lust of his quest' (GI 154) until he pushes Hector too far; Axle's inflexible adherence to the system: 'There was something so heavy and solid about Axle! What a perfect governor of a prison camp!' (GI 103). Merk, who makes the above observation, is himself a dangerous man. Much more imaginative than Axle, he is an example of the obsessive scientific mind which finds it impossible to 'stop this exciting game of teasing the human mind into its strands, of combing the strands, and leaving them knotless and gleaming and smooth over one's arm or the back of a chair' (GI 78). In the attempts to deal with the recalcitrant Art, one foresees the gradual imposition of a police state, and the ease with which this step could be justified.

The problem posed by the Green Isle administrators is one that has faced man throughout history, particularly in a religious context, as religious systems and sects have sought to impose the true way as revealed to them on heretics and unbelievers. It is with us in a secular form in the twentieth century where contrasting political ideologies compete for supremacy with the fervour once reserved for the religious. But also, perhaps less obviously, it is potentially present in the increasingly systematic way we organise our social welfare and the minutiae of everyday living. The Green Isle administrators would have had no difficulty in abstracting the 'maybe' from the narrator's comment about Old Lachie the fisherman in Gunn's story 'Down to the Sea': 'it 'id hev been better for him, mebbe, if they hed pit him to the poorhoase' (WH 214). Lachie, like

the old woman in her tumble-down cottage in The Well at the World's End or Mad Mairag in The Drinking Well, would, for his own good, and for the convenience of the community, have gone to the poorhouse. Increasingly today we make a similar convenient assessment of individual social needs. Gunn's anti-utopian fable is not only about complex philosophical arguments on the nature of freedom; it is about actual freedom among the minutiae of everyday living.

Appropriately, it is God Himself, returning to the Seat from His meditations at the call of Hector and because of the growing legend of Art, who persuades the administrators of the error of their ways and dismisses them from the administration of the Isle. His condemnation of their functioning is that put forward by Gunn in the article 'On Belief': 'Mean-time you might think over the contention that at the core of a theory or a plan, in addition to the highest intention there can abide self-delusion and the last refinement of cruelty' (GI 218). And to Hector He explains that the Questioner has lost his wisdom because 'he has divorced knowledge from wisdom, the head from the heart, the intellect from the spirit' (GI 242). Again what is emphasised is that the cruelty which has been perpetrated in the Green Isle has not arisen from deliberate evil intention, but from the obsession with a theory to the exclusion of all else, and the separation in the psyche of elements which should harmonise with each other. As with Muir's investigation of the roots of evil in poems such as 'The Good Town' and 'The Refugees', the Green Isle cruelty appears, not as an evil which can be set apart as a freak occurrence, but must be considered at least as potentially present in the systems we set up and in the way we play a passive role in their operation. In 'The Good Town' Muir asks: 'Could it have come from us? Was our peace peace?/Our goodness goodness?' (CP 186). Similarly God tells Hector: 'It is bad . . . but we cannot blame them.

And we cannot blame them because we leave things to them, you and me. We forget them. We forget that they live in their heads, where the knowledge of power gives to a good intention the edge of a sword' (GI 241). God's solution is a Council of Wise Men, of whom Hector will be one, but a Council which will have no power; which well pleases Hector: 'For well he knew that a wise man will give the best he can distil with the finest grace when he gives freely and without reward' (GI 245).

It is in relation to this solution of the Green Isle's, and by implication, of our own earthly problems, and in relation to the concluding passages of the novel of which God's solution is a part, that one questions the degree of success of Gunn's method in the book. Up until the point at which God returns to that region of the Green Isle where Art's and Hector's adventure is being played out, Gunn succeeds in maintaining a balance between convincing surface reality and underlying fable in his depiction of the Green Isle and his criticism of its philosophical and organisational system through the responses of his two Highland protagonists. God's appearance during Art's dramatic flight from the Hunt is, I believe, also convincing. In The Atom of Delight Gunn describes how 'the boy was taught in the beginning that man was made in God's image. So the image of God as the bearded patriarch coming down the straths of time is familiar. He could all at once be there, like the gamekeeper. A person in authority could suddenly appear. This was something learned; it had meaning. It was far from being theoretical' (AD 239). God's re-appearance in the Green Isle is similarly far from theoretical. Bearded patriarch that He is, He is mistaken for Hector by Art, who has forgotten for the moment that his old friend can no longer be relied upon as surely as before. God is thus pulled into Art's flight from the Hunt and so learns at first hand how the

administration of His kingdom has been proceeding in his absence. Such conviction is missing from the events which follow on from Art's accidental meeting with God. This miraculous appearance is convincing because there is a realistic dimension within it in consequence of the confusion of identities in God's resemblance to Hector. There is an imaginative suspension of disbelief. Such suspension of disbelief is not possible in the episode where Art and God escape from the locked cell through the eating of the magic hazel nuts, which remains at the level of supernatural sleight of hand. There is a similar unimaginative Peter Pan quality about Art's appearance 'astride a gargoyle to starboard of the Great Gate, with bare legs dangling and the left hand gripping the stone hair of the gargoyle's head' (GI 237), and in his appearance, apparently without legs, in the sea-green room into which Merk stumbles during God's Audience at the Seat; as there is also in God's later disappearance from the region by means of an astonishing long jump during the Games held to celebrate the rescue of the Green Isle from the administrators.

From a philosophical point of view, God's questioning of the administrators, their attempts before their Audience with Him to concoct explanations to deceive Him, and the solution for proper management which He puts forward, all raise doctrinal questions about the nature of God and His omnipotence which detract from Gunn's fable, and which, although implicit in it from the beginning, did not intrude in the earlier stages of the action.

Philosophically and dramatically, it would in my view have been much more satisfactory for Gunn to have ended his allegorical novel with the return of God and His rout of the administrators, leaving the action of the fable to stand as the detailed criticism of their operation, which it very well does. As it is, the adventure in the Green Isle ends in something

of an anti-climax and with some loss of belief in the efficacy of its fable. Nevertheless, the book as a whole remains a powerful imaginative condemnation not only of obvious totalitarian political systems, but also of the tendency in our everyday lives to put convenience before the human need for individual expression. And like the other novels in this second grouping, it demonstrates the positive qualities induced by the true communal way of life which Gunn considers to be the essential Highland experience.

The Drinking Well is the final novel to be considered in this group of novels of essential Highland experience. It differs from the others in the group in that in it Gunn attempts to marry the earlier theme of Highland decline with that of a positive and optimistic solution of the problems which inhibit regeneration.

As with the preoccupations of the other novels of the group, this forward-looking approach in The Drinking Well is in accord with the themes explored in Gunn's journalism of the early 1940s. As early as 1931 Gunn had been expressing the view in his Scots Magazine article 'Highland Games' that 'what is needed [in the Highlands] is not a blind acceptance of bad conditions, but the initiative to work out new conditions.'⁵⁶ Now in the 1945 article 'Belief in Ourselves', which is significant for the themes of The Drinking Well, he points to the outstanding obstacle in the way of Highland renewal: 'the general lack of belief among the Highland people themselves in the future of their own land as a place where life could be lived interestingly and well.' As in so many of his Scots Magazine articles, he instances the lack of will among the fishermen to organise themselves into leagues and co-operatives to contend more successfully with the contemporary conditions in the fishing industry, and gives as an example the

newly organised sheep clubs which not only make for more efficient sheep-farming, but also help preserve the ancient communal traditions of the people. His own visit to a sheep club found 'a scene reminiscent of an older Highland economy, when neighbours assisted one another not only at clipping, but at peat-cutting and harvest, and indeed on any occasion when necessity called for a helping hand.'⁵⁷ Significantly, the optimistic The Drinking Well is set, not on the sea-coast, as is usual with Gunn's early and middle-period novels, but in sheep-farming country in the Grampians. Two slightly earlier articles, 'Scotland Moves'⁵⁸ in The Scots Magazine in 1943 and 'Awakening of a Nation'⁵⁹ in The Daily Record in 1944 both look optimistically on the future of the Highlands: 'For the first time in centuries the feeling is growing upon us that we can do things for ourselves.'⁶⁰ Their arguments about the way forward for Scotland, and especially, for the Highlands, provide the thematic context of The Drinking Well.

In its formal structure The Drinking Well returns to the pattern of earlier novels such as Morning Tide, The Lost Glen and Butcher's Broom which were organised by division into several parts. The Drinking Well has four parts. Part Two is set in Edinburgh, the other three sections in a sheep-farming area of the Highlands. The novel is related to the novels of the first period in its thematic resemblance to The Lost Glen. In addition, the short story 'The Man Who Came Back' (1928) and the play Back Home (1932), both contemporaneous with The Lost Glen, which was serialised in The Scots Magazine between April 1928 and November 1928 before its publication in book form in 1932, are directly related to Part Three of The Drinking Well which is in fact entitled 'Back Home'. But while in The Lost Glen the disgraced student Ewan degenerates on his return

to the Highlands into an aimless, cynical ghillie, a prey to the fatalism of the Celtic Twilight, and while both Back Home and 'The Man Who Came Back' end in emigration, Iain Cattanach in The Drinking Well, similarly returned home in disgrace, is active in propounding his theories for Highland regeneration, and successful in the practical work of his father's sheep farm. At the end of the novel he is given the opportunity, through the interest in experiment of a new, ex-Colonial laird, to put his theories into practice.

Parts One and Two of the novel are equally splendid evocations of very different living communities: a Highland sheep-farming estate and the Edinburgh of legal offices and pub talk, the latter the kind of urban milieu which Gunn does not usually tackle with conspicuous success.

By beginning his novel, not as in The Lost Glen with the return home of the student, but with the teenage schoolboy immersed in the life of his community, Gunn is able to give imaginative life to the factors which have worked towards continuing emigration from the Highlands and, on the other hand, depict the qualities which make the attempt at renewal from within a worth-while activity. Iain's late flight to school on his cycle in chapter three demonstrates the sense of place created in the book, a sense both of physical environment and human warmth and individuality. Similarly, his walks on the hills with his father as he goes about his business of looking after the sheep, illustrate the empathy between father and son and between father and land, a sense of at-one-ness and belonging which even the struggle to make a reasonable living cannot destroy:

Presently a distant whistle stopped him. Through the dusk of the summer evening, he saw his father, a small, still figure, directing that living world. Grey specks on a slope above rushed together as if an eddy of wind had blown them. Then his keen eyes picked up the moving dog. Another whistle and the earth sucked the dog under.

The stillness that was the silence of the mountains now held everything, and far away the purple-dark peaks stared upon the world of the west, whither the sun had gone, leaving a wake of molten silver in the sky. (DW 37-8)

And as the boy meets his father:

Their voices were unstressed, unhurried, in the quiet of the evening, and the faint humour was the greeting between them (DW 39)

There is something of Wordsworth's Michael and of the steadfastness which Wordsworth believed came from the contact with the natural environment in the depiction of Iain's father, who has the qualities which Gunn more often reserves for fishermen. Indeed, in a later part of the book, he tells us that 'Iain had heard real sheep men compared with seamen. The steady far look, the need for self-reliance, the same kind of independence, often slow in speech, as if experience and thought had never quite got used to a speaking outlet, as if indeed speech at most times didn't help much' (DW 259). Similarly in the opening scenes of the book, as Iain helps his father on the hills, he feels that the father's deliberation 'was a final steadying of the whole man, and in this Christmas weather, as they found themselves out together in the frosted air, with the hill-tops white and bright, the hay dry and warm to the touch and mustily fragrant, he would now and then have a consciousness of friendliness to his father, of a delight in helping him, steadied in a wordless responsible way by his father's steadiness' (DW 76-7).

Such empathy and steadiness is absent from the boy's relationship with his mother. Mrs Cattanach, like the mother in The Lost Glen, is unusual among Gunn's mother-figures in the harshness of the depiction of her embittered alienation from her community. All Gunn's mother-figures in the books set on the north-east coast fear the sea; and like Catrine in The Silver Darlings and the mother in Morning Tide, scheme to keep their sons

from following the occupation of the father. But Mrs Cattanach's hatred of the land which keeps her in relative poverty and her relentless determination to remove all her children from it is pathological. Major Grant, the Estate Factor, describes her as having 'a strange power in her . . . something wild about the eyes . . . wings beating from a trap' (DW 25) (Gunn's ellipses). We learn with Iain after her death that the trap for her has been not only the struggle to make a living from the land, but the limitations of a small inward-looking community which would not allow her to forget, when a child, that she was illegitimate, and which could not afford her the opportunity for the education which she desired and for which she was suited. Like Mrs Morel in D.H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers, she attempts to escape from her trap through her children, whom she drives to education and a life outside the Highlands. Unlike Mrs Morel, however, she does not appear to have been successful in simultaneously tying them to her emotionally or morally. In a scene heavy with the sadness of things unsaid, or even privately acknowledged, she cries to her husband:

'Would James, your son as well as mine, be a doctor in Canada this day, but for me? Would William be making the money he is making in the United States, but for me? Would Shiela be married in London, but for me?'

'They have all gone. That is true' (DW 13)

is the father's answer.

Significantly it is not to her well-educated, successful sons that the mother looks for help in educating her last child, Iain. And while Iain is sorry for his mother, it is to his father that he turns for companionship and example. And 'it was out-of-doors that he came to himself and all unconsciously stored memories which had little to do with human relationships but which, when they recurred, were sharp and clear as the pattern of frost' (DW 73-4).

The sharpness with which the tensions in the Cattanach family are depicted in the opening chapters of the novel is present also in Gunn's illustration of the nuances in the social divisions between villagers and the Estate through Mrs Cattanach's visit to Major Grant to ask if he can do anything for Iain. With the firmly-drawn picture of her own farm-kitchen environment in the opening chapter in our minds, we see her approach the factor's 'stone house' with its 'two bay-windows and rose climbers.' In contrast to the formality of her dress - she wears 'an old-fashioned black hat' and has 'the air of one who has not been dressed in her best clothes for a long time' - there is the confident informality of Mrs Grant, the factor's wife: 'a woman of forty in a gay, skimpy wrapper came up from the garden carrying flowers and a pair of scissors in gloved hands. . . . Mrs Grant was gracious enough but firm, with an eye for her visitor' (DW 17-18). The reader imbibes Mrs Cattanach's nervous resolution as he waits with her in the factor's office, listening for every approaching sound, preparing herself for the interview. And she is the equal of the factor in not giving ground: 'I am sure he is a very fine gentleman', she replies to Major Grant's praise of the new laird and to his suggestion that it might be better to wait to see what changes and improvements he makes in the estate before sending Iain off:

Here was the real problem that Mr Henderson would have to deal with! Sinking money in draining and fences might be all right for a landlord with money to burn and with an eye on political life, but it would hardly bring about a revolution in Balmore! He drew his letters in front of him and slowly lifted his face. 'You would rather I wrote Mr Cunningham about a place in his office?'

'Oh yes,' she said. (DW 24)

The views of Iain's mother, although held in a less extreme fashion, are also those which prevail in the community as a whole. Except for Mad Mairag, who calls Iain to a love of his land similar to what he sees in

his father's relationship with his sheep, the villagers of Balmore support his mother's plans for him - 'Leave the land to the dull minds' (DW 49) - and at the end of Part One of the novel we see him leave, reluctantly, for Edinburgh and a legal training which will bring him the success of his brothers and justify his mother's sacrifice of her health, and her life, in the effort to ensure that her children escape the land.

In all the middle-period novels of positive Highland experience, Gunn successfully creates the living atmosphere and positive qualities of his Highland milieu through dialogue and descriptive narrative. In The Drinking Well he extends this successful creation of milieu to the city of Edinburgh. Iain's response to the city and its unfamiliar class-conscious mores is splendidly realised, as is the atmosphere of the legal office to which he goes as an apprentice. We do not need to be told of the youth's initial feelings of alienation and loss of direction any more than we needed to be told of Art's and Hector's reaction to the atmosphere of the Green Isle. We sense his mood in his every response and reaction. As Donul's apartness from the southern cattle-men in Young Art and Old Hector was emphasised by the kind of jokes they made at his expense, so in Edinburgh Iain finds an objective quality in the attitude of the other members of the office towards him, which contrasts with the personalised, involved relationships of his home community, and with which he finds difficulty in coping. The legal clerks and apprentices are prepared to have a laugh at his expense in a distanced, uninvolved way. They are not unfriendly towards him, but they encourage the antagonism between him and Mr Smeaton for the interest it adds to their day's work. Iain's over-reaction to the trick played on all new apprentices, that of being sent to the Revenue Stamp Office to enquire about the stamp duty on a verbal agreement, is the consequence of his feelings of social inadequacy and disorientation:

At home, folk welcomed him and laughed, and he could pull legs and give back answers with the best. And make the fiddle fly and the dancers swing.

Now he feels

awkward and stupid, unsure of his movements, with a dull wild-beast anger throwing up sudden spirts, and all the time trying to be correct, smiling, saying 'Yes, sir' - oh, excruciating! - to the commissionaire! And two juniors saying, 'yes, sir - if you please,' as they passed out laughing, while Corbet blew out his moustaches. (DW 119-20)

Corbet the commissionaire is in his own way helpful to Iain, giving him an insight into the ways of the office and its relationships, but Iain's relationship with him once more emphasises his apartness from Edinburgh mores: while all the young men have an easy, friendly rapport with Corbet, only Iain treats him as an equal as he would treat any of his village acquaintances at home. One could not see Young Lindsay or Douglas drinking familiarly with Corbet in the pub during office hours as Iain in the beginning frequently does. The alien quality of the city's social discriminations is conveyed equally in the pub scenes. Only with Davidson, the socialist orator, does Iain feel at home, even although Davidson's approaches to Scottish political affairs are equally new to him:

Iain liked this matter-of-fact way of dealing with the ancient subject of Scottish nationhood. Where he would have felt shy of an outspoken patriotism, of references to Wallace and Bruce, Flodden and Bannockburn, he could listen to this statement of an economic argument and find a wonder, at times a thrill, in its newness, in its air of being grown-up in an actual world. . . . For no-one at home, or anywhere else as far as he knew, saw or spoke of Scotland in this way. (DW 147)

The arguments about the possibility of regeneration in the Highlands which in Part One lie beneath the surface of Iain's wish to remain on the sheep farm with his father and his mother's determination to clear him from the land, and which in Part Three, after Iain's return from Edinburgh,

are carried on overtly through his arguments with the men of the community in Ewan's house, become in the Edinburgh section arguments about the possibility of regeneration and self-determination in Scotland as a whole. The intensity of these pub arguments is communicated by Gunn with verve and conviction, with a spirit which, one feels, must have similarly animated the discussions between him and MacDiarmid which he remembers with affection in his tribute to MacDiarmid, 'For Christopher's Cap'.⁶¹

These arguments about Scottish self-determination and renewal are reminiscent of the arguments which Edwin Muir carried out with himself and his readers in the many articles he wrote on Scottish affairs in the 1930s and in the two books Scottish Journey and Scott and Scotland. In a review of Scott and Scotland in The Scots Magazine in 1936, Gunn pointed to the political equivocation which is consistent in Muir's examination of the Scottish situation, and which is itself inconsistent with the evidence he uncovers in his literary and social analyses. In particular Gunn attacks the muddled inconsistency of the last page of the book - 'surely one of the most signal instances of the Caledonian Antisyzygy run amok'⁶² - in which Muir argues against the programme of the Scottish National Party, yet affirms the necessity for Scotland to maintain and assert its identity: 'it cannot do so unless it feels itself an entity; and it cannot feel itself an entity on a plane which has a right to human respect unless it can create an autonomous literature.'⁶³ Gunn asks: 'What do the words "identity" and "entity" mean here? Do they mean the nationhood of a free and independent Scotland, or do they mean some vague literary ideal to be perpetuated in a vacuum?' He concludes: 'But it is important, I feel, that a writer who faces up to the absolutes in literary criticism should not hesitate over their implications when they are brought into the light of our common day.'⁶⁴

As we have seen from Gunn's journalism of the thirties, he had a much more practical and knowledgeable approach to the problems of Scottish decline than had Muir, and he was much more straightforward in his approach to the politics of the situation. Like Muir he was socialist in his thinking, but he was also a convinced nationalist, working behind the scenes in his period as an Excise Officer and openly after his resignation from the Civil Service. For Gunn, working and living in the Highlands, and seeing at first-hand the decline of traditional occupations and ways of life, the way to renewal could only be through more local control of the machinery of government; through a government which knew intimately the peculiar elements in the varied Scottish geographical and cultural make-up and could plan accordingly.

In the Edinburgh passages of The Drinking Well, Iain, like Gunn in his journalism, inclines to the economically-oriented, practical arguments for self-government of the socialist orator Davidson. Yet the arguments against a purely economic case put forward by Douglas, the romantic historian, also leave an impression on him. He tells Douglas: 'You talk out of the blood. And - and that's where the music comes from' (DW 236): a comment in which we hear Gunn the novelist of Highland experience speaking. What comes out from the talk which flows as fast as the claret is the recognition that one cannot divorce, as Muir tried to do, economic, political and cultural identity: all are part of the same loss of nationhood, and the attempt to regain one, without the others, cannot result in true renewal.

Much of the talk revolves around the question of a 'distinctive Scottish capacity for creativity in the arts' (DW 181), the question of a distinctively Scottish form of expression which occupied MacDiarmid in

A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle and the composer F.G. Scott in his song-writing. One of the characters in the pub discussions is also a composer, Colin Campbell, 'a first fiddle in a B.B.C. orchestra' (DW 236), and his intention is to make a distinctively Scottish contribution to music through his 'Ballet of Edinburgh'. His problem, in the fragmented cultural condition of Scotland, is that same one which has emasculated so many Scottish artists: 'he did not know how to finish his ballet - "and, hell, I don't want to finish in satire! I don't want to make the descent into the abyss of the Mile, to light up the silent Rock as a peepshow for tourists. We should be done with satire. The best of us have lived on satire too long, that negation of the damned. It's too bloody easy. It's ashes in the mouth. It's death"' (DW 242). His problem is to some degree Gunn's also in The Drinking Well, as he attempts to impose a positive solution on the recalcitrant economic and social problems of the Scottish Highlands.

Iain's sojourn in Edinburgh ends when he throws through a glass door in the office the lawyer, Mr Smeaton, with whom he has developed an antagonistic relationship and whom he has discovered dealing dishonestly with a claim by his father's friend Ewan from his home village. He returns home to Balmore, intending to tell his father of the mishap, but, instead, finds himself taking refuge in the assumption of the villagers that he has returned to convalesce after an illness.

Part Three resumes the presentation of the case for the renewal of the Highlands from within through the arguments which Iain has with his acquaintances about farming methods and organisation, and through the depiction of his involvement in the daily work of his father's farm. Some of the finest evocations of the working life of the Highlands in all Gunn's novels are to be found in this section of The Drinking Well. Foremost among these is the account of Iain's driving of the hogs over the moors

in an April snowstorm, an account which equals the epic sea-voyages of Finn and Roddie in The Silver Darlings in intensity and narrative power. As Gunn's sea episodes are founded on a knowledge of the ways of fishermen and the experience of sailing with them, so what impresses one in this epic journey in The Drinking Well, and in the many other passages which deal with Iain's work on the hills with the sheep in this book, is the knowledgeable details on which the accounts are based and which transform the descriptions into living experience. In the article 'Off to Ullapool', Gunn comments that 'I wanted to see where my friend the shepherd nearly lost his flock of sheep in an April snowstorm. . . . It was a long and heroic story, told as only a shepherd can tell it, but he saved all his flock in the end, though storm-stayed at a nearby house for several days.'⁶⁵ It is most probable that this was the model for Iain's journey.

But while this period of Iain's work at home among the sheep has a philosophical purpose in its demonstration of the worthiness of the attempt at renewal, and the capacity and suitability of Iain himself to be the instrument of such renewal, as opposed to the course which his mother had planned for him, in terms of the novel's structure it is not satisfactory. The problem is to some extent that which affected The Silver Darlings after the account of the epic voyage to Stornoway of Finn and Roddie, but the situation is much more serious in The Drinking Well. It is difficult to maintain the novel's shape and its momentum after the safe return of Iain with the hogs. Its pattern increasingly becomes episodic and melodramatic. There is an excess of trivial detail and dialogue. Yet the important communication that Iain is 'secretly leaving in two days' (DW 405) is passed over in a few words. We do not see him struggling to make the decision to leave, the only reference to such a possibility having been

passed over equally quickly in a previous conversation with his friend, Hamish. Perhaps the close relationship between this last section of Part Three and the earlier play and short story on the same theme led Gunn to believe that he had prepared his ground more carefully than was actually the case. There is also in this final section of Part Three a bitterness and an emphasis on the imprisoning effect of the community which is, if one excepts the rather special case of the mother's attitude, on the whole absent from the portrayal of Balmore, but which is characteristic of the atmosphere of the play and story and of the earlier novel The Lost Glen.

It is at this point in the novel, and especially in the entirely unsatisfactory final section 'The Drinking Well' which follows, that one becomes aware of the lack of a mediating but objective narrator, something which was not necessary in Parts One and Two because of the quality and liveliness of the dialogue and action. Instead of a mediating narrator, however, we have one who becomes increasingly identified with his principal character and involved in the invention of adventures for him. Action is piled upon action, suspense upon suspense, co-incidence upon co-incidence, and the quality of the writing deteriorates accordingly. At the end of Part Three we find Iain rushing out of the house after a confrontation with his father, who has now added the knowledge of Iain's involvement in the poaching expedition during which Major Grant was almost drowned, to his shame of the knowledge of his fight in Edinburgh. Iain is knocked down by the car of the new laird, Mr Henderson (with whom he had been engaged to discuss new methods of sheep farming on the day of his Edinburgh fight, and who thus witnessed that fight), and is taken off to the big house to be nursed. His Edinburgh employers are by chance guests of Mr Henderson.

The reason for his fight is made clear, to his advantage; the fact that, although involved in the poaching, he had been the one to save Major Grant from drowning is made known; a decision is taken to put him in charge of an experimental sheep farm, and his father agrees to advise him. At this point, when everything seems set fair for a happy ending, the laird's daughter announces Iain's disappearance and a search is mounted: 'They all stared at her, and the silent question sprang like a trap: were they too late?' (DW 451) They are not too late. Iain is found by Mary, the daughter of Ewan, and the girl from home whom he loves, at the cottage of Mad Mairag who had earlier advised him to love the land, and to whose drinking well those who have loved the land come. And Mary is able to persuade Iain to take on Mr Henderson's challenge.

It is difficult to isolate possible reasons for the collapse of a novel which, in its first two parts and in much of the third, had promised so much. One wonders if Gunn, whether he was conscious of it or not, did not in himself have enough faith in Highland renewal to carry through his planned optimistic outcome convincingly. Was the dilemma of the Edinburgh musician Campbell also his? Was the predetermined intention to effect an optimistic ending in conflict with the facts of the situation as they were in actuality and with the unfolding of the novel as it took its own course? Or was it merely that the similarity with the theme of The Lost Glen and the play and short story on the theme of the returned student which becomes prominent in the third section of the novel inhibited Gunn's fresh handling of the material in the later work? Did his critical faculties and creative imagination inexplicably desert him as they did in the closing section of Morning Tide, an earlier novel which began supremely well and ended in melodrama and sentimentality? The explanation, whatever it might be, is perhaps not without relevance to the course Gunn's novel-writing took after The Drinking Well.

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The Essential Highland Experience

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NEIL M. GUNN

II THE NOVELS

iii Disintegration and Freedom in the Modern World

Wild Geese Overhead The Serpent The Shadow
Second Sight The Key of the Chest The Lost Chart
The Silver Bough The Well at the World's End
The Other Landscape Bloodhunt

The Drinking Well marks the end of Gunn's exploration of the Highland situation for its own sake. In the novels of the post-war period he increasingly turns to the analysis of social and personal freedom in the contemporary world and to the investigation of the forces of disintegration which work against the achievement of that freedom, against what he calls in Highland River 'the fine essence of delight.' (HR 114). Where the Highland physical and spiritual milieu features in these late novels, it does so as an opposing cathartic or reconciling vision.

Significantly, the 'true form of communal living'¹ as dramatised in books such as The Silver Darlings, Young Art and Old Hector and the early Morning Tide, does not have an essential part to play in this cathartic vision. In the late novels Gunn's Highland experience is increasingly both Wordsworthian and primitive in character. While in Morning Tide it is the human warmth and companionship of old Sandy which comforts Hugh and helps him ward off the menace of the natural world as he gathers bait in the evening light, and while in The Green Isle of the Great Deep the Questioner recognises that Art's strength and individuality derive from

the complete community he has grown up in, in the late novels it is nature itself - a bird singing or the land with its wildflowers and its crops - and the sense of communion with the past which are the sustaining powers. Moreover, in The Serpent and The Key of the Chest, the country community and its intolerance create a prison for the questioning mind just as inescapable as that which Gunn saw the contemporary urban world as providing for man. In the late books there is no boy hero. Boyhood has passed into adulthood with the pressures it brings for Gunn's protagonists. With the exception of Bloodhunt, all these late novels exhibit insecurity in formal technique and impoverished perception.

The themes of the post-war novels are anticipated in the city novel Wild Geese Overhead² which was published at the outbreak of war in 1939, and in two other books of the early war period, Second Sight and The Serpent. While a preoccupation with disintegration and freedom is present in one form or another in all the novels of this final grouping, within the whole there are smaller groups of books which relate more closely to each other, but which, as with the novels of positive Highland experience, do not necessarily follow each other chronologically.

One such group consists of the anticipatory Wild Geese Overhead, The Shadow, which closely follows its themes some nine years later, and The Serpent. These are the novels which Francis Hart isolated also in the essay 'Neil M. Gunn: A Brief Memoir' as demonstrating Gunn's attempt to find in Highland experience a 'curative vision of the murderous modern world.'³ I believe that Professor Hart is mistaken, however, when he includes with these novels The Drinking Well. In it, as we have seen, any 'curative vision' works towards the alleviation of Highland decline and the 'murderous modern world' is subservient to the arguments about the debilitated economic and political condition of Scotland.

Wild Geese Overhead, The Serpent and The Shadow explore the philosophical and political questions which troubled Gunn in his journalism of the late 1930s and early 1940s and which are given dramatic form in the action of The Green Isle of the Great Deep. But while in that book questions of personal freedom, individual response and authoritarian legislation are investigated through the allegory of the totalitarian paradise of the Green Isle, in Wild Geese Overhead, The Serpent and The Shadow they are argued out directly through the talk of the characters. In these three novels there is also a town/country dimension. In Wild Geese Overhead and The Shadow 'the Wellsian aseptic city-honeycombs'⁴ are opposed by the restorative qualities of the countryside. In The Serpent, on the other hand, town and country have in their different ways both freedom and constriction. In all these novels the principal protagonist is no longer the child but the young adult. While The Serpent is comparatively successful in its attempt to portray the maturing philosophical vision of its hero, both Wild Geese Overhead and The Shadow exhibit Gunn at his most insecure, philosophically and artistically.

In Wild Geese Overhead the principal character and the centre of consciousness for the novel is Will, a Glasgow journalist of middle-class origins who attends socialist meetings as his parents before him had attended church. As the novel opens, we find Will dissatisfied with what he considers to be the aridity and unhealthiness of his city existence. Like the young writer in the short story 'The Mirror', he decides to leave his lodgings - but not, in Will's case, his job - in the city for a life in the country, where he hopes he will find fresh sources of inspiration and a more personal, individualised existence. Unlike the young man in 'The Mirror', however, who finds that his particular source of inspiration is in fact the city, and so returns to Glasgow, Will perseveres with his

country living, and much of the argument of the novel revolves around the contrast between the forces of disintegration which he finds active in the environment of the city, and the individualised response to nature, the 'atom of delight', which the countryside arouses. The context of the action is that of the late thirties in Europe: impending war; but as in the later book The Lost Chart,⁵ Gunn does not succeed in creating an atmosphere of crisis in his setting. What does predominate is the conflict in Will's mind with relation to the question of society and the individual; between socialism, with its necessary curbs on individual freedom, and what Gunn describes in 'On Belief' as the spirit's 'instinctive urge to dodge restrictive mechanisms.'⁶

But while in The Green Isle of the Great Deep Gunn found an admirable dramatic objective correlative for his themes of individual freedom and authoritarian social organisation, Wild Geese Overhead is unsuccessful in its reliance on direct discursive presentation and on a concentration on the thoughts and feelings of Will as the vehicles for the playing out of the conflict. The questions raised are of universal significance and concern, but, as with Nan in The Shadow, the characterisation of Will is not sufficiently convincing and the perceptions and emotional responses which he expresses are too simplistic and trivial, to bear the weight of the philosophical argument which Gunn places on them.

Gunn's failure in this book is both a failure of technique and of perception. The adoption of a predominant protagonist and a single centre of consciousness for the action is a device which works well in the short story form. It was successful on the whole also in a book such as Highland River, where the apparent single centre of consciousness was in fact a dual one through the composite character of Kenn the adult and Kenn the boy; and in Morning Tide where the child Hugh was the eyes and ears of

the novel. In the later complex philosophical and social/political novels this single centre of consciousness becomes inadequate. In Wild Geese Overhead we have no external touchstone against which to judge Will. We see Will through Will's eyes. The other characters are paste-board role-players, to some of whom Will attaches a symbolic label: Mac, his fellow journalist, is 'Nero the destroyer', one of the intellectual destroyers who feature again in The Shadow; Joe, the socialist worker, is 'Christ the Saviour', a secular Good Samaritan who acts while Will theorises and mentally agonises; Felicity the sophisticated friend now working in Paris, is 'Helen of Troy' (WG 266), and like Mac, Will sees her as a sterile, destructive force. Jenny, who never comes alive for the reader, but in whom as in the countryside Will's salvation lies, is 'Primavera . . . the Lady Spring who comes with the flowers' (WG 267).

Apart from the limited exceptions of Will's bustling country landlady, who plays a very minor role in the action, and Joe, whose role is much more significant with regard to the book's themes of the relationship between the individual and his society, there is no convincing character or convincing action depicted in this book. Nor does Gunn himself compensate for this by acting as a mediating narrator. Instead there are set speeches and set pieces of action and there is most often little causal relationship between the two.

Gunn's failure is most clearly demonstrated in the passages which relate to Will's visits, with and without Joe, to the slum areas of Glasgow. Gunn's description of the walks through the slums are powerfully evocative, but Will's responses are simplistic and unconvincing. Supposedly an experienced journalist who not only writes his paper's literary criticism, but, more significantly for the themes of the novel, writes on social and

economic matters, Will is overwhelmed by his fear of the slums and their menace. While Joe attends to the practicalities of a situation in which the wife of an injured, and now unemployed, worker has died in childbirth as a result of undernourishment, Will wanders the streets in mental anguish continually hearing the last words of the woman as they have been reported to him: 'I am very tired' (WG 114, 131, 227); words, which like his symbolic captioning of Mac, Joe, Felicity and Jenny, become by repetition a substitute for the depiction of genuine emotional response. There is a similar failure of perception with regard to human relationships and responses - a failure absent in the Gunn of the novels of Highland experience - in Gunn's depiction of Will's relationship with the prostitute Ivy, who becomes another medium for Will's vicarious living in the slum areas. He does not wish to sleep with her, but to express through a friendly, equal-terms relationship with her, his personal approach to socialist practice as opposed to what he considers to be Joe's detached, impersonal actions:

Tell me this, Ivy. I want to be quite friendly with you. I do feel friendly, to tell the truth. You couldn't forget yourself and just be friendly with me? As you know quite well already, I am not in the right mood for the lusts of the flesh. I could spend a few hours with you - but what am I saying? Have another drink? (WG 137)

Neither Will nor his author seems to realise the appalling condescension - quite apart from its utter lack of conviction - implicit in this and similar passages between Will and Ivy.

The arguments between Will and Joe on the subject of society and the individual form the philosophical heart of the book, but these are presented in a dull, artificial way in the form of set-piece statements and counter-statements. Will's point of view is that Joe makes 'the mistake of mistrusting the personal'; he has

'not only lost touch with the personal but - almost lost belief in it.'

He tells him: 'I'd say that you are obsessed with the importance of social relations to such an extent that the individual tends to become an element in those relations - a mere element rather than a free individual' (WG 198-99). Joe's counter argument is that 'no individual is free. He is a product of and is conditioned by his social relations' (WG 199). To which Will, like Gunn in 'Memories of the Month: A Balance Sheet', replies: 'So, we get our stuff from society all right, but we give back as much as we get - and a bit over, or there would be no evolution' (WG 200).

The context of these arguments is that theme of the validity of the individual contribution and personal expression which the administrators rejected in the Green Isle, a theme which Edwin Muir explored also in his definition of imagination in The Estate of Poetry: 'By imagination I mean that power by which we apprehend living beings and living creatures in their individuality, as they live and move, and not as ideas or categories'⁷; and to which he gave poetic expression in poems such as 'Reading in Wartime' and 'Song for a Hypothetical Age'. Unfortunately, however significant the theme and the opposing philosophies which it presents, Gunn does not succeed here in bringing it before the reader as he does in The Green Isle of the Great Deep and in his articles, and as Muir does in his late essays and poetry. For the reader, Joe's reply to Will's charge that the slum-dwellers Jamie and Ettie were units in the greater cause to him is the convincing one:

Had it not been for the cause, I should not have done what I had done? Possibly. What is certain is that had it not been for the cause I should not have known them at all, and so have done nothing. (WG 208)

Will's arguments, on the other hand, coming as they do after the descriptions of the visits to the slum areas and of the hopelessly deprived lives

of Jamie and Ettie, could be regarded at best as immature, at worst as obscene:

When you shift the emphasis from the individual to society, to social relations, you shift it from the vivid springing core of life to a windy, if convenient, abstraction. But, and this is the snag: it is difficult to be a real individual living from your feet up. It needs grit, and pride, and courage, and power to endure through despair; you need to be quick with beauty, and light, and love, and sex; you must see men, not as social units, but as your individual brothers, full of this magic thing called life. And that is difficult. But - it is easy to be a socialist . . . (WG 204)

After various episodes which unconvincingly depict Will's vicarious living experiences, Wild Geese Overhead is brought to an end by means of the melodrama of his nervous collapse, a collapse which almost results in his death. The nervous breakdown has been precipitated by a fight in the slums - an incident described with all the excitement and vigour characteristic of Gunn's suspense episodes - in which Will is knocked unconscious. It would appear, however, that the death-wish which prevents his recovery is caused, not as one might expect, by the trauma of the sum of his experiences in the slums, but by the fact that he thinks that his Primavera Jenny, with whom he has fallen in love, has spent a 'lost weekend' with his sophisticated city acquaintance Philip. The banality of Gunn's presentation of Will's anguish over this proposed happening is surpassed only by the melodrama of a death-bed scene in which the perception of 'the tender human eyes of the girl from Lewis' (WG 317), his nurse, who notices the movement of an eye-lid, prevents Will from being covered up and left for dead.

Inevitably he discovers that Jenny has not gone off for her weekend with Philip, and Will's recovery is assured. The final pages in which Will, now convalescing at the farm, tells Jenny the background to his collapse are almost unbelievable in relation to the earlier slum episodes and in

relation to what one has accepted as Gunn's genuine concern for personal freedom. In response to Jenny's 'Must be dreadful - living down there in the slums' (WG 325), we have this from Will:

'But it's not really as bad as it sounds to us or as it is written about. Their reactions are not our reactions. Your garden here would bore them stiff. And the overwhelming mass of them are extraordinarily decent; the women caring for their room or kitchen, or even single end, their home, keeping it clean and tidy, concerned about the menfolk and children, putting up a magnificently stoic fight against a real or ever-threatening economic famine that is hellish because it shouldn't be. It's that awful greyness, gloom, that got me. Their lives are not dramatic. They are grey. But they don't feel that greyness as we would. To them the street noises and the grinding trams are their singing-birds. Well, all right. But for God's sake, keep them from fear, fear of want; let us - oh!'

Will dropped his head back.

'I am glad you spoke to me like this,' said Jenny quietly. (WG 325-26)

What can one possibly say about this? It is the classic argument of the complacent bourgeois or colonial of all times and places against ameliorating the conditions of the working classes, the blacks, of any down-trodden or uncomfortable section of society: 'their reactions are not our reactions . . . they don't feel the greyness as we would.' And it is not possible, in my view, to mount a defence for Gunn by saying that Will is an autonomous character, who does not necessarily speak for his author. Throughout the novel one has felt the lack of a narrative irony which might have put Will's outpourings and immature actions into perspective. Now, at the end, it is impossible to argue against Gunn's endorsement of this feeble, insensitive character and his equally synthetic girl with her 'long-stemmed daffodils' and automatic 'small social smile' (WG 303). The ending is whimsical and sentimentally approving as Will tells Jenny the story of the wild geese:

'There is much to tell you. You are like some one who has been a long time away. And it's the queer stuff. But it's very real, Jenny. (I love your name!) It's as real as the slums. It's more real than the slums in a way.'

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Looking at her, he was drawn into a swift movement that scattered the rabbits; but a few of them stopped to sit up; whereupon, seeing no further cause for alarm, they went on eating. (WG 340-41)

Wild Geese Overhead is an extremely poor book and it might seem prodigal to spend much critical consideration on it. But just as its themes anticipate the social, political and philosophical themes of the post-war novels, so its inadequacies also anticipate the limitations of the late books. Some commentators on Gunn's work have claimed much for these late novels. For Francis Hart, for example, in the essay 'Neil Gunn's Fiction of Violence', 'it can be argued that the latest of Gunn's twenty novels (in twenty-nine years) are in many ways the best, most universal, most timely, most mature philosophically and artistically.'⁸ J.B. Pick, discussing Faber's difficulties with The Shadow, an equally poor book in my view, comments that while 'many of Neil's books were not only difficult, but in some way flawed . . . it is often with these flawed books that we find the most penetrating insights.'⁹ Wild Geese and The Shadow are extreme examples of artistic and philosophical failure, but though this failure may vary in degree, it does not really vary in kind from that of the late novels as a whole which, with the exception of Bloodhunt, exhibit, in my view, an artistic failure and a lack of critical judgement and perception which take Gunn at times perilously close to an artistic and philosophical kailyard. Wild Geese Overhead is a warning when considering the fashionable themes of the late novels that philosophical themes in themselves are no guarantee of success. Themes must find dramatic expression in the action of the novels. In addition, as Walter Allen

comments in The English Novel, 'in judging a novel we are faced with the task of assessing not only the author's ability to create characters, for instance, but also the values inherent in the characters and their behaviour.'¹⁰ (my italics)

The Serpent, published in 1943 and thus situated between Young Art and Old Hector and The Green Isle of the Great Deep, is a considerably more thoughtful and competent book than Wild Geese Overhead. In its flashback technique it is reminiscent of Highland River, but it is more clearly a remembering of times past in contrast to the earlier work's re-entering of the past through the adult Kenn's memories of his childhood. One of the stylistic and philosophical achievements of Highland River was Gunn's success in creating the sensation of time being 'eternally present',¹¹ of the unity of all time. In The Serpent, on the other hand, there is a definite division into time past and time present. We watch time moving irrevocably forward as we listen to Tom's reminiscences. What might have been is left, sometimes with regret, in the past. And change in Tom's personal life is patterned in 'the gradually changing social conditions, the emigration of young men to the Colonies, the slow break-up of the crofting townships' (S 232).

The Serpent is a slow-moving book, its narrative pace suited to the thoughtful, at times reluctant, remembering of its principal protagonist, the old 'Philosopher' Tom. Unlike The Silver Darlings, this is a book of new beginnings which came to nothing: Tom's new life in Glasgow is aborted by his father's illness and his enforced return to his Highland village. His courtship of Janet is blocked by her attraction to the minister's son, Donald. A possible later marriage with the widowed Tina, Janet's friend, is forestalled even before it has been consciously considered by the middle-aged Tom's reluctance to become once again involved in close relationships.

As in Wild Geese Overhead and The Shadow there is a city dimension in The Serpent, but the book is unusual among Gunn's novels in its presentation of the city as a possible source of freedom, while the Highland community in its intolerance of new ideas which depart from traditional ways, becomes a prison-house for the returned Tom. In the midst of the crisis of illness brought about by his father's death and the censure of the community, 'memories of Glasgow came back to him frequently . . . as if Glasgow were a distant place of refuge in the factual world much as his own home was in this present intimate life' (S 191).

It is thus not from the Highland community that Tom in The Serpent derives strength, but from the land itself. In the descriptions of the young Tom's return from the city with his newly-learned practical skills and philosophical ideas, his initial joy in the outdoor work of the croft and in his enjoyment of the companionship of the young men who gather in the barn as in a traditional ceillidh-house, Gunn evokes the sense of fellowship which can exist in a small community where all accept the traditional mores. But this fellowship is shown to be precariously rooted, as Tom's new ideas about religion and socialism begin to filter through to the guardians of the community. He becomes an outcast in the village; at home, before his father's death, his life is made intolerable by the restrictions imposed on him by his father's narrow, uncompromising religious attitudes. He cannot read his Glasgow books within the house.

Tom's saviour is the land, and his sense of affinity with the people of the past. Although his first awareness of the 'intimacy with the earth' (S 72) arises as a result of his courtship of Janet, his love of the land persists when Janet has left him. In the early days 'suddenly something came out of the land, out of the air, some cool shiver of spring like an immemorial essence, an elusive scent, and it ran through his flesh and into

his blood. It was enlivening, touched with hope and promise' (S 87).

In the dark days after his father's death he finds comfort in the earth:

'All at once a delicate mood of renewal touched him, ran over his body and into his mind. The earth, that old patient mother. But beneath the surface - the hidden heartbeat, that which invigorated and renewed, that which drew his body secretly. . . . He sat under a bush and at once knew release' (S 166).

In Highland River, the adult Kenn, musing on the way society has developed in the modern world, finds that 'our river took a wrong turning somewhere!' (HR 123) Tom, as befits his socialist, even Marxist stance, takes a more evolutionary view of the course of human history: 'Yes, it will come back, but not in the old way,' the old man tells the younger shepherd whom he meets on the hills. 'We are in the period of the great decline in the country here. A period like that will cover a hundred - two hundred - years. We have not reached the end of the ebb yet. But we will, and then the tide will slowly begin to flow again' (S 173). Like Gunn in articles such as 'Scotland Moves' of September 1943, Tom puts his faith in the machine and in Hydro-Electric power: 'What do you think all these big fellows are trying to get hold of Highland hydro-electric power for? The machine is finding out our land. The machine has taken away, the machine will give, blessed be the machine!' (S 173) And although the community seems presently in decline, it is not all loss. Tom's hope for a return through the machine to repopulation and the warmth of the old life is a hope for a return to a time in history before that of the Calvinist-dominated community of his own youth. While the shepherd laments that the old life has gone, he, like Tom, recognises that people are 'more tolerant now to a man with a point of view of his own. In the old days some of the ministers and elders were real tyrants!' (S 174)

Edwin Muir wrote admiringly of The Serpent, calling it 'a mature book' in which 'the unity of the story is the unity of one man's experience as seen by himself shortly before his death, when the pattern has already woven itself, and by turning round he can see it spread out before him.'¹² The Serpent is in this way close to Muir's own preoccupations with living experience and with his own past experiences in particular. Tom's final acceptance of life after the impatient atheism and socialism of his youth is in a sense allied to Muir's expression of the mystic's vision in the poem 'The Three Mirrors' and in the essay 'Yesterday's Mirror: Afterthoughts to an Autobiography', both of which are roughly contemporaneous with Gunn's book. In addition, Tom's memories of his eager Glasgow days have a relationship to Muir's own early socialist enthusiasm in Glasgow, to Mansie Manson's experiences of transfiguration during the socialist procession in the novel Poor Tom. One can understand why this book so appealed to Muir.

One can understand also, while disagreeing with his judgement, why Muir singled out for especial mention Gunn's depiction of 'the hero's love story.'¹³ As Poor Tom and The Three Brothers make clear, Muir, no less than Gunn, was inept in his handling of relationships between the sexes in his novels and there is some similarity between the development of the love story of Tom and Janet in The Serpent and Muir's depiction of the affair between Tom and Helen and Mansie and Helen in Poor Tom and between the brothers and Ellen in The Three Brothers, which novel, although it is supposed to be set in Reformation Scotland, in its male/female relationships at least has a ring of the early twentieth century about it.

Gunn's portrayal of Tom's love for Janet and his betrayal by her is the principal flaw in The Serpent, descending as it does at times to the sensationalism and triviality of the cheap novelette. All the clichés of romantic fiction are present: the faithful sweetheart betrayed by his girl; the girl herself betrayed by the minister's son; the former lover's attempt

to force the new lover to marry the girl; the girl's death and her refusal to name the father of her child. The dialogue between Tom and Janet is superficial and trite - 'Please, Tom - don't - make me break down' (S 139) - and their meetings in the hollow of the hills behind Janet's house, while intended, I think, to appear chaste by Gunn, have a titillating quality which is too frequently present in Gunn's depiction of relationships between the sexes. Nor is the relationship sufficiently deeply or sensitively developed to bear the weight Gunn places on it, as Tom sees those closest to him in symbolic terms: 'his mother . . . creation; his father . . . God, and Janet the symbol of love' (S 66). Tom's attempt to justify Janet's actions is rhetoric merely: 'he saw how right Janet had been, how true her life instinct to nature, to the phenomenal world, the stars, the dialectic of rhythm and change, all the processes that together make up the sum total of what we know and guess at' (S 240). As far as Janet is concerned, the reader does not know, nor does Tom, what was her relationship with Donald, whether she thought she loved him and he her, or whether the attraction was purely a temporary, sexual one. Janet never speaks to us, or to Tom, except in clichés such as the above 'don't - make me break down'. We do not know what goes on in her mind. Like Jenny in Wild Geese Overhead, she is paste-board. Tom's attempt to justify her affair with Donald shows that same synthetic attitude towards human relationships which characterised Will's attempt to justify Jenny's weekend with Philip in the earlier book. Trite philosophising about how women have 'their own sort of morals . . . based on their instinct' (WG 279) and how 'for a woman to lose the potency of her instinct is her first and last sin to herself' (WG 280) just will not do. In the matter of relationships between the sexes Gunn's own instinct constantly plays him false.

To counterbalance this failure, the portrayal of young Tom's life in Glasgow, the alienation from his Highland community on his return, and the conflict with his father which brings about the father's death is psychologically convincing and at times genuinely moving. Especially effective is Gunn's evocation through Tom's listening to his mother's singing in church, of the psalm-singing of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, that strangely powerful, nasal surging, simultaneously free and restrained.

Although not one of Gunn's best books, The Serpent has its own quiet satisfactions for the reader.

The Shadow, on the other hand, returns to the self-indulgence and banality of Wild Geese Overhead. The principal protagonist this time is a young woman, Nan, and Gunn's conspicuous lack of success with contemporary young women characters does not lead one to put much trust in Nan as the centre of consciousness for the novel. Nor does the fact that Nan is convalescing from a nervous breakdown, and that the first section of the book is written in epistolary form, which makes it quite impossible for the reader to obtain any mediating viewpoints which might help him to place Nan. In the article 'Memories of Neil Gunn' J.B. Pick quotes from a letter from Gunn which relates how 'Faber himself, and two other readers, quite independently, found it almost impossible to get through the first part of the book.'¹⁴ One could wish that Gunn had heeded Faber's professional response and that the Directors of Faber had held to their initial disinclination to publish the novel. The Shadow, despite its laudable themes of freedom and disintegration, is, like Wild Geese Overhead, a very poor book which does no credit to Gunn's reputation as novelist.

In its opposition of emotional response and ruthless, impersonal intellectuality, The Shadow is the most Lawrentian of Gunn's novels. Indeed in a passage such as Nan's encounter with the horses in the early stages of

the book, it explicitly evokes the similar encounter between the overwrought Ursula and the horses at the end of The Rainbow. But a comparison of the two passages demonstrates how superficial this apparent resemblance is, and how poor is the quality of Gunn's depiction. Whether or not the horses are real which threaten Ursula as she tries to come to terms with her bearing of Skrebensky's child and her belated decision to accept his offer of marriage, or whether they are projections of her distraught mind and the conflict going on in her unconscious being over her decision, Lawrence does succeed in bringing the reader to share in Ursula's experience as she makes her way home through the fields. We feel the rain which soaks her, experience the claustrophobia induced by the wood which she enters for shelter, we hurry along the 'narrow groove in the turf between high, sere tussocky grass'¹⁵ with her until the fear of the sensed presence of the horses overwhelms her. The emotional and physical experience created by Lawrence is a totally absorbing one. In The Shadow, on the other hand, Nan's similar experience is unconvincing in its whimsicality and by reason of the lack of imaginative and linguistic vitality in its presentation. She writes to Ransald of her encounter with the horses:

The first time I came on them - at least they came on me - I was terribly frightened. I felt suddenly caught and they were enormous, and with their manes and their heads up, they stopped and stood there against the sky. Wild horses, I thought. Does that give you, far in, an uncanny feeling? For it's queer, isn't it, that if you say wild anything else - like wild lions - it's not the same? . . . But in wild horses there is something withholding. Terrible and wild, not looking but watching. They are imminent, or is it immanent? I was always a little confused with these two words.

After some more chatter in this vein, Nan recounts her terrifying experience:

Then the young horse with the grey face came towards me, with movement of its head against an invisible bit, in pride and power, and its brown eyes shone, and its nostrils curled, and all the flesh melted on my bones and my skeleton shook at the knees. I think perhaps my skeleton rattled, for the beast

stopped. As a small boy, my brother Archie had a hen's foot. He pulled a sinew in the leg and all the toes jerked. I squawked the first time it was done on me, and they roared with laughter. Well, this time the sinew was in me and something or someone pulled it, and every limb jerked, my arms flew up, and a surpassing discord proceeded from my lips. At once the wild horse threw its head aloft, reared against the sky, pivoted on its hind legs, and in a thunderous manner pounded back to its companions and once more formed into line above me, looking down from the sky.

Have you ever staggered against a roaring river? Neither have I, until then. But I reached the five-barred gate. It never occurred to me to try to open it. I just climbed over it and fell down on the other side. I won't say that I wept, and I won't say that I was nearly sick, but I will say it took a little time for the flesh to fall asleep on the bones, and for those awful heart-thumps, like thuds in an empty pump, to grow less and less and fall away into sleep, too. I had no idea the heart was so terrible and fierce an engine.

Then, in the next paragraph, we have this anti-climax:

But you'll be tired of these horses (they're pets really, and Greyface eats now out of my hand) and I have forgotten what it was I was going to say about them. Probably it was a thought I had. (Sh 8-10)

Even if Gunn were trying to convince the reader of the unstable nature of Nan's convalescent mind and emotions, which I do not think he is to any significant degree, there would be no defence for writing so inadequate as this. Gunn's Nan is synthetic Lawrence and belongs to the world of Scottish kailyard writing which, in its emotional life, is synthetic Burns.

This incident with the horses is unfortunately typical of Gunn's presentation of his principal character in The Shadow. Nan is full of the attitudes and linguistic clichés of television soap operas and cheap novel-ettes. It seems significant that she herself is employed by a London Women's Magazine: 'The Last Word. The word the woman has - in fashion and the arts' (Sh 34). In her opposition to Ranald's operation by intellect, she glorifies the 'little woman's instinct' beloved by writers of romance: 'I know that's right. Deep in me, Ranald, I know' (Sh 9). Her use of

language is half-educated and pretentious: 'Woe is me'; 'And a few tears have in very sooth downfallen'; 'No-one has seen the spirit; not even as in a glass darkly' (Sh 13, 15, 53). She commits the sin with which women are so often charged of personalising what should be objective and impersonal: of Freud's work she comments: 'As it happens I did not dislike the man himself as he came through his pages' (Sh 53). Like the heroine in any novelette who feels it is her mission in life to reform her alcoholic/gambling/womanising husband or lover, Nan feels it is her mission to save her 'big intellectual tough' (Sh 49) Ranald from his own intellectuality: 'I am going back to London. I have made up my mind, Aunt Phemie. I am going to help Ranald all I can. I shall give him all that's in me. But I shall never betray - this world - all this, that's in me and you. That's maybe, all I have to give' (Sh 240). And as Nan walks in the countryside with Phemie before returning to London: 'A bird was singing in the Dark Wood' (Sh 240) in true Hollywood fashion.

With such a character as the consciousness of the novel, arguments concerning the opposition between personal response and intellectual ruthlessness, and the nature of the relationship of the individual to his society, become trivialised and pointless. Instead of rescuing the intellect from the destroyers - 'We have to rescue the intellect from the destroyers. They have turned it into death rays, and it should be the sun' (Sh 42): a plea from Nan which is frequently quoted as evidence of Gunn's philosophical acuity in these late novels - one feels that one must rescue the emotions from such as Nan. With Nan as his example of personal responsiveness, one can only agree with Ranald's 'Emotions work up to an awful mess' (Sh 113).

Nan's Aunt Phemie is the most rounded and therefore, perhaps, the most trustworthy character in the book, and it is interesting to note that she comes from the fine short story 'Snow in March'. She keeps much of the

consistency and good sense associated with the middle-aged heroine of that story, but even Phemie is not entirely convincing. Like the heroine in the short story, Aunt Phemie is an ex-teacher, has travelled extensively and has interested herself in educational and psychological matters. Yet, like so many of Gunn's characters who return from intellectual activity in the city to an outdoor life in the Highlands, Aunt Phemie seems to have been able to put aside her intellectual interests completely, taking them up again only when she meets the challenge of Ranald's intellect. Her discussions with Ranald are therefore somewhat artificial, even if one suspects that she would make a better opponent for him than does Nan. There is too much narrative reference to her intellectual past: 'This brings back some of my remote past; late nights and endless arguments. I am not without some small experience. Tell me about your set' (Sh 109); too many dated shorthand terms such as 'set'; 'leprosy man'; 'bourgeois repressions' (Sh 113). There is, too, something essentially trivialising about the glorification of women's interests in this book: in the symbolic story of the painter's wife who makes sure that 'the moon is properly trimmed and not smoking' and that all the stars are lit' (Sh 75); in Nan and Phemie 'sitting at the bottom of the well of the world' with 'the something that is missing in our hearts' (Sh 222); in Phemie's 'Men have gone mad' (Sh 204).

The health-restoring ritual of the harvest which takes place towards the end of the book is also simplistic. In The Shadow as in Wild Geese Overhead and The Serpent, nature is the restorative power. There is no depiction of community life as in the books of Highland experience. Nan's longing is for 'the sun, the light, the light glistening on grass, on leaves; the wind that snares you with an eddy that you break out of with a laugh on your dancing feet' (Sh 25). In the harvest incident, however, Gunn seems to be attempting to communicate the idea of communal living and

warmth characteristic of the earlier novels. The passages in which Nan drives the tractor and in which the rabbit is killed are based on Gunn's own experiences of war-time community help on a farm,¹⁶ and the accounts in themselves are assured and convincing. Their symbolic significance with regard to Nan seeing Will as an earth god and herself as a woman in remote time seems contrived, however. Nor is the killing of the rabbit satisfactory in the context of earlier themes in the book. There has been much talk of predators - emotional and intellectual - in The Shadow. At one point during her convalescence Nan meets Adam, a painter, who is presented to the reader as an extreme of the emotional approach to living experience, and whom Nan categorises in Spenglerian terms as a beast of prey. Adam has mocked Nan's distress at the killing of a blackbird by a hawk, telling her this is part of the world of nature. But for Nan, it is the equivalent of the killings in World War Two: 'the new realism disposing of the old sentimentality! . . . it is so obviously an effort at justifying the new realism which produces death that, after world war number two, it is just too sickening, too unforgivably glib' (Sh 61). But it is Nan whose logic is 'unforgivably glib'. Birds have instincts. Man has intellect and a conscience. And Nan's own conscience is not in evidence when she watches the rabbit-killing at the harvest, a killing which can be justified only by Gunn's predeliction for the hunt:

As she swung in for the top stretch in the deep twilight, already irradiated with the moon's green light, she saw George leaning in over the grain listening, poised like a primitive hunter, still as a heron. Davie and Alan were waiting, their forks in their hands. As she came roaring along a rabbit bolted from the standing grain. Two forks clashed, then George was in hot pursuit. The rabbit doubled, for it could not run fast over the strong sharp stubble. George struck twice and missed. Davie and Alan swayed in their mirth. She heard Will's shout and brought the tractor back into proper line. She did not see George kill the rabbit, but she felt the killing in her heart.

She felt it as a sharp pain, but somehow it did not touch the picture of the men themselves, eager, full of friendliness and laughter, hunting in the deep twilight. (Sh 215-16)

For Edwin Muir, the relationship between man and the animals he had to kill to keep himself alive was one of guilt formalised in ritual. For Gunn, on the other hand, the hunting instinct is part of man's archaic heritage, and there seems no sense of guilt attached to the many episodes in his books which tell of poaching and hunting expeditions. This theme of the hunt, actual and metaphorical, is one which consistently recurs in Gunn's work, and in Second Sight it provides the entire context for the investigation of destructive forces in human life and, especially, in the modern world. Yet, as we shall see in the discussion of that book, I believe that Gunn's depiction of the intellectual predators of the modern world is flawed by his own glorification of man's primitive hunting instinct, which leaves one uneasy about the moral veracity of the hunting metaphor. In The Shadow, Nan's acceptance of the harvest ritual of the killing of the rabbit in contrast to her earlier anguish at evidence of killing in the world of nature seems to me to undermine further her credibility as spokeswoman for the forces of light in this most unsatisfactory book.

Second Sight, The Key of the Chest and The Lost Chart also explore themes of disintegration and destructive forces in society, but in all three the investigation is conducted through the medium of a suspense story. In addition, the disintegration explored is of a more personal nature than it is in Wild Geese Overhead and The Shadow. There is little reference to political systems or to the nature of the relationship between the individual and his society, although in The Lost Chart, political crisis in the international arena does provide the background context of the book. And while in the three books previously discussed, nature, as found by Will in the countryside around his farm lodgings, by Tom the Philosopher in his native Highlands, and by Nan in Aunt Phemie's farm, is the restorative

power, in Second Sight, The Key of the Chest and The Lost Chart one finds that modern nihilism is opposed by awareness of the integration which, for Gunn and his spokesmen in these books, existed in primitive society.

Increasingly in these late books one finds that a novel has developed out of the theme of an earlier short story, or that, as in The Shadow, an earlier short story becomes an incident in a late novel and to some extent colours aspects of its development. The Key of the Chest and The Lost Chart are both related to previous stories. The Key of the Chest takes its title and principal theme from the story-line of the 1931 'The Dead Seaman', while the Cladday sections of The Lost Chart have their source in the 1942 story 'Sun and Moon'.¹⁷ Second Sight is different in that its alliance is not with a short story, but with the play of the same name.¹⁸

The setting of Second Sight is the Highlands, but the Highlands of the outsiders: the sportsmen and the foreign landlords and tenants. The indigenous population is represented here by the housekeeper and gamekeeper, by the ghillies and maidservants. The setting is thus one of Highland decline as in The Lost Glen, but this decline is not what concerns Gunn in Second Sight. Here his preoccupation is with the individual psyche and the forces of disintegration in contemporary society such as impersonal intellectual activity, perverted sexuality and ruthless power-seeking which threaten its wholeness. The Highlands, in the form of the world of nature - the countryside, the stags in the deer forest - and through the primitive sensibility which is still extant in the previsioning powers of the ghillie Alick, present an opposing, if ultimately ineffectual - at least as far as this story is concerned - vision to that contemporary destructiveness.

The plot of Second Sight turns on the efforts of the young chemist, Geoffrey, a member of a sporting party at Corbreac Lodge, home of the ex-Colonials Sir John and Lady Marway, to disprove the existence of 'second

sight', the prevision experienced by the ghillie Alick, who has foreseen the death of one of the shooting party, believed to be Geoffrey himself. The others present at the lodge take sides, consciously or unconsciously, on the question of prevision, and thus on the conflict between scientific rationalism and what cannot be rationally explained. Harry, an 'engineering architect', and Helen, daughter of Sir John, are Geoffrey's opponents, Harry following J.W. Dunne's theories in believing that 'it is simply that there may be in existence a relationship of time and space which we not normally apprehend' (SS 41, 38). The atmosphere at the lodge becomes increasingly affected by the vision and its premonition of disaster for one of them, and the principal interest of the book lies in the suspense aroused by the possibility of its fulfilment, and by the effect of this possibility on the actions of the characters. Gunn is successful in sustaining this suspense throughout the novel. Only the ending in which the vision comes to fruition is not altogether credible. There is too much of the Master of Ballantrae's fake death in Geoffrey's end. One feels that the vision could have been fulfilled in a more mundane, and thus more truly credible way.

Yet although the suspense elements of the story are well handled, the philosophical dimension which lies behind Geoffrey's actions and the love interest between Harry and Helen, which is here opposed to the illicit sexuality of London society, are unsatisfactorily developed. As we see again and again in the late novels and as we have seen in short stories and an early novel such as The Lost Glen, Gunn is inept in presenting contemporary young women in his novels and in dealing with relationships between the sexes in the modern world. Yet, perhaps because he sees casual sexual relationships as one of the destructive forces in contemporary society, he continually forces such relationships into a prominent place in his late novels. Helen in Second Sight is a less experienced sister of

Nan of The Shadow and her unquestioning admiration of Harry - 'I'm glad you spoke like that, Harry' (SS 174) - relates her also to Jenny of Wild Geese Overhead. In his development of the theme of the social corruptions of London invading the Highlands and islands of Scotland, Gunn places Helen in a wood where we find her quoting Mark Alexander Boyd's 'Fra bank to bank' while she too flits to and fro, full of the emotional intensity of awakening love. She weeps, 'loving her weakness, seduced by it, giving in to it' (SS 156). When Alick the ghillie intrudes on her solitude, she first of all tries to engage him in conversation, then fears he may have thought she was trying to make advances towards him. This leads to thoughts of what she has heard talked of in London: about the 'daughter of the shooting tenant' on a neighbouring estate who 'selected each year a different gillie for her amorous needs. Quite openly. Everyone knew about it. The best-looking, most virile type, don't you know'; about 'the local dance' where the English chauffeur 'had suffered from an embarras de richesses amongst some of the local beauties that could not be experienced, he reckoned, outside certain places in Paris.' Gunn makes his didactic purpose here quite plain through Helen's thoughts:

That suggestion of the beginning of demoralisation, perhaps quite localised, perhaps spreading, but in the air. The possibility of that rotten section of London society finding here for a short time a keener air, a more complete irresponsibility. Odd stories even from the Isles, not so much of intromissions with the native stock, as of promiscuities and perversions amongst themselves.

And not all rumours. Quite definite facts. Known facts. That sort of thing - that she knew of in London, that accompanied its social life, like a miasma about decay. What socialists called the canker at the decaying root of capitalist civilisation. And the feeling that haunted her more and more that the socialists were right.

You had to be modern and emancipated and talk about those things in London, of course. (SS 158, 159)

I find something of the parochial in this attempt to posit urban corruption in the form of illicit and perverted sex reaching out even to the remote islands of Scotland. It is contrived and unconvincing and Helen's cliché-ridden musings on sexual relationships in general are equally synthetic: 'Sex accompanied a young woman's life, sometimes in a rosy cloud, sometimes as a fire, but sometimes shameful and hateful like that. It is her fate! Helen supposed, a flick of angry colour in her cheeks' (SS 159). As she waits for Harry to return from his stalk, men to Helen, as to Nan and Phemie, seem beings ruthless and apart: 'And all at once she was struck by something terrifying in the aspect of man, something she had never experienced before, that separated man from her, some dark force of the spirit, that could grip male flesh' (SS 199).

The 'dark force of the spirit that could grip male flesh' as it is symbolised in Second Sight through the metaphor of the hunt is also, in my view, unconvincing. As discussed in relation to The Shadow, Gunn has an endorsing attitude towards hunting which makes it difficult for the metaphor of the hunting and killing of King Brude to be effective. King Brude, in his magnificence and in the fact that he has so far escaped the hunters, is, like Art in The Green Isle of the Great Deep 'legendary'. He is also, like Alick, a representative of the old way of life which has now almost vanished. As the native human stock of the Highlands was depleted by the Clearances, so now the indigenous deer are being replaced by park deer which have to be hand-fed in winter. King Brude is a survivor from the old independent forest deer and Alick is his human counterpart. Harry tells Helen: 'There are not many King Brudes. Dying out. The bay tines are going. And in the end - King Brude will go into the mist for ever, and Alick will be driven forth' (SS 174). There is thus logic in the fact that

it is Geoffrey, the scientific rationalist, the egotistical power-seeker from the urban south, the epitome of the modern man who 'disintegrates - without integrating' (SS 171), who most ruthlessly stalks and finally kills King Brude and, by implication, the spirit and old way of life symbolised in him.

It seems to me, however, that Gunn cancels out the effectiveness of the symbolic hunt to the death by the fact that all the male members of the shooting party, even Harry, who believes in Alick's vision and supports the spirit of life represented in him, would shoot Brude if they could. Perhaps this is what Helen's 'dark force of the spirit' is meant to tell us: that all men are equally life-denying; but if this is so, then this in itself wars with Gunn's choice of the scientific Geoffrey as representative of the forces of destruction and with his endorsing elsewhere of the attitudes of Harry. I believe that the difficulty is caused not so much by the fact that, for Gunn at this stage of his novel-writing, women are seen as the life-givers and men as the destroyers, as by Gunn's enjoyment of the physical hunt.

In the typescript article 'Poaching' (held by the National Library of Scotland) Gunn comments: 'Tentatively I would suggest that the hunting instinct is as old and ingrained as sex, and in the true hunter more constant, or less liable to fluctuation, over the whole life span.' And in discussing the 'strange bond' which exists between hunter and hunted, he continues: 'One of these learned and sympathetic men [anthropologists] describes how in a certain very primitive community the hunter caresses the flank of the deer he has killed, murmuring "Dear brother." We use the expression "sickening sentimentality" or "revolting" with the suspiciously glib ease which never fails to attract a psychoanalyst. The simple fact

is that tribal man in his totem systems was mixed up with the tribes of animals in ways that ran deep into the blood over an immense period of time. Quite literally for him there was a blood bond.¹⁹ One finds similar comments in The Atom of Delight and in The Other Landscape.²⁰ But in Gunn there is none of the guilt in the man/animal relationship which one finds in Freud's Totem and Taboo to which Gunn also refers in these books, nor which one finds in Edwin Muir's An Autobiography where he describes the rituals of copulation and pig-sticking on his father's farm: 'There was a necessity in the copulation and the killing which took away the sin, or at least, by the ritual act, transformed it into a sad, sanctioned duty' (A 36). There is no such element of guilt in the attitude of Gunn's modern hunters to their unnecessary killings. Harry in Second Sight is Geoffrey's anti-thesis, a man who, we are told, enjoys his own company on the hill as much as he does the stalk. He recognises Brude's legendary qualities and it is he who specifically relates King Brude to Alick and the passing of the old, strong way of life. He seems at one point to deplore the killing of hand-reared stags as a symptom of moral deterioration in the humans as well as of physical deterioration in the stags. But he also would kill King Brude if he could, despite his awareness of what he symbolises. In addition, Harry's first shoot results in the wounding of a stag in the spine. His hysterical self-indulgence as he watches Alick put the paralysed beast out of its misery does not support his author's endorsement of him as against Geoffrey. And later, it is Geoffrey's ill-natured arguing which destroys 'the glory of the hill-top' (SS 147) for him, not the memory of his own cruel wounding of the stag.

The attitudes of the Highland ghillies are similarly equivocal. Angus is Geoffrey's ghillie on the day he shoots King Brude and the Highlander is in no doubt of the significance of the hunt: 'For this was the spirit of his forest, its incarnation, its reality, its legend, its living truth' (SS259).

There is a potential moral drama here which Gunn sidesteps. The heart of the moral problem presented by the hunt is not exploited. The moral problem for Angus as Gunn presents it is not that he should be the instrument by which King Brude, the legend of the forest, is killed, but that he should help 'this man - this man - to shoot' (SS 259). Angus sees the stag, but Geoffrey does not. It is within Angus's power not to tell what he has seen. But he does tell, Geoffrey shoots and wounds Brude and Angus himself; in the traditional manner, has to follow the wounded stag and complete the kill. Afterwards he tells Alick: 'I felt like a bloody Judas' (SS 284).

And Angus is in a sense a Judas. Like the predestined betrayal of Christ, Angus seems fated to betray King Brude. Gunn raises his dilemma, but he does not let the reader see into Angus's heart, hear his arguments with himself, if any, understand his motive for the betrayal. He just seems to conform to the role of ghillie, subservient to hiring master, and the potentially dramatic moral conflict in the situation is dissipated.

Angus's pursuit and killing of the wounded Brude calls forth one of Gunn's exciting suspense episodes. And in this death, there seems glorification of Brude's past magnificence, rather than understanding of the futility of his killing: 'Noble he looked, too; the great head up; the eyes, against the westering light, full of fire. A superb beast' (SS 267). Only Harry, inspecting the kill later in the day, feels 'some primordial sensation of fear' (SS 280).

While there are many, of whom Gunn would appear to have been one, who hunt for pleasure and do not share the view of man's relationship to the animal world expressed by Edwin Muir in An Autobiography, Gunn's use of the hunt in Second Sight as a metaphor for destructive forces in the modern world arouses additional moral questions which the novel, as he develops it, cannot satisfactorily answer.

The Key of the Chest is structurally a more complex novel than Second Sight. There are three plots. The principal one is that of the short story 'The Dead Seaman' and tells the story of the two brothers Dougald and Charlie, who live by crofting and fishing on the outskirts of their village community. Charlie's rescue of the foreign seaman from the storm and the subsequent discovery that the sailor has died from strangulation leads to suspicion of the brothers by the villagers, and to their further alienation from their community. The second plot, which is linked to the first but which does not appear in the short story, consists of the love affair of Charlie and Flora, the minister's daughter. Charlie has betrayed the minister's trust doubly: first of all by withdrawing from his divinity studies because of a loss of belief - thus negating both the minister's help in obtaining a place at University and the minister's own life's work; and secondly by carrying on an affair with his daughter while she was at school in Edinburgh, thus bringing about her expulsion. Charlie and Flora have been forcibly parted from each other, and as the novel opens, Charlie has only now returned to the village after an absence abroad. The third plot concerns the outsiders from the south: Michael, one of Gunn's nihilistic modern young men, who is saved from himself only by his creative interest in photography; and his older friend Mr Glynn, a literary man turned philosopher who seeks to investigate the primitive in man through his stay in the Highlands. Although all three plots have a tangential relationship to each other, they do not truly interact with each other. This is especially true of the relationship of 'The Dead Seaman' plot to the other two. It has a unity in itself which tends to dominate the novel and to make the other two plots seem afterthoughts. Interesting in this connection is the fact that the short story on which it is based has a sense of over-compression about it. One feels that its theme and the

questions it raises about the relationship of the individual to a narrow, traditional community are too complex to be dealt with in the space of a short story. Perhaps Gunn would have had more success in The Key of the Chest had he limited himself to the expansion and development of the short story source to take account of the implications within it.

Predominant among the underlying themes of The Key of the Chest is that of the community as prison-house. As J.B. Salmond commented in his review of the book: 'You may come away from this book wondering if the price paid for belonging to the community, to the landscape, is too great.'²¹ There are no positive communal values portrayed in the book. The community is dominated, for the most part willingly, by church and minister. Charlie and Dougald, because of Charlie's withdrawal from divinity studies and because of their non-attendance at church, are looked upon with suspicion by the villagers. They are different, and as often in Gunn, although not always with the suspicion portrayed here, their separation from the community is pointed to by their home being positioned on the perimeter of that community. In the talk of old Smeorach and the men as they watch and question Dougald on his infrequent visits to the village, there is all the gossiping, ingratiating intolerance of the petty-minded towards the one who is different.

Although the minister appears to dominate the community, he is in fact himself warped by the restrictive attitudes it epitomises. 'He had wearied of his tired wife' (KC 211) and now in Flora his daughter he sees 'his lost youth. The youth that had been lost in his earnestness and studies, in his divine idealisms, in his repression of secret sins, in all the horrible shifts and makeshifts, the feverish strife of youth, collecting in the gloom, already the gloom of pride, little talismans of learned metal that will one day be welded into the ideal, the heavenly structure.' And as he sees that

'heavenly structure', and the daughter for whom his love has turned subconsciously incestuous, assailed by the same enemy, Charlie, 'wrath stirs, jealousy moves darkly, the jungle comes to life' (KC 212). The above reads like the scenario for a potentially dramatic novel, a Scottish Wuthering Heights with the added complication of the Scottish religious dimension, but Gunn does not have space in his already over-complicated novel to develop this aspect of the action. The conflict between the repressed minister and the unbelieving divinity student remains a potentially exciting but undeveloped, theme, present only in the surface element of the minister's vengeful preaching against the brothers and the restrictions he places on Flora.

Opposing this vehement intolerance is a sentimentalised depiction of the Highland community. In the article, 'Fishing Lochs of Day and Night', Gunn talks about Galloway, the region where he spent his teenage years after leaving Caithness, and of the novels of S.R. Crockett. Of Crockett he says:

I think you have got to read him while young and in the Galloway country, and perhaps in an era when there are no world wars to upset the ideological applecart. . . . Perhaps we have become so governed by theories in the head, by intellectual analyses, that we grow slightly uncomfortable before any evidence of emotion, particularly when it assumes a somewhat nostalgic form.²²

In this pleading for Crockett, there is perhaps also a plea for his own procedures in his late novels. Yet in these late novels, Gunn, no less than Crockett in his field, sentimentalises and falsifies his Highland communities, as he does also the positive relationships between his young men and women which he presents as the antitheses of intellectual analysis and perverted desire.

Both the presentation of Flora with her 'primordial innocence' (KC 167) and that of the day-to-day lives of the insiders of the community is

flawed by Gunn's synthetic nostalgia. The following account of the death of an old woman could come straight from J.M. Barrie's Margaret Ogilvy:

The daughter talks to her mother as they await the minister:

'Mother,' she said, putting a glad earnest note into her voice, as if she were talking to a child, 'the minister is coming to see you.'

The old woman, who was eighty-one years of age, lifted her eyes to her daughter's face but did not speak.

'The minister,' repeated her daughter, a little louder. 'He's just coming.'

The veined wrinkled hands stirred, their long nails faintly scratching the hard texture of the counterpane.

'Aren't you glad?'

'The minister,' breathed the spent voice of the woman, whose death they had been awaiting all night.

'Yes, the minister himself. Aren't you the proud woman to be having him calling on you on the Sabbath morning? Whoever had the like before?'

The daughter straightened the pillows and smoothed back the white hair from the worn forehead and tucked it under the goffered linen cap. 'You look like a picture,' she said, on a rush of feeling. As she turned away, there were tears in her eyes. (KC 140)

And as the minister prays:

'Oh, it would be lovely if she died now!' This was a shattering cry within her, but it gave her face a great sweetness. (KC 143)

At the end of the book there is similar sentimentality. After Charlie and Flora's flight, after the storm and the rescue, after Charlie's near-death and the eventual reconciliation of father and daughter, the doctor, who is himself something of an intellectual misfit in his Highland community and who is more than a little attracted to Flora, muses on the future of the young couple:

Now she would sit and listen to Charlie as the grey light came, and then, Charlie being unfit, Dougald would see her home.

The moor was translated to a distant land, to the African veldt, to a plain in Canada, and Charlie was by her side, and they were walking along, golden and laughing. . . . That was the certain end. (KC 261) (Gunn's ellipsis)

This may be, in Gunn's view, the wholesomeness that opposes the intellectual disintegration of the modern world. But in artistic terms, it is Hollywood artifice.

The third plot, which explores the theme of primitive integration as opposed to modern nihilism, develops somewhat awkwardly alongside the other two. It suffers from the wordiness which plagued Wild Geese Overhead, and although Mr Glynn is a more intelligent, trustworthy commentator than Will in the earlier book, the expository method of monologue followed by leading question followed by monologue is equally unsatisfactory with the method in Wild Geese Overhead. And once again, as in Wild Geese Overhead, The Shadow and Second Sight, one feels that metropolitan nihilism is purely cerebral and theoretical as far as the author is concerned. There is no concrete action in the book to support Glynn's theories of disintegration and primitive wholeness. All is talk. There is no sense of living experience being communicated.

The Key of the Chest is unsatisfactory from a structural point of view also. As discussed earlier, although the three plots occasionally touch each other in their development and characters from one appear at times in the others, they do not truly interact with each other. In addition, as most often in Gunn's work, the structure is episodic, and especially in its final stages the constant introduction of new happenings and set-piece episodes which are not essential to the development of the plot is a source of lost tension in the action. The sea-storm episode in which the searchers find and bring back Charlie and Flora has a déjà vu quality about it. Gunn has used this kind of stirring, suspense-action

too often, one feels. Charlie's staggering off into the night after the rescue, like the similar action of Mr Martin in the later The Silver Bough, and his subsequent delirium and near-death, play out a melodramatic ending which one senses has become one of Gunn's suspense formulae. Like the doctor's romantic vision of the future happiness of Charlie and Flora - 'walking along, golden and laughing' - this too seems to have little relationship to the convincing picture of life which we expect of the novelist's art.

The Lost Chart carries the suspense elements of Second Sight and The Key of the Chest into a more explicit 'thriller' form and the action is removed from the Highlands to an unnamed city of Glasgow. The plot revolves around the attempts of Dermot, an ex-navy man turned shipping clerk, who doubles as an under-cover agent for the government, to locate the stolen chart of the waters around the island of Cladday. The setting is the post-war world of mistrust between the political super-powers and of the fear of nuclear destruction. Dermot's search for the lost chart becomes the search for a primitive, more integrated way of life.

Gunn is not the novelist to handle such a potentially complex, sophisticated, urban plot and setting, and the novel does not convince. 'Infernal war talk, which in the last few months had become socially taboo' (IC 8) is confined principally to Dermot's Club and has an academic air about it. We do not sense fear among the people in the streets, in the headlines on the newspaper boards, in the radio programme which Dermot hears through an open tenement flat window. For people in general, life would seem to be going on in its usual way. Dermot's crisis takes place in a vacuum. While this might be acceptable in a thriller where the intrigue is of a private, personal nature, it is not convincing in a book where the action is on the world stage of international affairs.

In The Lost Chart there is none of the precise detail of everyday activity which brings George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four or Franz Kafka's stories, despite their complex symbolism, so vividly before the reader. In contrast to Gunn's work as a whole, where the opening section of a novel is usually clear and interest-catching, the opening of this novel is vague and confusing. It is difficult for the reader to work out details of setting and character. Dermot's own situation is unclear. Is he shipping clerk or executive? Amateur sleuth or government agent? Who is Basil? In Dermot's mind he is obviously one of the destructive ones, but apart from his negative positions in the Club arguments, he has no concrete identity. It is never really clear whether he is just a Marxist talker, a supporter of totalitarian forces, or whether he has any more active role in the averted international crisis as Dermot's sighting of him on the country railway station platform might suggest. There is too much vague talk of 'fifth columnists'; 'when the buttons go'; 'a final gesture'; 'civilization atom-bombed'; 'the enemy' (IC 8, 13, 84, 94, 167). Nor does it seem credible that a group of Highland activists should be involved in the fifth columnist exercises; nor that a London government should entrust the defeat of foreign totalitarian forces to a Scottish shipping clerk resident in Glasgow.

The Highland dimension is, of course, essential to Gunn's philosophical opposition of modern nihilism and primitive integration in this novel, where forces of destruction permeate all sections of contemporary society. Gear, Dermot's secret service superior, is a Ranald type: 'There was something about him that made you feel he had come up, all clean and fresh, out of cold water. Never a point of real human contact; no warmth' (IC 42). Gossip at the tea parties of the Senior Service wives has 'propaganda value as a disintegrating factor' (IC 81). Basil is

obviously a potentially disintegrating force and several of Dermot's arguments with him turn on the difference between the true primitive society and the imposed corporate state of totalitarian systems. Fear of the development of a police state is constantly in Dermot's mind: 'The police state! Hell, is this what it is like?' (IC 43) he mutters as he watches a policeman move away from a close mouth. 'Are we to sell the workers' cause to the police?' (IC 138) he asks Christina. Modern art cannot escape its share of the blame. The non-representational paintings at the exhibition which Dermot attends with Joe are seen as 'the price man pays for an industrial or city civilization' (IC 110). Love between men and women is tainted. Dermot cannot bring himself to ask Ellen the folk-singer to marry him, thus making their relationship permanent: 'The game they played was enough, the game of apparent frankness, outrageous frankness, was enough. One couldn't break through the game to-day. One couldn't, because beyond it . . . the black smear, crawling like a river . . . seeping into the underground corridors and vaults where men were tortured and done in . . . and war . . . war . . .' (IC 44) (Gunn's ellipses). When he hears of Joe's plans to marry Christina he muses: 'The age, the times they lived in, had made personal love, love between a man and a woman, look like some strange and reprehensible passion - old-fashioned, unreal. Better get it over by coupling like brutes in the tribal interest. This had affected him. There was no doubt it had affected him . . .' (IC 319).

In opposition to these forces of destruction, with which Gunn appears to be almost pathologically preoccupied in this book, he offers Joe, the painter who paints the 'light' (IC 148), and the Highland girls, Ellen, the folk-singer, in whose singing Dermot finds a quality of 'primordial innocence' which 'always affected him in an atavistic way, like some sort of drug' (IC 58, 44); and Christina, whose unresponsiveness and 'archaic mask'

of a face recall the Dark Mairi of Butcher's Broom: 'The cheek bones were distinct, rather high, so that her face seemed to narrow to the chin, yet her mouth, full and wide, was somehow not out of proportion. In the police station, she had looked dull and scared, a little stupid, holding on dourly to something inside; even her black hair had been lank and rather pitiful. Now he saw that the set of the face was old, not lively and modern, but rather like a mask, an archaic mask, shaped by the bone. He had met faces like it many a time in the north and west' (IC 63). As in the other novels of urban disintegration, women as a group are seen as forces of life: 'Only the women were real, because they remained personal. A man could no longer be personal. He was caught up, and as an individual mattered no more. He had no longer a destiny. He was not even an ant - yet' (IC 220).

Gunn and Dermot equate the positive qualities of the Highland community from which the girls come, and which is represented by the songs which Ellen sings, with the innocent inspiration of the painter, Joe: 'You're too simple for this world, Joe,' (IC 54) Basil tells the painter, who, like Mr Glynn in The Key of the Chest, is interested in primitive sensibility and experience: 'Some of our best modern painting, the painting that has given art life again, and wonder, finds its inspiration in the primitive' (IC 53). At the end of the novel, when the crisis has been resolved and nuclear war averted, Joe, Christina, Ellen and Dermot set sail for Cladday, ostensibly to study it with a view to fortifying it as a strategic location, but in reality to hunt for the integrated way of life which the lost chart symbolically represents: 'And if in man's madness it did come to utmost violence, to lost pockets of earth with small surviving groups from world catastrophe, then more real than ever would be the need to know how to salute the face of the God of life, bow to the white moon of the seasons, and find again what was behind the wave' (IC 349).

Like the majority of the late novels, The Lost Chart is not successful from a formal point of view. As discussed earlier, its setting and characterisation are too vague to convey a sense of actuality in the plot. There are also too many co-incidental happenings. In addition, Dermot, the undercover agent, is no Richard Hannay. He philosophises too much and, like Will in Wild Geese Overhead, is lacking in action. Christina sees in him 'the seaman in the cut of his eyebrows, the seaman who can take his chance and put his craft about in dirty weather. The exhilaration of it was in his face' (IC 242). But this evocation of Gunn's earlier seamen heroes is not what the reader finds in Dermot whose actions are consistently smothered by the 'verbal cotton wool' (IC 121) which Joe finds in the Club discussions. Significantly, the one place in the novel where the action does take on a quality of suspense and conviction is in the account of Dermot's night visit to the old hulk anchored in the loch. Here, Gunn returns to well-known territory.

Joe the painter, a significant symbolic figure in the novel, is unconvincingly characterised. He is the romantic stereotype of a painter: inarticulate, impractical, at times, in Gunn's presentation, almost an imbecile. At the preview of the art exhibition of 'distinguished foreign artists' Joe almost weeps because one of the paintings - a 'wonderful painting' - demonstrates that its artist has been using his gift of the 'light' to create 'darkness'; it is 'the betrayal of the light' (IC 109). Gunn does not have the necessary urbanity and sophistication to handle this kind of milieu successfully. One needs a Cecil Day Lewis in his persona of thriller-writer Nicholas Blake, a Huxley or a Waugh, someone who is both insider and ironic observer simultaneously. There is a heavy, hodden-grey quality about Gunn's Scottish sophisticates as they comment on the world of modern art. One waits in vain for the sharp bite of satire, the flash of wit.

In the field of music also Gunn, through Dermot, rejects the modern way. Although, in this, Dermot seems to be at one with Basil and Professor Barclay the theologian, both of whom would have had the painting exhibition banned as obscene and immoral and would have all art conform to their (different) standards of what is morally and socially enriching, Dermot's opposition to the modern lies in his rejection of what he sees as the negative forces within it and in his contrary attempt to return to the wholeness of a more simple, integrated way of life. "Perhaps I don't know anything about music," Dermot admitted at last. "And I disagree with Basil in the business of purging, even of purging symphonies. But I am beginning to see how strong the simple tune is. I am beginning to see, quite literally, the force of it" (LC 173).

In the article 'Neil M. Gunn: A Brief Memoir', Francis Hart recalls a conversation with Gunn concerning The Lost Chart:

'Yes,' he said, 'I knew a girl who sang Gaelic songs, and her name was Helen, and I was sort of full of her at the time. Did you like that book?' Yes, I said, I did, for it was literally filled with light. 'It makes me glad,' he said, 'to hear you talk that way - because what I really wanted to do - and perhaps do it anonymously even - was to add a little bit to the light.'²³

This emphasis on the 'light', on the 'simple tune', plays an increasingly dominant role in the four novels which remain to be discussed: The Silver Bough, The Well at the World's End, Bloodhunt and The Other Landscape.

Before the resolution of the international crisis in The Lost Chart, Dermot's superior, Grear, discusses with him the ultimate significance of their mission: 'quite literally to be or not to be will be the question' (LC 167). More significant for Gunn's approach to his themes in the final novels to be discussed than this quotation from Hamlet is Grear's simultaneous reference to Shakespeare's The Tempest:

'You'll remember the old Shakespeare one about the globe itself and all which it inherits' . . . 'How did it go? . . . "the great globe itself, Yes, all which it inherits, shall dissolve. And, like this insubstantial pageant faded, Leave not a rack behind."'24

Apart from this quotation in The Lost Chart there is no firm evidence that I have been able to find to confirm that Shakespeare's last plays, and especially The Tempest, were in Gunn's mind as he wrote his last novels, but Grear's specific quotation of Prospero's words, when related to Gunn's themes of reconciliation in these final books, suggests to me that this might very well have been the case.

The Silver Bough (published one year before The Lost Chart), The Well at the World's End, Bloodhunt and The Other Landscape all continue the movement away from social issues and towards the personal, individual integration which was evident in Second Sight, The Key of the Chest and, despite its overall context of international crisis, The Lost Chart. Now, as in Shakespeare's Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest, the philosophical emphasis of Gunn's work is one of personal reconciliation and of symbolic rebirth. Apart from Bloodhunt, where the context of violence and disintegration is present within the action alongside the reconciling ending, the evil in these last novels remains, as in The Tempest, external to the happenings in the action. As the betrayal and violence which despatched Prospero to his Isle took place outside the plot of The Tempest, so in The Silver Bough, the evil which has warped Mr Martin during his wartime service and which has separated him from Anna, is external to the action of the novel. Disintegration in the modern world is mentioned only briefly by Peter Munro in the opening of The Well at the World's End. The destructive society of 'urban coterie critics' is in the past for Menzies the musician in The Other Landscape. In the action of the novel his preoccupation is now with his personal search for the landscape beyond that of everyday life.

Throughout these late novels of social and individual disintegration, Gunn has repeatedly emphasised the life-giving role of woman as opposed to destructive man, the 'cerebral he-goat' (W 231). Thus, as in Shakespeare's last plays also, rebirth in Gunn's late novels is experienced through woman. In The Key of the Chest, Flora, her name relating her to the restorative world of nature, is in the end an instrument of the limited reconciliation in that novel. In The Lost Chart, Dermot and Joe point specifically to the symbolic nature of Christina's name and, for Gunn, she, like the Gaelic folk-singer, Ellen, is a source of renewal. Although Simon Grant in The Silver Bough sees himself as a kind of deus ex machina, it is the little girl Sheena who in the end brings her mother and father together. Similarly, in The Well at the World's End, Peter's wife Fand, symbolically named after a Celtic goddess, is the instrument of his saving and the living embodiment of his realisation of the true way, while in The Other Landscape the spirit of the dead Annabel and the folk-singing of the living Catherine are presented as reconciling influences. In Bloodhunt the symbolic rebirth becomes an actual birth: the new beginning is heralded by the birth of Liz's child, although unlike Shakespeare's Marina in Pericles, the birth here is of a male child.

In addition, The Well at the World's End, and, especially, The Other Landscape, demonstrate the increasing influence of Gunn's interest in philosophy, in 'the way' of Taoism and in the ideas of Gurdieff as presented by Ouspensky in In Search of the Miraculous. Highland River demonstrated Gunn's philosophical interests as early as 1937, but in this earlier work the philosophical search was dominated by the actuality of the Highland experience which was portrayed. Now, just as Shakespeare's last plays evince a symbolic conception of drama, so Gunn's late novels move increasingly towards a symbolic, philosophical conception of novel-writing. Unfortunately, neither the novel form per se, nor Gunn's particular qualities

as novelist, are able to sustain this move into the symbolic and philosophical dimension. As Francis Hart comments in relation to the influence of Ouspensky's In Search of the Miraculous and the books written after Gunn's move from Brae Farmhouse in 1948, 'the biographical point here is that his thought was leading further from the novel, in the direction of the meditative essay.'²⁵

Poetry and poetic drama can accommodate such a move into the symbolic. Shakespeare's reconciliation themes are presented, not principally through the actions of the late plays, which, like the actions of Gunn's late novels, are often of doubtful credibility, but through the poetry, which in its ability to weave together and transform disparate entities can create a new harmony and, in the process, a world of living experience for the reader or listener. The realism which is in the nature of the novel form demands that a living picture of life should be created by the novelist through characterisation, dialogue and action. The novelist may choose to limit his field of action, to portray only a certain kind of experience, but he must be able to convince his readers that he is presenting a rounded picture of living experience. As we have seen, Gunn is not able to do this successfully when he moves out of the Highland milieu, and the difficulties he experiences with the portrayal of sophisticated urban life are continued in his preoccupation with the portrayal of the philosophical 'other landscape.'

Too often Gunn's approach in these late books approximates to that which Mrs Q.D. Leavis describes in Fiction and the Reading Public:

'Apparently all a novelist need do is to provide bold outlines, and the reader will co-operate to persuade himself that he is in contact with "real people".'²⁶ Or as Ouspensky puts a similar attitude to art and the artist: 'The artist knows and understands what he wants to convey and his work cannot produce one impression on one man and another impression on

another, presuming, of course, people on one level.'²⁷ Presuming, also, one might add, a quality of perception and artistic achievement on the part of the artist on a certain level. Francis Hart quotes Gunn as saying that his psychology as a novelist 'can be found in Ouspensky'²⁸ and J.B. Pick in 'The Boy in the Stream' asks the reader to trust the experience of The Other Landscape as he trusted that of Morning Tide.²⁹ I believe that Gunn himself, and too many commentators on his work, ask the reader for an unacceptable level of trust with regard to these late books. As Walter Allen comments in The English Novel, 'bold outlines' are applicable to 'what goes on only in the reading of fiction of a low order of ambition and attainment. The more highly a novelist has organized his characters the less they can be reduced to "bold outlines". And the organization of a character is conditioned by everything in the novel.'³⁰ This seems to me to be a necessary quality in a novel where there is an underlying symbolic pattern of meaning just as it is in a more naturalistic type of novel.

The Silver Bough tells the story of how an elderly archaeologist, Simon Grant, by paying more heed to the necessity for human warmth and to his instinctive sense of communion with the prehistoric past than to the demands of scientific archaeological practices, succeeds in bringing the legend of the Silver Bough to life for a few members of the Highland community of Clachar. It is a tale which moves from shadow to sunshine, from personal darkness into the light which Dermot sought in The Lost Chart and which, for Gunn himself, is the only faith which 'will ultimately keep the finger off the trigger.'³¹

The novel is based on the 1932 short story 'The Circle', which similarly tells of an archaeologist who employs an idiot youth to help him excavate a prehistoric stone circle, but the development of the action is handled differently in story and novel. In the story the archaeologist

is motivated by professional disagreement and rivalry with a fellow worker in the field. The employment of an idiot is seen by him as a satirical blow at the theories of his rival. As he works on the site the psychological lack of balance in his nature becomes translated into a kind of primitive blood-madness in relation to the idiot who works alongside him, and whom he begins to consider as a potential sacrificial victim. As in the novel, a prehistoric gold hoard is discovered, and archaeologist and idiot die as the result of the struggle for possession of the hoard.

In The Silver Bough, on the other hand, Simon Grant comes to excavate as part of his recuperation after an illness, and, as in The Shadow, such recuperation is seen by Gunn as a period of hypersensitivity in the patient. His engaging of the idiot is not, for him, a satiric joke, but arises from an initial misunderstanding, from his sympathy for the youth and his mother, and from his interest in observing how the primitive mind of the congenital idiot will react to its contact with the primitive past to be excavated. In the novel, as in the story, the idiot is killed when a standing stone, loosened from its bedding, falls on him. Simon Grant, however, lives on to see his scientific interest in the past displaced by its recurrence in the living present.

Neither story nor book convinces, and in the novel this is principally due to Gunn's outline characterisation and to his inability to portray character in action. The archaeologist is more fully evoked than the other characters in the novel, but like all Gunn's academics in these late novels, he does not convince. In The Well at the World's End, the Professor of Ancient History, Peter Munro, describes his intention as being to forget his 'importance', his notion of being 'somebody' (W 20), and it may be that, as Francis Hart suggests, Gunn's purpose is through such characters

to 'discover the nonsense of their academic categories.'³² But while it is certainly a nonsense to believe that a professor is in a category of 'importance' superior to that of the shepherd Peter meets on the hills or the old sailor who brings his boat in safely without help in the storm at a later stage of Peter's journey, the pursuit of knowledge and the application of precise, scientific procedures where relevant in that pursuit are not nonsense. The excavation of prehistoric remains, of any archaeological remains, demands painstaking care and precise action, however much imaginative intuition may be employed in the building up of the picture of the past through the interpretation of the artefacts uncovered. But one cannot believe that any professional in the field would allow his human sympathy and romantic interest in the past to dominate to the extent of endangering his work by the employment of someone so obviously incapable of careful workmanship and the understanding of instructions as a severely subnormal youth. One finds a similar unconvincing situation in The Other Landscape where the anthropologist Walter rushes into subjective judgements and snatches at unsubstantiated gossip in a manner entirely foreign to the 'objectivity' which he claims is essential to his profession. It would have been more helpful to the credibility of Gunn's story lines and to the development of his theme of 'light' had he made his archaeologists and anthropologists openly amateurs. For these academics are all somewhat bumbling, well-meaning amateurs, more than a little surprised to have achieved their present position of eminence. They have no intellectual toughness, a quality at least as essential as the sympathy they display. In Simon Grant's case, his lack of professionalism is both the cause of the loss of a significant archaeological find, and, in human terms, of the death of the idiot. Gunn's message seems to be that neither is to be interpreted as one would normally interpret such losses. The loss of the

crock of gold which daft Andie steals and hides is seen by Grant to be ultimately unimportant - 'After all, a crock of gold under the rainbow would be only an urn in a museum' (SB 322). Andie's death is portrayed by Gunn as a release, as is Menzies's death in The Other Landscape. Communal and personal grief is assuaged by the honour of the 'beautiful funeral' (SB 320).

In the case of that part of the plot which relates specifically to the story of the Silver Bough, lack of conviction arises from insufficiently substantiated characterisation and inter-relationships. The legend of the Silver Bough which Grant overhears Mrs Cameron tell to her granddaughter Sheena, is a kind of search for the well at the world's end. The man in the story sells his wife and children in exchange for the Silver Bough and its magic, and then, like Peter in The Well at the World's End, finds that the magic was actually in his life with his family. Sheena, and her mother Anna, have, like the family in the story, been cast out by the father, who in Gunn's novel is Mr Martin, the local laird, and an ex-soldier. It would appear that he and Anna have had an affair during their war-time service. He recognises neither Anna nor her daughter, although it is suspected that he knows the child is his. Simon Grant's involvement with the participants in this drama becomes so intense that it eventually predominates over his archaeological interests. He equates the skeletons of mother and daughter found in the cairn with the living Anna and Sheena and sees a pattern of recurrence in their lives. He has a replica of the Silver Bough in the story made for Sheena, and it is her childish absorption in this toy which becomes the instrument of reconciliation in the bringing together of the family.

The trouble with this plot is that we can believe in none of the characters nor in their supposed relationships. Anna hardly ever speaks.

As so often with Gunn's archetypal women, we do not know what she thinks. Mr Martin is similarly undeveloped, if to a lesser extent. There is no meeting between him and Anna before her rescue of him in the storm, so we cannot assess for ourselves any potential relationship. We do not know, nor does Grant, whether their association was a chance, casual coming-together, or whether theirs was a deeper relationship. There is absolutely no evidence in the novel, apart from its author's preconceived theme of reconciliation, to warrant Grant's interfering involvement in their affairs. And lacking such evidence, the magic worked by the Silver Bough is as insubstantial as Prospero's pageant, and with less prospect of lasting power. Knowing so little of the personalities of Anna and Mr Martin, and nothing of their past relationship, Grant may here be leading them to disaster as he earlier led daft Andie to his death through engaging him for work for which he was so clearly unsuited.

Equally unsatisfactory with the characterisation and plotting is the kailyard element which creeps into Gunn's depiction of the Highlanders. Increasingly in these late books one finds scenes reminiscent of J.M. Barrie's *Thrums*, or the Highlands one associates with A.J. Cronin's Dr Cameron as developed in the television and radio presentation of the character, or of Lillian Beckwith's outsider's view of the quaintness of Highland life. When Simon Grant inspects Mrs Cameron's lodgings, she points to a little room off the bedroom containing a commode: 'There's a little placie here' and 'We are glad to do what we can' (SB 42). Mrs Mackenzie, the mother of daft Andie, is honoured by Grant's patronage: 'To think we were of some use, to a gentleman of learning' (SB 122). Fachie and Davie at the funeral epitomise the couthy, quaint view of Highland life and characters which comes over in this and other late novels:

'If only Andie could have seen this!' said old Fachie sitting in one of the hotel cars, which Grant had privately ordered.

'It's more nor you or me will have, Fachie,' said Davie Munro, his gnarled hands on his stick.

'Indeed that's true. And we don't grudge it to him. So long as there's something in man, if I may take it upon me to use the words of our Lord, that would do it unto the least of us, there's hope for us all.'

'Indeed and I back you there. It's a brave show for Clachar whateverway. And the laird here himself, too. Boy, boy!'

'A fine thing to see. It is that. And a fine day for it.'

(SB 316-17)

A similar sentimentality permeates the book as a whole: in Grant's presentation of the Silver Bough to Sheena and in the family's reactions; in Grant's own 'honourable English gentleman' kind of response to Anna's 'Fall': 'it still remained amazing to him how any damn fellow could have deserted a girl like Anna. She was a practical, hard-working, kind-hearted girl, but she was also at moments a distinguished woman, who, dressed up and bearing herself with her natural reserve, would stand out in any company' (SB 70). And can one really believe that the students on the 'dig' have been so emotionally deprived that the sight of Mrs Mackenzie's open grief at the death of Andie would so astound them? The melodramatic account of the sea-storm and the resuscitation of Mr Martin by Anna when almost given up for dead is another sentimentalisation of authentic experience, as is the description of his progress home afterwards: a description which, like the sentimentality of the whole, would be more at home in a Hollywood film than in a novel which proposes a serious, philosophical purpose.

In Gunn's defence, one must acknowledge Edwin Muir's admiration of this book. In a letter to Gunn he described The Silver Bough as 'a wonderfully delightful book . . . a mature book, steeped in time and in your own experience and acceptance of things: it's like a harvest.' Muir found that 'the skeleton of the dead woman with her child repeated in the living woman

and her living child gave me an imaginative thrill which I shall never forget: it hints at something which has haunted me vaguely before on the very verge of thought, but for which I have never found in any writing before a form.³³

One can understand Muir's interest in the themes of the book. The pattern of recurrence between dead and living mother and child relates to that pattern which he defines in the essay 'The Poetic Imagination': 'in the past only is the human pattern complete . . . there is the place to which the present turns back to find its finished and timeless pattern';³⁴ and in The Estate of Poetry he refers to the way in which 'anthropology and archaeology have extended the possible world of imagination in time.'³⁵ Nor, in his literary criticism, is Muir too concerned about the formal achievements of a novel where the themes explored and the author's conception of the relationship of 'time past, time present, and time future'³⁶ pattern his own.

Perhaps a more acute comment on the kind of novel that it would seem Gunn intended The Silver Bough and its late companions to be is that by W.H. Auden, quoted by Gunn himself in the article 'On Belief': 'Goodness is easier to recognize than to define. Only the greatest novelists can portray good people.'³⁷

The Well at the World's End continues the philosophical search begun long before by Kenn of Highland River and symbolised in the legend of the Silver Bough. Unlike The Silver Bough, this novel is not based on an earlier short story, although the short story 'Ride the Gale' is incorporated as an episode within it, and some of the descriptive material in the opening sections such as the account of the well which appeared to be dry but was full, and the camping at the Picts' Houses, appears again in periodical articles.³⁸

There is some splendid descriptive writing in the early chapters of the book; in, for example, the evocation of the stillness of the evening as Fand and Peter prepare to stop for the night at the Picts' Houses. This is a return to Gunn writing at his best. The relationship between Fand and Peter is also securely established in these early passages, and it is this which makes the eventual happy ending in this book a convincing one. One knows that Fand would be out searching for Peter and would not rest until she had found him.

Peter's search in The Well at the World's End is twofold. On a personal level he wants to find the symbolic water in the well, the 'something in life that we think isn't there' (W 10). In addition he wants to find out

if this feeling of something magical is as rare as some of our misery-ridden plays and novels make out? . . . Do people, ordinary folk, ever stand tranced before some wonder that not only takes their breath away, but, for an instant, the human boundary itself away? . . . Does the hard-working shepherd, for example, whose hill ground this is, ever have his moment when he goes through the boundary? Or the man who comes and fishes the river down there. Or the man who pursues the grouse? Never mind what most of their lives may be. Does the moment come upon them? Do they know moments they would not give for all else? (W 20)

Peter's personal search is satisfactorily handled in that he finds, as Fand told him before he started, that the well he is searching for is in fact in the here and now, in his life with Fand. He is already 'on the way.'³⁹ His attempt to find out whether others go 'through the boundary' is less happily developed. It is this second search with which the action of the book is principally engaged, and as in The Silver Bough, Gunn's portrayal of Peter's actions and of the Highland characters he meets on his journey has frequently a sentimental, patronising quality about it.

As in The Silver Bough also, the principal protagonist and the centre of consciousness for the happenings in the novel is not convincingly portrayed. Peter, the Professor of Ancient History, seems ill-at-ease in his academic position: 'Now that we have a big house ourselves and do some dodging of academic circles . . .' (W 19); 'And he had produced a treatise on history's meaning for man; he had attended international conferences' (W 106). Although we are told at the beginning of his search that he wanted 'to meet people here and there by chance'; to 'forget his "importance", his notion of being "somebody"' (W 20) - a wish which itself suggests some psychological insecurity - he does not in fact travel incognito, but is careful to tell those whom he meets that he is a Professor of Ancient History, a piece of information which sets the minds of his simple Highlanders reeling. The somewhat irresponsible and unfunny episode in which the Highlanders, with Peter a knowing onlooker, trick the Lowland carpenters in the supposedly haunted house, causes one to wonder how Peter's search would have turned out had he tramped the countryside as an itinerant worker and not as a university professor.

Stories of the lad o' pairts and the Highlanders' reverence for learning are part of the legendary fabric of Scottish life. Gunn overdoes this aspect of Highland experience in The Well at the World's End, and the reactions of the simple people Peter meets to finding a professor in their midst is one element which contributes to the false sentimentality of much of this book. Old Phemie is the first of such characters:

'University,' she repeated above a whisper.

'I'm a professor. Professor of history.'

'Professor,' she scarcely breathed and the egg fell from her fingers and smashed on the floor. (W 43)

There is a similar reaction from the illicit whisky distillers Peter meets in the hills:

'What do you do?'

'Teach.'

'Where?'

Peter told him.

'A Lecturer?'

'No. Professor of Ancient History.'

'Holy God!' said Jock with awe. (W 116)

Passages such as the one in which Peter lodges with the girl Peggy's aunt after the fight in Badenscro are a poor caricature of earlier Highland books. Willie 'had been having glances at the professor, for he associated great learning with ministerial dignity, and here was one who carried his learning more modestly than a bridegroom his flower at a wedding' (W 221).

Peggy's aunt is more concerned with Peter's physical condition:

'I am sorry to say it,' said Peggy's aunt, 'but - but your mouth is a little swollen, Professor, and I think you should go home at once before the cold gets into it. I am going to fry some fish and that will help you on the road.' (W 222)

Gunn would appear to have intended Peter's search to show the communion of fellowship which can exist between all kinds of people, especially in the kind of simple life he has been depicting. He tells us that as Peter muses on his journey on his last day, he 'saw that its simple wonder was more wonderful than any immortal story that could be imagined, for there it was, there the ordinary folk went about their human business, more incomprehensible in earthly time than in any transcendent timelessness which yet, in some mysterious way, was suggested' (W 293). And as Peter looks at the figure of himself on his wanderings: 'From the very beginning the figure had had the slight wit to drop such importance and enjoy the fresh air' (W 293).

But this is not how Peter's journey appears to one reader at least. The discussions on sheep-farming with the shepherd on the hills have an

authentic ring about them, as in The Drinking Well's accounts of sheep-farming, but it seems to me that a false note is struck with Peter's introduction of the legend of the Golden Fleece, as there is later with his discussion of Hamlet's ghost in relation to the haunted cottage, and with his praise of the conversation in the whisky cave: 'I think this is good and excellent talk' (W 120). The comment that 'the more Peter evoked the world of learning - and it was about the only thing he could do involuntarily, without thinking - the more Sandy enjoyed being impressed' (W 82) (my italics), should surely make one look more closely at Gunn's idealised portrait of his hero.

In this book, as in most of the late novels, one feels that Gunn has become so identified with his hero's search that he has lost the essential quality of narrative objectivity. The fact that the happenings are seen principally through Peter's consciousness adds to the narrative problem, but even when Peter and his actions are seen through the eyes of other characters, the result is a further endorsement of him. Cocklebuster's response to Peter's clothing, which has almost a mystical, philosophical significance, is symptomatic of the wider idealisation of Peter by his author:

Cocklebuster had taken to him long ago at the first glance, for at the first glance he had seen not only that the professor's clothes were right but also that he wore them as if he didn't know it . . . Greenish shirt, grey-green suiting, grey socks, and all so absolutely quiet that the very rumples were necessary to give the quietness that higher negligent something which is unconsciously worn as a distinction by the bearer. Rummaged but right. (W 183)

Yet one feels that Peter's attitude to the happenings he confronts is very frequently not right. He does not try to interfere in the haunting of the two Lowlanders, although he knows that one man has already been driven

insane by such an experience, but goes along with the ploy: 'At any rate, it was all source material!' (W 73). And what is one to understand by his grace in the whisky cave? Gunn can hardly intend the reader to take this prayer seriously. But if Peter is being facetious, then he is in actuality mocking his companions, who look up to him as the Professor. One could only make this kind of ironic prayer if one were truly with one's equals and friends whose attitudes one knew one shared. Peter may think he is being truly democratic with the whisky distillers, but the relationship is clearly, for some of them at least, a master and man one. There is a similarly patronising quality in Peter's meeting with the old minister, where the rhythms and cadences of Peter's own speech begin to parody those of the Highlander. Peter comes upon the minister discussing the virtues of the mothan flower with Mrs Douglas, a guest at the local hotel:

'While I should not wish on so fine a morning,' said Peter, 'either to interrupt you or to touch upon matters of philosophic difficulty, perhaps you could indicate lightly how the word virtue is to be construed in this particular context?'

(W 196)

And after the meeting with the minister, Mrs Douglas comments: 'Isn't he a dear old thing?' To which Peter replies: 'He's something we have forgotten how to make' (W 197). For me, this smacks too much of the kailyard.

The quality of the 'magical' experiences which Peter encounters on his journey is not impressive. The shepherd's account of his inability to leave the quiet beauty of the evening hillside to return home rings truly, but the experiences recounted in the whisky cave return to the unconvincing romanticism of early short stories such as 'Visioning' and 'Hidden Doors'. The episode in which Peter eavesdrops on Mrs Douglas's administration of the love potion flower mothan to her estranged husband is both trivial in regard to the quality of its artistic imagination and perception and, like

the boy Hugh's similar eavesdropping in Morning Tide, unconvincing from a practical point of view. Like Hugh, Peter could not possibly have seen and heard in such detail. And while the episode in which the old seaman Malcolm brings home his boat safely through the storm communicates the excitement of Gunn's sea-storm episodes in early novels, it does not altogether fit with the development of the novel as a whole. One senses that its home is elsewhere.

The most satisfactory parts of The Well at the World's End are its opening and its ending. As discussed earlier, Gunn succeeds in evoking the stillness and beauty of the Caithness landscape in the early sections of the book in his description of Fand's and Peter's evening at the Picts' Houses. He also succeeds in conveying the essential stability of the relationship between Peter and his wife. The final stage of Peter's journey, where, injured after his attempt to rescue the lamb, he follows the traces of the wild man, his doppelgänger, seem to me to be satisfactorily handled also. Gunn communicates to his reader the suspense, exhaustion and (temporary) defeatism which accompany Peter. His earlier light-hearted comment that he was travelling backwards (W 199), a journey symbolised, perhaps, in his adolescent-type fight at Badenscro and his imagined falling in love with the girl Peggy, is further substantiated when he receives succour from the udders of the ewe whose lamb he has tried to save. More permanent succour is received from Fand who finds him when he can go no further and so closes the circle of his wanderings. Yet, in the end, Peter's journey as portrayed by his author has not had sufficient intellectual strength and integrity behind its 'moment of delight' to ensure, as Peter optimistically predicts, that the sceptic does not have 'nearly all the innings' (W 279).

The Other Landscape, Gunn's final novel, exhibits in an extreme form the inadequacies of the late novels as a whole. The only positive qualities in this book are the passages of natural description which evoke sea and landscape in a manner reminiscent of Gunn's earlier work.

The story-line of the novel tells how a youngish anthropologist, Walter Urquhart, returns from London to the Highlands where he had lived as a child to make an enquiry about a man who has sent a piece of writing of exceptional quality to an avant-garde literary magazine. He discovers that the writer is in fact a musician, a recluse whose wife has died in tragic circumstances. Walter becomes increasingly involved with the man and his tragic past and the underlying theme of the book is concerned with his growing awareness of the metaphysical 'other landscape' through his talks with the musician Menzies.

Gunn's purposes in this book would appear to be primarily philosophical. But the novel is an artistic form which demands that the surface reality of everyday life should be convincingly portrayed before its deeper meanings can be released. It may be that such a form was no longer of any interest to Gunn by the early 1950s. Whatever the reason for the failure, in The Other Landscape the portrait of living experience is once again not a convincing one.

The technical failure in this book stems partly from the decision to employ first person narration. This makes it impossible for the reader to acquire a meaningful perspective either on Walter himself or on the events which he relates. It also results in the structural imbalance of a story within a story and in a lack of credibility in relation to some of the information conveyed. Walter is of necessity a second-hand narrator. He himself has not witnessed many of the events he recounts and must rely on

gossip and on closer sources for his information. The account of the early married life of Menzies and his wife Annabel before they came to the Highlands is told as a separate story within the main narrative; but its length and excess of detail upset the balance of the novel as a whole. In the narrative as a whole, one cannot readily believe in the information related by Walter. To have the many intimate details of the life of Annabel and Menzies which he recounts to the reader, he would himself have had either to interview Annabel - which is not possible - or to have had Menzies bare his soul to him to a significant degree. But Gunn's economical portrait of Menzies suggests a man who would keep his own counsel. So one is forced to ask how Walter could possibly know, for example, that as they lived in their cottage retreat Annabel 'could follow the creation of his work from the inside' and loved the kind of evening when her husband 'spoke to her of his work at length' (OL 101). And when Douglas Menzies finds out about his wife's efforts to support them through sending articles on the Scottish scene to London magazines, how can Walter presume to know that 'the half hour that followed must have been earthly paradise for Annabel, for on earth no greater love could be' (OL 105). This is surely vicarious living at its most sentimental. Such sentimentality is characteristic of the presentation of both the main narrative and the story within it.

The characterisation of Walter, the centre of consciousness for the novel, like the unfortunate first person narrative form, works against any degree of success for the book. Like Simon Grant in The Silver Bough and Peter Munro in The Well at the World's End, Walter is unconvincing. As in these books also, one senses that Gunn is here identifying with his principal character - and in The Other Landscape also with the musician with whom his principal character is identifying - to the extent of losing his narrative objectivity. Walter's outbursts against 'coterie critics',

'urban critics' - 'The sea, after all, is hardly provincial, and urban critics can be left with their urbanities' (OL 57, 88) - against 'London' and the fact that 'the "high translumary things" were out of fashion' (OL 89, 108) has much more to do with Gunn's own feelings of rejection and of being out of step with literary fashion in his late work, than with the preoccupations of a youngish academic anthropologist, whose involvement with the prejudices of literary and music critics, would, one would have thought, have been minimal. One senses that Menzies's puzzlement at London's rejection of his latest work is Gunn's also: 'Incredible that what he was trying to do could not at least be perceived. It was so familiar to his manner now that surely, surely it could be seen' (OL 88).

The portrait of the musician pounding out his Cliff Symphony on a cottage piano in the remote Caithness landscape is also a suspect one. Of all artistic activities music-making is a communal one, depending on the contact with orchestras and other music-makers as much as on the contact with coterie critics and agents. Gunn's musical recluse does not seem to me to be credible.

Nor does his wife Annabel, at least in the admiring terms in which she is presented. There seems to me to be a slackness in Gunn's relationship to the Highlands in these late novels, a slackness which results in the sentimental portraits of the natives in The Silver Bough and The Well at the World's End, and, in The Other Landscape, in his endorsing accounts of Annabel's Scotch Features for her London magazine. These hints on 'how, when and where to wear Scotch tweeds, with emphasis on the right accessories, stockings, shoes and all that'; '"a new line" on tartans'; 'Food Hints from the Highlands'; 'A Highland Garden' (OL 90-91) surely demonstrate exactly the kind of tourist attitude towards Scottish matters which Gunn fought against so vigorously in his journalism of the 1930s:

Annabel knew exactly what was wanted and made a 'story' of it in the American fashion, producing soft wonderful colouring from common plants or weeds, glancing at an old woman gathering lichen off a rock, at a Highland chief's kilt to show that the older the tartan the better it looked, giving the 'right' knowledge, the authentic, the inside view, and finishing up with the specialist's exclusive practical hints. She took great care to give the article the intimate touch that let her reader share the appropriate sense of 'style' over seven hundred words.

(OL 91)

Her editor instructs her in the qualities of the new Kailyard: 'Keep up the personal, the intimate, the surprising incident, and you'll become our Scotch Feature' (OL 91). It is interesting to note that Gunn's own late journalism patterns Annabel's course. Instead of the angry articles of the thirties such as '"Gentlemen - The Tourist!"', 'Highland Games' and 'The Ferry of the Dead', one finds articles for the American magazine Holiday such as 'High on the Haggis' which, like Annabel's hints, deals with Scottish food, 'The Scottish Clans' and 'Scotland', the last-mentioned a lavishly illustrated article dealing with Flora MacLeod, the Royal Family at Braemar, crofts on Harris, ceilidhs and Highland dancing.⁴⁰ In contrast to the attacks on the Mod in the early article 'The Ferry of the Dead', the typescript article 'The Myth of the Gloomy Scot'⁴¹ is enthusiastic about the Mod.

Unsatisfactory also is the claim which is made for the folk-singing of the girl Catherine, which claim has by now become something of a standard formula in the development of Gunn's novels. Neither Catherine nor her relationship with Walter is sufficiently substantiated in the action of the novel, and the philosophical recurrence which Gunn attempts to embody in her person and singing cannot be sustained. Typical of the lack of care with which such elements are handled in this book is Walter's first response to her humming of a Gaelic song:

It was a very old Gaelic air; it went back so far that it was timeless or had transfixed time; it had words and these words told a story of human tragedy; yet that tragedy had been so winnowed by the generations that it could be sung, hummed, as a lullaby to a child. I know of no essentialising process more profound than this. (OL 54)

But the girl only hums the air. Words and story are later discoveries for the listener. And, as it happens, Walter later finds that the song is not one of the old seal songs as he had thought at the time, but something different. So his apprehension of story, tragedy, and winnowing by the generations is rhetorical only, or, if genuine, comes from his author's, not his own experience. Unconvincing also is the sea-storm episode which is introduced at the end of the novel. This, like the claims for the power of folk-singing, has become a cliché in the pattern of Gunn's novel-writing.

Claims have been made for The Other Landscape on the basis of its philosophical search, but here too Gunn in my view fails to convince. A philosophical novel should at least provide language use and intellectual perception of a significant quality, but one finds neither in this book. Walter's casual, imprecise speech betrays both his supposed trained mind and the claims Gunn makes through him for the quality of his and Menzies's metaphysical speculations. Of 'the other landscape' which he apprehends in the symbolism of the dismembered rowan tree, he comments: 'To put it naively for the moment, it stands for something' (OL 67). Menzies's musical output is 'stuff of that kind' (OL 79). In his talks with Walter, the musician 'stripped me bare'; 'worked me up' (OL 98, 100). Walter finds himself 'in the midst of the hot bout' (OL 143). In addition, the reader never really finds out just what perceptions of Menzies affect Walter so forcibly. One becomes aware that Menzies seems to be intent on trying to penetrate the other landscape or dimension into which his wife has vanished, but what is one to make of the conjuring up of Annabel's

presence in the cottage doorway so that she is visible to Walter?;

But the compulsion to turn, to follow his eyes, is too strong for the cramped reluctance that would defeat it. So I turn round and see Annabel standing in the doorway. . . . The whole energy of her being is in her eyes. And her eyes recognize Menzies with an intensity that is tragic and beautiful. Yet why write the word intensity when there is a smile in her eyes and why tragic with this ineffable communion between them? I perceive there is also compassion in her eyes, as though a woman at the end bears all. This terrible living quality, this sheer expression of love at its ultimate moment of wordless communion, becomes unbearable and I stir and get up, perhaps, God knows, to make way for her. The movement brings a dizziness to my head, a momentary half darkness, and the door is empty.

When I sit down I feel utterly drained. (OL 243-44)

In this the prevision of Second Sight is translated into the more doubtful realms of the séance.

Walter's reports of his final discussions with Menzies - 'another extraordinary night' (OL 302) of metaphysical speculation - are impossible to evaluate or even to comprehend. He comments:

I can hardly use a word now that for me isn't overcharged. Mere mention of a thicket of statistics and I am waiting for the face to appear. I did wait for it in the sense that I began to feel it coming, that he could explain as it were from inside the atom why it gave up the ghost or why its ghost was given up. I know this must sound quite fantastic. It irritated me even then. For I find that though in the ordinary way I may be tolerant of supernatural or other similar manifestations, like this one of understanding the involuntary 'death' of the atom, I become sceptical to the point of intolerance when brought slap up against even its direct argumentation, much less what purports to be the thing itself.

Anyway, when I felt it coming and when his words were looping about it and about in a way that seemed to me more than indecisive, I challenged him directly to tell me if he did really know what happened inside the blessed atom.

He looked at me. And he was silent. (OL 303)

And of the psychic activity in the atom he reports thus:

To call it a function of matter seemed abstract, woolly. I preferred the concrete word excretion. The atom or the atomic thicket excreted mind. Accordingly, if it is an excretion then it is part of the atomic function to excrete it. But even an atom cannot excrete an excretion that isn't there to be excreted. Remarkable how much at home one feels with the notion of excretion, but comfort alas! is not all. Somewhere mind inhered, but where and how? And the face in the statistical thicket was suddenly seen, and it was the face of Psyche, and her silent look was as forbearing as Menzies'. So we borrowed Psyche's wings and took flight to the universes of stars and planets where there was enough matter to do a fair amount of psychic excretion. I had to admit it, almost straight off. I may have toyed with the notion of life on another planet before, but now I saw that to deny it would be such a presumption of our solitary importance in the scheme of things entire that it bordered on a less reputable mental condition than that of simple idiocy; a 'provincialism' beyond the slickest cosmopolitan use of that word. Statistics began to blush at the possibility of the entertainment of such a notion. It takes a lot to make statistics blush. (OL 304-05)

Did Gunn genuinely believe that 'stuff of that kind' could be the material of a philosophical novel? Walter's belated self-criticism in relation to his Heine-ish Angst at seeing Catherine and Menzies talking together is, sadly, all too applicable to his author in this book:

I saw . . . how my own feelings and desires had vividly coloured everything to a degree that had created complete illusion. Every movement she had made, every word she had uttered, should have destroyed the illusion, but I simply wouldn't let it. (OL 159)

Finally, there is Bloodhunt, Gunn's penultimate novel, appearing in 1952 between The Well at the World's End and The Other Landscape and, for me, the only novel in this grouping of novels of destruction and freedom which could be called a work of quality. Its success negates any attempt to ascribe Gunn's failure in his late books to a general failure of imagination and artistic achievement such as has overcome many an artist in late middle age. On the other hand, it points clearly to the fact that, as we have seen in some of the short stories and in the unsatisfactory novels of

contemporary urban life, Gunn's success as a writer is directly related to the employment of the context and material to which his sensibility is attuned: namely that of the Highlands of Scotland. A departure from this milieu, or an attempt to force a symbolic or cathartic role on the Highland experience, is almost always a disastrous procedure for Gunn.

Bloodhunt is set on a croft on the outskirts of a small Highland town. Its principal protagonist is an old retired sailor, Sandy, a bachelor, not by inclination but by reason of the death of the Italian girl whom he had loved and who had sheltered him during his war-time service. He now lives alone with his dog and is considered to be something of an eccentric by the rest of the community. The novel returns to the world of the early Highland books in that the experience presented is an inside one. All the characters belong to the community. There is no Simon Grant or Peter Munro to inspect their ways and hold them up as examples of goodness to the destructive world outside the Highlands. There is thus none of the sentimentalisation of the Highlander, none of the quaintness which destroyed the depiction of the Highland way of life in The Silver Bough and The Well at the World's End. There is much shrewd humour in the word-play between old Sandy and the widow Macleay who attempts to take him over when he is confined to bed as the result of an accident, and between Sandy the unbeliever and Mr Davidson the minister, who sorrows over his lack of belief while he respects his charity and acuity; but this humour and the philosophy of life which lies beneath it have a backbone of integrity and strength and living experience as has the humour of the Young Art and Old Hector books. It is not surface entertainment for visitors.

As in The Silver Bough, The Well at the World's End and The Other Landscape, the ultimate theme of Bloodhunt is reconciliation, but unlike the above books the forces of destruction are present within the action of

Bloodhunt, as its title suggests. Yet, just as the portrait of the Highland community in this book differs in its authenticity from that given in the late books as a whole, so the evocation of violence and evil is a more convincing one than we find in books such as The Lost Chart or The Shadow. The destructive forces in Bloodhunt are not those of vague international crises, or nuclear weapons, of impersonal intellectuality or totalitarian political systems. They arise from human passions and psychological responses and are of a nature which could confront any one of us. A young man, Allan, has in a moment of passion killed Robert, brother of the local policeman, because Robert has made Allan's former girl, whom he still loves, pregnant and has then deserted her. The policeman who begins the hunt for his brother's killer as part of his police duties becomes psychologically warped by the pressures upon him and ends by hunting Allan and finally killing him in what has become for him a primitive blood hunt. Sandy is at the centre of the moral crisis of the novel as hunted killer, hunter and finally deserted girl converge on hiscroft.

The formal qualities of this novel are those which distinguished many of Gunn's earlier successful Highland books. Like the short story form, it has a single story line and its happenings are viewed principally through the eyes and mind of one character, Sandy. Unlike other late novels where there is a single centre of consciousness, one does not feel in Bloodhunt that there is an over-identification between author and principal character or that the fact that Sandy is the 'eyes' of the novel limits one's perspective on the events recounted. There is an objectivity in Gunn's portrait of Sandy which is lacking in other late novels. There are also several well-differentiated minor characters who have a point of view to contribute and whose words and actions add to our understanding of Sandy and of the community of which he is both part and yet not entirely part.

The opening chapters of the novel illustrate that ability to communicate tension and atmosphere through detailed description and through silence as much as through dialogue which one noticed in Gunn's first novel, The Grey Coast. The policeman Nicol bursts in on Sandy's unhurried preparations for bed with his questions and his news of the killing of his brother. Sandy's confusion, his instinctive distrust of the policeman - 'The menace of the policeman was about him, about the lads he had known so long' - (B 10) his wish to keep out of such emotional involvements at his age and the wariness between policeman and old crofter are all splendidly evoked through the painstaking, detailed description of Sandy's actions and thoughts:

'Your brother - murdered!' So great was the shock that Sandy's understanding seemed blinded by the darkness. 'I can't see you. Come in.'

'I want to have a look in the barn first. Give me the key.'

'The key? Wait till I get my boots on.'

'Just give me the key.'

But Sandy had turned back and as he pulled on his boots wondered where on earth the key was. Certainly he had not locked the barn door that day, or yesterday, or any day his fumbling mind could think of. The menace of the policeman was about him, about the lads he had known so long, and he could not gather his wits.

Groping along the top shelf of the kitchen dresser, his hand encountered a rusty iron key. Relieved to have a key of some kind, he called, 'I've got it. Will I light the lantern?'

'No. I have a torch.' The policeman had not come in and his voice was guarded. He was obviously keeping watch on the long croft building, of which the barn was the lower end. There were no doors on the other side. (B 9-10)

And as the policeman searches barn and henhouse:

There was no moon but some stars were in the sky and Sandy could now see the vague outline of the hen-house, a rough wooden hut which stood over from the barn. Under the still night as they stood listening, his mouth went dry. He had not been gripped by such direct physical emotion for a very long time. He was seventy-four years old. (B 13)

This is the specific, authentic quality which was missing in the vague talk of destruction and evil and its opposing 'light' and integration in The Lost Chart and The Shadow. Impersonality here is the impersonality of Nicol as he questions Sandy and relentlessly pursues every possible clue: for Sandy, 'it was as pure a human force as he had met. The lack of haste had something terrifying about it' (B 19). The tension and suspense build up as Gunn draws the reader into Sandy's waiting: into his waiting for Nicol's nightly visits, then into his waiting for Allan's calls on his help.

Sandy's moral dilemma is sharpened by his knowledge of and liking for the young man Allan. Similarly the reader's understanding of the murder situation is enhanced by Sandy's memories of the past, of the visits of Allan and his friends to help with the work about the croft, of their poaching expeditions. We begin to grasp the nature of the youth, to understand how this killing could have come about. There is nothing abstract in the situation. And, like Sandy, our moral response is divided between the wrong of the killing and the wrongdoing which caused such a young man to act in this way.

Throughout the novel the world of nature is interwoven with the action and through passages of natural description Gunn unforcedly introduces speculation on 'the other landscape' beyond this life. Before the killing had broken in upon him, Sandy had been quietly preparing his mind for death. And like old Lachie in the story 'Down to the Sea' and the old woman in 'The White Hour' it was Rilke's 'der eigne Tod' which he proposed should come to him. He intended to die in a way that was in accord with his life, among the hills he loved. As he sits in the horse-shoe scoop that Allan had once called 'Sandy's Chair' (B 34) he remembers a past experience in that place not long after his return from the sea:

The sun and the air, the roll of the hills, the ups and downs, perhaps brought back something of the sea. Anyway, he could hardly have enough of it, and when at last he saw his croft in the distance he sat down, reluctant to end his day, to lose this happiness, with the sun and the wind warming and blowing past him, knitting him into them and into everything with a sense of well-being throughout his utterly tired body that was rare beyond telling.

And then, as simply as a thought might come to him when taking his porridge, he saw that to pass out of his body was in the order of things, now revealed; not an end and not quite a translation, but precisely a passing on and away. At that moment it would have been easy and pleasant to die. He could have gone. (B 57-8)

Since that time

the country of the spirit had been gradually taking shape, gathering a feature here, a snapshot there, a certain light, a vague climate; but mostly when he wanted to catch a whole glimpse of it and enter its mood, he only saw the hills, the lochs, the bracken, the birches, the long tongue of water lilies where the trout fed and set their circles on the still water. . . . This was the land he had come to from the sea, the bit of earth that held his heart, the beautiful country . . . where Allan, having committed his murder, was now hiding.

(B 30) (Gunn's ellipses)

Later, as he lies in bed after his accident, nature again, in the form of the thrush's song this time, induces speculation:

As the light dimmed in the window, the thrush began singing on the rowan tree. Never had he heard such an urgency of song. The world rang with it, but he could neither go with it nor leave it, neither be moved by it nor yet not be moved. So near mockery that it was heavy and sad with despair.

Was it the song of some glory that had been intended? he wondered. Intended, but somewhere lost. And as he wondered he got lost, and the song took him and he asked the blind powers that did not hear him why the song should be, and the glory behind the song, and its outpouring in such urgency. (B 180)

This kind of speculation grows out of the action of the plot, out of the characters of the characters as they have been revealed to us. Its authenticity is demonstrated in the rhythms of the prose and in the vitality of the language. It is not the forced, artificial, rootless speculation of the so-called philosophical novels.

Sandy's moral predicament and the tension in the plot deepen with his accident when taking his cow to the neighbouring farmer's bull, and with the arrival of the pregnant girl who had been the impulse behind the murder. There is much comedy in Sandy's efforts to ward off the attentions of nurse and widow neighbour, but this comedy is never trivial or external. Like the philosophy it grows out of the personality and situation of Sandy and serves as a foil to the increasing tension in the action which relates to Allan and the girl Liz.

Sandy's allegiance gradually retreats from Allan, whom he has instinctively shielded, to the girl Liz whom he has equally instinctively, though at first unwillingly, befriended. The crisis comes for him when Liz sees Allan accidentally in the barn, where, unknown to Sandy, he has been hiding, and the shock precipitates the premature birth of her child. In his anxiety to help the girl, Sandy forgets Allan, and from this point onwards, although he does not lose his concern for the youth, it is the girl and the new beginning which her child represents which claim his first allegiance.

The ultimate message of this novel, as of The Silver Bough, The Well at the World's End and The Other Landscape is thus reconciliation. But before the harmonising vision can be fully effected, the fate of Allan the hunted, and Nicol the hunter, must be determined. It is in this final resolution of the plot of the novel that, in my view, Bloodhunt does not entirely convince. Gunn himself said of the ending:

When the old sailor finds the policeman's brother and decides to say nothing, and the girl has her baby in the barn - I thought that the world after the bomb might well be like this - with just a few pockets of life left, and the old man by himself living on the fringes, being forced to decide what laws are to be followed at such a time, and recognizing that life must and will go on.⁴²

What happens in the plot is that Sandy, worried by the fact of Allan's non-appearance after Liz had seen him in the barn, and worried also by the pathological obsession which causes Nicol to scour the hills ceaselessly for his brother's killer, decides to take to the hills himself to see if he can find any traces of the youth. He sees Nicol and Allan fighting through the lens of his telescope, but by the time he reaches the site of the fight, Allan is dead and Nicol has gone, having hidden the dead body under an overhang of peat. As Sandy has already made his own judgements in regard to the shielding of Allan and the taking-in of Liz, so now he decides, as Gunn describes above, to opt for life: to say nothing of what he has seen, to leave Allan's body to be discovered in the course of time, and Nicol to whatever future is in store for him. As he reaches his croft he hears Liz crooning an old Highland lullaby to the baby:

The tune seemed to well up from his own roots for it had put him to sleep many a time. Her voice was warm and the lullaby full of a woman's knowledge. He put his hand against the wall for a little while, gathered his resources, and went to the door. (B 250)

It seems to me that here, for the first time, a false note is struck in the novel. The Highland lullaby ending is too simplistic an opposition to the violence in the action. Much of the tension in the plot has centred on Nicol's abnormal psychological state; on the obsessive blood hunt that will not let him rest. Nor was the hatred in him alone. His mother, too, who had been against her younger son marrying the girl Liz, is driving him onwards in his inhuman search for his brother's killer. Can we believe, with Gunn, that Sandy, alone, can bring an end to such a pathological obsession by keeping quiet about what he has seen? For Allan's death is not the end of the matter. There is the girl Liz, the cause of the murder, and her child, Nicol's brother's child. Can his now unbalanced mind really

leave the hunt at the killing of Allan? There is, too, injustice in this ending. Allan had done wrong, but equally he had been wronged, especially in the manner of his death. Yet his name alone will bear the stigma of murderer. Liz has accepted her part in the wrong-doing by outlawing herself and by bearing and loving the child. Is she not strong enough to accept the truth of Allan's death and whatever consequences may follow?

Bloodhunt is a fine novel. It displays what J.B. Salmond described in his review of the book as Gunn's 'greatest gifts - his ability to fuse place and people, Highland folk and the Highland scene, in an incontrovertible unity, and his awareness of the essential one-ness of yesterday and today.'⁴³ It is marred, in my view, by the evasion in its ending. There is no catharsis in this tragedy. The reader is left with the fear of Nicol which haunted the earlier stages of the action. Nicol is not part of the reconciling vision, as is Prospero's wicked brother in The Tempest. And without his participation, the vision must remain incomplete.

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CONCLUSION

As we have seen, both Edwin Muir and Neil M. Gunn in their late work are deeply concerned with the kind of universal, international themes which have dominated human affairs in this unstable century: with the machine-like impersonality which has increasingly affected human intercourse and social and political organisation with a consequent diminution in personal and political freedom; with fears of the loss of our traditional consciousness of and involvement with the communality of human experience which is handed on to us from the past; with the apprehensions for the future of mankind engendered by two world wars and, in the post-1945 period, by the threat of nuclear war. Both writers, in their different ways, attempt to suggest an opposing regenerative vision. For Muir, this is attempted principally through the medium of a Christianity which, in the sense that it is not entirely orthodox, is at one with the transitional spirit of the century. Gunn, like many intellectuals and artists of his time, resorts to 'the way' of Eastern philosophy and to an endorsement of primitive culture and of the relationship between man and nature, both of which are elements in the Taoism with which he found himself inherently in sympathy.

Muir and Gunn arrived at such ultimate thematic preoccupations by very different routes, although they started from childhood environments which on the surface had many similarities. And just as the early work of each writer differs in assurance and quality, so, despite the affinity in theme, the late work of Muir and Gunn also diverges sharply in its quality.

Muir began his work as poet tentatively, with personal frustrations and obsessions dominating an insecure poetic technique. It was not until The Narrow Place collection of 1943, almost twenty years after the publication of First Poems, that he could be said to have achieved maturity as poet, and this maturity was characterised not only by increased technical assurance but by an involvement with the international preoccupations of this century which continued into his very last poems. His criticism, in which he achieved maturity earlier than in his poetry, is similarly universal in its social as well as literary concerns. Scotland, on the other hand, consistently occupied an ambivalent place in his life and work and his most overt involvement as writer in Scottish affairs took place during the 1930s.

Neil M. Gunn, on the contrary, was entirely rooted in Scotland and was involved in attempts to regenerate Highland social and economic life as he was sympathetic to the aims of the Scottish Renaissance Movement in literature. His early and middle-period novels, among which his best work is primarily to be found, are in the main set in the social and spiritual milieu of the Highlands, as are many of his finest short stories. In contrast, his late novels in which he explicitly pursues themes of disintegration and freedom in the modern world, and in which the Highland experience appears principally as an opposing cathartic or reconciling vision, are almost without exception unsuccessful. The exception, as we have seen, is Bloodhunt which returns to homogeneous Highland experience for context.

What one has to decide with regard to the evidence which the thesis investigation has uncovered is the relationship between and the relative significance of the Scottish and the international dimension in the work of Edwin Muir and Neil M. Gunn. To what extent can Muir be called

a Scottish writer? Would it be more accurate to call him an international writer who happened to be born in and at times domiciled in Scotland? And in view of the lack of success in Gunn's late international-theme novels, would it be just to describe him as an essentially Scottish writer, whose work is limited to national interest? Or is his achievement in his best work also of a universal, unparochial nature, despite its rootedness in the national context?

There is no difficulty in establishing Muir's credentials as an international writer. Even in his early work where his personal frustrations were predominant, the essential context, although frequently smothered by stylistic inadequacies, was the universal one of the human journey. And while the impulse behind Muir's attempt to universalise from the particular was his overpowering need to prove that his personal life was of significance, that he was not 'the mock of Time' (CP 48), unlike the eighteenth century Samuel Johnson's generalisations from the particular personal experience which grew out of a confident belief in the inter-relatedness of all life and experience, this personal impulse in his early work does not invalidate the intrinsic universality of Muir's concern with what he called in We Moderns 'the eternal problem' (WM 17).

In addition, Muir's poetry and criticism, in its purely literary aspects, early looked towards the international arena. Muir wrote of writers such as Hölderlin, Nietzsche, Kafka and Dostoyevsky as readily as he did of the Scottish ballads and of English literary figures. In his early reading he was influenced by the philosophy of Nietzsche and the poetry of Heine, and as we have seen, the influence of German romanticism found its way into the expression of First Poems as the philosophy of Nietzsche made itself felt in We Moderns.

In the mature work from The Narrow Place onwards, international themes and influences appear more clearly. And in addition to the universal themes related to man's spiritual journey which are constant throughout Muir's work, one finds also themes which are 'international' in a more specific, topical definition of the word, in which Muir employs the metaphor of the international political crises which have plagued the mid-twentieth century world. Neil Gunn commented in relation to that mature poetry in a review of The Narrow Place that Muir's work had 'caught a new vitality, an urgency. It has caught a flame - from the fire that is burning the world.'¹ This flame was never extinguished in Muir's poetry and in his criticism from this point onwards. As we have seen, the topical metaphor of international crisis was maintained alongside and was frequently interwoven with the more traditional universal themes of spiritual journeying and reconciliation.

The Scottish dimension in Muir's work is more difficult to assess, being often implicit and not immediately recognisable in surface theme or expression. It is significant that his poetry has on the whole been considered by critics in the context of English, not Scottish literature. Even Daniel Hoffman, who otherwise makes many perceptive comments about the influence of Calvinism in Muir's work, evinces a not uncommon critical lack of understanding with regard to Muir's Scottish background when he refers to his Scott and Scotland thesis that 'the Scot habitually thinks in English but feels in Gaelic.'² (my italics)

Muir's poetry could, on the surface, be said to be fulfilling his Scott and Scotland criterion of belonging to English poetry. He did not attempt to use the speech or the folk-culture of Norse-influenced Orkney in his work. He early committed himself to the English language as poetic medium and, as the ballad imitations in Scots in First Poems

demonstrate, his infrequent attempts to employ a general form of Scots language were poetically unmemorable. His insecurity with regard to the language question in Scottish literature is evidenced by his muddled analysis of the Scottish writer's predicament in Scott and Scotland. Nor are there many poems on specifically Scottish subjects in his work. There is also little nature poetry, no humour or satire, none of the 'exuberance, wildness and eccentricity of the Middle Ages'³ which he found in Dunbar and which can be seen again in the work of MacDiarmid. Yet in spite of the absence of these traditionally Scottish qualities, I believe that the investigation of his work has shown that he was deeply influenced by his Scottish upbringing and environment. His poetry could be said to embody the qualities he himself found in Henryson: 'the fundamental seriousness, humanity and strength of the Scottish imagination.'⁴

Muir wrote perceptively about the Scottish ballads in his criticism and in Scottish Journey and it is with the ballad tradition that his own work finds an affinity. Not, as we have seen, with the ballad form itself, but with the mood of tragic fatalism which is their context, with their sense of the transcendental and their preoccupation with the central issues of life.

The affinity with the fatalism of the ballads relates to the obsession with Calvinism which runs through Muir's poetry. Although the thesis investigation shows that he fiercely rejected Calvinism and its doctrines of Original Sin and The Elect, equating this graceless, impersonal system with the Bolshevism he encountered in Europe and finding both 'creeds of Wrath',⁵ yet it also demonstrates that the hold which Calvinism had obtained on his imagination as a child was not easy to loosen. This Calvinist influence is especially visible in his early

poetry up to and including the Journeys and Places collection, where it is given expression in themes of restricted fate and predestined journeyings; and in his obsession with the theme of the Fall and the loss of Eden which dominates the early work and which continues, although in a more balanced way, to the end of his work as poet. In the poetry of the 1940s this Fall theme is implicit in his writing of 'the single disunited world' (A 194) of war-torn and post-war Europe. Poems such as 'The Refugees' and 'The Good Town' explore both the mystery of evil in human life and our communal responsibility for it. 'The Usurpers' attacks the machine-like impersonality of a totalitarian regime where categories not people signify. 'The Interrogation' demonstrates the struggle between the individual and the impersonal vengefulness of authority while 'The Combat' evokes the arbitrary, relentless nature of evil and the contrasting indestructability of the human spirit. Muir's European experience of the forties showed him that impersonal vengeance was not the prerogative of Calvin's God.

Less harsh transformations of Calvinist themes in the mature poetry are to be seen in 'The Day' in which the poet's prayer is not that he should be allowed to escape the 'in eternity written and hidden way', but that he should be allowed 'the acceptance and revolt, the yea and nay/ The denial and the blessing that are my own' (CP 122). 'A Birthday' has as its burden:

Before I touched the food
Sweetness ensnared my tongue

.

Before I took the road
Direction ravished my soul (CP 158)

and affirms a vision of the essential rightness and direction at the heart of the universe.

Scottish Calvinist influence can be seen also in Muir's reworking of Greek myth in his poetry. It is interesting to speculate why a boy from a non-intellectual farming background, with few books and little formal schooling, brought up in the cultural ambience of Norse-influenced Orkney with its heritage of Viking sagas and folk-tales, should as man choose the classical severity of Greek myth as his metaphorical medium. It is significant that in Greek myth, as in Calvinist doctrine, one finds the concept of man pursuing a predetermined path to a predestined end, together with the related idea of a relentless, apparently arbitrary fate. In Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry Lillian Feder points to the fact that 'mythical thinking pervades and transforms the whole legend of the Trojan War. Battles are won not because of the superiority of weapons or manpower, but because of the will of the gods.'⁶ While Muir may have turned to myth initially, as in the early 'Ballad of Hector in Hades', in the attempt to distance himself emotionally from the personal preoccupations which threatened to overwhelm his poetry, his choice of Greek myth was a peculiarly appropriate one. As we have seen in the discussion of his work, Muir repeatedly returns to the Troy story for theme: to the predestined wanderings of Ulysses and the blind faith of Penelope; in 'A Trojan Slave' to the idea of the seeds of the destruction of Troy lying, like some form of Original Sin, within Troy itself; in 'Troy' to the arbitrary nature of evil and the apparent futility of both the evil of the robbers and the faithfulness and heroism of the old man. In The Labyrinth poem 'Oedipus', there is a mingling of pagan and Christian attitudes: Oedipus, in his predestined sinning and punishment, acts out the role of the mythical hero while at the same time, like Christ, he takes upon himself the guilt of men. Unlike Christ, however, this action is not undertaken to absolve men, but 'that so men's guilt might

be made manifest' and 'the immortal burden of the gods' (CP 191) eased.

As we have seen, there are few evocations of the Scottish landscape in Muir's poetry and few poems on specifically Scottish themes. Yet Scotland's loss of nationhood is one element in the Fall theme and it produced its own memorable statements in poems such as 'Scotland's Winter' and 'Scotland 1941' in addition to the Calvinist 'The Incarnate One'. Muir's involvement with the theme of the Fall of Scotland is more explicitly observable in his Scottish criticism of the 1930s and in books such as Scottish Journey and Scott and Scotland.

Thus, although Edwin Muir is primarily an international writer as evidenced by the quality of his poetry and criticism, the range and nature of his themes and, in a material sense, in the fact that he himself - like many artists of the century by choice, and like the enforced displacement of the European refugees about whom he wrote - was rootless, making his home for brief periods in many different areas and countries and being settled in none, the Scottish dimension is yet of considerable significance in his work. Emotionally tied to Scotland, and in particular, to Orkney, but unable to find either personal satisfaction or a way of making a living in Scotland, Muir's consequent sense of displacement enabled him imaginatively to enter into the experiences of the dispossessed of the twentieth century, whether the materially dispossessed such as the refugees, or the spiritually dispossessed in the religious or social and political spheres. On the other hand, this sense of displacement led him at times to an undue idealisation of the past in relation to the changes which have affected human life in this century, and especially to an idealisation of Scotland's past. His unhappy relationship with Scottish Calvinism provided the spur and the metaphor for much significant

investigation of the human condition, although it, too, in the early work especially, induced an evasive approach to that condition. In return, Muir's work, in its intellectual and spiritual range and in the quality of its perceptions, is a significant contribution to the revival of literature in Scotland in the twentieth century.

Neil M. Gunn's situation in relation to Scottish and international affinities is to a considerable degree the reverse of Muir's. Muir's sense of displacement in Scotland is opposed by Gunn's rootedness; his national ambivalence by Gunn's unequivocal 'This is my land.'⁷ In addition, in the artistic sphere, there is no sense of progression in Gunn's work as there is in Muir's. Gunn's least successful work, unlike Muir's, is his late post-war work with its international themes of freedom, impersonality and disintegration. The problem for the critic is to determine to what extent this failure in the late novels affects his right to be considered as a writer of international stature.

As the thesis exploration has shown, Gunn's failure in these late novels is both of technique and of perception. Yet the discussion of the short stories and of a middle-period novel such as Wild Geese Overhead demonstrated that the failure was not specifically related to a failing technique or to an inability to adapt to the changed conditions of the post-war world, but lay in aspects of technique and sensibility which had been present in Gunn's work from its beginnings. Gunn's failure is, in fact, as directly related to his rootedness in Highland life as is his success in the novels of Highland experience.

His problem is twofold. It is that of a sensibility which is attuned to the simple, traditional way of life and values of the Highland crofting and fishing community, and which is thus out of sympathy with and, even

more significant, unable to interpret and to discriminate between the values of the contemporary, sophisticated urban society which he makes the context for many of his late books. Gunn himself inadvertently defined his dilemma in the article 'On Tradition' when he claimed that 'only inside his own tradition can a man realise his greatest potentiality; just as, quite literally, he can find words for his profoundest emotion only in his own native speech. . . . Interfere with that tradition, try to supplant it by another tradition, and at once the creative potential is adversely affected.'⁸

His problem is also related to the difficulties confronting the Highland novelist: the lack of a living tradition within which to work; the restricted social nature of the Highland community and thus of the traditional material of the novelist; the communal traditions of the way of life which work against the development of the kind of plot which one associates with the urban novel and which frequently involves either conflict between individual and society or the coming to self-awareness of an individual character through his social relationships. In addition the stylistic attributes of orally-transmitted folk-culture which are the Highland writer's inheritance, like the communal values of the people, are opposed to the complex interweaving of plots and character interaction which have become characteristic of the printed bourgeois novel. It is significant that much of Gunn's best work is to be found in the short story form, or in the kind of short novel such as Young Art and Old Hector or Bloodhunt which has many technical affinities with the short story form in its employment of devices such as one principal centre of consciousness and a plot which is simple and episodic in nature. The Silver Darlings, a sizeable novel, succeeds because it is in essence a folk-epic, and the

traditional attributes of suspenseful heroic episodes and archetypal characterisation find new life in the chronicle of new beginnings which arose out of the tragedy of the Clearances.

Thus, while in Gunn's late novels one accepts in theory the significance of themes such as the relentless destroying intellect and the impersonality in human relationships which, for example, Nan revolts against in The Shadow, Gunn's characterisation of a protagonist such as Nan and his ability to dramatise the opposing philosophical viewpoints through the action of the novel are so inadequate that the artistic failures prejudice the attempt to explore the themes. In addition, as we have seen in the discussion of books such as The Silver Bough and The Well at the World's End, the attempt to force a regenerative role on the Highland community in opposition to what Gunn considers to be the nihilist tendencies of contemporary urban society, results in a sentimentalising of Highland life which is foreign to Gunn's novels of essential Highland experience.

Gunn's late novels were affected also by his increasing interest in Eastern philosophy in the 1950s. Gunn's interest in Taoism is understandable because in its concepts it relates to many of his own intrinsic philosophical inclinations and to the traditions of his Highland culture. Among the most significant mutual concepts are the belief in the solidarity of man and nature; in recurrence and the cyclical nature of time; in the importance of ancestor-worship and of the life-giving power of woman. Of especial significance in relation to the late novels and the development of their plots is the belief that any reform of society necessitates a return to the ways of the remote past: the ideal is a return to an original purity.

But just as Nietzsche was the wrong writer for Muir to choose to model himself on at the time of the writing of We Moderns, so it seems to me that the influence of Taoism and the related Zen Buddhist philosophy was an unfortunate influence on Gunn as he came to write his late books. Such philosophy reinforced his natural tendencies to look backwards to an idealised past and towards the spiritual as opposed to the material which were evident in the adult Kenn's search in Highland River and even earlier in the Celtic Twilight attitudes of Ewan in The Lost Glen. Gunn as novelist needed a philosophy which would force him to face the paradoxical interweaving of good and evil in human life, as Muir succeeded in doing in his late work, rather than encourage him to side-step the possibility of tragedy by a concentration on the spiritual, on primitivism, on, in artistic terms, nostalgia and sentiment and the happy ending. As we have seen, Muir also had such evasive tendencies, even in late poems such as 'The Horses' and 'Outside Eden', but he also had a restless, questioning intellect which would not let him escape the dilemma in this way but forced him back, like the battered animal in 'The Combat', to fight it out. Gunn's philosophical inclinations were intrinsically idealistic and unambiguous and therefore he was vulnerable to the charge of becoming philosophically simplistic in his attempts to deal with the complex problems of contemporary experience. For Gunn, the evil lay not within man, as in the myth of the Fall, but was external to him as in the Clearances. It was a consequence of a wrong turning in the river of human experience, and as such could be negated if man could retrace his steps towards the pure source. As suggested earlier in relation to Kenn's comments on tragedy in Highland River, this is not a productive philosophy for the novelist whose concern must be with the living experience, with the interwoven tragedy and comedy of everyday life.

Yet although Gunn's overt attempt to embrace international themes of contemporary experience in his late work was unsuccessful and his best work is that which depicts traditional Highland experience, as the thesis investigation has shown this Highland work is in no way parochial. Gunn's physical milieu may be that of the Scottish Highlands, but his concerns in these novels of Highland experience and in the best of his short stories are the universal ones which relate to our common human journey and the insights and judgements given expression in them are sure. Like D.H. Lawrence, he is perceptive about childhood. With Rilke, he believes in the necessity of a death which will not negate one's life. He shares with Wordsworth an understanding of the solidarity of man and nature, although his perception of the relationship is differentiated by the kind of animism peculiar to his Highland background.

Maggie, the heroine of The Grey Coast, is no parochial heroine, but is one with a long line of trapped women in English literature from Richardson's Pamela to George Eliot's Gwendolen Harleth and D.H. Lawrence's sisters Louisa and Mary in 'Daughters of the Vicar'. Her situation may be that of a girl without means in a small declining Scottish fishing village, but her plight is universal. In Young Art and Old Hector Hector tells Art that 'it's not the size of the knowing that matters', but 'the kind of the knowing' (YA 250), and the book is itself a demonstration of the universal validity of his insight. Butcher's Broom depicts the Highland Clearances which, in the injustice and hardship perpetrated on the helpless people, anticipated the instances of dispossession which have become familiar to us in the twentieth century world. In the article 'The Highland Clearances', Gunn himself compared the Scottish evictions with 'the unfinished story of the millions of the dispossessed in Europe today.'⁹ The Silver Darlings depicts the temporary heroic triumph of the

Highland people over their dispossession, and in that triumph brings to life the universal human qualities of communal concern, individual heroism and distinction and the awareness of the past living in the present, the loss of which Gunn attempted unsuccessfully to define in his late books.

The universality of these Highland novels and the contrast with the novels of city experience is seen most clearly in The Green Isle of the Great Deep. This novel, like Wild Geese Overhead, The Shadow and The Lost Chart, explores themes of impersonality and totalitarian systems, of the relationship between society and the individual, of the meaning of freedom. Yet because of the vitality of Gunn's ironical setting of the conflict in the totalitarian Paradise of the Green Isle and the established virtues of the Highland community from which the visitors to the Green Isle, Art and Hector, come, these theoretical philosophical arguments are given a meaningful life and potency which is absent from the late novels of disintegration and freedom. One finds a similar situation in Bloodhunt, where the abstract forces of evil which haunted The Lost Chart and the equally abstract opposing 'light' are given human definition and significance through their translation to the everyday life of a small Highland community.

Similarly, Gunn's investigations of the economic and cultural decline of the Highlands in his many articles for The Scots Magazine in the 1930s and early 1940s have a significance beyond the merely national. For Gunn, questions of a nation's life and health are essentially universal questions. In the article 'Nationalism and Internationalism' he states his belief that 'it is only when a man is moved by the traditions and music and poetry of his own land that he is in a position to comprehend

those of any other land, for already he has the eyes of sympathy and the ears of understanding.'¹⁰

Gunn was thus, unlike Muir, an active nationalist writer in the same way that Hugh MacDiarmid was a nationalist writer, and in the way that the musicians Janacek and Sibelius - to whom Gunn refers in The Well at the World's End and in the article 'The Essence of Nationalism' in connection with his hopes for Scottish music- were nationalist composers. Yet there is no doubt that MacDiarmid, Janacek and Sibelius are recognised as artists of international, universal significance. I believe that despite Gunn's failure in his late novels of overt international preoccupations, he too belongs with MacDiarmid as a Scottish nationalist writer of international significance. Like MacDiarmid again, Gunn was a prolific writer and his best work is to be found in a small part of his total output. But although his success is on the whole limited to those novels and short stories in which the context is that of the essential Highland tradition and experience, within these limits he succeeds in communicating the universality and communality of human experience in the present as in the past from which the present derives.

In the purely Scottish context, Gunn's work is again of more than transient significance. In fixing his sights firmly on the life of the Highlands as it was in actuality lived around him, he succeeded in removing the Highland novel from the realms of historical romance which it had inhabited since the time of Sir Walter Scott. His excursions into Scottish history - with the exception of Sun Circle - are also marked by their factual context and their sense of the living history of their people. And although Gunn, like Muir, wrote in English and used Scots dialect only occasionally and then mostly in his earliest work, as he

himself commented of Grassie Gibbon's prose, his own work exhibits 'an old rhythm'¹¹ in the quality of its prose. Its rhythmic flow and its cadences are those of the Highland speaking voice, frequently of the Gaelic-speaking Highland voice, although Gunn himself was not a Gaelic speaker.

Like Muir's poetry, Gunn's fiction writing demonstrates that a twentieth century revival in Scottish writing need not depend upon a revival of the Scots language. Both Muir and Gunn, in their different ways, conform, like MacDiarmid in his, to Gunn's estimation of the significance of another writer prominent in the twentieth century revival in Scottish writing, Lewis Grassie Gibbon: each is 'a portent on the Scottish scene and . . . a portent of incalculable potentiality.'¹²

And no less than Muir's more obviously internationally-oriented work, Gunn's best novels and stories, though limited in quantity and in the nature of their physical settings, confirm him as a writer of international significance.

Conclusion

- 1 Neil M. Gunn, Review of The Narrow Place, The Scots Magazine, XXXIX, No. 2, May 1943, p. 163.
- 2 Hoffman, Barbarous Knowledge, p. 234.
3. Muir, Essays on Literature and Society, p. 21.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Muir, Letter to Herbert Read, Selected Letters, p. 113.
- 6 Feder, Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry, p. 25.
- 7 Gunn, 'My Bit of Britain', The Field, 2 August, 1941, p. 136.
- 8 Neil M. Gunn, 'On Tradition', The Scots Magazine, XXXIV, No. 2, November 1940, p. 133.
- 9 Neil M. Gunn, 'The Highland Clearances', Radio Times, 24 November 1954, p. 1.
- 10 Gunn, The Scots Magazine, XV, p. 187.
- 11 Gunn, The Scots Magazine, XXX, p. 30.
- 12 Ibid, p. 31.

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Appendix

Tentative Bibliography of Short Stories by Neil M. Gunn

Stories marked NLS are represented either by printed copy or typescript in the National Library of Scotland Deposit 209 (Gunn papers). HD: collected in Hidden Doors; WH: collected in The White Hour. A story which has a relationship to a subsequent novel is marked with the title abbreviation of that novel.

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Abbreviations

Wherever practicable, quotations from the works of Edwin Muir and Neil M. Gunn will be referenced in the text by title abbreviation and page number.

I EDWIN MUIR

A	<u>An Autobiography</u>
Ch	<u>Chorus of the Newly Dead</u>
CP	<u>Collected Poems</u> (2nd edn 1963)
E	<u>Essays on Literature and Society</u> (2nd edn 1965)
EP	<u>The Estate of Poetry</u>
FP	<u>First Poems</u>
L	<u>Latitudes</u>
Sc	<u>Scott and Scotland</u>
SF	<u>The Story and the Fable</u>
SJ	<u>Scottish Journey</u>
T	<u>Transition</u>
WM	<u>We Moderns</u>

II NEIL M. GUNN

AD	<u>The Atom of Delight</u>
B	<u>Bloodhunt</u>
BB	<u>Butcher's Broom</u>
DW	<u>The Drinking Well</u>
GC	<u>The Grey Coast</u> (Porpoise Press edn of 1931)
GI	<u>The Green Isle of the Great Deep</u>
HD	<u>Hidden Doors</u>

HP	<u>Highland Pack</u>
HR	<u>Highland River</u>
KC	<u>The Key of the Chest</u>
LC	<u>The Lost Chart</u>
LG	<u>The Lost Glen</u>
MT	<u>Morning Tide</u>
OB	<u>Off in a Boat</u>
OL	<u>The Other Landscape</u>
S	<u>The Serpent</u>
SB	<u>The Silver Bough</u>
SC	<u>Sun Circle</u>
SD	<u>The Silver Darlings</u>
Sh	<u>The Shadow</u>
SS	<u>Second Sight</u>
W	<u>The Well at the World's End</u>
WG	<u>Wild Geese Overhead</u>
WH	<u>The White Hour</u>
YA	<u>Young Art and Old Hector</u>

GENERAL

NLS	National Library of Scotland
MS	Manuscript
PC	Printed copy
TS	Typescript