DIVISION AND WHOLENESS:

THE SCOTTISH NOVEL 1896-1947

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CHAPTER FOUR

NAOMI MITCHISON

Questions of identity, which figure so largely in discussions of Scottish fiction, also figure prominently in discussions of Naomi Mitchison. These two facts are related and it is in an attempt to establish the nature of the relationship that this chapter is written. Though Mitchison was brought up in England, both her parents were Scots. However, it is not enough to point to this fact and claim for Mitchison a place in Scottish literature. The English influences on Mitchison were formidable and it might have been that she would have accepted them completely, playing down the Scottish element in her identity until it was merely ornamental, were it not for one other significant part of her identity. She was female and grew up at a time when men held most, if not all, positions of power and influence. She was hindered from achieving self-fulfilment in English society not because of the politics of nationality but because of the politics of sex. Experiences of irrational discrimination helped Mitchison to identify with people who found that their interests were not those of their political rulers and throughout her work she befriends a series of oppressed peoples and causes. During her life one of the causes Mitchison has adopted is that of Scottish Nationalism and it is her relationship with that cause which will be particularly studied here. It will be necessary first of all to make some remarks about feminism in Mitchison's fiction because of the parallels with her attitude to Scotland, which are too fundamental to be ignored. After looking at Mitchison's early fiction which displays her attitudes to the position of women in society quite clearly, her relationship with the Scottish Renaissance will be specifically discussed with reference to her major contribution to the novel of the period, The Bull Calves, where the links between her attitude to women and her attitude to Scotland can be seen. Also important for the Renaissance is her interest in ancient history which developed into a Jungian understanding of myth; The Bull Calves and the short story Five Men and a Swan are prime sources for this.

Before beginning to study Mitchison in more detail there is one element of her background which ought to be taken into consideration: the element of class. Being a woman at a time when power, influence and authority were in the hands of men meant that ostensibly a woman's prospects were severely limited. In a period when many working class women were employed in hard manual labour and many middle class women had a fairly restricted sphere of activity centred on the family, Naomi Mitchison's chances of achieving a fulfilling career in either literature or politics might seem slight. What gave Mitchison an extra advantage was her class. For the Haldanes, economy was something you studied, not something you practised. The company kept by the Haldanes was of such an interesting nature that there was no danger of being bored to distraction. All the people Mitchison mentions as family friends were moving at the highest levels of British society. The man who was good with children was Andrew Lang; when her uncle had his portrait painted, it was done by Holman Hunt and the concerned friend who carried her brother back after he had been injured in battle was none other than the Prince of Wales.[1] In Small Talk Mitchison recalls:

> But even so the servants were different. Formal relationships were entailed; from babyhood, almost, I was Miss Naomi, putting a distance between us. [2]

Such an upbringing can do nothing else but engender a supreme confidence in children. Extra confidence, if such were needed, came from the position of Britain in the world prior to the First World War. Mitchison's mother was a fervent supporter of the British Empire and truly believed that Britons could govern the world better than anybody else. Because of her class Mitchison was close to the centre of power in her society. However, the drawback, to which I have already alluded, was that positions of authority and significance were denied her because she was a woman.

She experienced university vicariously through her brother Jack and his friends. Her abundant energy and enthusiasm were spent in the study of ancient history, which because of her contacts in the academic world, was more than just a leisured woman's way of passing time. It became the thoroughly researched and well-understood background of her early fiction. Thus it is apparent that Mitchison herself was forced to find other means to come to terms with her own identity, as none were offered to her by her society as a means of satisfying the potential she possessed. (Here is the major dilemma of the disaffected imaginative Scottish boy in a different context.) She had to pursue an alternative and fortunately was able to do so with comparative ease because of her social position. This experience made her open to alternatives to the dominating myths of English identity and her first novel The Conquered (1923) is certain to have been interpreted by contemporary readers as a piece of work sympathetic to the cause of Irish nationalism, critical of British Imperialism. On this point it is instructive to note that her brother, who was successful within English society, never felt the need to take time to familiarise himself with non-elitist views. In Among You Taking Notes, Mitchison recalls how her brother and her friend, Douglas Cole, continually snubbed John MacCormick, leader of the Scottish Nationalists, who was interested in ascertaining their political opinions:

> Again a difficult evening; at tea Jack and Douglas talking over everyone's heads about books that they liked, being hellishly snobbish, liking the poems of Thomas Aquinas, parts of Wordsworth, Gavin Douglas. . .it was tough on MacCormick and made me feel acutely ashamed and uncomfortable. No doubt the SNP is a small body so far, but it has a lot of opinion behind it. And what right have they to look down on us anyway? [3]

Undismayed by such prejudice, Mitchison continued to espouse minority causes.

Although The Corn King and the Spring Queen, one of Mitchison's earliest novels, cannot be described as a Renaissance novel, Mitchison did have links with MacDiarmid and others from as early as the 1920s onwards.[4] Much of the historical evidence for this link can be seen in Donald Smith's thesis:

> She championed Hugh MacDiarmid at a time when he had more critics than admirers, read Neil Gunn's novels and corresponded with Leslie Mitchell. . . the idea of regeneration for Scotland, urban and rural, had taken root in Mitchison's mind.[5]

Mitchison stood as a Labour candidate for the Scottish universities, and read The Modern Scot in order to keep in touch with cultural affairs in Scotland. She also tried writing in Scots and has a poem entitled "The Scottish Renaissance in Glasgow". This early relationship with Scotland deepened in 1937 when the Mitchisons bought an estate in Carradale. In turn MacDiarmid, Leslie Mitchell and David Cleghorn Thomson all refer to Naomi Mitchison when discussing contemporary writers. She is not thought by them at that stage as being a writer of the "Renaissance" group but she is included in discussions as someone to watch or whose opinion is worth having. Mitchison was interested and sympathetic during the '20s and '30s but creative alignment did not come until the early '40s when Gibbon was dead, MacDiarmid was in isolation and there was only Gunn with whom she could share the early vision.

The Corn King owes much to Mitchison's interest in early history and myth and her friendship with Gilbert Heard. He worked on ideas which saw the progress of civilisation as related to the progress

from the collective to the individual consciousness. This idea becomes the main theme of the novel. However, certain aspects of the novels are worth considering in their relation to Mitchison's thinking about Scotland. To begin with The Corn King describes the relationship between a small tribally organised state, Marob, which takes myths seriously and acts out the rituals of seasonal celebrations with due care and sincerity, and a larger state, Sparta, which is more aware of individual than collective consciousness, and whose more sophisticated members do not believe literally in myths, although some of its agricultural workers still do. The primitive state is being influenced by aspects of Greek civilisation. The conflict which ensues is seen in many ways - Tarrik's loss of faith in himself as Corn King, Erif's confusion about the mythic significance of her murdering her father, but, most importantly for the Scottish context, it is seen in the progress of the artist, Berris Der, Erif's brother. By examining the character of Berris in more detail, I shall try to clarify this statement.

Berris is one of the main characters in the book and the reader is introduced to him early in the novel. He has his own forge and his own tools because he is a member of a rich family who can afford to develop his talent on a lavish scale. Berris makes jewellery and small sculptures; sometimes he paints. At the beginning of the novel, he is in conversation with Epigethes, an artist who has arrived in Marob from Athens. Berris values his critical opinion, and, showing him a sculpture of a horse biting its back, asks Epigethes what he thinks of it. Epigethes wants Berris to take all of the violence out of the sculpture and make it smooth and untroubled like Greek art. He also wants Berris to come and study with him in Athens. However, his criticism has been too much for Berris to bear:

> Berris Der was getting more and more gloomy; all the joy had faded out of his horse; he saw nothing but its faults, its weaknesses; he lost all pride and assertion, could not hope to be anything but a failure; (TCK p.29)

In effect, Epigethes has made the classic mistake of members of an "advanced" civilisation. When he told Berris his statue was no "good", what he meant was that it was not "Greek". This confusion creates the worst possible lack of confidence in the mind of the artist who works in a different tradition but thinks of the achievements of the Greeks as superior to his own.

Later that day, Tarrik comes to see Berris and is angry with Epigethes for having made Berris doubt his own ability. Tarrik is partly Greek himself and knows the real value of Greekness and sees that it does not automatically invalidate all other cultural forms. Berris has destroyed the horse he showed to Epigethes and has since made a buckle in the Greek style. But because Berris is working in an imposed style which is not his native one, Tarrik realises that Berris's imitation is not valuable:

> "There's no use our copying Hellas; we haven't the hills and the sun. You know, Berris, that I've been there, I've seen these cities of yours, and I would see them again gladly if I could, if I were not Chief here. And they are not so very wonderful;. . . Turn away from it, Berris." (TCK p.36-7)

At a meeting of the Marob council, Tarrik is again faced with a similar unreasonable desire from citizens of Marob to excel in all things Greek and he counters this by refusing to accept that only by being Greek can fulfilment be achieved:

> The danger was that people should still think [Hellas] great and wonderful, still do what they said, not through fear of war, but through fear of seeming barbarian. "Let us be what we are!" said Tarrik. (TCK p.41)

Thus the theme of the relationship of the periphery to the centre of a culture is already emerging as one of Mitchison's major concerns in the novel. Berris, the genuine artist, with his own inner fire kindled by the cultural forms of Marob, on the edge of Hellenistic culture, is in a quandary: he receives inspiration from Scythian culture but desires recognition from Hellenistic artists whom he perceives as arbiters of taste. Yet when he tries to make himself acceptable to Epigethes, he loses his individual brilliance. Eventually Epigethes, the inadequate means by which the dominance of Greek culture is transmitted to Berris, is summarily killed by Tarrik, acting as absolute ruler of Marob. This seemingly "barbaric" act is to some extent justified, when evidence of Epigethes's stealing is later discovered. Here Mitchison forces her readers to re-evaluate terms like "barbaric" and "civilised". Is it "barbaric" or "civilised" for Tarrik to kill Epigethes? For Epigethes to steal from Berris? For Epigethes to denigrate Marob's art? For Tarrik to prevent ancient Marob tradition from extinction? The pattern Mitchison established in The Conquered when she used her classical learning to explore a remote and politically insignificant area of the ancient world is seen in The Corn King where again she highlights the conflict of indigenous culture with imperialism. It is not surprising that in later years she will fit Scotland into a similar pattern. This theme of cultural relationships is in many ways similar to the ideas current in Scotland, indeed it was a central plank in MacDiarmid's apologetics. Again the arguments are similar to those adduced by Edwin Muir in Scott and Scotland which appeared ten years after this novel. Not only are the arguments similar to those of Renaissance writers, so too is the pattern of studying

important themes in an ancient context before examining them in a contemporary Scottish setting.

Two points can usefully be made. First, as already described, Mitchison did know the work of MacDiarmid and others during this period so it could well be that this knowledge exerted an influence on the content of her own novel. Secondly, however, this closeness of theme may be a reflection of the fact that many of the ideas of the Scottish Renaissance were the common intellectual currency of the time and would therefore be as likely to appear in novels written in London as in novels written in Scotland. My own view is that, on balance, the selection and expression of this theme in The Corn King is in some respects a reflection of Mitchison's continuing interest in her Scottish background, but mainly it is the expression of the received wisdom of the period's avant garde. In The Conquered, for example, she examines this theme in an Irish context and this choice of context reflects the fashionable radicalism of the period.

Mitchison continues to study Berris's art and the place in society which he is accorded. Berris's father, Harn Der, thinks, "Artists are difficult people to have in a family." (TCK p.119) This is because there is such a large part of his son's nature that he does not comprehend. He cannot understand why Berris should spend time over art, which Harn Der can only appreciate if it is functional. Berris's occupation is not well understood by most people in any society. He realises this and thinks of himself as the detached watcher:

> He remembered once in Athens seeing an old red-figured cup. . . painted with a Komos scene, gay and frank young men and woman with torches and branches and flutes . . . but under each handle. . .

> there was a little man who was watching it all quite calmly . . . Thinking back to that, two things occurred to Berris. One was that the little man under the handle was the real Greek doing for once the essentially Greek thing; and the other was that he himself, while he was at work and essentially occupying his body most fully, was also that same little man. So that he, Berris Der, the sculptor and painter, in spite of Epigethes and all of them, he was the Greek! (TCK p.630)

The essence of any national art is also the essence of all human art and so to become a great artist is to transcend the bounds of nationality and work in a universally comprehensible medium. If that medium is labelled "Greek" then, the artist who achieves greatness achieves Greekness - which should not be understood here in a national sense, as it is a condition which non-Greeks can fulfil. Because of his considerable talent, Berris works out for himself the relationship between the cultural centre and the peripheries. Not all artists are able to do so.

In being on the outside of society and in having to struggle to find identity, Berris's position is similar to that of women. This equivalence is a striking feature of the novel. Berris is conscious of the impact he makes on people, but quite early on in the novel, because of Tarrik's help, he becomes certain of his artistic ability and identity. Such is his security that he acts on what he knows of himself and is even able to force people he likes to adjust their ideas about art. Philylla is dismissive of art and artists when he meets her at the Spartan court. Berris does not bear arms. He is prepared to fight if necessary but his true calling is to his art and so he does not wear a sword, the usual insignia of masculinity. Later it is made clear that Berris

knows that his identity, which includes both his personal security and masculinity, does not depend upon political power:

> Now he himself was successful, with a security quite apart from birthplace or property, something in the minds of men and in his own mind. (TCK p.522)

Berris is a human being who knows from his own experience that masculinity and political power need not be synonymous terms. He is also a human being who knows from his own experience that femininity and sexuality are not interchangeable terms either. This is what makes him so wary of becoming Philylla's husband:

> "I couldn't marry her, Erif. She's a Spartiate and I'm a barbarian. I daren't speak. I should lose what I have."
> "What have you?"
> "Part of her mind."
> "Not much for a man to say thank you for! Tarrik wouldn't. But you're more like a woman, Berris." (TCK p.358)

His own experience of the position of the artist within society is what has made Berris sensitive to the position of a woman like Philylla.

Here I wish to focus the discussion more clearly on the position of woman in order to introduce Mitchison's views on the subject which becomes more important when dealing with The Bull Calves. In The Corn King, the subject can be dealt with by contrasting the characters of Erif Der and Philylla. In her first appearance Phillyla is practising archery. When King Kleomenes and Panteus pass by, the gap between Philylla's desire to fight for Kleomenes in his army and her actual prospects becomes clear. The King

accepts her good wishes but firmly refuses to countenance her military ambitions. When she is young Philylla is allowed to run about like a boy but even during her country's deepest trial, when she is in her prime, the only work she will be allowed to do will be related to children and the domestic needs of men. Philylla is constantly loyal to Kleomenes even though she suffers at his hands. Her only adult occupation is to be marriage and she is to be married to Panteus, the King's lover, who only gets round to marrying Philylla after the King has taken a mistress. Without realising what he is doing, Panteus regularly neglects Philylla in order to serve the King and both she and Panteus see nothing strange in this:

> "But he [Panteus] must think of the King first. I know that. The King is Sparta, and I'm only a girl. (TCK p.387)

However, although intellectually, Philylla believes that Panteus's first duty is to the King, emotionally this continued absence of love is hard to bear. Philylla was loved by Agiatis, Kleomenes's wife, who dies in the middle of her husband's campaign. By constant reference to what Agiatis would have said or done, Philylla submits to circumstances, becomes more and more passive, reacting, never initiating. Finally in the last dark stages of the book, Philylla does have an affair with Berris Der but it is not satisfactory. Philylla has lost the ability to make herself happy. So deep has the habit of personal renunciation gone that she can only experience happiness vicariously:

> Have you got peace at last? Philylla, my own, only love, tell me. Ah, Berris, don't ask these things. Be content with what I give you. Be content my dear.

> And when she came back again she would not speak of herself. Only, she drank in his happiness; she made him speak of it to her over and over again. (TCK p.610)

Even a lover as sensitive as Berris cannot reach out and soothe her pain. Indeed, rather than being seen as a mature lover, Berris is presented as Philylla's child. The irony is great. Philylla spent her life looking after the royal children though her own marriage was childless.

Finally Kleomenes and his retinue are killed in exile in Egypt. The men are killed in street fighting. The women and children are executed in their home. After they have been executed, Philylla lays out the women and children and then she prepares herself:

> "She then smoothed out her dress and wrapped it tightly about her, so that she would be certain to fall with decency, thus giving no trouble to anyone after she was executed. A most helpful woman." (TCK p.672)

The word helpful is Philylla's leit-motif. She gave all that she had to give and received in return the short-lived love of Agiatis, two or three days of love with Panteus and the love of Berris Der which came too late to make up for all that she had lost. The portrait of Philylla is one of a painful waste of talents and emotional neglect.

Erif Der has one advantage over Philylla: she is a witch, she can cast spells. This interest in magic and myth is something that characterised British literature from W B Yeats and E M Forster onwards and can be seen in the work of Eliot and Joyce. Mitchison

and Forster had corresponded since 1923 when Forster had written to Mitchison praising The Conquered and the friendship had continued during the composition of The Corn King. Both read and enjoyed each other's work. In Forster's work, magic is not so unambiguous as it is in Mitchison's work. It is usually so surrounded by mystery that a rational explanation may be found to fit the facts. Mitchison's blatant use of actions which cannot be rationally or scientifically explained owes more to fairy-stories than to myth. While it is pleasant to suspend belief when reading children's fiction, how are we to interpret non-realist elements in a novel which for the rest of its course reads realistically? Two points can be made. First of all it is clear that Mitchison herself is disposed to believe in magical occurrences. She has had experiences which she cannot explain by reason:

> There is little enough now that I would say
> I was prepared to disbelieve in utterly.
> (TCK p.451)

Because the author herself is disposed to believe in magical occurrences, she is willing to take at face value what ancient people believe about the possession of supernatural powers. In addition to this, Mitchison is interested in examining these concepts to see if they will yield any insights which could be brought to bear on modern life. The findings of the relatively young discipline of psychology prompted Mitchison and other writers to re-examine supernatural or ritual aspects of ancient or folk-culture in order to find a framework by which they could interpret the meaning of their own minds. The existence of a pre-rational society gives opportunity for such a search and the study of it finally may become a catalyst for personal growth. In order to become wholly human, they would argue, a person has to come to terms with what goes on in the recesses of their own imagination and has to learn to use that knowledge and not suppress it. Mitchison can be compared with other writers who have a similar

attitude. In A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, MacDiarmid deliberately parodies the meeting of Tam Linn and the Queen of Elfland in the drunk man's statements about the Silken Lady. These strange aspects of the human mind represented by the the Silken Lady and the serpent must be treated with respect just as in previous periods of history, the creatures of the Fairy Hill were to be treated with respect. In The Silver Darlings when Roddy lights the neid-fire, Gunn, too, shows an interest in magic. Roddy performs the ritual just because it is "right" to pay attention to these matters although the minister would disapprove and even although Roddy is not able to articulate to himself or his friends the beliefs which lie behind the actions. In the end these authors treat such actions as inexplicable but significant. This openness to a supernatural world or power which Mitchison calls "The Fairy Hill", Gunn "the other world" and MacDiarmid describes by images of the moon, among others, is central to the thinking of these writers - in order to go forward, they argue, one has to go back. In The Corn King, magic and progress seem to be in inverse proportion to each other. In Marob, magic is more common than in Sparta. In Sparta some of the agricultural workers hold ritual festivals and seem to remember some magic. However, the other sections of Spartan society are much more rationalistic and equate magic unfavourably with superstition. In Marob, witches are a common occurrence. They form a small group of women set apart from the rest of the community because of their special powers.

The second point is that magic is directly related to the status of women in the community. At this level its symbolic significance is more important than discussion about how it is to be reconciled with realism. Women who live in primitive societies and possess magical abilities possess power. What Mitchison clearly shows in The Corn King is that this ability gives women a social position that they lose when society "progresses". In Marob men are dominant but women are not so oppressed as they are in Sparta.

Some women in Marob have a freedom of action and independence from men because of their magic. Harn Der might not like using Erif to further his political career but her abilities are something he cannot overlook:

> The girl's mouth and bright eyes twisted into sudden laughter: "Much you know of learning magic, father!"
> "Would I use you if I knew myself, little vixen? Go, get on with my work!" (TCK p.23)

In The Corn King, a woman's magic symbolises her esssential nature. It is fragile and can be overcome by personal trauma (as when Erif's child dies) and by the move away from a communal to an individualistic society (Erif gives up magic when she and Tarrik are enduring this change). However, the fact that it is so sensitive an indication of personality, means that for the most part it gives women a sense of self-worth that Phillyla never knew.

Erif Der is the Spring Queen. This means she is an honoured member of Marob society in her own right. She has political status. During the time of Tarrik's violence, Erif Der is able to save Essro and Yan by taking them into the marshes to a secret hide-out. During the time of Tarrik's imprisonment, Erif leaves Marob to find and free him. In general, the Spring Queen is responsible for ensuring her part in the rituals is acted out properly. Marob people believe that the Corn King and the Spring Queen have the power to produce good harvests and they are honoured because of this. As soon as Erif begins to make mistakes in the rituals, people become angry and suspicious. Because of the painfulness of the change from collective to individualistic society, and because this pain is felt first by society's leaders, Erif Der has to find some way of coming to terms with herself apart from her Marob magic, which is not flexible enough to cope with these new

circumstances. As she loses her faith in her own divinity, she wants something greater than herself to make sense of her humanity. Her quest leads her to a variety of mythical deities. The oracle from Apollo at Delphi eventually leads her to the temple of Isis, who is the Egyptian mother-goddess. When Erif sees the statue of Isis and her child she is moved:

> For some reason Erif was profoundly moved,
> her critical self stopped working. She lifted
> her hands in front of her as the woman had done,
> and remembered her own son. (TCK p.561)

The significant phrase is "her critical self"; that new self which could no longer accept the old understanding of the Marob fertility rites, is finding peace in this new goddess. At the temple of Isis, Erif is impelled to end her long-standing quarrel with Tarrik's aunt. It is after this that Erif is able to speak to her mother who has been reincarnated as a bird. Donald Smith objects to this part of the novel:

> It involves a naive acceptance of magic per se which has not been required of the reader heretofore and smacks more of the Edwardian fairy tale than of myth. In literary terms it is an easy way out, a wholesale abandonment of psychological realism to which Naomi Mitchison was attracted by a streak of whimsy which surfaces to better effect in her children's books.[6]

However, I do not think that this is the case. In the early chapters of the book, the reader has been faced with Erif's magical powers and has been given to understand that the book works on different premises from those of psychological realism, for all it takes account of such realism. Erif's early spells require just as much suspension of disbelief and are just as important in terms of

the novel's technical development. When Erif casts a spell on Tarrik we have to believe that she can control his mind, overruling all his personal independence to such an extent that he almost allows himself to be killed.

In terms of the plot if Erif had not tried to kill Tarrik, he would not have become so close to Sphaeros that he accepted the latter's invitation to Sparta. This mythical, or magical, level of life is humanly significant for Mitchison and the heart of her novel is not its psychological realism but this other dimension, this realm of living which is beyond the material world. This transcendent realm is where the life-drama of the major characters is worked out. It is this world which gives Tarrik and Erif their identity and it is when there is trouble here that Tarrik and Erif are in danger. It is this world which gives significance to the death of Kleomenes, when his impaled corpse is protected by Erif's "khu". Ankhet, the Egyptian woman with whom Erif and Berris are staying, explains the how the Egyptians thought the human personality was constructed. They divided it up into eight or nine constituent parts, the last two of which were the "kha" and the "khu":

> "there is the kha, that is the double, one's own image which is always separate. . . And there is a the khu, that is, the spirit. And both the kha and the khu can go on journeys and do things, and the khu can enter into other bodies or make itself a body to do its will." (TCK p.685)

To all intents and purposes, after the death of Kleomenes, Erif Der goes into a coma but Ankhet explains that "she has sent out her khu, her spirit, to take or make some other body and make it do something she wants it to do." (TCK p.685) Erif's khu, or spirit, appears to the watching crowds as a brightly coloured snake which coils itself round the impaled body of Kleomenes, preventing it

from being eaten by birds. It is this process which completes Erif's purification because it brings about the fulfilment of the Dephic oracle which had stated that in order for Erif to be able to take part in the Corn rituals of Marob again, "The Dead must meet with the Snake." (TCK p.417) Erif's purification takes place in a spiritual dimension, the same spiritual dimension in which the deification of Kleomenes also takes place, when he becomes truly a king who dies for his people. Although he dies, the memory of his ideals and actions continues to inspire later generations of Spartans who seek to overthrow unjust and inequitable rulers. They know of the death because of the pictures Berris painted of the last days and executions of the exiled Spartans and because of the myth which grows up about Kleomenes having his sacred corpse protected by an enchanted snake. Both myth and pictures are carried back to Sparta by Gyridas, the son of one of Kleomenes's followers who escaped execution. In the final pages, Mitchison is at pains to point out that this unseen spiritual world is recognised by all the national groups represented. Ankhet thinks that this killing of Kleomenes is like "the thing that King Set did to King Osiris in the Mystery stories." (TCK p.678) The Spartans in their history of King Agis and the Marobians in their rituals of the Corn King are also aware of the sacrificial value of the death of kings. As if these different national expressions of the meaningfulness of the spiritual world for humanity were not enough, Mitchison also makes a number of unmistakable references to the context in which these ideas are familiar in the contemporary West when she deliberately foreshadows in the death of Kleomenes, (as Gibbon does in the death of Spartacus) the passion and death of Jesus of Nazareth, the king who dies for his people. For Mitchison the "magic" of reincarnation has the same ontological status as the myth which arises from Kleomenes's death. Both phenomena cannot be rationally explained but that prevents neither from being humanly significant.

For Erif, as well as bodying out her identity in this mythical dimension, the whole process is part of her own personal development. Firstly, the coma helps her to come to terms with Philylla's death. Her old mythical self has not been entirely rejected but developed:

> She laughed louder, as though it were irresistible: as the actor in the Corn Play must laugh when he wakes again after Death and Winter. (TCK p.692)

This new identity confirms to her the value of her faith in myth which can be effective in the lives of others who do not believe in its potency - like Kleomenes. Here we touch on a theme which becomes more prominent in later novels for the second way in which this process develops Erif's personal identity is that it marks her out as a member of a royal community. The reason she can help Kleomenes is not simply because she is willing to express her loyalty to him but because she, as a queen in her own right, is able and equipped to show solidarity to a brother ruler. Thus the idea of a community of leaders who aspire to govern justly and who are willing to help each other in extremis is explored more fully in The Blood of the Martyrs (1939) in the context of the early Christian church, but as far as this study is concerned, it is the discussion of this theme in The Bull Calves which relates it directly to the Scottish situation.

Although Erif's identity becomes more and more secure as the novel progresses, the same cannot be said for Philylla. In Philylla, Mitchison anticipates the position of Kirstie in The Bull Calves as well as reflecting to some extent her own social position of the time - a girl circumscribed by a society dominated by strong, intelligent men. In Erif, however, Mitchison could express all the action, purposefulness and creativity of which she felt women were capable. Indeed through Erif, Mitchison is able to express her

belief that women were central to the health and prosperity of any society. However, for Philylla there was no earth magic and no Tarrik - no male from the power base who would help her find her whole humanity. Erif's earth magic is an analogy for her own essential unrestricted female humanity. Spartan society, and perhaps by implication early twentieth century, produced no such analogy. But Mitchison's own Scottish roots taught her to look elsewhere in order to find the means of expressing this concept of woman's humanity. It is significant that in the lives of both Erif and Philylla, Mitchison spends time describing relationships other than the husband-wife one. For Mitchison the sexual relation is not by any means the only significant relation in a woman's life. However, this description of friendships again heightens the differences between Erif and Philylla. Erif's friendships are the expression of mature personhood. Philylla's are rare experiences of self-worth in a society where her self-worth is consistently denied.

Before leaving this part of the discussion, it is instructive to note that Mitchison does use different modes when describing Erif and Philylla. Philylla's situation can be completely described within the bounds of psychological realism; Erif's cannot. In order to show human maturity, Mitchison opts for the language of myth. She does this for both men and women, but so repressive has Philylla's upbringing been that she never reaches this level. Philylla does not experience the "kataleptike phantasia" - that which is ultimately real, which carries its own conviction, as do the other characters.[7]

From this discussion of The Corn King two points emerge which provide a useful introduction to The Bull Calves. Firstly, from the description of Berris it can be seen that Mitchison is already sympathetic to a cause similar in substance to that of the Scottish

Renaissance: the culture of the dominant country is not thought to be the only acceptable one. Secondly, Mitchison conveys much of her criticism of society by describing the position it accords to women. In The Corn King, she shows quite clearly how a society can have a devastating effect on a woman's growth to maturity in the characterisation of Philylla, while at the same time in her characterisation of Erif, she shows how a fully mature woman can contribute to the health of her own society. What is striking about the novel is the parallel Mitchison draws between two socially disadvantaged groups: artists and women. Both groups are vulnerable to the attacks of political elites who cannot see the cash-value of their gifts. Thus Philylla's emotional growth is stunted. But Berris and Erif, because they live in a society which enables them to interpret their gifts as an index of their self-worth, are able to use their gifts to help others. Erif helps Kleomenes by giving him a mystical aura reverently remembered by his followers during the darkest days of their struggle. Berris helps by painting pictures which portray the history of Kleomenes. Kleomenes did not have anything but the most perfunctory politeness for the two aliens who appeared at his court. Yet they were the two people who made his death into something more important than a shoddy Egyptian killing and they were able to do it because of their reliance on the powers that belonged to them from what Neil Gunn called "the other landscape". What both Berris and Erif symbolise is the fact that the power of ruling elites is not the ultimate reality, though members of such an elite always think that it is. While the Scottish novel has striven to recognise that artists, given the chance to implement their ideas, would radically change the status quo, it has not come to a similar conclusion about the radical impact unrepressed femininity might have on a community. It is that lack of recognition Mitchison addresses in The Bull Calves.

During the 1930s, the Mitchisons bought Carradale and during the War years, Naomi was based there because it was felt that Carradale would be safer for the children than London. At this time, Mitchison kept a War diary for Mass Observation who asked various people in various sections of British society to record how people reacted to the War. Selections from this diary, recently published under the title Among You Taking Notes, gives a full account of Mitchison's interest in Scottish politics and culture during this period. Mitchison was very concerned about Scottish Nationalism and supported John MacCormick's National Convention when it was set up. Apart from this interest in the national scene, Mitchison was involved with local issues in Carradale where she was instrumental in setting up a village hall. Mitchison corresponded with Neil Gunn and was on friendly terms with other notable Scots. The whole Carradale experience was important to Mitchison. As she tried to run the estate herself, to become involved with the local people, she was looking for a place of resolution for her own many-sided identity and she was trying to keep alive an idea of freedom at a time when freedom was threatened by unbending tyrannies. It was at Carradale too that she found acceptance among working people - especially among the fishermen. In her long poem, The Cleansing of the Knife, written at this time, she writes about how her feelings of guilt about the ways her ancestors treated their workers have been absolved by her friendship with the fishermen.[8] It was against this personal background that she wrote The Bull Calves, which though not published until 1947, was begun in 1941, and is as much a Renaissance novel as The Silver Darlings.[9]

Like A Scots Quair and The Silver Darlings, The Bull Calves is an epic novel. Although it is set in two days in June in 1747, the issues raised by these two days are the issues of both Jacobite rebellions. But, further than that, the novel raises the perennial issues of Scottish history which go back to the days before the union and come forward to the present. There are representatives

of various sectors of Scottish society: Highlanders, Lowlanders, Jacobites, Hanoverians, improvers, reactionaries, Christians, Deists, sceptics, witches, prisoners and judges, workers and aristocrats. The action (remembered or actual) is set for the most part in Scotland at Gleneagles, though there are scenes in North America. Subjects dealt with include politics, religion, agriculture, fashion, newspapers, household management, foreign affairs and trade. As in The Corn King Mitchison works boldly on a large canvas and treats Scottish issues with this broad but detailed sweep which is a hallmark of the novels of the period.

The question most debated, however, is the nature of Scotland. What is Scottish identity? Does it matter? If it does, how should Scotland be governed? Identity and leadership are prominent themes in this novel as they also are in The Silver Darlings. This theme is the natural extension of the "frustrated youth" theme of earlier novels. During the Renaissance there was a vision of Scotland where people could come to human maturity and part of the vision was that those with special gifts should mature and be recognised as leaders of their communities and maintain conditions conducive to natural harmony, prosperity and self-fulfilment. In order that this should be achieved Mitchison knew that divided Scotland had to be reconciled. The Bull Calves was written during the Second World War and its themes can be paralleled with Mitchison's hopes for modern Scotland which she recorded in her dairy. Kirstie's plan for a College of Agriculture which includes as much practical work as theory is of the same ethos as Mitchison's own plans for the future. As well as being an analysis of the past, The Bull Calves is an optimistic guide for the reconstructing of a new, unified Scotland after the War. This is made explicit in the extensive notes to the novel - see for example TBC p.433) The theme of leadership which Mitchison broaches here has also been discussed by Gunn. This study will compare their views, which are, finally, opposed.

All the characters in The Bull Calves have their own ideas on these subjects and it is again in the tradition of the Renaissance novel that Mitchison attempts to synthesise these views. To begin this discussion it will be useful to listen to the opinion of Captain John Haldane, who is a younger member of the family whose views differ from those of the older members. Captain John loyally supports the Hanoverians. He can see little potential in Scotland and thinks that members of the older generation like Mungo Haldane, have lost touch with the contemporary scene:

> Scotland had, to his mind, been shrinking since then; [since the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713] had become a paltry, cramped kind of place, unfit for a man of ambition. (TBC p.269)

This character's attitude sums up a position so often discussed in this study. Scotland seems to offer no grounds for human self-expression. Any individuality is snuffed out by repressive, rigid institutions. (Captain John in the same speech goes on to identify the church as a prime source of this repression.) His allegiance is to the English government because it is this government which has given him the opportunity to use his own talents. However, John's contemporaries, James and Catherine, come to a different conclusion, which is reached by accepting the opinions of the older members of the family.

Mungo Haldane of Gleneagles has set out to improve his estate. He keeps diaries of his activities and reads up on the subject in his spare time. He experiments with different crops and trees and also built the first indoor water-closet in the district. With this improving temperament goes an orthodox Christian faith and a political adherence to the Whig administration. In his capacity as a Justice of the Peace, Gleneagles puts a stop to Sunday trading in Blackford. As far as his attitude to Scotland is concerned,

Glenealges is the literary descendant of Bailie Nicol Jarvie in Rob Roy whose speech about the merits of the Union is a classic of canny pragmatism. Gleneagles, too, is anxious to promote Scotland's economic good and that is part of the impetus behind his improvements. He believes that this is the way to restore Scotland to a healthy state after the destruction it has recently suffered:

> He had an inkwell and a quill pen beside him, in the thought that he might be needing them to write down some note about agriculture in the book's margin. It was strange the way these things came to him during the reading of theology. Yet indeed they were both of them equally profound subjects when taken with all their implications. Aye, aye, Scotland would rise again like a muckle turnip from the seed. (TBC p.156)

Yet Mungo is also aware of the problems union with England has brought in that it is extremely difficult for English MPs to show any sympathy with the Scots. Mungo sees the need to heal the breaches made by civil war if Scotland is to be made whole again and Kirstie notes the actual outworking of this:

> "Yet the first thing that our father and Mungo did when they got to London, was to make interest for our two cousins who were prisoners. (TBC p.69)

It is this sensitivity to Scotland's problems which leads Gleneagles to be a party to harbouring Robert Strange, a Jacobite on the run. Gleneagles knows that Strange was not a prominent Jacobite and is ready to let events slip by, not wishing to send a young man to imprisonment or death now he has seen the failure of his cause. Captain John cannot understand what he sees as his uncle's compromise on this issue. John does not see that if those who supported the Jacobite cause are not re-integrated with the

rest of the population, then the country will remain broken and divided forever.

Patrick Haldane, Mungo's brother, (or Bearcrofts as he is sometimes known) also has this sense of natural justice which sometimes runs counter to keeping the letter of the law. Bearcrofts was one of the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates. Because he accepted this position he was known as the "Curse of Scotland". (TBC p.31) He earned this title because he was willing to redistribute lands forfeited by Jacobites. Many Scots regarded this as the act of a traitor and Bearcrofts was never accepted by Edinburgh legal society and was hindered from being made Lord of the Court of Sessions when that post was vacant.

Although Bearcrofts does think that Jacobites should be punished for their part in the rising. Like Mungo, he sees the dangers of alienating a large section of Scottish society and he helps William MacIntosh of Borlum to see his father Red William who had been a leader of the Jacobites in the 1715 rising and who later died in prison. Red William spent his later years writing books on agricultural improvement. Kirstie comments on his "Essays on Ways and Means":

> "There was no breath nor hint of politics or bitterness. The old man had accepted, in meekness and charity, all that his enemies had done to him, and then had written his books out of pure love for Scotland and the poor folk of Scotland." (TBC p.189)

It is this identification with the Scottish poor which attracts Bearcrofts to Borlum because Bearcrofts himself has their interests at heart. Kirstie recalls Patrick's anger at the fact that at that time it was legal according to Scots law to enslave men. Black William states his opinion that in a certain situation Patrick did

not act because neither "the side of Scotland nor the common people" was involved. William goes on:

> "I would judge that you Haldanes have whiles had a sense of duty of another kind. One that is not always clear to the rest of the world and that leads you into trouble over the head of it. And I am not saying you would aye be in the right." (TBC p.236)

As with Mungo, it is this attitude to Scotland which means that Patrick is willing to shelter Strange.

Black William Borlum, Kirstie's husband, is a Highland laird who because of his birth and parentage was closely involved with the Jacobite cause before 1745. Black William was only a boy when he fought alongside his father in the 1715 rising. After the collapse of the rebellion, both men were captured and imprisoned. They managed to escape from London and William escaped to America though his father was recaptured. It was during this period that Black William met Patrick Haldane who helped him to visit his father, secretly, in prison. When Black William came back from America for good, he married Patrick's sister, Kirstie Haldane, and received back the Borlum estate, though it had been forfeited. William did not rise in the '45 because he thought that looking after his estate would be more beneficial to Scotland in the long term than fighting for a lost cause:

> "Our country had begun to save herself other ways. We had seen beyond the Stuarts. The things I was trying to do at Borlum last year and the year before - Kirstie and I together - they were small things, but if I had gone out at the head of my folk, the way Lady Anne Macintosh asked me to do,

> aye and more than her, I would not have got my turnips sown and harvested, nor got my tenants persuaded to try them;. . . "
>
> "How could we all not want to go after the '15, after the way we were looked on in the south, after my poor father dead in prison, after all that had been done to my clan? But I studied... what would be best for Scotland. . . (TBC pp.73-4)

What is supposed to differentiate William from the Haldane brothers is his Highlandness, his religion and his impetuosity. As for religion, all three men have their own relationships with Christianity. Mungo's Presbyterianism is disputacious; Patrick may not believe in God at all and certainly finds no difficulty in upsetting orthodox ministers by parodying Christian beliefs and practice in the style of the metrical psalms: and William's Episcopalianism leans towards Quaker ideas of the Inner Light. As for Black William's Highlandness, it is true that it gives him a different perspective on the Jacobite rebellion, but, as can be seen in the quotation above, very little actually does separate William from Mungo and Patrick. He sees that Scotland's political future does not lie with the Stuarts; he is inclined to stress the importance of a strong economy for Scotland's recovery and he is much more reliant on his own judgement than he is on that of his peers. Finally all three men are like in seeing their actions in relation to the Scottish body politic which is why the word "Scotland" crops up so frequently in their conversation.

However, though they have a consensus on how Scotland should be run or what is best for Scotland, what is the character of the country they wish to govern? To answer this question it is necessary to turn to Mitchison's delineation of Kirstie Haldane because, like

Jeannie Deans and Chris Guthrie, Kirstie is sometimes presented as a personification of Scotland itself. On seeing Kirstie during the dreadful period of her first marriage, her cousin Kyllachy says of her:

> "Ah, poor lassie, poor wee lassie," and then:
> "She is fast in her trap as poor Scotland herself, and as fully eager to bide there." (TBC p.106)

The trap to which Kyllachy refers is Kirstie's marriage to the Andrew Shaw of Bargarran, a high-flying Presbyterian minister. There are two ways in which this marriage can be seen as a trap. First of all, Kirstie is caught in the meshes of a strict, inhuman, unjust, unloving system. Secondly, marriage is a trap for Kirstie because it is the last act in which she can exercise control over her own destiny. If marriage is not a means of developing the potential of both Kirstie and her husband, then it is a trap from which neither however talented, can escape.

Taking the first of these points, Mitchison makes it clear in the novel that Kirstie's history parallels Scotland's in being overtaken by a strong religious impulse. Kirstie marries Andrew Shaw because of her grief following the death of her sister Ann. In order to make sense of Ann's death, Kirstie decides to endure a living death because she cannot endure the feelings of irrational guilt which her sister's death has produced in her:

> "It was above all paining us to think of our sister shut away under the cold earth when all above was lightness and flowers and the summer singing and nesting of birds. So I made up my own mind that I wouldna listen to merle or mavie, goldie nor laverock. I would listen only to the voice of heaven and seek an assurance that some way Ann and myself would be together again." (TBC p.79)

Kirstie's guilt is not the response of a healthy mind; it is the product of grief; the feelings are intense and incipiently dangerous if allowed to govern behaviour when that stage of grief has passed. By cutting herself off from natural sources of comfort, Kirstie's danger grows. She makes what she calls a "deed and covenant with the Lord", (TBC p.80) in which she exchanges herself (and especially her own power of volition) for release from the world of pain and suffering, the world of Ann's death. It works:

> "I came back down the brae soberly and sweetly, and it was dawn, and the mad birds singing again, but they didna rive me. They were apart from me now, in the natural world of sin and carelessness, whilst I had made my bargain and sealed myself to Christ. Yet they seemed gentle and they had my blessing." (TBC pp.80-1)

However, the price Kirstie paid was too high. She had given up her power of volition in the most important decision of her life:

> "I swore to myself I would take no bridegroom except direct from the Lord's hand and as a kind of earthly substitute for Himself." (TBC p.80)

Kirstie marries Andrew Shaw because she thinks it is the Lord's will. He marries her not for herself but because she seems to complete some kind of Christian ideal for him. After the marriage, Kirstie realises she has made a tragic mistake and cannot escape her situation:

> "at the solid back of it was the knowledge that I was Mistress Andrew Shaw and like to be for all the days of my life, and this was the answer to my Covenant and my principles. Yon were the times

> when another kind of thought would come creeping in on me, from away back, from Phemie - No, yon's past." (TBC pp.84-5)

At this early stage in her marriage, Kirstie is tempted by thoughts of witchcraft but for some time she manages to put them off. She has hardly any existence at all except for Andrew Shaw. She is known locally as the minister's wife and that is the limit of her existence. Although initially repulsed by the poverty and dirt of the colliers, it is among these people that she finds some acceptance and opportunity for action. On one occasion after a pit accident, a collier's wife calls at the Manse to ask Shaw to attend her husband. Shaw is absent and Kirstie goes in his place, but her visit is cut short:

> "There was little we could do, and a terrible groaning and stench, for some had their chests and bellies crushed. Yet what could be done I was doing. And then came my husband in his black coat with the horn buttons and the least good of his wigs, and before he had even looked at the colliers, living or dead, or given a kind word to man or woman, and in front of them all, he ordered me home." (TBC pp.99-100)

As this situation persists it grows more intolerable and it is as a result of this repression that Kirstie finds herself attracted to witchcraft. Her personal identity is under deep threat from Shaw and she finds herself repeating her maiden name and details of her personal history in a pathetic attempt to stave off Shaw's encroachment. Andrew's sister, Christine, helps her to put a spell on Shaw and in due course he dies. It is not suggested in the novel that Kirstie did kill her husband, but certainly if wishing someone dead is as bad as killing then Kirstie is a murderer. She and Christine Shaw made an image of Shaw on which they cast spells. Then Shaw dies. Black William assures Kirstie that her actions had

nothing to do with her first husband's death. Patrick does not believe that Kirstie had anything to do with Shaw's death. However, Kirstie herself is afflicted with guilt and her mind begins to fragment. She sees hellish "appearances". She meets with other "witches" at night. Finally she is ready to surrender herself again to a power outside herself as the other witches have told her that she must meet the Devil:

> "I waited for the Horny to open his mouth and to bid me serve him for all eternity, and to have his dealings with me that would bind me to hell, and for myself to say Yes to it all. And I kept my eyes on the Horny, considering the shape he had, for I wanted to keep my own thoughts to the last, before I gave way to a master's!" (TBC pp.168-9)

Kirstie's enforced passivity has led her to seek action in dangerous ways. Because Shaw gave her no life of her own and destroyed all her attempts to make life bearable she resorted to the dark side of her mind, she developed that way of thinking she had first adopted at the time of her sister's death and the sinister nature of what she did on that occasion is made explicit here in her interest in witchcraft. Fortunately for Kirstie the person who came to the door that night was Black William who proposed, not slavery, but true marriage.

The marriage of William and Kirstie is the focus of Mitchison's theories of personality which took a definite form when she read, during the writing of the novel C G Jung's The Integration of the Personality. (Mitchison makes this connection explicity in her notes to The Bull Calves (TBC p.511).) Both Kirstie and William have deep experiences of evil into which they have been led in order to find satisfaction for their animus and anima (the male and female parts of personality respectively). Kirstie tried to

satisfy the animus by aligning herself with masculine political and religious power. William tried to satisfy the anima by exploring Indian culture which reminded him of his Highland roots. However, both these quests led to evil and death: Kirstie feels involved in her husband's death and William took part in ritual Indian slaughter. When they met again after these experiences, with Kirstie on the brink of madness and William haunted by thoughts of revenge; evil was a possible choice, as William could have destroyed Kirstie in retaliation for what he had suffered and Kirstie was willing to be destroyed in order to end her sufferings. However, good reasserts itself at the very moment when destruction could have been total and Kirstie and William take the first steps on a journey to a secure relationship, each finding their personality satisfied in their love for their partner.

How is Kirstie's experience to be understood in relation to Scotland? It would seem that Mitchison believes that Kirstie, like Scotland, has misled her true nature by an experience which she thought would give her fulfilment but which brought her close to destruction. The experience in this case was marriage to a zealously religious minister. The experience for Scotland was a complex of religion and politics which Scotland chose, then lived to regret, according to Mitchison. Kirstie and Scotland, against a background of pain and deprivation, surrendered their essential independence to someone or something else. That is precisely why independent thought is so much valued by the Haldanes because it is a necessary ingredient for the re-building of Scotland, which until now has been lacking. However, such was the pass to which Kirstie and Scotland were brought that there was no alternative to the choices they had made. Staying as they were was as painful as progressing. However, the mistake made by Kirstie, illustrating the nation's similar act, was to think that she could achieve peace by giving herself up to the power of another, who, though professing good intentions, actually hindered progress. Once in

the union and having recovered from the initial shock, her independence of thought, which could not be given up, reasserted itself. She could then see what was wrong with her situation but had no power to change it. Kirstie needed someone to explain to her what had happened to her. Scotland, implies Mitchison, needs leaders who are not bound by traditions and can see realistically, not basing their judgements on the articles of faith of earlier generations.

Kirstie's saviour in this matter is Black William of Borlum. He had had an experience similar to Kirstie's while living with the American Indians. He too surrendered himself to evil to escape from pain. Because he knows what Kirstie has been through, he is able to explain to her what lay behind her ugly behaviour. This sympathetic understanding is what Kirstie needed to help her to a mature participation in life. William helps Kirstie because he loves her and because he knows the effect another betrayal would have on her:

> And maybe, lassie, you were like poor Scotland herself, and one more betrayal would have spoilt you clean." (TBC p.170)

Black William and Kirstie run their estate at Borlum with efficiency and foresight. William appreciates the way in which Kirstie has taken their project to heart. Their marriage is a partnership of equals. Kirstie, from this stage, assumes a position similar to Erif Der's Spring Queen role in The Corn King. Both women take an active and significant part in their marriages and if Kirstie is not so prominent on the national scene as was Erif that is only because of the prevailing social situation, not because of her personal relationship with Black William.

Their marriage is a good and true marriage where the needs and aspirations of both partners are met. The partners have equality of status, yet they are mutually dependent. The relationship is like those William had encountered on the American frontier:

> "They were free women, Kirstie; not kept by a city husband as playthings to be hung about with kerchiefs and necklaces. They were equals, trusted." (TBC p,185)

It is significant that it is this sort of relationship that William wishes for Kirstie and himself. Their marriage is significant in another way too as it is symbolic of a necessary and prosperous relation between areas of Scotland which traditionally distrusted each other: Highlands and Lowlands. Since her marriage Kirstie has come to understand the Highlanders and has found that such an understanding banishes fear. She realises that the Highland idea of a chief does not equate with the Lowland idea of a laird, because the chief is related by blood where the laird is not. She also realises that Highlanders have a different attitude to property: the land is not the chief's to do with as he pleases. Her niece, Catherine, finds these ideas new and disturbing and Kirstie has to reassure her:

> "But it is no' easy understood, yon, and, until it is understood, there will be hate and fear between the two nations of Scotland, ach, a kind of unreasoning thing, the way we ouselves felt about the Gregarach who were more disordered even than the lave of the Highlands, and hated us orderly folk all the more." (TBC p.55)

Only if Lowlands and Highlands learn to live together and overcome their suspicions will Scotland become a strong and united nation

once more. Black William speaks highly of Kirstie's attempt to understand the Highlanders;

> "She learnt to speak the Gaelic for my sake - or theirs. She has been hospitable to a wild lot of Highland gentry and half gentry that need to be persuaded into better ways of agriculture and managing both of land and of tenants, and that with little enough money to find the hospitality out of and herselfneeding to turn to in the kitchen or brewhouse. (TBC p.299)

At times Kirstie and William seem alien to each other but their love and good faith overcome these periods.

One of the foremost leaders presented in the novel is Duncan Forbes of Culloden. Forbes was the government's chief agent in Scotland and his powers were far-reaching. It was Duncan Forbes who led the campaign to have Patrick Haldane removed from the post of Lord of the Court of Sessions. However, other members of the Haldane family respect Forbes and are aware that Patrick's behaviour is not always entirely commendable. He arrives at Gleneagles, ill and weary from travelling, only to hear from Captain John the story of the Jacobite hiding in the respectable Whig house. Forbes is so weak he conducts his questioning from his bed. When all the circumstances come out, Culloden concurs with the judgement of Black William, Patrick and Mungo Haldane, and takes no action against them. Forbes concurs with their analysis of the situation and endorses their view that "mercy and compromise" are necessary virtues to practise in the present Scottish climate:

> "We in Scotland have been over much battered to be able to spare any man who will set his hand and mind to the future. Aye, or any woman, Kirstie!

> We must act together and build ourselves up slowly and surely, by way of the peaceful arts and trades through commerce and agriculture, until we are well of our wounds." (TBC p.389)

Forbes has come to this conclusion because he saw the alienating effect of the harsh repisals taken against the Highlanders after the battle of Culloden:

> "Yet I would say that the fountain head of my principles had been the good of my poor country, Scotland, which has been so sore torn by the politics. I knew fine that nothing but harm could come to us from the Stewarts, for all we have had so little good of the house of Hanover. But after the troubles were past - gentlemen, you will likely mind of how I counselled mercy to Cumberland and the rest after the battle." (TBC p.388)

Forbes is described even by his enemies as a man who did "justly and wisely by Scotland." (TBC p.386) In these speeches he is set forth as the paradigm of the Scottish leader. He is one who is upright but not inflexible, just but merciful, knowing when to punish and when to stay his hand. He reinforces all that Mungo, Patrick and Black William have come to recognise as being vital if Scotland is to advance. Though his efforts have wearied him, he has persisted in acting according to this vision of Scotland.

However, it is possible to express reservations about the view of leadership advanced here. It cannot have escaped the reader's attention that in the final pages of the book, all the sympathetic characters have remarkably similar views on how Scotland should be governed, despite the fact that they have been fighting over precisely that issue for years. Black William makes a journey

familiar to readers of Scott, by giving up any plans which would involve civil violence or economic instability and resolving to accept the government of Scotland as it was then constituted; he would only use such means of protest as were the prerogative of all citizens. Jacobitism is for decorative purposes only. To all intents and purposes he has no political quarrel with the Haldanes. Duncan Forbes, who is presented as an impartial judge, only confirms the actions of the others. This congruence of outlook is reflected in a similarity of economic and social status, intellectual capacity and cultural aspiration. The fact that all four men are related should not be overlooked: Patrick and Mungo are brothers, William is their brother-in-law and Duncan Forbes and William are distant cousins. What Mitchison is describing here is a group of leaders whom she has described before in her fiction. They are the inner group of all her novels, privy to each other's emotional lives and political struggles, who continually try to help, encourage and exhort each other to the fulfilment of their ambitions, which are directed toward the good of their country. It is clear that this conception of leadership inclines more to ideas of benevolent hegemonies than to ideas of democracy. In her fiction, Mitchison never presents this concept as anything other than the best, most natural form of leadership: out of the highest ranking members of society, the wisest should be chosen to govern. While no deleterious effects of this hegemonic rule are described in her fiction, the group has one worrying feature which does not augur well for its ability to rule: Mitchison ultimately places the group above any code of conduct, legal or moral.

In the novel, there is a continual discussion of principles and their validity. Kirstie believes it was her high moral "principles" which led her into the terrible marriage with Shaw. The night Kirstie made her bargain with God, her father suspected her of having been out with a lad. She explains herself, but in retrospect thinks:

> "But times, now, I am thinking I might have done better to have been with a lad, gif it had been the right lad. But there was a thing that couldna have been - given the principles I had." (TBC p.81)

When Catherine says her principles forbid her to be friendly towards a Jacobite, Kirstie replies:

> "It is a gey useful word, the principles," said Kirstie, "but the older one gets, the less principles one has, and the more practice." (TBC p.56)

During the course of the novel, William admits to lying and Kirstie accepts his explanation:

> "Kirstie, I am right sorry I lied to your brothers, but it was only a wee lie."
>
> "They were wanting to be friends, to heal any hurts you had, my dear. Their hearts were moved towards you." (TBC p.153)

Later he admits to murder and Kirstie says:

> "I am thinking by the voice you have, speaking of it, that you have repented it and that bitterly. Yet it was more thoughtlessness. You hadna planned it any." (TBC p.179)

Patrick wrote blasphemous rhymes to break the power of the Church of Scotland over the people and though Kirstie cannot agree with what her brother did, she is slow to think ill of him:

> "Och, Pate, I am sure you meant terrible well.. .
> Couldna you have done it any other how,
> Patrick?"
> "Being myself, no."
> "Are they terrible wicked rhymes, Pate?"
> "Will I say them to you, Kirstie?"
> "Ach, no! I wouldna like. Ach not at all,
> Pate! Maybe they arena that bad at all and I would soonest think so, but it would be better if I didna know in case they might be otherwise!" (TBC p.349)

Kirstie will not condemn outright any action taken by the men of the group.

Here Mitchison sets up a wholly misleading opposition between principles and practice. Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary gives as part of its definition of "principle", "a theoretical basis: a source of action". Her argument goes that principles restrict wholesome human activity and that people should act simply as they see best in any given situation. People should definitely not elevate their practice in one situation to a rule binding on them in similar situations; nor should they base their practice on rules arrived at by abstract, generalising thought. Now while it is obviously unobjectionable that people's behaviour should not be regidified by harsh and unnecessary moral regulations it is not clear that if people abandon all principles - that is theoretical bases for action - then their behaviour will be kinder towards themselves and their neighbours. What the categories of Mitchison's argument ignore is the fact that people do not act without a cause whether this is something they are conscious of or not. The fact that these motives are not called "principles" does not negate either their existence or their force.

Mitchison's characters do have a set of motivating principles and they are nearly always synonymous with self-interest or family interest. The only time Patrick abandons his usual pose of bitter cynicism is when he thinks his brother Mungo may be being misunderstood:

> "He is a kindly man," said Patrick, with his sudden leap of anxiety lest one of the family should be misunderstood, as was always likely. . . " (TBC p.299)

What constitutes socially acceptable behaviour has been removed from public, objective standards to private, personal ones. This personal affiliation can be seen in Margaret's reaction when she is trying to find the lost key to Strange's attic:

> "So this is the key you had me hunting the house for and blaming Mistress Grizzie and the lassies! You are all half traitors to one thing or another and I have no interest in your politics, but I am standing by my father and Aunt Kirstie!" (TBC p.309)

What is not enlarged upon in Margaret's statement is that if all the characters are half traitors, surely here is all the more reason for having a commonly agreed code by which to live, instead of living by emotional loyalties, or family loyalties, which dangerously obscure people's judgement. However, for this group the good name of the family is of prime concern and in order to uphold this, members are sometimes inclined to put practice before principle. Patrick uses the law to help the poor but does not stir himself to defend Edinburgh's middle-classes; Mungo takes on the duty of a Justice of the Peace and in the case of Robert Strange takes the responsibility on himself not to hand him over. What is right is not what the law is for everbody else, but what each

member of the group thinks is right according to his own judgment. Though in the novel the Haldane sense of justice is much praised, none of the main characters is actually evenhanded in his dealings. The inherent dangers of such leadership are obvious and nowhere more clearly seen than in the treatment of Kyllachy, the enemy.

Kyllachy has always been Black William's enemy because it was he who betrayed Red William and helped to have him re-imprisoned. Secondly, Kyllachy has abused his position of authority by raising rents from his land without doing anything to improve his estate. Thirdly, Kyllachy was in love with Kirstie, but she rejected him for Shaw. Kyllachy arrives at Gleneagles in order to discredit Black William by whatever means possible, chiefly by revealing to Mungo the fact that Black William's marriage to Kirstie was bigamous, because of a marriage William had contracted in America. That wife is now dead. Kyllachy's plot is foiled, not because Forbes finds his allegation unsubstantiated but because Forbes does not choose to proceed on any of the allegations Kyllachy produces. (These include the scurrilous songs Patrick wrote.) In the meanwhile, William has blackened Kyllachy's character to Mungo by telling him that Kyllachie tried to rape Kirstie. This allegation - unlike Kyllachy's - has little foundation in fact.

In the event Forbes decides that Kyllachy had been over zealous for the Whig cause by assisting in the capture of one of its chief enemies - Red William of Borlum! Forbes himself had tried to ameliorate the prison conditions of Red William in Edinburgh. Thus the men ranged against Kyllachy are all biased against him - Mungo and Patrick because of his exploitative attitude to his estate and his tenants; William and Forbes because of his attitude to Red William. All four men profess to have the best interests of Scotland constantly at heart. It must be coincidence then that their condemnation of Kyllachy is just what would have been

expected if they had acted according to their prejudices. However, the coincidence is too close for comfort and the reader's judgement should not be clouded by the fact that Kyllachy is clearly shown to have malicious motives. As has been shown, the others, though professing the highest motives, are often motivated by factors much less honourable than they make out. Why should Kyllachy be condemned when William and Patrick are pardoned? The position is not helped by the fact that Duncan Forbes makes statements which seem actually to support an objective code of behaviour. He actually says that the enforcement of law is not a matter for subjective opinion:

> "We canna take on ourselves such personal decisions. The law must be beyond kin or kindness or else we are back in the old days of courts and privileges and the favour of kings." (TBC p.372)

However, as the trial progresses what really motivates Duncan becomes apparent. This happens most clearly when he hears of Kyllachy's betrayal of Red William. Kyllachy puts his own interpretaion on his actions:

> "My Lord!" said Kyllachy, "I have ae striven to help the Government in all matters. And that through pure Whig principles!"
> "They carried you over far in this matter," said the Lord President. He thought he could see through it at last, and just what exactly was the quarrel between William Macintosh of Borlum and Lachlan Macintosh of Kyllachy that had involved a whole household, and himself. He had been one of those who, when old Borlum was a prisoner, had seen that he had books and claret, and had even helped over the printing of his own books. You could do no less for a

> neighbour and kinsman in prison and he an old man.
> (TBC p. 385-6)

In this speech Mitchison explodes Forbes' impartiality. What damns Kyllachy is that his actions are not the same actions Duncan Forbes would have taken in the same situation and Forbes has invested his actions with the authority of law. Captain John speaks up for Kyllachy and he is told that he is being over zealous. John says Forbes should act according to the law and not look "beyond the action at the motive behind it" which is the "business of theology and not of the law." (TBC p.386) Again Forbes compromises his impartiality. Motives are notoriously difficult to ascertain but Forbes is sure that Kyllachy acted from malicious motives. Finally he makes another claim to objectivity:

> "I judge as a Christian, and one of a community of Christians, and nothing can get past that."
> (TBC p.386)

This time the objective standard is Christianity. Forbes uses this statement as an explanation of his interest in motive, not action. This leads to the most bizarre argument of all. Having decided to judge men by motive not action, he goes on to elevate motive above action and reaches the strange position where he can commend wrong actions because they sprang from right motives, as he overlooks Patrick's wrong action (blasphemy) because he did it for "good" reasons (to lessen the hold of the church.) Here Mitchison touches on a common theme of Scottish fiction: the satire of religious bigots. From Burns's Holy Willie to Gunn's Sandy Ware, the itinerant catechist in The Silver Darlings, Scottish writers have often exposed the hypocrisy and pomposity of religious leaders. While it is understandable that Mitchison should wish to make a similar point, it does seem slightly out of keeping with the rest of the novel - which so effectively preserves the historicity of the eighteenth century - that from that period she should choose

one of the church's chief supporters to disregard mockery of that institution and its beliefs. What makes Duncan Forbes lenient to Patrick Haldane? There is one possible, though unpalatable conclusion. Both are members of the group of good Scottish leaders. Both are the kind of men Mitchison thinks would be good for Scotland and as a result they can do nothing wrong in their author's eyes. They know best and must be allowed to lead the Scottish people; just as Mitchison wrote the book for the "dumb Scots, the ones who need to be given pride and assurance and kindness". (AYIN p.179) It is true that this sort of leadership does desire the best for the country and that is a genuinely commendable aim but it is also true that this view often implies a low estimate of the people who are led. At the end of Part One there is a dance for all at the Big House, masters and servants. Here Mitchison tries in a more sophisticated way to criticise eighteenth century life:

> the Big House ones could have the top of the dance, but below them and in the same pattern the dairy and kitchen lasses danced with the lads from the bothy, the ploughmen, the horsemen and the byremen. (TBC p.146)

This is the more pleasant side of paternalism and while Mitchison does not hold with making distinctions on the basis of social class, she knows that in the eighteenth century the issues would not have been formulated in those terms. Although class division existed it did not always mean physical cruelty for the less well-off, thus Mitchison stresses the unity of everyone dancing in the "same" pattern. Although this view sees all Scots as involved in their community, it does not adequately account for the continuing inequalities which affected the workers. These domestic rustics are decorative. Their only political significance is as masses to be led or quelled. They are not seen as individuals whose human dignity needs to be realised by more thorough-going political and

social reform . While the Commons of Scotland get a lot of verbal sympathy from William and Patrick, both men rely on servants for their lifes style and show no sign of wishing to change things. The stated aim of this leadership is admirable: the means by which it is to be achieved is, from a democratic point of view, anathema.

As a comment on the ideas of leadership put forward here by Mitchison, it is interesting to note what T C Smout says about Tom Johnstone, Secretary of State for Scotland (1941-45) and a friend of Mitchison in his recent volume A Century of the Scottish People and in this review:

> He was very dedicated to a solution from within Scotland, a dominie solution where you had the wise and the good (himself and his friends) who would decide what was good for Scotland in a quango way; which is more or less how Scotland is ruled now.[10]

Such is Mitchison's view of Scottish identity and leadership in The Bull Calves. Scotland is a broken nation. If Highlands and Lowlands marry as successfully as William and Kirstie then Scotland will gain strength from this newly discoverd unity. In order to reach this state, Scotland needs upright, perceptive leaders to guide her. However, all these men come from the top rank of Scottish society and though their shared background and aspirations give them a wide, educated experience to draw on, these assets also limit their effectiveness because they allow no forum for criticsm. It is this uncritical, confident dogmatic way of thinking which leads to unjust actions, prejudiced decisions and one standard for themselves and another for everyone lse. It is not until Gunn's later novels that a less elitist form of leadership is envisioned.

The difference between Mitchison's conception of leadership and Gunn's lies in their respective views of the people who are being led. As has been suggested, Mitchison's leaders are fundamentally distant from their people. Finn MacHamish, the hero of Gunn's novel The Silver Darlings, who grows up in the local fishing and crofting community, imbibing its laws and culture and eventually becoming a leader in that community, identifying totally with his people; he is their representative. Mitchison's leaders are trying to understand a situation of which they have no personal experience, and indeed, their own personal experience militates against them understanding the people. They try to understand, they try to change attitudes, but they never identify practically with their people; the privileges of rank are too hard to surrender. Finn is a leader from the community who eschews the privileges of rank because he feels they would distance him from his people. He is a man who is with his people: he embodies and organises and understands more completely than anyone else, the common will. He does not impose his own will on people, but discerns the common will and articulates it and puts it into practice. The difference between the views is this: Duncan Forbes is a King; Finn is a servant of his people. The basis for this statement concerning Gunn will be established in the next chapter.

Although Mitchison's attitude to the Commons is fairly positive in The Bull Calves, there are indications that ultimately she cannot identify with them completely. None of the servant characters are drawn in the same detail as the members of the family and their friends. Kirstie's old nurse is seen as a witch who influenced Kirstie for the worse with tales of the supernatural. The nurse, Phemie Reid, is someone from whom Kirstie has to grow away. The two other main servant characters are Tammy Clow, the butler, and Grizzie Pitcathly, the housekeeper. Tammie is distinguished by his ability to hold theological arguments with Mungo and Grizzie keeps her opinions on family matters to herself. These characters

provide life-experience, entertainment and an efficient household for the family. It is not that the servants are badly treated or are not allowed a private existence by their masters, it is simply that their concerns are not their master's, they are never seen as being as important as their masters. In Lobsters on the Agenda, after a measure of disillusion with the Highlands had set in, lack of identification on Mitchison's part becomes more pronounced.

Concluding this discussion of The Bull Calves, I consider it to be a Renaissance novel for various reasons. The novel does have an epic scope and background. This epic sweep is part of the freedom of the Scottish novelist who had been encouraged by MacDiarmid to get rid of old myths about Scotland and to fill in the blank canvas with the results of their study. It is also true that a sizeable timescale gives authors more room to work out their own thesis about the facts of Scottish history. The setting of the novel is significant, as the myths which surrounded Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobites were felt to be areas in need of drastic reassessment. In The Bull Calves, Mitchison is much more concerned to emphasise economic, social and political issues than to give credence to Romantic stereotypes.

If so far Mitchison has, in common with other Renaissance writers like Gunn and Gibbon, explored the relatively new disciplines of economics and sociology with reference to Scotland, in The Bull Calves, Mitchison avails herself of another new set of ideas, those which profoundly described in a non-pragmatic way, human personality. The ideas are a pervasive feature of literary modernism and derive partly from Freud but more explicitly from C G Jung whose insights Mitchison acknowledges as being important for The Bull Calves. By thinking in terms of myth it was possible to give a resonance and dignity to the ideas of Scottish nationhood hard to come by in other fields of study and other modes of

expression. Often this thinking was expressed in descriptions of landscape which gave to the main characters a heightened awareness of their own destiny and significance. A phrase which Mitchison uses as the title to one of her later works, Return to the Fairy Hill (1966) provides an apt title for this theme which runs through Renaissance literature. Gibbon, Gunn, Mitchison and MacDiarmid share this idea of a place characters can visit which endows them with a sense of themselves that nothing else can provide. In Sunset Song, Chris uses the old Standing Stones for this purpose and in The Silver Darlings, Finn uses the House of Peace. The prominent ideas associated with these places are rest, peace, health and well-being. Both Chris and Finn are able to clarify their plans for the future there. Both places are monuments from the past and impart to their visitors a comforting sense of historic communal identity and the feeling that Finn and Chris are going back to the beginning of things, thus they are able to separate the essential from the secondary in life. (This often means the rejection of contemporary social manners and ideas.) Mitchison's contribution to this theme in The Bull Calves is to emphasise the internal aspect of being in this place. William is trapped in the Fairy Hill when he lives with the Indians. What he discovers there is his own capacity for evil. The setting is in a sense, incidental to the experience. However, it is only because he has endured that experience that he is a large enough person to understand Kirstie's similar experience. It is MacDiarmid who articulates most clearly a feature of the Fairy Hill experience which all the others imply. The sense of the transcendent which pervades these places is what the drunk man seeks above all else. He desires intensely to "hear the horns of Elfland blow." This yearning for his human experience to be authenticated, irradiated and made complete and glorious by some external force or being, which he senses is there, is the existential essence of these experiences which occur frequently in the novels of this period.

In The Bull Calves, Mitchison herself uses the formal mythical thesis worked out by Jung. Thus the marriage of William and Kirstie and their previous journeys into darkness are expressed in the Jungian concepts of anima, animus, the collective unconscious and the archetype. Further, it is Mitchison's stated aim in writing the novel to bring to the consciousness of the Scottish people archetypes by which they will be able to perceive their own identity:

> We have to have mythologies which will be potent and protecting for our own era. I have already written about this in The Moral Basis of Politics and I have tried to use a new set of symbols, not merely as protection for the individual, but also as social glue, doubtless another aspect of the same thing. (TBC p.515-516)

Perhaps it is this didactic and creative aspect which along with her analysis of Scotland and her identification of the theme of leadership as the logical consequence of earlier novels, which links Mitchison most closely with the ideas of MacDiarmid and Gunn. Like MacDiarmid, Mitchison is a compulsive communicator and the content of her message is educational. Behind its status as a novel The Bull Calves has all the passionate eagerness of a tract, earnestly persuading its readership that this way of dealing with Scotland's problems will be for its best and highest good. Her desire to persuade and teach can be seen by taking from her diary at random a selection of verbs describing her personal activities:

> I talked. . . I talked. . . I spoke. . . I also talked and generally lectured around. . . I explained. . . I wrote. . . I suggested. . . I made them a good speech, for about an hour, lammed into them, made them laugh, suggested all kinds of things. (AYIN pp.212-3)

Mitchison means her work to be in part the communication of her views, as Gunn and MacDiarmid did, and her work like theirs, becomes at best part of the process. As Mitchison counsels her reader to search for meaningful archetypes within the Scottish tradition, her book which is based on such archetypes becomes itself a revitalising force in Scottish culture.

This interest in revivifying archetypes was to become more pronounced in Mitchison's later work. In the short story Five Men and a Swan Mitchison uses myths and images of the swan to bring her characters to a mature participation in life. The swan is an archetype through which a vision of wholeness can be caught. The short story was written in 1940, before Mitchison began work on The Bull Calves. This story marks a new period in Mitchison's life. Her novel We Have Been Warned had been published amid controversy in 1935. It contained explicit sexual passages and some references to contraception. Cape refused to publish it after a long wrangle about proposed cuts and re-writing. Gollancz also refused to publish. Although he thought the novel was good, he was afraid the sexual passages in the book would be considered "filthy" and the ensuing scandal would make it more difficult to publish other left-wing work. Eventually the novel was published by Constable; the reaction predicted by Cape and Gollancz materialised and Mitchison received a good deal of hard criticism.[11] This period also includes the holidays to Craignish and in 1937, the buying of Carradale. It was a momentous move to leave London for the Highlands and several factors were probably involved, the first being the literary and social disillusionment following the publication of We Have Been Warned. Secondly, war seemed to be imminent. (YMWA pp.220-22) Thirdly, Mitchison's marriage had for some time been an open relationship and the high hopes she had had for that state did not seem to have fulfilled completely. (YMWA pp.70-4) The idealism which made her unable to predict the public

reaction to her novel is the same quality which characterised her attitude to marriage:

> We [she and her husband] had both decided rationally that we were not going to be jealous, since this is a very degrading emotion which should not be allowed to take possession. (YMWA p.71)

It is clear that because of her rather naive idealism and her belief that she could do whatever she had "rationally" decided (as could anyone else), she did not expect that she might be heading for hurt over the book and in her relationship. Jealousy and public attitudes to sexuality are not subjects noted for their susceptibility to the rational process. Then in 1940 she lost her baby which died a few days after it had been born. This stormy period coincides with a gap in her writing of fiction. In Among You Taking Notes she expresses doubts about whether writing was a worthwhile occupation and it is the case that so bad was the period that such doubts did not even surface until she was settled into a new life with new friends at Carradale and had begun to come to terms with the death of the child. In February 1941, she met E M Forster:

> Met E M Foster in his old school muffler at the corner of St James Square. I said should one write novels? He said yes, if there was anything one wanted to write, but he didn't. (AYIN p.118)

In May of that year she is saying:

> I think this body of poems I have written about Scotland are adding up into something pretty good, though the high-brows won't think so, and it is in a way hard to go on without encouragement from one's fellow writers. I get it from Neil Gunn though. But

> I want so much to be able to think about this long novel I have in mind;. . . (AYTN p.145)

As she gets further involved in Carradale life, she explores her Scottish identity more carefully:

> I feel I don't care about being in the same tradition as Shakespeare and Beethoven if only I can do something for my own people in Scotland. . . . I want to write for people here, for Denny M and Duncan and Angus and Lilla and Jemima and Lachie, for Alec and Anna, for Willie and Johnnie - to make them confident and happy. (AYTN p.159)

By November 1941, she is researching The Bull Calves. However, what seems to have broken her into her new context is the short story she wrote for Denny Macintosh, a fisherman from Carradale:

> Wrote two stories in Carradale dialect, both pretty good, one about the best thing I've written, I think - Five Men and a Swan. It came of Denny M clamouring to be told a story and saying wouldn't I write a love story, so I said yes, I'll write a swan story so I wrote this fairy tale about the swan woman and read it to Denny M on Sunday, ... It is pretty indecent;...
>
> Exciting starting writing again... (AYTN pp.101-2)

Although the actual day to day administration of Carradale was exhausting, the ambience was one in which her creative talents flourished again. In Five Men and a Swan Mitchison uses myth to investigate the complexities of sexual attraction.[12] The exploration has a Scottish context and it is linked to the Renaissance by this and by its use of myth.

Five Men is a short story about attitudes to women. In the story each of the crew of a five man fishing boat meet a swan-girl. The Swan myth is used to explore the wrongs and assert the rights of women in sexual relationships. The swan archetype enables Mitchison to say clearly what would have taken much longer to say using a realistic motif. By using this archetype, Mitchison is trying to put her beliefs about the potency of myth into practice. By exploring this archetype Mitchison is trying to make the reader recognise what might be quickly rejected if it came in the form of psychological realism. This stimulus to deeper, thinking involvement on the part of the reader was one of the aims of the Renaissance.

The use of swan symbolism is, like Mitchison's choice of a Scottish context for her work in this period, another means of searching for her roots. Mitchison has used animal symbolism like this before in The Corn King for example but after this period she uses it more frequently. As Erif's meeting with her bird/mother was supremely important in her own personal development, the return to a pre-human identity in The Big House, Travel Light and Five Men and a Swan is part of the continual searching of the psyche for harmony and peace. Like the Fairy Hill in Mitchison's fiction, animal symbolism takes the reader to that level of consciousness which is ancestral yet problematic. The lessons learnt from such a regressive journey are, however, useful for constructing present identity. This use of animal symbolism is common to other writers who use it for similar reasons. Gunn's salmon in Highland River is seen explicity in these terms. Eric Linklater's Sealskin Trousers deals with the same ideas. MacDiarmid's sea-serpent is closely connected with these ideas and there may be shades of this sort of thinking in the cat-imagery used to describe the inarticulate but vital Ewan Tavendale of Sunset Song, although most of the animal imagery in the novel is straightforwardly metaphorical and not symbolic. Thus what might be called a "Renaissance bestiary"

begins to take shape, offering the reader another literary technique through which writers attempt to release the potency of the archetypes they value.

The element of class which is discussed in The Bull Calves and Five Men, and which I noted in the introduction to this chapter was a significant feature of Mitchison's personal identity, is much more thoroughly discussed in the children's novel The Big House.[13] It is the charming story of a local fisherman's son, Winkie, and his adventure with Su, the daughter of the Big House. The novel also has its roots in the Renaissance because the third participant in the story is the Carradale Brounie who helps both Su and Winkie. This Brounie is Mitchison's link with the supernatural in the story and maintains the Renaissance emphasis on there being more to reality than can been seen or measured. Su and Winkie travel back in time to two periods. The first is Scotland after the French Revolution when Su's ancestors are in power at the Big House. The second is Scotland in its early Christian centuries, when Winkie is chief and Su is a swan.

Class was always a very difficult subject for Mitchison to address and there are a few lurking doubts at the end of The Big House which is supposed to show that upper class and working class can be friendly. Perhaps Mitchison does bring off an ending where there is ideological union instead of distrust and suspicion but at times it seems dangerously close to an unequal union. Why should Winkie make sacrifices for Su when she makes none for him? In their personal adventures Su is leader and decision-maker. This could just be a reflection of personal temperament. Though Su acknowledges Winkie's strengths, there is the sense that somehow she is always talking down to him. She has more knowledge and experience than Winkie and that extra knowledge comes to her because of her class. Will Winkie be a working-class leader when

he grows up or will he simply become a member of the upper class, or of Su's group, as Black William did in The Bull Calves. Perhaps like the leaders in The Bull Calves, it is a benign paternalism that Su demonstrates towards Winkie. Paternalism does not preclude inter-class friendship but it does ensure that the friendship remains inter-class.

Although Mitchison expended much effort in making her Carradale experiment work, the split attitude to class which surfaces in The Bull Calves and The Big House becomes more pronounced in later years and is part of the reason for her disenchantment with Carradale, Scotland more generally and the Renaissance in consequence. Therefore it is relevant to examine the background a little more closely here. When Mitchison arrived at Carradale at first, being accepted by the locals meant a great deal to her and she was happy to be involved in the local community:

> after tea I went down to Lilla's; it was the first time I had ever been formally invited to any house but the Semples',...I thought it was rather a triumph, and for me an honour; it must have been easily the first time that anyone from the Big House came there, like that...Of course I felt a little like an explorer who has at last been made a member of a secret society among the bongo-bongos, the same kind of pride: and I was listening to the stories, trying to remember them but realising that most of the fun was in the method of telling. But also I was just enjoying myself,as I don't usually at parties, and wondering why; (AYIN p.182)

However, the strangeness which Mitchison feels in their relative positions was something she never fully came to terms with. The

last extract in the diary is in a bitter tone; the idyll has passed:

> I feel far more suspicious of the Carradale people than I did; I know them less capable of either thought or generosity...
>
> I know we are going to have hell trying to work the peace...However, I think if we accept it and work from within in the sphere of values (and bloody well see that we and our children are in the ruling class - technocrats and commissars) the new civilisation will have a pretty good chance. (AYTN p.338)

So much for the Commons of Scotland.

Mitchison's idealism, which caused her severe pain over the publication of We Have Been Warned, again caused her pain over the Carradale experiment. Treating villagers as noble savages means treating human beings as stereotypes, with all the attendant dangers that entails. Once the honeymoon has ended and it becomes apparent that people are not acting in accordance with the stereotype, is it fair to blame them for not being what they never claimed to be? While Mitchison was a fervent supporter of democracy and giving people the rights to control their own affairs, and while she felt keenly and wished to purge her ancestral guilt on this issue, she never came to terms fully with the complexities of dissent, which meant that quite often what the people wanted was not what she thought they should have.

To crystallise this part of the discussion, it will be helpful to look at Lobsters on the Agenda, a novel published in 1952, in which the less idealistic view of Carradale society outlined above, is

described in more detail.[14] The enthusiastic goodwill of The Bull Calves which cheerfully assumed that working class people would benefit enormously as soon as they started taking the advice of their social superiors, has evaporated. The fishermen and other local workers have not taken the good advice, nor have they entered into the grand design of making Scotland great again. In this novel the workers are seen as weak, stubborn, wilful, suspicious, malicious, narrow-minded and dead set against change.

The action of the novel takes place during one week in the life of the community of Port Sonas, Argyll. This is a Carradale-like community and the main character is Kate Snow, a farmer and doctor, a Naomi Mitchison-like woman. The subject of the novel is the initiation of a project to build a village hall. Through this project, Mitchison discusses the nature of the community. Kate Snow, though like Mitchison in some respects, is neither so radical nor so outspoken as her author. She is similar to Mitchison in general outlook and returns to Port Sonas from England because of the untimely death of her husband. Kate expects some sort of healing from the agricultural community and landscape. However, at times she is more soothed by English attitudes than by local ones:

> God, what a place, Port Sonas - them and their lobsters now! What a lot there was to be said for the English virtues, honesty, truthfulness, punctuality. (LOA p.14)

In Mitchison's fiction a reaction has set in against idealising ordinary people and this can be seen in the way Kate recoils from their slowness. Instead of being befriended and aided by the locals, Kate is aware that she is constantly watched and that her actions are a prime subject of gossip. Sometimes she is seen as well-intentioned but misguided; sometimes her status is resented. In the face of this resentment, Kate reverts to the comforts of her

status and gives up her agricultural experiments. This at least prevents her from being constantly rejected by the local people. She employs the capable Isa to take over the manual work. Though she has changed her life style to what people think it should be, she is still quick to anticipate and deflect criticism, which comes her way often because as District Councillor she is expected to do for people what they are not willing to do for themselves, in some cases. Though she thinks she knows the community, her knowledge is incomplete. David MacTavish, the schoolteacher, has to tell her that though people listen to her respectfully when she comes to call, afterwards they state their true opinions which are often at variance with Kate's suggestions.

Kate is in an embattled position in the community. No one completely understands her though she is friendly with the Laird, some old crofters and some of the people in their twenties. She tries to do good but what she does is not enough or not appreciated. Her attitudes are scrutinised too, because of her sex. When she suggests that the Kirk elders should discipline one of their congregation who has been behaving cruelly to children boarded out with him, she meets opposition from Norman, an old crofter with whom she normally gets on amicably:

> "Yes", said Kate, "can't the Elders deal with him?" Norman said nothing for a moment. Then he drew himself up. "It's not for the women to say what we should do." (LOA p.61)

Thus Kate is surrounded by difficulties. For most of the novel she seems an unhappy woman, not openly miserable, but not fulfilled, not able to realise her own potential. She is restricted and limited by the nature of this small community.

The community itself is made up of various sections. There is some fishing, some forestry, crofting, tourism and service industry, a school, some churches. The fishing is going well and employs about forty or fity men and boys. Though the boats are older and slower than the new boats they "were paying a good share-out". (LOA p.76) Crofting goes on as it has always with the additional sources of income which come from taking in summer visitors. Roddy MacRimmon works for the Forestry Commission. He is interested in setting up a Village Hall and is voted on to the committee which is to organise it. He wants to inject some life into the community and had thought of starting up a Forestry football team. He encourages the younger Forestry workers but realises that they are tightly controlled by the older members of the community who possess power:

> "Once we get this Hall we'll need to get a Games Committee and we'll have you on it, and you'll not need to mump about it, Alasdair, for it's you lads with drive that we'll need to keep this Hall going." (LOA p.52)

But Roddy's young friend Alasdair expected more from his job and his peacetime life than he is getting:

> "I served my time in Africa, and plenty promises made, and here am I, getting a farm servant's wage and not even a farm servant's free milk and tatties. I thought when I signed on with the Forestry Commission that I would get a chance of promotion."
> "You're learning your job, Alasdair."
> "Cleaning and draining! I could do it on my head." (LOA p.51)

In addition, the poverty of the forestry workers means that they often have to postpone marriage because they do not have enough money to set up home. And Roddy knows what it is like to have

personal suggestions disregarded. His scheme for improving the forest is unceremoniously rejected by his superior. It is not even his suggestion which is criticised, but his temerity in making it. The bureaucracy which governs the Highlands and is responsible to no one suffocates the emergent talent of youth and thereby ensures the continuing decline of the Highlands. This analysis of Highland life is reminiscent of the early novels of Neil Gunn.

The influence of the church is very strong. Mitchison can put up with what she sees as the foibles of the Episcopalian Church, the Church of Scotland and the Free Church, but she finds it difficult to admire anything in what she describes as the life-denying ethic of the Free Presbyterians. The Christian sub-culture of this church is as binding on its members as their doctrinal adherence to the Westminster Confession. For them, even playing the bagpipes is a great sin. Such strict standards bring their own dangers as young people brought up in such a culture and who do not embrace it willingly are riven by guilt and rebel completely, committing acts so awesomely sinful that their parents can hardly cope. Such is the fate of Donnie Cameron who fathers a child on a local girl while in the process of getting engaged to a respectable cousin in Glasgow. The Free Presbyterians are diametrically opposed to a Village Hall because they think it will be a continual source of sin. This is the extreme view which characterises all the other churches to a greater or lesser extent. The church is a restrictive power in people's lives. Five girls leave the Ladies Choir because its members contemplate giving a concert in the new Hall.

District Council meetings are taken up with mundane matters like engaging a new cleaner for the school toilets in Port Sonas. Councillor Thompson who spoke on Saturday at the meeting about setting up the Hall, has, by the following Tuesday, become less

enthusiastic about the project, having been influenced in the interim by those who do not want the hall:

> "There's a section against it. Aye, aye, an influential section. I was speaking to one of them on the telephone and it is certain there will be a letter coming."
> "You mustn't let yourself be influenced, Mr Thompson."
> "No, no they'll not put me against Village Halls. But the question is, Mistress Snow, is it timeous?..." (LOA p.116)

Local politicians are anxious not to upset voters. Even Mr Stewart, a minister from the Continuing Free Church, who is probably the councillor closest to Kate in outlook, counsels caution - "it's possible to go faster than folk are ready for; that's the key to democracy as well." (LOA p.121) This caution is the curse of the Highland community. Partly it stems from a genuine fear of the unknown but a larger part of it is just cowardice and lethargy. Leaders, who never knew what it was to initiate, to enthuse, to look to the future, are so afraid of change which might expose their own inadequacy that they refuse to change; they refuse to lead; and the community stagnates.

While various members of the community are ready to point out to Kate that it is time to take an awkward decision, they themselves are not so good at taking their own unpleasant decisions. The crofter Snash, has been a thorn in the flesh of the Port Sonas community since anyone can remember. In fact it is this man who provokes Roddy to remark:

> "All this blether about the goodness of the crofters to them. I could tell you a thing or two, Davie." (LOA p.20)

His latest affront has been to ill-treat the evacuees. Everyone deplores his actions but no one will report him:

> "It's yourself knows the truth of it, Alan. Could you not be writing to Glasgow?"
> "Ach no, I wouldna like. No, no, I could not be doing that. Not at all! He's a bad one, Snash, but he is my neighbour and I'd need to be living with him all my days. (LOA p.74)

Thus it is a great triumph when after much struggling, old Norman himself decides to report Snash:

> "It is borne in upon me that I must speak over this to the gentlemen from the Department."
> "Snash is our neighbour, Tormod."
> "The children also are our neighbours whom we must love, and they are without help unless the Lord help them through his servants." (LOA p.216)

Norman's triumph is one of a number of small victories gained in the last chapters of the novels which seem to suggest that the community will right itself through time.

Women do not have much active part in the community. (Kate is something of an exception here.) Quite a few women who could have taken some form of training have been required to stay at home to look after elderly parents. The range of their activity is circumscribed: home, church and perhaps, choir.

This is the community which faces Kate: narrow and circumscribed. She sees the Village Hall as giving people something to live for, to be interested in. It is to be a centre where young people especially can come together to play sport, relax and get to know one another better, thus strengthening the ties in the community. Kate believes that such a community spirit used to exist:

> "There was a time once when folk in a village could get together for a thing that was for the good of all." (LOA p.43)

However, as the schoolteacher points out, the community is already fragmented:

> "This is a kind of divided community here and we all know that; and we're not the only Highland place to be afflicted in the same way." (LOA p.42)

Various reasons for this division are advanced: prosperity, no belief in their own abilities or no common cause to fight for. Kate hopes that the new hall will become a "gathering point of all that's good and vital in a community." (LOA p.254) However, the fight is arduous. Kate cannnot even persuade the local doctor to immunise babies against measles. During the novel, a child dies needlessly, in an outbreak of the disease. This is the starkest example of the community's refusal to move with the times.

The issues the book raises are focussed when the Highland Panel visits Port Sonas. Naomi Mitchison herself is one of the members of the Panel. After the meeting, Naomi visits Kate's house. By this time it has come to light that one of the members of the Hall Committee is casting spells on the Free Presbyterians who are against the Village Hall. Roddy and David are upset by this turn of events but c.Mitchison is undismayed. (To differentiate

Mitchison the author from Mitchison the character I will use the convention c.Mitchison to refer to the character.) In the course of their conversation it becomes clear that the author is again trying to set up her own views of leadership. She tells Kate that what the Committee needs is members who will be deeply loyal to one another. Here again is the inner group with more insight than the rest of the community who are to be its leaders. Again this view of leadership shows a distinct lack of sympathy for the people being led. The conversation continues:

> "But I'd sooner have them [Catholics or Communists] than the person who just doesn't care. Who doesn't have a vision. That lot - they're just raw material."
> "For what?"
> "Oh - Dr Buchman. Something mucky. I don't know..." (LOA p.204)

Mitchison's idiosyncratic views of leadership seem to have been soured by her time in Carradale and have metamorphosed from the idealism of The Bull Calves into high-handed authoritarianism.

The conversation again centres on loyalty. c.Mitchison on hearing about Fred MacFie's witchcraft thinks he will have a deep loyalty and begins to construct a mythical case history for him seeing him as a descendant of gypsies - "the Faas, the Pharaoh-folk":

> "he comes from Balana. That's the township of Ana and Ana was the White Goddess, the Goddess of life, the fertility Goddess who was there before Saint Molue even. Her man would be bound to be against Free Presbyterians, the people of death, wouldn't he?" (LOA p.199)

c.Mitchison feels that Fred would be a good man to oppose the village antagonism to the Hall because of this loyalty. Scottish history is also discussed in terms of loyalty. The higher loyalty of the Free Church people to what they call a "common good" is likened to John Knox's loyalty to his faith, which can in other terms be seen as betrayal. c.Mitchison says:

> "Nor would John Knox have admitted that he was trying to betray Scotland to the Protestant English. Nor does a good Presbyterian admit it about him today today! I think, though, that one has some kind of sympathy with anyone who has a common cause. Even if it's a Church with all it's horrible narrowness. Even John Knox." (LOA p.203)

The history of the Highlands so revered by the Highlanders and so often referred to by them as the best of all possible lives is not seen to be adequate to withstand twentieth century pressures. Again c.Mitchison says:

> "the Highland way of life hasn't stood against the money values of today, rotten as they are." (LOA p.205)

Then the main problem of the book is confronted again: resistance to change. This time it is c.Mitchison herself who has borne the brunt of it. In what is a disappointed and unhappy speech, c.Mitchison records her own local downfall:

> "My own crowd at Carradale were dirty enough, when they put me out of the County Council in May. But I see why they did it."
> "Why did they, then?"
> "Oh, by and large, I was a witch, a stranger, I did things out of pattern. I upset people.

> I wore the wrong kind of hat. Let's not talk about it." (LOA p.205)

After the evening is over, Kate considers what has been said. There is a distinct similarity here with Neil Gunn's thinking about the history of the Highlands. Both assert the validity of an early simple culture and deplore the effects of Presbyterianism on the Highlands. To be influenced by the White Goddess is to be "loyal to an older church, an older pattern". (LOA p.212) What took over from the White Goddess was the church:

> Up to a short time ago, Scots people had an overriding fierce loyalty to their church. To the presbyterian, revolutionary church of John Knox. Binding them because it was revolutionary. Because it had seemed to free them - yes, <u>had</u> freed them - from one thing. But only to thirl them to another. And now, in the last few years, the loyalty had broken down. (LOA p.212)

Kate expressed doubts about these opinions, unsure about the credibility and objectivity of the White Goddess and wondering whether the rule of Presbyterianism in Scotland is equivalent to that of Communism in Stalinist Russia. Mitchison's use of the White Goddess invokes the concerns of the Renaissance here by returning readers to works like MacDiarmid's <u>A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle</u> with its silken lady, closely based on the White Goddess figure, made famous by Robert Graves's book, <u>The White Goddess</u> (1947). In Mitchison's fiction this figure is indirectly hinted at in her ideas about the Fairy Hill and in her swan symbolism. The figure is related to the Queen of Fairy who caused Tam Lin's imprisonment. Thus the figure has power, a supernatural existence, beauty, an almost fatal attraction and, especially in MacDiarmid's poetry, the ability to inspire creativity. This strong ambivalent female figure stands behind much of the thought

and writing of the Renaissance. She makes an appearance here, perhaps surprisingly, because afterwards Mitchison uses the Earth-mother archetype, which she began to draw in Kirstie in The Bull Calves, much more frequently. However, the White Goddess is connected with creative ambition and human attempts to find fulfilment. In the novel, Kate, who has never managed to achieve permanent, personal peace and who doubts the value of her actions and thoughts, is perplexed about the exact relevance of c.Mitchison's confident application of ancient myths to contemporary society. This expression of doubt is an interesting phenomenon when it is remembered that Kate is closely related to the author herself. When the author appears as herself in the book, she is articulate, determined and always ready to state an opinion. Yet Kate, who may appear like c.Mitchison to the outside world is, inwardly, diffident, unsettled and lacking in confidence. From this separation of aspects of her personality, it appears that Carradale, in its phases of honeymoon and disenchantment, left Mitchison with a much less idealistic view of the Highlands - indeed the endless goodwill of The Bull Calves has been replaced by cynicism, resentment and bitterness. In the end plans for a new hall in Port Sonas are a far cry from plans for a new Scotland in The Bull Calves.

This is the most depressing aspect of the book as far as a comment on the Scottish Renaissance is concerned. The great vision of the new Scotland which had inspired Mitchison and others had come to grief. Lobsters on the Agenda is Mitchison's equivalent of Linklater's The Merry Muse (1959). The tone is satirical and bitter and in Mitchison's novel what is especially noticeable is the drastic reduction in scope compared with The Bull Calves. The fight over whether or not to go ahead and build a village hall in a remote part of Argyll brings out the paltry, narrow-minded nature of this small community. In fact with this novel, the study has come full circle because the conditions being described here are

exactly the same as the life-choking conditions of the pre-Renaissance novels. The comparison can be made point for point: the delineation of all sections of the small community; the failure of leaders; the alienation and suffocation of youth; gossip; inactivity; stagnation. It is noticeable that after this, Mitchison with her great capacity for human fulfilment turns to places where that is possible on a suitably grand scale: Africa, Australia, outer space. There are Scottish references or interludes in most of her subsequent novels but never again is it the focus of aspiration and emotional ambition.

In conclusion, nationality, sex and class, powerful elements in defining identity, all operate to their fullest extent in the character and fiction of Naomi Mitchison. The constant tension of these elements in her personality made her much more likely to be sympathetically disposed to minority causes and views. Yet the dominance of her English upbringing and the privileges which went with it were things which she never entirely rejected. When writing in a Scottish context, Mitchison had to contend with problems, outlined in this thesis, which faced Scottish novelists generally. In addition to such problems, Mitchison also had to assert the validity of a woman's point of view throughout her work. Like most authors discussed here, Mitchison is a very divided personality. She is divided between the primitiveness of the Scots and the sophistication of the English. She is divided between the working class and the aristocracy, between idealism and cynicism, between women as free agents and women as servants. However, though such tensions exist, Mitchison copes with them, moving easily between contradictory areas, exploring all for the benefit of her work. The history of her writing from The Corn King to Lobsters on the Agenda charts the course of the Scottish Renaissance. Beginning with The Corn King it is possible to see the intellectual background of the period with its interest in myth, the individuality of the small nation, the dangers of

imperialism and the importance of the indigenous culture - illustrated in the career of Berris Der. In The Bull Calves this background is drawn upon to analyse Scottish history and destiny. The analysis is achieved in large measure through the character of Kirstie Haldane who possesses that deep perception and insight which was seen earlier in the magical powers of Erif Der. Through Kirstie, Mitchison comments on Scotland's ruinous past and, through Kirstie's marriage to Black William, predicts a secure and bright future for Scotland if Highlands and Lowlands are united. The use of myth and the working out of Jungian theories in The Bull Calves provides such a congenial atmosphere that Mitchison uses it more than once in her fiction. In Five Men and The Big House, Mitchison examines various human characteristics in a Scottish setting and together with her desire to instruct her readers, Mitchison places herself in the centre of ideas commonly shared by MacDiarmid, Gunn and others. In Lobsters on the Agenda however, Mitchison describes a small, parochial community, which though set in Argyll is as near Brown's Barbie in spirit as makes no difference. The cynical realism of the novel marks Mitchison's disillusionment with Carradale and with the heady ambitions of the Scottish Renaissance. The "dumb Scots" have dug in their heels. As far as this study is concerned, Mitchison's major contribution to the ideas of the Renaissance is her study of leadership in The Bull Calves. Her own view of leadership is disturbing because she places her group of leaders outside the bounds of morality. Though they talk about justice and mercy, whether people receive that from them, depends on who they are, not what they have done. While this brand of leadership wants the best for people, it wants it whether the people want it or not. The leaders know what is best and the only responses open to the people are to follow or to refuse to follow. While the idealism and inherent dangers of this view warrant caution, the other extreme of bitter cynicism is also difficult to agree with in its entirety. Though Mitchison comes to a more realistic assessment of village people, because she is still working on the views of The Bull Calves, her only response to the

people is - Why won't you listen to me? Mitchison blames the people for not listening to her. However, the people do not listen for a variety of reason which demonstrate their all too fallible humanity. There is no point in blaming people for being human. Mitchison's theory of leadership did not work out in practice, but instead of constructing a new theory to fit her more complex constituency, she maintained the righness of her theory, feeling it was the people who were at fault for not being the amenable poor she had imagined them to be. With such thoughts Mitchison put Carradale into a different perspective: somewhere to relax; somewhere to come back to; but not somewhere to devote the rest of your life to. Mitchison's intense involvement with this place over a period of ten years or so however, produced fiction without which the Scottish Literary Renaissance would have been so much the poorer.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. The story about the Prince of Wales is recounted by Mitchison in All Change Here: Girlhood and Marriage (London, 1975), p.113.

2. Naomi Mitchison, Small Talk: Memories of an Edwardian Childhood (London, 1973), p.105.

3. Naomi Mitchison, Among You Taking Notes: The Wartime Diary of Naomi Mitchison 1939-1945, edited by Dorothy Sheridan (London, 1985), p.143. Future references will be abbreviated to AYTN.

4. Naomi Mitchison, The Corn King and the Spring Queen (London, 1931). Edition used with a new afterword by the author (London, 1983). Future references will be abbreviated to The Corn King or TCK.

5. Donald A. Smith, 'Possible Worlds: The Fiction of Naomi Mitchison' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1982), pp.187-189.

6. Donald A.Smith, p.107.

7. The phrase "kataleptike phantasia" is taken from the Stoic philosophy's theory of knowledge. In Stoic thought the human mind was originally a tabula rasa which received sensations from outside itself and it was the duty of the individual to decide which sensations were valid. However, as F F Bruce points out, "Some impressions were irresistible; they carried their own conviction with them (phantasiai kataleptikai)." F F Bruce, New Testament History (London and Glasgow, 1982), pp.41-46 (p.45).

8. Naomi Mitchison, The Cleansing of the Knife and other Poems (Edinburgh, 1978).

9. Naomi Mitchison, The Bull Calves (London, 1947). Edition used (Glasgow, 1985). Future references will be abbreviated to TBC.

10. Lorn McIntyre, 'Scotland 1986: a very enfeebled bunch of people', interview with T C Smout, The Scotsman 27 May 1986, p.9. Compare with T C Smout's remarks in A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950 (London, 1986), p.271.

11. Naomi Mitchison, You May Well Ask: A Memoir 1920-1940 (London, 1979), pp.178-180. Future references will be abbreviate to YMWA.

12. Naomi Mitchison, Five Men and a Swan (London,1957). Future references will be abbreviated to Five Men.

13. Naomi Mitchison, The Big House (London, 1950).

14. Naomi Mitchison, Lobsters on the Agenda (London, 1952). Future references will be abbreviated to LOA.

CHAPTER FIVE

NEIL M GUNN

> More clearly even than C M Grieve he [Neil Gunn] embodies the aims of the Scottish Renaissance.[1]
>
> Kurt Wittig

As Wittig points out, Neil Gunn was a central figure of the Scottish Literary Renaissance. Although Gunn's most popular fiction did not appear until the 1930s and '40s, after the first poetry-based phase of the Renaissance had passed, Gunn was in touch with MacDiarmid as early as 1923. The first three series of Northern Numbers had been produced by that time but Sangschaw, Peenywheep, A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle and the critical essays in Contemporary Scottish Studies were still to be published. During this period Gunn and Grieve were very close. In fact Grieve has said of his friendship with Gunn that in "those early days of the twenties, when the ideas of a Scottish Literary Renaissance were first being canvassed, there was no one in Scotland with whom I was in closer touch." And Gunn's later recollections of these days was, "what astonished me most, on reflection, was an absence of any real disagreement between us that I can remember, as though some kind of overriding harmony held us both."[2] Evidence for this similarity in outlook can be seen in Gunn's critical writing which expresses opinions very similar to what MacDiarmid was soon to write in Contemporary Scottish Studies. Gunn is "anti-kailyard" and in favour of a national literature which may be criticised on the same level as other world literatures:

> The Renascent Scot is - must be - intolerant of the Kailyarder, that is of the parochial, sentimental, land-associative way of treating Scotland and the Scots. He wants to treat of Scotland as rock and sea and land - and he wants to treat of Scotsmen as real projections of homo sapiens (rather than as kirk-elderish grannies), and he wants to complete his picture in a way that will make not only self-satisfied Scotsmen sit up but will make the cultured

> of the world sit up and take notice. That may sound rather a big claim. But considered in its creative aspect, it is merely the modest claim to serve the ends of literature. (April 1929) [3]

His views on Lallans or Synthetic Scots are not expressed as pugnaciously as MacDiarmid's, but he does recognise the importance of the subject. Gunn believed that in order to preserve the tongue, the first priority was to preserve the national culture. Although Gunn always saw this latter aim as being the more important of the two, he warned against the caution advised by some Scots on the language issue. "Instead of the living word on our lips, we want the dead word in a dictionary." Seeing the language question as symptomatic of larger issues he continues: "For if Scotland dies, then not only the vernacular but every thing that gives her separate meaning and identity dies with her".[4] (November 1935) Gunn contributed regularly to newspapers and other periodicals and his considered judgements of the work of other prominent literary figures like Ewin Muir and Lewis Grassic Gibbon show an acute understanding of their work in the context of the Renaissance, when other reviewers found their work difficult to interpret because they did not understand the writers' presuppositions.[5] During the 1920s, while Gunn was searching for his own literary metier, he even wrote some plays for a new theatre initiative, the Community Drama movement; another expression of the widespread concern to establish a viable, national identity in literature. Gunn was an informed and able member of the lively literary scene of the twenties and thirties, and the ideas which he embraced then reverberate throughout his fiction.

Two aspects of Gunn's writing link him firmly with the Renaissance movement. They are his interest in Scottish tradition and his belief that the world is open to influences and powers which cannot be fully explained by rational, scientific means. In his essay 'On

Tradition', Gunn clearly states what he means by tradition and how important this concept is for a healthy society. He begins by noting that many people find tradition a shackling and repressive thing and wish they could rid themselves of it. However, Gunn, by comparing tradition to some personal experience which exerts an unconscious influence on behaviour and can only be revealed by patient psychoanalysis, asserts that "so long as a people, whose tradition has been driven underground, are not yet dead, they will in moments of crisis, of sickness want to liberate their traditions so that they may have life abundantly again."[6] Throughout his work Gunn takes delight in recording the actions and attitudes which characterise Highland tradition and which enrich Highland society. Like other novelists of the period, Gunn presents in his fiction experiences which cannot be fully explained by reference to the material world alone. As Chris has an affinity with the land in A Scots Quair, so Gunn's characters experience "moments of delight". This is the phrase Gunn uses to express the moment when a character apprehends beauty or knowledge or a sense of self-worth more clearly than he ever had before. Gunn uses these distinctive aspects of the period to illuminate the particular Scottish theme which concerns this study: the relationship between the talented boy and the small, Scottish community. Because his beliefs were so influenced by the prevailing ideas of the Renaissance, Gunn is able to develop this theme powerfully in his fiction. He sees in the boy-character a significance which is not merely artistic but political. The boys in Gunn's novels are not simply potential artists, they are potential leaders. Thus communities whose culture is so meagre that they reject their talented members are destined to die because they reject the only people who could revive and lead them. This theme is explored in Highland River and The Silver Darlings while in the early novels The Grey Coast and The Lost Glen, the basis is laid for these later developments.[7] Despite Gunn's love of old traditions he does not try to impose them on modern society in a simplistic way. His idea is that the essence of tradition should be separated from its historic form and

then reintroduced into contemporary society. Thus the community and its culture is also the subject of detailed scrutiny in novels like Morning Tide, Sun Circle, and Butcher's Broom.[8] Again it is The Silver Darlings which provides the resolution of this theme. In his thesis on Gunn, 'Tradition and Violence: A Study of the Fiction of Neil M. Gunn', Joseph Sloan comments on the practical significance of The Silver Darlings being the culmination of Gunn's work:

> The novel becomes part of its own central theme - as Gunn dissolves the boundary between fiction and life, on the basis of the deep identification between folk and artist... [9]

It is this ability more than anything else which merits Wittig's evaluation as Gunn, through his novels, enables the reader to engage with Scottish cultural tradition.

Gunn's first novel The Grey Coast was published in 1926. It is characterised by frustration, depression and bleakness, relieved only by fortunate turns in the plot, not by any resolution of themes. The tone of the book which is bleak, seeing the characters against a background of poverty and a barrenness which seeps from the land into the human spirit.

Maggie and Ivor cannot marry because Ivor has no money. In addition, Maggie is being assiduously courted by a rich farmer. However, both Ivor and Maggie eventually declare their feelings for each other and decide to marry even although they cannot see how this can come about. If, at the end of the novel, Gunn had indicated that the possession of money was a necessity for marriage, then he would have been contradicting those passages in the novel in which Maggie and Ivor exalt human aspiration and

freedom above money. The plot turns out that Maggie's uncle leaves the pair enough money to marry on and their dilemma is solved. However Maggie and Ivor make their decision before they know that they are to inherit the money in Jeems' will. The money is really only an added blessing, the means by which they can marry immediately. Being true to their own secret knowledge, which is that despite their circumstances, their humanity is worth more than money, is what has brought them together. In the light of this it is not surprising that Jeems sees them as "two figures out of a dream" and as the "slow, fateful passing of figures in an old legend." (TGC p.318) Here, at the end of his first novel, Gunn begins to suggest a new strand of meaning for dream and legend as he equates them with the triumph of the human spirit over a materialistic world. These are the first signs that Gunn may be able to resolve the tensions encountered by previous authors.

The discussion of the themes of The Grey Coast provides a helpful introduction to Gunn's second novel, The Lost Glen. This novel is wider in scope than The Grey Coast and its presentation of themes is such as to invite comparison with the tradition of dissociation in the Scottish novel. The position at the beginning of the novel is reminiscent in particular of The House with the Green Shutters. Ewan MacLeod returns from university in Edinburgh in disgrace as John Gourlay did. As in Barbie, so in Ewan's village, gossip quickly spreads and the people are unhappy with Ewan because he has come back instead of staying away in disgrace:

> every house would live under the shadow of Ewan's return. (TLG p.10)

However, Ewan's "disgrace" is not so serious as Gourlay's. Whereas Gourlay was an alcoholic on his return to Barbie, Ewan's only fault was to have had one rather rowdy party which so shocked his respectable uncle who was financing him through university, he

withdrew his sponsorship. Ewan feels he has to return home in order to explain what happened. To leave without explaining would be a betrayal of trust. Thus Ewan returns feeling both guilt and injustice. He is plagued by his experiences and feels ashamed that he has let his family and friends down, but his greatest concern is to clear himself in the eyes of men like his father and Colin MacKinnon because they possess "the fine, secret Gaelic temper" which Ewan values. (TLG p.27) Ewan longs to be sure he possesses it himself and fears more than anything that he has betrayed it. His mother is angry because he has injured her family pride, but his father is angry because he sees that the experience and what it seems to imply about Ewan has almost "broken" the boy. (TLG p.32)

In the early chapters of the novel, Ewan is in mental tumult, as he tries to sort out what happened to him. During this period he is prone to attacks of anguished depression and bouts of deep frustration when he tries to "bury" himself:

> He threw himself flat, his face into the grass,
> into the earth. (TLG p.29)

His own frustration is compounded by the community around him:

> This land was too old...
> A huddle of grey houses, straw-thatched,
> lying to the earth with an aged decrepitude
> that humped their backs...No life stirred urgently...
> all at once he saw them mean and wretched,
> and understood that they were dying...
> There was no longer any meaning in living
> there. (TLG pp.58-60)

Not only does he see the dying community but he realises that in this state of weakness it is being exploited by the organised

'ceilidhs' got up to entertain the new local estate owners, who are American. When Ewan's sister, Annabel, is offered a job as a lady's maid in London, it seems to her the peak of achievement.

More importantly, in this connection, however, is the figure of Colonel Hicks. The Colonel served the Empire in India and now spends his time in the Highlands shooting, fishing, drinking and patronising the local people. Although he makes much of his class, part of the reason he stays in the Highlands is poverty (he could not afford to keep up a similar life-style in the home Counties) and the other is personal failure. Although the Colonel can command the Highland gillies to obey him, he has lost the respect of his own class because they sense the weakness of corruption in him. He loses his self-control easily and takes his wrath out on whoever he is close to at the time. Clare, his niece, sent to the Highlands to recuperate from city-life, feels that "Something in the essence of him [had] gone wrong." (TLG p.149) However, what infuriates Ewan about the Colonel is that he can take his bad temper out on the gillies who work at the hotel. They depend on him for their livelihood and cannot afford to do anything but submit to his ignorant behaviour. When he tries to browbeat Clare, by contrast, she tells him deliberately and effectively that his behaviour is unacceptable and she refuses to discuss matters further with him. The gillies do not have this option.

Linked to this aspect of the novel is the sub-plot about the Ardbeg crofters who, in protest that they do not have enough land to live on, band together and annex land belonging to a sheep farmer and break it up for cultivation. This plot is not dealt with exhaustively in the novel. Although it offers Ewan an opportunity to become a champion of his people, as can be seen on the occasion he demolished the arguments of Fachie Williamson, the local agent for the sitting member, who egged on the Ardbeg men, then had to

backpedal when he realised that there was no Parliamentary support for the crofters. Ewan opposes Fachie but by that time the situation is beyond sorting out as the crofters had been arrested and imprisoned and Colin MacEwan's question to Ewan, "Have you ever done anything to help them?" goes unanswered and merely adds to Ewan's feelings of guilt. (TLG p.189) Ewan sees the problems of his community very clearly, yet he cannot resolve on any course of action.

Ewan's attitude to the positive values of his community is tainted by his overwhelming sense of its deficiencies. Like Ivor in his uncertainty about the values of poetry, Ewan cannot see how the true spirit of the Gael relates to the society in which he finds himself. Gunn's treatment of Gaelic myth and poetry is extended in The Lost Glen to a discussion of the Gaelic inheritance generally in history and culture. Ewan calls his father and Colin the "final arbiters of that secret spirit which he had betrayed". (TLG p.34)

When Ewan returns at first it is only his father who truly understands what has happened to him. On their first fishing trip together, Ewan tells his father about this experience. His father is a strong and gentle man with a deep-seated set of values. For him there is a place for life and for death, a time for fighting and a time for peace. His love of life is not sentimental. He is a fisherman and death is part of his daily life. Ewan notices him fishing with "deadly precision". (TLG p.52) As far as his father is concerned, William has broken the bounds of proper behaviour in a cataclysmic way. By endangering Ewan's sanity and his life, William has forfeited his own:

> He could even see working within the silence of his father's mind the deadly resentment against William. But it would have to remain dumb. One could not get

> a fellow like William on that sea in a small boat. (TLG p.53)

When fishing with his father, however, Ewan experiences freedom and meaning in life once more. Although they do not talk much, Ewan feels that his humanity is satisfied by this activity, even though he is quick to note to himself its financial importance:

> Manhood came upon one here in the freshness of the morning. Here, too, food was being produced - the most important part of the whole economic scheme...Ah, and there was something else too - that sense of well-being which is akin to the glow of creation, is indeed creation's very self and moment. This moment, now. (TLG p.52-3)

This feeling of well-being, described in terms which Gunn will develop in later novels to such an extent that moments like this can offset years of misery, evaporates as soon as Ewan lands.

The second fishing trip is undertaken in threatening weather. Ewan meets his father as he is deciding whether to go out or not:

> "Well, Ewan, you've got back." How smooth and friendly the tone, how companionable! Ewan warmed under it, felt himself cut off with this man from the mean land... (TLG p.62)

Ewan wants to go fishing because at the mercy of swiftly changing moods, he suddenly feels reckless. His father takes the decision to go to prevent Ewan from having to spend most of the evening in the company of his disapproving mother. He knows how close Ewan is to suicide and does not wish his son to bear any more that he has

to. At first Ewan is exhilarated by the choppy seas. He imagines the waves drowning books and sarcastic students. His father notices how well he looks. Then the night turns really dirty and Ewan's recklessness turns to fear before the awesome power of the sea. As he and his father row for their lives, Ewan is afraid that he will not be able to hold on, that what happened at Edinburgh is the real truth about him:

> His spirit began to lash it too violently, because into his spirit had crept the thin loathsome worm of fear....
>
> The wind was too strong...She was beating him. They were nearly broadside on. Oh Almighty God, give me, give me strength...They have taken my strength from me - oh, God! (TLG p.68-9)

However, the boat capsizes and his father drowns while Ewan survives, after having made up his mind to die.

Although Ewan survives he is still emotionally and physically broken. Colin MacKinnon, a surrogate father, is the man from whom Ewan can receive absolution and integration with the community. Colin is a piper and he knows the old Gaelic pipe tunes; Ewan, who also plays, admires Colin's skill. The title of the novel, The Lost Glen, is connected with Colin. At eighteen, Colin had had an unusual experience while out on a long walk. He had lain down to sleep for the night and had woken in a glen where no human being had been before. The glen haunted his memory and one night, years later and after months of suffering, a tune came to him which expressed the essence of the lost glen. Thus out of suffering Colin was able to produce his composition "white and shining". (TLG p.241) Ewan tells this story to Clare and it is clear that he seeks a similar outcome from his own pain, though presently it eludes him. If Ewan is to enter society and have a meaningful

existence there, then it is through Colin that this will come. Colin sets tasks for Ewan to fulfil, but because Ewan is so cynical and unsure of himself he often avoids Colin. Colin realises that Ewan has gifts which could help the Ardbeg men, but Ewan does nothing. Ewan seems to be in love with Mary, Colin's daughter, but like Ivor he will not propose because he does not have enough money:

> "Donald MacCrimmon, " pursued Ewan, "was telling me about an argument they had at the hotel the other day over getting married. The conclusion they came to was that a man could hardly ask any decent woman to share his lot nowadays unless he had a thousand a year - with prospects."
> "I've heard them at that," said Colin. (TLG p.189)

Colin's response is as much as to say that he sees the force in their argument but that he does not agree with it. He will not allow himself to be ruled by economic forces alone.

Later on in the book, Ewan admits that he is wary of meeting people and that he is living as a solitary within the community. This is the most serious case of alienation within Gunn's fiction and the most protracted case of it that has been examined in this study. Ewan has been offered several ways back into society but has not been able to take any. It is the final task that Colin indirectly sets Ewan that produces one of the most difficult scenes in the book. The Colonel, who believes he has a perfect right to behave however he likes towards the "natives" attempts to rape Colin's daughter. Colin tells Ewan what has happened and asks him if he knows what the Colonel's movements are so that Colin can confront him. Ewan's black anger at the Colonel's behaviour leads him to be off-hand with Colin. Colin sees that Ewan could easily kill the Colonel and begins to regret having told him. He tries to extract

a promise from Ewan that he will not attack the Colonel. Ewan refuses to give it and Colin hits Ewan twice with the Colonel's stick, which he had left at Colin's croft the afternoon of the attempted rape. Colin stops when he sees Ewan's determination:

> They stood in the grip of an understanding deeper than any affection, in their vision a cruel clear light. (TLG p.297)

Colin tacitly sanctions Ewan's future decision and the incident clarifies Ewan's own thinking:

> And when he had stopped talking and was listening to Colin, deeper than the dark innuendo came alive the aversion to touching his native world at that point represented by Colin and his daughter Mary. That's what he had been withdrawing himself from;... that was why he had been living in his precious secret world... (TLG p.289)

It now becomes clear that while the Colonel is Ewan's enemy, ranged alongside the forces of corruption and materialism which threaten Ewan, the Colonel is also a gross caricature of Ewan himself. Both Ewan and the Colonel are outcast from their societies because they failed to live up to expectations. The Colonel's response is to try to dominate people he still believes to be inferior to him, where Ewan withdraws. The Colonel is pitied by those he thinks are his equals. Ewan is not quite at the stage of being pitied by Colin because Colin still believes there is hope left for Ewan. In terms of the plot, this parallel is even clearer. Ewan wants to confront the Colonel because he attempted to rape Mary, the girl with whom Ewan is in love. The Colonel wants to confront Ewan because he has been seen with Clare, the Colonel's niece. The Colonel's actions show his distance from his equals; so do Ewan's as he admits that his episodes with Clare were part of his

withdrawal from his own world. Ewan used Clare as a means of escaping from his unhappy circumstances; he does not truly care for her. Of course this exploitation is far less reprehensible than the Colonel's.

What appears to be able to save Ewan, however, is the spirit of his people. He thinks about this a lot as he nears his final meeting with the Colonel:

> in a moment he saw not his own spirit but the spirit of his people. He saw something so fine and sure that its betrayal would live on through eternity....
>
> Why, when he came back, had he not in due course settled down and married Mary and supported his mother and gone on gillieing?...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....
>
> The old Gaelic music, the pipe tunes, the long heave of the sea, the green glens, the mountains, the brown moors. (TLG pp.338-9)

Ewan knows that the task is to recreate the old spirit in modern society. At times he thinks he can see how to do it. But he has spent such a long time procrastinating that the opportunity has gone. All that is left to him is to kill Colonel Hicks. The final straw which makes him commit murder is that he mistakenly thinks that Hicks is responsible for his sister's pregnancy. When Ewan first meets the Colonel, it is the Colonel who strikes first because of what he believes Ewan has inflicted on Clare. The Colonel is ironically mistaken here as Clare was quite willing to accept Ewan's attentions. Ewan comes at last to determination and action when he strangles the Colonel. To get rid of the body, Ewan

pushes it over a cliff. However, although the act may have removed some blemish from his own spirit or the spirit of his people, it is an act of such enormity that it cannot be contained by the ordinary world and he has to pay the price of his action. He boards his father's boat and sails out to sea, presumably to his death. Yet as he makes ready to sail, we are reminded of Ewan's father and how he would have liked to have William alone on the open sea. Ewan feels at last that he has acquitted himself before himself, his peers and his people:

> When a man had done what he must, he could enter in. How a man enters this gateway is he finally judged by the valiant souls of his race who have gone before him and who live forever. (TLG p.351)

Though Ewan cannot enter his own temporal community, he feels he is ready to enter its spiritual counterpart. As he makes ready he hears Colin playing 'The Lost Glen' on the pipes and so sets off, like one of the Norse heroes sailing into Valhalla. In Morning Tide it is the way of courage that is laid down for all those who cannot achieve any further victory in a hopeless cause:

> "Never give in to the thing when it's coming at you. And at the worst - at the worst-"
> Alan leapt to his feet with a laugh.
> "At the worst, battened down and with sails set - sail her right under!"
> "Good for you, Alan!" said Hector the piper...
> (MT p.152)

These first two novels mark Neil Gunn's entry into the tradition of dissociation in the Scottish novel. Though the novels are set in Highland communities, Gunn, especially in The Lost Glen, is self-consciously addressing issues which have a wider relevance. Gunn, influenced by the opinions of MacDiarmid and others about how

Scotland should be portrayed in literature - sentiment was to be avoided and realism embraced - has begun his literary career by adopting a position close to that of the pre-Renaissance writers discussed above. It is notable that in The Lost Glen, he states his work clearly in terms of the gifted individual and the community. Ewan is, in this respect, like Eoghan Strang and John Gourlay. The last two characters mentioned fail partly because of the destructive influence of their home lives and partly because of an innate weakness of spirit. In the first instance Ewan fails because of the small-mindedness of his uncle, not through any fault of his own. However, the disgrace of being sent down from Edinburgh wounds him so deeply that he cannot re-enter the community and remains, for the rest of the novel, a flawed character.

Both The Grey Coast and The Lost Glen clearly express the attitudes of the Scottish Renaissance. By concentrating on the economic hardship of the people and the misery it produces, Gunn resolutely dismisses the sentimental view of Scotland purveyed in the Kailyard novel. In spirit and theme these novels have an affinity with the pre-Renaissance novels discussed in chapter one. The theme of the gifted individual who finds no way of expressing himself within the community is prominent and the atmosphere is one of barrenness and violence. It is in his portrayal of a disjointed world that Gunn resembles Brown, Hay, Munro and Barrie (the latter two in so far as they address the theme of a barren society). Their protest that the country was not large or free enough is borne out by Gunn who describes in detail a catalogue of criminal assaults which provoke black, deep-down, blinding anger from men who have been injured. While it is not a great imaginative leap to mirror mental violence with physical violence, it is a significant move and Brown, Hay, Gibbon and here, most vehemently, Gunn vent their anger by depicting acts of violence and crime. What distinguishes Gunn and Gibbon from their predecessors' work of unrelieved gloom is that

they have moments of vision in their novels which portend a different and a better reality. This better world is hinted at in the discussion of poetry and music and in characters like Colin MacKinnon, who represent an admirable and noble sort of manhood closely related to Gaelic cultural values. In his essay on 'Tradition and Magic in the Work of Lewis Grassic Gibbon' Gunn says:

> for man has in him to this day a positive intuition of that far-back primordial goodness.[10]

It is this feature of his work which Gunn takes up in his next novel, Morning Tide, in which he begins to outline how such ideas might bring resolution to the vexed issues of the Scottish novel.

In many ways the society depicted in Morning Tide is similar to the one depicted in the two previous novels. The story centres on the Macbeth family. Alan MacBeth is forced to emigrate to find work, along with some other young men of his own age. The villagers come out to see them off and thought they expect the boys will do well, they are under no illusions about what it all means for their own village:

> their smiles were weary, as though there was a final element in them of defeat. The grass had grown greyer, the trees barer. Virtue had been drawn out of the place, out of themselves. (MT p.183)

The society still breeds small and petty ambitions in people and is marked by unwholesome personal relationships. Grace MacBeth is the prime example of this in the novel. Grace is "something more" than a lady's maid to Mrs Bentley, a rich woman from London. When she returns to visit her family she is ashamed of their poverty and what she sees as their provincial manners. Grace is able to wear

perfume and good quality clothes. However, her mind has not completely rejected the values of her home and childhood, and she is in some confusion when Alan comes down to the house to tell his mother he has taken someone else's turn in the boat. His mother is angry; she does not want Alan to go to sea in case, like his older brother, he drowns. Grace does not want Alan to go either, but for different reasons:

> She sided with her mother. Even the steak that they had had tonight, hadn't she herself provided it? And to think that this fine fellow Alan, this Hugh in his sensitive boyhood, should become common...no! It was all right here - where everybody was the same... (MT p.55)

Despite areas of decay, the good spirit of the people is still preserved. Hugh MacBeth, the youngest of the family, recognises this quality. He knows there are minds that "could think anything". But he is aware of others of a different cast:

> But not the brave fine minds that were secretive and strong and kind. (MT p.104)

These minds are seen in Hugh's mother and father and his sister Kirsty, characters which Gunn begins to invest with a significance greater than their personal place in the story. Hugh's mother is seen as the person who binds the family together, the one who provides food and light and warmth. "She was the starting point of a circle that finished in her." (MT p.42) Gunn uses the symbol of the circle in order to describe the perfection, evenness and completeness which encompasses her family. She is generous and though poor, she always has enough. Unlike Uncle Jeems, the miser, or Ewan's mother Mrs MacLeod, who tried to "save the light", Hugh's mother has not been so completely ground down by economic

necessities that the whole temper of her life is to save, scrimp and worry:

> In her own home, life was a flame...Poverty there might be, and misery too - but the mournful,saving note never. (MT p.73)

In the later stages of the book, Gunn indirectly links Mrs MacBeth with the land by seeing it as a mother:

> He [Hugh] was being born to the earth, to the mother that is behind all mothers. (MT p.156)

From the qualities Hugh loves in his mother he is beginning to generalise archetypal truths about the nature of the world. When in the third part of the book, Mrs MacBeth is so seriously ill that she almost dies, Kirsty is almost overcome by her mother's essential goodness:

> "Sometimes when I'm away from mother I see her, Hugh, not so much like our mother, but like a woman...I don't know, I can't explain it...she is like a great mother of great peoples...
>
> "You know, away in the time of the Preacher and in these strange places, mother would be a woman amongst them wise and calm, smiling and hospitable and welcoming them. In some way the world here is little...they don't understand mother, they don't see the greatness of her spirit. Her spirit is old and great. (MT p.249)

Here again are the stirrings of myth in Gunn's fiction. It has been noticed that Hugh's society is mean. There is no scope for grand actions. People are often bound together by economic neccesity which can sour personal relationships. Here, however,

Kirsty pits the littleness of society against the greatness of her mother, who, quietly and capably carrying out the tasks of her life, speaks to Kirsty of great, comfortable and enduring values written into the core of living. These are qualities which recur throughout the sequence of generation, and when they are manifested in any particular temporal period they are the true reality of that period, despite unemployment or prosperity, social justice or injustice, loyalty or betrayal. After the meaninglessness of the last two novels, Gunn, in developing his use of myth, is selecting some aspects of his society which, he feels, invest life with meaning.

A similar process can be seen at work in the characterisation of Mr MacBeth and Kirsty. MacBeth's boat and two others sail from the harbour one winter's night, although there has been stormy weather previously. After they have left, the storm blows up worse than before and the villagers gather at the harbour to watch for the boats returning, and to provide assistance. Hugh and Kirsty go down to look for their father and Alan. During this period of communal worry and suspense, Kirsty acts in a wholly traditional manner. When she says that the fishermen will never return, Hugh hears in her voice "the born voice of the story-teller":

> Her tone was not mournful: it was as 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 p.68)

As Kirsty becomes more anxious about her father and brother she becomes more like heroines from myth and Gunn states explicitly that the legendary qualities are eternal and can recur in any period of history:

> All races have their legends of lovely women. Deirdre and Emir and Fand. There are moments in eternity when one conceives them, moments of fire, yellow flames blown out of time.
> (MT p.76)

Kirsty also has a foreboding that Alan will be drowned. It seems to her that circumstances have so fallen out that Alan must die. The description of the sea storm, from the time Hugh and Kirsty leave the croft till the time all the boats come safely home lasts for about thirty-five pages. During this time the excitement and suspense Gunn creates for the reader is intense. He spends some time depicting details of the general picture, yet all the while forcing the reader to focus on the ultimate issues at stake. Kirsty's foreboding occurs about two thirds of the way through this section and by that time it is almost easy for the reader to believe in the validity of Kirsty's vision, especially as she has been given this mythical importance and because it is too painful to keep on hoping that the boats, though they have appeared by this time, will land safely. However, all the boats return and Alan and his father are safe. Gunn forces the reader to distinguish between myth and superstition brought about by overwrought nerves.

When John MacBeth's boat appears, Hugh hears his father complimented on his fine seamanship, and not merely for that "but for the seamanship that conquers come what will." (MT p.95) Hugh's father sails into the harbour even though it is more dangerous, rather than beach his boat on the shore. He sails with grace and elegance, as if he has all the time in the world. His ability is such that on landing Hugh praises the generations that have handed down such consummate skill:

> He [Hugh] turned from the woman, his soul a flame. "Oh Father!" sang the flame to generations of Norsemen and Gael. (MT p.101)

From Morning Tide, therefore, it can be seen that Gunn's view of the community has changed from the two previous novels and while it still acknowledges the problems and faults of the community, it centres on values represented by people like Colin MacKinnon and Ewan MacLeod's father. Gunn's view of the relation of the gifted individual to the community is no less striking. In the opening scene of the novel, Hugh has been sent down to the ebb-tide to gather bait for his father. Although he would rather have been playing football, he is secretly proud that he has been entrusted to do this man's job. On the way home he has to fight Rid Jock and some other Seabrae boys who taunt him. He manages to beat Rid Jock, sustaining only a bleeding nose himself. Just after this fight, Charlie Chisholm, walking with Grace, trips over his bag which he had left lying on the road in order to pay attention to his wounds. Charlie chides him for his carelessness. This is too much for Hugh and he begins to cry. Hugh's self-pity seems justified. Not only has he missed football to help his father, he has trounced Rid Jock. It is bitterly disappointing to be treated like a child by Charlie. However, when he does get back his efforts are better appreciated. His father stops his mother from asking too many questions. His mother realises that he, the last of all her children is growing up and away from her, and Kirsty takes a suitably enthusiastic view of Hugh's fight. Hugh is at pains to stress that though his opponent blooded his nose it was only by chance:

> "And you made him run, even with your nose bleeding - that was great." And added, "It was far greater than if it hadn't been bleeding."
> Hugh made no reply. Kirsty could see through a thing at once. She was great. (MT p.49)

The opening scenes showing Hugh's immediate circle, his problems and his potential, are finely drawn. The emotions of childhood are accurately caught but what is most important about these scenes is that they show a boy in a happy, secure and natural environment. It is not usual to find in the Scottish novel this picture of a well-adjusted child in a well-adjusted family. His father is not an ogre; his mother is not an alcoholic, or terminally ill; his parents are not bankrupt or mad or suicidal or dead. His parents do understand him, and they do not try to stifle his sensitivity or knock it out of him. He is not deprived or ill-treated or spoiled or neglected. He is growing up healthily in the care of two parents, watching the example of brothers and sisters and working out why, although he likes Grace, he likes Kirsty better. While these initial scenes deal with conflict and tensions in Hugh's childhood, they are natural healthy tensions which children have to experience as they grow to maturity. Although Hugh's family is stable and affectionate, his experience of school does link him with boys studied earlier.

Like John Gourlay, Donald Graeme and Malcolm Maudslay, Hugh MacBeth had a bad tempered schoolteacher. Even when this man punishes children brutally and the people say he has gone "clean beyond the bounds" no action is taken against him because the village people have an exaggerated respect for the schoolmaster's intelligence. One of Hugh's tasks is to learn some lines of peotry by heart. (Like Gilian, Hugh makes his acquaintance with Walter Scott in this way.) Although Hugh has to memorise the lines, understand them and be able to parse them, he is still aware of the attraction of the poetry itself:

> Short glimpses of a breast of snow was like suddenly coming on a curved snow wreath. You couldn't forget it. It stood out - even if breast of snow made one feel a bit shy. (MT p.109)

In the class itself the teacher has unlimited power and often has the whole class in terror of his questions. Although Hugh is intelligent, he does not respond to learning by rote. In Morning Tide and again in Highland River Gunn criticises this sort of teaching which kills the creative perception of the child because it does not relate fact to experience. This teaching is not organic and by implication Gunn appears to be suggesting that a radical Rousseau-based impartation of knowledge would be preferable. In the afternoon, Hugh is punished for having forgotten something in a geography lesson. However, when he gets home he can laugh about the whole nerve-wracking experience with his brother Alan. Although Rid Jock was belted nine times in the morning and three times in the afternoon, Hugh's friend Bill belted and various girls reduced to tears, in Alan's presence Hugh can see the funnier side of the teacher's strictures.

As it is Alan's last night before going away, he invites Hugh to go up the river with him to poach salmon. This episode follows directly from Hugh's day at school and in it Gunn shows us the "alternative syllabus" taught in Hugh's community. Leading to no formal qualification, it introduces Hugh to his historic inheritance. Alan and Hugh set off to poach - the villagers are not allowed to fish the rivers without a permit from the people who own the estate - but there is strong feeling among Highlanders that the land and rivers and their fruit rightfully belong to them, not to the estate owners who are able to show legal certificates of ownership only because many years ago the Highland clan chiefs betrayed their people by selling clan land as if it was theirs to sell, when it was understood that they merely held it in trust for the people. Though these things took place centuries before, Alan and Hugh still live with the results.

Before they set off up river they stop at the house of Hector the roadman. As Hector and a few others are there, the evening begins to take on the shape of a ceilidh. Hector, reminded by Hugh's appearance of Hugh's drowned brother, Duncan, begins to tell the story of how the drowning came about. Hugh learns this piece of his own family history and he also senses the wisdom of Hector who understands so well why Mrs MacBeth would rather that Alan emigrated to Australia than that he became a fisherman. Later on, Hector plays flawlessly on the pipes and Hugh and the others are delighted with his skill and dexterity. The beauty of the music and Hector's ability, all part of what it means to be a part of the Seabrae community, begin to disturb Alan, who is being forced to leave it all behind the next morning. Alan and his friends leave for the fishing.

Their enemy on the river is the gamekeeper who guards the estate against poachers. Hugh is posted as look-out and is nearly overcome with the responsibility. They catch four salmon. Hugh, encouraged by Alan's skill and enthusiasm, overcomes his own fear by understanding its place in a night like this and in consequence makes another step in his growth:

> Without conquering it, Hugh got the better of his fear, and entered into this land of memorable youth. (MT p.161)

After Alan has gone, Hugh develops his own hunting talents. He hunts rabbits up the strath and fishes the pools of the river with a friend, and though Bill manages to take the credit for most of the game caught, Hugh knows that it was because of his skill that they were bagged:

> slowly inch by inch he brought the hook to the water sank it, inch by inch...

> His nose was now immersed. His lungs were like to burst...
>
> But as Hugh threw he leapt. His fingers found the gill and silence...
>
> A neat hunter, clearly born to the job. (MT p.197)

Hugh leaves the river quickly and runs up into the wood. He loves the varied forms and colours of the wood and is happy because of his successful catch. He looks "At once a boy and something older; as if the wood had entered into him". (MT p.199) This union with the landscape is more than just love of the countryside or happiness caused by the ordinary pleasures of life because it touches on the magical, mythical realities which suffuse Hugh's world:

> His senses grew abnormally acute. The salmon of knowledge under the nuts of the hazel of wisdom. But deeper than that, deeper than conscious thought or myth. Sheering right through to the vivid and unconditional, where are born the pagan deities, who are lovely until conscious thought degrades them. (MT p.199)

Here Gunn uses the natural landscape to break through, only for a moment, into a world where the human spirit finds complete fulfilment. Gunn describes the mythical realities which suffuse Hugh's world by using ancient Gaelic symbols: the salmon of knowledge and the hazelnuts of wisdom. Although this is not the place to go into Gunn's symbolism, it may be helpful to know where Gunn took these symbols from. These particular motifs come from a popular Scottish folk tale about a well in the Green Isle (paradise) which is overhung by nine hazel trees. Wisdom is concentrated in the hazelnuts. When they fall into the water, they are eaten by the salmon and whoever eats either the nuts or the salmon becomes the recipient of wisdom and poetic inspiration.[11]

Through these motifs Gunn begins to move into a new area of living symbols and this is closely associated with the pagan deities and ancient people who can also pass on skill and wisdom to Hugh. Hugh is close to such pagan forces in the broch. It is dark and cool there even on a sunny day and though the broch is ancient, it is living and powerful: Hugh, by staying in the place as long as his fear will let him, obtains some of the power:

> And when you could do all this alone, you got a certain secret power. It had remained hidden in you, a live strength...a swift blow. A man's blow. No one knew about it! (MT p.190)

These experiences of hunting and fishing in the company of brothers and friends which predominate in Hugh's childhood and youth will shape his maturity. Even the schoolmaster's anger is an important experience. Because of the weight of Hugh's other experiences, even this ferocious time can be made good, by teaching Hugh that irrational anger exists and can be faced and outlived. Unlike earlier heroes, the influence of a bad teacher is not one more in a list of detrimental influences. What differentiates Hugh so signally from the other gifted characters is that his sensitivity finds adequate cultivation, not in institutions but in a valid, living, cultural tradition. In the novel, Gunn mentions mythical figures and motifs not to decorate or illustrate the moods or actions he is describing but because they are living symbols of the tradition that created them. The tradition is still able to manifest the realities thus symbolised and it is this transcendent dimension which makes Hugh's life so full to overflowing with goodness. As Gibbon forged for himself a transcendent meaning from the landscape of the Mearns, so Gunn forges his from history, landscape and personal relations of the communities of which he writes. Unlike the earlier pessimistic vision, Gunn's vision in Morning Tide is bouyant, optimistic and leads to a fruitful development in Highland River.

Before leaving the early novels there is one other feature which signals Gunn's difference from preceding writers: he has a much easier relation with autobiography than they had. It has been noted that it is a characteristic of pre-Renaissance novels that they often included autobiographical references to their author's literary development or lack of it. By facing the fact that they do not seem to have any continuing literary tradition in the novel, they use their own novel as a first step in a personal literary tradition, as it has so often been the catalyst to their literary ability.

Gunn seemed to follow a similar route. Both The Grey Coast and The Lost Glen bear marked similarities to pre-Renaissance novels. They show Scottish society to be mean and parochial and, on occasion, violent. Because society is so narrow-minded, it rejects people like Ewan because of the very qualitites for which he should be accepted. However, what differentiates Gunn is that to a great extent he seems to be working in a tradition: the Green Shutters tradition. Though the plot of The Lost Glen is similar to that of The House with the Green Shutters, the autobiographical element in Gunn's novel is much less than in Brown's, and the sense that Gunn is writing in a tradition much greater. One of Gunn's early statements of literary criticism, written in 1929, shows that what is uppermost in his mind is his dissimilarity from the Kailyard and his acceptance of the literary standards re-established by MacDiarmid in the 1920s. The nature of Gunn's first novels would suggest that Gunn is endeavouring to be anti-Kailyard, and to be anti-Kailyard in the manner of Brown. This seems to be a significant difference from previous writers. The pre-Renaissance novels which I described in chapter one appeared independently of each other with the exception of Gillespie, which was closely based on The House with the Green Shutters. The others, though they bear striking resemblances to each other seem to be spontaneous and independent reactions to Scottish society. Gunn's critique,

however, seems to follow Brown's quite closely and it seems that Gunn is writing out of a tradition, not, as these others writers were doing, writing out of personal experience. However, the other side of the Scottish Renaissance case was that though society was moribund, certain areas of culture were stimulating and impressive. The problems Gunn had with the Green Shutters tradition was that it supplied no literary analogy for this sort of thinking; it did not end in optimism but in despair and death. He had to modify the tradition to contain this new emphasis and when he did he drew on the experiences of his childhood: Morning Tide is closer to what we know of his childhood than The Lost Glen is to what we know of his youth. However, Gunn is one of the first writers discussed in this study who was working consciously in the literary atmosphere of his country. He was influenced by other writers, notably MacDiarmid, about what he should say and in what forms he should say it. The problems earlier novelists had through becoming too closely identified with their fictional counterparts do not surface in Gunn's early work.

Encouraged by other writers and by the facts of his own personal experience, which led him to believe that there was value in tradition, Gunn's view of tradition is worked out very carefully and deliberately in his fiction. Before he comes to a conclusion about its role in contemporary life, Gunn explores and analyses the history and nature of Highland tradition in Sun Circle and Butcher's Broom.

Hart notes that Sun Circle bears similar features to other novels of the period:

> It was written at a time when novelists,
> excited by new developments in primitive anthropology,
> experimented with archaic psychology in pre-Christian

> settings. The temptation to mingle imaginative psychology with a highly conceptualised "primitivism" is evident in most, and Sun Circle is no exception.[12]

Gunn, like Linklater in The Men of Ness and Gibbon in Spartacus, finds in this ancient setting freedom to interact with his own tradition, to find there qualities and customs which he thinks are valuable for his own generation.

What Gunn finds most admirable about his ancient Highland society is that it is pluralistic. Three religions are present in the novels and they are linked to three ways of governing and looking at the world. The invading Vikings believe in Norse gods who support them in their raids and battles. Molrua is a Christian priest, a missionary sent from Iona to convert the Picts. His most influential follower is Silis, the wife of Drust, ruler of the Pictish tribe, the Ravens. For Silis, Christianity is connected with a more sophisticated way of life which she has experienced at court. Silis wishes to impose Christianity on Drust's tribe in order to increase her own earthly importance. The Ravens, and the two neighbouring tribes, the Finlags and the Logenmen, all worship Celtic gods - there is Bel, the sun god and giver of light, and there are the terrible gods who have to be placated by sacrifice. Sweyn, Molrua and the Master are the representatives of each religion. It is clear that as far as the Norse and Celtic gods satisfy the human spirit, Gunn prefers them to the Christian God, who, though he can satisfy man, is dogmatic that only he can do this. He demands complete allegiance and separation from what Gunn sees as the good in other religions. It is this dogmatism which makes Gunn uneasy, much preferring as he does the open-ended Celtic Druidism summed up in this sentence from an old woman in the novel, "There are more things in life than one thing." (SC p.66) In contrast, Molrua's view of truth is that it is "found and fixed". (SC p.89) The Celtic view of life which is prepared to accept some

of the insights of Christianity, though not all, can be seen in the story of Molrua's conversion. When he was a boy, a Christian preacher came to preach to his tribe and the men laughed and jeered at him. The young Molrua throws a stone at the preacher which wounds him and provokes a surprise reaction in his father:

> "Is this a way to treat the stranger?" he bellowed in flaming anger. His son of thirteen boldly said, "I did it." "You did!" and his father hit him so hard that he felled him to the ground, whereupon he picked up the preacher under his arm and strode home with him. (SC p.175)

His father "loved the old ways deeply", even though he did not agree with the words of the preacher. When his son despised the preacher, he did it in such a way that violated the code of the Pict, who prided himself on his custom of taking care of strangers. Thus Christianity gained an inroad into the Celtic mind because of the essential goodness of the Pictish way of life, Gunn suggests. What the author resents is that, having been shown such goodness, the Christian preacher seems not to take this into account for his message is that all men are essentially evil. This is the difference in outlook which separates the Master, the Pictish priest, from Molrua. The Master says:

> "Take no heed of the morrow. What heed have our people ever taken of the morrow? Give to the poor. They give. But they do not give as Christ would have them give. Christ says to give secretly, and god who sees all will reward openly. Christ has to offer reward. But here there is no reward, and anyone being rewarded by man or god for giving to the poor would grow hot with shame...What sort of people then, did Christ live amongst that he had to tell them to give to the poor, and who his God that would reward them

> openly if they did it secretly? You see, then, that they must be a people different from us...
> (SC p.117-8)

The Master has just explained to Aniel, his disciple, that because the Druid priests became more interested in temporal than in spiritual power, their influence weakened and Chrisitanity grew in its place. However, though there were specific historic problems for the Druid religion, the values of the society which it shaped - care for the stranger, giving to the poor, toleration of differing opinions - are the values which carry authorial approval. The most important aspect of the Pictish religion, for Gunn, is its attempt to fuse the Eternal and the present, instead of devaluing the present, as he feels Christianity does. This fusion is described as a moment and from the following description of it, it is easy to recognise its affinity with Gunn's moment of delight:

> we have caught the balanced moment of all-seeing that is our moment of serenity. For all faiths and all unfaiths have their moments of serenity. But inasmuch as ours is not a simple belief, but an intense and prolonged striving to get at the dividing of forces, with no gain and no loss, with no question of reward beyond the reward of being there, therefore may we feel that it possesses human loneliness in its naked form. (SC p.116-7)

Gunn displays ambivalence over the Norse way of life. While deploring the violence and raiding, he does admire the energy, courage and determination of the Norsemen. Haakon, the young leader, receives his training from Sweyn, an older Viking:

> Man is a naked animal and he protects his nakedness with his sword. That is the song of his manhood, the saga of his adventure...For once you

> are as a naked man come out of the sea with the sun on the sword of your body and on the sword in your hand, then you are a whole man and your rage will be just. But if you are not a whole man, then your rage will be mean, and your deeds desperate, and your mind twisting upon itself like the mind of a woman. That is all the wisdom of living I know," said Sweyn.
> (SC p.290)

It is this capacity for action which Gunn associates with the Norsemen which will become prominent in The Silver Darlings as the society in that novel has evolved out of the three cultures of Sun Circle.

In his quest for roots, a common activity in the writers of the period, Gunn is close to Gibbon in his summing up of the situation. In the main the peasant people lived contentedly, tolerating and caring for one another. Gunn's view of early religions is not quite the same as Gibbon's; in its early stages Gunn views Druidism with approbation, a wholesome expression of the religious aspiration of the people. However, like Gibbon, he sees the later stages, characterised by excessive fear and sacrifice, as being detrimental to the people. This decadence paves the way for the coming of Christianity, a new faith less concerned with temporal than spiritual power. The power of the Pictish people was on the wane and their own weakness made them a prey to Viking strength. However, that strength, which began by dominating, was eventually integrated with Pictish culture in a helpful way. The legacy of Christianity did not turn out so happily. While it did provide a spiritual framework for the people, it was, according to Gunn, a narrower framework than that of Druidism. It divided body and spirit, present and Eternal, instead of holding them in a Celtic balance. This lack of balance produced an unnecessary sense of guilt in the people, who began to feel ashamed of their temporal

existence and physical needs. Although Molrua was saintly and took his vows seriously and had a true care for his people, it is clear from Silis's use of Christianity that it is going to become more and more closely associated with temporal power in years to come. As far as spiritual outlook is concerned, Gunn identitifes as Celtic the syncretistic, all-embracing, open-ended attitude to people and the world which the Picts had. Its special attraction is the moment of "all-seeing" which the Master speaks of, which confirms to the those who experience it the validity of their human lives. Such an experience of understanding is common to the novels of the period and is of the same quality as Chris's experiences at the Stones, as Black William's experiences of the Indians and even as Magnus's experiences of Orkney on a snowy morning in Magnus Merriman.

In Sun Circle Gunn delineates a small closely-knit community which is happy and peaceful for the most part. I have not shown it in detail here because the description of a similar community is the main burden of Butcher's Broom. Now Gunn shows a community, later in time, facing a threat from external forces, and from members of the community itself - the clan chiefs. As far as history is concerned, the results of this conflict are never really mitigated or reversed. What Gunn values most in the community is directly threatened by the Clearances. Thus he spends much of the book ennumerating the strengths and values of the community. These strengths are based on the traditions noted in Sun Circle; thus Gunn continues his investigation of tradition.

What is immediately obvious from the first pages of Butcher's Broom is that the Master's prophecy about the progress of Christianity has come to pass. The minister of the Riasgan is not, like Molrua, a man who has come to serve the people by his own choice. The older men are dissatisfied:

> The minister was concerned, they felt, far more with his bestial than with his human flock. The real field of his endeavour was his glebe, and he was more at home with the factor discussing estate affairs and news of the absentee landlord's doings in the great world than by the humble fireside of one of his following...The people had not wanted him, but the absentee landlord had 'placed' him over their heads. (BB p.16)

Gunn notes the disparity between the self-seeking, materialistic attitude of the ministers and the humble, spiritual reality which characterises the ordinary members of the community:

> Angus bared his head; the smile on his face faded. He asked God to bless them in these the first fruits of the harvest... in each home and in all homes; and he thanked the bountiful Giver and promised that they would remember His name. In saying these words, Angus to the boys was completely changed...They saw the power of reverence and dignity. In the running water there was that rock. (BB p.45)

While she is part of the society, Dark Mairi is also at a remove from it - partly because she is older, partly because of the healing powers she has. No one actually thinks she is a witch, but the idea haunts her activities. The ceilidh, where many of the traditional rituals are enacted, is seen through the eyes of Elie, a young woman. The first of these ceilidhs occurs to mark the graddaning. (Graddaning is a method of roasting newly-harvested corn.) It is a harvest celebration and takes place in one of the crofts where in the earlier part of the evening the girls were singing as they waulked the cloth. While they worked, because of

their improvisation, they were able to give their opinions of the men who had gathered:

> Most of the men came in for it one way or another, and many hidden things and feelings were more than hinted at, and when a hit was made the chorus went with a roar, the cloth getting licked into shape with energy. (BB p.42)

Before this they had had a proverb game and afterwards there is the graddaning. Angus gives thanks for the food and the harvest, but when his daughter Anna begins to sing the old quern-song, the pagan roots of the community become visible. They turn the stone sunwise just as they waulked the cloth sunwise. The influence of the sun is still respected and obeyed. The food it has brought to fulness is one of the blessings of the community:

> This meal, riddled through the fingers on to a bowl of roused cream and eaten with a horn spoon, is very palatable. (BB p.46)

The goodness of the food leads to reflection on the goodness of life:

> It melted like manna!...All life was mellow, with goodness. There were no bad times, only trials. And maybe there would never be any bad times again. Why should there be? (BB p.47)

Afterwards there is pipe music and dancing. Then, to round off the evening, Angus recites an old Gaelic poem. He begins with an "argument" because the poem is pre-Christian and there are various things in the poem he has to harmonise for his listeners because of this. As Angus explains and recites, it agains becomes clear that this is the core of Gunn's understanding of the people. He has

already shown in the ceilidh that the people have food, clothing and shelter - the basic necessities of life. He has shown that both young and old have a place in society and can mature properly, in a human way. He has shown that the community enjoys and encourages all the abilities of man - his ability to work and his ability to imagine and give imaginative form to his experience. From the poem, Gunn shows the natural beauty of the place:

> "O place me by the little streams that flow softly
> with gentle steps,
> Under the shade of spreading branches lay my head;
> And, O thou Sun, be kind to me." (BB p.55)

Secondly, he shows that this way of life is not unsophisticated or ignorant but is the result of a long, learned tradition:

> [The Aged Bard who wrote the poem] was not a simple or uninstructed man, but on the contrary was a man grey with years of experience of life, rich in knowledge, who had faced all things and exhausted all passions, but who in the ends prayed to be placed by the little streams. (BB p.56)

This tradition goes back to the ancient sun worship of the Pict and Gunn claims that the Calvinistic Christianity of the Highlands has suppressed the natural Pictish religious instincts:

> Behind the Aged Bard was the eternal earth and over it the Sun...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 p.57)

Gunn emphasises this point in his characterisation of Dark Mairi. She is seen by the shore gathering fish, weed and shells which she uses as medecines:

> She had a reputation for healing among the people of that land. (BB p.9)

She is completely identified with her community and little touched by Christianity at all. Mairi's knowledge is another thing that has been passed down by tradition. Mairi's grandmother taught her what she knew and Mairi is at all times practical, discussing without euphemism the symptoms of her sick patients. During the ceilidh, Mairi visits Seumas Og who is dying, and does what she can to help and comfort him by telling him about her recent visit to relatives and of the ceilidh at Angus's. Thus she comforts him with the fact that the good life he has known is going on as it has always done.

Elie, the young girl, goes south to earn money after Colin, who should have married her, joins a Highland regiment. In the south, Elie is raped by a farmer and after the birth of her child is shamefully treated. Gunn pointedly compares this society, supposedly much more civilised, with Elie's own. She describes the ferocious colliers:

> "They had been slaves - tied to the mines from their birth. They could not leave...And in other work it was as bad. They were sending children, years younger than Colin here, to work from four in the morning till nine or ten at night in new factories or mills...A woman and her child were put in prison for sixty days for taking a little meal."
>
> Mairi looked at Elie's drawn mouth
>
> "You - Elie?" Elie nodded. (BB pp.185)

Gunn uses Elie's story to contrast the values of Highland and Lowland society. It is the men who are prominent in this unjust society who are chosen to carry out the changes in the Highland estates, where owners evaluate a man's worth in economic, not humanitarian, terms. The estate agents listen to Tam the Drover, who is putting before the people the choice of being pushed out of their crofts like slaves or resisting in order to keep their own land. He does this with examples from their own history, notably from the time of Calgacus, who in his day averted the fate of slavery for his people. The agents listen but do not understand because Tam is speaking in Gaelic:

> "What was he gabbing about?" asked his second guest, Mr. Elder. "I mean was he really making something in the nature of a speech, or was all that just gibberish?"
> "I know very little of their dialect," said Mr. Falcon. "But I do know that they are utterly ignorant, lazy and filthy."
> "I mean," said Mr. Elder, rather interested in the point, "was he really making sense when he spoke? We know they are unlearned, and their dialect can have only a very few words, because the things around them are few and they live pretty much like animals..." (BB p.159)

Although the Duke of Sutherland wants his estates to be a model of agricultural improvement, he has no essential sympathy for the people who live on the land. It is not long after the French Revolution and any expression of popular will is to be understood as a threat to his own position. This lack of sympathy is compounded by the fact that he works through an army of factors and lawyers who are totally unconcerned with the people and concerned only with carrying out orders. Thus what is a lack of sympathy in the Duke of Sutherland in London becomes outright hostility in

Patrick Heller, his agent in the Riasgan. Just as clearly as Gunn depicts the subtle processes which make the Riasgan such a prized place to live, so he also understands the processes which are set to destroy the community.

The Clearances come and the people are banished to the seashore. Even there Mairi continues to look for remedies and bind up what is left of her people. But the old life has been broken and smashed. Tomas the Drover, after the news of Heller's acquittal, sums up what has been lost:

> "...we blamed them for murdering the soul; we blamed them for taking an order of mankind, faithful and loyal, who in the course of the ages had given light to the world and courage and a tale of deeds dressed in great music and story;...
>
> "the chiefs are blood of our blood and bone of our bone, and by their meanness, their vileness, they have dragged us in bitter degradation to their own level and shamed us forever before the peoples of the world." (BB p.420)

Gunn himself makes the same point and links it with his own creative development and spoke of it to F R Hart:

> "I'd always felt the need to write about the Clearances. I hated doing it. Most Highlanders hate bringing back that awful recollection, and are not willing even to talk about it." But actually, he insisted, "There is very little of the Clearances in Butcher's Broom. The tragedy is the destruction of a way of life, and the book is more about what is destroyed." (AHL p.103)

The "need to write about the Clearances" is bound up with Gunn's analysis of Highland tradition. Until he had understood for himself and faced up to all the implications of that dark night of the Highland soul, his imaginative authority would have been incomplete. However, having explored the subject of the Clearances, he is now equal to his troubled historical heritage and able to move on to other subjects which interest him.

It is clear from this brief survey of Sun Circle and Butcher's Broom that Gunn has analysed his tradition in a detailed and comprehensive manner. Even more so than Gibbon, Gunn has taken up ideas common in the criticism of the period - the quest for roots, the importance of tradition and the value of ordinary people - and given them an intense and mature fictional existence. In Gunn's later fiction, the mention of the Picts or the Clearances is a historical interpretation worked out fully in earlier novels. The mention of either of these times is linked to a culture and community whose values are timeless. The values Gunn affirms through these books are: the essential goodness of humanity; the goodness of the earth; the goodness of natural provision; love and respect in human relationships and the union of man with his world. The next step in Gunn's argument is that since these values are timeless, they cannot be eradicated: even when they are seemingly overcome and suppressed, there will always be some survivors to carry on the tradition. The last stage of the argument is the most radical: despite the way in which history is written in laws, in propaganda or in textbooks, what is truly significant about the people lies in what they value. Since they value the things listed above, then despite every historical adversity, they are still spiritually in the ascendancy. Even though broken, having to wrest a living from the sea, inwardly they still have the ancient tradition which can preserve their human dignity. Though the ending of Butcher's Broom is one of Gunn's bleakest, even here he cannot stop himself from picking up the pieces of the broken

community. On the seashore, Dark Mairi sains the fishing boat, sign of the people's eventual prosperity. Though Dark Mairi is attacked and killed by the shepherd's dogs, she is carried back for burial by a newly united father and son on a bier of birches and heather rope: there is a new generation to use the traditional resources.

Gunn's exploration of these themes has led him to a rich depiction of a particular historical tradition. However, the second result of his exploration is more crucial for his work and for the Scottish novel. Because of the value Gunn sees in tradition, he has at last found something strong enough and great enough to pit against that other great force in the Scottish novel - History. Hart describes what he sees as the dominant theme of Gunn's fiction:

> To envision a transcendance of high comedy in the face of the history and tragedy of Highland experience is the gist of his achievement.[13]

G J Watson takes up the theme of transcendence of history in his essay on Gunn:

> The opposition between the 'way of life of peaceful ("prehistorical") generations' and the 'bloody bits' of history is fundamental in Gunn's vision, and leads to a dismissal of history and a corresponding celebration of the historyless community, of the archaic, and of the folk.

Watson also notes that this view is similar in places to Gibbon's:

> This belief in the supreme value of the experience of the folk in turn is related to Gunn's vision, shared with Grassic Gibbon, of the Golden Age. Future and past are linked here, and history obliterated, in the timeless vision...[14]

However, Gibbon could not bring himself to believe completely in the supremacy of tradition over history. As has been seen from A Scots Quair, Chris is, in the end, overcome by history and in Grey Granite, the dream of the Golden Age which irradiated Kinraddie has been reduced to bewildered memories easily drowned out by the sound of men on hunger march. No peace has been represented within the historical novel ever since Scott. In The Heart of Midlothian and in Old Mortality, Scott has to suspend the impact of history in the first and remove the hero out of history in the second in order to achieve a fictional reconciliation. Where Gunn's approach differs is that the tradition he presents is not only outside history but simultaneously inside it as well. Thus he allows historical forces to have their full impact, and although they triumph in their own terms, because they do not triumph in Gunn's, they do not triumph at all. Gunn does not have to suspend history, nor does he despair that the strength of folk-values is illusory compared with the strength of historical forces which removed so much of the communities which preserved such values. The modern world, in whose history Gibbon found a challenge which Kinraddie could not resist, is Gunn's next challenge. In Highland River, Gunn again takes up the theme of the relation between the gifted individual and the community, this time in a contemporary setting. I wish to discuss several points in relation to this novel: its contribution to the theme of the individual in the community, the way in which it reflects contemporary literay thinking, its place in Gunn's development and its relation to the Scottish novel generally.

Even for Scottish novelists of the thirties the relationship of the gifted individual to the community was still problematic. Through the character of Chris Guthrie in Sunset Song, Lewis Grassic Gibbon makes a heroic attempt to reconcile the parties. However, this reconciliation was not able to withstand the economic and political realities of the Depression years. However, it was MacDiarmid's persistent argument that Scotland must sustain its own government and culture:

> Surely it is grossly anomalous that the history and literature of a foreign country [England] should be thus given priority over our own - a priority which is largely responsible for the desuetude of Scottish literature and history, the poor quality of our attention to affairs, and our muddled and mediocre response to the arts. "Each nation must be conscious of its mission," says Tagore. "There are lessons which impart information or train our minds for intellectual pursuits. These are simple and can be acquired and used with advantage. But there are others which affect our deeper nature and change our direction of life. Before we accept them and pay their value by selling our own inheritance, we must pause and think deeply." Scotland has paused on the verge of this surrender.[15]

William Power, who was hailed by MacDiarmid as a "true critic" and whose book, Literature and Oatmeal is a mine of Renaissance themes and attitudes, confirms MacDiarmid's view and adds his opinion of the role of contemporary writers:[16]

> What our Scots writers are more or less consciously trying to do is expand and develop the "idea" of

> Scotland in a manner worthy of our whole history and the part we ought to play in the modern world.[17]

Gunn's great achievement in Highland River is to demonstrate how a Scottish community can nurture its members and how those members can depend on the community to provide the resources for their journey to maturity.

The narrative structure of the book is based on two parallel lines: Kenn's growth from boyhood to maturity and the route of the river from where it joins the sea to its source. Kenn's growth is seen in terms of his exploration of the river: the journeys are not exactly parallel, sometimes Kenn does not understand the meaning of an early event until he recalls it in later life. The narrative technique uses third person narration for both young and old Kenn. The only difference is that old Kenn's thoughts are written in the present tense which often gives the prose the tone of a reported conversation. This contrast with the ordinary use of the third person narration makes it seem that grown-up Kenn is working out the meaning of his life from his own experiences and this life-thesis seems to be given more directly from Kenn himself, making the author seem more like a reporter recording what Kenn has said. Although the reader to receiving Gunn's imaginative configuration of events, the distance between Kenn and the reader is decreased. Usually in third person narration the reader is told someone's thoughts by a mediator, who often is superior in knowledge of character and other events in the novel. Gunn, while still using the technique, uses it in such a way as to suggest its obvious limitations: it is not possible for any one person to know fully the thoughts of another. By using the present tense Gunn creates the situation where the narrator is a reporter, not an interpreter. Here are some examples of the thoughts of the older and wiser Kenn:

> Kenn is sensitive to false symbolism here... (HR p.56)

> To Kenn's older mind, these are words of 'poetic rhythm'... (HR p.58)
>
> He may be mistaken, but he sometimes thinks that... (HR p.59)

This narrative technique neatly supports Gunn's structure which is that the river incidents of Kenn's childhood do not reveal their full significance till later on in his life. As it is these later interpretations which contain much of the meaning of the novel, Gunn is able to signal this shift from boyhood to manhood by use of the present tense.

Gunn demonstrates this technique in the early chapters of the book. In the first chapter, the boy Kenn goes out to collect water and discovers a salmon in the Well Pool:

> Carelessly he bumped the pail down on the flat stone, and at the sound, as at a signal in a weird fairy tale, the whole world changed. His moodiness leapt right out of him and fear had him by the throat.
>
> For from his very feet a great fish had started ploughing its way across the river, the king of fish, the living salmon. (HR p.8)

Kenn decides to try to catch the salmon and in doing so unlocks a store of intuitive knowledge:

> Out of that noiseless world in the grey of the morning, all his ancestors came at him...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 p.8)

He discovers fear: the fear of the law courts and bringing disgrace on his family as well as the "primal fear" of the salmon. (HR p.8) After he gets over his initial shock and panicky reaction, he hunts the fish with a "more conscious cunning". (HR p.9) The fight is protracted and difficult because the fish is big and the boy small, but the boy perseveres and learns to conserve his energy by using his brain to plan a strategy. After more fighting Kenn knows all the places the salmon can hide, his experience has widened, and he also knows where to hit the salmon to achieve the maximum effect. Eventually Kenn catches the salmon with his hands and drags it out of the river.

The amazing nature of this feat is not fully brought home to Kenn until he sees the reaction of his father at the weighing of the salmon:

> On the wooden scales...the merchant laid the fish.
> "Twenty, did you say? Very well." He put on twenty pounds - and pressed the beam - and chuckled. He added the seven weight. Nothing happened. Two more to make twenty-nine. Then, gently, one for thirty and the beam trembled.
> "Bless me," said Davy softly.
> "Thirty good," said Sans.
> All three gazed at the salmon. (HR p.19)

Back home Kenn finds "What he had done was still incredible to him, as a memory of some high vision." (HR p.20) This experience is "magical" in the sense that Gunn uses the word to mean something which provokes wonder and happy incredulity in those who experience it. These moments and experiences in Gunn's fiction have a

function similar to the experience of the Land in Gibbon's fiction: they suggest the presence in the material world of a force or being which is wholly other than what is known. The main difference between their respective uses of the numinous is that in Gunn's fiction, fear, though present in the experience plays a less important role than laughter, which is the key aspect of the numinous here. It is easy to see how Gunn's understanding of the numinous grows out of his presentation of pre-Christian values in Sun Circle. Perhaps the best way of describing the heart of Gunn's numinous experiences is through the fable of the serpent from Celtic legend, who put his tail in his mouth to stop himself from laughing and thus created a perfect circle. Thus the result of happiness (the serpent's laughter) is a wholly unexpected, but wholly beautiful perfection.[18] While it is not easy to analyse these passages they can be instantly recognised by the uses of words like, laughter, ease, gentleness, joy, fulness and grace. Awe is also present as can be seen in the way the characters gazed at the salmon but it is an awe which leads not to fear or a sense of human littleness or impurity but to deep, satisfying human joy.

By the end of the first chapter and into the second and third, Gunn asserts the importance of such experiences in the life of the boy. This is the first development of the salmon incident. By catching the salmon, he earns himself a pair of new boots. Thus while there is a spiritual dimension to the experience, this does not affect the fact that real actions in the real world have real consequences. Secondly, in chapter two, the new knowledge and depth of experience gained in the salmon fight, provide a way of coping with school. The teacher in Highland River is very similar to the one in Morning Tide, and he belts Kenn twice for dreaming in school on the day he caught the salmon. (These descriptions of unsympathetic and ignorant teachers can be paralleled by descriptions in The House with the Green Shutters, Sentimental Tommy, Land of our Fathers, Magnus Merriman and The Thirteenth

Disciple.) On the first occasion Kenn's crime was "smiling at nothing", on the second he transposed the products for which Birmingham and Leicester were famous. Although the thrashing subdues him, it has another effect:

> [It] freed him from this school life and any obligation to the master; made him whole and secret and hostile. (HR p.31)

Kenn knows he has been treated unjustly and no longer feels the need to obey the master except out of self-interest. At this stage Gunn shows how inadequate, irrelevant and soul-destroying the education system is. He treated English and Arithmetic in Morning Tide, here he describes the teaching of geography and history:

> The history was concerned with English kings and queens and the dates of battles. There had been the Plantagenets. Now there were the Tudors. That Henry VIII had six wives did not really interest the children. They would have gaped in the same way if he had had six hundred. What was important was the exact number six. A near shot, such as seven or eight would have made the lion roar. (HR p.28)

Geography is taught by rote and Kenn's memory, not being his best faculty, leads him to transpose the lists which he has to memorise. In fact, the whole charade is, as Gunn points out, a matter of memory, not of learning. The fact that Henry VIII had six wives had nothing to do with fostering historical sense, nor did it promote interest or curiosity. In the face of such irrelevance, Kenn turns to the natural landscape, in exactly the same way and for the same reasons that Hugh did in Morning Tide:

> Outside this narrow prison with its captains and kings and their wives and small arms, was the

> free rushing world of light and earth and water,
> of which the master knew nothing but of which Kenn
> knew so much that he could stand up at that moment
> and tell him something that would astonish him!
> But he was careful not to smile to himself now.
> (HR p.31)

It is after this that Kenn begins to imagine to himself the mysterious and fascinating life of the salmon.

Gunn shows that because of the salmon fight, Kenn has a new sort of knowledge which interests him more than the series of facts he is taught in school. This knowledge also makes him differentiate himself from the view of society implied by the master - that his teaching, his values and his orders are those that have to be adopted to be socially successful. At this early stage of development Kenn rejects that presupposition. The second stage of development does not occur until Kenn has grown up and is a soldier fighting in the First World War. At this time too, Kenn uses the salmon experience to protect himself just as he had used it to protect himself as a boy at school. On the Somme, Kenn displayed "cool river cunning". (HR p.42) The use of "cunning" relates the experience directly to the "more conscious cunning" of the first incident. Here Kenn is involved in a surprise attack. The Germans have advanced without warning:

> He went into action with fear in his throat, the
> old panic fear he had felt as a lad when the
> salmon had moved from the well, but thickened
> with the consciousness of death. (HR p.43)

This excerpt clearly shows how Kenn's early experiences are only developed, not replaced or set aside, by later ones. During the attack, Kenn is excited and sees everything clearly. He begins

firing his own gun then takes over firing that of his friend who has just been killed. When the order is given to retreat, Kenn spikes his gun and flies, cleverly avoiding the orders of other officers whom he meets but to whom he is not directly responsible. When he rejoins his company later, he meets his CO who supports his efforts to elude the authority of other officers. The CO does this because he knows that Kenn "knew the human art of giving the CO his place in a world of necessary discipline." (HR p.47) There are features of this incident which Gunn relates back to the salmon-fight: Kenn's direct fear and his attitude to authority. Kenn accepts the CO's discipline as necessary, just as he accepted the teacher's discipline as necessary. He does not accept it as an expression of the world as it is, nor as an expression of any universal truth. However, there are other features of the incident - the escape throught he woods and his love of mathematics - which relate forward to incidents which occur later in the novel. Thus the reader is constantly anticipating, reflecting and understanding during the course of his reading.

This is how in the first three chapters Gunn demonstrates his technique of describing an incident then extrapolating from it various layers of meaning at different times during Kenn's life. Character is seen to be formed by landscape (the pool and the salmon) and history (the call of the ancestors) and also by relationships within the community, to which I now wish to turn.

Kenn's mother and father fulfil roles which are similar to those fulfilled by Hugh's parents in Morning Tide. Kenn fulfils his mother's dreams by studying and getting a degree so that he can have the chance of good employment outside the economically impoverished society in which she lives. Kenn fulfils his father's expectations by helping him with the fishing, even although this means taking time off from his studies. By presenting his father

and Sandy, his father's friend, with a half-bottle of whisky, Kenn shows he has understood his job and the comradeship of the crew:

> They could not believe their eyes. "Bless me, boy!" said Sandy. "What's this?" said his father. "What?" said Sandy. Their faces shone with wonder.
> Life was a glass that brimmed over. As its colour went over Kenn's face, he smiled awkwardly. Rarely has inspiration so perfect, so unforgettable, a moment. He loved the two old men, and felt the comradeship of all the toilers of the world. (HR p.206)

Because these relationships are similar to those of Morning Tide, I do not wish to cover the same ground by analysing them again, but will move on to the others described in the book.

In chapters six and seven, Kenn sees how men relate to each other and to their community. In the winter after Kenn caught the great fish, bad weather caused poor fishings which meant that most of the villagers were near to poverty. As the old fishermen stand about the harbour, they discuss one of their friends who is dying and how when he was young he cut a fine dash when he got a new fishing boat. Such days have passed. Going home with his father, however, Kenn senses how the men are linked together. Though his father holds him by the hand, it does not seem as if his father seems to be thinking much about him at all, yet Kenn understands this as "a remoteness that is the delicate core of comradeship." (HR p.70) In analysing this sense of comradeship, Kenn notes how strong his affection for his home and his parents was when he was young, though he scarcely displayed it. Kenn also notes that this experience is not his alone, other boys feel it too, and even though they emigrate, they still send money back to their parents.

Gunn says that this is an affection more profound than nostalgia and occurs because the life they knew was simple and directly related to natural resources and desires:

> Ultimately the shieling meant food, the river fish, and the peat-bank fire. The contacts were direct and the results were seen. There was thus about the most ordinary labour some of the excitement of creation. (HR p.79)

Kenn sums up his study of family relationships, comradeship affection, and the immediacy of life:

> Not that it worked out thus with all families by all the Highland rivers! But out of his experience, Kenn sees this as the essential social tradition. (HR p.79)

Looking back on his childhood, Kenn realises how, in relation to friends and landscape, he began to differentiate himself from them and develop his own individuality. Although Kenn and his friend Beel catch the spring salmon, Kenn realises he has had more of the catching of it than Beel. This is a new and surprising realisation for Kenn, as until then Beel had always been the leader of their exploits. Again this knowledge comes to him from the river:

> His own personality rose out of the river within him. He was a little shy of it, as he might be of some dark boy-stranger with a waiting smile. (HR p.111)

Lying in hospital as a result of being wounded during the War, Kenn realises that the reality of his own past is the only reality. He sees himself as a boy in the strath:

> When everything is said, that figure and himself are all he can be sure of. The rest, however, near and dear, are alien. (HR p.115)

It can be seen from this comment and others that the individuality bred by this community in the boy is strong and profound with a large element of solitariness in it. This solitariness, however, is quite different from that of the pre-Renaissance characters. Their loneliness was invidious because it was a symptom of their inability to relate to the surrounding community and was only made pleasurable by their illusory dreams and self-deception. Gunn's early (and younger) heroes dream little. In later novels dream is an important category but it is usually a healthy experience for characters like Finn and Catrine as their subconscious minds register a more subtle response to life than their waking mind is capable of. Dreaming is rarely seen however, as a substitute for living as Gunn's boys work during the day and sleep soundly at night. Ewan in The Lost Glen, by contrast, did daydream as is to be expected of that particular character given his situation in the novel. Like earlier heroes he daydreams in order to offset the barrenness of his surroundings. Finn is also an exception here. In The Silver Darlings he has dreams but they are not illusory or self-deceptive; they intimate his sensitivity and future greatness. The boys do not need to dream because they are able to act. Their society is rich enough to provide them with all the situations, challenges and difficulties necessary to grow to maturity. However, Kenn is still a solitary figure but the solitariness is healthy and is partly a necessary aspect of his individuality and partly arises from the cast of his own temperament, which is itself reflective. Kenn found out early that being able to differentiate himself from his situation was helpful in circumstances where he was being attacked, first by an angry teacher and later by the horrors of the war. In each of these situations, Kenn was able to preserve himself by knowing himself and being sure of his own identity and not allowing it to be moulded by anyone else's ideas.

This ability of Kenn's is seen very clearly in contrast with his brother Angus's reaction to authority. Here we come to a problematic strand in Highland River. In Morning Tide and Sun Circle, Gunn concentrated on those aspects of Highland society which he felt were valuable and enriched the community. However, in The Grey Coast, The Lost Glen and Butcher's Broom, Gunn describes elements of Highland life which disfigure people: grinding poverty, harsh religion and in Butcher's Broom, the feyness of the people themselves - people who do not fight back but surrender completely to their evictions. How this latter group of Gunn's characters fits in with the rich and culturally meaningful background of Highland River is the subject Gunn discusses with reference to Kenn's brother Angus.

Angus is Kenn's older brother, to whom Kenn looks for excitement and adventure. As Alan took Hugh, so Angus takes Kenn up the river to poach salmon. Angus takes Kenn further up the river than he had been before. Kenn passes the Well Pool, where he caught his first salmon, the Intake Pool, the Broch Pool, which reminds Kenn of the ancient history of his people, the Lodge Pool, where Angus recounts to him the legendary poaching adventures of Lachie-the fish. Lachie is Beel's big brother who has emigrated but though a recent member of the society historically, he is already spoken of as a legend. Then they come to Achglas Pool and the river begins to flow through the moorland:

> The immense distances drew Kenn's spirit out of him. He had come into the far country of legendary names. (HR p.138)

Angus also teaches him how to recognise land that was formerly used for growing crops by making Kenn pick out the visible pattern of old lazy beds. As Angus gets down to look in the pool, Kenn is excited:

> This was an example of that secret knowledge of the river which he himself hoped yet to attain; the knowledge that finally got into the bone and remained there forever. (HR p.143)

After Angus has seen a salmon in the pool, he makes Kenn get down and look, but Kenn cannot make anything out:

> "Did you see nothing at all?"
> "No. There was a wee little white thing -"
> "That's about his back fin," said Angus. "Down you go, you've got to learn to see him." (HR p.144)

Kenn looks again and this time is able to make out a fish shape:

> "Was that him?"
> "Yes. Great isn't it?"
> "Yes," said Kenn on a solemn breath, and was aware of a lovely lightheartedness in life; saw it sparkle in Angus's eyes; (HR p.144)

Unfortunately, Angus misses the salmon and the boys walk up to the Smuggler's Pool to take a look at it. On the way Kenn tells Angus some of his own knowledge of the place:

> "I saw in a book about the Celtic people," said Kenn, "they were people somewhere in the olden times. I forget what it was all about, except two lines, and they were something about 'the hazelnuts of knowledge and the salmon of wisdom.' It made me think of the strath. Funny wasn't it?
> "Not much sense in it."
> "No," said Kenn at once. "Only I thought it queer at the time."

> "They believed in anything in the olden times."
> "Yes," said Kenn. (HR p.151)

It is here that Gunn begins to show the deficiencies in Angus's character: when Kenn mentions the mythical symbols, Angus does not respond. Kenn, by thinking them "funny" and "queer" but somehow related to the strath, shows that he is aware that there is more to the strath than a purely natural phenomenon. There is something about it which can only be distilled in words. Angus does not see this at all. For him the strath is only a place for fishing, or a place where people used to live. His materialistic outlook has no room for the "magical" qualities of the strath. This deficiency is enlarged later, when after having caught the Achglas salmon, the boys are almost spotted by the keepers:

> 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 p.156)

Angus might have been clever enough to know how to catch the salmon, but he did not know how to evade the keepers. He was caught that night as surely as the salmon. Kenn's attitude is different. Although he cannot see how to escape, he is not cravenly afraid, because "there was the last chance, that purely magical chance, that they may not have been seen." (HR p.152) And of course, the boys are not seen. Kenn's trust is confirmed and Angus's lack of knowledge is therefore made the more marked.

As Douglas Gifford has noted, "Gunn's skill is nowhere better seen than in the way he makes the trenches scene a natural development

of the earlier episode when Angus and Kenn were almost caught by the keepers".[19] After the river scene Gunn shifts the novel forward in time to the trenches where Angus has capitulated to the world around him. He is continually watching and he advises Kenn not to volunteer for anything, to stay as far back from the fighting as possible. Inside his brother Kenn sees a "nervous, ghostly stranger". (HR p.165) Kenn tries to make Angus relive his river knowledge but Angus either gets lost in sentiment or else he cannot concentrate on it at all:

> There was no reality outside the world in which he was. (HR p.169)

The sight of Angus's deterioration makes Kenn feel nervous:

> The truth was he was going windy! He swore at that, in oaths that were unusual in his mouth. His eyes were now over his shoulders, quick and alert as a hunted beast's, but with something cunning and malignant in them purely human.
>
> He no longer cared about Angus's condition. If the fellow went like that, well he could go, God damn him. (HR p.170)

The bitterness lasts until he hears of Angus's death by which time he is strong enough to grieve for what happened to Angus without being unmanned by it himself. Angus became a prey to the world of war which Kenn had refused to acknowledge as the primary reality. When Kenn joined up he had no illusions about idealism or patriotism; he fought because it was necessary and because it was necessary he obeyed some orders. But the final imperatives in Kenn's life were the ones emanating from the river. What is so difficult to accept about this passage, however, is Kenn's abandonment of his brother and the fact that there is within this

great river knowledge no help for Angus. Douglas Gifford continues:

> For all Angus's basic decency, he seems to lack Kenn's deeper wellsprings of strength; he is like Ronnie of The Silver Darlings, with an inner weakness that gives in to the pressures of the sick society.
>
> Gunn puts in an odd, effective touch...; Angus of the strath is dead before he dies, but another Angus, from Canada, carries on his attitudes, lives in the tradition.[20]

While this interpretation works well because Highland River is such a highly patterned novel, it does leave some questions: is Gunn saying that there are two orders of mankind, those who succeed in life and those who fail? Is there no hope for those who fail?

At the end of chapter eleven, Gunn begins to answer these hard questions. He does so by using a concept, common to Renaissance writers, the concept of the Golden Age. (Here Gunn's ideas are very close to Gibbon's views on the Elder People, the Golden Age and its corruption by religion as expressed in an essay like "The Antique Scene".) Gunn works through his ideas on the Golden Age in order to provide a framework of ideas in which he can come to terms with the problem of Angus. His starting point is as usual a feature of the life of the young Kenn - his fear of the gamekeepers. Then Gunn uses this fear as evidence of a corrupting force in history. This force is the expression of political or religious Authority in any given society. It is this force to which Angus is prey, but Kenn is not. Let us examine Gunn's argument more closely.

From Kenn's fear of keepers, Gunn extrapolates the characteristics of authority in history - "gorgeous palaces...solemn temples...millenia of dark and bloody rites!":

> And the speaking voices always solemn. Tthe priest of Memphis. Pontius Pilate. Through the Dark Ages the voices come. From eternal damnation we deliver you in the name of God. Prison for Galileo...
>
> Voices of foreign secretaries as solemn today as the voice of Memphis. More money. More high explosive. More gas. In the name of Civilisation, we demand this sacrifice... (HR p.125)

Against this Gunn suggests that the boy's delight in the scent and colour of the primrose is not merely a bond between man and nature but also an evidence of a Golden Age. Having reflected on this relationship, Kenn says:

> There is no denying that however it comes about, whatever the cause, such a state of happiness is produced. Kenn has experienced it over and over again. He has deliberately gone back to his Highland river to experience it afresh. And the wider his general knowledge grows, the more exacting his scientific researches are, the farther from youth he travels, the surer his responses become. (HR p.123)

Against an imaginary disputant, Kenn argues that in seeking a Golden Age in his own life, he is not being escapist. This is because an argument on escapism assumes that because reality is uncongenial a person who cannot face it, ignores it and "escapes" into a fantasy world or into a pastime or occupation from which he does not need to admit the claims of reality. However, Gunn is not

arguing about uncongenial reality versus pleasant unreality. Gunn admits the claims of the uncongenial world when he shows Kenn fighting in the trenches. Gunn sees the argument not in terms of unreality and reality, but in terms of life and death. Civilisation and authority are linked to sacrifice, torture and death. The Golden Age is spoken of in symbols of life - laughter, primroses, heather, the adder, honey, flames - images which reflect nature or beneficial natural phenomena. Kenn is not escaping from reality into unreality but from death into life. This "salvation" is based on "faith" and confirmed by experience; this is how Kenn talks of the Golden Age in the above quotation. Although it has been shown that Gunn has rejected orthodox Christianity, the way in which he formalises his vision has close parallels with Christian formulations. He sees life in terms of salvation from death into life. The greatest folly that can be committed is not to believe in the river knowledge which can effect this change.

It is here that the argument reverts to the problem of Angus because Angus never "believed" in the river knowledge in the way that Kenn did. From his unbelief at the Achglas Pool can be seen the seeds of his later downfall. He does not have and never has had "faith" in the river; this makes him a prey to the keepers, then to the greater and crueller world authorities. When he has come to an end of himself and his old bearing has been corrupted, Kenn meets him and tries to make him see that there is a way of saving himself from the forces which are against him, but Angus cannot see this. Then Kenn leaves him and Angus dies. He is involved in a bloody battle and wounded badly. His friends are not allowed to try to bring him in, prevented by an officer, a "Bloody young whipper-snapper". (HR p.172) Like the gamekeeper in the strath, the officer is a representative of the "Authority" of which Angus has always been afriad. This "Authority", which Gunn equates with the wars of "civilisation", eventually claimed Angus because Angus believed that the world of "Authority" was the only world

there was. Put at its strongest, the only reason Angus could be prey to a corrupt "Authority" would be because he was corrupt himself. From this incident it would seem to be the case that Gunn recognised that there were people who would not see life in the way that he did. For them there was no help, no hope and in this case no salvation for here it depends nor on the will of God as Christianity argues, but on the nature of man himself.

However, this is going further than Gunn himself goes in Highland River. Angus is never blamed for not having the same understanding of life as Kenn; it is simply accepted that he does not. A central metaphor in Gunn's work which focusses these difficult ideas is the metaphor of the hunter and the hunted. Kenn is a natural hunter. He is prepared to engage in strenuous and risky activity to catch the salmon. The paradox of the metaphor is that courage and excitement are linked ineluctably with death. Yet Gunn - and here he is at his grimmest - is prepared to trust that conflict, even that, as part of the pattern of human life. Kenn is prepared to face all sorts of danger with the courage which helped him to catch the salmon. Angus, taken out of his natural context and subjected to the immense pressure of trench warfare is not that strong and cracks under the pressure. A similar pairing occurs in The Silver Darlings where Tormad in his valiant death-fight becomes a living force within the community while Ronnie who fought initially but then succumbed to navy life comes back eventually, washed out, dry, with no spirit left. This Nordic defiance which Kenn and Tormad display, Gunn uses to stiffen the pure Celtic spirit which he sees as being dangerously prone to fatalism. In the face of danger, it is better to fight, even if that fight leads to death, than to submit to "fate", as the people of the Riasgan do when faced with the Clearances. It is those who are willing to take risks who receive moments when they are broken in on by a greater and grander reality, whose nature cannot be specified. Who can say but within this reality there might not be a resolution for Angus also? This

discussion shows quite clearly that Gunn does not believe in the "spiritual superiority of the Gael". He sees clearly that though background is important for a person's growth, some Highlanders do not imbibe from their background the principles Kenn stored away, which become his resources in times of extremity.

The last chapters of the book are taken up with a disquisition on the kind of knowledge Kenn has gained. It begins, as usual, with the knowledge of his own locality. When Kenn and Angus talk to each other of places they know, they describe them by the position of individual boulders, hollows and the small intricacies of the land. There is no sense of using knowledge to destroy as some do:

> If one of the boys had been capable of saying, "Pouf! the blue is merely caused by the stuff in the shell absorbing all the other colours in the spectrum," the words might have smashed the the blue...for in the superiority that such cleverness breeds there can be a chuckling cruelty. (HR p.149)

As Kenn grows older his relationship with the river intensifies and affects him completely:

> And, from his river, his relationship is carried over, in whatever degree, to every other environment in life. (HR p.196)

Kenn uses this knowledge to preserve himself in all corrupt and threatening situations as, when as a student he and a friend doing midwifery training, visit a woman giving birth in a Glasgow slum:

> Kenn kept himself as still as a boulder, kept himself whole, and endured with primeval cunning,

> the grey agony on his face grey as stone.
> (HR p.197)

And it is after this experience that Kenn records his conviction that one day the world's ordinary people will destroy "the black cage". (HR p.197) Kenn knows that what his river means to him is the sense other men have that "life must be better than this"; this is yet another significance carried by the river in the novel:

> Kenn, who has never belonged to revolutionary political societies, knows what moves them. Old as the rocks, nameless as the old woman, warm as sunshine, insinuating as the wind, is this river that flows down the straths of time. (HR p.197)

Kenn's official schooling continues and his marks are high enough to enable him to enter the bursary competition which would lead to a university palce. During the exam he realises how his school knowledge and his secret knowledge are related. The first question reads - "Enumerate the principal forms of energy and show they are traceable to the sun." (HR p.208) This is unexpected and he answers first those question which depend solely on "textbook knowledge". (HR p.208) Eventually he gets round to the first question realising as he does so that what he is doing is writing down his secret knowledge in an academically rigorous form:

> The excitement of apprehension made his brain extraordinarily clear; his sentences were factual and precisely written. It was the first time that he had ever consciously evolved out of himself the marvel of the universe, and when he read over what he had written, he was queerly thrilled. (HR p.209)

To celebrate, Kenn goes out to catch a salmon this time from the Peat Pool further up the river than he had been with Angus. On this third stretch of the river the notion of the source is born in him. This new catch and stretch of river marks Kenn's entry into manhood. It is on the journey back up river to collect the fish that he knows that he has lost his fear of the dark and of the burial ground just as Angus had said he would.

After Kenn's wartime experiences, he becomes a nuclear scientist and works in Edinburgh. Here, as at all other times, Kenn relates his work to the secret knowledge. He wishes he could chart the mind as one charts the atom:

> It is the sort of thought that makes him dream dreams and see in his tubes and tiny electric currents and recording apparatus the flint arrowheads and stone drawings of his brothers who travelled before him into the straths of darkness. (HR p.220)

Here in the twentieth century, Kenn sees himself simply as one of the seekers who have characterised the history of his people.

Kenn tells his colleague, Radzyn, a Pole, about his project for the holidays: to walk to the source of the river. Kenn is in awe of Radzyn because of his wide knowledge and his professional ambition. He likes him though, because he seems to come from a "folk". (HR p.224) Radzyn teases him about going on a pilgrimage in order to receive a vision and Kenn becomes loquacious about what he feels is the significance of the river. And it is at this point that Gunn makes a connection which so definitely places the novel in the centre of the Scottish tradition, by showing that Kenn, as a scientist is simply another form of the gifted and talented individual. However, the significant change in Highland River is

that Kenn has not been rejected by his community but nurtured by it. Through Kenn, Gunn develops the old theme by seeing in Kenn not only the potential for intellectual excellence, but for leadership in the community. Kenn says that as a scientist his work on the nature of things is very like that of the artist. Kenn believes the work of the artist to be outmoded, and that natural discovery lies with the scientist:

> the thrill of new forms or new beauty are today to be found in science. (HR p.228)

Finally Kenn states his belief that the scientist will make war impossible and bring about a return of the Golden Age for the folk. What is so exciting about this speech is that Kenn's Bildungsroman has not been the story of the growth to maturity of a Highland boy merely, but it has been about the growth to maturity of a talented individual who is able to become what he was meant to be - a leader. It has been a restatement and development of the theme of the pre-Renaissance novels. Joseph Sloan comments:

> In this sense, Highland River is not merely Gunn's portrait of the artist as a young man, but his portrait of the young man as embryonic artist (the underlying identity of "scientist" and "artist" is explicitly suggested in the final chapter.) Kenn... is building up stores of vision on which he ever afterwards openly or secretly fed. (TAV p.116-7)

Before analysing the significance of this discovery any further, it is necessary to follow Kenn to the end of his journey. On his way to the source, Kenn, taking in the little Pictish dwellings, realises how closely he is linked to these ancestors and exclaims, "I am the Pict!" (HR p.242) This is the most concise and radical expression of contemporary thinking on the relation between the

people of the past and those of the present. It emphasises Gunn's understanding of a living tradition. Contemporary man is not merely influenced by the Pict or by looking on the same landscape as the Pict; in so far as modern man is a descendant of the Pict, he himself is the living expression of ancient man, who is not to be thought of as irrelevant, remote, uncultured and dead, but who is powerful and alive in his descendants. As Kenn realises this, he realises too, that his journey into community is a journey into solitariness and he says, "A man had to find himself, and to hold himself with a solitary, lonely integrity." (HR p.246) Sloan comments:

> in a characteristic and essential Gunn paradox, the realisation of individuality is simultaneous with the entry into communion with one's ancestors (TAV p.106)

As this last walk is a summing up of the novel's themes, Gunn again broaches the subject of evil as Kenn recognises in the clegs "an evil principle in creation." (HR p.246) This observation is developed into Kenn's analysis of the quick but sometimes cruelly ironic mind of Radzyn and he again realises as he did with Angus, that though evil can be recognised it cannot be entirely overcome, though Kenn does have hope in the future:

> Only occasionally now was the meaning amongst men. Radzyn. Though in Radzyn - he saw it now - there was something for ever tragic...There was nothing one could do with the tragic conception of life except acknowledge it. (HR pp.251-2)

As Kenn had predicted in his conversation with Radzyn, at the source he finds the river peters out into small puddles of black ooze and he is at first disappointed that there is nothing grander. But he brings himself to believe that it much more realistic of Nature to shows "Life and death in ooze." (HR p.253) However, the

stream appears again and leads into a loch as beautiful as anything he could have imagined: he realises that his own loneliness is part of the tradition of the people and sees that he wishes to achieve "not of personal salvation, but of an unending spiritual drive into the unknown." (HR p.255) In other words, he sees this personal salvation with which his tradition has endowed him, not as an end in itself but as a means to the great end, the journey into universal knowledge. As he sits by the shore of the loch, he does not receive a vision, but he does confirm to himself what he believes:

> As his eyes looked across the water, they smiled. Out of the great works of art, out of great writing there comes upon the soul sometimes a feeling of strange intimacy. It is the moment in which all conflict is reconciled, in which a timeless harmony is achieved.
>
> It was coming upon him now. (HR p.255)

From this survey of Highland River it can be seen that Gunn's contribution to the theme of the relationship between the gifted individual and the community is quite unlike those of other authors studied above. From the comments at the end of the novel, it is clear that Kenn sees himself as a leader, a scientist who will discover how to bring about a new Golden Age. (This is how Kenn as a boy saw the work of scientists like da Vinci, Galileo, Newton, Faraday and Archimedes - men who seek humbly to improve the human condition. (HR p.179)) Therefore if he is to improve the condition of his people it is important that he and they understand each other, that he grows to maturity within his own society. The clearest, most unmistakable comment on this subject comes earlier in the novel when Kenn is thinking about the noble qualities of his parents, qualities which make them in a sense the nobility of their own society. He is unlike talented men who aspired to social

greatness because only in that milieu could they exercise their talents; such men came not from the folk, but from enslaved workers. Kenn feels no need of social aggrandisement:

> all the more subtle elements of human intuitions, the sap and health of life, came naturally out of his heritage from the folk. (HR p.219)

The discussion just quoted from could not describe more accurately the plight of previous writers as seen by the writers in the first decades of this century. "Robbed of a background" is a telling phrase which sums up how earlier writers felt about their position within Scottish society. By implication, the phrase expresses the richness and wealth Gunn associated with his own society.

Despite the fact that his society has had its economy ravaged, that it has endured remote - and thus often irrelevant - government, that it has suffered teachers who were antipathetic to its values and sought to foist their own values on to the children they taught, Gunn finds that its springs in tradition and history have not dried up and are, in fact, bubbling over with life. Everything that makes Kenn a mature adult has its source in Highland culture. He is an intelligent child who will come first for the northern counties in a bursary competition and this intelligence which is linked with his sensitivity, is met and nurtured by his childhood in the strath where there are primroses for his sensitivity, brochs for his imagination, eels for his temper, green linnets for his spiritual aspirations and the river for his self. The threats and anger of teachers, gamekeepers, representatives of those people, who according to the history books control the Highlands, are undermined by the strength of the tradition of the people, of the folk. Kenn's gift is neither despised by his community nor destroyed by inimical institutional authority - as were those of John Gourlay, Eoghan Strang, Tommy Sandys, Gilian and the heroes of

MacPherson's novels - it is nurtured in the strath of delight. Unlike Barbie, Brieston, Thrums and Inverary, Kenn's place, his community, has enough contact with its own oral traditions to be able to offer Kenn much. He lives in a strath of delight, not a mean, narrow-minded, parochial community.

How close this view of the importance of environment is to the views of Gunn's contemporaries can be seen in their work. Gibbon's remembrance of his childhood and its significance was discussed in the previous chapter. Edwin Muir and Eric Linklater place a similar importance on Orkney experiences. The same theme occurs in MacDiarmid's poetry whenever he celebrates his birthplace, Langholm. Langholm traditions, remembered from childhood, provide him with a potent source of images and symbols which he uses in his maturity to interpret life:

> Drums in the Walligate, pipes in the air,
> Come and hear the cryin' o' the Fair.
>
> A' as it used to be, when I was a loon,
> On Common-Ridin' Day in the Muckle Toon.
>
> The bearer twirls the Bannock-and Saut-Herrin',
> The Croon o' Roses through the lift is farin',
>
> The aucht-fit thistle wallops in hie;
> In heather besoms a' the hills gang by.
>
> But noo it's a' the fish o' the sea
> Nailed on the roond o' the Earth to me.[21]

It is significant that none of these men were in their boyhood associated with industrialised Scotland. Though their mature vision includes industrialised areas, the main elements of what is

predominantly an optimistic vision are culled from country and small town life. Thus the writers' interest in the idea of a Golden Age in pre-history finds a personal parallel in their own lives. However, this is not a sufficient explanation of their optimism because earlier writers, though working in rural settings, were deeply pessimistic.

Linked to a wave of Nationalism, born out of the post-First World War concept of the importance of small nations, the writers associated with MacDiarmid who believed that Scotland was unique and significant had to find ways of expressing that in their writing. Largely, they agreed with pre-Renaissance writers that social institutions such as the churches and the schools and other oppressive bureaucracies were a failure as far as embodying a distinctive Scottish identity was concerned, and were in many ways actually detrimental to that identity. They solved their problem, however, by seeing in the relation of the community to landscape and tradition, a new value. Because, like language, tradition belonged to the community, it had been less affected by dominating English influences than had the institutions. Though it had been disregarded by those who took their system of living from English manners and was only palatable to such when sentimentalised by the Kailyard novels, when writers like MacDiarmid and Gunn looked at it more closely, it yielded to them a uniquely Scottish and valuable way of life. Because of these considerations, it is easy to see why the debate about language - one of the most obvious aspects of the folk tradition - was so vehemently conducted. If the traditional folk-life could not be preserved, then Scottish identity would evaporate into history. Pre-Renaissance writers tended to shy clear of Scottish tradition because it had been so devalued by the Kailyard writers. J M Barrie is not immune from over-emphasising the Scottishness of an accent to sentimentalise his characters, although there is often a satiric vindictiveness in

his writing which is not part of the emotional blandness of the Kailyard.

Pre-Renaissance writers do not put such a premium on landscape either, though there is some use of it in Brown (the "black" characters are impervious to natural beauty), Hay (the pathetic fallacy is a vital structural device in Gillespie) and Munro (Gilian is often enchanted by natural beauty), none of these writers use it as a means of nurturing their characters to maturity. There is no hint of a Wordsworthian "influence of natural objects", which is by contrast clearly seen in Gunn's fiction in supporting the growth and identity of these characters. Any help which the landscape might give them is swiftly destroyed by the hopelessness of their situation - the unreliability of their imaginations, the scorn of parents, the misunderstandings of teachers. Brown is perhaps the most interesting case of this non-use of landscape and tradition as a source of alternative value. The burden of his novel is the life-stifling atmosphere of the small Scottish community for the creative talent. His use of landscape is minimal and his use of tradition almost non-existent: Scottish identity seems to be on the point of extinction. However, Brown and the others do present, quite unselfconsciously, a density of Scots speech and culture, unavailable to MacDiarmid and Gunn only two or three decades later.

Perhaps the point is that while Brown was so concerned about the spiritual deterioration of the Scots community in terms of institutions and small-mindedness, he could not have been expected to believe that in the very language and understated wit of the "bodies", which he used so unmistakably and accurately to express the cruelty and violence of the people, an attractive, pithy and vibrant folk-tradition can be seen. Gourlay himself, an ogre, a brutish, bad-tempered man, is in some lights a brooding anti-hero,

imbued with the determination and verve of the devil of Scottish folk-tales, towering like a girning Colossus over his pygmy son. Gibbon and Gunn who are consciously using tradition to provide an alternative set of values give an optimistic cast to that which in Brown's novel leaves only room for pessimism. Gibbon does use the speech of people who are often shallow or narrow-minded in order to show the vibrancy of their tradition. Gunn pits the fathers of his novels into the teeth of death but instead of being anti-heroes, they are heroes who treat their sons with generosity and sensitivity, protecting them and nurturing them. The settings of both sets of novels are similar. Yet by emphasising in the later set what is taken for granted in the former, pessimism is often turned to optimism. The last point emerging from Highland River which I wish to consider is its importance in Gunn's personal development as a writer. Highland River is Gunn's personal manifesto. It marks a culmination of several themes in his writing - the importance of the individual, the value of the community and the resultant harmony of these two themes. Gunn did not start writing novels until he was in his thirties, although he had been writing poetry and short stories for magazines since the First World War. This is a late start compared with Gibbon and MacDiarmid who through their careers in journalism had come to writing much earlier. Both these writers were discouraged by their parents from taking up literary careers. By 1926, Gunn was working for the Customs and Excise, having completed his training and having passed all his exams. His father was dead and because he was qualified his mother had no objection to his writing, especially since it was undertaken in his spare time. By 1937, Gunn had written six full-length novels, numerous magazine articles on literature, politics and Scotland, and a prose work called Whisky and Scotland in which he set out his mature opinions on most aspects of Scottish culture at length. This work and Highland River seem to have confirmed to Gunn his own literary ability. He was not someone who just wrote novels in his spare time: he was, in truth, a writer. After Gunn realised this he gave up his job to

devote himself completely to writing. Pre-Renaissance novelists describe characters who have all the gifts of a writer but are unable to realise what the possession of such gifts mean. These characters, and many of their creators, enter the literary world through journalism - the closest job to writing from which a living can be earned. Brown, Munro, Barrie, MacPherson, Linklater and Gibbon all entered this way. As it took Linklater some time to understand the meaning of his gift before he chose the career of a professional novelist, so it took Gunn time, not so much to understand the nature of his talent but to build up confidence in its value. Gunn's career bears out the point that there are few enabling literary traditions through which, or even a literary environment in which, a Scottish writer can identify himself as a writer. The existence of his own talent was one of the few indications that Gunn had that he might be a writer. Sloan comments:

> The theme of the return of the native becomes not only a major issue of Gunn's own fiction, but a central theme of contemporary Scottish fiction generally - seen in different ways in Fionn MacColla's The Albannach, Eric Linklater's early novels, Lewis Grassic Gibbon's A Scots Quair. And within the context of the Scottish Renaissance movement, the issue has two levels. On the one hand it is a reality explored by these writers as a cultural fact. On the other hand, it becomes a fiction parallel to their own activity. (TAV p.30)

Gunn is remarkable in using his own fiction as a personal as well as a social tradition even though he had been more influenced by Scottish writers than is usual. By writing about the cultural traditions of the old Highland society, Gunn nudges the reader into engagement with them. By writing about the problems of the

individual, Gunn comes to terms with himself, with who and what he is. After Gunn had made this decision mentally, he follows it with an act of will, he affirms this self-knowledge by giving up his job. Having made these discoveries and decisions personally, he was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Highland River in 1937. This is one of the rare and fortunate occasions when the literary establishment was in step with the nation's talent.

Gunn has not developed the theme of the gifted individual and the community to its fullest extent. At the end of Highland River, Gunn introduces the idea of leadership. In The Silver Darlings he takes up this idea much more explicitly. Joseph Sloan has shown that from Ewan in The Lost Glen through Aniel and Kenn, Gunn has been shaping this theme:

> This issue of the need for a leader out of the folk haunts Gunn's subsequent fiction, and is at the root of his fictional idea of the Celtic hero-youth - Finn in The Silver Darlings, Young Art in The Green Isle of the Great Deep. In Aniel, Gunn projects his own relationship with his tradition, and sees his role, the role of the artist, inextricably linked with that of the folk. This is further explicated in Highland River, and most fully developed in The Silver Darlings and The Green Isle of the Great Deep, with hero, legend, myth and art, and the crisis of the folk contained in the figures of Finn and Young Art. (TAV p.67)

It is this theme in particular which I wish to discuss in relation to The Silver Darlings.

In outline the community at Dunster is similar to Gunn's other small communities, though there are important variations. The novel breaks in on Dunster at an important period in the history of the north of Scotland. Gunn has moved forward from the time of the Clearances to the time of the great herring fishings which produced thriving and prosperous communities down the east coast and to a lesser extent on the west coast. Gunn keeps up an international perspective throughout the novel even more so than in Butcher's Broom. In The Silver Darlings there does not seem to be the great distance between the Highlands and the rest of Europe that there was in Butcher's Broom and this is due partly to the Highlanders' own awareness of how they could exploit historical trends for their own benefit and partly due to the nature of the trend itself, the fact that it is expressed in travelling, in sailing. Thus distances between the east and west of Scotland, between Scotland and Germany or northern European ports have become practicable. Decisions taken in London may still take time to filter up to the Highlands, but they are not completely incomprehensible views of an alien world which is what they tended to be in Butcher's Broom.

At the opening of the novel, Gunn depicts one of the small seashore communities which has grown up as a direct result of the people being cleared from the glens down to the sea. In the early years many died but now the younger men are beginning to learn how to fish. Tormad is such a young man, who, though knowing next to nothing about the way of the sea, knows this much about it - "The sea at least is free." (TSD p.27) However, the unconscious irony of this remark is revealed in that it is made just before he and his crew are captured by the press-gang, whose boat prowls in the waters around the coasts looking for easy and unprotected targets. His remark is made to encourage the sons of a cleared people who know in their hearts that "everything that spoke of power and wealth had to be feared." (TSD p.27) Before they are captured however, Tormad and his crew make a full catch of herring and so

are the initiators, however, briefly, of what Gunn calls "a busy, fabulous time among the common people of that weathered northern land." (TSD p.14) Thus even at the end of the Napoleonic era people are still subjected to outrageous injustice, which is summed up by a comment made later by Kirsty, an old woman with whom Tormad's widow goes to stay after his capture, "If only we could have the law on them!" (TSD p.64) At the beginning of the novel though, the common people are still unprotected from the vicious incursions of an uncaring Establishment, what Gunn in The Green Isle of the Great Deep was to call "A vast impersonal power."

Because she lost Tormad so soon after their marriage, Catrine takes a deep dislike to the sea, "Her hatred of the sea had gone deep as an instinct." (TSD p.118) As she walks from Dale, her home, to Dunster, where Kirsty lives, she takes refuge in the land, the world to which she truly belonged and from which she had been cleared. Being tired from her journey, she lies down to sleep:

> In these great primeval moors, there was no human habitation...and in this lonely weariness she lay down in the heather. From being wide awake she passed in a moment into a sound sleep...
>
> As she sat up and gazed around the desolate moor came about her in a friendly way...here, at least, was a sunny world in which she was free, in which she was alone, in which she was glad to be alone - until the thought of her solitude actually touched her. Then for a little time, she wept freely, even turning over into the heather and gripping it.
>
> But the tears were doing her good, and deep in her mind she knew it. (TSD pp.50-52)

However, Catrine has to learn that political power reigns on land just as much as at sea. During her sleep she dreams of the stagecoaches which have been newly introduced:

> [they] signified to such as Catrine the traffic and pomp of the great world, its ruthless power speed, its cities and its wealth. (TSD pp.51-52)

Just after this she meets a southern shepherd whose intention is to be "companionable" and Catrine flees from him. The shepherd is the representative of the authorities who ordered the glens to be cleared of people and employed men, often from the Borders, to care for vast flocks of sheep. Catrine is as vulnerable to the power of authority on land as on sea. Yet she does not see this and though her love and understanding of the Land is a good quality, her hatred of the sea becomes one of the obstacles her son faces in his growth to maturity and responsibility. Finn, Catrine's son, realises that the promises of emotional security offered by the Land must not be pitted against the promises of financial security offered by the sea. Only when the two are balanced are the people safe.

This point about the nature of the Land leads on naturally to the discussion of the spiritual aspirations of the community. The community has a magical quality; Gunn has already described the herring fishing as "fabulous" (TSD p.14) When Roddie, the youngest skipper in Dunster, hears of Special, the curer's plans, to extend fishing in Dunster, it is like "something told in a dream." (TSD p.125) The source of this magic is the herring. At various times in the novel, someone will mention this word and the world takes on a magical quality, in the same way Kenn's world changed when he saw the salmon in the Well Pool. This excitement is part of Tormad's short experience:

> They forgot all about the ship; they forgot everything, except the herrings, the lithe silver fish, the swift flashing ones, hundreds and thousands of them, the silver darlings. No moment like this had ever come to them in their lives. They were drunk with the excitement and staggered freely about the boat. (TSD p.26)

The magic of the herring lies to some extent in their financial value. As Kenn's salmon was able to purchase new boots, so catches of herring produce unheard of wealth. While Gunn keeps this aspect firmly rooted in historical fact, he does not lose the connotations of the fairy story where the boy discovers by happy chance a magical goose which lays golden eggs. This part of the herrings' magic is caught in the proverb:

> "Creels of silver herring will turn into creels of silver crowns." (TSD p.81)

However, it is not simply for this reason that the herring are fabulous, it is also because of their beauty as seen in the description of Tormad's catch, their bounty (there is always a muliplicity of them) and their givenness. Had the sea not freely and generously given this gift to the people, more would have died and more would have emigrated. All these factors combine to make the coming of the herring a liberating time: a time of financial security and yet a time of amazement and wonder as men and women reap such a full and great harvest. Later on men can say with confidence that "the sea was free to all"; others say that "they wanted a large optimism, not the crofter's niggardly fear." (TSD p.85; p.491) All these feelings are described in a conversation between two old crofters, Donald and Lachie, who come down to Dunster on the night of Roddie's first big fishing. It is Donald's opinion that "The world is growing young." (TSD p.84) The times are so prosperous, time itself seems to be in reverse. Sorrow is

giving place to joy. Here, in this period of history, there is a Golden Age, when life is full and satisfying. Inside history itself, though there are fears and tragedies, in general, the people are at peace. The peace has been produced by the incredible sea-gift, by the sheer undeserved, illimitable grace of the sea. It is so incredible Donald says:

> "It's enough almost to frighten a man. Do you think it can last?"
> "I have a misgiving myself. It seems hardly right." (TSD p.85)

Donald's final summing up is:

> "It felt to me myself like the beginning of strange and wonderful things." (TSD p.85)

As magic is a feature of this community, so too is myth. Gunn pays attention to the spirit of an individual. When Catrine flees the shepherd, she urges her tired body to go on by calling to "her spirit". In The Silver Darlings some characters perceive knowledge by means which reason cannot adequately account for. Gunn does not try to explain how these parts of the psyche work, but his novel assumes their existence. Joseph Sloan comments:

> Gunn opens out the artistic possibilities of "marginal" states of experience, extreme states, what to normal consciousness are defined as epiphenomena, at the same time as he explores the human, spiritual significance of such experiences; and modern artistic preoccupation is fused with peculiar, if not unique, Highland experience (second sight). (TAV p.144)

Such experiences can be seen in the dreams Catrine has after Tormad is press-ganged. Although she does not know for certain that he is

dead, she is sure because of her dreams. The truth of her dreams is later confirmed by the eye-witness account of Tormad's friend Ronnie. Before Tormad went to sea, Catrine had dreamed of his death. In the dream she and Tormad stood by a pool in a wood, where according to legend, it was still possible to hear the cries of a girl who died of a broken heart. The place itself dates back to early Christian times, being called 'The Wood of the Cell of Mary'. Suddenly the rowan trees near by, usually mentioned because they ward off evil spirits, look evil themselves and the pool turns into a loch. A black horse comes out of the wood and carries Tormad into the loch. The horse is the water-kelpie, the death horse which carries its quarry to the bottom of the loch. In the days after Tormad's capture, Catrine is obsessed by the conjunction "Blood: rowan-red." (TSD p.43) Sometimes she hears Tormad's footsteps approaching the door. Then on the fifth night, Tormad appears to her:

> He stood upright, but with his head slightly lowered, looking at her...The power of the emotion in him, its desire to help her without being able to help, its essence of the inmost man, the soft generous man she knew so well, its appeal to her, with the glimmer in the eyes searching for her understanding, so wrought upon her that her own love mounted through her in a warm flood and she cried to him in a broken cry, and awoke fully, and in the wakened moment saw him fade backward into the far wall. (TSD pp.43-44)

This "appearance" is similar to Ewan's appearance to Chris in Sunset Song. Neither widow has a body to bury and both women make their peace with their men in dreams or visions, thus reconciling themselves to the fact of their deaths. Catrine's dreams are not, on the whole, like Chris's. Many of Chris's dreams are expressions of the divided consciousness so common to Scottish literature.

Catrine's dreams are not an expression of illness but of health. Gunn uses her dreams as valid means of perception, extremely uncommon though they may seem to us, but quite ordinary, though still significant, occurences in Catrine's world.

The mythical heritage of this community stretches further back than the legends of early Christian times. Other incidents in the novels show that there is still a deep folk memory of the old gods of Sun Circle. When plague comes to Dunster and crofts where infected people have died are to be burnt, the crofters look on at the flames "the red flames, the cleansing flames, as at some dread rite to the old dark gods." (TSD p.202) The thoughts of old ways persist among devoutly Christian people. When Kirsty dies, Catrine opens the window to let Kirsty's spirit out to travel to its rest. While these myths still shape the life of the people in the community, they in turn, tend to see things in these terms and make myths out of their own experiences, as Angus was able to do for Kenn when he told him of Lachie-the-fish. This process is seen when Finn and his cousin Barbara travel from Dunster to Dale:

> At the Grey Hen's Well, Barbara drank twice.
> "Once for Auntie Catrine and once for myself,"
> she murmured...
> "Why that?" he asked astonished.
> "This is where your mother rested," she said,
> "long, long ago, when for the first time she
> crossed the Ord and entered into a strange land."
>
> He smiled at her legendary tone, but he saw,
> too, that there was something behind it and,
> whatever it was, all in a moment it touched
> his heart. (TSD p.441)

Gunn develops this attitude to the world as myth in his depiction of the people's attitude to the world as tradition. In a novel like The Silver Darlings terms like legend, myth and tradition have a common strand of meaning and it is possible to see a character like Finn in relation to all three. First of all there is his own individual identity. Later he becomes a legend in his own lifetime because of his heroic acts. Occasionally he is seen as a reincarnation of the mythical Finn MacCoul and often he is seen in relation to his own historical tradtion. The common link between these categories is that they all suggest that there is more to Finn than can be found in his contemporaries. His greatness, which these categories reveal, distinguished him from his fellows.

As the world is inhabited by events or persons who are thought of as mythical, so too people and events are seen in terms of tradition. When Catrine first meets Roddie at Dunster they pass an old ruin and Roddie passes on the traditions associated with it to Catrine:

> "The old folk call it Chapelhill," he answered. "It seems there was a church here at one time, though I have heard it said that long, long ago it was a monastery and the name it had was the House of Peace." (TSD p.61)

Kirsty is one of those people who preserve histories and relations of people by prodigious feats of memory. Kirsty is able to relate endless annotated genealogies to Catrine and gets upset if she thinks Catrine is not listening to her. These never alter in detail. Some people have a tag attached containing the essence of their social reputation, like Mr Sage, always known as the "beloved minister of Kildonan" because he tried to protect the Highlanders during the Clearances. (TSD p.110) (He is mentioned in Butcher's Broom as one of the few ministers who took the side of the people

at that time. See BB p.168.) People Kirsty knew personally usually draw Kirsty's own opinion of them into their description:

> the youngest, Ruth married to that runaway shepherd in the Borders, God help her, poor lassie, for of us all, she was my favourite.
> "But she loved him?"
> "Faugh! Him! What she saw in him beat me, as I told her many a time. But she made her bed and she'll lie on it, lumps and all. (TSD p.110)

Kirsty spends hours retailing this kind of information and Finn often goes to sleep under the sound of her "endless voice". (TSD p.153) This activity shows what value she sets on a detailed precise account of her people. She remembers clearly and works up her accounts into their best form. The people may have been cleared and have had the important component of place removed from their identity but their historical identity has not been lost because it still exists in the memory of older members of the community.

Traditions go back to pre-Christian times and include members of the community both past and present. They also include the diverse elements of Highland culture. Roddie's father is described as a "tall viking of a man" bringing to the surface the fact that there is a knowledge of seamanship deep in the folk tradition. (TSD p.130) Roddie, the young skipper who does so much to advance the knowledge of the sea in Dunster, is also described as a Viking as Gunn deliberately draws on the fact that the Vikings and their seamanship were a constituent people of the north of Scotland. In Lewis, after he has had a run of bad luck and danger, Roddie gets into a brawl:

> Roddie glared at him, as if he did not
> know him, and, turning on the men in the pub,
> let out his challenging berserk roar.
> (TSD p.360)

Finn's crew-mate, Rob, is a type similar to Kirsty and often the crew spend the hours in the boat listening to Rob's stories. He has a tale about an eccentric laird and his housekeeper which is grimly amusing. After it is over however, one of the others says that if his people had had the guts, they would have murdered such a man:

> [Finn] knew why Henry was sore. For the
> Black Doctor had driven Henry's people from
> the pleasant valley lands far up the green windings
> of the strath, had cleared them out to make room for
> sheep, just as the Earl of Sutherland had evicted
> Finn's own kindred from Kildonan and Strathnaver.
> (TSD p.274)

Tradition is not only entertainment, it is education, history and identity.

Communal discussion takes place at Meg's house. She makes nets as the men stand around discussing the politics and the economics of fishing. This marks a change from the ceilidhs of Butcher's Broom, though these have not died out entirely. Finn passes old Lachlan's house after he has been at Meg's:

> Lachlan's house was a famous gathering place - the
> real ceilidh-house before Finn was born...

> When he got round the house Finn paused again to listen. The rhythm of the song was more intimate to him than his own face. (TSD p.188)

Finn realises that at Meg's house men are concerned with money whereas at Lachlan's they are not and Gunn shows how the new economic prosperity may dismiss older values. Later on the in the novel, he shows how older values are able to help a person understand himself, to understand the deep and twisting path of his emotions. Finn's understanding of his mother is usually furthered by means of traditional songs or proverbs.

What these various myths, traditions and attitudes add up to is a way of life and a way of perceiving life. In such a community a boy like Finn can fit in. Finn has to stay with Roddie's family when Kirsty has the plague:

> The constraint at being in a new house did not irk Finn; it gave him a feeling of being whole and collected; (TSD p.211)

Such is the bond created by common tradition and close living that Finn finds it easy to settle in places with which he is superficially unfamiliar.

Finn is the hero of the novel and it is his story that is followed in detail as Gunn charts his growth from childhood to maturity, from obscurity to prominence. As he is to be a leader of his people so it is necessary that he understands and is proficient in all aspects of the community outlined above: political knowledge, elemental knowledge, magic, myth and tradition. In discussing Finn, I would like to consider him in relation to the first four of these categories showing how his understanding of each fits him as

a leader. Then I want to look at the main events of his growth before considering him in relation to the fifth category, tradition.

When still in his teens Finn is able to follow the discussion of the Reform Bill by his uncles in Helmsdale and understands the issues well enough to be able to report back to Roddie's father on the nature of the Bill and his uncles' opinion of it. Finn is intelligent and gets on well at school. It must be noted that his teacher, Mr Gordon, is unusual as far as fictional portraits in Scottish literature of teachers are concerned, because he is sympathetic to the people and anxious that they should not be exploited because of their ignorance. This is why when teaching arithmetic he teaches it by using examples which will be meaningful to his pupils. Even so, out of the entire class which includes men as well as boys, it is Finn who comes up with the correct answer when Mr Gordon sets the problem of finding out how many knots Meg has to tie before she earns a penny. To do this the class must find out how many knots are in a net:

> "Well now, how many knots are there in the net?"...
> The answer given was four times the number of meshes.
> "You all appear to be agreed?" And then it was that
> Finn made the impatient movement with his hand.
> "Someone seems to be troubled," remarked Mr
> Gordon, giving Finn time...
> "Well?"
> Finn raised his head. "The number of knots along
> the top is 1,801. The number down from that is 504.
> So there are 505 lines of 1,801 knots in each.
> The total" - he pauses to add on his slate - "is
> 909,505 knots." (TSD p.180)

Later on when Finn has left school for the fishing he remembers much of what he learnt in school or read in books:

> They [the Scarabens and Morven hills] had never looked so vast and impressive before, with something foreign about them, as if they were a "mountain range" in Spain or Africa, from one of Mr Gordon's geography lessons. (TSD p.244)

Measured by these external signs, Finn's intelligence is above average and when Mr Gordon finds that Catrine has enough money, he suggests that Finn should be sent to university, a well worn path for the leaders of Scottish society but a path which will almost certainly separate Finn from his own people and train him in values and ideals which would be antagonistic to his traditional ones. So the choice comes to Finn as it came to many of his literary ancestors. Will he go? Will he leave his community and align himself with the world of political power? Will he be like Chris Guthrie and choose not to go then see his own potential shrivel up as the forces of political power overcome him?

Finn refuses to go. He realises that a university education would align him with lairds, ministers and lawyers and while he is ready to concede their status, he has no desire to share it:

> He just wanted to have nothing to do with them, to avoid them, so that he could enter into the comradeship of his own folk. (TSD p.279)

This is only one of the many instances which show Finn's natural alignment with his people. Joseph Sloan comments:

> Finn does not "come back"; he deliberately chooses not to leave; the issues are the same. (TSD p.135)

The choice is justified as Chris's was not, by later events which show Finn using his intelligence to work out what is happening to his people, why they have prospered while the people on the west coast have not. Finn tends to have pieces of information others lack but which are necessary if an overall interpretation is to be achieved:

> "But when the fishing comes on here, why don't they fish it?" asked Henry.
> "You need curers for that - and the curers are on the East coast then," answered Rob.
> "They had bad luck in the days of the Government bounty," said Finn, "and they've never got over it. There were fellows then, calling themselves curers, who were just pure chancers. They had no money, and all they were after was the bounty. Seumas was telling me about it." (TSD pp.531-532)

The decision about going to university is one of the few times Finn is involved with an institutional authority and he does not seriously consider it as an option. It is inevitable that Finn will go to sea and be trained for leadership through the resources of the community itself. Thus the pattern of an "alternative syllabus" which Gunn established through Hugh in Morning Tide and Kenn in Highland River is being developed in detail here.

Catrine, as was shown earlier, had an imbalance in her attitude to the land and sea. That Finn should find pleasure in the sea, however, troubles Catrine deeply because she worries that, as the sea killed Tormad, so it might kill Finn. However, Finn's

introduction to the two great elements of his world begins with the land. As a child Finn finds refuge in the land, as Catrine had done. One day Finn strays far from home and that coupled with his other adventures, makes him unhappy:

> He lay down on his right side, pulled his knees up, and hid his face with his arms and hands, whimpering as into his mother's bosom in the moment before sleep overtakes. The earth's bosom was warm with the sun and soon little Finn was sound asleep. (TSD p.95)

He always displays interest in the creatures of the land. His mother reflects:

> Finn and the birds. He had always been so curious. "What bird is that, Mama?" Eager eyes and quick feet, trying to follow the bird to its nest... (TSD pp.233-234)

However, Finn always wants to go to sea and when at last Catrine allows him to go, he begins to understand and enjoy the sea:

> He came to love the sea. It was a great element. He saw now how great and strong it was, with the strength of great men and daring and courage. It was a man's element. Never before had he seen it quite in this way. It was beyond even making money out of. It was a stupendous thing in itself... And the knowledge of all that lifted him above earthly misfortunes. (TSD pp.434-435)

This reflection coincides with a period of increasing stress in Finn's relations with his mother and reflects an imbalance between land and sea on his part which is not rectified until Finn

understands his mother and finds Una, the girl who is to be his wife. Then from the sea he can look lovingly on the land and pick out in his mind's eye Una's cottage. Gunn uses land and sea as symbols of male and female, action and passivity. He charts a person's maturity by his relation to each and the account of Finn and Catrine's relation to the elements has been adequately criticised elsewhere.[22]

Finn is aware of the magic of his community. He recognises in it qualities beyond naming, qualities which impelled the Vikings:

> in that moment [he] realised with a queer thrill of clear certainty the impulse that in the beginning moved those great wanderers of the sea to carve the lifting stem in a face. (TSD p.286)

Finn sees magical qualities in the world and at times seems to be endowed with them himself. Rob asks Finn to whistle up a wind:

> Finn pursed his lips once or twice before he could get them to sound. And hardly had the sound died when a puff of wind fanned their faces. (TSD p.282)

While Finn does not do this more than once in the novel, he is a boy who often brings victory from the jaws of disaster. This quality is recognised by some as marking Finn out from the people in general and its culmination comes in the words of an old shepherd who listens to Finn telling the stories of his own adventures:

> "You gave me a vision - of the youth of Finn MacCoul himself." (TSD p.449)

As the presence of the silver darlings causes men to marvel, so too, on some occasions, does the presence of Finn.

This area of Finn's character is developed through Finn's relation to myth. He is called Finn in order to make explicit his identity with Finn MacCoul, one of the great heroes of Celtic myth. Finn's appearance in the world has been prepared for by the courage of Tormad, his father, who, in his valiant attempt to win security for his people, fought like "a great hero" and in the prowess of Roddie, his surrogate father, "one of the old Vikings" who is hailed as a leader by the two old crofters after the big fishing:

> "Do you know, man, Lachie, when I saw that
> lad Roddie, tall and fair, with his blue eyes
> and his quiet ways, I had the sort of feeling that
> he had come himself up out of the sea like-
> like one sent to deliver us."
> (TSD p.453; p.85)

It is no accident that Finn himself is related by blood and circumstance to these two men who have begun a task that he is to continue. Finn MacCoul is a Celtic figure something akin to King Arthur. It is said of both that they will return to help man in his battle against evil. Finn MacCoul had two great war dogs Bran and Oscar and it is amusing that Gunn transposes these two names on to the two croft dogs belonging to Catrine, who are biddable and helpful, but hardly the dogs of war that Finn MacCoul's hounds were. This transposition shows the subtlety of Gunn's art in that he can suggest unmistakably the golden mythical past while not losing for a moment the detailed reality of the present and the opportunity for a touch of humour. Occasionally the present is transfused with the spirit of the past but it is never overcome by it, it always remains itself. Before the late explicit references to Finn MacCoul, young Finn is linked to him in childhood by the

trumpet he buys at the Fair. Roddie shows him how to blow it - significantly enough - as this trumpet becomes a symbol of his growing up and his place in the community. That night he dreams of blowing it and of causing a wall to collapse. Douglas Gifford comments:

> the symbolism moves on to the level of myth, and an eerie music comes in. The trumpet has become the great curved horn of Finn MacCoul, and Gunn's Gaelic readers would immediately recognise the meaning, that the great heroes, the Fianns, are slumbering in their mountain halls, awaiting the call on Finn MacCoul's trumpet which will rouse them to life, to aid mankind in its eternal battle against evil. Finn in the dream asserts his courage and blows this great trumpet - and not only are we to see this as a summoning of Finn MacCoul, we are to see Finn <u>becoming</u> Finn MacCoul as well. But Finn is not quite ready yet, and in the dream the stones leap on him.[23]

Again Gunn uses dream not as an escape from reality, but as a means of understanding it. Thus Finn carries in his name his identification with Finn MacCoul.

Although Finn is brought up a Christian and learns his catechism so that he can answer the catechist, as he grows up he becomes aware of other older rites carried out by the fishermen to protect their boats. While Kirsty has the plague and Finn stays with Roddie, he sees Roddie and Rob raise the neid-fire to sain their boats and their homes. Finn watches Roddie put out the hearth-fire and cannot understand why he should do this as it takes so long to start a fire. He is also frightened by Roddie's intensity:

> Roddie, his body getting darker and darker as the fire disappeared, looked like one performing some dreadful, unimaginable rite...like one slowly and deliberately murdering fire. (TSD p.217)

Rob explains why the fire has to be renewed:

> "Fire must be put out and created afresh or it, too, grows old and full of trouble and sin. Did you notice how dark-red, like blood, was the fire over David Sutherland's house?" (TSD pp. 218-219)

Dave Sutherland's house was burnt because he and his wife died of the plague. The description of the fire as being "dark-red like blood" evokes the earlier image of the rowan berries in Catrine's dream of Tormad - an image which speaks of destruction and death.

When the new fire is raised the men are awed:

> A little tongue of flame, dancing flame, whiter than the new moon. Finn could see the congested faces in those new-born wisps of fire, fire paler and brighter than ever he had seen before, dancing in glee like sprites.
>
> The brightness and whiteness seemed a pure miracle and struck the men themselves indeed with awe. (TSD p.218)

After the new fire is raised a pot of water is heated and as that water is "holy" it can give health to the men and "sain" the boat. Roddie sprinkles his crew as they sit with him. The old traditions are kept. Rob implies that the plague has come because they have not been kept by all the people in the village. They provide a

sense of wonderment which fills out the humanity of the participants. Finally they are equated by Finn with manhood. The company of such men seems so satisfying and sweet that though he longs to get up and join in, he does not:

> But all this was suppressed in the instinct for harmony. (TSD p.220)

In time Finn helps raise the neid-fire to sain his friend Henry's boat and the reasons for doing so are the same. Though the church is against it, it seems needless to put oneself on the wrong side of the "dark ones" when such a simple rite appeases them. In addition there is the "inflow of comradeship and confidence" which binds the men together in readiness for whatever they may have to face together at sea. (TSD p.527)

Finn knows about the magic and myths of the community and his own response to them can be seen in his relationship with the House of Peace, the site of Molrua's monastery in Sun Circle. In discussing Gunn's similarity to Wordsworth, in that both show spiritual experiences in moments of time, Douglas Gifford comments:

> Where Wordsworth's experience was private, Finn's is social as well. And it is the House of Peace which gives Finn his deepest spiritual experiences. It is the symbol of Gaelic and Celtic living tradition, for all that some people will not listen to its message.
>
> The House of Peace is Finn's symbol. (GAG p.131)

Throughout the book it is a place of respite and understanding. The day Finn strays from home, he falls asleep in the House of

Peace. When his mother is nursing Kirsty and Finn cannot go home, he tries to sort out his feelings in the House of Peace:

> Finn's mind always quickened as he looked around, and hearing and sight became acute.
> (TSD p.213)

He is not afraid of the place, as are many, because of the superstitions that surround it. It is there that he has his vision of a green and sunny world and it is there that his earthly sorrows can be put into perspective:

> It was a great relief to feel himself floating and sinking and the burden of his misery releasing its hooked fingers from his shoulders. All that he wanted on earth was that his mother should escape the plague, that she should live...And when this had gone from him into the knoll, he followed it, so tired he was. (TSD pp.213-214)

Finn takes great care not to pray to the knoll but he does unburden himself there. It is immediately after this that Finn has the ineffably comforting vision of the man dressed in a white cape with the tonsure of a Celtic priest. The man does not say anything, he simply comforts Finn:

> the look was extraordinarily full of understanding, and somewhere in it there was a faint humour, the humour that knows and appreciates and yet would not smile to hurt, yet the smile was there. It knew all about Finn, and told him nothing - not out of compassion, but out of needlessness. (TSD p.214)

The sense of being understood completely and being accepted, being loved by a power greater than himself releases Finn from the

torture of worry over his mother, as he experiences this mystical sensation of utter well-being.

Later as Finn begins to fall in love with Una, because he does not realise the meaning of his feelings, he does not have the confidence to approach her and is maddened by the number of boys who seem to draw her attention easily. With Una and her friends he seems clumsy, with the other boys he is boorish. He is annoyed that he cannot live up to his expectations of himself. He has the common adolescent problem of being unsure of himself and overreacting in public to compensate for this insecurity. The House of Peace reminds him of himself, who he really is, the self which will finally mature:

> He lay back and slowly settled into the earth like one of the heavy grey stones. This was relief and in a few moments he came into the core of himself, where he was alone, and felt strangely companioned, not by anyone or anything, but by himself. The rejected self found refuge here, not a cowed refuge, but somehow a wandering ease; as if it were indestructible, and had its own final pride, its own secret eyes. (TSD p.419)

Finn's insecurity is developed in the next House of Peace scene, where after Finn has got drunk and behaved badly at Meg's, he visits the House of Peace, deciding to challenge its reputation for being haunted. He approaches it in a spirit of cynicism, fear and immaturity. Gunn shows these qualities in Finn's thoughts as he goes up:

> Behold the House of Peace, lifting its dark head against the faint light in the sky. It was the hour when ghosts walked. A coldness crept

> over his skin. Very good! He would accept the challenge. He stumbled once or twice and when he got to the top he was sweating. (TSD p.430)

He thinks he sees a grey man with a beard but it turns out to be Maria's goat. The House of Peace thus answers Finn's melodramatic self-dramatisation with comic reduction, which Gunn sees as a feature of animistic Nature. In a comparable passage in Highland River, the river went underground deliberately when Kenn was seeking its source which he had expected to be grand and beautiful. It is not long before Finn returns to apologise for his bad manners:

> He had not let the "Come forth!" incident even enter his mind, but he knew that it was washed out - as if one existed here not in words or even in silent thoughts but in states of mind. (TSD p.480)

Finn's story is almost over, the only thing he has to learn is his love for Una which he still tries to repress. He looks for peace at the knoll but all he realises is that he must settle with Una. He thinks "It was the first time the House of Peace had failed him." (TSD p.564) He does not realise that the magic of the place is not the magic of conjurors who do irrelevant things with rabbits and hats, but it is a natural force linked closely with human potential. If a man does not do what he is able to do and what he knows he has to do, there is no further help for him. The House of Peace can tell him what to do if he does not know what that is, or it can do things for him that he cannot do for himself, but it cannot do things he will not do for himself. Only after Finn has told Una that he loves her does peace come again.

In all these respects Finn is part of his community, in fact his distinctive understanding of his people and their way of life marks him out especially. He is gifted and sensitive. It is now time to look at events which shape his life.

Even as a child Finn always wants to explore; he always wants to go "further". This basic orientation of his character is one of the earliest signs of his potential to lead. The reason Finn strayed so far away from home the day he slept in the House of Peace was because he was chasing a butterfly:

> the butterflies excited him in a way nothing had ever excited him before. They appeared suddenly out of nowhere, like magic, and were white, white. (TSD p.87)

Finn, young as he is, realises there is something special about the butterfly. One day trying to catch a butterfly he falls and misses it. The anger he feels against himself for having failed he takes out on the butterfly:

> It was at that moment that death entered into his heart.
>
> He would kill the butterfly. (TSD p.88)

As he chases the insect, he travels further and further from home and has to overcome large obstacles, like the deep burn. Eventually he does kill the butterfly. At first he is full of triumph but it is mixed with guilt. He knows that God made the butterfly because his mother had told him so, and he had felt the insect "break" in his hand as he crushed it. The enormity of the act causes tears and exhaustion for the rest of the day, especially when Roddie tells him the butterfly is called "God's fool" though his mother had called it the "grey fool" because the other title

used God's name improperly. Finn is sorry that he killed the butterfly and as Catrine holds his tired little body she knows what this means:

> Her lips trembled. The meanings had started to take her son away from her. Already the terrible knowledge of good and evil was in him. He had killed the butterfly. (TSD p.100)

As Douglas Gifford says, this is Finn's "first moral act." (GAG p.131) Finn's moral and spiritual development has begun. He knows the difference between good and evil. He knows he deliberately chose to harm the butterfly which he knew was good. He knows his own propensity for evil and the guilt and sorrow which have to be borne before he gains peace of mind again.

Finn grows up to admire the sea as much as the inland country. However, though his mother is against him going to sea, he and Donnie, a friend, go down to fish from the shore one day when they are both in their early teens. They fish quite successfully, not realising that the incoming tide is beginning to cut them off from the shore. This news comes to Finn just as he has allowed a huge eel to take the bait, although he knows he should not have done so because the eel could easily break the borrowed line. As he sees his mother's anxiety, instead of making Finn feel sorry, it makes him feel rebellious. As this tumult is going on, the eel pulling against his line arouses his hunting spirit and he turns and pulls as hard as he can. Unfortunately the line breaks and he loses the eel only to be further mortified by his mother's tears, as she sees him in danger from the sea.

Kirsty realises that "The man was stirring!" and she warns Catrine that if she stops Finn from going to sea she will warp him. (TSD

p.170) Catrine manages to make her peace with Finn but she has to explain her actions before he is sorry for his coldness. Reconciled, the balance of their relationship has changed slightly. No longer is Finn to be protected and worried over as a child. Catrine must learn to allow him his freedom:

> "Now go to your bed, Mama; you'll get cold."
> "All right," said Catrine, as if accepting his wise advice; "I'll go. Good night, Finn." Her voice was happy. She offered him no endearment.
> "Good night," he answered.
> Life was light again as thistledown. His mother had obeyed him as if he were a man. He loved her. He would fight for her. (TSD p.174)

The incidents which occur from now on are tests which show Finn's strengths and weaknesses. The mythical motif of the labours a hero must perform before he is considered fit for some position of authority is transformed here by Gunn into experiences which go to make up Finn's maturity. The psychological element which is usually missing or unconvincing in the myth is also supplied by Gunn. The tasks for Finn are usually dictated by circumstance, not as in Ewan MacLeod's case, by an older member of the community. The first such task is to walk to Wick to obtain medicine to cure his mother of the plague. The world is bigger than Finn imagined it and he is not always sure where he is going. He learns not to tell strangers too much in case he does not succeed in getting the information he wants from them before they discover that he is from a plague village and leave him abruptly. In Wick, Finn has to arrange an appointment with the doctor through a receptionist who speaks neither English nor Gaelic, but Scots. The doctor gives him medicine and instruction on hygiene. When he comes back he finds his mother listless because in the intervening time, Kirsty has died. Finn has to keep his earlier promise:

> "Don't give in, Mother." Now he was fighting for her. He knew she could not speak. "The powders will cure anyone, the doctor said. You must think of yourself now, Mother. There's nothing else to do. It's no good giving in. I'll lay them here. Come and take them." (TSD p.258)

This time Catrine obeys Finn, not to humour him but because he has to. Finally he gets back to the Sinclair's and is able to sleep after hearing Roddie's accolade:

> "I'm not tired," said Finn.
> "You must be," said Roddie. "That was a terrific journey in the time. You've done all you could, if any boy ever did it." (TSD p.261)

Before Kirsty died, she warned Catrine again of the dangers of keeping Finn from the sea. Though Catrine relays to Finn Mr Gordon's suggestion about university, when she realises that Finn's mind is made up, she gives him the money Kirsty left him in her will, in order that he might buy a share in a boat. In the next chapter, Finn is the youngest crew member in Roddie's boat. Finn is able to make the others laugh and as he lies down to sleep in the boat, he is more than satisfied with this new life that is enabling him to come out of his shell:

> though he felt very tired, he was not sleepy. He was now more than ever pleased at having said things which made the others laugh. His old shy self had opened, and to his surprise up the words had come. That one about the China trade. You could see it troubling Rob's eyebrows for some time! (TSD p.287)

This new life is to provide Finn with some of the stiffest challenges yet. Sailing west across the Pentland Firth, Roddie has

to turn south to make for Lewis. However, the ship is caught in a storm and turning south too late they miss Lewis altogether. After rowing through the storm they see the Flannan Isles though they do not know the name of the island cliffs that sheer out of the ocean. They have practically no drinking water and are all weak from trying to stay afloat during the storm. Finn volunteers to climb the cliff to collect water from the top.

As usual with these tests, they are always made more daunting because of the human relationships they put at risk. One of Finn's talents is for climbing cliffs. He has done it at home and offers to do it here, having taken stock of the cliff in front of him. Roddie, however, is under an unspoken obligation to Catrine to bring Finn home safely. Their situation is so desperate, however, that Roddie has little room for manouevre. Finn starts getting angry with Roddie because he is letting these considerations weigh on him. The argument goes back and forth tiring them further, until Roddie allows Finn to do something he could not do himself - Roddie has no head for heights. This inadequacy of Roddie's annoys him and makes him doubly angry with Finn for putting at risk his relation with Catrine by suggesting a dangerous way of escape, possible for Finn but impossible for himself.

The description of Finn's climb is terrifying. G J Watson comments:

> Gunn's descriptions of storms at sea, of hairbreadth escapes, of perilous cliff-climbs, and of the tension and exhilaration of poaching, are all superbly realised and have the power to keep the reader almost literally on the edge of his seat...The pleasures of this kind of writing, which pitchforks us out of our 'sedentary trades' into elemental experiences...should not be...

> undervalued. At this basic level, Gunn's writing is deeply therapeutic, bringing vividly before us the life of action and instinct, attempting unpretentiously to redress (as Lawrence in a different way had attempted to redress) that imbalance between the head and the heart and instincts which Gunn feels is one of the sicknesses of our time.[24]

Finn does reach the top and after his climb he is acknowledged by the author as being "like an immortal youth" as he waves down to the crew. (TSD p.316) Finn finds a small uninhabited house on the island:

> There was a damp smell of the earth or of something very ancient. Finn felt that he was not alone. (TSD p.317)

Later Finn learns that this is a cell which belonged to St Flannan who lived there in contemplation. Finn is able to recognise here, as he is at home, the presence of ancient but kindred spirits. Then follows more heart-stopping description as Finn collects birds' eggs and climbs back down the cliff. In the boat he faces Roddie's anger which disguises the terrors he has been through waiting for Finn, but Finn himself is hailed as a hero:

> Callum was now in a pretty bad way, because his quick, self-sensitive mind had endured the agony of having sent Finn to his doom.
>
> "Finn, my hero," he croaked huskily.
> (TSD p.323-324)

They sail on to Lewis which seems to Finn strange and beautiful:

> It was a different world altogether from the iron-bound coasts of home. There was a softness upon the land, in the air. His blood grew warm and sluggish with dream. It was a world of fable, where the mind was wafted upon its own adventure by the wind of desire. (TSD p.332)

It is in the west, where Highland tradition is at its strongest, that Finn learns things that have been forgotten over in the east. He learns from Seumas about the Flannan Isles and about the rites the Harris men perform when they take their sheep there. Finn also begins to understand more about his own personal relations with Roddie and Catrine. Whether at this point Finn understands completely the complexity of the relationship between Catrine and Roddie, he knows that Roddie can get depressed very quickly at times and then he can be violent. This occurs to him after Roddie strikes him an almighty blow in a fight in a pub in Stornoway. Roddie is still working out his anger against Finn for climbing for water. Though Finn seems to be dimly aware that for Roddie to be complete he must marry Catrine, he is still jealous of Roddie's affection for his mother and after returning from the Lewis trip, he grows more estranged from them both.

However his stature in the community is increasing even though he is too preoccupied with his own affairs to notice it. As Barbara makes a legend out of Catrine, so the village boys make a legend out of Finn and try to emulate him:

> Then one day Finn got a slight shock. A boy of twelve had fallen over a rock and broken his leg...Two boys of fourteen had brought off a daring rescue. And all of this, Finn discovered, was a direct result of his own exploits on the Seven Hunters, though he himself had never made

> any reference to them. He had observed that boys liked to be in his comapny and were willing to do anything for him. (TSD p.412)

Finn, still on course for the place of leader, is coming close to the end of his training. Two things remain. He must understand about his father and he must understand his own role in terms of tradition. Ronnie, a man who sailed with his father, tells Finn what happened to Tormad. As Finn listens, he is glad his father fought:

> He saw it all with a terrible clarity, and fought beside his father as he would beside a great hero. (TSD p.453)

Thus Finn understands his father and what he was trying to do. He finds that his own will and inclinations lie along the same lines. Impelled by the same motives as his father, Finn determines to continue the task his father began. Thus Tormad's life and death are vindicated. Tormad is a <u>living</u> force and the movement of the novel brings to mind the idea of the phoenix as out of the tragedy of the first chapter, Tormad's spirit is reborn and fulfils its purpose in Finn's life. The baleful influence of father over son which is so characteristic of the Scottish novel is here reversed as father and son share the same vision and purpose.

After Ronnie tells Finn about his father he begins to commission Finn for the task ahead and does this first by pointing out to Finn that every human need for challenge and fulfilment is met by the exigencies and securities of his own land. Supposing Finn did sail round the world, he would not find greater challenges but the same ones, only in a different form. Thus, Finn's training has not been parochial or inadequate but one which equips him for action anywhere:

> "All I wanted to say, Finn, was that you are doing fine here. You stick to it, boy. This is a full enough life for any man. You have everything here - and freedom besides. Don't go hankering after the wastes of the world. They were telling me of your story of adventure into the Western Ocean."
> "That was nothing."
> "It took you to the edge of death - and further than that no adventure can travel in this life."
> "Oh, I don't know," said Finn, feeling restless.
> "I know," said Ronnie. And he added, with a quiet finality in his voice, a summing up of wisdom, "We were driven: you went." (TSD p.454-445)

After pointing out to Finn the nature and significance of his experiences, the nature and significance of his own gifts, Ronnie commissions Finn:

> "It's for fellows like you to lead, Finn; to build up the ways of our folk once more. Your father and myself started - but we were beaten. You are the new generation. Justify your father, boy, before the world. And look after your mother, who suffered more than you'll ever know." (TSD p.456)

Finn does not take the words too seriously as he travels home, but they are serious enough nonetheless.

In Finn's next climb which is to rescue men who have been caught in a storm off Dunster, Finn begins to be reconciled to Roddie:

> "Are you ready?" asked Finn, and he met Roddie's eyes.
> "Will you try it, boy?" asked Roddie, and his voice

> was gentle.
>
> It was a moment of communion so profound that Finn felt a light-heartedness and exaltation come upon him. This was where Roddie and himself met, in the region of comradeship that lies beyond all the trials of the world. (TSD p.513)

Finn rescues one boy, Una's brother, and Roddie brings him back from unconsciousness. Again Finn and Roddie emerge as natural leaders able to co-operate with one another.

The final section of Finn's training comes in his next fishing trip west. It is during this trip that he understands fully his relation to tradition, the fifth category mentioned earlier. By this time, Roddie and Catrine are married and Finn is dismayed that Roddie has elected to stay at home because Catrine is pregnant. Finn longs to go west again as that land is to him "a land that existed in a dream." Again the boat gets blown off course on a trip they make out of Lewis. They land in North Uist. Old traditional songs and dances have lingered there longer than they have on the mainland, but so too has the unjust, poverty-inducing authority of the landlords;

> They lived under a system of rack-renting that made Henry's eyes glisten, and when he questioned them, after telling how his own people had been treated in a clearance, they gave him an old saying to the effect that it was bad enough to be a tenant, but to be a sub-tenant was the evil of the Evil One. (TSD p.536)

However, it is the songs and stories which take up Finn's attention. The old man Finn lives with is one of the <u>three</u> recognised storytellers in the district. He has special interest

in the stories of Finn MacCoul. As Finn has been commissioned by Ronnie for social responsibility, he discovers his own aesthetic talents while staying with the old man, Finn the storyteller:

> as he listened something in himself that had hitherto been dry, like dry soil, was moistened as by summer rain and became charged with an understirring of life, and with an upper movement of wonder like fragrant air. (TSD p.538)

One night Finn tells his own story of his first trip to the west. (He had previously told it at Helmsdale and had led an old shepherd to wonder if the days of Finn MacCoul were returning.) His storytelling wins the praise of Finn-son-of-Angus:

> "It was well enough done. It was all well done. It was done, too, with the humour that is the play of drift on the wave. And you were modest. Yet - all that is only a little - you had something more, my hero, something you will not know - until you look at it through your eyes, when they are as old as mine."
> "What do you mean by that?" asked Finn.
> But the old man shook his head and turned away.
> "Go to your sleep, my boy. Many a one may come,"
> he muttered to himself, "in the guise of a stranger."
> (TSD p.540)

This beautifully understated Gaelic proverb shows old Finn's recognition of young Finn's abilities and role. Gods and heroes sometimes come in the guise of strangers. On the third night, Finn sees the old dances that ministers have forbidden elsewhere in the islands. From an old woman who tells a story in which the butterfly is the man's soul, Finn learns the reason for his deep-seated child's sorrow for killing the butterfly:

> "And if you catch that butterfly and kill it
> you kill the soul in its flight." (TSD p.543)

A lullaby explains to him his growing distance from his mother which is necessary and only natural in so far as he refuses to recognise its necessity:

> The effect upon Finn was deep and self-revealing. Love for his mother cried out in him, the love that now understood the withdrawn fatality of the mother. He had been blind, blind. (TSD p.544)

The evening ends with Finn singing his own song, understanding his own role in terms of tradition, when he sings "As the Rose grow merry in time." Douglas Gifford sums up what the song means for Finn:

> Finn has gained all the experience necessary to transform his life. By singing his own song "As the Rose Grows merry in Time", he contributes towards the transmission of values and culture and tradition through song and story. This is the song of life too; and Finn's singing of the tasks that must be faced by the young hero is nothing less than a song of self-recognition. He has been setting himself tasks which he must perform before he is fit to take Una. (GAG p.145)

After this evening Finn understands consciously that these traditions which he has inherited amount to an education:

> Perhaps here was the education that came from no schooling, came from the old stories by men like Hector and Black John and Finn-son-of-Angus,

> none of whom could either read or write. And the girl, not teaching, but singing the experience of the race of women in tradition's own voice. (TSD p.550)

This equilibrium which Finn has achieved is worked out in practice when he returns from the west. Finn brings presents for Roddie and Catrine as well as a horn and silver spoon for their baby. Thus the reconciliation is complete. Finally Finn settles with Una also, and the night before his wedding he hides from his friends in the House of Peace. Finn realises how potent life is and how its deeper mysteries lie before him. Then Finn realises his relation with the past and with the future:

> He saw himself as an old enough man by that time! a white-haired old man, head of a tribe, sitting on this knoll in quiet thought, his sea days over! How distant and fantastic - how pleasant and amusing, with kindliness about it and peace! Like the figure of the white-haired man he had once imagined here... (TSD pp.583-584)

Finn is ready to live and ready to lead and Gunn finishes the novel with a magnificent closing line, calling to mind the last line of Sons and Lovers in its anticipation of the sheer excitement of human maturity:

> The hunters in their primordial humour were closing in. Life had come for him. (TSD p.584)

The Silver Darlings is not simply one of the finest expressions of Gunn's art, it is also one of the finest of the Scottish Renaissance. Even though it was not written until 1941, when the Second World War had dissipated much of the immediate impact of the Renaissance, this novel is clearly linked with those of the 1930s by its similarity of theme and outlook. It is the literary

antithesis of The House with the Green Shutters; Gunn sees community as healthy and full of living traditions. It provides a person with every experience which they need to bring them to maturity.

As in Highland River, so in The Silver Darlings, Gunn achieves a resolution of his themes. This resolution occurs because his presuppositions are not the same as those of the pre-Renaissance novelists, but are directly influenced by the ideas about Scottish culture prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s. Neither MacDiarmid in A Drunk Man, nor Gibbon in A Scots Quair made such a strong resolution. MacDiarmid veers between strong statements about Scotland's capacity for nationhood and strong statements of doubt about that capacity. In the ending of Grey Granite, tradition and Scotland's power to produce its own Golden Age is defeated by history, and hopes based on Scottish folk-tradition are displaced by hopes base on universal Communism. It is only Gunn who achieves resolution, first as a personal contemporary faith in Highland River and then, at a specific period in Scottish history, for an entire community.

The Silver Darlings is typical of the Scottish Renaissance in another way, however, in that it is cast as an epic. Scottish novels before the Renaissance are often like Hobbes' description of the life of man, "nasty, brutish and short". However, the new beliefs of the period produced a new confidence and scope. It is hard to emphasise the radical nature of this change. Even minor writers like George Blake and James Barke in The Constant Star, The Westering Sun and The Land of the Leal follow families over a series of generations, looking again at vast areas of Scottish life and attempting to re-interpret history. While Sun Circle, Butcher's Broom and The Silver Darlings are not a formal trilogy, Gunn does take care to connect the novels. The Celtic priest of

Sun Circle appears to Finn. The pipes of the broken-hearted piper of Butcher's Broom are used by Tormad as floats for his net. A continuing tradition is stressed by these deliberate connexions. From pre-Christian times till the present day what defines Scottish culture and what makes it valuable can be clearly seen, runs the argument behind the novels. So exciting were these ideas for Gunn and his contemporaries, that they provoked these vast historical excursions, in order that a body of supporting evidence might be gathered from history itself. The confidence and optimism of the Renaissance is reflected in the expansive, inclusive, discursive nature of the epic novel. At the time it seemed, such was the charisma of MacDiarmid's personality, that the Renaissance movement could interpret and provide answers for every Scottish problem and phenomenon. It may seem strange that such grand claims should have faded so quickly into obscurity. However, people believed that a good time, a new time was coming and that they were chosen to usher it in. Gunn's works have less of the euphoria of some of the most extreme expression of others, but there is all of the strong commitment and hope.

However, when discussing the work of Lewis Grassic Gibbon, it became apparent that despite his emphases which aligned him with his contemporaries, older and intractable problems associated with the Scottish novel eventually overcame the early optimism. Is there a similar conflict in Gunn? Certainly there does not seem to be. Despite the invasions of the Vikings, the Clearances and the depopulation which followed, Gunn presents a community whose values enable it to survive. Despite the fragmentation that history produces, individuals do not necessarily experience a psychological fragmentation as they do in the novels of Brown and Munro. Some individuals do - Angus in Highland River and Rob in Butcher's Broom - but they are seen as flawed and weak personally, unable to see in their tradition significance which they could build into their own lives. It is the characters who have this second sight, this sight

on two worlds, who can transcend history by locking themselves into a great and peaceful union whose essence history cannot fragment.

With the coming of the Second World War, the urgency and enthusiasm which characterised the early years of the Scottish Renaissance disappeared. Political nationalism became less of a burning issue and a new surge of popular fervour did not manifest itself again until John MacCormick's National League after the War. Nationalist aspirations were somewhat assauged by the appointment of Tom Johnstone to the Scottish Office. He had power to deal with Scottish issues and used much of the expertise gained by the Nationalists to help him implement new policies. Gunn himself worked on the Hospital Committee and later on the Crofting Committee. As far as Scottish literature was concerned this was not such an exciting period as the first flush of the Renaissance. Most people's attention was taken up by the War. After the War, there was not the same agreement about literary aims as there had been previously. As happened in Linklater's case, so in Gunn's, the Renaissance impetus began to take on private meanings, individualised from the earlier consensus. Although strictly speaking, they are not Renaissance novels, The Green Isle of the Great Deep and The Other Landscape show two different ways in which influences which have their source in the Renaissance manifest themselves in Gunn's later fiction.[25]

The Green Isle of the Great Deep was written in an attempt to come to terms with the rumours about concentration camps which were circulating during the War. In an article in The Scots Magazine Gunn wrote:

> 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 of my mind that I couldn't shake off...[26]

Gunn pits the values of the communities he has depicted earlier against the evils of the totalitarian state as if this is the final and, in some respects, the only test of the community's spiritual strength. Gunn uses his profoundest simplicity in theme, in character and in symbol to make this short novel ring like a parable.

Hector and Art find themselves in what should be a Highland paradise - the Green Isle of the Great Deep - but it is actually a totalitarian state, where the humanity of Hector and Art is under threat. Hector resists those who want him to submit to them by refusing to agree with their rejection of all that it means to be human. Art resists by becoming a legend - a boy with seemingly supernatural strength and abilities - which provokes people into spiritual and not mechanistic ways of thinking, just as Finn did in The Silver Darlings. In the end the actions of Hector and Art invoke "God", who arrives to restore paradise.

It is Gunn's belief that the values inherent in Highland communities (and therefore inherent in humanity in general) are able to withstand the onslaught of inimical values. However, this is problematical. It may be that the kind of community Gunn describes is able to produce a leader like Finn, but it seems doubtful that any human culture can produce paradise. Paradise is restored at the end of the novel, but can it be a lasting restoration? Gunn has shown in the early chapters that the will to do evil has overcome the will to do good. In the later chapters the situation is reversed. "God" in this sense is an irrelevance as he merely externalises for the purposes of the narrative the will to good, appearing after the decisive words and actions have

been spoken and taken, like a deus ex machina, to facilitate the winning of the peace. There is nothing in the novel which assures us that evil may not triumph again. There is no permanent basis for paradise, unless Gunn believes in human perfectibility. If human beings are basically good, why does evil dominate so easily? If human culture is good, why is it so often dominated by evil? If there is no guarantee that good will triumph ultimately, then what is the point of being good? If good has no absolute intrinsic value, then there is no meaning in being good or evil, both types of behaviour are expressions of the character of man. There may be powerful arguments for believing that it is better to be good, but unless goodness is an absolute, there are no logical ones. Gunn inhabits an uneasy half way house in this argument. On the one hand he seems to see good and evil as two equal but opposed principles in creation. On the other he regards good as being natural and inherent in mankind while evil is an aberration. Under the first argument, human action is meaningless. Under the second while suffering is justified by the eventual triumph of good, that comfort is destroyed by the fact that evil exists and is likely to overcome good. The phenomenon of suffering is not easily contained by either argument.

Despite these personal qualms, it is obvious that Gunn is still influenced by the beliefs he shared with the other writers of his time, especially by the belief that myth was an important means of understanding human spirituality. Gunn uses symbols from myth and demonstrates belief in the power of myth to raise men to their essential humanness, above their aberrations in evil. Thus the salmon, the hazelnuts and the fruit - key elements in the novel - take on a symbolic meaning. Art himself, by refusing to deny this part of his humanity, wins back a higher calling for mankind. These very direct statements about the power of myth recede in Gunn's later fiction. However, it is not that he has lost faith in them; it is that he prefers to discuss them in less obvious ways,

often introducing a character for the reader to identify with who is agnostic, informed and open-minded about the claims Gunn makes for myth. The Other Landscape is the last of Gunn's novels and in it he deals delicately with the subjects closest to the heart of his fiction.

The Other Landscape is about an anthropologist, Walter Urquhart, who takes a holiday from his job in London on an anthropological periodical to visit a Highland village from which a startlingly good short story has been received. The writer is a man called Menzies who is wrapped up completely in the world which Kenn finds in the River and Finn finds in the House of Peace. Major Thornybank, similar to the character of Colonel Hicks in The Lost Glen, is Menzies's opposite. He lives in "life's dark shadow." (TOL p.156) The troubles which make Menzies remote, make Thornybank bitter. Out of these two characters Gunn weaves his own wisdom of living, seeing in them two principles - one of life, the other he names the Wrecker. Urquhart the agnostic outsider chooses Menzies's way and Gunn still portrays two types of humanity - those who believe and those who do not.

In conclusion, Gunn's achievement is great by any standards, though this chapter has seen him in terms of the Scottish Literary Renaissance and the Scottish literary tradition generally. It was part of the ethos of the Renaissance years that Scotland was a nation and one of its towns or communities could represent not only itself but the nation also. Thus Gunn's Highlands are - like Muir's Orkney and MacDiarmid's Langholm - ways of talking about Scotland. Gunn's sense of the north-east as his home, did not stop him from being concerned with Scotland as a whole - fictionally and politically. This can be seen by tracing the Scottish themes in his fiction. His first two novels are firmly in the 'Green Shutter's' tradition with flawed heroes, flawed communities and

unsatisfied lives with no hope for the future. While it was a part of MacDiarmid's view that Scotland should be presented less sentimentally than in the Kailyard novels, and he praised novels like Grey Granite highly which were set in Scottish cities, it is noticeable that this is not what he singled out for attention in his criticism of Gunn's first novel, although its portrayal of the consequences of economic hardship in a community is very striking in comparison with the idyllic, rural communities of Kailyard novels. Instead MacDiarmid praises Gunn's "sudden breakings-through into dimensions in which the editors and readers of popular periodicals of even the best kinds suffer from incontinent agoraphobia."[27] This spiritual side of Gunn's fiction appears fitfully in The Grey Coast and in The Lost Glen only to be snuffed out by the consequences of history but it is to those experiences Gunn returns to find the sources of later novels. Like Gibbon and MacDiarmid, Gunn found resources in the folk-tradition of his people, which, on closer inspection, provided the basis for a spiritually meaningful life for an individual who received them as an enlivening part of his community. This is a common view expressed by many writers of the twenties and and thirties and expounded by MacDiarmid implicitly in the early lyrics and explicitly in A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle (1926). It is from this assumption that these writers are able to tackle the prevailing disillusions about the nature of the Scottish community in the work of earlier writers. Gunn's first entry to this region is Morning Tide in which, effortlessly, he suggests an entirely new interpretation of individual and community from the earlier writers, and from his own early work. The re-orientation is convincing and a fruitful new beginning for Gunn as it provokes questions and ideas followed up in other novels. If this community is so good, where has it come from and why have so many people lost faith in the Scottish community? In Sun Circle and Butcher's Broom, Gunn answers that they have been looking in the wrong places. It is true that history and institutions have not been kind to the indigenous culture but nevertheless folk culture still

exists and it has a venerable history which is perhaps more important to understand than some versions of Scottish history which appear in text-books. Thus Gunn becomes one of the people he writes about, continuing the tradition by writing about it and curious himself to find out "what it is that keeps some of our moderns burrowing among the roots."[28] Gunn's version of history is that though folk elements of tradition have been valuable since the earliest times when the Master taught Aniel to recognise the moment of delight, they have often been suppressed by inimical historical forces - sometimes the government, sometimes the church, sometimes the people themselves have nearly destroyed their tradition. Since tradition is sound, however, what does this mean for the present? This question is answered in Highland River in which Gunn explores the value of the tradition to bring to fulness the humanity of one man, Kenn, who is followed from childhood to maturity as he discovers and assimilates the knowledge of his river of delight. Apart from sections of Naomi Mitchison's fiction, this is one of the clearest, strongest statements of the importance of tradition made during the Renaissance. We are not shown in Kenn an intellectual interest in tradition, instead we are shown a faith for life. This is the highest claim made during the Renaissance for the importance of tradition. If you live this way, you are truly human; if you do not live this way, you do not live at all. It is extremely unusual to find, in a literary tradition which only thirty years previously was on the verge of extinction, claims that similar communities actually hold traditions which are the way to life. The Silver Darlings is the culmination of all Gunn had previously written and in one particular case a development of it. This development occurs in the theme of the gifted individual and Gunn shows why that theme should be so prominent among other writers. Sensitivity is not something which should be encouraged out of charity or merely a spirit of tolerance. The sensitivity of many of these boys is not a sign, simply, that they are artists but that because they are artists, they are part of the leadership of the community. Thus it becomes another index of the failure of the

communities. Not only did they lack the aesthetic sense to recognise their artists, they even lacked the self-interest to recognise their leaders. By showing this to be untrue in the case of Finn and his community, Gunn not only contributes optimistically to the literary tradition, he also fashions one of the finest novels in Scottish literature. After this novel, as the influence of the Renaissance dissipates into more private and individualistic expression, Gunn's interpretations may either be mythical as in The Green Isle of the Great Deep or mystical as in The Other Landscape. The power of Gunn's spiritual cosmography which fitted in so well with the spirit of the Renaissance continues unabated in novels which are impelled by causes outside the Renaissance altogether. But these influences became a private spiritual understanding not shared by many and especially not shared by younger writers and critics. Hart and Pick record the probable moments of doubt about the value of his work which affected Gunn:

> Perhaps Neil now felt that for years he had been deceived into thinking that readers appreciated his books because they appreciated the nature of the mind that made them, only to find that the true "inwardness" of the novels did not register with them at all - only the surface, the events, the emotional charge.[29]

Compounded by "an absurd public discussion on the Scottish novel which took place at the Edinburgh International Festival in 1962...Neil felt that he had been forgotten by the literary establishment in Scotland."[30] However, this was the beginning of the sixties, when a severe reaction set in against the writers of previous decades. The similarity between the end of Linklater's career and the end of Gunn's is close. Their contribution to Scottish literature was largely unread, or misunderstood; the following generation of novelists not being influenced by novelists as the poets were by MacDiarmid. They had no literary offspring to

honour them for their past achievement after the inspiration had gone. Despite Gunn's own feeling of neglect, however, he has always attracted critics and few have been unimpressed by his power and greatness. Kurt Wittig's tribute to Gunn that he "embodies the aims of the Scottish Renaissance" still remains one of the most meaningful compliments Gunn could have been paid.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature (Edinburgh, 1978), p.339.

2. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Neil Gunn and the Scottish Renaissance' in Neil M Gunn: The Man and the Writer edited by A Scott and D Gifford (Edinburgh, 1973) p.360; Neil Gunn, 'Scottish Renaissance', Scottish Field, 109 (August 1962), 34 (p.34.)

3. Neil Gunn, 'The Scottish Literary Renaissance'", Scottish Literary Journal, 4 (1977), 58-61.

4. Neil Gunn, 'Preserving the Scottish Tongue', The Scots Magazine, 24 (1935) 110-111 (p.111; p.110).

5. See Neil Gunn, 'Books and other things' (a review of Edwin Muir's Scott and Scotland) in The Scots Magazine, 26 (1936) 72-78; Neil Gunn, 'Nationalism and Writing 1. Tradition and Magic in the work of Lewis Grassic Gibbon' in The Scots Magazine, 30 (1938) 28-35.

6. Neil Gunn, 'On Tradition', The Scots Magazine, 34 (1940), 131-134), (p.134).

7. Neil Gunn, Highland River (Edinburgh, 1937), edition used will be (London, 1960; The Silver Darlings (London, 1941), edition used (London, 1969; The Grey Coast (London, 1926); The Lost Glen (Edinburgh, 1932), edition used with foreword by Diarmid Gunn (Glasgow, 1985). Future references to these works will be abbreviated to HR; TSD; TGC and TLG respectively.

8. Neil Gunn, Morning Tide (Edinburgh 1930), edition used (London, 1975); Sun Circle (Edinburgh, 1933), edition used (London, 1983);

Butcher's Broom (Edinburgh, 1934), edition used (London, 1977). Future references to these works will be abbreviated to MT; SC; and BB respectively.

9. Joseph Sloan, 'Tradition and Violence: A Study of the Fiction of Neil M Gunn' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Strathclyde, 1978), pp.136-137. Future references to this work will be abbreviated to TAV.

10. Neil Gunn, "Nationalism and Writing 1", op.cit. p.34.

11. Anne Shanks, 'Scottish folklore in the novels of Neil M Gunn' (unpublished BA dissertation, University of Strathclyde, 1977), pp.37-38.

12. F R Hart, The Scottish Novel (London, 1978), p.358.

13. F R Hart, 'Beyond History and Tragedy: Neil Gunn's early fiction' in Essays on Neil M Gunn edited by David Morrison (Thurso, 1971), pp.52-65 (p.52).

14. G J Watson, 'The Novels of Neil M Gunn' in Literature of the North edited by David Hewitt and Michael Spiller (Aberdeen, 1983) pp.134-148 (p.41).

15. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Sir Herbert Maxwell, Bt.: Sir Ian Hamilton' in Contemporary Scottish Studies (Edinburgh, 1976) p.66.

16. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'William Power: W Sorley Brown' in Contemporary Scottish Studies (Edinburgh, 1976) p.66.

17. William Power, Literature and Oatmeal: What Literature has meant to Scotland (London, 1935) p.195.

18. Anne Shanks, op. cit. pp.18-20.

19. Douglas Gifford, "The Source of Joy: Highland River" in Neil M Gunn: The Man and the Writer edited by A Scott and D Gifford (Edinburgh, 1973), pp.101-122 (p.117).

20. Douglas Gifford, ibid., p.117; p.116.

21. Hugh MacDiarmid, "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle" in The Hugh MacDiarmid Anthology: Poems in Scots and English edited by M Grieve and A Scott (London and Boston, 1972) p.37.

22. See Douglas Gifford, Neil M Gunn and Lewis Grassic Gibbon (Edinburgh, 1983), chapter 5. See also J B Caird, "Neil M Gunn: Novelist of the North" in Essays on Neil M Gunn, op. cit. pp.41-51 (p.44)

23. Douglas Gifford, ibid., pp.133-134.

24. G J Watson, 'Neil Gunn's novels', op.cit., pp.136-137.

25. Neil Gunn, The Green Isle of the Great Deep (London, 1944), edition used Souvenir reprint 1975; The Other Landscape (London, 1954). Future references to the latter will be abbreviated to TOL.

26. Quoted in F R Hart and J B Pick, Neil M Gunn: A Highland Life, op.cit., p.197.

27. Hugh MacDairmid, 'Neil M Gunn' in Contemporary Scottish Studies (Edinburgh, 1976) p.97.

28. Neil Gunn, 'Nationalism and Writing 1' op.cit., p.35.

29. F R Hart and J B Pick, op.cit., p.254.

30. F R Hart and J B Pick, ibid., p.265.

CONCLUSION

The Scottish Literary Renaissance was an unusual period in the history of Scottish literature. It was unusual because of the high degree of self-awareness that the writers, as a group, shared about their status and purpose. Earlier writers often saw themselves as isolated, misunderstood figures but the Reniassance was corporate, public and self-aware. Writers, in sympathy with each other, shared a common set of presuppositions about the prevailing cultural situation which they thought was unhealthy and they had a common vision of a new culturally vibrant Scotland.

Renaissance writers believed that Scottish national identity was on the verge of extinction. Customs which made Scottish life distinct had often been set aside for English customs which were perceived as being "better". Few areas of Scottish life seemed to be exempt from this dilution. In government, institutions and art, expressions of Scottish identity were felt to be either superficial or false. Renaissance writers saw the reasons for this in their versions of Scottish history: turning points like the Union of the Parliaments or the Clearances signalled to them that in the minds of Scotland's leaders a distinctive Scottish identity was a matter of secondary importance. In response to this situation, writers made a deliberate attempt to reconstruct what they thought was a genuine Scottish identity. Hence the choice of models like the Medieval poet William Dunbar who wrote his poetry when Scotland was still a separate nation and George Douglas Brown who had rejected the spurious Scottish identity purveyed by the Kailyard. Renaissance writers believed that they were recovering genuine Scottish traditions in literature but with the advantage of hindsight it can be seen that their version of the traditions led them to exclude some writers who had pertinent contributions to make. Renaissance writers never seriously considered as <u>bona fide</u> Scottish writers men like Neil Munro and J M Barrie because of their association with the Kailyard. Having dismissed what they considered to be spurious expression of Scottish identity,

Renaissance writers were involved in continuous debates about what did constitute Scottish identity. Literature was closely related to politics for them as they felt that the changes they wanted to see in Scottish society could be brought about most effectively by changes in the way Scotland was governed.

History, the major feature of the Scottish novel in general, was a subject which Renaissance writers were not afraid to tackle. Perhaps more powerfully even than institutions, language or culture, history has been a major force in shaping Scottish identity, one whose inheritance has been unhappy and often divisive. Scottish novels writeen out of this heritage display fierce conflict. Renaissance writers used history freely to provide a context for their work, culling material for their authentic tradition from settings in pre-history, or showing the evolution of Scottish culture over a long period of time. However, their use of history was not always as straightforward. Writers with a vision of wholeness had to confront a history of division. Some held up the existence of a prehistoric Golden Age not just as a comforting past but also as a future destination. Others actually wrote about the divisive issues themselves: the history of the Highlands being one such issue. The divisions between the Highlands and the Lowlands and the events of the Clearances had bitter consequences which Neil Munro, Ian MacPherson and Fionn MacColla documented. Distrust had been bred between two areas of Scotland and Highland culture had been severely injured by the Clearances. Yet two of the finest novels of the Renaissance, The Bull Calves and The Silver Darlings, contain a vision of these wounds being healed. Mitchison suggested that if both sides, Highlands and Lowlands, were willing to learn from one another, their traditions were complementary, not antagonistic. Gunn saw that if financial security was guaranteed, there was within Northern culture all the was necessary to bring human beings to maturity.

Another aspect of the vision of a new Scotland healed from its historical division was the presentation of the artist within the new society. Although much attention centred on this subject in the Renaissance, it tends not to be formulated so insistently as the programme for Scottish regeneration. Partly this was due to the nature of the subject itself. Biographical examples show how long it took writers of considerable talent, like Linklater and Gunn, to recognise that they were writers and have confidence in that fact. What is certain is that over and over again Scottish novels display the diseases of the creative imagination. The figure of the young boy, to whom attention has continually been drawn over the course of this study, who has a vivid imagination but is prone to dreaming, role-playing, replacing reality dangerously with fantasy and morbid moods, appears throughout the history of the Scottish novel. This figure is an embryonic artist who fails to reach artistic, and sometimes physical, maturity within Scottish society. Brown, Hay, Munro Barrie, MacPherson and Moon all write about such a figure and, so problematice a theme is it, that it often produces grave stylistic inadequacies in the novels themselves.

Although this theme of the embryonic artist was not one which during the Renaissance was recognised as a distinctive theme of the Scottish novel, it appears to be such a persistent and unmistakable facet of Scottish literary culture that Renaissance writers quite inedpendently of earlier writers and of each other, took the theme up and developed it. The new society which they envisaged was one in which creative people could find a place. Each of the four major writers discussed in this study portrayed an imaginative youth who was able to exist happily within Scottish society. Magnus in Magnus Merriman, Chris in Sunset Song, Kirstie in The Bull Calves, Kenn in Highland River and Finn in The Silver Darlings are able to come to terms with surrounding society because their authors have carved out a new set of values which these characters

hold in common with the rest of society. Instead of orthodox Christian belief, or the belief in the moral worth of hard work or the pursuit of respectability, Renaissance writers substituted beliefs derived from the Land, or from Jungian archetypes or from some other combination of animism and the transcendental. In Magnus Merriman and Sunset Song, both Linklater and Gibbon show their main characters at peace in a community which satisfies their intellectual and spiritual aspirations. In The Bull Calves and Highland River and The Silver Darlings, Mitchison and Gunn develop this theme further and see in Kirstie, Kenn and Finn not just human beings with imaginations who need to be integrated into society for their own good, but people who must be integrated into society for society's good. This is one of the unique insights of the Renaissance novel; it recognises that imagination is a quality of political as well as cultural leadership.

All the writers discussed here outlived the optimism of the Renaissance as they saw that the foundations on which their vision was based would never be laid. Within the compass of A Scots Quair Gibbon moves from optimism to pessimism: finally Ewan finds Scotland too restrictive a place and sets off for London. Even Chris, whose union with the Land in Sunset Song seemed so joyful, so permanent, dies, small and dried up, convinced that the only reality is Change. In The Merry Muses and Lobsters on the Agenda, Linklater and Mitchison described Scottish society in terms which bear a marked similarity to those used by pre-Renaissance novelists and Scotland is seen as a small, mean country, uninterested in culture and not even perticularly interested in its own government. And although The Green Isle of the Great Deep and The Other Landscape show that the attitudes of the Renaissance still had personal authority for Gunn, the private meanings of these novels are a quiet echo of the bold pronouncements or earlier years.

In general, Scottish novels show how the forces that shape Scottish society are inimical to the creative identity. It may perhaps be Scotland's main contribution to literature generally to describe and analyse the frustrated creative talent and the conditions which cause it. In the end, even the enthusiasm generated by the Renaissance was not enough to overcome what seemed to be an antipathy to culture endemic to Scottish society. The high points of the Scottish Literary Renaissance demonstrate that in a more congenial cultural climate better novels can be written, better dreams can be dreamt, even if, in the last analysis, they do not come true.

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