'Beauty Tradition Experiment': Scotland, the avant-garde, and landscape in the work of Ian Hamilton Finlay and Alec Finlay

by

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Note on text:

When not written in full, Ian Hamilton Finlay is referred to in the text, footnotes and short references as 'Finlay'. E.g. (Finlay 2009, p. 13)
To avoid confusion, Alec Finlay will be referred to by his full name in the text. In the references, he will be referred to as 'Finlay, Alec'. E.g. (Finlay, Alec 2012, p. 1)
In the first instance *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse.* will be referred to in full. From thereon, it will be abbreviated as *POTH*.

Abstract

This is a critical study of Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925 - 2006) and Alec Finlay (b. 1966), analysing the ways in which they developed their practices as poets, artists and publishers.

This thesis uses Alec Finlay's concept of the homely avant-garde as the starting point for an exploration of both poets' engagement with the relationship between art, society and the environment. Both poets' work is animated by the interplay of tradition and experiment, a relationship that is reflected in their treatment of place and conception of dwelling. I aim to show that while their work shares certain formal interests and cultural contexts, their responses to them are quite distinctive.

This thesis builds on existing commentary through close textual analysis and extensive use of archival material including public and private correspondence. It is to my knowledge the first scholarly study of Alec Finlay, drawing on his work and interviews. My project brings new theoretical approaches to the subject. I take a broadly cultural materialist approach, locating the Finlays' avant-garde poetics and art practice within their original contexts of post-war Scottish culture and the international smallpress avant-garde. Later chapters consider the Finlays' treatment of landscape and the environment. I apply the pastoral theory of William Marx, Raymond Williams and Terry Gifford to Ian Hamilton Finlay's short stories and garden poems, exploring the tensions between nature and culture, country and city. In my analysis of Alec Finlay's eco-poetry and art, I reject Heideggerian ecocrticism's emphasis on poetry as a medium for the revelation of man's essential state of being in nature. Instead, I look to the geophilosophy of Deleuze and Guatarri in order to suggest that Alec Finlay's social and environmental art brings forth a series of becomings through its emphasis on pragmatic, co-operative and sustainable forms of creativity.

Introduction

inheritance

this is just to say
that I have taken

the little boats
you made

with keels of lead
and hanky sails,

the fine woollen socks
your muses gave you,

a dusty mouth organ,
and some books

Creeley, Le Corbusier,
The Zen Gardens of Japan

the rest of what's left
is the world's to keep (Finlay, Alec 2012, p. 27)

Alec Finlay's 'Inheritance' is the penultimate poem in his book of 'Stonypathian memories' *Question Your Teaspoons* (Finlay, Alec 2012, p. ii). Borrowing its framing device from William Carlos Williams' famous 'This Is Just To Say', the poem takes the form of a fond note to his late father, Ian Hamilton Finlay. The poignancy of the situation is offset by the sense that the father remains present through these keepsakes. It is significant that it should be these small, personal items which Alec Finlay chooses to remember him by, rather than the better known artworks or publications. The socks, boats and books evoke memories of growing up at Stonypath, the Scottish hillside farm his father and mother Sue transformed into the neo-classical garden Little Sparta.

In this extraordinary place the homely (the Stonypathian) co-exists with the violent and the imperial (the Little Spartan). It is this former quality the poem celebrates.

The phrase 'question your teaspoons' comes from a motto composed by George Perec (Finlay, Alec 2012, p. 27). In his 1973 essay 'Approaches To What?' the French writer urges his readers to cast a keen eye on the everyday in order to 'lay hold on our truth':

> How should we take account of, question, describe
> what happens every day and recurs everyday: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?
> (Perec 2008, pp. 209-210)

What truths do the model boats, socks, mouth organ and books reveal about Ian Hamilton Finlay? They reveal a gentler, more playful, side to a man whose art regularly invoked the violence of World War II and the French Revolution: the Stonypathian rather than the Little Spartan. One can picture the domestic idyll of Finlay sitting in his shed, constructing his toy boats. The boats speak of his love of the sea, of fishing, of Orkney. Carved out of wood, with handkerchiefs for sails these little boats can be seen as Stonypathian counterparts to the rock and metal sculptures of military vessels dotted around the garden. The fine woollen socks speak of an appreciation for tradition and craft, simple items that embody warmth and goodness. The mouth organ will resonate with those familiar with the final poem from Finlay's 1962 concrete collection *Rapel*: 'This is the little burn that plays its mm mMm m mmouth-organ by the m mm mmm mMm mill x mm Mmm' (Finlay 1963, unpag). Is it too fanciful to imagine the mouth organ as a Scottish version of the flutes played by Virgil's shepherds, with Finlay a playful, mischievous Pan?

The books, meanwhile neatly encompass a number of Finlay's great interests: the American small-press avant-garde, European modernist art, Japanese form, and

gardens. For his father and his small-press peers, books were 'the common currency of friendship', and Alec Finlay recalls books arriving at the house daily, their packages covered in exotic stamps: Kyoto, Mexico City, New York, Vienna (Finlay, Alec 2001, p. 14). The Creeley volume may well be *For Love* (1962), which Alec Finlay recalls pulling off the shelf as a curious teenager, his introduction to 'a whole avant-garde tradition' (Pittock & Crawford 2002, p. 100), 'a community of itinerants, enthusiasts and eccentrics' he immediately wanted to belong to (Finlay, Alec 2001 p. 16). This inheritance forms a basis for his own activities as a publisher, editor, critic, poet and artist. As an editor and critic Alec Finlay has restored his father's work to its original contexts of post-war Scottish culture and the international avant-garde. As a poet and artist, he has built on those contexts, re-opening paths untaken and mapping new routes of his own.

'Inheritance' closes with an invitation: 'the rest is for the world to keep'. Alec Finlay is generous with the legacy he inherited, encouraging others to share in and expand on his research. As he wrote in 2002, there is a 'pressing demand for new cultural histories' of post-60s Scotland, taking in the work of such figures as Ian Hamilton Finlay, Edwin Morgan, Alexander Trocchi and Tom McGrath, as well as radical theatre and community arts projects (Birrell & Finlay 2002, p. 13). In subsequent years, writers and academics have begun to meet that demand via histories, biographies, scholarly articles, theses and research projects in a range of disciplines. This thesis is my own contribution to that field. It is not a comprehensive study of all the Finlays' work, but rather an analysis of the contexts in which they developed their practices. As such, it owes a particular debt to the critical legacies of Stephen Bann and Yves Abrioux, who situate Ian Hamilton Finlay within the context of 20th century art, and Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn, who resituate him within a Scottish framework.

I build on this critical legacy through my own close textual analysis and by making extensive use of archival material. While Alec Finlay draws on some of his father's correspondence to construct the biographical account that opens the 2012 collection *Ian Hamilton Finlay: Selections,* I approach the archival material in a more critical manner, helping me to develop a deeper analysis of the work and the context in which it emerged. My most significant contribution, however, is the application of new theoretical approaches to the Finlays' work. The first three chapters use the term 'homely avant-garde' to show how the interplay between tradition and experiment animated Finlay's development from a lyric poet to a concrete poet, artist and innovative publisher. Chapter four goes beyond existing considerations of place and the classical pastoral in the work of Ian Hamilton Finlay, by applying a range of pastoral and ecocritical theories to his stories, poems and garden works. Chapter five is to my knowledge the first in-depth academic study of Alec Finlay's work. The first part discusses the ways in which Alec Finlay builds on the legacy of the homely avant-garde in a post-devolutionary context, while the second part discusses his participatory and generative environmental praxis as a poet and artist. In this section I read against the grain of conventional ecocriticism by applying the geophilosophy
of Deleuze and Guatarri.

My first aim, therefore, is to gain a deeper understanding of how each poet developed his practice in relation to the contexts of post-war Scottish culture and the international avant-garde, using the concept of the homely avant-garde as a starting point. The homely avant-garde is Alec Finlay's term for the early 1960s alliance between his father, Hamish Henderson and Edwin Morgan. This loose alliance, he writes, was less a programmatic movement than 'a fey shoulder against the moribund wheel of the Scottish Renaissance' (Finlay 2012, p. 20). Recognising the need to move on from the Scottish Renaissance, this trio tentatively shaped a new Scottish aesthetic

that embraced the country's folk and popular culture alongside new international developments. Its homeliness is manifested in an interest in everyday
life and a certain 'home-made' approach to publishing and making.

An insert to Finlay's magazine *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse* is the closest we have to a manifesto for the homely avant-garde. In it, Finlay declares that Wild Hawthorn Press stands for beauty, tradition and experiment (*POTH* 3, June 1963). These core values underline Ian Hamilton Finlay's work, from the innovative vernacular poems of *Glasgow Beasts*, through to his concrete poetry and garden art. My approach then, is to take the 'homely avant-garde' term and develop it into a theoretical framework for understanding the work of Ian Hamilton Finlay and Alec Finlay. Through their homely avant-gardism, both poets construct plural visions of Scottish culture, where the interplay of tradition and experiment is an animating force. Their work thus offers valuable insights into both the Scottish Renaissance and the culture of the post-devolutionary era.

The homely avant-garde also provides a context for Alec Finlay's own exploration of Scottish culture. As a publisher emerging in the early 1990s, Alec Finlay re-assessed the work of the homely avant-garde, hoping to find his own solutions to the questions they raised. From his father, he gains an interest in formal experimentation and small-press publishing, while from Henderson, he gains a social sense of art, where sharing and participation are central to the act of creation. Morgan's internationalism and enthusiasm for new ideas is also highly influential.
Alec Finlay shares the homely avant-garde's commitment to reconnecting art and life, but brings to it an ecological ethics, raising questions about how avant-garde art
relates not only to culture and society, but the environment.

My second aim is to analyse each poet's treatment of landscape and the environment, arguing that they arrive at different conceptions of being or dwelling.

The creation of the garden at Stonypath/Little Sparta can be seen as an attempt to resolve the homesickness that characterised Ian Hamilton Finlay's work of the fifties and early sixties. An agoraphobic made anxious by city living, Finlay idealised the Perthshire where he had lived and worked as a shepherd, and the Orkney where he had worked on his first poems. His work can therefore be related to the pastoral tradition, as well as Heidegger's concept of dwelling poetically on earth. Reenchantment with nature, argues Heidegger, reveals the essence of being (Heidegger 1971, p. 213). Alec Finlay's work, I argue, is less concerned with a transcendental notion of being and more focussed on the act of becoming. Instead of retreating into his own world, Alec Finlay goes outward, creating participatory and experiential artworks which bring forth a series of becomings: creative and artistic methods of co-production and engagement with the environment which open up new ways of thinking about human relationships with nature.

To realise these aims, I have posited that the homely avant-garde principles of 'Beauty. Tradition. Experiment', as stated by Ian Hamilton Finlay in a 1963 Wild Hawthorn publicity release, provide the most useful framework through which to analyse his and his son's work. Their poetry, prose, drama, art and publishing practices can be understood as articulations of these principles. The interplay of tradition and experiment animates their work, sometimes resulting in tensions and fractures, but ultimately producing richer, more complex art. For Ian Hamilton Finlay, the pursuit of beauty is a moral cause. Beautiful art, he feels, offers 'an image of goodness and sanity… a model of order, even if set in a space of doubt' (Finlay 2009, p. 22). It allows man to dwell poetically. For Alec Finlay, however, the principles of beauty, tradition and experiment are put to explicitly social and ecological ends, helping us to imagine a better, greener world.

My primary sources for this study are the works that the Finlays have produced, including poems, short stories, plays, prints, artists' books and little magazines, artworks, essays and public and private correspondences. I have made extensive use of correspondence from the Gael Turnbull archives at National Library of Scotland and the Edwin Morgan archives at the University of Glasgow Library's Special Collections. Alec Finlay kindly gave me access to his copies of archival material from a range of American institutions, as well as private archives. Besides close textual analysis of these writings, publications and artworks, visits to Little Sparta, and various exhibitions and installations have proved invaluable in researching this project. I have also witnessed several readings and performances by Alec Finlay, and participated in events as part of *The Road North,* a multi-media 'word map' of Scotland based on the haiku master Basho's travelogue of 17th century Japan.

Chapter one locates Ian Hamilton Finlay in a Scottish context, arguing that the homely avant-garde represents a move away from the cultural nationalism and elitism of the Scottish Renaissance towards a plural vision of Scottish culture which bridges the gap between art and society. While never cohering into a programmatic movement, the homely avant-garde allowed Finlay to make alliances and create a context for himself. Through close textual analysis of his poetry, I discuss the ways in which Finlay experimented with Glasgow dialect and popular culture, combining the vernacular with innovative forms drawn from the historical avant-garde and contemporary developments in America, Europe and Japan. By analysing his public and private correspondence alongside issues of *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse* I aim to show the ways in which Finlay critiqued the Scottish Renaissance and developed his own Scottish aesthetic.

Chapter two explores the influence of the American small-press avant-garde on Finlay's work. In parallel to seeking out a community at home in Scotland, Finlay

sought out contacts overseas. Discovering the New American Poetry was an affirmation of his imagist poetics and his home-made publishing practices. Finlay felt a great affinity with the formal exactitude and imagist perspective of poets such as Robert Creeley and Lorine Niedecker. Such poetry offered a spare, lyrical alternative to the 'giantism' of MacDiarmid[1]. Many of these American poets were associated with small-press publishing, and their DIY practices showed Finlay how to run his own magazine and press. Using Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker's concept of periodical codes, I perform a close textual and material analysis of

Poor.Old.Tired.Horse., demonstrating how Finlay transmitted his values and aesthetics through his publications.

Chapter three explores Finlay's engagement with concrete poetry, a form he saw as 'a model of order, even when set in a space of doubt' (Finlay 2009, p. 22). To ensure that his concrete poetry is not merely a formal exercise, divorced from life, Finlay makes reference to 'the real' and takes his work from the page to the environment. I begin by focussing on Finlay's concrete poetry as it appeared on the medium of the page, before going on to look at Finlay's innovative treatment of print media, from the poster-poems and postcards to the kinetic poem-books, via the collaborative poet-artist issues of *POTH*. I then discuss the transition to non-print media - glass, metal, concrete and wood – culminating in the early garden poems at Stonypath. Throughout, I discuss the ways in which tensions between the real and the ideal, classical form and avant-garde experiment, animate his concrete poetry. Chapter four engages with pastoral theory to go beyond existing commentary on Finlay. I read Finlay's treatment of landscape through Leo Marx's concept of the complex pastoral, whereby an idealised vision is contrasted with a world that is more 'real'. This dialectic runs throughout Finlay's

[1] 'I am for GIANTISM in art', MacDiarmid 1966, p. 56

stories, poems and artworks. I argue that Finlay's complex pastoral represents one of the most imaginative and challenging treatments of Scottish place. Orkney and Perthshire provide him with idyllic images of rural and domestic life, but the pastoral ideal is subject to a range of counterforces, including realism, irony and violence. Tensions between tradition and modernity, the landed gentry and the rural poor, animate his short stories and lyric poems. His garden at Stonypath/Little Sparta is both a dwelling and an imaginal realm, where the domestic and the pastoral are juxtaposed with imperial and
revolutionary violence.

The final chapter turns to the work of Alec Finlay in order to illuminate his father's work and see how he finds potential solutions to questions raised in the previous chapters. In the first part, I look at his practice as a publisher and critic, as he links the homely avant-garde to contemporary developments and in the process develops an art practice. Alec Finlay describes the area in which he works as 'shared consciousness', and through participatory practices, his work examines the relationship between the avant-garde and social and environmental issues. The second part discusses Alec Finlay's environmental and social practice in his 'microtonal' projects: multi-media, interdisciplinary projects that gather several smaller elements into a larger whole. Drawing on the geophilosophy of Deleuze & Guattari, I explore the ways in which Alec Finlay's work engages with questions of dwelling.

In so doing, his work raises several important questions: to create a truly social and ecological art, to what extent should the artist relinquish traditional modes of authorship and creation? To what extent should he or she involve others and how much of a mark should he leave on the environment? Alec Finlay's solution is to create visual, textual and material objects, presenting them in an experiential context that allows for a degree of participation and relation, inviting readers/viewers to

consider the relationship between culture, society and the environment.

The central claim of this thesis is that while the work of Ian Hamilton Finlay and Alec Finlay shares certain formal interests and cultural contexts, their responses to them are quite distinctive. Both poets explore the relationship between art, society and the environment, but reach different conclusions, with the father ultimately moving inward to explore his own world, while the son goes outward to work in the area of shared consciousness. However, in both cases, their work thrives on the interplay between tradition and experiment, and it is in this spirit that they have
forged their remarkable oeuvres.

Chapter One.

Ian Hamilton Finlay and the homely avant-garde

This chapter looks at Ian Hamilton Finlay's poetry and publishing of the early 1960s through the frame of the 'homely avant-garde', arguing that his activities played a significant part in moving Scottish poetry beyond the values of the Scottish Renaissance. The 'homely avant-garde' is Alec Finlay's term for the loose alliance his father formed with Edwin Morgan and Hamish Henderson. Less a programmatic

movement than 'a fey shoulder against the moribund wheel of the Scottish Renaissance', this 'oddly homely' avant-garde interwove 'strands of folk culture, contemporary poetry, art and a hotchpotch of sentiment' in their work (Finlay 2012, p. 20). Alec Finlay's use of 'oddly' suggests that the avant-garde is not commonly associated with the homely, the rural or the domestic: make it new, make it *unheimlich*. Yet by fusing the 'homely' with innovative poetic form, Ian Hamilton Finlay and his peers helped develop a new Scottish aesthetic, one which revived and extended the modernist aims of the Scottish Renaissance, while rejecting its cultural elitism and macho paternalism. As a result, it can be argued that the homely avant-garde pointed towards a more democratic model of culture, restoring the connection between art and life.

While the poet, editor and polemicist Hugh MacDiarmid, aka Christopher Grieve's, achievements in modernising Scottish literature were widely acknowledged, by the late 1950s there was a sense among younger writers that the Scottish Renaissance project had lost its connection to contemporary life. As Morgan argued in his 1962 essay 'The Beatnik In The Kailyard', 'in its excitement at having established a new literature' the Renaissance had 'allowed life, both in Scotland and elsewhere, to move on rapidly and ceaselessly in directions it chooses not to penetrate, and the result... is a gap between the literary and the public experience which is surprising and indeed shocking' (Morgan 1974, p. 174). Ian Hamilton Finlay and his peers recognised the need to close that gap by establishing a new Scottish art and aesthetics which embraced folk and popular culture, as well as new international developments. As Ken Cockburn notes, by the early 1960s, Ian Hamilton Finlay saw:

> a need to define an art and aesthetics separate from MacDiarmid and his influence, and to create a 'support structure' of likeminded practitioners, though... this was the opposite of closed and exclusive.
> (Finlay 2004, p. xvi)

In this chapter, I theorise the concept of the homely avant-garde, using it as a framework for understanding Finlay's work as a poet and publisher in this period. I begin with an overview of the 'homely avant-garde', discussing its historical background and its relationship with the Scottish Renaissance and Folk Revival. While acknowledging the individual contributions of Morgan and Henderson, my primary focus is of course on Finlay's work and how it relates to the concept of the homely avant-garde. I contrast Finlay's embrace of popular culture to the elitist and paternalistic attitudes of MacDiarmid, discussing how he reclaimed elements of Scottish culture that had been discarded by the Renaissance as inferior or kitsch, such as the kailyard and music-hall. This is followed by an analysis of Finlay's treatment of folk, showing how his approach relates to that of Henderson. I then move on to an analysis of Finlay's poetics in relation to those of MacDiarmid. Finlay stood for 'beauty tradition experiment' (Finlay May 1962) and his poetics are both modernist and classical, with an emphasis on lyricism and purity. In contrast to the 'giantism' (MacDiarmid 1966, p. 56) of MacDiarmid's later work, Finlay sought a return to the classical values of lyric poetry, with an imagist focus on the thing. Bringing form and content together, I argue that works such as *Glasgow Beasts* represent Finlay's own conception of the homely avant-garde, fusing elements of vernacular culture and language with innovative form. Throughout the chapter, I will show how Finlay developed and promoted the ideas of the homely avant-garde through his Wild Hawthorn Press and the magazine *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse.*

To understand the context from which the homely avant-garde emerged, I will begin with a brief historical sketch, before discussing Finlay and his peers' response to the Scottish Renaissance. When Finlay came to poetry at the end of the 1950s, he was living in poverty in Edinburgh, suffering from agoraphobia. His work had not sold well and he felt marginalised by the Scottish literary establishment. Other than George

Mackay Brown, who had praised his 1959 short story collection *The Sea Bed* in the Edinburgh student magazine *Gambit*[2], Finlay had few Scottish allies or supporters, having fallen out with MacDiarmid. By the end of the decade, challenges to the dominance of the Scottish Renaissance emerged from emergent poets and the Folk Revival, of which Hamish Henderson was a key figure. Literary dissent centred around the publication in 1959 of *Honor'd Shade: An Anthology of New Scottish Poetry to Mark the Bicentenary of Robert Burns*, edited by Norman MacCaig and sponsored by the Arts Council. An anonymous review in *The Scotsman* newspaper criticised the collection as unrepresentative:

> There are certainly many fine pieces in the anthology, but the editor does not seem to have ranged very far in making his selection... As perhaps might be expected, Hugh MacDiarmid is given most space.
> (Bold, 1984, p. 798)

The reviewer went on to suggest that the selection was biased towards a clique of male nationalist poets, led by MacDiarmid, McCaig and Sydney Goodsir Smith, who gathered at Edinburgh's Abbotsford and Milne's Bar. MacDiarmid's withering response to these criticisms sparked a lively debate in the letters pages of the newspaper. A number of correspondents criticised MacDiarmid and his followers' domination of the literary scene, arguing that important developments, in particular the folksong revival led by Hamish Henderson, were being unjustly dismissed by the establishment makars[3].

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[2] Brown praised Finlay's 'innocent eye' and declared, 'At last Scotland has a good short story writer. I hope Scotland has the sense to realise it.' (Gambit, Autumn 1958, p. 32)

[3] Critiques of MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance's cultural nationalism also emerged from a younger generation attracted to the Folk Revival and the Beats. In his editorial from the 1959 American number of the Edinburgh student magazine *Jabberwock*, Alex Neish denounced the narrow, parochial vision of certain Scottish writers and their 'Nationalist lackeys', accusing them of losing track with new international developments such as Beat literature. Far from reviving Scottish culture, the 'inferior romantic drivel of misdirected Nationalism (has) for too long… hung like a mill-stone around the necks of younger Scottish writers' (Neish 1959, p.7). Although Neish published Finlay in his subsequent magazine, the short-lived *Sidewalk,* the former was more oriented towards the Beats.

Finlay himself made a small, but innovative, contribution to this episode, producing a reel-to-reel tape entitled *Dishonour'd Shade: Seven non-Abbotsford Poets* in February 1960[4]. The poets on the tape were a diverse group, united by their exclusion from the Renaissance inner circle rather than any particular stylistic approach. Despite its lack of aesthetic cohesion, the tape can be seen as an early attempt by Finlay to make alliances and position himself as separate from MacDiarmid. As Alec Finlay comments, the *Honour'd Shade* flyting can been seen as the beginning of a new phase in Scottish culture, with Finlay, Edwin Morgan and Henderson, among others, all recognising the need to move beyond the 'outdated aims of the Scottish Renaissance' (email to author, 11 Jan 2011). A significant aspect of this new phase was, as Alec Finlay puts it, the 'unusual alliance between the folk revival and the progressive forces in Scottish poetry' (Morgan 2015, p. 405). MacDiarmid's 1959-60 flyting with Hamish Henderson and other figures of the folk revival led to a degree of solidarity between the 'folkies' and the younger poets. In a

January 1995 letter to Alec Finlay, Morgan writes:

> I think there is some truth in what you say about an 'unusual alliance between the folk revival and the progressive forces in Scottish poetry'. MacDiarmid, who had become distinctly reactionary by that time, circa 1960, went out of his way to attack both; the attacks were usually separate but inevitably the attacked felt something of a common cause.
> (Morgan 2015, p. 405)

As Robert Alan Jamieson and Gavin Wallace suggest, 'The *Honor'd Shade* flyting of 1959-60... and the condemnation by talented younger writers must have been hard felt. Painful enough, indeed, for him to turn openly against the new' (Jamieson & Wallace,

[4] By taking the form of an audio recording, *Dishonour'd Shade* reflects the vogue for poetry on record. Finlay's decision to issue the recording as a tape instead of a vinyl record is likely down to practical and financial considerations; tapes are easier and cheaper to reproduce in limited numbers. Finlay's innovative use of the medium anticipates the DIY approach he would take with the Wild Hawthorn Press. Alec Finlay suggests that his father was inspired by Henderson's use of the tape recorder to document folk songs and stories (email to author 19 Nov 2011). The rise in the popularity of poetry readings ranin parallel to the folk revival, with Edinburgh poets and folk singers moving in the same bohemian milieu.

1997, p. 4). MacDiarmid would infamously go on to denounce the Scottish beat writer Alexander Trocchi as 'cosmopolitan scum' (Campbell & Niel 1997, p. 156) and dismiss Finlay and his allies as 'Teddyboy Poetasters' (Bold 1984, p. 813). As Alec Finlay writes, MacDiarmid's 'uncanny ability to jumble together folksong, the skiffle and beat movements, Concrete Poetry, the writings of Alex Trocchi, and place them all on a list of proscribed items' only helped bring the folkies and new poets closer together (Henderson, 1996, p. 341).

The homely avant-garde came together through Finlay's friendship with Henderson, a relationship which goes back to the 1940s, but had been renewed in the late 1950s following Finlay's move to Edinburgh. As Henderson's biographer Timothy Neat writes, 'thus begins a life long friendship that is well documented in letters, articles, artworks and conversational remembrances' (Neat 2010, unpublished). While Finlay, like Morgan, was never a 'folkie', both men admired Henderson's vision of a renewed Scottish culture based on a fusion of vernacular culture and 'high' poetry. They also shared his interest in language and translation, and both Finlay and Morgan would experiment with Scots versions of international poetry. Finlay would approach Henderson for contributions to *POTH,* but by this point, the latter was concentrating on songwriting and essays. Nonetheless, as I shall show, their correspondence was central to the development of the homely avant-garde.

Finlay and Morgan's first contact dates from around 1960, when both poets appeared in the transatlantic poetry magazine *Migrant.* The two men met the following year, with Finlay inviting Morgan to Edinburgh with the offer of tea and 'a lovely Elvis Presley record to play you when you come' (IHF > EM Summer 1961, Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848 Box 35, GUSC). In a subsequent letter, Finlay expresses how much he enjoyed their meeting:

> I enjoyed seeing you very much. It was so nice to be with someone who saw poetry as being of people and the world and not like a headmaster or gamekeeper with a shotgun. I just hope my didacticism, and nervous up-in-the-air-ness, did not scunner you too much. It's a funny thing that always strikes me when I meet Glasgow writers after Ed. [Edinburgh] ones – they are like creatures, very sad and mortal, with exposed foreheads, open to what comes.
> (IHF > EM Summer 1961, Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848 Box 35, GUSC).

Finlay's comments reflect Morgan's argument that the Renaissance had 'lost hold on life' through its failure to engage with contemporary society and culture. Their letters of this period see Finlay complaining of the 'headmaster' MacDiarmid's dominance: 'Grieve is like a great crazy weight on top of poetry now… But one is gagged by the bloody Establishment.' (IHF > EM, 12-7-61, Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848 Box 35 GUSC). By the 'Establishment' Finlay means the dominant writers of the Renaissance and their supporters. He saw their prescriptions for poetry as elitist and restrictive, and positions himself in opposition. 'I do see art as being essentially moral,' he explains to Morgan, 'but that is the opposite of the Scotch idea: you MUST write like this or else you are a wicked person and won't be let in the Abbotsford' (IHF to EM 23-6-1961, Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848, Box 35, GUSP).

Each man brought his own interests to the homely avant-garde. Finlay brings an interest in the pastoral, the maritime and the domestic, along with a fondness for art forms deemed vulgar by MacDiarmid: the music hall, the kailyard, the Scottish lyric tradition. Henderson was of course the great folklorist and song collector, but he also brought his own skills as a poet[5] and an essayist to the homely avant-garde. Morgan

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[5] Morgan greatly admired Henderson's *Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica*, describing it as 'a strong, stylistically adventurous (avant-garde?) book of a kind that MacDiarmid could never have written even though he too had been in a war'. Morgan also noted his 'special inship' with the book, having himself been in the North African desert campaign. Morgan would write his own war sequence, *The New Divan,* in the 1970s. (Morgan 2015 p. 405) [6] The opening of Morgan's essay is blunt: 'When are the leading Scottish publishers going to do something about modern poetry?'. He criticises the conservatism and lack of imagination shown by the larger publishers, and bemoans the fact that established and emergent Scottish poets were often forced to publish in 'England or in America, or in Scotland through one-man and ephemeral publishing ventures' (*New Saltire* 2 Nov 1961 pp. 51-56). In subsequent issues of *New Saltire,* Finlay's co-publisher Jessie McGuffie expands on Morgan's account, telling of the difficulties she had had in persuading bookshops to stock Wild Hawthorn publications and getting newspapers to carry reviews (*New Saltire*, Summer 1962 p. 50).

was the more urbane figure of the three, drawn to the excitement of city life and the new world of 'television and sputniks, automation and LPs, electronic music and multi-story flats... a world that will be more fast, more clean, more "cool" than the one it leaves behind.' While the others did not necessarily share his technological utopianism, Morgan's comments reflect their common goal of representing 'the experience of living in Scotland' today (Morgan, 1974, pp. 174-6). In contrast to the outspoken Finlay, Morgan positioned himself as a more conciliatory figure, seeking to heal the rifts in Scottish literature. Nonetheless, as his 1962 essays 'The Beatnik In The Kailyard' and 'Who Will Publish Scottish Poetry?'[6] show, he was not afraid to speak out against perceived complacency or conservatism.

The homely avant-garde's relationship with folk, which I shall elaborate on shortly, is an interesting one. It would be a mistake to over-inflate the poets' shared interest in folk. Henderson was of course the folk scholar, attracted to the great classical ballads. By his own admission, Morgan was 'never a folkie in any meaningful sense', but he was aware of developments in the folk scene, partly through his old friend Norman Buchan, the folklorist and future left-wing Labour MP. Furthermore, he shared Henderson's admiration of the great folksinger Jeannie Robertson, and was fascinated 'by the fact that [her] singing was anti-expressive, classical, often emphasising the wrong word or making a pause or link that ran counter to the sense, because that was how it had always been done' (Morgan 2015, p. 405). Finlay, for his part, was more interested in music hall style folksong (Finlay, Alec, letter to author 19 Jan 2011), although in a letter to Cid Corman, later published in *Origin*, he expresses his admiration for the Clancy Brothers, who he saw at a house party during the Edinburgh Festival:

> I liked them; they are very peasant; I get disturbed at city people with their soft bodies singing wild folksong, but thse ones had that hard and cruel, yet fine thing of the real peasant; their bodies were

> the same kind as the songs; that kind of short tight peasant hair,
> and tight-drawn almost glassy skin, and bright eyes – it is become
> a funny world where city people at smokey parties go crazy over
> mountain songs.
> (*Origin* 2 No. 6 1963, p. 28)

Finlay's notion of the 'real peasant' is somewhat essentialist and romanticised, but his comments give an insight into his conception of folk as 'of the people', as well as his class-conscious sense of distance he felt from it, a point I shall return to shortly.

All three poets shared an interest in contemporary poetry from Europe and America, and were critical of the Scottish Renaissance's failure to keep abreast of new developments. In the *New Saltire* Finlay bemoaned Scottish exceptionalism: 'I don't have to quarantine myself from the rest of the world just because I am a Scots, or Scottish, or Scotch writer… When will someone write about Scotland and its literature, not as The Great Exception, but as part of the world?' (*New Salitre*, Summer 1962, p. 80). While Morgan acknowledged MacDiarmid's internationalism, he lamented 'a new provincialism… Almost no interest has been taken by established writers in Scotland in the important postwar literary developments in the continent. Ignorance is not apologised for.' The Beats, he noted, were 'dismissed as a throwback to the 1920s', while the visiting Italian poet Eugenio Montale, who Finlay and Henderson would both translate, was 'greeted with something like indifference' (Morgan 1974, p. 174). As I shall discuss in more detail in the following chapter, the American influence was particularly important on the homely avant-garde. Morgan favoured the Beats over Finlay's beloved Black Mountain poets. As Morgan told Alec Finlay, 'I was more Times Square than wild hawthorn… It did not matter. Both groups of American writers were needed. We had a double benefit' (Finlay & Birrel 2002, p. 33).

Of course, Finlay did not see eye to eye with Morgan on everything. As I shall discuss in the third chapter, Finlay disagreed with Morgan's attempts to create 'political'

concrete poetry, and the pair had a number of fallings out over the years. Morgan and Henderson knew and admired Alexander Trocchi: Finlay did not. While Finlay's personal politics were liberal, his classical ideals led him to dismiss the transgressive and libertarian literature associated with the post-war avant-garde. In a letter to Robert Creeley, Finlay denounces John Calder, the Scottish-born publisher of Trocchi and Burroughs (and later Creeley himself), as 'a silly man… he is uncultured and never gets over dustbins and some notion that sex is avant-garde. Yugh!' (IHF > RC 18.8.64, Robert Creeley papers 1959-1997, Collection no. M0662, Box 48, Folder 25, Stanford).

Reflecting on *POTH* in 1968, Finlay claims that it was 'the only avant-garde magazine that never printed sick poetry, pornographic poetry, etc and which was really for lyric poetry of a positive sort' (IHF > EM 15.2.68 Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848, Box. 35. GUSP). As he wrote, 'the best a writer writes is beautiful / he should ignore the mad and dutiful' (Finlay, 2004, p. 192). 'Sick', 'pornographic' and expressionist poetry did not fit into his classical notion of art as moral and 'pure'. This separation of art and sex would put him at odds with the emergent counter-culture of the 1960s. There is perhaps an element of unconscious heterosexual privilege to Finlay's position. Although he was no homophobe, he perhaps did not recognise the radicalism (unlike Morgan and Henderson) of Trocchi's representation of gay sex and sexuality. These minor differences aside, the loose alliance of Finlay, Morgan and Henderson shared a common aim of renewing Scottish culture, albeit on more
generous terms than those of the Scottish Renaissance.

The Scottish Renaissance: modernism and mass culture

To understand the homely avant-garde's criticism of the Renaissance and its 'outdated aims', we need to go back to the founding principles of MacDiarmid's movement and

its relationship with modernism. As Scott Lyall writes, 'high modernism was cosmopolitan and elitist. Many of its canonical literary artists left their country of birth, seeking in foreign metropolises for new experimental perspectives that they believed could not be envisioned in the philistine provinces of home'. (Lyall, 2006, p. 152). The Scottish Renaissance, however, made a point of its rootedness. In contrast to cosmopolitan modernists such as Eliot and Pound, MacDiarmid produced his 'high art from the peripheries', rooting his work in his experience of rural and provincial Scotland. While 'radical reactionaries' such as Eliot, Pound and Wyndham Lewis looked to antiquity to shore up what they saw as the ruins of the modern age, the socialist MacDiarmid was aware of 'the ideological shortcomings of elitist metropolitan modernism' and was dedicated to understanding and challenging 'the economic and social forces underpinning such alienated reaction' (Lyall, 2006, p. 153). For MacDiarmid, the Scottish Renaissance was a vehicle for the cultural and political renewal of Scotland, with the ultimate aim of establishing an independent people's republic. As he wrote in 'A Drunk Man Looks
At The Thistle':

> Pu' Scotland up,
> And wha can say
> It winna bud An blossom
> tae. (MacDiarmid 1994 [1992], p. 50)

MacDiarmid's writing career, argues Lyall, was 'a committed act of engagement and identification with the land of his birth, a poetics of place striving to reveal the essential totality of the nation' (Lyall, 2006, p. 153). As he wrote in 'Scotland', by 'gathering unto myself / all the loose ends of Scotland... loving them and identifying myself with them' MacDiarmid attempted to 'express the whole' (MacDiarmid 1994 [1992], p. 230). Thus MacDiarmid became the Great Man of Scottish Letters, remaking the nation on his own terms and leading his people to freedom. His Renaissance

project involved the invention of a dictionary derived synthetic Scots, or Lallans, and the establishment of a new canon with his 1940 *Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*. As Alec Finlay writes, this anthology 'allied Latin and Gaelic poets and the anonymous ballads and folk-songs with the Makars and the modern Renaissance in a redoubt against Anglification' (Henderson 2004 [1992], p. xxvi). Yet in trying to express the whole, MacDiarmid excluded much. As Lyall argues, MacDiarmid's

tendency to define Scottish identity through the 'organicist essentialism of a totalising project that attempts to uncover the "real" Scotland' led to the exclusion of certain voices, such as so-called 'Anglo-Scots' (Lyall 2006, p. 11). By the 1950s, his increasingly prescriptive attitudes towards language and aesthetics caused tensions with other writers, who felt that different voices were being stifled by the Renaissance's dominance. MacDiarmid had been selective in his gathering of Scotland's loose ends. Finlay and the homely avant-garde reclaimed those he rejected. Finlay recognised the need to challenge the dominance of MacDiarmid and his followers and find new ways of engaging with contemporary Scottish society and culture. The Renaissance project, he felt, had become too intellectual, detaching itself from ordinary life. Writing to Morgan, Finlay complained that 'On the one hand there's the popular culture... on the other there's Groaning Grieve's "intellectual" (my foot) poetry... art and culture don't meet' (IHF > EM 13.4.62, Morgan MSS. Acc 4848, GUSP). As Alec Finlay writes in his introduction to Henderson's selected letters, 'MacDiarmid passionately believed that great poetry served heights to which only the greatest spirits could aspire. Folk-song was the kailyard, inimical to the avant-garde' (Henderson 2004 [1994] p. xxviii). Despite its clear influence on his early lyrics, MacDiarmid was by the late 1950s denouncing folk-song as 'the ignorant drivellings of swinish shepherds' (Calder: Henderson, 1992, unpag). MacDiarmid's disdain came partly from his experience of the sentimentalised versions of folk tradition prevalent in the popular culture of the

early 20th century. He failed to see that the folksong revival was something altogether more authentic and diverse. In *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect* George Davie describes the intellectual background to MacDiarmid's attitude:

> The starting point of [MacDiarmid's] argument... is the historic… struggle between the elite, the intellectual few who do the discovering, and make possible the progress and the anti-elitist many, who are not equal participating in the general argument, and who seek, often successfully to bring to an end 'The insatiable thocht, the beautiful violent will, / The restless spirit of man' by imposing egalitarianism... (Davie 1986, p. 111)

Lyall notes that although MacDiarmid was indeed a self-declared elitist, as a socialist he believed that such art should be available to all (Lyall, 2006, p. 153). Nonetheless, his attitude towards the masses could be rather paternalistic. As David Goldie notes, 'like many leftist intellectuals of the time, [MacDiarmid] took few, if any, of his values from this mass, but demanded rather that they adapt their tastes and judgement to those he had acquired through his professedly superior reading and culture' (Goldie 2006, online). In the post-war context of what Corey Gibson describes as 'the British intellectual Left's great disillusionment with the Soviet experience and their despair at the inhumanity of that model of Stalinist-Leninist Communism' (Gibson 2012, p. 100), MacDiarmid's elitist and authoritarian vision of an intellectual and political vanguard leading the lumpen proletariat out of their false consciousness seems deeply outdated and, to use Morgan's phrase, lacking in 'ordinary human sympathy' (Morgan 1974, p. 174). Morgan would elaborate on this idea in his 1967 essay

'MacDiarmid at 75':

> [MacDiarmid] would regard it as an essential part of his historical mission as a Scottish poet to undo the over-reliance on human feelings and human situations in Burns and his Victorian successors. As he remarks disgustedly in 'The Kind Of Poetry I Want': 'Almost all modern Scottish poetry gives off a great sense of warmth and offering, like a dog when it loves you.' Well, this is fair enough in the sense that we don't want wet poetry. But a poetry of human feeling is not

> necessarily wet, and one would suspect that an inadequacy as well as a polemic lay behind this rejection of warmth.
> (Morgan 1974, pp. 220-1)

Separately and in correspondence with each other, Finlay and Morgan emphasise the need for 'a poetry of human feeling'. Writing to Morgan about a proposed anthology, Finlay explains that he wants to capture 'the warm, new, we're for life thing' he sees in the best contemporary poetry (IHF > EM, 25.6.62 Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848 Box 35 GUSP). Morgan, meanwhile, writes of the need for poets to remember the 'human centrality of what one is doing' (EM to IHF 22.11.62, Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848 Box 35, GUSP). As I shall discuss in more detail later, in Finlay's own poetry, this sense of warmth and humanity was reflected in his preference for the lyric over the MacDiarmidian political and philosophical epic. As he writes to Morgan, 'the traditional themes of lyric poetry, are not 'trivial', and a poem is not empty because it is about, say, a girl, and not about politics' (IHF > EM 23.11.64, Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848 Box 35, GUSP).

Reconnecting with human feeling and popular culture

For the homely avant-garde as a whole, an engagement with popular and folk culture was key to their aim of reconnecting poetry with human feeling and contemporary life. In saying that Scottish literature must go 'back to Humanity and never mind Dunbar' (IHF > EM, 12.7.61, Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848 Box 35, GUSP), Finlay presents a direct challenge to MacDiarmid's call for Scottish writers to reject the values of the 19th century and go back to Dunbar and the makars of the Renaissance Scottish court in order to find a model of a high vernacular literature. As his review of the 1962 reprint of John Spiers' 1940 book *The Scots Literary Tradition* shows, Finlay rejected the notion

that 'there has been no Scottish literature… since the eighteenth century'. Speirs' argument anticipates that of David Craig's 1961 book *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1630-1830*. As Cairns Craig reflected in 1996, such studies typified the approach taken to Scottish literature in the twentieth century whereby 'a story of Scotland's loss of tradition' is constructed (Craig 1996, p. 617). David Craig and Speirs, notes Andrew Nash, were responding to the cultural parameters developed by MacDiarmid and Edwin Muir. Although they disagreed about the remedy, writes Nash, 'MacDiarmid and Muir both diagnosed the problem with Scottish literature in terms of tradition, concluding that in the 19th century Scottish literature had run down' (Nash 2007, p. 230). Thus, as Douglas Gifford notes, the 'Scottish Renaissance had to be based on a repudiation of nineteenth century cultural values and what they saw as that century's excessive religiosity,
stemming from their view that the Reformation of 1560 and the Industrial Revolution in Scotland had brought about a disastrous Deformation of Scottish
creativity and art' (Gifford 2007 p. 340).

The symbol of this Deformation was the kailyard, which MacDiarmid famously abhorred as sentimental, inferiorist claptrap ('And owre the kailyard-wa Dunbar they've flung'[6]). To Finlay, however, the kailyard 'at least was on the side of man, and feeling' (IHF > GT, 1.5.62, Turnbull MSS. Acc. 12552, NLS). As Finlay argues below, J.M. Barrie is as much a part of the Scottish literary tradition as Stevenson, Scott and MacDiarmid. Morgan also spoke up for the genre, arguing that:

> intellectuals and reformers… must guard against lashing themselves into a fury over the Kailyard. Not only is there an important place for sentiment and pathos in any literature, but the whole history of nineteenth-century culture in Scotland, and the reasons for the continued appeal of some form of Kailyard right down to the present time, still remain to be properly investigated. (Morgan 1974, p. 168).

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[6] From 'A Drunk Man Looks At The Thistle', MacDiarmid 1992, p. 51.

These remarks are prescient, anticipating later critical reappraisals of the kailyard by Ian Campbell, Andrew Nash and others. As Campbell argues in his 1981 study of the genre, for all its sentimentality and stereotyping, the best of the kailyard was underpinned by a realistic portrayal of a Scotland that, to its contemporary readers at least, was still familiar. As Campbell writes, 'to reject the kailyard is to reject much that is central to any attempt to define "Scottishness"' (Campbell 1981, p. 16). Alec Finlay echoes this, arguing that 'this plea for a more honest appraisal of the Scottish character, including its sentimentality, was part of the struggle for a new openness in emotional and political terms' (Henderson 1996, p. 342).

In his attempts to define Scottishness, Speirs not only rejects the kailyard, but also the language and culture of contemporary urban Scotland. As he writes, 'There is little that is positively Scottish in the life of the modern cities, Glasgow, Edinburgh, or that distinguishes them from the other cities of the modern world'. Finlay's response to this is worth quoting at length:

> This may be sound theory, but five minutes on a Glasgow bus would prove to anyone with ears and eyes that Mr Speirs is being unperceptive – to put it mildly. Or again: 'What survives of a (living Scottish) speech among what survives of the peasantry is in its last stages and is even something its speakers have learned to be half-ashamed of.' I have worked on many farms and I have never yet met a lowland farm-worker who didn't speak some form of Scots broad enough to be called such. I have never met one who was even one-eighth ashamed of it. But, incredibly, the paragraph continues: 'That is why there has been no Scottish literature… since the eighteenth century.' No Scott, no David Gray, no Robert Louis Stevenson, no J.M. Barrie, no Fionn Mac Colla, no… MacDiarmid? Or yet again: "Burns's poetry represents what in Scotland, as in England, has been destroyed. Nothing like it is possible now, because the conditions that make a vernacular verse of any kind possible no longer exist." So, to prove the abstract theory, the vernacular poems of Robert Garioch (for example) no longer exist!
> (*New Saltire 4*, Summer 1962, p. 80-81)

Finlay utterly rejects the notion that vernacular Scottish culture is dead: 'The tradition is there. Get with it! Enjoy it. This is your life.' (*New Saltire 4*, Summer 1962, p. 81). To Finlay, music hall and football were among the most vibrant examples of this tradition. For MacDiarmid, on the other hand, music hall was 'hokum, hokum, hokum', part of 'a cultural racket that panders unashamedly to a debased popular taste and thus makes the work of serious art impossible' (Goldie 2006, online). But as Henderson argued, Glasgow music hall had strong roots in the folk tradition, reflecting the city's Highland, Lowland and Irish heritage[7]. Furthermore, the homely avant-garde's interest in folk and popular culture reflects broader trends in post-war British culture. Writing in 1962, Henderson recognised a similar approach in the New Left, 'a new school of Socialist thinking' based around such figures as E.P. Thompson, whom Henderson had studied under at Cambridge, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, whose seminal study of mass culture, *The Uses of Literacy,* had been published five years previously. This school, Henderson writes, 'is not afraid of sociological revaluations, and goes out into the streets to hear not only the "gamin cry", but the voice and song of the people' (Finlay 1996, p. 93).

The homely avant-garde's embrace of the voice and song of the people thus represents a bracing challenge to the Scottish Renaissance's high modernist elitism. As a highly political artist, MacDiarmid was no hardline aestheticist, but he did share what Andreas Huyssen would describe as modernism's 'obsessive hostility to mass culture, its radical separation from the culture of everyday life'. Huyssen argues that while 'modernism's insistence on the autonomy of the art work' had faced a plethora of challenges from within (Cubism, naturalism, Brecht's use of the vernacular) the 'great divide' between high art and mass culture 'has remained amazingly resilient over the decades' (Hussyen 1986, p. viii). In his study of the culture of 1922, Michael North

[7] See Henderson's essays, in particular 'McGonagall The What' in *Alias MacAlias, pp.* 265-286.

challenges Huyssen's notion of the 'great divide', arguing that modernism and mass culture were far closer than is often assumed, citing the early French avantgarde's mining of 'music halls, newspaper advertising, billboards and the movies for aesthetic forms and rhetorical strategies' and the 1920s German avant-garde's 'extraordinarily close ties with "the culture industry"' of advertising and mass-market magazines (North 1999, p. 206). The homely avant-garde can thus be situated in relation to the tendency in modernism identified by North. Finlay himself recognised several precedents, discussing with Henderson in 1964 the interest Russian avantgarde poets[8] such as Larionov and Goncharova had in 'street-folk-speech… and the painters, too, were crazy on folk-art and *used* it in their work… I'm sick of folk as a *dead* thing, and they never treated it as such… We are surely very narrow if we understand only one culture (they talk of two cultures, but it seems to me there are
twenty two. And all of value)' (Henderson 1996, p. 116).

Finlay's interest in popular theatre and the music-hall has precedents in the plays of Brecht and the early modernist avant-garde. As North writes, 'the association between the art movements of the French avant-garde and popular entertainment of this kind is so close that [Jeffrey]Weiss has termed it 'music-hall modernism' (North 1999, p. 152) The French music hall and cabaret to which Weiss refers is altogether bawdier than the family entertainment of Stanley Baxter and Harry Lauder, but as popular theatrical forms, they share a playfully subversive, even carnivalesque quality. North's comments about French 'music hall modernism' readily apply to the homely avant-garde:

> In part, the association depends on simple enthusiasm for popular forms that seem fresh and unacademic. But the music hall also provides a formal model for the avant-garde, a model of ironic juxtaposition in which quick transitions between the high and the low, the comic and the bathetic, the

[8] Finlay celebrated the Russian avant-garde in *POTH* 8, August 1963, which included his 'Homage To Malevich'. For more on this, see chapter three.

artistic and the commercial deflate pretensions and level out specious distinctions. (North 2001, p. 152)

The Scottish music-hall of which Finlay was so fond performs such a function, and I will discuss its influence on *Glasgow Beasts* later in this chapter. For Finlay, the Glasgow humour of music-hall and Bud Neill's cartoons for the *Glasgow Evening Times* and the *Daily Record* had wit and life, 'a recognising quality' the 'posh ones don't like' but he found 'delightful' (IHF > Turnbull 12.3.63, Turnbull MSS. Acc. 12552, NLS) [9]. In his Summer 1962 critique of Finlay and Wild Hawthorn, Maurice Lindsay had described *Glasgow Beasts* as 'amusing, though much less so than the effusions of that other laureate of the Glasgow dialect, Bud Neil [sic]' (*New Saltire 4* Summer 1962, p. 66). Finlay's publication of a cartoon and poem by Neill in *POTH 7* the following year may well have been a sideswipe at Lindsay. Neill's work appears alongside poems by Kurt Schwitters and Paul Celan. As such, it is tempting to regard this combination as an example of the homely avant-garde's own brand of music hall modernism, an 'ironic juxtaposition of high and low, the artistic and commercial', as North puts it, which collapses cultural hierarchies (North 2001, p. 152). The cartoon depicts a lazy husband lounging on the beach while his wife holds a bawling infant. While the wife complains 'AW, TOAMY—THE WEANS ERSE IS A' SAUN'' ('*Oh, Tommy—the child's bottom is covered in sand*'), the husband dreams of being out on a row boat, 'miles awa'/fae them/ bloody flies' (*POTH* 7 1963, insert).

Another aspect of the homely avant-garde's playful but pointed anti-elitism was their enthusiasm for the infamous Dundonian poet William Topaz McGonagall (1825-1902), a figure who appalled MacDiarmid. As Alec Finlay notes, the use of McGonagall

[9] It is tempting to draw comparisons between Finlay's blend of Scottish and Japanese tradition in *Glasgow Beasts* and Neil's inspired fusion of working class Glasgow humour and Hollywood genres, particularly the Western and Cold War era spy and science fiction, in his hugely popular 1950s strip for the *Evening Times,* Lobey Dosser. A comparable superimposition of the local idioms onto the international genres and forms can also be seen in Morgan's science-fiction and Glasgow poetry.

became 'a satirical club to hit over MacDiarmid's head' (Finlay, Alec, 1996, p. 341). Both Henderson and Finlay were fans of McGonagall, the former publishing an illuminating essay in 1964 on the folk-song roots of his 'hobbling and broken backed' verse. Henderson affectionately described McGonagall as the 'unchallenged prince of bad verse' capable of moments of 'sublime banality' (Henderson, 1992, pp. 274 - 276). McGonagall's poems certainly have a charming innocence, and there is something remarkable about his inimitable misshapen verse[10]. In a letter to Turnbull, Finlay commented 'E. Morgan asks why [McGonagall] is popular, and me, I'd say it's because he really is the first stream of consciousness writer, the one who writes as one REALLY thinks. Also he is very Scottish' (IHF > GT, 1.5.62 Turnbull MSS Acc. 12554 Finlay Box, Folder 3, NLS). A 1962 feature in the *Daily Express* about *Glasgow Beasts* had compared Finlay to the Dundonian versifier. With the same irreverent spirit that would see him publish Bud Neill in *POTH 7*, Finlay gleefully responded to his critic by publishing McGonagall's 'The

Great Tay Whale' in *POTH 5*:

> 'Twas in the month of December, and in the year 1883,
> That a monster whale came to Dundee,
> Resolved for a few days to sport and play,
> And devour the small fishes in the silvery Tay.
> (*POTH* 5, December 1963, insert)

The poem was presented as 'AN AMAZING FREE GIFT!' and came printed on a separate insert, accompanied by a woodcut illustration. Finlay's playful use of the language of advertising and commercial publishing further subverts the great divide between high art and mass culture.

Morgan also recognizes the satirical potential of McGonagall's poetry. In 'The

[10] Analysing 'The Tay Bridge Disaster', Ben Lerner finds himself 'marvelling at McGonagall's radical failure': 'What I find terribly compelling about this poem is how, when called on to memorialise a faulty bridge, McGonagall constructs another one… Suffice it to say that the mishmash of metres (and of rising and falling rhythms) makes the ostensibly tactical elision of the third syllable from "silv'ry" truly preposterous' (Lerner, 2015 online).

Beatnik In The Kailyard', he notes that McGonagall 'clearly supplies some need in the Scottish soul, and we must ask what that need is'. In addition to being unintentionally funny, Morgan suggests that McGonagall lasts 'because he gives us a kind of inverted Kailyard; he writes in such as way as to make us laugh at some of the things the real Kailyarders would want us to drop a tear over' (Morgan 1974, p. 171). Similarly, McGonagall makes us laugh at authority: 'He upholds all the institutions from Queen Victoria downwards, but he does it in such a ridiculous way that the institutions seem to be being mocked. He gives us an outlet, quite unconsciously, to all those irreverent feelings which were held in check by writers of "My Granny's Fireside" and its co-tranquilizers' (Morgan 1974, p. 171). In creating an outlet for irreverent feelings, McGongall thus supplies a similar need, albeit
unintentionally, to the music hall, 'deflat[ing] pretensions and level[ling] out specious distinctions (North 2001, p. 152).

Football was another element of popular culture celebrated by the homely avant-garde. Written in 1935, MacDiarmid's 'Glasgow 1960' imagines a future in which the Renaissance has created a society where the masses flock to Ibrox stadium not to see Rangers football club, but 'a debate on "la loi de l'effort converti" / Between Professor MacFadyen and a Spanish pairty'. The poem offers an appealing vision of the democratic intellect made manifest across society, with newsboys proclaiming the publication of a 'Turkish Poet's Abtruse New Song' and 'Scottish author's opinions' making the headlines (MacDiarmid 1992, p. 205). Playful as the poem is, there is something rather paternalistic about MacDiarmid's privileging of high art over football and popular culture: if only the masses knew what was good for them! For Finlay, it was not a matter of football or poetry. Both were valid parts of the culture and people could and should be able to appreciate both. In a letter to Morgan he writes of 'trying to get Tommy Walker to advertise our books over the Tannoy at Tynecastle. I think

there's a good chance' (IHF > EM 15.3.62. Morgan MSS. Acc 4848, Box 35, GUSP). Finlay was of course a passionate football fan and gave it a prominent role in his vision of Scottish culture, seeing affinities between the poetry and the beautiful game. Writing to George Mackay Brown, Finlay described the great Scottish players Jim Baxter and Dennis Law as having 'the quality of poetry. I really feel that' (IHF > GMB 21.7.65. private collection). And writing to Robert Creeley, he likened the Scottish national team to his own Press, describing their playing style as beautiful, laconic and precise, 'a victory for The Wild Hawthorn Approach' (Finlay 2009, p. 13). To bring the worlds of poetry and football closer together Finlay and McGuffie planned to release records of Rangers and Celtic songs. Finlay even dedicated a folded paper poem sequence, *Concertin*a (1962), to a minor Scottish player, Pat Quinn, 'largely because he is wee (haiku), and for his style
(deadpan, graceful).' (Finlay 2009, p. 13).

Making use of folk

The Wild Hawthorn approach referred to here typifies the homely avant-garde, as Scottish popular and folk culture is brought into contact with contemporary international poetry and art. As noted above, Finlay's idea of folk was not synonymous with the Folk Revival associated with his friend Hamish Henderson, but that movement's 'heterogeneous blend of ballads, protest songs, skiffle and music hall' (Henderson 2004 [1992], xxiv) was broad enough to intersect with his own
tastes. While Finlay's conception of folk was not explicitly socialist or nationalist, his egalitarian embrace of folk and popular culture brings it into line with Henderson's

vision, with its emphasis on folk as a living tradition, a 'carrying stream' on which songs are transmitted orally and textually, undergoing a constant process of renewal[11].

This 'folk process', as Corey Gibson writes, was a timeless historical process which Henderson devoted his life to understanding (Gibson 2012, p. 9).

Drawing on the Marxist philosophy of Antonio Gramsci, Henderson saw folk culture as an entire worldview, which is, writes Gibson, 'necessarily "subaltern" rather than "hegemonic"; existing in opposition to "official" conceptions of the world and offering a counterpoint of perpetual resistance, due simply to the fact that it exists' (Gibson 2012, p. 97). Gibson argues that 'Henderson's compulsion to identify art which might connect with "people" is what seems to inform all of his work... he proceeds on the assumption that the writer can connect meaningfully with society, or the anonymous collective of the 'folk' (Gibson 2012, p. 8). By the late 1940s, Henderson felt that the Scottish Renaissance and Lallans project had failed in this regard, writing that there was a danger of Lallans poetry becoming archaic in its subject matter, and reducing itself to a 'mere academic exercise, a field for Alexandrian virtuosity – a "pluralism of superstructures" above a life with which it has lost all contact' (Henderson 2004 [1948], p. 378)[12]. In order to heal the rift between 'the voice of the people' and the 'intellectual forms of Modernism' which he came increasingly to identify with MacDiarmid's later work, Henderson hoped that 'a contemporary and popular literature in the Scots tongue' would emerge from the Folk Revival. This could be achieved, he felt, by attempting to 'fuse the speech of the common people with the voice of the art poet'. (Finlay 1996, pp. 333-335). Morgan was appreciative of these

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[11] Henderson's vision of the carrying stream of folk tradition is detailed in his poem 'Under The Earth I Go': 'Remake it, and renew... Tomorrow, songs / Will flow free again, and new voices / Be borne on the carrying stream' (Henderson 2000, p. 154-155).

[12] These sentiments would of course be echoed 14 years later in Morgan's claim that the Scottish Renaissance 'had begun to loosen its hold on life' (Morgan 1974, p. 174).

concepts, recalling a letter of Gramsci's that Henderson had shown him: '[it] made a plea for Sardinian against Italian, like similar pleas for Scots against English but based on unMacDiarmidesque arguments about the actual spoken language' (Morgan 2015, pp. 405-6). Finlay's thoughts on Gramsci are unknown, but as I shall discuss shortly, he found his own way of fusing 'folk'
language with 'high' poetry.

Hearing the voice of the people meant revelling in the 'polyglot oral tradition', which, as Alec Finlay writes, 'made such a nonsense of the ascendancy of any single tongue. [Henderson] took delight in demonstrating that all languages are, as Gavin Douglas has it, "bastard" affairs'. Thus, the Folk Revival was open to 'the gallus brogue of Jimmy MacBeath; the classic ballad style of Jeannie Robertson; Matt McGinn's "wee cock sparra" Glaswegian; and Hamish's own songs such as the "Freedom Come-All-Ye", written in Perthshire ballad-Scots' (Henderson 2002, p. xxvi). This openness to different voices chimed with Finlay, who objected to the Second Renaissance makars' (Sydney Goodsir Smith, Douglas Young, Maurice Lindsay) dogmatic insistence on Lallans as the primary literary language of Scotland. While Finlay had no particular ideological objection to Lallans, he was, as he told Morgan, against 'the kind of attitudes that have often gone with it... e.g. a lot of the Lallans ones have refused even to read *Glasgow Beasts* because it isn't PROPER Scots. That is silly, and academic. I'm not personally much bothered about synthetic Scots, but I feel people should be left free to write any way they want to – so long as it makes a nice result... no?' (IHF > EM 13.4.62, Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848, Box 35,
GUSP).

Having been born 'so far from Scotland[13]' Finlay 'had no easy access to "the local idiom" and the ease of self-expression it could bring' (Finlay 2012, p. 25). As

[13] Finlay was born in the Bahamas

such, it is tempting to agree with Morgan's comments to Alec Finlay that 'I would have some problems about your linking of your dad's early work and "folk".' Morgan is right to say that 'the irony and sophistication and literary reference take the poems a long way from folk' (Morgan 2015, 410), but as Finlay's own comments suggest, 'irony and sophistication' was the means by which he could make use of vernacular language and folk forms. Finlay's approach was to 'to use - not to duplicate from outside, but to make from, by understanding' (Finlay, Alec, 1996, p. 116). Writing to Morgan he explained, 'I'm interested, myself, in the idea of using spoken speech (speech as spoke by folk) and doing something at once natural and sophisticated with popular culture' (IHF to EM 13.4.62, Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848, Box 35,
GUSP)s.

> It seems to me that this *use* of folk – i.e. a deliberate use of it, putting it to use, has a lot of possibilities. As has the use of actual Scots, Glasgow Scots, and so on...
>
> *Ian Hamilton Finlay > Hamish Henderson, Edinburgh, 23.2.64*
> (Finlay 1996, p. 116)

Finlay had experimented with 'making use' of folk forms and voices in *The Dancers Inherit the Party* and it is worth discussing these before moving on to *Glasgow Beasts.* 'Folk Song For Poor Peedie Mary' uses the simplest of forms, and a smattering of Orkney dialect, to delightful effect:

Peedie Mary
Bought a
posh Big machine
To do her wash.

Peedie Mary
Stands and
greets, Where dost
thoo Put in the
peats?

Silly Peedie
Mary thoo
Puts the peats
Below, baloo.

Peedie Mary
Greets the more,
What did the posh paint
Come off for? (Finlay [1960] 2006, p. 206)

In lesser hands, such a poem could come across as snide, but Finlay warmly acknowledges the comic consequences modernity has on Mary's island lifestyle. The short lines of 'Folk Song For Peedie Mary' are contrasted with the long lines of 'Angles of Stamps'. 'You talk about the long folk line of the concertina sort, with rhyme-ending', Finlay wrote to Henderson, 'Do you know my poem 'Angles of Stamps'... I tried to use the folk-long-line there, with a kind of *ironical sophistication'* (Finlay 1996, p. 116). This ironical sophistication manifests itself in the playful use of slant-rhyme ('letter/water', 'kisses/crosses') and enjambment, which allows Finlay to build up increasingly long lines by the final stanza. It's to Finlay's credit as a craftsman that these long lines, which do not follow the regular metre of folksong, have a sense of rhythm and movement through deftly spaced repetitions of the word 'kiss': 'It means a kiss, yes, but what sort, is it a torn / Kiss, sweet kiss, anguished, cool as water / Rowan-burning kiss or kiss as pure as hawthorn?' The rapid succession of 'kiss, sweet kiss' in the second line sets up an expectation of a third 'kiss' soon after. Yet Finlay makes us wait until the next line, creating a sense of anticipation with the two trochaic feet which separate the kisses. In addition to the folk form of the long line, the poem uses imagery Finlay associated with Scottish 'folk' life, such as the rowan and the hawthorn, which were, along with the

Orkney and Perthshire pines, his signature trees.

Finlay and the modernist lyric

Finlay's great breakthrough was to combine 'folk' content and langague with innovative form. While MacDiarmid unapologetically declared, 'I am for GIANTISM in art' (MacDiarmid 1966, p. 56), Finlay wanted to pare things back, rejecting MacDiarmid's epic forms and philosophical content for a modernist iteration of the Scottish lyric tradition. As Roderick Watson notes, Finlay's search for 'a kind of purity, for the freshness of a naïve, or symbolically naïve vision and expression, was a serious attempt to restore clarity and directness to verse'. Finlay's

poems, Watson argues, 'can stand comparison with the Imagist force of MacDiarmid's early lyrics in Scots – *except* for their utter and absolute avoidance of expressionism or individual psychological profundity'. Therein lies the difference, he suggests, between 'Finlay's vision of his art, and the strenuous agenda of early AngloAmerican modernism' (Bell 2013, 76-78). Finlay felt that this 'strenuous agenda' had led MacDiarmid and his followers to lose their feeling for humour, tenderness and lyricism. Scottish writers, he complained in an angry letter to Gael Turnbull 'all want to be "big", "huge", "important" - what is *beautiful* doesn't matter to them at all.' (IHF > GT 7.4.62, Turnbull MSS. Acc. 12554, Finlay Box, Folder 3, NLS). In a letter to the Austrian poet Ernst Jandl, Finlay argued that 'Scotch poets':

> do not understand modern poetry at all... They like to think they are *thinkers,* full of very *serious* thoughts about serious matters... but 'thought' is not intelligence and one *image* against another, can create something more subtle than thought. (Finlay 2009, p. 32)

These comments reflect Finlay's allegiance to the kind of 'purity' and 'clarity' Watson refers to above. Writing in the American magazine *Origin,* Finlay dismisses Ted Hughes

and Thom Gunn as 'slop-poets', who 'have this same idea as the Scotch that a poem is an idea done up in images, and that syntax is the kind of wire that you poke the images on to' (*Origin 2*, Issue 8 1963, p. 28). Finlay's comments about putting 'one *image* against another' to 'create something more subtle than thought' follow Imagist practice: as Pound has it 'An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time' (Pound 1960, p. 4). Layering and juxtaposing images thus creates an even greater intensity of feeling. This also echoes William Carlos Williams' famous post-imagist maxim, 'No ideas but in things' (Williams 1983, p. 133). In his *Autobiography*, Williams argued that the poet's business was 'not to talk in vague categories but to write particularly, as a physician works, upon a patient, upon the thing before him, in the particular to discover the universal' (Williams 1963 unpg). For Finlay, images are the basis of a poem, the particular from which any ideas, feelings or associations arise. Take, for example, his Orcadian reworking of the Japanese poet Tatsuji Miyoshi's 'Snow', 'Snow In Rousay':

> Sending Mansie to sleep – it slowly blankets Peedie
> Mary's roof.
> Sending Peedie Mary to sleep – it slowly blankets
> Mansie's roof. (Finlay 2004, 211)

Laid against each other, the images of Mansie/Mary falling asleep and the snow falling on the roof, do indeed 'create something more subtle than thought'. By allowing these 'things' to be themselves, the images resonate with a sense of peacefulness and warmth. As the snow slowly covers the roof, and Mansie lies snugly indoors, the wintry landscape is contrasted with the warm interior. The repetition conveys a sense of time, with the snow slowly and surely blanketing the roof. And as the focus moves from Mansie to Mary, the near-indentical second line also creates a sense of the Rousay snowfall as a shared experience, the universal emerging from the particular. Japanese poetry's influence on imagism is well documented and it is clear that forms such as

haiku offered a purity and clarity Finlay felt was sorely lacking from MacDiarmid's later work. As he fumed in a letter to Turnbull, 'I'd give the whole of MacDiarmid for five of the best haiku, which testify to human imagination, grace, feeling and subtlety' (IHF > GT 7.4.62, Turnbull MSS. Acc. 12554, Finlay Box, Folder 3, NLS).

Finlay's squib 'Mansie Considers the Sea in the Manner of Hugh MacDiarmid' satirises the didacticism of the later MacDiarmid, demonstrating how attempts at philosophical profundity can undermine lyricism.

The sea, I think, is lazy,
It just obeys the moon
\- All the same I remember what Engels said:
'Freedom is the consciousness of necessity'.

(Finlay 2004, p. 206) By considering the sea in the manner of MacDiarmid, Mansie fails to appreciate the sea and moon for themselves, and the image collapses under the clunking weight of a political meditation.

For all that Finlay's poems teased the 'didactism of the late epic poems', writes Alec Finlay, the Orkney lyrics were a 'playful homage to MacDiarmid's early lyrics'. Indeed, as Watson commented above, Finlay's poetry shares 'an imagist force' with MacDiarmid's and it is worth comparing their work in order to better understand their commonalities and divergences. While MacDiarmid is known for his lofty philosophical meditations, as Edwin Morgan notes, in the early lyrics 'we are never far away from earthly interests' (Morgan 1975, p. 9). In this respect, some of MacDiarmid's early lyrics connect with contemporary Scottish life in a way that his later poetry of ideas do not. We might even say that these modernist lyrics of rural and domestic life represent a homely avant-gardism of their own, providing a model for Finlay's own efforts. As Morgan argues, some of the rural and domestic poems of *Sangschaw*, MacDiarmid's first Scots collection from 1925, 'have a Brueghelesque realism that was absolutely new-minted as far as Scottish poetry was concerned, after its many years of retreat from reality' (Morgan 1975, p. 9). He cites the poem

'Country Life':

OOTSIDE... Ootside!
There's dooks that try tae fly
An' bum-clocks
bizzing' by, A corn-skreich
an' a cay An' guissay i'
the cray.

Inside! … Inside!
There's golochs on the wa',
A craidle on the ca',
A muckle bleeze o' cones
An' mither fochin' scones.

The homely imagery of the second stanza could be from a Finlay poem (just substitute mither for Peedie Mary) while 'functional, gauged, at once, economical and liberated' lyricism also anticipates the younger poet's approach. MacDiarmid also conveys an unusual effect that Edwin Muir remarked combined humour with 'a kind of horror' via the grotesquerie of the 'golochs' (earwigs) on the wall (Morgan 1976, p. 9). As such it bears a striking comparison with some of Finlay's early poems. 'Optimist' sees the protagonist's 'would-be-father, old and slow' buying a 'kind of tin – Can for brewing proper out-of-door tea in / The bloody fire, though, it wouldn't go' thanks to 'the bloody wet sticks' (Finlay 2004, p. 189). There are further humorous misadventures in 'Finlay's House (on Rousay)'. Instead of golochs, Finlay's wall is festooned with dried fish, while 'spiders spin in nooks'. Here there is no reassuring presence of 'mither fochin scones' but rather 'a chair where you can't sit for – No, not the tar – The hooks, the lost fish-hooks'. A 'wild stone on the floor' keeps the door shut, but causes visitors to fall: 'They trip first, then they fall – They catch on the lost fish-hooks'. Finlay precedes this line with a reference to the spiders spinning, a subtle layering of images which prompts the reader to imagine the visitors as flies trapped in a web. 'Am I an awful man?' asks Finlay. 'I'm better housed than ducks / And like to lose fish-hooks' (Finlay 2004, p. 193). If MacDiarmid presents a relatively harmonious

vision of rural living, rooted in the community of Langholm, Dumfriesshire, Finlay creates something slightly more eccentric, dysfunctional even. In other poems Finlay's realism gives way to a playful fabulism. 'Orkney Interior' depicts a local character who keeps a pet lobster, while 'Catch' plays on an aural and visual rhyme between a lobster and a helicopter.

There once was a fisherman of Scrabster
Caught in his poet a gey queer lapster.

Thought he, this lapster's a sure sellar,
A tail it has, and a wee propellor,

In fact, it's no ordinary lapster felly,
It looks far more like a peedie heli -

You know yon kind of hoverlapster,
A what do you call it, helicapster.

Aye, aye, it's a peedie helicapster:
There's lots are caught in the sea off Scrabster. (Finlay 2004, p. 204)

In itself, the form is not innovative, but we see the elements of the homely avantgarde taking shape, as Finlay combines the feel of a limerick-like verse or folk rhyme with an almost surrealist sense of verbal and visual play. A number of the *Dancers* poems play on such metamorphoses – the boat as lemon ('The English Colonel Explains an Orkney Boat, Finlay 2004, p. 205)] or a foal ['The Island Beasts Wait For the Boat' (Finlay 2004, p. 201)]. Finlay takes the idea of laying an image against another to strange new heights. These images were of course reworked in concrete poems, and the idea of metamorphosis would take on a Zen resonance in *Glasgow Beasts*. One last point before moving onto that text; a similar 'imagist force' exists in MacDiarmid's multiple transformations of the thistle in 'A Drunk Man Looks At The Thistle'. Morgan lists some of these comparisons: a bagpipe, an alligator, a gargoyle, a skeleton, a flashing of

lightning, a candelabra, an octopus, a penis, the masts and rigging of a ship... (Morgan 1976, p. 14). The difference is that while MacDiarmid reels off associations and comparisons, Finlay is much more measured and economical in his approach, alighting on the perfect visual/verbal rhyme and allowing it to resonate.

There is a modest amount of modernist formal invention in the irregular longlines and playful short verses of *Dancers*. However, it was through the use of Japanese forms that Finlay made the transition to a more innovative poetics, bringing his fusion of the homely and the avant-garde to its fullest flowering. There was of course 'Snow In Rousay', but the great leap forward came with that 'pioneering menagerie', as Alec Finlay puts it, *Glasgow Beasts* (Finlay 2012, p. 24). With this collection, Alec Finlay claims, his father 'became the first British poet to bring together innovative poetic form and the potential of contemporary dialect' (Finlay 2012, p. 24). Arriving during 'the period of consolidation of the Revival in the cities' (Finlay 1996, p. 343), *Glasgow Beasts* was an affirmation of Henderson's beliefs, while also pushing into new territory.

Finlay fuses the modern tanka forms of Shimpei Kusano with the vernacular of music-hall and folk-song. Traditionally, the tanka is composed of five syllabic units that follow the pattern 5-7-5-7-7. When translated, these units are often divided into lines. However, the original form has no concept of line or rhyme. On first appearance, Finlay plays fast and loose with these rules. His poems have no regular syllabic patterns, and include elements of rhyme. However, while his poems are lineated, the lines are often so short they feel less like traditional western verse forms, and more like the reduced forms of Japanese poetry, as presented in Cid Corman's translations of Shimpei Kusano. Finlay's sequence combines folk imagery with the zen concept of reincarnation, with his beasts metamorphosing from beast to bird, insect to fish. Kusano was famous in Japan for his frog poems, and Finlay dedicates *Glasgow*

Beasts to the man, 'whae/writ/a haill buik o poems/aboot puddocks' (Finlay 1961, p. 5). As Corman writes, Kusano's frogs are 'the voices of nature - in its largest sense - and of absolute innocence. They sing in the face of every moment's doom... They are the gaiety and spontaneity and love and rootedness of fear in man. They mock our pretensions but share them too' (Kusano 1986 [1984], p. vii). Thus in 'Ten Thousand Years, Goodbye' a frog stands 'up on one foot. / gazing at the the far side of the universe'. Kusano urges the reader to join the frog 'at that height' and experience the sublime from its perspective (Kusano 1986 [1984], p. 4). 'Monologue of a Hibernating Frog', meanwhile, sings in the face of doom, wondering if his underground nest is hell and concluding that if so, 'I think hell is fine'. Rather than disturb him, the sound and vibrations of a truck passing overhead 'like electric massage feels good'. Again, we have a glimpse of the sublime, as the frog emerges from hibernation 'into the dazzling light and air' and experiences a joy that awakens the senses, making him 'smile with all my eyes' (Kusano 1986 [1984], p. 32).

Finlay's beasts have similar qualities to Kusano's frogs. The first of Finlay's beasts, a fox, also mocks human pretensions, while sharing them. He's cocky - 'an wis ah sleekit' – proudly recalling the way he'd go 'slinkin / heh / an snappin / yeh' through the wood, hunting for food and outwitting humans. With a touch of false modesty he adds 'aw nae kidding / ah wis pretty good'. This is a proud fox, revelling
in his legend:

see
me wan
time
ah wis a fox
an wis ah
sleekit! Ah gaed
slinkin
heh an
snappin
yeh
the blokes

aa sayed ah wis a G R E
A T fox aw nae kiddin
ah wis pretty good
had a whole damn wood in
them days
hen (Finlay 2004, p. 223)

Finlay uses the perpendicular form of tanka to capture the speech rhythms of the music hall performers, while the spacing of the words on the page gives a further sense of movement and comic timing. Morgan notes that there is one voice throughout *Glasgow Beasts*, 'a storyteller's voice' with a spoken quality (Morgan 2015, p. 410). This is the patter of the Glasgow music hall, and Finlay conveys this tone of voice through effects such as the capitalisation of 'G R E A T', where the reader can 'hear' the fox speaking these lines with relish. The final lines, however, strike a more wistful note: 'had a whole damn wood / in them days / hen'. We might imagine the speaker as an older fox, recalling his youthful exploits. Or, if we run with the theme of reincarnation, it's a recollection of a past life, foreshadowing the uncertain tone of later poems in the sequence.

In the following poem, he becomes a moose (mouse), 'a richt wee douce/chap', watching out for traps, and this theme of entrapment is continued with the 'minnie' (minnow) taken from his pond and placed in a jar. Being a giraffe might have been 'a laugh', but the animal nonetheless ends up with his neck stuck in a tree. Reincarnation as a 'heilan coo/wis mair liker', as the mischievous protagonist enjoys frightening the hikers with his 'hoo hoos'. But the 'bess' (best) incarnation was as a cleg (horsefly) as it represents freedom and Finlayan smallness: 'honess/pals/like/no been born'. Yet in the final poem he comes back as a coal-horse, burdened by the weight of his cart: 'ho the/heavy'. A tragicomic ending perhaps, the Creeley-ian 'Poor.Old.Tired.Horse' a sad reflection of the slinkin' and snappin fox, or the 'zebra/crossin'. However, like Creeley's 'Poor.Old.Tired.Horse.' or Morgan's Mayakovskian 'cuddies' (cart-horses),

Finlay's coal-horse has a quiet dignity. He is the most sympathetic of the beasts, accepting his lot with good humour, all the while imagining a better life (Finlay [1962] 2004, pp. 223-233)[14].

Morgan, reviewing *Glasgow Beasts* in *New Saltire* 2, Autumn 1961 praised the collection: '[it is] guaranteed to raise the spirits - and to remind us that the possibilities of a local dialect are far from exhausted' (*New Saltire* 2, Nov 1961 p. 53). Despite the collection's innovation and sophistication, MacDiarmid claimed that its Glaswegian dialect was 'not the kind of Scots in which high poetry can be written'
(Bold, 1984, p. 687). *Glasgow Beasts* was considered slight, with the *New Statesman's* Karl Miller glibly dismissing it as 'zennery pokery' (*NS* Summer 1962, clipping from Morgan MSS, Acc. 4848, Box 35, GUSP) and the Glasgow *Evening Times* reviewer, Eric de Banzie writing '*Glasgow Beasts,* I'm told, is only a kind of gay aside in relation to his serious work... I'm afraid I don't see this letting "some air into the Scottish literary set-up."' (*Evening Times* 18.9.61, clipping from Morgan MSS, Acc. 4848, Box 35, GUSP).

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[14] As Alec Finlay has noted, whether by accident or design, the horse seems to have a special significance to the homely avant-garde (email to author 19.1.11). There was of course *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse.,* its name taken from a line in Robert Creeley's poem 'Please': 'This is a poem about a horse that got tired./ Poor.Old.Tired.Horse.' (Creeley 1982 p. 156). In addition to Finlay's poor horse and his Glasgow Beasts coal-horse ('ho the heavy', there was Morgan's translation of Mayakovsky's 'Khoroshee o krasnoi shapochke' as 'A Richt Respeck Fur Cuddies' (*carthorses*), first published in *Migrant 5*, March 1960 (Morgan 1972, p. 30). Henderson and Morgan's shared interest in language saw them both explore the coded language and esoteric rituals of the Horseman's Word, a secret society of horsemen, ploughmen, farrowers and blacksmiths that was, as Timothy Neat notes, Henderson's first anthropological discovery. Henderson saw the all-male society as the continuance of a primordial horse-cult, adapted to nineteenth-century agricultural practices (Neat 2009 pp. 15-17). Again, there is no record of them discussing it, but it is likely Morgan would have read Henderson's articles on the topic and in 1970 he published a sequence of concrete poems called *The Horseman's Word* as part of Akros's Parkland Poets series. The poems feature modern horses (there is a Clydesdale, alongside references to the racing horses at Newmarket, the famous horse show at Hortobagy national park in Hungary, and the horses in cowboy movies), the prehistoric 'dawn horse' Eohippus, and mythological horse-like beasts (centaur, kelpie, hrimfaxi), inviting comparison with the theme of metamorphosis in Finlay's *Glasgow Beasts.* The idea of transformation also relates to Morgan's use of language, as he plays with permutations of Scots, English Arabic, Hungarian and Spanish to create a phonetic sound poetry which can be seen as his version of the Horseman's Word secret language (Morgan 1970 pp. 1-12). All these connections may be coincidental, and can only be pushed so far, but nonetheless there is something about the horse that makes it the quintessential creature of the homely avant-garde. With the exception of Morgan's eclectic bestiary of 1970, the horses of the early homely avant-garde are working horses, very much part of the human world. As such, they mirror our human selves, experiencing tiredness, sadness and regret: the poor cart-horse in the snow which reminds a woman of 'her own small saddest part' in Finlay's 'Poem On My Poem On Her and the Horse' (Finlay 2012, p. 128). Yet their horses also display dignity, strength and a certain resigned humour, as in Finlay's coal-horse's stoic comment about spending 'hauf the day / wi yur piece / hauf-etten / hung / roon yir / ear' (Finlay 1961, p. 31) and Morgan's Mayakovskian cuddie: 'My chesnut chiel! / Back home to

Following *Glasgow Beasts*, Finlay continued to experiment with homely avantgardism, translating modern poetry into vernacular Scots. These are Finlay's own contributions to the modern tradition of Scots translation that begins with MacDiarmid, sharing the older poet's internationalist aims, while rejecting his notion of 'the kind of Scots in which in which high poetry can be written' (Bold, 1984, p. 687). The unpublished 'Rowan Tree', which he dedicated in a letter to Morgan, is a 'variation on a theme of Brecht', adapting the German's 'Der Pflaumenbaum' ('The Plum Tree') to an urban Scots setting:

I hae a rowan oot the back,
At heich toon-houses starin back -
The heck, it says, an it stauns there,
A rowan wi its ain wild air.

It's nae place fir a tree tae bide,

---

his stable / lauchin like a pownie / staunin by the stable-waa / feelin in his banes able / to dree the darg and the dowie / for the life that's worth it aa.' (Morgan 1972, pp. 31-32)

It micht weel think on suicide;
But na – fir aa ma rowan's wee
It luiks the toon-warld in the ee.

It disnae ken Why – just Believes.
The dust greys ower its simmer leaves.
Syne it graws berries,

reid an bonnie It deeves me
hoo I hinnae onie.

(IHF > EM 29.9.61. Morgan MSS. Acc 4848, Box 35,

GUSP)

In addition to its anthropomorphism, 'The Rowan Tree' shares the melancholy strain that runs through *Glasgow Beasts,* ('It micht weel think on suicide;') as well as the cocky defiance, ('But na – fir aa ma rowan's wee / It luiks the toon-warld in the ee'). (IHF > EM 29.7.61. Morgan MSS. Acc 4848, Box 35, GUSP). Despite its small stature, the rowan tree stands proud in its urban surroundings. The influence of music-hall comes through in the wordplay of 'Hoo I hinnae onie' ('how I haven't any'), while the choice of tree echoes the popular folk song 'Oh Rowan Tree', written by Lady Nairne, Carolina Oliphant (1766-1845). Finlay also made Glasgwegian translations of poems by the American objectivist poets Lorine Niedecker, whose own folk aesthetic has parallels with Finlay's own, and Louis Zukofsky ('Such Is The World', subtitled 'Wan wee fragment frae Louis Zukofsky, pit intae Glasgow-Scots', 1962). The American influence, which I will explore in much greater depth in chapter two, led to Finlay making playful references to the Beats and rock 'n roll. 'My Little Beat Mill In The West' makes use of the 19th century lullaby to create the tender imagine of a 'dark guitar' tinkling 'up above the world so sly / Like an Elvis in the sky!' (Finlay 2013, p. 127). This can be seen, in part, as a riposte to MacDiarmid's jibes about 'Teddyboy poetasters' (Bold 1984, pp. 813), but there is no doubting the genuine fondness in Finlay's poems, or his belief that these influences were a rich source of inspiration[15].

It was with concrete poetry that Finlay's homely avant-gardism reached its apex, as he created innovative work from Orkney and Perthshire images. I will discuss Finlay's concrete in much greater detail in Chapter 3. However, it is worth illustrating the point

[15] Note Finlay's promise to play Morgan 'a lovely Elvis Presley record' (IHF > EM Summer 1961, Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848 Box 35 GUSC)

with some brief examples. 'This is the little burn that plays its mouth organ by the mill' (Finlay 1963, unpag), a Fauve poem from Finlay's first concrete collection *Rapel,* combines a Perthshire scene with elements of 'Keepsake Mill' by Finlay's beloved Robert Louis Stevenson: 'Here is the mill with the humming of thunder, Here is the weir with the wonder of foam' (Stevenson 1950, p. 377). The words and letters are presented in blue and green text, evoking the water and grass of the landscape. The 'mouth organ' sound of the burn is rendered in permutations of 'mMmxm' which wrap around the main text. Finlay also stretches out the consonants of 'mouth' and 'mill' with a lingering, sensual 'mmmm'.

The homely avant-garde and the WILD HAWTHORN approach

> Did I tell you that Scotland beat England in the annual football game: It was splendid… They played beautifully, like I am always saying they should start and write: precisely, laconically… oh, it was wonderful; the first time Scotland has won for about two decades – I really felt it was a victory for The Wild Hawthorn approach.
> Ian Hamilton Finlay > Robert Creeley 25 April 1962 (Finlay, 2009, p. 13).

Finlay's letter to Creeley is, as noted previously, a charming example of the homely avant-garde's embrace of football. Playing style is likened to poetic style. Finlay invites parallels between the old, failed kind of football and the Scottish Renaissance. By adopting the beautiful, laconic and precise Wild Hawthorn approach, Scottish football and poetry have been reborn. The following months, however, saw Finlay coming under increasing pressure, as a war of words broke out between representatives of Wild Hawthorn on one side and MacDiarmid[16] and Scottish arts journalists and

[16] In a latter published in *The Scotsman* on May 18 1962, MacDiarmid denies that it is untrue that the Scottish Renaissance has held down younger writers. While he agrees that older poets should encourage their promising juniors, MacDiarmid could not see 'any obligation to assist in the promotion of work diametrically opposed to [his] own.' No progress, he believed, could be achieved under 'the impetus of a group of teddyboy poetasters'.
Morgan may have deemd *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse.* 'attractive' but to MacDiarmid it was 'utterly vicious and deplorable'

critics[17] on the other, leading to a stream of letters in the Scottish press, and the rush publication of MacDiarmid's curious diatribe *The Ugly Birds Without Wings,* in which Finlay was charged with contributing to the debasement of Western art and conflated with everyone from Samuel Beckett to the Beats. As

MacDiarmid writes:

> The work of Mr Finlay and others – notably in that happily short-lived periodical *Sidewalk* – is fittingly characterized by Jacques Barzun in an essay in which he says that the effects of the second World War are "ensuring the elimination not only of Romanticist art and its sequels, but of all the high art of the last five centuries." (MacDiarmid 1962, p. 11)

Stung by these attacks from what he saw as the Scottish literary establishment, Finlay went on the offensive, spreading rumours that he was organising an antiMacDiarmid march during the Edinburgh Festival[18]. A letter to Niedecker captures

Finlay's anger:

> it has become clear that there is NO alternative but to fight, and I who once was rather gentle and tolerant, am now going to make that crowd RUE THE DAY THEY showed their hatred of beauty – Time for poetry, perhaps, later – now I'm going to fight them to the death – the whole horrible lot – I am BLAZING MAD that our books and poets should be so slandered. (Finlay, Alec 1994, p. 21)

During the summer of 1962, he circulated a Wild Hawthorn release with copies of

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(Bold 1984, pp. 813-4). In their reply of May 19 1962, Finlay and McGuffie denounced MacDiarmid as a 'Stalinist', an epithet to which MacDiarmid did not strongly object. They continue: 'the poets of the Scottish "Thaw" have to be abused as "stilyagi" – teddyboys. For a poet who denies being part of an "establishment" this is a rash line to take (Bold 1984, p. 814 n).

[17] The spat began in response to Douglas Young's negative reviews of *Glasgow Beasts* in December 1961 and Niedecker's *My Friend Tree* in early 1962 in *The Glasgow Herald.* As he wrote to Morgan in March 1962, 'Did you see Douglas Young's nauseating review of Lorine Niedecker? He writes to me that he doesn't think "many sensible Scots people will be interested in the wild floundering of Miss Niedecker and her like...", Oh, ha ha, how funny. That's the International minded Scotch Renaissance for you! Bastard cunt that he is.' (IHF > EM 31.3.62, MS Morgan Acc 4848/ Box 35, GUSC). A Wild Hawthorn circular was issued the following month, entitled *Pan Loaf Provincialism* ('pan loaf' is a colloquial term for the affected accent of social climbing Scots). In it, Finlay announced Wild Hawthorn would no longer send its book for review to *The Glasgow Herald* and accused Young of deliberately misleading readers of the contents of *Glasgow Beasts.* Young was also taken to task for 'sneeringly referring' to Finlay's poems as 'lyrics'. Finlay questions Young's integrity, contrasting his work with the 'fair reviews' of *Glasgow Beasts* and *My Friend Tree* in the *New Saltire* and 'half-a-dozen other newspapers'. Finlay concludes: 'Writers and artists, speak up in defence of your work!' (Finlay & McGuffie March 1962, p.1).

[18] As Alec Finlay notes, this was the first of Ian Hamilton Finlay's battle scenarios, anticipating the Little Spartan 'wars' (Finlay 2012, p. 23)

POTH3, setting out the reasons for his anger:

HATE FOR HATE – WE'VE DUNNETT NOW

We had better make this clear – The Wild Hawthorn believes in

BEAUTY TRADITION EXPERIMENT

We began with a feeling of warmth and open-ness. We are now going to return hate for hate, BECAUSE

Hugh MacDiarmid, you called Mayakovsky and Attila Jozsef
and Fyodor Tyutchev and Lorine Niedecker – and many more
creators of beauty – "fools" and betrayed poetry to your
"capitalist" press.

BECAUSE

Mr Dunnett, editor of the Scotsman, you printed "TEDDYBOY POETASTERS" - like this, in headlines.

and pretended that the Scotsman stood for "culture"
(popular front against the warm voice of poetry…

BECAUSE

We say NYE to the "Voice of Scotland", believing that Scotland has many voices.[19]

NYE to a "culture" not open to everyone.

NYE to the products of raving intellect.

But AYE to those forgotten writers who came before
us, who are sacrificed to the greater glory of
MacDiarmid.

AYE to Robert Burns and Sandy Brown.

AYE to all good poets, including MacDiarmid.

AYE to panache.

AYE to humour.

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[19] A play on the name of the Scotsman's literary editor, Robert Nye.

AYE to Rangers AND Celtic.

AYE TO THE RHUBARB AS IT GROWS TO HEAVEN THROUGH A RAGGED HOLE IN A RUSTY PAIL.

(*POTH* 3, June 1962)

The above quote comes from a Wild Hawthorn circular inserted into copies of *POTH* 3 in 1962. The piece is Ian Hamilton Finlay's angry response to attacks on his poetry and publishing by Hugh MacDiarmid and various critics and newspapers. Finlay vowed to 'return hate with hate', but the piece takes a more positive turn with a conciliatory nod to MacDiarmid and its declaration of Wild Hawthorn values. As I argue throughout this thesis, 'BEAUTY TRADITION EXPERIMENT' is a useful frame for Finlay's whole project. Beauty, for Finlay, was what all art should strive for. Finlay felt that the high-minded seriousness of poets like MacDiarmid had blinded them from beauty. Beauty was not merely a question of aesthetics, but of morality. Finlay saw the popular confessional and expressionist poetry of the time as selfindulgent and negative. As he wrote in 1964, 'I think the new poetry (coming) will be without the word "I", and will be seen as a sign, of goodness, and not as an expression of personal conflict, or anguish. Perhaps this will be because anguish will have increased, and people will need examples of goodness' *The Aylesford Review* Vol VI, Number 4, pp. 198-199).

This association of beauty with morality partly stems from Finlay's emotional problems at the time. Unhappy experiences of therapy inspired the 1960 poem, 'The Writer and Beauty': 'The best a writer writes is beautiful/He should ignore the mad and dutiful' (Finlay, 2004, p. 192). Images of pastoral and domestic idyll in his work, therefore, served as 'examples of goodness' in the face of his own anguish. The domestic imagery of the rhubarb growing 'to heaven through a ragged hole in a rusty

pail' can be seen as a metaphor for the transformative power of art and beauty. It's as if Finlay has transposed William Carlos Williams' red wheelbarrow to the kailyard, finding an ecstatic lyricism in the humble rhubarb. This is a fine example of Wild Hawthorn's homely avant-gardism, modernist imagism delivered with 'humour' and 'panache'.

Finlay's litany covers many of the homely avant-garde's concerns: a celebration of football, popular music (Sandy Brown was a popular Scottish jazz musician), and the lyric tradition associated with Burns. Through *POTH* Finlay championed forgotten lyric poets who did not fit in with the aims and aesthetics of the Scottish Renaissance. Chief among these were Hamish Maclaren (1901-1987), a naval officer whose poetic career ended with the Second World War. His best known collection was *Sailor with Banjo* (1929), which he described as 'a narrative poem interspersed with lyrics' (Internet 2). Maclaren's work appared in two issues of *POTH*, and it is not difficult to see why his lyrics, with their idyllic images of Scottish island life appealed so much to Finlay. Publishing such traditional work alongside more experimental material was a key characteristic of *POTH*. As he wrote to Morgan, 'There's also a place for the lyric, and even for the little, the tiny wee thing' (IHF>EM, 13.4.62, Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848 Box 35, GUSP).

The Wild Hawthorn approach extended throughout Finlay's publishing activities, as he sought to 'make something of use to Scotland, in presenting different kinds of good poetry' (IHF > EM 15.2.68, Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848 Box 35, GUSP). In addition to publishing international poetry, Finlay sought to represent Scotland's many cultures. A range of Scottish dialects were included, from Morgan's vigorous Scots translations of Mayakovsky and Robert Garioch's Edinburgh Scots, to the rural Scots of Helen B. Cruickshank. All three used forms of Scots that were closer to the spoken language than MacDiarmid's synthesis. Although Garioch and Cruickshank

were of an older generation to Finlay and Morgan, they were not entirely sympathetic to the aims of the Renaissance[20]. Finlay's experience of island culture influenced his editing, with the Orcadian George Mackay Brown appearing in several issues. His most radical move, however, was the inclusion of an elegiac poem in the Shetlandic dialect by Veng, 'Da Lad at Deed Owre Young' ('*The Lad Who Died Too Young*'):

> Da streen ida kirkyard we laid him doon,
> Brucks o da boannie man he might a been;
> Wi muckle speculation I da toon,
> An gairded teets ahint the window screen...
> (*POTH* 3, 1962, p. 2)
>
> *Last night in the churchyard we laid him down,*
> *The scraps of the handsome man he might have been;*
> *With great speculation in the town,*
> *And guarded looks behind the window screen...*

Shetlandic dialect is a blend of Norn, English and Lowland Scots (MacNeil, 2011, p. xix). There is a rich tradition of Shetlandic poetry, but it has often been neglected by anthologists and critics. To include it in a 1962 poetry magazine, then, was truly pioneering.

Although Finlay was not a Gaelic speaker, he, and his contributors, were attracted to the sound of the language, and its potential to create sound poetry. Finlay may have joked that 'almost everyone thinks sound poems are in Gaelic' (IHF > EM 19.5.62. Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848, Box 35, GUSP), but just as Kurt Schwitters and Hugo Ball forged sound poetry from German phonemes, so the Liverpudlian performance poet Pete Brown and Edwin Morgan drew on British languages and dialects. The first two poems on the front page of the first *POTH* are sound poems by Brown. The first, 'The

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[20] Regarding Garioch, writes Robin Fulton, MacDiarmid 'chose to be supercilious: "he has no elevation and is… not only dull but vulgar in the worst sense." I suppose the Great Man was aware how Garioch had little patience with his windy self-promotion (and with what he saw as MacDiarmid's political naivety)'(Garioch 2004, p. xvi). Cruickshank's contribution to the *Honour'd Shade* flyting was a poem which mocked MacDiarmid ('Hughoc') for his 'freamit learnin' and reliance on 'borrowed words' from the Chambers Dictionary. MacDiarmid responded, not unjustifiably, with an accusation of anti-intellectualism (Bold, 1984, p. 806n).

Blue Moor', combines the phonetics of Hugo Ball 's Dada sound poetry with a guttaral Scots diction – 'Trenglooor muryurr dyuumm' - anticipating Morgan's later sound work. The second, 'McBnuigrrs Speech', fuses
Dada with Gaelic and a cheerful northern English absurdism:

OIGBLE MEELONEYS? Sftinch stf'chuint
McBnuigrr cruspsicade stoor banclum triptthss
roityusc foor terhiptthss anclubm yus lbcumble – ffor
trhiptss roit roitthriptyuscumble!

(FOOR)
stfb
'oigchuint!

(*POTH* 1, 1962, p. 1)

The Gaelic gives Brown the velar plosive trills of 'grr', the voiceless velar fricatives of 'ch' and the dipthongs of 'ui' and 'oor'. Constructions like 'cruspicade' ' roitthriptyuscumble', with their rollicking mix of dipthongs, plosives, rhotics and laterals are closer to the English sound poetry of Bob Cobbing, or the nonsense verse of Lewis Carrol. Inspired, Morgan provided an answer poem, published in
POTH 3:

'Meeloneys Reply to McBnuigrr':

B'OIGJABRRSMAC – fcatchoo bfck
bfcuttchling mdeirdras mdeirackache bfckoil
kll oil cascoil spellme oil couplshlellacafuttchoo:
b'goddoill mcsickrr,
McBnuigrr!

(*POTH 3*, 1962, p. 4)

As enjoyable as Brown's effort is, Morgan's reply is the more successful poem. His mastery of craft is evident in the poem's use of internal rhyme, half-rhyhme and consonance, while the phonetic transformations are worked through with greater

precision and flair. Most impressively, Morgan captures something of the rhythm and sound of Gaelic speech. The dipthong into the dark L of 'oil', sounds truer to the Gaelic than Brown's eccentrically English 'oigble', and its repetition contributes to the rolling rhythm.

Finlay was delighted with both poems and proposed to include them in an anthology of 'sound, Dada, etc poems' entitled *Cool Ossian*. His notion of a 'cool' take on the Gaelic oral tradition, as represented by James 'Ossian' MacPherson, seems to be an example of the ironic sophistication he aimed to bring to folk. Wild Hawthorn were to open a shop in which to sell their publications for the Edinburgh Festival, and in a parody of the kitsch souvenirs abundant on the city's Royal Mile, Finlay planned to give *Cool Ossian* a tartan cover, illustrated 'with little blocks of highland cottages'. Describing the project to Morgan, he wrote, 'I am "wicked" as you once said, but I believe that nothing will preserve a tradition so much as *kidding* it. *Cool Ossian* would do more for Gaelic than thousands of Mods[21], etc. Also, Dada must be given *local* setting, it's got academic' (IHF > EM, 19.5.62. Morgan MSS. Acc. 4848. Box. 35, GUSP). *Cool Ossian* never got beyond the planning stages, but its concept is another winning example of Finlay's playfully imaginative approach to tradition, where new hybrid forms emerge from the fusion of tradition and experiment.

Another victory for the Wild Hawthorn approach and the homely avant-garde.

Conclusion

To answer the question of how Finlay developed a separate Scottish aesthetic to MacDiarmid's, we must consider their individual relationships with Scotland. While

[21] A festival of Scottish Gaelic song, arts and culture.

Finlay has a strong sense of Scottishness and is in some ways a poet of place, he does not identify with the nation in the way MacDiarmid did. Born in the Bahamas, Finlay lacks MacDiarmid's rootedness in any one place. As a result, his work is not motivated by the same totalising nationalist thrust. In *Dancers* and *Glasgow Beasts* Finlay gathers various aspects of Scottish life into his personal homely avant-garde aesthetic. In contrast to the totalising project of the Scottish Renaissance, whereby MacDiarmid sought to envision the nation on his terms, Finlay does not claim his homely avant-garde represents the whole of Scotland. However, it does represent a more open idea of Scotland than MacDiarmid's vision would allow. As Alec Finlay notes, the Finlay-Morgan-Henderson axis was in some ways a failure, as Scotland was not yet ready to embrace a homely avant-gardism which drew on Scottish folk and art traditions, popular culture and new international developments. So each became an exceptional individual: Henderson, the 'folklore figure of myth', Morgan the great 'civic poet', and Finlay the 'eccentric gardener genius' (email to author, 11 Jan 2011). Yet in 'making use' of these elements, all three discovered their own voices and opened paths for others to follow, creating new possibilities for the democratisation of the avant-garde and helping to restore its social function. The homely avant-garde may have been short lived, but like the Renaissance it sought to transform Scottish culture through tradition and experiment. Where it differed was in its egalitarian
spirit of reconciliation.

Chapter 2.

From homely to home-made: Ian Hamilton Finlay and the New American Poetry.

'Of course my poetry is home-made, a home-made solution to the needs of inklings'

(IHF > Cid Corman, 1961. Corman MSS III, Box 15, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington)

In this letter to Cid Corman, the American poet and publisher of *Origin*, Finlay describes his poetry as home-made, a personal solution to an inner need. The 'homemade' can be interpreted in a number of ways. In terms of form, it recognises the poem as a made object which the poet shapes in his or her own way. It can also refer to a way of seeing, with the poem springing from the poet's own perceptions of the world around him: focusing on the local to find the universal as William Carlos Williams would put it (Williams 1963, upgn). More broadly, it's an apt description of the DIY practices of the international little magazine and small press scene, where poets took the means of production into their own hands. This understanding of the

'home-made' thus provides a framework for my discussion of Finlay's engagement with the New American Poetry, as defined by Donald Allen's seminal 1960 anthology[22]. As noted in chapter one, Finlay's connections with the American smallpress scene, and his interest in contemporary American poets such as Lorine Niedecker and Louis Zukofsky, played a significant part in the development of his homely avant-gardism. In a letter to Gael Turnbull, Finlay expressed his affinity with the new generation of American poets, in particular those associated with the Black Mountain school, arguing that they had arrived at 'much the same conceptions' as he had in his 'own wee way... rather home-made, and AGAINST everything I was

taught to do by other Scotch writers' (Finlay, Alec 1994, p. 7). This chapter explores what these conceptions were and how important they were to the development of Finlay's poetry and publishing. I will also consider the ways in which the new poetics and publishing practices brough art and life closer together and helped democratise the avant-garde.

In the 1962 Wild Hawthorn pamphlet discussed in the previous chapter, Finlay stated his key poetic values: 'BEAUTY TRADITION EXPERIMENT' (Finlay & McGuffie 1962, p. 1). Rejecting what he saw as the elitism and didacticism of the Scottish Renaissance, Finlay sought a return to the classical virtues of lyric poetry, privileging 'beauty' over 'importance' (IHF > GT 7.4.62, Acc. 12554 Finlay Box, Folder 3, NLS). His interest in experimentation took him back to imagism, with its emphasis on the direct treatment of the object. Finlay's discovery of a new

generation of American poets building on this imagist tradition was an affirmation of his own poetics, and gave him the confidence to develop his own 'home-made' imagism and formal experimentation further, preparing the ground for his embrace of concrete poetry. In the second part of this chapter, I discuss the influence of the

[22] Donald Allen (ed) *The New American Poetry*, New York: Grove Press, 1960.

American small press scene on Finlay's home-made publishing practices, providing him with models for disseminating his own poetry and building a community. As Robert Duncan wrote in his poem 'Motto', 'A correspondence is a poetry enlarged' (Duncan 2012, p. 457). Through the exchange of letters, poems, magazines and books, Finlay and his poet-friends shared new ideas, theorised, joked and squabbled. All this ensured that poetry was not just a solitary practice, but part of a larger formation comprising support networks and alternative institutions. I argue that through his publishing practice, Finlay helped create a context for his own work, and developed an approach to the presentation of poetry which anticipated his engagement with concrete poetry. Throughout my discussion of Finlay's poetry and publishing, I will argue that this engagement with the New American Poetry showed him how he could further the aims of the homely avant-garde by reconnecting poetry to human feeling and contemporary life.

The legacy of imagism

The poems of *The Dancers Inherit The Party* are mostly written in traditional verse forms, although Finlay often disrupts these with abrupt line-breaks and extended lines which follow speech rhythms. Part of these poems' charm is their slightly oldfashioned, faux-naive quality, something that comes through in Finlay's couthy locutions, playful approach to rhyme, and often comic use of simple metrical forms. In these early poems there is sense of Finlay undertaking his poetic apprenticeship, working his way through received forms, enjoying their musicality and benefitting from the sense of order they provide, while also taking pleasure in gently teasing their structures apart, delaying and subverting expectations in a modernist manner. While not all his poems have regular metres or end-rhymes, Finlay gives them a sense of shape and movement through the

use of sound patterning, parallelism and cadence. Ever the classicist, Finlay seems keen to impose a sense of order on his poems and treat them as made things.

This classicism extends to Finlay's sense of what poetry should be. Finlay's Orkney Lyrics, as Alec Finlay notes, paid ironic homage to MacDiarmid's early lyrics, but Finlay regretted the older poet's turn towards the political/philosophical epic, which he felt had created a dominant ethos in Scottish poetry that only 'the "huge" was worth consideration'. In the country of Allan Ramsay and Robert Burns, he fulminated, this neglect of the lyric tradition was deplorable. (IHF > GT, 7.4.62, Acc. 12554, Finlay Box, Folder 3, NLS). As Christopher Beach notes, modernists such as Pound, T.S. Eliot and William Carlos Williams rejected the English lyric of the 19th century, arguing that it relied too heavily on melodious language and was ill-equipped to convey complex thought (Beach 2003, p. 49). Nonetheless, the lyric survived, adapting to the challenges of modernism by stripping away Romantic excess and incorporating elements of the new poetry. In developing his own lyric approach, Finlay looked to the Scottish tradition, while also appreciating the directness and purity of Japanese and Chinese poetry. Those qualities of grace, feeling and subtlety are present in many of Finlay's early poems, from the sweetly wistful 'Poet', where instead of counting sheep to help him sleep, he counts the islands, always coming back to Rousay 'my dear black sheep', to the childhood memories of 'End Of A Holiday', where he wonders if his father is 'all right / Up in the dark without / A proper light?':

He pulls the heavy clothes
Up to his chin.
I'm fine, he says, I'm perfect.
- Goodnight, son.
(Finlay 2004, p. 214)

These early lyrics show Finlay's deft way with traditional forms and his 'natural' voice. The tone conveys sentiment without being sentimental. Both have a Stevensonian quality, an ability to tap into a childlike perspective, without seeming faux naïve or

twee. They are less formally adventurous that the poems he would produce under the influence of the New American Poetry and concrete, but their subtlety and charm offers a refreshing alternative to the 'strenuous agenda' of MacDiarmid (Bell 2013, 76-78).

It was through these various influences that Finlay developed what Roderick Watson describes as an imagistic poetry free from expressionism or individual psychological profundity (Bell 2013, pp.76-78). As Finlay told Lorine Niedecker, 'what I have done in poems is really nothing compared to what I sense, but I did manage something home-made, and against everything I had ever been TAUGHT by Scotch poets, as it had to be alone'. Ploughing this lonely furrow, he claims, saw his poems dismissed by other Scottish poets as naïve and 'technically bad', but he felt he was 'doing something else, an inner thing, and it is in the *movement*, (not metre) and the *implication*...' that one moves 'towards the true subtle thing' (Finlay 2009, p.11). In his search for that 'true subtle thing' Finlay rejected the idea, which he felt was prevalent among 'Scotch' poets, 'that a poem is an idea done up in images, and that syntax is the kind of wire that you poke the images on to' (Corman 1963, p. 28). An image, as Ezra Pound wrote, 'is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time' (Pound 1960, p. 5). This method allows the poet to deal with abstract content through concrete images: as William Carlos Williams' put it, 'No ideas but in things' (Williams 1983, p. 133).

Direct treatment of the thing, the avoidance of abstraction, the image as a vortex through which ideas and sensations flow: such an approach can be clearly discerned in the Finlay poems discussed above, which distil a complex of emotions, sensations and experiences into resonant images which reveal the relationship between people, places and things. As he wrote in a letter to Ernst Jandl, '"thought" is not intelligence and one *image* against another, can create something more subtle than thought' (Clark 2009, p.

32). In his own home-made way, Finlay was building on the legacy of imagism, inadvertently bringing him into line with the new generation of American poets (Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, Ronald Johnson et al) who had been shaped, as Guy Davenport writes, by Pound, Williams and the Objectivist Louis Zukofsky, whose 'admonitions to the young stressed objectivity, technique, honesty, clarity, realism...' (Davenport 1983, pp. 184-5). Such poetry insisted, wrote

Davenport elsewhere, that:

> the world is interesting enough in itself to be reflected in a poem without rhetorical cosmetics, an arbitrary tune for melodramatic coloring, or stage directions from the literary kit and caboodle. (Davenport 1981, p. 192).

A letter to Creeley makes it clear that Finlay recognised the links between the new poets and previous generations of imagists and modernists. 'It begins to become clear that Williams/LZ/and you, are a tradition, or way... Well now, there are two things there, first a concern for language, culture, and what I'd roughly call decency; secondly, the movement of the poem, syntax, structure' (IHF > Robert Creeley, 20.8.62, Creeley papers M0662, Box 48, Folder 25, Stanford).

These poets, Finlay felt, perceived the world in a similar way to himself, with a focus on the particular, and a concern for 'decency' and human feeling. As Finlay told Corman in 1961: 'It was so like what I had felt (when I was writing on my own up in Orkney, never knowing all this stuff existed) should be done. Not the same, but the same world, or same relation to the world' (IHF> Corman 1961, Lilly Library, Corman MSS III, Box 15). For these poets, 'truth' was based on their own perception of the world around them, rather than on abstract concepts derived from elsewhere. As Charles Olson wrote in his widely cited letter to Elaine Feinstein, 'pure "localism" of space-time... can now be called: what you find out for yrself.' (Allen 1960, p. 399). As a result, poets responded to images from from everyday life and places, while

developing an innovative and highly personal approach to form which often incorporated local speech rhythms and dialect. Again, we come back to William Carlos Williams, whose autobiographyes quotes approvingly from John Dewey, 'The local is the only universal. Upon that all art builds' (Williams 1963, upgn).

As Williams argued, 'the poet thinks with his poem', with ideas flowing from his or her perception of things. In a *Paris Review* interview, Robert Creeley argues that Williams' interest in 'The Red Wheelbarrow' lies not the 'literal material evident in the red wheelbarrow, but in *how* the perception occurs, how [Williams] thinks in the context of that relationship. Not simply *why* he says this, but *how* he says it, how he gives it credence, how he gives it recognition' (MacAdams & Wagner Martin 1968, online).

So much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

(Williams 1983, p. 57)

With the sparest of details, Williams recognises the relationship between the objects, revealing their order and restoring meaning and significance to everyday things we may take for granted: 'so much depends'. The small details bring these objects to life: the red of the wheelbarrow, the white of the chickens; the glaze of rain water reminding us that this inanimate object exists in relation to an environment, an ecology. We see similar things happening in the Finlay poems discussed above: the distillation of everyday life experiences, family relationships, local customs and history into resonant

images. 1962's 'Lucky' finds the speaker recalling reading some Russian classics for the first time, presenting the moments as they happened in imagistic stanzas:

> I first read Tolstoy's 'The Snow-Blizzard'
> In a wooden shed with
> A big one blowing in.
> - It was cold in bed!
>
> And I first read Turgenev's 'First Love'
> By a candle
> In a whitewashed out-house. (Raining)
> What an apple-y smell!
>
> (Finlay 2012, p. 129)

In recalling these incidents, Finlay does not present the reader with some newly earned insight or epiphany. He simply presents the world as it was at that moment, giving an articulation to his sense perceptions. The reader feels the cold of the blizzard, the glow of the candle-light; while the 'apple-y' evokes an older rural way of
life, with winter apples stored in the outhouse. Or is the smell some kind of synaesthetic response to the rain? Finlay's layering of images reveals a complexity of sense, emotions and associations: 'something more subtle than thought' (Clark 2009, p. 32). As Zukofsky put it, 'The world is a physiological thing' intimately related, writes Dembo, to the poet's direct response to things as they exist (Dembo 1972, p.
76).

There are clear affinities between this approach and Finlay's homely avantgardism. The focus on the particular ties in with Finlay's poetics and also provides a theoretical justification for his embrace of the local in his subject matter and language. Finlay was so elated to discover kindred spirits, he expressed his affinity with the American poets in familial terms: 'Your new American poets, Creeley, Dorn etc,' he wrote to Turnbull, 'I feel they are my brothers' (5.7.61, Turnbull MSS. Acc. 12554, Finlay Box, Folder 3, NLS). Of Lorine Neidecker he asked, 'You wouldn't be my sister

or something? Your poems are a delight' (Peters 2011, p. 146), while he signed off a letter to Ronald Johnson 'Love from your illegitimate father, and mentally ill, lazy layabout, nothing-person, Ian' (IHF > Johnson, 1965, Johnson MSS, Folder 100, University of Kansas). For Finlay, it seems that the new American poetry community represented the 'home' and 'family' he had been longing for. Misunderstood at home, Finlay was initially unsure about how his poems would be received by the American poets Turnbull had introduced him to: 'I'd like to show them my poems but I'd be scared they didn't like them' he writes (NLS, 5.7.1961, NLS Acc. 12554, Finlay Box, Folder 3). But like them they did. The publication of *Dancers* in 1960 brought Finlay to the attention of Robert Duncan, Cid Corman and several others. Creeley praised Finlay's 'lovely tone of wit and good nature', adding 'the more read, the better'. Louis Zukofsky, meanwhile, wrote to Turnbull in December 1960 describing Finlay's poems as 'charming – he is a poet, it's about as simple as that' (Finlay, Alec 1994, p. 7). Reflecting on the Orkney and Perthshire 'folk' poems, Zukofsky saw Finlay as a 'Scots Lorine Niedecker', adding that he thought the Wisconsin poet would 'like his work very much', which of course she did[23]. Finlay, for his part, was 'ecstatic' about Niedecker's poems, according to Penberthy (Finlay, Alec 1994, p. 17). As he wrote to Turnbull in June 1961, 'I think Lorine Niedecker's poems are superb, I am fair touched.' (Finlay, Alec 1994, p. 7). In the following sections, I will discuss the significance of Finlay's relationships with Niedecker, Zukofsky and Creeley, exploring the affinities between the poets, before analysing the ways in which their poetics influenced Finlay's own.

'You wouldn't be my sister?' Finlay and Lorine Niedecker

[23] In a subsequent letter, from January 1961, Zukofsky writes, 'I knew Lorine would fall for the Finlay' (Finlay, Alec 1994, p. 7).

The affinity Finlay and Niedecker felt towards each other is understandable when we consider that both poets create vivid impressions of local customs and places, while capturing the delight and melancholy of human experience. As discussed in the previous chapter, Finlay brings a highly idiosyncatic vision to Orkney life, populating his poems with eccentric characters such as Peedie Mary and her cousin Mansie[24], who are affectionately and humorously portrayed. Take 'Mansie Considers Peedie Mary':

> Peedie Alice Mary is
> My cousin, so we cannot kiss.
> And yet I love my cousin fair:
> She wears her seaboots with such an air.
>
> (Finlay 2004, p. 205)

This poem has the 'lovely tone of wit' Robert Creeley so admired in Finlay's poetry, where the love Mansie feels for his cousin Peedie Mary is not so much romantic but a more innocent sense of admiration. The image of Mary wearing 'her seaboots with such an air' gives the reader a rich sense of her character: slightly comical and dignified at the same time. In other poems, Finlay introduces fish-out-of-water characters like the English colonel and the English poet John Sharkey, emphasising the remoteness of this community.

While associated with the Objectivists, Niedecker spent most of her life in the rural Wisconsin community of Blackhawk Island. As such, she was, as Jenny Penberthy writes, 'a poet with twin allegiances to a rural backwater and a metropolitan avant-garde', whose folk poems 'offer a rich and subtle study of folk habits' (Niedecker 2002, p. 6). As Penberthy writes, Finlay's own poems and his praise for hers, proved to be 'a timely affirmation of her folk aesthetic' (Finlay, Alec 1994, p. 18). As she told Zukovsky:

---

[24] Peedie is Orcadian for small, while Mansie is the diminutive of 'Magnus'. (Finlay 2004, p. 205)

I thank whatever gods there be that someone's good
hand... sent me these poems. Nothing in a long while
has reached my particular kind of home like they have.
Certainly one-third of them have simply set me free.
(Finlay, Alec 1994, p. 17)

Despite their very different backgrounds, Finlay felt that Niedecker belonged 'to the same world':

You are using as yours the way of writing I dimly sensed
and believed in – and it is something that belongs to *all*
literature, it is different but the same. Truly traditional. And
new, of now. So that is a very important thing to me: I
can't explain more.
(IHF> LN 1961, Louis Zukofsky Collection, II. Box
32.2 Harry Ransom Humanites Research Centre,
University of Austin)

It is interesting to note that both poets use spatial metaphors – 'my particular kind of home', 'same world' – to describe their worldviews. Of course, these worldviews are shaped by their experiences of particular places. Niedecker writes of her own experiences with a similar mixture of warmth and wit as Finlay, underlain with a melancholy that is more comparable to Finlay's stories and non-Orkney poems. In one poem, she has her father reflecting on his life, wondering if he should have 'built a boat' (Niedecker 1961, p. 31). In another she describes the Niedecker tribe as typical of their community, their lives determined by the cycles of nature and social structures: 'every seventh day they wash: worship sun; fear rain, their neighbors' eye' (Niedecker 1961, p. 39).

Niedecker even writes of fishing:

My man says the wind blows from the south,
we go out fishing, he has no luck,
I catch a dozen, that burns him up,
I face the east and the wind's in my mouth
but my man has to have it in the south.
(Niedecker 1961, p. 35)

One might choose to read Niedecker's poem as a wry marital comedy, where the husband is too stubborn to admit his mistake, but to me there is a lingering sadness to the poem, a sense of disappointment at a stagnant relationship. Funny and sad, this poem is perhaps closer to Finlay short stories like 'The Sea-Bed' and 'The Old Man and the Trout', where fishing expeditions lead to a loss of innocence, or 'Straw', where a father and son dream in vain of buying a house in the country where they can work the land and fish the streams. Finlay's Orkney poems are on the surface more light-hearted, but in their wry way they capture the small disappointments of everyday life. As he writes in 'Finlay's House (In Rousay)', 'I'm better housed than ducks' (Finlay 2004, p. 193).

Of equal significance to the folk content are the comparisons between Finlay and Niedecker's formal approach. The poems in her 1946 collection *The New Goose* drew on the 'short metrical rhymes of Mother Goose — poems of anonymous authorship, of proletarian origin, and of subtly subversive intent' to explore the lives of Blackhawk Island's citizens in the aftermath of the Great Depression (Niedecker 2002, p. 6). Her often elliptical style, writes August Kleinzahler, 'incorporated certain characteristics of local speech – diction, cadence – along with the terseness and flatness of tone common to the American rural Midwest: Protestant, stoic, of necessity valuing thrift above other virtues' (Kleinzhahler 2003, online). Niedecker's exacting approach to language and form was at this point further developed than Finlay's, but both poets share the ability to articulate human emotions from a particular situation. Finlay's diction and cadence is lighter than Niedecker's, but both make use of the local idiom, imposing form on 'natural' speech. He also makes witty use of traditional sources, in this case Wordsworth and the Bible, to present a fond picture of Scottish childhood. Presenting the poem to Niedecker in a letter, Finlay explains its reference points:

Do you know Wordsworth's poem about Lucy[25]? And the psalm that begins, The Lord's my Shepherd... and do happy, wee go-fishing American boys wear long blue jerseys knitted by their grannies?

'Lucy's Wee Brother'

The world's his jersey,
He'll not want
a garment:

Blue woollen trees
To please
always *His knees*

(IHF > LN 30.6.61, Louis Zukofsky Collection, II. Box 32.2, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Austin)

Finlay distils generations of Scottish childhood experience and family life into the delightful image of 'blue woollen trees', the oversized arms which hang down to the boy's knees. As amusing as the use of Psalm 23 is, it also serves to remind the reader of the centrality of Christianity to Finlay's kailyard idyll.

'The best definition of lucidity' Finlay and Louis Zukofsky

Niedecker's friend and greatest champion Louis Zukofsky was another key poet in Finlay's development. Zukofsky's objectivist poetics were a revelation to Finlay, who recognised that the American poet had achieved the purity of form and expression – 'the refinement in your work (fineness)' - he had been working towards in his own home-made way. As he wrote to Zukofsky in June 1963, 'Almost any line of yours is, next to a clear stream, the best definition of lucidity that I know' (IHF > LZ, 20.6.63. Louis Zukofsky Collection, II. Box 23.10. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre,

[25] Finlay's reference to Wordsworth is unclear. It is possible he has confused 'Lucy' for 'Alice', as in the poem 'Alice Fell', where the protagonist buys the orphan Alice Fell a replacement for her 'tattered cloak' (Wordsworth 1801, online).

University of Austin). In a previous letter Finlay wrote, 'You are the only poet I know who has made the new form, or whatever it is to be called, method perhaps, *habitual* in his work, as it is habitual, if I make myself clear, in painting'. Finlay expressed his wish to be able to do 'what you can do (I will never do it, though) put THE thing down WITHOUT the other lesser things so that the poem works by PURE beauty' (IHF > LZ 2.5.63, Louis Zukofsky Collection, II. Box 23.10. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Austin).

L.S. Dembo explains Zukofsky's method as such: by working towards a purity of vision and expression, the poet can hope to achieve 'ideal "objectivist" perception and discover the form that will turn sensations and impression into poetry' (Dembo 1972, p. 74). Eliminating 'clutter' - rhetoric, description, simile, and other literary devices - reveals what Zukofsky called the 'intense vision of a fact'. As Dembo notes, this approach is articulated in poems such as 'Anew #6', where Zukofsky, 'plays off in counterpoint two views or "experiences" of summer; the form of the poem provides an aesthetic order for the sensations described'. The poem begins from the perspective of a man looking up at trees on a hot day ('Anew, sun, to fire summer / leaves more toward the air / from the stems of the branches') then imagines how people at sea, who have not experienced late spring and early summer, would view the same scene from offshore; for them, 'the green leaves that fill up the day': 'blow up on the trees of the cliff'. As Dembo argues, 'Nothing is being said here; Zukofsky is merely expressing "the intense vision of a fact" from two points of view that reinforce rather than counteract one another and form a "cadre" for the experience'. (Dembo 1972, p. 85). In other words, the tree remains itself; it is the different perceptions of the objects and the relationship between them which creates the
poetic force and brings them to life.

In his own 1962 homage to Zukofsky, 'Such Is The World', Finlay borrows the idea of the speaker looking through 'the leaves o a tree' from 'Anew #6' (Zukofsky 1997, p. 82):

> Lookin doon
> Thro the leaves o a tree
> -   Green leaves
> In the evenin - We
> seen a laddie
> Wi his dog, a black mongrel,
> Bi the bairns' bonfire
>
> An the fire
> Wis deein doon
> An the serious laddie
> Wis aa alane there,
> Aa alane,
> An the mongrel gaed
> Tae an fro,
> Here an there,
> Tae be sniffin, wi Wee
> black feet.
>
> Aa this we seen
> Thro the leaves o a tree in
> The evening – aye,
> 'such' Says Zukofsky 'Is
> the world'.
>
> (Finlay 2012, pp. 128-129)

Finlay offers only one point of view, with the leaves of the tree framing a painterly scene in which a boy walks his dog, 'a black mongrel / bi the bairns' bonfire'. But as in Zukofsky's poem, the objects in the poem stand for themselves, and by showing the relationship between them, Finlay creates a 'cadre of experience'. In capturing the scene, Finlay uses spare language, avoiding simile or rhetorical flourishes. The single adjective, 'serious', is carefully placed, providing a glimpse of the boy's personality and feelings. Juxtaposing the lonely boy with the carefree behaviour of his dog gives the poem its emotional charge, while the speaker's nod to Zukofsky concludes the poem

on a wry and wistful note, shifting the emphasis from the particular to the universal. In invoking Zukofsky, Finlay emphasises the ordinary human quality of this scene: 'Such is the world' indeed. The use of Glasgow-Scots, meanwhile, furthers the homely avant-garde's aim of renewing Scottish literature through an engagement with international influences, making use of the local idiom.

One of Finlay's most affecting uses of the imagist/objectivist method is 1962's 'Poem On My Poem On Her And The Horse'. In the poem's subtle shifts in

perspective we can see objectivist perception in practice, the layering of images working to reveal the poem's emotional core:

A little horse came treading through the snow
At which she said, Poor horse, poor horse[26] thou art-
Poor little horse to have that heavy cart, To have
that cart, to have to make it go.

And then I thought, Oho, I thought, Oho
She's thinking of her own small saddest part.
Poor horse, Poor horse. Poor horse. Poor horse. Poor cart.
And in her eyes the snow, you know, the snow.
(Finlay 2012, p. 128)

The first stanza presents a woman talking to a poor horse trudging through the snow, while the second presents the speaker's interpretation of the scene. At first, the speaker seems rather pleased with his discovery ('Oho, I thought, Oho'), but the poem soon takes on a more wistful tone, as he begins to understand that in identifying with the horse, the woman is thinking of her own 'small saddest part'. What this part may be is never revealed, but her emotions are made present in the final image, 'And in her eyes the snow, y'know, the snow'. The reader gains some sense of how she feels, projecting

[26] It is possible that the image of the 'poor horse' was inspired by Robert Creeley's 'Please', which of course provided the title of Finlay's magazine: 'This is a poem about a horse that got tired./ Poor.Old.Tired.Horse.' (Creeley 1982 p. 156). See chap one p. 44n for more on the horse in the work of the homely avant-garde.

his own 'small saddest part' onto hers. These subtle shifts of perspective generate one perception after another, revealing a complexity of senses and emotions.

Feeling and form: Finlay and Robert Creeley

Of course, not all of Finlay's poems follow the Williams credo of 'no ideas but in things'. 'The Dancers Inherit the Party', for example, is not an imagist poem, but rather a lyric reflecting on the speaker's relationship with the world around him, in this case, the milieu of an urban house party:

> When I have talked for an hour I feel lousy -
> Not so when I have danced for an hour:
> The dancers inherit the party
> While the talkers wear themselves out and sit in corners alone,
> and glower. (Finlay 2004, p. 175)

The poem itself is the 'thing', the object, through which Finlay articulates his feelings and thoughts. As such, it is a highly artificial construct, a made thing. Throughout the poem, a fine balance is struck between freedom and structure, with Finlay establishing an intimate, conversational feel, without veering into free verse. The 'intimacy of voice' which Creeley feels brings 'one in to his physical person' (Finlay 2004, p. xi) should not be mistaken for an 'organic' rendering of speech. This is a highly formalised poem, a made thing, with Finlay imposing order on thoughts and emotions. As Creeley wrote in 1996, 'The Dancers Inherit the Party' is 'one of the most elegant poems I've ever read, so clear in what it says and how it says it, so physically, words 'pace and sound' (Finlay 2004, pp. xi – xii).

A detailed formal reading of the poem attests to Finlay's precision and care. The extended anapestic feel of the opening line provides a sense of metrical movement which is brought to an abrupt caesura with the dash, setting up the turn in thought of the second line. This line could be read as a straight anapestic trimeter, its neatness

reflecting the lighter, more optimistic content of the line. Another caesura, this time indicated by the colon, brings in the poem's central statement, its concision and regularity (an amphibrach this time, with the stress falling on the second syllable – '*the* – danc - *ers in* – her – *it')* underlining its importance. This shorter line stands out not only rhythmically, but spatially, reinforcing its place at the physical as well as the emotional/intellectual centre of the poem. There is also a rhyme to link it to the first line ('lousy/party') and help it stand out from the remainder of the poem, even though it forms the first clause of one long sentence. The use of blank space at the end of the line suggests a slight pause, allowing the thought to linger and stand out from the rest of the sentence. In these last two lines, the regular metre breaks down, as if the poem, like the talkers, has worn itself out. This sense of exhaustion is reinforced by the dragging out of these lines, and the delayed resolution of the ABAB rhyme scheme ('hour/glower').

Finlay and Creeley became lifelong admirers of each others' poetry. As Marjorie Perloff puts it, Creeley is interested in the 'condensed "minimalist" lyric' which is 'intensely personal' and yet 'intensely oblique' (Perloff 2007, p. 12). Finlay's own poems often have these qualities, with feelings and thoughts articulated through condensed lyric forms. In his famous 1963 letter to Pierre Garnier, Finlay would describe concrete poetry as 'a model of order even if set in a space which is full of doubt' (Clark 2009, p. 22). His minimalist lyrics can also be seen as models of order, their condensed forms and artifice helping to organise thoughts and intensify feelings. It is the means through which the poet gives voice to his particular thoughts and perceptions, making the local universal. As Creeley puts it, the local is 'a place in a given man - what part of it he has been compelled or else brought by love to give witness to in his own mind... To make that present, and actual for other men, is not an embarrassment, but love' (Creeley

1989, p. 480). In a 1961 letter to Creeley, Finlay touches on this method, describing the way in which he sees thoughts and feelings being made present in literature:

> Your poetry is 'very Scottish, not that it's like how Scottish poets write, but like how they ought to write if they make a proper use of their moral part... I mean like Tolstoy is moral, not when he is moralising, but when he does that amazing thing of presenting a moral statement as a physical sensation'
>
> (IHF > RC, 26.10.61. Creeley papers M0662, Box 48, Folder 25, Stanford)

That 'physical sensation' can be interpreted as the poetic force of an abstract idea being presented through language and form. A 1950s letter to George Mackay Brown sheds more light on these comments. Discussing his plays with the Orcadian poet, Finlay writes, 'It's true that nothing "is stated", and that there is no "moral", and yet *the whole* does make what I shall call an *idea,* which is a moral feeling, or the form of the moral *become* art.' (Clark 2009, p. 10). Rather than explain or moralise, Finlay argues, the writer should present 'moral feelings' through 'the whole' of the artwork. This can be readily applied to Finlay's poetic method in the terms described above.

'The Writer And Beauty' (1960) is a rare instance of a Finlay poem about poetry, but it clearly, and wittily, articulates Finlay's ideas. 'The best a writer writes is Beautiful. / He should ignore the Mad and Dutiful.' he begins, arguing that the poet should not wallow in his or her neuroses, but 'write of sky // And other things quite sad and Beautiful.' The poem ends with an image of the Finlayan poet, liberated from madness and duty by 'beauty': 'See how he dances on his toes!' (Finlay 2004, p. 192). Finlay's classicism comes through in the inference that beautiful feelings and thoughts require beautiful forms. This formalism is another reason why Finlay and Creeley admired each other. As Stephen Burt notes, Robert Creeley was 'a man with a very good ear, averse to big words, alert to colloquial speech' (Burt 2008, online). But while Creeley did use the 'natural' American idiom in his poetry, Finlay recognised that the poetic forms were not themselves 'organic' extensions of speech.

In a letter to Corman, he writes:

> My opinion really is, that RC uses the natural, like he uses lots of idioms, for <u>what he can make with it</u>; I think he's the most intelligent poet for a long time. But the point is, he uses it, that is, makes with it.
>
> (IHF > CC, 13.12.61, Cid Corman mss. III 1943-2004 Lilly Library, LMC 2514, Box 15)

Finlay expands on this in a 1961 letter to Creeley himself: 'There is this idea that you use natural rhythms, American, etc, but I would say that what is remarkable in your poems is their artificiality, that is, the way they exist surrounded by a clear space, a pure style in a pure space. That is, they are beautiful. And there is this great fineness in their actual substance' (IHF > RC, 8.12.62, Creeley Papers, Collection no. M0662, Box 48, Folder 25, Box 48, Folder 25, Stanford Universities). In regards to Finlay's own work, *Glasgow Beasts* may use the speech forms and rhythms of Glasgow music hall patter, but he imposes order on them through the use of the Japanese tanka form. For all their intimacy of voice, the poems are artificial and formal, rather than freewheeling and formless.

Although it was Creeley who formulated the precept, 'Form is never more than an extension of content', as quoted in Charles Olson's famous essay 'Projective Verse', his poetry often parted, argues Perloff, from the 'open field' poetics of the Black Mountain school (Perloff 2007, p. 12).[27] Like Finlay, his minimalist lyrics are highly formalised, often using stanzaic forms and occasional rhymes. While Olson argued that the human

[27] 'Projective Verse' emerged from Olson's correspondence with Creeley. In a development of Pound's talk of dynamism and Zukofsky's concept of movement, Olson saw the poem as a transference of energy from the source, to the poet, to the poem, to the reader. As he puts it, 'I think it can be boiled down to one statement (first pounded into my head by Edward Dahlberg): ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION'. To achieve this dynamic transfer of perceptions, the projective poet should avoid traditional poetic forms, conventional syntax and punctuation, and even completed thoughts, for these are too neat and stop the flow of perceptions. Instead of composing by received form or measure, the projective poet should let the content determine the form (As Creeley put it, 'Form is never more than an extension of content') 'and listen closely to the breath, shaping syntax by sound rather than sense'. For Olson, the line length should be determined by the breath. Duration and pauses, meanwhile, should be indicated through the spacing of words on the page, the use of typographical features such as the dash, and abbreviations such as 'yr' and 'sd'. Olson discouraged over reliance on simile and description, and proposed a movement he called 'objectism' which he defines as 'the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul [. . .] For man is himself an object.' (Allen 1960, pp. 387-388).

breath should be the determiner of line length, Finlay and Creeley shape speech forms into terse, elliptical lines. Both make use of the poetic space of the page, but in a manner closer to that practiced by Williams, Niedecker and Zukofsky. Finlay's attitude to form is further reflected in a letter of 1963 or '64 to the American poet, Ronald Johnson where he complains about Scottish and English poets misreading the new poetry as 'a kind of blank verse... they never see the structure, the movement... the inference that it is somehow naturalistic is wrong; it is very artificial, and formal (thank goodness)' (IHF > RJ, 24.5.64, Box 24 Folder 76, Ronald Johnson Collection, Department of Special Collections, MS 66, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries).

Zukofsky argues that the image is not 'dissociable from the movement or the cadenced shape of the poem'. The sound and pitch emphasis of a word, he writes, is never separate from its meaning, while the typography, 'the print and arrangement of the words will help tell how the voice should sound' (Zukofsky 1981, 17-18). As I have shown in poems like 'The Dancers Inherit the Party', Finlay makes great use of typography and the spacing of words, playing on the eye as well as the ear. As Dembo notes, Pound's division of poetry into melopoeia, phanopoeia, and logopoeia was particularly relevant to Zukofsky's ideas on the aesthetic-musical nature of poetic form. In short, writes Dembo, these terms stand for 'movements' affecting the ear, the eye, and the brain. But rather than viewing them as independent or separate, Zukofky sees them as fused into a single 'emotion which in its movement, in its verbal existence, sensuously and intelligently manifests poetry' (Dembo 1978, p. 79). For Zukofsky the poetic object is composed of the idea or meaning carried in the 'thing' itself. This corresponds with Finlay's idea that the whole makes the idea. By treating the poem as an object, language, form, sound, spacing all come into play in presenting an idea or feeling.

Lessons applied: Finlay's *Origin* poems

With the poems of *Dancers*, Finlay had independently reached similar conclusions to the American poets. The question of what happened after he had actually read and corresponded with these poets is an interesting one. Finlay would soon discover Concrete, taking his work in a new direction. As a result, it could be argued that Finlay never got the chance to develop his work in a more 'American' direction. However, during the homely avant-garde period, Finlay arguably began to apply some of the lessons of the American avant-garde to his own work. This goes beyond working through imagism to arrive at similar conceptions: Finlay was making use of formal elements and modes of perception he would have picked up from reading and corresponding with the American poets. I have already noted his Glasgwegian homage to Zukofsky and the possible influence of Creeley's 'Please' on 'Poem On My Poem On Her And The Horse'. This poem comes from a set published in *Origin* in 1962, which also includes 'Such Is The World' and 'Lucky'. These poems arguably represent Finlay's most direct engagement with the poetics of the Creeley-ZukofskyWilliams tradition. Particularly striking are the poems where he experiments with spacing and typographical arrangement. 'The Pond of Oo Farm' sees Finlay combining his interest in dada sound poetry with Zukofksy's ideas about the aesthetic-musical nature of the poem, as he uses spacing and typographical features to represent the objects visually:

____
____
____

The little pond of Oo
Is flat
As that.

v v v v
v v v v v

With yellow ducks of
Oo Upon it Too.

O O O O
O o' o' o' o'
And cows that low, also. And
coos
That loo. (*Origin 2* Number 8 1963, p.
12)

The short lines and predominantly mono-syllabic words give the poem an ultracondensed quality. But rather than come across as terse and expressionless, the poem gains humour and life from the assonance and Finlay's play on Scots and English vowel sounds (cow/coo, low/loo) in the even numbered stanzas. The odd-numbered stanzas are visual representations of objects depicted in the even-numbered stanzas directly below them: the flat surface of the pond, the wings of the duck forming a V. Stanza five, is a curious one. The capital Os might represent the cows in the foreground, while o' may be a representation of a cow flicking its tail. Finlay plays on the sound of the letter, creating an assonance with 'low', and then translating low to the Scots loo, concluding the poem on its predominant vowel sound.

'Dalchonzie', also from the *Origin* set, sees Finlay exploring the space of the page, arranging his lines in a manner which recalls the staggered spacing deployed by Zukofsky and Niedecker. Here, Finlay attempts to achieve the 'pure style in a pure space' he so admires in Creeley.

Hot day

the pines say Wheesht!
Along the railway

Night

the mill has two wheels, a red, a black - one
is the sun.

(Finlay 2012, p. 130)

The typographical arrangement is very deliberate, creating a sense of space, both visual and aural around the lines and providing a sense of duration as day goes into night. In lines two and three, the reader's eye is drawn along the page in time with the sound of the pines moving along the railway track, while in the final couplet, the longer line has a rolling movement akin to the turning of the mill wheel. The dash before 'one' provides a caesura, while the enjambment allows Finlay to make one last turn of thought, as the sun completes the image. Finlay has another trick up his sleeve, however. The spacing draws the reader's attention away from the fact that the poem is, in both style and form, a haiku, or rather two haiku as stanzas. As with many modern haiku, Finlay does not strictly follow the classical 17 syllable structure, but he does retain the three line form. In another nod to the classical haiku form, each of these 'stanzas' opens with a season word – 'hot day' 'night' – and goes on to depict images of nature, with a 'turn' in the final line, as the author's perception creates a thought in an instant. Again, note the play on the different senses – visual and aural ('wheesht'), the humour and the imagist force of the final lines. The imagism and condensed forms appeal to Finlay's sense of pure style and pure space, and also lend themselves to the themes and objects he is interested in exploring as a poet. The home-made, therefore, relates to both form and content, as Finlay fuses modes of perception associated with haiku, imagism and objectivism, with innovative form and homely content.

This process of reduction was accompanied by a loss of confidence in traditional syntax. As Finlay explained to Creeley:

there is also a complete confusion about structure, in that the
kind of rhythms, based on rhyme, I suppose, that I used to
feel inside me, have stopped, and I have this silly but real feeling
that all that has become rhetoric, or something, and that the poems I

want to write are about three words long, but also that I don't feel how to put those words together... I suppose what I really want is for the words not to join into phrases but to be in space, each, as a sign, about a thing outside me; which seems to me very eccentric, but it is certainly where my feeling has led me, and in the way of my poems, wee and not important as they are (just me doing my best), it even does seem a logical development.
(IHF > RC 20.8.62, Robert Creeley papers 1959-1997,
Collection no. M0662, Box 48, Folder 25, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries)

Finlay found a solution to the problem of syntax and presenting the word as a sign in concrete poetry. However, his journey into the constellation of concrete and visual poetry began with the lessons learned from his engagement with the New American Poetry. As Finlay commented to Corman, 'Of course my poetry is home-made, a home-made solution to the needs of inklings' (IHF > Cid Corman 1961, Corman MSS III, Box 15, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington). His engagement with the new poetry helped him turn these inklings, these glimmers of perception, into poetry. The homely avant-garde sought to bring art and life closer together and through his minimalist and imagistic lyrics, Finlay found a way to turn everyday emotions and experiences into poetry.

Company of love: the small-press avant-garde

As noted in the introduction, 'home-made' is not only a useful term for describing Finlay's deeply personal approach to writing poetry, but also an apt term for the DIY publishing practices of the homely avant-garde. As with his poetry, Finlay reached many similar conceptions in his publishing practices to his American peers, bypassing mainstream channels to produce his own books and magazines, while making new connections and building a community. While Finlay was plugged into the American

small press avant-garde, he was also keen to establish his own space within Scottish culture. As discussed in chapter one, this required a direct engagement with both the literary establishment and the wider mainstream culture. *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse.* and the publications of Wild Hawthorn thus reveal a complex relationship with these different aspects of culture, reflecting the populist and innovative aims of the homely avant-garde. To help understand these complex interrelations, I draw on Andrew Brooker and Peter Thacker's notes towards a materialist history of modernist magazines, in which they use the concept of 'periodical codes' to analyse the content and format of the publications themselves, and explore their relations to a range of cultural formations. Through this, I aim to show the ways in which Finlay built on, and diverged from, the practices of his smallpress peers.

As Brooker and Thacker write, '[p]eriodicals functioned as points of reference, debate, and transmission at the heart of an internally variegated and often internationally connected counter-cultural sphere' (Brooker & Thacker 2009, p. 2). To gain a better understanding of how magazines and their contents relate to this counter-cultural sphere and the world of mass culture and commerce, they draw on the work of the American critic Jerome McGann, who argues that books consist of 'linguistic codes' (the words of which they are composed) and 'bibliographic codes' (semantic elements of design, typeface, binding etc) and that these two signifying systems work together to generate the overall meaning of a text (McGann 1991, p. 12). Brooker and Thacker make McGann's bibliographic codes more precise 'by discussing a particular subset, the *periodical codes* at play in any magazine', including page layout, typefaces, price, size, periodicity of publication, use of illustrations, 'use and placement of advertisements, quality of paper and binding, networks of distribution and sales, modes of financial support, payment practices towards contributors, editorial arrangements, or the type of material published' (Brooker & Thacker, 2007, p. 6). They also distinguish between

'periodical codes internal to the design of a magazine (paper, typeface, layout, etc.) and those that constitute its external relations (distribution in a bookshop, support from patrons)', while pointing out that it is the *relationship* between internal and external periodical codes that is most significant. Advertisements, for example, constitute both internal and external codes:

> indicating, on the one hand, an external relationship to an imagined readership and a relationship to the world of commerce and commodities, while operating, on the other hand, in their placement on the page or position in the magazine as a whole, as part of the magazine's internal code.
> (Brooker & Thacker 2009, p. 6)

By analysing the linguistic and bibliographical codes of Wild Hawthorn's early publications, and the linguistic and periodical codes of *POTH*, we can gain a better understanding of the relationship between their contents and their intended audiences. We can assess the extent to which these publications advanced the aims of the homely avant-garde through the type of poetry they included, their use of illustrations and their external relations to cultural formations in Scotland and abroad.

To help frame their analysis of the external relations of periodical codes, Brooker and Thacker draw on Raymond Williams's elaboration of the concepts of hegemony and formations. Williams distinguishes between 'dominant', 'residual', and 'emergent' cultural tendencies or practices, allowing for a heterogeneous and flexible analysis of the cultural sphere. '[T]he complexity of culture', Williams writes, 'is to be found … in the dynamic interrelations at every point in the process, of historically varied and variable elements.' (Williams 1977, p. 121) As Brooker & Thacker note 'Williams's model of a stratified cultural order in the process of change... offers a way of describing the relation of magazines to a hegemonic mainstream as an active and changing set of relationships, but also helps us identify "residual" and "emergent" emphases *within* single magazines or across the career of a changing title, group, or generation' (Brooker

& Thacker 2009, p. 17). So, if the Scottish Renaissance can be seen as representing the dominant in Scottish literary culture [28], then POTH represents the emergent. However, this binary opposition is complicated by the presence of residual elements in *POTH*, such as its inclusion of vernacular poets such as Helen B. Cruickshank and overlooked lyric poets of the recent past like Hamish MacLaren.

The second term Brooker and Thacker take from Williams is 'cultural formations'. The term is a useful one, they write, 'in that it serves to connect a general social history of culture to specific cultural productions, styles, and forms'. A cultural formation is a formal or informal association of individuals engaged in some nature of cultural production which in turn sees them in different relations with broader trends in society. (Brooker & Thacker 2009, p. 18) How, therefore, might we characterise POTH's relation to cultural formations? Williams distinguishes between a formation's *internal organization* as a group and its *external relations*, both proposed and actual, to other organizations and to society more broadly. 'Little magazines' often belong to the type of 'independent formations' whose internal organization is 'not based on formal membership, but organised around some *collective public manifestation*, such as an exhibition, a group press or periodical, or an explicit manifesto'. This *collective* manifestation, they explain, would distinguish 'those magazines produced by and representing a group agreed on a common literary or artistic taste or set of values, from a more individual production... Not all magazines, that is to say, embody a cultural formation' (Brooker & Thacker 2009, 18). While Wild Hawthorn and *POTH* were Finlay's vehicles, in their initial phases they can be said to represent the aims and values of the homely avant-garde, which can be seen as an independent cultural formation. However, they soon come to represent Finlay's individual aesthetic, albeit an aesthetic developed in relation to other cultural formations: the small-press avant-garde, the

[28] Of course, in the wider context of British cultural sphere, the Scottish Renaissance was marginal.

Scottish Renaissance, the Folk Revival, concrete poetry. The magazine and press's external relations to popular and folk culture represent an anti-elitist attitude that is reflected in the magazine's internal organisation, where women played significant roles as co-publishers, collaborators and contributors.

POTH arises out of a decade of transatlantic exchange between little magazines in Britain and North America: exactly the kind of 'internally variegated and often internationally connected counter-cultural sphere' Brooker and Thacker write of (Brooker & Thacker 2009, p. 2). In America, the 1950s wave of magazines and small presses, enabled by greater access to printing technology, has often been called the mimeograph revolution.[29] This movement helped decenter literary production from the hegemonic major cities, universities and publishers. As Charles Bernstein writes, the emergent poets, of necessity, 'existed on the margins, outside mainstream publication and distribution channels'. They 'invented their own communities and audiences (often indistinguishable), with a small press or little magazine often serving as the nucleus of both'. Direct access to printing technology in the form of mimeograph duplication machines, letterpress and inexpensive offset made these publishing ventures possible, 'putting the means of production into the hands of the poet'. Independent bookstores helped distribute such publications 'in all their raw homemade beauty'. Another means of distribution was through a mailing list, the magazines being 'produced for a community of kindred spirits as a literary newsletter – a quick way to get new work out' (Clay & Phillips 1998, pp. 13-14). As I shall discuss, such methods of production and distribution have a significant bearing on the internal and external periodical codes of these magazines. The mimeograph revolution enabled the development of an aesthetically broad and geographically disparate avant-

[29] The term 'mimeograph revolution' covers magazines produced using a range of printing technologies, from duplicator, mimeograph and letraset, to more professional offset lithographs.

garde community, from the Beats to Black Mountain, and provided new models for poetry magazines worldwide.

Of particular importance to Finlay would be Cid Corman's *Origin* (1951 – 2004), which led the way in championing experimental poetry which built on the imagist-objectivist tradition, and Robert Creeley and Charles Olson's *Black Mountain Review* (1951 – 1957) which featured contemporary visual art alongside Black Mountain and Beat poets.[30] *Origin* was a genuinely independent, poet-run magazine, giving Corman freedom in his editorial decisions. He often dedicated entire issues to a single poet, an approach Finlay would build on with the later, unified poet-artist collaboration numbers of *POTH*. As a magazine and press, *Origin* also published poetry from further afield, most significantly Corman's translations of classical and modern Japanese poets, including Finlay's beloved Shimpei Kusano. Corman's

poetics and editorial choices clearly influenced Finlay, who would contribute to the magazine's second series in 1962. The magazine's independent status is reflected in its championing of a particular aesthetic and in its periodical codes. Clean, spare and quietly contemporary, *Origin* makes its intended audience clear in its sub-heading: 'a Quarterly for the Creative'. This is a magazine by poets for poets, or at least those who consider themselves 'creative'.

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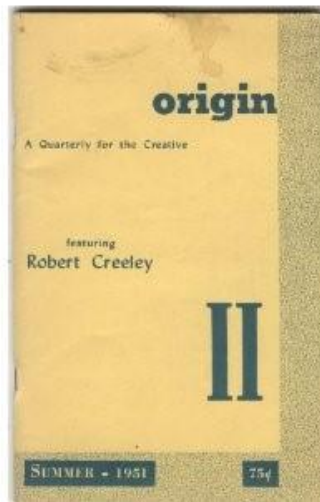
[30] Founded by Charles Olson during his tenure at the experimental Black Mountain College in North Carolina, *Black Mountain Review* was edited by Robert Creeley from 1954-57 and became a key outlet for the post-war avantgarde. Several variants of the New American Poetry - Black Mountain, Beat, San Fransisco Renaissance – were represented in the magazine, alongside abstract expressionist art, by College staff Franz Kline and Jess Collins, among others. *Origin* ran, with some interruptions, from 1951 to 1984, and was briefly revived online between 2003-4. Alan Golding argues that for its first series of twenty issues, published between April 1951 and Winter 1957, *Origin* had 'virtually no competition as a durable little magazine receptive to experimental work'. *Origin*, he notes, represented a 'school' or movement which re-read 'Anglo-American modernism so as to further the Pound-Williams tradition', acting as 'apologist for a poetics generally considered marginal when the magazine began' (Golding 1990, p. 692). This was of course the kind of poetics Finlay favoured, with its practitioners having reached similar conceptions to himself. Golding also notes that *Origin* offered 'a model for later aesthetically and institutionally independent magazines seeking to further the poetics that *Origin* had established' (Golding 1990, p. 692).



The consistent design reflected a regular and reliable appearance that, as Tim Woods notes, reduced the time-lag between submission and publication, giving the contributors confidence (Brooker & Thacker 2012, p. 967).

Black Mountain Review may have been affiliated with an educational institution, but that institution was the prototype 'alternative university' Black Mountain College. As a result, the magazine reflects the College's pioneering inter-disciplinary approach, publishing key creative and critical work by Charles Olson, Denise Levertov, Louis Zukofsky and Robert Duncan alongside artwork by College staff Franz Kline and Jess Collins, among others (it could also be said that with its irregular publication schedule, it reflected the College's somewhat dysfunctional administration). With the input of such artists, the *Review* was well designed, with the final three numbers taking the radical step of having text-free covers illustrated with abstract expressionist paintings. This is John Altoon's artwork for issue 5 (1955).

Such periodical codes reflect the magazine's confidence in its aesthetic and alternative modes of distribution. This is not a magazine designed to be easily recognised by casual readers, but rather one designed to be distributed among an inthe-know network of 'creatives'. Yet its air of mystery is appealing rather than elitist – curious newcomers are invited to investigate further. Interpreting Pound's advice, notes Kyle Schlesinger, Creeley thought of the *Review* '... as a center around which, "not a box within which/any item..."' could appear. The *Review* had a group of regular contributors, while Creeley made a point of introducing emergent and little known writers to ensure that (again akin to Pound's dictum) each issue would consist of 'a constant and a variant' (Schlesinger 2006, p. 12). This is of course common practice, but like Creeley, Finlay struck a healthy balance between trusted regulars and newcomers, who in turn became regulars.

Turning to the Scottish context, magazines played a significant role in the development of the Scottish Renaissance, with Hugh MacDiarmid producing a series of short-lived magazines throughout the 1920s and '30s (*Northern Numbers, The Scottish*

Chapbook, Scottish National, The Free Man, Outlook) and regularly contributing poems and polemics to modernist Scottish and English magazines in the following decades. As Cairns Craig notes, the Scottish magazines of the interwar period reflect the diversity of views within the wider Renaissance movement, with MacDiarmid's titles advocating a cultural nationalism based on the primacy of Gaelic and Scots, while *The Modern Scot* favoured a civic nationalism which celebrated Scottish culture while placing it within a wider European context. These debates continued in postwar titles such as *Scottish Arts & Letters* and MacDiarmid's *Voice of Scotland,* while the 1950s saw a further diversification with the emergence of several new titles such as *Saltire Review* (1954-1961), which published a cross-section of contemporary Scottish writing, and the long-running Gaelic magazine *Gairm*, alongside magazines with a less traditionally Scottish focus like *Extra Verse* (1952-1998)*, Lines* and *Gambit* (19571962) (Miller & Price 2006, p. 89).

As a keen follower of cultural developments in Scotland and abroad, Finlay would have read a number of these post-war Scottish titles (he would later contribute to both *Lines* and *Gambit*). In a 1962 letter to Morgan, Finlay notes that he read *The Modern Scot* while living in Dunira in the 1950s (IHF > EM 13-4-62, GU SP MS Morgan Acc 4848, Box 35). By giving voice to a range of nationalisms and presenting a broad cross-section of Scottish writing, *The Modern Scot* may well have been an influence on Finlay's own thinking about Scottish culture. As Cairns Craig notes, while the magazine was committed to the writers of the Scottish Renaissance, it advocated what would today be recognised as a form of civic nationalism, 'opposing the language of a rediscovered national "essence"'. A nation, wrote its editor James Huntingdon Whyte, is simply 'a social group sharing a corporate sentiment engendered by a historical process'. (Miller & Price 2006, pp. 773-774). For Whyte, 'the key issue facing modern art was to "reconcile the democratic vernacular cultures of today with the classical ideals" of

Europe's cultural past – to be, therefore, at once the representative of a national culture and "a good European"'. (Miller & Price 2006, pp. 773-774). Whyte's aim of reconciling vernacular culture with 'high' art has clear parallels with Henderson's thinking and Finlay's iteration of the homely avant-garde. Whether Finlay was directly influenced by Whyte is moot, but by articulating an alternative vision of Scottish modernism, *The Modern Scot* helped open a space into
which voices such as Finlay and Morgan could emerge.

William Price Turner's Glasgow-based *The Poet* (1952-56) was perhaps closer in spirit to *POTH* and the magazines of the mimeograph revolution in that it was independently produced and had close links with the emergent poets and magazines in England and America. Rather than see the 1950s as a low-key decade for British poetry magazines, Miller and Price suggest it as one of cultural reconstruction. As print technology became cheaper and better, the 'idea of what the literary journal's expectations should be would later be reconfigured, with an increasing specialisation of aesthetics.' And in parallel to the mimeograph revolution, there developed a sense of the little magazine 'more as a circular among like-minded practitioners than as a review for non-practicising readers' (Miller & Price 2006, p. 89). This reconfiguration of the literary magazine's external relationships with its readership and the world of commercial publishing had an impact on the linguistic and periodical codes of the emergent magazines, with the Scots-American doctor Gael Turnbull's *Migrant* (195960) taking a particularly radical approach to the kind of material it published and the way it was presented. A genuinely transatlantic figure, Turnbull built on the legacy of the new American magazines, as well as the Glasgow-based *The Poet* and its English counterparts *The Window* (1951 – 1956), *Nimbus* (1951-58), *Artisan* (1951-55) and *Stand* (1952-57, then 1960 to present). Turnbull had been a contributor to many of these magazines. With his work taking him to both Britain and North America in the 1950s,

Turnbull sought out local poetry scenes and made contacts on both sides of the Atlantic, introducing young British poets to the American avant-garde[32].

Migrant was very much a product of the mimeograph revolution, its DIY mode of production written into its periodical codes. Produced on a second-hand duplicator in Turnbull's spider-infested California garage, *Migrant* made few concessions to professionalism or commercialism. Its typewritten text was strewn with errors, while its thin yellow pages were often smudged with ink. The point was to get the work out there as cheaply and as efficiently as possible, with the magazine envisioned as a kind of newsletter to be distributed privately between poets, a rehearsal space or laboratory. As Turnbull wrote to his Worcester-based co-editor

Michael Shayer:

> I think it is essential to regard the little magazine as semi-private, and not a self-sufficient world in itself. More like theatre in rehearsal than the presented performance. It is a kind of preparation for other things, a place where one can make one's mistakes and push forward one's tentative shoots both to one's own use and to those of the few others who can benefit from seeing them tried.
> (*Migrant* 8, 1960, p. 4)

Nonetheless, this was no elitist enterprise: the editors were happy to send the magazine to any interested parties, and through its extensive international mailing list *Migrant* made a significant impact within its own limited field. Reflecting on *Migrant*

32 As the Birmingham poet Roy Fisher – another Migrant discovery - remembers: 'I met Gael Turnbull and I was exposed on one day to Olson, Creeley, Bunting, Zukofsky, Duncan, Ginsberg, Corso, Ferlinghetti, Ray Souster and, most of all, William Carlos Williams' (Price 2007, online)
Finlay eagerly received all the American poetry Turnbull could send him: 'Robert Duncan, William Carlos Williams... All people I can't get here. Or any magazines, or anything' (IHF > GT, 27.8.60 Turnbull MSS, Acc. 12554-6. NLS).

in the early 1990s, Turnbull wrote, 'The magazine provided an opportunity to create a context in which things might happen, encounters occur, ways of expression be

explored, ideas expressed' (Finlay 1994, p. 3). Closing *Migrant* after eight issues, Turnbull and Shayer turned their attention to publishing pamphlets by poets who had come through the magazine, including Finlay and Morgan.

Wild Hawthorn and *POTH*

As Richard Price notes, *Migrant* showed Finlay that it was relatively easy to set up a pamphlet imprint and and that a magazine was also relatively easy to manage (Price 2007, online) and letters see him discussing various aspects of publishing with Turnbull, from aesthetic considerations to financial and logistical matters. An analysis of *POTH*'s periodical codes can help bring a greater understanding of Finlay's relationship with the American small-press avant-garde and cultural formations in Scotland. When Finlay and Jessie McGuffie began Wild Hawthorn Press, they asked Turnbull for a copy of the *Migrant* mailing list, which proved invaluable in promoting and distributing Wild Hawthorn publications, and would, in turn, help Finlay add to the pool of potential contributors to projects such as *POTH* and the unrealised international anthology *The Thaw*. In a letter to Turnbull, Finlay explained that the 'idea is to publish *human* poetry, small books, well done, with good lineocuts' (IHF > GT, 22.7.61. Acc. 12554, NLS). In this respect, the early Wild Hawthorn books were closer to the Migrant books, which were small, professionally printed pamphlets. This of course reflects the conventions of each medium: the magazine is considered ephemeral, while the book is a more lasting, definitive product. While the initial run of Wild Hawthorn books - Niedecker's *My Friend Tree* (1961), Zukofsky's *16 Once Published* (1962) and, on the Dada Wild Flounder imprint, Finlay's *Glasgow Beasts* (1961) – were 'well-done', they were not ostentatious. Their size is a happy consequence of economic practicalities and aesthetic considerations. These slim, pocket-sized volumes have a

homely, understated charm, with their autumnal colours and lineocut illustrations giving the pamphlets a folk-art quality. These bibliographical codes complement the linguistic codes of the poems, with the muted colour palette and lineocuts providing an appropriate setting for the 'human poetry' (IHF > GT, 22.7.61. Acc. 12554, NLS) of everyday life and 'folk' experience. John Picking and Alexander McNeish's charming animal lineocuts for *Glasgow Beasts*, for example, have a vitality and deceptively rough feel which aptly reflects Finlay's homely avant-gardism. Although Wild Hawthorn would go on to experiment with different design styles and formats, Finlay held to his standard of producing small, well-made publications with a homely, 'human' quality.[31]

Finlay's above reference to '*human* poetry' reflects his desire for a poetry that connected with contemporary life and culture, and early Wild Hawthorn lists promised an exciting range of publications from new Scottish, English and American writers, as well as European and Cuban poets in translation, broadening the scope of the homely avant-garde. In his social practice as a publisher, Finlay experimented with different means of disseminating work, continuing the homely avant-garde's mission of bringing poetry to new audiences. Taking his cue from the then popular trends of 'poetry-on-record' and 'jazz and poetry'[32], Finlay planned to release a number of LPs, including readings of Lorine Niedecker's poems with guitar accompaniment by Roy Williamson of the Corries, deepening the homely avantgarde's connection with the Folk Revival. There were also plans to release an album of Rangers and Celtic football songs, a boldly anti-sectarian gesture, which also has echoes of the ethnographical albums of folk music being released at the time by collectors such as Alan Lomax, who had worked

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[31] The influence of concrete poetry saw Finlay producing books (and issues of *POTH*) in which text, design and illustrations were fully integrated, bringing him into line with the emergent medium of the artists' book, as pioneered by American poet-publishers like Jonathan Williams. I will consider these innovations in more detail in the following chapter.

[32] Alec Finlay recalls that his father was very fond of Jack Kerouac's 1959 album *Blues and Haikus*, where the King of the Beats reads his poems to a jazz accompaniment by saxophonists Al Cohn and Zoot Sims (email to author 2012)

with Henderson in the 1950s. For various reasons – financial, logistical and personal – most of these more ambitious publishing and audio projects went unrealised, but they indicate Finlay's willingness to experiment with new media and forms, as well as his desire to connect vibrant new currents in culture.

One project which went further than most was *The Thaw,* an international anthology of contemporary poetry which was to be edited by Edwin Morgan. The aim of the book was to capture a snapshot of the emergent culture of the early 1960s which represented hope to both poets, linking the homely avant-garde to new cultural formations in North America and Europe. 'Us, The Beats, CND etc etc are all *symptoms* of *something else*, something *good*, not as yet defined', wrote Finlay to Morgan. (IHF > EM 25.6.62, MS Morgan Acc 4848, Box 35, GUSP). The book was initially to be a co-production between Wild Hawthorn and Edinburgh's Paperback Bookshop, later catching the attention of the Scottish publisher Giles Gordon, then launching his career. Gordon wanted McGuffie to edit the book, but by this point it seems that neither she, Finlay or Morgan had much enthusiasm for the project, the three agreeing that the moment they were trying to capture had passed. While *The Thaw* slowly gestated, *POTH* got underway and it may be that Finlay came to see the magazine as a more efficient and dynamic outlet for new poetry, able to respond to new developments as they happened. *The Thaw* was no wasted effort, however, for the contacts Finlay made in planning *The Thaw* would help shape the direction of *POTH*. Finlay brought in *Migrant* contributors such as the Finn Anselm Hollo, and new American correspondents such as the poet, translator and publisher Jerome Rothenberg, both of whom could provide their own poems and translations, while helping to extend Finlay's networks and aesthetic horizons.[33]

[33] Rothenberg's Hawk's Well Press produced a series of anthologies, *Poems From The Floating World*, between 1958 and 1964. His 'sensitivity to a wide variety of traditions and enthusiasm for the "forgotten"', write Clay and Phillips, were 'motivating forces since his young adulthood' (Clay & Phillips 1998, p. 117). It is not clear whether

It should be noted that my focus here is on the first ten issues of POTH, from roughly 1962-63, before the influence of concrete poetry took the magazine in new directions. The type of material chosen by Finlay and McGuffie in this period reflects their attempt to articulate the new aesthetic of the homely avant-garde. While the range of material changes over time, from the start there is an attempt to articulate an alternative vision of Scottish culture to that of MacDiarmid and his followers. Finlay features emergent and overlooked Scottish poets, while representing elements of Scottish popular and folk culture. This is combined with a major interest in American poetry, particularly that of the Black Mountain and Objectivist schools, poetry in translation, and the historical avant-garde, as represented by Dada and Russian futurism. These different strands form part of the magazine's internal code, helping to define its aesthetic, but they also indicate *POTH*'s external relations to a range of cultural formations, from contemporary and historical avant-gardes, to the Scottish Renaissance. The inclusion of elements of popular and folk culture, meanwhile, indicates a playful relationship with the sphere of mass culture and commerce, which I will discuss in more detail shortly.

Another important aspect of *POTH*'s periodical code is the absence of editorials, reviews or letters. Finlay, as it were, allows the poetry to speak for itself, with the relations between the individual poems generating ideas and contexts. From the start, this sends a clear message about the kind of magazine *POTH* was to be. It was not a wide-ranging literary review in the vein of the *Saltire Review* or the Grove Press's international avant-garde journal the *Evergreen Review*, but it also differed from its small-press forbears *Migrant* and *Origin*, which included commentaries by editors and featured authors (fragments from Finlay's letters were anonymously published in *Migrant*, while

Finlay had seen any copies of of Poems From the Floating World when POTH began, but as we can see from Finlay's own interest in different traditions and 'forgotten' poets, he and Rothenberg shared similar editorial approaches.

the special number of *Origin* dedicated to his poems featured his own notes). Finlay's editorial practice places the emphasis on the poetry itself, allowing it to stand apart from the world of criticism. As such, it is a safe space in which poets can present their work as they see fit, built on a contract of mutual understanding and trust. Finlay's approach also indicates a trust in the reader's ability to appreciate different kinds of poetry in its own right, free from the mediating factors of criticism or biography. The only information *POTH* provides about featured poets is their nationality – a periodical code which emphasises the magazine's internationalism and provides a certain amount of context. No dates are given, allowing Finlay to make connections across time and genre. The 'purity' of Finlay's approach to the presentation of poetry reflects his objectivist poetics: in *POTH* the poem is the object. Abstraction, in the form of polemical and critical articles, is eliminated. Ideas are presented directly through the poems themselves: 'no ideas but in things'. This conception of the poem, and magazine, as an object, reached its fruition in later issues where Finlay and his collaborators created unified works where the poetry, illustrations and design were integrated.

The design of *POTH* in its initial phase might also be seen as 'pure', although this has as much to do with technical and financial practicalities as aesthetics. The magazine's original layout was devised by its first editors, McGuffie and Paul Pond (aka Paul Jones of the pop group Manfred Mann), a friend from the folk circuit[34]. They designed the magazine themselves, pasting it up at home, and their approach reflects the initial idea for the magazine to be a kind of poetry newspaper, published monthly and printed simply for efficiency and cost. As noted earlier, the regular publication schedule of

[34] Pond left after the first issue and Finlay would assume co-editorship with McGuffie, and from around 1964/5, his second wife Sue. While McGuffie's role was creative as well as administrative, there is little doubt that Finlay was behind the magazine's artistic direction.

Origin was key to its success, earning the magazine a reputation as reliable among contributors and readers alike (Brooker & Thacker 2012,

p. 967). In later years *POTH* would not always stick to a regular schedule (the consequence of financial difficulties, as well as the more ambitious design ideas he explored) but initially at least, Finlay and McGuffie clearly recognised the importance of regular and consistent publication in helping the magazine establish itself. Finlay makes this idea explicit in a letter to Jerome Rothenberg: 'We hope you like *POTH* ok - the idea is to make it look like a poetry newssheet – what is happening now.' (IHF > JR 19.5.62, MSS 10, Box 1, Folder 10, Rothenberg Papers 1944-1975, Mandeville Special Collections Library, UCal). Up to and including *POTH 9,* the magazine took the form of a single folded sheet, so as to create four pages. The 'front page' resembles a newspaper, with its masthead carrying the title and publication details (publisher name and address, issue number, periodicity, price per issue and by subscription) and the poems appearing in the two columns below[35]. The magazine, however, is considerably smaller than a newspaper, being slightly shorter and wider than an A4 sheet. That makes it larger than *Migrant* or the typical little magazines of the time, but smaller than a glossy magazine or the larger reviews like *Evergreen,* striking an appealing balance between the formats. Writing to Turnbull, Finlay commented, 'What I like about POTH is the size [;] small and neat and practical, and not glossy' (IHF>GT, 7.4.62, Acc. 12554, Finlay Box, Folder 3, NLS). This functional approach made it easy to put each issue together relatively quickly, allowing for regular publication. Having been frustrated by the protracted gestation of *The Thaw,* Finlay enjoyed being able to represent new developments while they were fresh.

[35] Issues five and seven included loose single page inserts featuring poems and artwork, and from seven, the magazine itself contained illustrations thanks to the advent of photo-offset printing technology.

POOR · OLD · TIRED · HORSE ·

The Wild Hawthorn Press 24 Fettes Row Edinburgh Scotland.

The blue moor

McBnuigrrs Speech

Pete Brown
(England)

From Fyodor Tyutchev (1803-73)

trans. Edwin Morgan
(Scotland)

The newssheet format may have been functional, but as we can see from the cover of *POTH 1* above, the layout was cleaner and more spacious than that of *Migrant,* reflecting the approach taken by American publications like *Origin* and *Black Mountain Review,* whereby poems were given space to breathe on the page. As poet-publishers schooled in imagist and objectivist poetics, Creeley and Corman understood the importance of typographical arrangement and the poetic use of space, and respected the poets' intentions. Despite the poet's wishes, publishers had often standardised the layout of their poems. By taking control of production, poets could publish their work as they wanted, and the periodical codes of their magazines reflected this internally (through the layout and design itself) and externally (indicating to poets that this magazine was on their side, and to the general readership that this was a space for experimental work). The gradual introduction of illustrations[36] – initially woodcuts similar to those in the Wild Hawthorn books, and then cartoons and line drawings – indicates a playfulness that was lacking from the rather staid looking Scottish literary magazines of the time. While some magazines reflected radical content through equally radical design (think Wyndham Lewis's confrontational looking *Blast),* the simple

[36] The advent of off-set printing allowed for much greater experiment with the integration of text, illustrations and design, and I will discuss these innovations in the following chapter on concrete poetry.

newssheet format of *POTH* was relatively neutral, allowing Finlay to present traditional and experimental poetry side by side, with equal status. The front page format also helps to make the poetry more accessible than a traditional magazine with a cover. It is hard not to be drawn in to the poems when they are presented right up front, like reports in a newspaper.

I have discussed the ways in which the homely avant-garde's egalitarian aims are reflected in the internal codes of the newssheet *POTH*, but it is also important to consider external codes, such as price, modes of distribution and funding arrangements. The accessible newssheet format indicates a desire to get the poetry out there quickly and efficiently, and this is reflected in what Edwin Morgan described as the 'astonishingly un-elitist price of 9d (4p)', which held for its entire five year run, regardless of increases in pagination, print quality and production costs (Finlay 1994, p. 7). To distribute *POTH,* Finlay and McGuffie used a number of different channels, reflecting their aim of reaching beyond the poetry community. From Turnbull they received the *Migrant* mailing list, which proved indispensable in distributing the magazine among poetic circles in England and America. They also sold the magazine through alternative bookshops such as Edinburgh's The Paperback and London's Better Books. But Finlay and McGuffie also recruited
friends to sell editions in pubs and cafes, and paid students and children a commission to sell them in universities, colleges and schools, reflecting their desire to engage with wider audiences.

While *POTH* engaged with mass culture through its internal and external codes, the absence of advertisments from the magazine might suggest that the magazine kept itself separate from the world of commerce, inhabiting instead a utopian world of artistic purity. In this respect it contrasts with Alex Neish's *Sidewalk,* another Edinburgh magazine with an interest in the avant-garde. For Neish, carrying

advertising was an economic necessity and indeed, its short life-span was partly down to a lack of funds. However, *Sidewalk* was a different kind of magazine to *POTH* in several respects. As a wide-ranging literary review, it simply cost more to produce, due to having a far higher page count and higher production values (an illustrated colour cover for example). It had emerged from the ashes of the Edinburgh University magazine *Jabberwock,* which ran on a combination of institutional funding and advertising revenue from local businesses. Without sponsorship, Neish had no choice but to carry advertisements. By following the more modest approach of *Migrant* and other mimeo magazines, Finlay kept costs low, thus allowing him to keep the magazine at a remove from the world of commerce. Nonetheless, Finlay made witty use of the language of commercial magazine publishing with wheezes such as *POTH* 5's 'Amazing free gift!' (an illustrated insert featuring a MacGonagall poem) and his unrealised plan of including a free lollipop with *POTH* 11 (lollipoth). Finlay's engagement with Scottish popular and folk culture through the publication of Bud Neill's cartoon and poem, and references to music hall and football, position the magazine outwith the elite sphere of *l'art pour l'art,* while taking a gentle satirical jab at the Scottish Renaissance. It also helped distinguish the homely avant-garde from the American small-press avant-garde, which tended to exist within its own nonmainstream sphere.

As noted earlier, *POTH* did not carry editorials, letters or reviews. However, Finlay's prodigious letter-writing gave him an outlet for ideas that might otherwise have gone into an editorial. Due to Finlay's agoraphobia, letter-writing was one of his few forms of social contact and his openness may have come from his relief at discovering some like-minded writers after years of intellectual isolation. As he wrote to Corman, 'I feel [a sense of connection] with the letters I get from America... I feel your letters are real and relevant, even if they SAY things I don't agree with at all' (IHF

> Corman 14.11.61, Corman MSS 14, Lilly Library). Correspondence, wrote Robert Duncan, is 'poetry enlarged', and this idea is borne out by the centrality of letter-writing to the publishing practice of poet-publishers like Creeley and Finlay. In a *Paris Review* interview, Creeley commented, 'I think it was [William Carlos] Williams who said once in a letter that they served as a kind of rehearsal of what it was we were to do' (MacAdams & Wagner Martin 1968, online). Finlay exchanged not only poems but ideas with fellow poets, and his letters provide a fascinating insight into his thinking about poetics, art and publishing. The sense of things awakening through communication, to paraphrase Creeley's 'The Conspiracy'[37], is reflected in *POTH,* which was, to a large extent, the product of these correspondences, and itself a spur to further communication, creation and debate. The magazine can thus be seen as part of that conversation, Finlay's way of engaging with the world.

Letter-writing was of course a way of soliciting contributions to *POTH*, but there was always much more to this process than a straightforward exchange of work.

Finlay would comment on individual works and discuss the best ways in which to present them in the magazine. As the magazine grew more confident and sophisticated in its approach, Finlay's engagement with his correspondents became increasingly collaborative. Instead of simply receiving finished poems, Finlay would initiate collaborations between poets and artists and invite poets to produce new works around certain formal or thematic constraints. From this we can see that letter-writing, poetry making and publishing are all activities which constitute 'poetry', or 'a poetry enlarged'. Finlay's use of a mailing list to help distribute and disseminate *POTH* built upon this correspondence network, reflecting Turnbull's idea of the magazine being a semi-private affair primarily distributed between poets. But as I have shown, Finlay reached

[37] from 'The Conspiracy': You send me your poems, / I'll send you mine. // Things tend to awaken / even through random communication. (Creeley 1982, p. 131)

beyond the American and Scottish literati to engage with his local community and the wider public. Finlay's publishing practices therefore redefined the concept of poetry enlarged to follow the anti-elitist aims of the homely
avant-garde.

Finlay's editorial practices were ahead of the American small-press in terms of gender representation. The critic Libbie Rifkin has noted the relative absence of women from the US small-press scene. The emergent institutions of the American avant-garde may have envisioned themselves as alternatives to a conservative mainstream, but, as Rifkin argues, 'the gendered relations of power in the broader culture weren't merely mirrored in the masculine excesses of this avant-garde, they were refracted through the organizational dynamics of its various subcultures and came out both different and worse'. While some female poets made a name for themselves in this scene, most prominently Denise Levertov, they remained
marginalised from the centre of power (Rifkin 2000, p. 7). The involvement of Jessie McGuffie and later Sue Finlay would suggest that Wild Hawthorn avoided these masculine excesses to some extent. It could be argued that by handling most of Wild Hawthorn's administrative tasks and subsidising Finlay with her teaching, McGuffie remained in a traditional supporting role to Finlay, the male creative genius, but this does disservice to her creative and committed work as a publisher. In terms of content Finlay and McGuffie's publications were often more gender balanced than those of their American peers. In addition to publishing Lorine Niedecker's *My Friend Tree,* Finlay gave considerable space to female poets, translators and illustrators in *POTH*. With all this in mind, it can be argued that in its egalitarian values and generous homely avant-gardism, Wild Hawthorn went further than the US small
press model in its aesthetic range and social inclusiveness.

Finlay's discovery of concrete poetry saw *POTH* take a more experimental

approach to its format, which I shall discuss in the following chapter. In 1967, Finlay suffered a heart attack, slowing down his work rate and contributing to the end of *POTH*. While it seems that he was still interested in publishing the magazine, it is likely that his health scare led to a loss of momentum. As Finlay became more deeply involved with Stonypath, he stepped back from his engagement with the Scottish cultural scene and also took a less active role in the international community of poets and artists. *POTH* might have been no more, but he continued to correspond with several of his American friends, all of whom continued to help distribute Finlay's work and spread word of his endeavours at Stonypath and elsewhere. The acts of friendship and admiration which saw Finlay publishing their work were returned through their support for him.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Finlay's development of a home-made poetry and magazine took him from the homely avant-garde towards his own personal aesthetic. Through his engagement with the New American Poetry, Finlay honed his own form of late modernist lyric - spare, imagistic, witty and sad – paving the way for his concrete poetry. In aiming to create a 'human' poetry, Finlay eschewed personal expressionism and political or philosophical didacticism for an engagement with everyday life and the world as he perceived it. By combining such content with innovative form, Finlay furthered the aims of the homely avant-garde. Finlay's publishing practices also furthered the aims of the homely avant-garde, with the internal and external periodical

codes of *POTH* reflecting his relationship with the cultural formations of the Scottish Renaissance and American avant-garde, as well as popular culture and the world of commerce. *POTH* helped Finlay create a context for his own work and that of his peers, allowing the Scottish homely avant-garde to engage with an international community of poets and artist. The homely avant-garde's egalitarianism was reflected in *POTH*'s content and distribution practices, and by having Jessie McGuffie and Sue Finlay as co-editors, Finlay suggested an alternative model to the patriarchial structures of the American avant-garde. With the advent of concrete poetry, Finlay would move beyond the original aims of the homely avant-garde, but he had succeeded in creating a space in which he could develop his aesthetic and instigate a conversation between poets, artists and readers in Scotland, America and elsewhere.

Chapter Three

Making the world a home: Ian Hamilton Finlay and Concrete Poetry

As the first two chapters have argued, Ian Hamilton Finlay's activities as a poet and publisher constitute an intervention in culture and society, introducing new ideas and voices to Scottish culture, and connecting art to everyday life through the interplay of tradition and experiment. The homely avant-garde created new possibilities for the democratisation of the avant-garde, helping to restore its social function. This chapter discusses how these aims were furthered through Finlay's concrete poetry, as it evolved from printed poems to sequential books and environmental objects. I also note how his activities as a publisher fed into his concrete practice, helping him to explore the possibilities of form and medium. Finlay's adoption of concrete poetry saw him move

beyond the aesthetic of the homely avant-garde, replacing the vernacular speech and folksy woodcuts of *Glasgow Beasts* with plain English words and modern typography. However, his new work continued to draw on 'homely'
images of Scottish rural and urban life, while retaining its lyric aim of communicating perception and feeling. The aim of concrete poetry, wrote Eugen Gomringer in his 1954 essay 'From Line To Constellation', is to 'give poetry an organic function in society again' whereby the poem 'becomes an object to be both seen and used... containing thought but made concrete through play-activity'. Gomringer envisioned the concrete poem as a constellation, enclosing 'a group of words as if it were drawing stars together to form a cluster'. The poet determines the dimensions and possibilities of the play-area. The reader 'grasps the idea of play and joins in'. As such, 'the constellation is an invitation' (Solt 1968, p. 67).

As Gomringer notes, the constellation brings something into the world. 'It is a reality in itself and not a poem about something or other' (Solt 1970, p. 67). Thus the concrete poem is an artificial construction, existing in its own space. To ensure that his concrete poetry is not merely a formal exercise in 'abstract word composition' (Sheeler 1965, Jerome Rothenberg MSS. Box 9, Folder 10, Mandeville Library UCSD), divorced from life, Finlay makes reference to 'the real' and takes his work from the page to the environment. Take this sundial version, created with John R Thorpe in 1971, of 'Evening will come they will sew the blue sail', a poem which has
also appeared as a print and a glass standing poem (Finlay & Thorpe 1971, online).

The text itself constitutes one of Finlay's most evocative poems. The blue sail is the night sky on which the stars are 'stitched'. In the wider context of Finlay's interest in the maritime, the image of the blue sail becomes all the more resonant, as a chain of associations unfolds in the reader's mind. A sense of the 'real' world emerges from Finlay's lyrical metaphor. We can picture a fishing boat, out at sea at night, the only natural light coming from the stars. Or to be more literal still, perhaps the boats have returned home for the evening and the sailors are patching the sail. The poem not only captures a way of life, a model of order, but a sense of time, the eternal cycle of day turning to evening. Here we have a classic Poundian image which presents 'an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time' (Pound 1960, p. 5).

As Mary Ellen Solt argues Finlay was the 'concrete poet who has been most imaginative in his use of materials [enlarging] our concept of the poem as a functional object in the environment. To function in the world the poem must be evident in the world' (Solt 1970, 44). By turning this text into an object in the environment, Finlay adds further layers of meaning. Particular contexts bring

particular associations. In the long vertical poster-print version, the text is presented in white, stylised lettering against a blue background, so as to mimic the blue sail. The

see-through glass version, meanwhile, can be held up to the sky, allowing the viewer to 'sew' the words, as it were, onto the blue sail. In its sundial form, the poem's cyclical sense of time is reinforced[38]. As night falls the words are obscured, but the process they describe becomes a reality. In time, the artwork has come to fit in with Finlay's conception of Stonypath/Little Sparta as an island, with the surrounding moor a sea, 'Mare Nostrum'. Marking the point where the garden edges into the wild moor, the 'sail' becomes an image of human dignity against the sublimity of the sea and sky. The passage of time is also reflected in the artwork itself. Exposed to the elements on the edge of a moor, it has become badly worn over the years, to the point where many of the letters are indistinguishable. By functioning in the world, the poem-object thus becomes the embodiment of its elegiac image of evening.

By 1964, the homely avant-garde as we know it was no more, but Finlay remained connected to the wider world through *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse.*, which continued in its democratising and innovatory aims. The American and European small-press avant-garde was a space of innovation in print media, as publishers took advantage of new technology to experiment with book and magazine design, and all this fed into Finlay's practice as a publisher and producer of concrete poetry. In addition to being an important outlet for concrete poetry, *POTH* became a space in which Finlay could experiment with different design styles and make use of illustrations and photographs: this ranges from Margot Sandeman's calligraphy and line drawings for *POTH* 15 (Spring/Summer 1965) to the neues typographie and minimalist layout of *POTH* 22 (Spring 1967), via the faux-naïve drawings for *POTH* 14 (March 1965) and 20 (October 1966). *POTH* 24 (October 1967), meanwhile, featured photographs of concrete poetry at the 1967 Brighton Festival, including sculptural poems and installations by Edwin

[38] To consider shape, it could also be suggested that the triangular gnomon of the sundial resembles a sail, making it a representation of a boat adrift on the flat ocean of the wood. And if we read 'evening' as a portent of death, the wood could be seen as a tombstone.

Morgan, Stephen Bann and Hansjorg Mayer. As I will demonstrate *POTH* also acted as a catalyst for new work, with Finlay seeking out new collaborators and inviting poets and artists to work together on special numbers: of particular note are Reinhardt and Bridget Riley's *POTH* 18 (Jan 1966) and Ronald Johnson and John Furnival's *Io and the Ox Eye Daisy, POTH* 19

(September 1966).

Finlay's role as a publisher allowed him to take control of the way in which his work was presented, and as I will demonstrate, this fed into his practice as a concrete poet, as he explored the possibilities of typography, colour, design and format in numerous prints and sequential books such as the *Ocean Stripe* and *Canal Stripe* series (1964-67).

Thus, the first section of this chapter focuses on Finlay's concrete poetry as it appeared on the medium of the page, going from the early 'fauve' and 'suprematist' poems to the one-word poems. Section two looks at Finlay's innovative treatment of print media, from the poster-poems and postcards to the kinetic poem-books, via the collaborative poet-artist issues of *POTH*. The third and final section focuses on the transition to non-print media - glass, metal, concrete and wood - culminating in the early garden poems at Stonypath. In so doing, Finlay finds his place in the world. Concrete poetry, as Stephen Bann writes, provides a 'shelter of being' (Finlay, Alec 1993, 57).

From line to constellation

Finlay's introduction to concrete poetry was a May 1962 letter from the Brazilian poet E.M. de Melo e Castro to the Times Literary Supplement, introducing the Noigandres movement, which Edwin Morgan had passed on to him (Gardiner 2006, p. 110).[39] Morgan and Finlay soon obtained copies of the Brazilian anthology *Poesia Concreta*, three poems from which were subsequently reproduced in *POTH* 6 in March 1963. By late 1962, both Finlay and Morgan were composing concrete poems. Finlay's first concrete collection *Rapel* appeared in early 1963. Its best known poem, 'Homage To

[39] The Noigandres collective was led by the brothers Augusto and Haraldo de Campos and Decio Pignatari, in Brazil. As their 'Pilot Plan For Concrete Poetry' acknowledges, there were a number of antecedents for the new form: Mallarme's 'Un coup de des' in 1897, with its use of spaces and 'typographical devices as substantive elements of composition'. Pound's ideogramic method, Joyce's word-ideogram, 'organic interpenetration of time and space', ee cumming's experimental poems, Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* ('the vision, rather than the praxis'), Futurism, Dadaism and various Brazilian poets and artists. (Solt 1968, p. 72).

Malevich' sees Finlay building on techniques instigated by Gomringer [40] and Noigandre: the use of repetition and permutation, and the arrangement of words in such a way that the visual form mimics the thing being described. In homage to Malevich's 'Black Square' paintings, the words form a 'black block':

[40] Gomringer developed his new form of visual poetry independent of Noigandres. However, the German and Brazilians had similar aesthetic and ideological values and upon meeting, agreed to bring their work under the banner of concrete poetry, with a nod to the concrete art of the 1940s (Solt 1968, p. 72).

lackblockblackb
lockblackblockb
lackblockblackb
lockblackblockb
lackblockblackb
lockblackblockb
lackblockblackb
lockblackblockb
lackblockblackb
lockblackblockb
lackblockblackb
lockblackblockb
lackblockblackb

Through a process of repetition and permutation, 'black' and 'block' become 'lack' and 'lock'. I will discuss this poem in more detail later, but I use it here to compare its formal techniques with those of Gomringer and the Noigandres poets. Permutational wordplay was a Noigandres speciality… Marcelo Moura's 'Sol/Sal' (*POTH* 6, March 1963, p. 4), which appeared in *POTH 6*, uses the simple technique of substituting a vowel to create two different words: sun and salt. In the poem, 'sal' appears upside down, mirroring the word above, while being subtly different. Although Gomringer uses some wordplay, much of his poetry is animated by the relationship between word and visual form. His poems are not shaped or pattern poems like George Herbert's 'Easter Wings'. Rather, their mimetic quality comes through in the sense of movement.

In 'Ping Pong', Gomringer spaces the words to convey a sense of the movement and sound of a game of table tennis:

ping pong
ping pong ping
pong ping pong
ping pong

(Gomringer 1953, online)

Concrete poetry was, wrote Finlay, something he had been 'feeling towards for a long time' (Finlay 2009, 15). With its imagist focus on the object and precedents in Dada, Russian and Italian futurisms,[41] Concrete poetry offered a poetics which appealed to Finlay's aesthetic sensibilities. By reviving and expanding on various aspects of the early modernist avant-garde, concrete poetry is a prime example of what Marjorie Perloff calls the arriere-garde, or rear guard. As she explains, drawing on William Marx:

> In military terms, the rearguard of the army is the part that protects and consolidates the troop movement in question; often the army's best generals are used for this purpose. When, in other words, an avant-garde movement is no longer a novelty, it is the role of the arriere-garde to complete its mission, to insure its success. The term arriere-garde, then, is synonymous neither with reaction nor with nostalgia for a lost and more desirable artistic era; it is, on the contrary, the "hidden face of modernity" (Perloff 2012 [2010], 53).

Perloff proposes this dialectic as 'a useful corrective... to the usual conceptions of the avant-garde, either as one-time rupture with the bourgeois art market, a rupture that

[41] As Greg Thomas notes, the concretists 'neat, formulaic grids or sequences of language were wholly different from the Dadaists and Futurists' iconoclastic emphasis on language as brute matter'. Concrete poetry builds on the imagist 'demand for "a poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite", adhering to the contours of its objects via linguistic "concentration" of their physical characteristics', by concertedly concentrating these characteristics through spatial and graphic technique (Thomas 2012, p. 204).

could never be repeated – the Peter Burger thesis – or as a series of ruptures, each one breaking decisively with the one before'. Avant-garde means to make it new, she notes, therefore, for the Utopian avant-garde of the early 20th century, the past was to be rejected (Perloff 2012 [2010], 53).

In contrast, the arriere-garde, she argues, 'treats the propositions of the earlier avant-garde with respect bordering on veneration. She notes that the Brazilian Noigandres group specifically derives its name from a passage in Pound's *Cantos.* Concrete poetry, as an arriere-garde, 'transformed the Utopian optimism and energy of the pre-World War 1 years into a more reflective, self-conscious, and complex project of recovery' (Perloff 2012 [2010], p. 56). This project of recovery must be placed in the context of the two world wars. The first world war, as Guy Davenport argued, cut 'the brilliant experimental period in twentieth-century art' short. Provocatively, he states that 'except for individual talents, already in development before 1916, moving on to full maturity, the century was over in its sixteenth year' (Davenport 1982, 314). As extreme as this may sound, Perloff thinks Davenport's basic premise is correct, arguing that the interwar period 'witnessed the refinement of these early innovations… but the rupture that caused such widespread shock and consternation in art circles had already occurred'. With the rise of socialist-realism in
response to the turmoil of the 1930s and 40s, avant-garde experimentation was sidelined and even frowned upon. Far from being exhausted, then, the space of possibilities created by the original avant-garde had yet to be fully explored. As a result, arriere-garde activity is 'much more than repetition' because 'the rear flank of the army can't protect the troops without understanding the moves the front-runners have made' ((Perloff 2012 [2010], p. 61).

Wild Hawthorn stood for 'Beauty Tradition Experiment' (Finlay & McGuffie June 1962, p. 1). The concept of the arriere-garde, then, helps articulate Finlay's

position as both an avant-garde concrete poet and carrier of tradition. Like the Noigandres poets, Finlay reflected on the avant-garde of the 1910s, making explicit the connection between concrete poetry and Russian Futurism with his 'suprematist' concrete poem 'Homage To Malevich'. Elsewhere, he referenced other modernist art movements, including fauvism, cubism and dada. His status as an artist-producer can also be seen as an extension of Futurist practices which sought to blur the boundaries between poet and artist. By recovering and expanding on the intermedia practices of the early modernist avant-garde, Finlay embodied the values of the
arriere-garde.

The problem of syntax

Given Finlay's interest in the early avant-garde and his engagement with post-imagist poetics, his move to concrete poetry seems almost inevitable. The influence of the New American Poetry had encouraged Finlay to pare his work back in pursuit of objectivity, but increasingly he found that syntax was a hindrance to the 'purity' he was trying to achieve. As he wrote to Creeley in August 1962, 'I suppose what I really want is for the words not to join into phrases but to be in space' (Finlay 2009, p. 13). Finlay's poetry of 1961-62 sees him attempting to strip away unnecessary words, but for all his attempts at an elliptical style, he finds it hard to abandon conventional syntax altogether. 'Midhope (All Gone)' is an interesting example, with Finlay running line breaks and rhymes across the linear progression of syntax. The first two lines could almost stand alone as a minimalist, Japanese-influenced poem. Finlay presents the image of the father in the meadow. Then, a brief caesura, before the supplementary image, 'lovely shadow'. I am reminded here not only of haiku, but Finlay's comments that 'two images laid against one another can produce something more subtle than

thought' (Finlay 2009, p. 32). The combination of the images is lyrical and touching. The impression of syntax being disrupted, however, is transitory, as the phrase runs on in the following stanza - 'Lovely shadow // Of the beech woods' - and the poem falls into conventional syntax:

'Midhope (All Gone)'

My father in his meadow
- Lovely shadow

Of the beech woods – and the pigeons Going
coo

- Coo roo coo
Like quicksilver

- And the milestone:
'3 miles to Society' – we

Never got so far. (Finlay 2004, p. 243)

Concrete poetry, which subordinates the syntactical element to the visual design of the poem, provided the answer. I will discuss the aesthetic and theoretical implications of this shortly. However, it is worth noting that Finlay's attraction to concrete poetry came not only from an 'aesthetic preference, but inner need' (Finlay 2012, p. 29). As Stephen Scobie suggests, Finlay's poetry, 'proceeds from a deeply felt emotional experience'. Concrete poetry provided Finlay with the form, or model of order, with which he could develop his 'personal language' to express these feelings (Scobie 1970, pp. 60-61). Alec Finlay relates his father's frustration with syntax in language to his agoraphobia, which he writes, had left him cut off from the world and 'disconnected from the "ordinary syntax" of "social reality"' (Finlay 2012, p. 26). By describing his father's disconnection from the language of everyday life in terms of syntax, Alec Finlay relates this to the problem of syntax in language.

> 'Concrete' began for me with the extraordinary (since wholly unexpected) sense that the syntax I had been using, the movement of language in me, at a physical level was no longer there – so it had to be replaced with something else, with a syntax and movement that would be true to the new feeling (which existed in only the vaguest way, since I had, then, no form for it)' (Finlay 2009, p. 21).

In a letter to Dom Sylvester Houedard, reprinted in the radical Catholic magazine he edited, *The Aylesford Review*, Finlay explains how concrete allowed him to break away from conventional syntax and achieve something purer:

> I got very disturbed about syntax, or movement; syntax I began to feel as a forward-moving line that carried the nouns along, and out of themselves (which I didn't like); and it also seemed to me that this line, if you followed its movement far enough, ended up in society, or social being, and I wanted poetry to be something purer. So I see concrete poetry as a poetry of nouns, and of a new syntax – ie for practical purposes, nouns, or words anyway, with a new cohesive element.
> (Houedard, Winter 1964-65, p. 98)

As Stephen Bann argues, this new relationship with language reflected Finlay's need to find his place in the world through his poetry. 'The sense of loss of syntax is compensated by the enterprise of founding syntax *in another place',* he writes. 'But man's strategy for the domestication of the Other can only thrive through the colonising project of language' (Finlay, Alec 1993, p. 57). In other words, concrete poetry provides a 'shelter of being' (Finlay, Alec 1993, p. 57), a model of order which language inhabits. The 'other place', or 'new syntax' is the visual element of the poem's design, which performs the function of linking the words, allowing them to 'be in space' as Finlay puts it in his aforementioned letter to Creeley (Finlay 2009, p. 13).

The Noigandres pilot plan points towards ways in which Finlay could find a new form: '[the] concrete poem communicates its own structure: structure-content. Concrete poem is an object in and by itself, not an interpreter of exterior objects and/or more or less subjective feelings... the poem-product: useful object' (Solt 1968, p. 72). They see the poem as object in itself, existing in its own space. The poem is

'useful' in that it invites the reader/viewer to participate in that space, echoing Gomringer's idea of the poem as play area (Solt 1968, p. 67). Take Augusto de Campos's 'Pluvial/Fluvial', as published in *POTH* 6 (Finlay & McGuffie, March 1963 p. 4).

The poem pivots on the play of pluvial and fluvial, the geological terms for land shaped by the movement of rain and river respectively. The words are thus related not only through sound, but through their meaning. As the Pilot Plan has it: 'Concrete poetry: tension of thing-words in space-time'. This tension creates a sense of 'movement', allowing the poem to communicate its own structure. The way 'pluvial' mixes with and dissolves into 'fluvial' reflects the erosion of the earth to form rivers: a mingling of waters, creating new linguistic permutations. The shape of the poem could be said to mimic the form of a river and of rainfall, thus echoing Apollinaire's famous calligramme 'Il Pleut', an acknowledged antecedent of concrete poetry. Despite these hints of mimesis, the poem is not the thing it describes. It is an
object in its own right, existing apart from the world.

IL PLEUT

Il pleut des voix de femmes comme si elles étaient mortes même dans le souvenir

c'est vous aussi qu'il pleut merveilleuses rencontres de ma vie ô gouttelettes

et ces nuages cabrés se prennent à hennir tout un univers de villes auriculaires

écoute s'il pleut tandis que le regret et le dédain pleurent une ancienne musique

écoute tomber les liens qui te retiennent en haut et en bas

(Apollinaire 1918, online)

By absorbing the theory and practice of Gomringer and the Noigandres poets, Finlay was finally able to abandon syntax and find his own 'home-made solution to the needs of inklings' (IHF > Cid Corman, 1961. Corman MSS III, Box 15, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington). In a letter of 12 March 1962 Finlay tells Gael Turnbull he has been writing concrete poems '*poesia concreta* – but I think I'll call mine thingpoems. I want them to be simple objects[42], gay or sad, and no more complex than a potato… subtle in a subtle way, i.e. simple on top, but full of hidden life' (Finlay 2009, pp. 15-16). The following month, he tells Turnbull, 'I feel that I have come – at least for the moment – to the end of poems that are *about*, and want to do poems that just are. It suddenly seems very strange to write about things, I mean, to describe them'

[42] An important factor in Finlay arriving at the idea of the poem-as-object, or the poem as a made thing, is his toy-making. Describing to Robert Creeley a red cardboard he had made on Christmas Day 1962, Finlay remarks, 'how nice it was to have just the simple object, the toy, which also brimmed with feeling, if you cared to really look' (Finlay 2009, p. 15). Writing to Jerome Rothenberg, Finlay explains that his toys were 'really an attempt to

(Finlay 2009, p. 16). Thus Finlay goes from 'Midhope (All Gone)', which for all its attempts at imagist purity still retains traditional poetic elements like adjectives ('lovely') and similes ('like quicksilver') (Finlay 2004, p. 243), to 'Homage To Malevich', a poem which does not describe but forms an object whose content determines its structure: a radical development of Charles Olson's edict, 'form is never more than an extension of content' (Allen 1960, p. 387). Writing to Edwin Morgan, Finlay attempts to synthesise Noigandres with his own classicism, wondering 'if Augusto [de Campos]'s idea that the content of the poem is its own structure could not be re-worded to mean that the poem is not about the beauty of this or that but simply, beauty – the content is a fine-ness of relations, which IS meaning'. This is somewhat vague, but Finlay demonstrates this idea with a brief poetic sketch:

(traditional) the beauty of this landscape

(modern) the beauty   of this landscape

(concrete) (the) beauty

(IHF to EM, 25/6/53, Morgan MSS Acc. 4848 Box 35, GUSP)

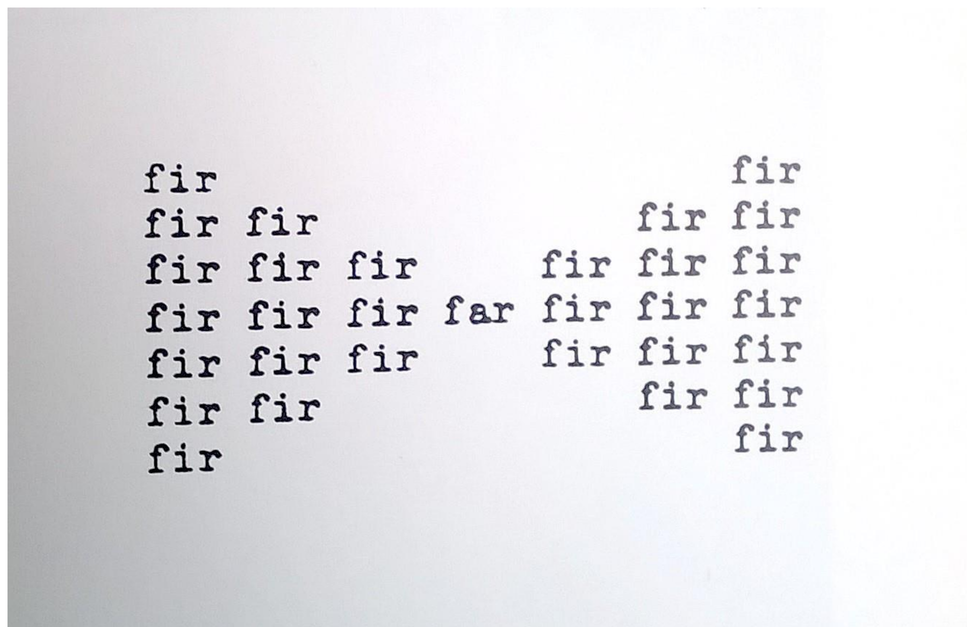
I read Finlay's diagram as suggesting that in the traditional poem, the beauty of the landscape is conveyed through conventional syntax. In the modernist poem,

make poems in conformity with the new movement and feeling. Because a toy is like concrete in this, that it clearly exists in its OWN kind of space. It is 'cut off' from the world, but AT THE SAME TIME it is not without feeling'

(IHF > JR, Fettes Row 15 May 1963, Mandeville Special Collections, University of California, San Diego MSS 10, Box 1, Folder 10). I discuss Finlay's interest in toys, and the role they played in his poetry's development, in greater detail on page 145.

typographical spacing works across the linearity of syntax, allowing space for contemplation of the beautiful landscape. Nonetheless, the content remains the same: this is a poem about the beauty of the landscape. In the concrete poem, however, beauty itself is the content, determining its own structure. Meaning emerges from the relationship between the poem's semantic and visual elements. As an example of how Finlay put these ideas into practice, here is 'Fir/Far' from

Telegrams From My Windmill (1964):



(Finlay 1964, p. 23)

Using a vowel substitution reminiscent of Coura's 'Sol/Sal', Finlay plays on the reader's perception of the fir tree, emphasising his distance from the object. The content determines its structure, with the idea of distance and proximity conveyed through the visual form, as the adjacent constellations of 'fir' narrow to a central point: 'far'. In Finlay's own terms, the poem is not *about* anything, i.e. it is not descriptive, it simply *is*

- an object in its own space, apart from the world. Of course, its relation to the material world of trees and humans ensures it is not a purely abstract formal exercise [43]. As I will argue in the following section, Finlay's reintegration of the 'real' into the artificial art-object animates much of his finest work.

Gomringer and Noigandres' aim of restoring the social function of art stems from the utopian thinking of the concrete art of the 1940s, the movement which lent concrete poetry its name. For its founder, Hans Arp, concrete was a deeply moral, humanist project:

> concrete art aims to transform the world. it aims to make existence more bearable. it aims to simplify man's life. it aims to identify him with nature. reason uproots man and causes him to lead a tragic existence. concrete art is an elemental, natural, healthy art, which is where concrete art enters, melancholy departs, dragging with it its gray suitcases full of black sighs.
> (Arp 1948, p. 72)

Noigandres build on such ideas to envision '[a] general art of the word' (Solt 1968, p. 72), while Gomringer writes of restoring the organic function of art in society by drawing on the 'language of today' such as newspaper headlines and advertising slogans. As a result, the new poem becomes 'an object to be both seen and used', its 'objective element of play' being useful to man (Solt 1968, p. 67). This use of the language of mass media was by no means uncritical. Décio Pignatari's 'Beba Coca Cola' is perhaps the most famous example of early 'committed' concrete poetry, with the poet working through permutations of the titular phrase to create a satirical 'antiadvertisment'. 'Beba' (drink) becomes 'babe' (to slob). Cola becomes 'caco' (pieces),

[43] In the copy of *Telegrams From My Windmill* he sent to George Mackay Brown, Finlay has handwritten a quote from Soren Kierkegaard on the facing page to 'Fir/Far': 'like a lone spruce fir, egotistically circumscribed, pointing toward loftier spheres, I stand, casting no shadow, and only the stock-dove builds its nest in my branches' (Finlay 1964, p. 22). These lines supplement the poem rather than 'explain' it, but by making the association, Finlay points to the poem's 'hidden life' (Finlay 2009, p. 16).

before Pignatari fuses the two into 'cloaca' (sewage) (Williams 1967 [2013], unpg).

Finlay would himself make use of the forms and language of mass media in later works. This could be to playful effect, as in the poem-print 'Summer Sails' (Finlay with Jim Nicholson 1967, online), or to ironic effect, as with *L'Ami du people*, where the twee Scottish magazine *People's Friend* is reimagined as Marat's scurrilous newspaper of the French Revolution (Finlay 1989, online). However, as Greg Thomas notes, for Finlay, the 'usefulness' or value of concrete was expressed in
spiritual and not socio-political or scientific terms (I will discuss Finlay's debates with Morgan over the question of socio-political *content* in concrete poetry later), 'bringing to light the vision-truth analogy implicit in many constellations.' (Thomas 2012, p. 208). In his famous September 1963 letter to Pierre Garnier, Finlay describes concrete poetry as 'honest' and 'true' (Finlay 2009, p. 22), a classical conceit which does not sit easily with modern anti-essentialist thought. Finlay's belief in the inherent morality of art and its ability to reveal essential 'truths' could be seen as somewhat naïve, and as I shall discuss later, his defence of these principles led him to
take some rather extreme, even questionable, positions.

With the homely avant-garde, Finlay did aim to reconnect poetry with contemporary life and language, and his focus on 'human poetry' indicates that Finlay shared the modernist aim of stripping away Romantic excess in language and form to focus on the 'real'. Finlay's realism, however, was not of the transgressive or expressionist kind then popular; he refused to admit the 'mad and dutiful' (Finlay 2004 p. 192) into his work. Concrete poetry, he wrote, 'by its very limitations, offers a tangible image of goodness and sanity; it is very far from the now-fashionable
poetry of anguish and self... It is a model, of order, even if set in a space which is full of doubt' (Finlay 2009, p. 22). As a model of order, concrete poetry provides what

Stephen Bann calls a 'shelter of being' (Finlay, Alec 1993, 57), a bulwark against the anguish or doubt of the wider world. Finlay explains this further in his letter to

Garnier:

> I approve of Malevich's statement, 'Man distinguished himself as a thinking being and removed himself from the perfection of God's creation. Having left the non-thinking state, he strives by means of his perfected objects, to be again embodied in the perfection of the absolute, non-thinking life...' That is, this seems to me, to describe, approximately, my own need to make poems...
> (Finlay 2009, p. 22)

Finlay acknowledges, however, that the pursuit of perfection can divorce art from life: 'one does not want a *glittering* perfection which forgets that world is, after all, to be made by man into his *home.'* While some man made objects might achieve a state of perfection, the poet and painter will not, he writes. Any pilot plan for new art forms should, he continues, distinguish between 'what man can construct and what he actually is... new thought does not make a new man' (Finlay 2009, p. 22). Nonetheless, for Finlay the act of bringing beautiful objects into the world is a moral, even spiritual, one. Finlay acknowledges that his notion of Beauty might be 'theoretically inadequate', but to him it is 'compelling and immediate'. As his letter concludes, 'I mean this in the simplest way – that if I was asked, "Why do you like concrete poetry?" I could truthfully answer 'Because it is beautiful' (Finlay 2009, p. 23). For Finlay concrete poetry answered not only an aesthetic need, but a personal one: a way of making the world into a home.

Reintegration of the real: suprematist and fauve concrete

Finlay's notions about the spiritual value of concrete are undoubtedly idealistic, but through reference to the 'real', he ensured his poems were not merely formal exercises, but related in some way to the world. In his first concrete poetry collection *Rapel* (1963), Finlay subdivided his concrete poems into terms drawn from visual art, 'fauve', after the modernist movement led by Matisse and Derain, and 'suprematist', after the Russian avant-garde painter Kazimir Malevich. The most succinct definitions of Finlay's two different 'purities' - fauve and concrete - comes from Dick Sheeler's unpublished essay 'A Note on Concrete Poetry', which, Alec Finlay notes, were presumably approved by Finlay (Finlay 2012, 272). Fauve poems recreated 'sensed experience', while suprematist poems were 'abstract word compositions' (Sheeler 1965, Jerome Rothenberg MSS. Box 9, Flder 10, Mandeville Library UCSD). The sensual qualities of Fauve were also reflected in their use of colour typography, whereas Suprematist poems were printed in stark black text. Writing to Edwin Morgan in July 1963, Finlay explains the terms in more detail:

> To be quite clear about it, the structure seems to be the thing that carried the meaning and the pleasure, but the words in it should have a plain and not a nonsense sort of being. This I would call pure or suprematist concrete. The other kind, which you favour – the figurative sort – I would call fauve, and it seems to me to be a different pleasure, and a different impulse. And why not? One can enjoy both things.
> (IHF > EM, 25 July 1963, Morgan MSS Acc 484, Box 35, GUSP)

Suprematist and Fauve relate broadly to Mike Weaver's distinction between constructivist and expressionist concrete poetry. In an article in *The Lugano Review* (1966), Weaver writes, 'the constructivist poem results from an arrangement of materials according to a scheme or system set up by the poet which must be adhered to on its own terms' (Solt 1970, p. 7). This definition is echoed in Finlay's idea of 'pure'

concrete poetry and his notion of 'abstract word compositions' which work through various permutations of words and letters. In the expressionist poem, writes Weaver, 'the poet arranges his material according to an intuitive structure' (Solt 1970, p. 7). This approach would seem to describe Finlay's 'figurative' and sensual Fauve. Yet as Mary Ellen Solt points out, 'Weaver's definitions and classifications are most clarifying when applied generally... when we are confronted with the particular text or poem, we often find that it... is expressionistic as well as constructivist' (Solt 1970, p. 7). This could describe many of Finlay's own poems, for as we shall see, his Suprematist and Fauve poems, while broadly relating to Weaver's constructivist and expressionist classifications, do not strictly adhere to them. Weaver also identifies three potential properties of concrete poetry - visual, aural and kinetic. As we shall see, many of Finlay's concrete poems, while primarily visual, have aural and even kinetic properties. As Finlay moved away from the formalism of his earliest concrete poems, the aural and kinetic elements became more pronounced.

Let us focus first on Finlay's Suprematist concrete poetry. Anne MoeglinDelcroix notes that the term 'Suprematist' 'implies a deliberate desire for rupture'. 'Homage to Malevich', she writes, 'sought to institute an absolute artistic reality, at the price of the violent negation of empirical reality' (Murray & Johnson 2010, p. 36). Finlay's Suprematist poems are 'abstract word compositions' in the vein of Gomringer's constellations and Noigandre's 'poem-products'. As such they 'communicate [their] own structure: structure-content. Concrete poem is an object in and by itself, not an interpreter of exterior objects and/or more or less subjective feelings' (Solt 1968, p. 72). A number of critics have interpreted 'Homage To Malevich' in such terms. As Susan Howe comments, 'the poet has made an exact arrangement with complete economy' (Howe 1974, p. 8). Finlay alludes to Malevich's black square paintings by presenting a constructivist text grid in the shape of a perfect black square, formed by

the words 'black block'. The poem's form and content, Howe writes, are 'completely bound (locked) together'. The poem's contrasting elements - black and white, lack and lock etc - balance each other to create a model of order:

> The black (figure) and block (ground) balances with lock (stability) against lack (insta- bility). Something open versus something closed.
> Are lack and black one and the same image, or exactly opposite?
> Are block and lock alike? All this is exactly what the title or subject suggested- Malevich's search for formal invention. Do black and white open or close? Are they absence or presence? Sense or non-sense? … it is hard to separate color from color, shape from shape. Here form and content are completely bound (locked) together. (Howe 1974, p. 9)

Howe is right to recognise the poem's formal rigour, and the way in which the content and structure work together to determine meaning. To Howe, the word 'lack' brings an element of doubt to the poem: 'are lack and black one and the same image, or exactly opposite?' (Howe 1974, p. 9). Ultimately, these are resolved through the formal harmony of the grid, but the elements of doubt are less easily resolved. Howe is right to argue that the poem embodies Malevich's search for formal invention, but in so doing, it raises questions about the limitations of pure formalism. As abstract word compositions, it could be argued that Finlay's suprematist poems 'lack' the 'human' qualities he sought.

As Anne Moeglin-Delcroix argues, the questions raised by the poem suggest a more ambivalent attitude towards the formalist rigour of Suprematism. While acknowledging that the poem successfully takes up some of Suprematism's qualities – qualities which were common to all constructivist European concrete poetry: 'abstraction through reduction to the elementary... and systematization of processes' – she asserts that 'it is from within the Malevichian square that the seed of doubt about the perfection of this fine, regimented order arises' (Murray & Johnson 2010, p. 37). Even more fundamentally, she continues, it is 'under the guise of a formalist exercise that formalism itself is put into question, since, as formal as it seems, Finlay's

square contains... a message that consists of an interrogation on the limits of formalism' (Murray & Johnson 2010, p. 37).

Indeed, as Stephen Bann points out in 'Ian Hamilton Finlay: An Imaginary Portrait' - an essay which heavily informs Moeglin-Delcroix's thinking – Finlay does not assume that Malevich's 'dialectical expression of the painter's problem of figure and ground' in his 'Square' paintings, can 'simply be transposed into poetic terms. For language is in itself presence and absence, in terms of Saussure's distinction it comprised both *signifier* and *signified'*. For Bann, 'in "Homage to Malevich", the space
of doubt is not simply the white page, but the dimension of meaning whose incompatible signs (lack/lock) are in contrast with the certainty of typographic structure'. The tension which emerges in the poem is, Bann argues, crucial to Finlay's 'further development as artist: that of form and non-form, language and non-
language, being set not merely in opposition, but *in a dialectical relationship'*. This dialectical tension is, argues Bann, 'the early guarantee that concrete poetry will not, for Finlay, become a barren, formalistic practice:

> As 'Homage to Malevich' indicates, the principle of conflict animates the very formal structure of the poem, But it is also a force that will break open the framework of syntax's new shelter on the printed page, making Finlay's career a continual transcendence of medium.
>
> (Finlay, Alec 1993, p. 60).

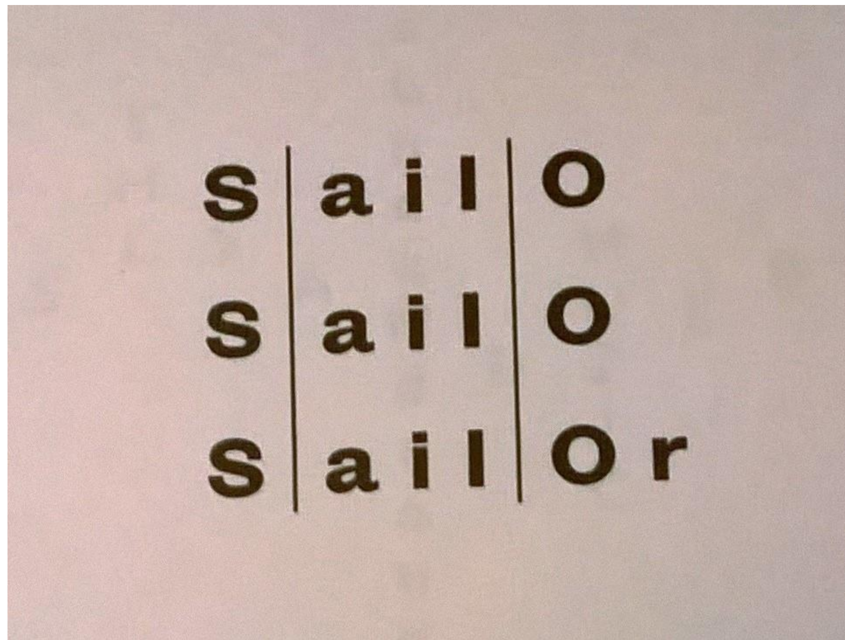
In Constructivist thought, as Moeglin-Delcroix writes, 'the manufactured perfection of all works on canvas can and does serve as a model for the rational ordering society' (Murray & Johnson 2010, p. 37). As we know, Finlay acknowledged this in his letter to Pierre Garnier, writing that concrete 'by its very limitations offers a tangible image of goodness and sanity' (Finlay 2009, pp. 21-22). But as he added, 'one does not want a glittering perfection which forgets that the world is, after all, also to be made by man into his home' (Finlay 2009, pp. 21-22). This conception gave Finlay's concrete poetry,

writes Moeglin-Delcroix, 'a personal slant that emphasizes the poet's capacity to live in the world, to make of it a "home" - to recognise a link of reciprocal belonging, rather than remaking it according to a new rationality which is imposed from the outside' (Murray & Johnson 2010, p. 37).

As Alec Finlay suggests, Finlay's poetics arose from a 'homesickness' that was life defining (Finlay, Alec 2012, p. 100). Confined to his Edinburgh bedsit, the agoraphobic Finlay longed for a home in the country. Alec Finlay notes the affinity with Robert Louis Stevenson, a writer his father loved. In *A Child's Garden of Verses,* Stevenson draws on the exotic travels he dreamed up during his sickly, bed-ridden childhood. Ian Hamilton Finlay, writes Alec Finlay, was 'driven to dream his own "Land of Counterpane" into existence, whether in reminiscences of idyllic childhood scenes or, increasingly, in the more radical investiture of the toy as a "pure" object'. Thus, Finlay's concrete poems became 'testaments to happiness', representing rural and coastal idylls, representing the journeys 'the poet could not make himself' (Finlay, Alec 2012 pp. 100-104). As Moeglin-Delcroix argues, Finlay's sense that 'formal harmony cannot suffice' progressively leads 'the poet to treat language as more than just visual material. The element of meaning will be reintegrated into poetry, [partly through] reference to the real' (Murray & Johnson 2010, p. 39). Finlay's reintegration of 'the real' into his poetry ultimately takes it off the page and into the world, developments I will discuss in detail in the following sections. This process begins with the Fauve poems of *Rapel*, which use colour and typography as well as phonetic and kinetic elements to recreate 'sensed experience' of the world.

Finlay does not specify which of the poems in *Rapel* are Suprematist or Fauve. Perhaps the most obvious clue is in the use of colour: black text for Suprematist, coloured for Fauve. The former seems austere and pure, the other more sensual and playful. The next clue is structure. As noted, 'Homage To Malevich' is a constructivist 'word

composition', in which the words 'black' and 'block' are organised according to a scheme of the poet's devising. 'SOS Poem' also takes this permutational approach, using vertical lines to deconstruct the word 'sailor':



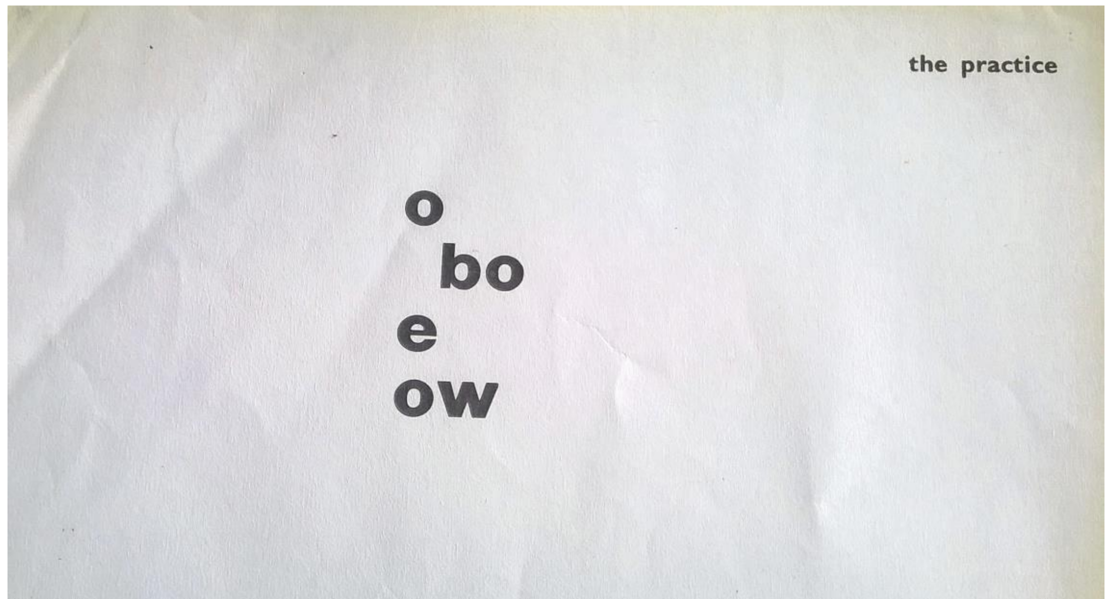
(Finlay 1963, unpag)

From this we can read the words 'sail', 'sailor', 'ail' and 'or'. The capitalised letters S and O loop back on each other, forming 'SOS' when the reader's eye returns to the start of the line. From these permutations a simple narrative emerges in which an ailing sailor calls SOS. But this does not account for all the permutations. Do the capitalised S and O only work in relation to the words and 'SOSOSO' loop they form, or can they stand alone as separate semantic units? Read on the vertical, the capitalised letters mimic the Morse Code distress signal of three dits (for S), followed by three dahs (for O), looping back to S to form the final three dits. So far, my reading has worked purely on a visual basis, relating to the arrangement of words and letters on the page. I would suggest that the S and O, taken as separate semantic units, introduce an aural or phonetic element to the poem: the sound of the sea ('sss') and the ailing sailor calling out in distress or pain (as in 'oh!'). Then there is 'or'. Is this to be read simply as part of 'sailor',

or can it stand alone? The 'or' can be read as a comment on the poem's structure: its permutational scheme invites us to ask if the poem represents a 'sail' or a 'sailor'. As the poem loops back on itself, the process of transformation from 'sail' to 'sailor' starts over again. 'Or' could also hint at a world beyond the self-contained scheme of the poem. As with 'Homage to Malevich',

Finlay allows an element of doubt to enter this Suprematist word composition.

There is one other black, presumably Suprematist, poem in *Rapel,* 'The Practice'.



(Finlay 1963, unpag)

The poem links the words 'oboe' and 'eow', humorously evoking a musician's painful attempts to master a tune. As Finlay put it in a letter to Morgan, 'eow' is:

> the universally acknowledged symbol of a sound of pain, or an exclamation of animal displeasure; I thought they used it in comics, and things. Does this not give the abstraction a sort of plain and simple light-verse base? I hope it does, for that is how I meant it' (IHF to EM, 25.7.63, Morgan MSS Acc. 4848 Box 35, GUSP).

By introducing an element of humour into this abstract word composition, Finlay subverts the austerity associated with 'pure' constructivist or Suprematist concrete, taking Eugen Gomringer's notion of the concrete poem as a play-area and emphasising the 'play' element.

The Fauve poems are much more obviously humorous and playful, with their use of colour and their freer, more intuitive structures. Yet some still contain constructivist or Suprematist elements, such as 'Formal Poem' and 'a peach, an apple'. Both are permutational poems, yet the words are arranged in a more figurative manner than in the Suprematist poems. 'Formal Poem' is made up of the words 'tree' and 'deer'. 'Tree' appears in yellow on the vertical axis, intersected on the horizontal by permutations of the letters making up 'deer' in blue. Finlay works through six variations of this combination, adding or subtracting letters from 'deer' so that the missing elements are made up from the three letters it shares with 'tree'. So in the first instance, Finlay places 'd' and 'r' on either side of the vertical 'ee' of tree. In the second he subtracts the first 'e' of 'deer', leaving the last 'e' of 'tree' to fill in the gap. Finlay works through the different permutations until the words are fused and the 't' of 'tree' floats loose from 'ree'. As its title suggests, this is a formal exercise,
another word composition in the constructivist vein. But in contrast to the abstraction of the Suprematist poem, the words and letters here create concrete images, mimicking the movement of a deer around a tree. The permutations of deer/tree suggest different obscured views of the animal, until the final permutation, in which the words blend into each other as the deer stands in front of the tree. This figurative quality gives the poem a life beyond its self-contained structure; the use of colour is appealing, adding a sensual quality, but also disorientating. The colours Finlay uses for the text (yellow for 'tree' and blue for 'deer') have no obvious correspondence to the objects described. However, in a witty painter's joke, as the deer blends into the tree, blue mixes with yellow to create green. The yellow 't' is shifted right (perhaps it becomes the sun?) leaving the green letters 'ree' on the vertical, with a blue 'd' a space below, one step to the left. The displacement of the 't' and introduction of the green 'ree' suggests a world beyond the 'deer/tree' structure. While retaining constructivist elements, 'Formal

Poem' sees Finlay use Fauve colour and mimesis to bring the world into the poem, and the poem into the world.

'a peach / an apple' also combines constructivist word composition with Fauve expressiveness. The poem is a kind of concrete still life, taking an image of fruit on a table and using word play and typographical arrangement to create different verbal and visual associations. One might even suggest that the poem, with its different permutations of the words within the visual space of the page, invites comparison with the use of multiple-perspectives in cubist still lives. Finlay was particularly fond of Juan Gris, paying homage to him in another of *Rapel's* poems, and it is worth viewing 'an apple/a peach' alongside the cubist's *Fruit Bowl with Bottle* (Gris 1916, online)

a peach

an apple

a table

an eatable
peach

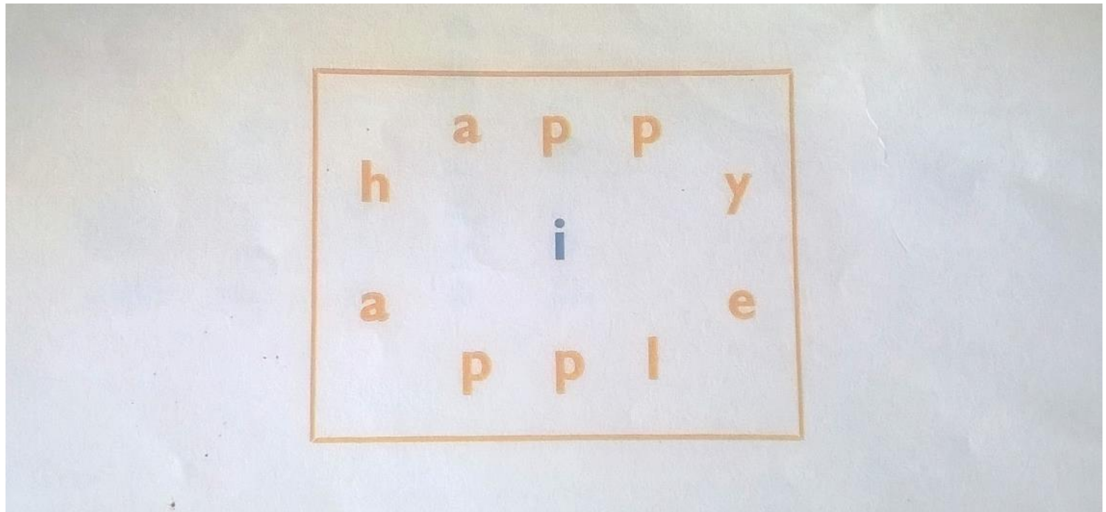
an apple
  an eatable
    table
            apple

an apple   a peach

(Finlay 1963, unpag)

The eye is drawn rightwards as Finlay introduces the three semantic elements at play: a peach, an apple, and then, across the page, two lines below, a table. The eye is then pulled back across the page to the far left as Finlay works through permutations of the words. Finlay adds 'eat' to 'table', playing on the sound as well as the meaning of the words: the fruit on the table is 'eatable'. Moving across and down the page we read 'an eatable/table/apple'. An eatable table sounds absurd, but Finlay wittily allows these words (which play nicely on the repetition of the semantic element '-table') to hang on the page before qualifying it with 'apple', so that we understand that the apple is associated with the table - a 'table apple'.

'an apple/a peach' combines constructivist permutation with visual mimicry of the multiple-perspectives of cubism. Curiously, such strategies are almost absent from the poem which actually makes Finlay's debt to cubism explicit, 'To the painter Juan Gris'. Rather than working through different arrangements of words and letters, Finlay offers a single composition: 'happy' and 'apple' are arranged on the page so as to form an oval.



(Finlay 1963, unpag)

In the centre of the oval, between the middle letter of each word ('p') Finlay places an 'i', forming 'pip' on the vertical. So with the addition of a single modifying letter, Finlay creates a new word which clearly relates to the apple. These words and letters also perform a figurative function, arranged so as to resemble an eye, with the oval 'happy/apple' framing the 'i' pupil. But unlike Apollinaire's calligrammes, in which the words are arranged to resemble the objects or actions which they describe (see 'Il Pleut' on p. 119) where the words pour down the page like rainfall), the only relation between the shape of the poem and its content is the 'i', which in this context, becomes an independent semantic unit, a phonetic rendering of 'eye'. Where does that leave the happy apple and its pip? And why the adjective? How can an apple have feelings? An element of doubt creeps in, only to be replaced with delight, as the reader adapts to the new rules of the game. Suprematism's strict formalism is replaced with the associative word play and sensuality of Fauve. The reader is invited to consider the relation between the words, shapes and colours. We might think about how the oval-shaped pip resembles an eye, or suggest that a pip, like a pupil, is positioned in the centre of a larger object. To develop the latter idea, we note that the pip, like the pupil,

is a smaller black object set against a while oval-shaped space. This brings us back to the letter 'i', a model of order set in a space of doubt, a white

page. But we have yet to mention another key element of the poem, the yellow rectangle which frames the words. We remember the reference to Gris and the rectangle becomes a picture frame for a still life of a happy apple. But instead of shaping the words into an apple, Finlay shapes them into an eye. A gap opens up between signifier and signified. Our eyes *see* an eye but they *read* apple. In that semiotic space of doubt between the shape of the words and the object they describe, Finlay raises questions about visual perception, echoing the strategies of Gris and his fellow Cubists. Is this an apple or an eye? Perhaps it is the (literal) apple of Gris's painterly eye, transmitted to the reader through Finlay's concrete poetics? The poem's structure becomes a comment on its own content.

'sail, sail, sail, sail, sailor' uses the same two main words as 'SOS Poem', but instead of working through the permutations to create an abstract word composition, it uses colour and typography to create a figurative fauve poem. Finlay stacks the words using progressively larger letters, so that the largest word is the last one, 'sailor'. This typographical arrangement creates the impression of a sailor in the foreground, with his boat's wake (as represented by four progressively smaller 'sail's) fading into the horizon behind him. Rather than imitate the shape of the boat, the poem mimics its movement. This kinetic quality also helps bring 'Carousel' to life. The poem is very clearly figurative, with the words arranged to mimic the shape and movement of that which they describe. On the vertical, Finlay has three 'poles' made up of the words 'roundandroundand'. Each is positioned at a different height, so as to mimic the up-and-down motion of the carousel. Intersecting these on the horizontal are the words 'horses and zebras', which are also arranged in a zig-zag pattern to convey movement.

To complete the experience, the 'horses and zebras' are intersected on the vertical with 'the' and 'muzik'.

While the music of the carousel is evoked, the poem does not actually feature any aural effects. However, there is one fauve poem which successfully incorporates, the visual, kinetic and aural, 'This is the little burn that plays its mouth organ by the mill'. These words recall a children's poem by Finlay's beloved Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Keepsake Mill': 'Here is the mill with the humming of thunder, Here is the weir with the wonder of foam' (Stevenson 1950, p. 377), but while Finlay's poem shares that sense of wonder, its 'humming' is altogether gentler, the 'mMmxm' of a mouth organ. Permutations of this 'mMmxm', a phonetic rendering of the 'mouth organ' sound produced by the burn, bookend the text. Finlay also stretches out the consonants of 'mouth' and 'mill' with a lingering, sensual 'mmmm'. The words and letters are presented in blue and green text, evoking the water and grass of the landscape. The typographical arrangement is perhaps the closest Finlay got to the figurative quality of Apollinaire's calligrammes, with the words and letters winding down the right hand side of the page, evoking not only the concrete image of a burn in a field, but the movement of running water and the notion of sound being carried through the air. Of all the fauve poems, 'this is the little burn' is arguably the most successful in its evocation of 'sensed experience', bringing the world back into concrete poetry on a thematic and formal level, incorporating visual, aural and kinetic elements. He would continue to exploit these elements in his subsequent innovations: the poster poems and sequential poem-book. Reference to the real brought the world into these poems, but by their very nature, these forms
represented new ways of bringing Finlay's poetry into the world.

While pursuing these radical new directions, Finlay also continued to develop and refine his Suprematist and Fauve concrete poetry, contributing poems to *POTH* and

other magazines, and publishing concrete collections such as *Telegrams From My Windmill* (1964?) and *Tea-Leaves and Fishes* (1966). In *Telegrams...* Finlay plays on the idea that each poem is a telegram or letter. Indeed, the cover itself reproduces a Post Office telegram from Wild Hawthorn Press, complete with address and date. The poems themselves are printed in typewriter script, reflecting their method of composition (with its even spaces between letters, the typewriter lends itself to concrete and visual poetry) while also giving them a relation to the text typed onto a telegram. This conceit helps give the individual poems a certain unity. Furthermore, they are all love poems, as Finlay explained to Edwin Morgan (IHF > EM 21 July 1964, GU MS Morgan Acc 4848/ Box 35). In one poem, Finlay places two lovers amidst a bed of roses, diagonally intersecting two horizontal roses with vertical 'yous' and an ecstatic Molly Bloom-like 'yess' (Finlay 1964, p. 3). 'Au Pair Girl' is one of his most sensual poems, playing on the phonetic and orthographic proximity of 'pair' and 'pear' to shape the words into a pear on the page (Finlay 1964, p. 13). Yet, for all its playful eroticism, the poem contains a seed of doubt, as the possibility arises that the relationship has gone 'pear-shaped'. Several poems contain this combination of charm, romance and doubt, with some expressing a particularly strong sense of longing and loneliness. Windmills are a recurring image in Finlay's 1960s work, symbolising the rural idyll he longed for. Their blades form an X and Finlay plays on this, arranging two of his poems into this shape, while also suggesting the 'x' or kiss a lover signs off a letter or telegram with. One windmill-shaped telegram plays on the phonetic and orthographic similarities between 'heart' and 'hurts', 'arrow' and 'apple'. Cupid's arrow has struck the poet, piercing his heart like the apple in William Tell (Finlay 1964, p. 21). The final poem in the collection reinforces this image, using the X form to play on 'all' and 'alone' (Finlay 1964, p. 29). Each of the four blades is made up from four repetitions of 'all', with a single instance of 'alone' forming the axis upon which they turn. Alone in his mill, the poet's heart

aches. The playful approach to language and form ensures the poems retain their charm and wit, but the underlying sense of doubt brings ambivalence.

With their figurative forms and expressive qualities, these X poems fall firmly within the Fauve definition. Other poems use apparently Suprematist or constructivist forms, albeit to expressive ends. 'Tendresse' resembles the word-grid of 'Homage To Malevich', with the French for 'tenderness' repeated over and over (Finlay 1964, p. 11). In the first line, after four repetitions of 'tendresse', Finlay leaves the word hanging after four letters: 'tend'. But instead of running on to another 'tendresse', Finlay transforms the hanging 'tend-' into 'tender dress'. Not 'tenderness', which would be a direct translation, but 'tender dress'. Through permutational wordplay, Finlay creates an ode to a lover, her tenderness represented by her dress. In 'Homage To Malevich', the emergence of 'lack' and 'lock' from 'black block' allowed a sense of doubt to creep into the Suprematist model of order, as pure formalism was complicated by the suggestion that something was lacking. So we might say that in 'Tendresse' 'lack' is expressed in terms of a melancholy lover's sense of loss and longing.

Telegrams... saw Finlay giving his concrete poems an ever greater sense of human emotions and the real world. Yet there were limits to his recuperation of the real. Finlay was uncomfortable with Morgan's attempts to make concrete more 'serious' by introducing political and topical themes such as state violence in apartheid South Africa. 'You know, I think your concrete about the shootings in Africa is much more sentimental than my lovers among roses', he wrote to Morgan, 'I'm quite willing to take the risks of the sentimental, rather than the easy scores of the fashionable... I would be for the charming but against the easy. It is the gritty that

comes easy now' (IHF > EM 22 October 1964). Finlay was not suggesting that political poems should not be attempted, 'but the "ought" should not apply to everyone.' He goes on to make bold claims for the classical virtues of form:

> My own point, which I perhaps exaggerate, because it is seldom made, is, that 'formalism' and 'triviality' are not avoided by mere subject-matter. It is not so simple as that. As you say it is a question of the 'human centrality' of what one is doing, and a love of form is AS human as a loathing of injustice. Moreover, the traditional themes of lyric poet, are not 'trivial', and a poem is not empty because it is about, say, a girl, and not about politics. It could be that Mondrian's 'formalist' paintings have done more to defend the idea of order and decency, than Picasso's 'Guernica'.
> (IHF > EM 23 November 1964, Morgan MSS Acc. 4848, Box 35, GUSP)

His final point is highly questionable, but we can see how it fits in with his idea that concrete poetry's morality is inherent in its form: it is a model of order, a representation of harmony. As such, concrete poetry has value in our lives, allowing us to relate to the world and make it our home.

Finlay's defence of the 'sentimental' is framed within a wider celebration of the lyric tradition. Defending his work from Edward Lucie Smith's comments that some of his imagery was 'Georgian' and 'sentimental'[44], he wrote:

> It would take a great fool not to see that warm or positive feelings about fields, horizons, sails, little boats, etc. are going to look sentimental to a critic in – say – London, so long as he judges by categories (as he is almost certain to do). If one wanted to avoid such a charge, one would merely need to write cynically about love affairs, streets, monuments and bombs... (Smith 1966, pp. 44-45)

I prefer to see Finlay's 'sentimentality' in terms of what Stephen Scobie describes as

[44] These comments should be put in context. Lucie Smith, as noted in the previous chapter, was friends with Robert Creeley and had been a key figure in the transatlantic small-press poetry scene of the late 1950s. In the 1960s, he became a prominent critic for mainstream British newspapers and journals, and was receptive to new developments, including concrete poetry. His article for *Encounter* discusses the 'Between Poetry and Painting' exhibition of 1965 and praises Finlay as the 'leading writer and theorist of concrete poetry now writing in English' (Smith 1966 p. 45).

'the essentially humanistic act of creation'. Finlay's work, writes Scobie, celebrates life, 'expressed in terms of the beauty, whimsicality, and precarious-ness of (for example) a fishing boat' (Scobie 1970, p. 60). Scobie's acknowledgement of the 'precariousness' of life reminds us of the dialectical tensions which animate Finlay's concrete poetry and give his depictions of 'wee' things their richness. Finlay's defence can also be related to the Constructivist idea that formalism in art can offer a model of order and decency, going so far to suggest it is of more social value than explicitly political art, taking us back to Arp's comments that concrete art 'causes the stars of peace, love and poetry to grow in the head and the heart' (Arp 1948, p. 72).

The poems collected in *Tea-Leaves and Fishes* (1966) see Finlay combining the lyric tradition with a range of formal approaches. To some, its subject matter may seem trivial, yet they exude charm in both content and form. In these poems, Finlay found innovative forms with which to celebrate his beloved maritime, domestic and pastoral themes: 'fish & fishing', 'firs', 'football', 'tea', 'boats' and 'other subjects' Finlay 1966, p. 2). Some of the poems are little more than jokes, but they are beautifully rendered. 'Scotch Fish', for example, consists of the pun 'macmackeral', printed in silver text on a thin sheet of white paper: a gleaming silver fish against the sea foam (Finlay 1966, p. 18). In addition to playful fauve poems, there are two alphabet poems, a semiotic (or 'Semi-idiotic') code poem, and found poems using the names and registration codes of fishing boats. Finlay's debt to Dada comes through in the absurdist newspaper headlines constructed from phonetic and orthographic permutations of 'night' 'fish' and 'star', and the piscine puns of 'Summer Vocabulary

Lesson' (Finlay 1966, p. 10):

'Is the tea infished?

It is infished.

Suffishiently?

Suffishiently.

Another significant innovation was the one-word poem, which I shall discuss later. These are just a few examples of the different types of Concrete poetry with which Finlay experimented. With his Suprematist poems, Finlay recognised the limitations of pure formalist concrete poetry. As he wrote to Gael Turnbull, 'I want to get this world of fire and fish and burns, immortalised' (Finlay 2009, p. 16) and with the Fauve poems he devised his own 'home-made solutions' to this problem, reintegrating the 'real' and a 'local vernacular element' (Finlay 2009, p. 16) through the use of homely imagery, colour, and typographic play. However, his most significant innovations were in the materiality of the poems themselves. In the following sections, I shall discuss Finlay's sequential poem-books and the poemobjects which saw him take his poetry beyond the page.

Sequential books and linear discursivity

The fauve poems of *Rapel* and other collections allowed Finlay to travel imaginatively to rural idylls and childhood experiences, his own Stevensionian 'Land of Counterpane', as Alec Finlay has noted (Finlay, Alec 2012, p. 104). As I demonstrated in my analysis of *Rapel*, Finlay incorporated kinetic elements into a number of his concrete poems, using typography and the space of the page to mimic the lilting motion of a carousel or the winding of a stream through a field. The next logical step was to use the book form itself to create a sense of movement and space. On page 130 I cited Moeglin-Delcroix's argument that Finlay reintegrated meaning into poetry through 'reference to the real'. Discussing this process, she identifies a second modality, 'discursive linearity', whereby the medium, and not just the visual design of the poem, performs the function of syntax, thus contributing to the meaning.

'The book as form will contribute significantly to their recuperation', she argues, 'firstly from lending the sequential structure of [a book's] pages to the words contained therein, and secondly by incorporating photographic images' (Murray & Johnson 2011, p. 39). In this section I will scrutinise her claims, with reference to some of these sequential bookworks, including the *Canal Stripe* and *Ocean Stripe* series, exploring the different ways in which they exploit the properties of the medium. Moeglin-Delcroix is correct to identify the sequential structure and use of photograph as key elements, but I will also pay attention to Finlay's decisions regarding such factors as typography, colour, format, and paper type.

The act of travel and movement was embodied in the kinetic elements of Finlay's fauve 'word-pictures'. Yet he would also use toys to create imaginative journeys, creating, as Alec Finlay writes, a prototype 'poemorama', a 'sort of theatre of kinetic poems' as he puts it in a letter to Ann and Zeljko Kujunzic. Toys were, Alec Finlay argues, 'the crucial *made* things that marked his evolution'. The 'modeled world' Finlay created when he was 'mostly confined to his flat in Fettes Row, consisted of pinewoods, watermills, boats and planes' (Finlay, Alec 2011, online). Other than a small exhibition in a country house near Edinburgh in 1964, Finlay's toys and poemoramas were not on public display at the time[45]. However, by translating their ideas and images into concrete poems, poster-poems and sequential poem-books, Finlay made the crucial transition Alec Finlay describes. I will demonstrate this transition by comparing the concrete poem 'Canal Scene' and the sequential poem-book *Canal Stripe Series 2*. Most finely realised in *Tea-Leaves & Fishes,* 'Canal Scene' presents a tugboat's passage along a canal, taking in such sights as a 'yellow meadow' and a 'charming farm'. The boat and water are represented by the words in blue which run through the middle line

[45] These early poemoramas can be seen as a precursor of the 1977 audio visual installation *Carrier Strike* in which Finlay uses model irons, ironing boards and planes to depict the WWII pacific naval Battle of Midway.

of the poem. The first and third lines, printed in red, represent the canal banks and the features which go by:

ayellowmeadowanolderalderacharmingfarmasleepingsteading

atugand - - - - 3offs - - - - prin - - - - (fla)g

acharmingfarmayellowmeadowanolderalderasleepingsteading

(Finlay 1966, p. 11)

The heavy use of assonance and repetition helps create a gentle but steady sense of movement. The lack of spaces between the words in red assists in creating a sense of constant motion, with no pauses for breath or contemplation, thus mimicking the way in which ambulatory viewers see the features of the landscape blurring into one another.

'Canal Scene' is an attractive poem, but it is less effective than its predecessor, *Canal Stripe Series 3* (1964). In this, Finlay's first concrete poem in book form, the reader is, writes Greg Thomas, 'metaphorically transported along the canal, objects homing into view as their craft approaches, then receding as another draws near. Crowning this combination of sensory effects is a physical analogy: the turning of the page itself becomes a stroke of the oar, a further propulsion across the water' (Thomas 2012, pp. 208-209). The book is in an A5 landscape format, with the words printed in a Johnston sans serif font[46] on the recto, then repeated in reduced text at the bottom right of the verso behind it, thus mimicking the effect of objects coming into view then receding; a 'cinematic sweep' as Thomas puts it (Thomas 2012, p. 208). The permutational word play of concrete poetry is reflected in Finlay's use of portmanteau words and neologisms, which are recombined throughout the book, with the repeated word

[46] A famous sans serif font designed by Eric Johnston, the British designer behind the London Underground font. It can be distinguished from the equally popular Gill Sans by the use of a diamond, rather than a circle, for the dots of the i and j.

'cathedral' inserted between each cycle. The portmanteau words 'correct' themselves in the final spread, where the objects appear in full sized text across the verso and recto:

hayboat

cathedral

housemill

windstack

haymill

cathedral

housestack

windboat

haystack

cathedral

houseboat

haystack cathedral | houseboat windmill

(Finlay 1964, pp. 7 – 31)

As Moeglin-Delcroix points out, the reader stops in front of this final double page 'as though before a painting: he or she has found the overall point of view, which the movement of the book has prepared'. The scenic elements are 'named and placed', she writes, 'in order such that they recreate a landscape'. This, she argues, 'is the opposite of the illustrative process of the calligram'. Linear discursivity is produced entirely by 'the placement, in the book, of words that are divided within themselves and unbound from each other... unlike regular books, this one not only describes what we can see

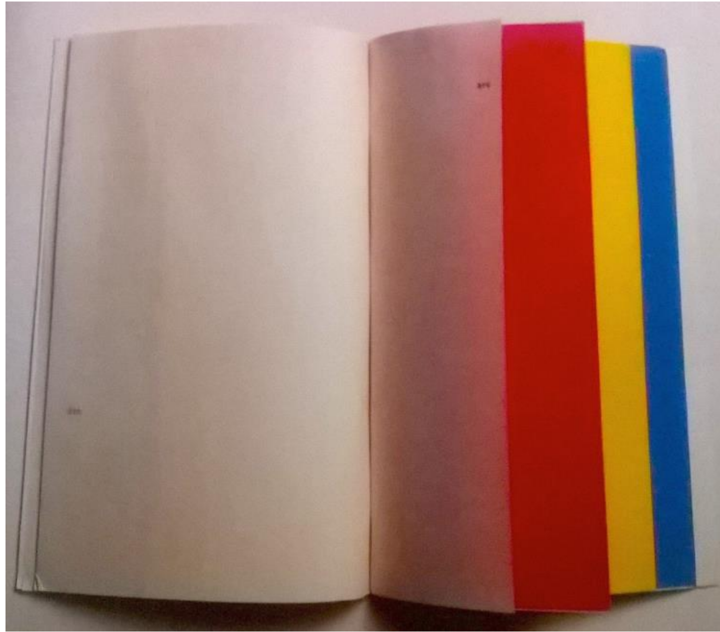
(the landscape), but give us the way to see it (the voyage)' (Murray & Johnson 2010, pp. 42-42).

Ocean Stripe Series 3 (1965) uses the medium of the book to help the reader see an altogether more mythic voyage. The book depicts the moment in Genesis, chapter 9, in which God tells of how he will mark the end of The Flood with a rainbow. This bow, emerging from behind the clouds, is a symbol of God's covenant with mankind, his promise not to flood the earth again. The reader only understands this from reading the insert, which features typewritten verses from the King James Bible:

> I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token
> of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall
> come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that
> the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my
> covenant, which is between me and you and every living
> creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more
> become a flood to destroy all flesh. (Finlay 1965, unpg)

The book itself uses minimal text, relying on an extra-linguistic element to convey meaning: colour. Finlay places the work 'ark' on each recto of the first four white double pages. This word is printed in a small Gill sans-serif font and appears each time three-quarters down the right-hand edge of the page. When we turn the fourth 'ark' page we are presented with a double-page of which the recto is cut short

halfway across, revealing three coloured pages of staggered lengths:



(Finlay 1965)

The single word 'arc' is printed in the top right-hand corner of the white recto. Thus, through a simple orthographic substitution, Finlay turns Noah's ark into the rainbow's arc. This arc, of course, is represented by the three coloured pages in red, yellow and blue, which gradually emerge from behind the cloud cover of the four white, but semi-translucent, pages. As Moeglin-Delcroix points out, 'the succession of white pages in the beginning expresses the duration of Noah's journey, while their onion-skin-thin paper allows the reader to glimpse, as the pages are turned, the colours of the final pages: the rainbow pierces the clouds and finally dispels them'. Moeglin-Delcroix adds that the book is a journey in two senses: temporal ('the narrative link between two episodes: the divine punishment of the Flood and God's reconciliation with humankind') and spatial ('the move from low to high, from water to sky'). Yet she adds that the story told by the book 'is not entirely present within it', its presence being both 'essential – since the narrative in question... is at once the narrative of beginnings and the first story – and indirect, in the form of a legend (which we must read in order to understand what we are seeing), printed on an insert'. Thus, she sees the book as 'the transcription of the story, purified by the only materials a book knows: paper, pages, colors, and letters' (Murray & Johnson 2010, p.

46). It might be argued that the inclusion of the insert is too much of a concession to the reader, serving to fix the poem-book's meaning and closing off other interpretations. Nonetheless, *Ocean Stripe Series 3* is a beautiful object, and more successful than the sculptural version Finlay mounted at Gledfield. Lacking the action of turning the pages, it does not manage to convey the sense of a journey as effectively.

Ocean Stripe Series 4 (1965) is a less heralded entry in the series, perhaps due to its relatively crude hand-drawn and handwritten 'folk' style, and also because it does not make as radical a use of the book medium as its predecessors. No analogies are made between the movement of the page and the movement of a body through space, and there is no experimental use of coloured and shaped paper. However, the book does create linear discursivity by unfolding a sequence of phrases based on the double-meaning of the word 'patch'. Each double-page spread offers variations on the characteristically Finlayan analogy between 'a patch on a sail' and 'a patch of potatoes'. What makes the book particularly significant is its use of illustrations: a reintegration of the real which allowed Finlay to exploit visual, as well as semantic analogies and associations. OSS4 does not only offer permutations and variations on a text: it translates the word-images into corresponding illustrations, finding 'visual rhymes' in the simplified forms of Emil Antonucci's line-drawings. The first doublepage spread presents two different objects signified by the word 'patch', then translates this double-meaning into a visual representation of these objects, objects which are shown to share a basic visual form. Thus the square outline of a patch on a sail can be transformed into the patch of land in which potatoes (as represented by a single, roughly looped pencil stroke) are planted. Compared to other concrete poems, *OSS3* relies less on orthographic and phonetic play ('ark/arc' etc), instead playing on the relationship between signifier and signified. The key to this work is that the signifiers are visual as well as verbal.

The poem-book's use of visual rhyme is heralded on the front cover, which, instead of the clean sans-serif title of its predecessor, simply presents a hand-drawn figure of 4 on a small landscape booklet. The number 4 is formed from the addition of a diagonal line to a cross, the arms of which are equal in length. This Greek cross brings religious connotations, reflecting the spiritual concerns of *Canal Stripe 3* and *Ocean Stripe 3*. The maritime context suggests the idea of a sailor's cross, something Finlay would return to with his sculptural poem-object 'Fisherman's Cross' (1966). Of course, there is a more obvious maritime association: the triangular part of the figure 4 resembles a boat's sail and mast, with the horizontal lines the surface of the ocean (an 'ocean stripe'). The triangle-as-sail motif is developed throughout the book: a 'patch on a sail' is represented by a large triangle with a stitched-on square patch, 'the patch of a sail' (i.e. the 'patch' of sea a boat sails over) is rendered as a smaller isosceles triangle atop a horizontal line. In the third instance ('the sea, patched with sails') triangles of differing sizes are used to represent sails and the jagged waves below them.

The text of the book is as follows (| represents the fold of the double-spread):

a patch on a sail | a patch of potatoes
the patch of a sail | earth, patched on potatoes the
sea, patched with sails | earth, patched with potatoes
the earth, patched with sea | star potatoes star sails
(Finlay 1965 (ii), pp. 4-11)

With reference to the illustrations, we can see how Finlay develops his ideas from page to page. As noted, the patch on the sail is 'rhymed' visually with the 'patch' of earth dotted with potatoes on the opposite page. Both patches are titled at an angle to form a diamond shape. The diagonal patch on the sail becomes a frame for a patch of potatoes in a field. On the next double-page, Finlay introduces the verb 'patched', but instead of the earth being patched *with* potatoes, it is patched *on* them. This phrase is curious – how would one 'patch' earth, as in dirt from the ground, *on* to a potato? Perhaps Finlay is describing the process by which earth is turned up by the plough and

piled or 'patched' onto the potatoes. The act of stitching a patch onto a sail is linked to the ploughing of a field – the plough's blade leaves its impression on the patch of land, leaving ridges between the potatoes.

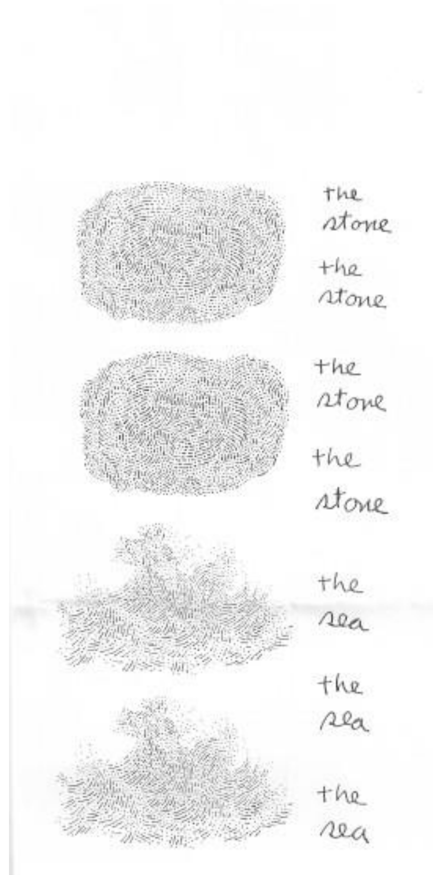
On the next double spread, Finlay 'corrects' the 'patched' sequence by inserting the expected preposition: the sea is 'patched *with*' sails and the earth 'patched *with'* potatoes. The angle of the square patch is also 'corrected', so that it is no longer askew. The straight lines of the earth's surface now sit on the x-axis, so they correspond with the straight lines of the 'sea'. Five straight lines represent ploughed fields, each 'patched' with potatoes which sit atop them. Then, on the following page, the straight lines of 'the earth' (note the use of the definite article, dispelling any ambiguity) are patched with sea, which, as in the previous spread, is represented not by a straight-line, but by a jagged one (which can also be read as a series of irregularly sized triangles). On the final page, night seems to fall over land and sea, with a row of stars shining over a row of potatoes, and a row of stars over a row of waves. In a letter to Morgan, Finlay explains that the image was not in fact a night scene, but an analogy between the:

> the earth when the potatoes have been thrown up on top of it (by the spade or digger, that machine that runs down the drills, scattering the potatoes on the earth-surface). Then, the potatoes look very pale, and shine, like a scatter of stars, on the dark earth. I also thought of the little star-shaped (pointed) sails, shining faintly on an expanse of dark sea – something I often saw in Orkney'. (IHF > EM 2 July 1966. Morgan MSS, Acc. 4848, Box 35, GUSP).

It is worth noting the analogy between the way in which the visual forms of the illustrations recombine basic elements (lines, shapes) and the way the words, letters and semantic units are re-organised. The 'stars' are drawn as simple asterisks, and the triangular shapes formed by each stroke correspond with the sails and the waves on previous pages. Thus a unity between text and illustration is achieved.

Finlay and Antonucci first introduced this approach in *POTH 17* (Finlay, January/February 1965)[47] in which the latter's illustrations accompany Robert Lax's poem. Antonucci arranges small, curved strokes of varying weight into various configurations to create semi-abstracted representations of Lax's words. Thus 'the stone/the stone' is represented by a boulder-like form, while 'the sea/the sea' sees Antonucci organise his tiny strokes into a wave-like form. The visual and verbal signs are co-dependent. Without the verbal referent, the reader may not be sure what the illustrations represent. Yet without the illustrations, the text itself is almost too minimalist to stand on its own: a sequence of concrete nouns in which tactile or 'hard' objects ('the stone', 'the vine') are contrasted with 'soft' or elemental ones ('the sea', 'water', 'the sun'). The verbal and visual signs develop in tandem, helping reintegrate language with the world. As with the sequential poem-books, the absence of linear syntax is compensated for by the movement of the pages:

[47] This number was the first in a run of single author-artist collaborations in *POTH*, which saw Finlay reconceive the magazine as a unified work akin to his own sequential poem-books of the time. These numbers (1722) are effectively artists' books, and while not all of them could be called concrete poetry (Ad Reinhardt's writings in *POTH 18* and Charles Biederman's 'An Art Credo' from *POTH 22* are hybrids of prose-poetry and art theory) Ronald Johnson and John Furnival's *Io and the Ox-Eye Daisy* is one of Wild Hawthorn's most successful realisations of the concrete poem as sequential-book.



POOR OLD TIRED HORSE: 17
Wild Hawthorn Press : Gledfield Farmhouse
Ardgay, Ross-shire : 9d per issue plus 3d p&p
poems ROBERT LAX drawings emil antonucci

the
stone

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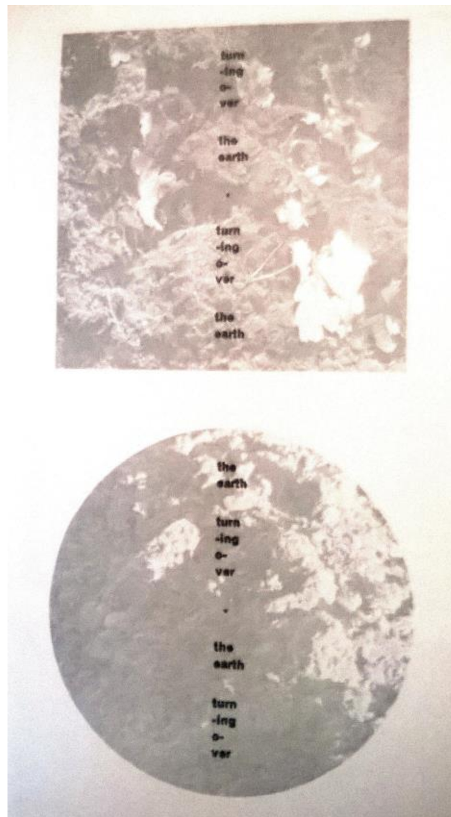
Building upon Moeglin-Delcroix's argument, I have demonstrated how the two modalities of discursive linearity and reference to the real (Murray & Johnson 2011, p. 39) are recuperated, firstly by the sequential structure of the book, and secondly, in a slight variation on her argument, by the incorporation of images. For MoeglinDelcroix photography is the medium with which to recuperate the real and she presumably privileges it over illustrations because they are a more direct representation of the real than the more impressionistic illustrations and material elements (such as the page size, paper type and colour in *OSS3*). I would still argue that the fundamental innovation is the introduction of a visual sign alongside a verbal one (i.e image and word) but I will grant that the photograph has its own

characteristics and brings 'the real' to life in a different way to an illustration. Having experimented with a range of illustration and design styles in both his own sequential books and the single author-artist run of *POTH,* Finlay's introduction of photography into the poem-books was the next logical step.

To illustrate her point about Finlay's use of photography, Moeglin-Delcroix discusses *Ocean Stripe 5 (*1967) in which photographs of Scottish fishing boats drawn from the pages of *Fishing News* are juxtaposed with quotations from Enrst Jandl, Paul De Vree and Kurt Schwitters about concrete and sound poetry. However, I will analyse a less-discussed poem, *Autumn Poem* with Audrey Walker (1966). Where Ocean Stripe Series 4 used illustrations of a patch of potatoes, *Autumn Poem* uses photographs of a patch of earth dotted with fallen oak leaves. This is overlaid with the text 'turning over the earth – turning over the earth'. The photography introduces an element of 'the real world', but this should not be mistaken for 'realism'. Various elements distance the photographs from the real world: the images are in black and white, they are cropped, they are overlaid with text. Furthermore, these real world elements exist within the space of the artificial art-object or artists' book. As a result, everyday objects from the world take on a symbolic value. The fallen leaves are of course a symbol of autumn, while the repeated 'turning' of the patch of earth stands for the turning of the day, the turning of the seasons, and the turning of the planet Earth. This relates to the wider context of agriculture, and the deep historical process of man working the earth, turning the soil. Following the first two identical pages, where the photograph is cropped into a square, Finlay performs a permutation of the text and the visual design. Over a circular cropped photograph of a plain patch of earth, the text reads 'the earth turning over – the earth turning over'.

The circular frame transforms the patch of earth into the planet Earth. A shadow looms over the left hand side of the image, thus giving a sense of the day turning to

night. Over the next three pages, Finlay progressively reduces the text: 'the earth turning over' to 'turning over' to 'the earth'. For the last of these, 'the earth', Finlay returns to the original image of a patch of earth dotted with leaves, completing the cycle of turns. Finlay goes full circle, relating the turning of the earth in agriculture to the turning of the seasons, determined by the turning of the planet earth. *Autumn Poem* is one of Finlay's most evocative sequential books, where the tension between 'the real' and the artificial produces a sense of order and a chain of associations.



(Finlay & Baxter 1966. Pp. 3-4)

Concrete poetry beyond the page: poster-poems and poem-objects

Using the structure of the book, illustration and photographs, Finlay continued the process, begun with his fauve poems, of reintegrating the world into his poetry. His

interest in media and materials soon led to poster-poems, standing poems and poemobjects which took his poetry *into* the world. As Stephen Bann notes, these works, displayed in galleries, parks, homes and gardens, could be said to be set in social space rather than in the private space of the printed book (Finlay, Alec 1994, p 62).

(Finlay 1964)

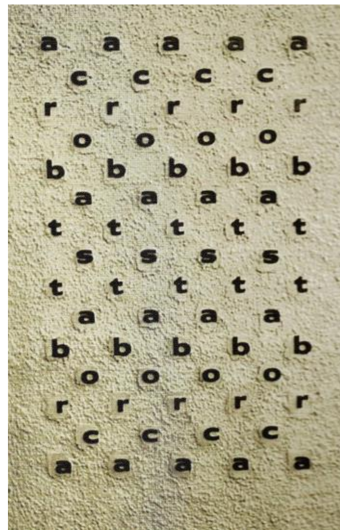
In 1964 Wild Hawthorn published a series of 'poem-prints' by Franz Mon, Pierre Albert-Birot, Ferdinand Kriwet, John Furnival and Finlay himself. These were, as Alec Finlay notes, inspired by the 'poeme-pancarte' Birot pioneered in the 1920s (Finlay 2012, p. 25). Finlay's 'Le Circus' (1964) pastiches dada posters, as Abrioux notes (Abrioux 1992, p. 83), by, as Lila Matsumoto adds, using 'different font types and non-textual elements, the interweaving of bright colours, and the variations in typographical arrangement' (Matsumoto 2012, online). In a visual rhyme which first originated in Finlay's short story 'The Boy and the Guess', a fishing boat, represented by the port code K47, is likened to a circus pony. Both leap across the space of the poster, which represents both the circus arena and the sea. In a letter to Emmett Williams, Finlay explains how the the poster compares the fishing smack's 'port and starboard lights to coloured blinkers, the crew to bare-back rider, the rainbow and its reflection on the sea to a hoop. The corks, nets, "etc" are introduced like lesser parts of the act' (Finlay

2012, p. 25). The playful sense of movement extends to the design of the poster itself which, as Matsumoto writes, 'imitates a circus: the words perform acrobatics within its parameters, entertaining the audience in their different guises, positions, and alignments' (Matsumoto 2012, online). There is a direct line from the more kinetic fauve poems of *Rapel*, such as 'Carousel' and 'mMmx', albeit with the action played out in the larger space of the poster. The medium itself helps bring the poem alive, not only in its size, but in its situation: displayed on a gallery wall, say, we are encouraged to view the poem as we would a painting in a frame. The medium and setting change the rules of engagement for poetry.

As an exercise in Civilising Dada, 'Le Circus' is clearly highly successful. The typographical arrangement, colour and design, combined with Finlay's metamorphosis of the boat/pony, transform the everyday in a cavalcade of energy and delight. Matsumoto also notes that while the poem may pay homage to the French avant-garde, 'the poem and circus are situated firmly on Scottish waters, with the reference to a boat registration number from Kirkwall, Orkney'. This merger of Dada aesthetics with the image of a traditional Scottish fishing smack evokes in the viewer 'a sense of defamiliarity and delight' and suggests the arrival of a Scottish avant-garde movement (Matsumoto 2012, online). As I demonstrated in chapter 1, Finlay had been toying with the idea of a 'Scotch' Dada for some time; 'Le Circus', with its pastiche of Dadaist aesthetics and Scottish reference points, was Finlay's most successful realisation of this to date, paving the way for the more complex interrogations of Dada and the avant-garde in works such as *Ocean Stripe Series 5*. While the sense of movement in 'Le Circus' was evoked by a freer arrangement of words across the space, 'Acrobats' (1965) appears to represent a return to the suprematist word grids of 'Homage To Malevich'. Yet unlike 'Homage To Malevich', where the words are 'locked' in stasis, 'Acrobats' uses the repetitive structure of the grid to create a constant sense

of movement. By placing the word 'acrobats' on the diagonal, Finlay creates new visual patterns which evoke the leaping and running of a circus performer. Furthermore, as Matsumoto points out, 'within the particular arrangement of the letters, new anagrammatic words emerge which can be associated with acrobatics, such as "bats" and "robot" (Matsumoto 2012, online).

Arriving at Gledfield, Ross-shire in 1965 finally provided Finlay with a natural environment in which he could embed his poems. With the help of Dick Sheeler, Finlay's first collaborator, the first outdoor poems appeared, large-scale versions of concrete and poster-poems, including 'Acrobats' which projected them into relief:



(Finlay 2012, p. 35)

In a letter to Creeley, a palpably excited Finlay describes these works:

> I have been making big versions of some of my poems – 'ajar', in a triple version, reaches right up the stairs and looks very classical and expensive. It's unfortunately too big to photograph in its place but we did try to take one outside... I also did 'acrobats' and 'happy/apple' on the wall, and, with Dick's help, there is a 14 foot version of 'horizon of holland' in the garden, looking half like a giraffe and half like a striped tree... and very gay. Now we are doing a 3-dimensional 'ark/arc' by the back steps. Architects really ought to get interested in the possibilities of concrete poetry, especially now that they can see the real thing here... The purer ones (the poems) really look quite the thing, and not eccentric in the least.
>
> (IHF / Robert Creeley, 23.8.65 Robert Creeley MSS. 1959-1997, Collection no. M0662, Box 48, Folder 25,Stanford)

As Alec Finlay writes, the potential of the outdoor poem was clear, allowing Finlay to realise 'his youthful dream of an ideal place, where the word might be at home in the world and the world be only that home, by the new means of translating poemobjects into a permanent setting', with the addition of garden features (Finlay 2012, pp. 35-36). As Finlay wrote to Mary Ellen Solt, 'new means of constructing a poem aesthetically, ought to lead to consideration of new materials. If these poems are for "contemplating", let them be made with that intention, and let them be sited where they can be contemplated' (IHF > MES, 27.1.67, Finlay MSS 1, Box 1, Lilly Library)

Writing to Henry Clyne in 1966, Finlay discussed the possibilities of this new kind of concrete poetry: 'Far from being an end... it is really only a beginning... I think the garden, and the church, and the side of the block of flats, are the places for poems' (Finlay 2012, p. 37). At the 1967 Brighton Festival he presented poems on sandblasted glass, stone and metal, which were placed outdoors. Photographs of some of these appear in *POTH 24* (1967) alongside some of the other concrete poetry installations, including Morgan's poster-poems and the typographical columns of Hansbjorg Mayer, foreboding perspex tubes printed with abstract poems in dense
typescript.

Finlay's consideration of new materials saw him experiment with glass and stone. As he wrote to Creeley, 'It's time concrete poetry came of age and had the same standards of production as any other art that has a visual element. I feel that mixture of anguish and excitement about the glass-poems that denotes a good thing, if it is managed' (IHF > Robert Creeley, 25 Dec 1965, Stanford). If the poster-poems and wall poems represented the projection of concrete poems into a social space, the inscription on glass, argues Bann, went much further, 'since it formed a material imprint upon the hard, intractable surface' (Finlay, Alec 1994, 62). Writing to George Mackay Brown, Finlay expresses his delight at the sandblasted glass version of 'Wave

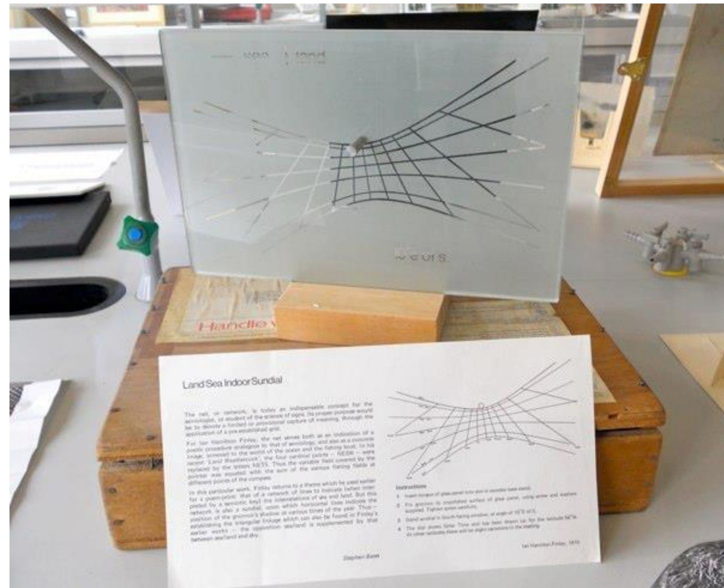
Rock':

> It's a long narrow poem, made up of the words 'wave' and 'rock', with some letters over-printed, making the seaweedy confused area where land debates with sea; and these overprintings give the suggestion of the word 'wrack'... no, it doesn't really work on the typewriter but you can see how [wave/rock typed so that w and k are distinct, and the other 3 letters are overprinted] gives the 'shadow' of wrack, and the look of tangled seaweed, and this is brought out more in the glass because the poem is so clearly an object or *thing*... Anyway, I am pleased with it, and I can't understand why other concrete poets have not made this obvious step into actual object-poems – it seems so implicit in the whole way of working. The actual letters, too, are so beautiful, being hollowed out of the glass – they are poems a blind man could read. (The letters are formed by jets of sand hitting the glass at very high speed). I make little stands of plain wood, to hold them. But they are very expensive, and beside, one must first prepare a finished design, actual size. So it is much work. But crafts are good.
>
> (IHF > GMB, 13 July 1966, George Mackay Brown MSS, Acc. 1029 Box 6, NLS)

While the print version of the poem is appealing, the transparency of the glass allows the surrounding environment to be incorporated into the poem, thus transforming any space into a seascape, over which the waves crash into a rocky shore.

(Finlay 1966, online)

As we can see here, the glass also catches the light, putting the lettering into relief, and creating a range of interesting effects. Finlay further exploited such effects with his 'Land Sea Indoor Sundial' (1970), which combines one of his favourite traditional garden features with modern production techniques:



(Finlay 1970)

The use of the sundial, a traditional garden form, reflects Finlay's move towards the exploration of classical forms and themes from a modernist starting point. As Bann writes, Finlay was 'well aware by this stage that what had generally come to be called "concrete" designated an artistic approach in many ways the very opposite of his own intentions. He began to speculate on the need for what he called a "new classicism"' (Finlay, Alec 1994, p. 61). Finlay had grown increasingly disillusioned with the concrete poetry movement and was dismissive of the kind of then fashionable work which eschewed poetic meaning for decorative arrangements of text. Such works, he felt, were made by graphic designers, not poets. His reflection on a new classicism led him to ponder what Stephen Bann suggests might be 'defined as the problem of *inscription* and the problem of the *sign*'. He explains further:

> Inscription is the problem of the relation of the work to the world, the problem of its *material* embodiment. The problem of the sign (or of sign and supersign) involves on the other hand the relation of part to whole within the work considered as structure'. Both are integrally connected with the question of classicism, as an overall aesthetic stance... The poem as object could be abandoned, up to a point, in the material world. Yet as a balancing compensation, the poet's act of inscription – his projection of the symbolic order upon the real – acquired intensified force.
> (Finlay, Alec 1994, pp. 61-62)

Finlay ponders the question of inscription and sign in a letter to Crombie Saunders:

> I have lately been pondering a possible relationship between certain concrete poems and the kind of inscriptions that are carved on tombstones. One could argue that the inscriptions are brief, and often set small in a large space, because each letter must be carved; but it would be equally true to note that the brevity is part – as the space is part – of some kind of implicit statement about life, death and time (if you follow)... The image is the poem; the rest is padding and a technical error, almost grotesque precisely because the image itself is the result of such a cultured way of seeing.
> (IHF > Crombie Saunders, 1966, private collection)

Brevity would be at the heart of Finlay's next crucial innovation, the one-word poem. While initially conceived for the final issue of *POTH,* these poems were later inscribed on stone and embedded in the garden at Stonypath. A distillation of the monostich, or one line poem, the one-word poems also have a certain relation to inscribed forms such as the epigram. While one-word poems may seem more verbal than visual, their shape and layout contribute to their overall effect. The one-word poem was to be composed of a title of any length and a single word. Its meaning pivots on the relationship between title and poem-word, producing something like a riddle. While their effect is mostly linguistic, playing on Saussurian semiotics, the one-word poem also works on a spatial level. The title of the poem could be of any length, but they were to be set out in a particular way. As he explained in a letter to his friend Kenelm Cox:

> the one-word poem should be composed of a title plus one word. All (true) poems have form, and in this case one should see the title and the word as being 2 straight lines, which come together forming a

corner; the corner is the form of this poem. Only, these corners
must be so constructed as to be open (opening) in all directions.
That is the paradox. (Finlay 2009, p. 39) Their form, as we see below, is very much a model of order:

The Boat's Blueprint

water

(Finlay 1967, p. 8)

Placed in the centre of the page, surrounded by negative space, the form achieves the openness Finlay talks of. Like his concrete poems, Finlay's one-word poems are an invitation. The test of these poems was, for Finlay, whether they were memorable and resonant. This example certainly achieves such an aim. As Finlay explained, 'the shape of the boat is determined by the nature of water, or he who understands water may calculate the appearance of the boat; further, water is blue, water is blue print (on white stones), water is clear and has lines on it, like a blueprint' (Finlay 2009, p. 40). As Finlay commented in a letter to Ernst Jandl, one of several poets he invited to contribute to the one-word *POTH,* the form has 'haiku-brevity, without reading like a pseudo-Japanese poem. Or in another way, it is very close to the classical Latin epitaph or epigram' (Finlay 2009, p. 41). Despite its classical aspects, the one-word poem still relates to modernism, being situated in a tradition that runs from the Poundian epigram, through objectivism, to concrete poetry. Thus we can see how Finlay goes beyond the arriere-garde project of concrete poetry to reintroduce the classical values of poetry and art, working through the tradition in order to inscribe his ideas onto a landscape.

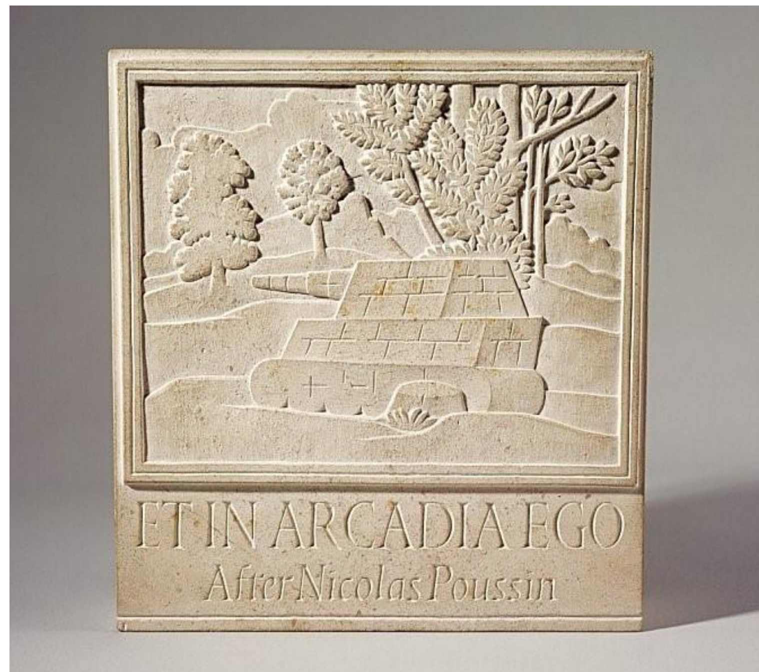
Conclusion

The 1960s saw Finlay trying to find his place in the world as an artist and a human being. The homely avant-garde and the American avant-garde provided him with communities of like-minded souls and introduced him to new ideas and forms. While he continued the democratising aims of the homely avant-garde by championing the new poetry through *POTH*, Finlay's embrace of concrete saw him move further away from the sociopolitical aims of Morgan and Henderson. For the classically-minded Finlay, the social value of poetry was in its form rather than its content. Concrete poetry offered a model of order, an image of goodness and sanity. As Stephen Bann has written, concrete poetry helped Finlay find his place in the world through 'the colonising project of language' (Finlay, Alec 1993, p. 57). Yet the beautiful objects of concrete were not to be so perfect that they forget that the world is to be made into a home. The concrete poem exists in its own space, yet Finlay found a number of ways in which to connect it to the world: images drawn from Perthshire and Orkney life, themes of love, friendship and play. By creating sequential poem-books and poem-objects, Finlay explored Gomringer's idea of the concrete poem as a play-area in ways which transcended medium: these were useful objects, inviting the reader/viewer to play. Bringing his poem-objects into public spaces and the environment represents another leap forward, fulfilling Gomringer's aim of restoring the social function of poetry. These are not monumental works of public art, but artworks that can be used and enjoyed. We might think of Finlay's notion of mounting 'Acrobats' in a school playground, or the glass poems, which play on the natural light and enframe the surrounding environment through linguistic and graphical play. The move to Stonypath and closure of *POTH* in 1967 saw Finlay playing a less public role, while his legal battles with the publisher Stuart Montgomery led him to fall out with several of

his peers. As his neo-classicism emerged, Finlay found himself at odds with certain avant-garde trends, and he found himself looking back to more traditional forms. However, all this should not be interpreted as a retreat from the world, or a move away from the innovations of concrete poetry. As I shall argue in the following chapter, by bringing the word into the world through his artworks and garden poems, Finlay developed new ways in which art can help humans relate to the environment.

Chapter Four

Et In Arcadia Ego: Ian Hamilton Finlay's Complex Pastoral



As the previous chapters have shown, much of Ian Hamilton Finlay's work of the early sixties was concerned with his search for a rural idyll, his own Land of Counterpayne. Pastoral imagery runs through his Perthshire poems - the whispering pines of 'Dalchonzie', the 'Little Beat Mill In The West', the 'apple-y smell' of the whitewashed house in 'Lucky' (Finlay 2012, pp. 127-130) - and the fauve poems of *Rapel* - the little burn that plays its mouth organ (Finlay 1963). Orkney poems such as 'The Little Pond of Oo' and 'Snow In Rousay' represent a kind of island pastoral, while *Glasgow Beasts* could be described as a form of urban pastoral, with its cast of foxes, zebras, budgies and horses bringing the natural world into the city. Beginning with the 1966 concrete alphabet poem 'Arcady', Finlay makes an explicit engagement with the classical pastoral, leading to the creation of the Arcadian realm that is Little Sparta. But what are we to make of the above artwork, made with John Andrew in 1977, where a Panzer tank disturbs the peace of an Arcadian grove? The key is in Finlay's allusion to Nicholas Poussin. In the old master's painting, shepherds come across the tomb inscribed with the eponymous Latin phrase. As the art historican Erwin Panofsky argues, the I (ego) in Arcadia is Death. The tomb is a *memento mori,* reminding us that even in the 'ideal

realm' of Arcady, death is a presence (Panofsky 1955, p. 297). By turning the tomb into a tank, Finlay brings the mechanised violence of the 20th century into the natural world, reminding us of the fragility of the idyll. This work encapsulates Leo Marx's idea of the complex pastoral, whereby an idealised vision is contrasted with a world which is more 'real' (Marx 2000, p. 25). This dialectic runs throughout Finlay's work; as Alec Finlay argues, his father's work is a lifelong dialogue between oppositions (Finlay, Alec 2011, online). In this chapter I will use the idea of the complex pastoral to discuss the tensions and oppositions in Finlay's landscape poetry and art, ranging from his early stories and concrete poetry to his garden poems and environmental artworks.

Looking back through the earlier poems, we can see the first signs of this tension within Finlay's vision of the pastoral. Several poems see Finlay gently undercutting the pastoral idyll with both humour and melancholy. We can enjoy a mischievous chuckle at Finlay setting traps for the visitors to his house in Orkney, and sympathise with the plight of the poor old horse dragging its coal cart ('ho the heavy') and struggling with its feed bag in *Glasgow Beasts*. Then there are the short stories, which I will discuss in detail in this chapter, where Finlay presents personal disappointments and sadnesses, death, poverty and class tensions alongside moments of beauty and sentiment in rural Perthshire. In chapter three, I discussed Finlay's recuperation of the real in his concrete poetry. As discussed in the previous chapter, Finlay makes reference to 'the real' in order to ensure that his work never quite attains a '*glittering* perfection which forgets that the word is, after all, to be made by man into his home' (Finlay 2009, p. 22). While Stonypath seemed to represent the rural idyll Finlay had longed for, it was also his home. The reality of living and working the land and surviving harsh winters ran up against the idealised vision of Arcady. This, combined with his personal battles with publishers and local authorities, saw the garden begin to reflect the violence in nature

and humanity. Yet Finlay would counter these forces with visions of beauty drawn from various pastoral traditions: the Old Masters Poussin and Lorraine, the English garden tradition, his own Scottish idylls. Finlay's vision of the pastoral is a complex one, where the ideal comes into conflict with realistic and mythic violence. By applying Leo Marx's theory of the sentimental and complex pastoral to Finlay's stories, poems and garden works, I aim to gain a nuanced understanding of his engagement with the pastoral as both a literary genre and as a mode of consciousness or area of content. In addition to Marx, I draw on Raymond Williams' (Karl) Marxist analysis of the country and the city in English literature, applying his ideas to the context of the Perthshire estates where Finlay lived and worked in the 1940s and '50s. To discuss the tensions in Finlay's work, I also make use of Terry Gifford's notion of the pastoral movement of 'retreat and return' (Gifford 1999, p. 1).

The Interrupted Idyll

In his seminal study of the pastoral in American literature, *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Leo Marx notes that Arcadia is a utopian idyll, situated between 'primitive' nature and civilisation (Marx 2000, p. 19). Its 'symbolic landscape', as created by Virgil in the *Eclogues,* is 'a delicate blend of myth and reality'. Out of this delicate blend emerge two main forms of pastoral: the popular and sentimental, and the complex and imaginative. The sentimental pastoral is an escapist vision of rural life, a 'soft veil of nostalgia that hangs over our urbanized landscape'. Marx is not unsympathetic to the sentimental pastoral; it expresses 'the yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence "closer to nature," that is the psychic root of all pastoralism – genuine and spurious' (Marx 2000, p. 6). Yet, he asks, 'what possible bearing can the urge to idealize a simple, rural environment have upon the lives men lead in an intricately

organized, urban, industrial, nuclear armed society?' (Marx 2000, p. 5). He acknowledges that this popular and sentimental form of pastoralism can have a 'pernicious' aspect, working in the service of 'a reactionary or false ideology, thus helping to mask the real problems of an industrial civilisation' (Marx 2000, p. 7). A 'shallow, not to say perverse, conception of reality' is inherent to sentimental pastoralism, he argues (Marx 2000, p. 8).

The sentimental pastoral can be taken out of its literary context to describe our experience of the real world: 'We say of a pleasing stretch of *country* that it is a "pastoral scene"' (Marx 2000, p. 24). Our reactions to literature, however, are seldom as simple. Through their sophistication, literary works 'manage to qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture' (Marx 2000, p. 25). Out of this emerges the complex and imaginative pastoral. As Marx puts it, in the complex pastoral, the pastoral *ideal* is circumscribed by the pastoral *design* (Marx 2000, p. 23). By *design*, Marx means 'the larger structure of thought and feeling of which the *ideal* is a part' (Marx 2000, p. 24). The pastoral design, he writes, 'embraces some token of a larger, more complicated order of experience', bringing a world which is more "real" into juxtaposition with an idyllic vision (Marx 2000, p. 25). As Terry Gifford puts it, the necessity of return [to the real] in the pastoral design, always leads to a qualification of the idyllic retreat: 'What the pastoral delivers at its best is ultimately an implicit realism' (Gifford 1999, p. 10). The dominant counterforce in the pastoral design of our age, Marx argues, is industrialization, 'represented by images of machine technology' (Marx 2000, p. 26). One such image is the steam train which disturbs a peaceful woodland scene in Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.* This train, he argues, is the archetypal 'machine in the garden' in American literature, an irruption of modernity into the idyllic pastoral dream (Marx 2000, p. 15). The relevance of this to Finlay, with his Arcadian tanks and his Orkney helicopters, is clear. Alec Finlay

recognises his father's work as a 'lifelong dialogue between oppositions'. Finlay's complex pastoralism is a dialogue between 'the pastoralism of sentiment and the pastoralism of mind' (Marx 2006, p. 32). Counterforces to the sentimental and idealising elements in his work include literary devices such as realism and irony, as well as images of art, culture, technology and violence, all of which will be discussed in relation to the early stories and poems, as well as his garden art and poetry.

The complex pastoral in Finlay's short stories

A complex pastoral design frames even Finlay's earliest work, with the pastoral ideal subject to a range of counterforces, including realism, irony and violence. His short stories of the 1950s draw on his experiences of a childhood spent between the country and the city, and his contemporary life in rural Perthshire. As Ken Cockburn writes, this limited world was no disadvantage, as Finlay was interested in 'universal problems treated in particular terms' (Finlay, 2004, p. xvii). The world of Perthshire was 'as unique as Faulkner's Deep South' (Finlay, 2004, p. xvii), Finlay argued, and from the local, Finlay would draw universal experiences. Many of Finlay's stories express a delight in nature, with the rural representing an idyllic retreat from city life. In 'A Break For Tea', even the infamous Scottish weather becomes part of the idyll, as fishermen huddle round a fire and play 'Home Sweet Home' on a mouth organ, accompanied by the 'roaring of the rain', 'the sad bleating of the moorland sheep', and the gurgling of the 'audibly brown' ditches (Finlay 2004, p. 4). Yet as I shall demonstrate, this idealising tone is often undercut with realism and irony. Fishing and tea drinking take on an almost mythic quality in tales of childhood such as 'The Blue-Coated Fishermen'; they are rituals which bring people together to create a sense of continuity and respect between generations. The countryside may represent an idyllic retreat for the young

boys of 'The Old Man and the Trout', 'The Seabed' and 'Straw', but the idealising impulse is balanced with a sense of disappointment and danger. Contrasts between the country and city lead to humorous situations in stories like 'The Two Fishermen' but Finlay is careful to avoid simplistic binaries between the places. Finlay's rural Perthshire, which he astutely compared to the decaying plantation society of Faulker's Yoknapatawpha county, is effectively a feudal society, a world of country houses and hunting estates, populated by wealthy landowners and poor tenant farmers. In stories such as 'The Encounter' and 'Over The Sharp Stones', Finlay explores the tensions between landowners and those who live and work the land. 'The Potato Planters and the Old Joiner's Funeral' and 'The Fight In The Ditch', meanwhile, depict the drudgery of agricultural work and the iniquity of this feudal world with a realism reminiscent of Finlay's beloved Chekov and Turgenev. Thus, in
Finlay's complex pastoral design, the 'real' intrudes on the beauty of his idyllic retreat.

As I shall argue, the complex pastoral of the latter stories represent a challenge to the kind of sentimental and ideological pastoral criticised by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*. Contrasts between the rural idyll and the reality of the world, writes Williams, are a characteristic of the classical pastoral going back to Virgil and Theocritus. The idealizing tone of the classical pastoral, he argues, is 'not yet abstracted from the whole of a working country life' (Williams, 1975 [1973], p. 28). Even in works which 'inaugurate tones and images of an ideal kind, there is almost invariably a tension with other kinds of experience: summer with winter; pleasure with loss; harvest with labour; singing with a journey; past or future with the present' (Williams, 1975 [1973], p. 29). With the advent of the Renaissance, however, these 'living tensions are excised, until there is nothing countervailing, and selected images stand as themselves: not in a living but an enamelled world. (Williams, 1975 [1973], p. 29). Thus, by the 18th century

Alexander Pope could write '[w]e must therefore use some illusion to render a Pastoral delightful; and this consists in exposing the best side only of a shepherd's life, and in concealing its miseries'. The 'tradition', said Pope, had been altered (Williams, 1975 [1973], p. 30). Williams goes on to discuss the process of 'selective cultural adaptation' in which English pastoral of the 17th and 18th centuries served to uphold the values of the landowning class. This version of pastoral offered an 'idealization of actual English country life and its social and economic relations' (Williams 1975, p. 38), concealing the exploitation of the people who lived and worked the land.

Finlay's stories about childhood appear to offer his most sentimental versions of pastoral, with their idyllic scenes of fishing and tea-drinking. Ken Cockburn astutely notes that the boys in Finlay's stories have an attitude to the world that is similar to the artist's: 'capable of engagement with it, without having to take responsibility for material or economic production. Both have a certain freedom to appreciate the world simply as it is, without anxiety as how best to exploit it for gain' (Finlay, 2004, p. xvii).[48] As noted above Finlay's childhood was spent between the country and the city. Thus the countryside is presented as a retreat, but this is qualified by the necessary return to the city. As Terry Gifford argues, the 'fundamental pastoral movement [is] some form of retreat and return', either within the text, or in the sense that the pastoral retreat 'returned some insights relevant to the urban audience' (Gifford 1999, p. 1). In 'The Blue Coated Fishermen' (1953) a boy dresses up 'to resemble his idea of a fisherman', and heads out of Glasgow on a tram which moves 'with a choppy motion like a boat in a swell' (Finlay 2004, p. 5). Even in this early story, Finlay is developing his signature images and skill for transformation, with our urban fisherman 'sailing' to the fishing ground, a tram becoming a boat, and the landscape being compared to a body of water.

[48] Note the ironic treatment of his adult self in stories such as 'The Money' and 'Advice from the Author' where Finlay presents himself as a somewhat naïve and unworldly character, committed to his art and the homely pleasures of fishing and tea-drinking, but lacking financial nous or city knowledge.

Finlay presents the pastoral and the maritime as two sides of the same coin: fishermen are farmers, the rivers and seas their fields. But this tram is no romantic fishing boat, where sailors huddle over a steaming billy can of tea, it's a cramped, noisy and smoky place. Yet sunlight strikes 'through the spaces between the tenements' flickering 'across faces, raincoats and coloured scarves', suggesting the promise of a semi-rural idyll beyond the urban sprawl (Finlay 2004, p. 5). The stagnant 'green water' (Finlay, 2004, p. 6) of the canal running past the Maryhill tenements is compared with the 'open country' and 'rippling water' (Finlay 2004, pp. 6 & 7) of the fishing and bathing spots he visits. Inexperienced, the boy fails to catch any fish. However, he exchanges bait with some kindly fishermen and enjoys a cup of their strong black tea. They also gift him with six small trout, which are threaded through with a piece of string to resemble 'coloured clothes pegs dangling on a line' (Finlay 2004, p. 10), an image Finlay would return to with his Toy Fish of 1965 (Abrioux 1992, p. 2). By the end of the story, the boy has a newfound confidence, having gained expert advice on fishing and tea-making. He discards his mother's weak brew and fixes himself 'the real thing - good tarry brew' (Finlay 2004, p. 12).

As charming as these stories are, Finlay resists the temptation to oversentimentalise the dynamic of retreat and return. Contrasts and tensions are built into his complex pastoral design. Young boys will return from their rural retreats with insights into the often disappointing reality of the adult world, in ways that are both comic and poignant. In 'The Sea Bed', a boy is both pleased and disturbed by the sight of a cod, which 'had come like a herald from the sea-depths'. This sighting encourages the boy to imagine the sea-bed. Suddenly, it becomes 'real to him, and he could feel it going out and out, below the sea, further down than even it was there, and frightening to think of' (Finlay 2004, p. 32). What begins as a simple pastoral tale of two boys out fishing takes on a wider scope, as their activities encourage them to think about the

world beyond the safe confines of arcadia. A similar loss of innocence occurs in 'The Old Man and the Trout', where an old man instructs two boys on the art of fishing. Together, they see a splendid trout, which swims out of reach of their reach. Later, unbeknownst to the old man, the boy finds the fish floating dead in a pool, a bluebottle crawling over its eye. It had died as a result of swallowing the boy's inadequate hook, but too ashamed to explain what happened he buries it. When the old man later says it was a pity they lost the trout, the boy can't bear to tell the truth, 'for I guessed that it would have broken his heart' (Finlay 2004, p. 52). The outcome of 'Straw', later reworked as the play 'The Estate Hunters', offers a more melancholic and ironised sense of retreat and return, as a father and son return from an unsuccessful fishing trip to their tenement flat, still dreaming of one day finding a home in the country.

As Gifford writes, 'Pastoral is essentially a discourse of retreat which may either simply *escape* from the complexities of the city, the court, the present, "our manners", or *explore* them' (Gifford 1999, p. 46). It is his exploration of the relationship between country and city in the context of post-war Scotland which helps elevate Finlay's childhood stories to complex pastoral. Certainly, there are tensions: take 'The Two Fishers' in which an old shepherd invites two young fishermen from the nearby town to dry off in his cottage. As they sip the ubiquitous Finlayan black tea, the shepherd regales them with tall tales. The young men give each other knowing looks, thinking they've heard it all before. Well aware he is being patronised, the shepherd stops his tale and claims he can hear the engine of the laird's car coming. The laird, he claims, does not take kindly to poachers. The fishermen may think they are wise to the ramblings of this country bumpkin, but they fall for his ruse hook, line and sinker. 'Just the very day for trouts, just the very day...' says the old shepherd as the pair make a panicked exit (Finlay 2004, p. 18). This wily character has the last laugh, his eyes

twinkling 'like two large raindrops in the shadow' as he begins to compose a tale about two fishermen from the town, which he of course embroiders and improves.

The binary of the country and the city is further complicated by the landscape itself. Perthshire, with its rolling fields, forests and country estates, is a very different Scotland to that celebrated by Romantic seekers of the sublime: there are no mountains, only hills. The settings of Perthshire, and the semi-rural outskirts of Glasgow, are not remote wildernesses, but 20th century landscapes shaped by human intervention in the form of farms, houses and roads. The countryside in these stories is never too far from the town or the city. There is a regular flow of people and trade between country and town. While Finlay does contrast country and city, he also looks for points of connection. Rural elements find their urban counterparts: country hill ponies and city coal horses, gamekeepers and welfare officers. Most significantly, Finlay's sympathy for the everyday people over the wealthy landowners and authority figures transcends their location.

'Encounter', with its tense confrontation between a poacher from the city and the gamekeeper of a Perthshire estate introduces the issues of class and land ownership to Finlay's complex pastoral design. As previously noted, Raymond Williams demonstrates how the neo-pastoral literature of the 17th and 18th century upheld the structures of land ownership as an idealised 'natural order'. Williams notes how an artificial mode of eclogue and idyll developed in 'the direction and in the interest of a new kind of society: that of a developing agrarian capitalism'. This artificial idyll of 'extended manors, neo-classical mansions' he reminds us, was created through a long and systematic process of exploitation and seizure (Williams 1975 [1973) p. 132). 'It is not easy to forget', he writes, 'that Sidney's *Arcadia*, which gives a continuing title to English neo-pastoral, was written in a park which had been made by enclosing a whole village and evicting the tenants. (Williams, 1975 [1973], p. 33). This model of land

ownership of course extended to Scotland; indeed feudal tenure was only abolished in 2004, and the large hunting estates remain intact. Williams notes how counter-pastoral texts such as George Crabbe's long poem 'The Village' (1783) challenged the ideology of the country house by presenting a realistic portrait of rural life. It is tempting to see some of Finlay's stories as modern Scottish examples of counter-pastoral: the class tensions of 'Encounter', the bleak realism of 'The Fight In The Ditch' or 'The Potato Planters and the Old Joiner's Funeral'. However, as they do not completely reject the pastoral, I prefer to see them as examples of Finlay's complex pastoral, in that their design accommodates both a celebration and critique of the genre.

In 'Encounter', a working class fisherman - Finlay eschews the pejorative term, 'poacher', with its connotations of criminality and desperation – engages in a battle of wills with a gamekeeper. As far as this fisherman is concerned there is 'no such thing as private ground'. We learn that the fisherman is a miner by trade, who, 'when he had completed his five or six pit-shifts each week, felt free to fish wherever he pleased... he came and went so circumspectly he was seldom noticed' (Finlay 2004, p. 72). '"Trout belong to no one till they are caught"' he tells the keeper. Finlay's narrator refers to this as a 'coaldust ingrained truism, an instinctive rather than conscious thought' (Finlay 2004, p. 73). The story is reminiscent of the apocryphal tale told by land campaigner Andy Wightman, where a Scottish miner is walking home one evening with a brace of pheasants in his pockets. He unexpectedly meets the landowner who informs him this is his land and he better hand over the

pheasants.

> 'Your land, eh?' asks the miner.
> 'Yes,' replies the laird, 'and my pheasants.'
> 'And who did you get this land from?'
> 'Well, I inherited it from my father.'
> 'And who did he get it from?' the miner insists.
> 'His father of course. The land has been in my family for over 400 years,' the laird splutters.

'Ok, so how did your family come to own this land 400 years ago?' the miner asks.
'Well... well... they fought for it!'
'Fine,' replies the miner. 'Take your jacket off and I'll fight you for it now.' (Wightman 2013, p. 5)

As Wightman notes, this tale neatly illustrates 'the extent to which land rights which appear legitimate and almost sacred today are, in fact, the product of a long and none-too-wholesome history' (Wightman 2013, p. 5). While it would be a stretch to describe Finlay as a left-wing land rights activist, his story does reflect the tensions between those who lived and worked the land and those who owned it. In reclaiming the land from its wealthy owners the fisherman upsets the artificial order of the country-house pastoral. Arguably, his love and respect for the land in many ways make him the true pastoralist. The countryside is his retreat from a life of hard work in the enclosed spaces of the mine. His relationship with the land is sustainable; unlike the land-owning aristocrats who hunt and fish for sport, he takes only what he needs. In contrast to the dignified and defiant fisherman, the keeper comes across as a bully and a coward, an agent of the laird rather than a free man. He itches to shoot the miner, just as he illegally shoots the 'shrill blue-jays', but he hasn't the gall. Both the miner and the blue-jays are to him 'trespassers... a menace to the estate' (Finlay 2004, p. 72).

In the almost supernatural 'contest of instincts' which ensues, the miner wins, as he seems to invoke 'phantom comrades of the coalface' who gather 'around him in silent ranks' (Finlay 2004, p. 73). Unsettled, the keeper walks away, defeated, warning the miner he must be gone by the morning. And of course, when the keeper returns the next day, the miner is gone, leaving behind the ashes of a fire, into which the frustrated keeper discharges his gun, a futile and pathetic act. His job is to keep people like the miner out of the countryside. By defying the estate and seeking his own idyll, the miner challenges the reactionary ideology of the country house. In this story, the pastoral

movement of retreat and return becomes political, with the miner claiming his right to the land.

In 'Over the Sharp Stones', Finlay explores the relations between landowners and their tenants in a more humourous, albeit somewhat mordant, manner. A
gamekeeper stops an old man to ask if he has seen any of his missing rabbit traps. Reinforcing the sense that Finlay is deliberately dealing in archetypes as a satirical device, the keeper's eyes are described as 'cruel but simply for the same reason a ploughman's hands are hard-skinned: on account of his trade' (Finlay 2004, p. 61). The old man claims he has seen no trap, speculating, somewhat unconvincingly, that a dog or a sheep must have taken it. But when he returns to his cottage we discover the old man has been stealing the traps all along, describing them as '"cruel things"'. The old man's motives are not particularly noble, however. He springs the trap, its teeth snapping together with 'a vicious sound, scaring a pigeon from inside the wood into the light air'. Yet he is content to put out his own snares, a more primitive form of trap, smiling in bed as he hears 'the shrill, white squeals of a rabbit caught in a snare... his eye on the black stew-pot' (Finlay 2004, p. 64). Any appreciation the reader may have of the old man's outfoxing of the keeper is undermined by his hypocrisy. While this is not quite a Ted Hughesian vision[49] of nature as a bleak battle for survival, Finlay's description of the rabbit's death throes provides a counterpastoral irruption of reality. The traps and snares are machines in the garden of Perthshire, interrupting the pastoral idyll with a violent flash.

This realism could be related to the anti-pastoral tradition identified by Gifford, in which 'the natural world can no longer be constructed as "a land of dreams", but is in fact a bleak battle for survival without divine purpose' (Gifford 1999, p. 120). Anti-

[49] Take Hughes' 'Pike', in which the fish are described as 'killers from the egg', or the tide-worn jawbone symbolising the relentless brutality of the food chain in 'Relic' (Hughes 1960, p. 56, p. 44). By depicting nature as a brutal battle for survival, Hughes reflects on mankind's own capacity for destruction.

pastoral, Gifford writes, is a corrective in a dialectical relationship with the pastoral (Gifford 1999, p. 120). However, I would argue that rather than stand in contradistinction to Finlay's pastoral, this dialectic is part of its complex design. The tensions within Finlay's pastoral take it back to the fundamental characteristics of the genre. As Williams reminds us, the idealizing tone, is not 'abstracted from the whole of a working country life' (Williams, 1975 [1973], p. 28). The classical pastoral, he notes, encompasses both the Eclogues, with their idealised vision of a land which needs no farming, and the Georgics, which celebrate the working life of the farmer: 'that prolonged and detailed description and celebration of the farmer's year; of his tools, his methods, his dangers, his enemies, his skills and his lifetimes efforts' (Williams, 1975 [1973], p. 28). Finlay's descriptions of farm labour and rural poverty bring his work into closer contact with 19th century French and Russian realists. Yves Abrioux compares Finlay's short stories to 'those Russian exponents of the genre, Sologub and Andreyez' (Abrioux 1992, p. 71). Chekov's novella *Peasants* is another likely model, with its depiction of Russian serfdom. Finlay himself makes reference to both Russian and German writers while discussing his own artistic response to the landscape. In a letter to the older Scottish poet Helen B Cruickshank, Finlay recalls a visit to her cottage:

> What with the sun, and the trees, and the wee explanations you made about them, and everything, it has become a very Russian memory in retrospect; the day I went to Helen's dacha – if that's how you spell it. It is also a very calm memory, like a few I have from childhood.
> (IHF > HC, 2.2.63, Finlay Mss. Series 1, Box 1, Lilly Library)

Finlay compares this to a visit to R. Crombie Saunders, poet and editor of *Fishing Times,* where they went fishing in the river 'and it was very hot, with ripe raspberries, and the sun on the water - just like dear Turgenev (and his Raspberry Spring[50], if you know it)'

[50] This was an image Finlay would return to: early letterheads from Stonypath were inscribed 'Raspberry Spring'.

(IHF > HC, 2.2.63, Finlay Mss. Series 1, Box 1, Lilly Library). In this story, Turgenev's narrator writes, 'I managed to reach the little river Ista... descended the steep bank, and walked along the yellow bank in the direction of the spring, known to the whole neighbourhood as Raspberry Spring. This spring gushes out of a cleft in the bank, which widens out by degrees into a small but deep creek, and, twenty paces beyond it, falls with a merry babbling sound into the river; the short velvety grass is green around the source: the sun's rays scarcely ever reach its cold, silvery water....' (Turgenev 1852, online). Yet this bucolic scene is undercut by the presence of the peasant Styopushka, who subsides on vegetables from the garden of a ruined estate and whose family, he suspects, have starved. In the Russian master's complex pastoral, a recognition of the iniquities of serfdom undercut the idealised depiction of the countryside, providing a model for Finlay's own nuanced stories of life on the Perthshire estates.

In 'The Planters and the Old Joiner's Funeral' Finlay describes a scene of planters 'spread out in almost a straight line across their first drills in the middle of the field' (Finlay 2004, p. 44). The monotony of such work is conveyed in their methodical and 'mechanical' actions (Finlay 2004, p. 45), the tedious business of walking up and down the drills to empty their sacks then refill them. To compound their misery, this exhausting routine takes place under a blazing sun, which looks like 'a huge marigold in the blue sky right above their heads' (Finlay 2004, p. 44). Potato planting is at least a communal act. The farm labourer Big Dod, in 'The Fight In The Ditch' has the far lonelier task of 'shawing' (stripping them of their leaves) turnips. He works without halt, 'moving quickly up one drill and down another, so that half the field, now, was softly alight with stripped turnips'. Yet this idealised image is undercut by the physical toll of the work: 'He did not straighten up to ease his bent back, knowing that to do so would surely have made the dull ache worse' (Finlay 2004, p. 55).

Both these stories are marked by death. The potato planters pause in their work to observe the funeral procession of the old joiner. This death is not presented as a tragedy, however, as the reader does not know the joiner. The funeral sets in motion a comedy of manners, as the planters fret over the appropriate response to the procession. The death of an older man, like that of the lame lamb in 'Midsummer Weather' (Finlay 2004, p. 37) is part of the natural order. The tone is elegiac, but not tragic, maintaining the balance of the pastoral. A more disturbing counterforce to the pastoral comes with the death of animals. As noted, 'The Old Man and the Trout' sees death intrude on its young protagonist's pastoral idyll. In Finlay's elegiac mode, the sense of loss is not so much for the trout itself, but the sense of beauty and order it represents. In 'The Fight in the Ditch', the farm labourer Big Dod, shirking off his work in a turnip field, kills and tears apart a large trout, because, as Cockburn writes, 'he perceives it as an enemy and a threat to himself, as if allowing such a substantial creature to retain its freedom would point up his own limitations' (Finlay, 2004, p. xvii). Like the gamekeeper frustratedly firing his gun into the ashes of the fisherman's fire, Big Dod destroys the big trout because it represents an unattainable freedom and beauty.

In discussing the elegiac qualities of pastoral we must return to Erwin Panofsky, whose 1955 essay '*Et In Arcadia Ego:* Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition' explores the treatment of death in the pastoral tradition. Arcady is an 'ideal realm', a 'dream incarnate of ineffable happiness, surrounded nevertheless with a halo of "sweetly sad" melancholy', he writes (Panofsky 1955, p. 297). As noted earlier, Panofksy demonstrates that the Latin motto 'Et In Arcadia Ego' in Poussin's painting is a *memento mori*, meaning 'I [Death] also am in Arcadia'. To reinforce his point, he notes the death's-head skull carved onto the tomb that the shepherds crowd around. Panofsky shows that sometime in the 17th century, the motto was reinterpreted so that the words

were attributed to another shepherd. This version of the pastoral is sentimental, stabilising, offering a 'retrospective vision of... a bygone happiness ended by death' and not the more dramatic, disturbing vision of 'a present happiness menaced by death' (Panofsky 1955, p. 296). Finlay's elegiac mode reaches its fullest expression in Little Sparta, which I shall discuss later in this chapter. In the earlier work, the elegiac mode expresses itself not only in images and experiences of death, but in the halo of melancholy that surrounds the boy's loss of innocence in 'The Old Man and the Trout' and the sense of a lost and distant idyll in 'Straw'.

As Raymond Williams notes of the classical pastoral, contrasts between the rural idyll of the 'poetically distant Arcadia' and the reality of the world are 'presented as living retrospect, as in the sad memories of Virgil's Meliboeus'. The note of idealisation which sounds throughout the classical pastoral becomes an extended lament for a distant past, rather than a more immediate idyll, situated just outside the walls of the city. The Golden Age of Hesiod is seen as present in Virgil's Arcadia, 'at once summoned and celebrated by the power of poetry'. He quotes from the Eclogues:

> For them, far from the strife of arms, the earth, ever just, pours an easy living on the land of its own accord... By their own will the trees and the fields bear produce, and he picks it. His peace is secure and his living cannot fail. (Williams, 1975 [1973], pp. 28 – 29).

An Orcadian idyll?

This idea of pastoral as living retrospect helps frame a comparison of Finlay and his friend George Mackay Brown's visions of Orkney. Finlay's Orkney is an idyll, but of a rather different sort to the nostalgic constructions of his contemporary George Mackay

Brown. Terry Gifford argues that 'for Mackay Brown [Arcadia] is a retreat into an unchanging mythic past away from problems of the present' (Gifford 1999, pp. 43-44). Gifford quotes the poet: '"Modern Orkney"' he has said, "has little of the stuff of poetry... Too many machines, pre-packaging etcetera..."' (Gifford 1999, p. 40). Much of Mackay Brown's poetry seems set in an Orkney of the recent past. The famous 'Hamnavoe' depicts a bustling market town, with church bells tolling and much activity in the harbour. There are no modern machines or pre-packaging here: this scene could be taking place in 1950 or 1850.

The complex pastoral design of Finlay's Orkney, on the other hand, contrasts the idealising mode with a recognition of the working life of the modern island. As Finlay's review of John Speir's *The Scots Literary Tradition* shows, Finlay had little time for representations of fishing communities as lost idylls, 'on the edge of the modern world'. As he writes, 'I have lived on Orkney, and I have never felt – except when talking to the local Grand Intellectual – that the modern world was somewhere else, that the island I was on was not a part of it.' Finlay questioned Speirs' claim that the traditional ways of life for such communities had vanished: 'I wonder if the folk of the north east *really* feel that their community has vanished?' (Gordon, Summer 1962, p. 80). His Orkney has its idyllic qualities: take, for example, the serene imagery of 'Snow In Rousay' or 'John Sharkey Is Pleased To Be In Sourin at Evening' ('How
beautiful, how beautiful, the mill!') (Finlay 2004, pp. 211 & 206). Finlay's celebration of old island customs has something of Mackay Brown's mythic quality, with 'Island Moment' capturing a sense of tradition and continuity as the lady of the island shop goes to the shore-side to retrieve salted herrings from the 'big shed' 'in the still of an island evening'. Her son cycles past; Finlay notes that he is soon to be married. Finlay takes the reader into the shed, revealing the woman's 'long white boat' and 'the yellow bamboo wand / For fishing sillocks, lithe and cuithes'. Light just strikes the little

herring barrel, 'over/Islands and miles and miles of water / That tilts to the North Pole.' (Finlay 2004, p. 198). In these few lines, Finlay presents a whole world, with its rituals, traditions and continuities. Its smallness is set against the sublime vision of the islands stretched across the sea.

Yet Finlay's Orkney is also a modern island, whose chief crop, as the poem reminds us, is wireless-poles (Finlay 2004, p. 194). When technology does interrupt the idyll, it tends to be to a humorous and even surreal effect, such as in the encounter between a local character and a naval officer, where the latter gazes in admiration at the design of the Orkney boats, which to him resemble lemons (a visual rhyme Finlay would of course return to throughout his career). Alastair Peebles speculates that 'Catch' may have been inspired by an occasion during World War II when a naval helicopter landed in Rousay, a story Finlay may have picked up from local folklorist Ernest Marwick (Price & Friel, 2011 online). Finlay's gift for metaphor allows him to transform this helicopter into a lobster, or 'lapster', as they are known on Orkney. A fisherman from Scrabster considers a 'gey queer lapster' (lobster) comparing it to a helicopter: 'A tail it has, and a wee propellor... It looks far more like a peedie heli - / You know yon kind of hoverlapster, / A what do you call it, helicapster' (Finlay 2004, p. 204). Finlay plays on the sound of the words – Scrabster into lapster into 'capster - and finds visual rhymes between the lobster's claws and the helicopter's propellor, and their respective tails. The 'Orkney Lyrics' sequence, meanwhile features a humorous incident where Peedie Mary struggles to work her new washing machine – 'where dost thoo / Put in the peats?' - a scene which captures the transition from old to new with warmth and wit (Finlay 2004, p. 206). Finlay's poverty does not impinge on the island idyll: he always has fish to eat. 'Blossom Quarry, Rousay' is one of few poems in which the reality of the modern island intrudes upon the idyll. Finlay idealises the work of the fishermen, but his experiences of labouring in the ironically named 'Blossom Quarry,

Rousay' are depicted in a bleaker light. The environment of this 'quarry of grey stone' is harsh and lifeless, 'where never white / Blossom was sweetly blown; wet dynamite / Would blossom more than seeds in this place grown.' Its flowers, writes Finlay, are on his hand: 'Bent backs, sore bloody blisters it has grown' (Finlay 2012, p. 126).

Finlay's apparent embrace of island modernity might set him apart from Mackay Brown, but arguably the two poets are engaged in a similar process of celebrating the continuity and organic process of change on the island. I feel it is rather unfair of Gifford to pigeonhole Mackay Brown as a nostalgic conservative, retreating into a mythic past to escape the problems of the present. As Louisa Gairn argues, Mackay Brown's poetry and prose is 'both a celebration of personalities and a history of change, with one wave after another of incomers to the island, each bringing with them their own traditions and technologies.' Yet behind these human changes, she notes, 'lie the cycles of the seasons and the lives of the animals'. As such, his work forms part of 'an ongoing debate in Scottish literature concerning the importance of myth and ritual in our relationship with the natural world' (Gairn 2009,
p. 147). What Mackay Brown is aiming for, she writes, is 'word, blossoming as legend, poem, story, secret', which 'holds a community together and gives a meaning to its life'. His poems, she notes, frequently have a solid, runic quality about them, as though they too were carved or crafted artefacts. (Gairn 2009, p. 144). We can see this runic quality, and the sense of community and continuity, in the crisp imagist lyrics of the 'Rackwick Runes' published in POTH 15 in 1965:

> 'Crofter-Fisherman'
> Fish-plough, sea-plough, provider
> Make Orderly Furrows
> Till the herring jostle like August corn'
> (Finlay & Finlay 1965, p. 2)

In likening fishing and farming, Mackay Brown illustrates the centrality of both activities to island life; these are the things which have sustained the community for

generation upon generation. Human activity is tied to the natural world and the cycle of the seasons. In these brief lines, Mackay Brown captures a world, a sense of order, what the ecocritic Jonathan Bate calls the *oikos*, a dwelling place or home. It is language (logos) which can help return us to that home (Bate 2011, pp. 75-76). We may be reminded here of Finlay's famous comments to Pierre Garnier: 'the world is, after all, also to be made by man into his *home*' (Finlay 2009, p. 22). As Gairn argues, '[w]hat writers like Finlay and Mackay Brown value above all, she writes, is the human capacity for "naming" and "dwelling", and the ability for poetic language to, as [Edwin] Morgan suggests, fulfil its potential as "the brilliant, vibrating interface between the human and the non-human" (Gairn 2009, p. 148)'. Finlay's retrospective poems of Orkney can thus be seen as an attempt to construct an *oikos* through language. As Raymond Williams reminds us, the idealising impulse of pastoral can also be turned toward the future. The poetic act of remembering is also an act of preservation and restoration, bringing forth 'a second coming of the Golden Age'. This magical Utopian vision, writes Williams, is a prophecy: "run looms and weave the future"' (Williams, 1975 [1973], p. 29). Take 'Poet', which, with its sweetly melancholy tone, is a good example of what Williams calls the elegiac mode of

pastoral:

> At night, when I cannot sleep,
> I count the islands
> And I sigh when I come to Rousay
> My dear black sheep. (Finlay 2004, p. 213)

Through this and subsequent poems and artworks, Finlay would reconstruct this idyll through words and images. This idyll, it should be noted, also has a domestic and homely quality. We can see this in his description of his beloved island of Rousay as a 'dear black sheep', as well as in poems such as 'Finlay's House (In Rousay)' and 'Snow In Rousay' (Finlay 2004, pp. 193 & 211). Tea and fish are constants in this domestic

idyll, their homely charm helping to ground the idyll in lived reality. As I shall show in subsequent sections, the domestic and the maritime are important elements in Finlay's complex pastoral design, playing a major part in his construction of a home and an idyll at Stonypath. As Stonypath gradually became Little Sparta, these contrasts and tensions would be played out on an epic scale.

The complex pastoral and concrete poetry.

The runic quality which Gairn attributes to some of Mackay Brown's poems can also be seen in Finlay's concrete and one-word poems, which present images and convey feelings through the most minimal of linguistic and formal means: words become icons. 'Words, too, have an aura of their own', wrote Walter Benjamin, and as Yves Abrioux notes, 'a single word can condense an entire descriptive sequence without losing the element of aura the corresponding prose passage would seek to convey' (Abrioux 1992, p. 182). The one-word poems pivot on the relationship between the title and the poem itself, giving them a riddle-like quality: 'The Boat's Blueprint/Water'. Here, Finlay uses mimetic and analogical figures to convey a sense of order and proportion, with the boat leaving its imprint – its wake - on the water. And as Abrioux notes, 'The Cloud's Anchor/Swallow', with its formal alignment of the worlds of the sea and the sky suggests the Aristotelian definition of a metaphor of proportion (Abrioux 1992, p. 198). Thus modernist form is used to create a neoclassical model of order. These poems are beautiful, but through their reference to the real – Finlay's world of boats, fishes, forests and fields – they are not so perfect as to forget that the world is 'to be made by man into his *home*' (Finlay 2009, p. 22). These poems reveal the relationship between man and nature, guiding us 'home' through language and form. 'Curfew/Curlew', for example, conveys through

wordplay the sound of the curlews singing in the fields around Stonypath as evening sets in.

In 1966 Finlay published an alphabet poem called 'Arcady', a one-word poem of sorts, appending it with a series of questions:

ABCDEDFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

Some questions on the poem

1. The poem is no more than an alphabet with a title.
Why should an alphabet be presented as a poem and given the title 'Arcady'?
2. 'Roam' is a verb we associate with Arcady. Can one roam among the letters
of the alphabet? Might it be that the letters are compared to the fields and forests, mosses and springs of an ancient pastoral landscape? If so, why?
3. Is it relevant to the effect of the poem that the letters are given caps, when they might be lower case? Could letters possibly have existed before words?
Can you imagine their appearance?
4. The original Dada-ists of 1916 wrote a number of poems composed entirely of single letters. Do you think that 'Arcady' is, (a) non-poem; (b) a neo-Dada poem; (c) a poem that tries to civilise a neo-Dada cliché by turning it into a light-hearted classical conceit?

A Question on the Questions
In your opinion do the questions show a classical conceit?

(Finlay 2012, p. 147)

One should note, writes Abrioux, the phonetic play linking title and text in the poem – 'arcady': 'A[-]CD'; and also 'the mimetic relationship between the alphabet and an idyllic landscape' (Abrioux 1992, 199). The alphabet and arcady are both, I would add, models of order. Letters form words, so by inviting us to roam among the letters of the alphabet, Finlay gives us the building blocks of language through which we can construct a pastoral landscape. As with the one-word poems, Finlay is using modernist idioms to create a classical conceit; a process he calls civilising Dada. Other examples of this approach include 'Sea Poppy 1' and 'Le Circus', where the letters and numbers of port registration codes represent boats on the sea. As he made the leap beyond the

page, Finlay brought letters, numbers and words into the world, creating poem-objects and constructing a complex pastoral realm at Stonypath.

After several difficult years in Edinburgh, Finlay and his second wife Sue moved to the country, firstly to Gledfield near Ardgay in Ross-shire in 1964, then Coaltown of Callange, Fife during the summer of 1966, before settling at Stonypath, a derelict farm owned by Sue's family, in autumn 1966. It was in these spaces, with space to work and new pastoral landscapes to inspire him, that Finlay was able to realise his ideas about turning poems into objects in an environment, pastoral images placed in a pastoral landscape. As Yves Abrioux notes, the one-word poems, while originally written for the page, would become some of Finlay's first ventures into epigraphy, the practice of inscription on stone (Abrioux 1992, p. 93). Yet as noted in chapter 3 these were preceded by the toys and 'poemeramas' he began making in Edinburgh: 'toys for the imagination, icons rather than playthings, their simplicity containing manifold associations and meanings' as Jessie Sheeler nee McGuffie puts it (Sheeler 2009, online). Serendipitously, Finlay's toy-making began shortly before his discovery of concrete poetry. As quoted by Abrioux, Finlay had felt:

> "an absolute need to turn from the rhythmic to the static... and turned towards making little toys – things of no account in themselves, yet true to [his] inspiration, which was away from Syntax toward 'the Pure'."
> (Abrioux 1992, p. 2).

The 'pure' meant a move away from verse to the word and the 'thing' or object. In creating his toys, Finlay drew on his Orkney idyll, making model boats and stylised fish, their simplified forms reflecting his interest in cubist and suprematist scultpure. At Gledfield, the Finlays, with the aid of Jessie McGuffie and her new American husband Dick Sheeler, embarked on a number of projects. The white walls of their cottage became the canvas for 'acrobats' and 'happy apple,' concrete poems made of coloured cork letters (Sheeler 2003, p. 14). They also worked on a rug to match the

poem 'ajar' and, as Finlay explained to Creeley, 'a splendid giant fish, which everyone sewed, in red, and yellow, and blue – he flies at the top of the flagpole (tree, cemented in), and is most pleasant to look at' (IHF > EM 23.8.65 Creeley papers M0662, Box 48, Folder 25, Stanford). With the help of Dick Sheeler, Finlay was able to construct larger scale poem-objects, including a wooden structure 'with V-shaped arms sticking up like windmill sails – or hare's ears' (Sheeler 2003, p. 14) inscribed
with the text 'THE HORIZON OF HOLLAND IS ALL EARS'. Anticipating his use of inscribed objects to prompt the contemplation of a landscape at Stonypath, Finlay placed this structure 'on the rising slope of his garden' (Sheeler 2003, 4), emphasising the contrast between the rolling hills of Scotland and the flat horizon of Holland. The v-shaped struts, imitated 'the tops of windmill sails on a Dutch horizon, seen by a Scot whose horizon was more likely to feature rabbits' ears', explains Sheeler (Sheeler 2003, 4).

Finlay's 'Arcady' poem of 1966 played on the idea of metaphorically constructing a pastoral landscape from the letters of the alphabet. Yet Finlay had been thinking about constructing such a landscape, in the form of a garden, for some time. In 1965 Finlay published his plan for a garden *Cythera* with drawings by Peter Lyle. As Patrick Eyres notes *Cythera* was devised in 1964 and applies theories of concrete poetry to the garden - a garden, Lyle notes, Finlay did not yet have (Eyres 2000, pp. 153-4). The plan presents a path through a garden, along which are placed blocks inscribed with the words of the poem. This approach reflects Finlay's contemporaneous experiments with the materiality of concrete poetry, in particular the kinetic poem-books, except rather than turn pages, we read the poem by following the garden path, passing through the glass pavilion and ending at a 'wee
lake'.

CYTHERA
air
in
blue leaf
.
blue bark
and blue leaf
.
a
leaf a
barque
a blue leaf
a barque in leaf-blue
aire
. (Abrioux 1992, p. 249)

Finlay's pastoral vision here encompasses land and sea in the verbal/visual play of bark and barque (a motif Finlay would return to numerous times throughout his career) and their relation to the colour blue. Blue represents both sea and air (sky) as well as the boat, the shape of which can be abstracted as a 'blue leaf'. The blue leaf could also be thought of as a sail, anticipating the blue sail of 'Evening Will Come'. Just as the leaves of the tree are related to the maritime, so is its bark, both in the homonymic play with barque and the association with the colour blue. And lest we forget, trees are carved into boats. Finlay produced numerous works from this association of trees with boats. Three plinths inscribed 'Leaf & Boat, Boat & Bark, Bark & Leaf' (Sheeler 2003, p. 37) perhaps offer the clearest expression of this idea. It is also worth noting the classical allusions of *Cythera,* the mythological home of Venus. Abrioux writes that the poem is a concrete 'translation' of Watteau's Rococo painting, *Pilgrimage on the Isle of Cythera* in which the pathway leads to a notional island 'conjured out of the air in a song which, by way of silent variations on just two words ('bark'/'barque'), operated controlled jumps in scale that embodied the variation between two elements (land/water)' (Abrioux, 1992, p. 302). Finlay's use of the word 'barque' takes on another level of meaning when we consider the original French title,

'L'embarquement pour Cythere'. As *Cythera* was a plan for an imagined garden, its text does not relate to the environment in the way Finlay's realised garden works often do. Indeed, how could it? While the word 'leaf' is, in its first instance, situated near some trees, this seems incidental. The inscription does not, in this case, function as a prompt for the contemplation of its surroundings. This integration of art and nature could only be fully realised in an actual environment. Working the land - or 'turning over the earth' as *Autumn Poem* puts it, seems to have had a direct impact on Finlay's practice.

Gledfield, with its woods and streams, returned Finlay to an idyllic setting similar to that of his stories, although, as he told Creeley, Ross-shire lacked the 'bittersweet' quality of Perthshire (IHF > RC 28.5.65, Creeley papers, M0662, Box 48, Folder 25, Stanford). The pastoral setting was inspiring nonetheless, as it gave Finlay the chance to fish again, to 'dangle a worm into the lyric pools' as he wrote to Creeley (IHF > RC, 28.5.65, Creeley papers, M0662, Box 48, Folder 25, Stanford). Gledfield also had two ponds, to which Finlay added another pair made from concrete. The process of landscaping did not end there, as Finlay told Creeley later that summer: 'I have also been building paths and digging flowerbeds out of the nettles, which are matted over all' (IHF>RC, 23.8.65, Creeley papers M0662, Box 48, Folder 25, Stanford). The Finlays left Gledfield after a dispute with the landlord, spending the summer of 1966 at Coaltown of Callange in Fife. For Sue Finlay, Callange was 'a place as pastoral as its address', and, as Abrioux notes, 'the idyllic pastoral' of the house, with its lush kitchen garden, inspired such works as the *Coaltown of Callange Tri-Kai* and *6 Small Songs in 3's.* (Abrioux 1992, p. 2) The most affecting of the Fife works was the poem-book *Autumn Poem*, with its sequential repetition of the words 'turning over the earth/the earth turning over' (Finlay 1966). The text is printed on semi-transparent paper, so as to superimpose pages with photographs of a patch of earth and the planet earth. In turning the page, the reader invokes the act of ploughing the field (the

autumnal oak leaves disappear in the second photograph of the field, reappearing in the last with the final turning of the field), and the movement of time, which is itself embodied in the planetary motion. Again, Finlay presents a complex pastoral vision in which the 'natural' cycle of the seasons is combined with an acknowledgement of human intervention.

Creating a complex pastoral: Stonypath

Callange might have been almost *too* idyllic for Finlay. As he wrote to Jerome Rothenberg, 'Here, all is corn and barley and fences, and I get quite desolate without desolation' (Finlay to Rothenberg, 1.9.66, Rothenberg Mss, Box 9, Folder 10, UCSD). Stonypath, a derelict farm on a bleak Pentland hillside, offered the desolation Finlay craved. Despite being some 300 metres above sea-level, 'unvegetated' and 'devoid of ponds', Finlay transformed the 4-acre site into 'a watery and embowered haven' (Eyres 2000, p. 153), and inland garden in which the pastoral and maritime were combined. As one of Finlay's *Domestic Pensees* puts it, 'Tree and Sea are the same in sound' (Finlay 2004, p. 13). This deceptively slight collection is on of the *bon mots* from the trusty blue jotter Finlay kept by his fireside chair. Viewed in the context of his work, these aphorisms offer a rich insight into Finlay's vision. When the Finlays moved to Stonypath in 1967, the only tree in the garden was a great ash. The sound of the wind in its branches recalled to Finlay the sound of the sea (internet 1). So, in what he

described as 'a beautiful transposition' (Bann 1980, video), Finlay put the sea on a tree in the form of a tree plaque inscribed with the Latin, 'Mare Nostrum', the 'splendidly impudent' (Bann 1980, video), Roman name for the Mediterranean, 'our sea'. Around the base of the tree is a bench with the inscription: 'The Sea's Waves/The Waves' Sheaves/The Sea's Naves'. As Sheeler writes, the two inscriptions invite us to recognise Stonypath/Little Sparta as a domain. 'Mare Nostrum' signals the moral aspect of the domain – here the principles of artistic truth and order will be paramount', while 'the cadence of the words on the bench reflects the swell and sound of the sea' (Sheeler 2003, p. 43). By likening the waves to
sheaves of corn swaying in the breeze, Finlay draws together the maritime and pastoral, envisioning the fields which surround Stonypath as an ocean. The nave alludes to the central aisle of a church, suggesting 'the valley between rolling waves', so that the sea becomes 'a sacred space to be entered with reverence'. Nave is also a derivation of the Latin for ship, *navis,* and we are invited to think of the wind-beaten garden objects as boats battling through stormy seas (Sheeler 2003, p. 44).

As Tom Lubbock writes, the relationship of land and sea is the most constant of the polarities central to Finlay's work (Finlay, 2002, p. 7). At Little Sparta, writes Sheeler, the sea provides 'a context or universal idea from which metaphors may be trawled'. Just as the sea can be a source of life, it is also a source of tragedy, a sublime force, and Little Sparta features some works which are 'full of tranquillity' and others which 'are challenging in the violent tragedies they employ' (Sheeler 2003, p. 44). As Finlay comments in a filmed interview with Stephen Bann, force is part of the world, and the garden could not exist without it (Bann 1980, video). Violence and tragedy provides a counterforce to the idyllic and tranquil in Finlay's garden, making it a complex pastoral. At the entrance to Little Sparta, there is a gate inscribed with: 'das gepflugte Land / the fluted land'. 'Gepflugte' is a play on the German 'gepflegte' or

'cherished', and this original meaning conveys Finlay's sense of delight in nature. The landscape behind the gate is described by Sheeler as a Scottish pastoral, characterised by 'the fields and hills, the sheep, the curlews and skylarks and the ever-changing light'. In classical poetry, the land was celebrated by its shepherds' flutes. The phrase also alludes to the ploughed fields which are fluted in the manner of a Doric column (Sheeler 2003, p. 23). We might also liken these ploughed and ridged fields to the ripples and waves on the surface of the sea. Elsewhere in the garden, Finlay has mounted a piece of corrugated iron, dipped in concrete, to produce a fluted effect. Sheeler likens the piece to a 'fragment of billowing drapery on a classical statue' (Sheeler 2003, p. 72) and I would add that it also suggests a sail, or indeed, waves.

As Stonypath evolved into Little Sparta, Finlay began to invest the Scottish pastoral of his early work with classical allusions. This process can be traced in his landscaping of ponds, with Finlay moving from concrete poem-objects to more
traditional garden features. The letters from Gledfield quoted earlier attest to his love of ponds and fishing pools and describe his efforts to build new ones. Writing to Robert Creeley in 1965, Finlay hopes the American poet can make a visit and have a shot on the raft Finlay is building. 'I shall sit on it, in the middle of the pond, and think'. This tranquil idyll contrasts with the clamorous Edinburgh literary scene he has escaped from. Finlay pictures the raft as having a mast, a sail, and a pirate flag, a symbol of his – and Creeley's – status as poetic rebels. Warming to the topic, Finlay mentions his plans for a 'wee book' called *Pondlines*:

CATERPILLAR IN POND

ONLOOKER SENDS FOR LEAF-BOAT

and

GREAT FROG-RACE A FLOP

(IHF > RC 14.4.65, Creeley papers, M0662, Box 48, Folder 25, Stanford)

These lines evoke fairytales, *Wind In The Willows*, and in form as well as content, Basho's frog haiku, not to mention Finlay's own *Glasgow Beasts*. The image of the stranded caterpillar being carried to safety by a 'leaf-boat' is delightful (albeit with an undercurrent of tragedy), while the 'flop' race conjures wonderful sounds and sights. Numerous Western poets have attempted translations and parodies of Basho's famous frog haiku, with Cid Corman's minimalist 'old pond/frog leaping/splash' (Corman, online) forming the basis for concrete poetry variations such as Dom Sylvester Houedard's 'frog/pond/plop' (Houedard & Furnival 1996, online) and Edwin Morgan's 'Summer Haiku'. Finlay's take on Basho is more in the vein of his 'translations' of the paintings of Malevich or Watteau: allusive rather than literal, the frogs flopping rather than plopping over the pond's surface.

In 1968, Finlay created the floating poem *Frogbit* for one of the Stonypath ponds. The poem consists of painted wooden discs which spell out 'frogbit' and float alongside the leaves of the eponymous pond plant (Abrioux 1992, p. 3). The previous year he made a rather more elaborate outdoor-poem which combined the natural and the man-made. Writing to Jerome Rothenberg he described:

> a wee wooden tub, full of water, and a lily, sunk to ground-level, in a circle of gravel – and beside it is a board with the word CLOUD, and a hand, rather like Rene Magritte, pointing up, and one pointing down, into the water. The downward CLOUD can either be reflected, or it can be a cloud of lily-blossoms, if the lily does. It is supposed to have white blossoms.

(IHF > JR, 12.10.67, Rothenberg Mss, Box 1, Folder 10, UCSD)

One could argue that the poem's charm is in its transitory nature; it is an embodiment of the fleeting nature of clouds and flowers. It also provides an insight into the

development of Finlay's concrete poetics in the garden. Finlay's one word poem from *POTH 25* (Finlay 1967):

The Boat's Blueprint
water

hinges on the reflective quality of the sea's surface and 'Cloud' transposes this idea into a material object. While Finlay did not always use the water's surface in such a deliberate manner, his landscaping does demonstrate a sensitivity to the effects it can produce. Inscribed objects invite us to contemplate the pools, ponds and streams of Little Sparta, drawing attention to the sights and sounds around us. An inscribed stone tablet by the Temple Pool reads 'HIC IACET PARVULUM QUODDAM EX AQUA LONGIORE EXCERPTUM', 'here lies a small excerpt from a longer water'. The tablet resembles a headstone, an impression reinforced by 'here lies', and Sheeler notes 'how poignant to think of the Pool as *parvulum quoddam* – a tiny little thing – cut out from the great Ocean and placed here to be visited in its resting place' (Sheeler 2003, p. 51). I read the inscription as witty rather than sombre, however, and agree with Sheeler that 'from a longer water' is an implicit invitation to 'read' the Pool and 'give attention to its fish, frogs, weeds and ripples' (Sheeler 2003, p. 51). As such it is a celebration of nature and life, a pastoral idyll in which the *momento mori* is rendered harmless through irony. At the Middle Pond we are invited to compare the surface of the water to the fields through further use of the 'fluting' metaphor. A stepping stone is inscribed, 'RIPPLE n. A FOLD. A FLUTING OF THE LIQUID ELEMENT' (Sheeler 2003, p. 31). The element of air is also 'fluted' in the set of pastoral panpipes which are accompanied by the inscription 'When the wind blows, venerate the sound' (Sheeler 2003, p. 64).

As the garden at Stonypath took shape, Finlay's concrete poetics were wedded to more traditional forms. He worked his way through garden tradition, adapting pastoral

features (benches, tree seats, water features, sundials) to his own purposes. As he told Stephen Bann, 'When I began putting words on things outdoors, I simply looked for traditional forms where this was done... I would just let myself be possessed by this idiom and work out of it. And then you're doing two things, you're creating something new out of the idiom and yet what you're doing is also
celebration of the ideas' (Bann 1980, video). As a 'gardenist', to use Patrick Eyres' term, Finlay acknowledged the artifice of the garden as a form and tradition. If the Romantics, as Mark Scroggins writes, celebrated 'untamed nature' then Finlay looked back to the earlier 'English' garden tradition associated with Alexander Pope and William Shenstone where designers aimed to 'draw out the beauties already inherent in the landscape, to work in conjunction with the *genius loci*' (Scroggins 2012, p. 586). At Stonypath, the inscribed objects often act as prompts to our appreciation of the landscape. They may highlight an existing feature of the landscape, or provide a referential frame for viewing the surroundings. As Scroggins writes, 'the new English garden is known as the *picturesque* garden, and implicit in that term (Pope's coinage) is a shift from gardening as a branch of architecture to gardening that takes painting as its paradigmatic art' (Scroggins 2012, p. 586). 'Nature after art' is the title of a 1980 exhibition of Finlay's work and this phrase is key to understanding Finlay's gardenist approach.

One of Finlay's wittiest commentaries on the English garden tradition and its relation to painting comes in the form of a section of wooden fence, the upper slat of which is inscribed with the word 'Picturesque'. The fence is itself unglamorous but it serves as a prompt for looking across Lochan Eck and the hilly moorland at the northern boundary of Stonypath. Andrew Lawson's photograph emphasises the
picturesque qualities of the scene (Sheeler 2002, p. 110), with the Lochan's rippled surface of sunlight and shadow receding into the rolling hillside behind. A few small

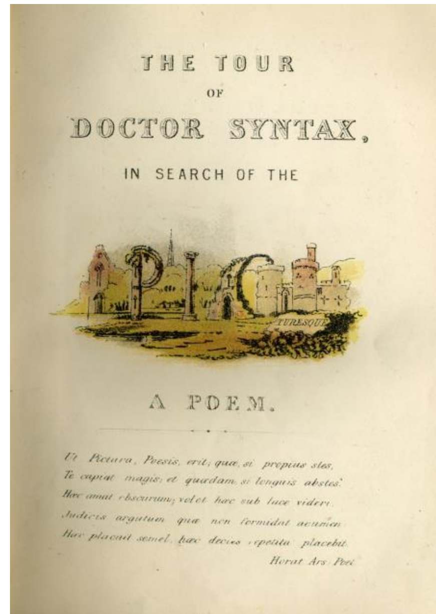
trees fill the top left corner of the frame, creating a view in accordance with the picturesque aesthetics of Gilpin. The picturesque, of course, is a construction, and Finlay draws our attention to this, while commenting on the artifice of his own garden. The fence itself is a picturesque ruin: an artful imitation of a wind-worn, dilapidated fence, its furthest post sinking into the water. The fence leans at an angle, and has a too-long upper slat which suggests this section was once part of a longer fence, one which has collapsed into the lochan. Of course, the angle is deliberate, and the fence forms an arrow, drawing the eye left across the vista. Just as 18th century painters would frame their picturesque landscapes with a carefully placed tree or ruin, Finlay uses the fence as part of his own picturesque arrangement of the real environment. Lochan Eck is man-made, built by Finlay in the late 1960s, while the rougher land beyond it has itself been shaped by agriculture.

The 'picturesque' fence can be seen as an ironic comment on Stonypath's place in the tradition of Humphrey Repton's picturesque landscape design. Repton felt that landscape gardens should be composed like a painting, with a foreground, midground and background. The foreground should be the realm of art, the midground should have a parkland character, and the background should appear to be wild and 'natural'. This part of Stonypath then, is the background. Yet for all its relative wildness, this area of Stonypath has several features, culminating in the monumental Saint Just stones at the top of the hill. Repton argued that gardens 'must studiously conceal every interference of art' and that the natural scenery should be 'improved' so as to 'appear the production of nature only' (Topp 2014, online). Finlay, however, alerts us to the contrived artificiality of this landscape, simultaneously celebrating and critiquing the picturesque ideal. As the garden historian John Dixon

Hunt writes:

We have, after all, only reached this broken fence after moving through the much more obviously 'Picturesque', contrived spaces of the lower gardens, where references to Dure, Edward Atkinson Hornel, Claude Lorrain, Poussin and Corot, among others, would have more precisely directed our attention to how the garden recreated or recalled earlier paintings... The single word inscribed on a sloping rail is itself a fragment, just as much as the random bits and pieces of the natural world admired by Picturesque theorists.

(Hunt 2008, p. 52)



Finlay's broken fence and the prospect it frames has echoes of William Coombe and Thomas Rowlandson's satirical poem and cartoon *The Tour of Doctor Syntax, In Search of the Picturesque* (Coome & Ronaldson 1808, online), the title page of which features a Gilpin-esque landscape in which the ruins of an abbey form the letters 'PIC', and a rock bares the inscription 'TURESQUE'. Coombe and Rowlandson's parody mocks the pretensions of the Romantic aesthetes, but Finlay's fence offers a more nuanced take on the tradition, wryly acknowledging its artifice while ultimately celebrating its approach to landscape. There is no mistaking Finlay's genuine delight in nature itself, or his love for the traditions of garden design. This self-conscious treatment of tradition is a key component of Finlay's complex pastoral design.

This pastoral design gains further complexity through its engagement with the elegiac tradition of the pastoral and Finlay's acknowledgement of force as a presence in nature. As noted earlier, in his print 'Et In Arcadia Ego', Finlay updates Poussin's famous painting by representing death in Arcadia with a panzer tank. This idea was translated to the Arcadian setting of Little Sparta, a garden idyll interrupted by the threat of violence. The military technology so prominent in Little Sparta can be seen as an artistic manifestation of Marx's notion of 'the machine in the garden', as well as *momento mori* in the elegiac tradition of the pastoral. The picturesque tradition celebrated and ironised in Finlay's inscribed fence was of course a product of the country-house ideology criticised by Williams. Finlay's exploration of class tensions and implicit critique of the land-owning class in 'Encouter' is not a factor here, but he does intrude on the artificial idyll of the picturesque by placing it in close proximity to the sinister *Nuclear Sail*, a black obelisk which resembles the conning tower of a nuclear submarine. I shall discuss this work in more detail shortly, but I mention it here to illustrate the presence of death in Finlay's pastoral realm.

'Some gardens are described as retreats when they are really attacks' (Eyres 2000, p. 158): this much quoted aphorism of Finlay's neatly captures what Patrick Eyres calls the critical or 'polemological' aspects of Little Sparta. The garden is a nursery for Finlay's philosophical and political ideas, which are transmitted to the wider world through photographs, publications and artworks (Eyres 2000, p. 158). The renaming of Stonypath as Little Sparta in 1980 is part of this polemological 'attack' or critique of contemporary society and culture. Finlay's neo-classicism went further than an interest in traditional forms. The garden for Finlay was a sacred site, a realm which 'may require or can elicit a spiritual experience' (Hunt 2008, p. 86). The garden stood in contradistinction to an outside world governed by secular

rationalism. Hunt compares Finlay to William Blake, who in his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* recounted a modern loss of spiritual faith and recalled how the ancient poets '*animated* everything in the world around them, placing every city and county "under its mental deity", until modern rationalism and religion abstracted and systemized this ancient responsiveness to place'. Finlay concurs with this, arguing that secularisation – post-enlightenment positivism and post-modern relativism - has emptied 'the natural world of any mystery and the phrase *genius loci* of any
significance' (Hunt 2008, p. 86). 'If you do away with hierarchy and value you end up in the secular, the total secularisation of everything', Finlay told Stephen Bann in 1980. 'I feel that arts, ironically enough, were first to be completely securalised' Finlay argued, 'and set the model for the totalitarian secularisation that is taking place at an ever increasing rate. This is the crisis of our time, this is what people won't look at' (Bann 1980, video). To Finlay, the contemporary phenomenon of sculpture parks is symptomatic of this trend. Unlike his own gardens, where the art is integrated with the *genius loci,* sculpture parks are merely an 'ill-designed indoor museum with the roof left off' where individual works are emphasised and there is no attempt to synthesise natural forms and cultural objects (Eyres 2000, p. 158-9). Finlay had little time for this so-called 'environmental art', arguing that it was trivial with little civic meaning (Bann 1980, video).

The word 'attack', in relation to gardens, also relates to the violence inherent in the creation of the garden and in nature itself. As Finlay told Stephen Bann, the garden is 'a ruthless, Roman imposition of order'. To tame nature the gardener must 'indulge in ruthless slaughter on a daily basis' (Bann 1980, video). In Finlay's view, contemporary secular society does not wish to acknowledge force as a presence in
nature. 'Force is part of the world', Finlay told Bann, 'It doesn't cease to exist because you stop looking at it' (Bann 1980, video). As he told Bann, 'Our society has rejected

any idea of force, therefore rejecting any idea of being responsible for force... It's very nice to remind people, as the Greeks so clearly did, that life is tragic, it's not this ridiculous flower power vision where everything has got a boiled sweetie' (Bann 1980, video). Finlay's often disturbing use of military imagery in the garden, his programme of 'neo-classical rearmament' (Eyres 2000, p. 153) represents a challenge to what he sees as contemporary society's unwillingness to acknowledge or take responsibility for force. Finlay valorises those who are willing to defend their ideals to the death, a notable example being the Jacobin revolutionary Saint Just. Finlay presents Saint Just as a modern incarnation of Apollo, a figure who represents both art and violence, beauty and cruelty. The Temple to Apollo hails 'his music, his muses, 'his missiles' (Sheeler 2003, p. 62) and by invoking these two sides of Apollo, Finlay reflects on his own practice. Finlay's own 'music' is in his pastoral poetics, which provide a 'camouflage', as Eyres puts it (Eyres 2000, p. 159) for his 'missiles', the critiques he sends out into the world.

As his quips about 'flower power' and 'boiled sweeties' suggest, Finlay softens – without undermining his seriousness of intent - his polemics with wit and a playful delight in nature. To Hunt, it is clear that in Finlay's work and our responses to it that 'there must exist levels of response as there do levels of meaning' (Hunt 2008, p. 53). This is well illustrated by his aircraft carrier bird tables, which are both delightful and disturbing. One might celebrate the repurposing of military technology to peaceful ends: how wonderful that an instrument of death can become one of life. The idea of the fighter planes transformed into birds is similarly appealing. But we can also see the birds as jet planes. To Finlay, this is 'quite a nice thing for the birds. There is quite a lot of that element in them if you think about the way they go on' (Bann 1980, video). Finlay finds delight in comparing the movement of the birds to the flight of the jets, which liberal pacifists may be uncomfortable with. Force as a presence in nature is

implicit in this transformation, and some may read the piece as a commentary on nature 'red in tooth and claw', with the birds' hunting for worms and grubs likened to a bombing raid. The confusion that results amuses Finlay. As he told Bann, 'obviously people associate aircraft carriers with force and violence. And of course bird tables mean ecology and feeding birds and of course everything that is fashionably good. This is quite nicely puzzling for people... They don't really know what they ought to feel about these things; are they nice or nasty, and I like that' (Bann 1980, video). Of course Finlay is not merely out to confuse or provoke; out of play a serious point is made. 'There's that awareness. People have got to sustain those two things, but that is what life is, sustaining these two things' (Bann 1980, video). We might not be able to fully reconcile these different responses, but in being aware of them, a degree of equilibrium can be achieved. As Finlay argues, 'all order is a kind of harmony of opposing forces' (Bann 1980, video).

Behind these different levels of response lies another level of meaning. For Finlay, the aircraft carrier is a perfect model of the pre-socratic model of the cosmos, representing earth, air, fire and water. 'They're earth or field to the planes, and they go on water, and the element of the planes is air, and the planes distribute fire'. The stone carriers in his garden are then models of a model of the cosmos. 'And in the model everything is more clear... Again, it's not part of nature, it's art encompassing nature.' (Bann 1980, video). Finlay sees fishing boats and warships as 'images of integrity because there is nothing superfluous about them'. Their beauty lies in their purity, their functionality.

This is perhaps why, in his memorial to the World War II Battle of Midway, Finlay uses bee-hives to represent the sunken boats. Bee-hives are also images of integrity, being pure in their functionality. Like boats, they are self-contained, housing workers who are organised in a hierarchy of command. Military technology is pastoralised, with the drowned sailors finding a peaceful resting place in Arcadia.

Nuclear Sail represents a more sinister use of the military fleet. This black, polished obelisk rises from the ground, like a nuclear submarine's conning tower coming out of the sea. As Jessie Sheeler writes, the word sail 'brings to mind peaceful, beautiful and harmless sea-going vessels. But instead of the slender, billowing elegance of a canvas sail this one's shape is as the conning tower, or sail, of a nuclear submarine rising here from the earth, its colour recalling the black sail of a ship bearing news of death' (Sheeler 2003, p. 94). This black sail might be a dark echo of the blue sail, sewn by fishing communities as evening comes. *Nuclear Sail* casts a dark shadow over the picturesque Lochan Eck, the threat of nuclear war circumscribing the pastoral ideal. A similar trope appears in Sorley MacLean's Gaelic poem 'Screapadal':

A seal would lift its head
and a basking-shark its sail,
but today in the sea-sound a submarine
lifts its turret and its black sleek back
threatening the thing that would make
dross of wood, of meadows and of rocks
that would leave Screapadal without beauty
just as it was left without people
(MacLean 1999, p. 309)

Terry Gifford describes MacLean's poem as 'one of the most far-reaching transformations of a pastoral tradition [the Gaelic praise-song] that reflects upon twentieth-century world politics and the nuclear threat in its various forms... (Gifford 1999, p. 107). MacLean draws a parallel between the 19th century clearance of Screapadal by landowners and the ultimate clearance of the land, a nuclear holocaust. But where MacLean's anti-war sentiment is clear *Nuclear Sail* is more problematic. With its sleek curves and polished surfaces, it recalls the sculptures of Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore. The polished surface can also reflect, depending on the weather, its surroundings, allowing it to mirror and embody that which it threatens with

destruction. *Nuclear Sail* is a sublime object, beautiful and terrifying. As ever, Finlay's work is double-edged; a warning as well as a chilling recognition of our attraction to power and violence, as manifested in the sublime technology of our war machines. This terrible attraction is reinforced by the way the viewer's face can be reflected in the polished surface of the sculpture.

Finlay acknowledges that force is a presence in the world, but rather than dwell on the arbitrary brutality of nature, he asserts that the moral imperative is on man to take responsibility for this force. With works such as *Nuclear Sail*, Finlay makes an argument reminiscent of Adorno and Horkheimer's dialect of the Enlightenment, whereby progress is a destructive as well as creative process. As his motif of the scythe in works such as *Death is a Reaper* (Abrioux 1992, p. 291) reminds us, the same technology used to cultivate crops is also a symbol of death. This double-edged blade parallels what Laurence Buell calls the 'the double-edged character' of classical pastoral embodied in Virgil's contrast between Tityrus 'the happy co-opted shepherd' and Meliboeus the 'dispossed, alienated shepherd' (Buell 1995, p. 51). Thus while there are elements in Finlay's work which can be seen to act against idealisation, he does not go so far as to overturn the pastoral completely. As noted earlier, the contrasts and tensions in Finlay's complex pastoral design are played out on an epic scale in his garden. Alec Finlay recognises his father's work as a 'lifelong dialogue between oppositions', and uses the terms Stonypathian and Little Spartan to describe the different energies at work in his parents' home and garden. 'The two terms can be seen to be wedded together, speaking to the home and the imaginal domain it became', writes Alec Finlay. 'The Stonypathian is a recuperation of the domestic,' he explains, 'so that Little Sparta is not an act of Imperial overwriting, as The Roman "Mare Nostrum" was for the Mediterranean' (Finlay, Alec 2011, online). This space embodies the complex relationship between art and life. For Alec Finlay, Stonypath represents home, the

Scottish hillside farm where he grew up, as well as the work of art, the 'imaginal domain' his parents created. In its homeliness, the Stonypathian acts as a corrective to the military and revolutionary counterforces of Little Sparta. The Stonypathian and the Little Spartan can be seen as balancing forces in Finlay's complex pastoral design. As a Scottish farm and garden, Stonypath itself is a domestic counterforce to the imported neo-classical arcadia of Little Sparta. Finlay's
imagery often has a double meaning, metamorphosising from domestic to revolutionary or vice versa. So a domestic watering can becomes in its French translation 'arrosoir', also the name of the day in the French Republican Calendar when the Robespierrists were guillotined (Finlay & Hincks in Abrioux 1992, p. 290). Like the scythe of *Death Is A Reaper*, this simple piece of technology has both lifegiving and destructive associations. Finlay does not seek to resolve this dialectic. Rather, he allows the oppositional forces to co-exist, creating a complex web of associations and inviting a range of responses from the viewer.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated the different ways in which Finlay has engaged with the pastoral as an area of content and a literary and artistic genre. We have seen that Finlay's work is far too sophisticated to be described as a simple or sentimental version of pastoral. The idyll, or the pastoral *ideal,* to use Leo Marx's term, is complicated in Finlay's work. The ideal is circumscribed by the pastoral *design*, 'the larger structure of thought and feeling of which the *ideal* is a part' (Marx 2000, p. 24). The pastoral design, Marx writes, 'embraces some token of a larger, more complicated order of experience'. Through their sophistication, literary works 'manage to qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony

in a green pasture' (Marx 2000, p. 25). In the complex pastoral, counterforces bring 'a world which is more "real" into juxtaposition with an idyllic vision (Marx 2000, p. 25). As Gifford writes, at best, pastoral offers a kind of implicit realism (Gifford 1999, p. 10).

The relationship of Finlay's short stories to the pastoral, then, is a complex one. In their explicit realism and unsentimental depiction of hard farm labour, stories such as 'The Fight In The Ditch' and 'The Potato Planters and the Old Joiner's Funeral' have more in common with the 19th century realism of Zola or Turgenev than the Arcadian settings of pastoral. These rural settings, characterised by long, muddy fields, are places of work, not retreat. Big Dod's destruction of the trout in the former story can be seen as an counter-pastoral act, a violent reaction against the beauty and freedom the trout represents. Yet in his stories of childhood, Finlay depicts young boys escaping the city for a country idyll. In 'The Blue Coated Fishermen', his youthful protagonist finds companionship and returns to the city renewed, having gained new knowledge. The gaining of knowledge, however, can also represent a loss of innocence, such as in 'The Old Man and the Trout', where the boy's carelessness leads to the needless, wasteful death of the fish he and the old man had been trying to catch. In 'Encounter', Finlay implicitly critiques the artificial idyll of the country-house, siding with the miner who upsets the feudal order by reclaiming the land for himself. The imposed order of the laird is replaced with a true pastoral vision, where the miner is free to roam the countryside which represents a retreat from hard labour.

For Marx, the dominant counterforce in the pastoral design of our age is industrialization, 'represented by images of machine technology' (Marx 2000, p. 26). Surveying 19th century American literature, specifically Washington Irving's *Legend of Sleepy Hollow,* Marx observes how the 'machine in the garden', in the form of a steam engine, interrupts the settlers' idealised notion of the 'New World' as a pastoral idyll

(Marx 2000, p. 15). Finlay's placement of modern military technology in arcadian settings can be seen as examples of 'the machine in the garden'. But while Marx's phrase relates to a specific time, Finlay's machines are much more universal: they represent force and death. They are modern day manifestations of Poussin's tomb in *Et In Arcadia Ego*, *memento mori* for the post-industrial age. Finlay, then, is a modern day inheritor of the elegiac pastoral tradition identified by Panofsky, reminding us that death is ever present in Arcadia. The pastoral poetics of Little Sparta, as Patrick Eyres notes, provide a camouflage for his polemics. The effect is that Little Sparta goes beyond the pastoral to enter the realm of the epic, as Finlay sends his polemological missiles out into the wider world. The machines in Finlay's garden remind us that we must take responsibility for force. Force can be a power for good and bad. In his memorials to Second World War naval battles, Finlay pays homage to the fallen heroes of a just war. What makes these works problematic for some is their unapologetic militarism. Warships are celebrated for their purity, their functionality. In Finlay's neo-classical worldview, they are models of order. Finlay's attitude to these machines is ambiguous. *Nuclear Sail* is both beautiful and terrible, its sublimity leading to a disturbing realisation of our own attraction to violence. The epic and the sublime, however, can never completely overwrite the domestic and pastoral idyll of Stonypath. Alec Finlay reminds us that his father's work is a 'lifelong dialogue between oppositions' (Finlay, Alec 2011, online) and nowhere is this is dramatised better than in the complex pastoral design of Stonypath/Little Sparta.

Chapter Five

Place Tradition Experiment: Alec Finlay's art of shared consciousness

> The area I work in is shared consciousness. So that can exist in a poetic form – a formal quality that we might be able to recognise together.... Or I might make a building and that might be about sharing the quality of light. Or an investigation into the characteristics of a woodland. So it does not matter to me what the object is, or whether it is poetry or art. I approve of what Ad Reinhardt says: 'There is only one art.'
>
> (Finlay, Alec, Animate 2011, online)

This chapter discusses the ways in which Alec Finlay has built on the homely avantgarde's dynamic of tradition and experiment in order to explore the areas of 'shared consciousness' and cultural relationships with the landscape. As the above comments suggest, Alec Finlay's conception of 'one art' is inclusive, rather than exclusive, encompassing a range of interdisciplinary and participatory approaches to a subject. His role as an artist is often to create a situation or space in which people can share ideas and experiences. This idea of 'sharing' thus extends to his collaborative and generative practice as well as his creative dialogue with past voices. Those voices include his father Ian Hamilton Finlay, from whom he receives a grounding in interdisciplinary practice and avant-garde poetics, and his mentor Hamish Henderson, from whom he gains the idea of a social art and an open-minded vision of Scottish culture. Other formative influences include associated figures like Edwin Morgan and poet-publishers of the small press avant-garde like Cid Corman and Robert Creeley. As noted in chapters one and two, Alec Finlay identifies this nexus as the homely avant-garde, and he builds on their legacy of beauty, tradition and experiment by exploring subsequent developments in Scottish and international poetry and visual art, working them into his own practice as an artist and poet.

The first part of this chapter discusses these aspects in relation to Alec Finlay's work as a publisher, editor and artist-poet. As publisher of the Morning Star Folios and pocketbooks series, he opens up ideas of Scottish culture from an internationalist and avant-garde perspective, building on the legacy of the homely avant-garde and the Scottish Spring, while also looking to contemporary developments in Scottish and international culture. Just as his father created a context for his own work with Wild Hawthorn Press and *POTH.*, Alec Finlay uses his activities as a publisher and editor to shape an aesthetic animated by the interplay

of tradition and experiment. In the process he develops his own socially and environmentally minded practice, of which poetry is only one aspect. Alec Finlay describes his practice as 'microtonal', combining a number of smaller elements within a wider field (Finlay, Alec, Skying 2011, online). He often works with condensed poetic forms such as haiku, mesostics and circle poems, incorporating these into larger, often collaborative, experiential works which can take the form of
interventions in the landscape or web-based media projects.

In the later sections, I look at Alec Finlay's application of this microtonal practice to landscape and the environment in projects such as *The Road North, A Company of Mountains* and *Skying*. In *The Road North* Alec Finlay explores cultural relationships with the Scottish landscape, while with *A Company of Mountains* he seeks creative solutions to the ableist discourse of mountaineering literature. *Skying*, meanwhile, is a poetic and artistic exploration of the ways in which wind power affects our relationship with the environment. Running through these projects are the issues of sustainability, social justice and land ownership. Like his father, Alec Finlay is interested in making the world into a home, but his conception of the world as a 'home' or dwelling, is much more socially and ecologically minded, with a focus on the role art can play in developing sustainable ways of being. Drawing on the geophilosophy of Deleuze and Guatarri, I argue that Finlay's environmental praxis goes beyond conventional ecopoetics through its formal experimentation and use of social and relational practices from contemporary art. Finlay's experiments in shared consciousness bring forth a series of becomings: creative methods of co-production and engagement with the environment which open up new ways of thinking about
our relationship with it.

From publisher to poet: building on the homely avant-garde

In their anthology of Scottish concrete, sound and pattern poetry, *The Order of Things*, Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn argue that a defining feature of Scottish culture is the 'interplay of tradition and experiment' (Finlay & Cockburn 2001, p. 13). As previous chapters have shown, this dynamic is played out in the homely avant-garde of the early 1960s and Hamish Henderson's conception of the folk tradition as a 'carrying stream', renewed by new voices and experimentation. It is also characteristic of Alec Finlay's own practice as a publisher, poet and artist, which as noted above, was shaped under the influence of two mentors: his father and Henderson. Alec Finlay describes himself as 'an ordinary kid who grew up in an extraordinary place... I was just lucky that I happened to grow up in a house that was so full of a whole avantgarde tradition' (Fraser 2003, p. 101). As Alec Finlay has noted, he grew up on postwar American poetry and the European avant-garde, only discovering his

'Scottishness' through Hamish Henderson:

> Hamish introduced me to a different approach to culture; he had everybody singing, he created an air of conviviality. Thanks to him I really discovered my Scottishness. What I discovered from him was a sense of immediate sharing, of the oral tradition. Also, like my father, he had an incredible range of friends, from EP Thompson and Ewan MacColl, to Montale and John Berger.
> These things changed my social sense of what art could be.
> (Fraser 2003, p. 104)

The oral folk tradition offered a model of shared consciousness, shaping Alec Finlay's social sense of art. He was also drawn to the generous spirit of the small press avant-garde, where books were 'the common currency of friendship' (Finlay, Alec 2001, p. 16). As he writes, 'I immediately wanted to belong to this community of itinerants, enthusiasts and eccentrics' (Finlay, Alec 2001, p. 16). For him, 'The most exciting and enduring [small press] practitioners presented their work as a library, offering their audience the opportunity to subscribe to a new vision of the world' (Finlay, Alec 2001, p. 16). As he explains to Lilias Fraser, 'In the same way as a writer is engaging with

other authors, a publisher shapes a library of his own as a kind of annexe to the greater imaginary ideal world library' (Finlay, Alec, quoted in Fraser, 2003, p. 101). While he loved the post-war American poets and the European avant-gardists, Alec Finlay did not consider himself a particularly intelligent reader. Nonetheless, he was drawn to the 'energy and rhythm' of the poetry and the book forms which reflected this. 'I have to be honest and say it was as much just handling the books, and looking at the forms of the books, and being excited by them, kind of in the same way as punk had got me as a teenager, that drew me into publishing' (Fraser, 2003, p. 101). With the small press Morning Star Folios and the mainstream *pocketbooks* series, Alec Finlay would set about shaping a library of his own, his first venture into the area of shared consciousness.

Alec Finlay's first publications saw him engaging with older mentor figures from his father's generation. As a series of poet-artist collaborations, the Morning Star folios and Under the Moon series in some respects picked up where *POTH* left off in 1967. The American and European avant-gardes are well represented, with a particular focus on Black Mountain, concrete poetry, Dada, Russian Futurism. There is also a strong interest in Japanese poetry, in particular Alec Finlay's first love, haiku[51]. *Morning Star Folios* first series, volume 1 is a haiku calender, featuring Cid Corman's translations of the Zen poet Santoka, with design by Walter Miller, who had worked on some of the earliest Wild Hawthorn publications. By showcasing the editor of *Origin,* the first Morning Star Folio quietly announces its debt to a particular American avant-garde tradition. Subsequent volumes tap into this continuum, as Theordore Enslin, Robert Lax and Robert Creeley – all *POTH* contributors - appear. The series also features American artists associated with the small-press avant-garde of the 1960s - Sol Le Witt and Jess Collins – and makes overtures to American nature writing by featuring a prose

[51] 'Haiku were my very first love, and when I was seventeen I read haiku, and then kind of left them alone – they weren't very fashionable, and didn't seem to fit into the contemporary world' (Fraser 2002, p. 109).

piece by Barry Lopez. *Morning Star Folios* and *Under the Moon* also share *POTH*'s interest in poetry in translation, with a particular focus on Scottish contributions to the field, notably those of Edwin Morgan (translating Khlebnikov and Joszef, and collaborating with Chilean poet and artist Cecilia Vicunia on a project that combines concrete poetry with translation [52]), Ian Hamilton Finlay's old friend Lesley Lendrum (translating Friedericke Mayrocker),

Hamish Henderson (translating a selection of Italian modernists including Montale and Quasimodo), and, from a younger generation, Christopher Whyte (translating Rocco Scotallaro). Spanning the Americas, Europe and Japan, the series' range of translations bring different cultures and eras into dialogue. Further Scottish poets and artists contributing original work to the series include Thomas A Clark, Ian Stephen and Laurie Clark, adding some more contemporary voices to the mix and building on the homely avant-garde's approach of placing overlooked Scottish

writers in a wider context.

The worlds of the small presses and the homely avant-garde were brought into a mainstream paperback format with pocketbooks (1999-2002), which Morning Star produced in collaboration with the Edinburgh publishers Polygon and Canongate, as well as various Scottish arts institutions. Of the 16 pocketbooks, five are anthologies focusing on particular themes (the sea, love poems, multi-culturalism, libraries and the art of the book, mountains) and another two are anthologies organised around poetic forms (haiku and short poems, and sound, pattern and concrete). There is also a Scottish counter-cultural reader, *Justified Sinners*, containing a range of forms and media.

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[52] Their collaboration is arguably the most innovative of the series. Morgan responds to Vicuna's Spanish phrases with his own Scots translations. Both poets create words within words by inserting letters in smaller sized text, so 'corazon' (heart) becomes 'con razon' (with reason). As Marjorie Perloff writes, 'in Morgan's Scottish version, the "hert" ("heart") contains withn itself that which is "right." But the isolation of "ich" "(German "I") personalizes that heart, even as "hert" points back to Vicuña. But then her paragram isolates the "co," suggesting that these poets are truly collaborators' (Perloff 1996, pp. 335 - 344). This sense of true collaboration is reinforced by Vicuna's insistence that Morgan's efforts are not translations, but 'an installation in the language of poetry.' (Finlay, Alec 1994, p. 6)

The remaining titles are artists' books, taking the small press experiments of the Morning Star folios into a mainstream format. Five of these are works by Scottish poets and artists, while the other three document Alec Finlay's own artist projects. Together these map a vision of Scottish culture animated by the interplay between tradition and experiment, the rural and the urban. As such, they reflect the shift in conceptions of Scottish identity from the ethnic and cultural nationalism of the Scottish Renaissance, to the civic nationalism of the post-devolutionary era. Alec Finlay recognises that national culture is not a fixed entity, but an ongoing dialogue between past and present: a unity understood as diverse and fluctuating.

While the large Scottish poetry anthologies of the decade, as edited by Douglas Dunn, Roderick Watson, and Robert Crawford and Mick Imlah recognise the centrality of English, Scots and Gaelic to Scotland's poetry, *pocketbooks* go well beyond the tri-language model to represent a range of languages and dialects throughout the series.[53] The dedicated multicultural anthology, *Wish I Was Here,* encompasses various Scots and English dialects, Gaelic and Shetlandic, as well as the post-colonial hybrids produced by diasporic communities from Africa, the Caribbean and Asia. In his introduction, Kevin MacNeill remarks that the book is 'surprisingly peerless. I could think of no reason... as to why no editor(s) had been Here before and I am still mystified'. He acknowledges the difficulty of achieving as wide a representation as possible: 'Scotland is more multicultural today than ever. This book is not as diverse as her'. However, he stresses that the book is not 'a timidly apologetic, overly politically-correct collection that will obligingly beg for or effortlessly expect space' in the media or bookstores (Finlay & MacNeill 2000, p. 15). Neither is it a token gesture;

[53] See Douglas Dunn, ed., *The Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry*, (London: Faber, 1992), Roderick Watson, ed., *The Poetry of Scotland: Gaelic, Scots and English* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), Robert Crawford and Mick Imlah, eds, *The New Penguin Book of Scottish Verse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000).

several of its contributors appear elsewhere in the series, reflecting the quality of their work.

In terms of genre and form, *pocketbooks* are arguably the most adventurous anthologies produced by a mainstream Scottish publisher in recent times. Concrete poetry is absent from Douglas Dunn's Faber anthology and *The New Penguin Book of Scottish Verse*, although Roderick Watson's vast *Poetry of Scotland: Gaelic, Scots and English* (1995) does contain some examples by Ian Hamilton Finlay and Edwin
Morgan. *Dream State* features work by poets associated with the Informationist movement [54] alongside such mainstream figures as Carol Anne Duffy, but the examples included are relatively conventional in form. As its editor Donny O'Rourke writes in the introduction to the second edition that 'to the lure of the lyric, I've perhaps too easily succumbed. Experimental work that has no desire to mean, suggest or communicate beyond its own supra-syntactic linguistic ingenuity has lost out somewhat'. He suggests that readers might seek 'less direct, postmodernly occluded poetry elsewhere' (O'Rourke 2002, p. 4). *Pocketbooks* step into that gap. While open to more conventional forms, the series aligns itself with the avant-garde, tracing a line from the 1960s homely avant-garde to the Informationists and Peter Manson's innovative Glasgow-based magazine *Object Permanence* (1994-97) which published experimental Scottish poetry alongside international language-led work. In the introduction to *The Order of Things,* Cockburn and Finlay remark that 'while contemporary visual artists have continued to subvert dominant modes of representation, poetry has on the whole retained conventional literary discourse as the norm'. While they add that the use of more conventional forms by the leading contemporary Scottish poets is 'in itself no bad thing', they still think it is worth asking

[54] Informationism was a Scottish poetry movement of the 1990s, influenced by MacDiarmid and Morgan, as well as the international avant-gardes such as the New York School and American L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E poetry.

why the period of experimentation covered in the anthology has been 'so overlooked during the past two decades' (Finlay & Cockburn 2001, pp. 13-14). Morning Star Folios and *pocketbooks*, with their interest in experiments across form and media, attempt to bring some of this subversive energy back into contemporary Scottish culture. By presenting traditional and experimental work alongside each other, and blurring the boundaries between art forms, Finlay and his co-editors create a vibrant, eclectic vision of Scottish culture, offering illuminating and often
surprising points of contact between writers and eras.

As the inside cover blurb puts it, *pocketbooks* constitute 'a contemporary generalist view of Scottish culture' (Finlay, Alec, 2001, inside cover blurb), a deliberate nod to the generalist tradition in Scottish education and intellectual life discussed by George Elder Davie in his books *The Democratic Intellect* (1962) and *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect* (1986). *The Democratic Intellect* identifies a Scottish intellectual tradition characterised by its generalist and inter-disciplinary nature, an approach which contrasted with the specialist tradition at Oxford and Cambridge. This approach was one of the many ways in which civic Scotland maintained its identity within the United Kingdom (Davie 1962). As Murdo MacDonald writes:

> it sets out to defend not only the intellectual culture of Scotland but the whole notion of what an intellectual culture can be, by showing that all its parts should benefit from all its other parts. As human beings we require both poetry and mathematics. They are not in competition. (MacDonald 2013, online)

As a student in the late 1970s, MacDonald remembers 'being acutely aware of how little information was available to me about my own culture except in the form of stereotypes. What I wanted was a vision that treated Scottish art and ideas as a normal part of an international context' (MacDonald 2014, online). He, and several of his peers, found this in Davie. As Christopher Harvie notes, Davie's ideas were influential

on radical Scottish writers of the 1980s such as Alasdair Gray and James Kelman (Harvie 2007, online). Davie's ideas clearly had an influence on Alec Finlay too: *pocketbooks*, with their inter-disciplinary and non-specialist approach to Scottish culture sit proudly in this context. Indeed, a quote from Davies' essay on the Scottish Enlightenment appears at the beginning of *Without Day: Proposals for a New Scottish Parliament* (Finlay, Alec 2000), in a letter from MacDonald to Finlay:

> … in order to keep the consciences right in the matter of first principles, they refused to vote their parliament out of existence at its final meeting, simply proroguing it sine die. They thus allowed the debate to continue on an intellectual plane, and enabled Francis Hutcheson to argue, in post-1730 Glasgow, that the Union was defective in failing to provide Scotland with institutional machinery for defending its rights as a nation.
>
> (Finlay, Alec 2000, p. 13

As MacDonald adds, 'this seems to sum up something of the metaphysical Scotland of which George has made sure we remain aware' (Finlay, Alec 2000, p. 13). Without recruiting a diverse range of writers and artists to a unified cause, *pocketbooks* reflected on the ways in which artists kept that metaphysical Scotland alive throughout the 20th century, while showcasing the new ways in which Scotland was being imagined at the dawn of the devolutionary era. The politics of imagining are at the heart of the 13th book in the series, *Justified Sinners: An Archaeology of Scottish Counter-culture 1960-2000* (2001), which documents 'moments of spontaneous action and organised resistance, refusal and renewal', with contributors who range from the local to the international: 'the wandering Scots who carried the territory of *Scotia Nostra* with them' (Kenneth White, Alexander Trocchi, Mark Boyle) to 'those welcome visitors from overseas who challenged Scotland's habit of cultural withdrawal' such as Noam Chomsky, Joseph Beuys, Buckminster Fuller and the Polish theatre-maker Tadeuz Kantor (Finlay & Burrell 2001, p. 12). The figures whom Finlay would later identify as a homely avant-garde – Ian Hamilton Finlay, Edwin Morgan and Hamish Henderson – are among the

Justified Sinners who stayed in Scotland, helping sow the seeds for what Morgan calls the 'Scottish Spring' of the late 1960s[55] 'a time of beginnings, a time of openings' (Finlay & Burrell 2001, p. 34). *Justified Sinners* also makes direct connections between art and activism, drawing a line from the anti-Polaris marches of the 1960s, with their anti-nuclear folk songs, to the radical critiques of Thatcher and neo-liberalism by figures such as James Kelman, Tom Leonard and Douglas Gordon. As such it shows that political engagement amongst writers and artists not only took the form of representation and imagining, but direct acts of resistance.

The interplay of the traditional or folk elements with those of the international avant-garde is reflected, notes Alec Finlay, in representations of the Scottish landscape, 'a domain of political and environmental struggle, and of mythic renewal'. While Beuys enacted this in his trips to Rannoch Moor[56], Scots, Alec Finlay notes 'have found it less easy to re-establish this relationship' (Finlay & Birrell 2001, p. 12). This, however, is changing, as *pocketbooks* such as Hamish Fulton's *Wild Life: Walks In the Cairngorms* (2000), Ian Stephen's book of island stories and recipes, *Mackeral & Creamola* (2001), and Helen Douglas's photographic mapping of a Hebridean beach, *Unravelling The Ripple* (2001), attest. Such artists' books, alongside the boating anthology *Green Waters* (1999) and the mountain anthology *The Way To Cold Mountain* (2001), assert the importance of nature and landscape in contemporary Scottish culture, making a strong case for landscape and nature being a constant source of inspiration for innovative

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[55] The idea of a 'Scottish Spring' and rebirth is reflected in the title of Morgan's 1968 collection, *The Second Life*. The late 1960s saw the emergence of new voices in Scottish literature such as Tom Leonard, James Kelman, Liz Lochhead, Agnes Owens et al.

[56] Beuys was invited to Scotland in 1970 by Richard Demarco to participate in the Strategy: Get Arts exhibition at the Edinburgh College of Art. Demarco led him to the Moor of Rannoch and Argyll, a journey which inspired his moor-action of 13 August 1970 and 'Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch): The Scottish Symphony' with Henning Christiansen and Rory McEwan. (Caroline Tisdall, 'Joseph Beuys in Edinburgh' in Martin & Demarco 2009, p. 17). The latter performance included film of the mist on the moor, a soundscape, and actions by Beuys himself involving gelatine (Herd, Colin 'Review: 10 Dialogues at the RSA, Edinburgh' *Aesthetica* magazine 2010, online). In 1974 Demarco described Beuys' journey to Rannoch Moor as 'a search into those spaces where the Celtic and pre-historic sites are a complement to the purest forms of 20th Century Art' (Gibson, David 2010, online).

new work. The mountains, Alec Finlay writes, are *gestalt,* 'representing a touchstone for how we relate to the land' (Finlay 2001, 20). If much Scottish art and literature of the '80s and '90s was associated with the urban, then the cultural responses gathered in *pocketbooks* offer a basis for re-engaging with the rural and the maritime. This fits in with the historic conceptualisation of nationhood based upon what Susan Oliver calls 'an environmental imaginary—a space in which art and literature is self-consciously associated with flora, fauna, soil and geology'. In this conceptualisation, 'an ecological understanding of the land' becomes a basis for nationhood (Oliver 2014, online). As a civic nationalist, Alec Finlay is careful to remove ethnicity from this equation: the land is for everyone. Hence the anthology's inclusion of writings 'not necessarily by Scots, and not necessarily describing Scottish mountains'. Through the inclusion of work by Primo Levi, Antoine Saint-Expury and Han Shan, the reader is reminded that Scottish mountain writing is part of a larger world library. 'The resulting mosaic reveals the different meanings that the wilderness holds' (Finlay, Alec 2001, p. 11, p. 15). As I shall discuss in the second part of this chapter, Alec Finlay would soon move from exploring these different meanings, and the means by which writers and artists have articulated them, from a retrospective editorial perspective, to that of a practising artist and poet.

A key element of *Justified Sinners* is 'the ebb and flow that characterises the relationship between literature and visual arts' (Finlay & Birrell 2001, p. 9). In his interview with Lilias Fraser, Alec Finlay laments the separation of these art forms, which he sees as a retrenchment of the advances made by the 1960s avant-garde: 'Culture in Scotland – in Britain – is split in a really divisive way, in a way that it wasn't in the sixties... There's no energetic meeting between the best contemporary artists and the best writers... Most people tend to stay within their own field of expertise'. (Fraser 2003, p. 104). *Pocketbooks*, along with earlier projects such as the Morning Star Folios and Under the Moon series, aim to bridge the gap between literature and art. Indeed,

it is through his work as a publisher that Alec Finlay develops an art practice. The Morning Star Folios series, running from 1990 to 1994, were strongly influenced by Alec Finlay's youthful interest in American and European small press poetry and artists' books. As he points out, it was the materiality of the 'oddly-shaped books, small books, books with Japanese binding, and books with funny titles, like *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse.*' which attracted him as much as the poetry itself. (Fraser 2003, pp. 100-101). Influenced by concrete poetry and artists' books, he was keen to explore 'visual thinking'. For him, the key to a successful publication was putting 'image and poem together so that one doesn't dominate the other' (Fraser 2003, p. 103).

For financial reasons, the projects had to be small-scale. As he explained, 'It made no sense to do big collections of poems as I couldn't afford that; so instead I gathered poems, gathered an artist who could work with them, and together we made this folded work called a Folio'. Sold by subscription and presented as a series of four annual issues, these folded sheets were presented in a printed envelope, reflecting the fact that 'most of the work happens in the post' (Fraser 2003, p. 103). Morning Star Folios were in some respects a throwback to the small-press scene of the 1960s, relying on the same tried-and-tested correspondence based networking and production methods that had sustained the poet-publishers in his father's library. At the outset, Marjorie Perloff writes, 'the folios tended to keep the verbal, visual, and even musical, media distinct... but soon Finlay was bringing together artists and poets who seemed naturally in sync', citing the collaborations between Robert Creeley and Sol Le Witt and Morgan and Vicuna as particularly successful examples (Perloff 1996, pp. 335 - 344). As the series evolved Alec Finlay was able to experiment with and refine his visual presentation of poetry, while drawing on different traditions of book design in order to modify the format of the folios. With the *Under The Moon* series, published between 1994 and 1996,

Finlay consolidated these developments while exploring a wider range of artists' book formats: the concertina, the sewn book and the bound anthology.

Alec Finlay's interest in the art of the book led to two curatorial projects: the centre for the artists' book at Dundee Contemporary Arts, and *Imagined Lands*, a 1996 project in which artists and writers were invited to designs stamps for an independent Scottish republic. As he noted in 2003, 'The use books are being put to by artists excites me – by artists like Graham Fagen, Nathan Coley & Jaqui Donachie – and it's that that I feel part of' (Fraser 2003, p. 107). It is significant that Alec Finlay's activities as a publisher should lead to the development of an art practice. We see him transcending the role of editor, to become the creator of a situation. As Finlay explains, 'the way my art practice has developed is that I author an invitation, which defined certain parameters, and then anyone could contribute to it' (Fraser 2003, p. 107). Inspired by the 1992 Freedom March for Scottish devolution and the work of the American stamp artist Donald Evans, *Imagined Lands* brought together artists and writers including Edwin Morgan, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Robin Gillanders and David Bellingham for a project that is both playful and political, celebrating 'the language of stamps; a secret language, intimately connected with the customs and superstitions of correspondence, which lie outside of the ken or control of any governing agency' (Finlay, Alec 2006, p. 5). The stamps reflect and celebrate their means of production, created as they were through a process of correspondence and collaboration. Alongside an exhibition, Alec Finlay produced a limited run of stamp albums and stamps, allowing readers to take pleasure in the materiality of the form.

In John Burnside's words, Alec Finlay is 'an artistic catalyst' who 'encourage[s] and foster[s] collaborations between artists' (Burnside 1996, online). This approach is typical of contemporary art practice, where the artists' role is a generative one. In the words of Jeremy Deller, 'the artist is someone who makes things happen' (Deller

2012, unpag). As Alec Finlay told Lilias Fraser:

> There are many artists who are interested in what you might call configuring social experiences… I think that catalyst role is quite clear; it's just that I've now begun to discover a confidence and articulation of it as an artist. So whereas in the past I was an enthuser, who would bring two other people together, now I'm taking that further and further towards authorship... I've learned from countless experiences that there is no authorship, or not in any interesting sense; every project I'm involved in involves other people. (Fraser 2003, p. 109)

One might relate Finlay's practice to Nicholas Bourriard's concept of relational asethetics[57], a major current in contemporary art where the artist's role is to create a social situation. The poet-artist himself cites Joseph Beuys, whose concept of 'social sculpture' rests on the proposition that 'EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST who – from his state of freedom – the position of freedom that he experiences at first hand – learns to determine the other positions in the TOTAL ARTWORK OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL ORDER' (Bishop 2006, p. 125). As Shelley Sacks writes, Beuys's expanded conception of art, or social sculpture, incorporates 'the democratic shaping of society'. He would declare the Free International University that he cofounded, as well as his teaching, as his greatest artworks. His 'radical and spiritualized understanding of art' has been, notes Sacks, a major influence on those 'groups and networks within and beyond the art world who are working toward a sustainable future' (Beuys 2010 [2004] ix). In their own modest way, Alec Finlay's generative projects are a form of social sculpture, opening up space for ideas and experiences to be shared, with a focus on connectedness that reflects his desire for an equal and ecological society. This chimes with the social sense of art Alec Finlay gained from Henderson: the idea of art as an act of shared consciousness.

[57] 'an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space' (Bishop 2006, p. 160)

He brought this practice to *Without Day: Proposals for the New Scottish Parliament* (2000), where a range of writers and artists contributed unrealisable proposals for Enric Miralles' building. As Alec Finlay writes, 'If [Miralles's] buildings are, in his own words, a form of spatial "writing", inscribed in architecture forms and shadows, then this book exists as an inventory of imaginings for that real and imaginary site'. In his role as 'artistic catalyst', Finlay authored an elegant invitation to create text only proposals for the parliament, thus ensuring that 'the scale remained imaginative' (Finlay, Alec 2000, p. 11). While text-based, the proposals could take the form of an event, work of art, or some other kind of intervention, in any media. None will be realised[58] and are in this sense 'without day'. 'Freed from physical or temporal limitations they may be monumental, or suggest the smallest intervention, action, or idea without physical form' (Finlay, Alec 2000, p. 29).

Alec Finlay's own proposal takes the self-reflexive form of a special edition of *Without Day*, 'consisting of as many copies as there were days between the suspension of the sitting of the last Scottish Parliament on 28th April 1707, until the recall of Parliament on May 6th 1999'. These will be available for free from the foyer of the Parliament itself, and their gradual distribution throughout Scotland and abroad will 'echo the flow of the democratic process from the Parliament building to the wider world' (Finlay, Alec 2000, p. 30). This democratic spirit animates the project. A number of artists base their proposals around Scotland's natural environment, incorporating trees, stones, birds and animals. Others draw on Scottish history, language and culture. Like Edwin Morgan's stamp for a Scottish republic[59], many of the proposals in *Without Day* project

[58] Alec Finlay's concept of unrealisable proposals recalls his father's controversial *Third Reich Revisited* series, but can also be located within a wider context of proposals by a range of contemporary artists and poets, 'comrades on a synchronous adventure into the non-material world', such as John Latham, Nathan Coley, Tilo Schultz, Douglas Gordon, Thomas A. Clark, Tom Leonard, and Hans Ulrich Obrist (Finlay, Alec 2000, p. 11).
[59] See Alec Finlay, *Imagined Lands vol XIV. – Scotland.* Edinburgh: City Art Centre, 1996

elements of the past into the future, reflecting the interplay of tradition and experiment.

The final two *pocketbooks*, *Football Haiku* and *Labanotation* see Alec Finlay taking his generative practice into the context of social art projects which involve poets, artists and members of the public. *Football Haiku* documents a haiku writing project Finlay undertook with established poets and schoolchildren, featuring a combination of text, illustrations and photographs. *Labanotation* documents Finlay's collaborative efforts to dance Archie Gemmel's famous goal for Scotland in the 1978 football World Cup, featuring photographs and choreographers' diagrams. Both include miniature CDs featuring recordings of the performances. By involving the public, as well as artists, in these collaborative processes, Finlay opens up a space of shared consciousness. Finlay's shared writing practice had begun with his rediscovery of haiku and his participation in renga sessions. In 1999, he and David Connearn designed a renga platform, a portable structure for the collaborative writing of linked verse. As Alec Finlay writes, 'the renga platform is like a stage and a temporary dwelling. For those who come to watch, the platform offers a quiet performance, for those who write it becomes a home'. A platform is not necessary for composing renga. As Alec Finlay notes, anyone can gather a few friends and write poems together using the schema. Renga goes beyond poetry, he argues: 'it is an art of communalism, or, if you prefer, a renga day is "social sculpture", to adopt Joseph Beuys' terminology, and shared writing is a public platform' (Finlay, Alec 2005 pp. 910). Thus we see Alec Finlay making the connection between his poetics and the
participatory art practice of Beuys.

In 2003 Alec Finlay remarked that he was 'finding a way to work with place, and books, and with physical and psychological experiences, and that would be where I'd like to go on working'. He related this to his own experience of growing up at

Stonypath – 'the poetic space of the garden' – and the social 'space of singing that Hamish gave'. These experiences could be related through books – 'the way pages turn and so on' – and participatory and collaborative projects like the renga platform and football haiku. As he told Fraser, 'You can see with the renga platform, and with the football haiku where kids in football games are wearing poems[60], that this work is about animating... It's about bringing into consciousness these undercurrents of consciousness' (Fraser 2003, p. 107). Alec Finlay's own poetic practice comes out of the avant-garde small-press traditions, with a focus on haiku, concrete and visual poetry, found text and minimalist lyrics (I will discuss these in detail in the second part). As the following comments suggest, Alec Finlay is not only interested in formal experimentation, but in taking poetry off the page and into experiential situations:

> It's a sweeping generalisation, but poetry – *Poetry*? – has let slip the possibilities of Modernism; the poem as object, as field, as constellation... I want to see what can still be done with the poetic, the poem (with or without words)... In an odd way, the poem can do what conceptualism once did: being a proposal, a possibility, being (usually) non-material. (Internet 2)

By moving away from ideas of individual authorship, Finlay conceives of the poem as a site for shared consciousness. We see this with the renga platform, where the shared experience of a place is the basis for collective writing, but also in visual forms such as the circle poem, which he describes as 'a space that we could both occupy, in looking at. We would have a relationship to it, and that might be a bit more confidently shared than a solipsistic, confessional poem, say' (Internet 2). By placing individual poems and artworks within a wider field – a practice he describes as 'microtonal' – Alec Finlay extends the possibilities for shared consciousness (Finlay, Alec 2011, online). Such 'microtonal' projects see Alec Finlay setting the parameters of a proposal and then

[60] Finlay had the haiku printed on t-shirts, which the children wear while playing football.

inviting others to join him in the sharing of consciousness. Yet unlike some contemporary artists for whom the resulting
situation is the end result, Finlay sets himself lyrical tasks, writing poems and creating artworks which convey his own thoughts, experiences and responses to other voices. Microtonal projects are multi-media, incorporating blog posts, interventions, artworks, poems and books. As he explains, it depends on what is appropriate to the social situation: 'A lot of the formal resolution comes from thinking about how people will physically be when they experience it. Will they be walking through a wood? Or sitting on a bench? Or reading a book? Or looking at a blog?' (Internet 2). This ties in with Ad Reinhardt's notion of 'one art'. As Alec Finlay notes, 'it's the quality of experience that matters, not the particular form it takes' (Internet 2). The sharing of consciousness is also reflected in Alec Finlay's dialogue with past voices, whether it is the poets of the homely avant-garde, or the layers of meaning inscribed in a place. As I shall discuss in part two, the microtonal projects open up spaces in which people can experience the interplay of tradition and experiment, bringing forth new understandings of culture, society and ecology.

An experimental environmental praxis: social art, the avant-garde, and landscape.

I went back to Skjolden
and the dark circle

of the mountains

to look for my own
place in the glen
of a shadowed world

where what I
find is shown in
how I think and live.

From 'The Wittgenstein House (Skjolden)'

(Finlay, Alec 2012, p. 11)

Alec Finlay's poem sequence 'The Wittgenstein House (Skjolden)' offers an illuminating introduction to his poetics. As Calum Rodger notes, Alec Finlay's poetry establishes a dialogue with the past, 'augmenting old voices with phenomenological reflections from the imagistic... to the corporeal... breathing life into both by means of quiet reverence and unadorned formal exactitude' (Rodger 2013, online). We see that formal exactitude in his use of the tercet. This, combined with short lines and the calm pace help convey that sense of reflection and quiet reverence. In this poem, the old voice is of course Wittgenstein, but rather than engage directly with his thought, Finlay is more interested in establishing a sense of the context in which the philosopher lived and worked. Skjolden is an inscribed landscape – quite literally. As a sign across the lake notes, in 1914, Wittgenstein owned a hut here, where he
worked on the manuscripts of the *Tractatus* and of the *Philosopical Investigations*. Finlay's poem thus blends his own immediate responses to this place with his awareness of its significance to Wittgenstein's life and work. He observes how the light changes over the mountains, notes the trees, flowers and geological features: 'wild rasps / & nettles', a slope 'splashed with grey & orange lichen'. Yet he also brings us to the hut itself, inviting us to imagine 'the view that W chose: / a landscape utterly simple.' (Finlay, Alec 2012, pp. 11-15). As Tony Williams writes, 'Accumulating alongside these

immediate details is a sense of the context, in terms of both the speaker's and Wittgenstein's personal lives. The two figures become entangled' (Williams 2012, online). Finlay engages with Wittgenstein, while seeking out his own place in this shadowed world, hoping that what he finds is 'shown in / how I live and think' (Finlay, Alec 2012, p. 11). Thus, as Williams notes, 'Wittgenstein's House (Skjolden)' is 'partly a poem about, yes, place, but place as a blank space in which thinking and being can begin' (Williams 2012, online). Alec Finlay's poetry and art opens up such spaces, inviting the reader and viewer to participate in the sharing of consciousness.

Like his father, Alec Finlay is interested in making the world into a home, but his idea of a 'home' or 'dwelling' has a much stronger social and ecological basis. While Ian Hamilton Finlay largely confined his work to the semi-private space of his garden-state, Alec Finlay has gone out into the world, inviting collaborators and fellow travellers to join him in acts of shared consciousness. As such, his work fits more comfortably with Louisa Gairn's contention that contemporary poetry in Scotland constitutes 'an ecological "line of defence", providing a space in which the reader and author can examine their relationship to the world around them' (Gairn 2009, p. 156). While Finlay senior's work certainly encourages readers and viewers to examine their relationship with the landscape through imagery and inscribed
language, it does not actively engage with issues of ecology and sustainability in the way that Alec Finlay's does. As I shall argue in this section, Alec Finlay's work constitutes not only an ecological line of defence, but a series of becomings, overcoming static or nostalgic conceptions of being. As Caroline McCracken Flesher notes,

> In much Scottish literature the land sustains and marks the unproblematically Scottish... But if the land itself is inscribed, over time it shifts and surges unpredictably according to its accumulated detritus of words and meanings. Can it then offer

a stable place or static geography against which problems of
identity can be reduced? The Green Party thinks so, for
'environment is the basis upon which every society is formed'.
(McCracken-Flesher 2014, online)

For Alec Finlay, the mountains are a source of stability. They are, as noted earlier, *gestalt,* 'representing a touchstone for how we relate to the land' (Finlay 2001, p. 20). Yet while the mountains may sustain across deep geological time, the environment around them is complex and ever-changing. The land is continually re-shaped by human and non-human forces, inscribed with language and cultural meanings. Alec Finlay's conception of ecology privileges connectedness and sustainability over the artificial preservation of an environment. The world is to be made by man into a home: the question is how to achieve this responsibly, balancing human needs with those of the earth. Through his poetry and art, Alec Finlay explores ways of being - and becoming – in an environment. Just as the landscape changes, so does Scottish identity. As McCracken-Flesher writes, the landscape 'is a site for potential, for Scotland as something else. Feeding on inscriptions by generations of authors Scotland... will always be bursting its bounds' (McCracken-Flesher 2014, online). As I have shown with *pocketbooks,* Alec Finlay's work does not reinforce some essentialist idea of Scottish culture and identity, but opens itself to becoming by embracing difference and change through the creative meeting of tradition and experiment. In microtonal projects such as *The Road North,* Alec Finlay unpacks the layers of inscribed language and adds new layers of his own, inviting others to share the experience: the Scottish landscape becomes a site for potential.

Drawing on ecocritical readings of the philosophy of Deleuze and Guatarri, I argue that Finlay's practice opens up new ways of thinking about human relationships with nature. To do this I take two key concepts from Deleuze and Guatarri: geophilosophy and the rhizome. I will discuss geophilosophy and its

relevance to ecocriticism in more detail in the subsequent section, but to offer a brief explanation, Deleuze and Guatarri describe it as form of philosophy where 'thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth', rather than in that between subject and object (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 85). Rejecting Husserl's demand for a ground for thought as original intuition, they look to the motion of the earth. Through its rotation, the earth 'carries out a movement of deterritorialization on the spot, by which it goes beyond any territory' (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 85). Geophilosophy, therefore, frees thought from any fixed 'ground', deterritorializing philosophy from fixed categories, binaries, traditions and hierarchies, allowing thought to expand freely across a 'plane of immanence' (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 85). With their focus on immanence and 'becoming', Deleuze and Guatarri seek to overturn the Western philosophical tradition's search for essential 'truths' or ways of being. As Sheri Benning writes, geophilosophy denies 'appeals to transcendence, essence, or universal principles' (Benning 2007, online). By 'stretching out a plane of immanence that absorbs the earth (or rather, "adsorbs" it)' (Deleuze & Guattari 1994,
p. 85), geophilosophy frees or 'deterritorializes' thought from tradition, hierarchies and binaries. As they explain, 'the earth is not one element among others but rather brings together all the elements within a single embrace while using one or another of them to deterritorialize territory' (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 85). This earthcentred approach has a clear relevance for ecological thinking, not least in its aim of ceradicating the dichotomy between humanity and nature. By treating nature as 'other', humanity has exploited it as a resource, leading to environmental ruin. Ecologists aim to rebalance the relationship between humanity and nature, proposing more sustainable ways of dwelling. Geophilosophy, with its focus on immanence and becoming, goes beyond reactive environmentalism and the mourning for a lost Eden

by offering new ways of thinking about human relationships with nature. As I will argue, geophilosophy helps us understand the ways in which Alec Finlay's environmental practice art opens up potential sites of becoming, offering creative and sustainable solutions for renegotiating our relationship with nature.

While the concepts of immanence and becoming are appropriate to a discussion of Alec Finlay's investigation of the Scottish landscape as a site of potential, the idea of deterritorializing territory does not quite fit a body of work with such a strong sense of place and history. Deterritorialization is of course an aspect of the rhizome, Deleuze and Guatarri's famous concept of difference. In botany, the rhizome is a horizontal subterranean stem of a plant which produces roots and shoots from its nodes. The rhizome becomes a metaphor for any structure which 'connects any point to another point' (Deleuze & Guattari 2003, p. 21). This is very different, they write, 'from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order' (Deleuze & Guattari 2003, p. 7). The rhizome offers an alternative to hierarchical and centred ways of thinking – arboreal thought - and operates on the principles of multiplicity and heterogeneity. The rhizome resists binaries and dualisms, and has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills'. In the rhizome, thought is nomadic, moving through dimensions by 'variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots'. This approach deterrorializes place and explodes linear histories and traditions – it is, as Deleuze and Guatarri write, an anti-genealogy (Deleuze & Guattari 2003, p. 21). The rhizome fosters new relationships, 'becomings':

> In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with
> hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the
> rhizome is an accentred, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system
> without a General and without an organizing memory of central
> automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states. What is at
> question in the rhizome is a relation to sexuality – but also to the
> animal, the vegetal, the world, politics, the book, things natural and
> artificial – that is totally different from the arborescent relation: all
> manner of 'becomings'. (Deleuze and Guattari 2003, p. 21)

This emphasis on 'becomings' is what makes the rhizome such a radical proposition. 'The rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo'* write Deleuze and Guattari, 'The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and... and... and.." This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb to be' (Deleuze and Guattari 2003, p. 25). Therefore, with this emphasis on becoming or immanence, we can see how the rhizome fits into the wider project of geophilosophy. Deleuze and Guattari seek to overturn the Western tradition of transcendental philosophy, with its idea of a ground or subject on which experience can be based: 'It is a regrettable characteristic of the Western mind to relate expressions and actions to exterior or transcendent ends, instead of evaluating them on a plane of consistency on the basis of their intrinsic value' (Deleuze and Guattari 2003, p. 22). Their alternative, developed further in *What Is Philosophy* (1994), is to propose a 'transcendental empiricism' which, as Claire Colebrook writes, 'strives to think experience well beyond its human and fixed images', freeing us from 'the restrictions of common sense and a moral image of human reason, allowing us to become towards the future' (Colebrook 2008, p. 89).

Alec Finlay's work might take a critical eye to tradition, but it is clearly not an anti-genealogy. Similarly, his conception of place in *The Road North* is not so much a deterritorialization as a *reterritorialization,* taking elements of Japanese culture and topography and inscribing them onto the Scottish landscape. The template for their journey is *Backroads to Far Towns,* Cid Corman and Kamiake Susumu's 1968 translation of Basho's 17th century haiku travelogue *Oku-no-hoshimichi,* alternately translated as *The Narrow Road the the Deep North* or *The Narrow Road to the Interior*. The

terse modernist idiom of Corman and Susumu's version, where haiku are

interspersed with epigrammic prose, provide a model for Finlay and Cockburn's own approach[61]. Ian Hamilton Finlay's The pair roughly followed the great poet's northwest trajectory, matching his 53 'stations' (temples, mountains, dwellings) with equivalent places of personal and/or cultural resonance. Such a process opens up new ways of seeing place, without erasing the rich and complex history of cultural inscriptions on either landscape. While Alec Finlay's conception of tradition and place might not in itself be rhizomatic, his practice pertains to certain aspects of the rhizome in that by operating in the field of shared consciousness it goes beyond binaries, collapses hierarchies and opens up the potential for new human relationships with nature. I would argue that the field of shared consciousness can be seen as a DeleuzeGuatarrian 'plane of consistency' on which thoughts can be judged on their intrinsic values, and a 'plane of immanence' in which becomings take place. Thus I would argue that Alec Finlay's work combines a generous, but not uncritical exploration of tradition, with an experimental participatory practice which relates to concepts such as the rhizome and becoming.

Mapping and Tracing Scotland: The Road North

The mapping of Japan onto Scotland in *The Road North* corresponds with Deleuze and Guattari's fifth and sixth principles of the rhizome, those of cartography and

[61] As the publisher of *Origin* and a translator of Japanese poets from Basho to Shimpei Kusano, Corman is a key figure in the avant-garde small press continuum Ian Hamilton Finlay and Alec Finlay both work in, acting as a mediator between East and West. Corman's work has been published by both Finlays, from *POTH* to the Morning Star Folios. The first of Alec Finlay's Morning Star Folios was a Cid Corman haiku calendar, featuring translations of Santoka's 'Walking Into The Wind' (Series 1. No. 1. February, 1990). A later entry in the series featured Corman translations of Masaoki Shiki alongside rubber stamps by Hans Waanders (Series 6, No. 3, 1997). *The Road North* can thus be seen as the fullest flowering of Alec Finlay's long-standing engagement with Corman's work.

decalcomania, or mapping and tracing (Deleuze and Guatarri 2003, p. 12).[62] The rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari write, is 'a map and not a tracing… [it is] not amenable to any structural or generative model'. Such models or structures can be endlessly reproduced or traced, following 'tree logic'. Tracings, they write, are based on 'overcoding structures or supporting axes, following the predetermined branching patterns of trees' (Deleuze and Guatarri 2003, p. 12). Thus, 'the tree articulates and hierarchizes tracings; tracings are like the leaves of a tree' (Deleuze and Guatarri 2003, p. 12). Deleuze and Guattari urge us to 'make a map, not a tracing', following the example of the orchid and the wasp: 'The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome'. Rather than reproduce existing structures, the map fosters new connections, creates multiplicities, and can be endlessly modified. The map is a performance, something that can be 'drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation' (Deleuze & Guattari 2003, p. 12). In summary, the rhizome:

> pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight. It is tracings that must be put on the map, not the opposite' (Deleuze & Guattari 2003, p. 21).

If we apply these ideas to *The Road North* we can talk about tracings of Basho's Japan being put onto the map of Scotland - the literal map of Scotland, as well as the metaphorical map-as-cultural-model. Plugging these tracings into the map forms a rhizome, allowing Finlay to make connections and open up new lines of thought.

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[62] The other principles of the rhizome are connection and heterogeneity (Deleuze & Guattari 2003, p. 7). The rhizome becomes a metaphor for any structure which 'connects any point to another point' (Deleuze & Guattari 2003, p. 21). This is very different, Deleuze writes, 'from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order' (Deleuze & Guattari 2003, p. 7). 'There is always something genealogical about a tree.' (Deleuze & Guattari 2003, p. 8), writes Deleuze, where by contrast 'the rhizome is an antigenealogy', operating by 'variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots' (Deleuze & Guattari 2003, p. 21).
The principle of asignifying rupture goes against 'the oversignifying breaks separating structures or cutting across a single structure', stating that a rhizome 'may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines'. These lines 'always tie back to one another', which is why 'one can never posit a dualism or dichotomy' (Deleuze and Guattari 2003, p. 9)

Finlay and Cockburn's super-imposition of Japan onto Scotland is a performance reminiscent of Guy Debord's psychogeographic strategy of tracing a route from a map of London, say, and plotting it onto a map of Paris. The idea is to disrupt the official streetscape, opening up new and potentially subversive ways of experiencing the city. The rural landscapes of Finlay and Cockburn's maps may not have a grid of streets and buildings imposed upon them, but they are contested spaces nonetheless. In DeleuzeGuatarrian terms, this new map reverses and even detaches the structures of power and land ownership to reveal layers of history and meaning, reclaiming
these places as sites of potential. The layering of Japanese and Scottish inscriptions is not an arboreal act of defining or over-writing, but a rhizomatic structure based on alliance. As Deluze and Guatarri write, 'The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and... and... and..."' (Deleuze & Guattari 2003, p. 25). *The Road North* is composed of alliances: Scotland and Japan, haiku and lyric, found text and allusion, immediate response and retrospective reflection, poems published online and poems embedded in the environment. These alliances create new possibilities, new ways of being.

Alec Finlay's microtonal practice, in which any number of smaller elements contribute to a larger whole, corresponds with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the assemblage. For them, literature is an assemblage, a non-hierarchical entity which can draw into its body any number of disparate elements (Deleuze & Guattari 2003, p. 4). The book is itself an assemblage, containing assemblages within itself and entering into new assemblages with readers, libraries and so on. A 'root-book' follows arboreal logic, forming an image of the world by following 'the law of reflection, the One that becomes two'. Binary logic, they argue, is the reality of such a book; it never
reaches 'an understanding of multiplicity'. A rhizome-book, however, is an assemblage of multiplicities, 'lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also

lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification' (Deleuze & Guattari 20003, pp. 3-4). *A Thousand Plateaus* is itself conceived as a rhizome-book, a multiplicity of voices, styles, ideas and genres. In a rejection of linear, arboreal structure the book has multiple entryways. The chapters can be read in any order; lines of thought spread throughout the book in various directions, connecting to each other and looping back on themselves. These flows are manifested in a range of forms and media, which provide multiple entryways into the text.

As a microtonal, multi-media project, *The Road North* can be thought of as a rhizome-book, an assemblage of poetry, prose, art, sound, actions and blog entries. The project extends across several media - a website, interventions in the environment, an exhibition, a book. Each entry in Finlay and Cockburn's travel journal is itself an assemblage of prose, poetry, photography and occasional audio or video material documenting their walks. These elements provide the reader or viewer with multiple entryways into their journey. As a large, multi-media assemblage, the website can be approached in a non-linear, non-chronological manner, either by selecting a place or date from the side-bar menu, or by clicking on an interactive map of Scotland. Being part of a microtonal project, the website forms a relationship with other assemblages: exhibitions, talks and a book of linked lyrics, haiku and concrete poems. Intertexts such as *Oku-no-hoshimichi,* and the other poems and travelogues alluded to throughout the project, also form rhizomes with the website-assemblage. And by mapping a number of contemporary art projects in rural places, *The Road North* forms links with other assemblages. The participatory nature of the project meant that members of the public could enter into an assemblage with *The Road North* by attending the events as they took place. By leaving plaques with QR codes in each location, Finlay and Cockburn ensured that future visitors could enter the assemblage by accessing recordings of the relevant poems via their smartphones, thus ensuring that the project

continues to grow and inspire further engagement with these landscapes. The project also has a life beyond its official end date in the way it has informed, both directly and indirectly, the poets' subsequent works. Thus, *The Road North* reflects Deleuze and Guattari's idea that an assemblage extends
experience into the not-yet given future.

The Road North is an ambitious microtonal journey project which incorporates a wider range of formal resolutions in order to produce a 'word-map' of Scotland. Undertaken by Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn, among others, between 2010 and 2011, *The Road North* took its inspiration from the travel journal of the 17th century Japanese haiku master, Basho, *Oku-no-hoshimichi,* or *Backroads to Far Towns,* with the poets travelling in north-west trajectory to 53 stations: sites of cultural, geographical and personal interest. At each station, they would drink tea and whisky and write haiku, leaving a copy of the poem in situ. In his introduction to the translation Finlay and Cockburn used, Cid Corman notes that Basho's companion Sora kept a journal of their trip, but it was a strictly factual 'check', while Basho 'made his into (essentially) a poem (after some years) that has become a center of the Japanese mind/heart' (Basho 2004, p. 10). Finlay and Cockburn's *The Road North* blog represents a work in progress. The poets blogged each station as they went along, publishing their poems, prose reflections, photographs and occasional sound or video files online. Once the journey was complete, the project expanded into other forms: an exhibition, talks, and a long collaborative poem, published as a book in 2015. A visit to Little Sparta yielded a number of the poems in Alec Finlay's book of Stonypath memories, *Question Your Teaspoons* (2012).

The poems in *The Road North* take a number of forms - haiku, lyric, mesostic, circle poem and wrd mntn[63] - blending found texts and literary allusions with Alec Finlay's own impressions of place. As Alec Finlay notes, he is 'drawn to a tradition that equates poetic forms with natural elements' (McCracken-Flesher 2014, online). A post-concrete form often associated with the composer and writer John Cage, the mesostic in Alec Finlay's hands takes on a mimetic quality, as seen in the 2004 project *Mesostic Herbarium* where the poet presents 'word-branches growing from a name-stem' (Finlay, Alec. *Company of Mountains Overview* 2013, online):

heAr
Sea
wHispers (Finlay 2004, p. 4)

This poem is one of a series presented on tree-plaques in Yorkshire Sculpture Park. The phonetic qualities of the name-stem 'ash' help evoke the sound of the wind through its branches, which itself recalls that of the sea. This itself is an allusion to the ash tree at Little Sparta, where the sound of the wind through its branches brings the sea to the garden. As a result, the poem not only names the actual tree, but places it in a context, inviting the reader to roam imaginatively in the space it opens up.

Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn came to call their approach in *The Road North* 'Bashoing', 'writing *in* places'. As Alec Finlay puts it, they were written 'in the space between Basho's text and our locations' (Finlay, Alec 2013, online). Working in these locations led to a change in their poetics, recalibrating 'the conventional brief of landscape poetry as recollective description' (Finlay, Alec 2013, online). Their poems, often composed in situ 'during a brief visit, with little time for revision' were sewn into

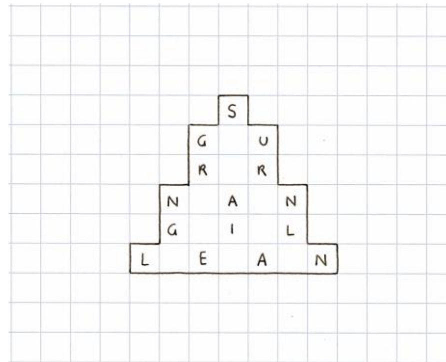
[63] Wrd-mnt or Word mountain: a type of concrete poem devised by Alec Finlay where the Gaelic name of a Scottish mountain or hill is arranged into a triangular, peak-like, form. I discuss this in more detail from p. 247.

the blog's 'patchwork of poem-labels and retrospective reflections' (Finlay, Alec 2013, online), thus continuing the tradition shaped by Basho in *Oku-No-Hosimichi*. The constricted space of the poem labels – simply traditional luggage labels with a rubber-stamped rectangular frame – ensured that the poems would be brief. It also meant that the poems could be left in situ, tied to the branch of a tree, propped up against a rock, and photographed against the settings that inspired them.

Designed to 'catch the flux of time, tide or season' (Finlay, Alec 2013, online), the circle poem's circular form invokes a cyclical sense of time. There is something of the ouroboros to them, with the beginning of the poem eating its own tail, as it were. Take this poem, from station 40, Berneray: 'Swans float on the loch / Geese fly over the loch' (Finlay & Cockburn TRN 40, 2010, online).

The words float in space, like the swans on the loch and the geese in the air. The circular form gives a sense of the seasons' cycle, while also evoking a body of water and the flow of currents. Freed from vertical verse form, no one phrase is strictly the 'beginning' of the poem; the order of the two phrases can be swapped without changing the meaning. By allowing the reader to enter at any point, the circular form invites play. The reader can transform the poem into a series of absurdist commands ('Fly over the loch [,] swans / float on the loch [,] geese'), and surreal inversions ('over the loch swans float / on the loch geese fly'). Here is a form which evokes nature, while standing apart from it. Its unconventional structure invites the reader to

roam imaginatively between word and object, even to the point where meaning breaks down. Also evoking natural forms, while standing apart from them is the *wrdmntn*. Sketched out on graph paper, the first *word-mntn,* 'offered themselves as models of the hills' writes Alec Finlay. Here is his take on the Skye Cuillin, Sgurr Nan Gillain:



As Alec Finlay notes, 'Their schematic letters formed triangular summits but, being dictated by language rather than geology, they diverged from the "true" shape of their "home" mountain'. This reminds us that 'the hill is not its name' thus maintaining 'the distinction between names and things' (Finlay, Alec 2013, online). While such poems are phenomenological, capturing immediate experiences in an imagistic manner, they often have a sense of a greater whole. As Cid Corman writes, Basho's poems 'are not isolated instances of lyricism, but cries of their occasions, of someone intently passing through a world, often arrested by the momentary nature of things within an unfathomable "order"' (Basho 2004, p. 10). Everywhere Basho goes, Corman continues, 'one feels a sounding made, the ground hallowed, hardwon, endeared to him, and so to us, through what others had made of it, had reached, discovered' (Basho 2004, p. 10). This desire and need for context is shared by Finlay and Cockburn, who as noted previously, enter a dialogue with past voices. As Finlay told Andrew Sneddon, 'Art is about how you give and share memory, for the future. The world is poetic, if only you allow it to be' (Sneddon 2008, p. 12). Even their wildest landscapes are

cultured, and in the space between Basho's text and their Scottish locations, Finlay and Cockburn engage with 'what others had made' of these places, from writers, musicians and artists, to mountaineers, farmers and engineers, using them as a starting point for their own creative responses[64]. One prominent voice is, of course, Ian Hamilton Finlay. While the elder Finlay's poetics of place are a clear influence on the project as a whole, he also appears as a figure associated with specific places: the Perthshire community of

Dunira, the Orkney island of Rousay, and the garden-state of Little Sparta, Stonypath. Through my reading of *The Road North* blogs for these locations, and related texts, I aim to show how the project forms assemblages and rhizomes, and invokes the power of the eternal return.

'Shirakawa'

People ask us
the way to Shirakawa Barrier?

our reply: take it easy
there are Shirakawa
Barriers
everywhere.[65]
(Finlay & Cockburn TRN 14, 2010, online)

[64] To give a particularly resonant example, take Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn's trip to the island of Raasay, where they visit the abandoned village of Hallaig, the inspiration for Sorley MacLean's great poem. On their trip, they engage with the cultural inscriptions on this landscape and add some of their own. Elements from Basho's poem are paired with elements from the island: 'Our *old cherry tree* of Saigyo is a birch or a hazel or a rowan of Sorley. Our *imperial tomb* is a poet's memorial, Sorley's Cairn, Hallaig, and the house of his youth that bears no marker'. During their visit, they allude to other artists inspired by MacLean's 'Hallaig': Hamish Henderson, who considered it one of the great modern European poems, and Martyn Bennett, whose musical setting of the poem they listen to on the ferry. On this visit, they are accompanied by the poet Meg Bateman, a Skye resident and Gaelic speaker, underlining the participatory nature of their practice. During their visit, they compose poems, leave haiku-labels and carry out their tea and whisky rituals. (Finlay, Alec & Ken Cockburn TRN 8.9.2010, online).

[65] Basho's text is richly allusive, quoting from and referencing past poets from Japan and China. In this spirit, Finlay and Cockburn's poem 'Shirakawa' references not only Basho, but the famous Chinese poet Han Shan, another great traveller. Gary Snyder's translation of Han Shan's sixth Cold Mountain poem precedes Finlay and Cockburn's own on the blog. Finlay and Cockburn riff on the question of form and the idea that a legendary place sought out by travellers is a state of mind as much as a physical entity: 'Men ask me the way to Cold Mountain / Cold Mountain: there's no through trail / In summer, ice doesn't melt / The rising sun blurs in swirling fog. / How did I make it?/ My heart's not the same as yours. / If your heart was like mine / You'd get it and be right here' (Snyder 1958, online).

The first part of *Oku No Hosimichi* documents Basho and Sora's journey from Edo (now Tokyo) to the Shirakawa Barrier, the crossing point to Oku, the north country. As Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn set out from their Edo, Edinbugh, their idea is that the Shirakawa Barrier corresponds with the Lowland-Highland divide. They take the A9 road, 'cutting a swathe through remoteness', to Perthshire. As their poem above suggests, the barrier is as much a state of mind as a topographical feature: 'The signs tell us we have crossed into Perthshire; later signs say we've crossed into Highland; but where are the signs marking Highland Perthshire?' (Finlay & Cockburn TRN 14, 2010, online). Their Scottish Shirakawa is a liminal space, both Highland and Lowland. They liken the lovers' beeches they pass to Shirakawa: 'close enough to settlement to be reachable, but remote enough for privacy, for intimacy' (Finlay & Cockburn TRN 14, 2010, online).

In *Oku No Hosimichi*, Basho and Sora, having crossed the Shirakawa barrier, arrive at station 14, Sukagawa, the home of haiku poet Tokyu, with whom they spend several days. He asks them if anything has come of crossing the Shirakawa Barrier. In response, Basho composes this beautiful haiku, describing a summer scene of country-women planting the rice fields:

natural grace's
beginning found in Oku's
rice-planting singing (Basho 2004, p. 25)

Finlay and Cockburn also mark their crossing with song: Basho's 'moment of transition, beyond the capital, through Shirakawa and on into the hills, is our moment to hear an old Gaelic song' (Finlay & Cockburn TRN 14, 2010, online). They ask their Tokyu, the Perthshire-based singer, storyteller, writer and folklorist Margaret Bennett, for the most appropriate and she chooses 'Gradh geal mo chridh', 'Dear love of my heart, I would plough with you and reap', also known as the 'Eriksay Love Lilt'. They play her beautiful recording of the song (which can be heard on the blog) at the top of

St Fillan's Hill, their No.1 Shirakawa (Finlay & Cockburn TRN 14, 2010, online). There is a sense of circular time to this pairing of Scottish and Japanese songs, as the eternal themes of love and harvest play out across culture, place and time. Yet there is also a sense of difference, not only in terms of landscape and agriculture, but in the way the themes are expressed culturally. Rather than suggest that Scotland and Japan share some essential being, Finlay and Cockburn's pairing repeats the power of difference, bringing forth new ways of seeing the
landscape.

In his short stories, Ian Hamilton Finlay captured the sense of north Perthshire as a place that can feel both 'close enough' and 'remote enough' (Finlay & Cockburn TRN 14, 2010, online). With its rolling landscape, farms, forests and hunting estates, Perthshire presented to the elder Finlay a 'whole world... that is as unique as Faulkner's Deep South – no-one is aware of it. No writers I mean' (Finlay, Alec &
Cockburn TRN 14, 2010, online). Finlay often thought of Perthshire in literary terms. As he recalled several years later in a letter to Stephen Bann, 'I used to go for wood every evening through an extraordinary landscape of pines and mountains which I still owe many poems to …; the landscape, or my wee bit of it, was so bittersweet, like a mixture of Heine and Trakl' (Finlay, Alec & Cockburn TRN 14, 2010, online). Alec Finlay adds Japan to this chorus of American and European voices, laying Basho onto the map of his father's Perthshire. In the entry for station 15, Dunira, Alec Finlay roams the 'estate' of their Tokyu, Margaret Bennett, visiting the locations to which his father's poems owed so much, and finding parallels between the worlds of Basho and Ian Hamilton Finlay. Here is Basho's original journal entry for his 15th
station:

> Off on the edge of town in the shade of a huge chestnut tree, a priest, completely out of things. Perhaps "in the mountain depths gathering chestnuts" referred to such an

existence, or so to my imagination it seemed... Gyogi
Bosatsu[66], they say, during his lifeteime used it [the chestnut]
for his walking-stick and the posts of his house.

(Basho 2004, p. 26)

And now Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn's station 15, Dunira:

Our *huge chestnut* in a corner of Tokyu's estate is the great
Sycamore on the estate at Dunira

Our *off on the edge of town… a priest, completely out of things*,
is Ian Hamilton Finlay, painter, playwright, poet, who
lived here in the early 1950s

Our *chestnuts* are the Quebecois buckwheat pancakes that Margaret
cooked for us, with a wee glass each of our whisky,
Tullibardine 1993

Our *walking-stick* is the hazel walking-stick made by
Margaret's uncle in Balquhidder

(Finlay, Alec & Cockburn TRN 15, 2010, online)

'A priest, completely out of things', Ian Hamilton Finlay worked as a shepherd in the late 1940s, living in Glen Lednock, then Dunira, with his first wife Marion and their dog Fin MacCool. Visiting these places gives Alec Finlay new insight into his father's work. At Glen Lednock, he notes how the sheep shelters, high up on the moor, inspired one of the elder Finlay's last works, the sheep fank or stell at Stonypath. For the inscription, he took a quotation from a Gaelic poem: 'The beginning and ending of life is herding'. Moving over the hill to Druim-na-Cille, Dunira, to the house where his father lived, Alec Finlay is struck by the 'uncanny resemblance to Stonypath: white-washed cottages at the edge of habitation, reached by stony tracks, their windows facing south-west over a conspectus – the Stonypathian *vale* finding its counterpart in the sacred hill of Saint Fillan and the pyramid of Mor Bheinn'. Ken Cockburn goes on to discover the ruined formal garden at Dunira, 'complete with fallen columns identical

[66] From Corman's notes: Gyogi Bosatsu, 'high priest in the Nara period... *Bosatsu* (Boddhisatva) is an honorary title conferred upon him by the Emperor Shomu (AD 724-748)

to those Ian hid among moorland grasses at Little Sparta' (Finlay, Alec & Cockburn TRN 15, 2010, online). And there are also the Boltachan Burns at Dunira, its rills mentioned in Sarah Murray's *Beauties of Scotland* (1799). Inspired by this idyll, Ian Hamilton Finlay would many years later construct a stonelined rill flowing into the Top Pond at Stonypath, Little Sparta, '*a memory of wee burns in Perthshire*, complete with planted ferns. A Virgilian Celtic spring', as Alec Finlay writes (Finlay, Alec & Cockburn TRN 15, 2010, online). One could also speculate that this is the 'little burn that played its mouth organ by the mill' in one of *Rapel's*
most resonant fauve poems (Finlay 1963).

In a later blog entry, Finlay and Cockburn travel to Rousay, visiting places the elder Finlay wrote about in his Orkney poems and noting how the island's land and seascape influenced his work as a whole. These visits are not just retrospective explorations of landscape and memory, with Alec Finlay tracing his father's footsteps. The tracings are plugged back into the word-map of contemporary Scotland,
providing different frames for viewing these locations are they are now, and creating new work. At his father's old house above Dunira, Alec Finlay ties two poem-labels to the trees. The first of these homages to his father reads 'pastor of pines / shepherd of rocks // Druim na Cille / St Fillans Hill'. The places are named so as to claim them for Ian Hamilton Finlay – not an act of ownership, but an act of remembrance for one of the voices who has shaped this cultured landscape. There is an echo of Basho's 'a priest, completely out of things' in 'pastor of pines', while 'shepherd of rocks' evokes not only the elder Finlay's actual work as a shepherd on these hills, but his life's work as a maker of poem objects at Stonypath and elsewhere. In the second homage-label Alec Finlay links the natural burns and rills of Perthshire to the man-made ones at Stonypath: 'pool / fall / pool / fall / pool / fall / pool / fall / rill // Druim na Cille / Stonypath' (Finlay, Alec & Cockburn TRN 15, 2010, online). Both poems give a

sense of a creative rural ecology in which processes, both natural and (agri)cultural, leave an imprint on the landscape.

pastor of pines / shepherd of rocks // Druim na Cille / St Fillans Hill', IHF // AF

'pool / fall / pool / fall / pool / fall / pool / fall / rill // Druim na Cille / Stonypath'

(Finlay, Alec & Cockburn TRN 15, 2010, online)

The poems memorialise his father, while also looking to the future. The power of difference in Ian Hamilton Finlay's original creative responses to the Perthshire he

loved is repeated through Alec Finlay's framing of those places through his own experience and that of Basho.

Alec Finlay's dialogue is not just with past voices, however, for Margaret Bennett's own experience as a long-time resident of Dunira, as refracted through her deep knowledge of folk culture, brings further layers of meaning. She takes Finlay and Cockburn to a special spot in the woods, only to find that 'Narnia' has lost its green spell. But then she finds 'a new magical spot, a rowan and a holly both growing out of the bole of a gean' (Finlay, Alec & Cockburn TRN 15, 2010, online). It's a perfect image of nature's cycle of decay and growth, and an apt metaphor for *The Road North*'s fostering of new lines of growth from old roots and radicles. As a singer and folklorist, Bennett is also important to the project's sense of a social art. It is worth noting that Bennett and Henderson were fellow travellers on the carrying stream. Her involvement in the project therefore links it to Henderson's values where the living folk tradition is part of a broader artistic movement that is

modernist, left-wing and internationalist. Finlay's idea of art as an invitation, a social assemblage, is bolstered by her contribution. At the final station, The Hidden Garden in Glasgow, Finlay, Cockburn and a number of the poets, artists and singers who had joined them on their travels, gathered, alongside members of the public, for a masturi (local festival). Following an opening ritual where the Tibetan singing bowls were played, their resonant drones 'clearing the air' as it were, Bennett sang 'Gradh geal mo chridh', inviting all to join in an act of shared consciousness. Here is a perfect example of Finlay's rhizomorphous practice, a generous social artwork which brings a range of voices, past and present, together in order to experience a place. It is through this social, experiential dimension that the literary and artistic assemblages of *The Road North* enter into a number of social assemblages, connecting different lines of thought and opening new ones. As I shall argue in the following section, Finlay's commitment

to shared consciousness animates his engagement with ecological issues. His mapping of place through poetry, prose and art events, constitutes an experimental environment praxis, which aims to foster a creative and sustainable relationship with the natural world and its resources.

Environmental praxis and Deleuzian ecocriticism

I take the term 'environmental praxis' from Lawrence Buell, who writes in his influential study of Thoreau and American nature writing, *The Environmental Imagination,* that ecocriticism 'explores the relationship between literature and the environment in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis' (Buell 1995, p. 430 n. 20). The implication is that ecocriticism and the environmental texts it studies makes a valuable contribution to the wider environmentalist movement. Alec Finlay's work certainly corresponds with Buell's four main criteria for an environmental text:

> The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history...
>
> The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest...
>
> Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation...
>
> Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text. (Buell 1995, pp. 7-8)

By inviting us to contemplate our relationship with the environment, Alec Finlay's work clearly suggests that human history and natural history are deeply interconnected, thus inviting ecocritical readings. Ecocriticism is, in Cheryll Glotfelty's simple definition, 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment' (Glotfelty 1996, p. xviii). By replacing anthropocentrism with an 'earth-centred approach', ecocritics can make a substantial contribution to environmental

thinking, she argues, with humanities scholars helping to raise consciousness by thinking 'seriously about the relationship of humans to nature, about the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis, and about how language and literature transmit values with profound ecological
implications' (Glotfelty 1996, p. xviii).

However, I feel that there are limits to a traditional ecocritcism and ecopoetry. As ecocritics such as Louisa Gairn argue, environmental texts constitute 'an ecological "line of defence", providing a space in which the reader and author can examine their relationship to the world around them' (Gairn 2009, p. 156). Without denigrating the importance of consciousness raising, it could be argued that these poetic 'lines of defence' offer little in the way of practical environmentalism. Furthermore, environmental texts which focus on individual relationships with nature, often centered around a 'lone enraptured male' as Kathleen Jamie[67] puts it, tend to uphold structures of privilege. As Astrid Bracke argues, this male-centred nature writing tends to obscure the class, gender and ethnic biases which shape social and cultural relationships with place. As she writes, 'nature is never wholly innocent, and that in addition to talking about *what* we see, we should also pay attention to *how* we see it'. Ecocriticism, she adds, 'is often too little aware of these dimensions' (Bracke, Astrid 2014, online). Connected to this is the issue of access. As noted in chapter four, in the context of land ownership, access to the land takes on a class dimension. As I shall discuss, Alec Finlay also raises the issue of access to rural
places for those who are less able bodied.

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[67] Reviewing Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places,* Jamie admits 'when a bright, healthy and highly educated young man jumps on the sleeper train and heads this way [Scotland], with the declared intention of seeking "wild places", my first reaction is to groan. It brings out in me a horrible mix of class, gender and ethnic tension. What's that coming over the hill? A white, middle-class Englishman! A Lone Enraptured Male! From Cambridge! Here to boldly go, "discovering", then quelling our harsh and lovely and sometimes difficult land with his civilised lyrical words. When he compounds this by declaring that "to reach a wild place was, for me, to step outside human history," I'm not just groaning but banging my head on the table.'
Kathleen Jamie 'A Lone Enraptured Male', LRB Vol. 30 No. 5 6 March 2008.

In this section I argue that Alec Finlay's interest in access, participation and 'shared consciousness', helps his work overcome some of these issues. Accordingly, we need a form of ecocriticism that is up to the task of evaluating it. I suggest that Deleuze and Guattari's environmental thinking offers a more illuminating and dynamic framework for thinking about Alec Finlay's ecopoetics. As a number of critics, including Patrick Hayden, Mark Halsey and Dianne Chisholm have argued, Deleuze's talk of rhizomes, multiplicities and becomings – which are part of their wider project of geophilosophy - are useful to environmental thinking, helping us to think beyond reactive environmentalism and essentialist notions of nature by offering experimental, creative and pragmatic approaches to ecological living (Chisholm 2007). I have already demonstrated the rhizomatic qualities of Alec Finlay's microtonal projects such as *The Road North,* showing how they connect multiple lines of thought and assemblages - artistic, scientific, political, social – to bring forth multiple becomings. As I shall argue, Alec Finlay's rhizomatic ecopoetics correspond with Deleuze's conception of nature as a plane of immanence. Through his artistic experiments in 'shared consciousness' Alec Finlay invites us to explore more sustainable and creative ways of engaging with nature.

In Deleuze and Guattari's geophilosophy, 'thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth' (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 85). As Sheri Benning writes, geophilosophy is a philosophy of immanence, 'denying appeals to transcendence, essence, or universal principles'. They eradicate the dichotomy between humanity and nature by 'stretching out a plane of immanence that absorbs the earth (or rather, "adsorbs" it)' (Benning 2007, online). Deleuze and Guattari describe how 'the earth is not one element among others but rather brings together all the elements within a single embrace while using one or another of them to deterritorialize territory' (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 85). Thus we can see how geophilosophy incorporates

ecology's interest in the interconnectedness of all things. Drawing on Patrick Hayden's environmental reading of Deleuze & Guattari in

Multiplicity and Becoming (1998) she writes:

> The plane of immanence is common to all things; it is where different ways of living are simultaneously installed and constituted. Life is understood according to its relations of movement and rest and each body, whether human or nonhuman, by its capacity for affecting and being affected. Thus Deleuze and Guatarri suggest an immanent, nondualistic continuity between human and nonhuman life whose complex interrelationships overlap with the physical, biological and chemical, and the social, ethical and political (Benning 2007, online).

Removing the dualism between humanity and nature is a key aim of ecological thought. What distinguishes Deleuze and Guattari's geophilosophy from other

ecophilosophies is its focus on *becoming* over *being*. This frees ecology from essentialist ideas of nature and what Benning describes as 'hands-bound mourning for lost "natural" places', by opening it up to experimental new ways of thinking about 'the interrelation of the human and nonhuman' (Benning 2007, online). Becoming does not ultimately create utopia, a concept Deleuze and Guattari reject 'because even when opposed to History it is still subject to it and lodged within it as an ideal or motivation'. Becoming 'is the concept itself'. It is 'born in History and falls back into it, but is not of it'. Becoming is more geographical as 'in itself it has neither beginning nor end but only a milieu' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 109). The geophilosophy of becoming is thus not historical, but experimental. 'To think is to experiment', they write, 'but experimentation is always that which is the process of coming about'. History helps shape experimentation, but experimentation allows us to escape history, replacing 'the appearance of truth' with the multiple possibilities of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 110).

Geophilosophy offers a creative and dynamic alternative to the essentialist ontology of Martin Heidegger, whose concept of dwelling and critique of instrumental

rationalism has been popular with a number ecocritics. While recognised as one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century, Heidegger's membership of the Nazi party has ensured he remains a controversial figure. His vision of mankind alienated from nature through technological 'enframing' has been attractive to a number of ecological thinkers. As Gairn writes, 'Heidegger viewed the human predicament in terms of "ontological homelessness, meaning that we have no abiding home, since we are not embedded in the world as a part of nature", and suggested that, in the twentieth century, "Spellbound and pulled onward by all this [technology], humanity is, as it were, in a process of emigration"' (Gairn 2009, p. 114). As she acknowledges, Heidegger's talk of exile and belonging have become loaded terms and 'such concepts had to be radically reassessed in the aftermath of the two world wars, with the knowledge of what "blood and soil" ideologies of home and homeland could mean'. Nonetheless, she argues, this philosophy of home and exile 'is certainly relevant to the foundational premise of ecological criticism, that ways need to be found to circumvent our fundamental alienation from nature, to somehow reconnect us with the earth'. She notes how, in this way, ecological theory links up with 'both post-colonial anxieties and the discourses of phenomenological philosophy, linking lost Edens with displaced humans' (Gairn 2009, p. 114). Pointing to Jonathan Bate's use of 'belonging' to 'denote the idea of ecological "dwelling"' and John Burnside's view that 'there is a need for communal inclusiveness in the face of political patriotism, re-enfranchising "the non-belongers, the flag-less"', she suggests that Heidegger's concepts can be recuperated from nationalist discourses to capture a sense of what it is to be in the world, what Willa Muir described as a 'universal sense of belonging' (Gairn 2009, p. 114).

Citing Hölderin's famous line 'man dwells poetically on earth' (Heidegger 1971, p. 213), Heidegger valorises poetry for its ability to help us access the essential Being of things, something that has been hidden from us through technological 'enframing', i.e.

the instrumentalist use of the natural world (Heidegger 1971, p. 213). In the modern age, beings have been reduced to *Bestand,* 'standing timber', robbed of their true essence by the needs of technological man. Heidegger gives the example of the River Rhine, which, dammed up into a hydroelectric plant, has lost its essential Being as a river, instead becoming a water-power supplier (Heidegger 1971, p. 213). Language, and by extension poetry, opens up a space, a *Lichtung* (literally forestclearing but also giving a sense of illumination), in which this veiled Being can be disclosed, giving meaning to the world so that it is no longer merely a habitat (Heidegger 1971, p. 213). The forest clearing, as Greg Garrard writes, and 'the things that "show up" there have a mutual need of each other'. (Garrard 2010, pp. 253-4). For ecocritics like Jonathan Bate, Heidegger's ideas of being and dwelling help us understand the power of poetry to name the earth. By naming things in nature – the plants, rocks, animals, rivers, mountains – ecopoets bear witness, claiming these things for the earth and preserving their memory in the face of environmental degradation. As the title of one of Bate's books puts it, poetry is *The Song of the Earth.*

He concludes the book by asking what poets are for in this new millennium:

> Could it be to remind the next few generations that it is we who have the power to determine whether the earth will sing or be silent? As earth's own poetry, symbolised by Keats in the grasshopper and the cricket, is drowned ever deeper – not merely by bulldozers but more insidiously by the ubiquitous susurrus of cyberspace – so there will be an ever greater need to retain a place in culture, in the work of human imagining, for the song that names the earth.
> (Bate 2000, p. 282)

As Robert Macfarlane writes, 'certain types of language can restore a measure of wonder to our relations with nature' (Evans & Robson 2010, p. 118). The notion of 're-enchanment' brings to mind the spectre of Kathleen Jamie's 'lone enraptured male' (Jamie 2008, online), but while I do not share his Romanticism, I broadly agree with his argument about the value of writing about environment and place. Alec Finlay has

himself spoken of the importance of naming; not as an act of ownership, but as a way of understanding our relationship to place. He agrees that it is important we maintain beautiful places, but that does not mean he is resistant to change (Finlay, Alec 2013, online). Neither does he share Bate's suspicion of cyberspace; his engagement with technology is more pragmatic.

For a materialist like Garrard, Bate's talk of poetry saving the earth is overly romantic. For him, there simply is no question of Being. Aligning himself with pragmatic and analytical traditions, he dismisses Heidegger's metaphyical 'betwitchment' and calls for a more scientific approach to ecocriticism (Garrard 2010, pp. 251-271). I would defend Bate's argument on the grounds that poetry is not science. I share Adam Dickinson's view that while the attempt to build disciplinary bridges between literature and science is laudable, 'this ecocritical emphasis on scientifically established realism has resulted in suspicion of contemporary experimental poetics', where 'the "story of how the world is"... appears to be more surreal than real' (Dickinson 2007, online). Although his post-concrete poetics derive, in part, from surrealist experiments, the language or imagery of Alec Finlay's work rarely enters the realms of the surreal (although as noted above, forms like the circle poem hold the potential for surrealist language play, whether intended or not). Nonetheless, the point stands; his work, particularly in its layering of voices and associations, goes beyond a strictly materialist or phenomenological treatment of 'how the world is'. A strength of Alec Finlay's work is its embrace of the metaphysical and the materialist, allowing for a sense of wonder, while maintaining a critical experimental praxis. His work opens up an imaginative space in which we are invited to dwell poetically. As Finlay says, 'The world is poetic, if only you allow it to be' (Sneddon 2008, p. 12).

The scientific method, while indispensable for 'a responsible apprehension of one's environment', is one way of thinking. 'A more environmentally literate writing', argues

Dickinson, 'is not necessarily one that simply traces a single line of thought, but instead remains actively (or *ecologically*) open to the potential becomings of other forms, or maps, and other deterritorialized lines of inquiry' (Dickinson 2007, online). While Dickinson acknowledges the dangers of pursuing 'what might be farfetched stories about the world', the 'anxiety about deterritorialization, about opening the question of the environment as equally to culture – or, more specifically, postmodern social constructionism – as to scientific discourses of nature, is what confines ecocriticism to a narrow conception of the "reliable story"' (Dickinson 2007, online). Dickinson praises the poetry of Lisa Robertson as an example of 'experimental works that offer responsible ways of thinking the materiality of the "real" world as a "rhizomatic" articulation between nature and culture' (Dickinson 2007, online). In other words, by articulating the interconnectedness of things, such works offer a genuinely ecological vision of the world. As Diane Chisholm writes:

> "Geophilosophy" and the various "plateaus" of *A Thousand Plateaus* describe and prescribe the becoming-earth of philosophy and art, bearing in mind the first principle of ecology: namely, that all things assemble with other things in heterogeneous composites. To ecology's conception of life's interconnectivity and diversity, they add the "double articulation" of macro and micro (or molar and molecular) fronts, along with a flux of affects and intensities (Chisolm 2007, online).

A focus on *becoming* over *being*, as discussed previously, allows us to think beyond the kind of 'hands-bound mourning for lost "natural" places' that Benning feels doesn't lead to any real change. Better to follow Deleuze in imagining a becoming-earth through experimentation and creativity. Alec Finlay's microtonal explorations of shared consciousness offer, I argue, exciting and innovative approaches to environmental praxis.

An ecologist will use her knowledge of botany, ornithology and geology to record the natural features of a place[68]. The act of naming the plants, rocks and wildlife does not convey ownership. Rather, this taxonomy is a means of recording and remembering what is there. Meg Bateman's litany of flora, 'The Year's Flowers', first published in the nature writing journal *Archipelago* in 2011 and republished on Alec Finlay's *Company of Mountains* blog, is a perfect example of this, celebrating the flowers of southern Skye:

The first sign, a starry celandine,
shining through a lattice of broken stalks,
then my favourite, wine-heady primroses,
and anemones in quivering clumps by the burn
where violets flicker, and naked coltsfoot
stare unblinking at the watery sun, and
dandelions and marigolds blaze lusty
as Van Gogh's sunflowers in craggy paint.
(Bateman 2011, online)

Bateman's style is more conventionally lyrical than Finlay's, articulating a sense of place and season through extensive use of adjective ('starry celandine', 'wine-heady'), personification ('naked coltsfoot/stare unblinking') and other traditional poetic effects. There is of course poetry in the flower names themselves, with words like butterwort, lady-smock, and sea-spurrey blossoming from the page, and Bateman builds on the religious and mythic associations of names like St John's Wort and Grass of Parnassus. She places each flower in its context, noting the time of year it blooms and describing its place in the landscape, its relation to features natural (ponds and streams, cliffs and hilltops) and man made (walls, ruins, roads, paths). Over its 13 stanzas 'The Year's Flowers' builds into a detailed and richly imagistic portrait of the island's biodiversity, combining scientific taxonomy with folkloric associations and sensuous imagery. Bateman may not use another text as her guide as Finlay does in *The Road North*, but she is working within the same tradition of the cultured landscape. She reaches across

[68] This discussion of ecology and the poetry of Meg Bateman is indebted to a paper given by William Welstead at the Societe Francais d'Etudes Ecossais conference 2013, 'The environment and the (post)human in Scotland. Representing nature and the living'.

time and space, pairing her Hebridean dandelions and marigolds with Van Gogh's sunflowers. The 'craggy paint' of Van Gogh's canvas is folded into Bateman's image-world, evoking the rocky topgraphy of Skye. Here is, in Jonathan Bate's terms, a work of human imagining, 'the song that names the earth' in order to save it (Bate 2000, p. 282).

While his methods may be different to those of Bateman, Finlay is also engaged in the mapping of ecosystems. The imagist details and rich associations Bateman articulates through the contemporary lyric form are realised by Finlay across poetry, prose and experiential art, often drawn together in microtonal projects. Each of *The Road North* blogs features detailed prose descriptions of the natural environment, alongside poems and artworks inspired by particular features. Returning to Station14: St Fillan's Hill, as discussed in the previous section, Finlay and Cockburn observe how the landscape changes as they move from Edo to Oku, lowland to highland: 'east is Edo by way of Crieff's Hydro, delis, bistrots; west is Oku by way of Dunira's wooden sign, pheasants and deer, tumbledown gardens' (Finlay, Alec & Cockburn TRN 15, 2010, online). To gain an overview of the transition from lowland to highland Finlay and Cockburn climb St Fillan's Hill, named for the Irishborn Saint who is said to have had special powers of healing. Particular flowers become symbols of their transition to the highlands, each one pointing the poets toward their personal oku: 'When the winding path through the bracken opened, we each chose our way, it seemed, by a different wildflower' (Finlay, Alec & Cockburn TRN 14, 2010, online). Finlay's is 'marked by foxgloves, nodding at the edge of the scree field. Ken's by English stonecrop (*Sedum anglicum*), a stranger – like Fillan – fitting right in to the vein of the rock' (Finlay & Cockburn TRN 14, 2010, online). As in Bateman's poem, careful attention is paid to the relation of these wildflowers to their environment. Finlay also riffs on their

symbolic value, using the story of St Fillan to acknowledge the way in which wind-borne species become, over time, an integral part of an alien ecosystem[69].

In addition to naming flora and wildlife, Finlay and Cockburn take care to name the mountains, hills and glens surrounding them. In order to realise their encounters as poetry, Finlay writes, 'we had first to understand *where we were*. OS maps were a starting point, but soon I found myself 'compassing' views, using a rubber-stamp made the year before to print a compass-rose'. He describes how this

process developed:

> A hapless orienteer, I looked from the rose to my surroundings and copied out the names of hills, lochs, dùns and islands by hand, finding where I was, quadrant by quadrant. The purpose of the hand-written place-names was not to plan a linear route – we weren't concerned with hikes or climbing –but to sketch an initial understanding of the terrain. A still figure in a strange landscape, I shepherded my gaze, aligning landmarks, composing conspectus (Finlay, Alec 2013, online)

Finlay engages in this practice at St Fillan's Hill, sitting on the stone 'chair' at its summit to take in 'a Saint's conspectus', Consulting their map, they 'name the view', mapping the hills, glens and mountains which surround them:

> from Glen Artney ('Glen of Pebbles') under Beinn Dearg, beyond the screen ridge pegged between Beinn Fuath and Mor Bheinn; along the ridge of Bealach Ruadh, Meall Remhar, imagining the hidden western peaks of Beinn Domhnuill and Ben Vorlich ('Hill of the Kingfisher'?). Then East: to Dunira and Comrie ('Confluence'), where Lednock, Earn and Ruchill meet, with Melville's needle hung over (Finlay & Cockburn TRN 14, 2010, online).

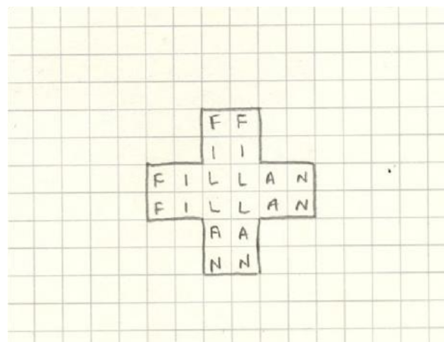
As with Bateman's floral litany, Finlay and Cockburn's mountain inventory glistens with the poetry of the names. While the full richness of this poetry is inaccessible to non-Gaelic speakers (although it is still appreciable on an aural and visual level), the names that they do translate are highly evocative. Glen Artney, the Glen of Pebbles, is named after a geological feature, while Ben Vorlich, Hill of the Kingfisher, takes its

[69] Their poetic treatment of plant-ecology invites comparison to the Deleuzian language of nomadic movement, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, something I will discuss in due course.

name from the wildlife of the region. There may be ancient meanings to these names which have been lost to time and of course modern readers bring their own associations.

In experiencing these places and observing their ecology and cultural associations, Finlay and Cockburn peel back the layers of history, going through the time of the early Christian saints, all the way back to the neolithic. From the summit of St Fillan's Hill, they observe how the 'airts and glens were set out from this natural outlook tower, a compass centuries before the Gospels reached this glen' (Finlay & Cockburn TRN 14, 2010, online). Their mapping and naming reveals how

intertwined the Christian and the pre-Christian are in the cultural geography of the landscape. Looking out from the Saint's stone seat helped Finlay and Cockburn make sense of 'the remnants of a native tradition of viewing' (Finlay, Alec 2013, online). To this tradition, Finlay and Cockburn add their own. A 'wordrawing', Finlay makes of the word St Fillan's Hill takes its visual form from the Christian cross (the form also evokes the compass rose).



From these, Finlay developed the *wrd-mntn*, as discussed in the previous section. As *The Road North* progressed, Finlay began notating the name of every Scottish mountain, 'writing each one out on a sheet of gridded paper, as a "drawing" (Finlay, Alec 2013, online). Finlay's conspectus, as fully realised in the Skye-based *Company of Mountains,*

are elegant visual representations of a territory, as viewed from a particular point. Looking at these concrete poem-like forms, the reader becomes a mountaineer, looking out from a trig point, her eyes following the words as if they are tracing the contours of a mountain range. The clusters of overlapping words indicate the sheer density of mountains on the island:

N

BEINN A' CHAPUILL
BEINN SGRITHEALL
THE SADDLE
LADHAR BHEINN
MEITH BHEINN
ROIS-BHEINN
BEINN
BEN MORE
AN SGÙRR
SGÙRR NAN GILLEAN

1 DÙN BÀN
NG 600 004

(Finlay, Alec, May 2012, online)

Composing *wrd-mntn* and conspectus allowed Finlay to see an 'index of potential journeys, summits I may never see out from'. Wrd-mntn are logical, systematic, providing an organizing principle. The next step is to plug these tracings into the very territory which has been mapped. With *Company of Mountains,* returning the names, as poems, to their mountains became 'the lyrical task'[70]. Photographs became the means

[70] The gesture of giving a feature of nature back to its 'home' also animates elements of Finlay's recent project the Bee-Bole (2011-2012). A major part of this microtonal project was the Bee Libary (Finlay, Alec 2013, online). Finlay would convert books on bees into shelters for wild bees. Each Bee-Library becomes a metaphor for the cyclic interaction of the human and non-human world. A book about bees is of course a human representation, a tracing, of the non-human. Furthermore, the materials from which the books are made have been taken from nature. By recycling these books as Bee Libraries, Alec Finlay plugs them back into the map, giving their content and material back to the non-human world, hanging them from trees and providing sanctuary for the bees.

to record the encounter, with the poem-labels providing a potential viewing point of the mountain. The photographs, however, were not the end result. The intention, as Finlay writes, was 'the self-awareness of being as fully as possible in and of a place'. The space between the different media opens up 'the potential for inner translation, feeling and reflection'. Past and present, the personal and the external, come together in the experience of viewing. The meaning of a view, Finlay writes, 'can be rewritten from many perspectives. If we find the right places to stand and look out from, then we may share a view, and realise it has been held in common for thousands of years' (Finlay, Alec 2013, online).

Finlay's comment about the summits he 'may never see out from', is key to understanding his walking practice. Due to a muscular condition, Finlay has never climbed a mountain, and although he loves wild places, it can be difficult, even painful, for him to be in them. As a result, he would often question the purpose of his walks: 'What do I mean by this attempt to enter a territory that is, inevitably, in my own terms, harsh?... It was difficult to feel that I could belong, as the experience of illness never stops being alien. And I resisted normalizing the situation as a "disability", because I didn't want the wilderness to be placed, finally, beyond me' (Finlay, Alec 2013, online). It was only with *The Road North* that Finlay came to accept the reality of 'this defining experience'. Walking toward Loch a Mhadaidh Mor,

Finlay accepted defeat:

bend after bend
skyline after skyline

we came this far
no further (Finlay, Alec 2013, online)

Rereading Basho, Finlay recognised that the Japanese master was 'honest in his accounts of illness, describing the various places that he [had] never reached'. Finlay came to understand that 'with generosity and imagination we can reach beyond our

limitations, and accept them'. He relates this to the need for 'new narrative of the hills and wilds, rebalancing the well-worn sense of triumph' that comes with reaching a summit (Finlay, Alec 2013, online). In this, Finlay finds an alternative to the ableism of much mountaineering literature, where the focus is on the conquering of the summit. His approach recalls Nan Shepherd's idea of going into the mountain, rather than up it, experiencing its totality (Shepherd 2011 [1977]).

Such a rebalancing might be thought of as rhizomatic, breaking away from the dominant model of representation to open new lines of thought. His comment that '[o]ur topographical models of thought no longer restrict themselves to picturing philosophy as a vertical ascent toward the summit of the ideal' has further Deleuzian resonances; instead of tracing one line of thought, Finlay uses a variety of forms - *word-mntn*, guides, sketched poems, mountain conspectus and photographs – as 'collaborative solutions' for experiencing the peaks he is unable to reach (Finlay, Alec 2013, online). Here is the kind of pragmatic and experimental praxis called for by Sheri Benning, one that names and maps a territory, its ecosystem and topography, allowing people to experience these in different ways. Finlay's collaborative solutions allow different artistic and social assemblages to intersect, helping overcome the axis of privilege – ablist, class and gender – which can dominate narratives of the hills and wilds. Finlay's generous invitation to experience the natural world imaginatively suggests a becoming-ecology. As he writes, 'there is... no quarrel between these aesthetic solutions. All we can share is care for the places we love, and the allowance we make, that anyone shall belong, as long as they do no harm' (Finlay, Alec 2013, online).

As Sheri Benning notes, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that 'art creates aesthetic figures and unleashes percepts and affects which facilitate sensory becomings... Thus, artistic vision creates a plane of "composition" that destratifies conventional experience'. She

stresses that her sister Heather's installation at the Saskatchewen farm they grew up on, which the family sold to corporate agribusiness before it was abandoned altogether, was not merely a reactive representation of their childhood experiences: 'Rather as Heather moves through and engages with the site, she actively embarks on deterritorializing what might be thought about it and other abandoned yard-sites. By rendering the abandonment of rural settings manifestly visible, Heather implicitly calls for the proliferation of new becomings', which troubles 'the reign of agribusiness and its attendant social and environmental costs, and recouple prairie nature with human habitation for the sake of a new and thriving earth (Benning 2007, online).

Throughout his travels, Alec Finlay has engaged in such a practice, embodying the Deleuzian vision of the artist as 'a seer, a becomer' (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 171). In his own projects and interaction with rural arts initiatives, he raises questions of land ownership and ecology, implicity calling for 'the proliferation of new becomings' (Chisholm 2007), as Benning puts it, and challenging 'the foul wealth of entitlement' that sees a rich minority owning the majority of the land (McCracken-Flesher 2014, online). As he writes, 'In the Highlands, the sense of belonging is pinched by history, land ownership, the contested values of marginal crofting, tourism and wilderness'. However, he sees hope in the 'new approaches to commonality' he discovers on Skye:

> co-operative wind-farms, the stewardship of the John Muir
> Trust in Torrin and Strathaird, Staffin's Urras an Taobh
> Sear Eco-museum, the continuing influence of the Gaelic
> College, Sabhal M r Ostaig, and, indeed, the work of Atlas, exploring new approaches to culture and memory.[71]
>
> (Finlay, Alec 2013, online)

[71] Alec Finlay is referring here to Atlas Arts, the Skye-based organisation which commissioned *A Company of Mountains*.

He finds similar projects on the mainland and it is to wind-farms that this final section turns. *Skying* (2011-12) saw Finlay and a number of collaborators surveying renewable energy, with a particular focus on wind-farms. In a correspondence with the poet John Burnside, a vocal opponent of wind-farms, Finlay sets out his position. While acknowledging the issues of access and ownership that come with corporate windfarms, Finlay argues that 'of all the current power sources renewable energy points most clearly to social, community or national ownership – or reminds us of that principle'. He stresses that common ownership of energy enables us to take responsibility for our own consumption (Finlay, Alec, June 2011, online). Renewables, and wind-farms in particular, differ from other power sources in that they encourage us to think about our relationship with the environment. Some commercial wind-farms, such as that at Whitelee, suggest 'the potential of public access as a given', a marked contrast with the fenced-off plants of nuclear or coal:

> How improbable it would be for any of the dominant power complexes of the carbon age to associate themselves with leisure, access to wild nature, or indeed the encouragement of any form of human activity that isn't immediately productive of monetary value. Scuba diving under an oil platform? Geocaching in a nuclear power plant?
> (Finlay, Alec, June 2011, online)

The potential for public access invites Finlay to ask how the artist might use a windfarm? Working with a number of collaborators, Finlay devises aesthetic solutions to deterritorialize the dominant idea of the commercial wind-farm as an economic enterprise. Instead of treating the wind-farm as an Augéian 'non-place'[72], Finlay recognises its place in the local ecology, and its potential for becoming. His starting point is to see the turbine as a form of public sculpture. As he explains to Burnside:

[72] Marc Augé, *Non-Places; Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity,* trans. John Howe. (London: Verso, 1995)

I have come to love turbines, as things, though *not* for every landscape, and *not* if they bring pylons in their wake. I think of them as symbolic monumental sculptures, in opposition to the ghastly monumentalism of Gormley, Plensa, et al, who conceive artworks which make a pseudo claim to represent 'us'. At least a windmill is a sculpture which produces energy and illustrates the possibility we could all take responsibility for that scarce resource. (Finlay, Alec, June 2011, online)

At Whitelee, Europe's largest active wind farm, Finlay considers the relationship of its 215 turbines with the moorland plateau and peat bog it occupies. He maps the topography, noting how the farm embraces 'Lochgoin Reservoir and Dunwan Dam, the heights of Drumdruff, Corse, Queenseat, Mid Hill and Green Hill'. He notes how the site is 'fringed by another dominant influence on the Scottish wilderness landscape, the commercial sitka forest'. Set nine miles from Glasgow, the turbines are easily visible from the city they power. Thus, this commercial site 'faces "outwards" in terms of the community', as it has a visitor centre and offers outdoor pursuits such as hiking, cycling and horse-riding. Ornithologists can come to observe the pipits, grouse, skylark and peewit who live on the moor (Finlay, Alec, June 2011, online). Finlay composes a mesostic to capture an impression of the blades slicing through the air. This effect is reflected in the form itself: note how the words on the horizontal axis slice through the vertical 'Whitelee'.

W hen

t
H e

m l st

lif T s

th E

b L ades

slic E

gr E y

(Finlay, Alec, June 2011, online)

He then composes poetic texts to accompany Alexander Maris's photographs, 'which catch the eerie Tarkovskian[73] atmosphere of the array of white towers, against the bleached bog grasses and dark heather of the moor' (Finlay, Alec, June 2011, online). Rather than focus on the uncanny, the text of his proposal recognises the monumental form of the turbines, while capturing a sense of their movement:

[73] Finlay is presumably thinking of Tarkovksy's 1979 film *Stalker*, in which the camera meditates upon a mysterious landscape known as 'The Zone'. Venturing through a forest, the characters come across an abandoned industrial complex. The contrast of the concrete buildings against the lush greenery and watery sky creates an eerie atmosphere, one which Finlay recognises at Whitelee.

The turbines 'narrow the infinite moor' by providing a sense of scale and becoming landmarks. This idea is developed in a blog for the windmills at Braes of Doune. 'Our field of vision extends into the beyond, but we take comfort in the familiar measure of the near at hand', writes Finlay, before offering a poem which captures
this phenomenon:

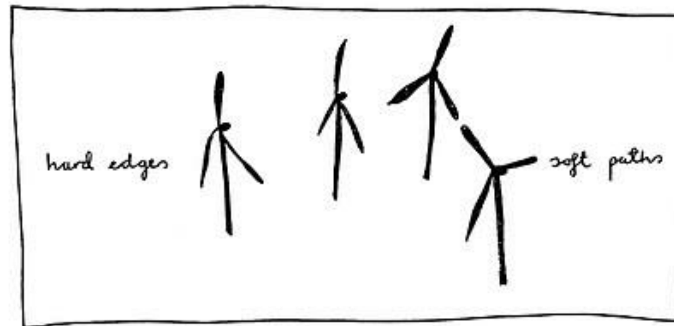
– over
there *– just a*
wee way

away –
not far
now

'On the scale of plane, vale or hill, which shape our horizons, the eye is irresistibly drawn to known verticals,' Finlay writes. 'We navigate by natural and technological landmarks, seeing and saying that the far is coming near'. He describes how certain landmarks indicate that he is on familiar territory, 'just a wee way away' from home. Travelling through a land in which we know no landscapes, he adds, is quite different, 'how rapidly do we grasp on to anything new that becomes known on such new horizons'. These landmarks help us orientate ourselves, proving, he argues, 'that most of us will – whether willingly, or despite ourselves – grow used to and fond of windmills as landmarks: gnomons for places' (Finlay, Alec, Sep 2011, online).

Another way of seeing the wind turbine is to compare its shape to natural forms: the leaf, the tree and the flower. A four-leaf clover becomes a 'lucky windmill' (Finlay, Alec, Sep 2011, online), while a sycamore leaf becomes an 'autumn windmill'. The metamorphosis of natural forms into made-made ones is a feature Finlay has inherited from his father, and he includes Ian Hamilton Finlay's one-word poem, 'One

(orange) arm of the world's oldest windmill/autumn' alongside the latter (Finlay, Alec, Sep 2011, online). The most explicit example of Finlay's pairing of flower and turbine forms comes with his 'sketches of the elements of a windflower', which break down the components of each, designating petals as blades, stems as pillars and so on (Finlay, Alec Nov 2012, online). More poetic are the playful sketches incorporating text and line-drawings:



The first poem 'hard edges/soft paths' refers to the sensation of blades cutting a 'soft path' through the air. The reader is reminded of the blade of a shovel digging a path through soil, locating wind-farms within the wider contexts of farming and gardening. The second poem realises the gardening metaphor on an industrial scale, with the construction of a monumental steel flower (Finlay, Alec. Aug 2011, online). The monumentalism of the large commerical wind-farms is contrasted with the modesty of community owned projects. Finlay admires the smaller turbines for their perfect form and marvels at the ingenuity and wit with which local communities incorporate them into the environment. In the Shetland isles, he is particularly delighted by a wind-garden at Burra, an assemblage of model planes or wind-toys which surely remind him of his fathers' own models (Finlay, Alec. Oct 2011, online). Small turbines provide opportunities for the installation of poem-labels and other forms. At the Kielder Observatory, Finlay adds a poem to the blades of their wind turbine, likening the movement of the blades to the cosmic cycle of day and night:

'space arcs/light eclipses/time bends' (Finlay, Alec. Sep 2011, online).

By envisaging wind turbines as sculptures, landmarks and flowers Finlay makes them beautiful as well as useful, relating functional objects to their environments. Community-owned wind-farms and turbines represent the future, by putting the responsibility for natural resources into the hands of the communities who use them. By exploring wind turbines' potential as aesthetic objects, Finlay relates art to issues of environmental, social and economic justice. A becoming-art and becomingecology are closely interrelated. Benning talks of the potential of such an art for recoupling 'nature with human habitation for the sake of a new and thriving earth' (Benning 2007, online). Through his poetry, art and microtonal projects, Alec Finlay achieves this recoupling, making the world a home.

Conclusion

As with his father's work, the interplay of tradition and experiment animates the poetry and art of Alec Finlay. While he gained a grounding in the avant-garde from his father, it was Hamish Henderson who helped him discover his Scottishness. Henderson's metaphor of the 'carrying stream', a living folk tradition which continually renews itself, clearly influenced Alec Finlay's own conception of Scottish tradition, allowing him to bring canonical and marginal voices from the past into dialogue with a plurality of voices from the present. Thus we can see his work as a realisation of some of the aims of the homely avant-garde, picking up where they left off in the early 1960s, and building on the cultural renaissance of the intervening decades. With the *pocketbooks* series, Alec Finlay constructs a generalist overview of Scottish culture from an internationalist and avant-garde perspective, creating a context for his own work, just as his father did with Wild Hawthorn Press and *POTH* in the 1960s. These books are also contributions to the wider discourse, shining a light

on hidden corners of Scottish culture and making connections with contemporary developments. In his explorations of Scottish culture, past and present, two key themes emerge: the interplay of tradition and experiment, and the role of art in raising consciousness about social and environmental issues. Alec Finlay considers the area he works in to be 'shared consciousness' and in this chapter, I have shown how he brings this forth through social art practices.

Starting out as a publisher and editor, Alec Finlay gradually developed an art practice, drawing on his experiences of small-press publishing and artists' books. From overseeing poet-artist collaborations and themed collections, Alec Finlay moved into curation and the authoring of situations, thus making the link between publishing and the participatory practice of contemporary art. Central to this is a generous, open notion of authorship in which his role is to create a proposal and invite other poets, artists, experts and members of the public to join him in a sharing of consciousness. Yet unlike some contemporary artists for whom the resulting
situation is the end result, Finlay sets himself lyrical tasks, writing poems and creating artworks which convey his own thoughts, experiences and responses to other voices. He gathers his own responses, and those of others, into microtonal projects.

These microtonal projects have been primarily concerned with the landscape and environment of Scotland. In projects such as *The Road North* and *Skying,* Alec Finlay raises consciousness of the environment and our relationship with it as a culture and society. As I have shown, he does this through a range of forms (haiku, minimalist lyrics, concrete and visual poems, found texts, prose essays and blog posts) and media (books, prints, artworks, installations, websites), opening up different possibilities for engaging with landscape. This process corresponds with aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome. In *The Road North,* Finlay and Cockburn plug tracings of Basho's Japan onto contemporary Scotland, opening up new ways of seeing

culture and place, forming a rhizome. With their word-map of Scotland, Finlay and Cockburn create a space in which thought and becoming can occur. As a microtonal project, *The Road North* is a space of potential, bringing together several elements into one milieu, from which new lines of thought move out in multiple directions, entering new artistic and social assemblages. His participatory and experiential practice creates further possibilities, breaking down hierarchies of authorship and inviting others to join in the process of thinking and becoming.

As I have shown, Alec Finlay's experimental environmental praxis corresponds with Deleuze and Guattari's geophilosophy, which goes beyond traditional ecocritical approaches which focus on recovering a lost sense of being or belonging in nature. This is not to say Alec Finlay resists such conceptions of place, but he tempers his romanticism with a critical view of essentialist notions of identy and place. Rather than use poetry and art to access some transcendental state of being, Alec Finlay takes the world as it is and looks for creative ways in which we as a society can build a sustainable relationship with it. For example, instead of viewing wind farms as instruments which enframe the landscape and reduce it to 'standing timber' (Heidegger 1971, p. 213), he sees them as potential models for a greener, more egalitarian society, which inscribe the land with new meanings. His explorations of shared consciousness establish the landscape as a site of potential, a place where becomings are brought forth. While looking to the future, Alec Finlay also has a strong sense of tradition, making it new through experimental practice. His work harnesses the energy of the homely avant-garde's interplay of tradition and experiment, moving it forward to explore creative and ecological ways of making the world a home.

Conclusion Making the world a home

They returned home tired but
happy.

The End.

(Finlay 2012 [1972], p. 259)

The above poem, which forms the text of an illustrated booklet, speaks of the pastoral movement of retreat and return (Gifford 1999, p. 1). Together with Ian Gardner's bucolic image of a house on a hill, Finlay's poem suggests long Sunday walks in the country, or a group of people returning home after a trip far afield. Viewed retrospectively through the military and imperial turn Finlay's work took in the 1970s, we might also think of soldiers returning home from war. As in the
classical pastoral, there is a reminder that beyond the idyllic realm of Arcadia lies a world of warfare. In the terms of Finlay's famous letter to Pierre Garnier, this poembook is an image of goodness and sanity, a model of order set in a space of doubt, i.e. the wider world (Finlay 2009, p. 22). By playing with the conventions of storytelling and the medium, this model becomes a space in which the reader/viewer can roam imaginatively. The booklet resembles a fragment from the end of an illustrated children's book. Of course, so familiar are we as a culture with the conventions of the story form, and the inscribed landscape of the illustration, we can fill the rest in ourselves. In this sense, it is not unlike Ian Hamilton Finlay's alphabet poem 'Arcadia', where the reader is invited to roam imaginatively among the letters, constructing an

idyll from them (Finlay 2012, p. 147). The poem reflects on how we use language to inscribe meaning on objects and places. It is through the act of 'writing', by which I mean any form of cultural representation, that we make the world into a home.

The making of a home in the world is a key theme of this thesis. This project discusses the Finlays' attempts to find a 'home' for themselves as poets and artists, as well as their different approaches to dwelling poetically on earth. The former sense of 'home' relates to their attempts to develop a personal aesthetic practice and establish contexts in which to work. By restoring Ian Hamilton Finlay's work to its original contexts of post-war Scottish culture and the international avant-garde, this project helps form part of a wider reappraisal of post-war Scottish culture, one that Alec Finlay has played a significant role in as an editor, publisher and critic. Applied to particular streams in post-war Scottish culture, the 'homely avant-garde' is a useful frame for exploring the relationships between 'high' and 'low' culture, and the interplay between tradition and experiment. My work on the Finlays' publishing activities, which draws on a range of archival material, lays the groundwork for further research into transnational avant-garde networks between individual poets and small presses in Scotland, England, Europe and America. It also raises the
possibility of further research into the relationships between poets and artists in postwar Scottish culture.

In both poets' case, publishing plays an important role in their development. Through Wild Hawthorn Press and *POTH,* Ian Hamilton Finlay establishes a context in which to work and builds a support network. These ventures were also, as Alec Finlay has pointed out, his father's apprenticeship, allowing him to experiment with typography and design, and experiment with the mediums of the book and magazine themselves, a process that informed his attempts to take poetry beyond the page. Publishing performed a similar function for Alec Finlay, with Morning Star allowing

him to experiment with the visual presentation of poetry, and helping him to make contacts and establish connections. 'Home' thus relates to the home-made, DIY practices of poet-publishers, and the 'homely' subject matter with which both Finlays engage: the domestic, the 'wee', the everyday. Out of this confluence of the quotidian and the experimental, the Finlays' homely avant-gardism emerges.

As I have argued, the aesthetic of the homely avant-garde is neatly encapsulated in Ian Hamilton Finlay's formulation 'Beauty. Tradition. Experiment.' (Finlay 1962, unpg). These were the core values of the Wild Hawthorn Press and offer a neat way of framing both his and Alec Finlay's approaches. Ian Hamilton Finlay's neo-classical conception of beauty focused on purity and order: 'The best a writer writes is beautiful / he should ignore the mad and dutiful' (Finlay 2004, p. 192). In addition to these classical traditions of art, Ian Hamilton Finlay developed his own selective Scottish tradition, celebrating music hall, the kailyard and the lyric tradition of Burns and Ramsay, helping to form a separate Scottish aesthetic to that of the MacDiarmid-led Renaissance. Having been born outside Scotland, Finlay felt he lacked direct access to folk traditions and dialect. His approach, therefore, was to 'make use' of folk and popular culture, combining Glaswegian dialect and music hall patter with innovative poetic forms, and translating contemporary poets such as Brecht, Niedecker and Zukofsky into Scots. These hybrid forms are emblematic of the homely avant-garde and Finlay's attempts to find a place, or a 'home' as a poet.

While Marjorie Perloff has recognised that Alec Finlay is working in the smallpress tradition of his father (Jackson, Dros & Drucker 1996, p. 335), this project is the first in depth study of the connections between the two poets. Alec Finlay picks up where the homely avant-garde left off, connecting the legacies of his father, Henderson and Morgan with contemporary Scottish culture. His engagement with Scottish traditions runs deeper and wider than that of his father's, as he explores the

carrying stream of the folk tradition and reappraises MacDiarmid from an avantgarde perspective. While much of Ian Hamilton Finlay's early work was motivated by a homesickness, Alec Finlay has always seemed 'at home' in Scotland, identifying with its culture and landscape, while rejecting totalising or essentialist notions of the nation. This of course reflects the renewed confidence in Scottish culture, whereby a radical engagement with tradition is combined with an internationalist outlook. The interplay between tradition and experiment that characterised the homely avant-garde is therefore a feature of Alec Finlay's work too. This dynamic allows him to imagine 'home' in new ways, envisioning a greener, more democratic and creative Scotland.

The other sense of 'home' refers to the Finlays' relationship with society, landscape and the environment. While critics such as Yves Abrioux have discussed Ian Hamilton Finlay's engagement with the pastoral tradition, this has predominantly been within the parameters of the classical genre. My project brings fresh insight to Finlay's work through the application of the pastoral theory of Leo Marx, Raymond Williams and Terry Gifford. In transposing Marx's reading of American pastoral and Williams' critique of English pastoral to a Scottish context, I open up new possibilities for Scottish studies as a whole, not least in the discussion of how literary representations of the landscape relate to the issue of land ownership.

By reading against the grain of conventional ecocriticism and applying, for the first time, Deleuzian geophilosophy to the work of Alec Finlay, I have argued that each poet has his own way of dwelling poetically on earth, with Ian Hamilton Finlay going inward to create his neo-classical garden realm and Alec Finlay going outward to work in the area of shared consciousness. After his initial engagement with the 1960s Scottish scene, Finlay senior removes himself from society, sending his ideas out into the world in the form of what Patrick Eyres calls polemological attacks or critiques of contemporary liberal society and culture (Eyres 2000, p. 158). Alec Finlay, on the other

hand, moves in an opposite direction, gaining a social sense of art from his mentor Hamish Henderson's conception of the folk tradition as a carrying stream, a dynamic force which constantly renews itself through oral transmission and innovation. He connects this with the participatory and relational practices of contemporary art to open up the field of 'shared consciousness'.

While Ian Hamilton Finlay's poetry and art has attracted ecocritical readings[74] and been influential on a new generation of 'radical landscape poets' (Tarlo 2011, p. 2), it is Alec Finlay who has developed a truly environmental praxis in his art. While Ian Hamilton Finlay's relationship with place is more personal, Alec Finlay's is more social and ecological. This is reflected in their practice. As poet-artists whose work is richly allusive and often relies on collaboration, both Finlays challenge the idea of the 'individual genius'. Further research needs to be done on Ian Hamilton Finlay's collaborative practice – not least on the role of Sue Finlay - but while it is clear that he welcomed his collaborators' input, he ultimately remained the controlling force.

Alec Finlay, on the other hand, is more open to chance, authoring a situation in order to generate new ideas. His interest in shared writing and social experiences present writers and critics alike with new ways of exploring the question of authorship. By working in the area of shared consciousness, Alec Finlay invites his readers and viewers to consider cultural relationships with landscape and imagine creative and sustainable ways of dwelling in naturecultures. While Alec Finlay's work makes room for individual reflections, including his own, his ultimate goal is to connect them to wider social and environmental forces. This project is the first detailed consideration of Alec Finlay's social and environmental practice, linking it to Sheri Benning's notion of a pragmatic Deleuzian ecopoetics, where the focus is on becoming, as opposed to

[74] See Louisa Gairn, *Ecology and Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008)

transcendental notions of being. As far as I am aware, this study is the first to use such an approach in a Scottish studies context, opening the
way for new readings of a range of writers and artists.

My thesis also breaks new ground in connecting the ways in Ian Hamilton Finlay's landscape art and Alec Finlay's environmental praxis relate to the homely avant-garde values of beauty, tradition and experiment. The Scottish landscapes of Orkney, Perthshire and the Pentlands are of course beautiful, a rich source of imagery and inspiration for both poets. They are also inscribed with tradition, and both poets explore the layers of cultural and social meaning attached to particular places, from early pagan and Christian ritual to modern poetry and art. In both poets'
work, landscape becomes a site in which the interplay between tradition and experiment can be enacted.

Neither poets' identification with the landscape takes the form of blood and soil nationalism. Rather it is a space to be shared. Both poets invite us to roam imaginatively in the world, making it our home. They combine a phenomenological approach to landscape with an exploration of the layers meaning associated with a place. Both make inscriptions on the landscape in the forms of poems and artworks. This is not an act of over-writing or erasure, but rather a way of engaging with place, adding further layers of meaning and signficance. For Ian Hamilton Finlay these inscriptions come to dramatise the process of imposing order on nature, turning chaos into form. Nature, however, always fights back. Man must learn to live with the co-existing forces of beauty and violence, striving for harmony. Alec Finlay reads his father's work as a lifelong dialogue between oppositions. His own work, however, is less focussed on conflict or transcendental notions of being. He is deeply concerned with reconnecting with nature as a culture(s), and part of that process involves an engagement with tradition. But he's also looking to the future, how we dwell creatively

and sustainably on earth: a becoming-ecology of art. As noted, Ian Hamilton Finlay and Alec Finlay share certain formal procedures and interests. But while the father can be characterised as a reclusive philosopher king, presiding over his imaginal realm, Alec Finlay is a more convivial figure, going out into the world and opening up spaces in which, to use Hamish Henderson's motto, 'poetry becomes
people'.

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