

Landscapes of Belonging: Self, Nation and Gender in the Fiction of Neil M. Gunn

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Declaration

I affirm that the following has been composed by me, and is my own work. The Following has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree. All quotations have been signified as such, and all sources of information have been acknowledged.

Mairi MacLeod
11/11/2020

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Abstract

This dissertation offers a critical re-assessment of the fiction of Neil M. Gunn, focused on the inter-related discourses of landscape, nationhood and gender. Building on earlier Gunn scholarship and recent critical developments in landscape studies and Scottish Studies, it specifically examines how Gunn's treatment of Highland landscape articulates with his romantic nationalism, supported by folk culture sourced from Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*. Gunn's fiction also renders the passive feminine as an accessory to active masculine nation-building, while his female characters are often relegated to purely symbolic roles within a male national narrative. The treatment of landscape in Gunn's novels reveals the multi-faceted nature of his nationalist ideology, and its roots in both the Scottish Literary Renaissance and earlier European Romanticism, whereby recovering the authentic folk culture of the people rejuvenates and gives legitimacy to the nation, supports its ethnic and political identity and enables access to the primordial 'youth' of the nation. The Romantic immersion and rediscovery of the self in nature is translated by Gunn into an encounter with national place as sacred bounded territory. Nationalist discourse in Gunn's fiction is also articulated through a gendered landscape of masculine defeat and renewal, supported by problematic and reductive figurations of sacred, symbolic femininity. In reconstructing and defining the relationships between these strands of Gunn's literary, political and spiritual project, this dissertation offers a productive engagement with long-standing critical debates in Gunn studies.

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Introduction

In a 2017 article on Neil Gunn's hometown for the literary magazine *Northwords Now*, Kenny Taylor reveals his 'envy' of the 'rootedness' of one of the inhabitants of Dunbeath and his 'unbroken line of connection' to the place, going back 'many generations'.¹ The established inhabitant, Taylor continues, possesses a hidden world of memories bound up with place that remain invisible to the visitor, leading Taylor to ask:

I wonder what motivates me to be here. Am I some kind of literary stalker, following traces in Neil Gunn's words and boyhood haunts in hopes of finding something more than his published works reveal? Am I hankering after a sense of my own ancestry, where a play of light on Caithness flagstone or water will help me glimpse a figure I carry within; a feeling formed from some wisp of DNA?²

¹ Kenny Taylor, 'A Leap in the Highland River', *Northwords Now*, Issue 33, Spring 2017, p.17

² *Ibid.*, p.17

Taylor's yearning for ancestral belonging through place is explored, as it is throughout Gunn's fiction, through sensual and tactile contact with the physical landscape: an immediate and direct interaction with place instead of a vague mystical sense of what it is to be Scottish. Taylor journeys on so he can 'dip a toe up the strath', 'feel the roughness of plant on rock', 'marvel at the masonry' of a broch and 'ponder [his] own Caithness ancestry'. In *Highland Homecomings* (2007) anthropologist Paul Basu explores the importance of individual reconnection with ancestry through a physical place in order to 'construct meaningful self-narratives'³ that have been lost through generations of displacement through immigration and the dehumanising effects of modern life. By examining the return of the Highland diaspora to their ancestral homeland, Basu explores the reconstruction of the self through place and cites Neil Gunn as an author who 'had a remarkable and subtle understanding of the place-world, its capacity for holding meaning'. Basu is aware of the way in which the interrelated nature of landscape and ethnic belonging in Gunn's novels leaves him vulnerable to accusations of promoting reactionary forms of nationalism through the 'seductive rhetoric of the blood'⁴ from critics such as Christopher Whyte. However, Basu argues that the complex relationship individuals have with landscape and place in Gunn's novels transcends a 'simplistic conflation of blood and soil'.⁵

Neil Gunn was a significant figure in the Scottish Literary Renaissance and remains one of Scotland's most renowned writers. Gunn's appeal both to regional and international readers, is due in part to his portrayal of the individual's relationship with place and the way in which sense of self is tied to the land, culture and heritage. He understood the way in which landscape is a nexus of cultural power and a space within which 'meaningful self-narratives' can be articulated. As Anthony D. Smith states:

The land as a historically unique and poetic landscape, as a decisive influence over historical events and as witness to ethnic survival and commemoration over the *longue durée*: these are all components of a general process of 'territorialisation of memory'. They help to bring about a close association between a given landscape and a particular community, such that

³ Paul Basu, *Highland Homecomings: Genealogy and Heritage Tourism in the Scottish Diaspora* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007) p.1

⁴ Christopher Whyte, 'Fishy Masculinities: Neil Gunn's *The Silver Darlings*' in *Gendering the Nation*, ed. by Christopher Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) p.66

⁵ Paul Basu, 'Other Landscapes', *Highland Homecomings*, p. 8

a people is felt to belong to a specific territory and a territory to a particular people.⁶

In Gunn's eyes the Highlands become both a physical and abstract landscape in which the inhabitants have a symbiotic relationship with the land on which they dwell, and the Highland landscape a 'terrain invested with collective significance is felt to be integral to a particular historical culture community or ethnies, and the ethnic community is seen as an intrinsic part of that poetic landscape'.⁷ Although his later novels are heavily influenced by metaphysical concepts such as Zen Buddhism, it is the way in which Gunn combines the sensuous physicality of the landscape with a sense of cultural belonging and identity in his novels that is the main focus of my enquiry. Gunn's poetic depictions of place establish the Highland landscape as a dominant presence in his novels and a silent, unacknowledged main character throughout his fiction as he utilises environment as an illuminator of inner emotional processes and the means by which the abstract is physically articulated and ideology expressed. Indeed, Denis Cosgrove argues that: 'Landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world. Landscape is a way of seeing the world'.⁸ The Edenic landscape of Gunn's childhood is translated into a wider thesis in his novels concerning rootedness, belonging and nationhood and often evokes a 'golden age' of national identity or, alternatively, question the ways in which this identity has been compromised by historical and economic forces.

Recent Gunn criticism has fallen somewhat into the doldrums, as Ken Keir explains:

Gunn's reputation in academia is at something of a nadir. Having been seen worthy of an entire chapter devoted to his work in *The History of Scottish Literature* (1988), he is barely included in the recent *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature* (2007). The reasons for such a remarkable decline are complex, but part of the explanation must be that while Scottish literary criticism has rediscovered and revalued a host of minor novelists, poets, and dramatists, it has been strangely content to let criticism of Gunn's work go fallow.⁹

⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.151

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.150

⁸ Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1998) p.13

⁹ Ken Keir, 'Modernist Myths and Mothers: Jung and 'Mythic Parallelism' in Neil Gunn's *The Silver Darlings*', *Modern Humanities Research Association*, 5, (2010) p. 1-2

After a revival of interest in the 1980s with F.R. Hart and J.B. Pick's seminal biography (1981),¹⁰ Carol Anderson's thesis exploring portrayals of female characters by Scottish male writers (1985),¹¹ and Margery Palmer McCulloch's comprehensive examination of all twenty of his novels (1987)¹² critical interest in Neil Gunn fell away. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a brief flurry of excitement with John Burns' *A Celebration of the Light* (1988) Richard Price's *The Fantastic Matter of Fact* (1992) and a collection of essays entitled *Neil Gunn's Country* (1991) edited by Douglas Gifford. However, no major publications on Gunn have been produced since. One possible explanation is Christopher Whyte's scathing critique of Gunn's troubling treatment of gender roles, an issue that Carol Anderson also dealt with in more detail when discussing Gunn's symbolic portrayals of women, although Whyte's appraisal of Gunn's 'woman problem' seems to have gained more critical traction. Gunn's problematic representations of women are indeed a sensitive issue for discerning modern readers, and remains a stylistic flaw that I will discuss in the latter stage of this thesis.

As Keir states, the factors behind this critical neglect are varied. According to Ryan Shirey, it seems that Gunn, more than any other writer of the Scottish Renaissance is 'a figure in whom the persistent anxieties among scholars of Scottish literature about the representation of Scottishness and the role of nationalism seem to crystallise.'¹³ Indeed, Gunn seems to simultaneously inhabit the roles of respected canonical writer and literary pariah. Although Christopher Whyte calls for a reappraisal of Gunn's work in light of the 'range of cultural nationalisms, both progressive and reactionary' that became part of the nationalist debate in Scotland throughout the twentieth century, he remains uncomfortable with Gunn's 'seductive rhetoric of the blood'.¹⁴ It could be argued that the recent critical trend of examining Neil Gunn's political beliefs through his correspondence and essays

¹⁰ F.R. Hart, J.B. Pick, *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life*, (London: John Murray publishers, 1981)

¹¹ Carol Anderson, 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Fiction: Character and Symbol' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1985)

¹² Margery McCulloch, *The Novels of Neil M. Gunn: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987)

¹³ Ryan Shirey, 'A Shrinking Highlands: Neil Gunn, Nationalism and the 'World Republic of Letters'', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, 3 (2007) <<http://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue3/shirey.htm>> p.7

¹⁴ Christopher Whyte, 'Fishy Masculinities: Neil Gunn's *The Silver Darlings*' in *Gendering the Nation*, ed. by Christopher Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) p.66

has proved problematic to Gunn's success as a modern author as he is so closely associated with Scottish Nationalism and was a passionate advocate of the movement in the 1930s and throughout his life. Gunn's treatment of landscape as an expression of ethnic belonging and rootedness therefore, has inevitably led to critical accusations of his fiction promoting a form of Highland 'blood and soil' ideology, a prospect that sits uncomfortably with Gunn's status as one of Scotland's most renowned authors, and an issue that few, if any, critics have dared to explore.

Despite the controversial aspects of Gunn's fiction, three main critical readings of Gunn have emerged: the search for individual balance, emphasised by Francis Russell Hart and J.B. Pick; art and myth as vehicles for national regeneration, highlighted by Douglas Gifford, and Margery Palmer McCulloch's reading of Gunn as regional novelist. Carol Anderson's analysis of the influence of Romanticism in Gunn's fiction and his reductive portrayals of women, as well as Christopher Whyte's caustic appraisal of Gunn's gender polarities, remain refreshingly disruptive and contrast with the supportive readings of Gunn that tend to dominate the critical scene. There have also been, however, a few recent articles finding new perspectives on Gunn such as Andrew Sneddon's deployment of landscape discourse to shed new light on Gunn's involvement in the hydro-electric debates,¹⁵ and doctoral work such as Ken Keir's psychoanalytical examination of Gunn's writing.¹⁶ As an answer to Christopher Whyte's call for a reappraisal of Gunn's work in light of the 'range of cultural nationalisms, both progressive and reactionary,'¹⁷ I aim to introduce a new critical perspective to Gunn studies: that of Gunn as a romantic author in the political sense, drawing predominantly on the tropes of romantic nationalism.

Gunn understood that Scotland's landscape in modern times has been a political battleground, a physical representation of cultural identity that has witnessed harsh economic realities and a slow, inevitable decline. From the shock of the Clearances to the domination of the tourist industry that sells the Scottish landscape as a commodity, the Highlands continue to suffer from the exodus of its young people. The relationship

¹⁵ Andrew Sneddon, 'Neil M. Gunn and Landscape Discourse in the 'Hydro' Debates', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, 5 (Autumn/Winter 2009) pp. 1 - 25

¹⁶ Ken Keir, *The Translating Effect: Neil M. Gunn, Psychoanalysis and Scottish Modernism* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2012)

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.66

¹⁵ Carmichael, Alexander, *Carmina Gadelica* (Edinburgh: T.&A. Constable, 1900)

between the people and the land and the politicisation of the landscape is an ongoing thematic concern in Gunn's novels. The examination of landscape – both physical and abstract in Neil Gunn's fiction – enables the exploration of various aspects of his work that have, so far, been neglected by critics. Firstly, I intend to examine the way in which Gunn's treatment of landscape in his novels reveals the multi-faceted nature of his nationalist ideology and its roots in Romanticism with its emphasis on the individual experience of nature. In chapter two, I examine the extent to which Gunn's use of the *Carmina Gadelica* (1900) is an expression of his Romantic Nationalism, in keeping with the aims of the Scottish Literary Renaissance. Gunn's use of the *Carmina Gadelica* – a collection of Highland prayers, songs and folktales recorded by Alexander Carmichael – remains unexplored. Chapter three examines the way in which Gunn's nationalism is also informed by perennial and primordial ethnonationalism as a means to empower the individual in the community, and to halt the decline of the Highland way of life. I will conclude with an examination of the problematic nature of Gunn's primordial nationalism articulated through a gendered landscape. The Highland landscape articulates Gunn's organic, romantic nationalism, supported by folk culture found in the *Carmina Gadelica* and uses the passive feminine as an accessory to active masculine nation building. Indeed, Gunn's female characters are often relegated to purely symbolic roles within a male national narrative. I will conclude with an examination of the way in which these elements combine in Gunn's Highland nationalism.

The most recent critical trend in Gunn studies promoted by critics such as Margery Palmer McCulloch and Richard Price is to give significant consideration to Neil Gunn's non-fiction writing and life experiences as a means to illuminate the main thematic concerns of his novels. In keeping with these recent critical approaches to Gunn therefore, I will also incorporate evidence from Gunn's essays and letters to support my thesis, as Gunn's correspondence and non-fiction writing reflect the content of his novels and short stories to such an extent that there is an intimate relationship between Gunn and his writing, and his fiction is often autobiographical in nature. The politics, interests and passions articulated in his essays and letters, therefore, are often reflected and stated outright in his novels. Throughout the development of this thesis, I will also draw on a broad range of Gunn's writing. Early fiction such as 'The Moor' (1929), to his last major work *The Atom of Delight* (1956) illustrate Gunn's abiding interest in self, nation, landscape and figurations of gender throughout his prolific writing career.

In my opening chapter, I will examine the hitherto unexplored influence of the romantic tradition on Gunn's use of landscape in his novel *The Serpent* (1943). Focusing on the spiritual interaction with nature seen in Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1782) and Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' (1798), I will illustrate the ways in which Gunn's writing conforms to romantic views of nature as an alternative to traditional Christianity and articulates Rousseau's organic nationalism. Rousseau's meditations on the island of Saint Pierre provide us with the template for subsequent representations of the natural world in the romantic tradition and are reflected in the romantic landscapes of Neil Gunn. Evident in both the *Reveries* and Gunn's fiction is the solitary individual escaping from society to a wild and Edenic landscape that signifies a primitive state of higher, or morally superior, innocence where the individual can once again regain his natural, or true, self. Gunn utilises Rousseauvian tropes of wild landscape representing a state of purity in a paradise regained and the 'imaginative melting of man into outer nature'¹⁸ in his Highland reveries. This is particularly apparent in *The Serpent*, where the philosophical meditations and inner processes of the aging main character Tom are revealed as he climbs a mountain near his childhood home in the Highlands. *The Serpent* deals with the same ideological oppositions that concerned Rousseau. Clearly evident is the same tension between modernity and antiquity, 'head' and 'heart,' Enlightenment thinking, science and politics, and Romanticism, represented by the two contrasting landscapes in the novel: urban and Highland. The dichotomy between Romanticism and Enlightenment intellectualism is present throughout the novel and leads to a crisis in the Highland community to which Tom returns after his time in the city.

Tom's frustration with his father's authoritarian Calvinism is also evident as he seeks to break free from the dogmatic confines of traditional Christianity and discover a more immediate and personal form of spirituality directly accessed through the natural world. Tom's search for spiritual renewal through nature bears a striking similarity to Wordsworth's meditations in 'Tintern Abbey' (1798). An examination of Wordsworth's spiritual relationship with the natural world as a panacea to the oppressive qualities of modern urban living may reveal the general influence of Romanticism on Gunn's writing. The spiritual rejuvenation through nature articulated in 'Tintern Abbey' is reflected in Tom's renewed appreciation of the rejuvenating qualities of the Highland landscape in *The Serpent*. As with Wordsworth, the natural world presents Tom with a form of spirituality

¹⁸ Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, (Alexandria: Kindle, 2016) p.123

that provides more fulfillment than the cold-headed logic of rationalism and atheism, yet transcends the confines of traditional Christianity.

Gunn's use of the *Carmina Gadelica* (1900) has yet to be explored in detail and my second chapter examines Gunn's use of Alexander Carmichael's seminal collection of Highland prayers, folktales and incantations in his novels as an articulation of the Scottish Renaissance aim to seek out an 'authentic' Scottish cultural tradition. This movement towards the 'ur-motives' of a nation can also be seen in the poetry and essays of Hugh MacDiarmid. Using folklore as a foundation for building the nation is highly similar to the romantic nationalism of eighteenth-century German philosopher, theologian and linguist Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) who sought out and collected folklore and poetry in order to rejuvenate the nation through the 'noble spirit' of the *volk*. Various key aspects of Herder's romantic nationalism can be seen in Carmichael's introduction to the *Carmina Gadelica*, a hitherto unacknowledged expression of cultural nationalism in Scotland. I will then examine the way in which Gunn's novel *The Silver Bough* (1948) is a celebration of the life-affirming and rejuvenating qualities of native folk culture as a panacea for the modern age and a means by which the 'youth' of the nation can be accessed. Gunn's portrayals of idyllic boyhood in *Young Art and Old Hector* (1942) and other novels such as *Morning Tide* reveal the yearning for the primordial nation in the discourse of romantic nationalism, grounding Gunn's nation-building in youthful optimism and hope.

In chapter three, I will examine the way in which the treatment of landscape in Gunn's fiction and non-fiction writing expresses the ideological complexity of his nationalism and leads us to a greater understanding of the importance of belonging and rootedness in his political and spiritual outlook. Gunn's 'landscapes of belonging' are a palimpsest of past, present and future identities that form an 'ethnoscape', which Anthony D. Smith asserts is a 'historic and poetic landscape, one imbued with the culture and history of a group whose character is felt by themselves and outsiders to derive from the particular landscape they inhabit'.¹⁹ Gunn's novel concerning the Highland Clearances, *Butcher's Broom* (1934) portrays a geographically defined ethnoscape and highlights the integral role landscape plays in shaping and influencing a community and its culture. In this sense, the landscape is no longer simply a natural setting but a multi-layered depository of collective memories, cultural associations and myths accumulated over long periods of time. In *Butcher's*

¹⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.150

Broom, the relationship between the individual and landscape illustrate the importance of place to cultural and personal identity, and demonstrates the crisis of self that can emerge as a result of being displaced from historic and poetic ethnoscapas.

Cynthia Enloe argues that 'Nationalism typically has sprung from masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hopes'²⁰ and chapter four explores to what extent this statement is true in regards to Gunn's fiction. Gunn's 'masculine renaissance', portrayed through male characters in novels such as *Highland River* (1937) *Morning Tide* (1931) *The Silver Darlings* (1941) and *Second Sight* (1940) conforms with masculinised nationalist discourse. We must ascertain to what extent Gunn's male characters, who are closely associated with both the land and seascape, are active embodiments of 'national imaginings' in Gunn's vision of primordial nationhood, and the way in which Gunn's treatment of male archetypes expresses his vision of national revival and recovery after periods of historical humiliation. Reflecting wider cultural trends in the early part of the twentieth century and anxieties concerning the ascendancy of feminism, Gunn's fiction deals with the tension surrounding masculinity lost and then regained in the proving ground of the wild Highland landscape and the challenging seascapes of the coast. I will examine the way in which the fisherman archetype, seen in *Morning Tide* and *The Silver Darlings*, is deployed by Gunn in order to articulate a sense of rejuvenated masculinity in the post-Clearance Highlands. In Gunn's fiction and essays the fishing industry and the wild sea mark an exclusively male sphere in which the beleaguered Highland Scot can rediscover masculine dignity lost in the Highland Clearances and connect him with his primordial ancestors. I consider Christopher Whyte's assertion that 'Gunn uses an imagined retroactive vision of Gaelic society to underpin a gender ideology based on division, polar oppositions, and the safeguarding of a masculinity he evidently felt to be endangered'²¹ and will illustrate the way in which Gunn does indeed seek to rejuvenate 'endangered' masculinity in his fictional fishing communities. I will also examine the problematic nature of masculinised nation building in examinations of nationalist discourse by Benedict Anderson and Anthony D. Smith who cite examples of nation building where the modern memories and myths of the nation are formed by masculine images and male experience. This is illustrated in the national myth making

²⁰ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) p.44

²¹ Christopher Whyte, 'Fishy Masculinities: Neil Gunn's *The Silver Darlings*', p.57

seen in *The Silver Darlings* in which the people have been driven out of the feminine, inner communities of the hills and glens of *Butcher's Broom*, a landscape of poverty and humiliation, marred by ruined crofts, and now look toward the outer, masculine seascape for their fortunes and future prosperity. The rejuvenation of primal masculinity, in the wild proving ground of the sea and male economic endeavour, enables a new community and national narrative of self-determination to spring forth.

In contrast, *Second Sight* (1940) portrays primal Highland masculinity in a state of decline and crisis as the land in which the novel is set has been appropriated for the construction of upper-class English masculinity through the sport of deer-stalking. Examination of Gunn's use of nineteenth century representations of the primal Highland male, in contrast to English masculinity, will highlight the way in which Gunn conveys his anxieties concerning the decline of the Highland way of life, and the subjugation of the native Scot, through his treatment of gender in the novel. In a damning appraisal of Neil Gunn's portrayal of gender, Christopher Whyte identified it as being '*the issue*' in Gunn's writing that critics have thus far chosen to ignore²² and continues to be a critically neglected aspect of his fiction. This chapter will introduce my examination of the often problematic nature of the portrayal of gender in Gunn's fiction and will allow me to adopt a more critical stance towards Gunn's writing.

Chapter four aims to provide a more thorough and nuanced examination of Gunn's portrayal of women that has been lacking in Gunn criticism since Carol Anderson's exploration of Gunn's romantic portrayals of symbolic femininity in her 1985 thesis. Linking Gunn's representations of symbolic femininity more closely to nationalism, my discussion will focus on the hitherto unacknowledged 'maiden', 'mother' and 'crone' pagan triumvirate, and the extent to which this reveals the primordial nationalism that underpins his fiction. Gunn's portrayal of women conforms to 'the problematic figurations of women and womanhood within nationalist imaginaries, of the sightings of women as subjects and objects of nation-building projects'.²³ Whereas male characters are the active embodiment of national revival and renewal, women are passive symbols of the nation, illustrating the masculine cultural hegemony at the core of the Scottish Renaissance movement. Gunn's male characters 'act' and his female characters, particularly young women, 'appear' as

²² Christopher Whyte, 'Fishy Masculinities: Neil Gunn's *The Silver Darlings*', p.54

²³ Deborah Elliston, 'A Passion for the Nation: Masculinity, Modernity and Nationalist Struggle', *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 31, No.4 (Nov., 2004) p.609

human landscapes and are embodiments of the sacred bounded territory of the nation. In this sense, Gunn's maidens are presented as passive objects to be surveyed, explored and like the landscape, by his active male characters. An examination of the portrayal of young women, or maidens, who are closely associated with a fertile and abundant landscape in *Morning Tide* and short stories such as 'Hill Fever' (1934) and 'The Moor' (1929) will support Tamar Mayer's assertion that in nationalist projects 'femininity is generally produced as a means of supporting the nation's construction, through symbolic, moral and biological reproduction; in turn, it is precisely because it is a masculine project that nation becomes feminised and figured in service to male needs'.²⁴ In 'Hill Fever' and 'The Moor', Gunn reinforces the connection between idealised maidenhood, articulated through a feminised landscape that conveys the essentially feminine essence of primordial nationhood and underpins the importance of female sexuality and fertility in Gunn's national imaginings.

I will also examine the intrinsic connection between the role of motherhood and its ideological significance in nationalist discourse.²⁵ The health and success, or demise, of the nation as a whole is articulated through the body of the mother. Additionally, the abundance of the larder, the produce of the landscape, associated with the mother is an evolution of the sexual fertility and abundance of the maiden and can clearly be seen throughout Gunn's fiction in *Highland River* (1939) *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944) and articulates the Scottish Renaissance desire to redefine 'home'. Confined to the domestic sphere, Gunn's 'sacred' mother figures are also highly idealised, depicted as 'the center of the circle' around which all life revolves and represent national continuity.

Finally, I consider the older woman or 'crone' in Gunn's fiction, such as Dark Mairi in *Butcher's Broom* and the old woman at the end of *Highland River*. Older women, as Kirsten Stirling states: 'function as the guardians of the traditions of the ancient nation' and are the keepers of hidden, sacred knowledge in the community and guardian of communal spiritual heritage. Although Stirling asserts that Gunn 'never explicitly figures woman as nation'²⁶ there is clear evidence to the contrary as symbolic femininity is a key component in his masculinist nation building.

²⁴ Tamar Mayer, 'Setting the Stage', *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, ed. by Tamar Mayer (London: Routledge, 2000) p.16

²⁵ Kirsten Stirling, *Bella Caledonia: Woman, Nation, Text* (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2008) p.21

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.53

This thesis seeks to offer an insight into the nuanced complexity of Gunn's fiction and the ways in which his novels are grounded in a rich tapestry of literary, political and spiritual influences. Through a productive engagement with long-standing critical debates in Gunn studies, I intend to reveal the ways in which self, nation and gender intersect in Neil Gunn's landscapes of belonging.

1.Highland Reveries

The evening is deep inside me forever. Many a blond, northern moonrise, like a muted reflection, will softly remind me, and remind me again and again. It will be my bride, my alter ego. An incentive to find myself. I myself am the moonrise of the South.²⁷

Paul Klee

Here is the possibility of an art of landscape which is all mobility – not the static statement of a concept of nature, nor the arbitrary record of impressions, but of landscape which is space to be moved in, which is formed and determined by the active imagination in the landscape, a walking imagination.²⁸

In their seminal biography of Neil Gunn, F.R. Hart and J.B. Pick state that Gunn ‘never belonged to institutional religion’ and that he ‘acquired his knowledge and faith elsewhere’, particularly in the Edenic ‘strath that runs by Dunbeath water to the edge of the moor’ that he explored as a boy.²⁹ Here Gunn developed an enduring affinity and spiritual relationship with nature that continued into adulthood and matured in the portrayals of

²⁷ Paul Klee, Felix Klee, ed., *The Diaries of Paul Klee 1898-1918* (Los Angeles: Berkeley, 1968) p. 290.

²⁸ David Burnett, ‘Paul Klee: The Romantic Landscape’, *Art Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Summer, 1977) p.4.

²⁹ F.R. Hart, J.B. Pick, *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life*, (London: John Murray publishers, 1981) p.29

landscape in his novels. Repeatedly evident in Gunn's fiction are individuals who withdraw from society to seek solace and spiritual renewal in the natural world in a manner that is highly reflective of the natural spirituality of the Romantic tradition in which we see the transcendent qualities of landscape and how it affected the journey of the self. An examination of the ways in which Gunn drew from the Romantic tradition, first established by Rousseau and developed by Wordsworth, will provide us with a more complete picture of Gunn's spirituality. This discussion will also lay the groundwork for a greater understanding of the Rousseauvian roots of his romantic nationalism that I will examine in chapter two. Gunn's affinity with the Romantics can first be established through a comparison of the key aspects of Rousseau's Romantic landscapes in *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* and the Highland reveries of Neil Gunn's novel *The Serpent*. Through the descriptions of his sojourn on the island of St. Pierre, near Geneva, Rousseau established the template for the Romantic depiction of the natural world and the way in which man can access transcendent states through the landscape. In 1919 Irving Babbitt identified the key aspects of Rousseauvian Romanticism as 'Arcadian longing, the pursuit of the dream woman, the aspiration towards the 'infinite' (often identified with God)' that 'appear at times more or less separately and then again almost inextricably blended with one another and with the cult of nature,'³⁰ and argued that 'Rousseau's great discovery was revery[sic]; and revery is just this imaginative melting of man into outer nature.'³¹ Other aspects of Rousseauvian thought that emerge from the *Reveries* are the rejection of modernity and desire to withdraw from society to seek solace in the wild in order to rediscover one's true or natural state. Through the examination of these key elements in *The Serpent*, it can be established to what extent Gunn's writing conforms with Rousseauvian Romanticism. These themes also recur in William Wordsworth's poetry, particularly in 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey' (1798) – Wordsworth's spiritual manifesto, in which he redefines his spirituality through the natural world as a more enlightened alternative to the Enlightenment and the crumbling edifice of traditional Christianity. The Highland reveries of Neil Gunn, seen in his novel *The Serpent*, are clearly rooted in the literary conventions of the Romantic tradition. Aspects of Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, the template for individual introspection articulated through the landscape in the Romantic tradition, are evident in *The Serpent*. In both texts can be

³⁰ Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, (Alexandria: Kindle, 2016) p.126

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.123

seen the 'Arcadian longing' that Irving Babbitt identifies as a key aspect of Rousseauian thought – the withdrawal of the individual to a wild place in order to commune with nature and rediscover the self as 'natural man'. Like Rousseau's rejection of society and his subsequent withdrawal to the island of St. Pierre, Tom in *The Serpent* often finds himself socially isolated and at odds with those around him, yet finds solace in the natural world. The self contained 'island' that Tom as 'The Philosopher' ascends as he reflects on his life throughout the novel is, like St. Pierre and the banks of the River Wye in 'Tintern Abbey', both a physical and metaphysical space through which transcendental reveries are expressed. Through these landscapes the solitary individual can escape the outer world and immerse himself in a wild and Edenic Arcadia, that signifies a primitive state of higher innocence, where the natural, or true, self can be rediscovered. The tension between the rationalism of the Enlightenment and Romanticism is clearly evident throughout *The Serpent*, initially manifesting in Tom's conflict with his fellow lodger Bob in Glasgow, resurfacing again in his rejection of Janet, who is the Romantic embodiment of the Highland landscape and represents the Romantic 'pursuit of the dream woman'. Wordsworth's rejection of traditional Christianity and embrace of a self defined form of spirituality rooted in and articulated through the natural world can also be seen in Tom's rejection of his father's authoritarian Calvinism and his embrace of natural mysticism and 'the imaginative melting of man into outer nature.'³² This, combined with 'Arcadian longing' and 'the pursuit of the dream woman', as Babbitt asserts, is 'often blended' 'with the cult of nature.' All of these elements are combined in Neil Gunn's portrayal of place in the Highland reveries of *The Serpent*. In this sense, Gunn is as much a Romantic writer as he is a Nationalist or Modernist.

Indeed, in her thesis 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Fiction: Character and Symbol' (1985), Carol Anderson argues that 'Literary Romanticism finds important expression in [Gunn's] novels' and that Gunn's fiction naturally builds upon the Romanticism found in nineteenth century Scottish literature, particularly concerning the portrayal of women as Romantic symbols. Gunn's 'use of romance structures, and a mythic conception of character and action' Anderson asserts, 'are a logical development in Scottish fiction.'³³ Whilst Anderson mainly focuses on the portrayal of Janet in *The Serpent* as an archetypal romantic female character, I intend to explore the parallels with

³² Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, p.123

³³ Carol Anderson, 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Fiction: Character and Symbol', pp. 264 - 265

Rousseau's Romanticism and the romantic reverie in *The Serpent* and the way in which landscape conveys the inner processes of the (male) main character.

Gunn's enduring affinity with Wordsworthian Romanticism has been highlighted by both Richard Price³⁴ and Douglas Gifford,³⁵ particularly in regards to the stylistic similarities in the autobiographical retrospection of *Highland River* and *The Prelude*. Gunn's interest in Wordsworth is confirmed in his final autobiographical novel *The Atom of Delight* in which *The Prelude* is quoted at length in a chapter entitled 'In Woods and Wild Places'. Here, Gunn describes the experiences of 'the nut cracking boy', a transcendent character that represents Gunn himself and reoccurs repeatedly throughout his fiction. As in *Highland River* and *The Serpent*, the natural world is a proving ground for the interrogation of the self, and the abstract is articulated through the concrete, the metaphysical communicated through the physical world, reflecting both Rousseau and Wordsworth's use of landscape.

Landscape as a space of introspection in the fiction of Neil Gunn resonates with the landscape meditations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1782) particularly the time he spent on the island of Saint Pierre near Geneva. Rousseau's last great work, an elegiac meditation described by Prabhu Venkataraman as a 'quintessential example of Romanticist literature in Rousseau's corpus' and 'enormously important, and yet oft neglected contribution to the literary works that inspired the Romantic movement,'³⁶ became the template for introspection through the landscape in the romantic tradition. This elegiac quality is also seen in the solitary character of Tom in Gunn's *The Serpent* and his meditations on the mountain. Like Rousseau, Tom is coming to the end of his life and his philosophical reflections unfold as he traverses the landscape. Rejecting the viewpoint of Bacon, Hobbes and Locke, who treated nature as mechanical and inert, Rousseau perceived this view of man's relationship with nature as harmful and destructive. The then entrenched philosophical and religious dogma of human superiority and man's estrangement from nature led to an estrangement from the physical self. Man will, therefore, gain a greater understanding of himself through a reconnection with the

³⁴ Richard Price, *The Fabulous Matter of Fact* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991) p.65.

³⁵ Douglas Gifford, 'The Source of Joy: Highland River', *Neil M. Gunn, the Man and the Writer*, ed. by Alexander Scott and Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1973) p.119.

³⁶ Prabhu Venkataraman, 'Romanticism, Nature and Self-Reflection in Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*', *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2015) pp. 326 - 327.

natural world. For Rousseau, the natural world also signified morality and, through a reconnection with nature, humanity will regain a moral integrity lost in the processes of modernity. In the *Reveries*, the withdrawal of the individual to the bosom of nature leads to the rediscovery of 'natural man', an idealised state that signifies an innate, uncorrupted innocence. Significantly, this is a reoccurring theme in Gunn's fiction. It is important to note, however, that Rousseau did not advocate a return to the animal state of the 'noble savage', but saw instead that it was a starting point from which to move forward and reappraise man's relationship with the natural world and himself. In *The Second Discourse*, Rousseau rejects the dichotomy of man and nature as separate entities and perceives natural man as being embedded and living in harmony with his surroundings, in contrast to man's 'fall' from Edenic innocence brought about by the subjugation of nature through agriculture. As seen in *The Confessions* (1782) nature was for Rousseau a mirror for man's natural self through which philosophical truths could be realised:

Wandering deep in the forest I sought and found the vision of those primitive times, the history of which I proudly traced. I demolished the petty lies of mankind; I dared to strip man's nature naked, to follow the progress of time and trace the things which have distorted it; and by comparing man as he had made himself with man as he is by nature I showed him in his pretended perfection as the true source of his misery.³⁷

For Rousseau, the original mold in which man was cast by nature is vastly superior to the flawed and corrupt image which man has created for himself. Only through the stripping away of societal illusion and a reconnection with the natural world can humanity regain its true sense of self.

It is to the natural world, then, that Rousseau turns in order to articulate his inner self in *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*. Distressed and alienated by increasing waves of criticism towards the end of his life, described at length in the 'First Walk', Rousseau finds sanctuary and, at times, 'raptures' and 'ecstasies' in solitude and nature.³⁸ In the 'Fifth Walk', on the island of Saint Pierre, near Geneva, Rousseau finds his greatest sense of well-being and happiness. He describes the island and the surrounding landscape as a romantic pastoral idyll:

³⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 2005) p. 362

³⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, p. 9

The banks of the Lake of Bièvre are more wild and romantic even than those of the Lake of Geneva, since the rocks and woods approach nearer to the edge of the water, and in other respects are no less delightful. If well cultivated meadows and vineyards are not so numerous; if there are fewer towns and houses, there is more natural verdure, fields, study retreats and groves; in a word agreeable and well-contrasted objects more frequently present themselves.³⁹

According to Rousseau, this Arcadian landscape is most conducive to inner reflection being 'highly interesting to the contemplative philosopher, who loves to ruminate at leisure on the charms of nature, while retiring into a silence broken only by the cry of eagles, the mingled warbling of various song-birds, or the rustling torrents which precipitate themselves from the surrounding mountains.'⁴⁰ The island, with its geographical isolation from the rest of the world, is perfectly suited to Rousseau's desire for solitude, and reflects his self-imposed separation from society. Saint Pierre is a self-contained, self-sufficient microcosm that becomes a physical expression of Rousseau's sense of self. Reflecting the language of the *Second Discourse*, where Rousseau, 'wandering deep in the forest' dares to 'strip man's nature naked' in his search for natural man, arrives on the island of Saint Pierre 'naked and alone,'⁴¹ and replaces the trappings of modern civilization – his 'stupid manuscripts and musty books' with 'flowers and plants.'⁴² Rousseau's interactions with the flora, fauna and landscape of the island and the lake are fully immersive and described with a sense of sexual ecstasy and abandon:

I stole away, then leaping into the boat, rowed it to the middle of the Lake, and when the water was calm, laying at my whole length, with my eyes toward heaven, let it drive slowly with the waters, sometimes, for several hours, enjoying a thousand pleasing, though confused reveries, which, without any particular and fixed object, were, in my opinion, an hundred times preferable to what I had ever found among the most delightful of what are called the pleasures of life.⁴³

Saint Pierre gives Rousseau a sense of returning to a state of innocence – the Edenic paradise lost, now regained in a 'fertile, though solitary island, naturally circumscribed and detached from the rest of the world, where nothing but smiling objects presented

³⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* p. 40

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 41

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 43

themselves, where no painful remembrances were recalled.⁴⁴ The reveries experienced in this transcendent landscape have released Rousseau from the psychological burdens caused by the 'tumults of society' and enabled his 'soul' to 'bound above the atmosphere' in preparation for his approaching death and the 'communion' of his soul with the 'celestial intelligences'⁴⁵ that he will soon be joining. Here, the abstract and the physical interact in the landscape to the extent that he can no longer 'distinguish the point of separation between ideal and real delights,⁴⁶ enabling the spiritual transcendence of the self.

Rousseau's meditations on the island of Saint Pierre provide us with the template for subsequent representations of the natural world in the romantic tradition and, in turn, the romantic landscapes of Neil Gunn. In both the *Reveries* and throughout Gunn's writing it is the image of the solitary individual escaping from society to a wild and Edenic landscape that signifies a primitive state of higher, or morally superior, innocence where the individual can once again regain his natural, or true, self. Through traversing and interacting with the landscape, it becomes an environment for self-reflection and improvement. The natural world is also a mirror for the soul as it moves in sympathy with the individual and reflects his or her inner processes. These elements are all present in Neil Gunn's novel *The Serpent* (1943), a bildungsroman in which the reflections of main character Tom and his journey to maturity are communicated through the landscape.

Tom is the 'serpent' of the title, having left his Highland village as a young man and immersed himself in urban intellectualism, he returns and introduces 'forbidden' political and scientific knowledge from the city to the uncorrupted Edenic innocence of his Highland community, with tragic results. Now, old and nearing the end of his life, Tom reflects on his troubled past as he climbs the local ben, the story unfolding as he moves through the wild landscape. As with Rousseau on the island of Saint Pierre, Tom, called 'the Philosopher' by the locals, has distanced himself from society and feels 'airy within himself, withdrawn from the community he could see like a cork from a dark bottle.'⁴⁷ Idealised Highland 'islands' – self contained microcosms shut off from the rest of the world – are evident in Clachdrum in *Young Art and Old Hector*, the Riasgan glen in *Butcher's Broom* and the Clachar community in *The Silver Bough*. Within these communities are

⁴⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, pp.45-46

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.46

⁴⁷ Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945, repr. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997) p.2

also characters that withdraw from communal life to seek even greater solitude in nature. The romantic and metaphysical qualities of Gunn's writing are often fully expressed in the experiences of these characters, and with Tom in *The Serpent*, the mountain he climbs is an island in the landscape that gives him the solitude necessary for his retrospections and philosophical meditations. Rousseau is referred to directly as old Tom delights in the abundance of the natural world around him:

He knew his Rousseau and many of the nature writers; had penetrated into animism and kindred beliefs. He was not prepared to be deceived or led away easily. Why this definite experience of gladness, of happiness, in this place? It always came to him now. He could think of it from a distance.⁴⁸

Gunn includes a direct reference to the Rousseauvian reverie during one of these meditations as 'The Philosopher smiled lightly to himself as he always did when an image entered and crystallised a mood of thought or reverie' and finds that 'when the image formed and passed the mind was freed and uplifted.'⁴⁹ There is a sustained focus on the main character's perception of the natural world around him in sensual descriptions of the landscape that are highly reminiscent of the romantic, pastoral idyll of Rousseau's *Saint Pierre*:

The only image in his own mind was of the ground around his feet, and he saw it tumble in gentle frolic, in little green dips and braes, broom and juniper and whin and wild briar, and grey salleys huddled in clumps over the tiny burn, hushing and hiding it. He smiled. The wild roses had just come into bloom, pink roses and white, and the broom was yellow as meadowland butter with an eddy of scent now and then that choked the brain like a sickly sweet narcotic.⁵⁰

Descriptions of Highland pastoral reoccur throughout the novel, predominantly in chapter openings, anchoring the narrative, and the meditations of The Philosopher, to the Romantic tradition. Chapter two conforms to this pattern, however this time the natural world is infused with the same sense of Edenic innocence encountered on Rousseau's island and in later Romantic writing such as Wordsworth's 'The Solitary', from the long poem 'The Excursion' (1814) where the Devonshire landscape is also described as a

⁴⁸ Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, p.262

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.127

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.1

Biblical Eden that functions as a place of memory.⁵¹ The same Romantic tropes are deployed by Gunn as The Philosopher recalls the idealised Edenic innocence of his youth:

The Philosopher got up and saw the world around him with slow delight and his nostrils caught the delicate scent of briar. He remembered how, on coming back to it after his first long absence from home, he had thought it like the sun-bleached and newly laundered scent of a countrywoman's linen. Or like the fresh pinafores of little girls at school when he was a boy. That clean freshness and living purity.⁵²

As in Rousseau's *Reveries*, we see the same sense of an Edenic paradise lost when Tom departs for the urban landscape of Glasgow, and then regained when his relationship with the natural world is re-established upon his return. Sensual interaction with a 'pastoral world of immemorial custom'⁵³ enables Tom to recapture the innocence of childhood simply through 'the delicate scent of briar,' and experience a 'living purity' that does not exist in the corrupt urban environment. Here again we see a landscape that, not only, represents a higher moral authority, but is also the catalyst for liminal states that can freely access memory, where the individual can no longer 'distinguish the point of separation between ideal and real delights.'⁵⁴ Just as Dark Mairi's temporal perception of the landscape in *Butcher's Broom* is used to time-shift back to the forming of the Riasgan glen in the ice age, nature is a prism through which Tom, in both youth and old age, can recapture forgotten memories, glimpse unseen supernatural worlds and access the primeval and primitive. Whilst on one of his journeys up the mountain, old Tom sees 'the carven head of an antique world' when he encounters a feral goat that also possesses an 'expressionless prehistoric stillness.'⁵⁵ The village of Tom's youth becomes a Highland pastoral scene inhabited by romantic characters of the ancient world such as Andie, with his 'weathered face and hands and the twisting strings of his neck glowing in the blaze' – a 'cattleman turned satyr.'⁵⁶

⁵¹ William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, ed. by Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, et al. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007)

⁵² Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, p.15

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.65

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.46

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.60

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.63

Tom's perception of his Highland idyll is an expression of the way in which his heart 'still hankered after the Romanticism' that his head 'could no longer believe in.'⁵⁷ As with *The Silver Bough*, in *The Serpent* we can see a tension between modernity and antiquity, 'head' and 'heart,' Enlightenment thinking, science and politics, and Romanticism, represented by the two contrasting landscapes in the novel: urban and Highland. Turning his back on his small Highland world at the start of the novel, young Tom leaves for Glasgow and, to his delight, is introduced to 'the vast hinter-lands'⁵⁸ of modern learning and political thought, leading to 'the awakening of his mind':⁵⁹

Huxley. Darwin. Robert Owen. Haeckel. Oh, the excitement in those days! Impossible for this late age ever to recapture that first fearful delight, that awful thrill of Scepticism. The horizon lifted, the world extended itself like a Chinese lantern and glowed with strange beasts and designs.⁶⁰

The conflict between intellectualism, scientific modes of thinking and Romanticism is embodied by the growing tension between Tom and Bob – a young man from a rural area in Galloway whom Tom is lodging with. Whilst Tom has embraced the intellectual delights of the city, Bob – the Rousseauvian 'natural man' – remains unaffected by the urban environment, other than enjoying its street fights and tribalism, retaining his 'natural' state with a 'laughing rush of life in him' and a 'natural aptitude for romantic poetry'.⁶¹ In a growing climate of antagonism between the two men, Tom takes great delight in waiting for the right moment to deconstruct and destroy Bob's religious beliefs and world view with his newly found knowledge and sharp logic 'that was more precise and exquisite in its work than any turning lathe'.⁶² Bob's exasperation with Tom's scientific and, in his opinion, reductive view of the mysteries of life reaches a climax after Bob reads Tom some love poetry by Tennyson:

Bob read the verse aloud, in a rich and tender bravado, then looking down at his body – for he lay on his back above the bed-clothes – at Tom who was sitting on the single bed, reading the *Origin of Species*, demanded, 'What do your wizened old potatoes think of that?

⁵⁷ Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, p.61

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.21

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.12

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.5

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.12

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.14

‘Just sex,’ answered Tom.

There was a pause. Then, ‘O Christ!’ cried Bob, ‘you make me spew.’ As he spoke he flung the poetry book at Tom. There was a wild rustling of leaves in the air, a thud against Tom’s body, and the much-handled volume fell to the floor like a shot bird, scattering poem-feathers as it fell.⁶³

The association of the romantic with the natural, embodied by Bob, and its conflict with Tom’s hard-headed logic, is expressed in the natural imagery Gunn uses here. The pages of the poetry book sound like the ‘wild rustling of leaves’, it falls like ‘a shot bird’ with ‘poem feathers’. Bob even describes Tom’s intellectual idols as ‘old potatoes’. This natural imagery contrasts with the modern and man-made in the comparison of Tom’s sharp logic with the mechanical ‘turning lathe’, a tool used to shape and process natural materials. Bob’s disgust with Tom’s reductive scientific approach is a reflection of the contempt Romantic thinkers held for the rationalist desire to quantify, dissect and demystify natural processes, and in doing so deny the presence of the miraculous in the quotidian, an approach Gunn criticises in his essay ‘On Magic’ (1940). Stating that while ‘it is the fashion of the modern conception to be logical and scientific’, it is ‘from the illogical, the irrational’ that his ‘fun and frolic’ and ‘profounder movements of his spirit would seem to arise’.⁶⁴ Gunn rejects the reductive manner in which scientific rationalism attempts to quantify and define a landscape of spiritual reverie:

The sea is a great mass of water of known composition from which he [man] can get fish and in which he can drown. But in his sailing boat on a summer morning, the sea is much more to him than that. So with the wind; with trees, and mountains, and the shapes of valleys. In certain moments their contemplation moves him to extreme delight, even at times to something approaching ecstasy, so that, not caring a rap for witch-doctor and system, he will shout and dance and bubble with excitement.⁶⁵

So if ‘science tries to take away or analyse away, the magical thrill’ Gunn continues, ‘then let science either attend to its own proper business or go to the devil’.⁶⁶

⁶³ Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, p.14

⁶⁴ Neil M. Gunn, ‘On Magic’, *Scots Magazine*, Dundee, Vol. 33, No.6, September 1940, pp. 433-436, repr. in *Landscape to Light* (Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing, 2009) p.75

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.75

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.75

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.76

Indeed, the 'profounder movements' of spirit expressed in poetry and art cannot thrive in the world of the rationalists. In the preface to Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800 Wordsworth states: 'the man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion'.⁶⁷ The 'man of science' Wordsworth identifies here has been dehumanised by his rationalism: he is 'remote' and isolated from the rest of humanity. 'Unknown' and anonymous, scientific man is defined by his separation from and denial of himself as a being of feeling. However, 'the Poet', driven by creativity, art and the vitalising mysteries of the inner life, enjoys a kinship with the rest of humanity. William Gunn, who Gunn hails as one who could glimpse the unseen world of spirits in his essay 'The Heron's Legs' (1958)⁶⁸ also expressed this sentiment more concisely on his annotations to his engraving of Laocoon (c.1826-27) where he states that 'Art is the Tree of Life. Science is the Tree of Death'.⁶⁹ Blake articulates the binary opposition between art and science with the natural symbolism so widely used by the Romantics. His allusion to the Edenic Tree of Life directly connects art with the natural and sacred, identifying it as the source of all true knowledge in opposition to the Enlightenment assertion that any knowledge established without the application of empirical and scientific methods has no value or validity. Blake is also expressing the wholesale rejection of the enlightenment view of nature as inert and opposes the dichotomy between the self and nature, the separation of 'I' and 'that' which emerged in Western philosophy after Descartes and practiced by Newton. The Romantic rebellion against the Enlightenment and its search for spiritual meaning is concisely summarised by Brian Barbour:

What appeared psychologically valuable in Christianity, cut off from any historical and doctrinal roots, could be regenerated by the creative genius of the poet, and the whole basis of man's spiritual and moral life could be reestablished. The issue was (or seemed to be) humanity's moral freedom and our life in a world that *means* something, where we are not just the atoms

⁶⁷ William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, Prefaces and Prologues*. Vol. XXXIX. The Harvard Classics. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14; Bartleby.com, 2001. www.bartleby.com/39/. [3 June 2021]

⁶⁸ Neil M. Gunn, 'The Heron's Legs', *Saltire Review*, 5, No.15, Summer, 1958, pp.19 – 22; repr. in *Landscape and Light*, Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987) p.229

⁶⁹ S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (Providence, 1965) pp. 28, 234

of Democritus of Newton's particles of light but are connected to a larger whole.⁷⁰

Wordsworth's 'scientific man' and 'the Poet' are embodied by the characters Tom and Bob. The conflict between the two men also comes to represent the dichotomy between Romanticism and Enlightenment thinking that Tom struggles to reconcile within himself. Blake's 'Tree of Death' has a darker significance for Tom later in the novel when his introduction of atheism, politics and science into a small Highland community indirectly lead to the death of his father Adam – who represents authoritarian Calvinism – and Tom's eventual mental breakdown. Tom finds himself caught between two worlds and, despite Tom's delight in rejecting the strict Calvinism of his father, embracing atheism, skepticism and science, he experiences a spiritual vacuum and struggles to find something to replace established religion.

It was within the similar context of the struggle between emerging Romanticism, declining Christianity and Enlightenment dominance that Wordsworth composed 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey' (1798) the spiritual manifesto of Romanticism and more refined offspring of Rousseau's ecstatic nature meditations in the *Reveries*. Brian Barbour argues that "Tintern Abbey" is irrefragably a religious poem in which Wordsworth sought to define and defend a realm of the autonomously spiritual – autonomous *contra* Christianity, spiritual *contra* the Enlightenment'.⁷¹ 'Tintern Abbey' is an exploration of a 'third way', a new spiritual mode that not only acts as a panacea for the spiritual vacuum of the Enlightenment but – like Tom's frustration with his father's authoritarian Calvinism – also seeks to break free from the dogmatic confines of traditional Christianity with its renewed focus on individual experience. Harold Bloom argues that 'the peculiar nakedness of Wordsworth's poetry, its strong sense of being alone with the visible universe, with no myth or figure to meditate between ego and phenomea,[sic] is to a surprisingly large extent not so much a result of history as it is of Wordsworth's personal faith in the reality of the body of nature.'⁷² Bloom's use of the word 'faith' is crucial here. Through his meditations on nature as a 'pure' source of revelation in 'Tintern Abbey',

⁷⁰ Brian Barbour, 'Between Two Worlds': The Structure of the Argument in 'Tintern Abbey', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Sep., 1993) p.151

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.152.

⁷² Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1971) p.133

Wordsworth seeks a solution to the spiritual dilemma he was confronted with through direct interaction with the natural world.

Location and place are crucial in 'Tintern Abbey'. Although it is most often referred to as 'Tintern Abbey', which implies the location of the speaker to be within or close to the abbey itself, the poem's full title tells us otherwise. As with the Old Philosopher, Tom, as he ascends the mountain in *The Serpent*, the position of the speaker is elevated, the poem having been composed 'a few miles above Tintern Abbey'. As he gazes down upon the derelict remains of the old spiritual order, Wordsworth meditates upon the formation of a new spirituality based to a greater extent on subjective experience and articulated through the landscape as he moves through his own natural cathedral. As in *The Serpent*, the climb the poet had to undertake to reach his present location symbolises the ascent towards higher knowledge and revelation. The poem begins with a landscape of memory and a temporal distance of five years between the speaker and the natural environment he longed for and seeks to reconnect with. This abstract landscape of the mind, memory and senses now unfolds before the poet as he traverses the environment. Wordsworth's immersion in his landscape of memory is all-encompassing, engaging not merely the mind but his body through the senses and throughout the poem there is a repeated emphasis on sensual contact with the landscape: 'I hear these waters', 'once again do I behold', 'I again repose/ Here', 'sensations sweet,/Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart'.⁷³ The accessing of memory through the landscape is also seen in *The Serpent* where Tom as The Philosopher on the mountain:

...removed his eyes and saw this withdrawn place of memory vivid with sunlight. Green leaves were translucent or glittered. The fragrance itself was colour. A small intimate world of close-cropped grass and winding alleyways, the yellow flowers, clustering like bees, glowing coolly in the sun's fire, a beauty that might have been too much, hanging still, now made light and playful in wandering eddies of wind.⁷⁴

Gunn meditates on the transcendental experiences of Yeats, Proust and Wordsworth in the natural world in *The Atom of Delight* (1956) and how they communicate these

⁷³ William Wordsworth, 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour. July 13, 1798', William Wordsworth, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) pp.131-132, lines 2-3, 4-5, 28-29.

⁷⁴ Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, p.60

experiences, reflecting Gunn's own idyllic childhood landscape. Here, 'the land is a memory', an elusive state of mind that Gunn fears can never be as fully realised or as concrete as the one that 'Yeats went on in his old age to find "among great trees" his most lofty philosophical conception, to "realise the nature of his timeless spirit"'.⁷⁵

In 'Tintern Abbey', as in *The Serpent*, reflections of Rousseau's sojourn on St. Pierre are also evoked through sensual natural descriptions and the yearning for solitude in the wild. Elements of the sublime in the 'steep lofty cliffs' are combined with the picturesque in 'a wild secluded scene' and 'connect/The landscape with the quiet of the sky'.⁷⁶ The landscape that has been touched by the hand of man has been over-run and reclaimed by wild nature as 'orchard-tufts', 'Among the woods and copses lose themselves' and 'sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms/Green to the very door'. Any human inhabitants seemed to have regressed to a more primitive state – back to 'natural man' – like the 'vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods' and the hermit that sits in solitude in his cave.⁷⁷

Although 'Tintern Abbey' is informed by the picturesque, tourism writing and the genre of landscape poetry, elements of which we see in stanza one, such as the influence of William Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye* (1782), its scope is far more philosophically ambitious and self-reflective. In stanza two, Wordsworth's memories of these natural reveries act as a panacea to the spiritual oppression the poet has experienced in the modern 'din/Of towns and cities'.⁷⁸ Here, there is a marked difference between the two states of solitude and loneliness. The restorative qualities of solitude surrounded by nature described in stanza one contrast with demoralising loneliness bringing 'hours of weariness' caused by the urban environment. Surrounded by a rejuvenating, animistic natural landscape, the poet may enjoy his solitude, but never experience the emptiness of loneliness. In this way, the absorption of the individual in the beauty of nature enables personal renewal and an antidote to social, political and mental struggles as the poet experiences 'sensations sweet', 'tranquil restoration' and 'unremembered pleasure'.⁷⁹ The spiritual and mental renewal the poet experiences through nature in turn leads to an elevated moral state and increased sense of his own

⁷⁵ Neil. M. Gunn, *The Atom of Delight* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956; repr. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1993) p.62

⁷⁶ William Wordsworth, 'Tintern Abbey', lines 7-9

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, lines 11-23

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, lines 26-27

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, lines 28, 31, 32

humanity, influencing the 'little, nameless, unremembered acts/Of kindness and love' that he has bestowed upon others. This generosity of spirit was recovered through nature despite the crisis in idealism that Wordsworth experienced after the atrocities of the French Revolution, as Irving Babbitt states: 'Wordsworth has described the misanthropy that supervened in many people on the collapse of the revolutionary idealism. He himself overcame it, though there is more than a suggestion in the manner of his own retirement into the hills of a man who retreats into an Arcadian dream from actual defeat.'⁸⁰ Indeed, Wordsworth's restoration of the self through the natural world is comparable to that of Rousseau on St. Pierre and Tom's withdrawal into the hills after Janet's infidelity in *The Serpent*.

Stanza two of 'Tintern Abbey' then builds to a philosophical crescendo as the poet shifts his focus on the quotidian and everyday to an abstract and transcendent state of being. The language used to describe nature is distinctly spiritual: it is 'sublime', 'blessed' and 'serene', with the phrase 'blessed mood' repeated to emphasise the poet's spiritual connection with nature. In a moment of reverie he states that the landscape has bestowed 'another gift, / Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood/ In which the burden of the mystery' of the world is 'lightened' and, with 'an eye made quiet by the power/ Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, / We see into the life of things'.⁸¹

The transcendental state that the poet describes here is highly reminiscent of the Zen inspired 'moments of delight' that Neil Gunn celebrated throughout his fiction, essays and letters which is based on the Zen Buddhist concept of satori or enlightenment; a moment of profound illumination and awakening that in Gunn's work usually takes place within a natural setting. In *The Atom of Delight*, Gunn expresses his admiration for Wordsworth's portrayal of a transcendent, animistic landscape in *The Prelude* that echoes his moment of illumination in 'Tintern Abbey.' Whilst out rowing on the lake, the poet describes the great cliff coming alive and 'like a living thing' comes striding after him, an experience that prompts a process of introspection and 'serious thoughts' working towards 'a dim and undermin'd sense/Of unknown modes of being'.⁸² Wordsworth's metaphysical explorations, enabled through the physical environment, lead the poet to profound revelations and captivates Gunn's imagination:

⁸⁰ Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, p. 127

⁸¹ William Wordsworth, 'Tintern Abbey', lines 37-49

⁸² Extract from William Wordsworth's 'The Prelude', Neil M. Gunn, *The Atom of Delight*, p. 62

Wordsworth may have his 'clouds of glory' around childhood, his alleged exaggeration of sentiment at times, his nostalgic backward look, but the athlete in him was once caught by that animism, which we have considered, so directly on the quick of the heart that I am happily left without any qualification whatsoever.⁸³

Although one of the principal aims of the Scottish Renaissance was to create an internally defined national canon, in which Scottish literature reflected the language and culture of the nation in a more authentic light, the writers of the Scottish Renaissance, such as Gunn and MacDiarmid were not opposed to drawing on wider literatures. Indeed, Gunn was not alone in his admiration of Wordsworth. Another prominent writer of the Celtic fringe, Seamus Heaney, drew from the well of the British literary tradition and found inspiration in the poetry of Wordsworth, who Daniel W. Ross cites as Heaney's 'primary Romantic model'.⁸⁴ Seamus Heaney's indebtedness to Wordsworth has been criticised and even condemned as a betrayal of his role as a postcolonial writer. In his examination of the way in which Heaney was drawn to Wordsworth's 'poetry of trauma', Ross discusses the critic David Lloyd's 'heavy handed dismissal' of Heaney's work and seeks to redress 'attempts to 'essentialise' a poet's work or to dismiss it simply because of its sources or influences'.⁸⁵ Far from being a betrayal of Heaney's status as a postcolonial writer, Ross argues that the poet's embrace of Wordsworth was an expression of his anti-imperialist position as 'in Heaney's mind [Wordsworth] was far more a critic than a reflector of British imperial ideology'.⁸⁶ Although Gunn has not received the same level of harsh criticism for his admiration of Wordsworth, understanding Heaney's attitude, as a poet of the Celtic fringe, towards Wordsworth gives us insight into why Gunn was so comfortable with, not only, openly admiring Wordsworth in *The Atom of Delight* but also incorporating aspects of the Wordsworthian landscape into his own portrayals of place.

Gunn's affinity with Wordsworthian romanticism also reveals the roots of his later interest in Zen Buddhism. In the essay 'Eight Times Up' (1958) in which Gunn discusses

⁸³ Extract from William Wordsworth's 'The Prelude', Neil M. Gunn, *The Atom of Delight*, p.62

⁸⁴ David W. Ross, 'In Search of Enabling Light: Heaney, Wordsworth and the Poetry of Trauma', *Nordic Irish Studies*, Vol. 5 (2006) p.109.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.109

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.109

'finding the self'⁸⁷ and higher states of mind he meditates on the 'clarity' of 'Wordsworth's light'⁸⁸ which is also referred to in 'Light'.⁸⁹ Wordsworth is also incorporated into Gunn's discussion of the esoteric teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky in 'Remember Yourself' (1959).⁹⁰ Extracts from Book One of 'The Prelude' are used as a focus for Gunn's meditations on 'other states of mind' stimulated by the natural environment in his essay 'The Heron's Legs'. Wordsworth's ability to see nature in a way that transcends quotidian modes of being prompts Gunn to reflect:

How often in the wilds of the Highlands have I filled a kettle from a burn and happening to look up and around, in that half-light which isolates, the grey light of magical suspension amid the fresh tingling earth scents...the remote cry of a hill bird... have seen the arch of the bridge at hand as a suddenly frozen frame for the picture. 'The lifeless arch of stones in the air suspended', says Wordsworth. That glimpse of the lifeless, like the first glimpse of a 'frozen' hare.⁹¹

Gunn goes on to recognise that 'the sight'⁹² is not peculiar to the Highlands'.⁹³ Including Blake in the argument for good measure Gunn also states that 'if we went beyond Wordsworth to William Blake we would find it in full flow in the sense that human figures, invisible to others, would as they passed by on the street, receive his salute'.⁹⁴ Gunn then links the way in which 'Wordsworth has spoken of 'one life' that was 'joy' – that was an obvious unity for him' to the 'unity' of Eastern spirituality.

The Romantic reverie and revelation experienced through contact with the landscape explored in 'The Heron's Legs' can also be found in Gunn's novel *Second Sight* (1940) which, like *The Serpent*, also explores the conflict between spiritual and rational modes of thinking. There is a point in the novel in which the character Harry experiences a 'moment

⁸⁷ Neil M. Gunn, 'Eight Times Up', *Saltire Review* 5, No. 18, Spring 1959; repr. in *Landscape to Light*, Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing Ltd., 2009) p.102

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.103

⁸⁹ Neil M. Gunn, 'Light', *Point*, No.3, Summer, 1968, pp.4 – 12; repr. in *Landscape to Light*, p.125

⁹⁰ Neil M. Gunn, 'Remember Yourself', *Saltire Review* 6, No. 18, Spring 1959; repr. in *Landscape to Light*, p.117

⁹¹ Neil M. Gunn, 'The Heron's Legs', *Saltire Review*, 5, No.15, Summer, 1958, pp.19 – 22; repr. in *Landscape and Light* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987) p.229

⁹² *The Second Sight*: The Highland term for psychic abilities that allowed individuals to predict the future and glimpse unseen worlds.

⁹³ Neil M. Gunn, 'The Heron's Legs', p.229

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.229

of delight' whilst surveying the landscape that is essentially a Rousseaurian reverie in which we see the 'imaginative melting of man into outer nature'⁹⁵ and 'the aspiration towards the infinite'⁹⁶ and it reminds us of Wordsworth's moment of transcendence where he glimpses 'into the life of things':

There was a shout of delight in him, but wonder held it in check, for the scene was of unusual beauty. The cone of Benuain was islanded clear before them to the north-west. And mountain-tops and long skerries floated on that white sea far as the eye could travel. A feeling of the marvel of first Creation came upon Harry in an atmosphere, not productive or hectic, but timeless and still. A Creation not being created, but invisibly creating itself from within. Eternity hung over that white sea, hung all over the world, let it dissolve or move as it may in temporary form and formlessness.⁹⁷

The sense that creation is 'invisibly creating itself from within' has similarities to the natural philosophy of Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling (1775-1854) who, through his study of medicine, physics and mathematics theorised that 'the holy ever-creative, original energy of the World' 'generates and busily evolves things out of itself'.⁹⁸ Wordsworth's spiritual reveries in 'Tintern Abbey' and Gunn's Highland reveries reflect the concept of a 'World Soul' and the symbiotic relationship between nature and spirit that was central to the philosophy of Schelling. This is expressed in 'Tintern Abbey' as 'a motion and a spirit, that impels/All thinking things, all objects of all thought/And rolls over all things',⁹⁹ and by stanza four it is clear that nature has replaced Christianity as 'The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse/The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul/Of all my moral being'¹⁰⁰ and declares himself a 'worshipper of nature', 'with far deeper zeal/Of holier love'.¹⁰¹ Thus, Wordsworth has found a focus for his spirituality and a replacement for traditional Christianity. A striking echo of Gunn's Highland reverie above, and an expression of the way in which man can access the divine through nature, can be seen in the following lines from *The Excursion* by Wordsworth:

⁹⁵ Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, p.123

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.126

⁹⁷ Neil M. Gunn, *Second Sight*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1940; repr. Glasgow: Richard Drew Publishing Ltd., 1986) p.138

⁹⁸ Robert Stern, introduction to Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature as Introduction to the Study of this Science*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)

⁹⁹ William Wordsworth, 'Tintern Abbey', lines 101-103

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, lines 110-112

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, lines 153, 155-156

A Herdsman on the lonely mountain-tops,
Such intercourse was his, and in this sort
Was his existence oftentimes *possessed*
Oh then how beautiful, how bright, appeared
The written promise! Early had he learned
To reverence the volume that displays
The mystery, the life which cannot die;
But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith.
All things, responsive to the writing, there
Breathed immortality, revolving life,
And greatness still revolving; infinite:
There littleness was not; the least of things
Seemed infinite; and there his spirit shaped
Her prospects, nor did he believe, - he saw,
What wonder if his being thus became Sublime and
comprehensive!¹⁰²

The idea of infinite, self-creating nature articulated by Schelling as ‘the holy ever-creative, original energy of the World’ that ‘generates and busily evolves things out of itself’, and in Gunn ‘invisibly creating itself from within’, is expressed here by Wordsworth as ‘revolving life/And greatness still revolving; infinite’. As with Gunn’s Highland reverie from *Second Sight*, the experience is intensely spiritual and is described using Biblical discourse, but the figure of God is absent. As in ‘Tintern Abbey’, here is a sense of the divine that is detached from the traditional patriarchal Godhead and focused instead on nature, even when the poet alludes to his ‘faith’. Again, as in *The Serpent*, we see Wordsworth’s use of elevated landscape in the ‘lonely mountain-tops’ to convey spiritual transcendence and revelation where the covenant or ‘written promise’ of God-like nature is made flesh in the physical landscape.

The Romantic struggle for a new kind of spirituality in the face of dominant rationalism and declining Christianity is also alluded to in *The Serpent*. As the young Tom rejects the strict Calvinism of his father and embraces new and exciting intellectual ideas such as socialism and atheism in Glasgow, he finds himself drifting further away from the old Highland way of life and the traditional modes of thinking that, Tom feels, Bob and his friend and fellow lodger Dannie come to represent. After moving to new lodgings shared by a group of modern thinkers he has become associated with, Tom becomes aware of

¹⁰² William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, ed. by E. de Selin-court and Helen Darbishire, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949) pp. 15-16, lines 219-234

the 'two worlds' that the two separate sets of lodgings come to signify. Turning his back on Bob and Dannie, Tom finds that 'Like a countryman gone back home to the companions and scenes of his youth, to find that he can no longer stay there, the bands of ancient custom irking him in a place gone small and grey'.¹⁰³ This transition however, is not a harmonious one and Tom experiences a sense of grief at the loss of his old, Highland sense of self. In contrast to those early days of intellectual discovery when 'the horizon lifted, the world extended itself like a Chinese lantern', Tom experiences a sense of losing something profound and impalpable, his horizon becomes narrower as 'The streets seemed darker than he had known them, more canyon-like, hidden more deeply from the sky'.¹⁰⁴ In this way, Tom's embrace of hard-headed intellectualism and logic and his rejection of the ancient ways, embedded in natural spirituality, and the 'heart', has limited his knowledge and comprehension of the world, rather than expanding it, reflecting Rousseau's view of modernity as a corrupting force taking us further away from the wisdom of the natural world. As Tom makes his way back to his new lodgings and intellectual associates, the spirit of Rousseau's *Reveries* is evident in his sudden awareness of the narrow world he returns to, and the overwhelming need to withdraw in solitude to nature:

The intuition was swift and sure, so clear that for a little way his footsteps lagged, and by some curious inversion of the mind the place to which he was returning seemed enclosed and hard and without its attraction. An urge came over him to go for a long country walk, to go by himself, to be by himself.¹⁰⁵

Bob's earlier confrontation with Tom foreshadows the later conflicts Tom encounters with the members of his community when he returns to his old life, bringing his new, and dangerous, ideas with him. Throughout the novel, Gunn maintains a simmering tension between escape and return, and the sense that Tom is caught between two worlds. Comparing his parents' physical characteristics to his own, Tom concludes that 'he himself was like something that had escaped from between them, slight in build and statue, fair in hair between the ginger and the black, and in mind very much like something that had escaped and secretly knew it'.¹⁰⁶ Tom vacillates between frustration with the primitive and narrow-minded beliefs of his boyhood home, and a longing for its

¹⁰³ Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, p. 27

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.27

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.28

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.32-33

tribal simplicity. To the members of the Highland community to which he returns, Tom is the bringer of unknown and forbidden knowledge from the outer world – the serpent that introduces hidden knowledge into an enclosed Highland Garden of Eden. The urban environment of Glasgow is perceived in the imaginations of the locals as a place of sin, sex and godlessness, threatening the authority of the elders, yet tempting and exciting to the young as Tom tells them tales of the city:

Some of them were loud-mouthed, some merry, some quiet and watchful, but in all of them was a sense of the marvelous, of a pagan forbidden country, of divination and second sight and ghosts, of a door behind them that might open.¹⁰⁷

The sense of the Highlands as an Edenic pastoral idyll becomes more apparent as Tom settles back into the rhythm of his old crofting life to take in the harvest. Having ‘escaped’ his place of birth and then returned, Tom looks upon his native environment from a fresh perspective. As he reconciles himself with being unable to return to Glasgow due to his father’s illness Tom ‘experienced, for the first time in his life consciously, a rare sense of physical well-being’ that had eluded him in the city.¹⁰⁸ In contrast to the mechanical imagery of the ‘turning lathe’ used to convey Tom’s fiercely intellectual state of mind in Glasgow, the imagery here is predominantly natural and expresses a sense of rejuvenation. The air ‘had a tingling fragrance and sweetness that came into the mouth and nostrils like a cool invisible drink’.¹⁰⁹ The spiritual renewal through nature articulated in ‘Tintern Abbey’ is reflected in Tom’s renewed appreciation of the rejuvenating qualities of the Highland landscape. As with Wordsworth, the natural world presents Tom with a form of spirituality that provides more fulfillment than the cold-headed logic of rationalism and atheism, yet transcends the confines of traditional Christianity.

Tom’s spiritual relationship the Highland landscape and his Romantic sensibilities grow and develop as the novel progresses, catalysed by his relationship with Janet, a local woman and Gunn’s most complex female character. As I will examine in greater detail in due course, Gunn’s female characters are most closely associated with the earth and often embody the landscape itself. As his relationship with Janet develops, Tom realises that ‘it was then no doubt, imperceptibly, little by little, that there was born in him a

¹⁰⁷ Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, p.35

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.35

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.34

first real intimacy with the earth, the earth of his own land'.¹¹⁰ The earth becomes Tom's 'fellow conspirator' when Janet and Tom meet for their secret trysts in the night; Tom 'could call it to witness silently, when he came into the hollow where Janet and himself had met in the dark'. As young Tom traverses the 'peaks and broad shoulders of several mountain ranges', described by Gunn using elements of both the picturesque and sublime, Tom surveys the landscape and asks 'Who created the world for him? Not God, but Janet'.¹¹¹ Just as nature has supplanted the God of Christianity and is an expression of the sacred feminine in 'Tintern Abbey', Janet has replaced the patriarchal God of Calvinism and has assumed the role of divine creator in Tom's mind. This resonates with Harry's transcendent reverie among the mountains in *Second Sight*, where his ecstatic communion with nature produces 'a feeling of the marvel of first Creation'. Most significantly, Janet is connected in Tom's mind with the Highland landscape, as 'He could not see Janet in a tenement stair in Glasgow'.¹¹² The three key aspects of Rousseauism that Babbitt identifies – 'Arcadian longing', 'the pursuit of the dream woman' and 'the aspiration towards the 'infinite' (often identified with God)',¹¹³ are all combined here in Tom's perception of Janet.

This perception is shattered however, when Tom learns of Janet's infidelity with the son of the local minister, prompting an emotional crisis and the return of Tom's rationalist outlook that predominantly manifests itself in his militant atheism, with tragic results. As Tom's anger grows, Gunn returns to the 'turning lathe' imagery used to describe Tom's intellectual attack on Bob's Romantic sensibilities earlier in the novel. This time, however, his reaction is far more extreme and foreshadows Tom's inner crisis and eventual mental breakdown:

The hours, the days that followed had a bitterness, an inner cruelty that changed his nature, hardened and shaped it blade sharp. And the blade itself was turned in on himself. Inwardly it cut and twisted, shearing off the soft adhesions of sentiment, of tender belief, whose existence he now regarded with an excruciating mockery.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, p.80

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.80-81

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.81

¹¹³ Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, p.126

¹¹⁴ Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, p.158

Tom's growing inner crisis manifests itself in a virulent attack on the spirituality of the local community as he reverts back to the urban intellectualism of Glasgow. The symbolic nature of Tom's character as the 'serpent' introducing forbidden knowledge into the Garden of Eden becomes more established here. Just as he has introduced the trappings of modernity into the community, such as bicycles, and established a workshop for repairing clocks, Tom now introduces a more dangerous form of knowledge. Admiring the example of Voltaire who made 'a mess and a battlefield of the Old Testament',¹¹⁵ Tom shows the young men of the village the literature on atheism that he has, thus far, kept hidden, and the effect is profound:

None of them repeated aloud what he had read. Not all of it they understood, and the learning which was beyond them served to add a mythical power and wonder, impressive as the Devil's slight of hand, marvels on the edge of the unseen that took the breath with the nearness of an ominous presence.¹¹⁶

As news of this new knowledge spreads throughout the community, it leads to an explosive confrontation between Tom and William, an elder of the local church, who challenges Tom's damning analysis of the hypocrisy of the Old Testament. As their argument intensifies, the two men go 'through the Old Testament like a furious whirlwind'. In a desperate effort to parry Tom's sharp logic and reason, William rises 'to visionary and prophetic heights', proclaiming to Tom that 'I see the serpent within you'.¹¹⁷ Driven by a fierce desire 'to pierce and destroy' the old beliefs, like his hero Voltaire, Tom underestimates the enduring power these beliefs possess in the minds of the local people watching as 'William had risen to the height of prophecy which moved them in the secret and fearful places, and they were silent in a deep stillness'.¹¹⁸ The confrontation climaxes as Tom's father, Adam, who embodies the patriarchal power and wrath of the God of the Old Testament, appears at the doorway:

The grey face, the grey beard, the blazing eyes, the silent pursuing face – it had come at last. The power of the father created in the image of God. The tribal power, the unearthly power. Each felt it, and Tom could not move.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, p.161

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.162

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.169

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.170

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.170

Adam is the antithesis of the sacred feminine that articulates Tom's Romantic sensibilities and reflects the traditional Christianity that Wordsworth turns his back on in 'Tintern Abbey'. Due to his physically fragile state, the stress of Adam's confrontation with his son results in his sudden death – a death that highlights the destructive nature of Tom's introduction of rationalism into the self contained microcosm of this Edenic idyll. From the perspective of this closed community, the outside world holds spiritual dangers that threaten their existence:

Outside this community of worship what was there in the world, the world of strife and vainglory and fleeting material things? Outside was the unreality that passed like a dream, like a coloured bubble that floated and burst upon the thin air, like a tale that was told and died in the mind. And there – there – stalking through that outside world, seeking whom he may devour, subtle as the serpent, crashing like a dark beast through forests, the Devil, the destroyer, the blasphemmer.¹²⁰

Tom is widely condemned by the community for causing the death of his father, and the aspects of progress and modernity that he brought from Glasgow are rejected – the workshop is abandoned, the windows having been smashed by the locals the bicycles are left to rust and even the young people of the community revert back to the comforting familiarity of the sacraments. In a reflection of the Rousseauvian misunderstood Romantic, rejected by society, Tom becomes isolated from the community. Aware of his new status as local pariah and burdened with guilt over the death of his father, Tom isolates himself from the community and descends into mental and physical illness.

However, like Rousseau's rejuvenating sojourn on the island of St. Pierre and Wordsworth's reveries along the banks of the Wye river, where nature is his 'nurse' and 'guide',¹²¹ it is in the landscape that Tom finds healing. Again, we can also see echoes of Schelling's philosophy of a rejuvenating 'World Soul', or earth energy, that man can access through interaction with nature:

All at once a delicate mood of renewal touched him, ran over his body and into his mind. The earth, that old patient mother. But beneath the surface – the hidden heartbeat, that which invigorated and renewed, that which drew his body secretly.

¹²⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, p.173

¹²¹ William Wordsworth, 'Tintern Abbey', lines 110-111

A craving came upon him to lie down and give himself to the earth, to sink far down, to sleep.¹²²

The earth is now identified, not with Janet as before, but with 'the old patient mother', foreshadowing Tom's physical and mental recovery through the renewal of his relationship with his mother who represents the old spirituality and nature mysticism of the Highlands, an aspect of Gunn's figurations of sacred femininity that I will explore in chapter five. It is through this renewed relationship that Tom finds spiritual balance and harmony and, like Wordsworth, finds in nature an alternative to the hard-headed logic of rationalism and authoritarian Christianity. Elements of Rousseauian primitivism are also suggested by the mature Tom, in the form of 'The Philosopher', as he explains ancient Highland spirituality, his 'religion', to a passing shepherd on the mountain. It is at this point, the significance of the title of the novel is revealed:

My point was simply that in the old days, when they had a settled way of life, when politics and economics had no meaning for them as they have for us, they had a special way of looking even at the serpent. Folk swore here in our country then, not by god or devil, but by the earth. Their bible for swearing on was the earth. You took a little earth in your hand and swore by that. The serpent was the earth spirit.¹²³

Here, the malignant figure of the Devil in the form of the serpent has been replaced by the benign and benevolent 'earth spirit' of the 'old days', reflecting Rousseau's admiration for the tribal simplicity of natural man and his intimate relationship with the land. For Gunn, the serpent also embodies the Romantic 'aspiration towards the infinite' as 'the old Gaelic image of eternity was the wheel made by the serpent when it put its tail in its mouth.'¹²⁴ Gunn returns to this form of Romantic spirituality throughout his novels; an individualistic and ancient spirituality rooted in the landscape that both Rousseau and Wordsworth would recognise:

'You have to watch them or they'll get you, each one of them: atheist, socialist, psychologist, philosopher, religious. Each is ready to take you 'the only way'. 'But watch them, or they'll have you in a cell or beehive like so many willing exhibits while the broom blows and the goat finds it unnecessary to smile.'

¹²² Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, p.187

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.200

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.190

High heaven save us from the symbolists, from the abstracters! Give us back the earth and the flesh and the lovely currents that flow in between them!¹²⁵

For Gunn, like Rousseau, communion with the landscape offered a far more authentic and meaningful spiritual experience than any ideologies constructed by man. In this way the landscape in Gunn's fiction allows his characters to access a primitive state of innocence. The latter part of chapter two will examine the way in which Gunn's use of a boyhood experience and innocence throughout his fiction is significant. Boyhood, for Gunn, is the mode of being closest to Rousseau's 'natural man' – a higher state of existence that Gunn deifies in the character Art in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* and seeks to access in his use of folklore and fairytale in *The Silver Bough*. Indeed, as chapter two will illustrate, the yearning to return to more authentic modes of being is a recurring theme throughout his fiction and would lead Gunn to explore the natural spirituality of native Highlanders in the *Carmina Gadelica*.

¹²⁵ Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, pp.73-74

2. Returning to the Source: Revival Through Folk Culture

I covet the mystery of our Gaelic speech
In which rughadh was at once a blush,
A promontory, a headland, a cape,
...And think of the Oriental provenance of the Gael,
The Eastern affiliations of his poetry and his music,
...And the fact that he initiated the idea of civilisation
That today needs renewal at its native source...

Hugh MacDiarmid
'Direadh'¹²⁶

The renewal and rebirth of the self through the Romantic communion with the landscape is also translated by Gunn into cultural and personal rebirth through folklore. The *Carmina Gadelica* (1900) was, for Neil Gunn, the primary 'native source' that he drew upon throughout his fictional works. Gunn's use of folk culture and texts from Alexander Carmichael's collection of Highland prayers, incantations and folk tales was, for Gunn, an expression of cultural authenticity and a key aspect of his romantic folk nationalism, reflecting that of Johann Gottfried Herder. Carmichael's introduction to the *Carmina* contains striking parallels to key aspects of Herder's political ideology and the way in which Herder sought to elevate folk traditions in order to enable cultural rejuvenation. Directly influenced by Rousseau's political philosophy, Herder's romantic, folk nationalism is marked by the rejection of Enlightenment elitism and intellectualism, and the celebration of the 'common man' and his natural nobility and moral superiority. Herder's nationalist aims therefore, included the rediscovery of threatened folk traditions, beliefs and customs,

¹²⁶ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Direadh III, Hugh MacDiarmid, Selected Poetry*, ed. by Alan Riach, Michael Grieve (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd., 2004) p.204

chiming with the Scottish Renaissance aim to reject the fatalism of the Celtic Twilight movement and find cultural rejuvenation in the authentic folk culture of the Highlands. Crucially, Carmichael's introduction to the *Carmina Gadelica*, is an hitherto unacknowledged document of Romantic Nationalism in Scotland. In it can be seen some the key features of Herder's political ideology, particularly the elevation of the *volk* and the superiority of native culture. In his novels Gunn, embraces Highland folk culture, celebrated by Carmichael, in *Butcher's Broom* (1934)¹²⁷ *The Silver Bough* (1948)¹²⁸ and *Young Art and Old Hector* (1942)¹²⁹ and viewed it as a source of national rejuvenation. A recurring theme in Gunn's novels is the individual either returning or being introduced to Highland landscapes and communities, and finding spiritual renewal in the bosom of the *volk* and native traditions. This is clearly evident in *The Silver Bough* in which key elements of romantic nationalism can be seen in the development of the main character Simon Grant. Like Tom in *The Serpent*, Grant's perception of his surroundings vacillates from 'head' to 'heart'. Despite his initial intellectual and scientific outlook, Grant's character arc mirrors that of Tom as his romantic sensibilities gradually emerge through exposure to the Highland landscape and the 'noble spirit' of the local folk culture. As he begins to connect with the people of the community Grant's perception of the landscape and the humble dwellings of the village become less scientific and increasingly romantic. The description of the dwellings found in Clachar is highly similar to the description of the homes of the Riasgan people in *Butcher's Broom* – structures that seem to have sprung out of the earth in an entirely natural and organic way. Gunn reinforces the cultural richness enjoyed by the 'organic community' of Clachar and the continuity and wisdom found in ancient folk art through the ancient folktale of 'The Silver Bough.' The heart of this tale contains a moral lesson concerning the spiritual emptiness of material gain and the importance of family, generosity and hospitality, core Highland values that Carmichael celebrates in the *Carmina*.

Throughout Gunn's fiction we see his main characters with 'anguished spirits' turning their backs on the trials of modern, Western existence, and finding solace and rebirth in an ancient Highland landscape, imbued with a rich folk culture, such as Ken in *Highland*

¹²⁷ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom* (Edinburgh: The Porpoise Press, 1934; repr. Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006)

¹²⁸ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948; repr. Glasgow: Richard Drew Publishing Ltd., 1985)

¹²⁹ Neil M. Gunn, *Young Art and Old Hector* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942; repr. London: Souvenir Press, 1993)

River, Grant and Martin in *The Silver Bough*, Nan in *The Shadow* and Tom in *The Serpent*. The silver bough itself becomes the dominant symbol of renewal and rebirth in the novel and comes to represent the spiritual redemption and psychological recovery of Donald Martin, the nihilistic counterpart to Grant's idealistic romanticism and archetypal embodiment of what Gunn described as 'horror vacui' of the Western imagination.¹³⁰ Martin also comes to represent the historical injuries of the nation as a whole. Shut off from the rich folk culture of the local community and dehumanised by his experiences of war, Gunn uses folklore to articulate the way in which Martin, like a traumatised post-war Scotland, can be fed from the ordeal of his past experiences. Set on an inevitable path to self-destruction, it is through his lost family, Anna and his daughter Sheena, that he will find redemption, reflecting the way in which Herder saw the nation as a natural progression of the family. The way in which the past, in the form of the authentic cultural tradition of folklore, can enable renewal in the present is revealed as Gunn articulates Martin's salvation through the tale of the silver bough. Martin and the nation itself, therefore, will be rejuvenated by the authentic cultural traditions of the people. Folklore is also a means by which the 'youth' of the nation can be accessed, a process articulated in Gunn's figurations of idyllic, primordial boyhood. Gunn's use of folklore in his journey for meaning communicates the themes of revival and rebirth, both of the self and the nation, in the post-war age. It is through folk culture that the 'youth' of the self and, by extension, the nation can be accessed and primal innocence reclaimed. The focus on boyhood as a means to process individual and cultural trauma and 'bring man back to the point' where he is at 'harmony within himself and the universe around him'¹³¹ is a recurring theme in Gunn's fiction and is brought more clearly into focus through the use of folklore.

Crucially, Gunn's use of Alexander Carmichael's seminal collection of Highland prayers, folktales and incantations is also an articulation of the Scottish Renaissance aim to seek out an 'authentic' Scottish cultural tradition, and this movement towards the 'ur-motives' of a nation can also be seen in the poetry and essays of Hugh MacDiarmid. The *Carmina* also represented for Gunn the 'light' of Gaelic civilisation, as well as the aims of the Scottish Renaissance to rediscover an authentic pre-Reformation Scottish culture.

¹³⁰ Neil M. Gunn, 'Highland Space', *Saltire Review*, 6, No. 23, Winter, 1961, pp. 45 – 48; repr. in *Landscape and Light*, ed. by Alistair McCleery, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987) p.80

¹³¹ Smith, John Frederick, *Studies of Religion under German Masters* (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1880) pp.131 - 132

In this way, Gunn's use of the *Carmina Gadelica* is an articulation of the cultural nationalism of the Scottish Literary Renaissance and is most akin to that of the romantic, populist nationalism of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803). Just as Rousseau is considered the pioneer of political nationalism, that places an emphasis on the nation as the manifestation of the collective will of the people, Herder is widely seen as the founder of cultural nationalism, in which the nation is an expression of cultural and ethnic belonging. Key principles of Rousseau's political philosophy, such as the importance of national individuality, the nation as a paternal entity and politics as culture all found a voice in Herder's philosophy. Like Rousseau, Herder also emphasised the need to consider the 'heart' and emotion just as much as the 'head' and reason when considering political reforms that lead to the most ideal modes of living for humanity as a whole, not just individual races. It is important to note that this crucial consideration is the main difference between Herder's philosophy and Nazism – a perversion of Herderian cultural nationalism that seemed to adopt the hallmarks of Herder's folk nationalism but ignored the humanistic and egalitarian principles that formed the core of Herder's philosophy. Herder sought to elevate Rousseau's notions of political legitimacy through popular sovereignty from simply a political state to a cultural and spiritual imperative that was intended to advance the state of mankind, an 'extended family with one national character.'¹³² Herder envisaged the nation as a natural progression of the family unit as an expression of emotional attachment, collective belonging, solidarity and continuity. In this way the macro-community of the nation enabled a rejuvenation of the self – a theme that consistently reoccurs throughout Gunn's earlier fiction.

Herder's romantic, folk nationalism can be identified through several key features: the rejection of Enlightenment elitism and intellectualism; the celebration of the 'common man' and his natural nobility and moral superiority; the seeking out or rediscovery of threatened folk traditions and culture found in folklore, beliefs and customs; a belief that true creativity and inspiration can only come from the primitive and that native cultures are shaped by their natural environment. In his seminal article on Herder and romantic nationalism, William A. Wilson identifies the importance of folklore to the romantic nationalist movement:

¹³² Rousseau, *Political Economy*, Masters, op. cit., pp. 209-11; Herder, *Werke*, XIII, p. 384.

[Serious folklore studies] were from the beginning intimately associated with emergent romantic nationalist movements in which zealous scholar-patriots searched the folklore record of the past not just to see how people lived in by-gone days – the principle interest of the antiquarians – but primarily to discover “historical” models on which to reshape the present and build the future.¹³³

For Herder, the very ‘soul’ of the people was to be rediscovered in folk poetry that contained ‘the imprints of the soul’¹³⁴ of the nation. ‘The poet,’ for Herder, is a creator of a people [Volk] around himself: he gives them a world to see and has their soul in his hand, to lead them to it.¹³⁵ Crucially, a national culture could only be judged to be legitimate if it possessed a sense of continuity with its authentic ‘immortal’ essence: national progress in the present was only possible through a dialogue with the past.

Herder’s influence spread throughout the marginalised nations of Europe such as the Slavic countries and Finland, which was united with Russia in 1809. In 1835 Elias Lonnrot published his collection of folk poems – the epic *Kalevala* – the Finnish equivalent of the *Carmina Gadelica*, in order to reawaken the Finnish national spirit. Herder’s movement of national revival through folklore was an effort, as Ergang states, to ‘go back to the sources of their own language and literature and liberate the former power and noble spirit which, unrecognised up to now, lie dormant in the documents of the national past’.¹³⁶

Herder was also influenced by Montesquieu’s idea that national cultural types are formed by the landscape. Asserting that ‘oceans, mountain chains, and rivers are the most natural boundaries not only of lands, but of peoples, customs, languages and empires’ Herder believed that the physical landscapes of nations ‘have been the guiding lines and the limits of world history.’¹³⁷ The landscape and the natural world dominate the imagery of the *Carmina* texts and were the language through which the Highland people articulated their spirituality. Indeed, Gunn’s spiritual journeys of the self and nation are

¹³³ William A. Wilson, Herder, ‘Folklore and Romantic Nationalism’, *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 6 (1973) p.819

¹³⁴ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sammtliche Werke*, vol. 3, ed. by Bernhard Suphan, Carl Redlich and Reinhold Steig (Berlin: Weidmann’sche Buchhandlung, 1877-1913; 3rd repr. as *Samtliche Werke*, Hildesheim: Olms, 1994-95) p.29

¹³⁵ Johann Gottfried Herder, ‘Über die Wirkung,’ *Sammtliche Werke*, vol. 8, p.433

¹³⁶ Robert Rienhold Ergang, *Herder and the Foundations of German Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966) p.235

¹³⁷ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sammtliche Werke*, vol.13, p.38

always expressed through the Highland landscape. According to F.R. Hart and J.B. Pick in *A Highland Life*, the challenging ‘mystical’ elements in Gunn’s fiction are better understood when articulated through the landscape and that ‘Part of the meaning lay in the hunt, the path through the wood, the sudden illumination by the way.’¹³⁸

Comprising prayers, incantations and folklore collected from the Highlands in the nineteenth century, the core texts of the *Carmina Gadelica* and Alexander Carmichael’s notes and introduction to the vast six-volume collection were described by one Celticist as ‘a strange blend of pagan and Christian imagery, witnesses to the spirituality of a vanished age’.¹³⁹ Controversy still surrounds the *Carmina* and scholars often question Alasdair Carmichael’s role as collector and editor of the texts. At best he is seen as saviour and custodian of an oral tradition that might otherwise have been lost in the ravages of time and emigration, with the publication of the *Carmina* hailed as ‘a signal triumph, an outstanding literary achievement, and an event of the greatest moment to the whole of Gaelic Scotland’.¹⁴⁰ At worst, he is compared to the MacPhersons with their production of their fraudulent Ossianic ballad. In the 1970s the once widely held belief that the *Carmina* was an authentic and original document gave way to scholarly doubts about the various liberties Carmichael had taken with the texts found in the collection. Questions surrounded various editorial decisions, such as the way in which Carmichael compressed several versions of a text into one, ultimately resulting in his own production of the published text. Much of the material deemed too ‘pagan’ was also omitted from the collection as it contradicted Carmichael’s romantic views of Celtic Christianity and, as Donald Meek states, ‘[...] possibly because it was deemed too ‘wild’ or unsuitable.’ Meek argues that in ‘[...] adherence to the paradigm of the ‘Spiritual Celt’, ‘the agenda driving the creation of *Carmina Gadelica*’, ‘[...] was therefore to present a particular view of the Gaels as essentially spiritual beings.’¹⁴¹ Any claims concerning Celtic Christianity or Celtic spirituality based on the contents of the *Carmina* therefore, must recognise the reconstructed nature of the collection. John Randall concludes that Carmichael:

¹³⁸ F.R. Hart, J.B. Pick, *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life*, p.254.

¹³⁹ John MacInnes, *Carmina Gadelica* (Edinburgh: T. & A. Constable, 1900, repr. Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2015) p.7

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.7

¹⁴¹ Donald E. Meek, ‘Alexander Carmichael and ‘Celtic Christianity’’, *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, ed. by Domhnall Uilleam Stiubhart (Port of Ness: The Islands Book Trust, 2003) p. 82

[...] did his best to advance the cause of the Gael politically and culturally in the late nineteenth century, but in doing so he allowed himself to a significant (but as yet unknown) extent to move away from the authenticity of his original recordings.¹⁴²

These doubts concerning authenticity however, did not exist when Gunn first approached the *Carmina Gadelica* as source material, and it is his perception of the collection as an authentic literary embodiment of the 'light' of Gaelic civilisation that holds greater relevance for our purposes.

Elements of the *Carmina* are woven throughout Gunn's fiction: prayers and references from the *Carmina* can be found in *The Lost Glen* (1949) and *Butcher's Broom*. F. R. Hart and J. B. Pick speculate that at one point Gunn considered writing a series of novels based on proverbs from the *Carmina* and that it was the 'principal inspiration'¹⁴³ for his novel *The Lost Chart*. Gunn's use of *Carmina* prayers and folklore in novels such as *Butcher's Broom* and *The Shadow* reflects the rejection by writers of the Scottish Renaissance of what they perceived as the redundant cultural legacy left by writers such as Scott or, to use Edwin Muir's infamous expression, the 'sham bards of a sham Scotland'.¹⁴⁴ Embracing older folk traditions and lore was also an antidote to what the Scottish Renaissance writers saw as the barren cultural wasteland left by the Reformation of 1560, the Act of Union and the Industrial Revolution that had produced a state of atrophy in Scottish culture, where the ancient roots of folk traditions had been rejected and lost. Indeed, Walter Scott was a symbol of cultural stagnation for Renaissance writers such as Gunn, MacDiarmid and Muir. In his review of *Scott and Scotland* in *Scots Magazine* (1936), Neil Gunn outlined the problem with Scott's cultural antiquarianism:

It is not that the history was untrue or was inadequate subject matter for his genius; it was that it no longer enriched or influenced a living national tradition; it had not even the potency of pure legend; it was story telling or romance set in a void; it was seen backwards as in the round of some time spyglass and had interpretive bearing neither upon a present or a future.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² John Randall, introduction, *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, ed. Domhnall Uilleam Stiubhart (Port of Ness: The Islands Book Trust, 2003) p.xiii

¹⁴³ F. R. Hart, J. B. Pick, *Neil Gunn: A Highland Life*, p. 217

¹⁴⁴ Edwin Muir, 'Scotland 1941', *The Complete Poems of Edwin Muir*, ed. by Peter Butter (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991) p.100

¹⁴⁵ Neil M. Gunn, review of *Scott and Scotland* by Edwin Muir, *Scots Magazine*, 26, No.1, October, 1936, p.73

Gunn's dissatisfaction with Scott is, in part, grounded in the lack of authentic folk culture, or 'living national tradition' in his fiction. Any attempts by Scott to reproduce Highland culture in his novels, therefore, are futile, due to the absence of authentic folk culture that would legitimise the portrayals of Highland life in his writing. Conforming with Herder's aims to use the past as a means to reinvigorate the present, Gunn is also trying to free fiction concerning the Highlands from the domination of historical romance, which provides no real solutions for rejuvenating 'a present or a future.' Scott's fiction, Gunn argues, lacks 'the potency of pure legend' and the power of authentic cultural sources.

In an attempt to counter inauthentic portrayals of the Highlands and revive and rejuvenate a Scottish cultural scene in a state of decay and sterility, the Scottish Renaissance writers, mirroring other cultural nationalist movements in marginalised countries throughout Europe, actively sought out and championed the great folk art of Scotland. In this way, the Scottish Renaissance intended to propagate a far more authentic cultural tradition than the 'sham bards'. Hugh MacDiarmid called for the cultural rebirth of Scotland through the ancient Gaelic culture. Rejecting the fatalism of the Celtic Twilight movement, Scottish literary Renaissance writers embraced the authentic folk culture of the Highlands as a source of cultural rejuvenation.

Gunn placed great cultural significance on the right of the people to distill their own whisky – a sacred right of passage that goes back to ancient times and, for Gunn, articulates the spirit of the authentic Scotland – a cultural tradition of the *volk* that is unrefined and raw, lacking in polish or pretensions. This sense of authenticity and, crucially, the insight it gives into the everyday lives and common traditions of the people – 'their drink, their habits, their arts, their dreams, their fun, their bestial lapses and heroic moments'¹⁴⁶ – is why Gunn found the *Carmina Gadelica* so compelling.

Interest in Celtic culture had been building steadily from the mid nineteenth century: from Matthew Arnold's essay on Celtic literature to a growing body of scholarship that included *Lyra Celtica* (1896) edited by Elizabeth A. Sharp with introduction and notes by William Sharp, Alexander Cameron's *Reliquiae Celticae* (1892) William Forbes Skene's *Celtic Scotland* (1876) John Francis Campbell's *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (1862) and, of course, Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*. Pioneering biologist,

¹⁴⁶ Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland: A Practical and Spiritual Survey* (London: Routledge, 1935; repr. London: Souvenir Press, 1977) p.105

anthropologist and forward thinking town planner Patrick Geddes sought a renewed engagement in civic affairs through accessing the Celtic heritage of the nation. In the 1890s he founded and edited, with the assistance of William Sharp, a periodical called *The Evergreen: A Northern Seasonal* (1895-1897) that often drew on neglected cultural traditions of the people to energise new modes of thinking. This renewed interest in folklore in Scotland also reflected the burgeoning artistic trend in Europe towards 'neo-classicism' that Hugh MacDiarmid identified as an artistic movement dedicated to the reawakening of aboriginal cultures. Indeed, Alexander Carmichael belonged to a circle of scholars that included Professor Donald MacKinnon, a native of Colonsay and authority on Gaelic traditions and belief. In the 1870s MacKinnon had gained distinction for a series of essays in the journal *An Gaidheal* where he discusses the native spirit of the Gael. Preferring to source his material from authentic Gaelic proverbs and lore, MacKinnon followed the approach of the European folklorists and, as Donald E. Meek argues 'earlier pioneers, such as Johann Gottfried Herder, appear to have influenced him'.¹⁴⁷

The 'noble' native spirit of the Gael is also celebrated by Alexander Carmichael in his introduction to the *Carmina Gadelica* when relating the Highland experiences of the 'learned barrister' Iain Campbell. In what sounds like a description of a Gaelic version of Rousseau's 'natural man', Campbell proclaimed 'that in no other race had he observed so many noble traits and high qualities as the unlettered, untraveled, unspoiled Highlander,'¹⁴⁸ Carmichael's introduction contains many striking similarities to the discourse of Herder's romantic nationalism, a discourse that also is evident Neil Gunn's writing. Far from being a straightforward introduction to a collection of prayers, incantations and folklore, Carmichael's introduction to the *Carmina Gadelica* is an hitherto unacknowledged document of Romantic Nationalism in Scotland. Key features of Herder's political ideology, particularly the elevation of the *volk* and the superiority of native culture are clearly evident.

At the start of the introduction Carmichael seeks to establish the integrity and authenticity of the *Carmina*, asserting that that his collection of 'old lore' has been 'collected during the last forty-four years'. The great creative abundance and geographical extent of Gaelic culture is emphasised as Carmichael identifies the *Carmina* as only 'a

¹⁴⁷ Donald E. Meek, Alexander Carmichael and 'Celtic Christianity', *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, Domhnall Uilleam Stiubhart (ed.) (Port of Ness: The Islands Book Trust, 2003) p.85

¹⁴⁸ Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, p.23-24

small part of a large mass of oral literature written down from the recital of men and women throughout the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, from Arran to Caithness, from Perth to St. Kilda'.¹⁴⁹ Acknowledging that the majority of the collection has been gathered from the Western Isles, Carmichael goes on to describe the rugged Outer Hebridean landscape as an environment beyond imagination:

No mind could conceive, no imagination could realise, the disorderly distribution of land and water that is to be seen in those Outer Islands, where mountain and moor, sand and peat, rock and morass, reef and shoal, fresh-water lake and salt-water loch in wildest confusion strive for mastery.¹⁵⁰

Carmichael's lengthy descriptions of the Outer Hebridean landscape grounds the context of the *Carmina* in physical place, reflecting how many of the texts in the collection are infused with natural imagery,¹⁵¹ eloquently articulating the way in which the lives of the Highlanders were dominated by the landscape and the changing seasons. This emphasis on physical place resonates with Herder's view that the essential character of native peoples is shaped by their natural environment. He argued that 'man considered as an animal is the child of the earth and is attached to it as his habitation'.¹⁵² The expansive landscape of the Outer Hebrides assumes mythical proportions as Carmichael speculates that the Long Island, comprising of Barra, South Uist, Benbecula, North Uist, Harris and Lewis is:

[...] evidently the backbone of a large island, perhaps of a great continent, that extended westward beyond the Isle of the Nuns, beyond the Isle of the Monks, beyond the Isle of St Flann, beyond the Isle of St. Kilda, beyond the Isle of Rockall, probably beyond the storied Isle of Rocabarraidh, and possibly beyond the historic Isle of Atlantis.¹⁵³

Carmichael places the Outer Hebrides within a greater geographical context of a 'great continent' that stretches back to an immemorial past, rooting Gaelic culture in the civilised glories of the ancient world. Citing Atlantis connects the Gaelic world with the fabled lost cradle of Western civilisation, a legend first 'recorded' by Plato in the dialogue

¹⁴⁹ Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, p.19

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.19

¹⁵¹ See appendix (i)

¹⁵² Johann Gottfried Herder, from *Sammtliche Werke*, vol. 8, pp.194-9, in J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture, F.M. Barnard, ed. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969) p.280

¹⁵³ Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, p.19

of *Timaeus*. Identifying Atlantis as 'historic' suggests the influence of Ignatius L. Donnelly's pseudoarchaeological *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*, published in 1882, which argued that Plato's Atlantis was based on historical fact and that the great civilisations of the ancient world had their genesis in this lost island. Carmichael's reference to Atlantis is perhaps an attempt to add legitimacy to his argument and foreshadows his assertion later in the introduction that Gaelic oral tradition surpasses the literary achievements of the classical age.

A reprise of this intersection of myth and history is combined with romance in an explanation of the lack of trees on the Long Island. According to legend, a Norse princess took her revenge after a prince of Lewis rejected her in favour of a native girl. The princess 'vowed by Odin, Thor and Frea, and by all the other gods and goddesses of her fathers, to avenge the insult, and she sent her witch to burn the woods of Lewis.'¹⁵⁴ Thus the landscape of the Outer Hebrides is further elevated as a theatre of epic deeds worthy of a Norse saga. Additionally, the idea that a native girl is considered by the prince to be as noble and worthy as a Norse princess, supports Carmichael's focus on the noble spirit of the native people in the rest of the introduction.

Carmichael continues by expounding on the noble qualities of the island people stating that 'the charm of these islands lies in their people – goodly to see, brave to endure, and pleasing to know'.¹⁵⁵ The superior Highland morality Carmichael encountered on his travels is described in detail:

During all the years that I lived and travelled among them, night and day, I never met with incivility, never with rudeness, never with vulgarity, never with aught but courtesy. I never entered a house without the inmates offering me food or apologising for their want of it.¹⁵⁶

A sense of Highland moral exceptionalism is also conveyed as Carmichael was 'never asked for charity in the West' in contrast to his encounters in England 'where I was frequently asked for food, for drink, for money, and that by persons whose incomes would have been wealth to the poor men and women of the West'.¹⁵⁷ Carmichael supports this assertion by quoting a Uist landlord who states that the people of the island are 'nature's

¹⁵⁴ Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, p.20

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.21

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.21

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.21

noblemen'.¹⁵⁸ This bears a striking similarity to Herder's idealistic perception of the *volk*:

The savage in his poor hut has room for every stranger; he receives him as his brother without even inquiring where he comes from. His hospitality is unostentatious, yet warm and sincere. The inundated heart of the idle cosmopolite, on the other hand, offers shelter to nobody.¹⁵⁹

Carmichael then moves on to emphasize the way in which the 'noble spirit' and superiority of the native is reflected in the excellence of their folk culture. In both Herder's political philosophy and Carmichael's introduction the belief that folklore is an elevated and superior art form, comparable to that of the ancient Greeks, is clearly articulated. Herder maintained that is only through fidelity to these 'ancient cultural values'¹⁶⁰ that a nation can become great. Wilson explains Herder's perception of folk poetry as a culturally valuable and superior art form:

'Much of the stimulation for Herder's work with folk poetry came from his reading of Bishop Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* and James Macpherson's fraudulent *Poems of Ossian*, both of which were published in England in 1765. These works – particularly the Ossianic poems – convinced Herder that the earliest Celts, Germans and Norsemen (at first no distinction was made between these races) had possessed cultural values equal to those of the Greeks.'¹⁶¹

This perception of the cultural superiority of folk art is also seen in the introduction to the *Carmina Gadelica*:

Gaelic oral literature was widely diffused, greatly abundant, and excellent in quality – in the opinion of scholars, unsurpassed by anything similar in the ancient classics of Greece or Rome.¹⁶²

Carmichael goes on to describe a ceilidh, an 'institution admirably adapted to cultivate the heads and warm the hearts of an intelligent, generous people'.¹⁶³ The ceilidh scene is revealed in detail imbuing it with a sense of immediacy, allowing the reader to feel the liveliness of the gathering. There is a sustained focus on the variety of attendees and the

¹⁵⁸ Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, p.21

¹⁵⁹ Johann Gottfried Herder, from *Sammtliche Werke*, vol. 8, pp.333-42, in J. G. Herder on *Social and Political Culture*, ed. by F. M. Barnard, p.186

¹⁶⁰ William A. Wilson, 'Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism', p.14

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.14

¹⁶² Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, p.21

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.21

minutiae of Highland life, such as the houseman ‘twisting twigs of heather into ropes to hold down thatch’ and the crofter twisting ‘roots into cords to tie cows’¹⁶⁴ lending the scene a dash of *volkish* colour. Carmichael uses the ceilidh to expound on the richness and diversity of the Highland oral tradition in a detailed ‘defence’ of native folk art:

The story-tellers of the Highlands are as varied in their subjects as are literary men and women elsewhere. One is a historian narrating events simply and concisely; another is a historian with a bias, colouring his narrative according to his leanings. One is an inventor building fiction upon fact, mingling his materials, and investing the whole with the charm of novelty and the halo of romance. Another is the reciter of heroic poems and ballads, bringing the different characters before the mind as clearly as the sculptor brings the figure before the eye. One gives the songs of the chief poets, with interesting accounts of their authors, while another, generally a woman, sings, to weird airs, beautiful old songs, some of them Arthurian.¹⁶⁵

Carmichael creates an image here of artisans operating at the peak of their artistic powers, able to hold their audiences captive with words and song. This is the ceilidh equivalent of the whisky distillation scene in Gunn’s *Young Art and Old Hector* (1942) with primordial ‘magic’ brought forth by ancient skills. Identifying some of the songs as ‘Arthurian’ grounds them in antiquity and implies the great age and provenance of the material. Incidentally, a sophisticated Highland culture with a rich oral tradition is celebrated in the same way in the wedding ceilidh in *Butcher’s Broom*, where cultural sophistication is demonstrated, not only, by the story-tellers, but also by the audience:

The guests reveled in this sort of invention, for it was born naturally out of their love for the ancient tales of their race, of proverbs, of impromptu satirical verses, of song choruses, of witty sayings and divinations. They relished the finer turns with a far keener appreciation than they relished differences in food or drink or shelter.¹⁶⁶

Here we can see the organic spontaneity and invention that in Herder’s view defined the oral tradition and demonstrates the artistic skills of the people. Herder regarded the artificiality of print culture with cynicism and admired the ‘freer’ more authentic qualities of folk culture:

Do you know that the wilder, that is to say the livelier, the freer in its effects a folk is (for this word means nothing less than that), the wilder, livelier, freer,

¹⁶⁴ Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, p.21

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p.21-22

¹⁶⁶ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher’s Broom* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006) p.255

more sensuous and more lyrical their songs become. The more distant the folk is from the artificial and the scientific mode of thought, language and writing, the less their songs are intended for paper and for dead written verses.¹⁶⁷

In his introduction to the *Carmina*, Carmichael emphasises the distance between the islanders and ‘the artificial and the scientific mode of thought, language and writing’ in descriptions of his encounters with individuals such as Hector MacIsaac of Ceannlangavat, South Uist. Hector is described as ‘the unlettered cottar who knew no language but his own’ who lives in a lowly hut in the peat-bog. Despite his impoverished existence and lack of conventional education, Hector possesses a ‘marvelous memory and extensive knowledge of folklore’ and can converse on an equal footing with ‘learned barrister’ Iain Campbell, a ‘world-wide traveller and honoured guest of every court in Europe’.¹⁶⁸ Carmichael goes on to state that he had similar encounters with ‘blind old Hector MacLeod’ of South Uist and ‘old Roderick Macneill’ of Barra, and highlights their vast store of cultural knowledge that ‘would have filled many books’ despite the fact that ‘none of the three men knew any letters, nor any language but Gaelic’.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, the cottar Kenneth Morrison is also ‘highly intelligent’ despite being ‘wholly unlettered’. Echoes of the way in which Herder viewed print culture as alien to the liberated oral tradition, and all the better for it, is evident in Carmichael’s assertion that these characters ‘could not have learnt their stories or poems from books, for neither stories nor poems were printed in their, and even had they been, those men could not have read them’.¹⁷⁰

Parallels between Carmichael and Gunn’s admiration for Highland folk culture, already highlighted by the ceilidh scenes, can be seen when we compare Carmichael’s notes for the *Carmina* and elements of *Butcher’s Broom*. Written in 1934, *Butcher’s Broom* is both a celebration of Highland traditions and a lament for the demise of the Highland way of life through the cultural devastation of the Clearances that took place throughout the nineteenth century. The primary focus of the novel is the people of the Riasgan glen, an isolated, self-sufficient Highland community in Sutherland with a rich folk culture rooted in antiquity. Gunn conveys the sophistication of Highland folk culture through colourful ceilidh scenes, extracts from the *Carmina Gadelica* and the character Dark Mairi who

¹⁶⁷ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Herder’s Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Bernard Suphan, 33 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877–1913) vol.5, p.164

¹⁶⁸ Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, p.23

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.23

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.24

personifies the ancient knowledge and traditions of the Gael. The rich cultural tapestry Gunn weaves throughout the novel serves to heighten the sense of cultural loss and tragedy at the end of the novel as the people are cleared from the glen to make way for sheep. The *Carmina* was an essential source for what Gunn perceived as authentic Highland culture and clearly drew on Carmichael's notes at the end of the collection as inspiration for the character Dark Mairi in *Butcher's Broom*. In his notes, Carmichael celebrates individuals such as Anne Campbell of South Uist, who is described by Carmichael as 'alert and intelligent, full of old-world songs and ballads and of old-world tales and traditions' and 'as Anne Campbell told these stories and sang these songs, it was easy to understand the fascination they exercised over the minds of old and young'.¹⁷¹ Anne Campbell is clearly a template for Dark Mairi who 'had a great number of ancient rhymes and verses, many of them not known to the folk of the Riasgan' and captivates 'little Colin' with her proverbs and stories 'as if he had wandered by incredible chance into a magical lost land'.¹⁷² At the end of the chapter, Colin recites a sleep consecration with lines that conclude with a prophetic poignancy:

Thou King of the Sun and of Glory,
O Jesus, Son of the Virgin fragrant,
Keep Thou us from the glen of tears,
And from the house of grief and gloom,
Keep us from the glen of tears,
From the house of grief and gloom.¹⁷³

The references to 'the glen of tears' and 'the house of grief and gloom' in these lines foreshadow the traumatic clearance of the glen in the latter stages of the novel. Dark Mairi recites 'The Rune of the Muthairn'¹⁷⁴ and finishes with a resting prayer.¹⁷⁵ Gunn makes a point of including these texts from the *Carmina Gadelica* in the novel,¹⁷⁶ grounding the substance of the novel in authentic folk culture and ensuring that the reader sees the poetic elegance of the verses. Unfortunately, the spiritual protection these prayers are intended to invoke cannot save either Colin or Dark Mairi from the forces of capitalism that will eventually drive them from their ancestral homeland. The addition of the *Carmina* texts

¹⁷¹ Anon, *Carmina Gadelica*, entry 526, p.668

¹⁷² Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom*, p.214

¹⁷³ Anon. *Carmina Gadelica*, entry no.36, p.58, lines 9-18

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., entry no.9, p.43, see appendix (ii) for full text.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., entry no.43, p.62, see appendix (iii) for full text.

¹⁷⁶ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom*, pp.214-216

in *Butcher's Broom* therefore, adds a sense of poignancy to the loss of a once great culture and resonates with the way in which Carmichael laments the demise of Gaelic oral tradition precipitated by historical and religious factors such as the Reformation and the Clearances. As Domhnall Uilleam Stiubhart argues, Carmichael was 'spurred by the conviction that it was his duty not only to record the present, but also to retrieve and reconstruct a glorious Gaelic past already vanishing before his eyes'.¹⁷⁷

It is clear that Neil Gunn shared this conviction. In his 1931 essay 'The Gael Will Come Again' Gunn, like Carmichael, expounds on the sophistication of Gaelic culture and defends it from critics such as Alexander Urquhart. According to Gunn, the Gaels are a 'self-supporting people' who, 'gave a good account of themselves not only in social life and the creative arts of poetry and music, but also in the matter of personal daring and courage.'¹⁷⁸ 'Gaelic literature', Gunn argues, 'was in its flower centuries before the beginnings of English literature' and 'Dr. Johnson was revealingly ignorant when he said that there was no Gaelic [literature] over 100 years old. There is indeed such a wealth of Gaelic [literature] in existence that one savant suggests it will take two hundred years for Gaelic scholarship to deal with them.'¹⁷⁹ In his comments regarding Sir Archibald Geikie's views on the 'dirt, squalor and laziness' found in the Highlands, Gunn's view of the Gael is unfalteringly idealistic, arguing that Sir Archibald had merely stumbled upon rare exceptions and had been 'singularly unfortunate in his encounters'.¹⁸⁰ Gunn's attitude mirrors that of Carmichael with his fervently positive reports of encounters with Highland people described in the *Carmina* introduction. Stiubhart contends that Carmichael's 'self-confessed 'romantic disposition', his artistic, spiritual, idealistic, and perfectionist cast of mind'¹⁸¹ conflicted with the need to record his experiences in the Highlands accurately, being more concerned with his duty to 'retrieve and reconstruct a glorious Gaelic past'. Indeed, John Hutchinson states that Hans Kohn, Ernest Gellner and 'many others' identify romantic nationalism as an idealistic 'reactionary movement' that acts in opposition to

¹⁷⁷ Domhnall Uilleam Stiubhart, 'Alexander Carmichael and the Carmina Gadelica', *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, ed. by Domhnall Uilleam Stiubhart (Port of Ness: The Islands Book Trust, 2008) p.4

¹⁷⁸ Neil M. Gunn, 'The Gael Will Come Again', *Scots Magazine*, 14, Feb. 1931, pp. 324-7; repr. in *Landscape and Light*, ed. by Alistair McCleery (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987) p.167

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.168

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.168

¹⁸¹ Domhnall Uilleam Stiubhart, 'Alexander Carmichael and the Carmina Gadelica', p.4

modernisation, seeking out a 'golden past', and occurs particularly in marginalised or fragmented cultures struggling to compete with more powerful countries:

When faced with competing with more advanced foreign cultures, such individuals compensate for feelings of inadequacy in the present day by retreating into a mythical golden past to create a superior spiritual and organic community which still lives on unspoiled in the world of the folk.¹⁸²

The 'superior spiritual and organic communities' that Gunn creates in his portrayals of rural Highland life are predominantly idealised 'unspoiled' constructs that support the idea that romantic nationalists such as Herder, Carmichael and Gunn were, in the main, middle class intellectuals who sought to view the *volk* in an idealised and sanitised manner, glossing over the unpalatable realities of peasant life. Eugene Lunn highlights a major criticism of this kind of romantic populism:

Seeking their own revitalisation through an absorption of the spirit and forms of popular culture, these upper-class folklorists often projected their own desire to feel more natural and instinctive, rooted in tradition and community, upon the more sober-minded and often wretchedly impoverished peasants and artisans whose lives they sentimentalised.¹⁸³

The characters in Gunn's Highland landscapes seem to exist in an Edenic landscape of plenty – a stark contrast to the attitude of fellow Scottish Renaissance writer Lewis Grassie Gibbon, who rejected the sentimentalisation of peasant life and the harsh realities of working on the land. For Gunn however, the Highland landscape and the culture of its people were symbols of renewal and rebirth. A reoccurring theme in Gunn's novels is the individual either returning or being introduced to Highland landscapes and communities, and finding spiritual renewal in the bosom of the *volk* and Highland culture.

One such example can be found in *The Silver Bough* (1948) where Simon Grant, an archaeologist, arrives at a remote Highland community to excavate an ancient burial cairn. Despite having a purely scientific mindset at the beginning of the novel, Grant begins to discover an inner romanticism through the excavation of the cairn and his interactions with the local people. The title of the novel refers to the folktale of 'The Silver Bough' which

¹⁸² John Hutchinson, 'Re-Interpreting Cultural Nationalism', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*: Vol. 45, Issue 3 (1999) p.11

¹⁸³ Eugene Lunn, 'Cultural Populism and Egalitarian Democracy: Herder and Michelet in the Nineteenth Century', *Theory and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (July, 1986) p.7

features in the novel itself and mirrors the character arc of local landowner Donald Martin. Traumatized by war, Martin eventually finds spiritual renewal in his daughter Sheena and her mother, Anna who represent the rejuvenating qualities of Highland folk culture. The title of the novel also reflects its intertextuality, as references to Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915) – a key text of European romantic nationalism – recur throughout. Key elements of romantic nationalism can be seen in the development of the main character Simon Grant and his response to the Highland landscape and the folk culture of the community. Like Tom in *The Serpent*, Grant's perception of his surroundings vacillates from 'head' to 'heart' – from cold, logical classicism to Romanticism – throughout the novel, and reflects the rejection of Enlightenment classicism by romantic nationalists like Herder.

At the start of the novel, as he travels on the bus to the village of Clachar, Grant appraises his fellow passengers with the objective eye of an anthropologist, observing the locals around him like curious exhibits in a museum, enjoying 'their country mannerisms, the Highland drawl'. One passenger is even reduced to an interesting skull specimen: 'Simon Grant, who had handled many skulls in his time, was immediately taken by the shape of the head, the colouring, and the fineness of the features.'¹⁸⁴ Grant's initial perception of the landscape is also predominantly scientific as he evaluates the cairn and its surrounding environment:

He climbed up it and down it; he walked round it; he climbed up it again and from his geological knowledge came at certain topographical and social conclusions as he gazed around, noting the shape of the hills, the alluvial flatness around the lower stretches of the small river...¹⁸⁵

The eye that now kept lifting to the landscape was the archaeological eye, the trained observing eye which found the most delightful interest in this exercise.¹⁸⁶

However, as Grant acclimatizes to his Highland surroundings and he begins to excavate the cairn, his romantic nature begins to emerge. 'Archaeologists' he muses, 'are romantics of the purest dye, indeed childish romantics [...] because they are forever

¹⁸⁴ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough* (Glasgow: Richard Drew Publishing Ltd., 1985) p.9

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.23

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.49

hunting for the unknown'.¹⁸⁷ This is deepened when he encounters a sleeping woman and her child nearby, the living embodiments of the 'noble' Gael. They are counterparts of the skeletons of a woman and child that Grant discovers in the cairn in a later chapter, an event foreshadowed by this encounter with the sleeping pair. Gunn's particularly sentimental Romanticism is most apparent when describing women and girls, a persistent stylistic weakness that I will examine at a later point in this thesis. Here, Gunn evokes an image of ethnic beauty that seems to have stepped out of local folklore itself, lending a greater sense of cultural authenticity and evoking the 'noble spirit' of the peasant that Carmichael celebrated and Herder championed. The face of the child is described as having 'a dreamlike beauty that is hardly of the earth' and 'the lips were parted in the innocence that comes by nature to the female child'. Her mother, Anna, possesses 'a fairness of skin' that 'gave the odd impression that its light came from within'.¹⁸⁸ Herein lies the 'light' of Gaelic civilisation that Gunn admired. Grant's feelings for Anna deepen as the novel progresses, to the extent that he compares her beauty to 'a figure in the landscape of a legend'¹⁸⁹, her 'yielding tenderness[...]shone like stained glass in an inner place'¹⁹⁰ and her touch was 'as light as a fairy's'.¹⁹¹ The allusion to Christian spirituality in 'stained glass' and comparing Anna to a fairy, a figure from folklore, is also a reflection of the Highland tendency to combine pagan and Christian imagery that Carmichael highlights in the *Carmina*. As Carmichael states, here we see the two diametrically opposed beliefs – 'blending and shading into one another like the iridescent colours of the rainbow'¹⁹² – in Gunn's portrayal of Anna. Like Dark Mairi in *Butcher's Broom*, Anna embodies the 'light' and ancient traditions of Gaelic civilisation. The mother of Andie, a local boy with learning difficulties, is also described in a similar fashion and that: 'Her shawled head and shoulders gave her the appearance of a woman coming out of a remote place or remote time,' and 'Once or twice Grant had been touched by the legendary, by a feeling of something archetypal, larger and more enduring than the individual.'¹⁹³

¹⁸⁷ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough*, p.23

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.24

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.264

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.274

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.313

¹⁹² Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, p.30

¹⁹³ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough*, p. 294

As he makes his way down to the village of Clachar, Grant's perception of the landscape and the humble dwellings of the village become less scientific and increasingly romantic as he begins to connect with the people of the community. The description of the dwellings found in Clachar is highly similar to the description of the homes of the Riasgan people in *Butcher's Broom* – structures that seem to have sprung out of the earth in an entirely natural and organic way, reflecting the romantic nationalist view of the 'organic community'¹⁹⁴ of the peasant being born from and nurtured by the earth:

Each had grown up in its own place and was well content, taking to the lie of the ground as a man might who had time to sit down, turning a gable here like a shoulder and a front there like a face. Where the ground tumbled in antique frolic the grass was thick and lush with wild flowers, and the scent from uncountable blossoms came to his nostrils like an immortal essence.¹⁹⁵

As with most descriptions of Highland communities in Gunn's novels and essays, the Clachar community exists in a highly idealised state of Edenic innocence, rooted in an ancient past, possessing an 'immortal essence', an expression that is compellingly Herderian. Dairmid Gunn states in his foreword to the 1985 publication of *The Silver Bough* that:

The Silver Bough underlines Gunn's belief in the importance of preserving the continuity of life from antiquity to the present – a continuity that can only be maintained if the wisdom of the past is neither forgotten nor forsaken. History for him is not a list of dates and names of leaders, good and bad, but rather an evolution in terms of community life, reflected in myth and tradition.¹⁹⁶

This emphasis on continuity and the wisdom found in ancient folk art is reinforced further when Grant approaches the cottage in which he will be staying as he excavates the cairn. Lingered outside, he hears the old grandmother telling her granddaughter the ancient Celtic folktale of 'The Silver Bough', the heart of which contains a simple lesson on the spiritual emptiness of material gain and the importance of family, generosity and hospitality, core Highland values that Carmichael celebrates in the *Carmina*. In a reflection of the tale told by Anne Campbell of Uist in the *Carmina* where a fairy 'would come and sing songs and lullabies in the tiny ear of the beautiful little child,'¹⁹⁷ the grandmother

¹⁹⁴ John Hutchinson, 'Re-Interpreting Cultural Nationalism', p.11

¹⁹⁵ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough*, p.37

¹⁹⁶ Dairmid Gunn, Forward to *The Silver Bough*, p.ii

¹⁹⁷ Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, entry 526, p.668

sings the lullaby of the tale that ‘was about as old as the soil the Silver Bough grew out of and as deep.’¹⁹⁸

Inside the cottage, Gunn reinforces the cultural richness enjoyed by the ‘organic community’ of Clachar, and the impression of a lush and bountiful Edenic landscape of plenty outside is developed further within the domestic sphere. Here, as in many of Gunn’s novels, the Highland larder always seems to be full. As Grant enquires about food, the grandmother proudly states: ‘there’s as many eggs as you can eat, and we have our own cow, so there’s milk and cream, and butter and crowdie.’¹⁹⁹ Indeed, the role in which food – its acquisition, preparation and consumption – plays in Gunn’s writing is an expression of Gunn’s romantic nationalism, as the plentiful larder is a metaphor for the cultural and spiritual wholeness found within Highland communities which are, in turn, microcosms of the national community. Within the domestic space it is also specifically and intimately linked with the emotional balance Gunn’s female characters provide. In *The Silver Bough*, the cottage, with its well-stocked larder and culturally rich inhabitants, is a microcosm of the Highland ‘organic community’, through which Grant finds spiritual renewal. This is also a reflection of the noble spirit and generosity of Herder’s ‘natural man’, also seen in Carmichael’s descriptions of Highland hospitality in the *Carmina*:

The savage who loves himself, his wife and child, with quiet joy, and in his modest way works for the good of his tribe, as for his own life, is, in my opinion, a truer being than that shadow of a man, the refined citizen of the world, who, enraptured with the love of all his fellow-shadows, loves but a chimera. The savage in his poor hut has room for every stranger; he receives him as his brother without even inquiring where he comes from. His hospitality is unostentatious, yet warm and sincere. The inundated heart of the idle cosmopolite, on the other hand, offers shelter to nobody.²⁰⁰

Parallels with Carmichael’s perception of Highlanders as being inherently generous in nature are also evident in *The Silver Bough*. Grant describes the hospitable nature of the inhabitants of the Clachar community and like Carmichael, includes a comparison with the moral decay and selfishness of urban society:

Care and thought, a natural kindness, for other people, that was what distinguished them, what was innate, he decided. And from them his vision

¹⁹⁸ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough*, p.40

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.41

²⁰⁰ Johann Gottfried Herder, *J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture*, ed. F. M. Barnard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) p.186

jumped to social levels where this quality was not so innate, where on the contrary it was eaten up by an egotism that lived on itself like rotten cheese.²⁰¹

The fabled silver bough itself becomes the dominant symbol of renewal and rebirth in the novel and comes to represent the spiritual redemption and psychological recovery of Donald Martin, the landowner on whose land the ancient cairn is located. Gunn contrasts the warmth and generosity of the Clachar inhabitants with the cynical and nihilistic outlook of Martin, who struggles with traumatic memories of war. A 'shadow of a man', Martin's humanity has been lost in the horror of his experiences. Repeatedly, in Gunn's fiction the 'light' of Gaelic civilisation acts as a counterpoint to the 'darkness' sweeping the western world through war and the ravages of modern life. This is a concern articulated by Aunt Phemie in *The Shadow* (1948) in a critique of the madness of war in the modern age:

Men had gone mad. Aunt Phemie saw quite clearly that men had gone mad. Her vision went all over the earth and saw men in the logical movements of their madness, stalking here and there, into council chambers and out of them, into railway stations and airports, across fields, all the fields of the world, intent and certain, fulfilling the high and urgent law of necessity. Whose necessity? cried her anguished spirit...²⁰²

Throughout Gunn's fiction we see his main characters with 'anguished' spirits turning their backs on the trials of modern, Western existence, and finding solace and rebirth in an ancient Highland landscape, imbued with a rich folk culture, such as Ken in *Highland River*, Grant and Martin in *The Silver Bough*, Nan in *The Shadow* and Tom in *The Serpent*. Traumatized by his experiences as a prisoner of war, Martin represents the annihilation of the self brought about by the ravages of the modern age, and his deep-rooted nihilism counterpoints Grant's idealistic outlook. This is evident in their very first encounter in chapter two, when Grant requests Martin's permission to excavate the cairn. Martin exhibits an 'objective look which seemed to pause and contemplate its object,' similar to Grant's cold objectification of the locals at the very start of the novel. Martin's traumatic past and the way in which it reveals the destruction of the modern age is suggested in this terse exchange between the two men:

"I really hope you don't mind," said Grant, his own tone firming.

²⁰¹ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough*, p.71

²⁰² Neil M. Gunn, *The Shadow* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948; repr. Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing Ltd., 2006) p.207

“Not really,” answered Martin. “To tear the guts out of everything is characteristic, I suppose.” His tone remained uninterested.
“Characteristic of what?” inquired Grant.
“Of our age.”²⁰³

Martin reveals his skepticism regarding the value of archaeological knowledge in chapter four, and with it, his entrenched nihilism, an archetypal embodiment of what Gunn described as ‘horror vacui’ of the Western imagination.²⁰⁴ As Martin’s sister argues that any kind of knowledge ‘helps everything,’ in other words, humanity, she is swiftly dismissed by Martin who, in a bluntly nihilistic denial of the value of humanity, states that ‘Everything is nothing.’ Disturbed, Grant senses within Martin ‘an annihilating insult to the basis of human living.’²⁰⁵ It is then revealed in chapter seven that Martin was a survivor of a prisoner of war camp in an unspecified location in ‘the East’, and it becomes clear to the reader throughout the course of the novel that Martin has been dehumanised by his experiences. He has become, to use Conrad’s expression, a ‘hollow man,’ with his sense of self a barren wasteland, annihilated by the wartime horrors of the modern age. Gunn’s portrayal of Martin’s wartime traumas injects the narrative with a compelling psychological realism that provides a refreshing contrast to the idealised, romantic elements of the novel.

Unlike Grant, Martin as the landowner, who lives in ‘the big house’, is not immersed in the rejuvenating culture of the *volk* but exists in geographical isolation, shut off from the local community. Martin’s face is described as a ‘mask’ that is ‘habitual, indifferent, and quiet as stone.’²⁰⁶ In *The Silver Bough*, Martin is ‘the stone man,’ possessing a ‘Neolithic face in stone,’²⁰⁷ represented in the landscape by the standing stone that guards the cairn, said by the locals to have a man, or *ulrisk*, inside and can walk about the landscape at night. In this sense, Gunn uses folklore to articulate the way in which Martin is a prisoner of his past experiences. Towards the closing stages of the novel, Grant recognises that Martin is on the inevitable path to self-destruction:

Grant groaned, for now he knew that Martin was the kind that went slowly down the road to a final nihilism, as slowly and remorselessly as he hunted

²⁰³ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough*, p.16

²⁰⁴ Neil M. Gunn, ‘Highland Space’, *Landscape and Light*, p.80

²⁰⁵ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough*, p.34

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.16

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.286

the yellow devils. All belief, all capacity for belief in human kind, had been slain at that horrible moment in the jungle.²⁰⁸

However, Martin's spiritual and psychological recovery coincides with Grant noticing the outline of a man in the natural shape of the standing stone, a recognition of the trace of humanity that still resides within Martin who, Grant realises, has to be reborn. The falling of the standing stone in a horrific accident that crushes Andie, a local boy with learning difficulties, to death, paradoxically signifies the beginning of Martin's rebirth. As it emerges that Anna's daughter, Sheena, is Martin's daughter, Grant understands that only through being reunited with his daughter – who, with her 'dreamlike beauty' is compared to a creature from folklore – will Martin regain his lost humanity and sense of self. In this sense, Martin is a microcosm of the nation, which will find renewal in a post war world through a dialogue with its authentic folk culture and a reconnection with the feminine. Again, like Herder, Gunn views folklore not as means to dwell on the past but to enable national progression in the present day.

The potency and significance of folklore in the novel and the way in which the past can enable renewal in the present is revealed at the end of the novel. As Martin is reunited with his family the reader then recognises that Martin represents the king who gave up his family in order to possess the silver bough as told in 'The Silver Bough' folktale. Grant, who had arranged for a musical silver bough pendant to be made for Sheena, is 'Mananan who had come in disguise as the young man with the silver bough in his hand'²⁰⁹ and had reunited Martin, Anna and Sheena, just as Mananan reunites the king with his family in the tale. At the end of the novel Grant sees the silver bough 'glisten in the sun' as Sheena plays a melody on it 'that seems to go on beyond time.'²¹⁰ Here there is a reaffirmation of the rejuvenating qualities of folklore, not only in a cultural sense for the nation, but also as a panacea for the modern age, using the past to rebuild the future. Significantly, the form of the novel in which two different genres are combined, in the realism of Martin's horrific war experiences and the romanticism of folklore, reflects the value Gunn placed on the need for the mythic in the everyday and the way in which folk culture can provide the comfort and healing absent from modern modes of thinking.

²⁰⁸ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough*, p.286

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.39

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.327

Grant too, discovers individual renewal through folklore and finds that the conflict between the rational and romantic aspects of his psyche has been resolved as he comes to terms, not only, with the loss of Andie, but also the hoard of gold objects found in the cairn, that he romantically calls the 'crock of gold'. Providing the main thrust of the action in the novel, the disappearance of the hoard plagues Grant throughout, as the rational and scientific sides of his personality struggle to come to terms with the loss, as he searches in vain for the missing treasure. However, when given the romantic, mythical explanation of the hoard's whereabouts by the locals that the treasure can be found 'under the rainbow' and witnessing the community come together for Andie's funeral, Grant rediscovers an inner romanticism that helps him to come to terms with the loss of the treasure and, more significantly, Andie. Despite acknowledging that, in life 'things do not happen in the romantic order', it is to romantic sensibilities that Grant turns to in order to process recent events. In a reflection of 'the meaning of immortal youth'²¹¹, a recurring image in Gunn's fiction that Grant 'glimpses' earlier in the novel, he remembers Keat's 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' and the 'Fair youth beneath the trees'. Grant realises that:

The crock of gold seemed to have brought Keats to life in him after many years! And it would not help much now to be jealous of the rainbow! After all, a crock of gold under the rainbow would only be an urn in a museum. Even irony had its over-all balance. The poets needed a myth to feed on. It was their secreted honey. Keats took over from the archeologist.²¹²

Grant finally recognises the greater spiritual value of myth making over material gain, and that folk culture contains more riches than any physical treasure.

In his essay 'On Magic' (1940) whilst 'turning up the pages of *Carmina Gadelica* to check a reference', Gunn reflects on the important role folk traditions play in maintaining 'the magic thrill of living out of which, so long ago, the one undying conception of freedom was born'.²¹³ Gunn employs Carmichael's account of the eve of St. Michael, a 'festival of the common folk', to expound on the life affirming qualities of folk culture. As the community comes together to feast, dance, compete in sporting events and exchange gifts, the 'very air is full of magic' and 'the whole is steeped in profound goodness and

²¹¹ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough*, p.284

²¹² *Ibid.*, p.326

²¹³ Neil M. Gunn, 'On Magic', *The Scots Magazine*, Dundee, September, 1940, Vol. 33, No.6, pp.433-36; repr. in *Landscape to Light*, p.76

happiness'.²¹⁴ This is then contrasted with Carmichael's account of a famous and talented violin player who lived on the island of Eigg and the devastating suppression of folk music by the Kirk. Condemned by the local preacher and forced to burn his fiddle 'the voice of the old man faltered and the tears fell. He was never again seen to smile.' Gunn argues that although 'it is the fashion of the modern conception to be logical and scientific', 'it is from the illogical, the irrational, that most of his fun and frolic, not to mention the profounder movements in his spirit, would seem to arise.'²¹⁵ The life-affirming qualities of folk culture, therefore, enable individuals and communities to transcend the everyday and experience 'the magic thrill of living', a key component of individual and collective wholeness.

Crucially, Grant's glimpse of 'the meaning of immortal youth'²¹⁶ at the beach where Martin – as the king from the 'The Silver Bough' fairytale – will reunite with his family also articulates the yearning to return to what R. G. Collingwood (1889-1943) identifies as 'national youth' in the discourse of Romantic Nationalism. This return to 'national childhood' through folklore, in which the self and nation will be rejuvenated supports national myth-making and nation building. Collingwood argues that 'Our national fairy tales are actual surviving fragments of our national youth and by steeping ourselves in them we live that youth over and over again'.²¹⁷ Matthew Campbell and Michael Perraudin state that: 'Fairy tales and the lore of the folk express wholeness and unity'²¹⁸ and the immersion of the self and nation in the 'national tale' 'is a vital part of how societies conceive of themselves in history as well as poetry, psychic reminders of survival and continuity'.²¹⁹ This 'national youth' also expresses the Rousseauvian desire to return to a higher state of innocence and primordial nationhood, reflecting the way in which both Rousseau and Gunn saw childhood as the golden age of the self. In *The Atom of Delight*, Gunn expounds on the way in which the 'primal innocence' of childhood can access a 'Golden Age':

²¹⁴ Neil M. Gunn, 'On Magic', *Landscape to Light*, pp.74-75

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.75

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.284

²¹⁷ R. G. Collingwood, *The Philosophy of Enchantment: Studies in Folktale, Cultural Criticism, and Anthropology*, ed. David Boucher, Wendy James and Philip Smallwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p.134.

²¹⁸ Matthew Campbell and Michael Perraudin, 'The Persistence of Revival', *Writing the European Folk Revival* (London: Anthem Press, 2013) p.201

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.201

Being of this unalloyed nature it is innocent, it seems to me that the poet – and others of the pre-Freudian age – were concerned when they spoke of the ‘innocence of childhood’. It may be a ‘primal innocence’, and, so phrased, give an ‘imitation’ of why man has in his time been haunted by, and hankered back towards, a Golden Age.²²⁰

In a reflection of Herder’s Janus-like approach to national renewal – accessing the past to move forward in the present – Gunn argues that it is in man’s inherent nature to ‘hanker forward as well as back’ seeking ‘innocence and pure joy’ leading to ‘his Golden Age in an immortal realm.’²²¹

Gunn’s preoccupation with ‘innocence’ is evident throughout *The Silver Bough* in the vulnerable, child-like Andie and Martin’s daughter Sheena who inhabit an Edenic landscape that is as ‘fresh as Creation’s dawn’²²², possessing ‘sheer innocence, bright glass, clear air’ and ‘immemorial freshness.’²²³ As an archaeologist Grant, the ‘childish romantic,’²²⁴ literally excavates and unearths the beginnings or youth of the primordial nation through his excavations.

Folklore as a Means to Access the ‘Youth’ of the Nation

The concept of childhood as the golden age of the self is a reoccurring theme in Gunn’s novels and remains one of the defining aspects of his fiction. Nowhere is this more self-evident than in the sculpture commemorating the birth of Neil Gunn in Dunbeath harbour. Occupying a prominent position at the heart of the small fishing community, the bronze sculpture, erected in 1991, portrays nine-year old Kenn from *Highland River*, grappling with an enormous salmon on his back having claimed it from the river of his childhood. Gunn’s portrayals of vivid boyhood experience contain some of his finest writing and are a key aspect of his nation building. Drawing on his own boyhood experience of the idyllic Strath of Dunbeath in the essay ‘My Bit of Britain’ (1941) Gunn expounds on the ‘intimate beauty’ of the landscape of youth: a landscape of ‘birches, hazel trees for nutting, pools with trout and an occasional visible salmon’, ‘a wealth of wild flower and small bird life, the soaring hawk, the unexpected roe.’ ‘We encompass it physically and our memories hold it’ Gunn explains, and the romantic nationalist interplay between past and present is realised

²²⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *The Atom of Delight* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1993) p.71

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p.71

²²² Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough*, p.73

²²³ *Ibid.*, p.178

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.23

in boyhood 'thoughts of the folk who once lived inland in straths and hollows, the past and present held in a moment of day-dream.'²²⁵ The golden age of boyhood, therefore, enables the revival of the past to inform and rejuvenate the present. Idyllic boyhood in novels such as *Highland River* (1937) *Young Art and Old Hector* (1942) *Morning Tide* (1931) and *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944) is articulated as a means by which 'national youth' can be accessed and is positioned as the well-spring of individual and national revival. In *Young Art and Old Hector* Art comes to embody the youthful essence of the primordial nation as Old Hector observes that:

'the scents of the earth for him were definitely in the past, but in a past so remote that it went far back beyond the beginnings of his own life, back into a time when morning was on the earth and the earth itself was young. Art's merriment came out of that distant morning.'²²⁶

Gunn's preoccupation with the transcendent state of boyhood as a means to access primordial innocence is also evident in the portrayal of twelve-year-old Hugh in *Morning Tide*, a novel that deals with the trials of growing up in a small fishing community struggling for survival. Set against the backdrop of harsh economic realities and the tribulations of family life, *Morning Tide* contains moments of boyhood exuberance that transcend the everyday struggles that Hugh is faced with. The novel also has the same combination of realism and romantic folklore that Gunn uses seventeen years later in *The Silver Bough* and elsewhere in his fiction. Again, the emphasis on boyhood as a means to access primordial innocence is evident when Hugh immerses himself in a woodland realm of folk myth and legend:

His face, wrinkling, took on a cunning look, full of gleeful triumph, that yet intensified its open innocence. At once a boy and something older; as if the wood had entered into him, the shape of the trees, the smell of the earth, the capture, the silence. He could have danced and slashed and danced. His senses grew abnormally acute. The salmon of knowledge under the nuts of the hazel of wisdom. But deeper than that, deeper than conscious thought or myth. Sheering right through to the vivid and unconditional, where are born the pagan deities, who are lovely until conscious thought degrades them.²²⁷

²²⁵ Neil M. Gunn, 'My Bit of Britain', *The Field*, London, 2nd August, 1941, Vol.178, No. 4623, pp. 136-7; repr. in *Landscape to Light*, p.24

²²⁶ Neil M. Gunn, *Young Art and Old Hector*, p.246

²²⁷ Neil M. Gunn, *Morning Tide* (Edinburgh: Porpoise Press, 1931; repr. London: Porpoise Press, 1987) p.199

Here Hugh, like Art, is transformed into an almost Pan-like elemental being at one with the ancient landscape and becomes the primordial boy, 'at once a boy and something older,' resonating with the way in which 'Art's merriment came out of that distant morning'. The boyish physicality in 'he could have danced and slashed and danced' is also seen the way Art 'ran and danced'²²⁸ whirls and spins with joyful exuberance. This purely instinctual behaviour is uncontaminated by the 'conscious thought' of adulthood which, according to Gunn, acts as a barrier to higher modes of being. From his second novel *Morning Tide* to *The Atom of Delight*, published at the end of Gunn's writing career, it is through the eyes of the boy, the 'seer in the eternal deep'²²⁹ that the primordial nation can be glimpsed and transcendental states realised. In *Highland River*, Kenn's 'inner eye' beholds 'the innocency[sic] of dawn on a strath on a far back morning of creation' and 'the relationship between man and nature' going back to a time 'which all solitary voices and races have called 'the golden age.'²³⁰ Significantly, the above description of Hugh's joyful connection with the earth is interwoven with references to symbols from Celtic folklore such as 'the salmon of knowledge', the 'hazel of wisdom' and 'pagan deities', grounding Hugh's experience in the same kind of signifiers of cultural authenticity encountered in *The Silver Bough*.

Indeed, Gunn's portrayals of transcendent boyhood are invariably combined with folklore. His 1942 novel *Young Art and Old Hector* is interwoven with Celtic folk tales and legends as Old Hector instructs his younger counterpart Art in the old traditions. Old Hector's ancient wisdom and Young Art's youthful innocence embody the past rejuvenating the present in romantic nationalism. Gunn grounds his narrative in folklore from the very start of the novel as Hector instructs Art in the importance of wisdom through the story of the 'little hero' and the 'blind giant'²³¹ and Finn MacCoul and the salmon of wisdom.²³² The nature of wisdom, seen in Hector's ancient knowledge but also the wisdom inherent in Art's innocence which Old Hector considers 'more beautiful than the wisdom of Finn MacCoul'²³³ develops into one of the primary themes of the novel. Just

²²⁸ Neil M. Gunn, *Young Art and Old Hector*, p.29

²²⁹ Neil M. Gunn, *The Atom of Delight*, p.71

²³⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *Highland River*, (Edinburgh: Porpoise Press, 1937; repr. Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd., 1996) p.111

²³¹ Neil M. Gunn, *Young Art and Old Hector*, pp.11-12

²³² *Ibid.*, pp.16-19

²³³ *Ibid.*, p.17

as Grant views the Highland landscape through the lens of folklore in *The Silver Bough*, thus recapturing his own youthful wisdom, in *Young Art and Old Hector* Art inhabits an 'enchanted country'²³⁴ of fairy dells and magical lochs, yearning to find 'the fabled River and the Hazel Pool'²³⁵ where he can find the nuts of wisdom from the Celtic creation myth. While Grant digs for the roots of the nation Art also yearns to return to the source of national myth, a quest also seen in *Highland River* where Kenn searches for the source of the river that dominated his boyhood experience.

The landscape of enchantment that Art inhabits is however, set against the very real backdrop of historical injury with the legacy of the Clearances and the impact of capitalism on the local community. Just as Grant recognises the lack of value in the crock of gold and symbolically turns his back on capitalism, Hector and the people of the community celebrate a time before money came to the Highlands, yet try to reconcile themselves to the new economic reality. In a reflection of the high regard Alexander Carmichael had for the honourable qualities of the Highland people, Gunn promotes a similar kind of superior Highland morality in Old Hector's opinions concerning the greed and corruption of the lairds:

Indeed there wasn't any money to speak of in the old days, and even the laird was content to get such dues as he could in butter or cheese. It's when the greed of money-making started that the lairds got their charters, through laws made by the lairds, and cleared our folk off the land. It was money-making they were after. And whenever the prime concern in life is money-making, then you have trickery and brutality and wrong.²³⁶

In this new economic reality, locals are forbidden from hunting deer, fishing salmon from the river or distilling their own whisky, an injustice against native rights that Hector and the men of the community rebel against with secretive poaching and illicit whisky stills. Having been overwhelmed by forces greater than themselves in the form of 'the sheriff, the police, and the soldiery, backed by the law'²³⁷ when they were cleared from their lands, the locals face the new terror of ground keepers with guns and custom and excise officers on the hunt for illegal whisky. The main crisis point in the novel comes when Art thinks Old Hector's illicit still has been discovered and he has been arrested by excise officers. Art sees the officers as 'three terrible men who had Old Hector in their

²³⁴ Neil M. Gunn, *Young Art and Old Hector*, p.65

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.154

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.174

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.166

power. This power, Art felt, was greater than all other power in the world.²³⁸ This ‘terrible power’ is however, confounded by Old Hector’s quick thinking as he leads them to an old disused still. Crucially, this act of rebellion in defence of native rights enables Old Hector to access and recapture his own youth. As he tells the story of the way in which he outwitted the authorities he feels ‘pleased to be amusing the boys and feeling not much older than them’.²³⁹ In *Young Art and Old Hector* the act of whisky distillation is a form of native rebellion and a means to recapture the ‘youth’ of the primordial nation, an aspect of Gunn’s nationalism that will be explored in greater detail in chapter three. When we do see Old Hector and his friends distill their illegal whisky in the latter stages of the novel, the duality of the ‘ancient youth’ of Art and Old Hector is embodied by the whisky itself. As if he is speaking of Art, Hector says ‘It’s young,’ he explained ‘It still has about it the innocence of creation.’ ‘Yes. Youth itself as yet unspoiled’. As if he is speaking of himself Hector also states that ‘only in advanced age does it get back the original innocence’²⁴⁰ reflecting Herder’s aim ‘to bring man back to the point, whence he started as a child, of harmony within himself and the universe around him.’²⁴¹ Art and Hector therefore, are reflections of each other and embody the Janus-like duality – accessing the past to move forward in the present – of romantic nationalism. It is fitting that, when the two set off in search of the fabled river of Art’s dreams at the end of the novel, there is a renewed sense of purpose, progression and hope as Art ‘groped up for Old Hector’s hand, and thus, walking side by side, they continued on their journey’.²⁴²

The purpose of folk culture in Gunn’s novels therefore, is not simply to add ‘local colour’ to his narratives. Firstly, the search for and celebration of folk culture was a key aspect of the Scottish Renaissance rejection of false representations of Scottish culture by the ‘sham bards’ such as Walter Scott. Before the nation could be built, the ‘real’ Scotland had to be discovered in the authentic traditions of ancient Gaelic culture. It was this search for authenticity that led Gunn to the *Carmina Gadelica*, reflecting the resurgence of folk culture in European romantic nationalism. The inclusion of passages from the *Carmina* in *Butcher’s Broom* grounds the narrative in native authenticity and reinforces the purpose of the novel as a lament for a rich culture lost in the Clearances and the Highland

²³⁸ Neil M. Gunn, *Young Art and Old Hector*, p.213

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.215

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.188

²⁴¹ Frederick Smith, *Studies of Religion under German Masters* (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1880) p.131-132

²⁴² Neil M. Gunn, *Young Art and Old Hector*, p.255

diaspora. By returning to the genuine cultural sources of the past, pioneers such as Herder also sought to rejuvenate the noble spirit and true essence of the nation. Carmicheal's introduction to the *Carmina Gadelica* celebrates the noble spirit of the Gael and the superiority of a sophisticated Highland culture with a rich oral tradition. The superiority and life-affirming attributes of folk culture are championed by Gunn in *The Silver Bough* as a means to rejuvenate the self and access the 'youth' of the primordial nation, also seen in Gunn's portrayals of idyllic boyhood in *Young Art and Old Hector*, *Morning Tide* and *Highland River*.

The focus on boyhood as a means to process individual and cultural trauma and 'bring man back to the point' where he is at 'harmony within himself and the universe around him' is a recurring theme in Gunn's fiction. Just as *Young Art and Old Hector* is set in a post-Clearance context, *Morning Tide* portrays a community struggling with a declining fishing industry and Kenn struggles with post-war traumas in *Highland River*. Figurations of idyllic boyhood therefore, combined with the rejuvenating qualities of folklore, are Gunn's response to these personal and historical injuries, an attempt to recapture a pre-Clearance idyll and convey a sense of youthful optimism for the future. The ancient wisdom of Hector compliments the innocence of Art, who in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* becomes the 'immortal boy'²⁴³ and Christ-like saviour figure, grounding Gunn's vision of national renewal in youthful confidence and hope. Just as Grant's child-like Romanticism and Sheena's innocence counter and negate the post-war nihilism of Martin in *The Silver Bough*, enabling him to return home to his family, the 'immortal boy' Art defies the oppressive totalitarian regime in *The Green Isle* and retains his individuality. In *Highland River*, Kenn finds solace after the war by returning to the river of his boyhood. These figurations of youth and boyhood reflect the reoccurring themes of European Romanticism that Campbell and Perraudin identify:

[...] motifs of homecoming and return, or Collingwood's reliving of youth over and over again, are tempered by a sense of loss, of failed acts of recovery pitted against a fear about the discontinuity of the self. These are themes which would be sounded across European Romanticism[...]²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Neil M. Gunn, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944; Edinburgh: Polygon 2006) p.122

²⁴⁴ Matthew Campbell and Michael Perraudin, 'The Persistence of Revival', *Writing the European Folk Revival*, p.202

The 'motifs of homecoming and return' are clearly evident in Gunn's fiction. From Kenn in *Highland River*, Tom in *The Serpent* and Martin in *The Silver Bough* we see characters either returning or being introduced to Highland landscapes and communities, and finding spiritual renewal in the bosom of the *volk* and Highland culture. What was once a desire to rejuvenate the nation through folk traditions for Herder, therefore, becomes a cultural and spiritual imperative for Gunn; not just for the nation, but also the self in the modern age.

However, Gunn's nationalism was not simply confined to romantic nationalism. As chapter three will illustrate, the multiple nationalisms – romantic, perennial, primordial and spiritual – seen in Neil Gunn's fiction and non-fiction writing – are articulated through a living landscape, or a poetic and historical 'ethnoscape' imbued with collective identity of the community. This exploration will reveal the more progressive aspects of his nationalist ideology.

3. Landscapes of Belonging: The Hybridity of Nationalist Discourse in the Fiction of Neil M. Gunn

Neil Gunn, a figure in whom the persistent anxieties among scholars of Scottish literature about the representation of Scottishness and the role of nationalism seem to crystallise.²⁴⁵

Ryan Shirey

For these are my mountains

And this is my glen

The braes of my childhood

Will see me again

No land's ever claimed me

Though far I did roam

For these are my mountains

And I'm coming home.²⁴⁶

The discovery of the self through interaction with the physical landscape recurs

²⁴⁵ Ryan Shirey, 'A Shrinking Highlands: Neil Gunn, Nationalism and the 'World Republic of Letters'', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, 3, Autumn/Winter, 2007, <http://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue3/shirey.htm>, p.7

²⁴⁶ James Copeland, 'These are My Mountains', *The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil*, John McGrath (London: Bloomsbury, 1981) p.4

throughout Gunn's fiction and is where he excels most as a writer. The character Hugh's first time poaching in the novel *Morning Tide* (1931) when the older boys introduce him to the 'true ways of the tribe', is a rite of passage where the wild, open landscape of the moor unlocks Hugh's ancestral identity and sense of belonging:

The vast night world of the moor. The high dark sky. Threading it to the river and the poaching of salmon. The half moon, wanly tilted over and sinking. Every sense in the boy grew so alert that shapes and instincts crept out of his blood. An occult ecstasy rimmed the dark hollow of his fear with white fire. He was being born to the earth[...]²⁴⁷

This has clear echoes of the clandestine whisky distillation in *Young Art and Old Hector*, where physical experience and tactile contact with the landscape unlock primordial ancestral memories and precipitate the discovery of a unified sense of self and nation. Neil Gunn was all too aware of the 'irrational' nature of belonging that 'has little to do with explicit aesthetic or material considerations' but 'springs out of affection and loyalty'. For Gunn, when the individual proclaims 'This is my land' they are 'at that moment profoundly in harmony and at peace'.²⁴⁸ In this way, Gunn's 'nation as landscape' is a signifier of belonging that fulfills a profound human desire to be rooted in physical place. Landscape is also a palimpsest of past, present and future identities that provides a stable constant in contrast to the stress of the ever-changing modern world. In 'A Global Sense of Place' (1994) feminist geographer Doreen Massey argues that amidst the unsettling 'flux' of modern life 'a 'sense of place,' of rootedness, can provide ... stability and a source of unproblematical identity.'²⁴⁹ However, Massey goes on to highlight the way in which this figuration of place is not entirely 'unproblematical' as 'place and the spatially local are then rejected by many progressive people as almost necessarily reactionary' and seen as merely 'romanticised escapism from the real business of the world.'²⁵⁰ Massey acknowledges the need to recognise the yearning for belonging to a particular place but also accepts that questions surrounding place in modern times have led to revivals of 'reactionary nationalisms, to competitive localisms, to introverted obsessions with

²⁴⁷ Neil M. Gunn, *Morning Tide* (Edinburgh: Porpoise Press, 1931; repr. London: Souvenir Press, 1975) p.156.

²⁴⁸ Neil Gunn, 'My Bit of Britain', *The Field*, 178, No.4623, pp. 136 – 37; repr. in *Landscape to Light*, p.19

²⁴⁹ Doreen Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) p.151

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.151

‘hertiage.’” According to Massey, the challenge of how to discuss notions of place and belonging in a progressive manner without appearing reactionary still persists.²⁵¹

This challenge certainly applies to figurations of place and ethnic belonging in Gunn’s fiction. Many critical readings of Neil Gunn’s novels have been guilty of what Ryan Shirey calls ‘Revisionist reductivism’.²⁵² In his argument, Shirey quotes Eleanor Bell’s explanation of this critical stance:

[...] while many Revisionist critics accuse Nationalists of homogenising discourses of national identity in order to accommodate their own agendas, [...] Revisionists, ironically, often tend to homogenise nationalism in order to undermine its political intentions.²⁵³

In his argument, Shirey draws on Pascale Casanova’s thesis of the ‘world republic of letters’ in which the literary world is dominated by centres of cultural hegemony which claim to be universal in nature, but embody the ideologies of European cultural and political hegemonies. These centres of literary dominance must simultaneously seek new ideas whilst also defending their cultural authority against challenges from the literary margins. Shirey then combines Casanova’s thesis with Jed Etsy’s examination of T.S. Eliot’s call for the resurgence of cultural nationalism in the wake of Imperial decline and the inward movement towards local culture in England²⁵⁴ to:

[...] triangulate a new reading of the work of the Scottish Renaissance as a movement locked in perpetual struggle with the forces of the capital market of the London metropole even as it simultaneously anticipated that metropole’s emergent post-imperial concern with the local signifiers that mark ‘provincial’ nationality.²⁵⁵

Shirey argues that the ‘perpetual struggle’ and dilemma that Neil Gunn and the writers

²⁵¹ Doreen Massey, ‘A Global Sense of Place’, p.151-2

²⁵² Ryan Shirey, ‘Neil Gunn and The World Republic of Letters’, p.3

²⁵³ Eleanor Bell, *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) p.149

²⁵⁴ Jed Etsy, ‘Insular Time: T.S. Eliot and Modernism’s English End’, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) pp.141-205

²⁵⁵ Ryan Shirey, ‘A Shrinking Highlands: Neil Gunn and the ‘World Republic of Letters,’ p.4

of the Scottish Renaissance were dealing with was that ‘the further a national literature is in terms of ‘aesthetic distance’ from the hegemonic capital of its literary language [in this case, London], the further it is considered behind the times – in the past.’²⁵⁶ Writing from the periphery, Gunn and other Scottish writers had to deal with Southern attitudes to Scottish national literature as inherently reactionary. To a certain extent therefore, Scottish authors were bound in the straightjacket of Southern sensibilities in order to be successful.

Shirey goes on to argue that unconstructive ‘divergent readings’ of Scottish nationalism arise when Scottish literature is not considered ‘in the context of its complex relationship with British (read English) literature.’²⁵⁷ Indeed, this ‘Revisionist reductivism’ often fails to account for Gunn’s status as a regional writer, the complexity and more progressive aspects of nationalist ideologies, such as self-determination and, as Etsy argues, the yearning for cultural renewal found in the local. At its most reductive this Revisionist approach suggests that the treatment of landscape, place and belonging in Gunn’s fiction and essays involves ‘blood and soil’ mysticism. Whilst Christopher Whyte calls for a reappraisal of Gunn’s work in light of the ‘range of cultural nationalisms, both progressive and reactionary’ that became part of the nationalist debate in Scotland throughout the twentieth century, he remains uncomfortable with Gunn’s ‘seductive rhetoric of the blood’.²⁵⁸ Aspects of European Romantic Nationalism and Herderism seen in Gunn’s use of the *Carmina Gadelica* and folk culture do have an unfortunate lineage with the extreme nationalist ideologies of the twentieth century. Indeed, Ryan Shirey argues that Whyte views Gunn’s nationalism as a purely reactionary form of ethnonationalism. However, this overlooks the subtle complexities that lie behind Gunn’s perennial and primordial ethnonationalism. Just as Jed Etsy identifies a renewed focus on the local as a means of English national rejuvenation in the post-Imperial age, the multiple figurations of nationalism in Gunn’s fiction are a response to cultural decline and articulate the desire for cultural renewal. Gunn’s nationalism therefore, sought to empower the individual in the community, and halt the decline of Highland culture and a way of life that had existed for centuries.

²⁵⁶ Ryan Shirey, ‘A Shrinking Highlands: Neil Gunn and the ‘World Republic of Letters,’’ p.5

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p.7

²⁵⁸ Christopher Whyte, *Gendering the Nation*, ‘Fishy Masculinities’, *Gendering the Nation*, ed. by Christopher Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) p. 66

The multiple nationalisms – romantic, individualistic, perennial and primordial – seen in Neil Gunn’s fiction and non-fiction writing are articulated through poetic and historical ‘ethnoscapes’ imbued with the collective identity of the people. Renewal and regeneration of the individual and national self is discovered in the local, the landscape and the nation as community, providing meaning and belonging in a post-imperial Scotland. Informed by socialist and anarchist ideas (via Kropotkin), Gunn envisioned independent autonomous communities, such as the Riasgan glen in *Butcher’s Broom*, as microcosms of the self-determining nation state. Michael Hechter identifies geographical isolation as a key component in the rise of nationalism. The inaccessibility of the glen and its ‘remoteness from the agencies of social control’ marks the Highlands as a ‘land of the free’.²⁵⁹ A state of separate or peripheral existence is frequently a signifier of individual and collective autonomy in Gunn’s fiction, and the communal society, or ‘Gemeinschaft’, of the Riasgan glen reflects the nationalist view that Highland society was ‘a model for how human beings can live well together in a community’.²⁶⁰ This is most akin to an ‘ethnoscape’, a ‘poetic and historic’ landscape, identified by Anthony D. Smith²⁶¹ where landscape plays an integral role in shaping and influencing the community and the physical environment is ‘no longer merely a natural setting’ but a multi-layered repository of collective memories, cultural associations and myths accumulated over long periods of time. I will then examine the way in which Biblical motifs seen throughout *Butcher’s Broom* resonate with, not only, the image of Scotland as a ‘new Israel’ seen in Covenanter rhetoric, but also more recent nationalist discourse, found in Neal Ascherson’s book on landscape and Scottish identity *Stone Voices*. This in turn expresses one element of Neil Gunn’s ‘faith’: nationalism. The perennial and primordial aspects of Gunn’s nationalism are also communicated through the ancient landscape of *Butcher’s Broom* as well as the use of place in *Young Art and Old Hector* (1942) and *Whisky and Scotland* (1935). It is through the physical act of whisky distillation that Hector and his friends in *Young Art and Old Hector* can regain the lost spiritual connection with a nobler, primordial age. In *Whisky and Scotland*, whisky is a metaphor for the pure essence of the landscape, and by extension, the nation. Through the examination of these texts I will demonstrate that Gunn’s ethnic nationalism,

²⁵⁹ Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development 1536 – 1966* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1975) p.51

²⁶⁰ Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland*, (London: Granta, 2014) p. 176

²⁶¹ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 150

dismissed by Whyte as ‘reactionary’ but identified by Shirey as more nuanced and progressive, is worthy of greater investigation, drawing as it does on a range of ideological and mythical currents to rejuvenate the present. This will enable us to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between the individual and place in Neil Gunn’s ‘landscapes of belonging’ and reveal the more progressive aspects of his nationalism.

Neil Gunn’s nationalism was, ‘varied and multiple’ as opposed to the homogenous and simplified view of nationalism held by some critics such as Whyte who viewed it, as Ryan Shirey states, either ‘unproblematically politically progressive’ or ‘as dangerously close to a ‘blood and soil’ ideology that conjures the spectral energies of the twentieth century’s worst nightmares – Fascism and Nazism’.²⁶² Shirey argues that Whyte’s dislike of Gunn’s nationalism has blinded him to ‘the variety of progressive, international perspectives on nationalism that were available to the writers of Gunn’s era’²⁶³ and demonstrates the perennial perception of nationalism as illiberal, a problem that progressive nationalists such as Gunn were all too aware of. As Shirey argues, Gunn’s nationalism envisaged the nation state as an expression of individual autonomy with national self-determination acting as a catalyst for personal self-determination and empowerment. This form of progressive nationalism, Shirey contends, is common to smaller nations that have a history of being overshadowed by a dominant cultural and economic hegemon. The spectre of imperialism and Scotland’s role in Empire – as both colonised and colonisers – added to a sense of disempowerment and energised the desire for self-determination:

For Scottish nationalists like Gunn, many of whom felt that the ‘soul’ (and much of the soil) of the nation had been sold along with the right of political and economic self-determination through the Union with England, the idea of a kind of spiritual renewal that would be located in both individuals and the national community was extremely powerful as a way to palliate the sense of loss inculcated by Scotland’s participation in Empire.²⁶⁴

Gunn’s progressive nationalism, Shirey states, must therefore be considered within the context of a post imperial Scotland struggling to reconcile its role as both the victim and perpetrator of British imperialism. As Shirey (drawing on Etsy) argues, regeneration of the individual and national self is discovered in the local, the landscape and the ‘national community’, providing meaning and belonging in the post-imperial age.

²⁶² Ryan Shirey, ‘Neil Gunn, Nationalism and the World Republic of Letters’, p.7

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.9

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.11

The dominance and expansion of English interests at the expense of the poorer nations of the Celtic fringe is highlighted by Michael Hechter as a crucial factor in the rise of Celtic nationalisms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The central hegemon must 'disparage the indigenous culture of peripheral groups' in order to remain dominant.²⁶⁵ For Neil Gunn, 'a people, whose tradition has been driven underground', resulting in 'moments of crisis' will 'want to liberate their traditions so that they may live life abundantly again'. A renewal in national identity will flower through a combination of civic and ethnic factors such as 'expression in language and in social institution, for a literary renaissance and a political nationalism'.²⁶⁶

However, despite the importance of 'social institution', a key element in progressive, civic nationalism, to Gunn's idea of national renewal, it is an ethno-centric form of nationalism that dominates his fiction, essays and letters. The status of Scotland as a former sovereign state reduced to a marginalised economic backwater concerned Gunn politically. However, it was the gradual disappearance of the Highland way of life that generated an acute sense of cultural and ethnic loss within Gunn and provided the creative impetus for many of his novels such as *Butcher's Broom*. This is articulated through a range of political discourses in Gunn's writing – particularly from the 1930s pre-war period – that interact with and inform each other. Margery Palmer McCulloch highlights political hybridity as a significant factor in the Scottish Renaissance movement where:

[...] shifting ideological positions also convey the fluidity of political nomenclature and understanding in a period when people were struggling to find alternative ways of organising society and of achieving power over social and economic problems. Terms such as 'fascism' and 'communism', for example, did not mean the same to those living in the 1920s and early 1930s as they do to us whose historical understanding includes awareness of the Hitler war and the Cold War.²⁶⁷

Here McCulloch highlights the need to view the political explorations of the Scottish Renaissance within the political flux of the interwar period. Writers such as Gunn were frustrated with the political status quo and sought out ideologies, such as nationalism, that

²⁶⁵ Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, p. 65

²⁶⁶ Neil M. Gunn, 'On Tradition', *Scots Magazine*, 34, No.2, November 1940, pp. 131-34; repr. in *Landscape to Light*, ed. by Alistair McCleery and Diarmid Gunn (Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing, 2009) p. 59

²⁶⁷ Margery Palmer McCulloch, Introduction, *Modernism and Nationalism*, (Glasgow: Bain and Bell, 2004), p.xvi.

they felt had the revolutionary potential to transform society. According to McCulloch, we must refrain from judging such explorations based on our knowledge of the extreme manifestations of nationalism and communism that emerged to dominate Europe and the Soviet Union. When reading Gunn therefore, a more nuanced approach to his political outlook is required. Indeed, Anthony D. Smith argues for the plurality of nationalism and ‘the complex and abstract nature’ of national identity:

The nation, in fact, draws on elements of other kinds of collective identity, which accounts not only for the way in which national identity can be combined with these other types of identity – class, religious or ethnic – but also for the chameleon-like permutations of nationalism, the ideology, with other ideologies like liberalism, fascism and communism. A national identity is fundamentally multi-dimensional; it can never be reduced to a single element, even by particular factions of nationalists, nor can it be easily or swiftly induced in a population by artificial means.²⁶⁸

Gunn’s political and philosophical outlook therefore, involves a hybridity of ideologies including a range of nationalisms and socialism blended with Kropotkinian anarchism, a hitherto unexplored aspect of Gunn’s political outlook. Gunn was a political magpie, selecting the elements from various political movements and philosophies that promoted individual freedom in opposition to the oppressive principles of fascism. As well as being a nationalist, in a letter to Alexander Reid (1958) he argues that ‘anarchism in some form has always seemed the final hope for humans who wanted to retain maximum individuality or freedom, consistent with duty to community’²⁶⁹.

Gunn was familiar with the libertarian tradition of Peter Kropotkin²⁷⁰ and was highly suspicious of any state that wanted to impose restrictions on the individual. In his essay ‘Nationalism in Writing III’, written at the threshold of the Second World War in 1939, Gunn expounds on the importance of individual liberty and states that ‘the concept of individualism, of individual freedom, is occupying the mind of man today more sharply than at any other period.’ Citing English anarchist Herbert Read’s account of suppression in the Soviet Union from *Poetry and Anarchism* (1938) Gunn laments that ‘freedom of

²⁶⁸ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991) p.14

²⁶⁹ Neil M. Gunn, letter to Alexander Reid, 17 April 1958, *The Selected Letters of Neil Gunn*, ed. by J.B. Pick (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987) p.141.

²⁷⁰ See Neil Gunn’s letter to Naomi Mitchison, 9 June 1944, where he asks: ‘And when you accuse me of anarchism, do you mean the anarchism of Kropotkin or individual chaos? There’s a mighty difference.’ *The Selected Letters of Neil Gunn*, p. 79

individual expression and action remains constricted, and the tragic fate of some of the Revolution's best poets and writers leaves him [Read] deeply troubled.²⁷¹

In a letter to Naomi Mitchison, Gunn stresses that *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944) is 'against fascism'²⁷² and this can be seen throughout the novel. In a dark parody of fascist Italy and Germany, the unfortunate citizens of the dystopian society in *The Green Isle* live in servitude to the state and their individuality is brutally suppressed. The spirit of individualistic anarchism is embodied by the character Young Art, who boldly defies the regime and breaks free from its oppressive grip. Gunn also translates this spirit of libertarianism into a practical solution for real communities when, in the same letter, he expresses his support for the decentralisation of the herring industry, advocating less state control and greater empowerment of the fishermen through the creation of locally run co-operatives. In another letter to Naomi Mitchison (1944) Gunn acknowledges that his 'left friends [...] won't like the book in their bones'²⁷³ due to the similarities of the *Green Isle* state to the oppressive Communist regime in Soviet Russia. Despite admitting being 'a Socialist since the age of fifteen', Gunn expresses his frustration with their static and narrow view that revolution in Scotland must be based on the disastrous Russian model that robs the individual of basic liberties and freedom of expression. The rejection of the oppressive nation state and the celebration of a particular type of Scottish individualism can also be seen in the highly individualistic characters that appear repeatedly in Gunn's fiction: stubborn old Sandy who defies the law of the land to shelter a wanted man in *Bloodhunt*, the archetypal embodiment of Gaelic wisdom, Dark Mairi, who screams her protests at the evictors in *Butcher's Broom* and Old Hector, who takes particular delight in defying the law when illegally distilling whisky in *Young Art and Old Hector*. Gunn uses place to denote the individualism of these characters by placing their homes on the fringes of communities: part of the community but retaining the integrity of their fierce individualism through physical separation. In this way the periphery denotes freedom in Gunn's writing.

²⁷¹ Neil M. Gunn, 'Nationalism in Writing III: Is Scottish Individualism to be Deplored?' *Scots Magazine*, 31, July 1939, pp. 275-82, repr. in *Landscape and Light*, p.115

²⁷² Neil M. Gunn, letter to Naomi Mitchison, 9 June, 1944, *The Selected Letters of Neil Gunn*, p.80

²⁷³ Neil M. Gunn, letter to Naomi Mitchison, 3 August, 1944, *The Selected Letters of Neil Gunn*, p.80-81

Michael Hechter highlights the importance of geographical separation in the development of nationalism:

The inaccessibility of the highlands also means that these regions were among the last to be subject to the central authority of the state. Hence the hills tended to provide refuge not only for cultural dissidents but also for outlaws and individualists of all kinds. Remoteness from the agencies of social control made the highlands a land of the free.²⁷⁴

Written in 1934, *Butcher's Broom*, Gunn's historical novel concerning a remote Highland community, the close relationship the people have with the land and the devastating effects of the Clearances, clearly evokes this sense of geographical separation. The Riasgan glen in *Butcher's Broom* is portrayed as a self-contained autonomous space, a microcosm of a self-determining community that is initially defined by its physical separation from the rest of the world at the start of the novel. Gunn draws the mind's eye to the distinctive geological and geographical features of a formidable Highland landscape; this is a land of high walls and barriers where 'vast hollows are gouged out' and 'fluent spinal ridges' grace the skyline.²⁷⁵ An accumulation of physical obstacles on the lower ground come in the form of 'the knolls, the humps and hillocks and boulders, the gravel faces, the black bogs' and even the burns are ominously described as 'winding like snakes'. It seems the landscape itself would conspire to confound any unfortunate stray travellers. The people are 'shut up and shut off' from the 'outside world' in this seemingly timeless place, untouched by the trappings of modernity – as 'there are no roads anywhere, no wheeled vehicles, only paths and shaggy ponies and burdens for the back' – emphasising the wild nature of the landscape and the people who inhabit it.²⁷⁶ A forbidding landscape of walls and barriers can also be seen in the coastal landscape of *The Silver Darlings* where 'the coastline was a wall of rock', a 'world of ravines near the edge of a high precipice' and 'a coast of precipices and wings and perilous depths'.²⁷⁷ The Riasgan landscape is a secret, enclosed world that its inhabitants seldom leave and is hidden and forbidden to outsiders. The narrator asks: 'What reason then is there for a

²⁷⁴ Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, p.51

²⁷⁵ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom*, p.7

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.8

²⁷⁷ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Darlings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943, repr. 1989) p.49

man to wander into strange places where he has no business?'²⁷⁸ We learn that the Riasgan community is industrious and self-sufficient, its communal society reflecting the Scottish nationalist view, identified by Neal Ascherson, that Highland society was 'a model for how human beings can live well together in a community':²⁷⁹

Here, where they made their own clothing, their own shoes, built their houses, produced their food and drove a few cattle to market to get coin to pay rent, surely the forces that had so shut them in could do without them and forget them.²⁸⁰

This model of communal and social self-sufficiency, or 'Gemeinschaft'²⁸¹ community, is more akin to an 'ethnoscape', a 'poetic and historic' landscape that Anthony D. Smith argues has as much legitimacy as modern notions of nationhood. Benedict Anderson, Anthony Giddens and Eric Hobsbawm, view the modern nation-state as a centralised political order supported by systems of bureaucracy and institutions.²⁸² Whilst this view of the modern nation is valid, Smith also highlights the significance of ethnic territories and ancestral homelands, a 'historic and poetic landscape, one imbued with the culture and history of a group, and vice versa, a group part of whose character is felt by themselves and outsiders to derive from the particular landscape they inhabit, and commemorated as such in verse and song.'²⁸³ Some ethnoscares can be found in 'mini-scapes' that are, as in *Butcher's Broom*, 'small localities' geographically contained 'in valleys or along the shores of lakes'.²⁸⁴ Smith highlights the integral role landscape plays in shaping and influencing the community and the way in which a landscape is 'no longer merely a natural setting' but a multi-layered repository of collective memories, cultural associations and myths accumulated over long periods of time. In *Butcher's Broom*, the inhabitants of the

²⁷⁸ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom*, p.8

²⁷⁹ Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland* (London: Granta, 2014) p.176

²⁸⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom*, p.15

²⁸¹ Ferdinand Tonnies, *Community and Society* (New York: Dover Publications, 2002)

²⁸² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) pp.121, 170-80; Anthony Giddens, *The Nation State and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985) pp.116-21, 212-21; Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

²⁸³ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.150

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.150

Riasgan glen have such a close relationship with the landscape, forged over many years, that their homes seem to have merged with it completely:

The round-backed cottages clung to the earth like long animals whose folded heads were always to the mountain. Lying thus to the slopes they were part of the rhythm of the land itself. They grew out of it and merged with it, so that the shadow or stillness caught them when it caught the mountain, and the cries of children were no more alien than the sharp cries of moor-birds.²⁸⁵

This almost symbiotic relationship the Riasgan people have with the land is reinforced by Gunn throughout the novel. In the extract above we can see that the people of the glen have existed in it for so long that they have assumed animalistic qualities, with the 'cries of the children' as natural to that place as 'the sharp cries of moor-birds'. When the evictors arrive the children are described as 'bolting into their homes as into a burrow'.²⁸⁶ As the novel progresses we learn that bad fortune befalls those who leave the ethnoscape of the glen and its egalitarian society – the embodiment of 'communitarian Scottishness' as Ascherson describes it.²⁸⁷ Elie leaves the glen and has her child only to fall into poverty and destitution and the young men leave to die for the British Empire in the Napoleonic wars, thus leaving the women and old men at the mercy of the factors and their dogs. The archetypal character Dark Mairi, who leads us through this 'ethnoscape' at the start of the novel is the physical embodiment of the Highland way of life and is skilled with esoteric and hidden knowledge of the old folk ways, rooted in an ancient past. However, she ultimately cannot thrive and survive beyond the glen and is destroyed by the external forces of economic progress and capitalism. This expresses the illusory nature of the autonomy and 'micro-nation' enjoyed by the Riasgan people hidden behind the secluded walls of their natural Highland fortress as they, ultimately, have no control over the external factors that will decide their fate.

There are points in *Butcher's Broom* where Gunn's anger at the fate of the lost Highland communities can barely be contained:

It could hardly be within God's irony that a world which had forgotten their very tongue should be concentrating all its forces of destruction upon them. What could the pride and power of emperors have to do with this little pocket

²⁸⁵ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom*, p.9

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.289

²⁸⁷ Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices* p.176

of self-sufficing earth lost in the hills, this retreat, this end of an age, this death of a culture which a millennium before had been no more offensive to the nations of the West than to set Christianity and learning amongst them? When tragedy thus completes itself has it not earned in a people the dignity of saying 'It is finished'?²⁸⁸

The loss of the Highland way of life is emphasised through the perceived antiquity of its culture, language and significant contribution to Western civilisation – a contribution that, in Gunn's mind, far exceeds the size of the 'little pocket of self-sufficing earth' that it sprang from. We can also see the apocalyptic nature of the clearing towards the end of the novel foreshadowed by reference to the 'end of an age' and 'death of a culture'. The Christ-like sacrifice of the people is expressed through 'it is finished'– Jesus' final words before his death.²⁸⁹ These Biblical allusions emphasise not only the depth of the cultural 'wound' inflicted upon the Highland people but also their similarities with the oppressed Jews during the Roman occupation – another nation at the mercy of the 'pride and power of emperors'. Neal Ascherson highlights the way in which this 'narrative of betrayal' that 'shines a torch on the virtues of the betrayed'²⁹⁰ is a crucial component of Scottish nationalism, and the traumatic events of the Clearances 'are now irreversibly a part of Scottish political identity'.²⁹¹ In this sense the landlord and factor in *Butcher's Broom* act as internal 'others', 'the aggressor whose black crime sets off the angelic whiteness of national essence' and, for Gunn, it is in the ashes of the lost Highland community that 'Scotland seeks to find its own image'.²⁹²

The religious myth motifs evident in *Butcher's Broom* also express a deeper spirituality at the heart of Gunn's nationalism where the nation is deified as a 'sacred bounded space'.²⁹³ Indeed, Gunn professed his 'faith' comprised of nation, community and spirit.²⁹⁴ Nationalism as a form of religion or faith is an aspect of Gunn's nationalist outlook that has been relatively neglected in critical studies, although Richard Price does briefly touch on it in his critical study of Gunn's early fiction in *The Fabulous Matter of Fact* (1991). In his

²⁸⁸ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom*, p.15

²⁸⁹ *The New English Bible*, The New Testament, John 19:30

²⁹⁰ Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices*, p.175

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.174

²⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176

²⁹³ Murray Stewart Leith, Daniel P.J. Soule, *Political Discourse and National Identity in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) p.74

²⁹⁴ Neil M. Gunn, 'The New Community of Iona', *Scots Magazine*, 30, No. 3, December 1938, pp. 169-74; repr. in *Landscape and Light*, pp.224-227

analysis of Gunn's serialised novel *The Poaching at Grianan* (1929) Price highlights the way in which the character Don sees Gaelic culture 'as *the* Scottish culture'²⁹⁵ and, quoting from the novel itself, 'not from any little-nationalist point of view but profoundly as a spiritual inheritance'.²⁹⁶ However, Price neglects to identify the nature of 'little-nationalism' as most likely nationalism as a purely political and ideological entity and not the larger more meaningful 'spiritual' force Neil Gunn believed it to be.

In *Nationalism: Man's Other Religion*, Edward Shillito argues that nationalism is 'another religion which offers itself to the hungry soul of man'. According to Shillito, who was writing in 1933, nationalism has become a surrogate faith in the spiritual vacuum that modern life has created. Dissatisfied with the established Church and 'the God, whom man has made out of his dreams' it is to the 'godless Church' of nationalism that fulfills man's longing to be part of something greater than himself.²⁹⁷ The decline of monarchy since the French Revolution has also contributed to the notion of the 'sacred society' with the notion of the divine nation filling the vacuum left by the absence of a 'divine' monarch. Benedict Anderson argues that the ideology of nationalism provided a sense of continuity, renewal and optimism, countering the 'fatality' of secular rationalism in the age of Enlightenment:

If nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and always 'historical', the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny. With Debray we might say, 'Yes, it is quite accidental that I am born French; but after all, France is eternal.'²⁹⁸

For nationalism, as Anthony D. Smith states 'its deity is the nation itself'²⁹⁹, expressed through the ideological triumvirate of territory, history and community. Guides to morality were communicated through 'landscape and poetic spaces' and 'history or golden ages'. In order to mobilise the people, nationalism tapped into the past to encourage:

²⁹⁵ Richard Price, *The Fabulous Matter of Fact* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991) p.19

²⁹⁶ Neil M. Gunn, *The Poaching at Grianan*, Scots Magazine, Vols. 11-13, September 1929 – May 1930; Part 1, Chaps. 1 - 2, Vol. 11, No. 6, pp. 418 – 434 (p.425)

²⁹⁷ Edward Shillito, *Nationalism: Man's Other Religion*, (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1933) p.10

²⁹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 2006) p.11-12

²⁹⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991) p.78

The return to that past through a series of myths: myths of origin and descent, of liberation and migration, of the golden age and its heroes and sagas, perhaps of the chosen people now to be reborn after its long sleep of decay and/or exile. Together, these myth-motifs can be formed into a composite nationalist mythology and salvation drama.³⁰⁰

One particular ‘myth-motif’ that can be seen in both Scottish nationalism and Neil Gunn’s writing, that we have already touched upon, is the adoption of motifs from the Hebrew Genesis and Exodus narratives and the betrayal and crucifixion story of the New Testament. These motifs not only convey the perennial nature of the nation, but also the deification of the nation as ‘sacred bounded space’.³⁰¹

The persistence of these Biblical motifs in Scottish nationalist discourse is evident from writer and journalist Neal Ascherson’s description of the political discourse during the campaign for Scottish Devolution. In his book *Stone Voices* (2002) Ascherson examines the intersection of Scottish identity and the landscape, and the way in which the ‘human experience’ of Scotland is ‘built so intimately into the geology and post-glacial ecology’ of the country ‘that a people and its stones form a single cultural landscape’.³⁰² Indeed, *Stone Voices* portrays Scotland as a poetic and historic ethnoscape where the landscape is imbued with collective cultural identity; a representation that clearly resonates with Neil Gunn’s landscapes of belonging. In Ascherson’s examination of the Scottish devolution campaign it is evident that the Biblical motifs used by Neil Gunn persist in the nationalist discourse of recent times and are also used by Ascherson himself. The deployment of the great exile and deliverance narratives of the Old Testament, particularly in relation to Highland experience and ‘the old Highland way of exalting political change into Biblical terms of grief, faith and the promise of redemption’³⁰³ were clearly evident on the campaign trail. Ascherson describes an older gentleman in the audience of a meeting for Home Rule in Inverness identifying the vote for devolution as ‘a moral and even spiritual decision’ and adds ‘Let politics look after themselves!’ Ascherson develops this Biblical discourse by adding: ‘The Scots, like many nations, have fancied that they have been led to freedom and safety by a pillar of fire by night, and that they have survived under the

³⁰⁰ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, p.66

³⁰¹ Murray Stewart Leith, Daniel P.J. Soule, *Political Discourse and National Identity in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) p.74

³⁰² Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices*, preface, p.ix

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.159

protection of heaven.³⁰⁴ This is a clear reference to the Biblical Exodus story, also alluded to in *Butcher's Broom*,³⁰⁵ in which the Hebrews are led out of bondage from the land of Egypt by the prophet Moses. The Hebrews are protected by God from the wrath of pharaoh and his army with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.³⁰⁶

There are clear echoes here of the Biblical rhetoric used by the Covenanters and their belief that the Scots were a 'chosen people' like the ancient Hebrews. Through the signing of the National Covenant in 1638, Scottish Protestants believed that they were, not only, defending their religious freedoms, but also retaining their national identity in the face of religious reform forced upon them from the south. A direct and 'covenanted' relationship between God and the nation was intended to reassert Scottish religious independence and reflected the increasing emergence of nationalism across Europe in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. Free of Papal control, individual nations now enjoyed a greater degree of self-determination, contributing to more robust national identities.

In Scotland, this emerging identity was articulated through the Exodean deliverance myth and the notion of the Scots as a 'chosen people'. Trevor Royle argues that the Scots who signed the National Covenant 'drew comfort from its clarion call to protect the true religion and from the inference in many sermons of the day that Scotland was the new Israel, a beleaguered tribe struggling to do God's great work by extirpating all traces of popery and superstition.'³⁰⁷ Whilst the promotion of Scotland as a 'new Israel' seems a gross over-inflation of the nation's worldly significance, it is best understood in the context of Scotland's status as a small European nation shouting from the margins and struggling to have her voice heard among more powerful neighbours. The adoption of these powerful Biblical motifs in Covenanter rhetoric added the weight and importance that Scotland's weak position in Europe could not provide, as well as imbuing the 'mission' of the Covenanters with divine legitimacy. This is clearly demonstrated in Andrew Cant's 'Exhortation at Inverness' (1638), where he asserts from the very start of the sermon that the spiritual purity of Scotland outshines her global insignificance:

Long ago our gracious God was pleased to visit this nation with the light of His glorious gospel, by planting a vineyard in, and making His glory to arise upon

³⁰⁴ Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices*, p.159

³⁰⁵ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom*, p.327

³⁰⁶ *The New English Bible*, The Old Testament, Exodus, 13:21

³⁰⁷ Trevor Royle, *Civil War: The Wars of the Three Kingdoms 1638 – 1660* (London: Abacus, 2005) p.73

Scotland. A wonder! That so great a God should shine on so base a soil! Nature hath been a stepmother to us in comparison of those live under a hotter climate, as in a land like Goshen, or a garden like Eden. But the Lord looks not as man: His Grace is most free, whereby it often pleaseth Him to compensate what is wanting in nature: whence Scotland (a dark, obscure island, inferior to many) the Lord did arise, and discovered the tops of the mountains with such a clear light, that in God's gracious dispensation, it is inferior to none.³⁰⁸

Cant begins his sermon with a strong emphasis on Scotland as a sacred nation and Scottish spiritual exceptionalism that is expressed through the landscape itself. Despite the barren soil and harsh climate, God's presence is felt in 'the tops of the mountains' of Scotland, a metaphysical landscape that provides a raw, more direct experience of the divine in keeping with the austere Calvinism of the Covenanters, and reflects the importance of the Scottish landscape to the Covenanter story as a place of worship and persecution. For Neal Ascherson, the 'Covenanter myth' had romantic threads that resonated with him as a child. One of these was the idea of a 'cultural landscape' created when the Covenanters (or the 'Society People') faced persecution, with 'human beings acting in nature' where 'men women and children had done their singing, journeying or dying in these hills'.³⁰⁹ Illegal conventicles were often held in secluded glens, a landscape that, as we have seen previously in Michael Hechter's argument, often provided a refuge for rebellious outcasts. The graves of Covenanters executed for their faith lie scattered across the landscape and are commemorated only by individuals who, like the main character in Sir Walter Scott's novel *Old Mortality*, faithfully restored the headstones.

Despite the absence of a national monument to the many Covenanter deaths in Scotland and their passing into history, as we can see from Ascherson's argument in *Stone Voices* and Gunn's use of Biblical motifs in *Butcher's Broom*, their image of the Scots as a 'chosen people' akin to the Hebrews and Scotland as the 'new Israel' seems to have persisted from the seventeenth century through to the twentieth and twenty first. Although the intolerant and austere form of Calvinism the Covenanters practiced stood in direct opposition to Neil Gunn's sensual attitude to life, he admired them as 'poor common

³⁰⁸ Andrew Cant, 'Exhortation at Inverness', *The Covenants and the Covenanters: Covenants, Sermons and Documents of The Covenanted Reformation*, ed. unknown (Glasgow: Aird and Coghill, publishing date unknown) p.77

³⁰⁹ Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices*, p. 276 - 277

people of Scotland' who attempted to introduce democratic principles to religion and bravely fought for their spiritual freedom against overwhelming odds .³¹⁰

Gunn makes extensive use of the Exodian motifs of 'grief, faith and the promise of redemption' in *Butcher's Broom* and reinforces the perception of the Riasgan glen as a sacred, metaphysical landscape inhabited by a 'chosen people'. In an echo of Andrew Cant's vision of God's presence in the mountains, this is established at the start of the novel that describes the mountains of the glen as sacred spaces akin to the holy Mount Sinai of Exodus, the 'dwelling-place' of God on Earth. Exodus 19:18-19 describes the terrible presence of Jehovah on the mountain as the Hebrews huddle below:

The whole of Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord had come down on it in fire. The smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace, and all the people trembled violently. The sound of the trumpet became louder and louder. Moses spoke, and the Lord answered him with thunder.

In the Riasgan glen, 'God breasts the hill-tops like a giant' and 'He sits in a stiff chair gloomy with thought'. The people of the Riasgan are reminded of God's presence when 'the shadow of Him stills the features'. Only the courageous Moses-like 'men with the beards', the Highland preachers called 'The Men' ascend to the mountain tops to experience His divine presence.³¹¹ Significantly, this God is the vengeful, angry God of the Old Testament – a distant and patriarchal deity that has 'withdrawn far into the sky' beset by 'gloomy' thoughts and, in the tragic events of the clearance to come, the brutal factor Heller becomes 'the Almighty's chosen instrument'.³¹²

The trauma of the clearance itself is conveyed through apocalyptic imagery reminiscent of the Book of Revelations combined, again, with mythical motifs from the Exodus narrative. After the clearing the now homeless former residents of the glen 'were like condemned beings by pits of fire in a smoldering hell'³¹³, Heller's men have 'an infernal appearance' in 'the thick evil-smelling gloom of the smoke'³¹⁴. As Ascherson argues, the profound feelings of loss and grief felt by the Highlanders are articulated in Biblical terms as 'Some of the older men called on their Maker to witness the end of them.

³¹⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland*, p.64

³¹¹ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom*, p.8

³¹² *Ibid.*, p.294

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p.324

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.327

Many blasphemed loudly'.³¹⁵ In *Butcher's Broom* the character old Angus laments with deep irony that 'We are like the children of Israel in the hand of Pharaoh. And now we shall have to arise and go to the promised land'.³¹⁶ There is, however, no 'promised land' waiting for the unfortunate exiles, but a barren, unforgiving landscape on the coast, a landscape of economic hardship and cultural marginalisation. The people are condemned to wander in the wilderness as the Hebrews did, or seek new 'promised lands' overseas. In this way, the key images from Exodus that conveyed a sense of hope and deliverance for the Covenanters are inverted by Gunn into a bitter and bleak reality.

In *Butcher's Broom*, the crisis of self that arises from this forced displacement and exile from their native glen manifests in the people's growing suspicion of Dark Mairi as a witch and the symbolic rejection of her as archetypal embodiment of the old Highland way of life. This illustrates the importance of ancestral homelands to the people's well being, security and sense of identity, as Anthony D. Smith states:

But the creation of nations requires a special place for the nation to inhabit, a 'land of their own'. Not any land; an historic land, a homeland, an ancestral land. Only an ancestral homeland can provide the emotional as well as physical security required by the citizens of a nation.³¹⁷

In *Memories and Myths of the Nation*, Anthony D. Smith, again, asserts that 'State-centred modernism attaches no weight to the properties of territory and the role of ancestral homelands' and 'tends to neglect the role of popular mobilisation, and the consequent return by the intelligentsia to ethno-history and vernacular culture'.³¹⁸ Neal Ascherson includes a section of verse from Psalm 124 that speaks of an oppressed people as the 'prey' of an oppressive tyrant who, through the grace of God, escape and find their freedom. This Psalm, he states, 'is a message for every Israel, for every small nation which has seen conquest and extinction approach'.³¹⁹ For Gunn however, God left the glen long ago and it is only through the 'godless church' of nationalism that the individual can experience 'deliverance'.

The vision of ethnic identity rooted in a sacred, ancient landscape seen in *Butcher's Broom* expresses both the 'perennial' and 'primordial' aspects of Gunn's nationalism.

³¹⁵ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom*, p.326-327

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.327

³¹⁷ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, p.150

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.149

³¹⁹ Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices*, p.159

Perennialism, particularly ‘continuous’ perennialism has the notion of continuity at its heart – the nation as an ancient construct with its roots in antiquity and reflects the once popular tendency to equate ‘race’ with ‘nation’. This view of the nation was most common among scholars before the Second World War but has now fallen out of favour – the concept of the nation as a modern construct is the current dominant orthodoxy and is far more widely accepted by recent scholars of nationalist political theory. The landscape of *Butcher’s Broom*, and by extension the community that dwells therein, is a space of great antiquity, ‘seen’ from the narrative point of view of Dark Mairi – the ‘eye that stares unwinking’ and is capable of ‘throwing the valley out of focus in space’, making it ‘change and curve in the backflow of time’ that is ‘frozen at last in the last Ice Age’.³²⁰ Mairi is said to possess ‘an older knowledge than was common to the rest of her ancient kind in these places’ and Gaelic is described as ‘the old language’.³²¹ This preoccupation with the ancient, perennial roots of Scottish nationhood is also evident during Gunn’s visit to the island of Iona, described in *Off in a Boat* (1938). For Gunn, the landscape and sacred ground of Iona is a physical testament to spiritual and perennial nationhood, the continuity of the Scottish nation stretching back to antiquity held in the very earth of the ancient burial ground next to Iona Abbey:

Yet perhaps the most astonishing thing about the burying-ground that lies before the chapel ruin (‘this awful ground’ as Dr. Johnson called it) is that it contains the dust of forty-eight Scottish kings, the last of whom was Macbeth. Murdered Duncan was buried here, as Shakespeare, the incomparable, knew:

*‘Carried to Colm’s-kill,
The sacred store-house of his predecessors,
And guardian of their bones.’*

Forty-eight Scottish kings buried in this tumbled graveyard – before the Norman conquest of England in 1066. And today should a man be bold enough to refer to the Scottish nation, he is looked upon as a bit of a crank, and his brothers smile at him, with diffident humour, in apology.³²²

Like the Declaration of Arbroath, Gunn emphasises the legitimacy of Scotland as a sovereign nation, reinforced by the long, continuous succession of Scottish kings stretching back into antiquity. A mention of Shakespeare’s, albeit inaccurate, version of

³²⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher’s Broom*, p.7

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p.6

³²² Neil M. Gunn, *Off in a Boat* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938; repr. New York: Faber and Faber, 1990) pp.228-229

the Macbeth narrative is included to bestow added gravitas. This is contrasted with Scotland's larger neighbour England who, subjected to foreign invasion in 1066, has not enjoyed the same level of continuity in its rulers – the implication being that the English nation, with its fragmented and broken line of succession, has less legitimacy and stands on an insubstantial foundation. Gunn is keen to make the point here, however, that it is the integrity of the Scottish nation that is more likely to be called into doubt and ridiculed. Furthermore, it is important to note at this point that Gunn's attitude to the preservation of the historic buildings and spaces of Iona conveys his progressive attitude to Iona's role in the physical and spiritual heritage of the nation. In his essay 'The New Community of Iona', published in *The Scots Magazine* (1938) he warns against the dangers of clinging to the past at the expense of recognising and experiencing the creative dynamic of the present.

The antiquity of Scotland as a nation can also be seen as symbolically embodied by Gunn in the development of whisky in *Whisky and Scotland* that is more akin to a political manifesto than a guide to Scotland's most famous tipple. Written in 1935 when Gunn was an active party political nationalist, *Whisky and Scotland* is described by Gunn himself as 'a flying excursion from self expression to nationalism' in which he seeks to examine 'what Scotland means to herself'.³²³ Whisky is an integral part of the 'imagined community' of Scotland, neatly illustrated by Micheal Grieve's poetic introduction to *Whisky and Scotland* in which he describes the different malts of the land combining together like an orchestra: 'It was once explained to me by a lover of Laphroaig, an Islay malt that rolls on you like a sea haar, that these whiskies are like an orchestra. The Islay malts are heavy and somber as cellos. Highland malts are violas, Lowland the discursive violin...' Grieve goes on to describe at length the various whiskies from the length and breadth of Scotland that geographically and culturally bind the nation together from distillery to distillery: 'From Dufftown, a capital of malt distilling – 'Rome was built on seven hills, Dufftown stands on seven stills' to 'Clynelish out of Brora, pure as a pibroch', 'In Skye there is the brooding Talisker, powerful enough to suit any man's mood' and 'In Orkney, there is the polished suaveness of Highland Park, and in Stirlingshire there is Glengoyne, a Lowland malt fit to start a Trossachs trek.'³²⁴ 'Fundamentally[...]' Gunn states, 'we are concerned with the commons of Scotland, whether in the Yllis of the Statutes or the Ayrshire of Burns. They

³²³ Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland: A Practical and Spiritual Survey* (London: Routledge, 1935, repr. Souvenir Press, 1988) p.54

³²⁴ Michael Grieve, introduction, *Whisky and Scotland*, pp.11-12

and their whisky are one.³²⁵ For Gunn, whisky is the very essence of Scottish identity, distilled from the landscape itself:

Am I implying that all this native tradition of the Scot, this environment of race and time and soil out of which he has come, this inner essence of him, is being denied, frustrated inhibited (or whatever the word) and that whisky is the liberating agent, the unerring psychoanalyst whose notes at the casebook are gathered in an all-night sitting? Is not the whisky itself taken out of that environment, a distillate of its very spirit?³²⁶

Here, the Scot born Adam-like from the soil will find realisation of himself through the fruit of knowledge or the 'water of life' distilled from the very landscape that 'created' him. The primordial, Celtic origins of whisky are imagined in a slightly contrived genesis or 'creation story', in a chapter entitled 'In the Beginning'. *Uisge-beatha* – a name conjured by some 'long dead mouth and tongue' – is established as one of the great 'fruits of the earth'³²⁷ of Gaeldom – a discovery born in an ancient, pagan landscape. This is woven into a description of a primitive, egalitarian society in which:

this folk were founded on what they called the democratic principle; that is to say, they believed that power ultimately resided in themselves, but for the smooth working of their community in peace and war, they found it convenient to elect Elders, a religious teacher or Druid, and a leader or Chief. It will thus be seen that they were a very primitive people; indeed so primitive that they were even prepared to fight for this democratic principle of theirs.³²⁸

The 'Discoverer' of whisky is portrayed as a spirited rebel who has been 'branded by the One God with the awful brand of the undying individualist.'³²⁹ Whisky as a symbol of Scottish individualism is also for Gunn a metaphor for the curbing of that individualism through market forces. What was once a sacred right of the Gael to distill whisky has now criminalised him and only the brave few dare to defy the taxman through the dark art of illegal whisky distillation on secret stills.

In *Young Art and Old Hector*, Gunn transforms the 'criminal' act of illegal whisky distillation into a sacred rite of passage that connects the characters with their primordial ethnic past. As Art stumbles accidentally on Old Hector's secret still site in 'the wild

³²⁵ Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland*, p.54

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.80-81

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.43

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.9

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.13

beast's den'³³⁰ it is again, through the landscape and natural environment this impression is established. Having narrowly avoided the men hunting for evidence of illegal distillation, Art takes a detour into the woods – a space seen through the boy's imagination as a place of enchantment and 'the little folk'³³¹ – where the physical realm meets the world of spirits and legend. Art hides himself in the undergrowth overlooking the dark cave where a secret, forbidden alchemy is taking place. The choice of the cave setting for the secret still is significant, for it was in the murky depth of caves that ancient ancestors lived, ate and practiced the mysteries and rituals of the 'Old Ways'. Caves were seen as doorways to the underworld – 'thin' places where the borders between the human and spirit worlds of legend became blurred. Neal Ascherson argues that:

A cave is a mneme, a damaged cell of memory preserved when all that existed in the open air – peoples, crafts, cults – has rotted away. In Scotland, the memory found in their damp, impacted floors or in the nettle-infested ground at their entrances is about fear: the fear of death by cold, of discovery by armed pursuers, of a world deaf to the voice of God, of the police looking for whisky-stills or of busybodies coming to drag an old man off to the poorhouse.³³²

Gunn uses a folk-tale narrative style to convey this fearful environment as Art spies something emerging out of the cave:

Art's mind became a whirling place of wild beast's dens and little houses of fairy folk and legend and dread that set the world itself going up and down and round like the machinery in the meal mill. Then out of the little door, which Art had discovered on the day Mary Ann and himself had set off to find the fabled River, out of the little door that gave entry to the dark den, came the shaggy head of a great beast, and all at once, O torrents of the mountain, it was not a beast's head, but the hairy *oorishk* itself, the fabulous beast human. There were legends of this human monster that could chill the heart's blood of grown folk. On all fours it came forth, and slowly it reared itself, and looked around, and Art saw, as in a strange and powerful dream, that the *oorishk* was Old Hector.³³³

As with Dark Mairi and her vision of the ancient origins of the Riasgan, the scene viewed through the lens of the character's imagination allows for a time shift back to a

³³⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *Young Art and Old Hector*, (London: Souvenir Press, 1993), p.183

³³¹ *Ibid.*, p.182

³³² Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices*, p.190

³³³ Neil M. Gunn, *Young Art and Old Hector*, p.184

'fabled', primordial setting – a 'historic and poetic ethnoscape'. Similarities with Hugh's walk in the forest in *Morning Tide*, discussed in the previous chapter, are also evident here. The interplay of boyhood experience with references to folklore such as 'little houses of fairy folk and legend' and 'the fabled River' is again deployed as a means to access the authentic roots and youth of the nation.

Gunn also seems to delight in picturing the scene from a child's point of view as it permits a freer license with the fantastic. Physical place as a child perceives it seems to be far more fluid and influenced by the imagination before the dark age of reason and adulthood descend. The cave exists both in reality and imagination as a secret and forbidden space, inhabited by a 'beast' of old, establishing the semi-mythical tone of the narrative to come as Art bears witness to Old Hector and his friends deploying their esoteric knowledge like druids of the still to produce the 'crystal liquid'.³³⁴ This is combined with long descriptions of the distillation process and equipment, emphasising the traditional skill and knowledge required to distill the whisky and know when it is ready. Initial stages of the process possess a distinctively sexual, Bacchanalian quality – the liquor is personified as female as Red Dougal builds up the fire: ' "Humour her," chuckled Red Dougal, switching the froth flat. "The great thing is to humour her first." His face was blown red and sweating, and charged with hearty mirth and a heavy brown moustache'.³³⁵ ' "Isn't she the lovely one? And when she's kissed you once or twice in the mouth and put her long white arms around you, it's dead to the world you'll be then, my boy." '³³⁶ The tone changes from the profane to the sacred as Red Dougal and Donul solemnly remove their bonnets in reverence as Old Hector samples the first drop:

"It's young," he explained. "It has still about it the innocence of creation." From the tumbler he swallowed a small drop and nodded. "Yes. Youth itself, as yet unspoiled. The fragrance is the fragrance of the yellow barley under the sun and of wild flowers in sheltered hollows. It has not yet begun to become old, Donul. With the days it grows rank a little, going through all the green humours as man himself does. Only in advanced age does it get back the original innocence, with something added besides."³³⁷

³³⁴ Neil M. Gunn, *Young Art and Old Hector*, p.186

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.184

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.185

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.188

Not only does this extract reflect the notion that the youthful ‘innocence’ of Art and the maturity of Hector are two sides of the same coin – two characters that embody a singular, unified notion of nationhood, we can also see an echo of ‘the field of barley all ripened by the sun’³³⁸ seen in the primordial ‘creation story’ in *Whisky and Scotland*. Whisky and the act of distillation, born out of folk knowledge and memory, is an expression of Gunn’s primordial nationalism, the nationalist paradigm Gunn also articulates in his use of the *Carmina Gadelica* and folklore that stretches back to Rousseau’s appeal to ‘flee urban corruption and return to ‘nature’ to recover a lost innocence’.³³⁹

As we saw in chapter two, it is through the physical act of whisky distillation that Hector and his friends can regain the lost spiritual connection with a nobler, primordial age and the youth of the nation. In *Butcher’s Broom*, the ‘primordial innocence’³⁴⁰ of the Riasgan glen acts as a counterpoint to the evils of modern capitalism threatening the old way of life in the glen. The teenaged girl Matili in *The Silver Darlings* (1941) is described as being ‘very old, archaic, a dark one out of the old race’. When she sings her voice ‘had in it the innocent note of the child, and surrounding it the primordial innocence of the mother’.³⁴¹ Anthony D. Smith highlights the significance of primordialism to the nationalist debate:

What is so important about the primordialist contribution, is that we, as individuals and members of collectives, *feel and believe* in the primordality of our *ethnies* and nations – their naturalness, longevity and power – and that if we ignore these beliefs and feelings, we evade one of the central problems of explanation in the field of ethnicity and nationalism.³⁴²

Significantly, Gunn states that his ‘only excuse for having been concerned so long with the primordial Celtic background’ is his perception that Celts prioritised ‘things of the spirit’ and represent a national unity between Highlands and Lowlands – the two Scotlands where ‘there are Lowlanders to this day who dislike and deride the Highlanders, feel different from them and jeer at them’, resulting in the ‘disintegration of a nation’ and preventing Scotland from contributing fruitfully to the international arena.³⁴³

³³⁸ Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland*, p.3

³³⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p.55

³⁴⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher’s Broom*, p.320

³⁴¹ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Darlings*, pp. 542-543

³⁴² Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, p.57

³⁴³ Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland*, p.105

Foreshadowing William McIlvanney's proclamation that Scottishness is a 'mongrel tradition',³⁴⁴ Gunn acknowledges Scottishness as a multiplicity of ethnies and does 'not much mind if it is Celtic or not', preferring to focus on the common traditions of the people – 'their drink, their habits, their arts, their dreams, their fun, their bestial lapses and heroic moments'³⁴⁵ that stretch back into antiquity, that have contributed to the construction of the nation. This is followed by the wholesale rejection of what Gunn perceives as a false and deceptive Scottish identity that has no relation to the common people and was constructed more recently by a selfish ruling class:

For the rest, an attitude of unconcern is conceivable towards any disillusioned Scot who may desire to take the Anglo-Norman clan chiefs, the Anglo-Scottish nobility, the Bonnie Prince Charlies, and all of the 'romance' that goes with them, and drop the whole tinsel-glittering or blood-glittering box of toys in the Thames.³⁴⁶

As we have seen with his use of folklore and the *Carmina Gadelica*, for Gunn the Scotland of antiquity expresses a far more 'authentic' and 'real' vision of the nation – one that is spiritually pure and uncorrupted by modern 'tinsel-glittering' interpretations of Scottish identity. It could be argued that Gunn's preference for ethnonationalism as opposed to the modern or 'progressive' 'civic' model is in closer contact with popular memory and collective imagination as Smith argues.

The multi-faceted nationalism, tempered by left wing politics, which Gunn and his contemporaries enjoyed, has now been blighted, however, by the spectre of Nazism and the horrors of the Second World War. It has become almost impossible for some to view nationalism as Gunn did, without its terrible historical legacy. Novelist and critic James Roberson highlighted this stigma surrounding nationalist feeling during the 2014 Scottish independence referendum:

Let us not waste time speculating on how Neil Gunn would have voted. He would have voted Yes. He was all his life a committed Scottish Nationalist. He defended nationalism against the idea that it was intrinsically bad, that it was anti-internationalist and the fundamental source of evils such as Nazism. He would have been irritated, in the present debate, by the endless criticisms of 'narrow' Scottish nationalism and bemused by the unquestioning acceptance of British nationalism, which to many of those same critics is either completely invisible or, at times for example of Olympic achievement, marvelously

³⁴⁴ Neal Asherson, *Stone Voices*, p.75

³⁴⁵ Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland*, p.105

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.106

wholesome and entirely benevolent. In his 1935 book *Whisky and Scotland* Gunn noted that ‘any effort on the part of any section – such as Ireland or Wales or Scotland – of the Celtic fringe to form itself into a nation is not merely opposed but bitterly resented as if it were something in the nature of a betrayal of human progress.’³⁴⁷

Robertson effectively highlights the residual anxieties that still revolve around nationalism and Scottish nationalism in particular, as a potentially malignant force. National identity and markers of ethnic belonging have fallen out of favour in liberal Western culture and are seen as being anti-internationalist and catalysts of fascism. However, in his essay ‘Nationalism and Internationalism’ (1931) Gunn asserts that only a nation secure in its sense of self can be truly international and that ‘the more varied and multiple your nationalism, the richer and profounder your internationalism. Conversely, where the nation would disappear and the world became a single body governed by the same machinery of laws and ideas, the common stock of culture would tend to become uniform and static.’³⁴⁸

The multiple nationalisms – romantic, perennial, primordial and spiritual – seen in Neil Gunn’s fiction and non-fiction writing are articulated through a living landscape, or a poetic and historical ‘ethnoscape’ imbued with collective identity of the community. The geographical separateness of the Riasgan glen in *Butcher’s Broom* emphasises the autonomous nature of the Riasgan society and the individualism of its people. Here we see the community as a microcosm of the nation, a harmonious, egalitarian society that has existed for centuries. The perennial ethnoscape of the Riasgan glen reinforces the length of time the inhabitants have culturally, historically and spiritually been a part of that landscape, emphasising the trauma of their eventual removal and exile. Deployment of Biblical myth-motifs seen in nationalist discourse, predominantly from the book of Exodus is, according to Neal Ascherson, a particularly Highland way of articulating ‘grief, loss and redemption’. This also strongly reflects the Covenanter image of Scotland as a ‘new Israel’ in their attempts to impart upon the nation a more potent spiritual identity and international

³⁴⁷ James Robertson, ‘A Highland Life: Remembering Neil Gunn’, Neil Gunn Lecture, given by James Robertson at Eden Court Theatre, Inverness, on Thursday 11th September 2014. *Scottish Review of Books*, September 15, 2014, 292, <<https://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org/2014/09/a-highland-life-remembering-neil-gunn>> [accessed 15:28, 28/5/21]

³⁴⁸ Neil M. Gunn, ‘Nationalism and Internationalism’, *Scots Magazine*, 15, June, 1931, pp. 185-8; repr, in *Landscape and Light*, ed. by Alistair McCleery, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), p.177

presence. Gunn utilises the Exodean myth-motifs to reinforce the idea of the Highlanders as an oppressed *ethnie* in search of their own 'promised land', that will in turn deliver a wholeness of the self. In *Whisky and Scotland* and *Young Art and Old Hector*, whisky and the distillation process acts as a conduit to ancient, primordial roots. For Gunn, the primordial past offers a more authentic connection to a construct of the Scottish nation that is based on the rites, beliefs and practices of the people as opposed to the inauthentic 'tartan shortbread tin' version of Scotland. In this way, the ideological complexity of Gunn's writing confounds the reductivist view of critics, such as Christopher Whyte, of nationalism as a two sided coin: either progressive or reactionary, and that Gunn scholars should cease their 'eulogising' and realise that he belongs firmly in the latter category. This simplistic attitude is as futile as saying that nationalism is either 'civic' or 'ethnic' when, in fact, it is a complex blend of the two. Indeed, James Robertson argues that 'Gunn came out of a place. He was rooted, and acknowledged the values of that place and its people, but that rootedness did not narrow his outlook.'³⁴⁹ Gunn's writing therefore, enables us to gain greater understanding of place and the complex layers of meaning for the individual, involving identity and belonging, which his landscapes are imbued with.

It is, however, as Whyte asserts, critically valuable to acknowledge and evaluate Gunn's flaws in a balanced manner. Indeed, as we go on to examine Gunn's treatment of gender in chapters four and five, the less progressive aspects of his nationalism emerge. In Gunn's male world of action the individual freedom and autonomy he celebrates does not seem to apply to his female characters.

³⁴⁹ James Robertson, 'A Highland Life: Remembering Neil Gunn'

4.The Masculine Renaissance

'Nationalism typically has sprung from masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hopes.'³⁵⁰

Cynthia Enloe

In his essay 'Fishy Masculinities' (1995) Christopher Whyte identifies the treatment of gender in the fiction of Neil M. Gunn as being '*the issue*', a highly problematic stylistic and ideological feature of his writing that has, thus far, been wholly ignored by the 'uniformly eulogistic' body of Gunn criticism.³⁵¹ In an examination of the hunting instinct in Gunn's portrayals of masculinity and the awkward eroticism of his novels, Whyte highlights flaws that recur throughout Gunn's writing and profoundly affect his overall achievement as a novelist. Whyte views himself as a lone voice speaking out against a wall of critical silence on the flaws in Gunn's portrayal of gender, however, he was certainly not the first. Ten years before Whyte voiced his objections to Gunn's gender polarities, Carol Anderson highlighted the reductive representations of Gunn's romanticised, symbolic female characters and the way in which his 'Romantic conception of archetypal femininity limit his

³⁵⁰ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) p.44

³⁵¹ Christopher Whyte, 'Fishy Masculinities', *Gendering the Nation*, ed. by Christopher Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) pp. 54,49

characters to a serious degree.³⁵² Similarly, in her in-depth critical study of Neil Gunn's fiction Margery McCulloch repeatedly criticises the reductive and two-dimensional portrayals of women throughout Gunn's body of work.³⁵³ In her discussion of Janet in *The Serpent*, McCulloch argues that 'Gunn's view of women was essentially an archetypal one, conditioned by the separation of the roles of men and women in his Highland culture.' When Gunn attempts to portray 'emancipated young women characters in contemporary society' McCulloch continues, 'he consistently fails.'³⁵⁴ Indeed, for more gender-aware modern readers, Gunn's portrayal of women in particular is problematic and a real obstacle for the literary audience of today in accessing his fiction. Many of Gunn's female characters are, as Anderson and McCulloch highlight, archetypal, defined by the male gaze and lack an inner life of their own. The conspicuous absence of educated, intellectual women in Gunn's fiction is surprising, considering the lively intellectual correspondences he enjoyed with fellow writers Naomi Mitchison, Nan Shepherd and Annie S. Swan. A possible reason for these lacunae is ideological, as most of Gunn's fiction expresses his beliefs concerning the Highland way of life and spiritual renewal in the Highland landscape as an expression of national revival, and any wholesale dismissal of Gunn's treatment of gender risks ignoring the nationalist ideology that underpins it. Gunn's 'masculine renaissance', portrayed through male characters in novels such as *Highland River*, *Morning Tide*, *The Silver Darlings* and *Second Sight* conform to the masculinised tropes of nationalist discourse seen in the later writing of Anthony D. Smith and Benedict Anderson. We must ascertain to what extent Gunn's male characters are active embodiments of his 'national imaginings' in Gunn's vision of primordial nationhood. Gunn's women are predominantly representations of the landscape itself and, just as men are associated with sublime spaces such as the sea in Gunn's fiction, women embody the land. In order to assess the symbolic role of women in Gunn's fiction, we must first examine how masculinity is constructed in his novels and the way in which Gunn's treatment of male archetypes expresses his vision of national revival and recovery after periods of historical humiliation. In *Morning Tide* and *The Silver Darlings*, the fisherman archetype embodies the 'masculinised memory' of a pre-Clearance primal masculinity as

³⁵² Carol Anderson, 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Fiction: Character and Symbol,' p.265

³⁵³ Further examples of Margery McCulloch commenting on gender and Gunn's portrayals of women in *The Novels of Neil M. Gunn: A Critical Study*, pp.46, 54, 89, 143, 145-146, 147.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 140 - 141

an expression of national revival. The seascape is a proving ground for the construction of Scottish masculine identity that leads to greater individual autonomy and self-determination through which Gunn articulates his vision of national self-determination. In *The Silver Darlings*, the renewal and rebirth of the nation springs from masculine toil and endeavours, healing the wounds of historical defeat and 'masculinised humiliation'. Driven from the inner feminine landscape of the glens, the Highlanders build a new life on the coast where the seascape becomes a proving ground for the rediscovery of the native masculine self. From *Highland River* and *Morning Tide* to *The Silver Darlings*, the 'masculinised memory' of pre-Clearances primal masculinity is embodied by the fisherman archetype in his 'native splendor' who conveys the 'masculinised hopes' of a nation seeking autonomy and self-determination.

As Anthony D. Smith contends, this is a reflection of the part ethnic myths play in forming national identity and meaning. These generational and cultural linkages are predominantly fraternal and that national myth-making is based on male heroes – a gendered feature of this discourse Smith neglects to comment on. The male-centric position of nationalist scholarship itself is highlighted as both Smith and Benedict Anderson, in his examination of the cultural significance of cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers in creating national narratives, fail to recognise and highlight the gendered nature of this discourse. In *The Silver Darlings*, which Christopher Whyte regards as 'a rearguard action in defence of a threatened gender identity',³⁵⁵ the sea is portrayed as perilous new frontier: a new Highlands with its own towering and changeable landscape in which primal masculinity can be reclaimed. Fraternal bonds of clanship are rediscovered by the ship's crew who operate through an unspoken collective male consciousness. The seascape is imagined as a transformative space through which the emasculating legacy of historical humiliation can be left behind on the land as the men seek out new horizons. Crucially, Gunn's figurations of rejuvenated masculinity in *The Silver Darlings* resonates with his portrayals of idyllic, primordial boyhood in *Young Art and Old Hector*, *Morning Tide* and *Highland River*. As we saw in chapter two, this transcendent state of boyhood is combined with folklore in order to access and revive the 'youth' of the nation.

In contrast, *Second Sight* portrays primal Highland masculinity in a state of decline and crisis as the land in which the novel is set has been appropriated for the construction

³⁵⁵ Christopher Whyte, 'Fishy Masculinities', *Gendering the Nation*, p.57

of English masculinity through the sport of deer-stalking. *Second Sight* explores the way in which traditional forms of masculine Highland occupations have now been replaced by, in Gunn's view, 'sporting landlordism and tourism' which signifies 'the end of the old Highland life and polity as we have known it'.³⁵⁶ Given over to shooting estates, the ancient male stomping grounds of the glens is now a space of emasculation and defeat as native men must serve their English masters as gillies, existing in a gender hinterland. In *Second Sight*, the Highland landscape is a focal point for the struggle between native collective rights and private ownership, and between a working landscape in which native masculinity could be restored, as opposed to a landscape reserved for virility tourism, through which English masculinity can be reaffirmed. The symbolic slaying of the stag King Brude by the Englishman Geoffrey is, as Maureen M. Martin argues, a 'means for middle and upper-class Englishmen to reenact both their nation's victory over Scotland and its absorption of Scotland's supposed essential masculinity'.³⁵⁷ Examination of Gunn's use of nineteenth-century representations of the primal Highland male, in contrast to English masculinity, will highlight the way in which Gunn conveys his anxieties concerning the decline of the Highland way of life, and the subjugation of the native Scot, through his treatment of gender in the novel.

Gunn's portrayal of gender, and masculinity in particular, should be considered within the context of the reactionary approach towards gender discourse driven by the male modernist writers of the 1920s. In a reaction to what they perceived as the cultural decline brought about by the 'degenerative' discourse of feminism, combined with the crisis of masculinity in the post-war period, writers such as Anthony M. Ludovici, Wyndham Lewis³⁵⁸ and D.H. Lawrence,³⁵⁹ embraced the idea of a masculine renaissance. In *Lysistrata, or Woman's Future and Future Woman*, Ludovici asserts that the sole root of

³⁵⁶ Neil M. Gunn, 'One Fisher Went Sailing...: The Plight of the West Coast Herring Ports', *Scots Magazine*, 27, No. 6, September, 1937, pp.414 – 18; repr. in *Landscape to Light* (Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing Ltd., 2009) pp. 27-29

³⁵⁷ Maureen M. Martin, *The Mighty Scot: Nation, Gender and the Nineteenth Century Mystique of Scottish Masculinity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009) p.40

³⁵⁸ Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1926) pp. 215-216, 223, 282, *Blasting and Bombadeering* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1937) pp. 252, 255

³⁵⁹ In *The Rainbow* (1915) Lawrence returns the New Woman character Ursula to the restrictions of the domestic sphere. In *Kangaroo* (1923) *Aaron's Rod* (1922) and *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) Lawrence promotes the denigration of the feminine and the rejuvenation of traditional masculinity.

the degeneracy and decline in the modern condition is the ascendancy of women at the expense of men, and views feminism as an attempt to masculinise women and usurp male dominance.³⁶⁰ In *The History of British Woman's Writing: 1880 – 1920*, Holly Laird discusses the male view of women as 'objects of concern' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

Women reappeared repeatedly as beckoning and threatening figures, across the discourses, from the arts through the popular press to the sciences, producing a now equally closely studied 'crisis in masculinity'.³⁶¹

New Woman fiction also challenged and disrupted traditional gender roles. A complex figure, the New Woman was an embodiment of the social anxieties surrounding the gender perceptions of the time. Seen in novels such as E.M. Forster's *Howard's End*, Elizabeth Robin's *The Convert* and Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, the New Woman challenged traditional masculinity by being too intelligent, too androgynous, and failed to conform to societal expectations of traditional femininity, provoking a reactionary response from those who wished to preserve the gender status quo. Despite being an anti-modernist, Ludovici's call for a 'regeneration of man' and a reawakening of the 'manly man' who has 'already been reared once before in these islands' and asserts his 'will-power, leadership, mastery over the mysteries of life'³⁶², was answered by D.H. Lawrence throughout the 1920s in much of his fiction and non-fiction. As Lyn Pykett states:

Like many other writers in the 1920s (including D. H. Lawrence), Ludovici and Lewis reversed the renovationist discourse of the feminists, and advocated the redefined and regenerated manly man, or a return to male/masculine values (although they defined these in in rather different ways) as the one thing needful to resolve the crisis of the present, to return women to womanliness and a restricted feminine sphere, to halt the creeping feminisation of culture, and to reverse the degenerationist trend.³⁶³

³⁶⁰ A.M. Ludovici, *Lysistrata, or Woman's Future and Future Woman* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1925) pp. 76-77

³⁶¹ Holly Laird, Introduction, *The History of British Woman's Writing: 1880 – 1920* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) p.2

³⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 108, 106.

³⁶³ Lyn Pykett, *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995) p.53

In Gunn's fiction and essays, it is the wild Highland landscape that becomes the proving ground for the rediscovery of the masculine self, the 'redefined and regenerated manly man', whilst his female characters are confined to the 'restricted feminine sphere' of the domestic environment.

This rediscovery of masculinity through wild landscape is a reflection of a wider cultural trend that had been gathering pace in Western society since the mid to late nineteenth century. In his examination of Seneca Ray Stoddard's photography and guidebooks to the Adirondacks in North America first published in 1874,³⁶⁴ Frank Goodyear highlights Stoddard's promotion of the wilderness as a space exclusively reserved for the rediscovery of the masculine self, rooted in an ancestral past that provided an antidote to the emasculating conditions of modern life:

Stoddard's notion of the Adirondacks as a distinctly masculine space was predicated on a select set of perceptions regarding its rugged terrain and its supposed "primitive" nature. Here those men who worked in white-collar occupations were presented with the opportunity to assert their own physical strength and virility. Here they could connect their own professional work with the achievements of those heroic figures from America's past who had explored and settled the nation.³⁶⁵

Although Stoddard's guidebook was written decades before Gunn embarked on his writing career, the notion of primal masculinity rediscovered through the landscape is evident in F.R. Hart and J.B. Pick's description of Gunn's holidays with his friend Maurice:

The holidays with Maurice were out of time, and the truly memorable for Neil became akin to the 'legendary'. Man the hunter and fisher had been like this before history began. 'This sort of companionship won't disappear in a hurry,' he said later, and he was offering an urgent defence against a modern suspicion of male companionship. His sense of his own manhood was shaped by a culture that idolised 'manliness'. In Maurice's company he found the reassurance of a masculine way of life that was carefree and natural, and throughout his life he cherished the warm reminiscence of times spent sleeping in the heather, telling stories round a campfire.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ Seneca Ray Stoddard, *The Adirondacks Illustrated* (Albany: Weed, Parsons, 1874)

³⁶⁵ Frank H. Goodyear, III, 'A Wilderness for Men: the Adirondacks in the Photographs of Ray Stoddard', in *Gender and Landscape: Renegotiating the Moral Landscape*, ed. by Josephine Carubia, Lorraine Dowler and Bonj Szczygiel (Oxon: Routledge, 2005) p.160

³⁶⁶ F.R. Hart, J.B. Pick, *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life*, (London: John Murray Publishers, 1981) p.48

This primal masculinity is also deepened and reinforced by the ancestral connection made through the landscape:

Sitting round the bright flame, with night softly prowling through the old ruins; black water and distant moors and our old Scots history. And far back beyond recorded history, men sat thus round the glowing logs that the prowling brute feared, casting a look now and then over their shoulders.³⁶⁷

Gunn's primal, ancestral masculinity, expressed through 'manly' activities such as hunting, is also evident in his celebrated novel *Highland River*, in which the young Kenn engages in some illegal salmon poaching in the river. As with 'Fishing Lochs of Day and Night', the act of salmon poaching brings Kenn in contact with a collective, ancestral sense of manhood that stretches far back in time:

Out of that noiseless world in the grey of the morning, all his ancestors came at him. They tapped his breast until the bird inside it fluttered madly; they drew a hand along his hair until the scalp crinkled; they made the blood within him tingle to a dance that had him leaping from boulder to boulder before he rightly knew to what desperate venture he was committed...

Not only did his hunting ancestors of the Caledonian Forest come at him, but his grown-up brothers and his brothers' friends, with their wild forays and epic stories, a constant running the gauntlet against enemy forces, for the glory of fun and laughter and daring – and the silver gift of the salmon. A thousand influences had his young body taut as a bow, when at last, bending over a boulder of the old red sandstone, he again saw the salmon.³⁶⁸

The return of the 'manly man', as a reaction to the crisis of masculinity brought about by the social upheaval of the Clearances and exacerbated by the First World War, is particularly evident in *Highland River* (1937), in which main character Kenn, after suffering an injury in the war, finds spiritual solace as he returns to find the source of the river from his childhood memories. Lying wounded and helpless in hospital, the Highland landscape of his childhood becomes a proving ground for the rediscovery of the masculine self.

Additionally, the gender division in the small fishing community in which Kenn spends his childhood is typical of Gunn's portrayal of binary oppositions of gender in Highland communities, not only in *Highland River* in which 'the difference between the men and

³⁶⁷ Neil M. Gunn, 'Fishing Lochs of Day and Night', *S.M.T. Magazine*, 30, No.3, September, 1942, pp. 13 – 15

³⁶⁸ Neil M. Gunn, *Highland River*, (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd., 1996) p.2

women was marked,³⁶⁹ but also in *Butcher's Broom*, with 'the man in his sphere and the women in hers'³⁷⁰ and *Morning Tide* (1931) where the character Grace observes 'the delicate opposition in the attitudes of her parents. It was elemental, like the wash of the sea – from which the mother recoiled, on which her father adventured'.³⁷¹ In this sense, Christopher Whyte's assertion that 'Gunn uses an imagined retroactive vision of Gaelic society to underpin a gender ideology based on division, polar oppositions, and the safeguarding of a masculinity he evidently felt to be endangered,'³⁷² is clearly justified, and it is in Gunn's portrayals of fishing communities that this is most apparent. In Gunn's fiction and essays the fishing industry and the wild sea that the fishermen grapple with is an exclusively male sphere in which the beleaguered Highland Scot can rediscover masculine dignity lost in the Highland Clearances. Having experienced the emasculating conditions of the Clearances, in which men were stripped of their living and role of provider, the lost male identity can be rejuvenated by the sea. Kenn imagines that 'back behind the muttering sea are a woman and children and, going and coming, the man himself'.³⁷³ The 'large strong splendid' fishermen that the young Kenn admires and feels a great sense of kinship with, represent 'a world of action, of doing' with 'the younger of them easy-going and merry' and 'the older men with the beards full of friendly dignity, with power in their hands and looks and in their easy commands'.³⁷⁴ It is this traditional masculine role, that 'gave to the men he had known a dignity and breadth'. This is in contrast to the emasculating modern, industrial conditions experienced by the clerks and businessmen that Kenn encounters later in his adult life, who are:

[...] all black-coated business, all industrial routine, everything that ties a man down to safe automatic work, takes from his dignity, his decision by will (not by intellect), drains him of some element of native splendor that is as real to Kenn as his memory of the colour in the seaman's cheeks.³⁷⁵

Removed from the masculine proving ground of wild landscape and languishing in the 'safe automatic' office environment, man becomes a shadow of himself. In contrast,

³⁶⁹ Neil M. Gunn, *Highland River*, p.45

³⁷⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom*, p.54

³⁷¹ Neil M. Gunn, *Morning Tide* (Edinburgh: Porpoise Press, 1931; repr. London: Souvenir Press, 2005) p.55.

³⁷² Christopher Whyte, *Gendering the Nation*, 'Fishy Masculinities', p.57.

³⁷³ Neil M. Gunn, *Highland River*, p.47

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.43

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.45

the spark of 'native splendor' that the fishermen possess expresses Gunn's masculine ideal of the hearty Scot thriving and making a living from his natural, wild environment. Indeed, Gunn's fisherman – an 'ageless' figure in whose eyes 'the waves seem to roll and wash'³⁷⁶ – is the male equivalent of Dark Mairi in *Butcher's Broom*, an archetypal character who embodies the landscape and, with it, Gunn's vision of perennial nationhood. This fusion of gender and nationalist discourse is elevated to transcendental heights in one of the most celebrated passages in *Morning Tide*, where the fishermen struggle to bring in their boats during a storm. Gunn's second novel, *Morning Tide* (1931) follows the childhood experiences of Hugh as he grows up in a small fishing community struggling to survive as the fishing industry falls into decline. As the members of the community wait with growing terror for the boats to come in, Hugh watches his father effortlessly sail his boat safely into the harbour:

"He's managed it!" said Kirsty breathlessly to Hugh.
Managed it! Managed it!! He turned from the woman, his soul a flame. "Oh, Father!" sang the flame to generations of Norsemen and Gael.
He saw the Viking mutter huskily, "God that's uncanny!" his blue eyes the colour of fluting green sea-water.
O ecstasy of the morning! The whole crowd swayed for the harbor. Hugh ran, tears were streaming down his face. Rid Jock, who was in front, turned and saw, and as he ran sideways his mouth opened to cry something. But looking on that face, drawn instantly white and implacable, he thought better of it, and the mouth weakly dribbled out ambiguous sound.
But he would yet pay for merely having seen. There was nothing more certain than that! Nothing under the red sky! Nothing!
O red ecstasy of the dawn!³⁷⁷

Here, the 'native splendor' of the fisherman is fully celebrated in this moment of masculine triumph as the despair of Hugh and the villagers is transfigured into the 'red ecstasy of the dawn' with Hugh's 'soul a flame.' The focus on male accomplishment and skill is emphasised by the sense of difference and separation between the genders evident throughout this passage in the novel. Not only are the women on the shore physically separated from their men at sea, but also in their emotional response. The women are stricken with terror and cry out, whilst the men remain silent and stoic, and Hugh's father demonstrates a commanding mastery of his environment. Afterwards, Hugh is determined to reassert his own masculinity and get his revenge when another boy – Rid

³⁷⁶ Neil M. Gunn, *Highland River*, p.47

³⁷⁷ Neil M. Gunn, *Morning Tide*, p.101

Jock – sees him succumb to his emotions and exhibit a ‘female’ response with tears. When Hugh’s ‘mouth weakly dribbled out ambiguous sound’, it is as if he goes from masculine ‘firmness’ and potency to ‘flaccid’ irresolution. In the moment of his father’s triumph however, Hugh ‘turned from the woman’ Kirsty. In Hugh’s eyes, Kirsty has clearly understated the enormity of her father’s achievement, a profound act that connects Hugh through his father to primordial male ancestors, the ‘generations of Norsemen and Gael’ that tamed the wild seas. Significantly, as with the stoic fisherman Kenn admires in *Highland River*, we see the archetypal ‘ageless’ fisherman character in the Viking with ‘eyes the colour of fluting green sea-water’ watching Hugh’s father with admiration.

Ancestral connection and native pride articulated through exclusively masculine experience are key features of nationalist discourse, but strangely neglected by most critics. In *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Anthony D. Smith highlights the significance of ethnic myths in forming national identity and meaning, and discusses the ‘generational linkages’ formed, not only by biology and bloodline, but also ‘spiritual kinship’, both of which are expressed by Hugh:

Against such biological modes of tracing descent, we find another important set of generational linkages: those that rest on a cultural affinity and ideological ‘fit’ with the presumed ancestors. What counts here are not blood ties, real or alleged, but a spiritual kinship, proclaimed in ideals that are allegedly derived from some ancient exemplars in remote areas. The aim is to recreate the heroic spirit (and the heroes) that animated ‘our ancestors’ in some past golden age; and descent is traced, not through family pedigrees, but through the persistence of certain kinds of ‘virtue’ or other distinctive cultural qualities, be it of language, customs, religion, institutions, or more general personal attributes.³⁷⁸

Significantly, Smith neglects to comment on the fact that these generational and cultural linkages are predominantly fraternal and that national myth-making is based on male heroes. In this sense, the nation is presented as a wholly masculine construct whilst women are marginalised and have little or no role in the building of the nation. In the case of Scottish nationalism, therefore, women are a marginalised group within a marginalised Celtic nation. Smith also fails to interrogate the highly gendered qualities of his own discourse, stating that ‘nationalism is a vision of the future which (claims to) restore man to his ‘essences,’ his basic pattern of living and being, which was once his undisputed

³⁷⁸ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.58

birthright'.³⁷⁹ Like Smith, Benedict Anderson also neglects to consider the importance of gender in nationalist discourse. In an early chapter of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson examines the cultural significance of cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers in creating national narratives. He states that 'no more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exists than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers', and that these monuments are 'saturated with national imaginings'.³⁸⁰ Again, the modern memories and myths of the nation are formed by masculine images and masculine experience which, in this case, is heightened and made more powerful through the act of feminine mourning. The editors of *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer and Patricia Yaeger challenge Anderson's conclusions concerning the exclusion of women from 'national imaginings' and asks 'How is it that the world has come to see itself divided along the seemingly natural lines of national affiliation and sexual attachment?'³⁸¹ The masculine dominance of national narratives is hardly a new development however, and can be seen in the discourse of early European Imperial ambitions. Indeed, Anne McClintock highlights the way in which the 'feminising of land' in male Empire building 'betrays acute paranoia and a profound, if not pathological, sense of male anxiety and boundary loss.'³⁸² Cynthia Enloe goes further in establishing a link between nation building and male experience and asserts that 'nationalism typically has sprung from masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hopes.'³⁸³

The significance of male loss and recovery in shaping the nation is clearly evident in Gunn's fiction. *The Silver Darlings* (1941), Gunn's most successful novel, develops the fisherman archetype, who embodies national revival through masculine endeavours, established in *Morning Tide*. Set at the dawn of the herring fishing industry in Caithness on the East coast of Scotland, the novel charts the struggles of a small fishing community as it tries to recover from the trauma of the Highland Clearances. Unlike the land, the sea is free from the tyranny of landlords and offers the promise of a new economic revival.

³⁷⁹ Anthony Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (New York: Torchbook Library Edition, 1971), p.22

³⁸⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006) p.9

³⁸¹ Andrew Parker et al., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992) p.2

³⁸² Anne McClintock, 'The Lay of the Land: Genealogies of Imperialism', *Imperial Leather: Race Gender and Sexuality in the Imperial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995) p.24

³⁸³ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) p.44

Out of all of Gunn's novels, *The Silver Darlings* most clearly conveys the 'masculinised hopes,' of the post-Clearance Highlands, in which the 'masculinised memories' of the injuries of the past will be set to rights by enterprising young men venturing out to sea. Gunn viewed the Clearances as a time of inverted gender roles as women became the guardians of the community, whilst the men became disempowered and emasculated by the onslaught of unstoppable outside forces robbing them of their essential manhood. Indeed, Christopher Whyte justifiably calls *The Silver Darlings* 'a rearguard action in defence of a threatened gender identity,'³⁸⁴ withered by the Clearances and seeking revival. Emigration caused by the Clearances brought on a new age of masculine Highland endeavor 'building up new generations in a new land'. Blazing a very male trail are Scottish 'colonisers, explorers, fighters, traders, from Hudson to India, from the plain of Waterloo to the blue mountains of the Cape'.³⁸⁵ The global exploits of the Highland male signifies a new masculine revival in the post-Clearance age of empowerment and enterprise. Women are notably absent from this narrative of exploration and nation building. In *The Silver Darlings*, the people have been driven out of the feminine, inner communities of the hills and glens of *Butcher's Broom*, a landscape of poverty and humiliation, marred by ruined crofts, and now look toward the outer, masculine seascape for their fortunes and future prosperity:

The land, the quiet land, which forever endures, threaded by women and children, in the bright patterns of their lives. Remote from the sea, from the turbulence of incoming waves, from the quick movement, the excitement, from the mind of a man like Special, with his flow of silver herring that changed into a flow of silver crowns. There's money in it, men, money, money.³⁸⁶

For the people of the Moray Firth 'it was the beginning of the herring fisheries, of a busy, fabulous time among the common people of that weathered northern land,'³⁸⁷ and the people are no longer victims of capitalism as they had been in the glens, but enthusiastic participants in and beneficiaries of masculine economic endeavor, through which a new community narrative of self-determination will spring forth.

³⁸⁴ Christopher Whyte, 'Fishy Masculinities', *Gendering the Nation*, p.57

³⁸⁵ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Darlings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941, repr. 1989) p.108

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.101

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.14

The idea of the sea as an exclusively male sphere, established in *Morning Tide*, is further developed in *The Silver Darlings* at the start of the novel through the contrast between Catrine's fear and hatred of the sea and her husband Tormad's quiet confidence. Here, the woman is portrayed as a barrier to male achievement and rejuvenation as Catrine tries to prevent Tormad from going fishing. However, Tormad turns his back on Catrine's terror, unable to resist the pull of the sea. As he makes his way down to the shore, it is evident that Tormad is a symbol of renewed hope and pride for the people, and the man once again takes his rightful place as figurehead of the community. The 'whole colony'³⁸⁸ gather to see him off and 'his young brother Norman, who was fifteen, strode by his side with pride' and 'had secretly made up his mind that next year he was going to sea himself'.³⁸⁹ As the young men venture out onto the water, Gunn emphasises the elemental power of the sea and the masculine physicality, courage and skill required to tame it. The sea itself is masculinised and is described as 'slow, heedless and terrible, its power restrained, like the power in some great invisible bull'.³⁹⁰ This perilous new proving ground provides an opportunity for young men to demonstrate a new found manliness and regain lost pride. This is evident when aspiring fisherman Roddie triumphantly walks into the local bar after sailing his new boat home, his masculine physicality and changeable nature reflecting that of the sea:

The men in the bar looked at one another, but did not say much. Their eyes were bright. The new boat had made a tremendous impression. Roddie and three of the crew had sailed her into the bay. No man grudged Roddie his high distinction, because he was not only a daring and persevering seaman but also had the quiet independent mind that would curry favour with no one. There were those who said he did not know his own strength, and in his twenty-first year, at the November market, with three glasses of whisky inside him, he had thrashed three men and might have killed one of them had he not been powerfully restrained. But normally he was mild-manned and pleasant and very obliging.³⁹¹

Later in the novel, Finn reflects upon the 'terrible magnificence' of Roddie's masculine physicality after his involvement in a bar fight: 'the flattening of the lower lip and flesh over the jaw, the rocking power of the body, the roar,' as if he has imbued the power of the sea.

³⁸⁸ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Darlings*, p.15

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.17

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.78-79

Roddie is also described as having eyes 'like living drops of the ocean itself'.³⁹² The hypermasculine Roddie, is a totemic figure from Gunn's vision of a pre-Clearances golden age of manliness, is described as being 'beyond the littleness of man today, looming like the far solitary figure of another place and time',³⁹³ and is a reprise of the ageless fisherman, seen in *Morning Tide*, who 'sang the flame to generations of Norsemen and Gael'. 'Roddie had become more than a fisherman to Hendry; he had almost become a talisman'.³⁹⁴ Herring fishing therefore, has provided the catalyst for the rebirth of this legendary figure and the seascape is the arena in which masculine identity is defined.

Finn, a younger member of Roddie's crew is the inheritor of this pre-Clearances masculine legacy as his sense of manhood is formed by his experiences on the sea as he comes of age. As Roddie, Finn and the crew navigate their way through a wild terrain of towering waves, Gunn portrays this perilous frontier as the new Highlands with its own landscape in which primal masculinity can be reclaimed. The seascape has 'whole hills of water,' 'with great valleys between' and 'a great lump of ocean, a long-backed ridge overtopping all, a piled-up mountain' with animalistic 'little waters' 'running, herding together'³⁹⁵ and is a tough, physical landscape that must be conquered through courage, strength and skill.

Through facing these challenges with the other men, Finn experiences a growing awareness of his masculine self and the fraternal bonds that bind the crew together. As he lies 'back in partial exhaustion, with the spirit grown thin and clear, Finn felt, coming out of the companionship of these seas, a faint fine exaltation'.³⁹⁶ Just as the lost landscape of the Highlands is represented by the landscape of the sea, so the fraternal bonds of clanship have been rediscovered in the form of the ship's crew who seem to move, think and make decisions as one 'as if some silent common intelligence had been at work'. On seeing this mysterious collective male consciousness at work, Finn is 'oddly moved by an access of quiet manhood,'³⁹⁷ a description which Whyte provocatively suggests has erotic,

³⁹² Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Darlings*, p.296

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.368

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.120

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.297-298

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.299

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.345

and possibly homoerotic, undertones.³⁹⁸ Whyte has however, unwittingly illustrated the 'modern suspicion of male companionship'³⁹⁹ that Gunn sought to challenge.

The sea is a transformative space for Finn and Gunn emphasises its distance, both physically and spiritually from the 'foreign' shore – a space specifically associated with the waiting women and Finn's mother in particular⁴⁰⁰ – and emphasises the sense of gender difference in the novel. Finn sees the 'profound, wordless' bonds felt by this 'fellowship of men,' as being beyond female understanding and prefers to be left 'with his own kind, where his heart grew warm'.⁴⁰¹ This reflects the gender difference emphasised in *Morning Tide*, when Hugh 'turned from the woman' (Kirsty) as his fisherman father skillfully sails his boat safely into the harbour. For Finn, individual masculinity is reinforced and strengthened through the communal bonds of the fishermen, and it is in the company of 'his own kind' – that Finn most feels a sense of belonging and emotional fulfillment. This new source of belonging also signifies Finn's maturity and coming of age as he has broken free from the emotional bonds of the mother and home, which is usually the emotional nexus for young male characters in Gunn's novels.

Whilst the fishermen are at sea the physical distance from the land also releases the men from the emasculating legacy of historical humiliation that the land bore witness to, and that 'sailing along the coast of one's native land was a new way of reading history, a detached way, so that instead of being embroiled in it, one looked on'.⁴⁰² A man, his boat and the sea therefore, represent a freedom from the memory of the Clearances and a newly realised autonomy with which he can shape his own destiny. This is evident towards the end of the novel when Finn contemplates the purchase of his own boat – 'this culminating act in the growth towards responsible manhood' and sees 'the green seas running, and knew that freedom was there, and adventure, and the song of man's strength'.⁴⁰³ For the first time, Finn is within grasp of possessing a level of economic and spiritual self-determination that was beyond the reach of his recent Highland ancestors:

He would take these possessions. They would be his. His own croft, his own house, his own boat. He felt them surround him and give him power. At that

³⁹⁸ Christopher Whyte, 'Fishy Masculinities', *Gendering the Nation*, p.53

³⁹⁹ F.R. Hart, J.B. Pick, *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life*, p.48

⁴⁰⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Darlings*, p.299

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.279

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p.278

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.563

moment, a cool shiver cleansing his skin and his mind, Finn entered with clear consciousness upon the state of manhood'.⁴⁰⁴

For Gunn, the success of the Scottish fishing industry was a prime focus for national revival. In his essay, 'The Wonder Story of the Moray Firth' (1968) Gunn compares the success of the herring fishing on the East coast to a Scottish gold rush in which, for the first time, a people beaten and bowed could, through their own efforts, set out and seek their fortunes.⁴⁰⁵ In contrast, Gunn mourns the demise of the modern Scottish fishing fleet, on both the East and West coasts. In 'One Fisher Went Sailing: The Plight of the West Coast Herring Ports' Gunn is dismayed at the sight 'of half-ruinous fishing villages' and a decline in the Highland masculine ideal of the independent fisherman with 'young men refusing to go to sea' except in the emasculating subservient positions of 'deck hands on summer yachts or trading vessels'. Young men no longer 'know how to handle boats' and 'do not know where the fishing banks are'. Traditional forms of masculine Highland occupations have now been replaced by 'sporting landlordism and tourism' which signifies 'the end of the old Highland life and polity as we have known it'. Gunn argues for changes to be made to fishing laws by the British Government in order to revive this fading remnant of native masculinity.⁴⁰⁶

The emasculating effect of the demise of traditional Highland occupations and the 'sporting landlordism' on Highland men is examined in Gunn's novel *Second Sight* (1940). The native autonomy and self-determination enjoyed by Finn is not evident in this later novel, which contains none of the optimism of *The Silver Darlings*. Set on a Highland shooting estate, *Second Sight* is primarily a thriller but is also set against the backdrop of the historical trauma of the Clearances and has gothic and Imperial gothic elements woven into the fabric of the story. The main focus of the novel concerns an English shooting party hunting for a legendary stag. An air of gothic mystery is provided by the clairvoyant gillie Alick, who possesses the second sight and predicts the death of an unknown member of the shooting party.

Throughout the novel, Gunn builds a palpable tension between the primal masculinity of the gillies and the feminised Englishmen who seek conquer the Highland landscape

⁴⁰⁴ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Darlings*, p.502

⁴⁰⁵ Neil M. Gunn, 'The Wonder Story of the Moray Firth', *Anarchy*, 8, No. 4, April, 1968, pp. 122 – 125; repr. in *Landscape to Light*, p. 30

⁴⁰⁶ Neil M. Gunn, 'One Fisher Went Sailing: The Plight of the West Coast Herring Ports', *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 27, No. 6, September 1937, pp. 414-18; repr. in *Landscape to Light* (Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing Ltd., 2009) pp. 27-29

and, in doing so, possess that primal masculinity for themselves. The 'native spirit' of the Scot is articulated through a masculine symbol of national identity, the stag King Brude, which also embodies the 'masculinised memory' and 'masculinised humiliation' of the native gillies, Angus, Donald and Alick, who must serve their rich English masters. It is through the stalking and eventual killing of King Brude, named after the ancient Pictish king Brudai, that the internal conflicts and anxieties concerning the native pride of Angus and Alick, who embody primal, pre-Clearances masculinity, are expressed. The Englishman Geoffrey's victory over King Brude signifies English dominance over the landscape itself and is also articulated through references to British colonialism throughout the novel. As 'the spirit of [Alick's] forest', King Brude represents the very essence of the primal Highland landscape, and is the one remaining symbol of native independence, defiance and pride in a vast stretch of land that once provided a livelihood for the native people, but is now exclusively reserved for the recreation of the English elite. Throughout the novel the shooting estate, defined as a space removed from the ownership of the Highlanders, is now a landscape of silence, empty spaces and post-Clearance ruins. The old crofting township of Clachvor is derelict and the remaining village of Corbeg owes its continuing existence to the estate, which is the main source of employment in the area. Dependent upon their rich English clients for work, Angus and Alick nurse a growing resentment towards Geoffrey, an English gentleman who shows a colonial contempt for the knowledge of the native gillies and is determined to pursue and kill King Brude. Gunn subtly creates the impression of the Highlands as a colonial space and the shooting estate as a Highland Shimla, appropriated for the repose and entertainment of an English elite. Colonial discourse, references to the British Raj and other colonial enterprises are woven throughout the narrative: Sir John Marway, one of the guests at the lodge, was a civil engineer for the British in India and had a 'sympathetic understanding of the native mind'.⁴⁰⁷ His wife, Lady Marway, remembers their time in India with fondness combined with a vivid terror of the wildness of the primal forest and 'the servants prowling about outside.'⁴⁰⁸ When Geoffrey is found after getting lost and the story is being retold back at the lodge, the wild Highland landscape is compared to darkest Africa: ' "Beats Stanley in Africa Hollow," said George. "If only he had the wit to remark out

⁴⁰⁷ Neil M. Gunn, *Second Sight* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940; repr. Glasgow: Richard Drew Publishing Ltd. 1986) p.10

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.178

of the darkness, 'Mr. Smith, I presume?' the thing would have been complete."⁴⁰⁹ Also, at one stage during a deer stalk, Helen, an English woman, remarks that Harry, an English gentleman is a "a pukka sahib"⁴¹⁰ a slang term of Punjabi origin used in India and throughout the British Empire as an expression of respect for British colonial authorities. The native gillies are, at times, regarded as little more than coolies and their humiliating subservience to their English masters is a reflection of the defeated landscape around them, described as 'beauty with a bowed head'.⁴¹¹

Native humiliation at the hands of English masters is also expressed in a moral sense in *Second Sight* and resonates with Modernist anxieties concerning the emasculation of men by modern, emancipated 'New Women'. Here Gunn turns this anxiety towards the emasculation of native men by the emancipated women of London society. The character Helen recalls stories she has heard 'of a neighbouring estate where the daughter of a shooting tenant, in her early twenties, selected each year a different gillie for her amorous needs. Quite openly. Everyone knew about it.' These women have 'little regard for the men except as puppets in the game.' This is a symptom of 'the beginning of demoralisation, perhaps quite localised, perhaps spreading, but in the air. The possibility of that rotten section of London society finding here for a short while a keener air, a more complete irresponsibility'.⁴¹²

Harry, a more enlightened and thoughtful member of the shooting party, recognises the frustrated, primal masculinity of the gillie Alick, who possess the second sight, with 'his thick, solid, opaque body', who seems trapped between his native pride and subservience to his English masters:

He was built to be a chucker-out in a pub. That was the job for him. His eye would know at once the dangerous drunk, and his body would find relief in action. Here he wasn't getting a real outlet. That was what was wrong with him. He was moving in a lost world...George and Joyce, the babes in the wood, wandering hand in hand, terrified through the Celtic mist – from ruin to ruin. Ruin to ruin! Lord, what a picture of historic significance!⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁹ Neil M. Gunn, *Second Sight*, p.185

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.202

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.58

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, p.159

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p.116

Here, the rugged physicality of Alick mirrors the primal masculinity of Roddie in *The Silver Darlings*. Just as Roddie 'did not know his own strength'⁴¹⁴ and 'had thrashed three men'⁴¹⁵ Alick is 'built to be a chucker-out in a pub' and 'his body would find relief in action.' However, unlike Roddie, whose native masculine identity can be fully expressed in his role as fisherman, there is something 'wrong' with Alick as he 'wasn't getting a real outlet.' Alick remains trapped in the gender hinterland of 'the lost world' of the post Clearance Highlands, forced by economic realities to serve his English masters.

Throughout the novel Gunn contrasts the noble stoicism and primal masculinity of the native gillies with the hapless, arrogant and feminised English guests of the shooting lodge who struggle to negotiate the Highland landscape without the help of their native servants. When two members of the shooting party, George and Joyce, get lost in the mist George's inability to lead them both through the wild landscape to safety emphasises both the inherent 'foreignness' of the visitors and George's unmanly sense of direction. Significantly, the 'Celtic mist' through which the infantilised 'babes in the wood' run represents the popular, romanticised perception of George and Joyce's Highland playground, whilst the ruins expose the harsh historical reality of the Clearances to which the hapless visitors seem oblivious. The feminised George contrasts with Alick and his 'swift assured stride'⁴¹⁶ and 'all-round sureness in the open.'⁴¹⁷ Imbued with primal masculinity and 'native spirit' the gillies are one with the landscape and move in harmony with the terrain. Gunn also draws on the image of wild, and sometimes dangerous, Highland primal masculinity created in the nineteenth century. Whilst gazing at the gillie Donald as he surveys the landscape for deer, Helen, an English woman, is 'struck by something terrifying in the aspect of man', 'some dark force of the spirit, that could grip male flesh'.⁴¹⁸ This contrast between the primal masculinity of the Highland Scot with the Englishman is highlighted by Maureen M. Martin in her examination of the mystique of Scottish masculinity that developed in the nineteenth century. In her analysis of Scott's *Redgauntlet* in *The Mighty Scot* (2009) Martin discusses the feminisation of the lowlander Scot Darsie, who identifies as English, in relation to the hyper-masculine Highlander Redgauntlet:

⁴¹⁴ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Darlings*, p.78

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.79

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.102

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.103

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.199

Redgauntlet excels at spearing salmon on horseback, while Darsie's bungling efforts to angle earn him the derision of a local urchin; Redgauntlet seems master of both the landscape and its inhabitants, while Darsie gets himself lost, is taken advantage of by the locals, and blunders into perilous waterways.⁴¹⁹

Despite Gunn's rejection of Scott's novels, his portrayal of the feminised Englishman Geoffrey in *Second Sight* and the way in which it emphasises the primal masculinity of the gillies is strikingly similar to Scott's portrayal of Darsie and Redgauntlet. At one stage, Geoffrey, a particularly dislikable member of the group, is separated from the rest of the shooting party and gets lost in the rugged terrain of the estate, injuring himself in the process. He is unable to whistle to alert others to his plight, in contrast to the effortless trilling of the gillies, and demonstrates an unmanly lack of common sense in his attempts to move across the wild landscape at night, which Alick declares is 'madness for anyone to move in a darkness like that, except perhaps ourselves, who know that the lay-out of our forest is very simple'.⁴²⁰ After a successful hunt Harry, a more enlightened member of the party, observes that 'Donald and the pony and the beast on the pony's back assumed legendary shape, like what's-his-name, thought Harry, going down into Egypt! With Alick, the tribe's Seer, bringing up the rear!' Next to this mythic masculinity Harry 'felt himself a stranger, a visitor from another, more light-hearted clime. Light was the word, indeed; a light-weight'.⁴²¹

This contrast between the genteel Englishman and the primal masculinity of the Highlander is also emphasised by Gunn when Harry describes attempts by Scottish landlords to enrich the native stock of red deer with English park deer. This ended in failure due to the incompatible natures of the two strains of animal. Whilst the genteel English park deer have been raised in shaded woodland and hand fed by man, the Highland deer 'has a noble history direct from Paleolithic times,' with its hardy independence born of the barren moors and rough terrain of the wild.⁴²² The elusive stag, King Brude, is the epitome of this primal nobility in the novel, and Gunn draws directly on

⁴¹⁹ Maureen M. Martin, *The Mighty Scot: Nation, Gender and the Nineteenth-Century Mystique of Scottish Masculinity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009) p.26

⁴²⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *Second Sight*, p.167

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, p.106

⁴²² *Ibid.*, p.172

the nineteenth-century English perception of the Highlands that was heavily influenced by Landseer's 'Monarch of the Glen':

He became aware of the pony, of young Donald and Alick talking together, of the stag's neck bent back so that the tilted head looked across at him tragically. Through his lashes, he recognised the Landseer composition, toned down, less dramatic, but with some intimate quality added, as if with the beginnings of understanding he was in truth penetrating into the strange and wild.⁴²³

King Brude is the pinnacle of natural perfection and symbol of primal masculinity, his elegant antlers the 'pure creation of the mountains and hill winds'.⁴²⁴ Harry then 'applied all this to the native human stock – to a fellow like Alick who is, spiritually, the king of his kind', noting that, with his primal masculinity Alick can be 'brutal and dangerous' yet possesses a 'spirit, a delicacy, a vision, that is the counterpart of the wind-blown antlers on King Brude'. The primal masculinity of Alick and King Brude 'in the wild native state'⁴²⁵ is, however, dying out and 'in the end – King Brude will go into the mist forever, and Alick will be driven forth'.⁴²⁶ Here Gunn is making a direct link between the demise of Scottish primal masculinity and the slow death of the native Highland spirit.

In this way, Gunn's portrayal of primal Highland masculinity in *Second Sight* draws on representations of Scottish masculinity that emerged in the literature and art of the nineteenth century. The Highlands in particular were portrayed as a primeval wilderness that imbued the natives with savage, yet noble masculinity which contrasted with and went on to inform English notions of manliness. The English desire to tap into and possess Scottish primal masculinity was most clearly expressed in the increased popularity of deerstalking in the nineteenth century, encouraged by Prince Albert's interest in the sport and the publication of William Scrope's *The Art of Deer Stalking* in 1838.⁴²⁷ Furthermore, Martin argues that participating in deerstalking was an expression of English dominance over Scotland and 'allowed an Englishman to insert himself into the narrative of English victory over Scotland and claim as part of himself the primal masculinity that the Highland stag, and Scotland, seemed to embody'.⁴²⁸ Gunn clearly recognises the cultural and

⁴²³ Neil M. Gunn, *Second Sight*, p.104

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.173.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.173

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.174

⁴²⁷ William Scrope, *The Art of Deer Stalking* (London: John Murray, 1838)

⁴²⁸ Maureen M. Martin, *The Mighty Scot*, p.39.

historical significance of the deer stalk as a means by which the Englishman can both possess and conquer Highland masculinity. Geoffrey's determination to pursue and kill King Brude is an expression of his resentment of and desire for Alick's primal masculinity – the embodiment of primal nationhood. In the early stages of the novel, unbeknownst to Geoffrey, Alick sees him trying to take a dangerous shot at King Brude, which would have seriously injured the animal. Later on, Geoffrey's humiliation at getting lost and being rescued by Alick compounds his already deep-seated resentment towards the gillie. When Alick discovers Geoffrey wounded and confused in the mist he commits the transgression of calling his English master by his name, to which Geoffrey lets out a feminine 'squawk', hits Alick in the neck and, foreshadowing Geoffrey's triumph over King Brude later in the novel, Alick 'sagged like a shot stag'.⁴²⁹

Geoffrey's single-minded determination to kill the elusive Brude becomes more acute from this point and reaches its climax in the closing chapters of the novel. He sets out to 'get King Brude or bust', and if the stag is on Benuain – the mountain where Alick saw Geoffrey attempt to take the dangerous shot – then 'King Brude must die'.⁴³⁰ Geoffrey is driven by a fierce and jealous desire to possess King Brude and is bitter when Angus tells him of an English lord who, in the previous year had tried to claim him, reflecting the increasingly bourgeois nature of deer stalking in the nineteenth century where the aristocrat was replaced by the disciplined Victorian gentleman. Geoffrey attempts to shut out the 'appalling vision' of the lord 'shooting the stag that was his, Geoffrey Smith's, and no one else's on earth. His eyes gleamed vindictively, his mouth closed'.⁴³¹ During the hunt for King Brude, the feminised, physical frailty of Geoffrey is once again contrasted with the masculine physicality of Angus. Whilst Geoffrey labours with his injuries from the previous fall in the mist and struggles with the wild landscape, in contrast, Angus 'went on and waited for him, went on and waited, tireless, brown, tough as heather'.⁴³² The deerstalk becomes a battle between Geoffrey's desire to possess and dominate native masculinity and Angus' need to protect native pride and spirit, embodied by the stag. When Angus finally catches sight of King Brude, he is torn between telling his English master and a 'deep potent instinct' that 'the spirit of his forest, its incarnation, its reality, its

⁴²⁹ Neil M. Gunn, *Second Sight*, p.168

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.251

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p.252

⁴³² *Ibid.*, p.255

legend, its living truth,⁴³³ should not be slain by Geoffrey, a soulless, hollow man with his 'grey face, the intolerance of the drawn lips, the material force of the rounded head, the fleshy dominance'.⁴³⁴ Succumbing to the demands of duty, Angus reluctantly tells Geoffrey of the sighting and, as Brude takes off for the forest, his master takes a bad shot, fatally wounding the beast. Exhausted, Geoffrey leaves Angus to pursue the stag and make the final kill, although he, of course, will take the credit. The death of King Brude, like the vanquishing of native pride, is slow and bloody. As Angus closes in, the masculine physicality of King Brude is emphasised by Gunn as the stag turns to make a final demonstration of native defiance:

Noble he looked, too; the great head up; the eyes against the westering light, full of fire. A superb beast, the power streaming forward from the lean flanks. Angus saw him gathering his power into neck and shoulders, as if to meet death in a last wild charge, the head sinking and rising with a slow terrible beauty.⁴³⁵

Gunn is clearly drawing on the well-established narrative of the last desperate charge of the powerful Highlander, glorious in defeat and, although Geoffrey made the first shot, it is Angus' heavy task to finish the kill. After a bloody and violent struggle, in which Angus is almost 'caught in the wild heave of the antlers' and 'a sobbing violence came into his throat', Angus stabs the stag in the neck and 'the blood gushed forth'.⁴³⁶ In his anguish, Angus 'muttered into the earth "Ah Christ!" and wept,' both in grief for the magnificent stag and his guilt for having a hand in his demise. The semi-divine status of King Brude and the significance of his death are emphasised when, back at the lodge, Angus exclaims 'I feel like a bloody Judas'. Having allowed his native pride and spiritual duty to King Brude be overruled by his economic subservience to his English master, Angus is riven by the shame of his betrayal and Geoffrey's triumph, and finds little comfort in Alick's reassurance that he 'merely did his job'.⁴³⁷

Geoffrey's victory over King Brude is a re-enactment of English victory over Scotland and possession of native masculinity, as Martin states:

⁴³³ Neil M. Gunn, *Second Sight*, p.258-259

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.259

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.267

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.268

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.285

The figure of the magnificently antlered stag, about to meet his death, embodied all that seemed fierce, tragic and heroically virile about Scotland, so that deerstalking offered a uniquely direct means for middle and upper-class Englishmen to reenact both their nation's victory over Scotland and its absorption of Scotland's supposed essential masculinity.⁴³⁸

The way in which Geoffrey has dominated and absorbed this native 'essential masculinity' is evident in the aftermath of the killing. Bringing the trophy back to the lodge completes Geoffrey's re-masculinisation, as others must bear witness and acknowledge his victory. Even in death, the mythical masculinity of the stag, now in Geoffrey's possession, exhibits a 'growing power'. Harry is gripped by 'some primordial sensation of fear' as he gazes in wonder at the vanquished animal, conveying Martin's assertion that 'like the figure of the hunted stag' 'the Scottish literary motif of the undead corpse evokes a nightmarish sense of Scottish identity suspended forever at the moment of its death'.⁴³⁹ Having de-throned King Brude and symbolically by extension Alick, 'the spiritual king of his kind',⁴⁴⁰ Geoffrey 'was enthroned on his epic'⁴⁴¹ and suddenly enjoys a new-found sense of empowerment and confidence. As soon as he has imbibed some of the stag's 'essential masculinity,' Geoffrey no longer exhibits the feminine traits that have defined his character throughout the novel. George, having disliked him in the past, now 'admired Geoffrey's assurance. Strong character', and 'wouldn't mind if he himself could act with that definiteness'.⁴⁴² After Geoffrey's 'triumphant day', he is possessed with a strengthened sense of his masculine self and muses that there:

'[...] was nothing that a man could not do, once he gave his mind to it. A certain type of man, with a trained mind. A superstition had been growing that no one would ever shoot King Brude. He had exploded that superstition – as he would explode others!'⁴⁴³

Here there is a definite nod to Imperial Gothicism on the part of Gunn, Geoffrey's masculine identity, while enhanced by the act of the stalk and the kill, is articulated through English mental discipline and rationalism, in opposition to the superstitions and spirituality of the natives, embodied by the mythical status of King Brude and the power of

⁴³⁸ Maureen M. Martin, *The Mighty Scot*, p.40

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.11

⁴⁴⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *Second Sight*, p.174

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.281

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, p.283

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.282

second sight, which Alick possesses. This reflects the way in which cold, hard rationalism is set in opposition to native spiritual wisdom a theme found in other Gunn novels such as *The Serpent* and *The Silver Bough*. In destroying the myth of King Brude, Geoffrey sees himself as a civilising force, bringing reason to a primitive, backward people – one of the many references to colonialism in the novel. By ‘exploding’ the myths of the native people, Geoffrey goes one step further in ‘re-enacting [England’s] victory over Scotland’.

Ironically, Geoffrey’s death at the end of the novel is brought about by the very superstition he sought to destroy when, terrified by the prediction of Geoffrey’s death by Alick and, mistaking Geoffrey for a ghost, George knocks him over and Geoffrey dies by hitting his head on the sideboard. Thus Alick indirectly ensures just retribution for the killing of King Brude and a means by which his own masculinity can be reclaimed from the Englishman. The rather mundane and unmanly nature of Geoffrey’s demise again highlights Victorian perceptions of the contrast between the feminised Englishman and the primal masculinity of the Highland Scot identified by Maureen Martin. Unlike King Brude, who suffers a ‘fierce, tragic and heroically virile’ death on the field of battle, Geoffrey meets his end in a chance domestic accident in the home – a distinctly feminine space in Gunn’s fiction. Gunn therefore ultimately denies Geoffrey the ‘absorption of Scotland’s supposed essential masculinity’ that Martin identifies and provides a sense of poetic justice for the reader.

Gunn’s concerns about modern-day Highland land use in the form of ‘sporting landlordism’ and the demise of Highland primal masculinity are clearly articulated in *Second Sight*. As long as vast areas of the Highland landscape are denied to the people, having been transformed into a proving ground for English masculinity, the native man will continue to exist in a gender hinterland. Not only has the native male been denied his cultural birthright to hunt in the landscape of his birth, the ritual of the deer-stalk is a perpetual re-enactment of historical injuries that is essential for the reinforcement of ‘troubled English masculinity’:

The stalker must appropriate Scottishness in a way that enhances, rather than undermines, his primary identification as an Englishman. For the operation to have meaning, he must also magnify the possibility of his own defeat and be assured of ultimate victory over the mighty stag. The climactic moment of slaughter, when the hunter can both intensely identify with and assert mastery over his prey – like the moment of defeat of the Jacobite rebellion – thus assumes profound ideological significance in the construction of an English masculine identity. And just as the Jacobite rebellion and its defeat must

continually be relived to bolster troubled English masculinity, so too must stag after stag be killed and memorialised.⁴⁴⁴

It is evident therefore, that Gunn's fiction constructs a highly gendered form of nationalist discourse. His treatment of masculinity in *Morning Tide*, *The Silver Darlings* and *Second Sight* reflects, not only, social anxieties regarding the ascendancy of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also the threatened Highland male who had been subjected to historical humiliations arising from the quelling of the Jacobite rebellion and the subsequent emasculation of the native Scot, driven from his ancient stomping grounds.

Gunn's fisherman archetype seen in *Morning Tide* and *The Silver Darlings* embodies a pre-Clearences golden age of masculinity through which the embattled Highlander can once again become a source of pride within the community and regain his economic independence. The seascape, an exclusively male sphere, is the proving ground for the construction of revitalised masculine identity. Pre-Culloden primal masculinity is embodied by Robbie, a totemic figure defined by a physicality that reflects the perilous nature of the sea. Young Finn comes of age and awakens to his own masculine identity on the sea through the physical nature of fishing and the fraternal bonds formed with his crew. The seascape also provides the space and distance – from both women and the injuries of history – for primal masculine identity to be fully realised. These factors culminate in Finn's masculine maturity at the end of the novel where he achieves economic autonomy and the power to shape his own future. In this sense, Finn is a microcosm of the nation itself and reflects Gunn's vision of national independence in which the revitalisation of the Scottish fishing fleet plays a vital role. Crucially, the figurations of rejuvenated masculinity in *The Silver Darlings* are a development of Gunn's portrayal of the idyllic state of boyhood, combined with the life-affirming qualities of folklore, as a means to access and relive the 'youth' of the nation. These two representations of young and mature masculinity are a central component of Gunn's nation building project.

In contrast to the hopeful optimism of *The Silver Darlings*, Gunn's treatment of masculinity in *Second Sight* deals with Gunn's concerns surrounding the impact of 'sporting landlordism' on the native male and the appropriation of vast areas of the landscape for the purposes of deer-stalking and the construction of English masculinity, to

⁴⁴⁴ Maureen M. Martin, *The Mighty Scot*, pp.40-41

the humiliation of the native men. The gillie Alick exists in the 'lost world' of the post-Clearance Highlands, a gender hinterland where native men have surrendered their autonomy and independence to their English landlords. Gunn's use of colonial discourse throughout the novel conveys the sense that, to the bourgeois Englishmen, the gillies represent the native 'other' who, nonetheless, embody a primal masculinity that the English gentlemen wish to simultaneously conquer and possess. Furthermore, the stag, King Brude is a symbol of Scottish pride and spirit and must, as Maureen Martin argues, be killed by the Englishmen in order for him to possess the primal masculinity of the Highlands and to reassert his dominance over the wild landscape and, by extension, Scotland.

Rather than presenting a reductive 'gender ideology based on division'⁴⁴⁵ Gunn's treatment of landscape in his novels leads to a greater understanding of the ways in which both the sea and the land articulate a complex array of gender discourses that express Scottish cultural identity and national imaginings defined by notions of masculinity. In this way, the highly gendered vision of nationalism that can be seen in Gunn's writing sheds light on the gendering of nationalism in a wider sense, and opens up wider discussions concerning the masculine narratives that dominate cultural nationalism. Christopher Whyte's assertion that Gunn's fiction supports 'the safeguarding of a masculinity he evidently felt to be endangered'⁴⁴⁶ has validity as 'endangered' masculinity is clearly evident in *Second Sight* whilst male revival is realised in *The Silver Darlings*. Gunn's portrayals of masculinity are, however, more complex and nuanced. Gunn does not present us with a 'gender ideology' that exists in itself, but figurations of gender that support his nationalist ideology.

As chapter five will reveal however, the problematic nature of Gunn's highly genderised national imaginings expose the more reactionary aspects of his nationalism that, unfortunately, do not contradict the point raised for discussion by Christopher Whyte in his introduction to *Gendering the Nation* that 'Nationalism is always bad for women'.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁵ Christopher Whyte, *Gendering the Nation*, 'Fishy Masculinities', p.57.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.57.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. viiii.

5.The Sacred Feminine

Feminist political theory has also observed the ways in which women's bodies are imbued with special significance as representations of community and cultural continuity. The adornment, ritualised movement, labour and sexual capacities of the female body signify the welfare of the larger body politic.⁴⁴⁸

Alexander Moffat's famous group portrait of the Scottish literary scene, 'Poet's Pub' (1980), is an eloquent visualisation of the masculine cultural hegemony at the core of the Scottish Renaissance movement. The portrait shows seven male Scottish poets, sitting around a table in a circle with their pints. On the margins of the circle, behind the men, are indistinguishable female figures that are distant and excluded from the important discussions taking place at the table. Indeed, despite the recent recognition of Naomi Mitchison and Nan Shepherd's contributions to the Scottish Renaissance, male writers still dominate studies of the movement and Mitchison and Shepherd have only recently been recognised for their contributions. A lesser-known group portrait called 'Authors in

⁴⁴⁸ Thembisa Waetjen, 'The Limits of Gender Rhetoric for Nationalism: A Case Study for Southern Africa,' *Theory and Society*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Feb., 2001) p.122

Session' (1950) by Stanley Cursiter, features James Bridie, Edwin Muir, Neil Gunn and Eric Linklater, again, sitting around a table. This time, women are completely absent from the composition. The general sense of female marginalisation in the Scottish Renaissance is not helped by comments such as Diarmid Gunn's, who described Neil Gunn's wife, Daisy, as symbolising 'the spirit of the house and the garden' and that 'she was a quiet woman, the perfect companion for a creative husband'.⁴⁴⁹ Kirsten Stirling argues that 'the nationalist impulse of the Scottish Literary Renaissance movement may well have contributed to the highly virile profile of its dramatis personae' and that Renaissance writers were reacting against the late-nineteenth century perception of the Celtic race and Celtic literature as 'essentially feminine', and prior to that the feminine domesticity of the Kailyard.⁴⁵⁰ The national myth making that the Renaissance writers were engaged in, therefore, conveys a male-centric view of the nation, whilst women, as in 'Poet's Pub' are often reduced to passive, secondary roles such as muse or symbol. As Kirsten Stirling states:

The various female figures representing Scotland during the early Scottish Renaissance depend very strongly on their reproductive potential, and on the metaphorical connection between the female body and the land. They provide stability for the nation that is being constructed and function as the guardians of the traditions of the ancient nation. But at the same time the job of constructing the nation is seen as predominantly male, and the virility of the Scottish race and the Scottish poet is emphasised.⁴⁵¹

Indeed, Gunn's portrayal of women conforms to what Deborah Elliston describes as 'the problematic figurations of women and womanhood within nationalist imaginaries, of the sightings of women as subjects and objects of nation-building projects'.⁴⁵² In her seminal work *Imperial Leather: Race Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995) Anne McClintock, who has written extensively on race, gender and sexuality, also asserts that in nationalism 'Women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency'.⁴⁵³ Gunn even viewed his fiction in

⁴⁴⁹ F.R. Hart, J.B. Pick, *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life*, p.4

⁴⁵⁰ Kirsten Stirling, *Bella Caledonia: Woman, Nation, Text* (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2008) p.39

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.38

⁴⁵² Deborah Elliston, 'A Passion for the Nation: Masculinity, Modernity and Nationalist Struggle', *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 31, No.4 (Nov., 2004) p.609

⁴⁵³ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995) p.354

gendered terms, stating that 'a man takes his short stories how and where he finds them' like a fleeting sexual encounter, 'in contradiction perhaps to the novel which might be conceived as taking a wife'.⁴⁵⁴ Gunn's treatment of gender is certainly regarded as problematic by critics such as Christopher Whyte and Margery McCulloch. Whyte incisively takes aim at Gunn's 'fantasy mothers' who are 'never the intellectual equals of their sons, always ready to provide food or attend a sick bed, never tiring of their offspring or demanding to be left alone for a few hours to read the paper or do an Open University course or just sit and look out of the window and think'.⁴⁵⁵ In her critical study of Gunn's fiction, McCulloch repeatedly criticises the reductive portrayals of his female characters, the marked gender polarity in Gunn's fiction and his 'consistent lack of success with contemporary young women'.⁴⁵⁶ However, the most detailed and critical exploration of Gunn's portrayal of women to date can be found in Carol Anderson's thesis 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Fiction: Character and Symbol' (1985). Anderson's insightful exploration of the fictional portrayals of female characters by Scottish male authors reveals the influence of Romanticism on symbolic femininity in Scottish fiction in which women 'have been fictionalised – indeed mythologised – in powerful, often damaging and limiting ways.'⁴⁵⁷ Anderson asserts that 'Gunn's use of romance conventions and his Romantic conception of archetypal femininity limit his representation of female characters to a serious degree.'⁴⁵⁸ In her examination of *The Serpent*, Anderson concludes that Gunn's two-dimensional portrayal of Janet, ironically one of Gunn's more complex female characters, 'remains essentially shadowy and unconvincing'⁴⁵⁹ and also states that 'Gunn's ideology with respect to women is often troubling.'⁴⁶⁰ Whilst Anderson does link the romantic portrayal of Gunn's women to national identity,⁴⁶¹ I intend to explore the figurations of woman as nation and woman as landscape in Gunn's fiction to a greater

⁴⁵⁴ Neil M. Gunn, *The White Hour*, (Glasgow: Richard Drew Publishing Ltd., 1990) p.6

⁴⁵⁵ Christopher Whyte, *Gendering the Nation*, p.9

⁴⁵⁶ Margery McCulloch, *The Novels of Neil M. Gunn: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987) p.145-146

⁴⁵⁷ Carol Anderson, 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Fiction: Character and Symbol' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1985) p.3

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.265

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.185

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.196

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.265

extent in order to understand the role of women as nationalist symbols in Gunn's nation building.

The 'troubling' treatment of gender in Gunn's novels can be defined by the schema of passive feminine, active masculine. The male characters think, philosophise, evolve, develop and have an exquisitely complex interior life, whilst the feminine characters are static and unchanging. They do not drive the action of the novels but exist in order to react to the male characters. Since Anderson's pioneering foray into Gunn's symbolic femininity more than thirty five years ago, a subsequent thorough and nuanced examination of Gunn's portrayal of women has been lacking in Gunn criticism, particularly in respect of the hitherto unacknowledged 'maiden', 'mother' and 'crone' pagan triumvirate, and the extent to which this reveals the organic, primordial nationalism that underpins his fiction. Whilst there is no direct evidence to suggest that Gunn intentionally set out to confine his female characters to these three distinctive archetypes, the recurrence of the maiden, mother and crone character types is prevalent enough for a distinctive pattern to emerge across Gunn's extensive body of work. Gunn's idealised Highland maidens – young, attractive women that Gunn deemed to be 'the living source of life',⁴⁶² – certainly conform to the Scottish Renaissance requirement for 'reproductive potential' that Stirling identifies, defined by their sexual availability and closeness to an abundant, life-giving landscape. This can be seen in various depictions of Gunn's maidens in *Morning Tide* and short stories such as 'Hill Fever' (1934) and 'The Moor' (1929) which support Tamar Mayer's assertion that in nationalist projects 'femininity is generally produced as a means of supporting the nation's construction, through symbolic, moral and biological reproduction; in turn, it is precisely because it is a masculine project that nation becomes feminised and figured in service to male needs'.⁴⁶³ As with much of Gunn's fiction, 'Hill Fever' portrays a gendered landscape that is surveyed and brought into existence through the male gaze. Gunn's sexualised portrayal of woman-as-landscape in 'The Moor' illustrates Gillian Rose's argument that the figuration of 'woman as nature' enables both to 'be burdened with men's meaning and invite interpretation by masculinist discourse'.⁴⁶⁴ The young woman, as the embodiment of an ancient and primordial landscape and in turn the nation

⁴⁶² Neil M. Gunn, letter to Geoffrey Faber, 29 November, 1946, *The Selected Letters of Neil Gunn* ed. by J.B. Pick, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987) p.92

⁴⁶³ Tamar Mayer, *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, ed. by Tamar Mayer (London: Routledge, 2000) p.16

⁴⁶⁴ Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993) p.94

itself, is the concubine of the male main character through which 'the virility of the Scottish race and the Scottish poet is emphasised'.⁴⁶⁵ The abundance of the larder, the produce of the landscape, associated with the mother is an evolution of the sexual fertility and abundance of the maiden and can clearly be seen throughout Gunn's fiction in *Highland River* (1937) and *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944). This domestic abundance also articulates the Scottish Renaissance desire to redefine 'home'. Confined to the domestic sphere, Gunn's 'sacred' mother figures are also highly idealised, depicted as 'the center of the circle' around which all life revolves and represent national continuity. The significance of the eternal primal mother as a fixed point in the landscape, functioning as emotional and spiritual focus to which male protagonists return for comfort and support, is clearly evident throughout Gunn's fiction. As a symbol of primal racial continuity, the mother and the domestic sphere she inhabits are a microcosm of the nation-family as a sanctuary of belonging to which the native Scot is spiritually rooted. Notably anonymous and unable to forge an identity outwith motherhood, Hugh's mother in *Morning Tide* and Kenn's mother in *Highland River* are elevated to sacred symbols of ethnic continuity and permanence, reflecting the way in which the mother is represented as 'the receptacle and transmitter of tradition and history'⁴⁶⁶ in nationalist discourse. The older woman or 'crone' in Gunn's fiction, such as Dark Mairi in *Butcher's Broom* and the old woman at the end of *Highland River*, as Stirling states: 'function as the guardians of the traditions of the ancient nation' and keepers of hidden, sacred knowledge in the community and guardian of communal spiritual heritage. Dark Mairi is not confined by the static domesticity of the mother and roams the landscape with which she has a symbiotic connection. Like Mary in *The Green Isle*, Mairi is a guardian of ancient wisdom, born of feminine affinity with the landscape. Having been cleared from their ancestral homelands, the people's rejection of Dark Mairi at the end of the novel represents a break with the ancient feminine landscape and culture of the glen, a displacement of identity that results in violence and alcoholism amongst the community. As illustrated in chapter four, this crisis is only resolved through the resurgence of masculinity and the birth of a new national narrative in *The Silver Darlings*. Although Kirsten Stirling states that Gunn 'never explicitly figures woman as nation'⁴⁶⁷ there is clear evidence to the contrary as symbolic femininity is a key component in his

⁴⁶⁵ Kirsten Stirling, *Bella Caledonia: Woman, Nation, Text* (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2008) p.38

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.21

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.53

nation building. In light of this, Gunn's belief that 'our salvation must come through women'⁴⁶⁸ seems mainly concerned with women as passive, ideological symbols, supporting both Elliston's identification of women as 'objects' of nation building and McClintock's assessment of women in nationalism as 'symbolic bearers of the nation.'

The 'problematic figurations' of 'the sightings of women as subjects and objects of nation-building projects' that Elliston identifies are particularly apparent in Gunn's reductive portrayal of his archetypal maidens – seen through the prism of romanticised feminine beauty – such as Hugh's sister Grace in *Morning Tide*, Art's sister Morag in *Young Art and Old Hector* and the young gypsy woman in 'The Moor'. On the cusp of womanhood and experiencing the first flush of blossoming sexuality, these young women are the most problematic of all of Gunn's female characters and the reductive manner in which they are portrayed underpins their role as 'subjects and objects' of Gunn's national imaginings. Lacking any inner life of their own, these clichéd, often two-dimensional women embody an idealised image of feminine beauty that reoccurs so often in Gunn's fiction that they almost amalgamate into a single 'stock' character that is brought to life solely through the voyeuristic male gaze, usually the main character.

The significance of the male gaze in interpreting the world of the novel is firmly established in the opening lines of *Morning Tide*, which focuses on the main character Hugh's perception of the seascape. The first line of the novel – 'the boy's eyes opened in wonder'⁴⁶⁹ – draws our attention to the masculine gaze and is followed by a sensual description of the shoreline seen through Hugh's eyes. This emphasis on the male gaze in Hugh's interaction with the landscape established at the start of the novel is then applied to his perception of his sister Grace. Here we can see Gunn's preoccupation with idealised female physicality in descriptions of his female characters, as Hugh surveys Grace like the shoreline at the beginning of the novel:

And in no time she was standing in the back-kitchen doorway, her face all lit by the candle she held before her. Her face was pale and dark-eyed and beautiful. And what lured in the beauty was its smooth grace. Nor did one think of the face as being pale. It had the warmth of sympathy that caught its gleam from hidden feelings. Yet it was faultless and poised.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁸ F.R. Hart, J.B. Pick, *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1985) p.210

⁴⁶⁹ Neil M. Gunn, *Morning Tide*, p.9

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.38.

Despite the allusion to ‘hidden feelings’ here, Gunn’s female characters rarely exhibit the depth of interiority that his male characters enjoy. As is often the case with Gunn’s young women, the reader is told more about her physical appearance than what she is actually thinking, a trait that has more in common with the Victorian ‘angel in the house’ archetype than Modernist interiority. With many of Gunn’s women, their scant inner lives are centred on feeling rather than thought, and on ‘feminine’ emotions such as sympathy in particular. Additionally, Gunn’s female characters are relatively static and confined to the domestic sphere, unlike the male characters, who are active and freely roam about the landscape. Here, Grace exists merely as a human landscape, a picturesque vista to be appreciated and possibly explored. In this way, the manner in which Gunn presents Grace to the reader conforms with the ideological norms summarised by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing*:

One might simplify this by saying: *men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.⁴⁷¹

Gunn’s male characters ‘act’ and his female characters, particularly the maidens, ‘appear’ as human landscapes. In this sense, Gunn’s maidens are presented as passive objects to be surveyed and explored, like the landscape, by his active male characters. Indeed, this is stated outright by Marjory in *Second Sight*, where she protests that ‘Men have that advantage: they *do* things don’t they?’⁴⁷² Despite the suggestion in Marjory’s objection that there may be something fundamentally wrong with this gender difference, Gunn makes no attempt to rectify the status quo by liberating his female characters from their role as passive bystanders in his male world of action.

This gender difference and the objectification of women in Gunn’s fiction are articulated through the landscape and the association of the natural with the feminine. In her analysis of cultural geography and the ways in which landscapes are perceived by the dominant male gaze, Gillian Rose has written extensively on power relations in visual culture, feminist geography and the intersection of place and individual identity. In her

⁴⁷¹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972) p.47

⁴⁷² Neil M. Gunn, *Second Sight*, (Glasgow: Richard Drew Publishing Ltd. 1986) p.133

critical writing, Rose also examines the 'masculinity of the gaze' and the feminisation of landscape in geographical discourse in a way that can also be applied to Gunn's fiction. In *Feminism and Geography* (1993) Rose identifies the growing association of women with nature in art, particularly landscape painting by the mid-nineteenth century in which 'Woman becomes Nature, and Nature Woman, and both can thus be burdened with men's meaning and invite interpretation by masculinist discourse'.⁴⁷³ The same preoccupation with idealised feminine physical beauty is evident in the descriptions of Art's sister Morag in *Young Art and Old Hector*: 'her pale face flushed in a moment like a wild rose', 'her voice came quiet and soft as a pigeon's' and 'her eyes were brighter than glass balls and her mouth redder than red berries'.⁴⁷⁴ Here, Morag's feminine attributes are articulated through natural images that strengthen the link between Gunn's idealised Highland landscape and his portrayal of idealised young women or 'maidens'.

Gunn's preference for idealised, symbolic femininity in the form of maidens is highlighted when contrasted with the portrayal of a newly married young woman in his short story 'Hill Fever'. This short story concerns a young couple on their honeymoon in the Highlands. Iain Og, the husband, experiences a deep, emotional connection with the landscape whilst his new wife, Edith, becomes petulant when she feels neglected by her new husband. Gunn's male main characters are rarely married, and relationships in his novels and short stories are often problematic and result in conflict. 'Hill Fever' not only brings one of Gunn's women into 'the real world' in its portrayal of a newly married couple, as opposed to the idealised construct of the Highland maiden, but it also suggests that the state of marriage instigates the negation of the male self and inhibits the male spiritual journey. As with much of Gunn's fiction, 'Hill Fever' portrays a gendered landscape that is surveyed and brought into existence through the male gaze. Emphasis is placed upon the perception of a feminine, sexualised landscape through the eyes of the male main character at the start of the story who makes an almost physical connection with the land through visual perception. Iain Og surveys the 'breasts of the hills – so near that they are at hand, wherever the eyes rest – and the fingers touch'.⁴⁷⁵ However, this sexualised landscape is also used to convey, not only a sense of life and fertility, but psychological

⁴⁷³ Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993) p.94

⁴⁷⁴ Neil M. Gunn, *Young Art and Old Hector* (Guernsey: Faber and Faber, 1993) pp.24, 36

⁴⁷⁵ Neil M. Gunn, 'Hill Fever', *The White Hour* (Glasgow: Richard Drew Publishing Ltd., 1990) p.33

disintegration and nihilism. The philosophical qualities of the story and Iain Og's meditations on the 'duality of life and death' are articulated through the sexualised, feminine body of the landscape. Contemplating the silence of the Highland landscape at night, Iain observes that 'at last all sound had died and was resumed again in the womb of negation'. This sense of psychological disintegration articulated through the feminised body of the landscape is developed further with overt sexual undertones:

Odd, because it stares, or sets the eyes staring – at the near hillside, for example, as it comes down, and slowly up under the fingers. The fingers pierce softly the black peaty earth with its oily ooze and, withdrawing, create their own gentle slimy suck of negation. The suck attracts; absorbs fascination, or horror, into mindlessness.⁴⁷⁶

Gunn's attempts to counterpoint this nihilism with an image of life and fertility in 'the roots of the grass and the heath under the brown skin of the slope are invisibly alive'⁴⁷⁷ fail to neutralise the overriding sense of negation of the male self through sexual contact with the female body, specifically the wife, that the reader is left with. The distant and fertile 'breast of the hill', full of sexual and maternal promise, out of which 'in green froth come the fairies',⁴⁷⁸ is separate and distinct from the 'black peaty earth' with its 'slimy suck of negation' that he has physical contact with, suggesting that the landscape may be representing two contrasting states of women-hood: the unobtainable fertile maiden and the infertile, close-to-hand wife. Gunn's awkward attempt to reconcile the two – 'bridging the gap between black negation under the fingers and that breast opposite' – through Iain Og's sense that 'it was all charged with a rare mirth',⁴⁷⁹ is not entirely convincing. The poetic Iain Og, full of sexual potency, could be seen as a representation of the virile male Scottish Renaissance writer, and probably Gunn himself, suggestively, 'never felt so full of the sap of life' and experiences 'a health shot through with sunlight'.⁴⁸⁰ This male potency is positioned in sharp contrast to the way in which 'he had seen his wife come ghost-like down to the water's edge', reinforcing the image of the wife, who remains nameless until the very end of the story, as the embodiment of death. A sense of distance and estrangement, resulting mainly from the behaviour of the wife, is then developed. Iain fails

⁴⁷⁶ Neil M. Gunn, 'Hill Fever', p.33

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., p.34

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., p.34

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., p.34

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., p.34

to answer his wife, Edith, when she calls out to him in 'detachment from her with warm assurance' and continues to absorb himself in his fishing. Edith too 'looked very cool, even more detached from his admiration'; she 'pushed his face away with her open hand' and Iain 'kissed its cold palm', developing the ghost image further. Edith also denies Iain sexually and is 'not in the mood' for his amorous intentions.⁴⁸¹ Gunn's difficulties with capturing realistic portrayals of women, and his preference for marked gender difference, becomes particularly evident as Edith begins to resent the amount of time Iain has been fishing and his need for introspective solitude. She works herself up into a hysteria over 'that feminine thing – being neglected' and had 'never in her life, been so feminine and irrational'.⁴⁸² This is contrasted with Iain's quietly strong demeanor as he calms the hysterical Edith down.

Just before daybreak, Iain, the poetic visionary, once again separates himself from his wife to seek solitude in the landscape and, as with old Tom in *The Serpent*, the lofty elevation of a hill provides the setting for a Rousseauvian reverie. Despite Iain being as 'sure of [Edith] as the sun's rising', the landscape and the ideological significance that it is imbued with conveys more spiritual meaning for Iain as the dawn approaches:

The grey was lightening; it was catching at last the inner glimmer. The coming of the sun from the abyss. The air sighed in a chill shiver. The first, the austere breath, of morning. This austerity was love's poise. His mind in its still rapture pierced all this and he saw what it was he had come to this place blindly to seek. Race, as it were, passed under his feet. Love, alone, eats itself to lust and grows rank.⁴⁸³

Spiritual release from the images of death and negation articulated through the body of Edith is expressed in the approach of the dawn and the 'coming of the sun from the abyss'. For Iain, emotional fulfillment is found, not in the companionship of his new wife and conjugal love, which becomes stagnant in settled domesticity and 'grows rank' as time passes, but in solitary communion with the landscape. He seeks instead the infinitely purer 'austere breath' of the morning, which is personified and 'sighed' as if it is a lover he has just woken up next to. The spiritual awakening Iain experiences here is a result of his solitude and separation from his wife. Edith, having done nothing but behave in a surly and ill-tempered manner for most of the trip, is completely removed from this experience.

⁴⁸¹ Neil M. Gunn, 'Hill Fever', p.35

⁴⁸² Ibid., pp.36, 37

⁴⁸³ Ibid., p.37

Instead, it is the eternal nature of 'race', embodied in the landscape beneath Iain's feet, which transcends the ephemeral qualities of human love that, in time, degenerates and decays into the fallen and lesser state of 'lust'.

Despite the affection he has for his wife, Iain's spiritual estrangement from Edith is exacerbated by the unwelcome arrival of an English couple, which Iain clearly detests. When the couple appear Iain attempts to hide from them, desperate to retain his quiet solitude. Against Iain's wishes, Edith gets their attention by waving her handkerchief behind Iain's back. They are discovered, and Iain must suffer the indignity of the Englishman, appropriately named 'Dick' calling him the derogatory moniker for Scotsmen, 'Jock'. This betrayal completes the physical and spiritual estrangement between Iain and Edith as 'Iain looked at Edith. She had waved her hankie to them, after his back was turned. Only a moment their eyes held, then Iain turned away'. Realising the consequences of her actions for their increasingly strained relationship, Edith 'went pale and sick-looking'⁴⁸⁴ – a reprise of the image of infertility, negation and death associated with Iain's wife.

In its portrayal of the figure of the wife, who is spiritually and sexually estranged from her husband, 'Hill Fever' is an eloquent portrait of the ways in which Gunn's portrayal of married women differs from his depictions of maidens. Unlike maidens, Gunn's symbols of abstract, idealised femininity who act as catalysts for the spiritual enlightenment of the male and embodiment of the nation, the figure of the wife is, in contrast, an oppositional force who often thwarts the spiritual journeys of the male characters. Another example of this can be found in *The Silver Darlings*, where Catrine tries to prevent her husband Tormad from going to sea – the source of masculine rejuvenation in the novel. Iain's rapturous realisation of the eternal nature of 'race' embodied by the silent landscape and the discovery of the eternal nation beneath his feet is compromised and contaminated by the English couple that appear on the scene due to Edith's actions. Iain's frantic response to their arrival, exclaiming 'We're trapped!'⁴⁸⁵, carries the suggestion of English invasion into the sacred bounded space that Iain imagines around him in the landscape. By inviting this 'invasion' Edith is identified as an oppositional force and has forever estranged herself from him. The figure of the wife, acting in opposition to the nation cannot therefore be part of Gunn's national narrative. Furthermore, sexual fertility and abundance are key aspects

⁴⁸⁴ Neil M. Gunn, 'Hill Fever', p.39

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., p.38

of Gunn's portrayal of the woman as landscape and woman as nation. The preoccupation with the infertile body of the wife as a representation of death and negation underpins the importance of female sexuality and fertility in Gunn's national imaginings.

This is seen very clearly in 'The Moor', a short story from *The White Hour*, the same collection that features 'Hill Fever'. In this short story Evan, a young man, explores a remote area of the Highlands and comes upon a ruined croft where a young woman and her aging mother struggle to survive. The two women symbolise the landscape and Scotland itself, with the old mother representing past historical injuries whilst the young woman embodies national renewal. Gunn reinforces the connection between idealised maidenhood, articulated through a feminised landscape that conveys the essentially feminine essence of primordial nationhood. In 'The Moor', as in *Morning Tide* and 'Hill Fever', the emphasis on masculine visual perception is established in the opening lines as the male main character Evan – identified solely by the gendered personal pronoun 'he' until mid-way through the story – views the features of the Highland landscape he is exploring for the first time. As in 'Hill Fever', the landscape of 'The Moor' is feminised and infused with notions of female fertility and sexuality that overshadows the male and holds its own kind of terrible power. A rocky outcrop 'had looked like a sea-anemone on a vast tidal ledge, but now, at hand, it rose out of the moor's breast like a monstrous nipple.'⁴⁸⁶ Foreshadowing his sexual attraction to the girl he is yet to meet, Evan 'with a shudder of longing', 'passed his tongue between his sticky lips'.⁴⁸⁷ The sexual undertones of the narrative continue with 'creaming in upon his mind stole the seductive thought of milk'.⁴⁸⁸ As with all of Gunn's maidens, we see a female character defined by the male gaze in the main character's description of the young woman, living in a cottage on the moor, who gives him a glass of milk, a symbolic act that is reprised at the end of *Highland River*. Hardly Gunn's finest hour, this adolescent male fantasy begins to stray into Mills and Boon territory, as the eroticism of the landscape is now transferred onto the female body through the voyeuristic male gaze:

Her eyes were gypsy dark. Perhaps she was twenty. Sunk in the darkness of her eyes were golden sun motes. His confusion stared speechless. A tingling

⁴⁸⁶ Neil M. Gunn, 'The Moor', *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 10 – 18; repr. in *The White Hour* (London: Faber and Faber, 1950, pp.33 – 39; repr. Glasgow: Richard Drew Publishing Ltd., 1990) p. 274

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.274

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.274

trepidation beset his skin. A tight drawn bodice just covered and repressed her breasts. Her beauty held the still, deep mesmerism of places at the back of beyond.⁴⁸⁹

There is a distinct preoccupation with the attractive physical attributes of this young woman that, apart from a brief mention of Edith in her nightdress, was not evident in descriptions of Iain's wife in 'Hill Fever'. In contrast, as in 'Hill Fever', with 'the breast of the hill' and 'out of it in green froth come the fairies'⁴⁹⁰ the female breast is a key symbol of fertility and sexual abundance. The 'golden sun motes' in the young woman's eyes reflect the use of sun imagery to denote spiritual rejuvenation in 'Hill Fever' and foreshadows the part this young woman will play in the spiritual awakening of the male main character in 'The Moor'. A fascinating aspect of this description is the way in which Gunn unwittingly employs the discourse of colonialism and Empire. The female body as a landscape of abundance and sexual promise becomes a territory to be 'explored, mapped, penetrated and known' in a manner that is strikingly similar to perceptions of Tahitian women in the paintings of Gauguin. Gillian Rose discusses Gauguin's portrayals of woman as landscape in her seminal work *Feminism and Geography*:

[...] perhaps the most well-known paintings which fuse beautiful, sexual fertile silent and mysterious Women with a gorgeous, generous, lush nature are Gauguin's paintings of Tahitian women. In perfect stillness, they offer the produce of their island to him in the same gesture as they offer themselves, their breasts painted like fruits and flowers. The first French encounter with Tahiti is described by Stoddart as one of the founding moments of scientific geography, and the encounter that he chooses to elaborate is a sexual one. Tahitian women represent the enticing and inviting land to be explored, mapped, penetrated and known.⁴⁹¹

Gunn's maiden in 'The Moor' with her 'gypsy dark' eyes who lives 'at the back of beyond' in a 'hidden moor'⁴⁹² is an exotic feminine other who becomes the 'subject and object' of Gunn's primordial nationalism as the story progresses. Unlike Edith in 'Hill Fever', with her obstinate, irrational and sexually obstructive behaviour, this fantasy maiden, who remains anonymous and barely says anything at all, is full of sexual promise and abundance and freely offers the glass of milk and the sight of her 'extraordinarily

⁴⁸⁹ Neil M. Gunn, 'The Moor', p.275.

⁴⁹⁰ Neil M. Gunn, 'Hill Fever', p.34

⁴⁹¹ Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, p.94.

⁴⁹² Neil M. Gunn, 'The Moor', p.276

potent' 'rich young body'⁴⁹³ like Gauguin's Tahitian women. The impression of the male main character, Evan, as an explorer is developed further as he leaves the cottage, shocked by his discovery of this beautiful woman 'in the dark of the moor'⁴⁹⁴, walking as though this place was 'not earth but a painted map'.⁴⁹⁵ Evan's discovery of the beautiful young woman in the cottage is 'the most extraordinary thing that had ever happened to him' and, suggestively, 'so vast were its implications that he could not feel them all at once in a single spasm of creation'.⁴⁹⁶ At the local hotel Evan learns that the young woman will soon be homeless and most likely 'go into service'⁴⁹⁷ as her old mother, who has been certified as mentally ill, will soon be taken away. This prompts a realisation for Evan that 'the auld mither' was 'an apostrophe for his country'⁴⁹⁸, with the 'grey-green oasis, dark moor and huddled cottage' bearing witness to the unfolding 'tragedy of their human children'.⁴⁹⁹ The frail and mentally disintegrating old woman and the crumbling cottage she inhabits is a symbol of the historic failures of Scotland, a prime concern of the Scottish Renaissance. The domestic sphere of the cottage on the moor is feminised and historical injustices, specifically the Clearances, are equated with sexual violence as the cottage 'had the desolate air of having had its heart torn out, of having been raped'. The barren and infertile condition of the old woman is reflected in the condition of the cottage which has become 'a spiritless shell, its dark-red door pushed back in an imbecile gape'⁵⁰⁰ and conveys the intrinsic connection between the biological role of motherhood and its ideological significance in nationalist discourse.⁵⁰¹ The health and success, or demise, of the nation as a whole is articulated through the body of the mother.

However, Evan recognises the young woman, who is identified as the moor itself, as a source of recovery and rejuvenation. Meditating upon the 'fertile matrix of the dark moor', Evan discovers that:

Vision grew and soon wholly obsessed him. He found in it a reality at once intoxicating and finally illuminating. A pagan freedom and loveliness, a

⁴⁹³ Neil M. Gunn, 'The Moor', p.276

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p.276

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., p.277

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., p.277

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., p.278

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., p.278

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p.279

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., p.282

⁵⁰¹ Kirsten Stirling, *Bella Caledonia*, p.21

rejuvenation, an immense hope...and, following after, the moods of reflection, of beauty, of race...to go into the moor not merely to find our souls but to find life itself – and to find it more abundantly.⁵⁰²

This is a clear reflection of Iain Og's reverie in 'Hill Fever' where 'race, as it were, passed under his feet' and conveys Gunn's organic, primordial nationalism which, originating with Rousseau, seeks to return man to innocence and a state of nature or 'a pagan freedom' as Gunn expresses it, where the very origins of the nation are to be found. Anthony D. Smith describes the idea of the primordial nation as existing 'in the first order of time, and lies at the root of subsequent processes and developments'⁵⁰³, a concept that can clearly be seen in 'The Moor' when, for example, Evan sits on the moor and 'silence wavered like the evening smoke of a prehistoric fire'.⁵⁰⁴

Gunn's use of female characters as passive symbols, objects and muses of primordial nationalism and nation building, in contrast to active male characters who create the nation, can clearly be seen towards the end of 'The Moor'. Evan says to the young woman: 'what I see is you who are the moor, and myself with the moor about me, and in us there is dawn and out of the moor comes more of us'.⁵⁰⁵ A distinction must be drawn here between woman as nation and woman as an object of nation building. In her discussion of the personification of the nation as female, Kirsten Stirling explains how the use of the female body to represent 'abstract virtues, such as justice truth and beauty' lends itself to the equally abstract notion of woman as nation. Stirling goes on to explain how the female body can also represent the physical landscape and thusly becomes an instrument of nation building:

This capacity of the female form to contain an abstraction contributes to the success of the nation-as-woman figure. But the female body is also associated with the land itself, both aesthetically and in matters of fertility. Thanks to these associations, the female body can represent both the physical, geographical existence of the nation, as in MacDiarmid's 'from Maidenhead to John o' Groats, and also the more abstract idea or essence of the nation, which is more difficult to illustrate.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰² Neil M. Gunn, 'The Moor' p.282

⁵⁰³ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010) p.55

⁵⁰⁴ Neil M. Gunn, 'The Moor', p.279

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.284

⁵⁰⁶ Kirsten Stirling, *Bella Caledonia*, p.16

The young woman in 'The Moor' as embodiment of the physical landscape and, in turn, the abstract essence of the nation becomes the concubine of the male citizen. Spiritual union with the woman-as-nation is expressed as sexual union with the fertile and abundant woman-as-landscape. This also clearly highlights the problematic nature of Gunn's use of female characters as objects of nation building rather than active participants, and supports Kirsten Stirling's assertion that, within the Scottish Renaissance, 'the job of constructing the nation is seen as predominantly male'.

Indeed, Gunn was not the only writer of the Scottish Renaissance to portray women-as-nation and objects of masculine nation building. In 'A Vision of Scotland' Hugh MacDiarmid also sees the nation as a sexually available, yet chaste, young woman:

I see my Scotland now, a puzzle
Passing the normal of her sex, going erect
Unscathed through fire, keeping her virtue
Where temptation walks with violence, walking bravely,
Offering loyalty and demanding respect.

Every now and again in a girl like you,
Even in the streets of Glasgow or Dundee,
She throws her headsquare off and a mass
Of authentic flaxen hair is revealed,
Fine spun as newly netted fibres
On a sunlit Irish bleaching field.⁵⁰⁷

Possessively describing 'my Scotland' as 'a puzzle/Passing the normal of her sex' MacDiarmid, like Gunn, sexualises the nation and articulates its journey through current and historical injuries with the suggestion of sexual violence. Whilst Gunn uses the image of the cottage in 'The Moor' which 'had the desolate air of having had its heart torn out, of having been raped' to express the trauma of the Clearances, in contrast MacDiarmid's tone is triumphant as he describes Scotland as 'going erect/Unscathed through fire'. Despite threats to the feminised body of the nation, Scotland maintains her chaste purity in 'keeping her virtue/Where temptation walks with violence'. Just as Gunn employs a 'real' woman in 'The Moor' to personify the nation, MacDiarmid uses the same approach in stanza two with 'a girl like you' 'in the streets of Glasgow or Dundee', bringing the enduring spirit of the nation into living reality. Like Gunn, MacDiarmid portrays an

⁵⁰⁷ Hugh MacDiarmid, 'A Vision of Scotland', *Hugh MacDiarmid: Selected Poetry*, ed. by Alan Riach and Michael Grieve (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2004) p.232

idealised woman-as-landscape with 'authentic flaxen hair' that are compared to 'newly netted fibres/On a sunlit Irish bleaching field'. This natural imagery evokes the sense that the hair of the young woman merges with the landscape and is rooted in the ancient Irish origins of the nation. It is evident therefore, that Gunn's own masculinist nation building was supported by the attitude of other Scottish Renaissance writers like MacDiarmid who portrayed a feminised nation being realised and brought to life by the masculine poet.

As we have seen in 'The Moor', mother figures also play a pivotal role in Gunn's narratives of nation building and embody the Scottish Renaissance aim of redefining 'home' and its importance to national rebirth. The old mother of the moor described as 'an apostrophe for [Evan's] country' embodies both historical failures and national continuity in her transformation into an almost mythic figure at the end of the story as she departs 'like a woman out of the ages'.⁵⁰⁸ Mother figures are fixed points in the landscapes of Gunn's fiction and function as an emotional and spiritual nexus to which male protagonists return for comfort and support. In this sense, the mother and the domestic sphere she inhabits are a microcosm of the nation as a sanctuary of belonging to which the native Scot is spiritually rooted to. Hugh's mother in *Morning Tide* is described as 'the permanent center round which they all revolved, and her order came from that center with a life-warmth',⁵⁰⁹ and is the 'starting point of a circle that finished within her'.⁵¹⁰ Although descriptions of mothers are usually brief, a fuller impression of the significance of the mother figure in Gunn's fiction can be garnered from a passage describing Kenn's mother in *Highland River* in, arguably, the most sustained description of a mother figure in all of Gunn's fiction. Kenn, is the quintessential traveller in Gunn's fiction, having explored the local landscape as a boy, leaves Scotland as a young man to fight in the trenches of the First World War and then returns home to seek spiritual renewal and rebirth in the landscape of his youth. The family home, a 'central world' which Kenn's mother 'presided over[...]with completeness',⁵¹¹ plays a small but significant role in his journey of exile and return. In Kenn's memories of his youth, it is from the outer world of masculine pursuits – 'From sledging and sliding, from the cold sea, from snaring birds and rabbits' – that 'Kenn came back to his home', to the inner feminine world of the domestic sphere. Assuming divine

⁵⁰⁸ Neil M. Gunn, 'The Moor', p.282

⁵⁰⁹ Neil M. Gunn, *Morning Tide* (London: Souvenir Press, 2005) p.57

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.42

⁵¹¹ Neil M. Gunn, *Highland River*, (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd., 1996) p.68

attributes, Kenn's mother's 'presence filled all the house, and Kenn accepted her as man accepts the sun or the storm or, perhaps, God'⁵¹² and 'from the shelter of her skirts one may brave God and all the unknown and terrifying things that go back beyond the hills to the ends of the earth and the beginnings of time'.⁵¹³ Kenn's mother is also elevated to a symbol of primal racial continuity:

All the history of her people is writ on her face. The grey seas are stilled in her eyes; danger and fear are asleep in her brows; wants bony fingers grow warm at her breast; quietly against the quiet trees the struggle of her days lies folded in her hands.

He can see her there in the moment of calm between struggle and struggle; in his generation and in the generation before, and far back beyond that till the ages are lost in the desert and she becomes the rock that throws its shadow in a weary land.⁵¹⁴

Here, Gunn's vision of primal nationhood that endures through generations of struggle is located in the body of the eternal mother. She is defined by stoic passivity and silent endurance, most notably conveyed by 'quietly against the quiet trees' and 'the struggle of her days lies folded in her hands'. The faithful provider, the mother also offers a safe and abiding sanctuary for her children. As symbols of racial continuity, Gunn's mother figures conform to key figurations of women in nationalism identified by Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias such as 'biological reproducers' of 'national collectivities', 'reproducers of national groups' and 'active transmitters and producers of the national culture'.⁵¹⁵ Kirsten Stirling also discusses the way in which motherhood in a biological sense becomes entwined with ideological notions of historical continuity in nationalist discourse:

This notion of biological reproduction is then transferred first to the reproduction of members of the race/nation and then to the symbolic reproduction of the boundaries of the nation. This symbolic reproduction is transferred to the reproduction of ideologies, generating the idea of the mother as the receptacle and transmitter of tradition and history.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹² Neil M. Gunn, *Highland River*, p.68

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, p.90

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.90

⁵¹⁵ Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, eds., *Woman, Nation, State* (London: Macmillan, 1989) p.7

⁵¹⁶ Kirsten Stirling, *Bella Caledonia*, p.21

Kenn's mother is clearly portrayed as a 'receptacle and transmitter of tradition and history' as 'the history of her people is writ on her face' and her role as mother transcends the biological and is elevated to the symbolic and sacred.

This expression of sacred matriarchy seen in Gunn's image of the eternal primal mother conforms with views on women found in German nationalist movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth century such as the Bachofen renaissance – a group of German intellectuals including philosophers, nationalists and proto-fascists who promoted the theories of Swiss philologist Johann Jakob Bachofen at the turn of the century until the 1930s.⁵¹⁷ In *Das Mutterrecht: Eine Untersuchung über die Gynaiokratie der alten Welt nach ihrer religiösen und rechtlichen Natur*⁵¹⁸ published in 1861, Bachofen proposed that pre-classical human society was matriarchal and was predominantly engaged in goddess worship. Whilst Bachofen argued that matriarchy was supplanted by the far superior patriarchal order, Bachofen's work is infused with a nostalgic desire to return to the 'Demetrian Matriarchy' of female rule.⁵¹⁹ Although matriarchal prehistory has been used as a focus for more enlightened liberal and feminist movements it has, ironically, also been used to promote regressive and conservative political agendas in a manner that reflects Gunn's use of passive, symbolic femininity. In 'Matriarchy and the Volk' (2003) Cynthia Eller reflects upon the Janus-like nature of the ways in which the myth of matriarchal prehistory has been used for political reasons:

We can try to determine whether we are looking at a liberal, progressive, even radical myth that has at times been turned to conservative purposes; a conservative, traditional, even reactionary myth that has at times been deployed for leftist political causes; or perhaps a politically neutral myth that can be (and has been) made to serve a vast range of political interests.⁵²⁰

Although Bachofen's ideas were largely ignored by the Western world for forty years, his work enjoyed a renaissance in the early twentieth century with a group of scholars called the Kosmische Runde (the Cosmic Circle), which included Alfred Schuler, Karl

⁵¹⁷ Cynthia Eller, 'Matriarchy and the Volk', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 81, No.1, March 2013, p.192

⁵¹⁸ Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Mother Right: Research into the Religious and Juridical Nature of the Gynocracy of the Ancient World*.

⁵¹⁹ Cynthia Eller, 'Relativising the Patriarchy: The Sacred History of the Feminist Spirituality Movement', *History of Religions*, vol. 30, pp.41-42, 55-60

⁵²⁰ Cynthia Eller, 'Matriarchy and the Volk', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 81, No.1, March 2013, p. 191

Wolfskehl and Ludwig Klages.⁵²¹ Possibly influenced by Rousseau's yearning to return to an age of innocence which, for the Kosmische Runde, matriarchy embodied, as a reaction to the dehumanising effects of the industrialised modern world, Klages in particular sought a return to a primitive state where children were 'formed in the community established by the mother of the tribe' and adult maturity was 'formed in the community shaped by the Great Mother of the Cosmos'.⁵²² Like Gunn, Klages elevated women and motherhood to sacred status whilst, as Cynthia Eller points out, simultaneously confining them to purely symbolic roles:

Schuler, as much as Klages, if not more so, hailed motherhood as the 'electron reactor' that could bring humanity back to its vital essence, to blood, earth, night and instinct. Given this, the worst thing one could do to women would be to rob them of this essence, so beneficial to humanity and its potential return to a matriarchal paradise. For this reason, Klages and Schuler cautioned against educating women: 'The less women learn, the more valuable they are, for then they know everything from within themselves'.⁵²³

Women therefore, and mothers in particular, provide a vital link to a primordial paradise lost, yet it is essential that they are kept in a state of stasis in order to preserve their primal 'vital essence'. Whilst there is no direct evidence that Gunn read Klages' work, he was clearly tapping into the wider gender discourse of European nationalism. There are clear parallels of Klages' views in Gunn's fiction: Kenn's mother represents an eternal matriarchy that stretches back generations and 'far back beyond that till the ages are lost in the desert'. The reoccurring images of woman-as-landscape in Gunn's fiction reinforce her connection to the inherent 'innocence' of the natural world, and the mother as 'rock' in *Highland River* clearly conveys her static and unchanging nature. Kenn's mother 'endures as the hills endure'.⁵²⁴ The mother as a symbol of permanence and continuity is also found in *Morning Tide* where Hugh's mother is 'the permanent center round which they all revolved'.⁵²⁵ Furthermore, the conspicuous lack of educated women in Gunn's fiction reflects Klages' opposition to female learning and the emphasis on instinctual knowledge. Whilst there is no evidence that Gunn would take a view as extreme as Klages' there are

⁵²¹ Cynthia Eller, 'Matriarchy and the Volk', pp. 192-93

⁵²² Ludwig Klages, *Samtliche Werke*, Vol. 2, ed. by Ernst Frauchiger (Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1964), p.1355

⁵²³ Cynthia Eller, 'Matriarchy and the Volk', p.197

⁵²⁴ Neil M. Gunn, *Highland River*, p.97

⁵²⁵ Neil M. Gunn, *Morning Tide*, p.57

notably few, if any, intellectual women in Gunn's fiction (Nan in *The Shadow* is one possible exception but is incapacitated by her mental breakdown). Gunn's mothers and older women 'know everything from within themselves' and are portrayed as possessing esoteric knowledge born of instinct that is the exclusive preserve of the feminine sphere. Kenn recognises in his mother 'something in her that transcended the religious observances in which she believed' and that '[...] throughout all winters – she was in truth the figure that tended the fire and dispensed life, and must often have created her bounty out of material resources so slender that their management assumed in Kenn's thought an air half-magical'.⁵²⁶ So deft and knowledgeable is Kenn's mother in gathering and preparing meager winter food supplies that family meals are described as quasi-religious experiences to the extent that 'the memory of a meal can take on something in the nature of a pagan mass'.⁵²⁷

This pagan imagery is sometimes combined with the Judeo-Christian in Gunn's portrait of sacred motherhood. Hugh's mother ministers to her family and is described as having 'the natural air of dispensing life's mercies'.⁵²⁸ Kenn's mother is portrayed as a Madonna-like figure who 'abides from everlasting to everlasting' and the nature of Kenn's mother 'that transcended the religious observances in which she believed', for Kenn, 'gathered its mythological value as the years went on'.⁵²⁹ In an echo of the Virgin Mary's suffering and forbearance, Kenn's mother 'bears the burden of all mortal things – against the earth and against the sky'.⁵³⁰ Writing in 1932, Ernst Bergmann stated that 'Maternal spirit is the will of the National Socialist state to return women to herself, that is, to the home, the family and sacred motherhood',⁵³¹ and it is all too easy to find disturbing parallels between the portrayals of sacred motherhood in Gunn's fiction with Klages' ideas and the genesis of the 'blood and soil' movement that was a central tenet of Nazi ideology, but we must be cautious. Despite a naïve and ill-judged trip to Germany and brief interest in the National Socialist movement in the early 1930s, Gunn was vocally opposed to fascism and extreme ideologies. Indeed, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944) was Gunn's answer to the destructive fascism dominating European politics in the

⁵²⁶ Neil M. Gunn, *Highland River*, p.88

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.88

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.42

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.90

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.91

⁵³¹ Ernst Bergmann, *Erkenntnisgeist und Muttergeist: eine Soziosophie der Geschelechter* (Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1934) p. 36

1930s⁵³² and positions sacred motherhood in direct opposition to fascist ideology in the form of the character Mary. Unlike the majority of Gunn's mothers, this female character plays a more proactive role in the plot of the novel and acts as a sacred mother figure, or Virgin Mary, to the Christ-like Art. Throughout the novel, Art attempts to evade capture by the oppressive regime that rules the Green Isle, a dystopian Eden where the inhabitants are forbidden to eat of the fruit of paradise. Once newcomers are forced to eat the food of the regime – a metaphor for fascist ideological indoctrination – the natural fruit of the land becomes poisonous and unpalatable. Having eaten the food provided by 'the Seat', Old Hector becomes ill when he eats the fruit from the trees and it is Mary who, in a grave act of defiance and rebellion that challenges the dystopian status quo of the regime, uses her 'instinctual' knowledge of ancient herbal remedies to devise an antidote for the affliction. Old Hector recognises Mary's achievement at a later point in the novel:

Mary – it was Mary who had found out how to make it possible to eat the natural fruit. It was Mary who had found the herbs and made the herb jelly that neutralised the effect from eating the processed fruit. It was Mary's miracle out of the old Highland earth life. It was Mary's creation.⁵³³

As in *Morning Tide* and *Highland River*, it is the sacred mother who harvests the life-giving produce of the landscape and 'the old Highland earth life' in order to provide bodily and spiritual succor. Mary gives the herbal jelly to Old Hector and it has 'a tart green flavour. Its juice cleansed his mouth, freshened his stomach, and penetrated in a slow cool surprise all through his body'.⁵³⁴ In this sense, the ancient Highland way of life, which Mary symbolises, is presented as an antidote to psychologically destructive fascist ideology.

Mary is defined as being notably different from the other indoctrinated inhabitants of the Green Isle who are like 'clean empty shells on a strange seashore'. Instead, Mary 'was almost human' and, in a flash of deeper female interiority that is rare in Gunn's fiction 'thought below the surface of her face'.⁵³⁵ Although Mary conforms to the Gunnian sacred mother archetype seen in *Morning Tide* and *Highland River* and is described in a similar

⁵³² Neil Gunn, letter to Naomi Mitchison, 9 June, 1944, *The Selected Letters of Neil Gunn*, p.80

⁵³³ Neil M. Gunn, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944) repr. (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006) p.165

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.70

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.37

way, she is a development of this archetype and is given greater agency and capacity for action in *The Green Isle*. Indeed, Mary is the most proactive mother figure in all of Gunn's fiction and, having lost her own child, is motivated by her emotional attachment to Young Art who becomes a surrogate son. Mary's symbolic role as sacred mother is highlighted by the fact that, in contrast to the mothers in *Highland River* and *Morning Tide*, who are unnamed and anonymous, Mary has not only been given a name, but a name synonymous with sacred motherhood in the Christian tradition. This is brought into sharper focus as the novel progresses and Art is transformed into a legendary Christ-like figure, 'the immortal boy',⁵³⁶ as he continues to evade capture by the authorities. Art also miraculously escapes from a locked prison cell in an echo of Christ's resurrection⁵³⁷ reflecting how active masculinity is a signifier of renewal in, for example, *The Silver Darlings*. In *The Green Isle*, and elsewhere in Gunn's fiction, symbolic sacred femininity supports and enables masculine resurrection.

The way in which Gunn's portrayal of Mary as sacred mother is both elevated beyond other mothers in his fiction, and yet proves ultimately reductive, unfolds as the novel progresses. In an attempt to discover Art's whereabouts, Mary is taken in for questioning at the 'Seat' and it is feared her mind will not survive the torture and interrogation that she will be subjected to. Old Hector and Tom eventually learn that Mary has skillfully deceived the authorities concerning Art's whereabouts. However, having emerged alive from the ordeal, Mary initially appears to have succumbed to re-indoctrination and behaves like the other mindless inhabitants of the Green Isle. The emotional toll of Art's eventual capture leads to the revelation of her true self and the carefully crafted deception Mary had maintained since her release, prompting Old Hector to consider the enormity of her achievement:

The supreme cunning with which she had deceived the inquisitors at the Seat, the torture she had borne, the deceits and shifts, the incredible acting, the undefeatable core of the woman, Old Hector understood now.⁵³⁸

At last Gunn appears to be presenting the reader with an autonomous mother figure with psychological depth and hidden motives who has managed to escape the confines of the larder. Here too is the suggestion of intellectual agency in her 'supreme cunning' and

⁵³⁶ Neil M. Gunn, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, p.122

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.232

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.213

the capacity to outwit her interrogators. Mary has also been more proactive than her husband sitting at home and even Art's senior counterpart Old Hector who, instead of coming to Art's rescue, is still incapacitated from his own interrogation. Mary, by contrast, has an 'undefeatable core'. In this brief moment, this is the closest we have come to seeing a female figure with heroic qualities in Gunn's fiction.

Unfortunately, despite Gunn allowing Mary greater interiority, personality and individual agency than his other mothers, he then immediately clips her wings and once again confines her within the symbolic role of the sacred, eternal mother:

Here at last was Woman, who for the warmth of life and for the love that sprang out of life and made life, would fight till the stars went down in their courses and rose no more. Here in her weary presence was the child who had been destroyed on earth. All the children who had been destroyed on earth lay in the quiet pallor of her skin and lay asleep in the wells of her eyes.⁵³⁹

This description of Mary has clear parallels with the primal mother of *Highland River*, who endures from age to age, 'the struggle of her days lies folded in her hands' and is 'the rock that throws its shadow in a weary land'. Despite Mary's heroic rebellion and triumph against the oppressive regime of the Seat, she is still defined and confined by her role as a mother much like the other mothers in Gunn's fiction. Whilst it could justifiably be said that Gunn is presenting us with a celebration of womanhood and motherly love 'that sprang out of life and made life', Mary has no agency outside of her role as symbol. This is a reflection of way in which the woman as symbol is used with Gunn's maidens and the life giving qualities of Gunn's fertile younger woman seen in 'The Moor'. Additionally, Gunn's use of a name specifically associated with sacred motherhood in the Christian tradition underpins Mary's status as a two-dimensional icon, and reflects the persistence of the Virgin Mary archetype throughout his fiction. Another memorable example of this can be found in *The Serpent*, where Tom has a dream in which his mother holds his dead father in a manner that is strikingly similar to Michelangelo's 'La Pieta' that portrays the Virgin holding the dead Christ:

His body was naked and the mother, sitting on the kitchen chair, held it in her extended arms, one arm under the knees and the other round the shoulders so that the head fell slightly back and the body slumped naturally to her lap. The naked body was white and smooth, and with the white beard on the ashen face, the eyebrows gaunt and jutting above the sunken closed eyes,

⁵³⁹ Neil M. Gunn, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, pp.113-114

the mouth slightly open in a remote solemnity, the whole figure looked like a Christ grown old.⁵⁴⁰

Whilst the Madonna archetype signifies sacred motherhood, it is also an expression of feminine passivity and the female body as an ideological vessel. Any individual agency Mary in *The Green Isle* demonstrates is invariably tied to maternal instincts that in turn embody mythic national continuity. The story of the stoic, long suffering mother who forbears all hardships is, for Gunn, the story of the nation. Sacrifice and suffering will in time give birth to national renewal and resurrection embodied by 'the immortal boy', the Christ-like Young Art – the 'son' of the nation. This reflects the way in which, as Julie Mostov states:

National mythologies draw on traditional gender roles, and nationalist discourse is filled with images of the nation as mother, wife and maiden. Efforts at nation-building which seek to 'recover' the unique character and purity of the nation and celebrate its ancient roots and historical continuity generally describe the nation as timeless and changeless, as a 'natural' set of bonds binding people to one another. Thus, the 'nation' naturalizes constructions of masculinity and femininity: women physically reproduce the nation, and men protect and avenge it.⁵⁴¹

Gunn's nationalist discourse however, is not simply confined to maidens and mothers but also includes older women, completing the pagan 'maiden, mother and crone' triumvirate⁵⁴² and ensuring that every stage of womanhood is utilised for ideological purposes in his fiction. The emphasis on historical continuity and the gendered nature of producing and defending the nation in national myth-making that Mostov identifies can clearly be seen in *Highland River*, when Kenn recalls his memories of an old woman who lived beside the river:

There is something more here, Kenn feels, than the irrational surge of loyalty which more than once in history nearly wiped out his folk from the banks of their Highland River. And if he were to write a modern myth, it would take some such central theme and carry the fight to the last cosmic ridge. For what

⁵⁴⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent*, p.99

⁵⁴¹ Julie Mostov, 'Sexing the Nation/De-sexing the Body', *Gender Ironies of Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2000) p.89

⁵⁴² There is an allusion to this archetypal image in *Butcher's Broom*, where Dark Mairi, Elie and her son sit around a fire: 'the old woman, like fate, the young woman, like love, and the small boy with the swallow of life in his hand', pp. 24-25

they would be fighting for would be their own achievement, their own creation, the glory in an old nameless woman's eyes.⁵⁴³

The historical injustices of the past are negated by the 'glory' of the nation that resides within the symbolic feminine that, in turn, galvanises masculine action in the pursuit of a new national myth from which the nation will be reborn. Cultural continuity is, again, articulated through woman-as-landscape as the old woman is transfigured into 'the spirit of our River what [sic] has kept it flowing throughout the ages'⁵⁴⁴ with the river symbolising the continuity of the nation. Gunn also utilises the same images of woman-as-nation seen in 'The Moor' where the fertile young woman, who represents national rebirth, stands at the door and offers a glass of milk to the poet. In *Highland River*, the poet is replaced by God, the young woman is now old and 'smiling, she looks deep into God's eyes and offers him a glass of milk'.⁵⁴⁵ The fertility the young woman offers in 'The Moor' has now matured into the wisdom that comes with age and, just as young women and mothers 'reproduce the nation' in Gunn's fiction, it is older women who are signifiers of historical continuity in their role as keepers and guardians of native folk culture and, as Kirsten Stirling states, 'function as the guardians of the traditions of the ancient nation'.⁵⁴⁶

The character Dark Mairi in *Butcher's Broom* is the most pertinent example of this. Unbound by maternal ties and free to roam around the landscape of the Riasgan glen and beyond, Dark Mairi 'of the Shore' is unique amongst Gunn's female characters as she is associated with both the masculine seascape of the coast, having been 'born by the sea'⁵⁴⁷, and the feminine inner landscape of the glen. She functions as the archetypal embodiment of the symbiotic relationship between the native people and the land to which they belong. Despite the greater freedom given to Dark Mairi, again we see the reoccurring nationalist tropes of woman-as-landscape, women as signifiers of cultural endurance and continuity, and Klages' and Schuler's preference for women to 'know everything from within themselves'⁵⁴⁸ evident in Gunn's portrayal of mothers. Dark Mairi is a renowned healer and respected member of the Riasgan community and, like Mary in *The Green Isle*, possesses secret, instinctual knowledge, an 'older knowledge than was

⁵⁴³ Neil M. Gunn, *Highland River*, p.166

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.168

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.168

⁵⁴⁶ Kirsten Stirling, *Bella Caledonia*, p.39

⁵⁴⁷ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006) p.3

⁵⁴⁸ Cynthia Eller, 'Matriarchy and the Volk', p.197

common to the rest of her ancient kind',⁵⁴⁹ handed down over generations and born of feminine affinity with the landscape. As she leaves the seascape and heads inland towards the glen at the start of the novel we learn that 'All of that sea she now carried in her basket'⁵⁵⁰ and with it all of the ingredients needed to create a variety of natural tinctures and cures for the people of the glen. Her face, like the mountainous terrain she inhabits, has 'ridges' that define her sharp features and, in an echo of Gunn's description of the enduring nature of Kenn's mother in *Highland River*, express the 'suggestion of persistence, of abidingness, that was the silent note struck by her person'.⁵⁵¹ Dark Mairi's elemental and almost mystical affinity with the landscape is combined with the notion of Mairi's 'unthinking self' which seems to suggest that, like an animal, Mairi is a purely instinctual creature who moves in harmony with her natural surroundings. Later in the novel she is even described as 'a bit of the earth that was given hands and eyes'.⁵⁵² To try and drive Mairi out of her 'unthinking self' the narrator states that 'One might as well have exposed a stone by causing it to smile or a piece of a mountain' and that 'in her steady unthinking darkness, she might have walked out of a mountain and might walk into it again, leaving no sign'.⁵⁵³ Like Kenn's mother being 'the rock that throws its shadow in a weary land', we also see Gunn's use of rock imagery to suggest permanence and cultural continuity. As an older woman, Dark Mairi enjoys a more active life than Kenn's mother's static domesticity, however, as with Gunn's other female archetypes her 'unthinking' nature and role as symbol inhibits the inner complexity required to make her a fully engaging character.

Mairi's role as symbol of cultural continuity is consolidated towards the end of the novel as the devastating clearance of the Riasgan glen shatters the community and marks the end of the ancient Highland way of life. The factor's men throw Mairi's treasured meal chest into the river and, like the Highland diaspora, the oats are scattered in the wind and lost in the torrent. Mairi, as archetypal symbol of her people's suffering, endurance and continuity, attempts to gather the scattered oats from the water and 'never would she crawl so resolutely, so blindly, as when she could save and gather her own people'.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁴⁹ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom*, p.6

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.4

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.5

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, p.128

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.5

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.329

The people's rejection of Dark Mairi at the end of the novel represents a break with the ancient feminine landscape and culture of the glen, a displacement of identity that results in violence and alcoholism amongst the community. As we have already seen, the cultural renewal and economic recovery of *The Silver Darlings*, will be found once the people have mastered the masculine seascape of the coast to which they have been exiled, and national renewal will be enabled through masculine endeavour. In this way, *Butcher's Broom* is the feminine prelude to the masculine triumph of *The Silver Darlings*.

In his critical appraisal of Gunn's 'epic fiction' and *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, Douglas Gifford erroneously claims that 'Gunn's epic fiction is not political' and that he 'kept his nationalistic activities by and large separate from his novels'. Gifford then proceeds to, not only, contradict himself, but also unwittingly emphasises the passive roles women play as enduring symbols of cultural continuity in Gunn's novels, and the active roles of men as nation builders identified by Mostov:

But by asserting the great age and essential resilience of Scottish community spirit, Gunn gives back perspective to Scottish literature and culture, and urges rejection of that fatalism and apathy induced by three hundred years and more of recurrent failure of will at national and local level. The enduring memory of these novels is of resilient women, strong as the land around them, like Breeta and Dark Mairi and Catrine and Mary Campbell; and looking-forward men like Aniel, Colin Sutherland, Finn and Art, standing on the threshold of their adventure, armed with only a sense of their past, and their will to make the present [...]⁵⁵⁵

Here Gifford has provided us with a neat summary of the way in which Gunn uses the gendered discourse of nationalism in his novels, and the way in which 'the topography of the nation is mapped in gendered terms (feminised soil, landscapes and boundaries and masculine movement over these spaces).'⁵⁵⁶ By returning 'perspective to Scottish literature and culture' Gunn seeks national renewal, embodied by the fertile young maiden in 'The Moor'. The 'fatalism and apathy' born of 'three hundred years and more of recurrent failure of will at national and local level' is represented by the mad old mother and her crumbling cottage who leaves historical failures behind at the end of 'The Moor' and becomes 'legendary'. The 'resilient women' – symbols of cultural rebirth and

⁵⁵⁵ Douglas Gifford, 'Neil Gunn and the Mythic Regeneration of Scotland', *Neil Gunn's Country*, ed. by Diarmid Gunn and Isobel Murray (Edinburgh: Chambers Ltd., 1991) p.111

⁵⁵⁶ Julia Mostov, 'Sexing the Nation/De-sexing the Body', p.89

continuity – are, like Kenn’s mother, directly associated with the landscape and are ‘the rock[s] that throws [their] shadow in a weary land’. Most significantly, by linking Gunn’s female characters directly with the land Gifford emphasises the static, passive role of women in Gunn’s nation building and highlights the active ‘masculine movement’ over the landscape that Mostov identifies, as his male characters are ‘standing on the threshold of their adventure armed with only a sense of their past, and their will to make the present’. It is through male ‘will’ that the nation will be reborn, evident in *The Silver Darlings*. As in ‘The Poet’s Pub’, therefore, Gunn’s young women, mothers and older women are relegated to symbolic supporting roles in the exclusively masculine sphere of cultural renewal and nation building.

Furthermore, Gunn’s female characters are confined by motherhood in a way that his childless male characters are not – young women invariably get pregnant out of wedlock, such as Elie in *Butcher’s Broom*, Janet in *The Serpent* and Liz in *Bloodhunt* (1952). Nan in *The Shadow* does not fall pregnant but is, instead, confined by her mental breakdown. Motherhood, and pregnancy in particular, are therefore inhibitors of action in Gunn’s fiction and prevent expressions of individual identity beyond that of motherhood. Paula J. Giddings identifies female confinement as a key component of nationalist ideology and that ‘women in the public sphere are, too often, anathema to nationalism while motherhood, with its notions of domesticity – and confinement – holds a sacred place in the ideology’.⁵⁵⁷

The gender polarities in Gunn’s fiction are also emphasised by the gendering of knowledge itself. Whilst women are portrayed as possessors of instinctual knowledge, men are positioned as the intellectuals, the philosophers. There are few intellectual women in Gunn’s novels. One of the distinctive features of Gunn’s fiction that throws this disparity into sharp relief is the ‘dram and debate’ scenes that take place in novels such as *Second Sight*⁵⁵⁸ and *The Silver Bough*.⁵⁵⁹ These often take the form of a philosophical discussion between the male characters of the novel, one of which often represents the views of Gunn himself, and an opposing, nihilistic counterpart, also male. If women are present they are mostly silent or ask questions which the male main character provides answers to. In this sense, male characters are the providers of intellectual knowledge and

⁵⁵⁷ Paula J. Giddings, ‘Nationalism and Its Discontents’, *Meridians*, Vol. 11, No.2 (2011) p.6

⁵⁵⁸ Neil M. Gunn, *Second Sight*, pp.215-244

⁵⁵⁹ Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough*, pp.96-102

women are the grateful recipients. Chinks of hope that this may not be the case are dangled tantalisingly in front of the reader as the character Marjory, during one of these discussions, asks “I wonder why”, said Marjory, “there should be this flattering assumption on the part of a man that women are not quite capable of the grave refinement of reason?”⁵⁶⁰ Marjory and the other female characters, however, do not get the chance to demonstrate their possession of the ‘grave refinement of reason’ as the men then proceed to dominate the conversation for the next twenty nine pages. Identifying the ‘assumption’ that women lack the capacity for reason as ‘flattering’ is at best an odd turn of phrase and, at worst, blatant chauvinism. Incidentally, the lengthy ‘dram and debate’ section in *Second Sight* causes the action of the plot to flounder as it becomes mired in metaphysical speculation, and is ultimately incompatible with the elements of the thriller genre that require a measure of suspense and action to keep the plot moving at an effective pace.

Any female characters that are positioned as being potentially intellectual such as the ‘New Woman’ character Helen in *Second Sight* are still bound by the gender restrictions Gunn imposes upon them and femininity remains a signifier of intellectual limitation. In *Second Sight* Helen seems to be on the brink of a romantic reverie, usually the sole preserve of men, both in literary romanticism and Gunn’s fiction. However, if the reader has hopes that Helen will operate on an equal intellectual and spiritual footing as Harry, who does experience the state of reverie, they are quickly dashed as ‘her feeble fantasy’ crumbles into ‘vague woman weakness’.⁵⁶¹

Gunn’s reply to a letter Naomi Mitchison’s wrote to him⁵⁶² suggests a difference of opinion concerning the portrayal of women in novels between the two authors and highlights his conviction that Mitchison’s ‘world of thought and action’, a sphere that is almost exclusively reserved for male characters in his fiction, is not the natural habitat of Mitchison’s female readers:

[...] you cannot blame the women for not feeling all at once at home in your world of thought and action. You just have to accept that. You won’t of course! Any more than you accept the sort of stuff I put in a novel. You feel it should be more vital, with more kick in it for the times!⁵⁶³

⁵⁶⁰ Neil M. Gunn, *Second Sight*, (Glasgow: Richard Drew Publishing Ltd., 1986) p.217

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.156.

⁵⁶² The contents of Mitchison’s letter are unknown.

⁵⁶³ Neil M. Gunn, letter to Naomi Mitchison, 9 June, 1944, *The Selected Letters of Neil Gunn*, p.78

There is also the suggestion here that Mitchison has in the past objected to the ways in which Gunn deals the portrayal of female characters, which Mitchison possibly felt should be more in tune with more modern portrayals of women with a greater sense of interiority. Other Scottish Renaissance writers, such as Lewis Grassie Gibbon, also portrayed women as landscape but did not place the same limitations on their female characters. In *Sunset Song* (1932-1934) Chris Guthrie is closely associated with the rural landscape of the East Coast throughout the novel, however, Chris is the main focus of the novel and is not relegated to a supporting, symbolic role as Gunn's women are. Gibbon is also far more sympathetic to the nature of female experience and interiority, to the extent that many initially thought *A Scots Quair* had been written by a woman when it was first published. Like Gunn, Nan Shepherd also articulates cultural continuity through the landscape in her novel *The Weatherhouse*, published in 1930 and read by Gunn⁵⁶⁴ when his early career as a novelist was also gaining momentum. Set in a small rural community with most of the men away fighting in the trenches of the First World War, *The Weatherhouse* deals with weighty themes such as the impact and traumas of war on the individual and the community, and man's relationship with the world around him. In the novel, Shepherd uses rock imagery to express the endurance of the local people 'whom the land had made' and were 'shaped from a stuff as hard and intractable as their rock.'⁵⁶⁵ However, Shepherd does not gender this imagery to the same extent as Gunn; both men and women are born of and belong to the land. Women are also given a far more prominent voice in her novels, displaying their dynamic female wit enhanced by Shepherd's deft use of the North East dialect.

There is evidence that Gunn can write convincing female characters such as Catrine in *The Silver Darlings*, who is not confined by motherhood and demonstrates a level of individual agency rare in Gunn's fiction, as she departs Helmsdale after the death of her husband. Catrine is certainly an exception, however as, for the most part, Gunn chooses to use female characters as passive, ideological vessels. It could be argued that Gunn is simply depicting the traditional role of women in Highland society, however, these women still had thoughts, fears and frustrations that are rarely given a valid voice in Gunn's fiction. There were formidable women in the Highlands who did find a voice, such as the

⁵⁶⁴ Charlotte Peacock, *Into the Mountain* (Cambridge: Galileo Publishers Ltd., 2017) p.189

⁵⁶⁵ Nan Shepherd, *The Weatherhouse*, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1988) p.113

celebrated Skye poet Mary MacLeod and novelist Nan Shepherd who challenged the norms of the Highland patriarchy that Gunn celebrates. There were also the women who resisted the attempted clearance of Durness Parish in 1841; Gunn does allude to this through the character Seonaid in *Butcher's Broom* who rails against the factors and the incompetence of the Riasgan men in opposing the clearance.⁵⁶⁶ Like so many of her female counterparts in Gunn's fiction, however, Seonaid is limited by her pregnancy and her role in the novel is not significant enough to counter the two-dimensional portrayal of cultural signifier Dark Mairi. Had Seonaid been given a more central role, *Butcher's Broom* may have been a completely different novel.

Indeed, Gunn's women have to get old before they can enjoy the same level of autonomy as his male characters and, like Dark Mairi, only gain freedom when they become sexually and maternally obsolete, yet are unfortunately still used as psychologically two-dimensional signifiers of Highland cultural continuity. In its reduction of the feminine to the purely symbolic, and in presenting the nation as viewed through the lens of male experience, Gunn's fiction will, therefore, continue to be problematic for discerning modern readers. By elevating his female characters to transcendental heights Gunn simultaneously presents them in a reductive manner: Gunn's mother figures and older women labour under the same dichotomy as his maidens. For all their mythical, symbolic significance, Gunn's young women are still confined and defined by their sexuality, mothers are not permitted to leave the larder or escape the domestic setting and older women are reduced to cultural signifiers. Gunn's novels rarely portray female eccentricity, unorthodoxy or the charisma of, for example, Nan Shepherd's Miss Barbara: a 'hard-knit woman of fifty' who Garry Forbes finds 'dancing alone on her kitchen floor in the middle of a world war, for no other reason than she wanted to!' in *The Weatherhouse*.⁵⁶⁷ Through their elevation to sacred heights therefore, Gunn's 'mothers maidens and crones' are dehumanised and less convincing as characters. In this sense, Gunn's female characters are trapped in an ideological cul-de-sac and are not permitted to 'get leave' to live.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁶ Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom*, pp.292, 320

⁵⁶⁷ Nan Shepherd, *The Weatherhouse*, p.57

⁵⁶⁸ 'It's a grand thing to get leave': a line spoken by Geordie as he is throttling a chicken in Nan Shepherd's, *The Quarry Wood* (1928), (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996) p.208. Charlotte Peacock identifies the 'deliberate' irony of this line as 'the recurrent theme of Nan's novels, *how* to get leave to live within a society so

Conclusion

Gunn's Highland Nationalism: Loss, Recovery and Reclamation

In the introduction to his 2020 publication *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution*,⁵⁶⁹ Scott Hames opens his argument with a description of a culturally prominent feature of the Scottish parliament building – the Canongate Wall. The physical fabric of the Canongate Wall, with its sections of rock hewn from the Scottish landscape including Caithness flagstone, Corrennie granite and sandstone from Dumfries, is a geological and cultural tapestry of the nation. It combines landscape, culture and place in an articulation of democratic values and national belonging. Just as the Scottish landscape has a physical presence in the wall, it is also culturally present in the various inscriptions hewn into the rock. On Bressay sandstone MacCaig asks ‘Who possesses this landscape?/The man who bought it or/I who am possessed by it?’⁵⁷⁰ Sir Alexander Gray outlines his own landscape of belonging on West Lothian Whinstone, declaring ‘This is my country,/The land that begat me./These windy spaces/Are surely my own.’⁵⁷¹ The tropes of organic romantic nationalism present in Gray’s ‘Scotland’ are also clearly evident in the anonymous ‘Canadian Boat Song’ that captures the longing of the exiled native Scot for lost ancestral homelands. The Highland landscape is a signifier of ethnic belonging and rootedness where ‘the blood is strong, the heart is Highland/And we in dreams behold the Hebrides.’ Gunn himself stated that: ‘In ‘The Canadian Boatsong’, evocative phrases like

strict in its conventions, is explored through many of her female characters.’ *Into the Mountain*, p. 61

⁵⁶⁹ Scott Hames, *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution: Voice, Class, Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020) pp. 6 - 7

⁵⁷⁰ Canongate Wall, Scottish Parliament Building, Edinburgh, Norman MacCaig, ‘A Man in Assynt’

⁵⁷¹ Canongate Wall, Scottish Parliament Building, Edinburgh, Sir Alexander Gray, ‘Scotland’

'the lone shieling' or 'the misty island' gather potency because the rowers were exiles from their father's land. Uprooted. The far-wandering, the exile – half the history of any Highland clachan'.⁵⁷² Permeating the Canongate Wall is a sense of the Scottish landscape as an expression of the 'natural' or 'pure' essence of the nation, a substratum of nationhood that has close parallels with the various figurations of landscape in Gunn's fiction and non-fiction. Just as the Canongate Wall features slices of the Scottish landscape in stone to legitimise its cultural authenticity, Gunn also saw the land – specifically the Highlands – as an authentic touchstone to the roots of the nation. For Gunn, the journey of the nation itself is written on the landscape and the loss, recovery and continuity of ancestral homelands is either a subtly present backdrop or central axis to many of his novels. The desire to return to a primordial landscape of Edenic innocence in Gunn's fiction expresses the Janus-like yearning of romantic nationalism: to return to a time before historical and cultural injuries such as the Highland Clearances and look forward to the rebirth and creation of a new nation. Gunn's egalitarian Highland communities in which individualism can thrive are also microcosms of the ideal nation. Significantly, landscape as a signifier of ethnic belonging also reveals the spiritual and personal nature of Gunn's Highland nationalism through the intersection of the Highland landscape, the male self and woman as nation.

The 'purity' of the Romantic immersion of the self in nature, examined in chapter one, is translated by Gunn into the (male) individual's relationship with place and nation as sacred bounded territory, with its roots in an ancient ethnoscape, explored in chapter three. As chapter two illustrates, seeking out the authentic folk culture of the people in the form of the *Carmina Gadelica* is an expression of Gunn's romantic nationalism, gives legitimacy to the nation, supports ethnic identity and is a means to access the 'youth' of the nation. As chapters four and five illustrated however, Gunn's use of a gendered landscape to articulate his nationalist discourse, where women symbolise the nation and men build it, remains the most problematic element of his fiction.

Gunn's portrayal of landscape therefore, is a multilayered tapestry that this thesis has sought to tease apart in order to fully understand its nuances and ideological complexity. In Gunn's fiction however, all of the different elements explored in this project are intrinsically connected. Indeed, the figurations of landscape in Gunn's fiction examined in this project – from the Highland reveries of *The Serpent*, the search for cultural

⁵⁷² Neil M. Gunn, 'The Heron's Legs', p.230

authenticity through folklore in *The Silver Bough*, the exile from ancestral homelands in *Butcher's Broom*, active male enterprise in *The Silver Darlings*, passive symbolic femininity in 'The Moor' and *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* – are essentially Gunn's response to cultural and territorial loss and express a yearning for recovery. This relationship between loss and recovery is rooted in the microcosm of the self and a personal relationship with the landscape and is extended outward to the macrocosm of community and nation.

An understanding of the role cultural and territorial loss plays in Gunn's fiction furthers our understanding of his romantic Highland reveries and the need, as he saw it, to have a personal and spiritual connection with the land – in essence, to spiritually reclaim native ethnoscaples. In *Whisky and Scotland* (1935) Gunn's lively guide to Scotland's national drink, which also discusses nationalism at length, Gunn returns again to 'The Canadian Boatsong' to meditate upon the deep wound left on the Highland psyche by the Clearances and the loss of ancestral territory:

The note of nostalgia, of separation, of the past. In all things pertaining to his land that move the Scot to his marrow you will observe this note of tragedy, this singing of lost causes, of dead years, of death.⁵⁷³

In an earlier chapter, Gunn laments that 'the Gael is ebbing away' with 'the utter inevitability of an uncorked bottle.'⁵⁷⁴ In his essay 'Caithness and Sutherland' (1935) Gunn gives us a guided tour of the cultural and historical landscapes of the area in which he grew up. Cultural loss being intrinsically linked to territorial loss is highlighted as Gunn outlines the devastating cultural impact of the Highland Clearances:

It was the era throughout the whole Highlands of the creation of the large sheep farm, and of the dispossession of the people, frequently by means so ruthless and brutal that they may not bear retelling easily, and always with a sorrow and hopelessness that finally broke the Gaelic spirit.⁵⁷⁵

Here, the Highlands have been reductively repurposed as 'the large sheep farm', a shadow of the rich human habitat that once existed there. This loss of ancestral territory is made all the more devastating by the cruelty inflicted upon the people, destroying the

⁵⁷³ Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland*, p.102

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.42

⁵⁷⁵ Neil M. Gunn, 'Caithness and Sutherland' (Whishart Books Ltd: 1935; repr. in *Landscape to Light*) p.8

'Gaelic spirit.' The impact of the loss of ancestral homelands is emphasised as Gunn outlines the profound cultural 'desolation' caused by the Clearances:

For untold generations they and their forebears had inherited these glens, a courteous people, hospitable, full of the ancient lore and music and ways of life of the Gael and the pre-Gael. No army of barbarians ever left behind it desolation so complete as did that ruthless handful of the chief's servants.⁵⁷⁶

Here, as in *Butcher's Broom*, examined in chapter three, Gunn's Highlands are primordial ethnoscaples inhabited by the native people for 'untold generations.' The homeland as an ancient inheritance also emphasises the legitimate claim the Highlanders have on the landscape. Again we can see elements from Carmichael's introduction to the *Carmina Gadelica*, examined in chapter two, in Gunn's description of the Highlanders as 'courteous people, hospitable' and 'full of the ancient lore and music and ways of life of the Gael and pre-Gael,' emphasising the cultural cost of the Clearance and injustice inflicted upon a noble people. Significantly, the brutal factors employed by the landlords are compared to an invading army worse than 'barbarians.' Overall, there is a clear sense of a land forcibly taken from its rightful owners.

The theme of 'desolation' and the sense of the cleared landscape as empty space and cultural desert are continued throughout Gunn's description of the Sutherland area. As the traveller ventures 'further north' the 'bleaker it gets'⁵⁷⁷ until arriving at Dalhalvaig which escaped the evictions having come under new ownership in 1829. As public anger grew against the Clearances, Gunn points out that 'the new owners found it more advantageous to pursue the intriguing ways of Parliamentary influence than to continue making deserts.'⁵⁷⁸ The interconnection and interaction between the people and the landscape seen most notably in *Butcher's Broom* is also highlighted as Gunn states that '[...] not only does environment affect human development, but human development in its turn affects environment.'⁵⁷⁹ Gunn goes on to observe that '[...] in Kildonan there is today a shadow, a chill, of which any sensitive mind would, I am convinced, be vaguely aware though possessing no knowledge of the Clearances. We are affected strangely by any place from which the tide of life has ebbed.'⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁶ Neil M. Gunn, 'Caithness and Sutherland', p.9

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., p.9

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., p.10

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., p.10

⁵⁸⁰ Neil M. Gunn, 'Caithness and Sutherland', p.11

The cultural rupture and decline caused by the Highland Clearances loss of ancestral homelands is expressed as the crisis point at the end of *Butcher's Broom* where Gunn's poetic ethnoscapes emphasise the symbiotic relationship with the land and primordial nationhood, examined in chapter three. Highland cultural decline is intrinsically linked with loss of ancestral territory, and the specter of the Clearances is also present in novels such as *Young Art and Old Hector* and short stories such as 'The Moor'. Indeed, the whole action of *Second Sight* is dependent upon the empty landscape of a shooting estate, resulting in the gender hinterland of the gillies, having been denied ownership of their ancestral homelands. In this sense, Christopher Whyte's identification of Gunn's concern for male 'endangerment' was justified, however, Whyte does not acknowledge that this is Gunn's response to cultural decline and loss of territory. The importance of male absence or presence on the feminine landscape emphasises the active male role in community, and by extension, nation building. The loss of territory experienced by the Riasgan community in *Butcher's Broom* occurs when the men are absent from the land whilst serving the British Empire in the Napoleonic wars, as opposed to the masculine renaissance of *The Silver Darlings* when the men are fully present and engaged in national enterprise. This sense of loss heightens the need for a connection with the land as a spiritual imperative and the need to reclaim the landscape as a native right.

Indeed, the personal communion with the Highland landscape articulated through the romantic immersion of the self in nature, examined in chapter one, is a means for the active native male to reconnect with and reclaim the feminine spirit of the nation herself. This process begins with the male perception of and immersion in the landscape through the romantic reverie and demonstrates the emphasis on recovery, of both self and nation, in Gunn's fiction. With the recurring focus on the perception of feminine landscapes and the human landscapes of Gunn's younger female characters through the male gaze in *Morning Tide*, 'Hill Fever' and 'The Moor' the native individual is spiritually repossessing the primordial ethnoscape of his birthright. This is most clearly articulated by the union of the young artist and fertile maiden in 'The Moor,' examined in chapter five. The immersion of the individual in a wild primordial landscape by allowing the male self and female landscape to merge as one, with each belonging to the other, enables a spiritual renewal that clearly resonates with Rousseau's meditations on nature in *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* and is articulated through the character Tom in *The Serpent*.

In *Whisky and Scotland* (1935), whisky is deployed as a metaphor for the creation of the nation and the relationship between the Scot and his native soil. In a chapter entitled 'In Scotland' Gunn discusses '[...] this native tradition of the Scot, this environment of race and time and soil out of which he has come, this inner essence of him[...]'⁵⁸¹ and the reconnection with the natural world in Gunn's Highland reveries brings the predominantly male individual closer to the true 'essence' of himself and the nation. In turn, this reconnection with the feminine natural world negates the traumas of historical injustice and cultural schism. In his essay 'Landscape Inside' (1959) Gunn meditates upon the profound effects of the Highland landscape on its inhabitants. In a Wordsworthian turn of phrase he argues that the 'rhythm of the sea' in old Gaelic melodies brings an individual to 'the essence of himself' where 'the outer and inner landscapes merge'.⁵⁸²

Crucially, in Gunn's fiction, individual and national recovery is dependent upon the acceptance of the female principle by the male self. In *The Serpent*, explored in chapter one, Tom's perception of the Highland landscape as a space of spiritual renewal is intimately linked with his relationship with Janet who embodies the three key aspects of Rousseauvianism that Babbitt identifies – 'Arcadian longing', 'the pursuit of the dream woman' and 'the aspiration towards the 'infinite' (often identified with God).'⁵⁸³ Significantly, the urban intellectual environment of the city is predominantly male in character whilst the Highland landscape is feminine, represented by Janet. Tom's ecstatic communion with nature is made flesh in Janet who becomes deified in Tom's eyes. This figuration of Janet as woman as landscape and, by extension, the nation conforms to the symbolic depictions of Gunn's other young women examined in chapter five. Significantly, Tom's embrace of the feminine principle, embodied by Janet, acts in opposition to his caustic intellectualism, which returns with a vengeance when Janet rejects him, resulting in the death of his father and Tom's estrangement from the community. Tom's destructive male intellectualism and atheism therefore, acts in opposition the creative and spiritual feminine principle. Similarly, in *Butcher's Broom*, having been cleared from their ancestral homelands, the rejection of Dark Mairi by her people at the end of the novel represents a break with the ancient feminine landscape and culture of the glen, a displacement of identity that results in violence and alcoholism amongst the community. This crisis is only

⁵⁸¹ Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland*, pp.80-81

⁵⁸² Neil M. Gunn, 'Landscape Inside', *Saltire Review*, Edinburgh, Autumn, 1959, Vol.6, No. 19, pp. 43-46; repr. in *Landscape to Light*, pp. 107-108

⁵⁸³ Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, p.126

resolved through the resurgence of masculinity and the birth of a new national narrative in *The Silver Darlings*. At the end of *The Silver Bough*, examined in chapter two, Donald Martin's acceptance of the feminine by acknowledging his daughter Sheena leads him to his spiritual salvation and psychological recovery from the war. Significantly, the active state of transcendent boyhood, which symbolises the youth of the nation and national rejuvenation, often acts in concord with the passive sacred mother figure, such as Hugh's mother in *Morning Tide*, Kenn's mother in *Highland River* and Art and Mary in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*.

The romantic male reconnection with the primordial feminine landscape in Gunn's fiction also embodies what Anne McClintock refers to as 'the gendering of nation time.' McClintock highlights the 'temporal anomaly' in the Janus-like nature of nationalism, first identified by Tom Nairn,⁵⁸⁴ where nationalism has an uneasy relationship with the past: simultaneously seeking to embrace the past but also reject it in order to progress. This anomaly is resolved, McClintock argues, by viewing time 'as a natural division of gender' where women represent the past and men go on to remake the present and build the future:

Women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking and natural), embodying nationalism's conservative principle of continuity. Men, by contrast, represent the progressive agent of national modernity (forward-thrusting, potent and historic), embodying nationalism's progressive, or revolutionary principle of discontinuity. Nationalism's anomalous relation to time is thus managed as a natural relation to gender.⁵⁸⁵

As symbols of the past, Gunn's women are therefore excluded from national progress in the present and nation building in the future. Gunn's belief that 'our salvation must come through women'⁵⁸⁶ is concerned more with the embrace of the feminine principle as an enabler of masculine action and nation building, as opposed to the direct actions or lived experience of actual women, an issue I will return to in due course.

Gunn's preoccupation with 'salvation,' both personal and national, and the deification of the feminine embodiment of landscape and nation in his fiction, also reveals the spiritual nature of his nationalism. Part of my examination of Gunn's nationalism in chapter

⁵⁸⁴ Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London: New Left Books, 1977)

⁵⁸⁵ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race Gender and Sexuality in the Imperial Conquest*, p.359

⁵⁸⁶ F.R. Hart, J.B. Pick, *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life*, p.210

three examined Gunn's 'faith': nationalism, community and spirit, in which the nation is realised as a 'sacred bounded space'.⁵⁸⁷ Anthony D. Smith argues that it is through 'landscape and poetic spaces', that the nationalist discourse of exile, deliverance and salvation are articulated,⁵⁸⁸ a discourse that was evident during the campaign for Scottish Devolution and has its roots in the Biblical motifs of Covenanter rhetoric with the Exodean deliverance myth and the notion of the Scots as a 'chosen people'. Gunn makes extensive use of the Exodian motifs of loss, faith and salvation in *Butcher's Broom* and reinforces the perception of the Riasgan glen as a sacred, metaphysical landscape inhabited by a 'chosen people'. In *Whisky and Scotland*, Gunn identifies nationalism as essentially spiritual in nature as opposed to the degenerate European nationalisms of the 1930s: 'Nationalism has, of course, its Fascists and other jingoists who debase it from the spiritual thing it is to a shirt and baton parade at the best and, at the worst, to a bloody lust.'⁵⁸⁹ In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson highlights the way in which the rise of European nationalism was a response to the decline of Christianity: 'Disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary. What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning.' Anderson goes on to state that '[...] few things are better suited to this end than an idea of nation.'⁵⁹⁰

Indeed, Gunn often seems like an author in search of a religion, and the spiritual Highland romantic nationalism evident throughout his fiction and non-fiction is his way of transmuting 'fatality into continuity', of responding to the terminal loss of ancestral land and culture with a new national narrative of recovery. This response is apparent in the recurring motif of primordial innocence in Gunn's fiction and the focus on the wild, untouched nature of the Edenic Highlands where communities blend with the environment, as opposed to the more developed lowlands. Joyous boyhood innocence, female fertility, continuity, stasis and instinctual thinking support Gunn's Edenic idyll. The Highlands, therefore, with its culture rooted in the life affirming qualities of folklore, is the point of origin for the rebirth of the nation, and autonomous communities, such as the Riasgan glen of *Butcher's Broom*, are microcosms of the ideal nation as community.

⁵⁸⁷ Murray Stewart Leith, Daniel P.J. Soule, *Political Discourse and National Identity in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) p. 74

⁵⁸⁸ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, (London: Penguin, 1991) p. 66

⁵⁸⁹ Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland*, p.90

⁵⁹⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.11

Although Gunn acknowledges Scottishness as a multiplicity of ethnies and does ‘not much mind if it is Celtic or not’, preferring to focus on the common traditions of the people – ‘their drink, their habits, their arts, their dreams, their fun, their bestial lapses and heroic moments,’⁵⁹¹ Gunn repeatedly locates national recovery around the ‘feminine’ bounty of the Edenic Highland landscape and its culture, not the ‘masculine’ urban industries of lowland Scotland and its civic institutions. In *Whisky and Scotland*, Gunn expounds upon ‘how naturally rich this Highland region is’ and ‘the quality of the natural products: the best mutton and meat in the world, the finest game and salmon and trout, white fish of unexcelled firmness and flavour,’ ‘fragrant berries, heather honey (on a vast scale) of so exquisite a flavour that a world grown economically sane could never have enough of it.’ Here, as seen in *The Silver Bough*, the role in which food plays in Gunn’s writing is an expression of Gunn’s romantic nationalism, as the plentiful larder is a metaphor for the cultural and spiritual wholeness found within Highland communities which are, in turn, microcosms of the national community. Gunn continues his description of his Edenic Highlands by asserting that ‘ancient records refer to Scotland as a land flowing with milk and honey – a literal reference to the extensive herds and cottage bee-hives of a once happy folk.’⁵⁹² Crucially, in a separate discussion concerning whisky duty, Gunn seems to view ‘the Highlander’ and ‘the Scot’ as one and the same, stating: ‘The Highlander – the Scot does not want to be a beggar.’⁵⁹³ Gunn’s use of the *Carmina Gadelica*, with Carmichael’s introduction promoting his own form of romantic Highland nationalism, also culturally locates Gunn’s nationalism in the Highlands.

Herein lies a problematic element in Gunn’s Highland nationalism: that ‘Highland’ seems to represent Scotland, or how it should be, excluding the urban centres of the south. This is an inversion of the nineteenth century perceptions of the Highlands as separate, peripheral and ‘other’, a savage landscape of uncouth natives. In Gunn’s fiction, the Highlands become the centre of national identity whilst the cities and towns (where most of the population live) are marginalised and play no part in the national story. This sense of ‘two Scotlands’ is seen most notably in *The Serpent*, where the clash between Highland and urban landscapes is played out in the conflict between Tom’s Romanticism and intellectualism. As illustrated in chapter one, it is in the romanticised Highland

⁵⁹¹ Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland*, p.105

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 190 - 191

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.190

landscape that Tom finds sanctuary. The spectre of exclusion: of women and half of Scotland, therefore, blights Gunn's fiction and compromises his success as a novelist.

It is all too easy, therefore, to equate Gunn's treatment of landscape, ethnic belonging and gender divisions with the blood and soil ideology of violent, exclusionary nationalisms of the twentieth-century. With his reductive portrayals of women as symbols and the separation of gender roles, Gunn's fiction reflects the patriarchal idiom that is a feature of the discourse of romantic nationalism. Herder saw the nation as an organic extension of the family unit, which was traditionally male-dominated and, as in *The Silver Darlings*, the role of nation building is essentially masculine. Indeed, although there is no evidence that Gunn read the German Agrarian novels of the 1920s some of the domestic scenes in Gunn's Highlands, with clearly defined gender roles, seem to be lifted directly out of these literary precursors of the blood and soil movement. Advocates for Gunn would argue that his vehement opposition to fascism in his essays and in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* counter any direct accusation of him subscribing to more extreme nationalist ideologies. As discussed earlier, Gunn is careful to differentiate between his spiritual Highland nationalism and the 'shirt and baton parade' of fascism in *Whisky and Scotland*. This unfortunately, may still be small comfort for modern readers who may perceive Gunn's reductive portrayal of women at best old fashioned, at worst highly unpalatable and reasonable justification to let Gunn slip quietly out of the modern Scottish canon.

Readers' encounters with Gunn's two dimensional women, defined by the voyeuristic, sometimes semi-incestuous stares of male characters, become an exasperating recurrence in Gunn's world. Gunn is frequently identified as one of Scotland's most celebrated novelists yet, as I highlighted in my introduction, critical interest has fallen away, and his treatment of gender may be the, widely unacknowledged, reason why. Gunn clearly has a 'woman problem' though few brave souls apart from Christopher Whyte, Margery McCulloch and, most notably, Carol Anderson have broached the subject. The tone of support, celebration and promotion that permeates Gunn scholarship over the past thirty years and the reluctance to interrogate more uncomfortable aspects of his fiction may be symptomatic of the reverence for the Scottish canon in Scottish literary criticism as a whole. Commenting on the 'singularly uncritical' 'discussion of Gunn's work so far', Carol Anderson speculates that 'this is probably because Scottish fiction receives so little attention, even within Scotland, that to be anything other than enthusiastic seems a betrayal of all that most critics who bother to write about Scottish literature would wish to

uphold.⁵⁹⁴ I will go further by stating that there is an inherent insecurity concerning the nation's small treasure of literature, which seems to be so intrinsically linked to Scottish nation building that to interrogate it in any meaningful way would somehow delegitimise the nation itself. Eleanor Bell asserts that 'Scottish studies [is] more focused on canon-building and the construction of the national tradition, and too immersed in tradition-inspired approaches to take account of such theoretical developments [like post-modernism]'.⁵⁹⁵ Ryan Shirey also argues that:

[...] the problem that plagues Scottish studies is, we might say, the construction (or constructedness) of the nation itself, which continuously reasserts its right as pre-eminent cultural concern by virtue of its historically (seemingly) tenuous existence in the absence of state sovereignty. Consequently, it is the objects of culture that come to stand in as a substitute for the non-existence of a state-sanctioned political identity, 'Scottish'.⁵⁹⁶

In order to establish a robust canon, however, identifying the 'cracks in the wall' is an essential component for a healthy national literature. As Carol Anderson states, countering the male literary tradition in Scotland which is 'so strongly dominant'⁵⁹⁷ with a greater focus on Scottish female writers can go some way to redress the balance. More than thirty-five years after Anderson's call for a greater spotlight on female writers of Scottish Literature, there is still a gender imbalance in the Scottish literary canon. An online seminar, organised by the University of Edinburgh in June 2021, aimed to '[...] facilitate much needed discussions about overlooked and neglected Scottish women writers.' The seminar focused on writers such as Annie S. Swan, Anna Buchanan, Nan Shepherd, Catherine Carswell and Willa Muir. Despite these writers creating 'interesting and complex work,' the call for papers states that: '[...] their influence on the reading public has largely been obliterated from academic and public knowledge.'⁵⁹⁸ The one

⁵⁹⁴ Carol Anderson, 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Fiction: Character and Symbol', p.265

⁵⁹⁵ Eleanor Bell, 'Postmodernism, Nationalism and the Question of Tradition,' in *Scotland in Theory: Reflections on Culture and Literature*, ed. by Eleanor Bell and Gavin Miller (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004) p.86.

⁵⁹⁶ Ryan Shirey, 'A Shrinking Highlands: Neil Gunn, Nationalism and the 'World Republic of Letters', p.2

⁵⁹⁷ Carol Anderson, 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Fiction: Character and Symbol', p.392

⁵⁹⁸ Call for papers, 'Unforgettable, Unforgotten', Scottish Network for Religion and Literature, The University of Edinburgh (2021)

possible exception to this neglect is Nan Shepherd, whose writing has enjoyed a recent renaissance. In the *The Living Mountain* (1977), republished in 2011, Shepherd reclaims the traditionally male romantic reverie and makes it her own as she describes her spiritual journeys through the Cairngorm landscape.

Anderson rightly asserts that 'the literary exploration of female experience by women can have the non-literary effect of 'validating' the real life experience of women in Scotland [...].'⁵⁹⁹ By the same token, Gunn's reductive depictions of 'female experience' may certainly disaffect modern female readers as the women they are presented with in his novels do not reflect their own reality. It is indeed ironic that, despite Gunn's search for cultural authenticity in his novels this does not extend to portraying authentic ethnic female experience. Whilst discussing the portrayals of Highland peasant women in Scottish fiction, Carol Anderson argues that 'the tension between 'mythic' and 'realistic' in the presentation of such characters can prove a problem in the fiction.'⁶⁰⁰ Indeed, Gunn's romantic descriptions of his female characters often conflict and are at odds with his attempts at realism. Descriptions of Hugh's vivid boyhood experience in *Morning Tide*, for example, do not sit harmoniously with the idyllic representation of Hugh's sister. Strong female characters such as Gibbon's Chris Guthrie, who possess a potent inner life and actively negotiate the challenges of existence, resonate far more with the experiences of modern women than the gentle passivity of Gunn's female characters. This may be one of the reasons why *Sunset Song* seems to enjoy more cultural prominence and endurance than even Gunn's most popular novel *The Silver Darlings*. Unfortunately, all too often, Gunn's female characters are as obscure and unrealised as the blurred women inhabiting the painted background of 'The Poet's Pub'.

Gunn's fiction therefore, provides us with a platform from which we can question the cultural and political processes that motivated the writers of the Scottish Renaissance, processes that still inform the national narrative. It is crucial to identify and interrogate discourses that exclude or devalue the feminine, or other groups in society in order to prevent the normalisation of such discourses and their integration into cultural and national narratives. Indeed, even scholars of nationalism such as Anthony D. Smith and Benedict Anderson seem blithely unaware of the masculine bias that permeates nationalist discourse. Scott Hames highlights and questions the conspicuous lack of

⁵⁹⁹ Carol Anderson, 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Fiction: Character and Symbol', p.392

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., p.26

quotations from women on the Canongate Wall and argues that ‘it would be impossible to read the wall as democratically reflecting the nation.’ A culturally important feature of the modern Scottish parliament building, the Canongate wall could be seen as a scaled-down historic and poetic ethno-scape, with the inscribed panels signifying ‘a ‘bedrock’ of national culture and identity.’⁶⁰¹ With only one quote from a woman featured, it is clear that, in the modern nation building narrative of Scotland, women (and minority groups) are as marginalised now as they were by the writers of the Scottish Literary Renaissance.

The nationalist vision of Scotland as a ‘terrain invested with collective significance’ in which an ethnic community belongs to a ‘poetic landscape,’⁶⁰² seen throughout Gunn’s fiction, is also evident in Scottish literary-political discourse of the past few decades. In his exploration of Scotland’s past and present cultural identity, Neal Ascherson glosses the title of his book *Stone Voices* as ‘the way in which human experience has been built so intimately into the geology and the post-glacial ecology of Scotland that a people and its stones form a single cultural landscape.’⁶⁰³ In a statement that reminds us of the intimate relationship between the people of the Riasgan glen and the land in *Butcher’s Broom*, Ascherson states that ‘staring into a Scottish landscape, I have often asked myself why – in spite of all appearances – bracken, rocks, man and sea are at some level one.’⁶⁰⁴ Ascherson’s discourse also demonstrates a nod to romanticism: ‘the image of a tomb with its mourning pillar-stone, silhouetted against the prospect of nature like a romantic contemplative in a Casper David Friedrich painting, is irresistible.’⁶⁰⁵

In his book *Soil and Soul* which outlines the galvanisation of Hebridean communities against corporate power and landlordism, Alastair McIntosh, perhaps unwittingly, deploys some key elements of Herderian romantic nationalist discourse such as the Janus-like need to be in touch with the past in order to move forward in the present, and states in his introduction that ‘the past should be carried forward to inform the future’.⁶⁰⁶ McIntosh, like Carmichael and Gunn, celebrates the superiority of folk culture and wisdom in the form of the *Carmina Gadelica* and Celtic spirituality as a whole stating that ‘the modern Celtic

⁶⁰¹ Scott Hames, *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution: Voice, Class, Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020) pp.vii-viii

⁶⁰² Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.150

⁶⁰³ Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland* (London: Granta Books 2014) preface, p.ix

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.26

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4

⁶⁰⁶ Alastair McIntosh, *Soil and Soul* (London: Aurum Press, 2001) p.3

world could perhaps look on it as a continuation of an ancient tradition: one in which these North Atlantic islands have long been looked to by Europe, and perhaps Ancient Greece, as places of the most profound learning.⁶⁰⁷ Like Herder, McIntosh identifies the wish for Europeans to 'connect with indigenous histories and geographies otherwise swept away by mainstream metropolitan influences from Roman times onwards.'⁶⁰⁸ In a chapter entitled 'The Womanhood of God', McIntosh discusses symbolic sacred femininity and the instinctual, female wisdom celebrated by the Celtic world. Although McIntosh frames this within the context of eco-feminism and cites sacred femininity as a panacea to the hyper-masculine discourse of corporate power, as with Gunn, the power of femininity is still articulated in a spiritualised, symbolic sense only.

There is still great value in reading the fiction of Neil M. Gunn. His literary output was prolific and drew on a myriad of sources and influences (many of which Gunn refused to acknowledge). The ideological complexity of Gunn's fiction still provides us with a rich seam of critical possibilities. Frequently throughout this dissertation I have been tempted by various other lines of enquiry and to wander off the path I have set for myself. For example, much has been made of the influence of Zen on Gunn, however, the spiritual influence of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky in Gunn's latter years is a critical avenue that has yet to be explored in greater detail. The challenging metaphysical material included in his later novels that subsequently led to a decline in Gunn's popularity could possibly be a result of this unexplored spiritual influence.

Another highly productive line of enquiry could examine Gunn's attitude to the Kirk and organised religion throughout his fiction as opposed to the 'organic' semi-pagan spirituality of Highland folk. Gunn often utilises Biblical allusions and symbolism in his novels and non-fiction writing. Biblical allusions recur throughout *Whisky and Scotland* for example, and Gunn asserts that: 'There is more humanity and understanding in an odd phrase of the Old Testament, I sometimes think, than in all the uplift books of our modern age.'⁶⁰⁹ He does however, give a damning appraisal of the Kirk's cooperation in the Clearances in *Butcher's Broom*. Gunn also seems to have a dim view of Adam's austere Calvinism in *The Serpent*. Clearly there is a clear contrast in Gunn's mind between religion and spirituality. However, Gunn also displayed admiration for the Covenanters and their struggles for religious freedom. It would be worthwhile, therefore, to ascertain to what

⁶⁰⁷ Alastair McIntosh, *Soil and Soul*, p.19

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.20

⁶⁰⁹ Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland*, p.81

extent Gunn's seemingly ambiguous attitude towards religion was influenced by his anarchist tendencies, moving him to reject any belief system, whether political or spiritual, that compromised individual freedoms. In a fairly recent exploration of religion and Scottish literary criticism and the legacy of Calvinist Presbyterianism by critics such as Crawford Gribben,⁶¹⁰ Patrick Scott⁶¹¹ and Matthew Wickman,⁶¹² featured in the *Studies in Scottish Literature* journal, Gunn is conspicuously absent. Whilst discussing the destructive nature of patriarchal, authoritarian Calvinism in *Sunset Song*, Matthew Wickman highlights the 'malign influence of religion, specifically Calvinism' upon communities.⁶¹³ A comparison with Gunn's portrayal of authoritarian Calvinism in *The Serpent* would have certainly strengthened Wickman's argument.

Regarding Gunn's use of folk culture in his novels, the way in which both Gunn and William Sharp, writing as Fiona MacLeod, drew on the *Carmina Gadelica* as an authentic cultural source suggests that these writers may have more in common than is currently accepted in critical circles. Indeed, Sharp and Gunn shared similar spiritual and Romantic attitudes towards nature. As a boy Sharp, like Gunn, developed an intimate relationship with the natural world that lay the groundwork for his later literary work. At the age of six Sharp imagined nature as the embodiment of a feminine divinity and constructed an altar in her honour. At university he was deeply interested in alternative spiritual outlooks and studied philosophy, folklore and mysticism, expanding his perceptions of spirituality beyond the Presbyterian faith in which he had been raised.⁶¹⁴ Having been brought up hearing old Gaelic tales and legends, Sharp's interest and education in folk culture was further encouraged by his encounters with local gypsies when he was staying at Ardentinny and his friendship with elderly fisherman Seumus Macleod. Significantly, whilst Gunn drew his knowledge of folklore from the *Carmina Gadelica*, whose texts may have been altered by Carmichael, Sharp experienced folk culture first hand. Sharp did however, include a Celtic blessing that is similar in style to many of the *Carmina* texts in *The*

⁶¹⁰ Crawford Gribben, 'Finding Religion in Scottish Literary History', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Vol. 45, 2 (2019) pp. 75 - 80

⁶¹¹ Patrick Scott, 'The Ghost at the Feast: Religion in Scottish Literary Criticism,' *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Vol. 45, 2 (2019) pp. 3 - 6

⁶¹² Mathew Wickman, 'The Sunset Song of Religion, or Have we Ever Been Post-Secular?', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Vol. 45, 2 (2019) pp.32 - 41

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, p.36

⁶¹⁴ The Fiona MacLeod Archive, <<https://www.ies.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/Research%20Projects/Fiona%20McLeod%20Archive/1855-1881.pdf>> accessed 27 June 2020

Dominion of Dreams. Under the Dark Star, published in 1895.⁶¹⁵ A comparative study of the way in which both Gunn and Sharp employed folklore in their writing, the striking stylistic similarities in the way both writers engage with the natural world and deployment of pagan imagery may reveal the extent to which Fiona Macleod influenced Gunn.

Although Gunn drew away from nationalism in his later career and novels such as *The Atom of Delight* contained more philosophical content, the presence of landscape as a focus for individual meaning and belonging remained an abiding feature of his fiction. As chapter three illustrates, Gunn was primarily responding to the cultural and ethnic loss in the Highlands that provided the creative impetus for many of his novels such as *Butcher's Broom*. Gunn's nationalism, the nature of which he considered 'spiritual',⁶¹⁶ must be viewed within the context of cultural revival and recovery. His predominantly optimistic vision of revival extends from the microcosmic level of the individual to the macrocosm of the nation itself. As Kenny Taylor discovers on his visit to Dunbeath, Gunn was adept at capturing the intimate and spiritual relationship with place experienced by individuals and ethnic communities, and his acute understanding of the nature of belonging continues to resonate with readers across the world.

⁶¹⁵ See appendix (iv)

⁶¹⁶ Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland*, p.90

Appendix

- i. Texts from the *Carmina Gadelica* that illustrate the influence of the natural environment and seasons on the lives and spirituality of the Highland people.

Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica* (Edinburgh: T.&A. Constable, 1900; repr. Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2015)

Anon., No. 81, *Carmina Gadelica*, p.92

Poem of the flood

On Monday will come the great storm
Which the airy firmament will pour,
We shall be obedient the while,
All who will harken.

On Tuesday will come the other element,
Heart paining, hard piercing,
Wringing from pure pale cheeks
Blood, like showers of wine.

On Wednesday will blow the wind
Sweeping bare strath and plain,
Showering gusts of galling grief,
Thunder bursts and rending hills.

On Thursday will pour the shower,
Driving people to blind flight,
Faster than the foliage on the trees,
Like the leaves of Mary's plant in terror trembling.

On Friday will come the dool cloud of darkness,
The direst cloud that ever came over the world,
Leaving multitudes bereft of reason,
Grass and fish beneath the same flagstone.

On Saturday will come the great sea,
Rushing like a mighty river;
All will be at their best
Hastening to a hill of safety.

On Sunday will arise my King,
Full of ire and tribulation,

Listening to the bitter talk of each man,
A red cross on each right shoulder.

Anon., no. 78, *Carmina Gadelica*, p.88

The blessing of the struan

Each meal beneath my roof,
They will be all mixed together,
In the name of God the Son,
Who gave them growth.

Milk, and eggs, and butter,
The good produce of our own flock,
There shall be no dearth in our land,
Nor in our dwelling.

In the name of Michael of my love,
Who bequeathed to us the power,
With the blessings of the Lamb,
And of his Mother.

Humble us at thy footstool,
Be thine own sanctuary around us,
Ward us from spectre, sprite, oppression,
And preserve us.

Consecrate the produce of our land,
Bestow prosperity and peace,
In the name of the Father the King,
And of the three beloved apostles.

Dandelion, smooth garlic,
Foxglove, woad, and butterwort,
The three carle-doddies,
And marigold.

Grey *cailpeach* plucked,
The seven-pronged seven times,
The mountain yew, ruddy heath,
And madder.

I will put water on them all,
In precious name of the Son of God,
In name of Mary the generous,
And of Patrick.

When we shall sit down

To take our food,
I will sprinkle in the name of God
On the children.

Anon., no. 448, *Carmina Gadelica*, p. 411

Charm for chest seizure

Power of moon have I over thee,
Power of sun have I over thee,
Power of rain have I over thee,
Power of dew have I over thee,
Power of sea have I over thee,
Power of land have I over thee,
Power of stars have I over thee,
Power of planets have I over thee,
Power of universe have I over thee,
Power of skies have I over thee,
Power of saints have I over thee,
Power of heaven have I over thee,
Power of heaven and power of God have I over thee,
Power of heaven and power of God over thee.

A part of thee on the grey stones,
A part of thee on the steep mountains,
A part of thee on the swift cascades,
A part of thee on the gleaming clouds,
A part of thee on the ocean-whales,
A part of thee on the meadow beasts,
A part of thee on the fenny swamps,
A part of thee on the cotton-grass moors,
A part on the great surging sea –
She herself has best means to carry,
The great surging sea,
She herself has best means to carry.

ii. Anon., *Carmina Gadelica*, no.9, p.43

The Rune of Muthairn

O King of the moon,
O King of the sun,
O King of the planets,
O King of the stars,
O King of the globe,

O King of the sky,
Lovely Thy countenance,
O beauteous Beam.

Two loops of silk
Down by my limbs,
Smooth-skinned;
Yellow jewels
And a handful
Out of every stock of them.

iii. Anon., *Carmina Gadelica*, no.43, p.62

A resting prayer

God shield the house, the fire, the kine,
Everyone who dwells herein tonight,
Shield myself and my beloved group,
Preserve us from handling and from harm,
Preserve us from foes this night,
For the sake of the Son of the Mary Mother,
In this place, and in every place wherein they dwell
Tonight,
On this night and on every night,
This night and every night.

iv. A blessing in the Celtic style by Fiona Macleod
From 'The Dominion of Dreams. Under the Dark Star'
(William Sharp, 1895)

Deep peace I breathe into you,
O weariness, here:
O ache, here!
Deep peace, a soft white dove to You;
Deep peace, a quiet rain to you;
Deep peace, an ebbing wave to you!
Deep peace, red wind of the east from you;
Deep peace, grey wind of the west to You;
Deep peace, dark wind of the north from you;
Deep peace, blue wind of the south to you!
Deep peace, pure red of the flame to you;

Deep peace, pure white of the moon to you;
Deep peace, pure green of the grass to you;
Deep peace, pure brown of the earth to you;
Deep peace, pure grey of the dew to you,
Deep peace, pure blue of the sky to you!
Deep peace of the running wave to you,
Deep peace of the flowing air to you,
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,
Deep peace of the sleeping stones to you!
Deep peace of the Yellow Shepherd to you,
Deep peace of the Wandering Shepherdess to you,
Deep peace of the Flock of Stars to you,
Deep peace from the Son of Peace to you,
Deep peace from the heart of Mary to you,
And from Briget of the Mantle
Deep peace, deep peace!
And with the kindness too of the Haughty Father
Peace!
In the name of the Three who are One,
Peace! And by the will of the King of the Elements,
Peace! Peace!

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